



FOR PROFESSIONALS

SINCE 1941



SA ATTORNEYS' CONFIDENCE IN QUALITY OF LLB DEGREE DECLINES FURTHER - SURVEY

4 October 2012: South African attorneys have grown increasingly concerned about the quality of the LLB degree currently being offered in the country's universities, voicing concern that it does not sufficiently prepare new entrants to the profession, according to a survey conducted by PPS.

The survey of almost 500 attorneys revealed a ten percentage point decline to 21% in the second quarter from 31% when asked whether they believe the current LLB degree sufficiently prepares prospective practitioners to enter and succeed in the attorney's profession.

According to Gerhard Joubert, Head of Group Marketing and Stakeholder Relations at PPS, the financial services provider focused on graduate professionals, discussions are taking place between several universities and the professional associations representing the profession, to ensure the ongoing relevance of the LLB degree and improvements required to the current course.

"The timing of this survey and the negativity about the LLB degree does also coincide with an increase in labour disputes as well as a high degree of political unrest in South Africa, with a number of wage strikes and disputes in a variety of sectors continuing to cause concern, as well as unease about potential developments that may occur towards the end of the year at the ANC's Mangaung conference. This may have contributed to the general pessimistic sense of the participants."

The survey did however reveal a sharp drop in confidence on all categories being assessed. When asked whether they would encourage their children to enter their profession, only 40% of respondents answered positively, down 4 percentage points quarter on quarter. "This is very worrying. Not only is there a shortage of key skills in South Africa but children often take a lead from their parent's perspectives and if they see the legal profession as a difficult or unrewarding vocation, this does not bode well for attracting new entrants."

Furthermore, the survey showed a five percentage point drop in confidence levels to 72% in the future of the profession over the next five years.

Joubert says this may be borne out by another result in the survey that revealed attorneys do not view their profession in a positive light. The results revealed a 1 percentage point increase to 45% when asked whether they believe that high ethical standards are maintained and the attorneys' profession is regarded as an ethical, professional and noble one. "While this result has increased marginally, it is still concerning that this confidence level is so low. 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 also declined five percentage points to 45%, while 93% 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 education sector, not only about the status of the LLB degree but also of the wider education system.”

The survey also showed strong levels of concern about the future of the healthcare system in South Africa over the next five years with a confidence level of just 42% being noted, down two percentage points. In addition to this, a seven percentage point decline to 14% was recorded when asked whether they believed that NHI was the solution to fixing the country’s ailing health system.

Confidence that crime rates in South Africa will improve remained an area of concern with a confidence score of 42%, down two percentage points, while confidence in unemployment improving over the next five years was also down three percentage points to 40%.

“The second quarter survey of local attorneys has revealed a very worrying decline in confidence level across very important issues for the profession, most notably the quality of the current LLB degree. It is vital that these concerns are addressed to ensure the future of this vital profession in the country,” concludes Joubert.

Other results from the survey

- Confidence in their ability to earn an income that keeps up with inflation fell 3 percentage points to 66%
- Confidence that they will remain in South Africa for the foreseeable future fell 2 percentage points to 80%
- Confidence in the economic outlook for South Africa over the next 12 months fell 4 percentage points to 60%
- Confidence that South Africa has seen the worst of global economic turmoil fell 5 percentage points to 49%
- Confidence that they have saved enough to retire comfortably fell 1 percentage point to 58%