

Introducing FBC Manby Bowdler LLP

FBC Manby Bowdler LLP is a full-service practice which combines innovation and modern thinking with traditional values. The firm's make-up consists of:

- 29 partners
- 70 lawyers
- 90 support staff
- Annual turnover is £12 million.

FBC Manby Bowdler Solicitors was created on 1st May 2008 by the merger of FBC Solicitors and Manby Steward Bowdler LLP.

FBC Manby Bowdler LLP is recognised in the 2015 Legal 500 Directory as a top tier firm for agriculture and estates, contentious trusts and probate, family, litigation, and planning. The firm was shortlisted in the Legal 500 United Kingdom Awards 2014 for the West Midlands in the Private Client category. The firm has also been ranked in Band 1 of the agricultural and rural affairs, family and matrimonial and Litigation categories of the Chambers UK 2015 Directory. FBC Manby Bowdler was awarded 'Professional Services Firm of the Year' at the Wolverhampton Law Society Annual Dinner and Awards 2014.

Why FBC Manby Bowdler LLP decided to invest in the Lexcel accreditation

When FBC Solicitors and Manby Steward Bowdler LLP merged in 2008, one practice had an ISO accreditation, and the other had Lexcel. The firm decided to follow and promote the Lexcel accreditation going forward because:

- a) The Lexcel framework put a greater emphasis on the client; therefore, as a newly merged firm, the organisation was able to use the accreditation in conjunction with its PR strategy to give them an edge in attracting clients to the new firm and building up its credibility; and
- b) A number of the newly formed firm's large commercial clients were more familiar with the Lexcel accreditation, having acquired it themselves.

Lyn Coughlan, the Audit and Compliance Manager at FBC Manby Bowdler Solicitors shared with us that *"The Lexcel framework was used extensively in the integration of the two practices. We used the framework as part of the review process of the systems, procedures and processes which were in operation across the two businesses. This review enabled members of staff to get together from both sides of the practice to reach a decision on best practice. We did not want to simply impose firm wide practices; using the Lexcel framework as a discussion tool not only helped us achieve best practice but it also enabled teams from either side to work together and, therefore, break down the 'us' and 'them' view which is inevitable in any merger"*.

Measurable benefits to the business

In the seven years FBC Manby Bowdler has held the accreditation from the Law Society, Lexcel has provided the firm with:

- Greater client retention and more fees being billed from these existing clients
- The ability to secure large, commercial clients who demand an exceptionally high-level of

- service and a well-recognised accreditation from the law firms they do business with
- A framework to create strategies and structures to unify procedures in all four of its offices; all files now look the same, are held in the same place in each location and all lawyers can be confident that all risk management and due diligence checks have been done notwithstanding the location a file is retrieved from
 - Easy, stress-free SRA audits, as all necessary reporting and data gathering has already been performed to meet the annual accreditation assessments.
 - A consistent framework to deal with client complaints, leading to happy, satisfied clients and more word of mouth referrals.

Lyn stated that having the Lexcel accreditation led directly to the firm securing a large commercial client. *“Every year, the client asks us if we have retained our Lexcel accreditation, it is very important to them. They are a construction company, and as a firm, we want to expand into this area of law further. Construction and manufacturing clients value the Lexcel accreditation; it provides them with the confidence that as a firm, we have the required quality control checks in place to deal with construction law, which is often complex and can involve large sums of capital being at stake”*.

Lyn states that Lexcel is used in the firm’s promotional material such as websites and brochures. *“We use Lexcel to demonstrate to prospective clients that by choosing a legal practice with the Lexcel accreditation, they can be assured that they will be doing business with a disciplined, efficient, well managed, risk aware firm”*.

The Time Commitment

FBC Manby Bowdler LLP found the time spent in preparing for Lexcel accreditation reaped unexpected benefits. By spending time putting in place the plans, policies and procedures that would work for their business, managers were able to spot areas of inefficiency and situations where risk management procedures needed improving. Lyn believes that using the Lexcel framework to create sound policies and procedures *“leads directly to fewer claims against a legal practice, which will bring down the cost of PII and lead to more repeat business from clients.”*

Life with Lexcel

At FBC Manby Bowdler, the principles and procedures of Lexcel are deeply embedded into the culture of the firm. This is illustrated by the fact that risk and compliance is a standard agenda item for all partner, departmental and team meetings. When issues around risk and compliance are discussed, Lexcel is used as the benchmark for best practice and then the measurement tool for whether compliance in a particular area has been achieved.

The accreditation underpins all work undertaken, and helps employees and partners to achieve the firm’s ethos, *“We employ excellent people, who intelligently deliver a stellar service to our clients”*.

When asked how the Lexcel processes and procedures are managed within the firm, Lyn states, *“The main point of contact for information on Lexcel within the firm is me, I’m regularly asked for advice and assistance on areas of compliance. I find I use the Lexcel Standard as a reference when I need to persuade on an issue which may or may not be well received by some staff members”*.

New staff are trained in the Lexcel framework and the standards which apply to each particular role. The savings made from the increased efficiency that following the Lexcel framework provides are invested into other areas of the business, most recently, a new case management system.

“Training on Lexcel for new staff starts on day one. Induction sessions are set so that I spend time during the first morning explaining the importance of Lexcel, what part they have to play in maintaining the Standard, what the SRA requires from law firms and its staff, and how Lexcel helps to underpin these obligations.

Following training with me, new members of staff have a training session with a member of the compliance team to go through processes that are firm-wide such AML checks and conflict of interest avoidance. They then move into their department on day three of the induction, at which point they will receive department specific training, for example, key date recording.

This may seem to be an intensive first couple of days, but time invested at this point is all part of achieving buy-in to the Lexcel culture from all staff”.

Resistance to Lexcel

Lexcel provides a framework for firms to embrace SRA demands surrounding risk awareness. Having completed the work to obtain accreditation, FBC Manby Bowdler found they save valuable time and money as they are not required to ‘reinvent the wheel’ every time the SRA changes its reporting requirements.

By highlighting these positive factors, Lyn is able to manage any resistance from fee-earners when it comes to maintaining the plans, policies and procedures Lexcel requires.

The advice Lyn offers to law firms considering Lexcel accreditation is this, *“It is very difficult for a practice to operate without Lexcel now that the SRA is making such onerous demands on risk management and reporting, and clients are getting savvier about the quality of service and value for money they receive from their lawyer. By investing in the Lexcel accreditation, everything just falls into place, and the money and time spent well and truly pays off in the long run.”*

Are you interested in becoming accredited?

Find all the information you need about applying for Lexcel online: www.lawsociety.org.uk/lexcel.

Download the Lexcel Standard for England and Wales, Scheme rules and self-assessment checklist.

W: lawsociety.org.uk/lexcel **E:** lexcel@lawsociety.org.uk **T:** +44 (0)20 7320 5933