

Equality Issues Section Report 2013-14

The Equality Issues Section works toward equality within the legal system and legal profession, in particular on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, age or disability. The Section aims to:

- promote awareness of equality in the legal profession and legal system;
- develop resources to assist the legal profession in eliminating discrimination and achieving equality and diversity;
- encourage appropriate accommodation where possible; and
- monitor the status of equality and diversity in the legal profession.

The executive of the Equality Issues section met in person and via email several times in the past year to plan the year's calendar of events and discuss and consider issues related to advancing equality within the legal profession in Manitoba.

In October, the section co-sponsored a lunchtime session with the Women Lawyers Forum on the process to become a judge in Manitoba. The event was moderated by Judge Cynthia Devine and included presentations from Madam Justice Freda Steel, Madam Justice Brenda Keyser, Judge Lee Ann Martin and Master Joy Cooper. Those attending learned about the application and appointment process for various levels of court and heard firsthand stories of what life as a judge can be like.

In addition to the scheduled events, the Executive discussed and considered the recent work by Professor Karen Busby for the Manitoba Law Reform Commission on the process of appointments to administrative tribunals in Manitoba. Work is ongoing on preparing a background paper and draft resolution for review and consideration by the Council of the Manitoba Bar Association. As well, planning is underway for a lunch-and-learn session on the topic to take place in late fall 2010.

In March, the section coordinated a lunchtime session on the topic of examining how far we've come in achieving gender equality since the Touchstones report was issued in 1993. The session was co-sponsored by the Women Lawyers' Forum. Zilla Jones, section Vice Chair, moderated the panel discussion with panelists Judge Carena Roller, Dean Lorna Turnbull, Brenlee Carrington-Trepel and Allison Fenske. There were approximately 20 registrants for the session and those attending heard often-moving personal stories as well as thoughtful practical suggestions to advance gender equality in legal workplaces. The session was also the topic of a subsequent post to Slaw.ca, Pausing to Reflect But Not to Rest (<http://www.slaw.ca/2014/04/09/pausing-to-reflect-but-not-to-rest/>).

As Chair, I was also pleased to participate in the Canadian Bar Association's SOGIC annual meeting, attending the CPD session, All Manner of Wickedness Abounds, and the reception afterwards.

The Executive consisted of the Chair and Vice-Chair, Zilla Jones. Ms Jones has indicated she will move into the role of Chair for 2014/15 and Ms Dyck will remain involved as Past Chair. A call for Nominations is being made to seek new members of the Executive, including an incoming Vice Chair.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Dyck, Chair