

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.

### **Demonstrating our value to members**

We have now published our 2018 Business Review. It looks back on what we delivered under each part of our member offer last year and summarises our business plan for this year. We have also created a simple 2 page summary of our achievements last year. The full review and summary are attached. I hope you will find them useful tools in explaining our great work to your constituents. Alongside [“the value of your membership”](#) which is sent in hard copy to all new members and our [“what we do for you”](#) leaflet these are tools to help us answer the age old question “what does the Law Society do for me?”.

Hard copies are available from [corporatecommunications@lawsociety.org.uk](mailto:corporatecommunications@lawsociety.org.uk)

Here are some highlights from this week.

## Influencing on behalf of the profession and promoting the profession

### **The Law Society’s media profile this week:**

The [Guardian](#) reported the government’s proposed increases to probate fees – which have been labelled a “stealth tax” by critics – have been delayed by Brexit. I commented saying: “This is a tax on grief.”

The [Times](#) (£) highlighted research from the Law Society’s Junior Lawyer’s Division showing 48% of respondents to their resilience and wellbeing survey said they had experienced mental ill-health in the past month with 6.4% saying they have experienced suicidal thoughts. Further coverage in the [Gazette](#).

[Stylist](#) reports on 100 years of women in the law. They cite a recent Law Society survey which shows that 48% of women believe there has been progress in gender equality in the law compared to 74% of men.

The [Gazette](#) reports that evidence from the Law Society, police and district judges demonstrates concerns over HM Courts & Tribunals Service’s court reform programme. The Law Society said the programme “is highly ambitious and dependent on a level of technological sophistication and reliability of IT that we are not confident can be assured”.

Also covered in the [Gazette](#) was the Law Society’s call for the release of Iranian lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes after defending women protesting against Iran’s headscarf laws.

The [Gazette](#) reports on the HM Land Registry’s decision to publish data on individual conveyancing firms. The Law Society said: “While we should seek to drive down the number of errors, we must also recognise that delays can be caused by mistakes either from HM

Land Registry, or because there is information awaited from third parties such as lenders or managing agents.”

The [Gazette](#) covers everything members might want to know about applying to become a Law Society council member.

There was widespread coverage of my comment on changes to the law allowing couples to divorce without blame, including [Sky news](#), [Gazette](#), [This is Money](#), [the Daily Mail](#), [The Times](#), [York Press](#), [Evening Standard](#), [Metro](#), [Solicitor's Journal](#), [Halesowen News](#) and [Hereford Times](#), plus the [Express and Star](#), [Worcester News](#), and [Evesham Journal](#). Elaine Richardson, a member of the family law committee, was interviewed on TalkRADIO. You can listen to the broadcast [here](#). Elaine's interview ran in the 10:00 – 10:30 time slot at 05:00. Cris McCurley, a member of the access to justice committee, also spoke to several BBC stations about the reforms. You can listen to her interviews on [BBC Newcastle](#) (07:50), [BBC Stoke](#) (1:45:40), [BBC Guernsey](#), [BBC Three Counties Radio](#), [BBC Coventry & Warwick](#), [BBC Kent](#), [BBC Hereford & Worcester](#) and [BBC Cambridge](#). Penny Scott, chair of the family law committee, was also on Radio Exe discussing the new 'no fault' divorce reforms.

Legal media covers the SDT's decision to lower the standard of proof when the SRA brings cases alleging professional misconduct by solicitors. I'm widely quoted in the [Gazette](#), [Solicitors Journal](#), [Legal Futures](#), [the Times](#) and [New Law Journal](#).

[Daily Trust Nigeria](#) covers comments I made on legal regulation.

The [Gazette](#) reports the Law Society has warned the Hong Kong government's plan to reform extradition laws so suspects could be transferred to mainland China for trial may put lawyers at risk. Further coverage in [Australasian Lawyer](#).

The [New Law Journal](#) and [Today's Conveyancer](#) both cover the SRA's conveyancing review and carry comment from the Law Society. Vice president Simon Davis said: "Buying a home is a significant long-term investment, so it's essential buyers have all the right information and support at the right time to make an informed choice."

The [New Law Journal](#) reports the Law Society's criminal justice petition reached 3,000 signatures. It urges its readers to sign.

The Law Society has asked the Legal Services Board (LSB) to introduce further requirements for 'freelance' solicitors, the [Gazette](#) reports.

Nimmisha Aslam – a member of the Law Society's LGBTI division committee – comments in the [Gazette](#) on the imposition of a Sharia penal code in Brunei which, among other things, imposes a penalty of death by stoning for adultery or consenting homosexual acts.

[Huffington Post](#) reports how a pilot moving appeals against immigration and asylum tribunal rulings online has created, in my words, "an immediate barrier to justice" by only being available in English and Welsh. The website reports the upshot of this is people who no longer qualify for legal aid could be asked to fill out forms in a language they don't understand without legal advice.

The [Gazette](#) carries an article on how a wholly separate Welsh legal jurisdiction could be detrimental to lawyers in Wales and for the nation's prosperity. That was the message from the Law Society this week as it made its submission to the Commission on Justice in Wales.

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

## Legal and Regulatory Policy

### **Access to Justice**

We recorded a podcast with Ian Bond, chair of the wills and equity committee, discussing HMCTS' online probate service and what this means for solicitors. It also covered government's proposals to increase probate fees and what effect this could have.

<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/support-services/court-reform/online-probate-system-cause-for-grave-concern/>

### Criminal Law

We met with the Ministry of Justice's engagement working group which engages the solicitor profession on the MoJ's crime fees review. We are also planning to host roadshows on the review for our members, which the MoJ will present at. We also met with the MoJ's data working group to examine existing data relating to the review and look at ways of collecting new data. Professor Abigail Adams, who contributed evidence to our response on the Litigators' Graduate Scheme, will be our representative at the data working group.

As part of our ongoing criminal justice campaign, we have launched a petition calling for the government to increase investment in the criminal justice system. To add your digital signature to the 3,000+ already on the [petition](#), and for further details on the campaign, please visit the campaign [webpage](#).

### Solicitor judges and advocacy

As the spring legal term draws to a close, the Law Society's solicitor judges division and advocacy support will be hosting a spring drinks evening with solicitor advocates and solicitor judges on 14<sup>th</sup> May. Vice president Simon Davis and Alexandra Marks CBE will speak at this celebratory networking drinks evening, aimed at solicitors working in the courts, solicitor judges and those aspiring to join the judiciary and offering an opportunity to network with peers, make career contacts and discuss anecdotes and approaches to cases over a drink and canapes. Any members wishing to attend this free event can book through our [events](#) page.

## **Regulation**

### SDT

The Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT) announced it will apply to adopt the civil standard of proof when it hears cases brought by the regulator. If the Legal Services Board approves the rule changes, the standard of proof will change from criminal to civil on 25th November 2019. We are disappointed with the SDT's decision and will be considering further steps. We published a [press release](#) (see Media coverage above).

### SRA rule change application for PII and the Compensation Fund

We wrote a letter to the Legal Services Board in response to the SRA's rule change application to carry over the existing rules for professional indemnity insurance (PII) and the Compensation Fund into the new handbook. The application proposes new rules to govern the PII arrangements for 'freelance solicitors'. We raised [concerns](#) that the proposed rules for freelance solicitors do not provide sufficient protections for our members or their clients.

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

### **Criminal justice campaign**

Our criminal justice campaign continues with the tabling of further written parliamentary questions. Our [criminal justice petition](#) has now been signed by over 3,300 people.

### **Westminster Hall debate on legal aid for inquests**

A Westminster Hall debate took place to discuss legal aid for inquests. During the debate, the Law Society's position on inquests was noted twice.

### **Wales**

The Law Society has responded to the [Commission on Justice](#) which was established by the Welsh Government to review the operation of the legal and justice system in Wales, and set a long term vision for the future. Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, former lord chief justice of England and Wales, chairs the commission which is reviewing and assessing all aspects of the law and practice in Wales. The commission is assessing and providing solutions for the administration of justice; legal education and training; the business of law; and the use of Welsh.

The Law Society attaches great importance in understanding and taking account of the distinctive needs of consumers, citizens and the profession in Wales. Recognising the distinctiveness of Wales has become more important in light of the growing body of law that is applicable only in Wales and the widening role played by the Welsh government in the delivery of justice in Wales.

The Law Society has actively contributed to the commission's work since the call for evidence was issued in February 2018 and has shared information and research on specific topics including technology and the law and our work in relation to access to justice. As a representative body, we have facilitated contributions from our members, including holding events for the commission, and providing information to the secretariat.

This submission focuses on two of the commission's grounding principles specifically issues for rural practice and the business of law and its contribution to the Wales economy.

### **Summary of main recommendations**

- Legal services need to be thought of as a critical service for the public good in the same way as other citizen-centric services. The Welsh government should be proactive in pursuing policies that support rural businesses to flourish and invest in critical infrastructure.
- The Welsh government should be proactive in developing a jurisdictional solution to the accommodation of Welsh law and the distinct needs of Wales without creating barriers for the operation of justice or the ability of practitioners to work across England and Wales.
- A shared regulatory system should be maintained and developed to accommodate Welsh and English law and practice

### **Our influencing work internationally:**

This week I attended the Commonwealth Law Association conference in Livingstone, Zambia with deputy vice president David Greene, Mickaël Laurans and David McNaught. Between us, we secured four speaking slots. We also organised a 'women in law' roundtable; a 'male champions for change' roundtable; and a women in law plenary session where I presented our work on gender equality in the legal profession to a packed room of delegates. We also arranged a number of bilateral meetings with bars and law societies from across the commonwealth.

On 9 April, the Brussels Office hosted the Legal Issues Task Force meeting with Brussels-based UK Offices and Organisations in which Helena Raulus, head the Brussels office, chaired the meeting.

## **Supporting members at every stage of their career**

### **Advocacy and Solicitor Judges' Division Spring Drinks, London - Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

**Location:** The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London, WC2A 1PL

Join us for The Law Society's Advocacy and Solicitor Judges' Division Spring Drinks; an excellent opportunity to meet solicitor advocates and solicitor judges.

### **The Annual President's and Secretaries' Conference 2019 – Friday & Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

**Location:** The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London, WC2A 1PL

This free, must-attend event for local law societies will incorporate a varied mix of plenary and breakout sessions. Delegates will have the opportunity to discuss common challenges, share experiences and hear practical tips from both their local law society peers and expert speakers.

<https://events.lawsociety.org.uk/ClientApps/Silverbear.Web.EDMS/public/default.aspx?tabid=37&id=2244&orgId=1>

## **Supporting practice excellence**

**Some of our upcoming events are:**

### **Nominations are open for the Excellence Awards**

With less than a month until nominations close for the [Excellence Awards](#), we encourage teams, firms and individual solicitors across England and Wales to [take the opportunity to promote their success](#). There are 22 categories to choose from, including Practice Manager of the Year, Excellence in International Legal Services and Excellence in Access to Justice.

### **MLRO and MLCO peer to peer learning, Southampton – Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

**Location:** Paris Smith LLP, 1 London Road, Southampton, Hampshire, SO15 2AE

The event is for MLROs, MLCOs and solicitors with an interest in anti-money laundering compliance. It will give you a platform to learn about best practice and upcoming developments in AML.

### **Private Client Section: Practical inheritance tax update, London – Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

**Location:** The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London, WC2A 1PL

This seminar will provide a practical focus on recent changes affecting inheritance tax. This one-hour seminar will provide an update on: residence nil-rate bands and downsizing, business property relief, criminal facilitation of tax avoidance, and the future of inheritance tax and trust taxation.

### **Private Client Section: Practical inheritance tax update, Birmingham- Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

**Location:** Birmingham - venue TBC

This seminar will provide a practical focus on recent changes affecting inheritance tax. This one-hour seminar will provide an update on: residence nil-rate bands and downsizing,

business property relief, criminal facilitation of tax avoidance, and the future of inheritance tax and trust taxation.

### **Civil Litigation Section Spring Conference 2019 – Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019**

**Location:** The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London, WC2A 1PL

The Civil Litigation Section will be hosting a half day conference Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May at the Law Society, London. The programme is split up into two sessions covering: what the Civil Litigator needs to know about Brexit, and current costs issues, including arbitration, mediation and tribunals will be covered in this session. This conference is inclusive for Civil Litigation Section members / £190 + VAT for non-members.

[www.lawsociety.org.uk/Civil-Litigation-Section-Spring-conference-2019](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/Civil-Litigation-Section-Spring-conference-2019)

### **Law Management Section annual conference 2019: success in an ever-changing world - Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019**

**Location:** The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London, WC2A 1PL

Registration is open to book your place at this year's Law Management Section annual conference!

### **Compliance forum for COLPs/COFAs: SRA Standards and Regulations, London – Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019**

**Location:** The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London, WC2A 1PL

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) will be issuing new Standards and Regulations later this year which will replace the SRA Handbook. It will have a new reduced set of principles, two separate Codes of Conduct - an individual solicitor code and a firm code - and simplified Account Rules. This forum, aimed at COLPs and COFAs, will provide insight into the changes that you need to make.

### **MLRO and MLCO peer to peer learning, Manchester - Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

**Location:** Shoosmiths, The XYZ Building, 2 Hardman Boulevard, Spinningfields, Manchester, M3 3AZ

This event, aimed at MLRO's, is designed to provide you with the platform to discuss best practice and upcoming developments in economic crime, while also acting as a peer to peer learning opportunity.

### **MLRO and MLCO peer to peer learning, Bristol – Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

**Location:** Bristol Law Society, 12 Colston Avenue, BS1 4ST

The event is for MLROs, MLCOs and solicitors with an interest in anti-money laundering compliance. It will give you a platform to learn about best practice and upcoming developments in AML.

### **Keeping members up to date**

We have a number of newsletters for members. Below is a list, along with links for signing up to them.

<b>Newsletter</b>	<b>Sign-up method</b>
Advocacy Update	<a href="#">Update My Law Society preferences</a>
Anti-money Laundering Update	<a href="#">Law Society newsletter page</a>
City Update	<a href="#">Contact the City relationship management team</a>
Diversity & Inclusion Update	<a href="#">Update My Law Society preferences</a>
In-house Forum	<a href="#">Update My Law Society preferences</a>

International Update	<a href="#">Law Society newsletter page</a>
Junior Lawyers Update	<a href="#">Law Society newsletter page</a>
	<a href="#">JLD sign-up page</a>
Legal Aid Update	<a href="#">Law Society newsletter page</a>
Professional Update	<a href="#">Law Society newsletter page</a>
Regional Update	<a href="#">Contact your regional relationship management team</a>
Risk & Compliance Update	<a href="#">Join the Risk and Compliance Service</a>
Small Firms Focus	<a href="#">Contact the Small Firms Division</a>
Solicitor Judges Update	<a href="#">Join the Solicitor Judges Division</a>

You can also register for the Gazette daily update [here](#).

Finally, can you spare an hour to make your voice heard? We're currently developing an exciting new range of learning resources for Law Society members. We are keen to put you at the centre of this and would like to test our thinking with a cross section of members. If you can spare 60-minutes to join us in our online discussion groups on 7 and 8 May, please email [Roberts.Donelan@lawsociety.org.uk](mailto:Roberts.Donelan@lawsociety.org.uk) by 23 April.

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

Kind regards,

Christina

**Christina Blacklaws**  
**President**

The Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London. WC2A 1PL