



The Law Society

Chief Executive's report to Council November 2005

Summary

A report on Law Society activity since the September 2005 Council meeting

Recommendation

Council is invited to note the contents of the report.

Risk

None

Financial and resourcing implications

None arising from the report

Equality and Diversity implications

None arising from the report

Freedom of Information

This paper is public.

Consultation

This is a report to the Council.

Chief Executive
Author of Report
Date of Report

Janet Paraskeva
23 November 2005

Chief Executive's report to Council November 2005

Corporate issues	4
Future Chief Executive reports to Council	4
Legal services reform and the future Law Society	4
Lord Carter Review of Legal Aid.....	4
Risk management	4
Media monitoring	4
Practising certificate renewal exercise	5
Reduced practising certificate fee for specific groups	5
Report against corporate plan objectives	6
To provide leadership and support to help the profession to embrace change	6
E-conveyancing.....	6
E-business.....	6
Disability Discrimination Act briefings.....	7
To improve the quality of services provided by solicitors to consumers by settling, maintaining and enforcing high standards of training, professional development and practice	7
Model contract with the Bar.....	7
Professional Ethics – guidance	7
Waivers	7
Professional indemnity	8
Regulation Compliance policy work	8
Legal Services Reform Bill	9
Higher rights of audience	9
New LPC monitoring regime	10
Practice Standards Unit.....	10
Lexcel.....	13
Practice Advice Service.....	13
To deliver an effective consumer complaints scheme.....	14
To maximise the relevance and effectiveness of our services to the profession.....	14
Sections.....	14
Groups.....	15
Activities of individual Groups	15
Databases for recognised groups	17
International Practice Rights	17
Representational Activities of Regional Offices.....	18
Library	20
To increase public confidence in the Law Society's regulation of solicitors and improve public perception of solicitors as providers of high quality legal services.....	21
The Law Society in the media	21
Citizens' Advice annual conference	21

Pro Bono Activity	22
To increase our influence in the development of law and legal services policy in the public interest, aiming to maximise justice for all.....	23
Campaigns	23
Responses to consultations	23
Judicial appointments.....	23
Child Care Review.....	24
Confidentiality of money laundering reports	24
Third Money Laundering Directive	25
Serious Organised Crime Agency – Money Laundering	25
The Law Society in Parliament.....	25
Submission of evidence to select committees.....	26
Influencing Law and legal Policy internationally	27
Promoting access to justice internationally	27

Corporate issues

Future Chief Executive reports to Council

This will be the final Chief Executive report to Council in the current format. In line with the separation of the governance of regulation and non-regulation, reports on matters which have been delegated by the Council to the Regulation and Consumer Complaints Boards will be made directly to the Council. I shall of course continue to report on all other Law Society activity as well as corporate issues and transition-related work where they are not covered in other reports or papers to Council.

Legal services reform and the future Law Society

Following the publication of the White Paper, we continue to work closely with the Department for Constitutional Affairs on the preparation of the draft legislation taking into account the views expressed by Council at the meeting of 11/2 November. A draft formal response to the White Paper will be before Council for review on 7/8 December.

Following the 11 November meeting of the Council, we have also consulted representatives of Regional Associations of Law Societies and Local Law Societies at our Cardiff office. Both this meeting, and a meeting on 14 November with representatives of the Diversity Forum, Equality and Diversity Committee, and the Recognised Groups, provided very useful feedback on the draft consultation materials. Andrew Holroyd and I have also been meeting with specialist practitioner groups to discuss with them the developing plans for the future Law Society. All of this has been taken account of in the draft consultation materials that the Council will consider at its December meeting.

Lord Carter Review of Legal Aid

The Society has brought together a group of three Council Member practitioners (Robert Brown, Lucy Scott-Moncrieff and Rodney Warren) who, together with staff, are working very closely with the Carter Review Team to ensure that the review is based on a proper understanding of the legal aid system. In addition, regional offices have arranged meetings for Lord Carter and his special advisors with individual solicitors and firms. Around 10-12 solicitors were invited to each meeting, spanning civil and criminal legal aid.

Risk management

Good progress is being made in rolling out the new process across the Law Society.

An improved range of management reports, including a new strategic risk register, is being developed to facilitate the dissemination of information about risks to key decision-makers within the organisation.

The Strategic Planning unit is working with the Transition project team to assess the impact and probability of risks relating to the transition to the new organisational model and to identify appropriate mitigating actions.

Media monitoring

The latest analysis of the coverage the Law Society receives in the print media shows that in the quarter from July to September 2005, 48% of the coverage received by the Law Society was beneficial; 49% factual and 3% was adverse. This is considerably ahead of the rolling averages of 42%, 52% and 6% respectively. The main reasons for the increased level of beneficial coverage was a number of positive

interviews with the newly elected President Kevin Martin, the Stamp Duty Land Tax campaign, the establishment of the London Bombings Legal Helpline, and Legal aid. The principal source of adverse coverage was the Training Framework Review when criticism by Nigel Savage of the College of Law and the City of London Law Society was reported; although it should be noted that it also achieved positive coverage when the Head of Education and Training and I defended the review in interviews.

Practising certificate renewal exercise

As Council is aware, all solicitors, registered European lawyers and registered foreign lawyers are required to renew their practising certificates/registration by 31 October each year. By 6 October we had sent out 12,865 firm based application forms (RF1) and 11,112 individual application forms (RF3).

As of 8 November 25, we have received 6,283 individual application forms and 9,875 firm based application forms which equates to 86,846 practising certificate applications.

As of 17 November, of those applications received we have issued 58,035 practising certificates (66.65% of target). All applications have been processed within the agreed service standard of 30 days.

Reduced practising certificate fee for specific groups

A question was raised at the last Council meeting as to whether there should be reductions in the PC Fee for black and minority ethnic solicitors. The reduced PC Fee scheme is reviewed annually and is put into place for those solicitors whose incomes fall below a certain level. Following review by the Finance and Resources Board earlier this year, the threshold was raised from £17,000 to £20,000. Basing the reduction on income has been taken as the best way of targeting this form of assistance.

Report against corporate plan objectives

To provide leadership and support to help the profession to embrace change

E-conveyancing

Work on Home Information Packs continues to dominate. The key development since the September Council has been the conclusion of a contract with MDA (formerly MacDonal Dettwiler) which will enable solicitors to assemble and deliver packs electronically. This is a significant step as it will ensure that solicitors are able to compete in the pack provision market and retain their key role in the conveyancing process.

The contract with MDA to provide a Law Society endorsed pack was signed on 26 October and was announced by the President at the Law Society Property Section Conference on Thursday 27 October at which the Housing Minister, Yvette Cooper was present to give the keynote address. The news was welcomed by the 250 property solicitors at the conference and, in a survey on the day, 85% believed that there would be public confidence in a Law Society branded pack.

Solicitors have been invited to register their interest in a Law Society HIP via an email address (hyps@lawsociety.org.uk) and 900 have done so in the first two weeks since the launch.

The Regulations were published on Monday 31 October and the consultation will end on December 30. The response to the Consultation will be led by the Conveyancing and Land Law Committee. On 17 November, the Government announced that HIPs would be introduced from 1 June 2007.

The HIPs Taskforce met on 15 November and viewed a presentation of the on-line Hips process which has been developed by MDA. The Taskforce will work with MDA to define the Law Society HIP and to pilot the product in time for the dry run in 2006. A joint marketing plan is also being developed with the first phase of advertising and direct mail to all property solicitors in early December.

A second series of HIPs seminars is also scheduled for the New Year.

The joint Law Society/Land Registry one day E-conveyancing events ended on 23 November in London. The Deputy Chief Land Registrar joined the platform to conclude the series which has been very successful, attracting 1500 delegates.

E-business

E-business events have been launched throughout the regions and further events will take place early in the new year. An e-business component to a series of Legal Aid seminars is being delivered and has received good feedback.

A monthly E-business newsletter will be launched at the beginning of December and over 1000 firms have already signed up to receive it.

The Electronic Law Committee's guidelines on the use of e-mail by solicitors have been revised and published to bring them fully up-to-date and to clarify the position on electronic records storage.

Disability Discrimination Act briefings

The first of a series of regional briefings to raise the profession's awareness of the practical implications of the changes in the DDA for their businesses took place in London on 10 November. It was well attended and well received. Four further events will run during November and December.

To improve the quality of services provided by solicitors to consumers by settling, maintaining and enforcing high standards of training, professional development and practice

Model contract with the Bar

After a number of years work, Law Society and Bar Council negotiating teams have reached provisional agreement on the terms of a pro forma contract, applicable or capable of being drawn upon in all cases where a solicitor secures the services of a barrister except where legal aid or CFAs are involved. The agreement is subject to endorsement by the Representation and Main Boards in the Law Society and by the appropriate committees of the Bar Council; the Bar will then need to approach DCA to secure consequential changes to the cab rank rule and ending the Withdrawal of Credit scheme. The contract is likely to be launched towards the end of 2006 or early in 2007. It is in no sense mandatory and will only apply where specific reference is made to it by the parties.

Professional Ethics – guidance

The Guidance Team experienced the usual peak in calls during October in the run up to the renewal of practising certificates. The figures are expected to show that fewer practising certificate enquiries were received than in previous years. It is thought that this may be as a result of posting more information on the website about when a practising certificate is required.

Accountants, too, can now access guidance in the form of frequently asked questions and other documents such as the report form direct from www.accountants.lawsociety.org.uk. Again, this has resulted in fewer calls than usual being made to the Helpline.

The new Client Care booklet "Your clients – your business" is almost complete, and it is hoped will be available to solicitors shortly. The booklet is broadly divided into three sections. The first discusses a solicitor's obligation when dealing with first interviews with clients either on a fixed fee or no fee basis. This guidance was approved by the Rules & Ethics Committee of the Law Society in 2004. The second section refers to matters that should be included in client care letters, or in the terms and conditions document that solicitors send to their clients. The third section gives advice to solicitors about how to deal with complaints, and parts of it have been taken from the document already published called "Handling Complaints Effectively".

Waivers

There continues to be an increase in the work of the waivers section. It is believed that a number of factors have led to this:

An increase in enquiries and applications are being received following the new Code of Conduct made by Council. Although not yet in force, speculative applications have

been received in circumstances where it appears that solicitors would in future be within the new Code.

- This has particularly affected the number of applications relating to the supervision of branch offices under rule 13, as the strict requirement to have a solicitor qualified to supervise to be based at each office is not included in the new Code. Applications have been put forward for a broader range of individuals, including non-solicitors with varying experience and other qualifications, to supervise offices.
- There may also be an equivalent effect in relation to sole principal applications where they do not have 36 months of practising certificates.

Professional indemnity

The Solicitors' Indemnity Insurance Rules 2005 came into force on 1 October and on that date all practices were required to have renewed their compulsory professional indemnity insurance.

There are 25 Qualifying Insurers for the 2005/06 indemnity period, an increase of 2 from the previous year. Although there were some withdrawals from the market there were more new entrants. The first indications are that the total annual premium income paid by the profession for the compulsory layer of cover is £243.5m, which represents a decrease of 3.4% from the previous year. This is despite an increase in the minimum sum insured for any one claim from £1 million to £2 million (£3 million in the case of most recognised bodies). At present a total of 21 firms have returned completed proposal forms to the Assigned Risks Pool. These figures are likely to change between now and the end of November with more firms joining the ARP, having been unsuccessful in securing qualifying insurance and other firms leaving the ARP having secured qualifying insurance backdated to 1 October.

Discussions are being held with the qualifying insurers through the Liaison Committee regarding the implications of the increase inadequate professional services (IPS) limit from £5,000 to £15,000 as from 1 January 2006.

The Professional Indemnity Section continues to deal with: policy and guidance in respect of both sets of the Rules; waiver applications and appeals; requests for directions regarding coverage disputes; and requests from claimants for disclosure of firms' qualifying insurer details. The Section also services the Indemnity Insurance Committee and the Law Society/Insurers Liaison Committee.

Regulation Compliance policy work

The Policy team continues working on the following:

- The Law Society's Code of Conduct, as amended by the Council in July, is currently being considered on a rule-by-rule basis by the Legal Services Consultative Panel. We have discussed with, and responded to, issues of concern to the Panel in relation to Rules 1 (core duties) and 2 (client relations) and await further developments. We are also assisting the DCA with some preliminary work to help the Panel in considering rule 5 (business management).
- Discussions led by the Deputy Vice President have taken place with the DCA and the chair of the Panel to try and speed up the approval process. These have been followed by a letter from the President expressing continuing concern at the delay.

- A detailed specification for web and CD publication of the Code is being developed.
- At the Council will recall, new Practice Rules 16D (conflict of interests) and 16E (confidentiality and disclosure) - made by Council in September 2004 - were "signed off" by the Legal Services Consultative Panel and its Advice and Recommendations were submitted to the Lord Chancellor at the end of June. Our response was submitted at the end of July. The DCA have invited us to discuss the continuing differences and a meeting is being arranged.
- Continuing implementation and guidance relating to the new Solicitors Anti-discrimination Rule: ongoing guidance has been provided to solicitors as to the implementation of the new rule and CD-ROMs and other materials have continued to be sent to firms to assist them with that implementation. Support and training has been provided to many departments within the Law Society, in particular to PSU to enable them to move to the position where they can incorporate anti-discrimination issues into their visits to solicitors' firms.
- Discrimination on grounds of age: In October 2006 age discrimination will become unlawful. Work is continuing on reviewing Government plans, in looking at how this will be incorporated into the anti-discrimination rule and providing guidance to the profession. In doing so we will be working in conjunction with other departments in the Society to ensure that we address all of the relevant issues, for example the affects upon trainees and members of the Young Solicitors' Group.

Legal Services Reform Bill

Several members of Professional Ethics Unit, with the Legal Services Unit are working on the development of proposal documents, to be forwarded to DCA, setting out changes required to various sections of the Solicitors Act and related primary legislation in order to effect entity regulation and to bring the legislation up to date, in line with Council policy.

The Unit is also beginning to consider changes required to Solicitors Conduct Rules (as opposed to changes to primary legislation) as a result of the developing White Paper/draft Bill.

Higher rights of audience

We received confirmation from the DCA on 28 October that our request for an amendment to the Higher Courts Qualification Regulations had been approved by the Minister.

This amendment provided for the continued availability of the exemption and accreditation routes to qualification as a higher courts advocate. These routes were to cease to be available from 31 October 2005. The amendment provides for their availability to experienced solicitors until the end of 2006.

The Exemption Route is primarily for solicitors who have practised, either as a solicitor or barrister, for at least three years, and can demonstrate experience of advocacy in the Higher Courts of England and Wales, or of a comparable jurisdiction, relevant to the award (civil, criminal or all proceedings) for which they intend to apply.

The Accreditation Route is primarily for solicitors who have practised, either as a barrister or a solicitor, for at least three years, and can demonstrate that by reason of their experience in the higher courts of England and Wales, or of a comparable jurisdiction, they have acquired a sound understanding of the procedure, evidence and ethics applicable in the proceedings for which they seek to exercise rights of audience. Successful applicants receive a certificate of eligibility from the Law Society to attempt an advocacy course and assessment, success at which will ultimately allow them to apply for the award.

The number of applications made under the provisions of the regulations has been significantly higher during 2005 than in previous years. The surge in applications towards the end of October, ahead of the anticipated closure of the exemption and accreditation routes, suggests that many experienced solicitors who had been expected to seek the higher courts qualification had delayed making their application.

During 1 January – 16 November 2005 we received 884 applications. This compares to a total of 330 received during 2004. To date, 473 applicants have been awarded the qualification during 2005, of which 331 had applied under the exemption route and 51 under the accreditation route. Of these, 75 had applied for qualification in the civil courts, 298 in the criminal courts and 9 for the all proceedings qualification.

The Higher Rights Qualification Casework Committee considers the applications made under the Exemption and Accreditation routes. Members of that committee must be commended for their willingness to deal with such a significant volume of applications.

New LPC monitoring regime

The first 3 day visit under the new LPC monitoring regime took place at the end of October. Refinements to the monitoring regime were developed by the LPC Board earlier in the year. Six aspects of LPC provision will now be separately graded (teaching, learning and the curriculum; assessment; students and their support; learning resources; leadership and management; and quality assurance and enhancement). Previously the provision as a whole was graded. There are 3 grades available for each aspect: commendable practice (where there is significant evidence of best practice); confidence in the provision (where appropriate standards are maintained); and failure to meet the required level of provision (where appropriate standards are not met). An expanded executive summary will appear on the Law Society's website so that interested parties will be able to access more information about the various areas of provision. The new regime will be evaluated during the course of the academic year.

Practice Standards Unit

The Practice Standards Unit (PSU) is currently on track to exceed its corporate objective of undertaking 1,200 visits in 2005. 105 visits firms to review compliance with the relevant professional rules particularly practice rules 13 & 15 including their complaints handling processes were carried out during October 2005. The improvement plans agreed following the visits will be monitored closely over the next 12 months and the firms may be revisited where necessary. 1045 visits were undertaken between January and 31 October 2005 and 192 visits are currently scheduled between November and December 2005.

The Practice Standards Unit delivered two Client Care seminars in October 2005 and four seminars are currently scheduled during the remainder of 2005. 30 seminars

have been delivered since the beginning of the year. Feedback from delegates has been consistently positive.

The Unit is continuing to make progress in taking forward the recommendations of Standards Board with regards increasing the monitoring of compliance with the Introduction and Referral Code. Development work has started to enable us to commence themed visits on the Introduction and Referral Code by February 2006.

Earlier in the year, the Unit changed its approach to obtaining feedback from the visited firms. A survey of the visited firms is now undertaken at quarterly intervals. In respect of the key question "Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with your experience with the Monitoring Visit process", 91% of respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied. Some of the qualitative feedback received from the recent survey is as follows:

"...clear that the adviser had first hand knowledge of private practice and is up to date with current issues and familiar with the particular 'profile' of the firm - applied this knowledge constructively during the visit (and afterwards in follow up)"

"it was particularly helpful to have guidance and feedback on our procedures - the adviser made some very helpful suggestions and recommendations"

"most impressed by the pro-active nature of the audit. Very helpful and thought provoking".

"we found the 2 monitors pleasant & helpful. it did not seem like an inquisition and areas where we were lacking were explained fully & assistance given in remedying the deficiencies."

"on the whole it serves as a good health check and gave us the opportunity to look at our service and how we can improve which is paramount to our service and survival in the economic climate we operate in"

This is reinforced by the unstructured comments recently received from firms following the monitoring visits. Some of the comments are as follows:

"Thank you for your assistance and advices arising out of the visit. I would again extend my own thanks for the very positive manner of your visit and the many suggestions made. Within the profession I think that a visit and inspection is very much thought of in a negative way – how wrong that is. The assistance given has been invaluable to myself and this practice"

"I believe that this joint exercise with the Law Society has been an excellent learning opportunity both for the firm and me as an individual. I hope that on the next visit by the Law Society we will be able to make considerable advance on all the issues raised by the Law Society I would also like to thank the Law Society for the monitoring visit, which I feel has been an excellent opportunity to learn and get invaluable feedback."

"We would first of all like to thank you for visiting our firm as we do feel that the process has been beneficial and will contribute to improving on the existing procedures that we already had in place. As we stated in the meeting we feel that such a service is valuable and we appreciate any support and guidance that the Law Society can give to law firms."

“I am also extremely grateful for guidance you imparted during your two day visit. I must add that I learned so much during those two days of your attendance, which I could not have on my own. I could have taken years to find and implement what you imparted with in two days. I am sure with departments like yours and more frequent visits the solicitors’ profession as a whole will improve tremendously.”

In addition to the positive feedback about the visit process, it is also worth noting the consistent views of firms on the following statements from the recent quarterly survey in the table below. These views have been consistent in all the surveys that the Unit has undertaken since 2003.

Table 1: General opinions of the monitoring visit

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Base
Monitoring visits should apply to all firms regardless of size	47.2	45.5	2.4	3.3	1.6	127
It is important to take action to satisfy complainants	46.3	43.1	1.6	1.6	7.4	127
It is a good idea for new firms to have monitoring visits	33.3	58.5	5.8	1.6	0.8	127
Proactive monitoring of compliance with professional rules enhances the profession’s reputation	32.5	47.2	13.0	5.7	1.6	127
Complaints handling by solicitors is an area of practice that should be monitored by PSU	17.4	57.0	19.8	4.1	1.7	125
We give in too often to unfounded complaints	14.6	36.6	26.8	17.9	4.1	127
Solicitors are generally supportive of monitoring by the PSU	4.1	45.5	38.2	10.6	1.6	127
PSU monitoring was not helpful in improving practices in this firm	4.1	9.0	12.3	57.4	17.2	126

Client complaints are seldom, if ever, justified and there is no need for PSU involvement	0.8	7.3	22.0	56.1	13.8	127
Having an internal complaints procedure is a waste of time	-	3.3	4.8	51.2	40.7	127

Lexcel

The Lexcel office has had a busy autumn with a number of promotional talks and meetings, including

- 6 Lexcel Focus group meetings, including the first meetings of the London and Newcastle Focus groups
- 'Lexcel & Risk Management' seminars in Cambridge and Newcastle
- 'Lexcel & Excellent Client Service' seminars in Manchester, Liverpool, Preston, Cambridge and Newcastle
- Presentations on Risk Management to meetings of local sole practitioner groups in London, Sutton, Kingston & Cambridge, with similar talks organised in Manchester, Llandudno and Ashford
- 4 breakfast meetings on Lexcel & liP, organised by The Assessment Network (Lexcel Assessment body)
- Other talks including a talk on Risk Management to Wolverhampton Law Society

Lexcel Statistics

	Jan-05	Feb-05	Mar-05	Apr-05	May-05	Jun-05	Jul-05	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec-05
Total Applications	575	579	585	592	598	598	600	600	607	614		
Total Awards	511	524	536	543	548	550	550	552	562	568		
Total Commitments	270	273	279	278	286	285	286	289	295	298		
Breakdown of figures:												
New Applications	0	4	6	7	6	2	11	4	7	7		
New Awards	14	13	12	7	5	2	9	2	10	6		
New Commitments	8	7	9	2	8	10	6	8	6	3		
Number of info packs sent	25	41	39	13	44	21	43	35	38	41		

Practice Advice Service

The Practice Advice Service has received an average of 2,100 requests per month from solicitors for assistance with practice and procedure issues. The majority of requests are received via the telephone helpline. The introduction of the new Conditional Fee Agreement regime in November 2005 has seen a noticeable

increase in enquiries relating to CFAs. In addition the PAS team have staffed the London Bombings Legal Helpline from its inception in the wake of the July bombings. Since mid July they have taken 143 telephone calls from victims and their families.

The Practice Advice Service has published a revised and updated edition of its "Non Contentious Costs" booklet, which is designed to assist solicitors in understanding all aspects of costs in this area of work. The booklet is available on the Law Society web site and can also be requested by solicitors in printed form.

To deliver an effective consumer complaints scheme

During October the conduct and service caseload which includes the work of both the CCS and CAI increased by 44 to 6316. The CCS and CAI received a total of 1583 new complaints and closed 1539. October was the third month in a row when exceeded the forecast. We continue to receive a large number of complaints through MPs about payments to solicitors in miners compensation cases. The CCS team are looking for ways to address the sustained high level of receipts.

The Contact Centre answered 6466 calls, with an average time to answer of 20 seconds and continues to perform at a high standard. Only 2% of calls for the first 10 months of 2005 been abandoned, this is well within the 'less than 5%' target. Service levels for the Helpline have averaged 83% for the first 10 months of 2005 again well over the 80% target.

Referrals to the LSO remain steady at 6% for the first 10 months of the year. The LSO satisfaction rate fell in October to 60%, the year to date position the overall satisfaction rate is 66%.

Customer satisfaction rates with the service provided were up from an average 59% in the first two quarters of 2005 to 61% in October. The year to date average is 60%.

The LSO issued an interim report on 14 November that was widely reported. Despite coverage of her warning on some areas of progress, the Commissioner did recognise improvements in our complaints handling which were also highlighted by government in the recent White Paper.

There is a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature and unintended consequences of meeting our complaints handling targets. In order to hit some of the targets set by the LSCC we would have to ignore some complaints which have been in the system for over twelve months. This is something that I have explained to the Council in the past.

To maximise the relevance and effectiveness of our services to the profession

Sections

The Civil Litigation Section held its first annual conference on 9 November in London which was attended by 140 delegates. Baroness Ashton gave the keynote address and Lord Justice Neuberger, Judge in charge of modernisation, outlined his concerns about the lack of investment in IT in the courts and updated delegates on the work that is underway. The Section is approaching 1000 members in its first year. The

proposal is to relaunch it in 2006 as the Dispute Resolution Section (title to be confirmed) as part of the new Law Society Dispute Resolution Service which was approved by the Representation Board in October.

The Law Management Section's annual events programme ended with two successful conferences, the Young Solicitors' management forum and the Business Development Forum. Plans are under way for the annual conference in March 2006 which will focus on the business opportunities for law firms outlined in the White Paper following the Clementi review.

The Property Section's HIPs regional seminars and the joint Land Registry events have attracted considerable acclaim and almost 3000 solicitors have taken part. Further HIPs seminars are planned for 2006 and it is envisaged that these may include surveyors and estate agents as we work with property lawyers to secure their position in the new marketplace being created by HIPs.

The Probate Section's winter seminar programme has begun and will deliver 16 free seminars throughout the country between now and March 2006. Demand is very high in some regions where it may be necessary to run additional events.

Groups

Local Government Solicitors

The National Executive Committee met in September to discuss a large programme of work for the forthcoming year. Branches and practice-specific special interest groups continue to expand. The group has submitted a number of consultation paper responses on practice issues and contributed to the Law Society's response on SAAP. It has finalised a careers brochure and continues to provide guidance on securing training contracts.

The website www.slgov.org.uk and magazine *Noter Up* continue to go from strength to strength. The magazine recently featured articles written by local government solicitors on the Licensing Act 2003, judicial appointment, Housing Law, partnership working, new government guidance on planning obligations, proposed changes to local authority transport provision, a report on the Community Legal Service from the Legal Services Commission and the Law Commission's proposals on renting homes.

Sole Practitioners

The group has launched new Surrey and Cambridge groups and will be launching groups in Manchester, Kent, Wales and Lincoln in the near future. The Surrey and Cambridge meetings focussed on practice management issues. Presentations were given by the Lexcel team. All local groups offer a forum for discussion, CPD training and networking opportunities.

Work continues on representing members in e-conveyancing and HIPs forums, the increases in professional indemnity insurance, lenders discrimination, and a range of practice issues. Also, the group remains very active in offering views on the Clementi reforms and the role of the new Law Society.

Activities of individual Groups

Association of Women Solicitors (AWS)

- The AWS have responded to a European Green Paper on Unifying Family Law across European Jurisdictions. They are currently working on responses to a

consultation paper on Judicial Appointments from the DCA, a paper from The Commission for Judicial Appointments on Women in the Judiciary, and will also be responding to a Department of Health paper on Review of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act.

- The annual Returner Course was held in September. The feedback was extremely positive and among the testimonials were the following: "I found this course truly empowering", "The course gave me confidence to go out and sell myself - a delegate returning after 20 years out of practice".
- The Mentoring Scheme continues to be of valuable assistance to women who have a variety of concerns, an increasing number who are returning and want to change career paths.
- The Maternity Helpline also continues to receive calls and it is served by a dedicated team of employment lawyers who answer queries on redundancy, a variety of maternity issues and sexual harassment.
- The Black Solicitors' Network (BSN) AGM is to be held on 24 November 2005. It is anticipated that Yvonne Brown will stand unopposed for the Chair as the Vice Chair Stephen Friday is on sabbatical until June 2006.
- The Association of Muslim Lawyers (AML) will be holding their Annual General Meeting on 9 December 2005. The current Chair is Ifath Nawaz and the group has approximately 300 members.
- The BSN Diversity League Table has now received 73 responses; this is an extremely positive response rate. The publication is expected in January 2006.

Group for Solicitors with Disabilities (GSD)

- The Group continues to expand its mentoring and counselling activities both amongst the disabled and able bodied members of the profession. David Merkel (their Council Member) continues his mentoring activities with various universities and the College of Law.
- Sue Maynard Campbell represented the GSD at a roundtable discussion at the DCA at the request of Baroness Ashton to discuss problems encountered by people with disabilities entering the judiciary, this will be an ongoing process and their views are much sought after. .
- The GSD has also been in discussion with John Lee, the Law Society's Buildings Manager, about the facilities at the Law Society. Arising from this, Mr Lee will be providing a map of the Law Society with accessible areas, bathroom facilities, etc. A number of adjustments have already been made including the lift at the front of 113 and handrails up to the Front Door.

Trainee Solicitors Group and Young Solicitors Group (TSG and YSG)

- TSG Helpline Review 2005 – The National Trainee Solicitors' Group has recently published its latest review of all calls received by its free phone Helpline. The help line is funded by a direct grant from the Law Society and run independently by trained volunteers. The review covers all calls received during the period 13 March 2004 to 18 March 2005. The Helpline received 2241 calls over this 12 month period, making the average number of calls approximately 187 per month. This is the first time that the helpline has been reviewed on a yearly basis. There

has been a 13% increase in the number of calls received since the last review was undertaken and this is the largest number of calls received by the Helpline.

- A large proportion of calls were received from callers looking for training contracts. 14% of calls were from people who wanted advice on how to go about obtaining a training contract and a significant number of callers also wanted general advice on a career as a solicitor. A more alarming finding was the number of calls which related to trainees who were experiencing problems during their training contracts. Around 26% of callers (categorised as other) were being bullied, bribed or harassed and even some forms of sexual harassment. A full report of the review is available on request from the
- TSG Conference and Ball - 22 October – Manchester - The TSG held a very successful conference and ball in Manchester on 22 October. The conference focused on skills not taught on the LPC and on the training contract. Feedback has been excellent.
- TSG at its AGM on 12 November elected new Executive Officers namely: Genevieve Mochlin (Chair), Clyde & Co, Katherine Gibson (Vice-Chair) Paris Smith & Randall Solicitors, Andrea Wardrop (Hon-Secretary) Prettys Solicitors.
- TSG and YSG Merger - The TSG and YSG have produced a pre-consultation discussion document setting out proposals for a possible merger of the two groups. The discussion document has been circulated to the national committees of groups, council members, recognised groups, and local law societies. Closing date for responses to this pre-consultation discussion document is 10 December. Council members are encouraged to respond to the online survey - <http://tinyurl.co.uk/85gh>. A fuller consultation will be conducted next year.

Databases for recognised groups

This project is part of the Law Society's support to enable all recognised groups to move towards opt-in membership from 1 January 2006. Six of the eight recognised groups have now agreed to participate in the opt-in database project. Development of the core database is nearing completion and user testing and training is expected to begin in the second week of December. By the end of December the groups will be able to gain access via their websites and a URL link to a database of members who have opted into the group.

International Practice Rights

India

The Law Society has submitted its report to the Indian government on liberalisation of legal services, following the deliberations of the Anglo-Indian committee on the liberalisation of legal services that was established in January. The British High Commission in Delhi and the Consulate General in Mumbai held events in mid-November with the support of the Law Society to mark the launch of QLTT test centres in India.

China

The Law Society and Bar Council held a joint conference with the Guandong Lawyers Association in Guangzhou on 3-4 November. The conference was designed to help a number of mid-size UK firms, who do not wish to open offices in China, to build their presence in the Chinese market. It was attended by around 200 Chinese

lawyers. The Law Society was also invited to contribute to a briefing session on English law for a business party accompanying the Chinese Premier Hu Jintao on his recent visit to London.

Lebanon

On 28 October, the Law Society held a joint conference in Beirut with the Beirut Bar Association, attended by around 250 Lebanese lawyers. The conference was held to mark the ratification of the EU-Lebanon Association Agreement and focused on the implications for the Lebanese legal profession of the entry into force of the agreement.

South Africa

At meetings with the South African Law Society from 18 to 20 November, progress was made on proposals for English and Welsh law firms to open offices in South Africa. The Society spoke at three conferences on the White Paper developments in England and Wales.

Representational Activities of Regional Offices

Legal Aid Presentations

These meetings have taken place in five regions and involved practitioners, representatives from the Legal Services Commission and local MPs. They have been delivered in partnership with the Legal Aid Unit and have also included a brief session to highlight the importance to solicitors of e-business. Response rates have been encouraging

West Midlands	60	Yorkshire	28	South West	45
North West	80	East Midlands	53		

In addition, Greater London regional office supported local law societies in London on a similar initiative and this attracted 150 delegates. As a result of the West Midlands meeting, the LSC have met with West Midlands regional office and suggested a range of joint activities to support our members.

In Yorkshire, a meeting was held in Sheffield between representatives from private practice, not for profit agencies, MPs and Law Society Immigration Policy Adviser. The meeting discussed current experiences of those working with and supporting people requiring immigration and asylum advice. Over 30 delegates attended.

Best Practice Programme

During the period, regional offices have continued to deliver the agreed programme for 2005 including e-business, Lexcel, DDA Part III and Home Information Packs

Other subject areas delivered by regional offices during the period included Taxation, ASBOs, Pensions and Complaints Handling.

Work continues on identifying the key subjects for 2006 and ensuring the infrastructure is in place for delivery. Subjects for quarter 1 in 2006 include Home Information Packs, Client Care, Legal Aid and Financial Management and Law Management Section Finance Management, further e-business seminars.

Mediation Week

In partnership with DCA and the Law Reform unit, six seminars have been delivered across England and Wales promoting mediation. Response rates have been encouraging.

Greater London 191 (2 events) West Midlands 102

Yorkshire 90 South West 40 East Midlands 45

Media

In addition to the everyday contact with local and regional media, regional offices, working with the Press Office are delivering a series of 'How to handle the media and why it's good for business' to the profession. These are being held in:

Wakefield	2 November
Birmingham	10 November
Newcastle	30 November

2006

Cambridge	21 and 22 February
Bristol/Exeter	28 February/1 March
London	25 April (provisional date)

International

Our programme of encouraging members to be alert to EU matters has resulted in four delegations of members visiting Brussels. The visits to the Commission, Parliament and MEPS have been arranged in partnership with the International Unit and have received financial support from MEPs. Delegations have visited from:

West Midlands/Eastern region	East Midlands
Wales	Greater London

Wales

Report on Better Law Making in Wales

The Wales Committee has been lobbying hard on the issue of publication of subordinate legislation by the National Assembly for Wales.

There has been no uniform system for making or publishing subordinate legislation (other than Assembly Statutory Instruments) made by the Welsh Assembly Government in Wales and this affects access to the law.

However, the Presiding Officer has now prescribed a form for this legislation which became operational in the autumn. The prescription includes a requirement to number legislation consecutively in each year and requires that the heading includes the number, subject area and title.

On 9 November 2006 a meeting was hosted by the Deputy Presiding Officer at the National Assembly. Lowry Morgan and Kay Powell of the Law Society Wales Office, David Lambert, member of the Wales Committee, and Marie Navarro both of Cardiff University attended and the Business Minister, Jane Hutt, along with the head of business unit, Marion Stapleton, were present.

At the meeting the Business Minister confirmed the Welsh Assembly Government's support for implementing the new prescribed form with effect from 1 January 2006 (although the form is already in use in some cases). Also, Mrs Hutt advised that a new website for the Welsh Assembly Government will be live from 1 April 2006. The new website will carry all the relevant legislation and new search engines are being applied so that it will be possible to search for legislation through the site.

A further meeting is to be held in February when a working 'mock up' of the website will be available to see how it will operate. The meeting will also be an opportunity to consider how the prescribed form is working in practice.

Consultations

The Law Society office in Wales has liaised with the Planning and Environmental Law Committee on the following:

A framework for Assessing the Soundness of Local Government Plans
Changes to Hazardous Substances Systems of Controls (Land Use Planning)
Resources for Planning
Mineral Planning Authority Monitoring of Mineral and Landfill Permissions
Revision of TAN1 Joint Housing Land Availability. TAN2 Planning and Affordable Housing and draft Ministerial Interim
Planning Policy Statement 02/05

Library

During 2005 the Library has received and dealt with an average of 2,500 legal information enquiries per month and has also supplied an average of 665 copies per month of extracts from published material in response to requests received by its Document Delivery service.

The Library is piloting a new service for solicitors: The Parliamentary Debates Research Service (PDRS) which offers detailed research into the Parliamentary debates relating to specific sections of Acts of Parliament in return for a fixed fee. This is aimed at practitioners who need to investigate the legislators' intentions behind a particular piece of legislation. There has been some immediate take-up of the new service.

The pricing structure of the Library's Document Delivery service has been overhauled and simplified in order to make the service more user-friendly for firms placing orders by making the costs more transparent. The new pricing takes effect from January 2006.

The Library has reorganised its use of storage space for older printed materials in order to improve efficiency in retrieving this material for Library users. Substantial quantities of less frequently used volumes have been moved to an external document storage service provided by Deep Store as part of this reorganisation.

To increase public confidence in the Law Society's regulation of solicitors and improve public perception of solicitors as providers of high quality legal services

The Law Society in the media

The Law Society featured prominently coverage of the Government's White Paper on reform of legal services. *The Financial Times* reported that the Law Society backed the reforms but had warned that the composition of the Legal Services Board should be demonstrably independent of government and operate with a light touch. *The Times*, reported the Society's view that the Legal Services Board could reinforce public confidence in the way lawyers are regulated but that it would be better for regulatory powers to be vested in the frontline regulators. *The Telegraph* and *The Express* said the Law Society had long promoted the need for a more flexible, consumer focussed, legal services market and new business structures for delivering legal services.

Following publication of the Compensation Bill, the Law Society's views were widely reported. Taking a lead in the debate, the President was interviewed on BBC 2 *Working Lunch*, SKY, BBC Radio 5 Live and BBC Radio 4 *You and Yours*, saying there was no compensation culture and that regulation of claims farmers must be meaningful. He also expressed concerns about the suggestion of watering down the law on negligence. *The FT* and the *Guardian* quoted the Law Society: "If the negligence provision in this Bill could allow schools to provide a lower duty of care, it could be a licence for people to take dangerous risks. That cannot be right."

The Law Society's concerns about the Government's counter terrorism measures continue to attract significant publicity. The President was interviewed on Radio 4's *Today* programme and I by BBC *Breakfast News* following publication of the Bill which included the controversial proposal to allow police to hold terrorism suspects for 90 days without charge. The Society's evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee was also covered in five national papers and a number of regional papers.

Reports appeared in two national papers criticising the Law Society's handling of complaints about alleged mis-selling of endowment policies by solicitors. The principal issue was whether home-buyers were disadvantaged by buying their policies through solicitors rather than other providers, because the Law Society's policy regarding complaints about mis-selling was less consumer-friendly than that of other regulators. Partly because of the potential for further detrimental publicity at a critical time, the matter was given the highest priority and a detailed paper was submitted to the Compliance Board as soon as possible after the critical coverage. The Compliance Board agreed, as far as possible, to make the Law Society's approach to complaints about endowment mis-selling as consistent as possible with that of the Financial Services Authority. This will particularly benefit clients in cases where the paperwork from the original transaction is no longer available.

Citizens' Advice annual conference

The Law Society took a stand at Citizens' Advice annual conference to promote the Consumer Complaints Service, making contact with over 200 delegates, many of whom were interested in the CCS complaints procedure.

Pro Bono Activity

The Law Society's London Bombings Legal Helpline was set up in the wake of the 7 July London bombings. It has proved to be very effective in ensuring that those caught up in the disaster have access to free legal advice. The helpline has operated in the following way:

On Thursday 14 July, following the 7 July bombings, the DCMS, the coordinating department for the Disaster Response Unit, approached the Law Society to ask if it would set up a panel of solicitors willing to give free legal advice to victims and their relatives.

The group, consisting of representatives from the Attorney General's Office, the DCMS and The Law Society, met on 14 and 15 July at the Law Society. The decision was made to set up a free legal advice line, using the existing web-based structure of the Solicitors Pro Bono Group's site, to record and allocate cases. It was agreed that there needed to be processes to ensure that only appropriate providers gave advice.

The process for obtaining legal advice providers was two-fold. SPBG's existing members were contacted, asking them to join the panel and a letter from the Law Society's President went out to all APIL members. Both contacts asked firms to confirm that they would be prepared to undertake the work, and, in the case of non SPBG members, that they would sign up to the terms of the Pro Bono protocol approved by the Law Society Council in early 2005.

In order to register as a member of the panel, firms were asked to reply by email to the Law Society, indicating the areas of law in which they would accept referrals – for example personal injury; probate etc.

In certain cases, status checks were carried out, relating to possible interventions, complaints etc. The SPBG was notified, by email, as soon as the status checks were completed.

The SPBG then contacted volunteer firms and allocated each a password to enable them to access the secure website, and pick up cases appearing on it on a 'first come, first served' basis.

Cases were posted to the website as a result of telephone calls made to a free, dedicated legal helpline, run by the Law Society's Practice Advice Service. Staff handling calls recorded brief personal details of the caller – (relationship to the victim) and nature of the matter (employment; probate; etc) and input these details on to the secure password protected website.

The take up of cases was monitored by the Law Society and SPBG daily. In the majority of cases, firms picked up the matter within an hour of it appearing on the website.

The LBLH received a small number of cases which were outside the scope of the helpline – for example, callers affected by the Israel and Sharm-el-Sheikh bombings. These took longer to place as a result, but members of the SPBG agreed to take these on 'exceptional' cases.

The latest statistics as at 10 November 2005 are as follows: We have received 143 calls in total, relating to 19 people who died as a result of the bombings and 83

victims who suffered physical injuries or psychological trauma. Typically, referrals generate more cases as often whole families are involved.

A review meeting, enabling LBLH panel members to share experience and raise any queries was held on 8 September 2005. A second meeting, with representatives from the London Bombings Relief Charitable Fund, will be held on Monday 5 December.

To increase our influence in the development of law and legal services policy in the public interest, aiming to maximise justice for all

Campaigns

Following the very successful Stamp Duty Land Tax campaign the Society has, in the last few weeks, been working with the Revenue to improve the guidance given to practitioners to assist them in completing SDLT forms.

The 'Defending legal aid' campaign, which is endorsed by LAPG, CLSA, LCCSA, has produced strong evidence for the Society's position that the competitive price tendering plans will have particularly negative impacts on: Black and Minority Ethnic practitioners; certain geographical areas currently not served at all by legal aid practitioners or by smaller firms which may not survive CPT; and recruitment and retention of legal aid practitioners in the future. Practitioners are now kept up to date with e-alerts sent out monthly, detailing progress on the campaign. Clearly the page on the website is also being read by members as increasingly they are signing up to be included in future e-alerts.

Through the 'Emergency legal aid' campaign we have been working with housing lawyers who have told us that they have had the costs spent completing emergency legal aid applications granted for the time being, under devolved powers taxed off by the LSC on assessment.

Responses to consultations

We submitted a number of responses to consultation papers including to a consultation document from the Office of Criminal Justice Reform on creating standards for witness care in criminal courts, which will include defence witnesses, and to a new PACE Code relating to arrest issues by the Home Office Police Powers Unit. We responded to the proposals to reform the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. We responded to consultations from DEFRA on repeal of s.68 Countryside and Rights of Way Act on vehicular access over common land; water abstraction; on impounding licensing Regulations; on Planning Guidance on Housing in Wales and on Byelaw Making Powers in relation to recreation. We submitted the response to the consultation on the age discrimination regulations, *Equality & Diversity: Coming of Age*, and to the ODPM consultation on Empty Homes. We submitted to the DTI draft clauses for the Company Law Reform Bill, and sent responses to DEFRA on the extension of the contaminated land regime to include radioactivity.

Judicial appointments

Law Society staff and representatives of the Group for Solicitors' with Disabilities have contributed to the work led by Baroness Ashton to develop an action plan on disability equality and judicial diversity. This plan has been commended by the Disability Rights Commission as "credible and comprehensive". Baroness Ashton has formally acknowledged the Society's and GSD's contributions.

The Commission for Judicial Appointments (CJA) on 19 October published a research paper on the issues and barriers effecting ethnic minority candidates entering the senior judiciary: *A Literature Review of research on ethnic inequalities in the senior Judiciary*. The report places together the key strands in academic and policy thinking in this area, highlighting the key issues and suggesting ways forward for research and practice. The Law Society and a number of groups are preparing a formal response to this paper.

Letters have been sent from the President and from DCA minister Baroness Ashton to all solicitors who have just reached 7 or 10 years pqe encouraging them to find out more about judicial appointments.. The letters went to just over 4,000 practitioners with 7 years pqe and about 2,500 with 10 years pqe. A press release was issued to coincide with the speech the Lord Chancellor gave at the Commissioner for Judicial Appointments International Summit on Judicial Diversity on the 2 November in London.

Child Care Review

The Child Care Review being undertaken aims to identify whether the present system delivers the best outcome for the child and how good practice could contribute to diverting children away from court proceedings. The Review Team are proposing to put recommendations to their Ministers by the end of January 2006. It is anticipated that due to the lack of time, the recommendations will be outline proposals on which there is likely to be further consultation and development work.

The full advisory group on which the Law Society is represented has met once and there will be 3 further meetings of the advisory group later in November and December on the pre-proceedings; proceedings and after proceedings stages. The Care Review Team has not yet made any specific proposals on the use of public funds. However, a separate Judiciary Review Team lead by the President of the family division and Mr Justice Ryder gave a report to the government at the beginning of November on their review of the judicial case management protocol, which contains some proposals for change.

There is a lot of detail to be thought through, including on the participation of parents and children with legal advice at each stage and on how health and other professionals will be tied into the system, but the Law Society is broadly supportive of these frontloading proposals. We have already suggested to the DCA a pre-action protocol and the need for focussed legal advice for families involved with social services to avoid proceedings where possible.

Confidentiality of money laundering reports

The Law Society continues to campaign for the Government to develop effective measures at all stages of the money laundering reporting regime to protect the identity of those making "suspicious activity reports" (such as solicitors). These concerns are shared by all the major organisations in the regulated sector. The President of the Law Society has spoken on this subject at various conferences and written submissions have been made to the Home Office for the development of a Code of Practice for law enforcement officers.

The Home Office has taken on board some of the Law Society's comments but disappointingly, they have not taken the taken forward the proposal for a Code of Practice. The great potential for physical, commercial and reputational harm for solicitors who make money laundering reports about their clients, which are

subsequently disclosed through lack of proper safeguards, remains a concern. The Law Society will continue to raise this matter and pursue the option of a Code of Practice to govern this area. The Law Society is submitting further comments in response to the Home Office's most recent proposals for the handling of Suspicious Activity Reports, targeted at Law Enforcement Agencies.

Third Money Laundering Directive

The Law Society is monitoring closely, developments relating to the implementation of third money laundering directive. The first stream of work being taken forward by the Treasury concerns the regulation of trust and company service providers. The Treasury is mandated by certain provisions in the Directive, to develop a 'fit and proper test' for this sector and to provide for licensing or registration and establish a supervisory authority. Many solicitors will be affected by these plans, particularly if a separate supervisory authority is established to monitor money laundering compliance by solicitors conducting the following types of work: for example, forming companies, acting as trustees, providing a registered office for a company or other legal person. The Law Society is participating in a Treasury Working Party to discuss future plans for this area and our position is that all solicitors who carry on regulated activities are already monitored for money laundering compliance by the Law Society and it is unnecessary to add another layer of regulation to their activities.

At the end of October, the Law Society submitted comments to the European Commission on the implementation of the Third Money Laundering Directive. The Law Society advised the Commission to exercise proportionality in the development of new measures for the identification of Politically Exposed Persons in order to avoid increasing the money laundering compliance burden unnecessarily.

Serious Organised Crime Agency – Money Laundering

For a number of years the Money Laundering Task Force has fostered a positive and constructive relationship with the National Criminal Intelligence Service ("NCIS"), which has led to positive changes in the handling of reports from the profession. By spring 2006 the function of NCIS will be subsumed into the new Serious and Organised Crime Agency ("SOCA"). It is therefore important that the problems faced by solicitors under the money laundering regime are fully explained at the earliest opportunity. The Law Society has been working with SOCA to organise a workshop for solicitors about how they view the current regime, and what improvements they would like to see in the future. The workshop took place on 21 November and was an opportunity for both sides to express opinions on contentious points, and to manage expectations. SOCA has offered to consider reciprocal secondments from lawyers in to SOCA and from SOCA into law firms. In its regulatory capacity the Law Society will also be separately forming a working relationship with SOCA.

The Law Society in Parliament

The Law Society was represented at the three main party conferences in late September/early October where we held meetings with MPs and peers. At the Conservative and Liberal Democrat conferences we also held special receptions aimed specifically at solicitor parliamentarians. At Labour Conference, we sponsored (with Clifford Chance) a fringe meeting with Home Secretary Charles Clarke MP and Lord Chancellor Charles Falconer, entitled 'How liberal is the Labour Party', which was very well attended. We also held meetings with the Immigration Minister, Tony McNulty, as well as with the Treasury Ministers Des Browne and Paul Goggins to discuss legal aid and money laundering respectively.

Parliament returned from summer recess on 10 October and there has been intensive legislative activity since then.

The Society briefed peers for the Second Reading and Committee Stage debates on the Identity Cards Bill where we proposed amendments on the compulsory nature of the scheme, costs and disclosure.

The Society also briefed peers for the Second Reading of the NHS Redress Bill, and we are currently tabling probing amendments dealing with the independence of investigations and access to courts and legal advice.

On the Immigration, Asylum & Nationality Bill we have pursued amendments on information sharing and the removal of appeal rights for Commons Committee stage.

On the Criminal Defence Service Bill we produced a number of amendments for Lords Report, including proposals for a Crown Court means test.

The Society produced briefings at each Commons stage of the controversial Terrorism Bill, and proposed a number of amendments, concerning, amongst other things, the crucial question of time limits for the holding of terrorist suspects. In addition we liaised with both the Home Affairs Select Committee and the Joint Committee on Human Rights on their enquiries into these issues and arranged to give of written and oral evidence to both.

We also liaised with both Constitutional Affairs Select Committee and the Lords European Committee on their enquiries into the small claims procedure and again arranged to give written and oral evidence to them.

We briefed MPs for a backbench (adjournment) debate on criminal legal aid.

The Society arranged for an Early Day Motion (EDM) to be tabled calling on the Government to withdraw regulations allowing for fraud trials to take place without a jury. So far, 70 MPs have signed up to the motion. We have also briefed MPs and peers for the subsequent debates and votes on the regulations.

The Compensation Bill was published on 3 November and we expect the Second Reading to take place on 29 November. The Society will brief Parliamentarians on the Bill to ensure that the regulation of claims farmers is effective and proportionate and to seek to ensure that the legislation will not involve any fundamental change to the law of negligence.

Submission of evidence to select committees

The Society submitted written evidence and gave oral evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights on the draft Terrorism Bill, together with Liberty, JUSTICE and Amnesty International. We also provided written evidence to the JCHR on other counter-terrorism issues.

We provided written evidence and gave oral evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on the Government's draft Terrorism Bill, together with Liberty and JUSTICE.

We submitted written evidence to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee on children with special educational needs and we are submitting written

evidence to the Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry into the UK's "compensation culture", and have also been invited to give oral evidence on 13 December.

Influencing Law and legal Policy internationally

New York State Bar Association and American Bar Association International Section Conferences

The New York State Bar Association held its international section conference at the Law Society between 18-22 October with the assistance of the international department and provided a platform for a number of UK speakers. The President spoke at the ABA Section of International Law's Fall conference in Brussels on 25 October on anti-money laundering.

Libya

The first meeting of the Anglo-Libyan legal working group which has been set up by the British Embassy in Tripoli and the Libyan General Peoples' Congress met in Tripoli on 12-13 November. On the British side, the group consists of lawyers from private practice, in-house lawyers and the FSA. It is tasked with reviewing the Libyan foreign investment framework, banking laws and provisions for international dispute resolution. This group will meet regularly over the next year and make recommendations to the Libyan government on how it can improve its legal framework in order to increase investor confidence.

Better regulation in Europe

On 14 November the Law Society hosted a breakfast to launch its reflections on better law making in the European Union. The breakfast was addressed by Charlie McCreevy, Commissioner for the Internal Market in the European Commission.

Promoting access to justice internationally

Human rights seminar

On 2 October, the Law Society held a round table for Bar leaders on human rights to mark the opening of the legal year. The speakers were the Presidents of the Law Society of Uganda and the ABA and a human rights lawyer from Colombia. The seminar provided an opportunity for the Law Society to offer support to the Rule of Law initiative launched by IBA President Francis Neate.