

LAW SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND COUNTRY REPORT

The Law Society of Scotland is the professional body for over 12,000 Scottish solicitors and was established in 1949. We have an overarching objective of leading legal excellence, and strive to excel and to be a world-class professional body, understanding and serving the needs of our members and the public. As part of our regulatory duties, we set and uphold standards to ensure the provision of excellent legal services and ensure the public can have confidence in Scotland's legal profession.

The Law Society also has 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 legal profession working in the interests of the public and protecting and promoting the rule of law. We seek to influence the creation of a fairer and more just society through active engagement with the Scottish and United Kingdom governments, parliaments, wider stakeholders and our membership.

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

1. COVID and the legal profession

As with all of our European colleagues, 2020 was defined by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the profession, our court system, businesses, families and society in general.

We have been working with partners in the Scottish legal sector and closely monitoring official advice and updates from Scottish Government and NHS to ensure that we are acting in accordance with the latest guidance to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees, members and stakeholders. We have produced guidance and practice updates examining the effects of the pandemic on various areas of work, as well as business support tools for members experiencing difficulties. We have also increased and tailored the support we offer through our [Lawscot Wellbeing](#) initiative.

At the end of April, we announced a package of financial support for the solicitor profession for 2020/21 in response to the pandemic, including a 20% reduction in the practising certificate fee, a 20% reduction in the accounts fee paid by law firm partners, and a nil contribution from law firm partners to the client protection fund. Taken together, the package has saved the solicitor profession over £2.2 million. It followed a series of other changes at the Law Society, including the furloughing of 20% of its staff, a recruitment freeze and other savings for the previous and current operating year.

We know the pandemic continues to place enormous pressure on the legal profession. We will continue to keep our members informed via direct emails, including our fortnightly e-newsletter *Lawscot News*, on our social media channels, and on our website.

2. Priorities for the Scottish Parliament Election 2021

Ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections in May, we have [published a document](#) setting out our key priorities for the new Parliamentary term. This document is intended to inform and influence political party manifestos for the 2021 elections, inform our members of the focus of our work with MSPs and the Scottish Government, and form an ongoing reference point for the Parliamentary term which is due to run from 2021-26.

The report makes a total of 43 recommendations across six key themes, underpinned by an opening section urging all parties to commit to respecting the rule of law. This is presented as a central pillar of our democracy and society and we call for the rule of law and the role of the legal professionals who uphold people's rights to be respected, promoted and championed. The six themes are: Protecting access to justice; Regulation of legal services; Economic recovery; Scotland's legal and constitutional future; A diverse legal profession and Public Policy and Law Reform.

3. 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties

The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) is to be held in Glasgow from 1- 12 November 2021. The UK is hosting the main event (described as the largest summit ever to be held by the UK), while Italy will host the preliminary meetings.

Inspired by the Scottish location for COP26, in August 2020 the Society set up [a working group](#) to consider COP26 and climate change. COP26 provides us with opportunities to consider our own responsibilities to climate change and look at how we are affected as individuals both personally and professionally, as a legal profession in representing clients and in policy matters, and, for the Society, as a professional body.

Legal representation on the working group demonstrates the universal nature and importance of climate change, with cross-cutting policy interests spanning planning, property, tax, energy, environment, competition, finance and criminal. The Society's committee interests fit well into the UK's key COP26 priorities of: Adaptation & Resilience; Nature; Energy Transition; Clean Road Transport; and Finance.

Within the context of the Society's statutory duty of working in the public interest, by

supporting COP26 policy development and law reform relating to climate change, the Society will engage with the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments, Parliaments, wider stakeholders and in return, seek to raise awareness of the issues for our members.

4. Diversity and social mobility in trainee recruitment

Following a successful pilot using the Law Society of Scotland's [contextualised recruitment scheme](#), two of Scotland's leading law firms have committed to using the recruitment system for their latest trainee recruitment rounds. The RARE recruitment system allows candidates to enter information about their personal circumstances that gives context to their application to show if they have had barriers to overcome achieve a certain outcome and to demonstrate that they might well have performed better, had those barriers been removed. This in turn helps organisations to have a more rounded and unbiased view of all the candidates before them and identify self-motivated, driven, outperformers by ensuring their applications are reviewed in light of their wider experience.

4. Gender Equality research

In May 2020, we published findings of roundtables held in the latter part of 2019 examining key gender equality issues and attended by people from across the legal profession. The [gender equality roundtable reports](#) focus on four key areas: the gender pay gap, flexible working, bullying and harassment, and bias. They detail the findings of 15 roundtables held in the second half of 2019 by organisations, including law firms, in-house teams and local faculties, across Scotland. The roundtables continue the work begun by the Law Society's [Profile of the Profession](#) research, published in late 2018, and offered participants a safe, structured place to candidly discuss their experiences and thoughts of these complex topics.

3. Specialist Accreditation in Legal Technology

In [February](#) and [April](#) last year, we accredited the first two non-lawyer legal technology specialists, the latter of whom is the first to come from a non-traditional law firm background, in recognition of their expertise and leadership role in developing and implementing technological infrastructure and solutions for legal services. There are now five Law Society of Scotland Accredited Legal Technologists.

The [professional accreditation](#) for those working in legal technology is the first of its kind in the UK. We launched it in November 2019 to reflect the growing need for technology-based solutions specific to the legal services sector, alongside the emergence of new roles such as legal process engineer, legal analyst, and legal technologist. It was designed to recognise both solicitor and non-solicitor technology specialists working in the sector.