



President's Report

As the 138th member of our profession to take the chair, I was very honoured in July 2011 to be elected President of our historic Law Society.

The Society continues to play an important role representing solicitors in the Tees Valley region. From negotiating with and lobbying the profession's regulators, government and others, to offering training and advice, we're here to help, protect and promote solicitors across the Tees Valley.

It has been a busy and thoroughly enjoyable year, during which we have:-

- launched our membership benefits programme;
- held our inaugural outstanding achievement and lawyer of the year awards; and
- forged closer relations with the law school at Teesside University.

Events

During the year as President, I have chaired the Society's Council meetings (which are held every other month), and attended the North East Joint Committee of Law Societies' meeting (which are held quarterly). In addition, I have represented the Society at the following events:-

- 10 July 2011: Durham Cathedral Matins for the Courts – a beautiful service, with a minor function in the legal train.
- 3 October 2011: Opening of the Legal Year at Westminster Abbey and attendance at the Lord Chancellor's Reception – a sweltering day down in London with the Lord Chancellor welting under his dress robes and wig, and a great opportunity to meet Presidents of our other law societies.
- 6 October 2011: Trainee social event – a pizza & pasta evening to welcome all our new trainees and introduce them to our Society.
- 7 October 2011: The Institute of Insurer's Dinner at the Thistle Hotel: the first of my formal dinners and a very enjoyable evening.
- 20 October 2011: TVLS autumn social – cocktails and live music at Capaldi's with the presentation of our inaugural outstanding achievement and lawyer of the year awards. Congratulations again to our winners, Anne Elliott and Nicola Neilson.
- 21 October 2011: Sunderland Law Society Annual Dinner at the Stadium of Light
- 10 November 2011: Newcastle Law Society Dinner at the Civic Centre – I was lucky enough to win a ride on a Harley Davidson in the raffle!
- 18 November 2011: Accountant's Dinner at the Thistle Hotel – I proposed the toast to the members of their society.
- 24 February 2012: Tees Valley Law Society Annual Dinner at the Thistle Hotel - without a doubt, the highlight of my year. Thanks to all our members who continue to support this popular dinner each year. We received great support from the local business community who donated a variety of wonderful prizes for our raffle. With gift aid, we raised almost £2,888 on the night and I know our chosen charity (Zoe's Place Baby Hospice) was delighted with our efforts. Our very own Public Relations Officer, Rachel



Donald and her band “Broken Plates” were brilliant and had most of us dancing the night away until the early hours.

Thanks

I would like to give special thanks to:-

- Helen Crute, our administrator who works very hard to ensure the smooth running of our Society;
- Geoff Cruickshank and Geoffrey Crute for all their efforts in making our education and training offering a very strong one;
- Judith Mason (our regional manager) and Nigel Dodds (our constituency member on the National Law Society Council) for keeping us fully informed of National Law Society matters; and
- all our other Council members who continue to support the work we do and give up their time to attend our council meetings.

Thank you for having me as your President for the last year. It is with much pleasure and confidence, that I hand you over to my successor, Jonathan Woodhouse.

Nicola Neilson



Education & Training Report for the year ended 31 December 2011

Statistical report

The “training year” covered by this report is the period from November 2010 to October 2011. The Society continued to offer six 2-hour seminars giving non-members access to 12 hours’ accredited CPD at a cost of £270, or members at a cost of £180 – a saving of almost double the £50 membership fee! A total of 183 places (out of 192 booked) were taken up in the year, the topics covered being:

- Land Registry update – understanding registered property boundaries (Land Registry)
- General property update (Northumbrian Water Solutions)
- Part 8 Litigation (James Kemp – Trinity Chambers)
- General insurance issues for lawyers (Ellis Bates, Harrogate)
- Private Company Administration (Harvey Legal Training)
- Commercial Property taxation issues (Simon Briton, Clive Owen LLP)

It is worth mentioning that in the current “training year” to date we have held four seminars, with a total of 197 places booked and 178 attendees, the topics covered being:

- Regulatory Changes for Conveyancers (Denis Cameron)
- Property Possession Pitfalls (Trinity Chambers)
- Outcomes Focused Regulation (LBS Legal)
- Contentious Probate (Constance McDonnell, 3 Stone Buildings)

There is therefore an encouraging upwards trend.

Retrospect

In the summer of 2011 we had an enforced change of venue by the closure of the meeting facilities at Castlegate Quay. After exploring a number of potential alternative venues, the training room at Archers Law, Lakeside House, Stockton on Tees was chosen as the “normal” venue. The available space is less than at Castlegate Quay, and we have placed a restriction on maximum numbers at 50. That number has been exceeded twice this year, and almost met on the other two occasions. A larger and additional venue has now been sourced, courtesy of Teesside University School of Social Sciences and Law at Middlesbrough which will be used for the first time in September.

After much discussion we have changed the style of our evaluation forms, and have received comments from attendees that are more thoughtful responses to the programme “offers”, and have enabled the committee to respond to those responses in both content and status of presenters. Our speakers have been drawn from the four corners of the country – both far and near – over the last 18 months. We have nevertheless maintained the present pricing structure for the last three years, despite the additional cost of running the programme.

As members know, our CPD programme is targeted specifically at the “high street” general practice firms, smaller firms and sole practitioners. The evidence remains that the larger and the specialist firms satisfy their CPD requirements – and indeed their training requirements generally – either in-house or via commercial providers. That said, the present turbulence in the organisation of the provision of legal services, the consequent impact upon the “high street”, and the likely impact of OFR on training requirements (both pre-qualification and CPD) – as well as the increasing reliance on electronic / virtual means of communication in training delivery – will present challenges for the Society’s Education & Training Committee in providing members with an economically priced but viable programme.

The marked reduction in the number of trainee placements in the Tees Valley over the last few years has also made it more difficult to support interaction between trainees across our area; and we have noted some difficulty in identifying prospective trainees who have been unable to find contracts, and who are working as paralegals, to seek to integrate them into activities.



In October 2011 we held a reception evening for such new and existing trainees as we were able to identify, and for recently-qualified. Almost 500 invitations were mailed out for this event to firms and training principals, as well as to trainees. The two dozen who attended had an informative and enjoyable evening; but the absence of response from training principals was noticeable.

Prospect

Significant research has been conducted nationally over recent years on the question of legal training, both pre- and post-qualification. This has culminated in the presently ongoing Legal Education Training Review, jointly commissioned by SRA, Bar Standards Board, and Ilex Professional Standards. From a solicitor's perspective, views may differ as to the quality of what we now do, and how "fit for purpose" that will prove to be in the "brave new world". The LETR brief from the commissioning bodies is to "ensure that the future system of legal education and training will be effective and efficient in preparing legal service providers to meet the needs of consumers". There is therefore a presumption for change, a presumption in favour of the consumer, and a presumption that solicitors, barristers, and chartered legal executives (collectively) will not necessarily retain a monopoly market. From a perspective of the Solicitors' profession, it is likely that certain training outcomes will be required both for firms and for training providers as a result of the introduction of OFR. The Chair and Co-ordinator of the Education & Training Committee are seeking to keep abreast of developments, and join in consultations, as the research progresses, so as to be able to inform the E & T Committee, and indeed all members, of material development. However hard pressed individual practitioners may be, it is important that everyone engages to some extent in the process by responding to requests for evidence and views; by following the course of the research via www.LETR.org.uk ; and by following the Law Society's own responses and consultations through the weekly Law Society e-bulletin and its attachments or on www.lawsociety.org.uk (salient points from which are reproduced through TVLS own web-site at www.teesvalleylaw.org.uk).

Locally, if our CPD programme and our support for trainees (or would-be trainees) is to add value to our profession, we need feedback on our E & T activity beyond that provided through the seminar evaluation forms. As a minimum, we need:

- Engagement from training principals with trainee events and workshops, at its lowest level by encouraging trainee involvement
- Support from training officers / training partners in firms ensuring that training and CPD opportunities are brought to the notice of as wide an audience as possible
- Encouraging trainees and chartered legal executives to become members of TVLS
- Input from those responsible for organising training both as to the subject-matter which is most topical for one-off CPD events, or perhaps more extended courses
- Evidence as to the needs within firms for developing both individual and corporate training plans which may meet the requirements of OFR; and the sharing of the necessary expertise and experience by those who have it.

The Society's resources are designed by members for the benefit of members and we continue to have an expectation that members will enjoy both the inputs and outputs that this involves.

Geoff Cruickshank (Chair of Education & Training Committee)
Geoffrey Crute (Education & Training Co-ordinator)



PRO Report to the AGM, July 2012

As the Press Release Officer for Tees Valley Law Society, my primary role is to raise the profile of the society and its members on a local and national level. A further key role is to inform members of issues in the press which may be relevant to local lawyers across Tees Valley. I must also ensure that the business community in Tees Valley are aware of the aims of the society which in turn will strive to promote solicitors in the locality.

This role enables me to act as a touchstone between the local legal profession and the media. The aim is to be both informative to members and to promote local professionals on a national level.

A key development for the Society in 2012 which has raised the profile of local solicitors is the introduction of the Excellence Awards. The Awards will be held annually and provide local solicitors with an opportunity to be entered into the National Law Society Excellence Awards to represent the Tees Valley Region. Further details as to how to nominate a local solicitor for an Excellence Award can be located on our website.

I would invite local solicitors to contact me with any relevant news stories which may be capable of promotion in the local press and further for coverage on our website.

Rachel Donald
PRO
Tees Valley Law Society