

LAW SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND COUNTRY REPORT

The Law Society of Scotland is the professional body for over 12,000 Scottish solicitors. With our overarching objective of leading legal excellence, we strive to excel and to be a world-class professional body, understanding and serving the needs of our members and the public. We set and uphold standards to ensure the provision of excellent legal services and ensure the public can have confidence in Scotland's solicitor profession.

We have a statutory duty to work in the public interest, a duty which we are strongly committed to achieving through our work to promote a strong, varied and effective solicitor profession working in the interests of the public and protecting and promoting the rule of law.

For more information about our work, visit: www.lawscot.org.uk/about-us/strategy-reports-plans/

1. Platinum Anniversary

In 2019, we celebrated the Society's [70th birthday](#) and marked the occasion with a variety of events throughout the year. At the launch of the platinum year in January, President Alison Attack unveiled the Society's [new timeline](#), charting important events in our 70-year history. The Society's platinum year coincided with another significant anniversary: the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, which paved the way for women to become lawyers for the first time. (That same year, [Madge Easton Anderson](#) – who would go on to become the first woman to qualify as a solicitor anywhere in the UK – graduated from the University of Glasgow with Bachelor of Law degree.) On International Women's Day in March, more than 200 women members of the Scottish legal community had their photographs taken as part of the #First100Years project. Other highlights included the 20th anniversary of our annual Donald Dewar Debating Tournament, a platinum blog series featuring contributions from members at all stages of their varied careers, and the debut of our platinum country dance, accompanied by original music commissioned especially for our anniversary.

2. Legal services review

In 2017, the Scottish Government commissioned an independent review to make independent recommendations to reform and modernise the framework for the regulation of legal services and complaints handling. Its conclusions were published in October 2018. The report made 40 recommendations, many of which we supported (and indeed had made ourselves in our submission to the review) but we did not support the principal

recommendation, which was to remove the Law Society of Scotland as the regulator of Scottish solicitors, to be replaced by a new single regulatory body. We believed it would risk weakening public protection and increasing costs for those who pay for legal services. We have almost 70 years' experience of successfully setting and enforcing standards in the solicitor profession, from accrediting degrees and managing the route to qualification to carrying out anti-money laundering supervision, inspecting law firms and managing the client protection fund which protects consumers from financial loss through the dishonesty of a solicitor or their staff.

In June 2019 the Scottish Government published a preliminary response to the report. It acknowledged that there were “polarising views” on the main recommendation and committed to further consultation with stakeholders on it and the other recommendations for reform. The Scottish Government established a working group in its effort to build a consensus on a package of measures which could be put out to consultation. We are pleased to be part of that group, which has now met several times. The government aims to publish models for consultation by summer recess.

3. LawscotTech

[LawscotTech](#) is an initiative that we launched in October 2018 to stimulate legal technology innovation in Scotland which will deliver practical benefits for those working in the justice and legal sectors and their clients. LawscotTech will provide support from concept stage through to taking a product or service to market.

It brings together experts from the legal world and the technology world to work collaboratively. Through our connections, we are well placed to reach out to the legal profession, technology firms, the academic community and other business sectors with similar programmes such as the financial sector (FinTech Scotland).

LawscotTech aims to:

1. Facilitate a thriving legal technology environment by bringing together solicitors and their employees with technologists
2. Through technological advances, improve efficiencies and create competitive advantages for solicitors and clients
3. Showcase a globally respected hub for legal technology innovation in Scotland
4. Collaborate with partners in other business sectors throughout Scotland and globally
5. Engage the Scottish business community's interest in the legal sector
6. Stimulate engagement and investment from outwith the legal sector.

We have led delegations of Scottish LegalTech companies on government trade missions to Switzerland, Austria, Madrid and Lisbon.

4. Brexit

Since the referendum in June 2016, we have been monitoring political developments closely and promoting the key issues we identified as being of utmost importance for citizens and for our members. Our [website](#) highlights all of our latest briefings, responses and position papers on Brexit-related legislation and parliamentary inquiries. It is also a source of information for our members on the impact of UK withdrawal on the profession and their clients.

Our focus for this next stage of negotiations is to promote the highest levels of continued cooperation in the civil and criminal judicial sphere, as this is in the best interests of UK and EU citizens and businesses. We also support mutual market access and professional recognition to the greatest extent possible, again believing this to be of mutual benefit to the UK and EU legal profession and the clients we serve.

5. Lawscot Wellbeing

In May 2018, to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Week 2018 we launched a web-based resource for those working in the legal sector. [Lawscot Wellbeing](#) provides information, help and guidance through a dedicated online portal on the Law Society of Scotland's website. It aims to:

- Equip legal professionals with information and signposting to help manage emotional wellbeing
- Provide access to support services and advice for solicitors, trainees and others within the Scottish legal sector who may be experiencing difficulties
- Help those responsible for people in firms, or their family and friends, to support those in difficulty or crisis
- Provide guidance to solicitors who are concerned about their client's emotional wellbeing

During Mental Health Awareness Week in May 2019, we hosted a Lawscot Wellbeing roundtable event with mental health experts for new lawyers to find out if they felt supported in their firms and what recommendations they would make for improvement. We also issued a questionnaire on mental health to all members to allow us to understand more about mental health issues within the legal sector as a whole. We expect to issue a report with the main findings in May.

6. CMA investigation

In one of its first Scottish specific projects, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has announced research into the Scottish legal services market. The work will focus on:

- The benefits of independent regulation of legal services in Scotland and whether the current institutional arrangement - where the bodies regulating the professions are also those representing and lobbying for them - dampens competition.
- The impact of the current legal services regulatory framework in Scotland on competition, particularly on innovation and the entry of new business models to the market.

The CMA expects to publish its report by the end of March.

We have had a number of useful discussions with the CMA. We met with the project team last August and agreed to share data and information around the legal services market.

Our focus and work on price transparency came about as a direct result of the CMA review in England and Wales. We published new guidance on 1 February 2020 to help consumers of legal services in Scotland make better-informed choices. The guidance comes into effect on 1 April 2020. You can read more about it [here](#).

7. Lawscot Foundation

In 2016 we established the [Lawscot Foundation](#), a charity which helps academically talented students from less advantaged backgrounds in Scotland through their legal education journey. The Lawscot Foundation offers financial assistance, mentoring and other support to students during the law degree (LLB) stage, right through the diploma in professional legal practice (the compulsory one-year post-graduate course). We also support the bright legal stars of the future by providing mentoring throughout their legal education from an experienced Scottish solicitor to help enhance the student's confidence, skills and knowledge.

The first eight students to be supported by the Foundation, all of whom are the first in their family to go to university, completed their second year of a law degree last summer; and a second set of nine students who were selected from 42 applications completed their first year. A further eight began their studies in autumn 2019.