

## The Legal Quality Standard of Ireland



### MARCH 2025 - ARTICLES & ITEMS OF INTEREST

#### **WARNING - FAKE FEES EMAIL SENT TO SOME LAW SOCIETY MEMBERS**

On the 27 March 2025, the Law Society of Ireland 'Top Stories' published an article warning firms that a fraudulent email impersonating the Law Society about membership renewal has been sent to some solicitors this week.

*'The Law Society has reiterated that it did not send a membership email to any solicitors requesting payment of overdue fees.'*

*It adds that this is an example of a 'phishing' email where individuals pretend to be a reputable company to steal money or information.*

*The fake correspondence, dated 25 March, does not come from a Law Society email address and uses American English spelling.*

*What to do*

- *Anyone who received this email is asked not to respond and to delete it immediately,*
- *Contact your IT provider if the email has already been responded to,*
- *Anyone who has been a victim of this or any other cybercrime is asked to please report the issue.'*

To view this article in full see <https://www.lawsociety.ie/gazette/top-stories/2025/march/fake-fees-email-sent-to-law-society-members/>

## **SUBJECT ACCESS REQUESTS**

On the 7 March 2025 the Data Protection Commission published a news article titled “The DPC’s handling of Subject Access Requests”.

This article discusses when responding to a data access request how an organisation or firm may be entitled to restrict the release of personal data if they can rely on restrictions in the GDPR and/or the Data Protection Act 2018. In such a case, the organisation or firm must be able to demonstrate the reasoning for any restrictions.

The article looks at different situations where such restrictions may arise and be justified.

To view this article in full see <https://www.dataprotection.ie/en/dpc-guidance/blogs/DPC-handling-of-Subject-Access-Requests>

## **EMPLOYEES TO BE GIVEN RIGHT TO WORK TO STATE PENSION AGE**

Proposed new legislation would allow workers whose contract has a retirement age of 65 or under, to work to the State Pension Age of 66 if they want.

The Employment (Contractual Retirement Ages) Bill 2025 published this month sets out that an employer may not enforce a contractual retirement age which is below the State Pension Age if the employee does not consent to retire.

For more information visit <https://www.gov.ie/ga/preasraitis/bfaa9-ministers-burke-and-dillon-welcome-the-publication-of-the-employment-contractual-retirement-ages-bill-2025/?#:~:text=It%20will%20allow%2C%20but%20in,does%20not%20consent%20to%20reire.>

## **CYBER UPDATE - NEW PLATFORM PROVIDING INFORMATION ON SCAMS PREVALENT IN IRELAND**

On the 21 March 2025, the Law Society of Ireland ‘Top Stories’ published an article about a site to highlight financial scam threats.

It states that a platform developed by the Banking & Payments Federation Ireland in collaboration with member banks, is working to raise awareness about the growing threat of financial scams.

FraudSMART.ie provides information on various scams prevalent in Ireland, from phishing emails to identity theft, and outlines steps to safeguard personal and financial information, insights and practical tips on how individuals can protect themselves from falling victim to fraud.

To view this article see <https://www.lawsociety.ie/gazette/top-stories/2025/march/site-to-highlight-financial-scam-threat/>

## **WELLBEING – PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

In the March edition of the Law Society Gazette, Ruth O’Sullivan, Psychological Services Executive at the Law Society published an article titled “Supercharger”.

This article talks about how the Law Society Psychological Services recently hosted a lunchtime event, unveiling its latest offering for legal teams – the ‘Psychological Safety Toolkit’

Toolkit Author Eadine Hickey emphasised the significance of psychological safety in team performance: *“Psychological safety has been proven through research to be a key for unlocking team learning and team performance. It’s about cultivating a learning culture where team members can feel comfortable having uncomfortable conversations, troubleshooting difficult and complex issues, raising concerns and ideas, and learning from mistakes without fear of consequences. It’s about creating an environment where team members can grow and thrive and deliver their best work for the organisation.”*

By addressing the unique pressures of the legal profession, the Psychological Safety Toolkit underscores that psychological safety is not about lowering standards, but about fostering environments where individuals can perform at their best without fear of judgement.

A recent study by Psychological safety by the International Bar Association revealed that 41% of legal professionals who experienced high levels of stress displayed a reluctance to seek support due to stigma or fear of repercussions.

Psychological safety plays a pivotal role in mitigating burnout, encouraging mentorship, and creating workplaces where individuals are empowered to raise concerns and seek guidance without fear.

So what does a high performing legal team look like?

- Trust and collaboration – team members feel comfortable sharing ideas and admitting mistakes without fear of judgement,
- Continuous learning – teams leverage experiences, including setbacks, as opportunities for growth,
- Open communication – leaders and employees engage in transparent discussions, improving efficiency and problem solving,
- Resilience and adaptability – teams that embrace psychological safety navigate challenges with confidence and agility.

Psychological safety is a cornerstone of a positive workplace culture, particularly in legal environments where high-pressure situations are common. When law firms and legal teams prioritise psychological safety, they find that:

- Junior solicitors feel empowered to ask questions and learn from senior colleagues without fear of judgement,
- Leaders foster trust by encouraging open dialogue, active listening, and constructive feedback,
- Legal professionals experience increased engagement, leading to reduced burnout and turnover,
- Innovation flourishes as individuals are comfortable proposing new ideas without fear of criticism,
- Client outcomes improve, as teams collaborate effectively and make well-informed decisions, and
- Diversity, equity and inclusion efforts are strengthened, ensuring that all voices are valued.

To view this article in full see <https://www.lawsociety.ie/globalassets/documents/gazette/gazette-pdfs/gazette-2025/march-2025-gazette.pdf#page=51>

### **EMPLOYEE SETTLES SEX DISCRIMINATION CASE FOR £215,000**

On the March 2025, the Irish Legal News published an article how a former Citibank N.A. United Kingdom employee has settled her sex and disability discrimination cases against the company for £215,000.

The facts were:-

- Maeve Bradley worked for Citibank in Belfast as an assistant vice president. In the spring of 2023, she went on maternity leave and believed she was in line for a promotion on her return.
- Ahead of her return, Mrs Bradley contacted a manager to let them know she had applied for reduced hours due to childcare needs. Mrs Bradley says she was offered an alternative role but was not comfortable with this suggestion as she had no experience of the new role.
- Mrs Bradley asked if anybody on the team had been promoted. She was told that the person covering her maternity leave had been promoted to a vice president role. Believing this to be unlawful, as she wasn't given the opportunity for promotion whilst on maternity leave, she raised a formal grievance.
- The grievance was not upheld. She says the company advised that performance is the deciding factor for whether someone gets promoted. The person covering her maternity leave had the opportunity and time to demonstrate the strength of their performance and was promoted.

*'Mrs Bradley issued legal proceedings alleging sex discrimination. Later she brought a further two claims alleging sex and disability discrimination and victimisation. These were based on the time taken to deal with her grievance and her belief that there was a lack of adequate effort to support her return to work.'*

*Mrs Bradley did not return to work and her employment with Citibank was terminated as part of the settlement.*

*Geraldine McGahey, chief commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland said: "Issues around pregnancy and maternity in the workplace continue to be the most common complaints of sex discrimination made to the Commission.*

*"The laws protecting women from sex discrimination were introduced almost 50 years ago to ensure women can return to and remain in the workforce and not be disadvantaged because of pregnancy or family responsibilities. Maeve should have been considered for the promotion", concluded Ms McGahey.*

*The company agreed to liaise with the Commission to review its equal opportunities policies, procedures and practices relating to the treatment of employees on maternity leave in Northern Ireland. The case was settled without admission of liability.'*

To view this article in full see <https://www.irishlegal.com/articles/former-citibank-employee-settles-sex-discrimination-case-for-ps215000>

## UK – AML CRACKDOWN – SRA REVEALS MORE FINES

On the 13 March 2025, the Law Society of England and Wales detailed the circumstances of a fine issued on a US-based international firm with an office in London's Square Mile by the SRA in relation to AML.

- The firm was fined £300,000 and £62,000 costs for historical breaches of anti-money laundering rules.

The firm was alleged to have failed to have, in compliance with the Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Transfer of Funds (Information on the Payer) Regulations 2017, to carry out a firm-wide risk assessment between June 2017 and March 2020, and, between June 2017 and January 2023, failed to have in place fully compliant policies, controls or procedures.

It was also alleged to have, between June 2017 and October 2022, failed to have in place compliant client and/or matter risk assessments in relation to four files.

To view this article in full see <https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news/300000-fine-for-us-firm-over-historical-aml-breaches/5122645.article>

On the 24 March 2025, the Law Society of England and Wales published a further news article in relation to three further AML fines.

1. The regulator fined Howard Fitton Solicitors of Lymm in Warrington, Cheshire, £2,894 and ordered them to pay £600 in costs. The firm had failed to comply with the MLRs 2017, in that it failed to maintain records of its risk assessment. It also failed to establish and maintain fully compliant policies, controls and procedures to mitigate and effectively manage the risks of money laundering and terrorist financing between June 2017 and May 2024.
2. The SRA reached a regulatory settlement agreement with Wolf Law Solicitors LTD of Birkenhead, Merseyside. The firm agreed to pay a fine of £5,215 and investigations costs of £1,350. It made a number of admissions, including that it failed to nominate a money laundering reporting officer; failed to seek SRA approval for a beneficial owner, officer or manager and failed to conduct ongoing monitoring including, where necessary, the source of funds.
3. The regulator revealed a regulatory settlement agreement was reached with Liverpool firm Bennett & Co, which agreed to pay a financial penalty of £3,305 and the £600 costs of the investigation. The SRA said the firm failed to adequately assess, identify and document risk by conducting client and matter risk assessments on files until October 2024, meaning it failed to ensure that it was fully compliant with its statutory obligations for a period of over seven years since the MLRs 2017 came into effect.

To view this article in full see <https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/news/three-firms-sanctioned-in-latest-aml-crackdown/5122735.article>