



Q1 activity report

1 November 2023 to 31 January 2024

Contents

- 1. Introduction and our corporate plan 4
- 2. Objective one: we will promote the value of the profession and provide a compelling member offer 4
 - Development of member resources..... 4
 - International opportunities for members..... 4
 - Key segments and our communities 5
 - Liaison with local law societies..... 5
 - Frontline services 5
 - Access to content..... 6
 - Diversity and inclusion 6
- 3. Objective two: we will protect the justice system and make sure it applies to everyone equally 7
 - Influence on developments in legislation and justice policy 7
 - Influence on regulation 8
 - Building public understanding 9
 - Supporting colleagues at risk around the world 9
 - Strategic litigation..... 9
 - Criminal Legal Aid Independent Review (CLAIR) judicial review 9
 - Churchill v Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council* ('Japanese Knotweed' case)..... 10
- 4. Objective three: we will maximise our potential by growing our commercial reach, by being efficient and sustainable 10
 - Creating greater value in various product and service offerings 10
 - Driving digital transformation 11
 - Legal..... 11
- 5. Objective four: we will be an employer of choice for people who want to make a difference..... 11
 - Human resources and organisational development 12
 - Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) 12
- 6. Concluding thoughts 13



1. Introduction and our corporate plan

In September 2022, our 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. This activity report is organised around those same strategic objectives.

2. 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
- frontline member services

Development of member resources

We released 24 learning and development products (five accreditations training and 19 for continuing professional development (CPD) and careers).

The most notable release was Conveyancing Quality Scheme training, which set new engagement records for the immediate post-release period. A January sale was held to promote the CPD portfolio.

Good progress was also made with the development of the digital CPD diary, which is scheduled to launch in April.

Q1 also marked the launch of a new Section content initiative, 'Member Talks', with the first video to be released for Property Section members on the Japanese knotweed case.

International opportunities for members

We were actively represented at the International Bar Association annual conference in Paris and the LAWASIA annual conference in Bangalore, meeting with members and engaging with international stakeholders on policy and market access issues.

We also undertook our first visit to Hong Kong and mainland China in six years. Hong Kong remains an important hub for over practising 1,000 members and the continuing attractiveness of the solicitor qualification for HK and PRC-qualified lawyers through the Solicitors Qualifying Examination.

The UK and Chinese government have agreed to resume a Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), which will include a legal services component.

Key segments and our communities

Collectively, over 1,500 members took part in the following membership engagement activities in Q1.

Nine topical roundtables were held on topics such as the Competition Markets Authority's talk on labour markets, in-person discussions with large law firms' anti-money laundering officers and operational challenges faced by small to medium-sized firms.

Two Section webinars were offered with legal practice updates for property, private client and commercial dispute resolution solicitors.

We held four seminars and networking receptions:

- in-house counsel on how to discuss the impact of climate change with boards
- diversity and inclusion amongst competition law practitioners
- compliance with price transparency requirements
- wills legal reform

Membership engagement visits were conducted by the president in Norwich and Chester.

In addition, the team held conversations with over 20 universities and stakeholders in relation to a potential aspiring solicitor member offer.

Liaison with local law societies

The bi-annual local law societies' townhall meeting with the president was attended by over 35 different local law societies and focused on key campaigns on 21st Century Justice and on Reframing Justice.

In addition, a quarterly online forum was also held, bringing together the parliamentary liaison officers of around a dozen large local law societies.

Frontline services

Our Support Centre and Practice Advice Service fielded over 60,000 calls and 3,000 emails and cases.

The main drivers continue to be spread across Find a Solicitor, events, member issues on the website and updating FAS data such as areas of practice and other firm details.

The Practice Advice Service continue to guide members across a broad range of subjects including anti-money laundering, source of funds, customer due diligence and reporting, as well as private client and a variety regulatory issues.

The library handled 1,817 enquiries and received 1,701 in-person visits. Services included research, remote document delivery, and resourcing a digital and print legal reference collection.

A library engagement campaign is raising awareness of these resources and services, through new member communications and high-performing social media posts.

Access to content

Q1 saw a focus on promoting the different ways the Law Society is supporting and championing the profession through its wide range of trusted resources and advocacy work. This included:

- new guidance on generative artificial intelligence (AI) that explores what generative AI is, the possibilities it creates for law firms and some of the risks that need to be considered
- highlighting members' views and concerns on a range of policy areas, including:
 - the Building Safety Act
 - plans to change CILEX regulation
 - immigration proposals involving Rwanda
 - the ongoing campaign to improve criminal and civil legal aid funding

We have continued to promote the stories, successes and experiences of solicitors, including a focus on topics such as social mobility, disability and inclusion.

We also ran eight admissions ceremonies for a total of 478 members and their guests and 16 free/low-cost events with 4,571 registrations and 1,170 post-event views so far.

The largest event was with partner Thirdfort (what the year ahead holds for AML and KYC), which attracted 950 registrations.

Diversity and inclusion

We held a joint forum with our in-house and large firm communities on 'What really works in D&I' sharing tips to optimise the impact of D&I interventions.

We held the first of two annual thematic roundtables for signatories of our Women in Law pledge. Attendees discussed approaches to developing an action plan and setting targets.

We arranged the inaugural Carrie Morrison lecture (previously named the Fiona Woolf lecture), hosted by the University of Chester, where panellists discussed explored challenges and barriers to gender equality, and how organisations can move the conversation beyond talk to action to shape a more inclusive profession.

We marked Disability History Month, sharing member stories, resources and guidance to celebrate, raise awareness, and support members to drive positive change on disability inclusion.

We published our annual Diversity Access Scheme (DAS) report which provided an overview of the application and award process for 2023.

We also held a webinar on understanding and managing microaggressions as part of our learning and development offer attended by over 100 people.

3. 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 justice system
- having a positive influence on developments in legislation and policy
- representing members in key policy areas
- promoting our home jurisdiction
- supporting colleagues at risk around the world

Influence on developments in legislation and justice policy

In November 2023, the King opened a new session of Parliament and delivered the King's speech, outlining the government's legislative agenda for the final session of this Parliament.

The speech outlined a total of 21 bills, six of which had been carried over from the previous session.

There was a clear focus on crime and justice within the government's programme, with five criminal justice bills unveiled, alongside further legislation of interest to the Law Society and its members.

In response to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, we strongly briefed parliamentarians throughout its passage, noting our significant concerns with the legislation and the impact on the rule of law.

The Victims and Prisoners Bill continues its progress through Parliament, and we were successful in lobbying government to pass an amendment to the bill to stop plans to provide the secretary of state with the power to intervene in parole cases involving serious offenders.

The amendment will instead give the secretary of state the power to refer a case to the Upper Tribunal or High Court.

In addition, our representatives have given oral evidence to several pieces of legislation as they progress through Parliament including the Finance Bill committee, the Renters (Reform) Bill committee and the Leasehold and Freehold (Reform) Bill committee, while continuing to engage directly with parliamentarians on other legislation of interest.

Representatives of the Law Society continue to meet and engage with political stakeholders in Westminster, including:

- Sir Bob Neill MP KC (Hons), chair of the Justice Committee
- Nus Ghani MP, minister of state at the Department for Business and Trade
- Alex Cunningham MP, shadow legal aid minister
- Gareth Thomas MP, shadow trade minister
- Sir Robert Buckland KC MP
- Kevin Brennan MP, shadow justice minister
- Lord Dick Newby, leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords

In addition, we held meetings with civil service officials and political staff.

We hosted a private roundtable dinner with crossbenchers in the House of Lords to discuss the Rwanda Bill, and we held a roundtable with members of the shadow business and trade team to discuss trade in legal services.

Members were able to discuss their priorities to support greater market access and identify barriers to trade.

Influence on regulation

On 4 December 2023, our president and our chief executive gave oral evidence to a session of the justice select committee on regulation of legal services, supporting the committee as they explored issues such as the operation of the Legal Services Act 2007, the fallout from the collapse of Axiom Ince, and the regulation of CILEX members.

In response to the Post Office Horizon Inquiry we have been actively engaged in discussions with regulators, members and other key stakeholders to consider the implications for professional practice.

We attended the launch of the LSB commissioned paper “What does it mean for lawyers to uphold the rule of law” and continued to engage with its programme of work which includes a gap analysis, consultation and publication of policy statement over the next year.

We have also been progressing our development of an ethics framework for members, and undertaking research to highlight the priorities for future member support and engagement.

We sought to influence the Legal Services Board (LSB) and Office for Legal Complaints (OLC) by responding to the first-tier complaints consultation and the OLC’s three-year Strategy (2024/27) and business plan and budget consultation for 2024/25 for LeO, in November and December 2023, respectively.

Economic crime and money laundering remain important areas of policy influencing including the work of the National Economic Crime Centre, Professional Enablers Working Group via the Legal Sector Affinity Group on strategy development and KPIs on tackling professional enablers across the regulated sector.

We also responded to the new information sharing measures introduced under Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act contributing to overarching Home Office guidance to support firms, trade bodies and public body supervisors in utilising them.

Following our 2023 professional indemnity insurance survey, which found that only 28% of firms have cyber insurance, we held discussions with leading brokers and underwriters on possible solutions including working with the ABI to promote the use of their online cyber tool, which is designed to assist SMEs that will soon be available on our website.

We responded to consultations from CILEX and the SRA in November opposing the redelegation of regulation to the SRA and CILEX’s proposed change of title, to ‘chartered lawyer’.

CILEX announced in January that it will proceed with both proposals. We followed up by writing to the SRA Board ahead of its meeting criticising its consumer research on redelegation and highlighting issues around consumer confusion which we believe will come from these proposals.

We have also been in contact with the MoJ to make them aware of our opposition to CILEX's proposed change of title, ahead of a Privy Council application.

Building public understanding

We published the research findings from the first year of the Reframing Justice programme and built a field of over 23 partner organisations in the wider justice and legal sectors interested in deploying the communications recommendations.

Over 45 individuals and organisations have also signed up through our website to hear about programme outputs.

Supporting colleagues at risk around the world

In January, a series of events was held to recognise the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, observed annually on 24 January. Each year, a country is chosen to be focused for the day. In 2024, this was Iran.

We took part in an international press conference to highlight a report, prepared by the Coalition for the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, which sets out the long history of interference with the legal profession and risks lawyers are currently facing.

We held a public hybrid event organised jointly with the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), the Geneva Bar Association and the International Observatory of Lawyers (OIAD).

The event brought together United Nations (UN) experts, legal professionals, Iranian and international human rights organisations including Margaret Satterthwaite, UN special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

On the Day of the Endangered Lawyer, we also launched our updated intervention tracker, which reflects where we acted on behalf of lawyers in 2023. In 2023, we took 40 actions relating to 17 countries.

We also provided a submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review mechanism documenting lawyers at risk issues in PR China.

Strategic litigation

Criminal Legal Aid Independent Review (CLAIR) judicial review

In 2023, we successfully applied to the High Court for permission to bring a judicial review challenge against the lord chancellor's failure to increase rates of legal aid for criminal defence solicitors by the bare minimum 15% as recommended by the CLAIR undertaken by Lord Bellamy KC.

The case was heard in December 2023 and judgment was delivered in favour of the Law Society on 31 January 2024.

The court declared that the lord chancellor's failure to undertake adequate funding enquiries and financial modelling was irrational and in breach of his legal duties.

The court also that our case presented an "impressive, compelling body of evidence".

The lord chancellor will now have to conduct further modelling as identified by the court, and address the questions which he failed to ask himself.

Strengthened in our position by this outcome, we will now take forward discussions with the lord chancellor and Ministry of Justice to address the immediate systemic failings in criminal legal aid funding.

Churchill v Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council ('Japanese Knotweed' case)

We intervened to make submissions in this Court of Appeal case about whether a court has the power to stay a claim for the parties to engage (or to order them to engage) in an out-of-court dispute resolution processes (such as mediation) and, if it does, when that power can and should be exercised.

Judgment was delivered on 29 November, confirming that a court does have such power, provided it is exercised in a way that does not impair a party's rights to a fair trial under article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In practice, this means a court will have to consider a wide variety of case-specific and party-specific factors whilst balancing the potential increased costs and/or delay which may result from an out-of-court process.

With the benefit of submissions from us and other parties, the court was able to give guidance on the factors that would be considered before ordering parties to attend a mediation, giving much needed clarity in this area of law.

4. 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
- raising engagement through improvements in governance processes

Creating greater value in various product and service offerings

Commercial activity continued to build on three consecutive years of positive growth.

We signed a new partnership with Paragon to bring greater value professional indemnity insurance to Lexcel and Conveyancing Quality Scheme (CQS) accredited firms. We also renewed our highly successful collaboration with Mitigo.

We completed the final transition activity to our new publications distributors, which will yield further efficiencies in our expenditure.

We continued to invest in and drive further enhancements to our new events and CQS application system, further improving the member experience across our digital estate.

Driving digital transformation

Once again, we achieved Cyber Essentials reaccreditation for a further year. Backed by the UK government, Cyber Essentials provides reassurance that we have an established core set of security standards in place and take seriously protection of the Law Society against external threats.

We successfully implemented an annual software patch from Sage, our finance system software.

The patch will ensure the financial solution remains secure and is able to exploit additional features that had been developed as part of our portfolio of transformation.

A number of projects are moving into their final stages and are scheduled to complete during the coming quarter.

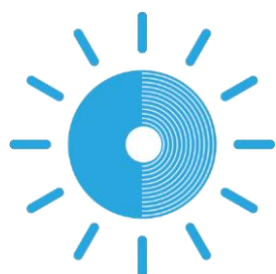
Legal

In addition to litigation support and case management, the legal team supported the conclusion of various commercial arrangements including strategic partnership agreements.

The team also advised on a wide range of events hosted for the benefit of members.

Working with the policy and public affairs teams, legal and strategic advice was given on a range of regulatory issues and developments, and responses to public consultations.

5. 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 EDI practices across the organisation
- ensuring our governance processes are efficient and continuously improving

Human resources and organisational development

We completed a comprehensive review of our reward approach and framework with Innecto, a specialist reward supplier.

Our initial focus was the annual salary review process and updating our pay grade ranges to reflect the market more accurately.

We are now scoping longer-term recommendations identified and have shaped five project workstreams:

- 1) job evaluation framework
- 2) pay and grading structure
- 3) pay progression
- 4) recognition
- 5) benefits

We undertook a staff snapshot survey in January focusing on four areas we wished to make improvements (reward, culture, leadership, and learning and development).

We also asked for feedback and ideas on what we can celebrate and where we can improve further and how. The response rate was 69%.

The data is being collated and the outcomes will inform the priorities for us to focus on before our next Investors in People review in June 2024.

We reviewed and relaunched the Development Academy in January.

The focus was to better demonstrate alignment of personal and professional development with the 'golden thread' linking to our business and corporate plan, and to highlight the importance and impact of using everyday learning for success and sharing our commitment to individual learning and career development.

Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

We have completed our annual EDI report, which includes high-level diversity and demographics data, activity completed in the last year and our EDI goals.

The purpose of the report is to increase transparency and accountability of our EDI activity.

The goals and actions have been informed by the Inclusive Employers Framework assessment in which we were awarded silver and shaped by our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), engagement surveys, and the actions we were already committed to.

We have also horizon scanned best practice from other organisations and sought advice from various sources including Inclusive Employers, Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion, and Stonewall.

We plan to publish the annual EDI report externally as well as internally by the end of February.

We have completed our pay gap report, detailing our pay gap data (gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual identity and trans- identity) and actions to reduce those pay gaps.

We plan to publish the pay gap report 2023 externally as well as internally, within the next month.

Recruitment activity for the 10k Black Interns programme is reaching completion, with over 450 applicants referred to the organisation. We have committed to appoint 10 interns over the summer. This is our third year of involvement in the initiative.

6. Concluding thoughts

We hope you will have found this report interesting and useful. We look forward to reporting next at the end of the three months to 30 April 2024.



The Law
Society