

Annual Plan 2015/16

Leading
Legal
Excellence



Contents

Foreword	2
Assure	3
Serve	4
Excel	5
Influence	6
Grow	7

Foreword

Over the summer, we published an ambitious new strategy for the Law Society.

It sets a clear path for heading towards 2020 as we seek to lead legal excellence and be a world-class professional body.

It has been great to get so much positive feedback from our members, stakeholders and the wider public on the vision we set out. Our plans clearly caught the attention and imagination of many whilst challenging some of the traditional thinking around the legal market and our role within it.

Understandably, the most common question back was – ‘so what next?’

In this annual plan, we begin to answer that question. It sets out our priority actions for the forthcoming year and explains how we will assure the public, serve our members, excel as an organisation, influence society around us and grow our membership and income.

I hope this plan will give our members, stakeholders and the wider public a clear idea of the critical projects we now need to deliver as we seek to meet our new strategic objectives. This includes securing agreement on a new Legal Services Act, agreeing our new categories of affiliate membership, implementing reforms to improve our consumer protections, launching new services for our members and boosting our commercial income. Of course, we know we need to do this in addition to providing excellent service to all those who rely on us, day in and day out.

As with previous plans, we will report each month to our Board and Council on our progress in meeting the actions listed. We will also publish a full report on our performance as part of our 2015/16 annual report.

As always, the Law Society’s success comes from a generous spirit of volunteerism from those who give up their time and expertise to sit on our Council and committees. We are lucky to be able to use that breadth of knowledge, both from our members and from the many outwith the legal profession who lead and support our work.

As chief executive, I am also lucky to lead such a talented team of staff whose hard work, dedication and values are critical to us achieving the goals set out in our strategy and delivering the actions set out in this plan.

The next 12 months will mark one of the most significant periods of change in the Law Society’s proud 66-year history. A new strategy, a new plan of action and, by the end of the year, a new home at Atria. We are excited to begin our journey towards being that truly world-class professional body.



Lorna Jack
Chief Executive

Assure



In our new strategy, we promised to assure our members' clients and employers by setting and upholding standards that ensure they receive excellent legal and customer service.

Our education and training standards are flexible, promote equal access to, and drive excellence within, the legal profession.

Based on a new empowering Act, our regulation is proportionate, effective and responsive for those who depend on legal services.

Our professional standards are recognised as world-class and our members respected for holding one of the most rigorous and globally valued professional membership accreditations.

In this first year of our new strategy, we will look to complete important work and launch new projects which enhance the confidence and trust of the public. This includes improving our protections for consumers and the diversity of the profession we serve. We will also look to bring the Scottish Parliament's reforms to open up the ownership structure of legal firms to a reality by becoming a regulator of new licensed legal services providers.

We know our ability to deliver our new strategy is limited by the statutory framework in which we currently exist, including legislation which is now over 35 years old. That is why we will be working with government and stakeholders to present the compelling case for new, flexible and enabling legislation that allows the legal market to thrive whilst also protecting consumer interests.

In 2015/16, we will:

Work with the Scottish Government and others to secure a commitment of time in the next term of the Scottish Parliament for new enabling legislation which allows us to meet our strategic objectives

Implement reforms to our Client Protection Fund (formerly the Guarantee Fund) and complete our work towards a system of entity-based regulation and charging following our consultations with our members and stakeholders

Seek approval from the Scottish Government to become a regulator of licensed legal services providers and commence the first licensing of these new entities

Seek to improve the diversity of solicitors and ensure the profession better reflects the public they serve by agreeing alternative routes to qualification and establishing a new Legal Education Trust

Reform our accreditation system with a focus on specialist accreditation across a range of subject areas as well as for those seeking rights of audience in the higher courts

Deliver the year-two projects from our equality strategy, including promotion of our new equality standards by holding high-profile events and launching a campaign to promote equal pay



Serve



In our new strategy, we promised to serve our members through a detailed understanding of their needs, providing tools and services which they can use every day:

Our products and services help our members to innovate, grow and deliver world-class legal services whilst our advice on professional standards is the 'go to' place for members seeking guidance

Our programme of support meets the ambitions of our members to develop their careers both within and outwith the legal sector, inside and outside of Scotland

Our products and services meet the challenge of the digital age with a bold technology plan at the heart of our operation which opens up those services to all our members

In this first year of our new strategy, it is essential that we improve our own understanding of the increasingly diverse needs of our members, whatever their background and wherever their place of business. We want to use that information to innovate and to create new services which bring added value to our members, including a broader use of our new digital Smartcards. At the same time, we want to further improve the already well-used and well-respected services, such as our professional practice helpline and mentoring scheme.

In 2015/16, we will:

Better understand and service the needs of all sectors of our membership by creating and implementing an engagement plan and appointing a new director of member services and engagement

Improve our engagement with solicitors working in-house, ensuring their interests sit at the heart of the Law Society through the work of our new In-House Lawyers' Committee

Enhance our professional practice enquiry service to ensure we deliver a consistent, high-quality response to solicitors

Develop our popular mentoring programme for members, supporting solicitors, trainees and those at the earliest stage of their legal career, as well as allowing mentors to build additional skills to develop their own careers

Expand the range of services which are accessible via our new Smartcard, including an e-conveyancing portal and secure email communication and complete the rollout of Smartcards to our solicitor members

Complete a digital and technology audit of the legal profession, producing a 'thought leadership' paper to support change within firms whilst also reviewing the potential of new technology to promote access to justice



Excel



In our new strategy, we promised to excel by operating as a world-class organisation:

Our governance and delivery structure is nimble, efficient and reflects wider society

Our diverse team of staff and volunteers reflects our purpose, mission, goals and values

Our brand is modern, dynamic, engaging and trusted and, in turn, gives our members a competitive advantage

In this first year of our strategy, it will be important to complete the move to our home at Atria, ensuring a smooth transition and maintaining all the services and support we provide throughout.

With a new strategy, this will also be the time to look at how we organise and structure ourselves, both in terms of our staff team and our network of volunteer committee members, ensuring we are all aligned with, and focused on, our new strategic objectives.

In 2015/16, we will:

Move to our new office location, providing a modern environment for our staff and volunteers which allows us to improve the service we offer our members, stakeholders and the wider public

Complete the work of our Constitution Working Party, including improvements to the operation of our general meetings, and agree other improvements to our internal governance and system of delegated powers

Act on the findings of our brand review to ensure the Society is recognised as a modern, dynamic and trusted organisation

Align our staff structure with our new strategic objectives, creating a new leadership development programme and reviewing the success of our system of performance-related pay

Act on the feedback from our Investors in People (IIP) silver award and make improvements that allow us to target IIP gold in 2016/17 whilst also working towards gaining an Investors in Volunteers award



Influence



In our new strategy, we promised to influence the creation of a fairer and more just society by being an international centre of excellence and thought leaders in legal services:

Our voice, which is respected throughout the world, communicates the views of our members and the clients they serve

Our research, expertise and policy development influences civic society on the rule of law, access to justice, legal issues and the market for legal services

Our work in legal education is recognised as ground breaking

We know the first operating year of our new strategy will bring further changes in the world around us, including potentially momentous political milestones. In May, we will see the new elections to the Scottish Parliament, the political institution which continues to impact most on our immediate legal jurisdiction and an institution strengthened by the passage of the Scotland Bill. We want to use that election to champion justice issues and to challenge the political parties to explain how they will protect access to our legal system, particularly for society's most vulnerable.

However, our interests go well beyond Holyrood and St. Andrew's House. There is much speculation to suggest the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union will also take place in 2016 and we have been promised major proposals from the UK Government on reforms to human rights laws before the end of 2015. On all these issues, we believe we have a unique contribution to make and perspective to give.

In 2015/16, we will:

Engage with the Scottish Government and other public agencies as reforms to the justice system move forward, including legal aid issues and the implementation of court reforms

Speak out in favour of human rights and engage constructively in the UK Government's consultation and any resulting legislation on a UK Bill of Rights

Set out our policy priorities for the next term of the Scottish Parliament ahead of the Holyrood elections whilst continuing to contribute to the debate on Scotland's constitutional future as the Scotland Bill proceeds through parliament

Provide a leading, non-partisan voice in the debate on the UK's membership of the European Union ahead of the referendum

Expand our innovative Street Law programme to a wider range of schools in a broader geographic area

Grow our research capacity by creating a dedicated team which supports our policy development on access to justice and the legal services market



Grow



In our new strategy, we promised to grow our membership and income by being a vibrant, influential and inclusive organisation:

Our membership will include 12,000 practising certificate holding solicitors, including more members working outwith Scotland

Our membership responds to the evolution of the legal market through involving 10,000 additional paying members, including registered foreign lawyers, paralegals and legal executives

Our commercial non-fee income rises to £3 million per year

It is essential that we use this first full year of our new strategy to begin delivering this growth. A key aspect will be agreeing the new forms of membership as identified in our strategy, such as legal executive and paralegals, so we can roll these out in subsequent years. We believe we can also grow our existing membership above 'business as usual' trends and continue to grow our commercial income by launching innovative new products and expanding our commercial partnerships.

In 2015/16, we will:

Grow the total number of practising and non-practising solicitors to 11,800 by developing a new strategy for the retention of our existing membership and ensuring we provide a value proposition for those not required to hold a full solicitor practising certificate

Use specific international events in the legal calendar to promote Scotland and the legal profession as a centre of excellence for legal services in a bid to retain and increase the number of Scottish solicitors working outwith the UK

Agree our new categories of affiliate membership and required qualifications

Introduce a five-year marketing and sales plan so we can attract 10,000 additional associate members by 2020

Expand our commercial activity by investigating new relationships and business models, aiming to deliver at least four new services to members and generate £1.6 million in commercial income



And providing a great day-to-day service too

This annual plan sets out the development projects and key areas of focus for the Law Society for the next year. We also want to provide a great service, day in and day out to our members and the public.



The Law Society's new offices at Atria One, Morrison Street, Edinburgh

Ensuring members of the public have rights of redress by investigating complaints passed to us each year by the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission and pursuing serious cases to the independent discipline tribunal so the reputation of the profession can be maintained.

Proactively inspecting the finances of hundreds of legal firms to ensure client money is protected.

Effectively and efficiently processing claims on our Client Protection Fund to ensure people who are the victim of a solicitor's dishonesty get the appropriate compensation.

Protecting consumer interests by intervening in firms when there is a critical need to do so, including judicial factors.

Delivering hundreds of events and thousands of hours of continuing professional development so members can maintain and enhance their skills.

Scrutinising legislation at both Holyrood and Westminster, suggesting amendments to improve the law and responding to consultations across a range of public policy areas.

Providing an active programme of support for trainees, newly qualified solicitors and those interested in a career in the law whilst continuing our schools outreach and Donald Dewar Memorial Debating Tournament.

Providing practical support and guidance for solicitors who are unemployed or face redundancy.

Keeping our members informed through the production of the e-bulletin, targeted email updates, active social media and our respected monthly Journal magazine.

Answering thousands of queries from the public and providing details of solicitors who can help them in their specific circumstances.



THE LAW SOCIETY
of SCOTLAND
www.lawscot.org.uk

The Law Society of Scotland

Legal post: LP1 - EDINBURGH 1
Telephone: +44 (0) 131 226 7411
Textphone: +44 (0) 131 476 8359
Email: lawscot@lawscot.org.uk

www.lawscot.org.uk

