

Council report – October

New Council members were welcomed following their recent election and induction. You can see the full list of your Council members at www.lawsociety.org.uk/aboutus.

Council agreed our business plan and budget for 2019-20. It also considered our work and position on Brexit, heard updates on our work to deliver for our members, and had a number of discussions including our relationship with the SRA, the latest on the Solicitors Qualifying Exam and our Diversity and Inclusion Charter.

Influencing for impact

Brexit

The Law Society, as the professional body for solicitors, has a pivotal role in protecting the rule of law. Our statements regarding the recent supreme court judgement and the independence of the judiciary were well reported. Council discussed how we best ensure we work to help the public understand the rule of law and its importance.

The current possibility of leaving without a deal on 31 October means we have continued to promote and communicate to members our [nine guidance notes](#) on steps solicitors could take in such a scenario (on civil co-operation, consumer law, criminal justice, data protection, family law, intellectual property, VAT, and providing legal services in the EU). We have worked with the MOJ on a series of regional roadshows to help members understand the issues and our guidance to help members prepare.

Council endorsed our current position: pointing out the negative implications of no deal for the profession, the economy and the public's right to access to justice, encouraging the Government to avoid it, and lobbying relevant Cabinet ministers – while not taking sides in political debate.

To influence the administration, on 1 August we published a report on the Law Society's asks for the UK-EU future relationship for legal services which set out the need for an association style agreement with the EU. The report was covered in the [Financial Times](#), [Politico](#), [City AM](#), [Legal Futures](#) and the [Times](#). We shared it with ministers, officials and parliamentarians, including the Chair of the Justice Select Committee, Bob Neill MP. The president told council that in many of his meetings with ministers and officials they are using our messaging.

We continue to engage with relevant EU bars and law societies on what steps could be taken in a no deal situation. We are developing Memoranda of understanding, having recently signed one with Belgium, and we also have existing and developing MOUs in a number of countries outside Europe.

We will shortly be publishing a report promoting England and Wales as jurisdiction of choice.

Criminal justice campaign

We published a report – “Justice on Trial” – in June which highlights the problems across the whole criminal justice system. This resulted in extensive press coverage including on the Today programme, the Daily Mail, the Independent and in over 70 local news outlets.

As a result of our campaigning, lobbying and the lobbying of other representative groups, the MoJ has announced areas of work they intend to bring forward for accelerated implementation under the Criminal Legal Aid Review.

In light of the Government's announcement for increased funding for police, prisons and the probation in August, we have updated our messaging to stress the need for funding across the whole criminal justice system – this messaging has received wide coverage including in the Guardian and in local media.

We wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury calling for increased funding for the criminal justice system.

Career companion

Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE)

Council were updated on the latest SQE proposals, set to be introduced from September 2021, and discussed the implications for the profession. The Society has published an overview of the proposals and supporting resources including a podcast series to help members understand the proposals and a series of round tables, one of which will feature in the Gazette. You can see more on our [website](#).

We continue to raise issues with the SRA around the nature of the exam, qualifying work experience, and equality and diversity issues. We are also raising issues about funding availability to reduce financial barriers to students. We want to protect the international reputation of English and Welsh Solicitors and be sure that the quality of candidates coming through SQE delivers consistently.

Diversity in our profession.

Council were encouraged to sign up to the Women in Law Pledge as we head for the 100th anniversary of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919. Launched in June, the pledge is for the whole legal sector. [Details are on our website](#).

The revised Diversity and Inclusion Charter is currently being piloted by firms of varying sizes across the regions. It requires evidence gathering and action planning and will have a modular approach. It is planned to learn from the pilot and launch in 2020.

Working effectively

Budget and business plan

The Council agreed the business plan for 2019-20. The themes of the plan were set by a Council strategic planning event in March and set our policy priorities for the next business year, for which the practising fee has been frozen at 2016-17 levels.

The themes are: Access to justice and the rule of law, Brexit and the international practice of law, civil justice, property, regulation, the role of the profession (economic crime), the reputation of the profession and technology.

We promote the profession, influence for impact, keep members up to date, support practice excellence and are a career companion. The plan also sets our intention to look at how we serve particular groups of our members, including what we offer, what we charge for and how we communicate. We will start with junior lawyers and in-house lawyers.

Future governance

Council received a presentation on work to look at the representative nature of Council. Views have been extensively canvassed by members of the relevant committee, and more work will be done before proposals come to Council for final consideration.

Next meeting

The next meeting of Council is 5 December.