



FOR PROFESSIONALS

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## **SA ATTORNEYS' LOSE CONFIDENCE IN THEIR PROFESSION - SURVEY**

Confidence levels among South African attorneys regarding their own profession declined towards the end of last year with fewer attorneys believing it would be an appropriate profession for their children, according to a survey conducted by PPS.

The survey of almost 500 attorneys revealed a six percentage point decline to 34% in the third quarter from 40% when asked whether they would encourage their children to enter the profession.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, the financial services provider focused on graduate professionals, the results of the survey may have been impacted by a general pessimistic feeling at the latter part of 2012 with the ongoing strike season, downgrades to South Africa's credit rating, and concern about potential political changes affecting sentiment.

"While such negative news may have had an impact on these results, this is still a highly concerning trend. The shortage of key skills, including attorneys, has been well-documented in the media and with children often taking a lead from their parents in career choices, this does not bode well for attracting new entrants," said Joubert.

Confidence in the future of the legal profession was recorded at 72%, unchanged from the previous quarter but down 5 percentage points from the first quarter.

Joubert notes that this result is also reflected by the fact that attorneys have relatively little confidence in the value of the current LLB degree. On the question of whether the current LLB degree sufficiently prepares prospective practitioners to succeed in the profession, only 24% said it did.

Reports at the end of last year suggested that the Law Society was holding meetings with various law faculties to discuss, among other issues, the current curricula of law degrees offered by universities with a view to potentially implementing more uniform standards among the various law faculties.

Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) Co-Chairpersons Jan Stemmett and Krish Govender say: 'The LSSA supported and promoted high-level discussions as regards proposed changes to the LLB degree with the Law Deans of universities during 2012 and these are set to continue this year.'

A further statistic revealed by the survey showed that there was a marginal drop in confidence regarding whether high ethical standards were being maintained and whether the attorneys' profession was regarded as an ethical, professional and noble one, to 43%, down 2 percentage points on the previous quarter.

Mr Govender and Mr Stemmett say: 'We share the grave concern being expressed by the members of our profession with the increasing erosion of ethics. There are growing perceptions that lawyers are sacrificing ethics in their quest for survival and profit in a shrinking marketplace. Ethics or the lack of it, affects all legal practitioners, from the smallest to the largest of firms. It has become the proverbial elephant in the boardroom. The sooner the growing lack of ethics is confronted the better it will be for the future of the legal profession and the citizens of our country. An ethically strong legal profession will benefit the economy of the country as well. The subject of "ethics" needs to be elevated strongly from its seemingly "Cinderella" status in the LLB curriculum at universities.'

'What is encouraging is that our own members are raising their concerns, which indicates that attorneys are uncomfortable with the situation and are striving for an ethical, trustworthy and noble profession,' say Mr Govender and Mr Stemmett.

"This is another concerning trend. It is imperative that measures are taken to ensure the reputation of the attorneys' profession is perceived as a fair and unbiased, as this is the crux of an effective legal system."

Confidence in the standard of education in South Africa remained unchanged at 45%, while 92% of respondents expressed concern about the lack of mathematics and science graduates in South Africa. "Clearly South African attorneys have huge reservations about current standards throughout the entire education system, not only about the status of the LLB degree."

#### **Other results from the survey**

- Confidence in their ability to earn an income that keeps up with inflation remained unchanged 66%
- Confidence that they will remain in South Africa for the foreseeable future fell 1 percentage point to 79%
- Confidence in the economic outlook for South Africa over the next 12 months fell 5 percentage points to 55%
- Confidence that South Africa has seen the worst of global economic turmoil rose 3 percentage points to 52%
- Confidence that they have saved enough to retire comfortably fell 1 percentage point to 57%