



The City of London Law Society

Annual General Meeting

22nd June 2022

Report from the Chair, Edward Sparrow

To start on a personal note, this last year has been one of change for CLLS. At the end of December, our Chief Executive David Hobart retired after 11 years in the role and at the start of the year we welcomed our new Chief Executive Matthew Rous. We are delighted to have Matthew on board for the next stage of the Society's journey.

Turning to our business over the last year, CLLS publicly condemned the invasion of Ukraine and urged compliance with sanctions. In response to criticism of law firms for acting for "oligarchs" in challenging sanctions, we have also emphasised the importance to the Rule of Law of everyone, whoever they are and whatever their cause, having access to justice through legal representation.

Matthew Rous and I meet regularly with the Law Society. A priority for both organisations is to ensure good communication and, where appropriate, coordination between us over common issues. Recent examples include our separate responses to the SRA's consultations on the continuation of post six run-off cover currently provided by the Solicitors Indemnity Fund and their proposals for changes to the regime for financial penalties for solicitors in breach of their rules.

Currently, we are discussing how we can together balance some of the public criticism of lawyers, particularly City lawyers, by explaining the importance of the Rule of Law as a pillar of our free and democratic Society; the contribution of English (and Welsh and Scottish) Law and Courts and the legal profession to business and the economy of this country; the scale of the pro bono work undertaken by firms; and the leading role being played by the profession in improving social mobility in the workforce.

With the help of our media consultants, Project Associates, we continue to look for and take opportunities to deliver these messages through the media. A few months ago, my interview with Joshua Rozenberg was broadcast on BBC Radio 4's Law in Action programme. I was able to support the themes of the Blackstone Lecture given by the Lord Chief Justice a few weeks earlier: the importance and undervaluation of the Rule of Law, English law and the contribution of the legal profession to the economy of this country. He called for a Government strategy to advertise, grow and exploit these contributions. I characterised the legal profession as the enablers of business and called on the Government to avoid unwarranted negative comments about lawyers.

Our regular meetings with the SRA and as a member of the International Law Committee continue. The SRA informed us about forthcoming consultations, the outcome of their work on workplace culture and the first set of results from the new Solicitors Qualification Examination. The ILC continues to focus on the consequences of Brexit and the opportunities it presents.

Any report on the year would not be complete without praise for our Specialist Committees. Their work is at the centre of what the Society does and is greatly valued by Government, Regulators and

other recipients of their wisdom. The many responses they make to consultations have included those issued by the SRA referred to above.

We are also establishing two new Committees: an Arbitration Committee and an ESG Committee to focus on the fields of pro bono, access to justice and social mobility.

Another example of the outstanding work of our Committees over the past year is the success of our Training Committee, under its Chair Patrick McCann and with the support of BARBRI, the provider of training for the Solicitors Qualification Examination, in launching the Social Welfare Solicitor Qualification Fund. It provides scholarships for those who would not otherwise be able to afford the fees to qualify as solicitors practising in the area of social welfare law. The Committee started with the target of raising £100,000 from our members and others. They have raised over £200,000 from 18 of our members and from the City of London Solicitors Company, which will enable 22 recipients of scholarships to qualify.

It is difficult to exaggerate the impact that this scheme will have on those individuals. It will also make a contribution to the number of lawyers qualified to help those most in need and is a perfect example of the impact our members can have when they work together. The initial success of the project and the generosity of firms, some of whom have committed for future years, mean that the ambition of making this project a permanent contribution by City firms to social mobility and access to justice is a real prospect. Many thanks and congratulations to all involved.
