

Challenging times

Comments from the Law Society of Scotland on the main issues covered in its annual report for 2017-18, now available online

With a continued focus on the Society's push for legislative change, and its work throughout the year around the Legal Services Review, the Society continued to engage with members, stakeholders and Government, providing platforms for interaction and discussion at all levels. GDPR featured highly in the Society's work: the Society secured its own compliance and produced a GDPR guide for members, whilst also continuing its focus on digital transformation and use of technology across its board and numerous committees.

Alison Attack, President

"A recent independent survey of the public in Scotland carried out by ComRes shows that over 90% of the public who have used a solicitor think they are trustworthy and were satisfied with the service they received. The Scottish legal profession contributes around £1.5 billion to the Scottish economy each year, with the profession accounting for over 26,000 jobs.



9 Lawscot Foundation students selected and each matched with a solicitor-mentor and a student buddy



We commented on 25 bills passing through Holyrood and Westminster and proposed 198 amendments – 88 of these on EU (Withdrawal) Bill alone

"Our call for legislative change and our push for new enabling legislation for the legal profession reached a pivotal moment this year, with a strong focus on our work throughout the year on providing our updated "case for change" and responding to the independent Legal Services Review group's request for evidence. We spent much time analysing all responses to the review, engaging with other organisations where appropriate and in particular discussing the issues with our Council, Regulatory Committee and wider membership.

"The Robertson report, published right at the end of our operating year, made a number of recommendations which we had originally suggested and which we support; however its primary recommendation, a new, single independent regulator for the legal profession, we stand firmly against. We will work with Government in 2019 to look at those options which support growth and continued respect of our legal profession."

Lorna Jack, chief executive

"We have gone from strength to strength this year on many fronts. Our membership numbers continued to grow throughout the year, with our core practising solicitor members reaching an all-time high of just below 12,000. We continue to safeguard our members' interests fully and aim to protect the future of the profession in difficult times, whilst promoting the public interest by having a strong legal profession with robust standards and a high level of education and skills.



Almost 20,000 visits per month to our Find a Solicitor website tool



158 consultations responded to across the Scottish and UK governments and the European Commission

"Our independently commissioned *Profile of the Profession* survey examined equality and diversity issues within the legal profession. With a tremendous response of over 2,700 responses, the survey results showed an improvement in gender equality and a reduction in the gender pay gap within the profession over the last five years. There is of course still much to do, and we have published our action plan for making further progress in addressing equality and diversity within the profession over the next few years.



8,000 telephone queries and 4,000 written queries from solicitors dealt with by our professional practice team

"A particular highlight for me was the launch of our Lawscot wellbeing portal (www.lawscot.org.uk/wellbeing), a fantastic resource of support, information and signposting for colleagues across all sectors of the profession who may be, or know or manage someone who is, experiencing issues with their emotional wellbeing."

Carole Ford, Regulatory Committee convener, 2011-18

“One of the main pieces of work before the Regulatory Committee this year was the response to the Office for Professional Body Anti-Money Laundering Supervision (OPBAS) recommendations, following their first supervisory visit to the Society in May. The Society was able to brief OPBAS on several significant developments in our AML supervisory regime, such as the development of a new dedicated AML supervisory team consisting of a head of AML and two other staff with the deep skills necessary to add value to the profession.

“Following the inspection, the Society prepared a detailed response and action plan which has been accepted by OPBAS. Work is now being undertaken to deliver on that action plan by implementing a number of recommendations arising from that first visit, including the completion of the AML risk profiling exercise. The Society is also taking the opportunity to implement a new governance structure for AML supervision and this includes an AML Subcommittee reporting to the Regulatory Committee.”

Footnote: Carole Ford handed over convenership of the Regulatory Committee to Craig Cathcart in December 2018.



Our GDPR web pages got 25,351 unique views since their launch in May

Graham Watson, Finance Committee convener and treasurer

“We have worked hard this year, alongside the Audit Committee, to complete a breakeven budget for this new operating year to 31 October 2019. The outcome of the Legal Services Review, published in October 2018, has resulted in some uncertainty around the precise regulatory role and shape of the Society in the years to come. In response to this we are undertaking scenario planning with a detailed review of all sources of income and expenditure, to ensure the Society will be in a position to adapt to any changes proposed by the Scottish Government in the future. Following the first increase in the practising certificate fee since 2008-09 (£15 or 2.7%), we will now seek stability in fee levels, whilst prudently managing expenditure and monitoring budgets, to enable the Society to meet its strategic goals under each of the scenarios being examined.”

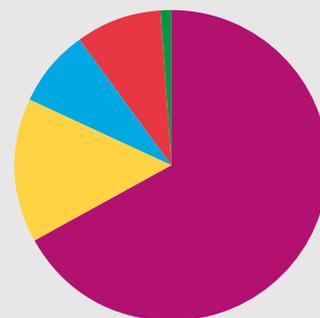
View the full annual report, including a report of the Society’s Regulatory Committee, at www.lawscot.org.uk/annualreport



Income

The Society’s income was £11.0m, an increase of 0.3% from the previous year

- 67% Membership
- 15% Other core income
- 8% Other fee categories
- 9% Commercial
- 1% Investment income



Expenditure

The Society’s expenditure (excluding actuarial movements in the closed pension scheme) was £11.2m, the same as the previous year.

- 6% Education, training & qualifications
- 23% Finance, IT & operations
- 7% Member services
- 8% Commercial
- 25% Regulation
- 14% External relations
- 17% Shared services

