



Council
20 May 2015

Classification – Public

Purpose – For discussion

PRESIDENTIAL YEAR PLAN FOR 2015-16

The Issues

This paper presents a Presidential Year Plan for the current Vice President, Jonathan Smithers's priorities for when he takes office as President in July 2015.

Statement of territorial application

This paper applies to England and Wales

Policy position

This policy issues are formed out of the business plan objectives agreed by Council in October 2014.

Financial and resourcing implications

The activity detailed in the plan is within existing budgets for the current financial year, and are also likely to be covered by the budget for the financial year November 2015 – October 2016 once set later in 2015.

Financial Consultation/Review

This paper does not contain any financial data, as the activity summarised within the paper is covered by the budgets of various business units within the Society. Therefore a copy of this paper has not been sent for approval by the Finance Directorate.

Communications

The activity and engagements contained within the paper will be fully supported by the Communications and Public Affairs teams.

Equality, diversity and inclusion implications

The equalities implications of the Presidential Year Plan will be considered before the final plan is set, and will be compatible with the wider aspects of the Society's business plan for 2014-15 and beyond.

Director / Chief: Deborah Oliver, executive director of External Affairs
Author: Jonathan Smithers, Vice-President
Date of report: **01 May 2015**

PRESIDENTIAL YEAR PLAN FOR 2015-16

Summary

1. The paper sets out the themes for the current Vice President, Jonathan Smithers', Presidential year of 2015 / 2016.
2. This document reflects Jonathan's ambitions for his Presidency. The plan is, however, subject to the forthcoming Law Society's Corporate Strategy for 2020 which will be published during his Presidential year.
3. To ensure business continuity wherever possible, Jonathan is keen that his plan aligns with the current Law Society's business plan. He has, therefore, considered what he would like to achieve within the context of a number of the Law Society's campaigning priorities: Rule of Law, Access to Justice and Conveyancing and Land Law. This plan also sets out the key priorities to continue the Society's work on legal regulation, including supporting the development of this area in the forthcoming Corporate Strategy.

Rule of Law

4. The Rule of Law is a cornerstone to our way of life in England and Wales. It is central to the protection of our human rights and essential for economic growth and stability.

Economic value to the country of the legal services market

5. Jonathan wishes to drive forward the Law Society's Rule of Law campaign by promoting the economic value to the country of the legal services market, including promoting the strength of the UK's legal institutions and making the argument that a broad commitment to justice ensures a stable society and Government.
6. To reflect that the legal sector is an integral part of the business community, Jonathan will seek to widen our political work. He will work with colleagues to strengthen our relationships and engagements with the Treasury, UK Trade and Investment, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, HMRC, the National Chambers of Commerce, the accountancy profession, EU institutions and other bodies.
7. Jonathan will seek to persuade the Government to have a legal representative on future international trade missions, as well as a place at the table when foreign trade missions come to the UK. This engagement will contribute to promote the country as a venue of choice for legal business and highlight the economic contribution of the legal sector internationally.
8. The Welsh Government has identified the legal services sector as a key economic driver. Jonathan is keen to work with the Welsh Government and Welsh National Assembly further to promote the profession's value.

Human Rights

9. The Law Society is proud of its achievements in the field of human rights. Jonathan will lend his efforts to ensure the continuance of our work in this important area.

10. A future Government may seek to amend or repeal the Human Rights Act 1998. It is important, therefore, that the Law Society remains vocal on this issue and ensures that it has a strong voice and is fully consulted.
11. In 2014 the Law Society was awarded special consultative status for the United Nations (U.N.), which has granted us unprecedented access to the UN. Jonathan will work with colleagues to identify opportunities for the Society to collaborate with member states on human rights and the Rule of Law, as well as input into discussions on the U.N. Council's agenda at both an international and domestic level.

Access to Justice

12. Access to Justice has always been a core theme for the Society and has received particular focus during the Presidential year 2014/2015. The Law Society's work in this area remains of vital importance to our members and the public.
13. Under Jonathan's Presidency, the Society will also continue to reiterate the responsibility of the Government to provide a fair and adequate system of justice.
14. Jonathan will continue the strong position the Law Society has taken on this matter and continue to work with colleagues identifying gaps in provision, lobby for change and provide solutions where possible.
15. The legal profession continues to practise in an increasingly digital world. There has been much discussion about how technology might fill in the gaps in access to justice provision, Jonathan believes that the Law Society must be at the centre of these discussions so as not to be sidelined in this important debate.
16. As part of this work, there is a role for the President and the Society to help members to understand the risks, challenges and opportunities presented by technological advancement in the justice system.

Legal Regulation

17. The development of the Society's vision for the future of legal regulation is key to the development of its overall corporate strategy, linking as it does to issues of funding for the organisation and the future of the profession generally. There will therefore be significant external engagement with stakeholders on legal regulation, as the Society sets out its vision for a reformed legal regulatory settlement. This will include dealing with any external challenges to the Society's current existence and continuing to work with key stakeholders such as the new leaders of the LSB and SRA.

Conveyancing and Land Law

18. As a former Chair of the Society's Conveyancing and Land Law Committee, Jonathan has for some years acted as the key spokesperson on home-buying and selling. He has also represented the Society on a number of external groups, including the Land Registry Rules Committee, the National Fraud Authority Mortgage Fraud Forum and the National Consumer Forum for Residential Conveyancing. Jonathan is keen to enhance the appreciation of the role solicitors have in undertaking property transfer. He would like particularly to highlight solicitor's knowledge about property and the housing market and the role our members have in underpinning commerce and industry.

19. To ensure that the Law Society is able meaningfully to influence the discussions on property and land law taking place over the next year, he would like to use his position as President to foster closer relations between the Law Society and the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Cabinet Office, the Welsh Government and Assembly and other decision makers.
20. He wishes further to increase the profession's voice in this area. The property market is often featured in the media and Jonathan will work to ensure that we are given the opportunity to express our views in the national press.
21. Jonathan was instrumental to the setting up and promotion of CQS and is now a Director of the joint venture company behind Veyo. He will work to ensure the success of this innovative product which has the potential significantly to support our members businesses.

Additional areas of key Presidential work:

22. Improving communication and engagement – Jonathan became involved with the Law Society via his involvement as both President of his local law society in Tunbridge Wells, and as President of Kent Law Society. He is clear about the positive role and importance of local law societies and special interest groups. He will focus on improving engagement with:
 - a) Members – both recognising the role of local law societies and other specialist groupings, assisting them wherever possible in adding value for members, also engaging directly with them and promoting the work of the Law Society.
 - b) External stakeholders – communicating with a wider audience about the role of solicitors in society and to broadcast the expertise and work of our specialist committees.
23. Equality, diversity and inclusion - building on the work of previous office holders to ensure that every opportunity is taken to educate the profession about the challenges in this area and to show the wider public what progress has been made.
24. Supporting the Society's international engagement – to act as an ambassador for the profession globally by supporting the Law Society's programme of activities promoting England and Wales as an international hub for legal services, and promoting English law and the solicitors' qualification around the world.
25. Promoting the Society's commercial services offering - both to the profession and to support the Law Society in furtherance of its objective to increase income and reduce dependency on the Practising Certificate Fee.
26. Legal services and the armed forces - in light of the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and the continuing commemorations for the First World War, there will be a focus on the role of the profession in armed conflict. This will include those currently serving in the Armed Forces (full-time and reserves) and lawyers supporting veterans via the Armed Forces Legal Action initiative.