



## Law Society Council meeting summary: 19 October 2016

Council met on 19 October for a very full agenda. Colin Ettinger was welcomed to his first Council meeting as representative of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, and Council noted that Bill Waddington had recently been nominated to the Criminal Defence Council seat in succession to Joy Merriam who is now the geographical Council member for North-East London. Among major items of business, Council agreed the Law Society budget and business plan for the coming year, with a focus on building value for our members and engagement with our members, alongside effectiveness in how the Society works and in supporting and developing the skills of the Society's people.

### Governance

Council has been discussing possible changes to Law Society governance at several meetings over the last few months. At this meeting, Council moved forward to agree some changes to the structure of boards that support Council in its work. None of the agreed changes are radical, but they are the next steps in the journey to modernising our governance and serving our members efficiently and effectively.

Council has agreed to establish a Main Board. This board's first task will be to review the form and function of other boards and make recommendations to Council for further changes as necessary. The Main Board will include solicitors who are not currently members of Council – this will help us bring a fresh perspective to the way we work, our current structure does not have this built in. The Main Board Chair will be appointed by reference to her or his skills – there will be a formal and open process to ensure the best candidates come forward from across the solicitor profession. The Main Board will have up to two lay members – they will bring their broader experience to the benefit of the Society, but will be non voting. We do not have lay membership on our existing Boards. The Main Board will also include the three Law Society Office Holders (President, Deputy and Deputy Vice President), five other Council members and the Chief Executive

Before we implement these changes, we now move on to the broader review of Council itself to ensure we take the opportunity to strengthen Law Society's connection with our changing, diverse and dynamic profession. We have been seeking input from individual members, local law societies and others as we have begun to consider changes. We will continue to take this open approach as we look at the representative role. The e-mail address [representation@lawsociety.org.uk](mailto:representation@lawsociety.org.uk) remains open for your thoughts.

### Promoting the profession - market and regulatory change

The Chief Executive updated Council on the SRA consultations on a new Handbook and accounts rules, which closed on 21 September, our response having been published on 8 September. On 21 September, the Society submitted further evidence to the SRA including an economic critique highlighting why a 'two-tier' profession was unlikely to improve competition or reduce unmet need for legal services, and a survey which showed that consumers do not support the SRA proposals. The Chief Executive also referred to the Ministry of Justice 'Transforming our justice system' consultation, which focuses on using technology to enhance the administration of justice, including a proposal for a new online process for resolving many civil cases. The Law Society has been consulting the profession widely, in advance of the closing date for responses on 27 October 2016.

### Representing and supporting the profession

The Chief Executive updated Council on our continuing engagement with policy committees on the Brexit agenda, and on the series of round-tables recently conducted round the country with different sections of the membership. The President and Chief Executive met with the Home Secretary and had a positive discussion about the need to maintain a safe and co-operative cross-border justice system. The first meeting of the Law Society's Brexit task force has been held, attended by representatives of all the Government Departments involved. Council noted that the Law Society is currently developing a campaign focused on promoting England and Wales as the governing law of international contracts leading up to and following Brexit. Council was pleased to note that the SRA's second consultation on the Solicitors' Qualifying Examination reflected many of the changes supported by the Law Society, including that the qualification should be at degree level and require a minimum of two years of work based training. Council also noted that the government's recently published response to a consultation on legislative proposals relating to money laundering and terrorist finance included a number of changes in response to Law Society arguments, for example on suspicious activity reporting.

The Chief Executive reported on a very positive meeting with the Lord Chancellor who had shown a strong commitment to diversity, welcoming the Society's work to increase the number of solicitor judges, and to the contribution of the legal sector to the economy at large. Council also noted the active programme of engagement with political party conferences and with international stakeholders.