

Council

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Item 7

President's Report

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Summary

This paper presents an update on recent activities of the President of the Law Society of England and Wales, with a particular focus on the programme of engagement and activity designed to deliver the three key priorities set out in the Presidential Year Plan:

Our profession as an economic powerhouse. Solicitors help power the UK economy by underpinning our international and domestic trade and being a core component of our international reputation as a great place to do business.

The value our profession brings locally. Solicitor firms provide local expertise and high-quality jobs and prospects for young people, in every town and city across England and Wales.

The value our profession provides individuals within wider society. We uphold the laws that bind society together and ensure that justice is done, helping everyone in society navigate through some of the most complex and difficult times in their lives. We serve all corners of society and contribute each day to upholding the rule of law and providing on the ground access to justice.

This document covers activity from 7 March 2024 to 21 June 2024.

Recommendations

For Council to note the report.



Introduction

This report serves to provide a progress report in reference to my Presidential Year Plan. This is supplemented by ongoing Law Society activity undertaken by the Vice President, the Deputy Vice President and I, including Admissions Ceremonies, regular meetings with the SRA and the LSB, and various engagements with Parliamentarians and senior stakeholders in the profession.

Since my last report, a General Election has been called. I look forward to engaging with government following July 4, and engaging with Ministers and new Members of Parliament to advocate for a strong justice system.

Our profession as an economic powerhouse

Our legal system is a true global brand, recognised and respected the world over and remains central to the UK's place on the international stage. The world trusts the stability and quality of our courts and tribunals, our arbitration and mediation, our English and Welsh law and our legal professionals. We cannot uphold this without the work of our private practice and in-house solicitor members on the ground, reaching into every high street, town and city in our jurisdiction and beyond to the world's major cities, providing the hidden wiring that underpins the UK's economy.

To support this theme, I have continued to strengthen relations with our counterparts in East Asia. I undertook a visit to Japan and Korea, where I attended the Inter-Pacific Bar Association Conference as well as meeting with members practising in the region. I also hosted the Japanese Ministry of Justice on a visit to England and Wales to discuss the UK legal profession and how Japanese lawyers and firms can practise in England and Wales. The Ambassador to Japan in London kindly held a private dinner at his residence in my honour. I will also attend a state dinner in honour of the Emperor and Empress of Japan.

Alongside developing links in East Asia, I also undertook a visit to Saudi Arabia and the UAE to discuss market access and to meet with members practising in each jurisdiction. The UAE has around 1,000 practising English and Welsh solicitors working there – the highest number outside of the UK. Therefore, this is a jurisdiction that is important to engage with and I hope that we will continue to engage in positive dialogue with stakeholders in the region over the coming years. Donna Evans from the International Team did an amazing job covering for me in the UAE when I suffered a bout of food poisoning!

I attended the IBA Bar Leaders Conference in Bucharest alongside the Law Society's Chief Executive, Ian Jeffery, and representative to the IBA, Christina Blacklaws. As well as attending the various mid-year meetings taking place at the Conference, I delivered a tribute to Stephen Denyer, the Law Society's former Director of Strategic Relationships, at the IBA Council Meeting. Stephen held various roles in the IBA, most recently Co-Chair of the Rule of Law Forum, and I was touched by the number of people who offered their condolences on his passing.

London has hosted various international events over the past few months, including the UIA World Forum of Mediation Centres and London International Disputes Week (LIDW). I spoke at both of these events and hosted a reception as part of LIDW at 113 Chancery Lane. I also attended an event with the UK-India Legal Partnership, attended by the former

Chief Justice of India, to sustain our relations with the jurisdiction and emphasise the importance of the UK-India relationship to the legal sector.

The value that the profession brings locally

Every solicitor, whether on the frontline of legal aid or delivering cross-border corporate deals, plays a role in our legal ecosystem and a role in ensuring a great British success story.

To support this theme, I have travelled up and down the country to speak with members and engage with local law societies. I visited Manchester, where I attended the Private Client Section Seminar, spoke to students at Manchester University about my story and how the profession needs to become more diverse. I also met with junior members, to discuss how the Law Society can support them at the start of their career and their experiences of working in the North West and met with Manchester Law Society and members.

I also undertook a visit to the North East, including speaking to students at Newcastle University. I hosted an in-house networking event as part of our support for in-house solicitors and visited Norton Rose Fulbright's North East offices to discuss the experiences of large firms with offices based outside of London. Following this visit, I also joined a meeting of the Yorkshire Union in Leeds and attended Leeds Law Society's annual dinner, where it was great to catch up with current and former colleagues, as well as discussing the crucial role that local law societies play in acting as a link between local members and the national Law Society.

Chancery Lane hosted a Local Law Society townhall meeting, which brought together law society leaders from across the jurisdiction to learn more about the Law Society's work and discuss key issues facing members in their respective regions. I joined part of this day, and hosted a fireside chat with the Attorney General, to highlight the Law Society's influencing work and give local law society leaders the opportunity to raise issues directly with government. Thank you to all those who worked hard to make this happen. On a separate occasion, I met with the County Societies Group in Chancery Lane.

I have just completed a trip to Cornwall and Devon, where I met with senior partners at firms based in the South West, as well as engaging with leaders from Cornwall Law Society and Devon and Somerset Law Society. I also met with law clinic volunteers at Exeter University and Plymouth University and learned about the work they are doing in collaboration with community organisations to increase access to justice for local people.

The value our profession provides individuals within our wider society

Solicitors uphold the laws that bind our society together and ensure justice is done, helping everyone in society navigate through some of the most complex and difficult times in their lives. We serve all corners of society and contribute each day to upholding the rule of law and providing on the ground access to justice. Part of this work means ensuring that the complexity and diversity of the profession accurately reflects the people it serves, from the high street to the high court to Chancery Lane.

I chaired an event in collaboration with Manchester Law Society and the Judiciary of England and Wales to encourage greater diversity in judicial applications, particularly

from solicitors. We had an excellent turnout and I hope that it encouraged aspiring solicitor judges to pursue a judicial career.

I hosted senior partners from large firms for a roundtable with the Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales to discuss entry routes into the judiciary for solicitors. The Law Society has an excellent relationship with the Lady Chief Justice and it was a pleasure to host her and discuss this important issue.

Legal leaders from large firms and in-house legal departments also attended Chancery Lane for a roundtable with the Attorney General, where we discussed the issues facing law firms and what more should be done to strengthen the rule of law in England and Wales. We raised issues including the need for a strong economy, strength in the regions and the importance of English law, which underpins our success and is a huge attraction for investment into the economy.

As part of our support for in-house members, I attended and spoke at the launch of GC Connect, a new initiative set up to bring together General Counsel and Company Secretaries of FTSE250 companies to network, share best practice and develop joint ideas. With 25% of the profession now working in-house, it is increasingly important that the Law Society engages with this group, especially given the unique challenges that our in-house members face in their roles.

I also hosted the Master of the Rolls for a dinner at Chancery Lane, where experts in AI and legal technology joined us to discuss innovation in the legal sector, using technology to support access to justice and how to foster collaboration across the justice sector. The discussion was thought provoking and all those who attended found it helpful to share their insights on AI with Sir Geoffrey Vos and others working in the field.

I chaired the first meeting of the Art Advisory Group, which I pledged to set up in my presidential year plan. This group will provide guidance on the best way to modernise our portraiture collection at 113 Chancery Lane ahead of the bicentennial and ensure that the Law Society Hall works to represent the vibrancy and diversity of our membership.

Finally, I held the first Presidents' Dinner at Carey Street since 2019. It was an outstanding success with VVIP attendees. One wrote: "...I will always remember it; it is a real honour to have been asked and a great pleasure to have had the run of what must be one of the most amazing buildings in the country. The company, food and drink were perfect...". I also hosted the London Legal (pre-) Walk judicial reception in the Carey Street Tribunal Room.

Upcoming Activity

We will soon find out who will be governing our country over the coming years. Once the election results have been confirmed, I will be writing to the government offering my congratulations and offering our support to develop their thinking around the rule of law and access to justice. July is going to be busy!

I am due to undertake further regional visits to Bournemouth and Southampton just before the election and will be attending the American Bar Association Annual Conference in Chicago over the summer, alongside doing a market access visit to San

Fransisco. I am also hoping to visit India, to discuss further the rules and regulation of foreign lawyers and law firms in India.