

COUNCIL
23/03/2021

Chief Executive’s Report to Council – Part 1

Item 9

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**Classification - Public
Freedom of Information**

Not applicable as this paper is public

Summary:

My Part 1 paper includes information that members should be aware of and may share with their constituents. Where possible, matters are included here to assist you in your role.

My part 2 paper covers progress being made against delivery of our business plan which can be turned white after discussions and subsequently shared with members.

Recommendations / Conclusions:

This paper is for: information.

Assessments. This should be either a summary of what is in the paper (cross-referenced to the relevant paragraph), or, if the issues are very straightforward, a full statement of the relevant position.

Financial:	There are no financial implications arising from the paper.
Risk:	The plans in this report are covered by the Strategic and Operational Risk registers in place throughout the Law Society.
E D & I	ED&I implications are considered as part of all aspects of our work, and particularly in this paper to issues around the SQE and appointment of members. This links to our desire to create an inclusive and proactive culture within the Law Society.
Organisational Values	Details of the ongoing work to embed our organisational values are included within the paper.
Consultation	Executive Leadership Team.

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1. Member-focussed updates

1.1. Covid

Throughout the quarter, we have continued to engage with both the internal and external challenges presented by the Covid pandemic. Internally, our focus has been on supporting the wellbeing of staff. We continue to produce content on the intranet on managing work-life balance and physical and mental wellbeing, and have regularly pushed out additional guidance for line managers to support their teams. In addition, with the re-tightening of restrictions in December, we have encouraged and supported flexible work patterns for staff with childcare and other caring responsibilities. Finally, in February, we began to prepare for the gradual easing of Covid restrictions. Our internal Covid working group met the day after the Prime Minister announced his new road map for a return to normality. This will consider the potential phasing of any return to the office, and our longer-term ways of working.

Further details regarding our external response are provided in the MX update.

1.2. Policy impact

At the beginning of the business year, reflecting the priorities established by Council, we created plans to prioritise six themes of work:

- Promoting Access to Justice;
- Upholding the Rule of Law;
- Regulation / AML;
- Promoting a Modern, Diverse and Inclusive Profession;
- Supporting the Economic Value and Viability of members' businesses; and
- Supporting the International Practice of Law.

During the quarter, we gave evidence to the House of Commons Justice Select Committee on two of their inquiries: the future of legal aid, and court capacity. Committee members shared our concerns on the two subjects.

In relation to Covid and court safety, we are in regular contact with HMCTS, including a weekly court safety meeting allowing us to raise the concerns our members are expressing to us.

We have updated the guidance and support available for firms and members on our website following the announcement of a new national lockdown in England at the beginning of the new year and tougher restrictions in place in Wales. We liaised closely with government departments to secure further clarification and confirmation that our members who act as key workers in England by attending court and fulfilling legal obligations will continue to be treated as such. Our website contains the latest guidance on these measures, as well as the local lockdown blueprint and mechanics of closing deals virtually (virtual execution and electronic execution).

On business support measures, we will join calls suggesting that business support should be commensurate with the scale of the restrictions imposed.

Clauses allowing the breach of international law were removed from the Internal Market Bill in December, following progress in the negotiations regarding the UK's future relationship with the EU and following a successful Law Society campaign on the issue, which saw over 5,000 people write to their MP using our campaign action to raise concerns regarding the proposals.

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1.3. Public Affairs

During the quarter we have had 82 citations by Parliamentarians. In January, the Law Society was positively mentioned in Parliament 19 times (8 times in social media and 11 times in Hansard). These mentions were in connection with our work on access to justice, the rule of law and the international practice of law.

During January we gave oral evidence to two select committees. Our Head of Justice, Richard Miller, gave oral evidence to the Justice Select Committee as part of two inquiries on court capacity and the future of legal aid. Our Head of International, Mickael Laurens gave oral evidence to the House of Lords EU Services Sub-Committee on the legal services sector and areas of concern for future trade.

We made a full submission to HM Treasury (HMT) ahead of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget. In our submission, we have set out a comprehensive package of recommendations designed to support firms and solicitors through the pandemic, repair access to justice, invest in training and skills, harness Law Tech to build a UK scientific superpower, address issues in the property market, and promote the English and Welsh jurisdiction globally. We have engaged with HMT officials following the submission and are currently scoping campaign activity to highlight our asks on SDLT and small business support.

Since the announcement of the EU – UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), we have worked on replacing the earlier guidance with up-to-date versions on our website. These updates relate to provision of legal services, data adequacy rules, VAT, AML and IP law. We also ran a social media advertising campaign targeting members and firms and promoting our end of transition guidance.

In January, we have run a series of webinars on end of transition. We have held six webinars, ranging from family law and commercial judgments to immigration and competition law. These webinars have attracted a wide number of members, from 240 – 600 per session.

We have communicated our initial reactions to Government and Parliament through meetings with the Lord Chancellor, ongoing communication with officials at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), and a briefing to MPs and peers ahead of the European Union (Future Relationship) Bill.

Our Brussels office is leading on influencing the EU's approach to Lugano. The EU Commission's UK Task Force is leading on the EU's position and do not believe the decisions should be taken quickly. Our influencing is focussed on emphasising how UK participation on Lugano is not simplistically in the interests of the UK or UK legal service providers, but in the interests of the SMEs and consumers in particular. We have been working with other stakeholders (business and consumer organisations in particular) in order to jointly influence EU institutions and member states and keep the issue alive.

Our Global Legal Centre campaign continues to focus on specific audiences, and we have been promoting our 'Jurisdiction of Choice' report to key stakeholders in target areas.

1.4. Member services

For our members, much of our work has continued to focus on member safety and our 3Rs – 'reset, resilience and recovery' – campaign. To date, our 'reset, resilience and recovery' campaign has made significant impact. As a result of our work, in collaboration with our SII colleagues:

- Over £500 million public spending was allocated from the Treasury to the justice system as part of the 1-year spending review;

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- The Ministry of Justice’s budget was protected for 2021 and the Chancellor announced an above inflation increase of over 4%.
- During second lockdown (and now in areas with tier 4 restrictions) the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Ministry of Justice agreed that law firms could remain open, solicitors could travel to work, solicitors could meet clients in law firms and visit vulnerable clients at home; and
- Almost 220 solicitors facing redundancy or employment related challenges benefited from the Law Society’s career clinics and gave positive feedback on the service.

We increased communications and guidance to members and firms to supporting them in adapting to the end of transition over December and January. Our resources, which we promoted through newsletters and social media, included a dedicated web hub, guidance on 13 different specific topics, detailed guides on ten key countries, seven pre-transition webinars on relevant areas of law, and six post-transition webinars focussing on the content of the TCA (this last series had had 1,537 attendees).

We also undertook a number of direct member communications, including direct emails, reaching out to individual members practising in EU / EFTA jurisdictions, and responding to queries sent to our dedicated Brexit email address (brexit@lawsociety.org.uk).

On 19 October, we launched our pilot digital community to 5,000 small firm members. ‘[Law Society Connect](#)’ is a place where small firm members can meet, share best practice, learn from peers, collaborate on common challenges and innovate. We have exceeded our three-month registration target and now have 505 registered users.

1.5. Learning & development

Law Society Learning (our new learning management system (LMS)) has performed well since its launch in November 2020. CQS 2020 has been received well by the membership, and revenue is up 10% on the commensurate launch period in 2019. Importantly, call queries about CQS and the platform have reduced by 79% compared to the same period in 2019, indicating that members are finding the new platform easier to navigate. This significant reduction reflects the amount of user-focussed work that went into deploying the platform to ensure its excellent legal education and training content is underpinned with a contemporary and easy-to-use digital experience.

We also released newly designed e-learning content to market in December, which has had a good reception. These modules targeted three key cohorts – junior lawyers, in-house, and compliance specialists – and the AML modules have been particularly well-received. The PDC was successfully decommissioned whilst LSL was launched. With foundation delivery complete, we will not focus on enhancing and developing the LMS, in terms of features that boost member experience and regular delivery of new content.

2. Conclusion

You can see from the above that there has been a great deal of activity across the organisation during the past couple of months, and we will build upon this as we move into Q2.

This paper is for information and discussion.

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