

Subject: President's Update 13.07.2020



Dear colleague,

[Your weekly Law Society update](#)

As the professional body for solicitors, every week the Law Society is working hard to influence the legal and regulatory environment on behalf of our profession and to promote solicitors at home and abroad. We support practice excellence, are an informed source of legal sector news and support members at every stage of their career.

#Solicitorspirit

We have promoted our new campaign to highlight the great work the profession has been doing for clients and the community during the pandemic. You can read more [here](#).
The latest twitter messages, including member comments and video are [here](#).

Please encourage your constituents to share their stories.

Parliamentary

On Wednesday, chancellor Rishi Sunak delivered a statement to the House of Commons in which he outlined his “plan for jobs”. The Law Society welcomed announcements of a Jobs Retention Bonus for firms bringing staff back from furlough and a temporary rise in the SDLT threshold. We have also expressed support for plans to boost job creation for young people through a “Kickstart” scheme and new funding for apprenticeships, though we called for the government to go further by giving law firms the flexibility to spend apprenticeship levy funds on retraining and LawTech seats.

On Thursday I gave evidence to the House of Lords Constitution Committee on the constitutional impacts of Covid. I spoke alongside Caroline Goodwin QC, chair of the Criminal Bar Association and Derek Sweeting QC, vice chair of the Bar Council. Topics included the impact of Covid on the courts and access to justice. I made absolutely clear that the system of justice had been in crisis before Covid-19, that in certain areas practitioners were massively overworked and woefully underpaid and that immediate support from government was needed.

We have been in the media this week to promote the role and value of the profession in difficult times

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced a raft of new measures to tackle the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, including stamp duty land tax relief and employment support schemes. The [Gazette](#) quoted me:

“We welcome the support and stimulus for the residential conveyancing market in England and understand the Welsh government will make its own decision on their equivalent transaction tax next week.”

I also welcomed plans for a ‘kick start’ scheme for young people. “We will be encouraging law firms as well as in-house teams to make use of this programme to train 16 to 24-year-olds by boosting the number of apprenticeships in the law,” I said.

Also in [Inside Conveyancing](#) and the [New Law Journal](#).

The [Gazette](#) reported on the Law Society and Bar Council joint statement condemning the government’s plans to reduce the courts backlog. We said: “We are already adopting new ways of working successfully to drive justice forward but the rule of law must not be undermined. We will not support any steps to remove the right to jury trials.”

Further coverage of extended hours and the HMCTS recovery plan in the [Gazette](#).

The [Gazette](#) also reported on controversy surrounding Saturday court listings. I said: “Before looking at extended hours the Ministry of Justice and HM Courts & Tribunals Services must ensure that it is making maximum use of normal court hours and the existing court estate.”

[New Law Journal](#) reported on the HM Courts and Tribunal Service's plan for recovery, which proposes extending operating hours, judge-only trials or smaller juries. It also covered the joint statement I made with Bar Council chair Amanda Pinto QC.

The [Gazette](#) and [New Law Journal](#) reported on issues with the Legal Aid Agency's Client Cost Management System (CCMS) which has left civil legal aid lawyers unable to log cases or bills. I said: "Civil legal aid solicitors have been working tirelessly since the beginning of lockdown to ensure everyone can access justice. These issues with the CCMS must be addressed as a matter of urgency."

[City A.M.](#) and [Accountancy Daily](#) report on a new Recovery Advice for Business scheme which will give small businesses access to free one-to-one advice with an expert adviser to help them through the coronavirus pandemic and enable them to prepare for long term recovery. Professionals from the Law Society are signed up alongside the Advertising Association and the Management Consultancies Association. The scheme is up and running.

The [Gazette](#) covered our return to work framework and toolkit. Our head of public affairs Alexandra Cardenas said: "The guidance does not trump existing legislation, such as that governing health and safety, anti-money laundering or equality."

We issued a joint statement with the Bar Council speaking out against Hong Kong's national security law – passed on 30 June – which could restrict fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression and a right to a fair trial. A Law Society spokesperson said: "The law could be used to stem dissent, as well as to arrest and criminally prosecute persons who legally exercise their internationally recognised human rights."

Adding that "we will monitor the application of this law in practice and stand in solidarity with legal professionals in Hong Kong and others in their efforts to uphold the rule of law and fundamental rights in their jurisdiction". The [Gazette](#) has the story.

[Law.com](#) (£) has an article by David Greene, vice president of the Law Society, who examines the current state of Brexit, noting that Covid-19 has already had a significant impact on the negotiations between the UK and the EU.

[The Gazette](#) reported that two Law Society committee members are among those who have been honoured as 'social justice heroes of the pandemic' by the Legal Aid Practitioners Group (LAPG). The group's board has made four LAPG Special Awards in response to this year's COVID-19 outbreak.

Gary Rycroft, chair of our digital assets working group, talked to BBC Radio 4's [MoneyBox](#) (starts from 18:18) about credit card chargeback rules if someone books an event on their credit card which is then cancelled due to coronavirus.

[ICAEW News](#) mentioned the Law Society's Law Management Section Financial Benchmarking Survey 2020, which has recently been published. The survey is the largest of its kind in England and Wales, with 214 firms taking part.

It was conducted before the pandemic – although many of the findings are still relevant - with a strong emphasis on helping firms to get the most out of their fee earners.

[Homes & Gardens](#) has a guide for first time buyers and advises they choose a Law Society member when looking for a conveyancer.

[Practice Source](#) cited a recent article in [Silicon.co.uk](#), which examined the current state of lawtech and what it could mean for businesses and organisations.

It highlights the Law Society's lawtech report, which found that the global lawtech market is valued at \$15.9 billion. Investment in UK lawtech, meanwhile, is likely to increase, while the value of investment shows encouraging levels of backing by angel and seed investors, as well as venture capital firms. Read our [report](#).

Update from our Brussels office

On 9 July, Helena Raulus, head of office attended a meeting with the UKMIS negotiation team via the British Chamber EU future relations committee. They discussed the nature of the negotiations and the preparation for January 2021.

As always, please feel free to share this update with your constituents

Kind regards,

Simon

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