



President's Update



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.

Public Law

Family

We wrote to the president of the Family Division, upon his request, on whether he should issue national guidance on remote hearings. We were concerned that automatically adjourning particular types of hearings with particular parties will be too exclusive and prescriptive. We also put forward the concerns our members continue to have with technology and case organisation. Our recommendations focused on case-by-case decision-making, alongside the sharing of best practice and improving collection of data within HMCTS.

Justice

First virtual PAJE workshop

The Law Society hosted its first virtual Pre-Application Judicial Education (PAJE) workshops this week. The PAJE programme was launched in April 2019 aiming to support talented lawyers from underrepresented groups to feel more equipped, confident and prepared when considering applying for a judicial role. The programme is the first joint initiative of the Judicial Diversity Forum, which consists of the Law Society, the Judiciary, Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC), The Bar Council and the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx).

These professional organisations deliver judge-led workshops to lawyers selected to partake in the PAJE courses. The virtual session, hosted on Microsoft Teams, follows four other courses since launch, delivered in London, Manchester, Leeds and Cardiff; however the spring round was interrupted by the Covid19 pandemic.

This live session was led by two judges and hosted 18 delegates of various

backgrounds and qualifications (the majority of whom solicitors). It involved smaller discussion groups in which delegates could share views relating to judicial ethics and decision-making as well as competencies and skills required for the role. Based on the successful delivery of this online workshop we will continue to deliver the remaining workshops of the spring round online.

New legal aid fee for immigration appeals

The Law Society has written to the MoJ expressing concerns about a new legal aid fixed fee for immigration appeals that are subject to the new HMCTS online appeals procedure in the first tier tribunal. We believe that the new fee is inadequate to cover the additional work required of practitioners in this process, and have called for the fee to be based on hourly rates. More details can be found here:

<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/news/stories/new-legal-aid-fee-first-tier-immigration-tribunal-appeals/> .

Additionally we have agreed to sign a joint letter with other representative bodies addressed to the president of the First Tier Tribunal requesting the suspension of directions under the new procedure pending the resolution of the legal aid fee issue.

Resumption of jury trials

Four Crown Courts have been assessed as currently suitable to hold jury trials and will begin to do so this week. They are: Central Criminal Court, London (Old Bailey); Bristol Crown Court; Cardiff Crown Court; and Manchester (Minshull Street). Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, the safety of all who use the court and tribunal buildings has been a key priority for the Law Society. co-chair of our Criminal Law Committee, Ian Kelcey, was part of the jury trial working group, chaired by Mr Justice Edis, which has been working to consider ways to safely re-start jury trials in England and Wales. Read the full summary [here](#).

Regulation and Economic Crime

Meeting with the SRA on the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE)

On Wednesday 13 May, the Law Society and Junior Lawyers Division (JLD) met with the SRA for the last in a series of meetings to discuss outstanding issues with the development of the SQE. The meeting covered the Welsh language issue and the results of the SQE 2 assessment pilot and next steps. It was a productive meeting with the SRA explaining their approach to offering the SQE assessments in Welsh, a gradual approach that the Welsh government have signalled they will be content with. The Law Society's Wales office will continue to lead on liaising on this issue. The SRA explained the disappointing pilot results and outlined the options they are exploring for next steps. The Law Society has agreed to feedback to the SRA by the end of the month following discussion by the Education and Training Committee.

LSB stakeholder meeting on the SQE

On Monday 18 May, the Law Society attended a roundtable discussion hosted by the Board of the LSB. Also in attendance were members of the Justice Select Committee, the SRA staff and members of the JLD. The discussion identified key issues that stakeholders have with the SQE and allowed the SRA time to respond. The LSB have suggested that attendees follow up with the SRA in writing on specific issues, which we will be doing shortly.

Meeting with the Bridge Group on the SQE

On Wednesday 20 May, the Law Society met with the Bridge Group which have been

commissioned by the SRA to carry out an independent review of the SQE, specifically looking at potential EDI implications. This is something we have lobbied for and that the SRA have undertaken as a result of the lobbying. The discussion covered the whole of the SQE and highlighted key areas of concern around disability access, social mobility, funding and the appropriateness of assessment arrangements. A follow up meeting will be held at the beginning of June to discuss findings.

Cloud Video Platform Training - Wednesday 27 May 4:30 - 5:30 pm

You are invited to take part in a Cloud Video Platform (CVP) training session hosted by HMCTS for the Law Society.

As part of HMCTS's response to the Coronavirus pandemic some hearings will be heard remotely using CVP. This session is to help you understand how CVP works and what to expect on the hearing day if the judge has decided a case will be heard via this platform.

The session has a maximum capacity of 100 people, and will essentially be on a 'first come, first served' basis, however a recording of the demo will be published afterwards. There is no registration process and for information on how to join the training session at **4.30pm on Wednesday 27 May** use the following link:

<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/news/stories/cloud-video-training-session-27-may/>

Parliamentary

Paul Tennant our CEO met with chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee on Tuesday to discuss the conveyancing market and the vice chair of the Ethnic Minority Lawyers Division met the shadow lord chancellor on Thursday to discuss the impact of covid-19 on BAME lawyers.

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

Melinda Giles, a member of our wills and equity committee, spoke with [BBC Radio Shropshire](#) (from 08:55), [BBC Radio Guernsey](#) (from 47:26) and eight others, about your rights if your holiday is likely to be cancelled because of coronavirus.

The [Gazette](#) reported that mutual recognition of legal qualifications remains a point of dispute in the negotiations over a free trade agreement between the UK and the EU. I said: "It is crucial the government seeks the best possible access to the EU27 for our legal professionals as well as recognition of their qualifications once the post-Brexit transition period finishes."

Ian Kelcey, co-chair of our criminal law committee was interviewed on the Shelagh Fogarty Show on [LBC](#) (from 01.30) on Monday discussing jury trials starting and the valuable work of lawyers on the frontline. He also spoke with [talkRadio](#) (in the 9:00 – 9:30 from 27:38) about some courts resuming jury trials.

[Money Saving Expert](#) cited the chair of our employment committee Max Winthrop's comments that umbrella companies' interpretation of furlough guidance for agency workers is incorrect.

Gary Rycroft, chair of our digital assets working group, told [Grazia](#) that it is 'really good news' weddings will now be permitted from June in a look at the legal rights of those who may still want to postpone due to the restrictions in place.

Update from our Brussels office

Helena Raulus, head of office, attended the BBUKOO plenary meeting, online, hosted by UK Mission. The UK Mission gave a debrief of the recent round of EU – UK negotiations. The Law Society was able to ask questions about services and MRAs in the context of the agreement.

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

Kind regards,

Simon

Simon Davis
President

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