



## Law Society Council meeting summary: 7 December 2017

### Changes to governance for 2018

Council received another update on progress to implementing the new Law Society Board and its two main supporting committees (Policy and Regulatory Affairs Committee, and Membership and Operations Committee) in early 2018 – the Board by the end of February, and the Committees by the end of March. Council approved the selection committee's recommendation that Robert Bourns, past president, should be appointed as Board Chair. Other external recruitment was under way, and elections among Council members for some places on the Board and committees would commence shortly. Council formally approved the changes to the Society's General Regulations which were required to set up the new Board and the Committees; once the new arrangements are fully in place, there will be a further consolidation of changes in Q1 of 2018.

Council also heard a brief update on the ongoing work to consider the functions, shape and representativeness of Council itself. Proposals were still in development following feedback at the previous Council meeting, and discussions were being held with a number of Law Society communities and other interested parties.

### Lobbying on Brexit

The Society's involvement in briefing MPs on the second reading and committee stage of the EU (Withdrawal) Bill was reported to Council. This focused on the Society's main concerns which related to the impact of the bill on citizens' rights and on devolution, and its compatibility with transitional arrangements. The Society had submitted written evidence to two parliamentary committees on these matters, and held meetings with several key stakeholders. It had also been active in a number of Government industry/sector groups including the Brexit Law Committee and the Professional Business Services Council's Mutual Market Access Group. The Law Societies' Brussels office had also organised a series of meetings with MEPs and law firms.

### International engagement

Council noted that the Society had been represented at the International Bar Association annual conference, attending a round-table with law firms organised by Lord Keen, as well as speaking on panels covering topics including pro bono, global legal markets, enhancing the presence of female talent in law firms, and the balance between migration, international security, rule of law and terrorism. The Society had also attended the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA) annual congress in Toronto. President Joe Egan spoke on the disciplinary rules that should apply to lawyers working under mobility rules. At the end of November, the Society hosted the second round-table on women in the law, championed and chaired by vice president Christina Blacklaws, at which the strategy for the international programme on women in the law was presented and agreed.

### Support to the profession

Council was pleased to note that, following extensive lobbying by the Law Society and others, HMCTS had announced the deferral of the Flexible Opening Hours pilot, to allow further engagement with court users as well as a further tender process to secure an independent evaluator. The Law Society had also been making submissions to HMRC on a number of matters including the proposed penalties for 'enablers' of tax avoidance. Council was also updated on the work of the relationship management team, a group of staff with four main areas of focus: regional activities, engagement with local law societies, gaining insights from member feedback, and a 'joined up' approach to member engagement. Council also noted the creation of a Law Society Quality and Standards in Education Committee to provide expert oversight of all aspects of quality and standards associated with the Society's education, training and accreditations. Another matter of note was that, during Pro Bono week in November, the 54 founder signatories of the Pro Bono Charter launched by the Law Society in 2016 had been invited to a forum to discuss the next twelve months of the Charter.

Council approved a refresh of the Society's logo to ensure that it remained fit for purpose in the digital age. This would be rolled out during 2018.

### President's report

The President made his half-yearly report to Council. Among matters highlighted was extensive engagement with political and non-political stakeholders both over the party conference seasons and in regular meetings with ministers and opposition spokespeople. There had also been active engagement with the judiciary, including a meeting with the new President of the Supreme Court, and the new Lord Chief Justice at whose swearing-in the President spoke on access to justice covering topics including court fees, criminal legal aid, and the courts modernisation programme. The President reported good progress on the 'pride in the profession' campaign, by way of the Global Legal Centre, attendance at several international conferences, and a busy programme of engagement domestically with local law societies and others.