

Developing Strategies for Change: Addressing Challenges Faced by Racialized Licensees

As part of its ongoing efforts to promote equity, diversity and inclusiveness in Ontario's legal profession, The Law Society of Upper Canada created the Challenges Faced by Racialized Licensees Working Group in 2012 to investigate the challenges faced by racialized lawyers and paralegals and to consider strategies for enhanced inclusion at all career stages.

After completing informal and formal engagement processes, the Working Group prepared the consultation paper, *Developing Strategies for Change: Addressing Challenges Faced by Racialized Licensees*, which Convocation approved on October 30, 2014 for dissemination to the professions and the public — and for further consultation.

The consultation paper includes a series of questions for the professions to consider and comment upon. Additional ideas are also welcome. Written submissions should be submitted to the Law Society by **March 1, 2015** to:

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Consultation meetings will also be held in key cities during fall 2014 and winter 2015.

Input received during the consultation process will help the Working Group determine its next steps, as well as its final recommendations to Convocation.

Following are some key issues and findings from the consultation paper:

- Although Ontario's legal profession has seen a steady increase in the number of racialized licensees in the last 20 years, these members continue to face challenges — many of which are distinct from the challenges faced by their non-racialized peers.
- Discrimination is a feature of daily life for many racialized licensees.

- Racialization is a constant and persistent factor affecting licensees during entry into practice and opportunities for career advancement. It is also a significant factor in shaping choices and career outcomes of racialized licensees.
- Forty percent of racialized licensees identified their ethnic/racial identity as a barrier to entry into practice, while only three per cent of non-racialized licensees identified ethnic/racial identity as a barrier. Racialized licensees who are most likely to cite race/ethnicity as a barrier to entry included: South East Asian, Black, Arab, and South Asian; those having a first language other than French/English; women; and those born outside Canada.
- For many racialized women, the experience of gender bias is compounded as a consequence of their racial status.
- Many racialized licensees lack a strong network of legal professionals, mentors or sponsors who can provide guidance and advocate for them in the workplace, and this can remain a barrier throughout their careers.
- Almost half of the survey participants said they had been expected to perform to a higher standard than others, due to racial stereotyping. Ethno-racial groups that named this factor more frequently than average included: Black, Chinese, South East Asian, Arab, and South Asian respondents.
- Racialized and non-racialized survey participants placed lack of mentors and professional networks and racial stereotyping by clients at the top of the list of factors that may increase the risk of complaints against racialized licensees.
- Internationally trained lawyers often face a combination of disadvantages, such as few professional network opportunities; language challenges; a different culture than their colleagues; lack of critical transition from law school to a first professional position in Ontario; and lack of mentors and contacts.
- Racialized paralegals appear to face greater challenges in the job market than racialized lawyers.

More information is available at www.lsuc.on.ca/racialized-licensees

