



URBIS

2023 ANNUAL PROFILE OF SOLICITORS NSW

Final

Prepared for
LAW SOCIETY OF NSW
4 June 2024

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Project Code	P0046295
Report Number	Final

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1. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Each year, the Law Society of NSW compiles a profile of practising solicitors in NSW. This report presents a range of information about the profession in NSW. This includes demographic characteristics and various aspects of working life, such as sector of practice, hours worked per week and income earned.

This is a summary of the 2023 key findings, based on data collected as at 31 October 2023.

1.2. SNAPSHOT OF SOLICITORS AS AT OCTOBER 2023

Data from the Law Society of NSW database shows:	
Number of solicitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">40,052 solicitors had an NSW practising certificate
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none">21,991 (55%) female solicitors18,061 (45%) male solicitors
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Average age of 42.6 years
Country of birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nearly a third of NSW solicitors were born overseas (31%)Of those born overseas, 42% were born in Asia and 13% in the UK/Ireland
Years since admission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Over half of solicitors had been admitted for more than 10 years (54%)Nearly one-fifth had been admitted for 6-10 years (19%)One-fifth had been admitted for 2-5 years (20%)Only 8% had been admitted for a year or lessOverall, male solicitors had been admitted for longer than females
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Half of solicitors worked in Sydney CBD (50%)A third worked in the suburbs of Sydney (33%)Just over one in ten worked in regional/rural NSW (11%)
Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Most solicitors were working in private practice (67%)Just over one-fifth were working as corporate legal practitioners (21%)Around one in ten were working as government legal practitioners (12%)
Private law practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">7,320 private law practices were operating in NSWThe majority were sole practices.¹ (62%)One-quarter had one principal.² (26%), while one in ten had two to four principals (10%)Private practices with 40 or more principals made up only 0.2% of all law practices in NSW, yet they employed over a quarter of all non-principal employees in private law practices (26%)
Of solicitors who responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey:	
Areas of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nearly a third of respondents were practising commercial law (31%)Similar proportions were practising corporate law (21%), civil litigation (20%) or conveyancing/real property (20%)
Income (gross annual for FY2021-22).³	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Just over one in twenty respondents were earning \$50,000 or less (6%)One in five were earning between \$50,001-\$100,000 (19%)A third were earning between \$100,001-\$200,000 (35%)More than one in ten were earning between \$200,001-\$300,000 (15%)Just over in ten were earning over \$300,000 (12%)

¹ In this report, a “sole practice” is a law practice of one principal working without any employed solicitors.

² In this report, a “one principal practice” is a law practice of one principal working with one or more employed solicitors.

³ In this report, reported incomes exclude solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

1.3. 2023 HIGHLIGHTS AND TRENDS



The profession continued to grow, with 5% growth from 2022 to 2023 and 4% average growth annually since 1997.*



For the seventh consecutive year, female solicitors outnumbered male solicitors. In 2023 there were 3,930 more female solicitors than male, and in the last five years females have entered the profession in NSW at a rate of 2.5 females to every 1 male.*



Nearly half (49%) of all solicitors were under 40 years old, with the age of female solicitors averaging more than six years younger than their male counterparts.*



The profession was culturally diverse, with 31% of solicitors born overseas** and 21% speaking a language other than English at home.*



Over one-third (35%) of private practice partners/principals were female, a 11% increase in the last decade.*



Almost three-quarters (73%) of solicitors were working full time but more women reported working part time (19% compared to 13% of male solicitors).** There was a small increase in males working part time since 2021 (11%).



Full time solicitors across all practice sectors reported working fewer 50+ hour weeks compared to last year.**



Annual gross income for full-time solicitors varied considerably across sectors, with corporate legal practitioners earning the highest median income, followed by those in private practice and government legal.**



In private practice, there is an overrepresentation of males in the most senior roles and women are overrepresented in less senior roles. This discrepancy is less apparent in the corporate and government legal sectors.**



While overall incomes increased from 2021, the gender pay gap remains evident across all practice sectors and among males and females of the same age and those who have been admitted for the same number of years.**



Members of the profession contributed \$117m in legal services free of charge to the community.**

* Data from the Law Society of NSW database. ** Data from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. THE ROLE OF THE LAW SOCIETY

The Law Society of New South Wales (NSW), as the professional association representing the solicitors of NSW, has commissioned this report to provide a profile of the legal profession.

The Law Society has two primary responsibilities: acting as the licensing authority and a co-regulator by maintaining professional standards of conduct, as well as investigating complaints against solicitors; and, representing and providing services to its members. The role of the Law Society of NSW is summarised by the objectives set out in its mission statement, which include to:

undertake activities and services determined by the needs and welfare of members

effectively represent the profession at government and community levels

ensure a competitive national profession

ensure the community is served by ethical, competent and independent legal practitioners

ensure the community has reasonable and affordable access to justice

advocate for ongoing reform of the law and the legal system.

Further information about the Law Society of NSW can be found at <https://www.lawsociety.com.au/>.

2.2. OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

This report provides a profile of NSW solicitors with practising certificates in 2023, including information on:

demographics, including age, gender, country of birth and number of years since first admission

the nature of solicitors' work, including location, sector, areas of law practised, hours worked and annual income.

The report also identifies trends in the profile of solicitors by comparing 2023 information with data from previous years.

2.3. METHODOLOGY

The information contained in this report is obtained from two sources:

annual census data obtained from the Law Society of NSW database

the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey.

Annual census data from the Law Society of NSW Database

The Law Society of NSW maintains records of all solicitors who hold a NSW practising certificate. The data used in this report reflects the records of all solicitors who held NSW practising certificates as at 31 October 2023.

As the profession fluctuates over the course of the year, and October is considered the most stable month, this report uses data up to the end of October. While the Law Society has retained records of solicitors for many years, this report relies on information collected and stored in the Law Society database since 1988. From that year forward, the coding of information has been reliable and consistent.

The Law Society of NSW does not maintain records relating to people who are working in law-related fields in NSW (some of whom hold legal qualifications and may have been admitted to practice), but are not required to hold a practising certificate.

Since the 2020 Annual Profile Report, "sole practices" and "one principal practices" were separated into two separate categories to better understand the profile of private practices in NSW. A "sole practice" is a law practice of one principal working without any employed solicitors whereas a "one principal practice" is a law practice of one principal working with one or more employed solicitors.

Practising Certificate Survey

The Practising Certificate Survey has been conducted annually by the Law Society of NSW since 1993-94, and in its current form since 2007. Each year, as part of the practising certificate renewal process, solicitors are invited to complete the voluntary survey. The survey gathers additional demographic data, including information about main areas of practice, work hours, and income. A total of 13,597 solicitors responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey, representing a response rate of 35%.

The Law Society does not, and cannot, link the information collected through the Practising Certificate Survey to individual solicitors or the law practices and organisations in which they work.

2.4. FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about this report, please contact:

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3. NUMBER OF SOLICITORS

A total of 40,052 solicitors held a NSW practising certificate as at 31 October 2023, up from 38,265 in the previous year. This represents a 5% annual growth in the profession, aligning with the average annual growth rate seen over the last 25 years. Since 1997, the number of solicitors holding a NSW practising certificate has grown from 13,409 to 40,052, an increase of 199%.

Table 1 – Number of solicitors by gender over time

Year	Male		Female		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
2023	18,061	45%	21,991	55%	40,052
2022	17,480	46%	20,785	54%	38,265
2021	17,269	46%	19,917	54%	37,186
2020	16,900	47%	18,809	53%	35,709
2019	16,448	48%	17,909	52%	34,357
2018	15,882	49%	16,797	51%	32,679
2017	15,595	49%	16,043	51%	31,638
2016	15,085	50%	15,065	50%	30,150
2015	14,705	51%	14,230	49%	28,935
2014	14,204	52%	13,371	49%	27,575
2013	13,775	52%	12,633	48%	26,408
2012	13,463	53%	12,030	47%	25,493
2011	13,112	53%	11,431	47%	24,543
2010	12,845	54%	10,915	46%	23,760
2009	12,516	55%	10,347	45%	22,863
2008	12,260	56%	9,845	45%	22,105
2007	11,974	56%	9,281	44%	21,255
2006	11,712	58%	8,618	42%	20,330
2005	11,677	59%	8,132	41%	19,809
2004	11,368	60%	7,566	40%	18,934
2003	11,112	61%	6,980	39%	18,092
2002	10,815	63%	6,374	37%	17,189
2001	10,417	64%	5,803	36%	16,220
2000	10,060	65%	5,322	35%	15,382
1999	9,777	67%	4,866	33%	14,643
1998	9,414	68%	4,457	32%	13,871
1997	9,310	69%	4,099	31%	13,409

Source: Law Society of NSW database

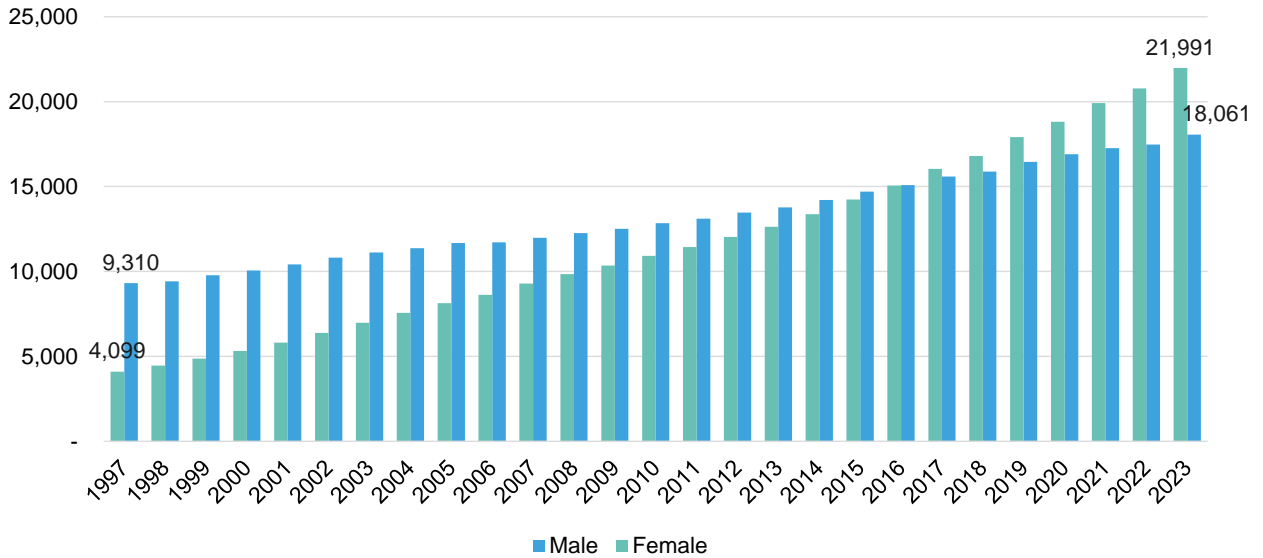
4. GENDER

4.1. GENDER AND GROWTH

In 2023, female solicitors outnumbered male solicitors for the seventh consecutive year. Of all NSW solicitors, 55% were female and 45% were male.

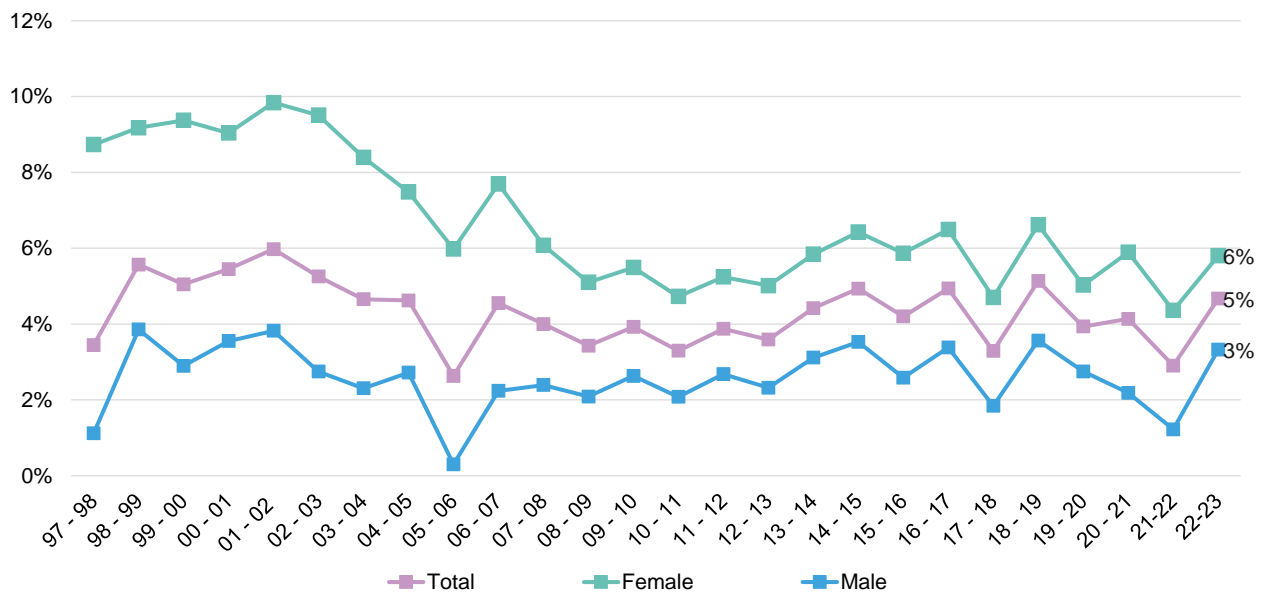
Since 1997, there has been steady growth in the overall number of solicitors; however, the growth rate of female solicitors has been consistently higher than the growth rate of male solicitors. Over this period, the number of female solicitors has grown approximately five-fold (from N=4,099 to N=21,991) while the number of male solicitors has almost doubled (from N=9,310 to N=18,061).

Figure 1 – Number of male and female solicitors over time



Source: Law Society of NSW database

Figure 2 – Annual growth rates in the number of male and female solicitors over time



Source: Law Society of NSW database

4.2. SNAPSHOT OF FEMALE AND MALE SOLICITORS

Table 2 provides a snapshot of the profile of female and male solicitors. Drawing on data from the Law Society of NSW database, the key differences between genders as at 31 October 2023 are:

a larger proportion of female solicitors in NSW were working in the corporate and government legal sectors (24% and 15% respectively), compared to male solicitors (18% and 8% respectively)

less than a third of female solicitors working in private practice were principals of their law practice (29%), compared to more than half of males working in private practice (52%).

female solicitors had a younger age profile than male solicitors:

21% of females were aged under 30 years, compared to 14% of males

31% of females had been admitted as a solicitor for five years or less, compared to 23% of males.

Responses to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey further revealed that:

almost one-fifth of female respondents reported working part time (19%), compared to only one in ten males (13%)

overall, female solicitors reported lower incomes than male solicitors:

a greater proportion of female solicitors reported earning less than \$150,000 (51%), compared to male solicitors (43%)

nearly a third of males reported earning more than \$200,000 (32%), compared to 23% of females.

Table 2 – Profile of male and female solicitors

	Male	Female	Total
Base	18,061	21,991	40,052
Practice sector			
Private practice	74%	62%	67%
Corporate legal	18%	24%	21%
Government legal	8%	15%	12%
Role within private practice*			
Partner/principal	52%	29%	41%
Employee	48%	71%	59%
Years since admission			
One year or less	6%	9%	8%
Two to five years	17%	22%	20%
Six to 10 years	17%	20%	19%
11 to 14 years	10%	12%	11%
15 years or more	50%	37%	43%
Age			
<30 years	14%	21%	18%
30 to 39 years	27%	34%	31%
40 to 49 years	20%	25%	23%
50 to 59 years	17%	13%	15%
60 to 69 years	14%	6%	9%
70+ years	8%	1%	4%

From the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey			
	Male	Female	Total
Base	6,391	6,901	13,292
Mode of work**			
Full time	78%	69%	73%
Part time	13%	19%	16%
Not working as a legal practitioner	8%	9%	9%
On leave at time of survey	1%	3%	2%
Income of full-time and part-time solicitors^			
\$50,000 or less	7%	5%	6%
\$50,001 to \$100,000	16%	22%	19%
\$100,001 to \$150,000	20%	24%	22%
\$150,001 to \$200,000	12%	15%	13%
\$200,001 to \$250,000	9%	9%	9%
\$250,001 to \$300,000	6%	5%	6%
\$300,001 to \$500,000	9%	6%	8%
Over \$500,000	8%	3%	5%
Prefer not to say	13%	11%	13%

Source: Law Society of NSW database (bases provided at top of table) and 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey.

*Role within private practice figures are from the Law Society of NSW database and include private practitioners only (bases: males N=11,949 females N=11,658, whole profession N=23,607)

**Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (bases: males n=6,391 females n=6,901 whole profession n=13,292). Whole profession figures in this table exclude those that selected 'non-binary', 'if you wish to specify otherwise' or 'prefer not to say' for their gender.

^Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (full-time and part-time solicitors bases: males=5,823, females n=6,073, whole profession n=11,896). Bases exclude solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey, and whole profession figures in this table exclude those that selected 'non-binary', 'if you wish to specify otherwise' or 'prefer not to say' for their gender.

Note: Percentages in further analyses of gender in this report may slightly differ from these figures due to rounding.

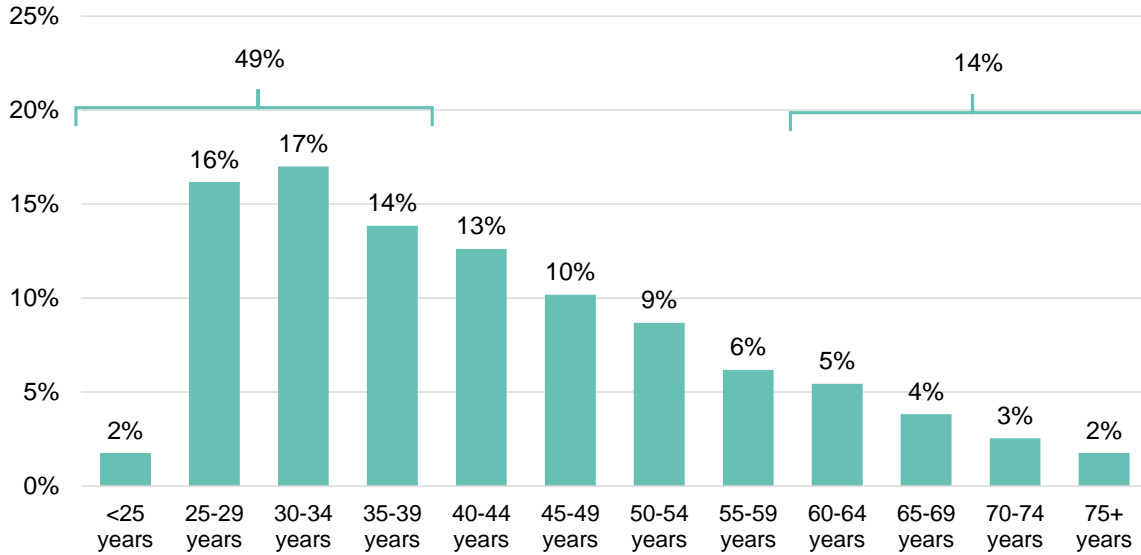
More detailed analysis of results based on gender is provided throughout this report.

5. AGE

The average age of all solicitors in NSW as at 31 October 2023 was 42.6 years old, in line with last year's result (42.7 years).

In 2023, nearly half of all solicitors in NSW were aged under 40 years (49%), while 14% of solicitors were aged 60 years or older.

Figure 3 – Age profile of solicitors



Source: Law Society of NSW database. Base N=40,052

Overall, female solicitors had a younger age profile than male solicitors:

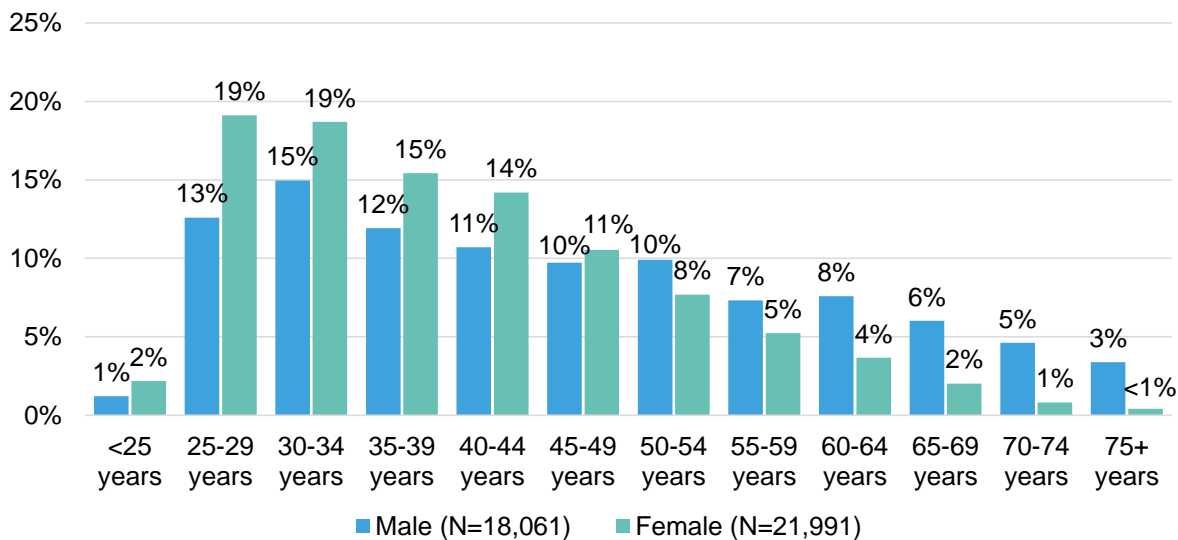
the average age of female solicitors was 39.8 years, compared to 46.0 years for males.⁴

more than half of female solicitors were aged under 40 years old (55%), compared to two in five male solicitors (41%)

61% of males were aged under 50 years old, compared to 80% of females

only 7% of female solicitors were aged 60 years or older, compared to 22% of males.

Figure 4 – Age profile of male and female solicitors



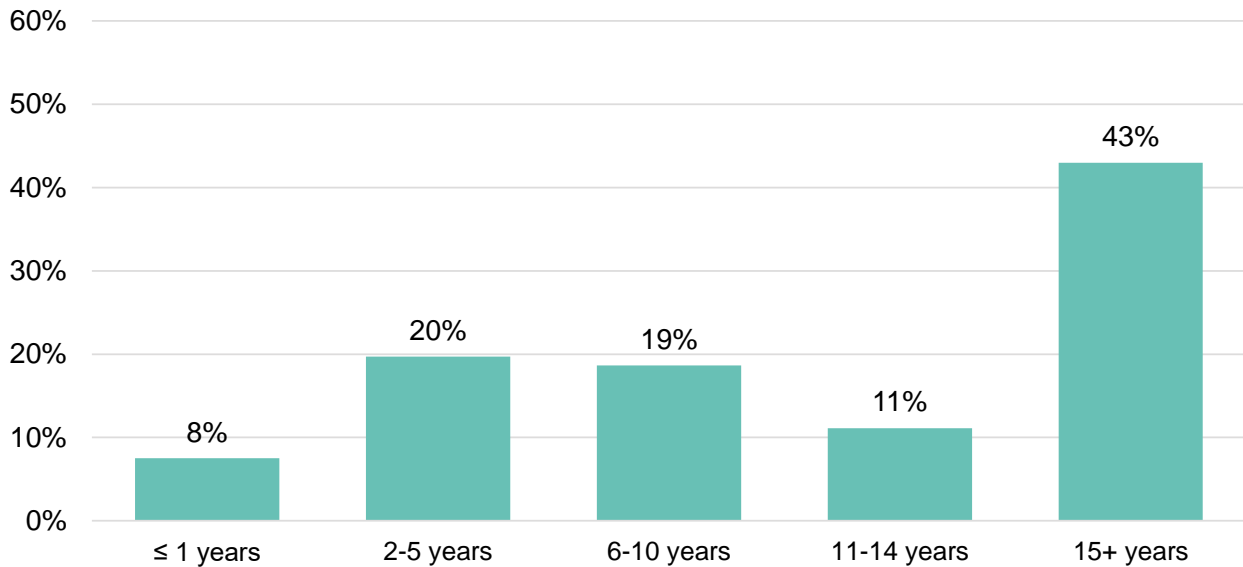
Source: Law Society of NSW database

⁴ Calculated using the mid-point of age bands

6. YEARS SINCE ADMISSION

In 2023, more than half of all NSW solicitors had been admitted for more than ten years (54%), while nearly two-fifths had been admitted for two to ten years (39%). Almost one in ten (8%) had been admitted for one year or less as at 31 October 2023.

Figure 5 – Years since admission

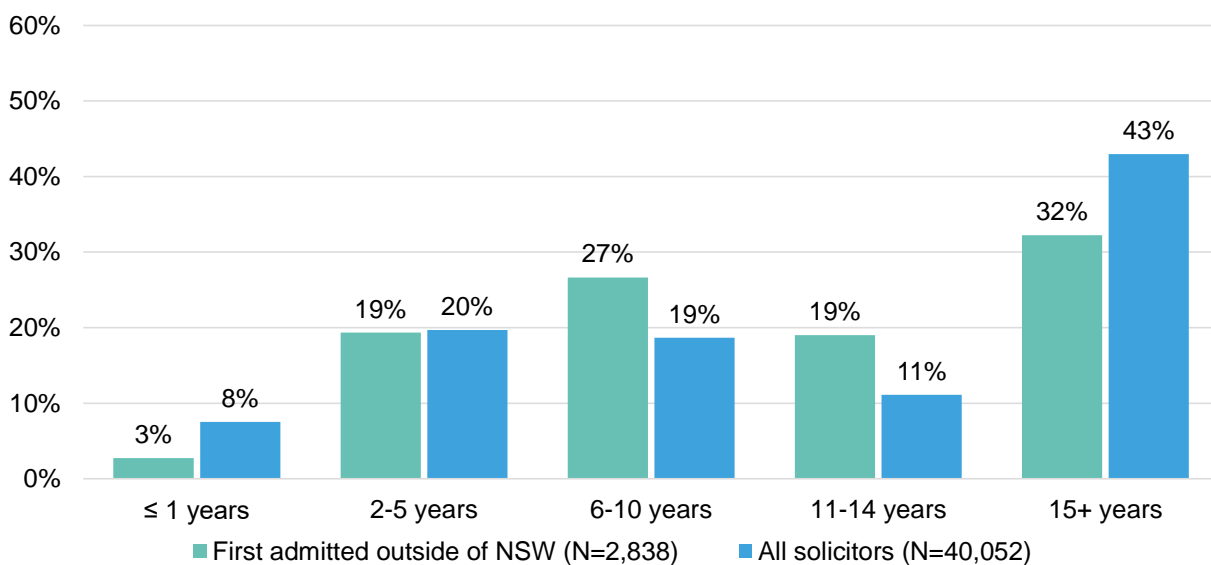


Source: Law Society of NSW database. Base N=38,265

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Of the 40,052 solicitors practising in NSW, 7% (or N=2,838) were first admitted as a solicitor outside NSW (including elsewhere in Australia or overseas). When looking at the years since admission of this group, a greater proportion are mid-career practitioners with 46% having been admitted 6-14 years, compared to only 30% of the whole profession.

Figure 6 – Years since admission of solicitors who were first admitted outside NSW

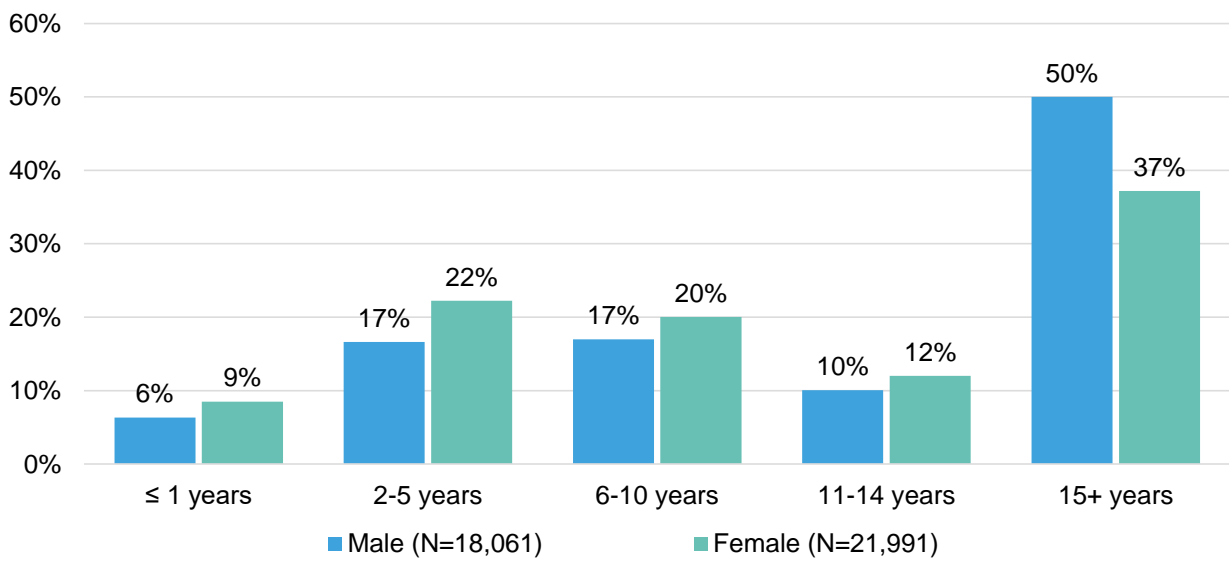


Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Overall, male solicitors had been admitted in NSW for longer than female solicitors. Half of all males had been admitted for 15 years or more as at 31 October 2023 (50%), compared to over a third of females (37%). This is consistent with the younger age profile of female solicitors compared to males (see Section 5).

Figure 7 – Years since admission of all solicitors by gender



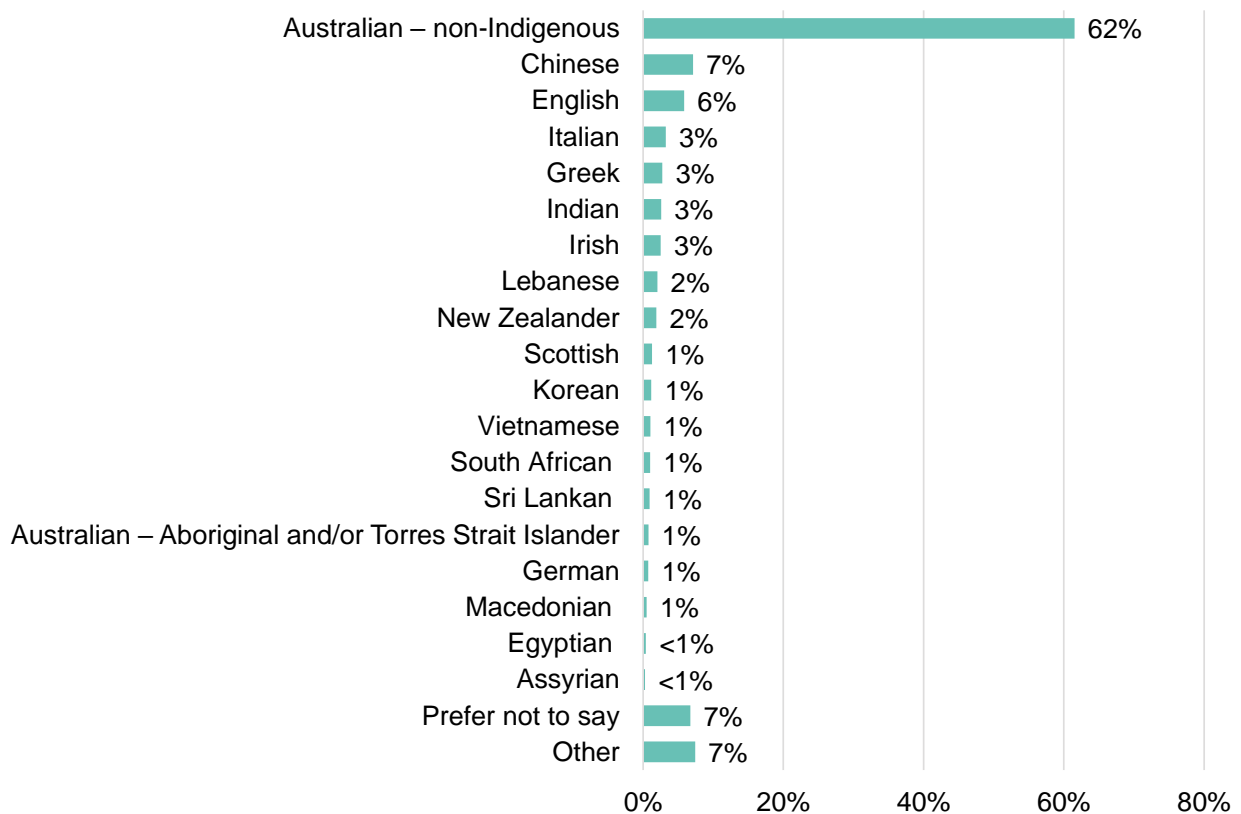
Source: Law Society of NSW database

7. CULTURAL BACKGROUND

7.1. CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey asked respondents to provide the ethnic or cultural backgrounds with which they identified. Three in five identified as Australian (non-Indigenous) (62%), followed by Chinese (7%) and English (6%). A full breakdown is shown below. Other backgrounds not listed which respondents commonly mentioned included Filipino, Jewish, Polish and Serbian.

Figure 8 – Cultural background



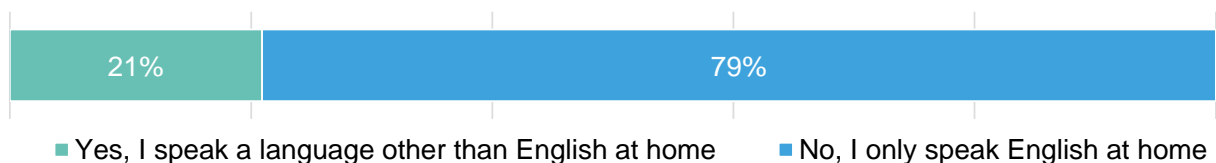
Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=13,597

Note: Proportions do not add to 100% due to multiple response options

7.2. LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Respondents to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate survey were also asked to indicate whether they speak another language other than English at home. Just over one-fifth of respondents reported speaking another language other than English at home (21%). This is lower than the general NSW population, where 27% speak another language other than English.⁵

Figure 9 – Language spoken at home



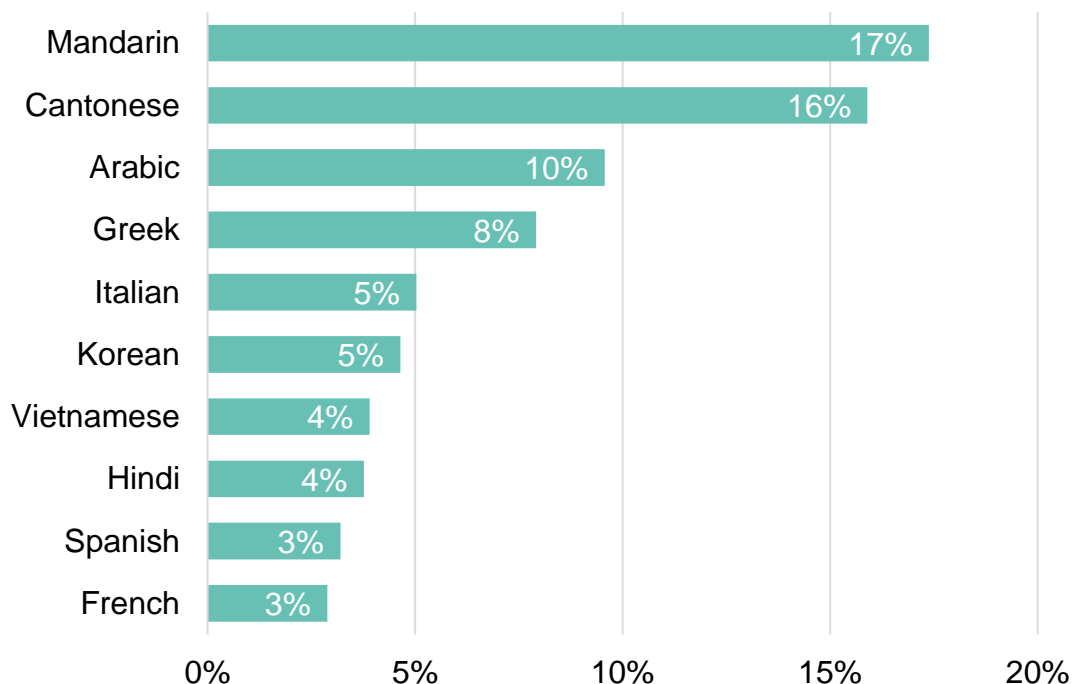
Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=13,597

Note: 1% of respondents declined to answer using the 'Yes, other' option.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *New South Wales 2021 Census Community Profiles*. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/1>

Of respondents who spoke a language other than English at home, the most commonly reported language was Mandarin (17%), followed by Cantonese (16%), Arabic (10%) and Greek (8%). A full breakdown is below.

Figure 10 – Top 10 languages other than English spoken at home

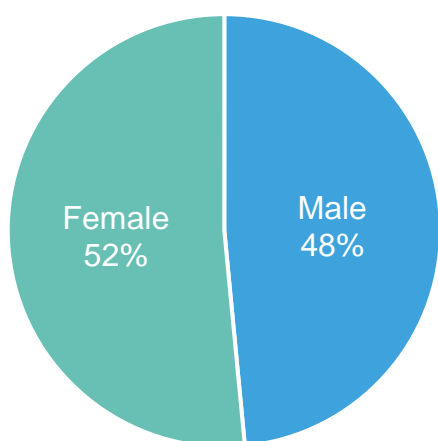


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=2,843

7.3. ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STATUS

A total of 364 solicitors identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, representing 0.9% of all solicitors in NSW. This is much lower than the general NSW population with the 2021 census reporting 3.4% of all people in NSW identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.⁶ Just over half of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander solicitors were female (52%; 48% male).

Figure 11 – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status by gender



Source: Law Society of NSW database. Base n=364

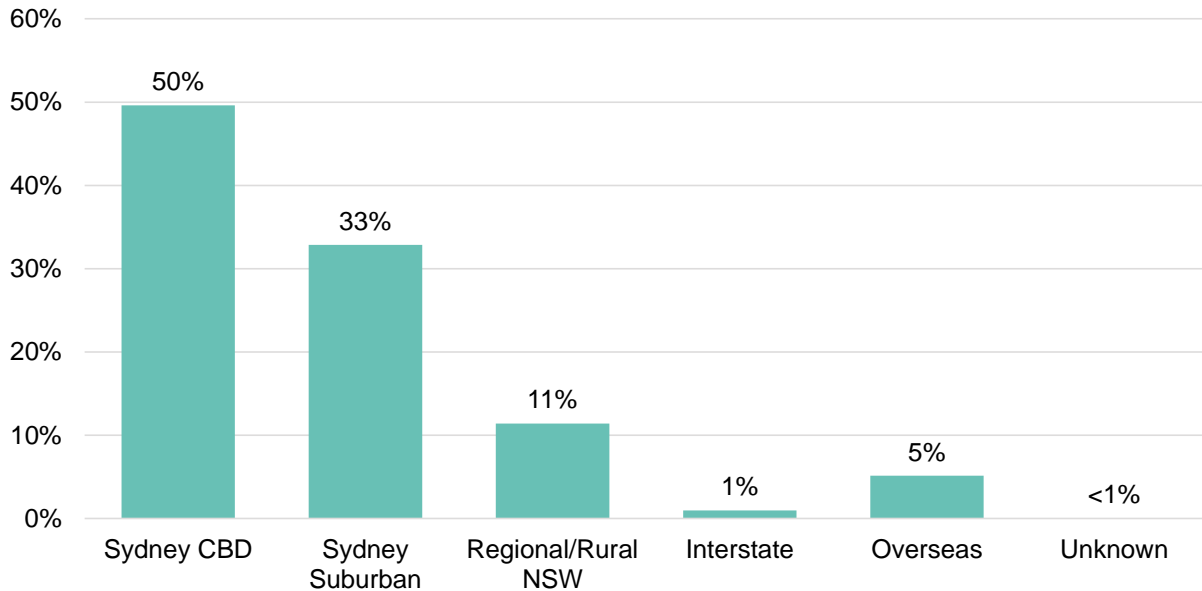
⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022, June 28). Snapshot of New South Wales. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/snapshot-nsw-2021>.

8. LOCATION

8.1. OVERVIEW

At as 31 October 2023, half of all solicitors in NSW were working in the Sydney CBD (50%), followed by a third working in Suburban Sydney (33%). Just over one in ten were working in regional/rural areas of NSW (11%) and 6% were working interstate or overseas.

Figure 12 – Location

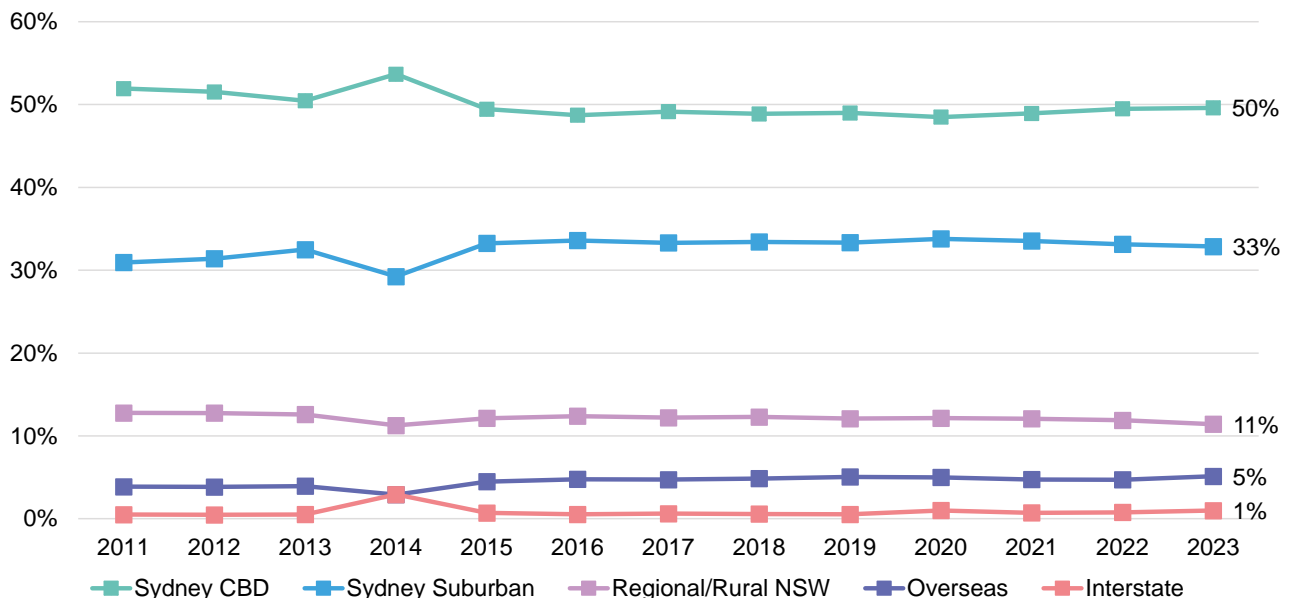


Source: Law Society NSW database. Base N=40,052

Note: Location categories are defined by the Law Society of NSW using postcode data

Over the past twelve years there has been minimal change in the workplace location of solicitors in NSW. The proportion of solicitors working in Sydney CBD has declined slightly, from 52% in 2011 to 50% in 2023. In contrast, the proportion working in suburban areas of Sydney has increased from 31% in 2011 to 33% in 2023. The proportion of solicitors working in regional/rural NSW, interstate and overseas has remained broadly consistent.

Figure 13 – Location over time

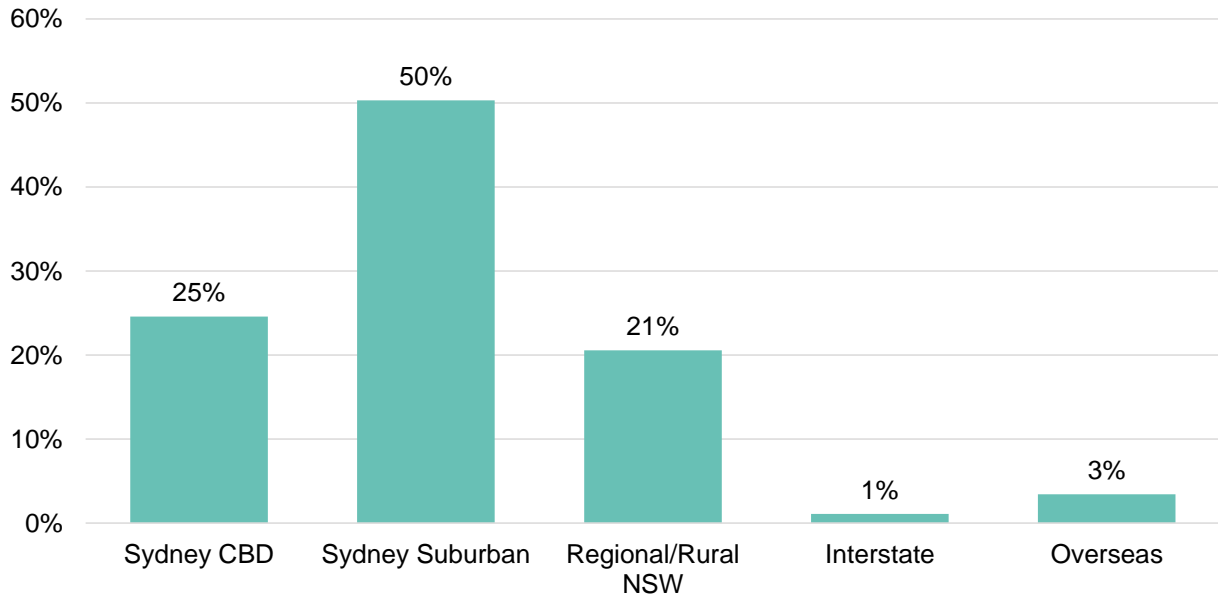


Source: Law Society of NSW database

8.2. LOCATION OF PRIVATE LAW PRACTICES

As at 31 October 2023 there were 7,320 private law practices operating in NSW. Half were located in suburban areas of Sydney (50%) and a quarter in Sydney CBD (25%). A further 21% were based in regional/rural NSW and 4% recorded their main address as interstate or overseas.

Figure 14 – Location of private law practices

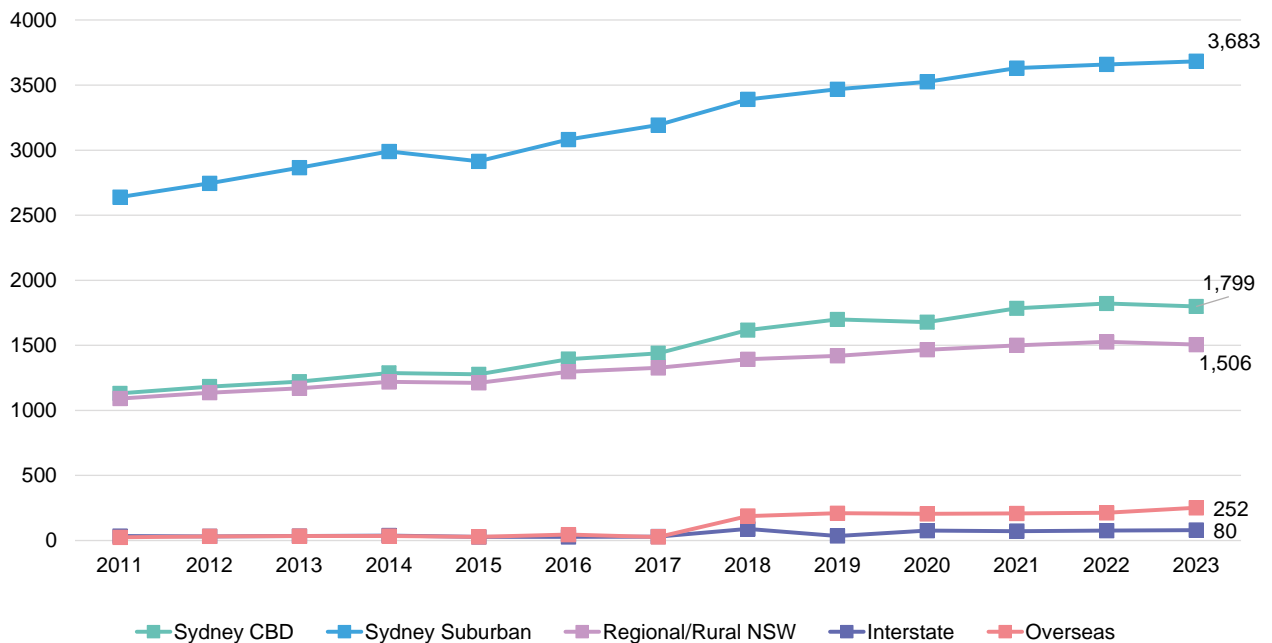


Source: Law Society of NSW database. Base N=7,320

Note: Location categories are defined by the Law Society of NSW using postcode data. Data includes private practice firms with unknown practice size.

There has been a steady increase in the number of private law practices since 2011 located in Sydney CBD (59% increase), suburban areas of Sydney (40% increase) and regional/rural NSW (38% increase).

Figure 15 – Location of private law practices over time

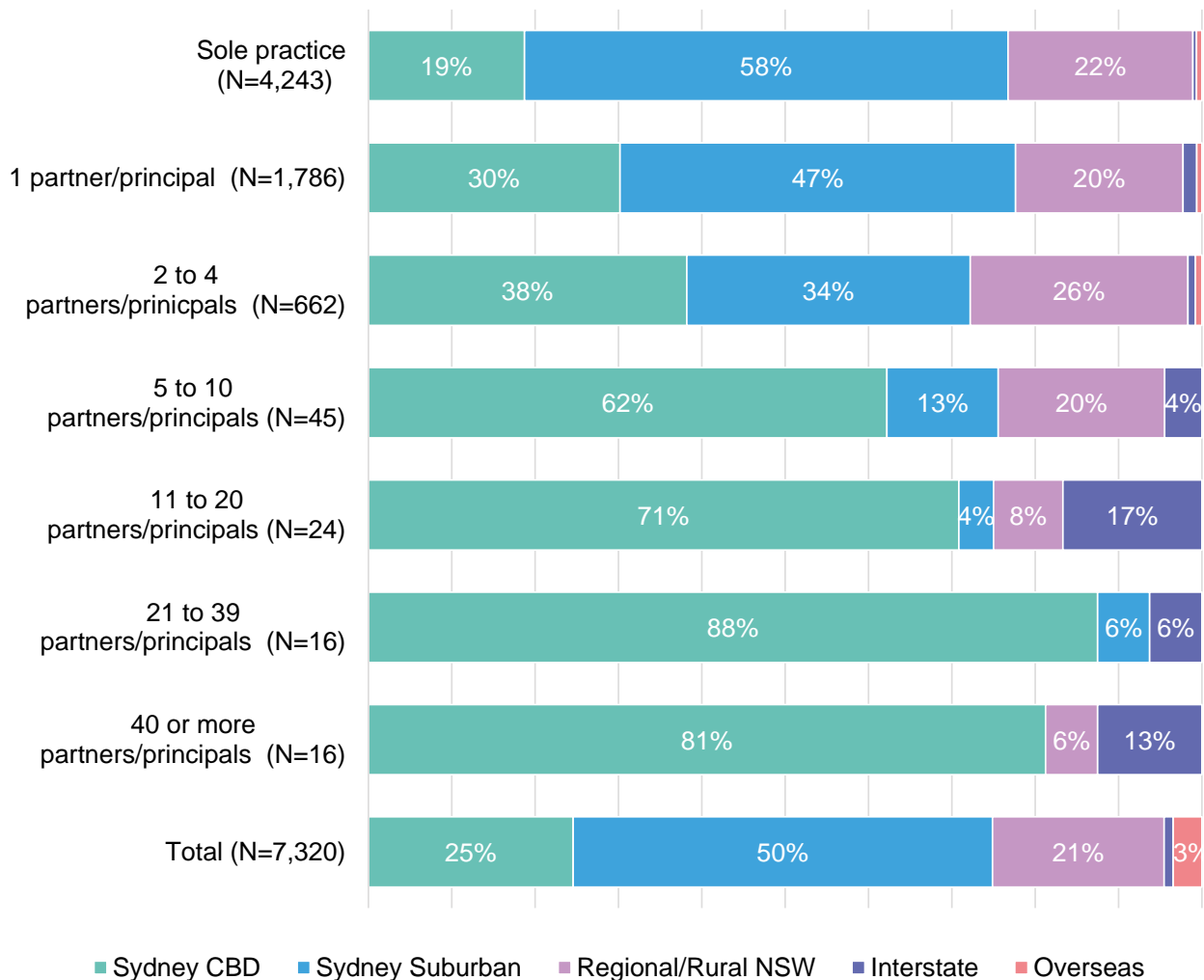


Source: Law Society of NSW database.

Note: Location categories are defined by the Law Society of NSW using postcode data. Data from 2018-2023 includes private practice firms with unknown practice size, data from 2017 and prior did not include practices with an unknown practice size.

The location of private practices varied by practice size, with sole practices and smaller law practices predominately located in suburban areas of Sydney, and larger law practices predominately located in Sydney CBD. It should be noted that the base sizes of larger law practices are smaller compared to other practice sizes (see Figure 16).

Figure 16 – Location of private law practices by law practice size



Source: Law Society of NSW database.

Note: Location categories are defined by the Law Society of NSW using postcode data. Total base (N=7,320) includes private law practices with unknown firm sizes.

9. DISABILITY AND ILLNESS

Respondents were asked about whether they had a disability, long-term illness or mental health condition. A total of 1,434 respondents (11%) identified as having of a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition.

The majority of respondents reporting they had a disability, long-term illness or mental health condition were:

- aged over 40 years (63%)
- employed in private practice (55%)
- female (57%).

Respondents with a disability, long-term illness or a mental health condition were more likely to be working part-time compared to those that did not report a disability, long-term illness or mental health condition (21% compared to 15%).

In addition, these respondents were significantly more likely to be considering leaving the legal profession, compared to those respondents that did not report a disability, long-term illness or mental health condition, (42% compared to 29%). However, it should be noted that those with a disability, long-term illness or a mental health condition were significantly more likely to be aged over 60 years than those without (22% compared to 18%) and therefore more likely to be potentially considering exit from the profession due to retirement. There was also a disparity in incomes reported – respondents that worked full-time that reported a disability, long-term illness or mental health condition reported a lower average income (\$162,262 compared with \$197,117 for respondents that did not report having these conditions). Further, those with a disability, long-term illness or mental health condition were significantly more likely to work in community legal or government legal than those without (3% compared to 2%, and 15% compared to 12% respectively).

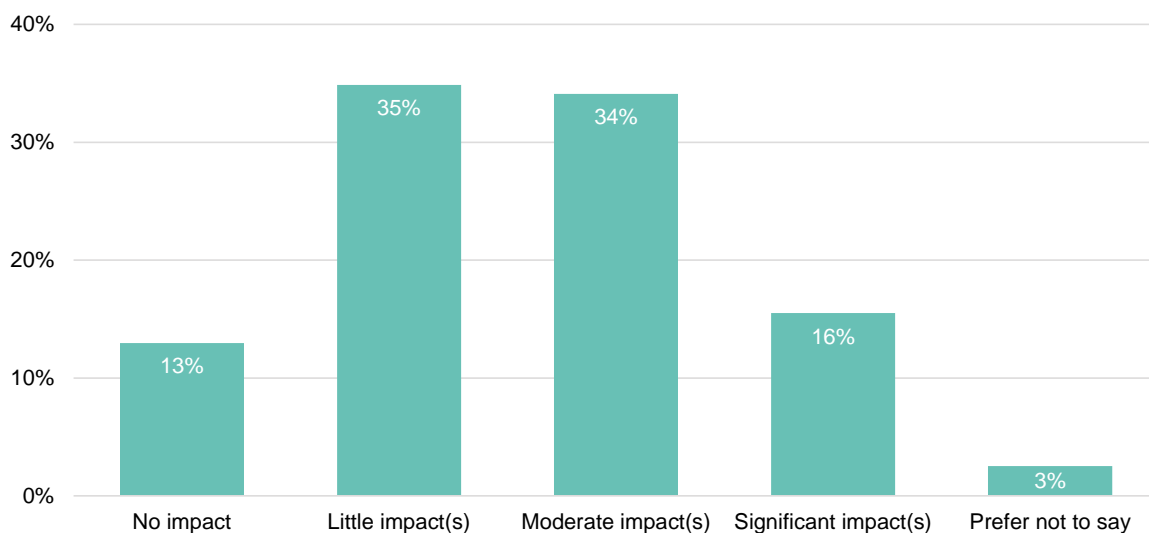
1.1.1. Disability

3% of respondents reported having a disability. The most common disabilities reported were:

- hearing impairment or deafness
- vision impairment or blindness
- mental health conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety and depression
- physical injury or mobility impairments.

These respondents most commonly reported their disability had a little (35%) or moderate (34%) impact on their ability to work.

Figure 17 – Impacts of disability on ability to work



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base $n=393$

Respondents were asked to describe these impacts in more detail. The most common impacts of disability on respondents' ability to work included:

- experiences of pain while working
- issues with mobility
- hearing difficulties
- negative impacts on the quality or potential scope of their work.

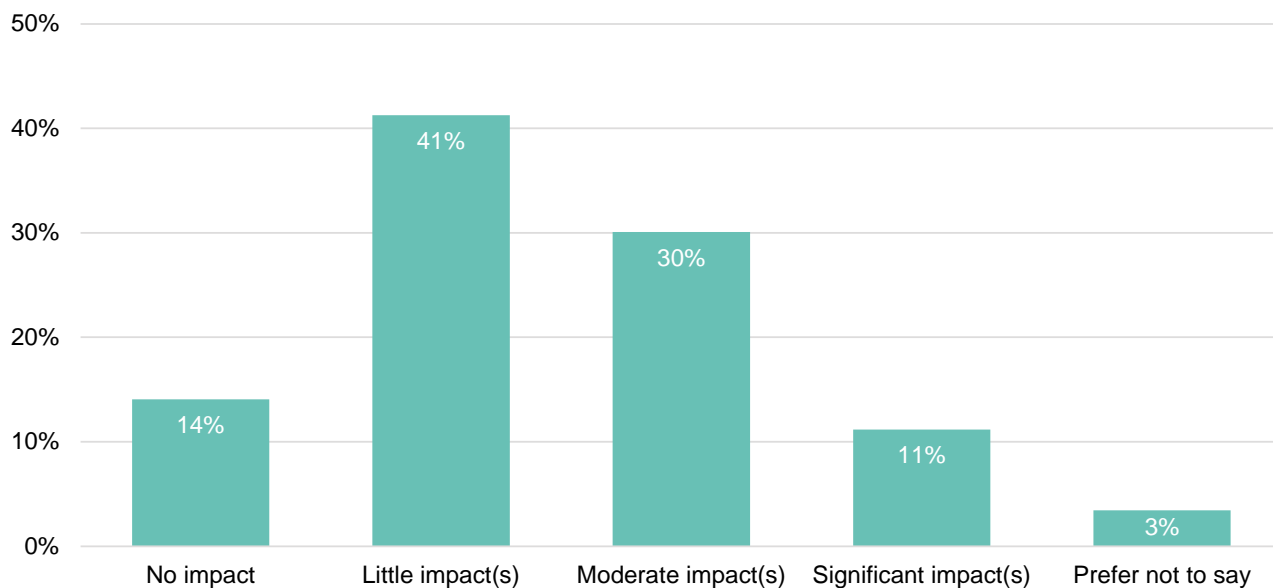
1.1.2. Long-term illnesses

4% of respondents reported having a long-term illness. The most common illnesses reported were:

- diabetes
- heart conditions or disease
- cancer
- autoimmune diseases.

These respondents most commonly reported their long-term illness had little impact (41%) on their ability to work.

Figure 18 – Impacts of long-term illness on ability to work



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=555

The most common impacts of long-term illness on respondents' ability to work included:

- increased fatigue
- needing more time off from work
- reduced ability to work longer hours
- experiences of pain while working.

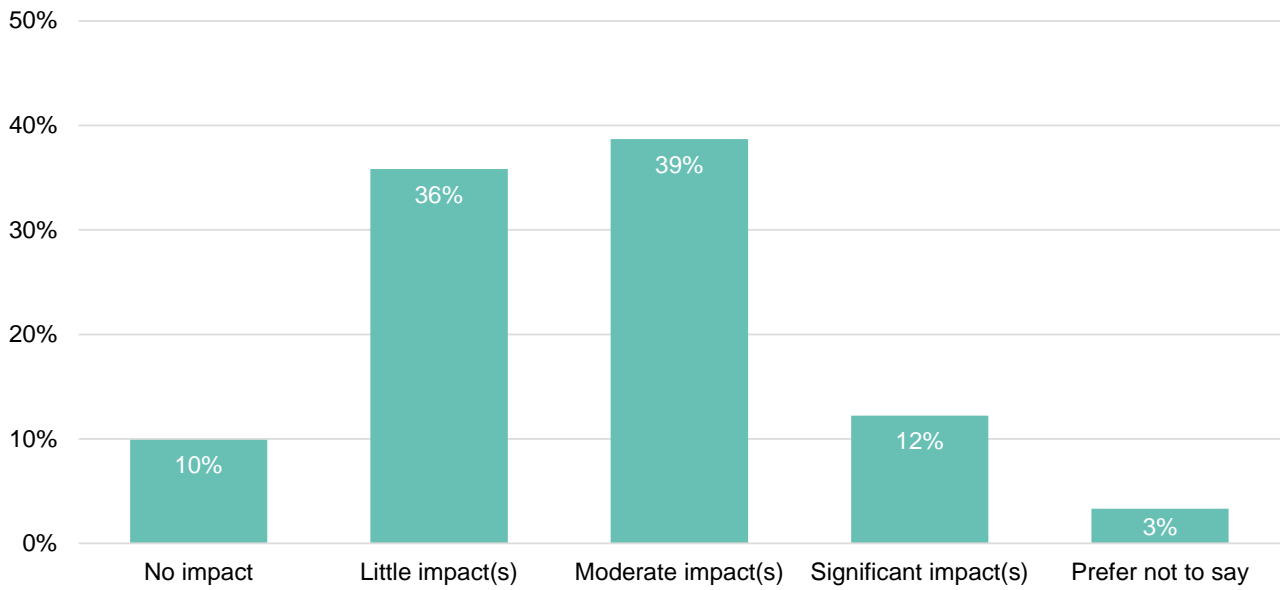
1.1.3. Mental health conditions

5% of respondents reported having a mental health condition. The most common mental health conditions reported were:

- anxiety
- depression
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

These respondents most commonly reported their mental health condition had a moderate impact (39%) on their ability to work.

Figure 19 – Impacts of mental health condition on ability to work



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=695

The most common impacts of mental health conditions on respondents' ability to work included:

- difficulties concentrating at work
- reduced work hours to manage symptoms
- additional levels of stress
- negative impacts on the quality or potential scope of their work.

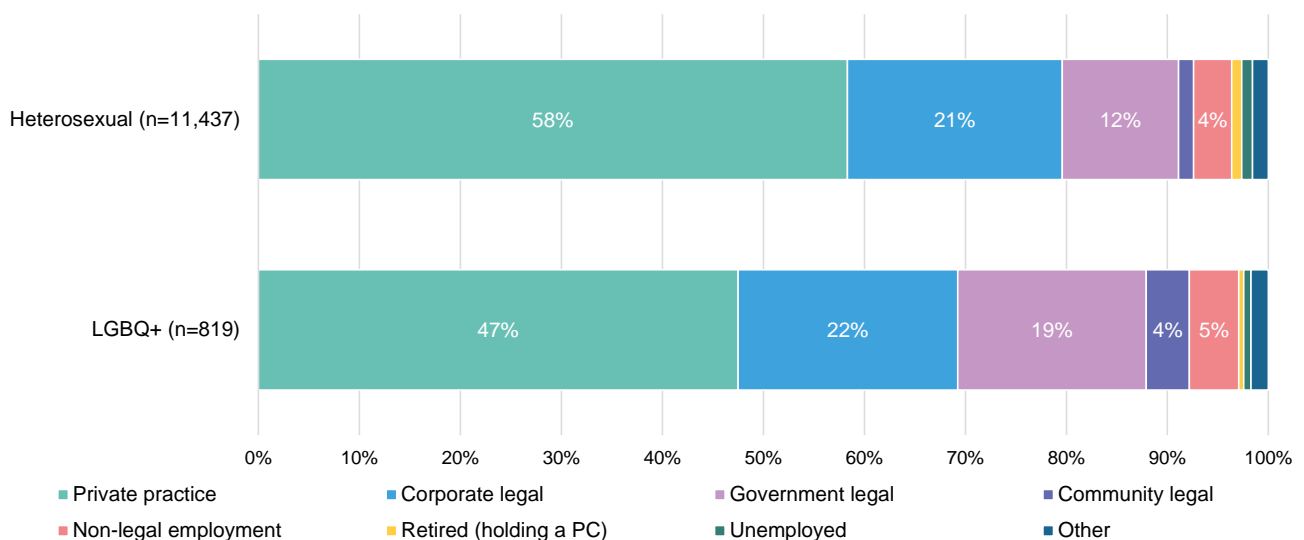
10. SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Respondents were asked if they considered themselves to be: straight or heterosexual; lesbian or gay; bisexual or pansexual; queer; or otherwise. A total of 819 (6%) respondents identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual/pansexual or queer (LGBQ+), 11,437 (84%) as heterosexual and 1,336 (10%) preferred not to say. Of the respondents that identified as LGBQ+ 62% identified as lesbian or gay, 30% identified as bisexual/pansexual and 8% as queer. Due to the overall small proportions for each of these responses, they were grouped together as LGBQ+ to allow for meaningful analysis.

A larger proportion of LGBQ+ respondents identified as male (53%) compared to female (43%), while 3% identified as non-binary. On average, LGBQ+ respondents were younger (24% were under 30 compared to 13% of heterosexual respondents) and were more recently admitted to the legal profession than heterosexual respondents (13 years compared to 18 years).

There was a significant association between sexual orientation and practice sector. As shown below in Figure 20, around one in five LGBQ+ respondents were working in the government legal sector (19%) compared to 12% of heterosexual respondents, and there was also higher representation of LGBQ+ respondents within the community legal sector (4% compared to 1%). There was a lower proportion of LGBQ+ respondents were working in private practice (47%) compared to heterosexual respondents (58%).

Figure 20 – Sexual orientation and practice sectors

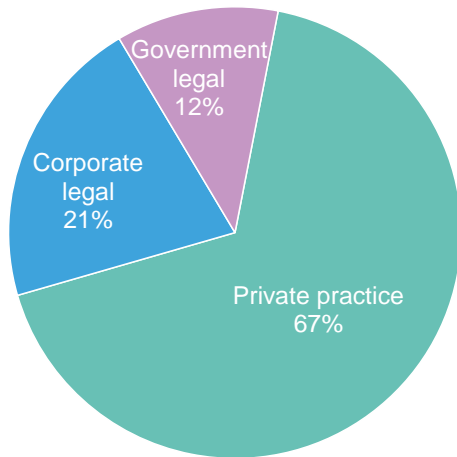


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

11. PRACTICE SECTORS

Over two-thirds of NSW solicitors were working in private practice (67%), and one-fifth were working in the corporate legal sector (21%). The remaining 12% were working in the government legal sector.

Figure 21 – Practice sectors



Source: Law Society of NSW database. Base N=39,976 (excludes N=76 solicitors classified as 'other')

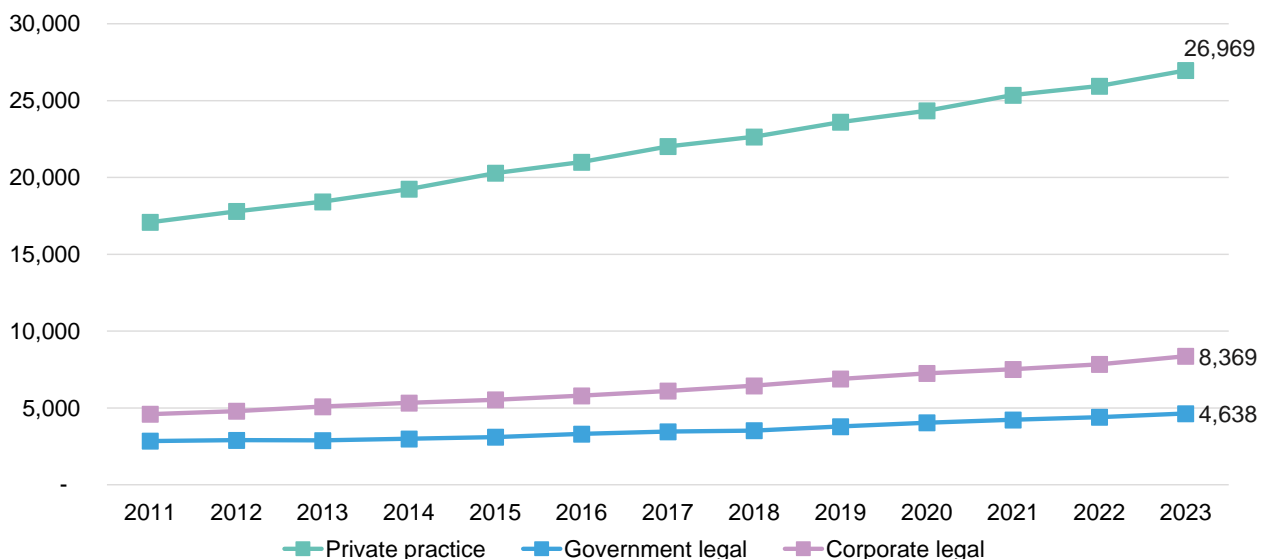
All three practice sectors have experienced growth since 2011, specifically:

The number of solicitors in private practice has increased from 17,091 in 2011 to 26,969 in 2023. This amounts to an average annual growth rate of 4%, and 4% growth in the 12 months to October 2023.

The corporate legal sector has grown from 4,601 practitioners in 2011 to 8,369 in 2023, with an average annual growth rate of 5% and a 7% growth rate in the 12 months to October 2023.

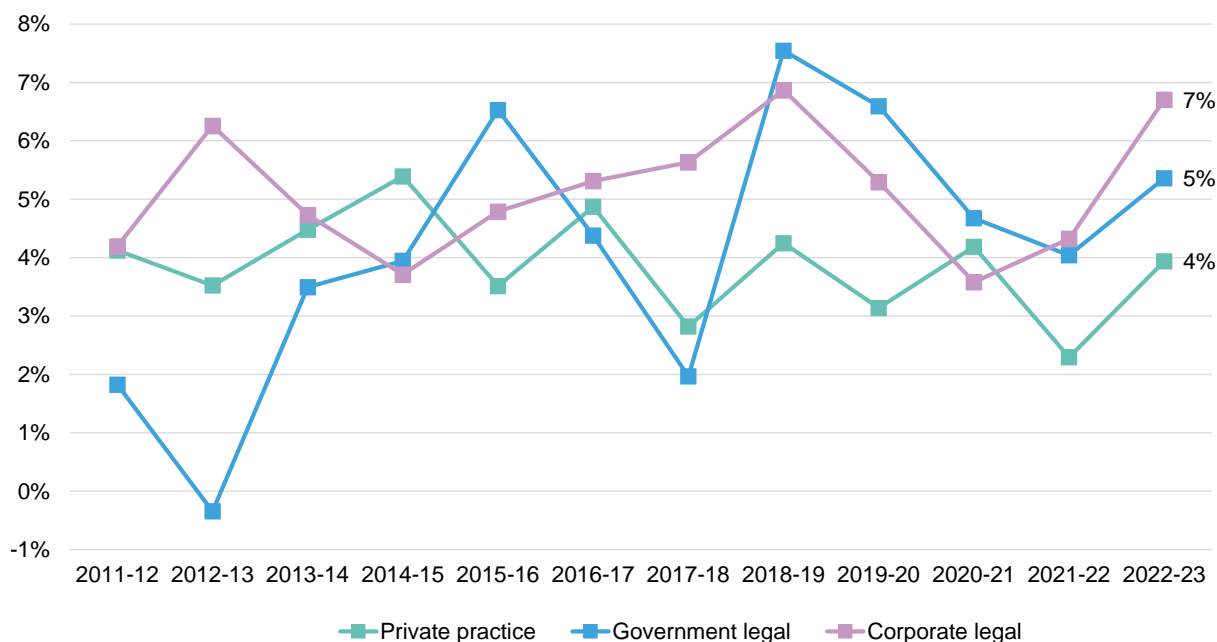
Finally, the government legal sector experienced 5% growth in the 12 months to October 2023 with an average annual growth rate of 4% from 2011.

Figure 22 – Number of solicitors in each practice sector over time



Source: Law Society of NSW database

Figure 23 – Annual growth rates of practice sectors over time



Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Annual growth rates are calculated from October to October each year

The profile of solicitors varied considerably by practice sector, as summarised below.

Gender: In private practice, there was an equal proportion of male and female solicitors (50% respectively). There was a greater proportion of female solicitors in the government legal sector (69%, compared to 31% of males), and in the corporate legal sector (62%, compared to 38% of males).

Age: There was a larger proportion of solicitors aged 30 years and under in private practice (21%), compared to the government and corporate legal sectors (16% and 7% respectively). At the same time, private practice also had a larger proportion of solicitors aged 60 years and older (17%), compared to the government and corporate legal sectors (9% and 6% respectively).

Years since admission: Private practice had the largest proportion of solicitors who had been admitted more recently, which is consistent with the younger age profile of private practice solicitors. Of those in private practice, 31% were admitted for five years or less, compared to 26% in the government legal sector and 14% in the corporate legal sector.

Income: Solicitors working in the corporate legal sector who responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey reported earning higher incomes than survey respondents working in private practice or the government legal sector. Over a quarter of those in the corporate legal sector (27%) reported earning more than \$250,000, compared to 18% of private practice solicitors and 5% of government legal practitioners.

Table 3 – Profile of solicitors by practice sector

	Private practice	Corporate legal	Government legal
Base	26,969	8,369	4,638
Gender			
Male	50%	38%	31%
Female	50%	62%	69%
Location			
Sydney CBD	51%	45%	51%
Sydney suburban	31%	38%	36%
Regional/Rural NSW	14%	4%	12%
Interstate	1%	2%	1%
Overseas	4%	11%	<1%
Age			
<30 years	21%	7%	16%
30-39 years	29%	35%	36%
40-49 years	19%	34%	25%
50-59 years	14%	17%	14%
60-69 years	11%	5%	7%
70+ years	6%	1%	2%
Years since admission			
One year or less	9%	2%	6%
Two to five years	22%	12%	20%
Six to 10 years	17%	21%	23%
11 to 14 years	10%	15%	13%
15 years or more	42%	50%	39%
From the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey			
Base	7,755	2,939	1,637
Mode of work*			
Full time	78%	82%	77%
Part time	19%	12%	14%
Not working as a legal practitioner	2%	4%	6%
On leave at time of survey	1%	2%	3%
Income of full-time and part-time solicitors^			
\$50,000 or less	8%	1%	1%
\$50,001 to \$100,000	22%	9%	19%
\$100,001 to \$150,000	19%	16%	45%
\$150,001 to \$200,000	11%	16%	18%
\$200,001 to \$250,000	7%	16%	6%
\$250,001 to \$300,000	5%	10%	2%
\$300,001 to \$500,000	7%	12%	3%
Over \$500,000	6%	5%	<1%
Prefer not to say	13%	15%	7%

Sources: Law Society of NSW database (bases provided at top of table, table excludes N=76 solicitors classified as 'other' practice sector) and 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey.

*Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (bases provided in table)

^Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (full-time and part-time solicitors bases: private practice n=7,503, corporate legal n=2,763, government legal n=1,498). Bases exclude solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

12. PRIVATE PRACTICE

12.1. OVERVIEW

According to the Law Society of NSW database, there were 26,969 solicitors working in private practice as at 31 October 2023. The characteristics of solicitors working in private practice are summarised below and outlined in detail in Table 4.

Gender: An equal proportion of private practice solicitors were male and female (50% respectively).

Role: Two-fifths of private practice solicitors were principals (37%), while 63% were employees.

Mode of work: Nearly four-fifths of private practice solicitors who responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey reported working full time (78%), which is higher than the profession as a whole (73%).

Location: Just over half of all private practice solicitors were working in Sydney CBD (51%), and a third were in suburban areas of Sydney (31%).

Years since admission: Two-fifths of private practice solicitors had been admitted for 15 years or more (42%) while just under a third had been admitted for 5 years or less (31%).

Income: The annual gross income of private practice solicitors who responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey was higher than that of respondents in the government legal sector, but lower than that of respondents in the corporate legal sector. A quarter of respondents in private practice (25%) reported earning over \$200,000, compared to 43% in corporate legal and 11% in government legal.

Table 4 – Profile of solicitors in private practice

	Solicitors in private practice		Whole profession
	N	%	
Base	26,969	-	40,052
Gender			
Male	13,423	50%	45%
Female	13,546	50%	55%
Role within private practice			
Partner/principal	9,880	37%	-
Employee	17,089	63%	-
Location			
Sydney CBD	13,732	51%	50%
Sydney Suburban	8,280	31%	33%
Regional/Rural NSW	3,675	14%	11%
Interstate	163	1%	1%
Overseas	1,118	4%	5%
Years since admission			
One year or less	2,529	9%	8%
Two to five years	5,947	22%	20%
Six to 10 years	4,680	17%	19%
11 to 14 years	2,612	10%	11%
15 years or more	11,201	42%	43%

	Solicitors in private practice		Whole profession
	N	%	
Age			
<30 years	5,795	21%	18%
30 to 39 years	7,765	29%	31%
40 to 49 years	5,082	19%	23%
50 to 59 years	3,823	14%	15%
60 to 69 years	2,927	11%	9%
70+ years	1,577	6%	4%
From 2023-24 Practising Certificate			
Base	7,755	-	13,597
Mode of work*			
Full time	6,045	78%	73%
Part time	1,458	19%	16%
Not working as a legal practitioner	137	2%	9%
On leave at time of survey	115	1%	2%
Income of full-time and part-time solicitors^			
\$50,000 or less	626	8%	6%
\$50,001 to \$100,000	1655	22%	19%
\$100,001 to \$150,000	1461	19%	22%
\$150,001 to \$200,000	840	11%	13%
\$200,001 to \$250,000	554	7%	9%
\$250,001 to \$300,000	382	5%	6%
\$300,001 to \$500,000	536	7%	8%
Over \$500,000	448	6%	5%
Prefer not to say	1001	13%	13%

Source: Law Society of NSW database (base provided at top of table).

*Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (bases provided in table)

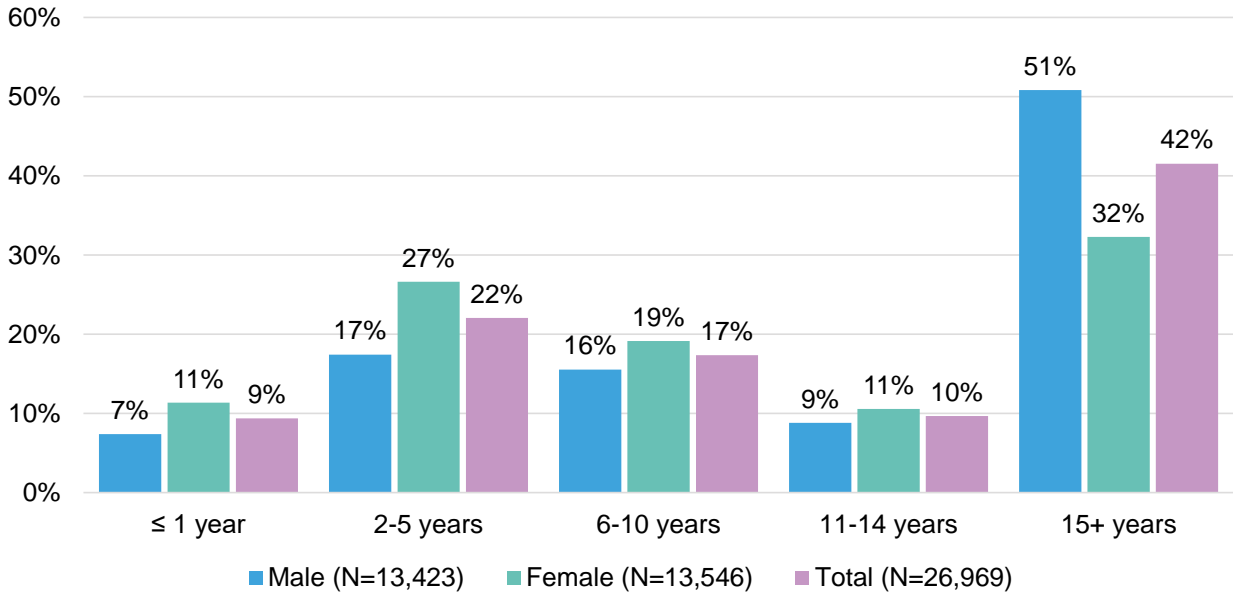
^Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (full-time and part-time solicitors bases: private practice n=7,503 whole profession n=12,157). Bases exclude solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

12.2. YEARS SINCE ADMISSION

Females in private practice were admitted more recently compared to males. Almost two-fifths of female private practice solicitors had been admitted for 5 years or less (38%), compared to a quarter of males (24%). Conversely, more than half of male private practice solicitors had been admitted for 15 or more years (51%) compared to under a third (32%) of females.

Figure 24 – Years since admission of private practice solicitors



Source: Law Society NSW Database

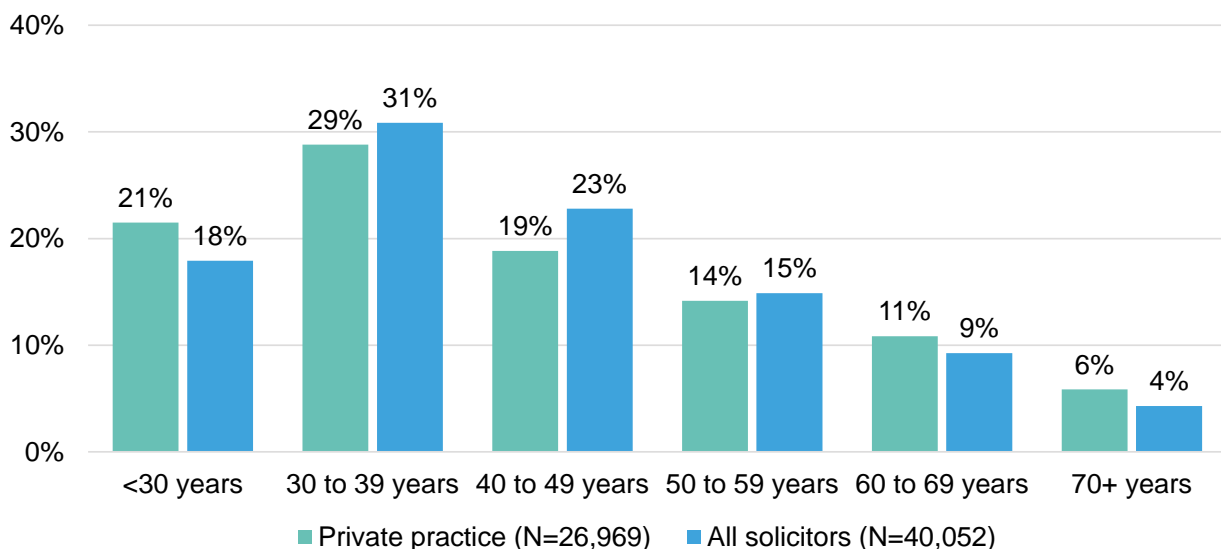
12.3. AGE

The age profile of solicitors working in private practice was similar to the profile of all solicitors in NSW. This is not surprising as the majority of solicitors work in private practice. Key differences include:

a larger proportion of private practice solicitors were aged under 30 years, compared to all solicitors (21% compared to 18%)

a smaller proportion of private practice solicitors were aged between 30 and 49 years compared to all solicitors (48% compared to 54%).

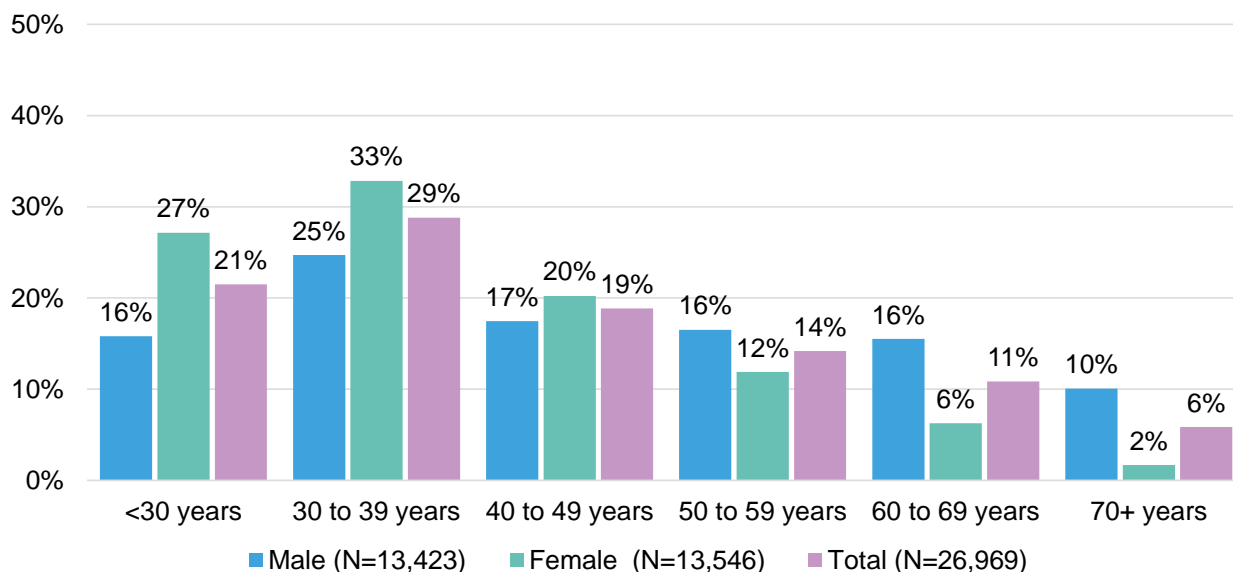
Figure 25 – Age profile of solicitors in private practice vs the whole profession



Source: Law Society NSW Database

When looking at age by gender in private practice, it was clear that females had a younger age profile than males. Three-fifths of female solicitors were aged 39 years or younger (60%), compared to two-fifths of male solicitors (41%). Conversely, over a quarter of male solicitors were aged 60 years or older (26%), compared to only 8% of female solicitors.

Figure 26 – Age profile of male and female solicitors in private practice



Source: Law Society NSW Database

12.4. LAW PRACTICE SIZE AND ROLE

As at 31 October 2023, there were 7,320 private practices operating in NSW. These law practices comprised 9,880 principals and 17,081 employed solicitors. The majority of private practices were sole practices (62%), followed by law practices with one principal and employed solicitors (26%).

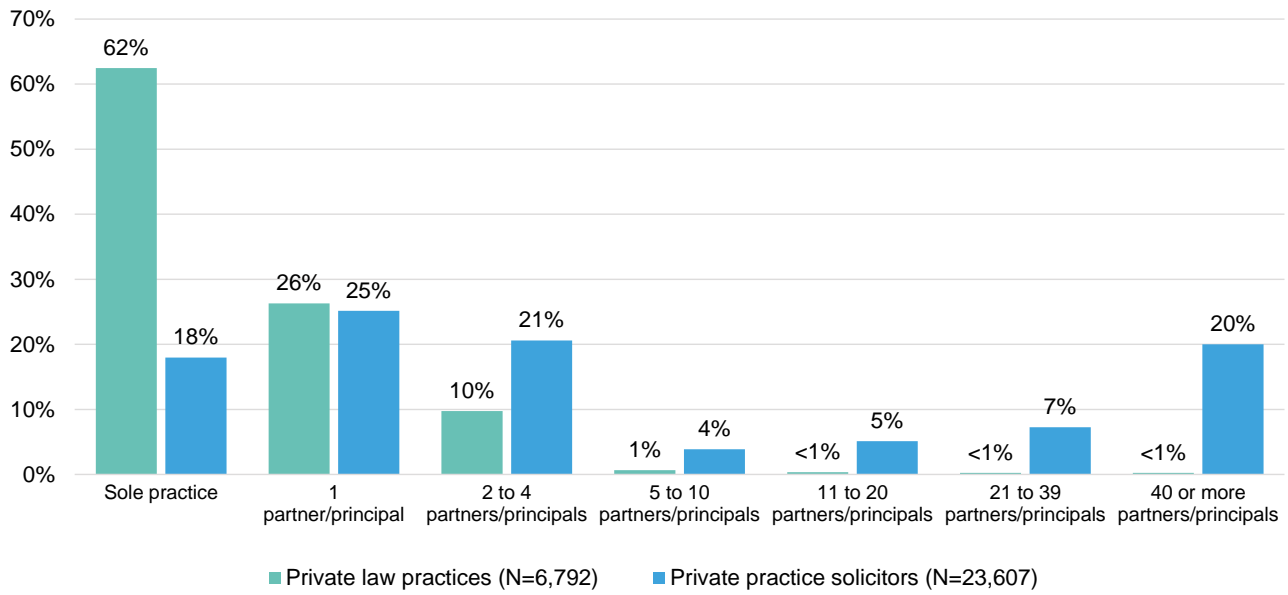
There were 16 private law practices with 40 or more principals (1,134 principals in total), which employed 3,592 solicitors. This represents just over one-quarter of all non-principal solicitors working in private practice (26%). In total, at 31 October 2023, 20% of private practice solicitors were working in less than one per cent of all private practices in NSW.

Table 5 – Private practice solicitors by role and size of law practice

Size of law practice (number of partners/ principals)	Private practices		Solicitors in private practice					
	N	%	Principals		Employees		Total	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
Sole practice	4,243	62%	4,243	44%	0	0%	4,243	18%
1 partner/principal	1,786	26%	1,744	18%	4,196	30%	5,940	25%
2 to 4 partners/principals	662	10%	1,444	15%	3,419	24%	4,863	21%
5 to 10 partners/principals	45	1%	275	3%	639	5%	914	4%
11 to 20 partners/principals	24	<1%	353	4%	852	6%	1,205	5%
21 to 39 partners/principals	16	<1%	443	5%	1,273	9%	1,716	7%
40 or more partners/principals	16	<1%	1,134	12%	3,592	26%	4,726	20%
Unknown	528	-	244	-	3,110	-	3,354	-
Total	7,320	100%	9,880	100%	17,081	100%	26,961	100%

Source: Law Society of NSW database. Note: Percentage calculations use the reduced base of N=23,067 is due to law practice classification in the Law Society of NSW database; excludes N=3,354 solicitors with an 'unknown' practice size.

Figure 27 – Private legal practitioners by size of law practice

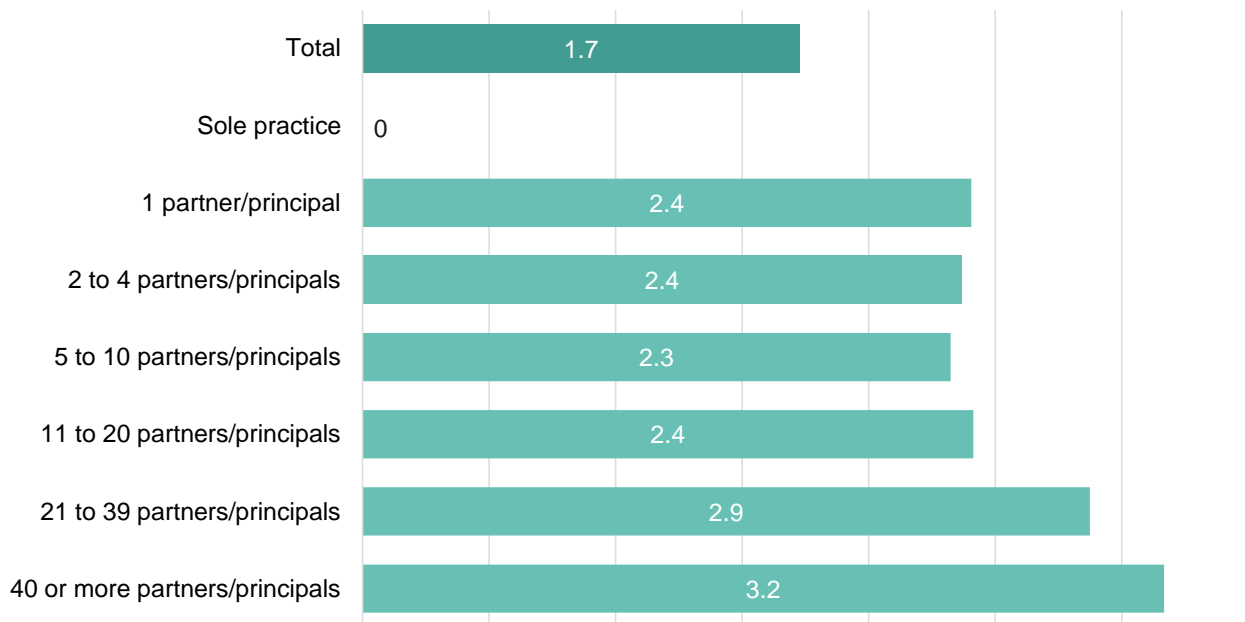


Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Reduced base of N=23,607 is due to law practice classification in the Law Society of NSW database; figure excludes N=3,354 solicitors with an 'unknown' practice size.

The ratio of employed solicitors to principals in private practices varied by the size of law practice. Larger law practices generally had higher employed solicitor-to-principal ratios. For instance, law practices with 40 or more principals had a ratio of 3.2, while practices of two to four principals had a ratio of 2.4. The ratio across all private practices was 1.7 employed solicitors to each principal.

Figure 28 – Ratio of employees to principals by size of law practice



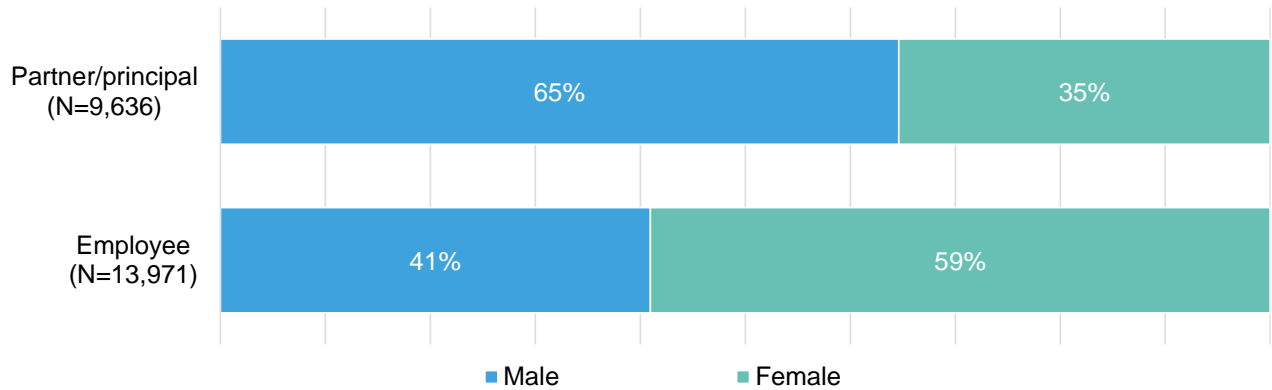
Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Ratio across all private practices includes N=3,354 solicitors with an 'unknown' practice size.

12.4.1. Gender by role in law practice

Consistent with previous years, there was a greater proportion of male principals (65%) than females (35%). However, this gap has been gradually decreasing over time; for instance, in 2013 76% of partners/principals were male and only 24% were female, and in 2023 these proportions were 65% males and 35% females.

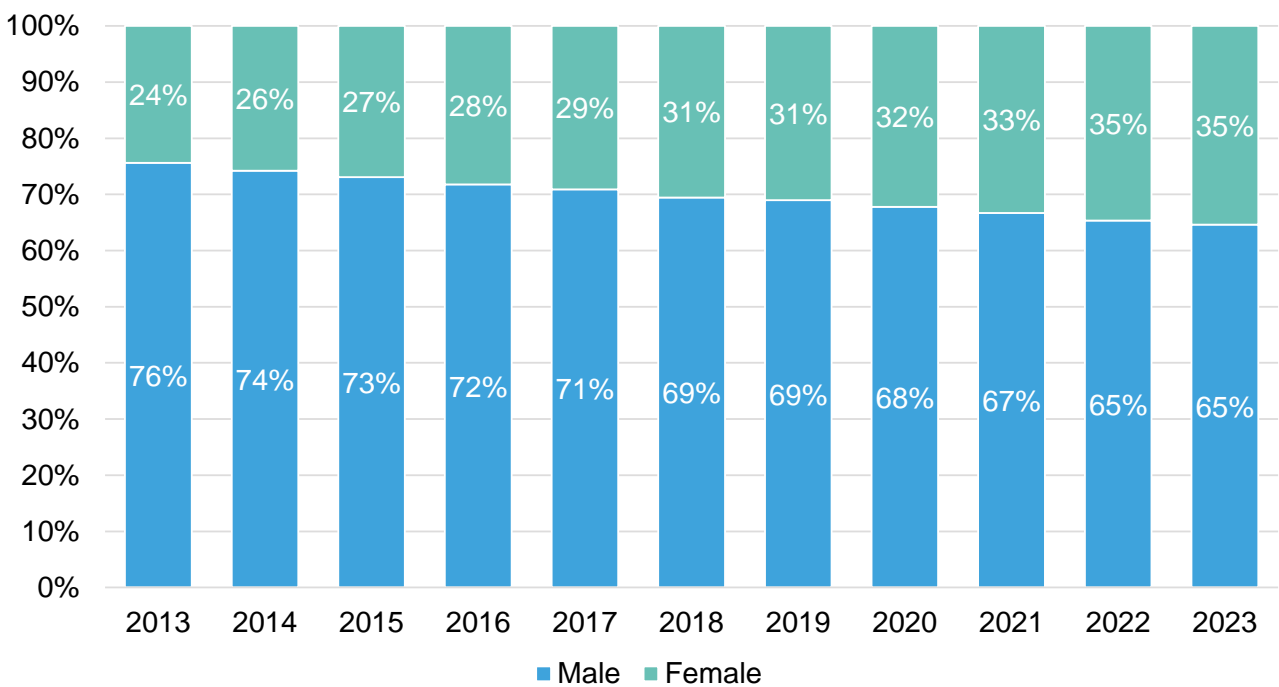
Figure 29 – Gender profile of partners/principals and employed solicitors in private practice



Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Reduced base of N=23,607 is due to law practice classification in the Law Society of NSW database; figure excludes N=3,354 solicitors with an 'unknown' practice size.

Figure 30 – Partners/principals in private practice by gender over time

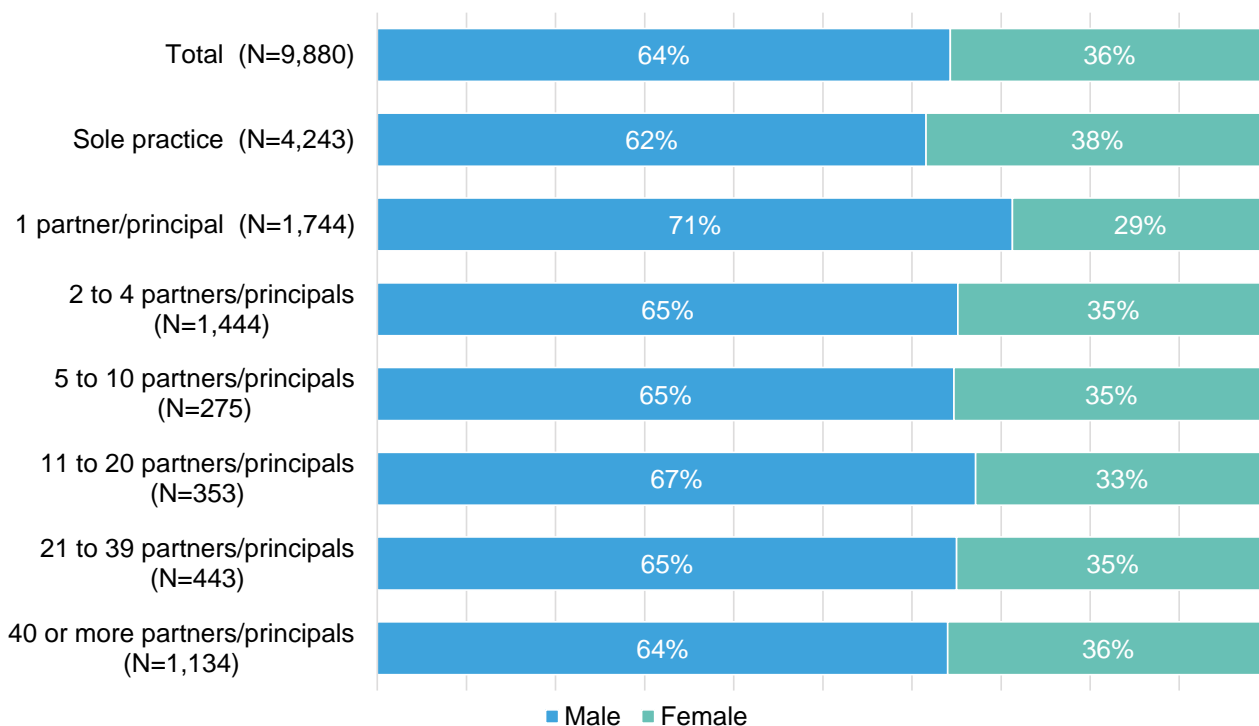


Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Reduced base of N=23,607 is due to law practice classification in the Law Society of NSW database; figure excludes N=3,354 solicitors with an 'unknown' practice size.

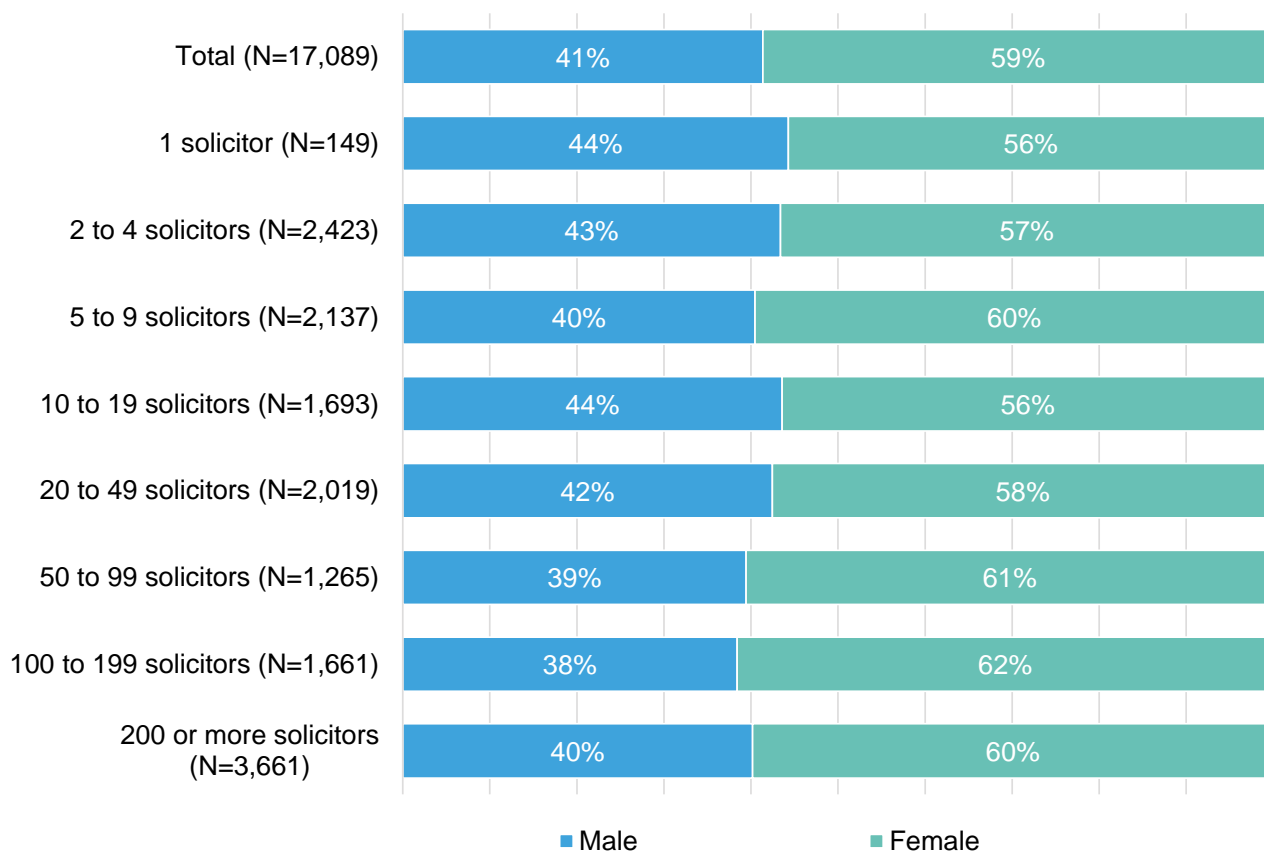
There was a relatively stable proportion of female practitioners across all law practice sizes, apart from 1 partner/principal law practices which had a lower proportion of female practitioners (29%).

Figure 31 – Gender profile of partners/principals in private practice by law practice size



Source: Law Society of NSW database. Note: Proportions across all law practice sizes (total N=9,880) include N=244 solicitors with an 'unknown' practice size.

Figure 32 – Gender profile of employed solicitors in private practice by law practice size



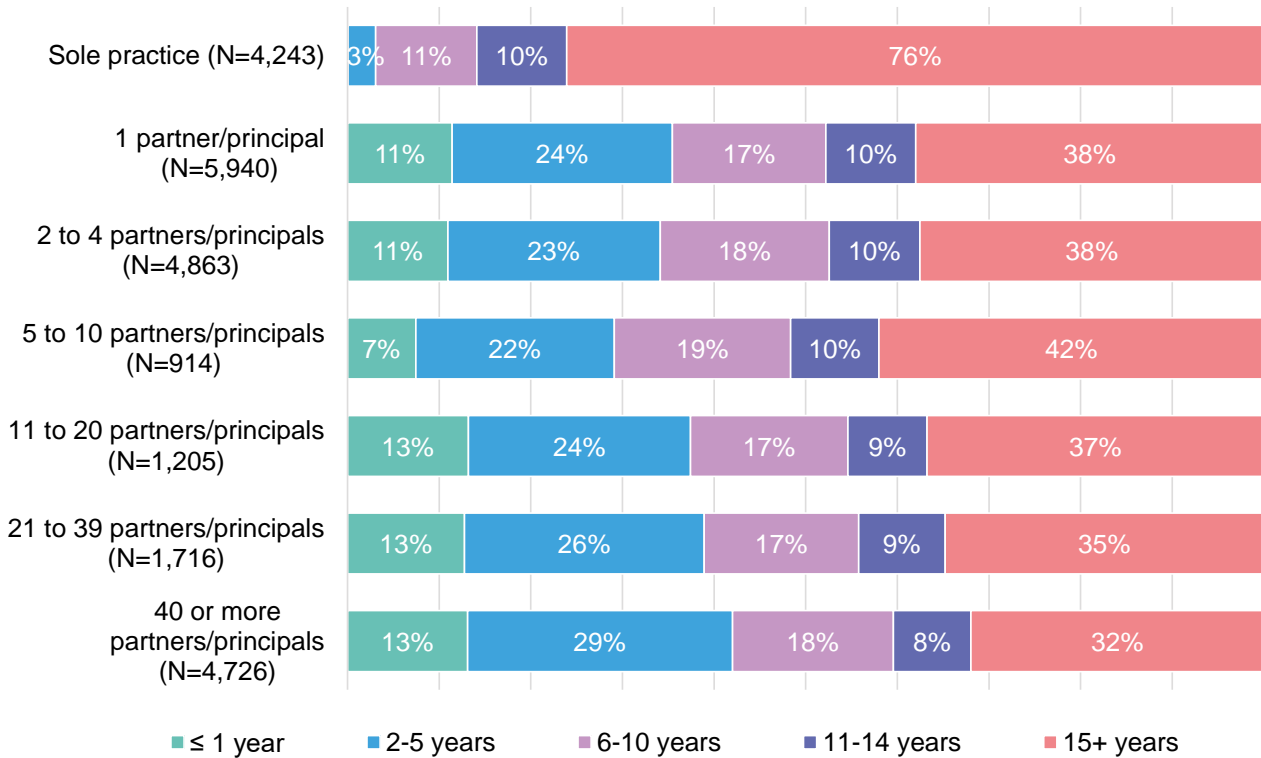
Source: Law Society of NSW database. Note: Proportions across all law practice sizes (total N=17,081) include N=3,110 solicitors with an 'unknown' practice size.

12.4.2. Years since admission by law practice size

Overall, larger law practices had a slightly greater proportion of early career solicitors than smaller law practices. For example, 42% of solicitors in law practices of 40 or more principals had been admitted for five years or less as at 31 October 2023, compared to 34% of those in law practices of two to four principals.

It should also be noted that three-quarters (76%) of solicitors working in sole practices had been admitted for 15 years or more as at 31 October 2023.

Figure 33 – Years since admission of solicitors in private practices by law practice size



Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Reduced base of N=23,607 is due to law practice classification in the Law Society of NSW database; figure excludes N=3,354

13. THE CORPORATE LEGAL SECTOR

According to the Law Society of NSW database, there were 8,369 corporate legal practitioners as at 31 October 2023.

Gender: Almost two-thirds corporate legal practitioners were female (62%).

Mode of work: A higher proportion of corporate legal practitioners who responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey reported working full time (82%), compared to the profession as a whole (73%).

Location: Only 4% of corporate legal practitioners were working in regional/rural NSW, compared to 11% of the whole profession. A larger proportion of corporate legal practitioners were working overseas (11%), compared to the whole profession (5%).

Years since admission: A smaller proportion of corporate legal practitioners had been admitted for five years or less (14%) compared to 28% for the whole profession; however, a greater proportion had been admitted for between 11 and 14 years (15%), compared to 11% for the whole profession.

Age: A smaller proportion of corporate legal practitioners were aged less than 30 years old (7%), compared to the whole profession (18%). A majority of corporate legal practitioners were aged between 30 and 49 years (69%), compared to 54% for the whole profession.

Income: Corporate legal practitioners who responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey generally reported higher incomes, with 27% earning more than \$250,000 compared to only 19% of the whole profession. The higher proportion of corporate legal practitioners working overseas (11% compared to 5% in the whole profession) may have contributed to this.

Table 6 – Profile of corporate legal practitioners

	Corporate legal practitioners		Whole profession
	N	%	
Base	8,369	-	40,052
Gender			
Male	3,171	38%	45%
Female	5,198	62%	55%
Location			
Sydney CBD	3,764	45%	50%
Sydney Suburban	3,176	38%	33%
Regional/Rural NSW	330	4%	11%
Interstate	179	2%	1%
Overseas	920	11%	5%
Years since admission			
One year or less	208	2%	8%
Two to five years	1,011	12%	20%
Six to 10 years	1,721	21%	19%
11 to 14 years	1,248	15%	11%
15 years or more	4,181	50%	43%

	Corporate legal practitioners		Whole profession
	N	%	
Age			
<30 years	612	7%	18%
30 to 39 years	2,924	35%	31%
40 to 49 years	2,868	34%	23%
50 to 59 years	1,459	17%	15%
60 to 69 years	438	5%	9%
70+ years	68	1%	4%
From 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey			
Base	2,939		13,597
Mode of work*			
Full time	2,416	82%	73%
Part time	347	12%	16%
Not working as a legal practitioner	120	4%	9%
On leave at time of survey	56	2%	2%
Role within the corporate legal sector*			
Group General counsel	190	6%	-
Head of legal team	320	11%	-
General counsel	318	11%	-
Senior lawyer/Senior legal counsel	1,074	37%	-
Lawyer/Legal counsel	781	27%	-
Graduate lawyer	38	1%	-
Paralegal	7	<1%	-
Other	211	7%	-
Income of full-time and part-time solicitors[^]			
\$50,000 or less	34	1%	6%
\$50,001 to \$100,000	249	9%	19%
\$100,001 to \$150,000	440	16%	22%
\$150,001 to \$200,000	438	16%	13%
\$200,001 to \$250,000	432	16%	9%
\$250,001 to \$300,000	263	10%	6%
\$300,001 to \$500,000	338	12%	8%
Over \$500,000	145	5%	5%
Prefer not to say	424	15%	13%

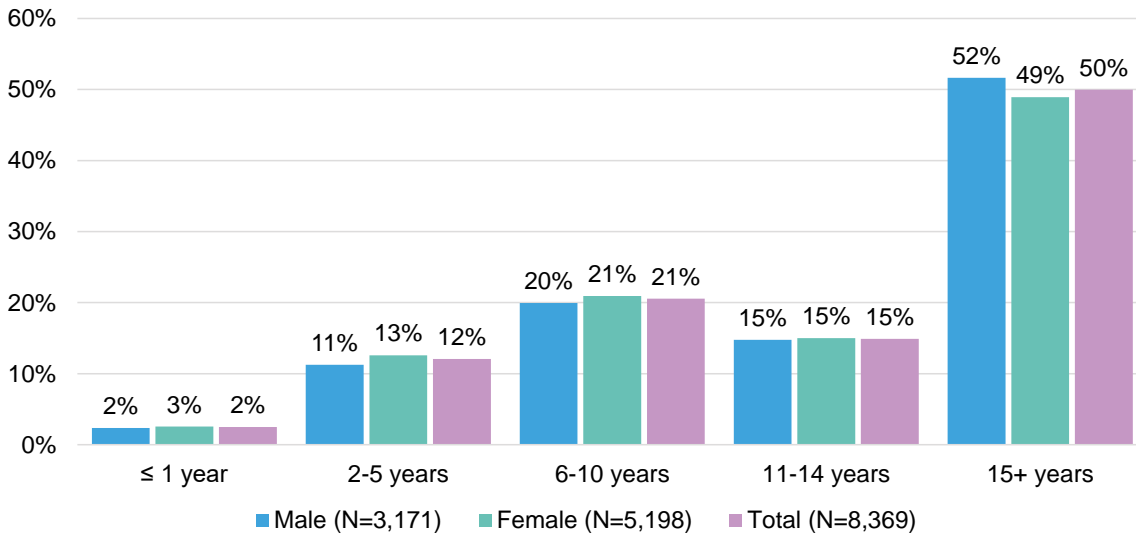
Source: Law Society of NSW database (base provided at top of table) and 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey.

*Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (bases provided in table).

[^]Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (full-time and part-time solicitors bases: corporate legal n=2,763 whole profession n=12,157). Bases exclude solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

Females in the corporate legal sector were slightly less likely to be admitted more than 15 years and generally had a younger age profile compared to males (see Figure 33 and Figure 34).

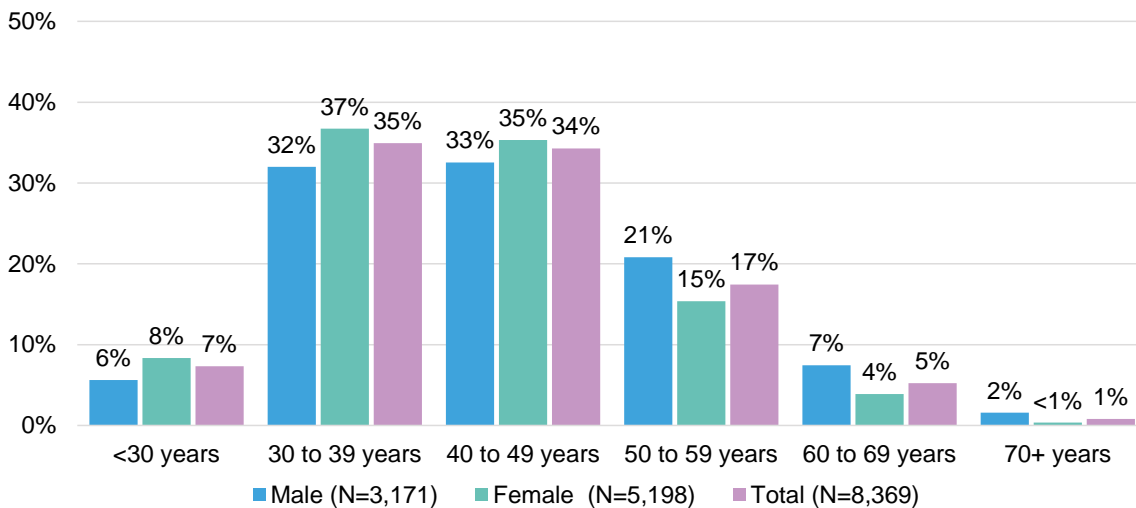
Figure 34 – Years since admission of corporate legal practitioners



Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 35 – Age profile of corporate legal practitioners

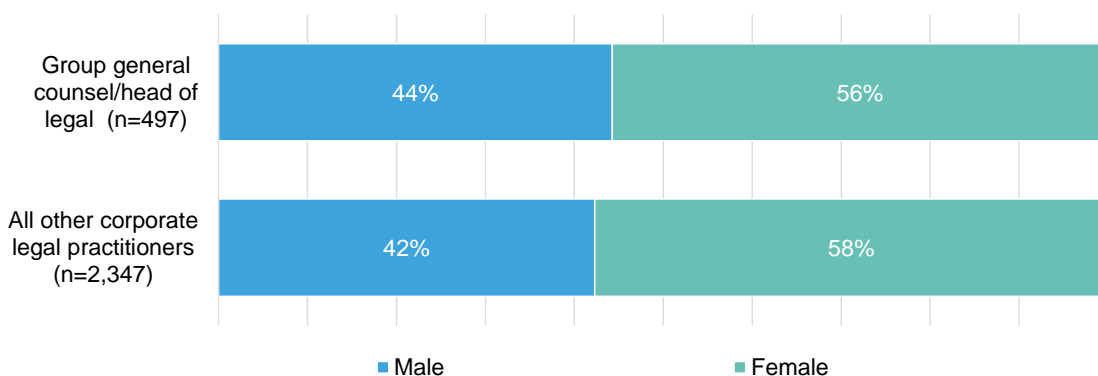


Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

There were more females than males in corporate legal working in the most senior roles such as group general counsel and head of legal, and in all other corporate legal roles.

Figure 36 – Gender of corporate legal practitioners by role



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

14. THE GOVERNMENT LEGAL SECTOR

According to the Law Society of NSW database, there were 4,638 government legal practitioners as at 31 October 2023.

Gender: More than two-thirds of government legal practitioners were female (69%).

Mode of work: Three-quarters of government legal practitioners who responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey reported working full time (77%), followed by 14% working part time, which is consistent with the profession as a whole. A small proportion reported not working as a legal practitioner in October 2023 (6%).

Location: Most government legal practitioners were working in Sydney CBD (51%) or in a suburban area of Sydney (36%).

Years since admission: Almost two in five government legal practitioners had been admitted for 15 years or more (39%), followed by 23% who had been admitted for six to ten years. This was generally consistent with the whole of the profession.

Income: Almost half of government legal practitioners who responded to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey reported earning between \$100,001 to \$150,000 (45%), almost double the proportion for the whole profession (22%). Further, a smaller proportion reported earning more than \$250,000 (5%) compared to the whole profession (19%).

Table 7 – Profile of government legal practitioners

	Government legal practitioners		Whole profession
	N	%	
Base	4,638	-	40,052
Gender			
Male	1,431	31%	45%
Female	3,207	69%	55%
Location			
Sydney CBD	2,352	51%	50%
Sydney Suburban	1,667	36%	33%
Regional/Rural NSW	554	12%	11%
Interstate	49	1%	1%
Overseas	16	<1%	5%
Years since admission			
One year or less	271	6%	8%
Two to five years	918	20%	20%
Six to 10 years	1,059	23%	19%
11 to 14 years	589	13%	11%
15 years or more	1,801	39%	43%
Age			
<30 years	759	16%	18%
30 to 39 years	1,652	36%	31%
40 to 49 years	1,164	25%	23%
50 to 59 years	661	14%	15%
60 to 69 years	332	7%	9%
70+ years	70	2%	4%

From 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey			
Base	1,637	-	13,597
Mode of work*			
Full time	1,261	77%	73%
Part time	237	14%	16%
Not working as a legal practitioner	96	6%	9%
On leave at time of survey	43	3%	2%
Role within the government legal sector*			
Group General counsel	14	1%	-
Head of legal team	56	3%	
General counsel	55	3%	-
Senior lawyer/Senior legal counsel	707	43%	-
Lawyer/Legal counsel	569	35%	-
Graduate lawyer	36	2%	-
Paralegal	10	1%	-
Other	190	12%	-
Income of full-time and part-time solicitors^			
\$50,000 or less	13	1%	6%
\$50,001 to \$100,000	282	19%	19%
\$100,001 to \$150,000	674	45%	22%
\$150,001 to \$200,000	265	18%	13%
\$200,001 to \$250,000	93	6%	9%
\$250,001 to \$300,000	28	2%	6%
\$300,001 to \$500,000	42	3%	8%
Over \$500,000	1	<1%	5%
Prefer not to say	100	7%	13%

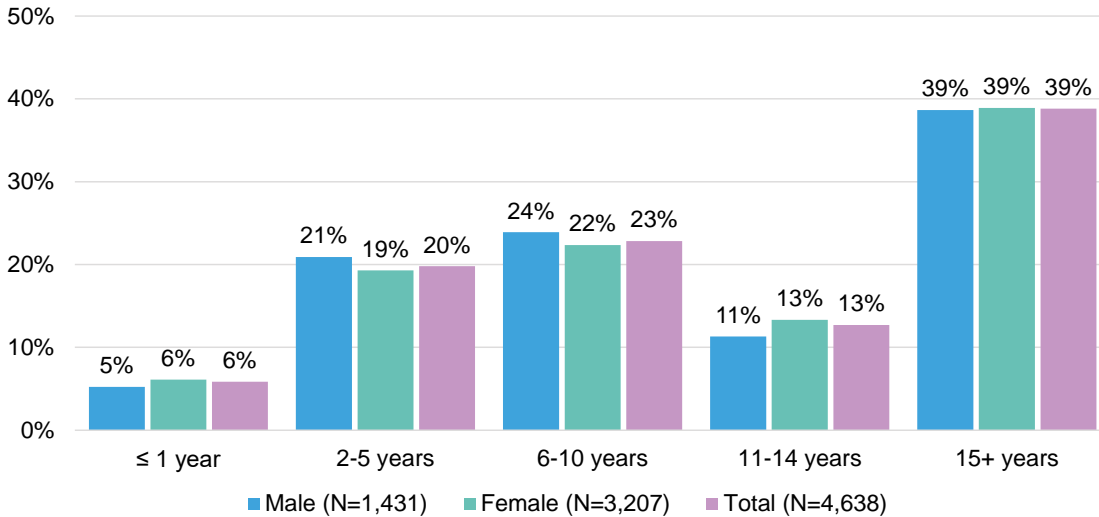
Source: Law Society of NSW database (base provided at top of table) and 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey.

*Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (bases provided in table).

^Figures are from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey (full-time and part-time solicitors bases: government legal n=1,498 whole profession n=12,157). Bases exclude solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

There was little difference in patterns of years since admission across gender. In previous reports, slightly more males had been admitted for longer compared to females, however since 2020, the distribution was almost equivalent across both genders.

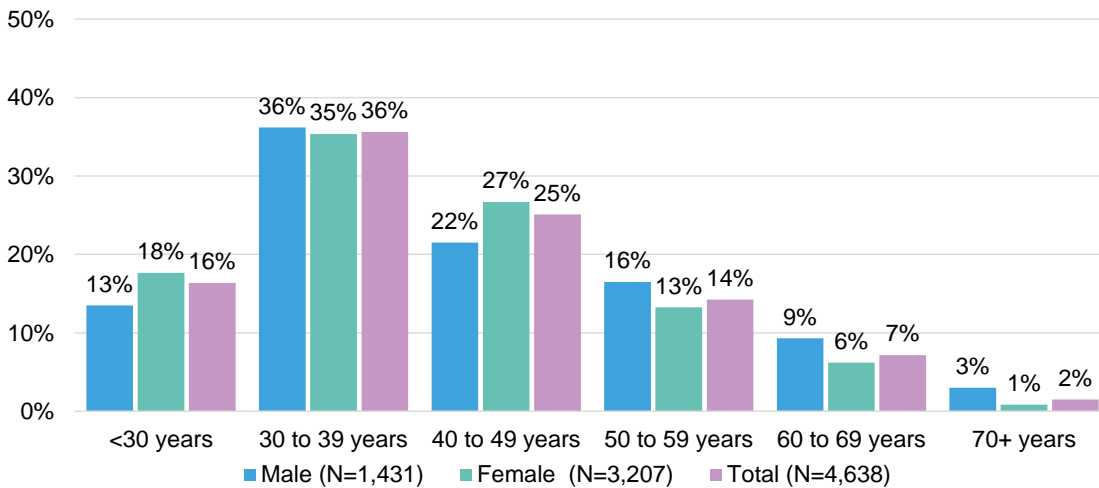
Figure 37 – Years since admission of government legal practitioners



Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 38 – Age profile of government legal practitioners

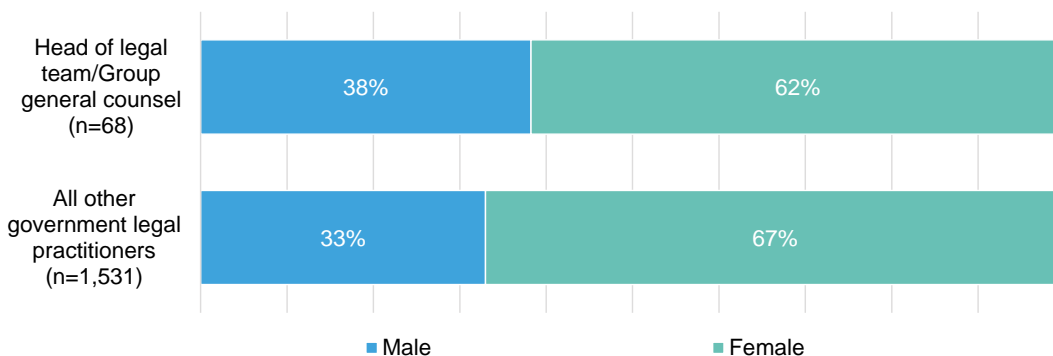


Source: Law Society of NSW database

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

There were more females than males in government legal working in the most senior roles as group general counsel and head of legal, and this was an increase in the proportion of females compared to last year. Females were overrepresented in all other government legal roles. Two-thirds of practitioners working in other government legal roles were female (67%) compared to a third of males (33%).

Figure 39 – Gender of government legal practitioners by role



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey.

15. AREAS OF PRACTICE

This chapter draws on data from the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. The survey was completed by 13,597 practitioners, representing 35% of all solicitors who renewed their practising certificate in 2023.

15.1. OVERVIEW

In 2023-24, the most common areas of practice reported by respondents were:

- Commercial law (31%)
- Corporate law (21%)
- Civil litigation (20%)
- Conveyancing/real property (20%).

Over the past 13 years, there has been an increase in the proportion of solicitors practising:

- Corporate law (+3%)
- Administrative law (+3%)

Meanwhile, there has been a reduction in the proportion of solicitors practising:

- Conveyancing/real property (-10%)
- Wills and estates (-4%)

15.2. PRACTICE SECTORS

The main areas of practice varied across practice sectors. Table 8 provides the five most common areas of practice across private practice, and the government and corporate legal sectors.

Table 8 – Five most common areas of practice by practice sector

Private practice		The government legal sector		The corporate legal sector	
Conveyancing/Real property	30%	Administrative law	41%	Commercial law	54%
Commercial law	30%	Criminal law	35%	Corporate law	49%
Wills and estates	30%	Civil litigation	16%	Banking/Finance	23%
Civil litigation	25%	Litigation – general	16%	Intellectual property	18%
Litigation – general	21%	Advocacy	14%	Employment/Industrial law	17%

Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Table 9 provides a breakdown of all areas of practice for respondents to the Practising Certificate Survey across the profession.

Table 9 – Areas of practice 2010/11 to 2023/24

Areas of practice	Areas of practice 2010/11 to 2023/24 (%)														Change (%)	
	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Change from 22/23 to 23/24	Change from 10/11 to 23/24
Administrative law	8	8	8	9	10	10	10	9	8	9	9	9	10	11	+1	+3
Advocacy	7	6	6	6	8	8	9	7	6	6	6	6	7	7	0	0
Alternative dispute resolution	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	0	-
Banking/Finance	8	11	12	11	11	11	9	10	10	10	10	11	11	10	-1	+2
Civil litigation	23	21	22	23	23	23	24	21	19	19	20	20	21	20	-1	-3
Commercial law	31	34	33	34	34	35	32	31	28	30	30	32	32	31	-1	0
Competition law	5	6	6	5	6	6	5	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	0	-1
Construction law	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-
Corporate law	18	22	23	23	23	25	29	22	20	20	21	22	23	21	-2	+3
Conveyancing/Real property	30	27	25	25	25	24	20	22	20	20	19	20	20	20	0	-10
Criminal law	15	12	12	12	13	13	14	13	13	13	12	13	13	13	0	-2
Debts/Insolvency	9	9	8	8	9	8	8	7	5	6	6	6	6	6	0	-3
Elder law	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
Employment/Industrial law	9	9	9	9	11	11	11	9	8	9	10	10	10	10	0	+1
Environmental law	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	+1	0
Family law	17	15	14	14	15	15	18	14	13	13	13	13	14	14	0	-3
Immigration law	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	0	+1
Insurance law	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	-
Information technology/Telecommunications	5	6	5	5	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	0	0
Intellectual property	8	8	8	8	9	9	8	8	7	7	7	8	7	8	+1	0
Litigation – general	19	19	19	20	21	20	20	18	15	15	16	18	18	17	-1	-2
Personal injury	10	8	9	9	9	9	10	8	8	8	8	8	9	8	-1	-2
Planning/Local Government	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	0	0
Small business	10	9	8	8	8	10	11	7	6	6	6	6	7	7	0	-3
Taxation	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	3	4	+1	+1
Wills and estates	23	21	20	20	21	22	26	18	16	17	16	17	18	19	+1	-4
Other	9	9	10	3	2	1	1	8	8	8	8	9	10	7	-3	-2

Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=13,597.

Note: Proportions do not add to 100% due to multiple response options. 'Trade practices law' was renamed to 'Competition law' from the 2022-23 Practising Certificate Survey. This year categories of 'Construction law', 'Elder law' and 'Insurance law' were added for the first time.

15.3. PRIVATE PRACTICE SIZE AND LOCATION

Within private practice, the main areas of practice varied by law practice size and location. Services related to wills and estates, conveyancing/real property, family law and commercial law were more commonly offered by law practices in major cities of NSW and suburban areas of Sydney than those in the Sydney CBD. Corporate law, conversely, were more commonly offered by Sydney CBD law practices. Small law practices with one to four principals more commonly offered services in wills and estates, conveyancing/real property, commercial law and family law. Larger law practices more commonly offered services in commercial law, civil litigation and corporate law. Further detail is provided in Table 10.

Table 10 – Main areas of practice by size and location of private practice

Main areas of practice	Law practice size – number of partners/principals (%)						Practice location (%)			All private practice (%)
	1 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 20	21 to 39	40 to 49	50+	Sydney CBD	Sydney suburban	Major cities of NSW	
Administrative law	6	4	7	4	6	7	11	12	9	6
Advocacy	8	6	6	6	5	3	6	8	11	7
Alternative dispute resolution	4	6	7	8	6	6	5	4	4	5
Banking/Finance	4	6	5	5	6	16	15	4	3	7
Civil litigation	24	32	26	36	36	23	23	20	17	25
Commercial law	32	35	32	23	25	26	32	36	27	30
Competition law	1	4	3	2	1	5	5	6	1	3
Construction law	5	7	6	7	8	8	7	7	6	6
Conveyancing/Real property	43	20	19	9	10	10	13	32	28	30
Corporate law	12	18	17	15	15	22	25	20	11	15
Criminal law	20	8	4	2	1	1	8	16	22	12
Debts/Insolvency	8	13	7	6	10	7	7	7	4	8
Elder law	6	2	2	<1	2	<1	1	4	5	4
Employment/Industrial law	8	10	11	8	6	7	9	13	11	8
Environmental law	2	3	4	1	2	5	4	4	4	3
Family law	31	15	8	3	3	1	6	21	27	20
Insurance law	2	7	11	24	25	11	10	4	4	6
Immigration law	8	3	2	1	0	1	4	6	2	6
Information technology/Telecommunications	2	3	6	3	3	5	6	6	1	3
Intellectual property	5	9	8	6	5	6	7	12	6	6
Litigation – general	21	22	20	19	26	20	19	19	14	21
Personal Injury	8	16	22	36	26	8	8	8	14	11
Planning/Local Government	4	6	5	3	2	5	4	4	6	4
Small business	16	9	8	4	3	1	4	11	9	11
Taxation	3	2	5	2	2	6	5	3	1	4
Wills and estates	46	23	15	11	6	2	9	29	35	30
Other	5	4	4	4	6	5	6	7	6	5

Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

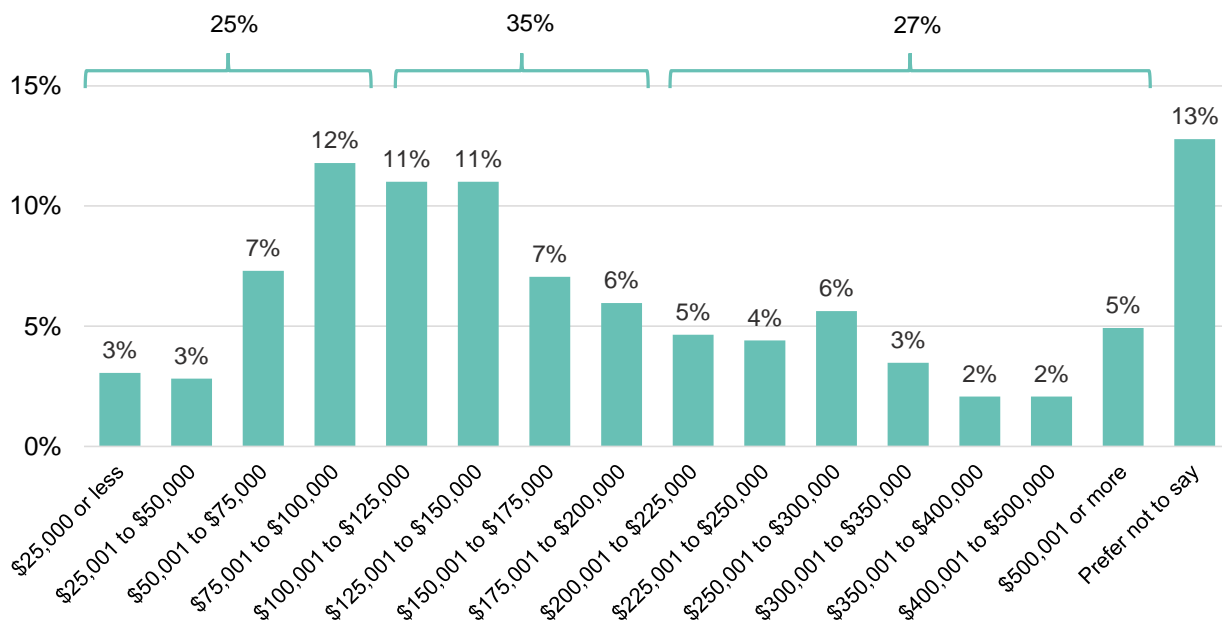
Base private practice solicitors only n=13,597 Note: Inner regional, outer regional and remote NSW not shown in practice location. Proportions do not add to 100% due to multiple response options. 'Trade practices law' was renamed to 'Competition law' from the 2022-23 Practising Certificate Survey.

16. INCOME

16.1. OVERVIEW

The Practising Certificate Survey asks respondents to indicate their gross annual (pre-tax) income for the previous financial year (i.e. FY21/22), by selecting one of 16 income categories. Across full-time and part-time solicitors, the most commonly selected category was \$75,001 to \$100,000 (12%), followed by \$100,001 to \$125,000 and \$125,001 to \$150,000 (11% each). Just over one in eight respondents opted not to report their income range (13%).

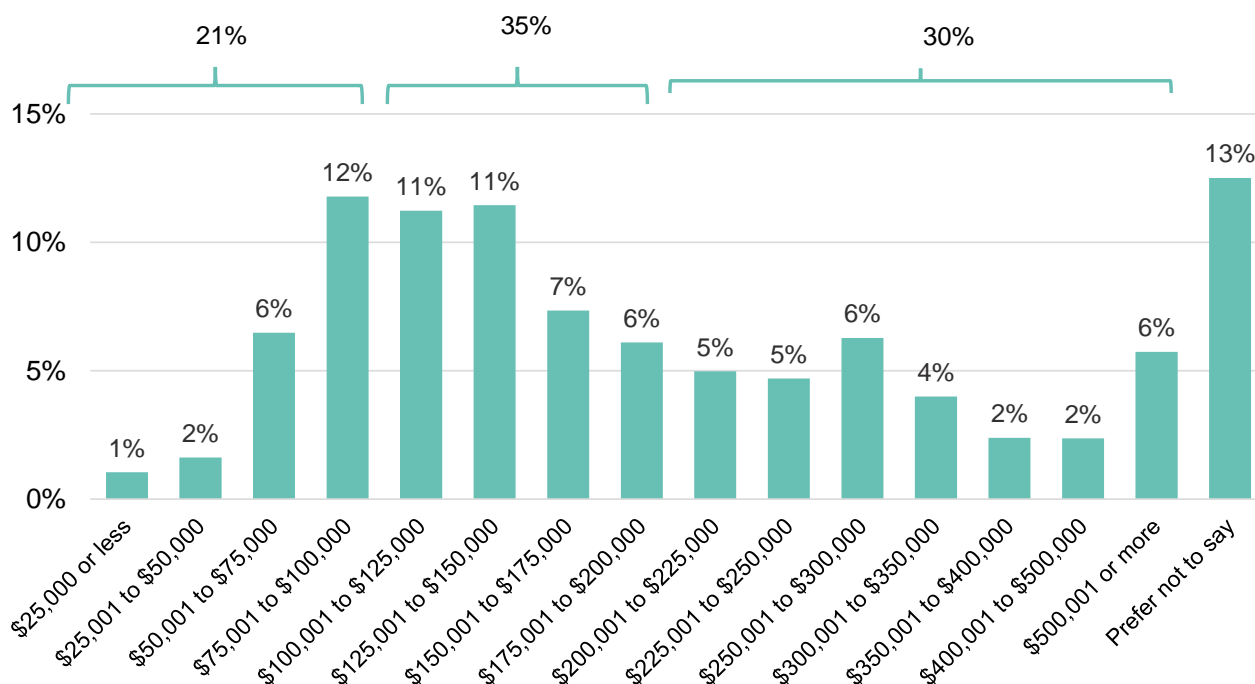
Figure 40 – Annual gross income full-time and part-time solicitors FY22



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=12,157. Base excludes solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

The income distribution of full-time solicitors was similar to that of full-time and part-time solicitors combined, with the exception that a smaller proportion of respondents reported incomes of \$50,000 or less (3%, compared to 6% across combined respondents), and a slightly higher proportion reported incomes of more than \$250,000 (20%, compared to 18% across combined respondents).

Figure 41 – Annual gross income full-time solicitors only FY22



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base includes full-time solicitors only, n=9,977

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Since FY12, there has been some change in the reported income of solicitors. The proportion of solicitors earning \$50,000 or less has decreased from 13% in FY12 to 6% in FY22. The proportion of solicitors earning more than \$200,000 has increased from 20% in FY12 to 27% in FY22. Since FY20, the proportion of solicitors who did not want to state their income, has remained relatively stable.

Table 11 – Annual gross income FY12 to FY22

	Respondents to the Practising Certificate Survey (%) – part time and full time										
	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
\$50,000 or less	13	14	13	13	10	10	9	9	8	7	6
\$50,001 to \$75,000	14	14	13	13	12	12	10	10	9	9	7
\$75,001 to \$100,000	17	16	16	15	15	15	15	14	15	14	12
\$100,001 to \$150,000	21	20	20	20	20	21	20	21	21	23	22
\$150,001 to \$200,000	12	12	12	11	11	11	11	11	12	12	13
More than \$200,000	20	18	19	20	17	17	19	19	20	23	27
Prefer not to say	3	6	6	8	15	15	15	16	14	13	13

Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

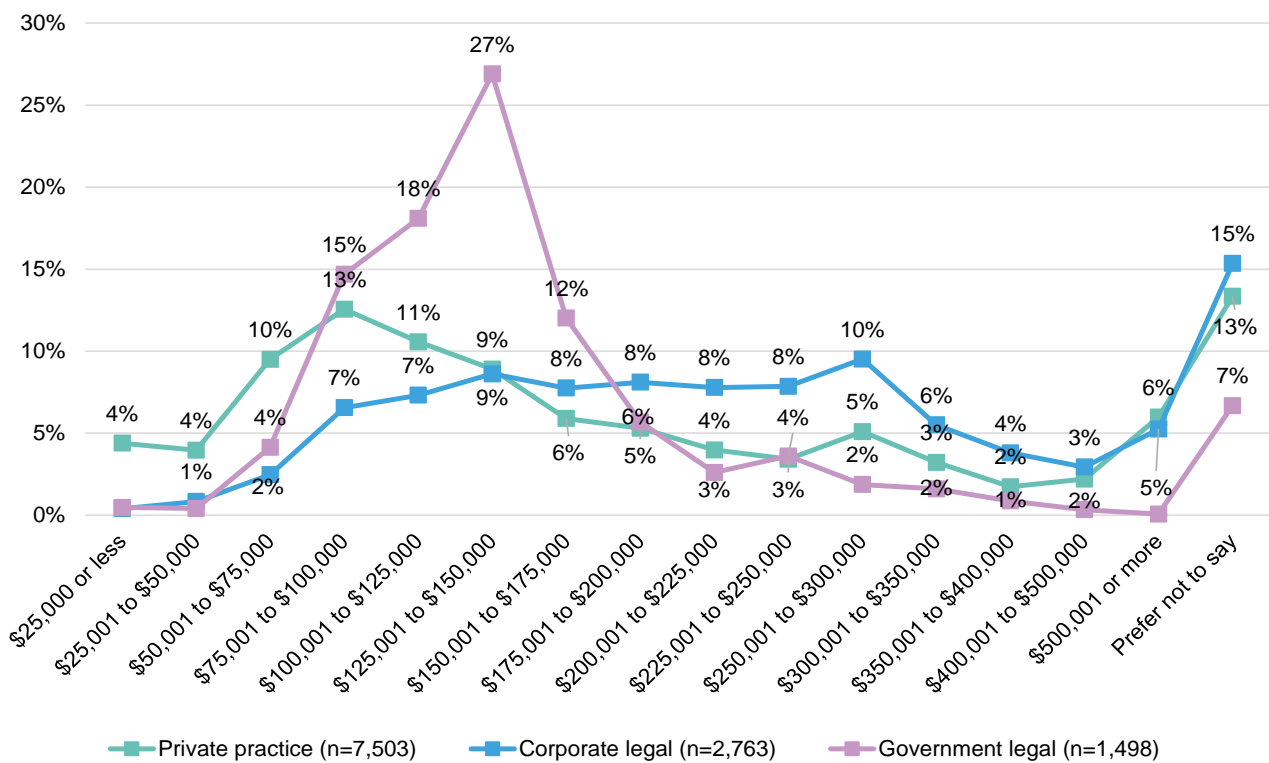
Note: Totals may not exactly equal 100% due to rounding. Findings for FY22 includes full-time and part-time solicitors only, n=12,157. This base excludes solicitors (n=1,440) on leave or not working at the time of the survey. Findings for FY12-FY21 include solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey, hence analysis over time may be slightly skewed.

16.2. INCOME BY PRACTICE SECTOR

The distributions of reported incomes in the private, corporate and government legal sectors are provided in Figure 42, and a summary of reported incomes for each sector is provided in Table 12. The large majority of government legal practitioners reported earning between \$50,001 to \$175,000, while respondents in private practice and corporate legal reported a broader range of incomes.

Corporate legal practitioners tended to report higher incomes than those in other sectors. For instance, 60% of corporate legal practitioners reported incomes of over \$150,000, compared to only 36% of private practice solicitors and 30% of government legal practitioners. Furthermore, almost half of all corporate legal practitioners reported earning over \$200,000 (44%), compared to 25% of private practice solicitors and 12% of government legal practitioners.

Figure 42 – Income distribution by practice sector FY22



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Note: Includes full-time and part-time solicitors, excludes solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

Table 12 – Annual gross income by sector FY22

	Private practice (n=7,503)	Corporate legal (n=2,763)	Government legal (n=1,498)	Community legal (n=196)	Non-legal employment (n=63)
\$25,000 or less	4%	<1%	<1%	1%	8%
\$25,001 to \$50,000	4%	1%	<1%	2%	3%
\$50,001 to \$75,000	10%	2%	4%	16%	6%
\$75,001 to \$100,000	13%	7%	15%	37%	3%
\$100,001 to \$125,000	11%	7%	18%	27%	11%
\$125,001 to \$150,000	9%	9%	27%	6%	10%
\$150,001 to \$175,000	6%	8%	12%	4%	5%
\$175,001 to \$200,000	5%	8%	6%	2%	13%
\$200,001 to \$225,000	4%	8%	3%	1%	10%
\$225,001 to \$250,000	3%	8%	4%	1%	3%
\$250,001 to \$300,000	5%	10%	2%	0%	5%
\$300,001 to \$500,000	7%	12%	3%	0%	10%
Over \$500,000	6%	5%	<1%	0%	2%
Prefer not to say	13%	15%	7%	3%	13%

Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Note: Includes full-time and part-time solicitors, excludes solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

16.3. INCOME BY LAW PRACTICE SIZE IN PRIVATE PRACTICE

The incomes of those working in private practice varied by law practice size. Overall, income was higher for respondents in larger law practices than in smaller law practices. For instance, 34% of respondents in law practices with 50 or more principals reported earning more than \$250,000, compared to only 10% of those in law practices with one to four principals. Conversely, only 9% of respondents in law practices with 50 or more principals reported earning \$100,000 or less, compared to 43% of those in law practices with one to four principals.

Table 13 – Annual gross income in private practice by law practice size FY22

	1 to 4 principals	5 to 10 principals	11 to 20 principals	21 to 39 principals	40 to 49 principals	50+ principals
\$50,000 or less	14%	2%	2%	1%	0%	1%
\$50,001 to \$100,000	29%	24%	21%	18%	17%	8%
\$100,001 to \$150,000	19%	20%	20%	21%	32%	19%
\$150,001 to \$200,000	10%	12%	16%	15%	20%	12%
\$200,001 to \$250,000	6%	9%	9%	10%	7%	10%
\$250,001 to \$300,000	3%	5%	7%	7%	5%	9%
\$300,001 to \$500,000	5%	9%	9%	10%	4%	11%
Over \$500,000	2%	5%	6%	6%	6%	14%
Prefer not to say	13%	12%	10%	11%	10%	16%

Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base private practice solicitors only n=7,491

Note: Includes full-time and part-time solicitors, excludes solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey.

16.4. INCOME BY GENDER

As seen in previous years, full time female solicitors reported earning less than males. This result remains the same regardless of age, years since admission and sector.

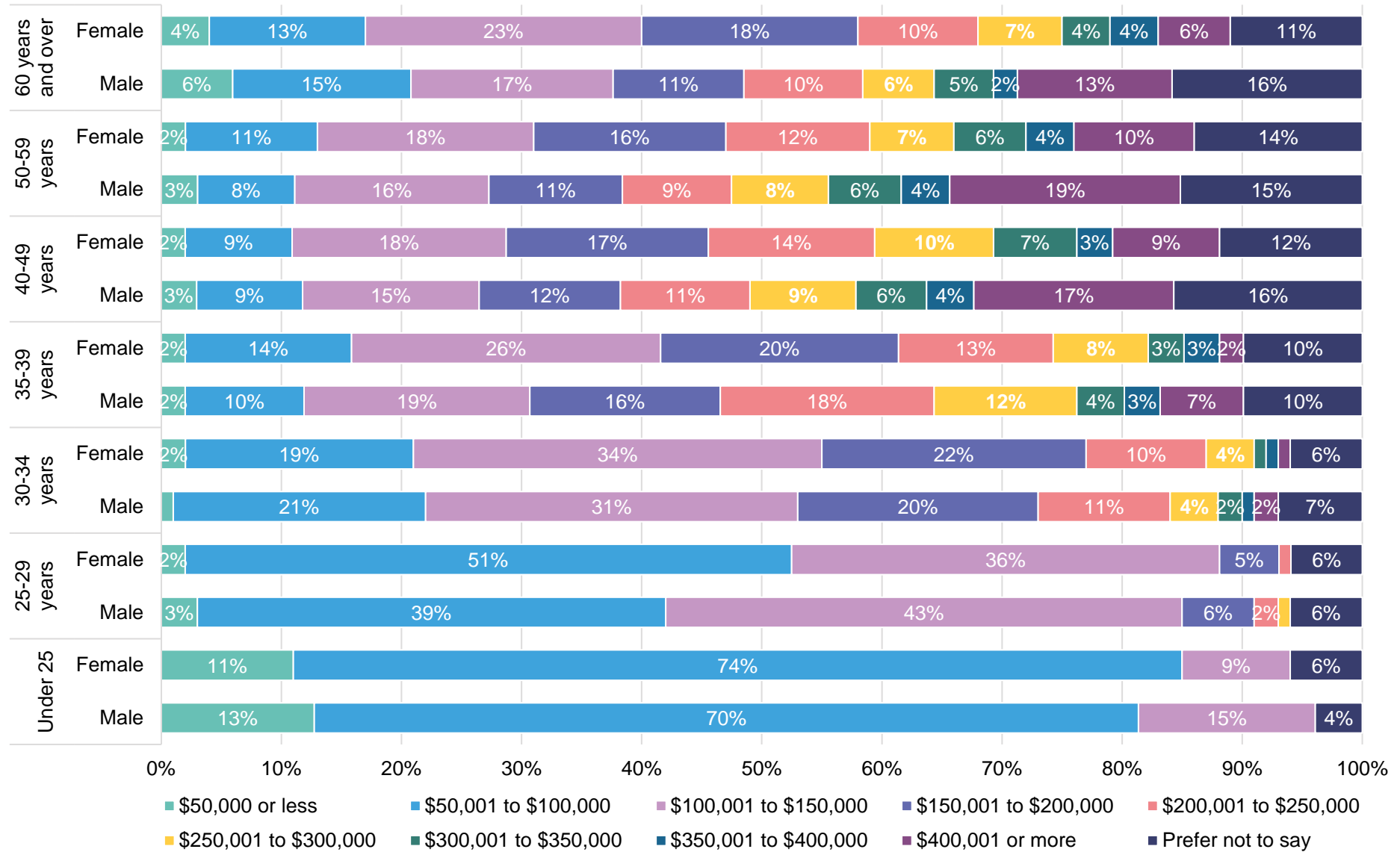
16.4.1. Income by gender and age

The gender pay gap is evident at all ages including:

- For the under 25 age bracket, 15% of male respondents reported incomes of \$100,001 to \$150,000, compared to 9% of females.
- in the 30 to 34 age bracket, a slightly greater proportion of female respondents reported incomes of \$150,000 or less (55%, compared to 53% of males) and a similar number of female respondents reported incomes of over \$150,000 (39%, compared to 40% of males).
- in the 35 to 39 age bracket, 44% of male respondents reported incomes of over \$200,000, compared to 29% of females.
- in the 40 to 49 year age bracket, 36% of male respondents reported incomes of over \$250,000, compared to 29% of females.

A full breakdown of reported income ranges is shown in Figure 43 on the following page.

Figure 43 – Annual gross income of full-time solicitors by gender and age FY22

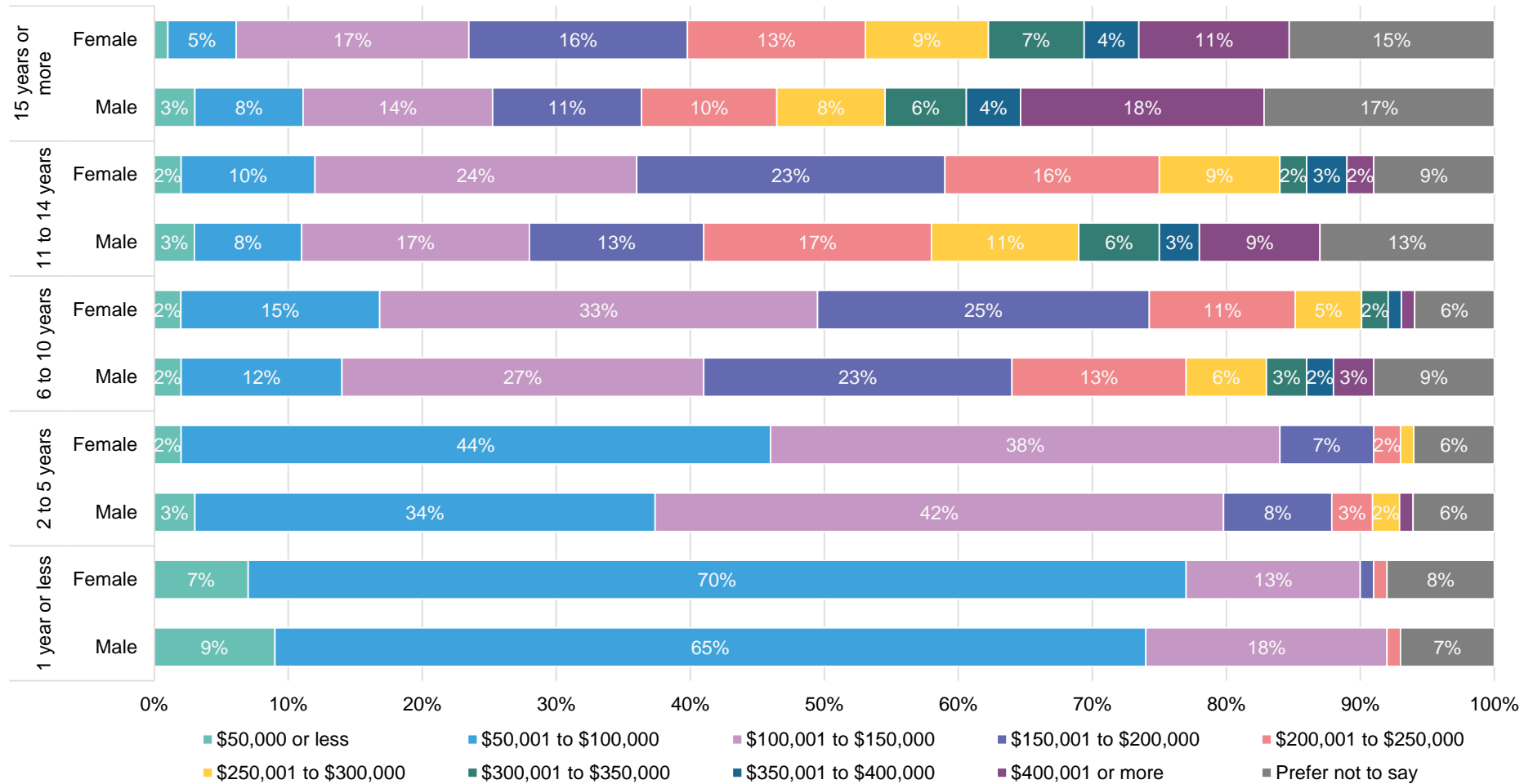


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base: Full-time solicitors only, n=9,753 Excludes respondents who preferred not to state their age.

16.4.2. Income by gender and years since admission across practice sectors

Further analysis of annual gross income by years since admission shows that the gender pay gap is evident regardless of years since admission (i.e. year of admission did not account for the pay gap between men and women). Additional analysis of income and years since admission is provided in Appendix A.

Figure 44 – Annual gross income of full-time solicitors (all practice sectors) by gender and years since admission FY22

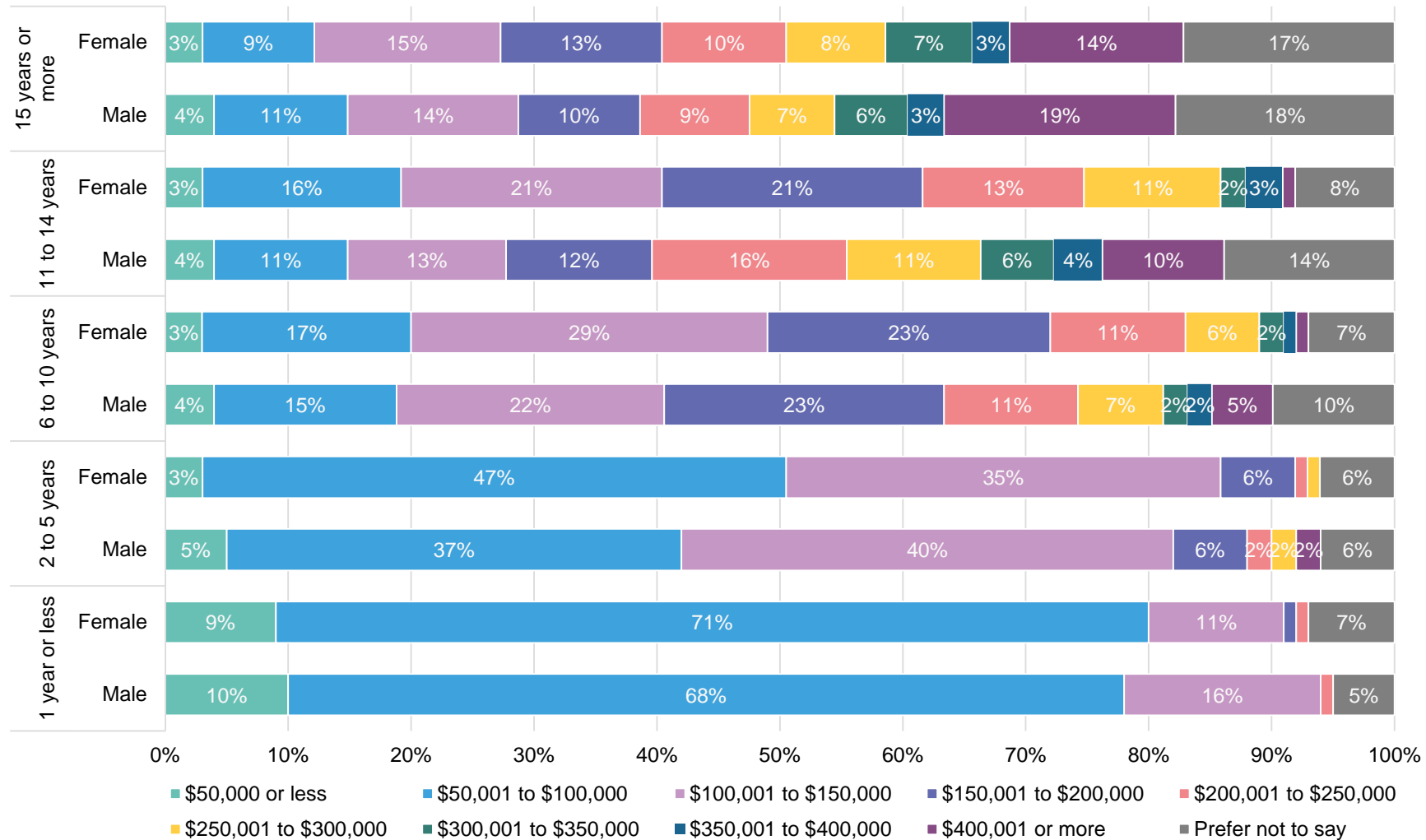


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base: Full-time solicitors only, n=9,753

Further analysis shows that the gap between male and female respondents is evident across all sectors. Over time, male respondents admitted as a solicitor in the same year as their female counterparts reported earning more than women in all sectors of practice, including in female dominated sectors (the corporate and government legal sectors). In particular, the difference is largest in the corporate sector.

Private practice

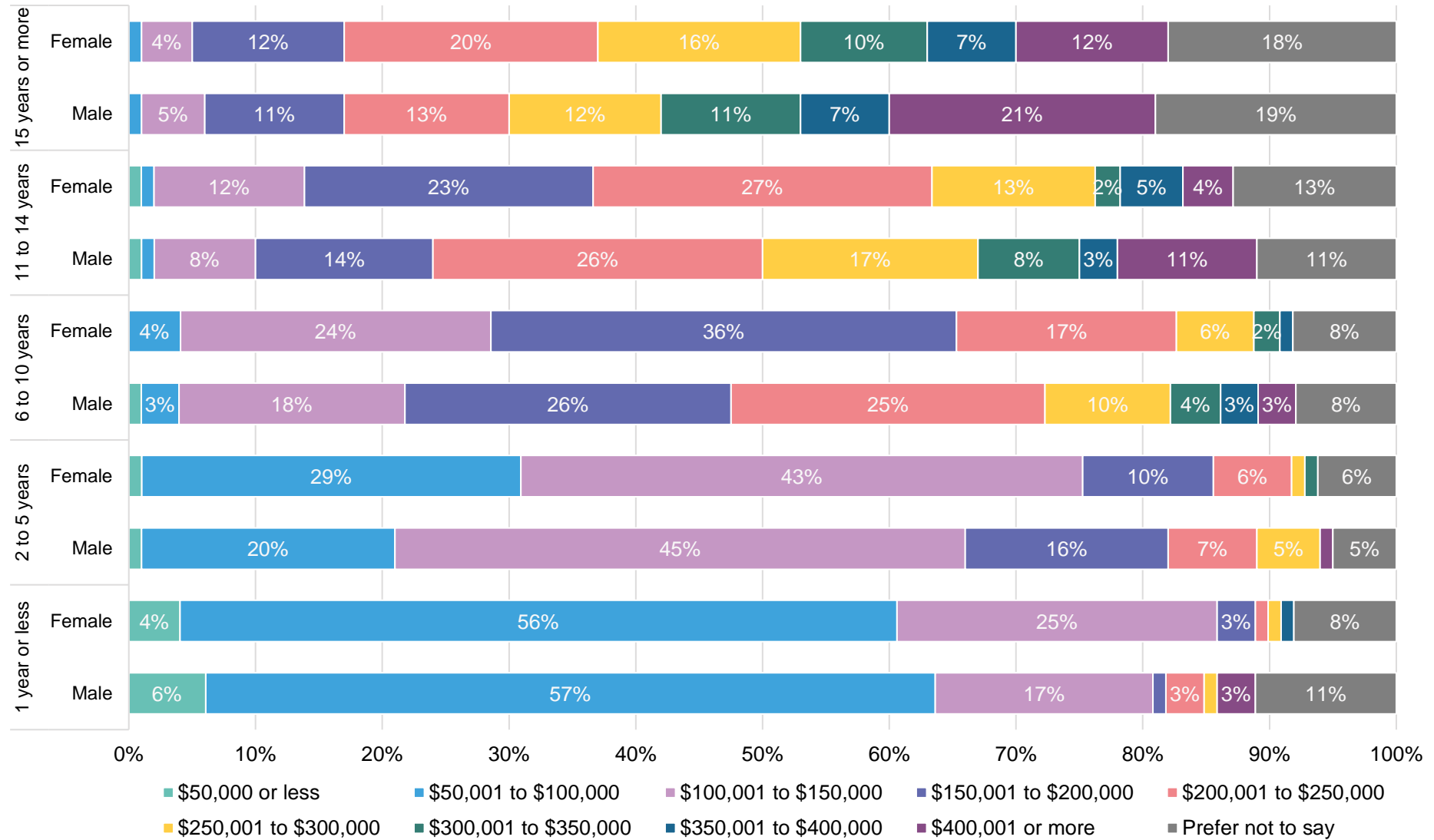
Figure 45 – Annual gross income of full-time private practice solicitors by gender and years since admission FY22



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base: Private practice full-time solicitors only, n=5,943

The corporate legal sector

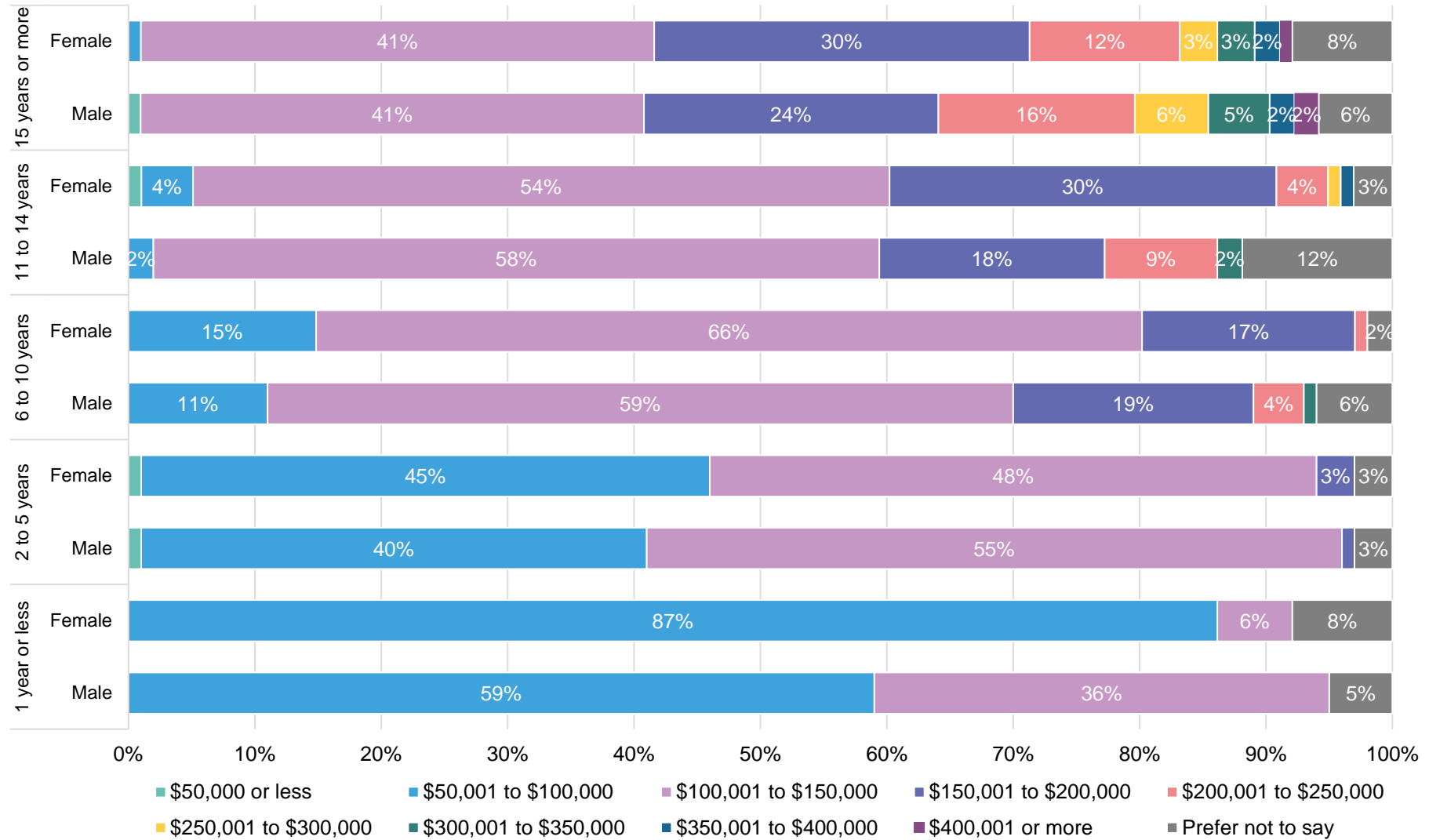
Figure 46 – Annual gross income of full-time corporate legal practitioners by gender and years since admission FY22



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey Base: Corporate full-time solicitors only, n=2,334

The government legal sector

Figure 47 – Annual gross income of full-time government legal practitioners by gender and years since admission FY22

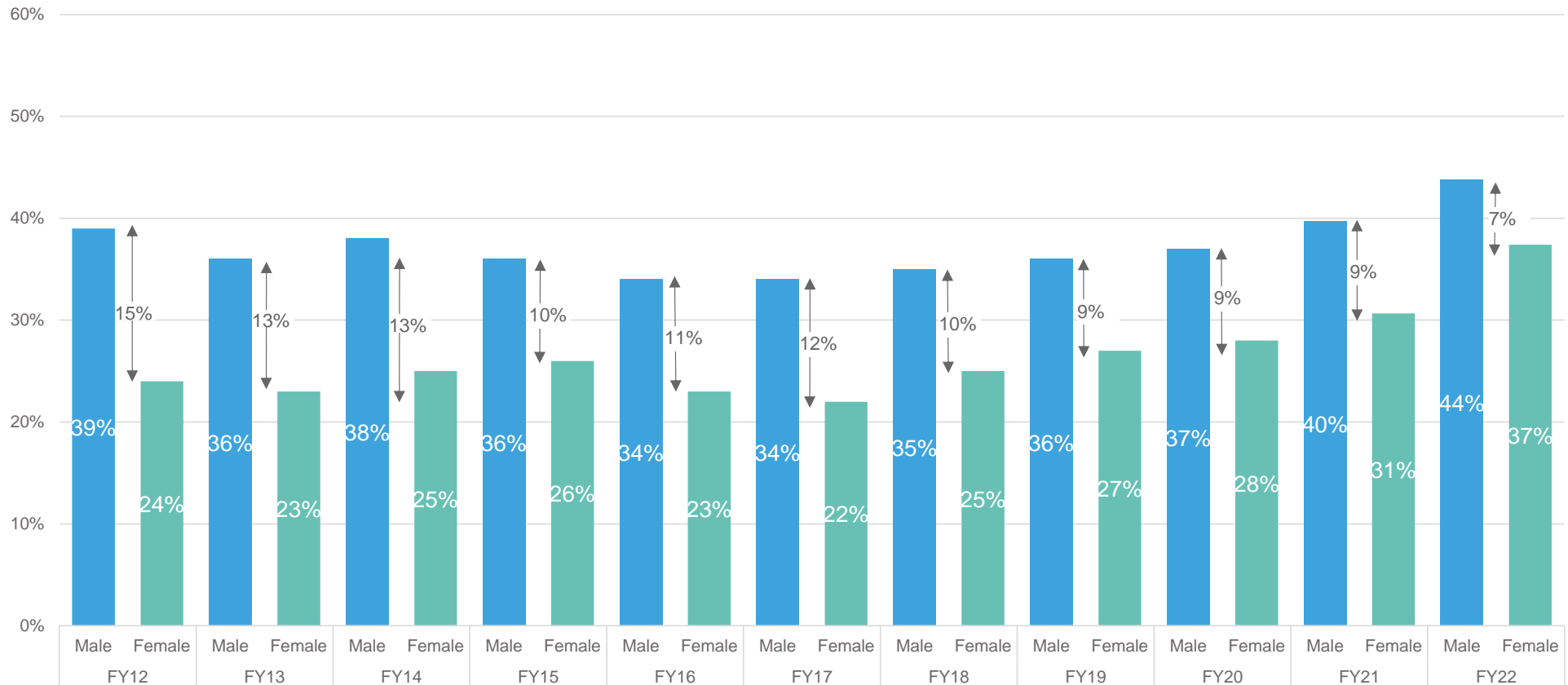


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base: Government full-time solicitors only, n=1,227

16.4.3. Income by gender over time

There has been some improvement in the reported income of female solicitors over time. Figure 48 shows the proportion of male and female solicitors reporting an income over \$150,000. This shows the difference in the proportion of male and female solicitors is narrowing, and has decreased by two percentage points since FY21. There has been large increase in the proportion of male solicitors who did not want to state their income (3% in FY11/12 compared to 14% in FY21/22), which may be skewing the results.

Figure 48 – Solicitors reporting gross income over \$150,000 by gender FY12 to FY22



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base: FY22 includes full-time and part-time solicitors only n=11,896, excludes solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey. The bases for FY12-FY20 do not exclude these solicitors. There has been large increase in the proportion of male solicitors who did not want to state their income (3% in FY11/12 compared to 14% in FY21/22), which may also be impacting results.

17. WORK STATUS AND HOURS WORKED

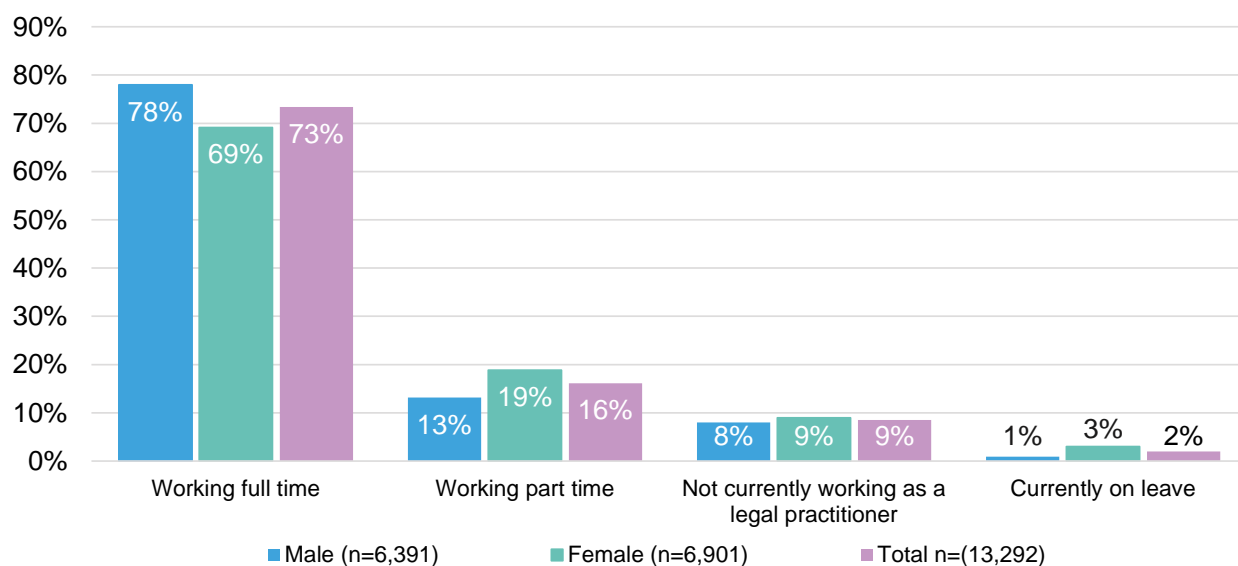
The Practising Certificate Survey collects data on whether respondents work full time or part time, work outside the legal profession, or are not employed at the time of the survey.⁷ It also captures information on the number of hours worked per week, as reported by respondents.

17.1. OVERVIEW

Just under three-quarters of respondents to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey reported working full time in the legal profession (73%), 16% were working part time, and 9% were working outside the legal profession. The remaining 2% were on leave or unemployed at the time of the survey.

More male respondents were working full time (78%) than females (69%), while more female respondents were working part time (19%) than males (13%).

Figure 49 – Mode of work by gender

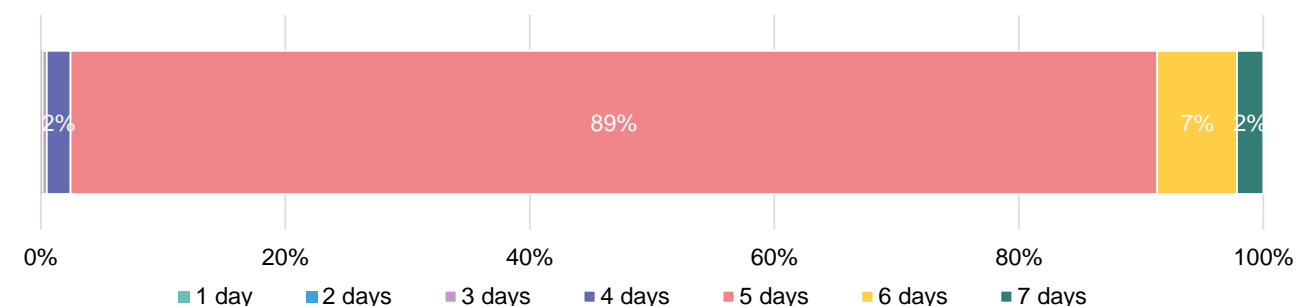


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=13,292 excludes those that that selected 'non-binary', 'if you wish to specify otherwise' or 'prefer not to say' for their gender.

17.2. FULL-TIME WORK

The majority of respondents who indicated they were working full time reported working five days per week (89%). A small proportion reported working six days per week (7%). On average, full-time respondents were working 46 hours per week.

Figure 50 – Number of days per week worked by full-time solicitors

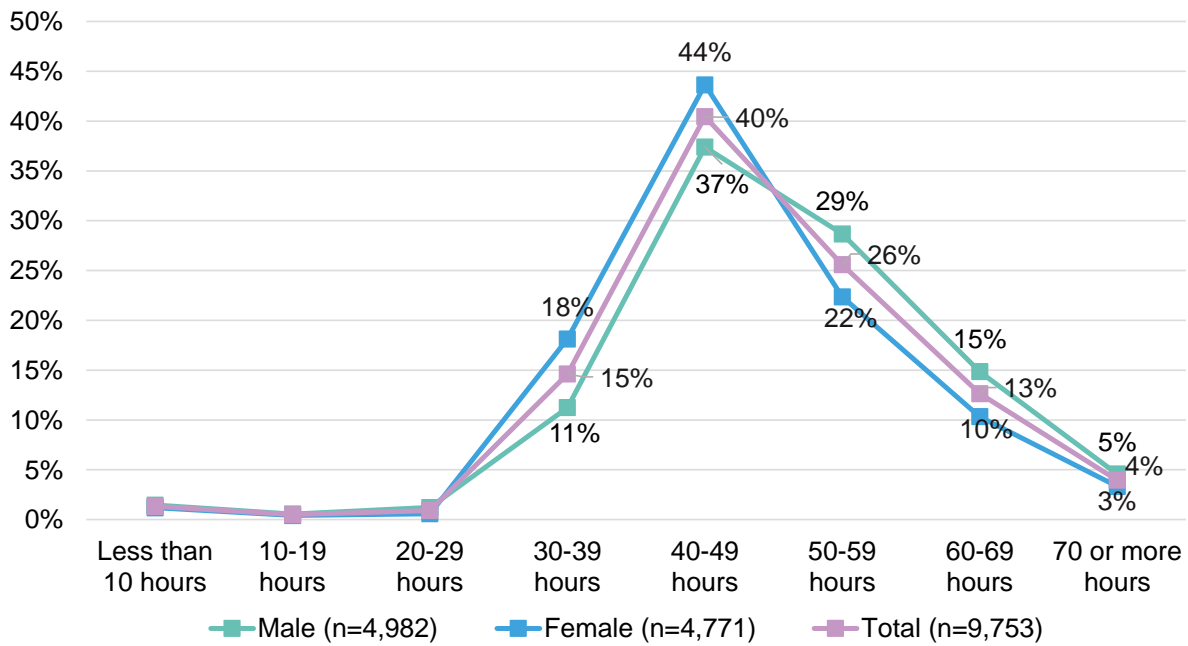


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=9,977

⁷ Work status is analysed based on self-reported status rather than a calculation of hours worked

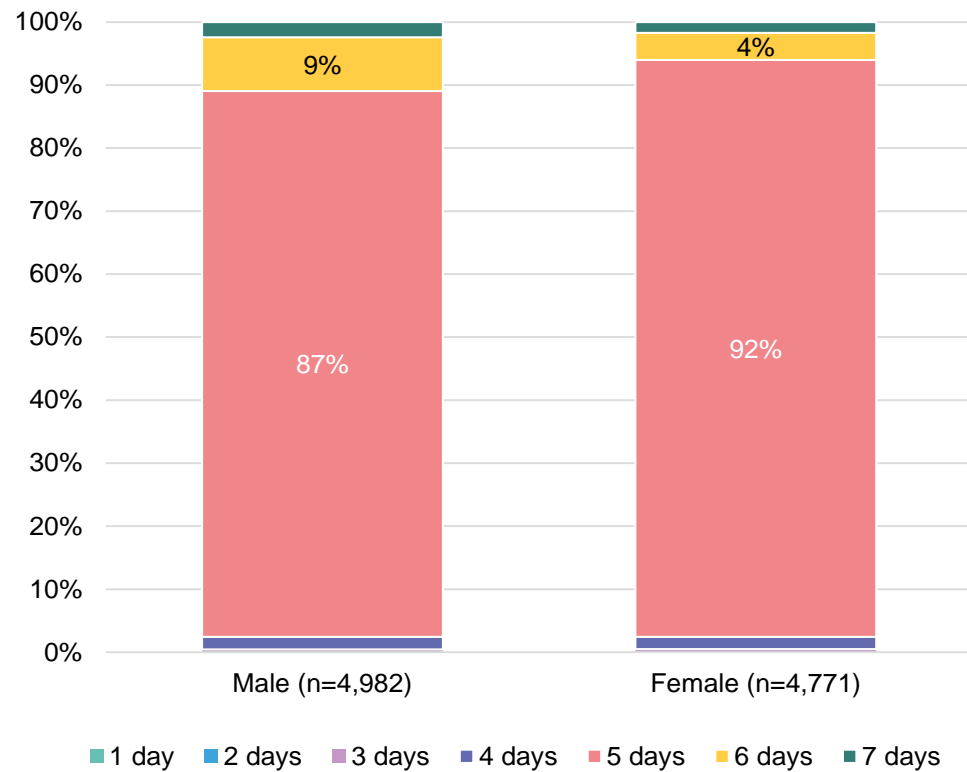
On average, the hours worked by male respondents were slightly higher than those of females (47 hours compared to 45 hours). A greater proportion of male respondents reported working six days in a normal work week (9% of males, compared to 4% of females).

Figure 51 – Average number of hours worked per week by full-time solicitors



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Full-time base n=9,753 (excludes those that that selected 'non-binary', 'if you wish to specify otherwise' or 'prefer not to say' for their gender).

Figure 52 – Average number of days worked per week by full-time solicitors by gender

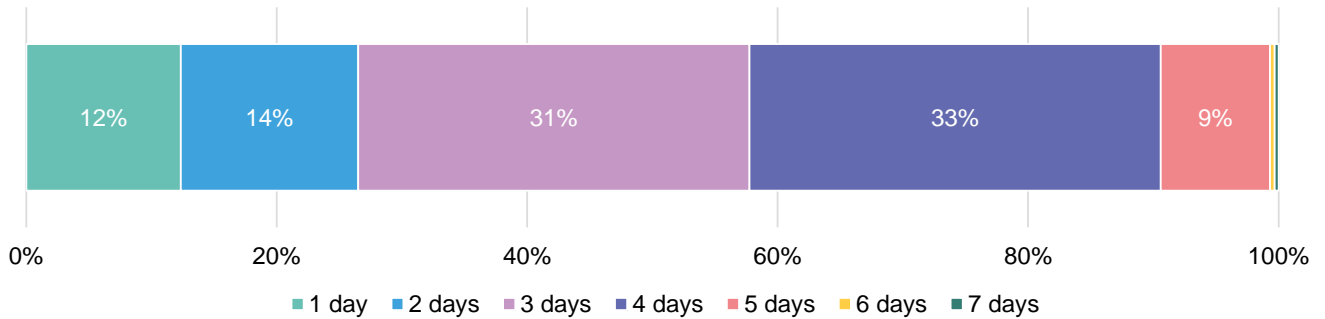


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

17.3. PART-TIME WORK

Of all the respondents to the 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey, 16% reported working part time. Part-time solicitors most commonly worked three (31%) or four (33%) days per week. A quarter of part-time solicitors worked one or two days per week (26%), while 9% reported working five days per week.

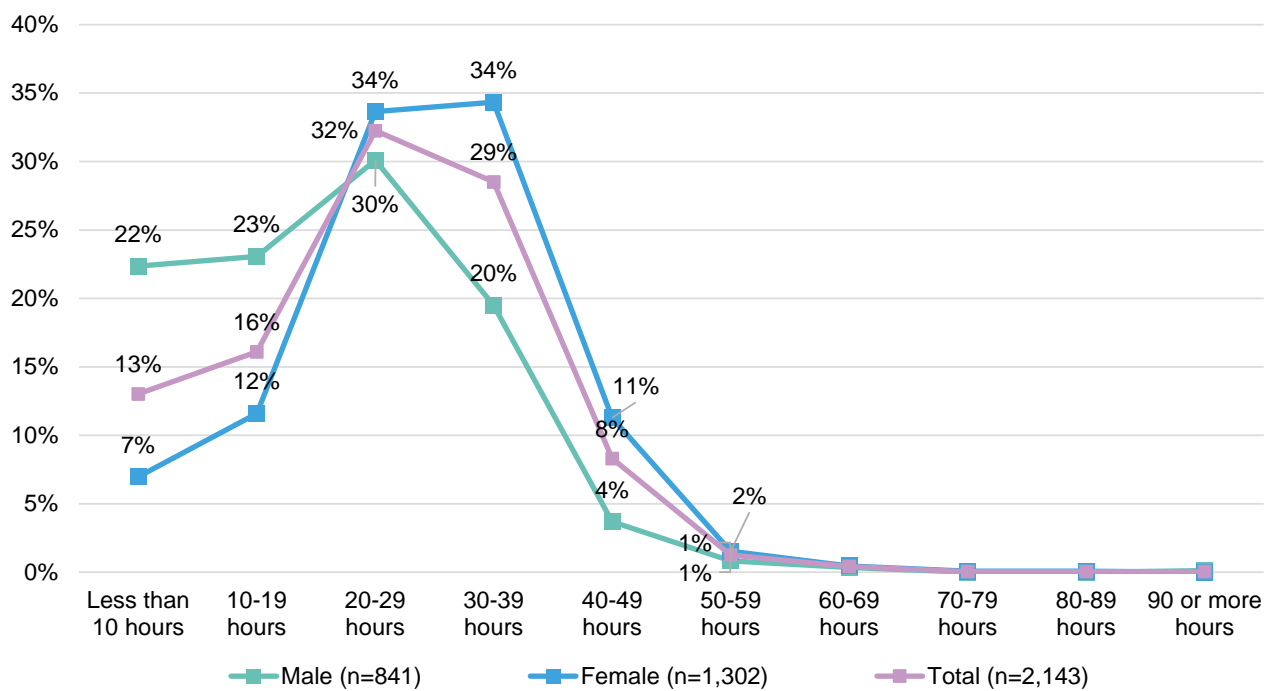
Figure 53 – Average number of days worked per week by part-time solicitors



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base n=2,180

Part-time solicitors worked 24 hours per week on average. Females reported working more hours per week (27 hours) than males (19 hours).

Figure 54 – Average number of hours worked per week by part-time solicitors



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Part-time base n=2,143 (excludes those that that selected 'non-binary', 'if you wish to specify otherwise' or 'prefer not to say' for their gender).

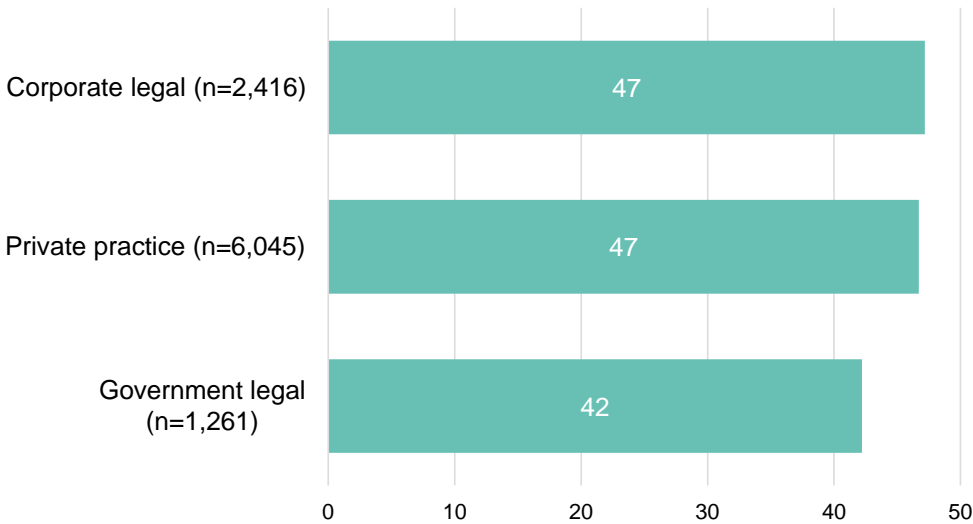
17.4. WORK HOURS BY PRACTICE SECTOR

Overall, respondents in the corporate legal sector and private practice reported working the longest hours, followed by those in the government legal sector.

17.4.1. Full-time work

Across all full-time solicitors, those working in private practice and corporate legal reported the highest average hours, at 47 hours per week. This was followed by those in the government legal sector, who reported an average of 42 hours per week (see Figure 55).

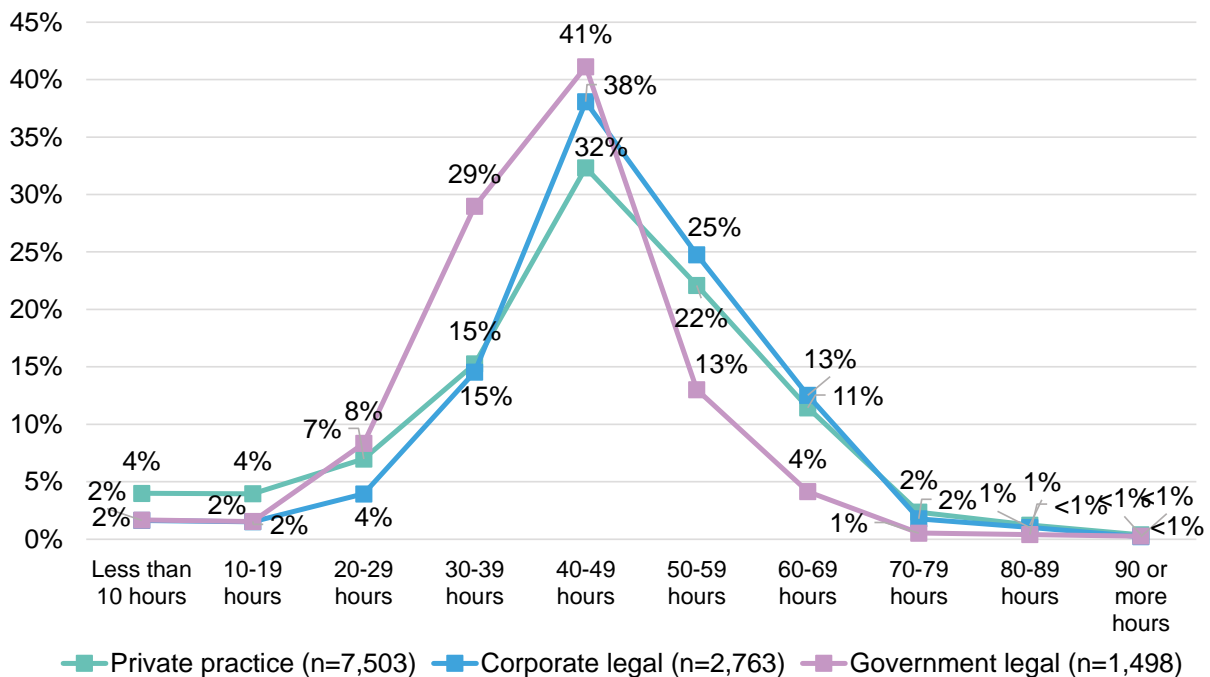
Figure 55 – Average hours worked per week by practice sector (full-time workers)



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Larger proportions of respondents working full time in private practice and the corporate legal sector reported working longer hours compared to those in the government legal sector. For example, approximately one-third of those in private practice (36%) and the corporate legal sector (41%) reported working 50 or more hours per week, compared to only 18% of those in the government legal sector (see Figure 56 below).

Figure 56 – Number of hours worked per week by practice sector (full-time workers)

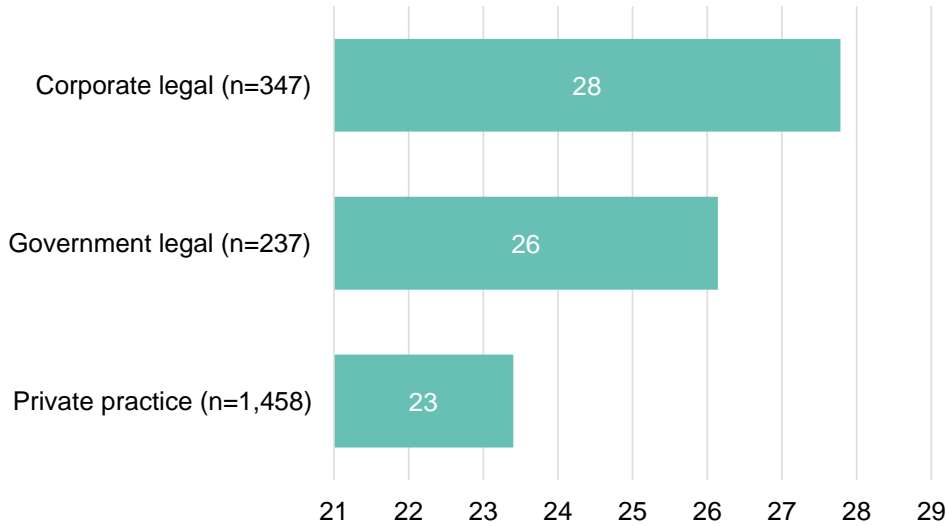


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

17.4.2. Part-time work

Across part-time solicitors, those working in the corporate legal sector reported working the highest average hours, at 28 hours per week. This was followed by those working in the government legal sector, who reported an average of 26 hours per week. Respondents working in private practice reported an average of 23 hours per week (see Figure 57).

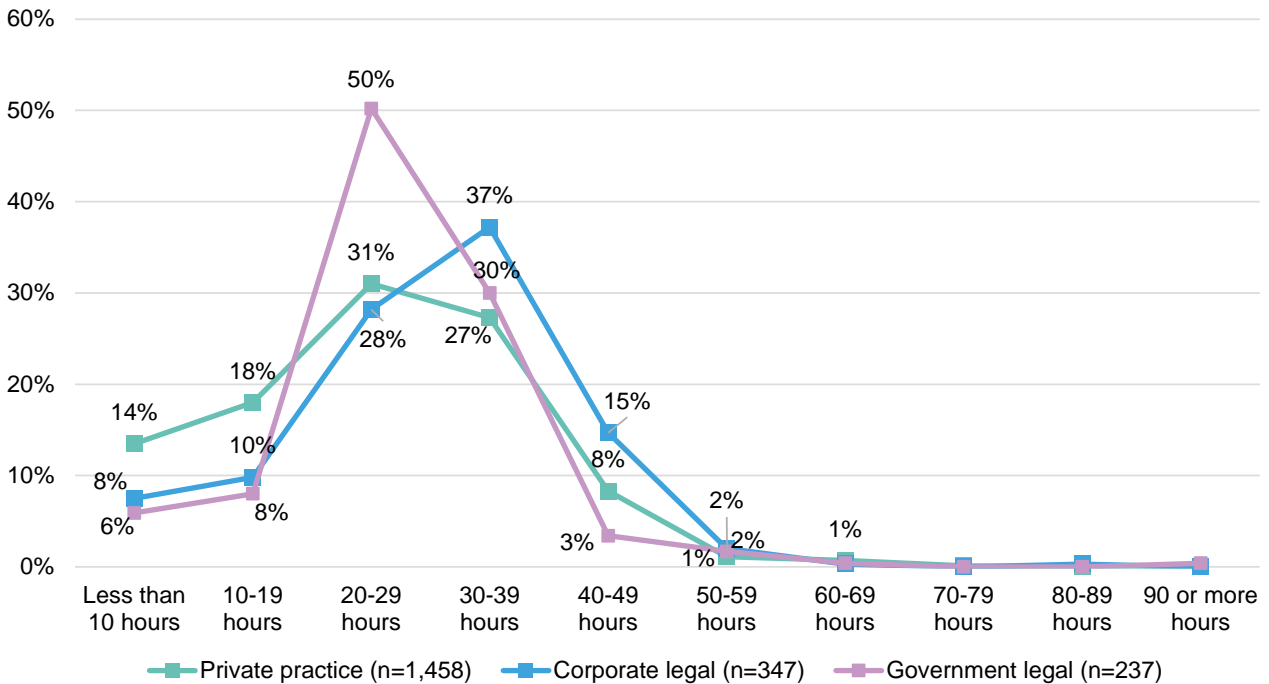
Figure 57 – Average hours worked per week by practice sector (part-time workers)



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Larger proportions of respondents working part time in the corporate legal sector and private practice reported working longer hours compared to those in the government legal sector. For example, 17% of those in the corporate legal sector and 10% of those in private practice reported working 40 or more hours per week, compared to only 5% of those in the government legal sector (see Figure 58 below).

Figure 58 – Number of hours worked per week by practice sector (part-time workers)



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

18. PRO-BONO AND OTHER UNPAID WORK

The Practising Certificate Survey collects data on pro-bono and other unpaid work. In the 2023-24 Survey, two-fifths of respondents (42%) reported conducting pro-bono, unpaid or voluntary work as a legal practitioner in the previous year. This is an increase of 2% from 2022-23. On average, they reported having provided 69 hours of service across the previous financial year, which equates to approximately 9 working days.⁸

Across all respondents, 389,045 hours (equivalent to approximately 51,873 working days) were reported to have been donated in the 12 months prior to the survey. Assuming an average charge of \$300 per hour, this equates to approximately \$117 million in free legal work.

In addition to pro-bono work, just over a third of respondents reported providing unpaid help, support or care to friends, family, neighbours or others in the year prior to the survey (37%). These respondents, on average, provided 207 hours of unpaid support during that period, an increase from last year's survey which recorded an average of 180 hours, and the report prior which recorded an average of 165 hours.

⁸ Based on a 7.5 hour work day.

DISCLAIMER

This report is dated 04 June 2024 and incorporates information and events up to that date only and excludes any information arising, or event occurring, after that date which may affect the validity of Urbis Pty Ltd (**Urbis**) opinion in this report. Urbis prepared this report on the instructions, and for the benefit only, of Law Society of NSW (**Instructing Party**) for the purpose of Final Report (**Purpose**) and not for any other purpose or use. To the extent permitted by applicable law, Urbis expressly disclaims all liability, whether direct or indirect, to the Instructing Party which relies or purports to rely on this report for any purpose other than the Purpose, and to any other person which relies or purports to rely on this report for any purpose whatsoever (including the Purpose).

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All surveys, forecasts, projections and recommendations contained in or associated with this report are made in good faith and on the basis of information supplied to Urbis at the date of this report, and upon which Urbis relied. Achievement of the projections and budgets set out in this report will depend, among other things, on the actions of others over which Urbis has no control.

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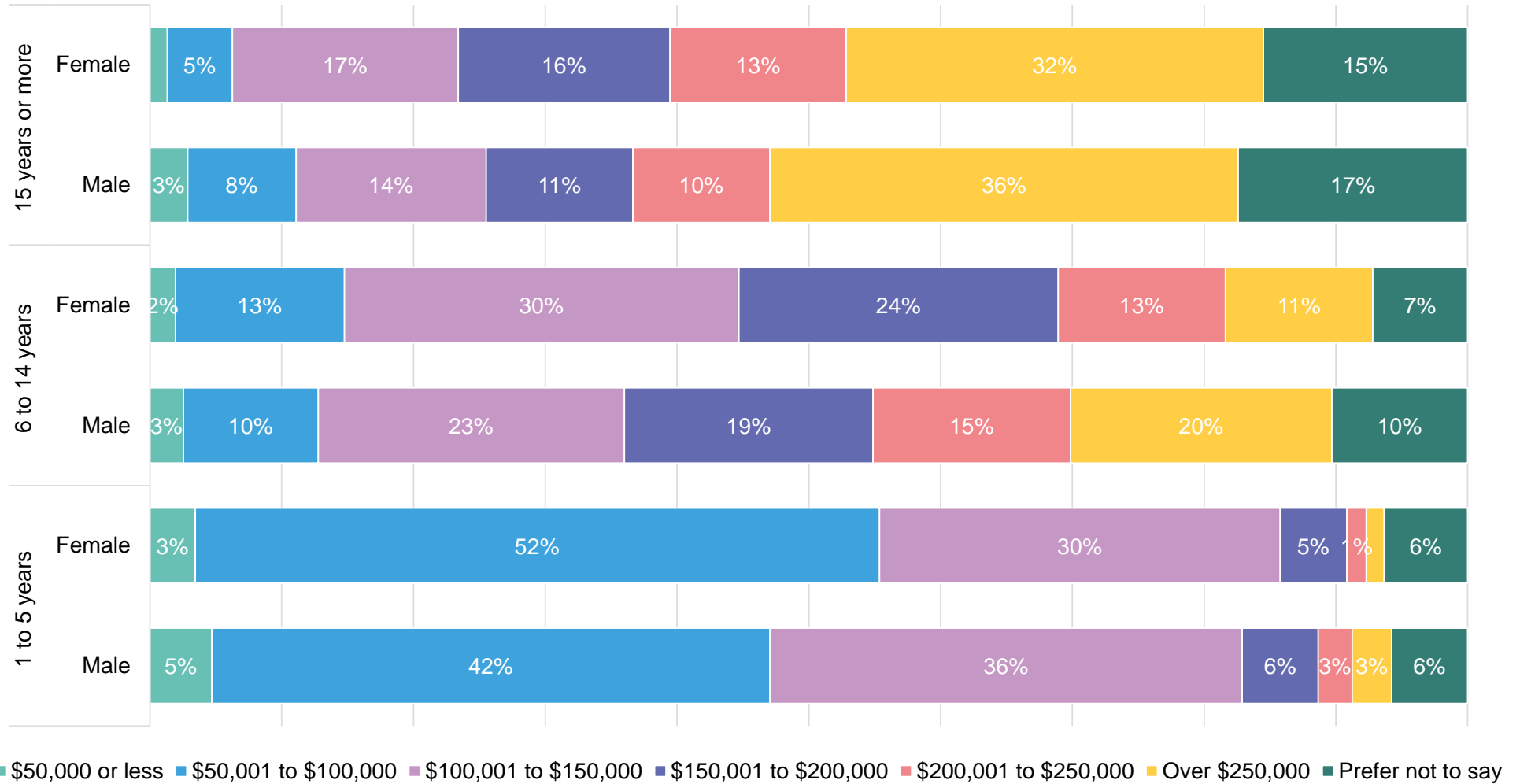
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This report has been prepared with due care and diligence by Urbis and the statements and opinions given by Urbis in this report are given in good faith and in the reasonable belief that they are correct and not misleading, subject to the limitations above.

APPENDIX A INCOME BY GENDER ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

All practice sectors – years since admission

Figure 59 - Annual gross income of full-time solicitors by gender and years since admission FY22

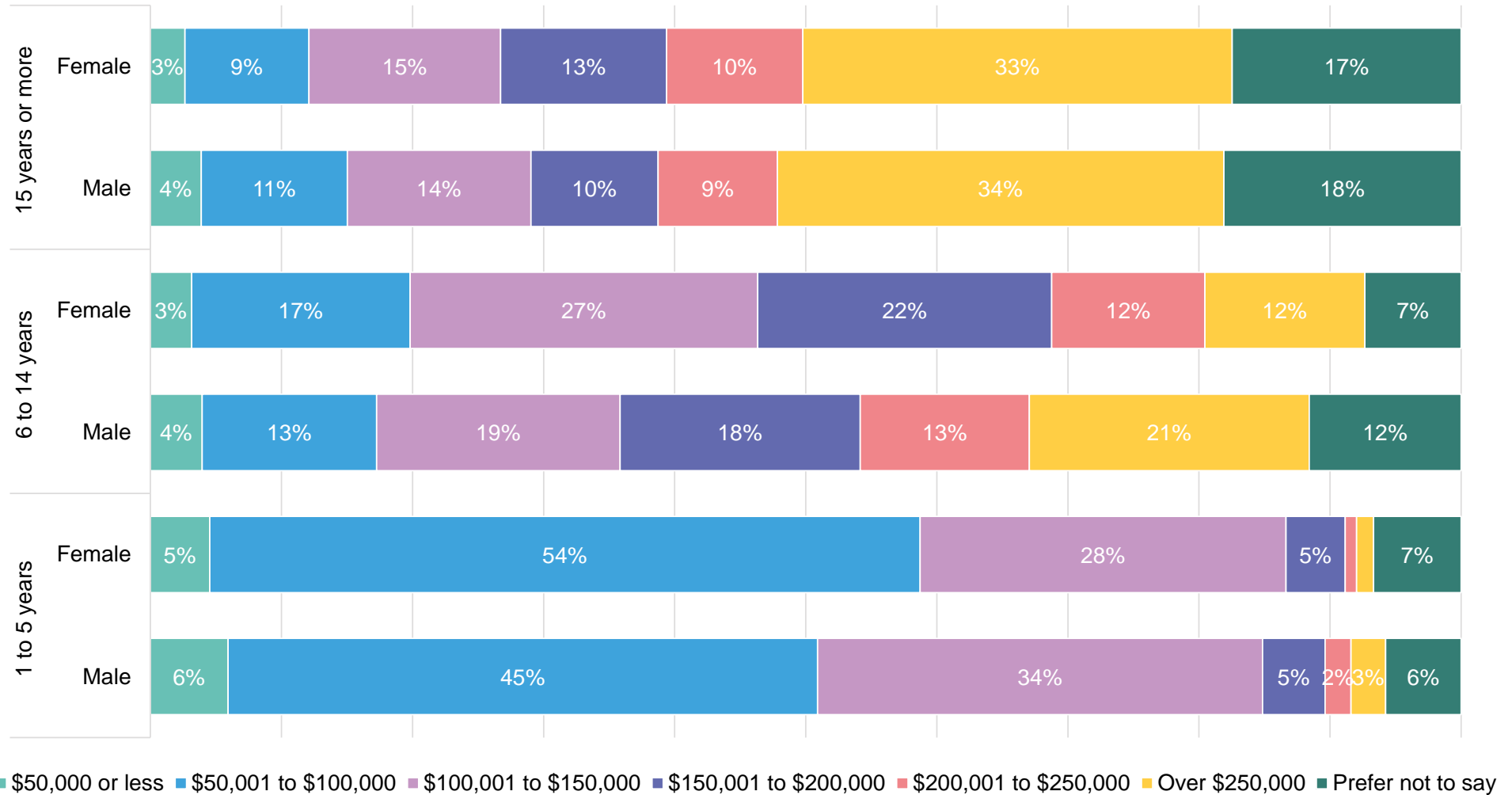


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Base: Full-time solicitors only, n=9,753

Private practice – years since admission

Figure 60 – Annual gross income of full-time private practice solicitors by gender and years since admission FY22

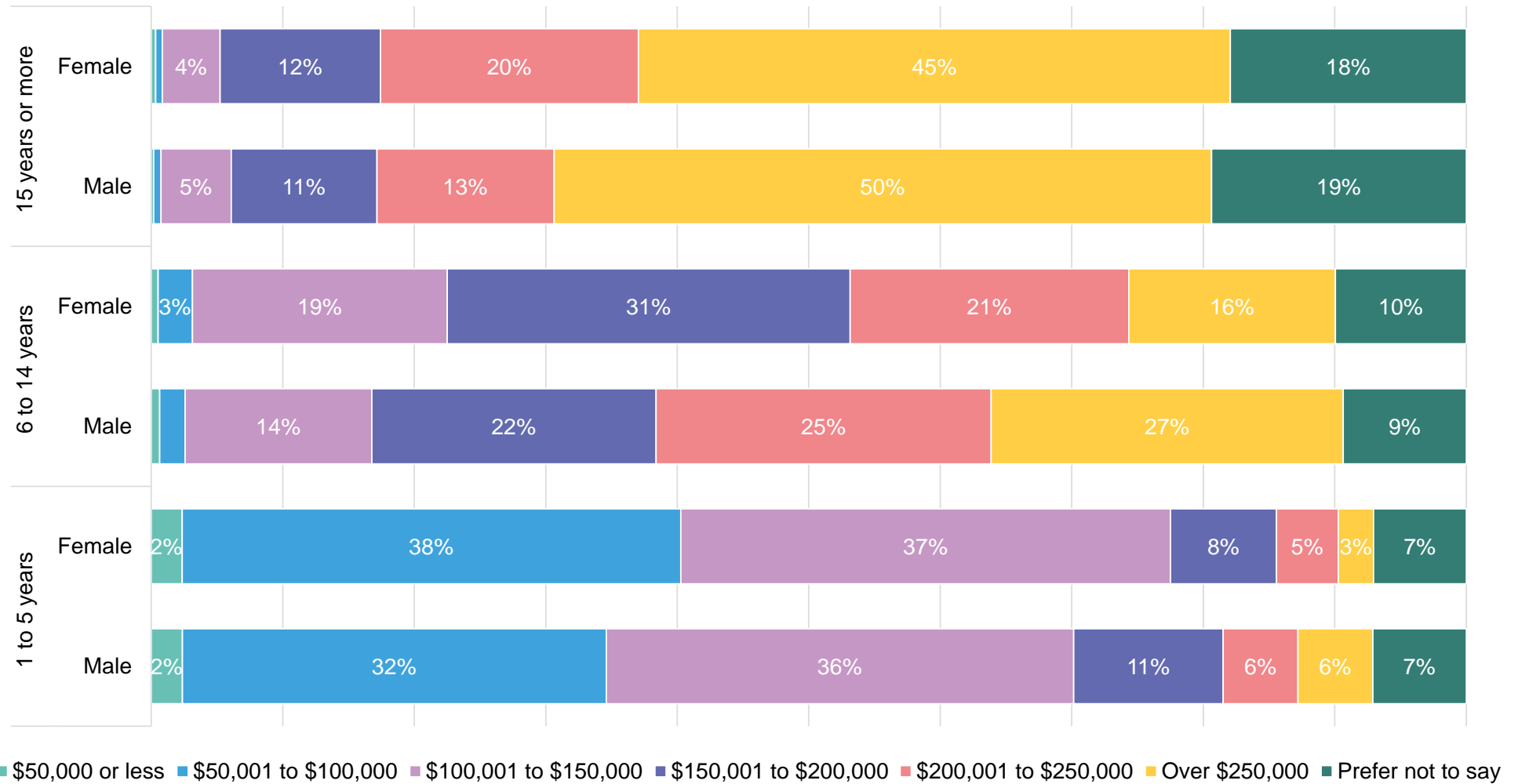


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Base: Private practice full-time solicitors only, n= 5,943

The corporate legal sector – years since admission

Figure 61 – Annual gross income of full-time corporate legal practitioners by gender and years since admission FY22

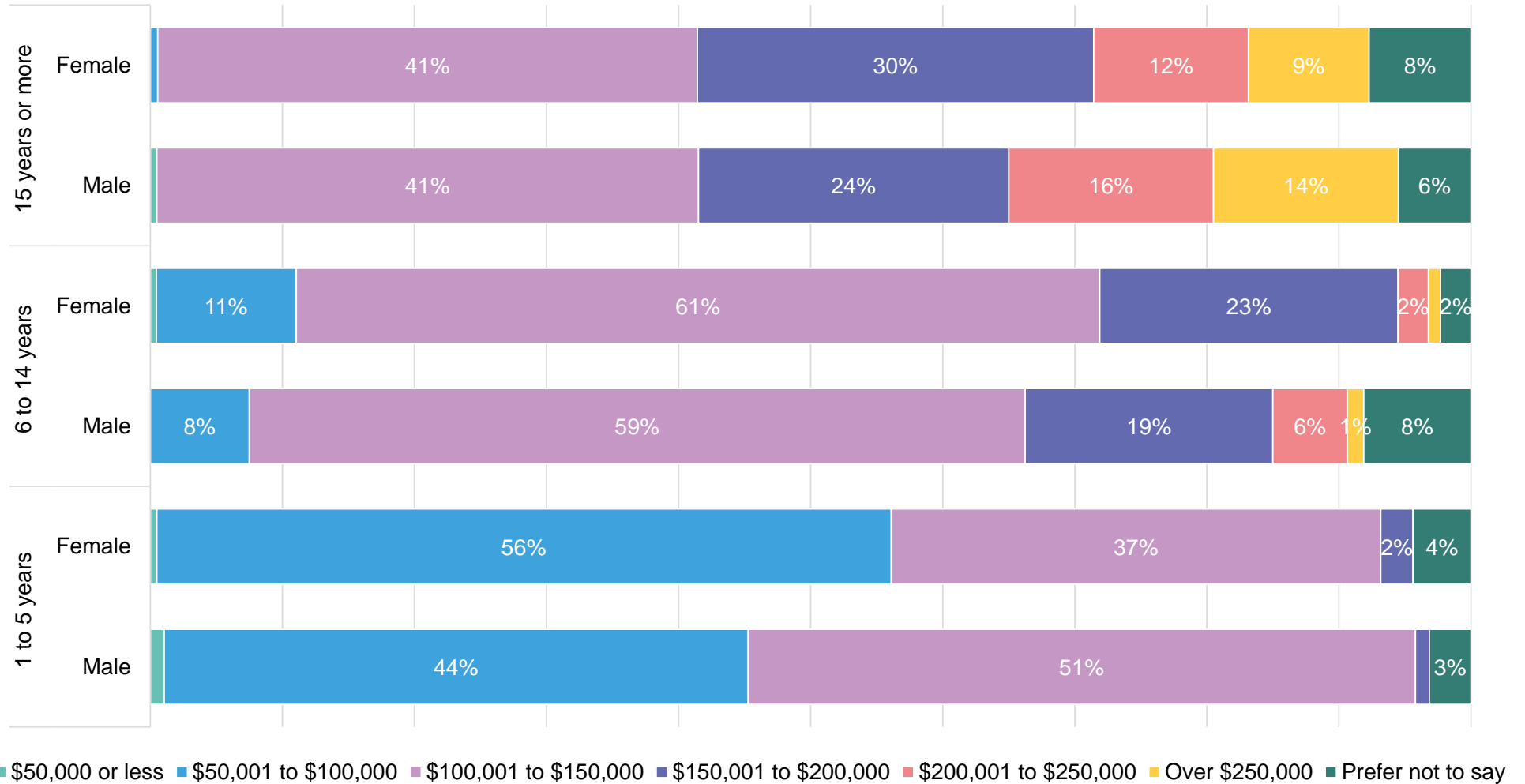


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Base: Corporate full-time solicitors only, n=2,334

The government legal sector – years since admission

Figure 62 – Annual gross income of full-time government legal practitioners by gender and years since admission FY22

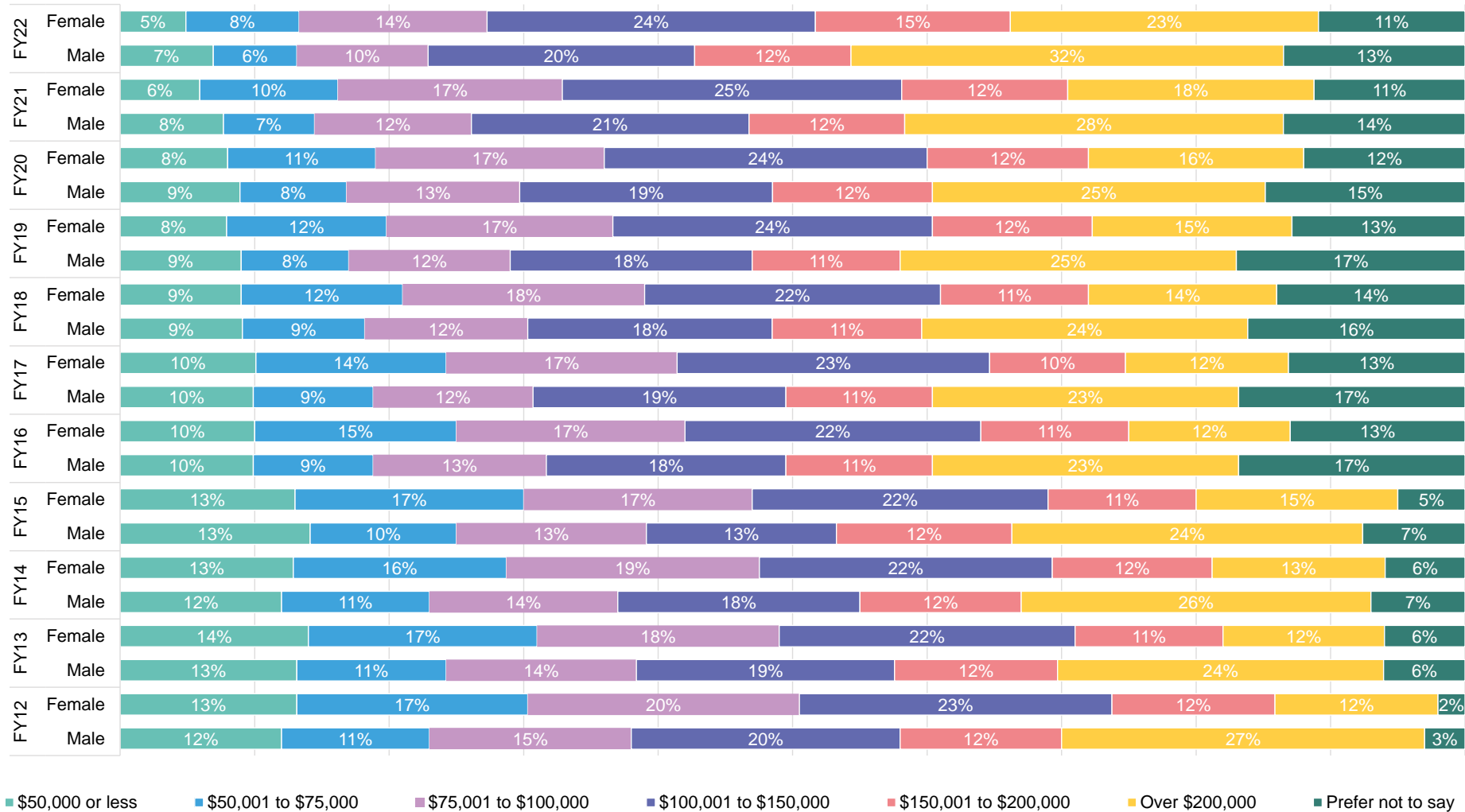


Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey

Base: Government full-time solicitors only, n=1,227

Income over time by gender

Figure 63 – Annual gross income of full-time and part-time solicitors by gender FY12 to FY22



Source: 2023-24 Practising Certificate Survey. Base: FY22 includes full-time and part-time solicitors only n=11,896, excludes solicitors on leave or not working at the time of the survey. The bases for FY12-FY20 does not exclude these solicitors, hence analysis may be slightly skewed.

