



Law Society Council summary: 14 May 2014

After the 2 April 2014 Council meeting in Cardiff, we returned to Chancery Lane for the 14 May 2014 meeting. Among matters announced to the Council was the election of Robert Bourns, one of the City of London Council members, to take office as Deputy Vice President in July 2014 (and then, according to the Law Society's constitution, to succeed as Vice President next year and then President in 2016).

Ongoing work on legal aid proposals

Council heard about 19 roadshows held across the country to assist practitioners deal with the consequences of the Lord Chancellor's decision on criminal legal aid, attended by over a thousand people. These roadshows, and the Law Society's response to the criminal legal aid cuts, have been covered in the *Gazette* and in the legal trade press, and, in the case of our wider response, the *Guardian* which featured interviews with Lucy Scott-Moncrieff (past President) and Richard Atkinson (chair of the Criminal Law Committee).

Shaping the environment

Council noted that the Law Society has given evidence to three parliamentary committees, including the Crime and Courts Public Bill Committee, and has briefed parliamentarians on the Finance (No 2) Bill, the Immigration Bill, the Deregulation Bill, and the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill. Internally, the Society has set up a team to look at strategic issues affecting the profession and the legal system, and its first project will look at the relationship between the UK and the EU and its implications for legal policy and providers of legal services. The Law Society has also prepared a response to consultations on the future of the Land Registry, and discussions are under way at Ministerial level over concerns about what appears to be a policy by UKBA of trying to bypass solicitors when dealing with migrants.

Member engagement

The Council agreed to a motion in February reiterating its desire that the Law Society should be a genuinely member focused organisation, and work is now proceeding on this, with a group of Council members representing a wide range of constituencies providing input and direction.

Events and services

Council heard about events organised for communities, including the Junior Lawyers' Division annual conference, the Women Lawyers' Division returners' course, and a practical encryption seminar for small firms. The annual Presidents' and Secretaries' conference had taken place on 9-10 May 2014. The library telephone enquiry service began its extended opening hours in the week of 31 March 2014, and there has been a positive impact on enquiry volumes.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Council received the annual report from the Equality and Diversity Committee, now renamed the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee to reflect the full range of its remit as covering the inclusion of as wide a range of characteristics as possible among the Law Society's employees and volunteers as well as the profession at large. Among issues addressed in the report were the ongoing success of the Diversity and Inclusion Charter which now has 431 signatories which between them represent over one third of solicitors in private practice. The regular range of Firms Diversity Forums has continued across England and Wales, BME / Judicial appointments outreach events were run jointly by the Law Society, the Bar Council and CILEX. The Law Society worked with Rliance to develop a free online tool to help firms with collecting the diversity data annually required by the SRA. It was agreed that priorities for next year would include: further activity to enhance the diversity of the volunteer community; and embedding an HR diversity programme within the organisation, including a series of diversity and inclusion workshops targeted at manager, staff, and board and committee chairs; and a continued focus on promoting and implementing the Diversity and Inclusion Charter, Procurement Protocol, and Career Barriers Action Plan externally.

Other issues

Council discussed and signed off Management Board's proposals for the recruitment of Des Hudson's successor as chief executive, a process which will begin with advertisements on 25 May 2014.

Council also had a preliminary discussion of issues in relation to the Compensation Fund, the operation of which the SRA is reviewing and on which there is likely to be a consultation later in the year. The discussion covered issues including the effect of ABS on the Fund, the recommendation of the Legal Services Board's Consumer Panel that there should be a single fund covering all of the regulated legal professions, and the effect of the conveyancing process of claims on the fund. Further consultation with the profession is planned over the next few months.

'Formal' committee status was agreed for what has until now been the Intellectual Property Working Party, recognising its significant contributions to an important area of law.

The opportunity was also taken to make some consolidating updates to the Society's General Regulations.