

Report from Law Society Council Member – Lubna Shuja

Firstly I am very pleased to confirm that I have been appointed the Chair of the Law Society's Membership and Operations Committee, which means that I am now on the new Law Society Board. This is a good opportunity for sole practitioners to be effectively represented at the heart of the Law Society and I intend to do my best to ensure SP interests are kept on the agenda.

I attended the Law Society Council meeting on 21 March 2018 which took place in Manchester. Council was also able to engage with a wide range of legal sector stakeholders from the North West as well as local law students. I set out below details of the main issues discussed at the Council meeting and the key decisions made. I have also attached a copy of the CEO's report which contains more detail on how the Law Society is working hard to promote our profession, support solicitors and become a truly member-centric organisation.

Governance Changes for 2018

The recent important changes in governance were formally passed by Council with amendments to the Law Society's General Regulations. This consolidated all the recent changes including the creation of the new Board and its two supporting Committees – the new Membership and Operations Committee (which I now Chair and which gives me a place on the new Board) and the Policy and Regulatory Affairs Committee. Council received its first report from the new Board, covering matters such as an update on organisational performance, the Law Society's communications, preliminary audit findings, and the Board's future agenda.

Member communications and engagement

Council noted that a new Joiners' Pack is now being sent to all members on admission to the Roll, including a welcome letter from the President and a copy of the Society's Member Handbook. In addition a refreshed digital monthly e-newsletter will be launched from April 2018 which will be sent to over 100 local law societies and Council members. This will include content focused on key overall themes for the profession and on regional and topical spotlights. The Law Society has also continued to develop guidance, products and services for the profession on the EU General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

New Award for Sole Practitioner of the Year

The Law Society Excellence Awards will, for the first time this year, include an Award for the Sole Practitioner of the Year. Full details on how to apply can be found at <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/excellence-awards>. Closing date for nominations is 25 May 2018 with the final ceremony taking place on 17 October 2018. Please do put in your nomination and make this new award a success.

Campaign for Legal Aid to be reintroduced for Early Legal Advice

The Law Society is campaigning for legal aid to be re-introduced for early legal advice, particularly in family and housing law. The early advice campaign has so far resulted in significant parliamentary interest and a commitment by the Labour Party to reintroduce legal aid for early advice in family cases. Please get involved with this campaign by writing to your MP. It only takes a couple of minutes if you do so via the Law Society website at www.lawsociety.org.uk/policy-campaigns/campaigns/early-advice where there is a template letter and a facility to allow you to send it directly to your MP.

Lobbying on Brexit

There was a presentation to Council on the Law Society's work on Brexit which continues to feature prominently on the agenda. Council affirmed the Society's continuing commitment to market access, now calling for a deep relationship with the single market as a guarantee of this. The Society also continues to focus on continued civil and family justice co-operation; collaboration in policing, security and criminal justice; robust and clear transitional arrangements; and the ongoing promotion of the jurisdiction of England and Wales. Continued high-profile engagement with government and with parliamentarians is set out in the attached report from the CEO and has led to the Law Society receiving many mentions in parliamentary committee reports. Engagement also continues with the EU and other European stakeholders.

Political engagement

Council heard of continued relationship building with the new ministerial teams, including the new Lord Chancellor David Gauke MP, and the new Justice Minister, Lucy Frazer QC MP, covering priorities on access to justice, court modernisation, personal injury reform, and the Society's early advice campaign. In January the Law Society and its campaigns were positively mentioned in Parliament on 17 occasions. It was noted that close collaboration continues with the Welsh Revenue Authority, including a joint survey on awareness of the new Land Transaction Tax.

International engagement

In addition to the work on Brexit mentioned earlier, Council noted a seminar organised by the Society on the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, with focus on Egypt, as well as engagement with the British Italian Law Association, a delegation of students from the India Think Council, and a visit to Russia in response to ongoing discussion about the reform of the legal profession there.

Presidential year plan

Christina Blacklaws takes office as President of the Law Society in July 2018 and presented her presidential year plan which was endorsed by Council. Among the areas of focus will be continuing to lead the 'pride in the profession' campaign, work on diversity and inclusion including a programme on women in leadership in the law, and a wide range of activities to encourage access to the profession for the best candidates regardless of their social background. Work on the future of legal services will focus particularly on technological innovation as a driver of change and there will also be a focus on championing the Law Society's programme of work on mental health, wellbeing and resilience in the workplace.

If you would like any further information on Law Society activities, or wish to discuss any issues affecting sole practitioners, or you would like me to raise any matters with the Law Society, please do not hesitate to contact me on info@legalswan.com or on 0121 551 7866.

Lubna Shuja

SPG Law Society Council Member
Chair of the Law Society's Membership and Operations Committee
Member of the Law Society Board
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