



Law Society
of Scotland

In-house Lawyers Committee Annual Report

2019/20



Introduction

The In-House Lawyers Committee (**ILC**) was established in 2015 to represent, support and promote the interests of Law Society of Scotland members working in-house in Scotland and beyond. It continues the work of the In-house Lawyers Group Committee (**ILG**)¹. There were approximately 3,400 in-house solicitors in the 2019/20 practice year. This represents almost 30% of the solicitor profession, which is relatively consistent with the numbers for recent years.

This Report summarises key priorities and achievements of the Committee for the practice year 2019/20.²

The Society published its strategy “Leading Legal Excellence” in 2015. This includes an objective to serve our members through a detailed understanding of their needs. In line with this objective, the ILC’s main aims are:

- To engage with in-house solicitors and trainees (not working in private practice), ensuring the Law Society understands and serves their professional needs.
- To promote the interests and status of in-house solicitors and trainees.
- To encourage and assist in the development of better training of solicitors and trainees working in-house.
- To promote the value of employing in-house solicitors and trainees to organisations who do not currently employ solicitors or trainees.
- To promote the interests of In-house solicitors in the development of Law Society policies and initiatives; and so to contribute to and support the Society in its work.

ILC office bearers and members

Sheekha Saha and Vlad Valiente were elected by their in-house peers as co-Conveners of the ILC, effective from 1 July 2019. The Committee also has two Vice-Conveners, who each head up one of the ILC’s two sub-groups:

- Thembe McInnes of Edinburgh Airport Limited as head of the Education & Careers Sub-Group.
- John Morrison of Phoenix Group as head of the Engagement Sub-Group.

Other current Committee members are:

- Arlene Gibbs, Aberdeenshire Council
- Catherine Corr, Scottish Enterprise
- Debbie Carroll, COPFS

¹ The ILG was established in 1973 as an independent committee, which was supported by the Society and worked co-operatively within the Society’s governance structure.

² The Society’s practice year runs 1 November - 31 October each year.

- John Forsyth, Lloyds Bank
- Michael Byrne, Thermo Fisher Scientific
- Norma Shippin, Central Legal Office of the NHS
- Rachael McLean, Scottish Government Legal Directorate

As can be seen, the ILC Membership is representative of public and private sectors of in-house practice and the diversity within that. In the Society's recent committee recruitment round, the ILC received thirteen applications to join the Committee. In line with the Society's governance arrangements, recommendations for new appointments will be submitted to the Society's Council in November 2020.

Principal achievements

In line with its aim of improved engagement with solicitors across the in-house community and promotion of the interests of in-house solicitors, the ILC has concentrated on the following:

- Supporting content delivery of the annual in-house conference. The conference was originally scheduled to be held in Glasgow in June 2020, but moved to a fully online forum in October 2020, in light of physical distancing measures mandated by Scottish Government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Society also supported the SOLAR annual conference in March 2020, an annual event tailored for in-house solicitors in local government, and co-Convenor of the ILC, Sheekha Saha, attended the Local Authorities Solicitors Bar Association (LASBA) annual conference and dinner in December 2019. The Society's Head of Engagement for In-house Lawyers attended as a guest of the European Company Lawyers Association (ECLA) for their Legal Disruption conference in Dublin in February 2020.
- Supporting delivery of Journal content including a feature on covid-19 response and how in-house teams are adapting, by Catherine Corr³; a Black Lives Matter opinion piece by Thembe McInnes⁴ and various interviews with eminent in-house solicitors over the course of the year⁵.
- Inputting into and promoting the Society's research into the in-house traineeship landscape, which included a detailed survey of the in-house community, three focus group sessions and a Journal report on findings in February 2020⁶.
- Inputting into and promoting the Society's research around Covid-19 response, which included telephone interviews with over fifty GCs and Heads of Legal⁷ and an online survey that had over 450 responses from across the in-house community⁸.

³ <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/journal/issues/vol-65-issue-08/in-house-so-how-are-you/>

⁴ <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/journal/issues/vol-65-issue-07/opinion-thembe-mcinnis/>

⁵ <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/journal/issues/>

⁶ <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/journal/issues/vol-65-issue-02/in-house-trainees-what-swags-the-decision/>

⁷ <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/media/369032/in-house-heads-of-legal-general-counsel-corona-virus-pandemic-survey-june-2020.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/media/369221/in-house-online-survey-proofed.pdf>

- Supporting and promoting the In-house Rising Star Award 2020, to recognise emerging talent in the in-house community. This year saw a record number of nominations, with fourteen outstanding new lawyers being put forward for the award.
- Reviewing a new Society guide on establishing an in-house legal function – a resource designed to support an organisation’s first or sole in-house counsel. This was published in October 2020⁹.
- Considering options for an online community platform to support in-house counsel.

In addition the ILC has supported the Law Society in:

- Running a number of roundtable sessions for in-house counsel to support information sharing in the early stages of the pandemic.
- Running three dedicated webinars with a focus on risk management in the context of the covid-19 crisis.

Conclusion

This has been a very different year, to that envisaged at the start. There is no question the Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically altered our ways of working, impacted on us all personally; for some dramatically on the type of work we do, and impacted on the client-organisations we work for. There are positives however: the in-house community, like the legal profession at large, has demonstrated agility and resilience. We are all gaining increasing awareness of the importance of good mental well-being: the Society has led significant work in this area.¹⁰ At the annual conference delivered this year as an online festival of in-house, over three days, the mood in ‘the room’ was firmly one of optimism.

Looking ahead, the Society’s Council has set next year’s annual plan and budget in context of an overall two-year strategy, shorter than previously given the sheer unpredictability of the longer-term impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit upon the work we do and the members we support and represent. It will be another busy year ahead; the ILC will continue to support the Society’s work in all areas, focusing on the needs of the in-house legal community. For further information and/or to get involved with any of the work we do please contact us at inhouse@lawscot.org.uk.

Sheekha Saha and Vlad Valiente, co-Conveners
On behalf of the In-house Lawyers’ Committee
October 2020

⁹ <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/professional-support/in-house/setting-up-an-in-house-legal-department/>

¹⁰ More information on the Society’s Lawscot Wellbeing initiative at this link:
<https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/wellbeing/>