

Background

Gartlan Furey Solicitors is a mid-sized firm, based in Dublin, Republic of Ireland. Established in 1991 as a niche practice dealing in private client, commercial, residential property, banking, and litigation. They have held a Lexcel accreditation since 2013.

The firm is made up of:

- 4 partners
- 22 fee earners
- 22 support staff

It has a turnover of circa €4 million per annum.

Gartlan Furey Solicitors' uniqueness lies in the specialist knowledge of its staff. According to Dermot Furey (Managing Partner), the firm "punches above their weight" in terms of the calibre of work and clients they attract. As a firm, they aim for high-end quality work rather than a high volume of cases.

Finding a strategy to demonstrate quality

Gartlan Furey Solicitors invested a great deal of time researching an accreditation that would help the firm demonstrate quality. They had several objectives in mind, including:

- Making fee-earners more efficient to increase firm profits
- Having a "stamp of approval" that encompassed all aspects of running a successful law firm
- Introducing a framework to create policies and procedures that would standardise how files were managed and the approach to client care
- Improving communication throughout the firm
- Creating stronger strategies for future growth and ensure the firm and its people have a series of SMART goals in place
- Having an accreditation that was an internationally recognised mark of excellence.

Having spoken to other Irish law firms, engaged with appropriate industry experts, and having put together an internal project team led by Geraldine Gray (Practice Manager) it was decided Lexcel, provided by the Law Society of England and Wales, covered these areas and more. It was felt that other accreditations were much more limited in their scope and recognition.

Having undertaken the research, it was clear, says Geraldine, that a great deal of pride is taken in having the Lexcel accreditation, and hence why it has such pride of place on the firm's marketing material and website.

Life with Lexcel

Geraldine confirms that, "all new staff are fully inducted into Lexcel." As such, new starters are introduced to the office manual (created using the Lexcel framework), and solicitors and legal executives are trained in the plans, processes and procedures surrounding file management. Geraldine further explains that applying Lexcel principles to file management, "allows fee-earners to feel more in control of their work, especially from a risk management point of view."

The time commitment

Gartlan Furey Solicitors invested in a consultant to help identify which parts of the firm's plans, policies and procedures should be addressed first to gain accreditation. A project team was then put in place to implement the business changes and communicate procedural improvements throughout the business.

"We targeted client engagement letters, operation manuals, and client files first," says Geraldine. "Getting the plans, policies and procedures correct brought immediate benefits to the fee-earners, helping them to see the benefits that Lexcel will bring to the business."

Benefits to the business

Lexcel provides numerous benefits to their business says, Dermot. These include:

- A more precise and structured initial engagement with new clients, thanks to improved client engagement letters; "Our fees are stated upfront, giving the client the ability to budget for their investment in our legal expertise. Robust client engagement letters also allow us to manage client expectations, resulting in few, if any, client complaints."
- Helping retain clients; "Many of our clients come from the banking sector, and they are becoming increasingly stringent when selecting legal advisors. Having a Lexcel accreditation has helped overcome any concerns about the quality of our processes and procedures."
- Dramatic improvements in organisational communication; "We have regular team meetings and provide updates to all staff regarding where the firm is at against its revenue targets and the development of new initiatives. We are also much more integrated as a team when it comes to our approach to client work, providing us with the ability to cross and up-sell our legal services."

Resistance to Lexcel

When asked about resistance to Lexcel and the changes and improvements brought about by it, Geraldine commented that they were very careful about who they chose to be on the project team charged with implementing the changes; "Our managing partner was passionate about Lexcel. He felt there were several efficiency gaps in the firm that could be remedied by applying the discipline, plans, policies, and procedures required to obtain and keep the Lexcel accreditation. The implementation team needed to be a full cross-section of roles and ages in the firm."

"Even if a firm considers their management systems are already very efficient, there are major benefits to being able to show clients and suppliers that you have an external mark of excellence.

"Even the best legal practices can be improved."

Are you interested in becoming accredited?

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

Download the relevant version of the Standard, Scheme rules and self-assessment checklist.

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