THE LAW SOCIETY
Business Review 2015-16
Upholding the rule of the law
Welcome

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Foreword

Whether you are working in a high street practice, a commercial, regional or City firm, an ABS (alternative business structure) or in-house for a private, public or charitable organisation, the Law Society exists for you.

We also fulfil, on behalf of the solicitor profession, an important public interest role of supporting access to justice, upholding individual rights and freedoms, supporting public legal education and upholding the rule of law.

This business review sets out our achievements in the 2015-16 financial year. This is the first year of our new strategy and we have focused on delivering our strategic aims, which are to represent, promote and support solicitors. Our business review is one of the ways we report on our strategy progress and against our three year plan, which sets out what we will deliver for our members. We review this plan annually to ensure it remains current and relevant.

We will continue to use your feedback about the issues which are important as you respond to a rapidly changing legal services landscape. As your Law Society, we are determined to make the most of our resources, by delivering products and services you value, as efficiently and effectively as we can, making sure you always get value for money, both from your practising fees, and when you choose to purchase our products and services.

We are committed to putting members at the heart of everything we do. Whether we are seeking to influence governments, campaigning for justice, delivering training or promoting solicitors to the public, we work to make sure your voice is heard, your needs are met and your business is supported.

Our professions’ proud commitment to justice and upholding the rule of law binds us together. We are committed to ensuring that you can make the most of opportunities and can respond to the challenges of an evolving legal sector. This report highlights some of the very practical ways we are doing this. We are always open to hearing your views and hope you enjoy reading this report.

Robert Bourns
President
The Law Society

www.lawsociety.org.uk
We made great progress on our work to represent, promote and support the profession effectively and efficiently this year. This review highlights the strides we made and gives examples of the impact we have had.

A snapshot of our year

We represented solicitors by speaking out for justice and on legal issues.

We acted to influence government and regulatory policy in England, Wales and internationally. We responded to 125 consultations throughout the year and alongside our relationship with the media, our influencing and party conference activities made sure our members were heard. We intervened in legal cases to protect our members’ interests and acted in the public interest on issues which raised concerns about rights, freedoms and access to justice.

We promoted solicitors, highlighting their ethical and professional standards, legal education and training, and the value of using a solicitor at home and abroad.

We raised the profile of the profession through our campaigns and promoted the value solicitors add. We celebrated the best work in the profession, encouraged the best people to join it, regardless of their background, and we informed the public about the benefits of working with a solicitor. A proud profession working in the public interest.

We supported solicitors to develop their careers, expertise and businesses, whether they work for themselves, in-house or a law firm.

We offered helpline support and advice, improved websites, new practice notes, toolkits, events, access to communities and published research on key issues.

We focused on doing all of this efficiently, always mindful of the fact that we are spending members’ money. You can see more detail of our achievements for the profession and in the public interest on the following pages. You can read our full, more detailed annual review on our website.
What we achieved in 2015-16

The number of members the Law Society library has helped with legal research enquiries during 2015-16.

In total 3,979 articles featured the Law Society and 1,512 quoted a Law Society spokesperson, with more than 80 in a major consumer publication or outlet. Our coverage in print media alone had an estimated value of £2.2 million.

Over 33.7m opportunities to see our new brand campaign, alongside 43 online adverts served and 226,000 YouTube video views.

On average, 590,000 visits per month to Find A Solicitor (226% increase on 2014-15).

The Gazette website received over 14,850,000 page views, with a 20.19% increase in users accessing the site.
The Support Centre dealt with 55,403 enquiries with a 97% satisfaction score. The Practice Advice Service answered 26,195 enquiries from members with a 99% satisfaction score.

Members attended 346 events, with 26,608 registered delegates. We offered 570.5 hours of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Our anti-money laundering practice note attracted 199,168 unique external page views. The anti-money laundering helpline receives about 3,000 calls annually.

The number of interventions by the Law Society’s International Action team on behalf of solicitors around the world over the past 12 months, promoting human rights and independent solicitors.

The Law Society gave evidence to parliamentary committees 8 times, briefed parliamentarians on over 20 pieces of legislation and has been mentioned 160 times in Hansard.
How we represented solicitors in 2015-16

We acted to influence government and regulatory policy in England, Wales and internationally. We responded to 125 consultations throughout the year, and our influencing and party conference activities, alongside our relationship with the media, made sure our members were heard. We intervened in legal cases to protect our members’ interests and also acted in the public interest on issues which raised concerns about rights, freedoms and access to justice.

We continued to represent the profession on a range of domestic matters and 2015-16 saw the build up to and the consequences arising from the result of the referendum on the UK’s departure from the European Union (EU).

Influencing government policy

The future of the UK’s relationship with the EU

• Before the referendum

In anticipation of the EU referendum, we published two reports at the end of 2015 to inform members and the wider debate. For the first report we commissioned an independent analysis, which provided a range of assessments of the possible economic impact of Brexit on the legal sector.

This report said that for all parts of the legal sector there would be a period of uncertainty and the possible opportunities and challenges could not be fully predicted. Ultimately, the effect on the legal sector would depend on the terms of any exit and importantly how this would impact clients.

• After the referendum

Since the vote to leave the European Union, we have undertaken a large project focused on:

• representing the views of our members to government
• informing the government’s work on Brexit
• internationally promoting English and Welsh law, and England and Wales as a global legal centre
• supporting the profession through this period of uncertainty with briefings, meetings, roundtables and other resources
We have worked with government to help identify the legal and justice issues that should be addressed as a matter of urgency, and the longer term planning that will need to take place to ensure that the interests of the profession, and our legal system, are safeguarded in any negotiations to leave the EU.

A number of meetings with government and parliamentary stakeholders have taken place, notable examples include meeting with David Davis, MP Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, The Lord Chancellor and justice minister Sir Oliver Heald QC MP and the Home Secretary. We have engaged with a number of civil servants from the Department for Exiting the EU, the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for International Trade and the Intellectual Property Office.

The Justice Select Committee announced an inquiry into the impact of Brexit on the justice system. We submitted written evidence and it is likely that we will be called to give oral evidence. We are also due to submit evidence to the Exiting the EU Select Committee and the Department for Exiting the EU.

We secured substantial media coverage on the issue, highlights of which include an interview with our president on the implications for the legal sector for BBC News, a FT.

We began developing a campaign building on our existing work on promoting England and Wales as the governing law of international contracts.

**What was achieved:** We have influenced the government’s Brexit plans and negotiations, including giving evidence to the EU Select Committee, while promoting the profession, both within the government and with key stakeholders at home and abroad. We will continue to influence the government’s Brexit plans and negotiations, alongside positive promotion of UK solicitors and law firms, especially during these times of political and economic uncertainty.

### Campaigning on access to justice

- **Raising the profile of housing advice deserts**

  In 2016 we developed a new approach to campaigning on access to justice issues by targeting our efforts on a series of specific campaign strands, including on issues resulting from the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

  The first of these focused on legal aid deserts for housing advice. At the heart of this campaign was a legal aid deserts heat map, based on data from the Legal Aid Agency (LAA), which showed that one third of areas in England and Wales had one, or zero, housing legal aid providers.

  We publicised this shortage and pressured the government to address it. This campaign, which we will continue to run in 2017, calls for an independent review into the sustainability of the civil legal aid system, and for the government to seek to commission a second provider in areas that currently only have one. It highlights the importance of the services our members provide to the most vulnerable people, whilst having a direct impact on government policy.

  **What was achieved:** We have received support from the shadow justice team and a number of MPs have supported the campaign in parliament, resulting in responses from the responsible Minister. The issue has also been raised a number of times in Parliament at Justice Questions. We achieved media coverage on BBC London News, on the BBC Radio 4 Today programme, BBC Radio 5 Live and in The Guardian, as well as over 40 regional media outlets, and on the Shelter blog. Our social media Thunderclap had an estimated reach of over 460,000 people.

- **Legal Professional Privilege**

  We secured changes to the Investigatory Powers Act to protect Legal Professional Privilege (LPP). The Investigatory Powers Act would have given government the right to monitor legally privileged material. We wanted to secure protection for this material. We influenced officials, MPs and peers throughout the year, in conjunction with the Bar Council and the Law Societies of Scotland and Northern Ireland.
What was achieved: We persuaded the government to move towards our position and the protection represents a significant improvement. Having express protection for legal professional privilege on the face of the Act is very valuable for our members. While it does not go as far as we would have wished, the alternative represented a complete absence of protection. We also secured national media coverage promoting the issue in City AM and The Times, as well as The Law Society Gazette.

- Anti-Money Laundering (AML)

We worked to preserve the consent regime for solicitors making suspicious activity reports to the National Crime Agency. The government consulted on proposals to change the AML Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) regime by removing the protection offered to solicitors and other reporters provided by the regime.

We strongly opposed the proposals, working closely with our fellow UK law societies and other professional bodies. We reiterated our commitment to maintaining the solicitor profession’s role as a key ally in the fight against money laundering and argued that the consent regime gave important protection for reporters of suspicious activity from the wide-range of money laundering offences. Without it, or a corresponding change offering an equivalent level of protection, the regime would have been over-criminalised and fundamentally unworkable for solicitors, undermining their ability to help the government fight money-laundering.

What was achieved: The government agreed with our position, and in the published Criminal Finances Bill put these proposals on hold. This was welcomed by our members who were potentially facing an unjustified removal of legal cover for meeting their obligations to report suspicious activity.

- Migration Advisory Committee’s (MAC) report

We influenced the MAC report on skilled worker migration so it did not adversely impact international law firms. The MAC is a non-statutory, non-departmental public body, funded by the Home Office, comprising economists and migration experts. The government asked the MAC to advise on ‘significantly reducing the level of economic migration from outside the UK and the EU’.

We argued that if London is to retain its position as a global centre of legal excellence, international law firms based in the UK must continue to be able to recruit skilled solicitors from outside the UK. We also proposed salary levels as a practical way of identifying highly skilled workers, as they inherently reflect market shortages in skills and the economic value of the work being done.

We also said that there should be no change to the position of skilled workers’ dependants’ ability to access the labour market. There was no evidence that those dependants displace UK residents in the labour market, or that restricting dependants’ working rights would reduce their contribution to the public finances.

What was achieved: We were seen as a credible voice for international law firms and the MAC’s recommendations, which were accepted by the government, met our concerns. There were no significant new restrictions that adversely impacted on international firms.

Influencing regulatory policy

There have been significant changes proposed to the regulatory landscape this year and more are on the horizon. It is even more important that we represent our members interests and work to influence how these changes impact them and their clients. Some highlights from this year include:

- Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) Handbook consultation

In June the SRA released two consultations, Looking to the Future: Flexibility and public protection and Looking to the Future: Accounts Rules Review.

These consultations made a number of proposals, including that the Solicitors’ Code of Conduct be replaced with two separate, shorter and simplified codes. One a code for solicitors and another for firms, and for the first time practising solicitors would be able to work in unauthorised entities.
We spoke to solicitors and the public to gather opinions and evidence about the possible impact of the proposals. We held 20 road shows around the UK, more than 1,650 members responded to our survey and over 1,600 consumers responded to a survey commissioned by us. We also presented an economic study and presented case studies to support our response, demonstrating the depth of the opposition to the proposals.

Our response to the consultation was that proposals were not properly evidenced and would demonstrably create consumer confusion and harm, without addressing the concern of unmet legal need and access to justice issues by those struggling to afford legal services. The legal profession and a number of significant consumer groups and organisations wholeheartedly agreed with us.

The SRA is currently considering the responses and we are not expecting the outcome before April 2017.

- Solicitors Qualifying Examination proposals

The SRA released a consultation proposing a new centralised assessment for assuring standards of entry to the profession, whilst proposing to remove all pathways to entry and requirements for a degree level qualification or substantial work-based learning.

We used a strong consultation response to compel the SRA to significantly alter their Solicitors Qualifying Examination proposals and used a widespread media campaign, alongside social media, newsletters and stakeholder relationships, to promote our key messages and encourage stakeholders to respond to the consultation.

What we achieved: As a result of our campaign, the SRA received an unprecedented number of responses, most of which were critical of the proposals and many of which used the key arguments we put forward. As a result, they announced a ‘pause and rethink’ and in October 2016 released another consultation on significantly revised proposals, taking on many of our points. The revised proposals currently under consultation offer a far better solution to the issue of standards for entry, whilst maintaining the key elements of education and training that make the solicitors profession so well respected. We will continue to represent the concerns of our members to the SRA on this issue.

Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) market study on the legal sector

The CMA commenced a market study into the possible failures in the legal market. Our research provided evidence that the market is not failing.

What we achieved: The CMA decided to not launch a full investigation in the legal market and not to launch an intervention on legal services, and as a result, substantial costs were avoided by our members. The full study was subsequently published in January 2017.

Other notable consultations we responded to included:

Civil Courts Structure Review: Interim Report by Lord Justice Briggs:

- We submitted a response to the second stage of a root-and-branch review of the structure of the civil courts in England and Wales, warning that an online court is not a universal remedy for the challenges facing the court system. We recognised the important role of information technology in the justice system and the efficiency savings for lower-value cases that an online approach to civil justice could offer, but warned it was critical that legal advice remained available to help people navigate the online court.

Legal Services: removing barriers to competition:

- We responded to the government’s consultation on alternative business structures (ABS). The consultation focused on the benefits of ABS and considered the removal of additional barriers to external providers’ entry into the legal services market. We are supportive of ABS as they provide choice for solicitors as well as their clients. However, it is critical that the regulatory framework, including client protection, is equal for ABS and solicitor
firms which will enable fair competition.

**HMRC Strengthening Tax Avoidance Sanctions and Deterrents:**

- We responded to the HMRC’s discussion document on strengthening tax avoidance sanctions and deterrents. The proposals included the introduction of sanctions for advisers who design, market or facilitate the use of tax avoidance arrangements which are subsequently deemed unacceptable. Our view is that the overly-wide scope of the definitions, the proposed level of penalties and the implications of LPP for a defence against those penalties could, if implemented, lead to some law firms deciding not to provide tax advice to businesses and investors.

**Ministry of Justice consultation on the Future of Camberwell Green and Hammersmith Magistrates’ Courts:**

- We submitted a response to the MoJ’s consultation on the closure of Camberwell Green and Hammersmith Magistrates’ Court. These proposals closely followed confirmation that 86 courts and tribunals across England and Wales, 10 of them in London, are to close. This represents one fifth of the entire courts estate. We consulted with members to assess the effect of the proposed closures on court users, specifically victims, witnesses and defendants. In the response we raised issues concerning access to justice, the impact on court users, use of technology and young offenders.

**How we influence**

We build individual and group relationships with parliamentary and other stakeholders and we speak out in the media to help get our views across. We publish research and use it to help build evidence for our influencing work and where appropriate we use legal interventions. Some examples from 2015-16 are:

- **Party Conferences**

  We increased our ministerial and parliamentary engagement at the party political conferences this year.

  **Conservatives**

  The president and the chief executive attended the Conservative Party Conference. We hosted a joint reception with the Society of Conservative Lawyers and the Bar Council. Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC MP spoke at the reception, as well as former Attorney General Dominic Grieve QC MP. We also hosted a business reception for conference delegates and stakeholders.

  **Labour**

  At the Labour Party Conference we engaged with key stakeholders on issues such as access to justice and the impact of Brexit on the legal services sector. Vice president Joe Egan spoke at a fringe event hosted by the Society of Labour Lawyers. He also spoke on the legal sector’s priorities for Brexit alongside Shadow Lord Chancellor Richard Burgon MP, Shadow Justice spokesperson Lord Bach and chairman of the Bar Council Chantal-Aimee Doerries.

  **Liberal Democrats**

  Our deputy vice-president Christina Blacklaws attended the Liberal Democrat Conference in Brighton. We were involved in panel sessions with the Liberal Democrat Lawyers Association, and a Q&A session with the Liberal Democrat justice, home affairs and equalities spokespeople.

  **What we achieved:** Our work at party conferences allows us to promote the legal profession and maintain our influence on behalf of our members and the public at the highest levels of government and parliament. They give us the opportunity to meet and network with other key stakeholders, whilst also providing a platform for us to represent the views of our members with decision-makers in parliament. We have briefed parliamentarians for 20 debates and submitted written evidence 8 times.

  - **Boosting coverage of key legal issues and representing members in the media**

  We have focused on achieving greater levels of high profile consumer media coverage.
This has seen both the president and chief executive taking part in a series of broadcasts on key outlets and being interviewed or quoted in national and international print publications and websites. This coverage has covered issues as diverse as the value of legal services, Brexit, advocacy training, access to justice and conveyancing.

We have been on the BBC’s Today programme twice, the BBC’s Victoria Derbyshire show, interviewed by The New York Times, The Guardian, The Times, FT and Five Live, amongst others. We have had letters in the Telegraph and FT and maintained commentary through regular opinion editorials, alongside outputs in the Law Society Gazette and many other trade publications.

In total, 3,979 articles featured the Law Society, 1,512 quoted a Law Society spokesperson, with more than 80 in a major consumer publication or outlet. In commercial terms, our coverage in print media alone had an estimated value of £2.2 million. 1

What we achieved:

142
Media statements issued

975+
Media articles featured the Law Society president

3,364
Tweets sent, which were seen 12.5 million times and interacted with 100,000 times

#
77,000
followers on Twitter. Increased from 65,000 (up 12,000 or 18.5 %)

• Research and Insight

We undertook and commissioned a number of research projects to provide an evidence base for our work, on behalf of members and in the public interest. Our research output was used, for example, in representation activities relating to the Competition and Markets Authority’s (CMA) study, a number of SRA consultations and to improving transparency and service in the supply of professional indemnity to firms.

What we achieved: Over 37,000 visits made to our web pages with research output and over 13,000 outputs downloaded.

Big picture thinking for the profession

We have a programme of research and future focused publications designed to help us influence and to support members as they consider the changing environment in the legal sector. Highlights included:

• Legal Needs Survey 2015

The Legal Needs Survey was the largest ever in England and Wales, with over 8,000 respondents covering 16,694 legal problems faced by these people over the previous three years. The survey enabled us to analyse the different strategies adopted by people in dealing with legal problems, how they chose a legal professional to help with their problem, the outcome they achieved and their satisfaction with this. The survey sample size enabled us to analyse this with a high degree of accuracy.

The survey was used as evidence in our submission to the CMA market study and the SRA consultation on unreserved activities. The survey gave hard evidence on how consumers use, or do not use, price information to select a professional legal adviser. It also enabled us to qualify assertions that there is substantial unmet demand for legal services, as analysis of the survey results showed that a large proportion of people not using legal advisors did so for rational reasons.

1 Provided by Kantar: Based on the estimated cost of purchasing advertising with the same size and prominence as the news articles the Law Society were included in.
• Future of legal services report

We wanted to understand what the legal services market might look like in 2020, including key drivers of change and what this might mean for our members. Findings from this report helped inform the decisions we make about our future strategy and directions.

The report achieved significant press coverage, with our views on the future of the profession being widely reported in newspapers such as The Times and The Guardian, alongside online channels.

As a direct result of this report, we organised a conference, Robots and Lawyers: Partnerships of the Future, to discuss advancements in artificial intelligence and machine-learning technology, and what the future may hold for the legal profession. Over 230 people attended the event, with members from private practice and in-house sections, including representatives from major tech companies and other organisations.

What we achieved: From January to April 2016, the report consistently achieved over 1,200 hits each month on the Law Society website, peaking in February at 2,779 unique views with a total of 10,241 for the year and a further 4,458 hits on associated articles and blogs. We sponsored the inaugural Legal Geek conference, an organisation who are uniquely connected within the UK LawTech start-ups community. This allowed us to be involved in shaping emerging technology solutions in the interests of our members. The report was also used as part of our work profiling innovation and change at events such as the IBA conference.

• Wider Economic Value

We commissioned analysis to quantify the economic value of the legal sector beyond its contribution to GDP. This helped raise the profile of the direct and wider contribution of the legal sector and solicitors in mainstream media.

The report provided a strong evidence base to promote the value of the sector and to ensure that its economic and social contributions were recognised in regulatory consultations throughout 2016. The information in the report gave firms a quantitative link to the value of their work in the production of goods and services in the wider economy and to inform strategic planning. This report was also used to raise the profile of the legal sector with key stakeholders, including at Secretary of State level.

What we achieved: Findings from the report were featured in numerous national press, including The Sunday Times, The FT and BBC Radio 4’s the Today programme alongside trade publications such as The Law Society Gazette.

• Using legal interventions to protect members and the public interest

We use our skills and resources to shape the law and access to justice issues on behalf of the public and our members. Some highlights from 2015-16 are:

› Rights of vulnerable parties

We were given permission to intervene and help the Court to find a solution to the lack of appropriate representatives available for vulnerable people in deprivation of liberty cases. The cases of Re JM and others were heard in the Court of Protection in December 2015 and January 2016.

What we achieved: The court placed responsibility firmly on the government to ensure that vulnerable individuals whose liberty is at stake have appropriate representation, and in a unprecedented judgment handed down in March, it stayed all future similar cases until a workable solution was found. The government has yet to respond.

› Rights of Women

This was a successful challenge against the eligibility criteria for the grant of legal aid for domestic violence victims which were denying vulnerable people access to justice.

What we achieved: The Court ruled that the criteria was unlawful, and as a result amendments are being made to the relevant regulations.

› The Fair Crime Contract Alliance

We were an interested party and provided support for this successful challenge against the lawfulness of the Legal Aid Agency’s (LAA) procurement of criminal duty solicitor contracts.
What we achieved: The government abandoned the scheme.

› The Public Law Project

We appealed against the proposal by the Lord Chancellor to introduce a residence test for civil legal aid.

What we achieved: This appeal secured a finding by the Supreme Court that it was unlawful and we were granted permission to intervene on public interest grounds.

› Embarrassment Clause challenge

Following the LAA’s refusal to heed our concerns raised in its consultation response to the inclusion of an ‘embarrassment clause’ we supported a legal challenge by legal aid practitioners, represented by the Public Law Project.

What we achieved: As a result of issuing a Pre-Action Protocol letter, the LAA agreed to redraft the clause in further consultation with representative groups.

› Legal help costs

This Judicial Review challenged the LAA’s refusal to pay legal help costs carried out in relation to cases taken to the European Court of Human Rights. The substantive hearing was listed to be heard in January 2017. Our work on this issue included a written intervention in support of the claimant’s renewed application for a protective costs order which was granted.

What we achieved: The claimant’s renewed application for a protective costs order has now been granted.

› Data retention legislation

We intervened in the Court of Appeal challenge by Labour’s Tom Watson MP and Conservative David Davis MP (who withdrew it following his appointment to the Cabinet), asserting that UK government’s data retention legislation is incompatible with EU law. The matter was referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and we were granted permission to make submissions on the issue of legal professional privilege.

What we achieved: Following written and oral submissions at the hearing in Luxembourg in April, the Court handed down judgment on 21 December agreeing with the Advocate General’s Opinion released in July. The judgment is favourable and supports the position we advocated that government retention of data must be subject to strict measures that safeguards professional privilege.

› Legal Aid Funding

We intervened in the appeal to the Supreme Court challenging the lawfulness of the application of the Legal Aid exceptional case funding scheme. The Court of Appeal invited us to intervene in this case which will consider whether defendant insurers are entitled to recover costs paid to solicitors under the road traffic accident fixed costs regime where the claim is not pursued.

What we achieved: We made written submissions supporting the right of solicitors to maintain monies properly received under the fixed costs regime. The case will be heard in February 2017.

Influencing in Wales

We have regular and growing interaction with the Welsh government across directorates and cabinet members. The Welsh government has an increasing justice policy function and an interest in supporting solicitors working in the financial services sector. Our focus is on maintaining and increasing our engagement with the Welsh government as they develop and make new laws for our members with clients based in or with interests in Wales.

During this election year we remained a trusted stakeholder and were involved at an early stage with matters which will impact our members’ practices. Areas targeted included developing policy, legislation and initiatives affecting the profession, such as:

• the new stamp duty land tax legislation
• the establishment of a new Welsh Revenue Authority
• economic policy
• the financial offering to the profession
• the developing justice policy function
We were invited to participate in a Ministerial Justice Stakeholders Group to consider law and justice in Wales. The chair of this group, solicitor Mick Antoniw AM (Assembly Member), was appointed Counsel General in the new Welsh government.

We were also invited to join the Welsh Revenue Authority implementation programme board. When the new Land Transaction Tax legislation was published the Cabinet Secretary spoke at a seminar at our Wales office, which was attended by over 50 members including those who practise in England.

**What we achieved:** We have maintained our influencing position at the highest levels of Welsh government, allowing us to support our members, influence new law, solicitors’ businesses and justice more broadly. By engaging early at a high level on policy development we were able to influence the practical implementation of a new tax collection mechanism in a field dominated by solicitors acting on behalf of clients.

**Influencing in Brussels**

Brexit was the primary focus for the team in Brussels. The office provided information on the UK’s EU membership and supported our Brussels and EU-based members by responding to their queries and concerns about a post-Brexit environment.

We enhanced our legal services work by developing direct relationships with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) secretariat and national delegations to the WTO. We organised three thought-leadership events in Brussels and Geneva, and stood as the professional body of reference on international trade in legal services with the newly-formed Department for International Trade in London, Directorate-General for Trade in Brussels and the WTO in Geneva.

In February 2016, EU Justice Commissioner Vera Jourova visited our London office to discuss justice policies, adapting consumer law to the digital age, as well as equality and diversity in the legal profession.

**What we achieved:** We continued our important work of contributing to EU law reform, responding to consultations, including Capital Markets Union (Insolvency reforms), Digital Single Market (including IP reforms), Corporate Taxation and the General Data Protection Regulation.

**Influencing internationally**

Our work internationally upholds and defends the rule of law and human rights abroad. Our members’ expertise as English and Welsh solicitors is valued abroad and enhances their opportunities to access further benefits. We represent the interests of our members and protect their rights when abroad. Our work creates networking opportunities for legal practitioners and opens contacts with legal professionals in other jurisdictions.

**What we achieved:**

- 2,850 delegates attended 50 events in London
- 280 delegates attended 2 English Law days in Moscow (Russia) and Almaty (Kazakhstan)
- 17 incoming delegations from Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Ghana, India, Malaysia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Philippines, Georgia, Japan, Fiji, South Korea, Russia, Kazakhstan, Brazil and China
- 7 roundtables organised on doing legal business in Azerbaijan, Central Asia, China, Hong Kong, India and Panama
Promoting the use of English law and of England and Wales and the role of England and Wales as a global legal centre

In order to open new business opportunities for our members, we organised a series of platforms to provide information on new legal markets and connect them with legal professionals around the world. We hosted foreign delegations from various countries to build those contacts and opportunities, enlarging the spectrum of professional engagements for our members. These foreign delegations represent a crucial avenue to promote the use of English and Welsh law amongst practitioners, and to promote England and Wales as a global legal centre worldwide.

Exploring new markets for our members

We explored new markets in Iran, Argentina and Cuba to identify new business opportunities for our members.

Iran

The easing of international sanctions on Iran generated a great deal of interest in the international business community, including law firms. The country is the largest new market to open up in over a decade. However, many challenges remain. Member firms are therefore looking to us for information, support and contacts to help them assess the apparent opportunities. We began building links with the country’s legal profession. For example, we met with the president of the Central Bar Association as well as several Iranian law firms.

Argentina

After more than 10 years of international isolation, the election of president Macri in Argentina signalled the country’s return to the global marketplace. Given the interest in Argentina and the potential of the reform process, we began building links with the legal profession, including a market visit to Buenos Aires, meeting with local law firms and the legal committee of the British Argentine Chamber of Commerce. We have developed links with the Argentine Embassy in London and hosted a number of joint events with the British Argentine Chamber of Commerce. We also hosted lawyers from Argentina as part of our Latin America day programme.

Cuba

We saw a softening in US-Cuban relations and signalling by the Cuban government of its intention to liberalise its economy. Given the significant interest in these developments by our members, we hosted a roundtable discussion with the British Ambassador to Cuba to discuss the potential opportunities and challenges for international law firms wishing to operate there.

“
At Sherrards, we are very happy to make introductions to Cuban professionals through our links via UK Trade & Investment (UKTI), the Law Society and the American Bar Association. Our thanks to the Law Society for holding this briefing.

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Paul Marmor, Head of International Services at Sherrards Solicitors, referring to the briefing on Cuba at the Law Society, July 2016.
Human Rights

We played a crucial role in monitoring the situation in Turkey since July 2016, including the dismissal of 2,745 judges and of our members. We maintained contact with the British consulate in Istanbul and met with Turkish lawyers in London as part of our on-going support.

We sent a joint statement, in conjunction with the Bar Council and other stakeholders, to five UN Special Rapporteurs on the arrest and detention of the lawyers Ayşe Acınikli and Ramazan Demir. These two lawyers were awaiting trial on terrorism-related charges. With the Lawyers’ Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) we also submitted an Amicus Curiae brief on freedom of expression and pre-trial release to the Turkish Constitutional Court in the case of these two solicitors. Both have since been released after 156 days of pre-trial detention.

A meeting was held between our officeholders and the widow of the lawyer Tahir Elci. We had previously sent intervention letters on behalf of Mr. Elci, but unfortunately he was killed in November 2015. We sent an intervention letter highlighting serious deficiencies in the investigation of his death.

Another meeting took place between our vice president and three Turkish lawyers to discuss the independence of the legal profession in Turkey in the aftermath of the failed coup. We are continuing to monitor the effectiveness of the Turkish legal system and we will support solicitors and human rights defenders in Turkey and other countries.

What we achieved:

743
International Division members, increased by 13.05% (646) from Nov 2015 to Oct 2016

34
intervention letters sent on cases of lawyers and human rights at risk and 5 international projects agreed upon

24
countries visited, including Colombia, Iran, Kenya, China, Japan, South Korea, Kazakhstan, Hungary, France, Spain, US, Brazil, Argentina, Angola, Zambia, Sweden and Chile

Business and Human Rights

As law firms come under increasing pressure to recognise human rights, not only due to corporate responsibility obligations, but also the needs of their clients, we launched a programme to address business and human rights in the legal profession. After consulting with members on the implications for law firms in England and Wales, we published practical guidance on policies and procedures.

What we achieved: The guide is a useful resource for all practitioners and firms, including those working in specific practice areas of law such as corporate governance, enterprise risk management, reporting and disclosure, and disputes.

“Thank you ever so much. I am really delighted to be able to participate in these events and very grateful to you and the Law Society for organising them.

Sebastian Lawson, Partner, Freshfields, referring to referring to English Law Day in Almaty (Kazakhstan), May 2016

"
How we promoted solicitors in 2015-16

We worked to raise the profile of the solicitor profession and promote the value that solicitors add. We celebrated the best work in the profession, encouraged the best people to join it, regardless of their background and we told the public about the benefits of working with a solicitor.

Promoting the benefits of using a solicitor

We extended the *Use A Professional* marketing campaign to May 2016. We used a range of communication channels to promote solicitors including online advertising, social media, member videos on YouTube and making marketing materials available to members, enabling them to promote their practices. The campaign built on the work in 2015 and delivered increased engagement with private client members and significantly increased the number of visits to Find A Solicitor (FAS), which provides details of solicitors’ specialist areas of practice.

In 2016 we developed a new campaign to promote the brand of solicitor based on the findings of research with members, the public and commissioners of legal services. In the spring and summer we worked with members to develop materials for the new campaign which we launched in October 2016. The campaign features our members on advertising and marketing materials and will continue into 2017, using outdoor advertising on buses, rail stations and on the roadside, as well as online advertising, social media engagement across a number of platforms, national and regional magazine advertising and member videos on YouTube.

The Law Society
Accreditations

Encouraging the public to choose a solicitor

We currently have a portfolio of 17 accreditations which support solicitors and their practice, enabling them to demonstrate expertise to potential clients and providing them with assurance of specialist expertise.

Four accreditations are for regulated entities and 13 are for individual practitioners. We are currently reviewing and making improvements to ensure our accreditations remain relevant, reflect the market and current practice.

In 2015-16 we reviewed several accreditations, with the key objective ensuring they remain a robust quality mark awarded to practitioners who specialise in this field, providing clients with the confidence that their case is being managed by a solicitor with the necessary experience and skill.

Practice level accreditations

What we achieved: The first phase of the new brand campaign delivered:
Immigration and asylum review

We produced a revised syllabus which better reflects the duties of practitioners and removed elements of the initial accreditation testing which were no longer relevant or practical. We produced guidance notes to help candidates study for their exams and replaced the re-accreditation exam with an online course, giving candidates greater flexibility.

Personal injury and clinical negligence

Both schemes were revised and re-launched in early 2016, with more emphasis on proof of competence and ability. The application process now uses a portfolio-based approach to assess expertise, including evidence of knowledge and experience.

Individual accreditations

Further developments are planned as we continue to listen to feedback and work with our members.

Children Law

The accreditation requirements and the assessment process has been updated to include developments in law and practice, with a greater focus on advocacy, particularly given the vulnerability of the clients being represented. Those accredited to represent adults now have their specialist expertise recognised under the Family Law Advanced accreditation, so that the Children Law accreditation clearly focuses on the representation of children in public law proceedings.

“I have to say that two of my team have sat the new level 2 exams and I think it is a great improvement.”

Zofia Duszynska, solicitor, Duncan Lewis
Wills and Inheritance Quality Scheme (WIQS)

We ran a series of legal advice surgeries for members of the public who needed advice on caring for someone with Alzheimer's or dementia at the Alzheimer's Show in London. Scheme members provided one to one advice on a range of subjects including will drafting, advance care planning, lasting power of attorney, care home funding and issues court of protection. In total, 50 one to one sessions were held as well as over 70 conversations with visitors.

"The 15 minutes of advice I’ve just received was the most useful conversation I’ve had in the last two years of looking after my dad."

WIQS exhibition stand visitor

Excellence Awards

This year we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Excellence Awards, continuing our role promoting the outstanding work of solicitors across the legal profession. We received a total of 416 nominations across the 17 award categories, including the new in-house team category, matching the previous year’s total, which was the highest in the awards’ history.

What we achieved: The winners were announced at our prestigious ceremony in October 2016, at the Hilton Park Lane, with over 650 people in attendance. In promoting the Excellence Awards in the press and across social media, we achieved:

Our social media campaign resulted in:

- 3,507 tweets from over 1000 Twitter users
- 1.6m Twitter users reached
- 28.5m estimated tweet views
- 155 articles covering the awards

Conveyancing

Improving the CQS re-accreditation process

We have simplified the process resulting in an improved member experience and have increased the efficiency in processing applications. The accreditation will continue to be awarded for 12 months, but will follow a three year assessment cycle, so practices submit a full application in year one and complete a reduced process in years two and three. In year four, practices are asked to complete the full re-accreditation.

CQS Quality Assurance

The continuous assurance process gives key stakeholders, lenders, insurers, consumers and clients the confidence that members are adhering to good practice management, financial and risk procedures, adhering to prudent and efficient residential conveyancing procedures through the Conveyancing Protocol, and providing their clients with a consistent and high quality standard of service.
How we supported solicitors in 2015-16

We offered helpline support and advice, an improved website, new practice notes, toolkits, events, access to communities and published research on key issues.

Our Insights Community provides a quick way of obtaining feedback from members across a range of issues. We undertook 21 research projects with Insights Community members and by participating in research, members are able to actively contribute to our work. These contributions informed developments in many of the support services we provide to members, including developing the Professional Development Centre, Find A Solicitor and the format and content of our Sections.

Some highlights from our work to support members in 2015-16 include:

**Education and learning**

- **Professional Development Centre (PDC)**

  Continuing competence has now come into force for all solicitors, and in response we launched the PDC. All solicitors who had not already moved to continuing competence were required to do so by the SRA.

  The new Professional Development Centre helps solicitors meet the revised requirements, enabling them to assess themselves against the SRA Competence Statement and capture their training against the new requirements, record their reflections on the training undertaken, and evidence their self declaration in one free online record.

  We developed new bite-sized training and a selection of new free 10–15 minute e-learning courses. These shorter pieces have been specifically designed in response to member feedback that one of the biggest challenges was fitting training into their busy schedules. We work with Sections colleagues to identify important topics to enhance the offering.

  Just over 41,500 users were migrated from the CPD Centre onto the new Professional Development Centre with their existing training transcripts, along with 336 unique pieces of learning content.
• Expert publications

As part of our commitment to professional development we regularly publish new and revised editions and new publications to support members. Members are able to benefit from a range of high quality expert publications that are specifically designed to develop their skills, keep them up-to-date with their practice areas, and help them to develop their firms and remain compliant with their regulatory obligations.

What we achieved: Last year we developed and produced 21 practitioner publications and some of our most popular titles were The Conveyancing Handbook, 23rd edition, the SRA Code of Conduct and Account Rules and The SRA Handbook (November 2015 edition).

Help and advice for members

• Member Support Centre

The Support Centre is the first point of contact for many of our members and has been providing ongoing support for member registration and usage of My Law Society. Following the launch, some members were experiencing difficulty registering an account. The team worked to support those members through the registration process. My Law Society is designed to be a self service portal, however, members requiring support are able to contact the Support Centre for help.

What we achieved: The Support Centre dealt with 55,403 enquiries with a 97% satisfaction score.

• Practice Advice Service (PAS)

The Practice Advice Service offers free and confidential support and advice on legal practice and procedure. The service is staffed by experienced solicitors who have access to a wide range of information resources and specialists.

What we achieved:

26,195 enquiries answered by the Practice Advice Service on a range of practice and procedural issues

99% satisfaction score

“After finding out that fraudsters had intercepted emails between ourselves and our client which resulted in our client not receiving a legacy, we immediately contacted the Law Society for advice. We did not expect the help and support we received; we always thought that when anything went wrong you were on your own with minimal guidance and left to get on with it. It is a very lonely place when you realise that a substantial amount of clients’ money has been stolen and you are liable to make up the shortfall. We were pleasantly surprised by the genuine and caring support plus professional help and advice. There is help available when things go wrong.”

Law Society member firm
• Anti-Money laundering (AML)

We provide trusted advice and guidance to our members on AML. Solicitors in England and Wales are subject to what is arguably the most stringent AML regime in the world, with strong penalties for non-compliance. We are the named supervisory authority for solicitors in England and Wales in the Money Laundering Regulations 2007. We have offered advice and support to our members through a number a of channels, for example the AML Practice Note, the AML helpline and an AML Toolkit. The bi-monthly AML newsletter has a subscription of 22,000 and we run a major annual AML conference.

Our free and confidential helpline offers advice on a range of AML topics and we also support an AML Directory of solicitors who practise in this area and are willing to offer 30 minutes of free legal advice to other solicitors.

The AML practice note attracted:

What we achieved: The HM Treasury approval of our AML practice note gives it legal authority and provides safe harbour for solicitors who can face criminal penalties for unintentional involvement in money-laundering. Our work has also been cited in court cases and Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal cases and by our international peers as an example of best practice in helping legal professionals comply with their AML obligations.

• Threat of cyber crime

Over 60% of law firms are now subject to cyber crime, yet a significant number are yet to put in place a mitigation plan. As such, we have been at the forefront of offering advice and guidance to scheme members on how to deal with this issue.

We delivered a series of Cyber Protect workshops in conjunction with the Cyber Protect team at the National Crime Agency, helping firms understand and mitigate this growing threat. By adding value to holding a CQS accreditation. We developed clear and concise information about this threat and signposted member firms to organisations that can help them further understand the current landscape and make positive changes to their working practices.

What we achieved: Events were held across England and Wales in which participants learnt how to assess threats and use simple technology to mitigate them. One firm has reported that after attending the workshop they helped save their client from losing a substantial amount of money after they fell victim to an email intercept scam.

• My Law Society

We launched My Law Society, our free online portal, in 2016, which lets members:

• personalise their log in homepage with information they want to hear about from us, the Law Society Gazette and Gazette jobs
• enhance their Find a Solicitor profile
• access the solicitor brand campaign materials, where they can download the marketing collateral they wish to use to promote themselves and the profession.
What we achieved: Over 7,500 people registered with My Law Society with more registering every week. We will be continually enhancing and developing the platform to meet the needs of our members.

- Find a Solicitor

We launched Find A Solicitor personalised profiles in early 2016 which allowed our members, for the first time, to update non-regulated information on the platform via My Law Society as well as adding new information such as taglines, social media links and more detailed descriptions about them and their firms.

What we achieved: On average, Find a Solicitor had over 590,000 visits per month, a 226% increase on 2014-15.

What we achieved:

- Learning and networking events

Members attend our events for a number of different reasons, such as continuing professional development, practice area updates, networking, thought leadership or when they are admitted to the Roll. We run events across England and Wales and internationally to support their needs.

88,980

calls answered

6,515
-enquiries received (email/letter)

89.9%
- Customer satisfaction scores

9,806
-member enquiries dealt with

77%
of the Top 100 used the library’s legal research service

97%
of users are likely or highly likely to recommend it

The excellent service I have received today was not an isolated instance but entirely consistent with the excellent service that I had received in the past-I do not see how you could possibly improve. I have sent a personal thank you e-mail to the librarian in question.

Library user

The Law Society Library

The library supports our members by providing them with a well resourced legal research service. Our legal research service acts as a link between our members and the information they need and is used by all types of solicitors, from trainees to retired, and all types of organisations, from sole practitioners to City firms. The library handles around 10,000 research requests per year.

The results of the library satisfaction survey showed 97% of members were highly likely or likely to recommend us to a colleague.
We continue to realign our events programme with developments. Our Competition Section has held seminars for members discussing the significant implications for competition lawyers. Our other Sections and Communities have Brexit seminars and events planned in 2017.

What we achieved:

- **346** events
- **26,608** registered delegates
- **570.5** hours of CPD over the year

"Excellent conference with outstanding speakers, insightful talks and an inspiring atmosphere of young lawyers."

Evelina Lapinskaite, paralegal Dentons UKMEA
Junior Lawyers Division annual conference and ball 2016

**Conduct of immigration judicial review**

We published a response to changes in practice, procedures and judgments in the Upper Tribunal which have emphasised the importance of compliance with the amended rules and the case management obligations upon legal representatives.

**Fiduciary roles and retirement or departure by a private client practitioner**

Guidance to assist firms in addressing the issues that arise when a solicitor, who has held fiduciary roles, retires or departs from a practice.

**Raising concerns and whistle blowing - guidance for staff**

Detailed advice on the regulatory obligations on solicitors to raise concerns and report them to the SRA, providing advice for individuals on how to raise concerns about the actions of their firm or organisation.

**In-house pro bono regulatory requirements**

Help for in-house solicitors wishing to offer pro bono services to the public, showing them how to do so in accordance with the SRA Handbook.

**Protecting your firm if you fall victim to a scam**

For firms holding client accounts which are therefore vulnerable to the risk of theft of confidential data which could lead to the theft of money held in client accounts.

**Semi-automated legal services**

This covers the risks for firms and their duties to clients, particularly in respect of their professional conduct duties when delivering legal services electronically and online.

**Execution of documents using an electronic signature**

Help for parties who wish to execute commercial contracts under English and Welsh law using an electronic signature. This practice note was prepared jointly with the City of London Law Society.

**Maintaining professional standards and sharing best practice**

- **Practice notes and toolkits**

Our practice notes are amongst the most visited pages on our website. Our research tells us that many members value the guidance these provide. We continued to update and develop them through our special committees and communities, producing 7 new additions this year.
• Legal Aid

We supported members going through the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) tender process for criminal legal aid contracts. We held a series of eight road shows and a webinar providing members with the information they needed to help them understand what was required in this process.

What was achieved: Our members, who undertake criminal legal aid work, were provided with valuable information to help them remain in business. Our eight road shows and webinar were attended and viewed by over 300 people each.

• Review of the Tier 5 Government Authorised Exchange scheme

Our scheme for migrant lawyers enables firms to continue to develop international networks and provides certainty in planning secondment and exchange programmes. Our review enabled us to continue providing a cost-effective service to our members, helping them employ non-UK staff with the skills they need within their organisation.

We redeveloped procedures and developed the system to allow us to better track visa expiry dates, which helped us reduce risk and improve our engagement with members. These members now have a better understanding of their obligations to the Law Society and Home Office and we are also better supporting members to have access to bringing over migrant workers. A total of 38 firms renewed their membership on the scheme.

“Sponsorship under Tier 5 Government Authorised Exchange through the Law Society allows a level of flexibility that would not otherwise be achieved without their support.”

Law Society member

• The Law Society Gazette

The Gazette is the most widely read title in the legal sector. It is now available via print, an app and daily news update formats, keeping the legal profession up to date with what is going on in our sector. Alongside our Law Society website, The Gazette website was made fully responsive, enabling it to be viewed on all devices.

Across this 12 month period, the Gazette website received over 14,850,000 page views.

What we achieved:

20.7%

increase in page views from the previous year across editorial pages of the Gazette

71%

of practising solicitors had read the hard copy Gazette, with 62% rating it seven or more out of 10

20.9%

increase in users accessing the website over last year
We launched our responsive www.lawsociety.org.uk website, making it more accessible and easy to use on mobile devices. It is vital that we communicate with our members and other Law Society website users in the way that is most convenient for them. The use of mobile devices to access our website has been increasing year on year. The website now works on many different devices, from a phone to a smart TV, and everything in between.

What we achieved:

“By the way, the Gazette is a wonderful paper, lively, well-written and an excellent read. Lawyers and legal journalists at their best.”

Philip Wood CBE, partner, Allen and Overy

• The Law Society website

We have increased member engagement through social media, building a stronger platform to inform decision makers and the public of the benefits of using a solicitor. Our primary Twitter channel has more than 78,000 followers, and our LinkedIn page has over 33,000 members.

What we achieved: Our Klout score, 64, is a key measure of social media impact and influence, putting us in the top 5% of all social media users. The average Klout Score is 40.

Pro bono support

Every year solicitors across England and Wales volunteer free legal advice to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. These free legal services are provided by the legal profession to those who would otherwise be unable to get the legal advice they need.

We increased our work to support pro bono this year, working with the Bar Council and the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx). We also partnered with key charities including the London Legal Support Trust, the Access to Justice Foundation and the Bar Pro Bono Unit.

Our pro bono support included the launch of our Charter in and Manual in 2016 as well as our ongoing funding of LawWorks, the solicitors pro bono charity. Signatories to the Charter are eligible for a three month trial membership with LawWorks, including access to their online information and resources.

• The development of a Pro Bono Charter

The Pro Bono Charter, supported by LawWorks, allows firms from across the profession to demonstrate a commitment to pro bono, whilst also providing them with guidance and networking opportunities. The Charter provides a common commitment for solicitors across England and Wales, allowing them to speak with a unified voice.

The Charter enables firms and in-house legal teams to celebrate and promote their pro bono work, while offering assistance and guidance, ensuring that members are benefiting from the collective knowledge we gather.
The Law Society Business Review 2015/16

I welcome the Pro Bono Charter as an innovation that will bring the solicitor profession together in its support of pro bono, helping to strengthen the already generous contribution that the solicitor profession makes to society through the voluntary free advice it provides to individuals, communities and NGOs.

Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC MP

Pro Bono Manual

Our Pro Bono Manual is a practical guide for developing a law firm’s pro bono programme, compiled by law firms, to enhance and support the provision of pro bono services. It is primarily aimed at mid-sized law firms, but is also useful for smaller firms, individuals, ABS and large law firms as a best practice reference. There is also a section for in-house solicitors, and most of the chapters are applicable to in-house teams.

The Manual is part of our ongoing commitment to share knowledge and further the development of pro bono work domestically and internationally.

National Pro Bono Week

National Pro Bono Week is a nationwide campaign to amplify the range and impact of pro bono work for the public good. It is an annual event at the start of November, sponsored by the Law Society, the Bar Council and the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx). The week celebrates the breadth and impact of pro bono work undertaken by the legal profession across the year.

It provides a useful and recognised marker within the year to plan and review progress. It also provides a visible demonstration of important coordination and collaboration within the pro bono sector.

Public Legal Education

Solicitors provide public legal education to the community, helping people understand their rights and how the legal system works. We published new guidance for solicitors on how to help the public understand and protect their rights. Through public legal education we aim to:

- raise awareness of rights and legal issues and of the wider justice system
- help people to identify the legal dimensions of everyday situations
- equip people with the skills and confidence to resolve issues and prevent problems
- enable people to recognise when they need help and find the best help
- help people to organise effectively for legal and social changes and get involved
- shaping the decisions that affect them both at a local and national level

We are a major funder of the Citizenship Foundation, who provide public legal education, since it was established in 1989 (and its previous incarnation as the Law in Education project). The Citizenship Foundation creates high quality educational resources, delivers interactive workshops in schools and provides teacher training.

We also support the work our members engage in through the foundation’s ‘Lawyers in Schools’ programme, which connects lawyers with local schools who are seeking legal education for their students. It is a unique skills-based employee volunteering opportunity designed to increase young people’s awareness and understanding of the law.
Celebrating and improving diversity within our profession

We work to support and celebrate our increasingly diverse membership and help firms consider their approach to equality and diversity. Alongside our divisions, some highlights this year include:

- Social Mobility Ambassadors

In the second year of our Social Mobility Ambassadors project we recruited 10 new ambassadors. These solicitor ambassadors shared their experiences of entering the profession including the challenges they faced and how they overcame them. We considered the demographic area, gender, and other protected groups such as disability, ethnicity and sexuality to help us select a broad range of ambassadors.

The Solicitors for Social Mobility: The Ambassadors publication was launched in October, showing that the solicitor profession is made up of talented individuals from all walks of life. Through this we are raising the aspirations of potential solicitors by showing them that the profession welcomes talent regardless of background.

The ambassadors share practical tips and provide inspiration and insight to aspiring solicitors, which was showcased through interviews on our website as well as being published in a printed publication. We also created a platform for the ambassadors to answer questions from aspiring solicitors, and worked with charities and institutions to host panel discussions, talks and networking opportunities.

What we achieved: The ambassadors project has received regional and national press, including the BBC, which helps to profile the work we are doing in this area and shows a diverse profession to the public. This initiative supports students by providing a useful tool on access to the profession. More than 500 aspiring students were engaged through the Pathways to Law conference, University fairs, student events, the Stephen Lawrence Trust foundation and Ask-an-Ambassador. We also saw over 4,000 website visits on our Social Mobility Ambassador page.

"I have received lots of positive feedback from my local community about my social mobility ambassador role, in particular that my career story and the career stories of the other ambassadors shows that the solicitors’ profession is open to anyone of talent who is willing to work hard. I think that the scheme really improves the solicitor brand by building a new narrative that it is an open profession and not just a profession for those from certain narrow backgrounds."

Karl Brown, solicitor and Social Mobility Ambassador

- Mentoring

We ran a pilot mentoring scheme to support people in groups which are under represented at senior levels to make progress in the profession. We matched 89 pairs of mentors and mentees to help their development.

"I can honestly say that I have benefitted greatly from the interaction the mentoring programme allowed as it helped me to develop my mindset by looking at the mentor/mentee relationship in a different way. Full marks to the Law Society and the mentoring programme."

Mentee
• **Diversity and Inclusion Charter**

The Diversity and Inclusion Charter is a public commitment by legal practices to promote the values of diversity, equality and inclusion throughout their business. Whether it is through recruitment, retention, career progression or training and development, all our signatories are committed to improving opportunities for people in the legal profession, regardless of their background or circumstances. There is no charge to sign up to the charter and it is backed up by free toolkits and protocols.

**What we achieved:** 495 firms are signed up and have ongoing access to our toolkits and protocols to support their work on equality and diversity, an increase of 112 from the previous year. In total 341 firms took part in the self assessment, compared to the 239 firms who took part in the last assessment period in 2013.

• **Black History Month**

We have been sponsoring Black History Month since 2009 and this year we ran a programme of events and a free photographic exhibition. The first event featured high profile Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) solicitors and included Justice Dobbs, the first BAME high court judge and Tan Ikram a District judge and Law Society Social Mobility Ambassador.

Our other events help support and prepare BAME students interested in a career in law. Students receive interview coaching and practical tips on CV preparation, they are also given the opportunity to win an internship, mentoring and a lunch with a solicitor. For the past four years we have successfully partnered with Irwin Mitchell and provided an inspirational evening of positive role models. The event showcases the achievements of BAME lawyers in the profession, providing positive role models.

• **Diwali celebratory event**

Asian solicitors make up the largest single ethnic minority group in the profession. To celebrate and highlight their contribution we host an event to coincide with Diwali. In addition to raising awareness of Diwali to the wider legal profession, it gives us the opportunity to collaborate with external stakeholders who form an important part of the profession. This year’s Diwali event featured Sir Rabinder Singh, the first Asian High Court judge, the deputy Indian High commissioner, and a networking reception.

• **Eid Event**

To mark Eid we hosted a celebratory event in association with the Association of Muslim lawyers. Eid is an important religious occasion in the calendar and by supporting this event we help raise awareness of Eid to the wider legal community and strengthen our relationship with our Muslim membership. The event featured a guest speaker, Nazir Afzal OBE. In addition to showcasing the achievements of high profile Muslim lawyers in the profession it provides access to positive role models.

**Targeted services for members**

Our membership offer is not one size fits all. Here are some of the things we did for particular groups of our members in 2015-16.

**Regional support for members**

We took a new approach to our regional support services, identifying a number of areas where we could improve how we represent, promote and support our members across England and Wales. We now target resources to where groups of members and law societies are based, providing improved links to in-house members, making better use of communication channels.
Greater London, South East and East

In the London, South East and East we continued our ongoing firm visits and local law society visits, as well as Office Holder member engagement at local and regional events for members supporting policy or business topics. The Presidents and Secretaries conference for local law societies saw 89 delegates from over 50 local law societies attend, making it the largest event in its history.

Midlands & South West

We formed the Midlands Risk group which provides a forum for the region’s largest 100 firms. We provided forums and conferences on areas such as international work, Brexit, regulation and business development.

North

We engaged on a one to one basis with the largest 200 firms, with local law societies and communities in the region, including the Junior Lawyers and Women Lawyers divisions. Our work included targeted engagement with communities to promote their activities, particularly with the revival of the Association of North Western Law Societies and the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies.

City

Throughout the year a number of events took place to engage and work with our members. A highly successful event was organised as part of City Week; What place does ethics have in modern business. Since the referendum, engagement with firms has been ongoing. In particular, 20 meetings have been held with American firms.

- Support based on who members are and what they do

Our communities, made up of divisions and sections, provide support, advice, networking opportunities and best practice sharing across all areas of practice.

We offer tailored support designed to keep members connected and updated. These communities bring together solicitors and other experts with shared interests, and provide access to relevant support and benefits. Our divisions offer free member support services based on your demographic or practice type and sections are subscription-based.

Law Society Divisions

- Ethnic Minority Lawyers Division

The division has been working on a series of inspirational events aimed at celebrating the work of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) solicitors within the profession and through society as a whole. The list of events tied into other areas of work, such as career progression, judicial diversity, Human Rights Week and Black History Month.

- Women Lawyers Division

This division started a new body of work, the Sisters in Law project, looking at the experiences of BAME women within the profession. Whilst there are many shared experiences with their white counterparts, there are also subtle differences and experiences for BAME women. The project has brought together BAME women to provide a forum for discussion and explore possible solutions to key issues that impact their career development and progression.

- Lawyers with Disabilities Division

The division launched the #MainstreamDisability project that aims to promote awareness of the impact that disability has on identity, discuss the impact of disability on mental health, and support firms to move beyond adjustments to inclusion.
• Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)
We launched our LGBT division, which already has 300 members, alongside 83 active members using our new social network app, helping to connect LGBT solicitors in England and Wales. We also had an excellent pride season, with over 250 people signing up to represent the Law Society in the London march and for the first time ever we marched in Cardiff pride, with another 100 people taking part.

• Junior Lawyers Division (JLD)
In addition to tailored web content, regular e-communications and a host of events and support, the JLD has been active throughout the year safeguarding and representing junior lawyers, ensuring that the impact of any proposed changes to SRA regulation or government policy which directly affects them were heard by the decision makers. Our work experience guidance sets out best practice for firms offering work experience to aspiring trainees.

"It helped me as a future lawyer to gain some insight into how to qualify and do well in my career."

A Junior Lawyer Division member

• Solicitor Judges Division
This division was relaunched with an expanded remit. This network of solicitor judges and aspiring solicitor judges have attended a launch event, co-hosted with the Advocacy section, providing the opportunity for solicitor advocates to meet and directly network with solicitor judges. Members also have access to regular e-communications with news and highlighted opportunities.

• In-house Division
This division is aimed at the growing in-house solicitor community working in corporate, government, not for profit and charity sectors. One third of solicitors will be working in-house by 2020, requiring targeted and distinct support from us. A regular e-magazine, e-newsletters, events and a flagship annual conference are part of the offering. We also provide information and guidance on career progression, regulation and compliance.

• Small Firms Division
Providing a resource for best practice and guidance, information and support, this division saw over 10,000 visitors to its community web page and 1,000 members attended targeted events including an annual conference in Leeds and London. Members also attended networking events including our ‘how to start up a small law firm’ and accessed tailored webinars.

Law Society Sections

• Advocacy Section
The Advocacy Section successfully delivered a targeted programme of support through practical webinars, seminars and networking events to its members. The quarterly e-newsletter delivered provided practical guidance and tips from well regarded solicitor advocates.

"The Advocacy Section is an extremely useful resource for all solicitors who value learning about key developments and sharing the experiences of other practitioners in their chosen field. In some ways I would liken it to a sort of online Inn of Court for solicitor-advocates."

Mark Humphries, Advocacy Section
• Civil Litigation Section

We continued to engage with practitioners across England and Wales, hosting a series of workshops designed to provide our members with a forum for discussing and learning from solicitors in their area as well as providing feedback and case studies. We have put members in front of key stakeholders in the field of litigation, including Lord Justice Jackson and Lord Justice Briggs. We also published guides on Brexit, costs and fixed fees.

• Competition Section

The Competition Section has engaged with over 1,100 members in the past year, with highlights including an annual dinner and awards night with keynote speaker, acting CEO of the CMA, Dr Andrea Coscelli, two Brexit seminars with speakers Peter Freeman CBE, Chairman of the CAT and Emeritus Professor Richard Whish QC, King’s College, London.

• Family Section

The Family Section delivered a programme of targeted support to its members on a broad range of key topics and issues including, the practical application of schedule 1 of the Children Act 1989, guidance on child exploitation and a step-by-step guide on how to set up a small law firm. After identifying a need, the section also introduced a new member benefit of monthly case with Family Law Hub.

• Law Management Section

This section provides best practice and support to members on the business of law and effective law management. Events included the annual finance and business conference, we also delivered targeted webinars for practitioner members. The magazine, Managing for Success, covers all practice management and leadership disciplines, focusing on key issues in practice, through features, comment, and practical guides from leading practitioners.

• Private Client Section

This section supported 2,315 members, with key highlights including three conferences with keynote speaker Baroness Ilora Finlay. Our New Residence Nil Rate Band webinar from Professor Lesley King attracted over 500 views and we delivered regional seminars in Cardiff and Exeter.

• Property Section

We expanded the content available to these members to not only include our 10 newsletters, but also unique articles, features and case reports. We listened to member feedback and built a programme of events aimed at addressing members’ most requested needs. We commissioned David Smith, economics editor at The Sunday Times to deliver a keynote speech on what the future might hold for property solicitors and continued to publish market leading content in our magazine, Property in Practice.

What we achieved:

115,000+ members offered support from divisions
1.2 million communities webpage views
5,441 section members
72 e-newsletters
17 community magazines
General Counsel 350 programme

Our General Counsel 350 programme, supported by an advisory panel, helps us to inform the support we offer influential members in large organisations in the uncertain economic and political climate. Organisations are recognising the importance of the role that general counsel plays, with two thirds now having a seat on the board. In addition to increased volumes, the work of in-house legal teams is becoming more complex, as General Counsel navigate changing market conditions which present business opportunities as well as challenges.

What we achieved: We published our first GC350 benchmarking report, sponsored by LexisNexis, to help members understand and share key issues facing General Counsel. This was the first part of our benchmarking study, identifying that in-house legal teams are growing their influence and credibility. The study also showed the increasing pressures in-house legal departments are under.

Partnership and sponsorship

We work with commercial partners to support our wider work and to help us manage the amount we ask for from practising fees. Our strategic partners in 2015-16 include First Title, Wesleyan Bank, Volvo, Hiscox and Eclipse.

Volvo will be the principal sponsor of the Law Society Excellence Awards 2017. This exclusive partnership gives our members access to a range of exclusive discounts and benefits across the Volvo range.

Summary

This review has looked back at our achievements for members during the first year of our new strategy 2015-16. This business review is just a summary of the work we did to represent, promote and support solicitors across England and Wales.

Over the next financial year we will continue to use your feedback to help us respond to a rapidly changing legal services landscape. Whether we are seeking to influence governments, campaigning for justice, delivering training or promoting solicitors to the public, we work to make sure your voice is heard, your needs are met and your business is supported.
Upholding the rule of the law