

The Law Society

Activity Report for the three months
ending 30 April 2024

Introduction and the Law Society Corporate Plan

In September 2022, the Law Society's Council approved a three-year corporate plan to run from 1 November 2022 to 31 October 2025. A business plan for the year to 30 October 2024 was later approved by Council in October 2023. Both plans are built around four key strategic objectives, and this activity report is organised around those same four strategic objectives.

Progress is reported for the period of three months ending 30 April 2024 ("Q2").

Objective One: We will promote the value of the profession and provide a compelling member offer



Under this objective we focus on development of member resources, international opportunities for members, key segments and communities within our membership, liaison with local law societies, access to content and frontline member services.

Development of member resources

Q2 saw the development of new expert guidance and resources to support members as a key benefit of their Law Society membership.

This includes a new guide to support conveyancers to make informed decisions following changes to the Building Safety Act, and new guidance outlining the support available during disciplinary investigations and enforcement actions.

International opportunities for members

The first plenary session of the Australia-UK Legal Services Regulatory Dialogue (LSRD) was held over two sessions on 5-6 March 2024, with key substantive discussions ahead of us on requalification and business structures.

Our Presidential visit to Korea and Japan in April enabled us to meet with members and to raise with our counterparts our key objectives in making international practice for our members easier in these two important jurisdictions.

The work to open the legal services market in India is subject to the outcome of a legal challenge against the Bar Council of India regulations and the resumption of free trade agreement negotiations after the Indian general elections of April-June 2024.

Key segments and our communities

In Q2 we designed and delivered a range of topical and networking engagements with over 960 members (live) held in-person in Manchester and Leeds and in-person / hybrid in London. These included the President's regional visits, regular committee meetings as well as additional planned engagements from roundtables on financial benchmarking amongst law firms, regulatory risks and the use of artificial intelligence in the legal sector to seminars on competition and private client laws and career-focused talks and networking for junior and in-house solicitors, covering key segments of the profession as well as aspiring solicitors.

We continued to prepare and release topical monthly recordings aimed at managing small firms as well as launched a new video series on contentious probate law, land law, commentary on a significant dispute resolution case and on running a law firm, as part of our premium section offering. By the end of Q2, the six sections had grown paid membership subscriptions by 5% on prior year, and also marked an acceleration in growth.

During the quarter we launched a pilot engagement project aimed at law students, initially with a cohort of around a dozen participating universities from across England and Wales. The pilot includes access to helpful and relevant information and talks to assist students to build knowledge, skills and contacts in preparation for becoming a solicitor as well as build brand awareness of the Law Society amongst aspiring solicitors.

Liaison with local law societies

We welcomed to Chancery Lane the County Societies Group of local law societies, attended the regular meetings online of approximately a dozen other local law societies where we delivered briefings on the Law Society's work, asked for input and collaboration and inquired about issues and topics of importance locally.

We also organised and delivered four online topical forums for groups of local law societies to raise awareness and discuss collaboration in relation to the 20th anniversary of the Diversity Access Scheme, the Bicentenary planning, government influencing work, and the impact of the government budget on the legal sector.

Frontline services

During Q2 we continued to carry out high quality frontline member research, resolving 1,730 enquiries through the library service. On-site we've supported 1,754 members coming through the library with legal resources and workspace.

Access to content

The events team ran 23 events with around 3,300 registered attendees. In March, we held our first Risk and Compliance Week, which saw exclusive offers for Law Society products from L&D, publications and commercial sales for R&C Conference attendees. Law Society Property Week in October will build on this concept.

Admission ceremonies

Following the high sales of the Law Society branded stole worn over the black gown at admissions ceremonies, the Admissions Shop launched in April selling branded merchandise to new admittees and their guests, currently items include lapel pins, mugs, and certificate holders and more will be added in due course.

Diversity & Inclusion

In February we welcomed the Solicitor General and over 100 solicitor apprentices, City of London law firms, and guests to celebrate year 1 of the City Century Solicitor Apprentices' initiative.

We marked LGBTQ+ history month in February, and International Women's Day and Neurodiversity celebration week in March by sharing member profiles, articles, guidance and resources.

Our Diversity Access Scheme opened for applications in February, receiving just under 300 applications by close in April.

In April, we held forums with our in-house and large firm communities on 'How to do D&I' where attendees discussed how D&I work is resourced, where accountability and sponsorship sits, and best practice around driving positive change on D&I across the whole business.

Objective Two: We will protect the justice system and make sure it applies to everyone equally



Under this objective we focus on building public understanding of the rule of law and the justice system, having a positive influence on developments in legislation, practice, and justice policy, representing members in key policy areas, promoting our home jurisdiction as well as supporting colleagues at risk around the world.

Influence on developments in legislation

The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act received Royal Assent in Q2. The Law Society worked closely with parliamentarians from all sides as the Bill progressed through each House, with many of our concerns reflected during the debates.

We continue to engage with parliamentarians on legislation and issues affecting the profession, including on the courts backlog, housing and property legislation and the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Bill, which was introduced to the House of Commons in March.

Representatives of the Law Society met and engaged with political stakeholders in Westminster. During the quarter we met and worked with the Lord Chancellor Alex Chalk KC MP, Chair of the Justice Committee Sir Bob Neill KC MP, Solicitor General Robert Courts KC MP, Shadow Justice Minister Alex Cunningham MP and Shadow Attorney General Emily Thornberry MP and Shadow Solicitor General Karl Turner MP.

In addition, we hosted a roundtable with Attorney General Victoria Prentis KC MP, a roundtable on diversity with Justice Minister Mike Freer MP and co-hosted with the Bar Council a keynote speech by Shadow Lord Chancellor Shabana Mahmood MP.

Influence on Justice Policy

Following our successful judicial review in relation to criminal legal aid, we have continued to engage with the MoJ as they undertake the remodelling required by the judgment.

The NAO report on legal aid reflected many of the concerns we had raised with them during their investigation and made a number of recommendations that align with our policy positions.

HMCTS extended and restructured its reform programme, including deferring further enhancements to the Common Platform system, as we had recommended they do. They also dropped a proposed increase in family court fees as we pushed for in our consultation response.

We submitted a detailed response to the MoJ's call for evidence as part of its Review of Civil Legal Aid, and published an interim report we commissioned from Frontier Economics showing the stark picture facing civil legal aid firms.

Influence on regulation

We worked to develop our response to the new consultation from the SRA on the potential regulation of unauthorised CILEX members. We are maintaining our opposition to the redelegation of regulation to the SRA, as well as these proposals specifically.

We took forward our work on the SRA's Consumer Protection Review which they launched in February. We engaged with the SRA via meetings and representatives of the SRA attended PIIC and RPC committee meetings in April. To support our work further and to help develop our response to the review, we established a Law Society Consumer Protection Working Group (CPWG) made up of elected and appointed members.

In February, HM Treasury launched a consultation on how to improve the effectiveness of the Money Laundering Regulations (the MLRs). This consultation proposes changes to the MLRs which are intended to respond to emerging risks, further strengthen the effectiveness of the regime and ensure that burdens on businesses and customers are proportionate. The Law Society, following hosting of member roundtables and from input from the Money Laundering Taskforce will be providing a response to the consultation by the deadline of 9th June .

As part of its Fraud Strategy, the government committed to improving the law enforcement response to investigating and prosecuting fraud. In March the Law Society

hosted a roundtable of with members chaired by Jonathan Fisher KC, which examined the Independent Review of Disclosure and Fraud Offences.

Building public understanding

During the quarter we raised public awareness of the Law Society's campaign and policy priorities through our media work. Coverage of our judicial review victory continued in the national press including BBC News, Times, Telegraph and Daily Mail, as well as more than 300 regional media covering the judgment.

We continued to raise awareness of the court backlogs. In March, Law Society vice president Richard Atkinson and Stuart Nolan, chair of our Criminal Law Committee, spoke to BBC Breakfast television about the Crown Court backlog, with 66,000 cases incomplete last year.

The government announced that legislation to quash Post Office convictions was set to be introduced. We responded to the news by saying that this was an extraordinary measure and that it should not set a precedent for any further government intervention in the independence of our justice system. Our statement was published in more than 220 national and regional media outlets, including Guardian, Evening Standard and Daily Express.

Following the Spring Budget, we expressed our disappointment at the government once again failing to address the crisis facing our justice system, which was covered by the Financial Times, City A.M. and Law Society Gazette.

There was also continued media coverage of our response to the Rwanda Bill throughout Q2. Chair of the Law Society's immigration law committee, Muhunthan Paramesvaran, spoke to BBC News about the Rwanda policy. Chris Cole, member of the Law Society's immigration committee, also spoke to the Financial Times about next steps in the Rwanda deportation plan.

Supporting colleagues at risk around the world

We continue to raise awareness of lawyers at risk concerns at an international level. We participated in the UN Universal Periodic Review pre-session for Afghanistan, to inform of the systemic persecution of lawyers, prosecutors, and judges. We also submitted a report and made an oral statement at the UN Committee against Torture's session on Azerbaijan to raise concern over the harassment and interference with lawyers in the country.

We remain engaged with the innovative process at the Council of Europe to draft a Convention on the Profession of Lawyer and have made submissions on recent drafts. We are also preparing a strategy to conduct advocacy in support of its future adoption and ratification.

In addition, we have promoted our lawyers at risk work in new jurisdictions. In April 2024, we conducted our first scoping visit to Uzbekistan with UK government grant funding. This involved a series of high-level stakeholder meetings to identify issues related to the legal sector in Uzbekistan that require reform and where the Law Society could add value through capacity building.

Strategic litigation

Following the success of the Society's Judicial Review against the Lord Chancellor's failure to comply with Lord Bellamy's recommendations in the Criminal Legal Aid Independent Review (CLAIR), engagement continued to ensure that the necessary remedial steps are taken in compliance with the court order. The Society has also sought to engage with the Lord Chancellor to ensure that the Society can provide input into the Lord Chancellor's remodelling and decision-making process. In addition, the Society continues to work to ensure that positive momentum from the successful challenge is not lost, including consideration of the legal options available to compel the Lord Chancellor to comply with the court order should it be necessary.

Objective Three: We will maximise our potential by growing our commercial reach, by being efficient and sustainable



Under this objective we focus on creating greater value in various product and service offerings, making better use of our heritage property, driving digital transformation projects and raising member engagement through improvements in governance processes.

Creating greater value in various product and service offerings

Q2 saw the Society successfully conclude a funding arrangement with the MOJ for immigration accreditations, increasing capacity in the sector as well as helping firms with a legal aid contract. CQS firms have benefitted also from the transition to digital applications, reducing average application times eight-fold on average. Work to transition our bookshop will shortly see a much-improved buying experience and we continue to provide value to law and in house firms, as well as legal recruiters by maintaining our position in the legal jobs market. Our commercial income is on budget at the half year stage.

Driving digital transformation projects

Following the successful launch of our Learning and Development platform we have built on our offering, soft launching a continuous professional development diary. The online diary is intuitive to use and will bring direct value to members by allowing them to capture all their training in one place.

We are also delivering value to members and colleagues through our new small change process, which focuses on enhancing the member experience and improve operational

efficiencies. Over the last quarter we have implemented enhancements to the events booking process, smoothing the customer journey experience.

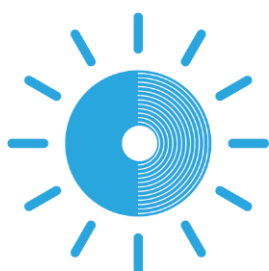
Internally we have implemented a new audio-visual solution for the Council Chamber, which will streamline hybrid council meetings, ensuring integrated and consistent participation for members during meetings, whether participating remotely or in the chamber. This quarter also saw the successful launch of basic Copilot to familiarise staff with the AI which will support and enhance our work for members.

Legal Services

The Legal team has provided support in the negotiation, drafting and completion of the 114 Chancery Lane construction agreements and a licence for the refurbishment of the Cardiff office. The team also advised on commercial partnerships agreements and other commercial arrangements and advised on marketing compliance issues.

Work has been carried out to support the Society's Artificial Intelligence project as well as the appointment of the Art Advisory Group in advance of the Society's bicentenary.

Objective Four: We will be an employer of choice for people who want to make a difference



Under this objective we focus on becoming more strategic in our approach to human resources and organisational development, continuing our work to embed equality, diversity, and inclusion practices across the organisation, whilst ensuring our governance processes are efficient and continuously improving.

Our approach to human resources and organisational development

We continued to enhance our Talent Acquisition strategy and recruitment processes, ensuring we remain competitive in the market, and able to attract diverse talent.

We supported hiring managers through formal training, as well as professionalising the interview and selection process. To date, over 90% of hiring managers have attended one of our in-person or online inclusive recruitment workshops.

To support a positive candidate experience, we reviewed and modified the application process, as well as launched a new candidate feedback survey.

Following the implementation of anonymised recruitment just over 12-months ago, we reviewed the recruitment and EDI data and are pleased to report that there has been no detrimental impact from either perspective.

We have set up Talent Pooling capability in our recruitment system, to proactively source and engage talent using LinkedIn Recruiter. This is having a positive effect on speed of Hire, with an average change from 11.5 weeks this time last year to 8 weeks.

Embedding Equality Diversity and Inclusion

We completed our Reverse Mentoring pilot, which lasted seven months. The primary purpose of the scheme was to support senior leaders with understanding the lived experience of black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals, with a focus on key topics such as racism, allyship, white privilege, and uncomfortable conversations.

A formal review of the pilot is now underway, analysing the pre/post survey results and the qualitative data received from the listening and feedback circle.

We successfully identified eleven interns as part of the 10,000 Black Interns programme, joining us in June 2024. All interns have been allocated mentors and will be undertaking paid internships for a minimum of six weeks.

In March 2024, we joined the Business Disability Forum (BDF). We have since completed a Disability Confident Level 3 review and are awaiting feedback from BDF. We will use the feedback to inform our approach to disability inclusion.

Concluding thoughts

We hope that you will have found this report interesting and useful.

We look forward to reporting next at the end of the three months to 31 July 2024.