

# Women and minorities take the law into their own hands

Frances Gibb, Legal Editor

More than half of all partners in solicitors' firms are state-school educated and a third are women, according to figures hailed as marking progress for diversity in the sector.

Data based on 180,000 solicitors in England and Wales across 9,000 law firms show that the profession is finally becoming more diverse at senior levels. The picture is less impressive in the bigger City or regional firms that have more than 50 partners, where the

proportion of women partners drops to 29 per cent. These firms also have a lower proportion of black and ethnic minority partners (8 per cent), compared with 34 per cent among sole practices.

Other key findings in the survey by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), the profession's watchdog, are that there has been a big rise in the percentage of partners who went to state schools. This has risen to 57 per cent, in increase from 47 per cent in 2014. Most partners, 59 per cent, are

also the first generation in their families to have attended university. A third of all solicitors have child-caring responsibilities.

Two per cent of solicitors said that their gender identity was different from that assigned to them at birth — the first time that the SRA had gathered transgender data.

Across the profession as a whole, nearly half of all solicitors, 48 per cent, are women, and 21 per cent, from a black, Asian or ethnic minority background. Paul Philip, chief executive of

the SRA, said: "I know we will all welcome the progress that is clearly being made in many areas. But there is much more to do to achieve a truly diverse profession that reflects the community it serves, encourages people to access the legal services they need and offers opportunities for the brightest and best from every background."

"The changes we are making to the training of solicitors, the growing and varied initiatives in the sector to support people into the profession and

the leadership shown by many firms will all help."

The SRA had produced research showing that diversity was good for business as well as for the public, the profession and wider society, he said. This would "help law firms to consider what more they can do to realise those business benefits, as well as doing the right thing."

The figures are based on information collected last August by an online survey completed by 92 per cent of all law firms in England and Wales.

HAN FORSTHA/GETTY IMAGES

## Terror alert as package is sent to MP

Patrick Maguire

Counterterrorism police were called to the Houses of Parliament yesterday after a suspect package containing white powder was delivered to an MP's office.

There were reports of a heavy police presence in the ministerial corridor of the Commons, where MPs serving in government have their parliamentary offices. Detectives examined the letter, which was later found to be "non-harmful".

Scotland Yard said that its counter-

