

Dear colleague,

Your weekly Law Society update

As the professional body for solicitors, every week the Law Society is working hard to influence the legal and regulatory environment on behalf of our profession and to promote solicitors at home and abroad. We support practice excellence, are an informed source of legal sector news and support members at every stage of their career.

Here are some highlights from our work last week.

Influencing on behalf of the profession and promoting the profession

The Law Society's media profile this week:

A [Financial Times](#) (subscription required) leader column looked at the state of the criminal justice system and quoted Law Society figures showing the number of newly qualified solicitors specialising in criminal law has fallen by 9.4 per cent since 2014 raising fears they may be nearing extinction in a decade's time.

Cutting back mandatory professional indemnity insurance (PII) for solicitors would be bad for partners, law firm employees and clients alike, the Law Society of England and Wales said in response to proposals to a Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) consultation. "The proposals would radically reduce financial protections for clients and solicitors and are without merit," Law Society deputy vice president Simon Davis said. Full coverage in [Today's Conveyancer](#) and also in [Law 360](#) (subscription required).

The [Guardian](#) reports that almost two-thirds of lawyers recommended to become judges in the past year attended state schools, according to the first social mobility statistics released by the judicial appointments commission (JAC). Vice president Christina Blacklaws said: "The solicitor profession has a vital part to play ensuring our world-renowned judiciary is as diverse as the society it serves and I would encourage all solicitors to consider whether a judicial role might be right for them."

[The Times Brief](#) (subscription required) and [Legal Futures](#) covered Law Society head of justice Richard Miller's evidence to the Commons Public Accounts Committee in which he warned that court closures had left witnesses and defendants having to travel further to attend criminal trials.

"Those greater distances mean that witnesses and defendants have to spend far more time on public transport," he said. "They could, therefore, quite easily be on the same train or bus, travelling to court for some time. That raises the prospect of a far greater risk of witness intimidation."

The Law Society has published interim guidance on the VAT treatment of electronic searches, following its latest engagement with HMRC on what it sees as 'inconsistencies' arising from the decision of the FTT in *Brabners LLP* [2017] UKFTT 666 (TC). The Law Society announced in April that HMRC had begun to contact law firms directly. [Tax Journal](#) and [Practical Law](#) (subscription required) both report.

Christina Blacklaws spoke to Joshua Rozenberg about women in the legal profession ahead of her presidency. You can listen [here](#). Christina's interview starts at 1:10.

A week-long annual celebration of lawyers' pro bono efforts could be replaced with a new event to highlight broader justice issues, the [Gazette](#) reported. The Law Society, Bar Council and Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx) are hoping to set up 'Justice Week'. A Society spokesperson told the *Gazette*: "Given the success of pro bono week, discussions have been taking place as to whether it is possible to widen its scope to other justice issues

such as public legal education and the role of technology. The ongoing conversation about the possibility of rebranding the week involves partner organisations across the legal sector.”

I wrote an article for the Gazette on consumer bias in the context of the Solicitors Regulation Authority’s drive for more price and service information to be published on law firm websites. The Law Society responded to the SRA last year and made clear that its proposals might lead to consumer confusion and therefore sub-optimal decisions. We have reiterated to the SRA that its proposals should better take account of how consumers process and respond to information. You can read the article [here](#).

Efforts are understood to be underway to ensure that long-awaited reform of Russia’s minimally regulated legal services sector does not stop foreign lawyers and law firms from practising in the country. The Law Society’s head of international, Mickaël Laurans, told the [Gazette](#): “We are working with the Russian Federal Chamber of Lawyers and Russian Ministry of Justice to make sure members of the Law Society of England and Wales can continue to operate in Russia under proportionate regulation, taking into account that they are already subject to a rigorous regulatory regime at home which extends to their practices overseas.”

Don’t forget you can read all Law Society press releases by clicking on this [link](#). For live updates follow us on [Twitter](#).

Consultation responses and parliamentary activity, influencing on behalf of the profession:

Justice:

We responded to the Legal Aid Agency’s private consultation on the ‘14 hour rule’ for duty solicitors. We have pushed for Crown Court advocacy to count towards a duty solicitor’s required 14 hours of work for a firm per week to qualify for duty slots, and for greater flexibility in considering what other work counts.

AGFS and LGFS

The government has announced additional funding of £15million for the Advocates Graduated Fees Scheme. We are seeking an urgent meeting with the lord chancellor. Here is our [press release](#).

We are instructing Counsel on a case in Wales in which a judge claimed to have the power to revoke a legal aid certificate for a firm unable to find an advocate.

Public Policy Commission

On 14th June we will be launching our Public Policy Commission. As a mechanism through which we will explore the broader human rights implications of technology and data use, the commission will over the course of the coming year call for both written and oral evidence from academics, the legal profession, technology developers, ethics experts, domestic and international government and regulatory agencies, and representatives of citizenry. The commission will be chaired by vice president Christina Blacklaws, Sofia Olhede (UCL), and Sylvie Delacroix (University of Birmingham). The launch will take place on 14th June 2018, from 5pm – 7pm, at 113 Chancery Lane. Personal invitations are being issued to external stakeholders.

If you’d like to attend, please email corporateevents@lawsociety.org.uk.

Technology & Human Rights

The Law Society and Essex University’s joint technology and human rights programme of work comprises a series of breakfasts, research seminars, and other set-piece events, designed to bring together technology practitioners, human rights solicitors, human rights organisations, and academics. On 11 April, we held the second of these events, a seminar

on the topic “Businesses as Gatekeepers of Online Content”, conducted under Chatham House rules. The seminar was chaired by vice president Christina Blacklaws. Professor Sheldon Leader and Professor Lorna Woods were the main speakers. The seminar’s purpose was both to stimulate thinking and discussion on the responsibility that social media firms have to regulate the content on their platform, and to increase our visibility and credibility on technology and law issues. The next event will be a research seminar, to be held on 10 July, on “The Meaning of Informed Consent”, and will follow a similar format. If you’d like to attend, please email Olivier.Roth@lawsociety.org.uk.

Meetings

Executive director of external affairs, Robert Khan, met Business Minister Richard Harrington to discuss Brexit along with other members of the Professional and Business Services Council.

On Friday, the office holders hosted a lunch at Carey Street with the Master of the Rolls ahead of him presiding over an admissions ceremony.

Parliamentary

Head of Justice, Richard Miller, gave evidence to the Public Account Committee on the Ministry of Justice’s court modernisation programme.

We were mentioned in Justice Oral Questions by SNP backbencher Gavin Newlands who noted our call for an independent review of legal aid in England and Wales. Labour MP Anna Turley also brought up our campaign on early legal advice.

Speeches

Our women in leadership in law roundtables continued this week with vice president Christina Blacklaws hosting events in Manchester, Liverpool and Bristol. Christina also spoke at a meeting of the Joint V law societies.

On Thursday deputy vice president, Simon Davis, spoke at the Hertfordshire Law Society annual dinner

Our influencing work internationally:

- From 2 – 6 June, we participated in a DIT trade mission to Georgia as a scoping visit to find out more about opportunities for our members in this market. The visit included meetings with senior government officials, the Ministry of Economics and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, our members based in Georgia, and the Georgian Bar Association.
- From 4-7 June, we participated in the German Bar Association’s first international symposium in Heidelberg. The visit included meetings with our members based in Frankfurt, as well as a bilateral meeting with IBA President who also attended the conference.
- On 7 June, we met the Egyptian Coordination on Rights and Freedoms to discuss the situation of lawyers and human rights defenders in Egypt.
- On 7 June, we attended a seminar entitled « Attractivité de la justice, attractivité du droit : le nouveau modèle français » discussing the new international chamber of commerce at the Court of Appeal in Paris created in 2018, and a new legal convention introduced in 2016, similar to the UK’s deferred prosecution agreement of 2014. The event aimed to make the schemes known to British companies and legal professionals and to exchange good practices between our two countries.
- On 7 and 8 June, Rita Giannini, EU policy adviser spoke at the Italian Bar Association of Naples’ conference on EU Law on the main legal challenges of the future relationship between the UK and EU.

Supporting members at every stage of their career

Some of our upcoming events are:

Making the right choices at retirement - 27 June 2018

This workshop covers investment in retirement and the planning issues you need to consider pre-retirement, at retirement and beyond.

Black History Month - Preparing students for the legal profession - 11 October 2018

This exciting event for undergraduates aims to cover all aspects of preparing for a career in the legal profession, including tips on increasing your chances of success, completing applications and interview techniques.

Return to Office Life – what to expect and how to prepare

The smart size webinar delivers top tips on what to expect when returning to work, how to prepare for life back in the office, as well as some useful links for additional help and support.

Supporting practice excellence

Arbitrating Brexit - What impacts the different models for arbitrating the UK's ongoing relationship with the EU?

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Compliance support forum for in-house lawyers, Birmingham - 25 June 2018

This forum provides an update on the in-house lawyer's current compliance position with discussions about common conduct and practising conundrums and suggestions for an appropriate and proportionate response. It also includes a review of changes of significance which have been suggested in the SRA's recent 'Looking to the future' consultation.

Process management - is technology overrated? In association with the LexisNexis In-house Legal Operations Forum

Strategic advice in building process management functions into your legal team.

Keeping members up to date

Serving out members better online

We want to improve members' experience of our online services. We are soon to begin our website redesign. We would like your help to do it. Take part in our short survey – tell us about your experience of our website and what is important to you.

<http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/about-the-website/digital-transformation-member-survey/>

Closing date: 22 June

Gazette

The new look hard copy of the Gazette features a double page spread of Law Society promotion every week. Please take a look at your copy this week.

As always, please feel free to share this update with your members unless otherwise specified.

Kind regards,

Joe

Joe Egan
President

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