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Recognition and management are key

A trainee patent attorney shares their thoughts on protecting mental health in the legal profession

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The digitisation of legal services is a trend that's set to continue into the New Year

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The legal profession in Leeds and Yorkshire is looking proud, vibrant and strong, but there are risks

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Leeds-Strong

The legal profession in Leeds and throughout Yorkshire is looking proud, vibrant and strong, but onshoring presents a risk, writes Nicholas Emmerson, president of Leeds Law Society



Nicholas Emmerson,
president of Leeds
Law Society

Just as I had resolved to invest in a 'Bah Humbug' Christmas jumper, vitamin D tablets and hide away until spring, jolly news kept popping up.

Steering away from the very jolly election and vaccine trial results, I recently had the privilege of chairing the judging panel for the Yorkshire Legal Awards.

Wow! We have some real talent here in Yorkshire. I was both ashamed and absolutely

delighted. Ashamed because I should not have been surprised and delighted because there is a plethora of first-class firms working hard for local and global clients.

The excellent entries from our high-profile big and medium-sized firms were not the source of my surprise. I know how good they are.

My surprise was instead reserved for the mountain of specialist law firms that flourish in every corner of Yorkshire. Most are small but all are populated by dedicated professionals who obviously love and are excellent at what they do. The depth of expertise harboured by these firms was outstanding.

Thank you to all those who entered and cheered me up. The state of the legal profession in Yorkshire is clearly strong and demonstrably resilient in these extraordinary times.

The jolly news then kept on coming.

The judging was followed by a recent *The Lawyer* article about Leeds that splashed: "The future is Northern."

The article referred to the Leeds City Region Legal Tech & Innovation 2020 Report. An initiative led by Leeds City Council and Leeds Law Society, which sponsored it along with Leeds law firms. The report can be downloaded from the Leeds Law Society's website and is excellent.

The *Lawyer* article concluded: "Covid-19 is tearing up the rule book on how and where we work, Leeds' ambitions to become a global legal tech hub could be realised sooner than you think."

I am tempted to sign off now at my most jolly and wish you all a safe and merry Christmas. However, it would be remiss of me not to dig deeper into what the future may bring.

The *Lawyer* article added: "With Leeds' headline rents 55 per

cent lower than London and lawyers on average 7.7 per cent cheaper, there's plenty to financially incentivise firms to open in the city."

The use of the word "cheaper" struck me. How do we promote Leeds's competitive advantage without promoting our city as a bargain-basement alternative?

The City of London Law Society recently promoted an event on the ethics of 'onshoring' or 'north-shoring'. An event about the ethical issues surrounding London firms setting up in provincial UK cities. Forgive me if I seem to exist in a perpetual state of surprise, but 'ethics'?

All became clear when I read a recent report issued by Birmingham Law School.

The report identified two basic structures: London-Lite offices and Matter Mills offices. The former is a mini version of the London office and the latter is more clearly subordinated to the London office, with London being seen as the client.

Both structures have advantages and disadvantages, as set out in the report. Common to both structures was that once quality had been ensured, clients were effectively location-agnostic. The report also noted that many solicitors were pleased with their higher salaries that were above local market rates but still less than London.

However, the report concluded: "We wonder if onshoring is leading to a category of sidelined lawyers whose professional development and futures are different to (and lesser than) lawyers in the London HQ."

It also noted that Matter Mills offices were proportionately staffed by women. "One Matter Mill office was entirely staffed by female lawyers. We find that remarkable," the report concluded.

Leeds has not yet experienced onshoring to the same degree that other provincial cities have. It will come.

The legal profession in Leeds and throughout Yorkshire is proud, vibrant and strong. The Yorkshire Legal Awards entries clearly demonstrated this. Leeds Law Society has successfully campaigned for Leeds as a centre of legal excellence for many years. We are not a bargain basement alternative but deep pockets from London potentially risk suffocating the market by offering vicarious London glamour, weak prospects and slightly more salary. If the ethical questions raised by the report are not addressed, the legal profession in Leeds will suffer. I favour Leeds-Strong over London-Lite and Matter Mills any day.

Be jolly, jolly careful and have fun.

Get registered and ready for the Yorkshire Legal Awards 2020

The Yorkshire Legal Awards will reflect the talent, hard work and commitment integral to the prosperity of the profession on 15 December when the 2020 ceremony is broadcast online.

The broadcast will stream via yorkshirelegalnews.co.uk at 7pm on 15 December and you can expect all of the usual glamour associated with an awards show, including a celebrity host, a speech from the chair of our judging panel and, of course, the awards ceremony itself.

Sign up now to watch the ceremony for free online via yorkshirelegalnews.co.uk. If you are shortlisted, this is your chance to find out whether you won one of the coveted awards recognising excellence in the Yorkshire legal profession. Of course, anyone can register and we encourage you to share the event with your friends and colleagues.

Unique access information will be sent out to registered attendees ahead of the event, so don't miss your opportunity to watch the biggest Yorkshire legal show in town on 15 December.

Although we cannot be together in person, show your support and participation via #YLAwards on Twitter and



LinkedIn. There will be shoutouts for photos of the best dressed, most impressive viewing location/setup, and cutest pet fans!

That's it—get registered and ready for the Yorkshire Legal Awards 2020. We can't wait to celebrate the profession's fantastic achievements.

Milners Solicitors secures rare public inquiry hat-trick after appointment to Grenfell Tower role



Leeds-headquartered law firm Milners Solicitors has added the Grenfell Tower fire to its growing portfolio of public inquiries—marking a rare hat-trick for the Yorkshire legal sector.

Milners has been instructed to act on the inquiry arising from the fire that destroyed the tower in June 2017 and claimed the lives of 72 people. This latest appointment means that the firm, which has offices in Leeds city centre, Harrogate and Pontefract, is

representing clients at three current public inquiries.

It is also retained as part of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and in the Infected Blood Inquiry (IBI).

Giles Ward, senior partner at Milners, said: "This is another major case for our firm, and our growing public inquiry specialism. I am delighted to play our part in this scrutiny of how the fire started, and what lessons can be learned."

"Being involved in three high-profile national inquiries at the same time is another endorsement of the quality and experience of the Milners' team, as well as a vote of confidence in the legal talent that exists out of London and in the regions."

"We believe this clutch of appointments marks a first for a law firm based in the North of England."

The day after the fire, former Prime Minister Theresa May announced there would be an inquiry into its causes. She made a statement to Parliament the following month and announced a judge-led inquiry in which "no stone will be left unturned".

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry, which is being live streamed, is divided into two phases. The first addressed the events on

the night of the fire, and the ongoing second phase, which commenced in January, is investigating the wider circumstances.

IICSA—set up in the aftermath of the Jimmy Savile scandal—is the largest independent inquiry into child sexual abuse ever witnessed in the UK. Milners is among just a handful of regional lawyers involved.

There are currently 14 investigative strands to the inquiry, which include the Roman Catholic Church; the Anglican Church; residential schools; children in the care of Lambeth Council; and Westminster.

The public hearings are expected to last until at least 2021 and the final outcome of the inquiry, which is costing around £20 million a year, will not be published any time soon.

Milners is also representing the interests of several victims and their families at the IBI into what was branded "the biggest treatment disaster in the NHS".

They include the person credited with being among the first to lift the lid on events in the 70s and 80s, when many thousands of hemophiliacs died after receiving blood products—many from America—contaminated with HIV and Hepatitis C.

The IBI panel is tasked with examining why men, women and children in the UK were given infected blood and/or infected blood products; the impact on their families; how the authorities (including government) responded; the nature of any support provided following infection; questions of consent; and whether there was a cover-up.

The Milners team, working alongside Sam Stein QC from the Chambers of Michael Mansfield QC, has already taken its clients' legal fight to Number 10.

It launched an appeal to Prime Minister Boris Johnson to end the postcode compensation lottery that exists, and grant victims living in England the same level of financial support already awarded to those in Scotland.

Keebles advises Xbite on plans to more than double warehouse operation



Keebles has advised Xbite over plans to more than double the e-commerce specialist's warehousing operation.

Based in Barlborough, Derbyshire, Xbite ships products around the world. Due to rapid growth, it has agreed a multi-year lease on a 102,000 square foot warehouse at Markham Vale, near Chesterfield.

Led by Paul Russell, partner and member of the commercial property team, Keebles acted as legal adviser to Xbite to ensure the process ran smoothly.

Xbite will also reconfigure its 45,000 square foot Barlborough headquarters into an office for its 130 employees.

Russell said: "Xbite is a fast-growing firm that needed to expand its warehousing capacity to fulfil orders. We were pleased to act on their behalf to secure a site that is close to

their head office and is also perfectly placed just off Junction 29A of the M1 for distribution.

Xbite, which has a turnover of £42 million, operates a variety of brands, including Shop4, Roov.co.uk, 365 Games, Pukkr, and Maison & White. It was founded in 2004 by Nick and Keely Whitehead to retail video games online.

Managing director Nick Whitehead said: "We have outgrown our much-loved unit at Barlborough and needed a warehouse that had the space and set up required to deliver our current and future objectives."

"Markham Vale will enable us to deliver a better work environment for all our warehouse operatives."

Rebecca Schofield, head of the Yorkshire industrial team at Knight Frank, acted as agent for Markham Vale.

Tyr Law completes high-profile commercial property deals

The commercial property team at Leeds-based law firm Tyr Law has completed a number of high-profile development deals in recent months.

Particular highlights included representing Leeds-based paper, plastics and board merchant PPB Limited on a consolidation of several sites into a new 30,000 square foot purpose-built facility in Dartford.

Tyr Law also advised Bradford-based cleaning products manufacturer Astonish on the development of its new larger facility comprising 120,000 square feet of manufacturing and office space at Thornbury Industrial Park.

Graham Cheesebrough, director of PPB, said: "We were delighted to complete the acquisition of our new unit. This purpose built building allows us to increase the amount of stock held for both PPB and NE Plastics thereby giving us

the ability to further develop our business. We have valued the advice and assistance provided by Tyr Law throughout the process, their knowledge and sector expertise has been invaluable."

This series of high-profile transactions completes another successful few months for the team, which has seen its inclusion in the latest Legal 500 rankings for Commercial Property – Yorkshire and Humber.

Dean Jowett, head of commercial property and managing partner of Tyr Law, said: "We are delighted to have got a number of high profile deals over the line for our clients in the last few months and are equally delighted to have achieved a ranking so soon in the firm's development in the Legal 500, which I feel is thoroughly deserved for the level of work undertaken by the team in the last 18 months."

Irwin Mitchell advises production company behind new children's TV show



Pictured: Sally Lindsay and Don Warrington. Credit: Paul Husband

Lawyers from Irwin Mitchell in Leeds have advised the team at Saffron Cherry on the production of a new Channel 5 and S4C TV programme, *The World According to Grandpa*.

The new humorous children's series is based on books by Chris Heath and was influenced by the tales of his own grandad, Arturo Garcia.

The series features 2D animation with each episode prompted by a question posed by one of the four grandchildren to the grandpa, who will be played in the *Milkshake!* Channel 5 programme by leading theatre and TV actor Don Warrington MBE.

Sally Lindsay, renowned actor, writer and presenter, provides the voice of the other lead character, Halifax the rabbit, which has been produced by puppeteers Talk to the Hand Productions, and is operated by Julia Frost.

The show is designed to inspire children to laugh and learn through relatable intergenerational relationships and visually engaging animation and live action mix.

Grandpa Productions was commissioned to make 25 episodes. The shows will appear on Channel 5's children's programming block, *Milkshake*. A Welsh language version will also appear on S4C, the Welsh-language free-to-air TV channel.

The Channel 5 version will be produced by newly established Grandpa Productions, and led by company director Caroline Roberts-Cherry and Derek Drennan, who runs The Nest Productions. The Welsh language version for S4C will be co-produced by Angharad Garlick and the team at Cardiff-based production company Boom Cymru, alongside Grandpa Production.

The government-funded Leeds-based Young Audiences Content Fund (YACF) has also supported the production. The British Film Institute (BFI) manages YACF, which supports the creation of distinct, high-quality content for children and

young audiences.

As the appointed production lawyers, Irwin Mitchell, which has offices in Leeds city centre, advised on all production and production finance agreements, including the negotiation and drafting of the broadcaster agreements with Channel 5 and S4C, and the production finance agreement with the BFI's YACF and the distribution agreement with Beyond Distribution.

Partner Laura Harper led the Irwin Mitchell team, which included senior associate Aurelia Butler-Ball and solicitors Elizabeth Maloney, Grace McNulty-Brown, and Amelia Darbro. Senior associate Robert Farrell advised on the banking issues.

Harper, who is the national media and entertainment sector lead at Irwin Mitchell, said: "We're delighted to be appointed by Grandpa Productions to handle all the legal aspects in connection to the production of *The World According to Grandpa*."

"This was a great project involving close collaboration between many stakeholders and supported by the collective strength of our sport, media and entertainment team."

Harper added: "It is a delightful children's programme that the excellent team at Grandpa Productions can all be very proud of. The series highlights the wonderful relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. It was a pleasure to work on such a joyful and diverse production with Grandpa, and each of the stakeholders, to help realise this superb programme."

Caroline Roberts-Cherry, founder of TV production company Saffron Cherry and executive producer of *The World According to Grandpa*, said: "Laura and her team offered a seamless and comprehensive service which freed up the creative team to focus on fire-breathing hamsters and cats that mine for jam, and of course our wonderful cast. It was also important to us that Irwin Mitchell were able to proactively cover off every aspect of the legal, which made us feel supported."

Exchange Chambers barrister seals maritime mediation success as another becomes a recorder



Paul Kirtley from Exchange Chambers in Leeds has secured the successful resolution of a high-value maritime personal injury claim, while Ashley Serr has added to his list of judicial appointments.

The claimant at the centre of the mediation, an EU national, was a marine engineer who suffered life-changing injuries on board a yacht sailing under a Guernsey flag, with a UK master.

The mediation involved complex evidence and negotiations with a range of maritime experts and lawyers before settlement was reached.

Due to the multi-jurisdictional nature of the case, as well as current Covid-19 restrictions, the mediation was conducted remotely.

The multi-jurisdictional aspect of Kirtley's mediation practice, in which he specialises in helping the parties reach a solution in cases involving intractable issues, has resulted in a number of instructions in recent months.

Earlier this year, the accredited civil and commercial and workplace mediator successfully mediated a high-value professional negligence case with parties from Austria, Switzerland, the UK and the Isle of Man taking part remotely.

Kirtley also successfully mediated a high value personal injury claim with eight parties from around the UK and the Isle of Man participating remotely.

All mediations were facilitated by Exchange Chambers's in-house IT department, which is well-versed in delivering remote hearings across all technology platforms.

Meanwhile, Serr from Exchange Chambers in Leeds has been appointed as a recorder by the Queen.

Recorders are barristers appointed to sit as part-time judges.

Earlier this year, Serr was also appointed as a deputy district judge (North Eastern Circuit), a fee-paid part-time judge of the First Tier Tribunal (Social Entitlement Chamber) and a fee-paid part-time judge of the Employment Tribunal (North West region).

Serr continues to practice as a barrister at Exchange Chambers alongside his judicial appointments.

Called to the bar in 1996, Serr provides expert legal advice to businesses of all sizes, government departments and individuals.

While originally known as a leading employment junior, Serr's practice has grown in recent years and now also encompasses contract disputes, restrictive covenant cases, director disqualification, insolvency and judicial review.

Exchange Chambers is continuing to expand in Leeds, after signing a new 10-year lease at Oxford House on Oxford Row in the Civic Quarter of Leeds City Centre, close to the courts.

Schofield Sweeney advises Quick Reach Powered Access on expansion

Schofield Sweeney has advised Quick Reach Powered Access on the expansion of its head office and distribution facility in Manchester.

The provider of powered access equipment such as scissor lifts and articulated booms saw demand for its equipment increase following the lifting of lockdown restrictions imposed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the company needed more office and workshop space.

Dave Barton, director of Quick Reach, said of the expansion at its head office and distribution facility in Manchester: "Our expanded Manchester head office allows extra space for additional offices, storage and a new dedicated training facility for IPAF and PASMA courses. Our head office in Manchester was the very first location for Quick Reach and continues to be the busiest."

"Over the past five years we have effectively doubled our Manchester head office and are now recognised suppliers for household names such as Everton Football Club, David Lloyd Gyms, and Ikea."

"The expansion was also part of our

strategic development plan as we look to expand our national branch network with future sites planned for London and Dundee. Our team continues to grow, and the expansion allows us to recruit new people and provide accredited training courses to help with their professional development."

Barton said the support of Schofield Sweeney "has been excellent", with the Yorkshire law firm providing property legal assistance all the way through to the detailed due diligence required to formulate a successful business transaction.

He continued: "Schofield Sweeney has helped us achieve a great result; we look forward to forging an even closer working relationship in the challenging but exciting times ahead."

Pardeep Khela, associate in Schofield Sweeney's commercial property team, said: "We are delighted to have assisted Quick Reach with the expansion of the Manchester branch."

"It was clear on the outset that the expansion was urgently needed. The technical nature of the site and the practical and title problems posed made the transaction challenging but very rewarding. From the entire Schofield Sweeney team, we congratulate Quick Reach on their continued expansion."





Silver linings emerge with the rise of tech adoption in legal

Recognition of the need for a digital future within legal is in sharp focus now and the pandemic was a big catalyst for change, writes **Bronwyn Townsend**, marketing campaign manager at InfoTrack

To suggest 2020 has been a turbulent year would be an understatement. As words and terms such as 'unprecedented', 'R number' and 'new-normal' spread like wildfire through the social lexicon, a paradigm shift was taking place in what has become the largest scale social experiment on the planet. When countries locked down overnight, businesses had to find alternative ways of operating and shift their business models to accommodate a host of newly imposed restrictions.

The Financial Times reported in June that the pandemic had been speeding up law firm adoption of technology, and software innovation in key areas such as property and conveyancing was keeping the sector moving. As we saw following the 2008 financial crisis, global events force change at a significantly faster rate than we're used to.

The legal industry in the UK has been slower to adopt new technology into their practices than other sectors. While the more tech-savvy firms may have been quicker to adopt digital processes, the digitisation of legal processes cannot take place without two key factors: changes accepted and initiated by leading industry and governing bodies, and the solutions providers to facilitate it.

Cue the upending of life as we were accustomed to in March

2020, when businesses were subject to pivoting swiftly or risk being left behind. At the beginning of the year, it would not be uncommon to walk through the offices of a law firm and see in-trays filled with documents, files stored in folders and visits from the postman regularly. Eight months on, and things have taken on a different shape. From 27 July 2020, HM Land Registry announced it would accept electronic signatures for deed submissions. This was a huge step for the digitisation of conveyancing and marked a new era in the UK. Emerging out of necessity, the change took place to ensure that the property market was not hindered further.

Recognition of the need for a digital future within legal is in sharp focus now and the pandemic was a big catalyst for change. The wheels are in motion and the evolution of the legal sector has been propelled forward with firms' ability to offer everything from client onboarding and ID verification to post-completion without paper, post or stepping foot inside an office.

Despite the challenges 2020 has presented, it's silver linings like digitisation that are shaping the future of the legal industry for the benefit of law firms and their clients.

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DLA Piper advises the Snowdrop Project on acquisition of new Sheffield headquarters



DLA Piper has given pro bono advice to human trafficking survivor charity the Snowdrop Project on the acquisition of its new headquarters at 7 Castle Street in Sheffield.

The Snowdrop Project supports survivors of human trafficking by providing long-term, holistic support through advocacy, counselling, community activities, house renovation services and pathways in to education and employment, empowering them to live safe and

independent lives.

It is a small but growing charity that has gone from supporting 10 people in 2015 to 167 adults and 79 children in the last year.

Snowdrop has operated from a series of temporary office spaces until now. Having this new permanent home will make a huge difference to the charity and will allow it to continue to expand the number of people it helps and the ways in which it helps them.

Lara Bundock, chief executive officer of Snowdrop, said: "A few years ago we dreamed of a building that would provide a sense of home for survivors of trafficking in the city, a place that can be relied upon to be a consistent and stable beacon of safety, security and hope."

"I am overwhelmingly excited to see the beginning of that dream realized and it would not have been possible without the incredible expertise and dedication of the DLA Piper team. We are so grateful for all that the team has done and it's been a pleasure working alongside them"

DLA Piper partner Jon Kenworthy, who is also a trustee of Snowdrop, said: "Snowdrop does wonderful work and I am delighted that DLA Piper was able to make a small contribution to help it on the next leg of its journey."

Sheffield real estate location head Nigel Howard led the DLA Piper team, which was supported by Sheffield-based real estate associate Amy Adams.

William Kaye joins Resolution Collaborative Working Party

Family law specialist William Kaye of Berwins Solicitors has joined the Collaborative Working Party of industry body Resolution.

The high-profile position adds further strength to the family law unit Berwins, which is ranked as one of the top five teams in the region.

This national role will see Kaye work to promote the benefits of collaborative practice and to offer support and guidance to family lawyers across the UK, helping them to grow and develop their expertise in this area.

Commenting on the honour, Kaye said: "As a passionate advocate for the collaborative process, I accept this role with a huge sense of pride and am looking forward to being involved in shaping the future of this important area of law."

"My experience has shown me that the collaborative process, which allows couples to work constructively together through a divorce, has significant benefits for separating couples over more confrontational approaches. I hope that by working with Resolution and professionals from across the county, I will be able to play a part in ensuring that more couples facing difficult situations can experience the best possible outcomes."

Danielle Day, head of family law at Berwins, added: "We are delighted to see William take on this role. As a well-regarded lawyer with over 20 years' experience, he has a great deal to offer and the ability to share best practice—particularly around the high levels of client care which Berwins prides itself on—will be a significant boost to the legal profession as a whole."

University of Bradford awards honorary doctorate to Ruby Bhatti OBE



The University of Bradford has awarded an honorary doctorate to consultant solicitor Ruby Bhatti OBE for her work in the city.

Bhatti, who works as a solicitor and has more than 27 years of experience in the legal field, holds several local leadership roles and non-executive directorships across housing, education, youth and health.

One of her most recent appointments was to the Bradford Youth Development Board as a non-executive director.

Bhatti's other current roles include chair of the Wolfson Centre for Applied Research, and chair for three primary schools and a secondary school.

In her speech accepting the honorary doctorate from the University of Bradford, Bhatti said: "I am deeply grateful and feel very privileged to be receiving this honorary doctorate from the University of Bradford—it came as a surprise and is very special to me."

"I'm proud to be appointed an ambassador and will hold this position with true commitment and compassion."

Peter McCormick steps in as interim chairman of FA



Harrogate lawyer Peter McCormick OBE has been unanimously elected to the role of interim chairman of the Football Association (FA), following the resignation of Greg Clarke.

He becomes the first person to have been chairman of both the Premier League and the FA.

McCormick was vice chairman of the FA and has been appointed as football faces one of its most difficult challenges in history in dealing with the ramifications of Covid-19 for the sport at all levels.

Clarke resigned as FA chairman following the language he used when talking to MPs about diversity. In a statement, the FA said: "Peter McCormick will step into the role as interim FA chairman with immediate effect and the FA board will begin the process of identifying and appointing a new chair in due course."

McCormick is senior partner of McCormicks Solicitors of Harrogate and has a long career as a leading sports lawyer. He is also chairman of the Football Board and chairman of the Legal Advisory Group of the Premier League, both executive positions, and a director of the FA, representing the Premier League.

In 2014, he was appointed chairman of the Premier League and served in that role for 15 months, prior to Richard Scudamore's combined appointment as executive chairman and chief executive officer.

McCormick is an internationally recognised expert in sports and media/entertainment law, and is ranked by the leading guides to the legal profession as one of the top sports lawyers in the UK.

He said: "Despite the unfortunate circumstances which have led to my election, it is a great honour to have been chosen to lead the FA and an even greater privilege to become the first person to chair both the Premier League and the FA."

Ranjit Uppal of Switalskis becomes district judge in the North Eastern Circuit



Solicitor advocate and Switalskis Solicitors director Ranjit Uppal has become a district judge in the North Eastern Circuit, based at Doncaster County Court.

Uppal took up the district judge role on 30 November, following his appointment by the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales.

Switalskis director of child care law, Ruth Coneron, replaces Uppal at the

helm of the child care law department at the firm.

Coneron has worked closely with Uppal since she started her training contract at Parker Bird in 1997. She plans to build on the successes achieved under his leadership and grow the department by bringing young and ambitious lawyers into the team.

Uppal has enjoyed a long and successful career as a solicitor, specialising in family, child care and immigration law.

He was the first Sikh solicitor in Huddersfield when he qualified in 1997, after training with Parker Bird Solicitors. He became a partner at the firm in 2000, before moving to lead the child care law department at Switalskis following its merger with Parker Bird in 2012.

He has Higher Rights of Audience, which enables him to represent clients before courts at all levels.

In 2006, at the age of 33, Uppal was appointed as the youngest and first Asian president of the Huddersfield Law Society in its 126-year history.

He has served as a part-time district judge since 2010, while working as director and solicitor advocate as part of Switalskis's family and care team. In 2016, he was named Solicitor Advocate of the Year at the national Law Society

Excellence Awards.

Pro bono work has played a significant role in his career. With the aim of uniting and developing the legal community locally and internationally, Uppal travelled to Uganda as part of the Huddersfield Law Society's Twinning Group and later on behalf of Role UK, which supports long-term partnerships between the UK legal sector and legal actors in developing countries.

In addition, the Ghanaian government enlisted his support in 2019 to provide advice on developing the country's childcare system, facilitated by UK-based group Strengthening Families for Abandoned Children.

Commenting on her colleague's departure from Switalskis, Coneron said: "Ranjit has been a tremendous driving force behind the department. Whilst we are all very sorry to see him leave Switalskis, he leaves the child care law department in a strong position and I relish the opportunity to take it forward."

Uppal said: "I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at Switalskis and recognise that the opportunities that my role here have presented have enabled me to develop into the district judge role. It is important to me that the child care law department is left in a strong position and in exceptionally safe hands, which it will be without a doubt with Ruth at the helm."

John Durkan, managing director of Switalskis, added: "It's with a very heavy heart that we prepare to say goodbye to Ranjit, but we completely understand his decision and all wish him the very best in this new role."

"The child care law department was one of only two in the firm when it was founded by Stephen Switalski in 1993. It will remain key to our business and we're delighted that Ruth Coneron will now lead the team and continue to develop it as an area of real strength and expertise."

Schofield Sweeney acquires boutique legal practice



Prodicus Legal is a successful and growing niche practice that complements the litigation and corporate services and wider offering at Schofield Sweeney.

James Wood established Prodicus Legal in 2013. The firm specialises in complex shareholder disputes, commercial frauds, insolvency litigation and property disputes for businesses and individuals across the UK.

Wood will become a partner at Schofield Sweeney. The Prodicus Legal litigation team also includes solicitor Damian Kilroy, who has worked closely with Wood for six years.

Pauline Hanratty will strengthen Schofield Sweeney's corporate offering. She has significant experience advising on all aspects of corporate and commercial matters for clients ranging from sole traders to PLCs.

The two firms have had a close relationship for many years. Hanratty trained at Schofield Sweeney while Wood was previously a partner before setting up Prodicus Legal.

Commenting on the acquisition, Wood said: "Schofield Sweeney has a strong reputation in the market and the opportunity to create a combined entity will provide clients with access to a wider range of services, strategic advice and excellent client care."

"We've seen an increase in litigation activity this year and the safe assumption is that there will be significant levels of fall-out from distressed debt. As part of a larger team we will continue to offer the sound commercial advice and support that our clients have come to trust."

Steven Millward, partner at Schofield Sweeney, said: "We are really pleased to welcome the Prodicus team and their clients to Schofield Sweeney, where they will continue to enjoy the high quality of advice and service that they have been used to, together with access to the range of other services we provide."

"We have responded well as a business to the challenges presented by Covid (since March we have recruited close to 20 lawyers) and look to the future with cautious optimism as we continue to grow."

Rachel Roche launches Law Society-backed book on setting up a law firm



York-based Rachel Roche has co-written a Law Society of England and Wales-backed book to help solicitors set up their own practices at one of the most challenging times for the legal profession.

Roche, of Roche Legal, is a multi-award winning solicitor who was commissioned by the Law Society to write the book, *How to Start a Law Firm*,

with Darren J Sylvester, who set up his own practice, DJS Law Solicitors, in 2016.

The 110,000 word book was released in November, with the authors hoping it will become a groundbreaking template for solicitors wanting to set up their own practices.

Roche started writing her 55,000 word contribution last year, which marked the 100th anniversary of women being allowed to practise law in the UK.

She said: "It was important to me to be able to produce a book that would help lawyers wanting to set up on their own, particularly given the current problems. In response to the pandemic, we added a final chapter entitled Covid-19: The ultimate disaster recovery test."

Roche and Sylvester committed to writing *How to Start a Law Firm* because such a resource did not yet exist. Roche explained: "A number of people have contacted me in recent years asking for advice about how to set up on their own and there wasn't this kind of resource."

"I set up my own practice nearly seven years ago when there was no manual or template to work from and that is why I felt it was important to get everything I have learnt down on paper, which helped consolidate my own ideas. Darren and I have brought different strengths to the book and pulled on the experience of the 16 case study contributors."

Roche added: "I started writing my 55,000 words contribution last year, which was the 100th anniversary of the passage of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 that meant women could enter the legal profession in the UK and now we are able to launch the book exactly a year after we signed our deal with the Law Society."

David Barraclough joins Law Society council

Immediate past president of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies, David Barraclough, has been elected as a national Law Society council member representing the region.

Barraclough was elected to the governing council of the Law Society of England and Wales following a nomination process conducted between the local law societies in Yorkshire.

He replaces Chris Cole, who retired at the Law Society AGM, and joins Peter Wright and Mark Newby, the two other Law Society council members representing Yorkshire.

Commenting on his election, Barraclough said that he is delighted to be continuing to support solicitors throughout Yorkshire in a period of rapid change for the legal profession.

Barraclough practised as a commercial property solicitor in Leeds for more than 40 years, is a director and past president of Leeds Law Society, and sits on the Council Membership Committee of the Law Society.

He is also the Under Sheriff of West Yorkshire, the chair of the Yorkshire Legal Support Trust and a trustee of the Yorkshire Regiment.

Yorkshire Union of Law Societies names new president and vice president



Switalskis associate Natalie Cosgrove has been appointed as the next president of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies, the umbrella organisation for all local law societies in the region.

Cosgrove, a specialist in clinical negligence based in



Sheffield and a former president of Sheffield & District Law Society, was appointed at the quarterly meeting of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies. She succeeds David Barraclough, who has held the position since 2017.

Andrea Pashley, senior director and head of family at Malcolm C Foy & Co in Doncaster and current president of Doncaster & District Law Society, was appointed to the role of vice president, succeeding Cosgrove.

Commenting on her appointment as president of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies, Cosgrove said: "I am delighted to follow in David's footsteps. He truly resurrected this society and it is my honour to continue his incredible work."

"For now my focus is to provide support to local law societies as they support their member firms to navigate the ongoing difficulties that Covid-19 presents to the legal industry."



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The legacy of coal mining

Allie Parsons, customer success consultant at Landmark Information (Legal), speaks to a coal mining expert to find out what lawyers need to consider when undertaking ground stability due diligence on property transactions



A recent article in the Observer newspaper questioned whether we are facing the imminent end of coal as an energy source in Britain.

Looking back at where we have come from, UK coal production was around 70 million tonnes a year in the mid-18th century and rose to a peak of just under 300 million tonnes by 1913, according to UK government figures. Usage of the fossil fuel has, however, dropped as residential use has largely ended and just eight million tonnes was reportedly used by UK industry last year, with only two million supplied from UK sources.

Today, UK mining is virtually wiped out, having fallen from 3,000 mines at the peak to just 13 now, with coal representing approximately 5% of overall annual energy usage.

From the heights of the industrial era, coal production instead leaves behind a significant and long-lasting legacy that will continue to have an impact on the country, well into the future. Ground stability poses a real hazard for properties located over or even near mine workings for decades to come and is important to consider when transacting properties.

Yorkshire is the county most associated with underground coal mining in recent times. The vast majority of the activity was concentrated in Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire and the last serious deep mined coal was worked there from Kellingley Colliery.

I spoke to Phil Huddleston MRICS, a director of PinPoint Coal and former head of mining information at the Coal Authority, about what lawyers need to consider when undertaking ground stability due diligence on property transactions in these areas.

Huddleston says: "All the UK coal mines in Yorkshire were located in what is known as the concealed coalfield. In a concealed coalfield, the coal bearing rocks are not present at the surface but instead are concealed below more recent rocks. So, while the industrial revolution got underway in places where the coal was at the surface, like Lancashire, the coal in this part of Yorkshire was deep and concealed, and in fact was some of the deepest workings in the UK."

"Looking at the impact, having deep concealed workings does reduce some of the risks we associate with coal mining—there are fewer shafts, for example, and no legacy problems

with shallow mining. However, recent mining does increase the risk from subsidence; with deep mining, this lowering of the surface takes place over a relatively short period of time. With the last mining having taken place in 2015, we can assume the majority of settlement to have finished, so is it relevant?"

"Subsidence can manifest itself as tension or compression strains resulting in damage to buildings or quite simply a lowering of the surface and no damage at all. When buying a property in an area like this, the purchaser should be encouraged to look at mining reports to see if there have been any claims on the property, and if there have, to satisfy themselves that any damage has been repaired."

"They should also look to see whether the property has ever been notified under Section 46 subsidence legislation as this is a good indicator that the operator of the mine thought there would be subsidence."

Huddleston concludes: "In addition, the tendency for fissures to be created by the mining means that cracks can create a visible scar at the surface of the ground, which can—and do—present themselves under houses. Obtaining a coal mining report, therefore, enables prospective purchasers to be made aware of the risks and to see whether there is any history of damage."

The new Landmark Coal Mining Report—powered by PinPoint—provides all the standard answers required by the Law Society together with (as appendices) additional information about mine entries and claims when they are reported. The reports are supported by professional opinion from a chartered minerals surveyor.

While coal mining may be largely condemned to the history books, its after-effects leave behind a lasting legacy that certainly means it shall not be forgotten, and cannot be ignored.

landmark.co.uk/landmark-legal

Sources

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Moving on up

A round-up of the latest appointments and promotions in Leeds and Yorkshire



Property lawyer and retail specialist Steven Silver has joined the commercial property team at **LCF Law**.

Silver has enjoyed a successful career working at the likes of Bradford property law firm Sugden and Spencer and Radcliffes Le Brasseur in Leeds.

He then joined Yorkshire Cooperative Society as its first in-house lawyer and following several mergers,

he became deputy group counsel of the Cooperative Group Limited.

Silver moved to Weightmans and most recently spent the last two years with Squire Patton Boggs, as a director working across the firm's Manchester and Leeds offices.

In total, Silver has spent more than three decades advising on all aspects of commercial property law, with particular expertise in development work and the retail sector.

As a partner in the firm's Leeds office, Silver will now work alongside LCF Law's existing commercial property partner, David Jameson.

Commenting on his appointment, Silver said: "LCF Law is a leading law firm, with a flourishing client list in the commercial property sector that also offers continued scope for growth, which makes this a very exciting and appealing career move."

Simon Stell, managing partner at LCF Law, said: "Steven is a vastly experienced property lawyer and will be a welcome addition to our respected commercial property team. He has strong connections in the regional property market and joins at an exciting time, as we continue to win a wide range of commercial property work, throughout Yorkshire and beyond and following our recent Leeds move to new offices at 33 Park Place."



Schofield Sweeney has welcomed back Richard Jobs to lead its property litigation team.

Jobs is a well-respected litigation expert whose practice focuses on disputes over land and has grown to include a specialism in planning-related litigation.

He acts for investors, landlords, retailers, and

owner-managed businesses. Jobs also works closely with clients on major infrastructure projects and contentious planning matters.

Jobs has been published in the Estates Gazette and Property Law Journal and regularly delivers sessions to clients and intermediaries. He is also a member of the Property Litigation Association (sitting on its northern committee) and the Compulsory Purchase Association.

Given the Schofield Sweeney's presence across Leeds, Bradford and Huddersfield, servicing clients over the whole of the region, as well as acting for a significant number of national clients, Jobs is well placed to maximise value and achieve the best practical outcomes for the firm's expanding client base.

Commenting on his return to Schofield Sweeney, where he started his career, first as a trainee and then as a qualified solicitor, Jobs said: "Whilst it has grown during the intervening years, the firm still exemplifies the values that initially attracted me to it: clarity, commerciality, and a can-do spirit."

Jobs added: "We are living through uncertain times. Tenants are concerned about their ability to pay the rent. Landlords naturally want to know what options they have in relation to struggling tenants. I am looking forward to helping business and individuals deal with the impact of the pandemic. Despite the economic climate, the firm is doing very well, and I fully expect the property litigation team will expand in the coming months."



Legal Studio Solicitors

has appointed civil and commercial litigation expert James Perry as a consultant solicitor.

The former DWF, Ison Harrison and Lee & Priestley solicitor has spent his career specialising in litigation, moving from a practice focused on high court enforcement to another where he covered general litigation

matters with a remit that included commercial contract, intellectual property and property disputes, as well as contested debt recovery, breach of data protection cases and employment law work.

Perry moved to DWF in 2011. While dealing with complex litigation services, he co-managed a team of 45 paralegals.

As the only qualified solicitor within the department, Perry helped to increase turnover within his team from approximate £1 million in 2011 to £3 million. In 2013,

he was promoted to associate and in 2014 he became a director.

Perry has held several external roles, including independent solicitor for the complaints board of the High Court Enforcement Officers Association. He is also currently chair of the Law Society's National Civil Litigation Committee.

Ian McCann, chief executive officer at Legal Studio, said: "It's great to have been consistently adding quality consultant solicitors like James to the team at Legal Studio throughout 2020. We're all looking forward to working with James to help him provide his clients with an excellent service and him with flexibility and freedom in his career."

Leeds-based Legal Studio has added several prominent solicitors to its team this year, including construction specialist Chris Hutchinson and experienced litigator Stacey Pocock.



York and Lincoln-based law firm **Langleys Solicitors** has appointed Claire Ward as a partner in its family law team.

Ward has more than 20 years of experience as a family lawyer, with expertise in advising clients on separation and divorce.

She was appointed to assist the firm's growth in the East Yorkshire area,

where she has a strong reputation. Ward was previously based in Hull for many years and now advises clients throughout the East Yorkshire region, including Beverley, York and Scarborough.

Ward regularly advises on complex, high-value cases and has particular expertise in financial settlements, as well as property disputes and pre-nuptial agreements.

She also acts on behalf of parents in private children disputes over relocation, international cases and allegations of abuse.

Ward has built up a professional network of barristers, accountants and trusted advisors over the years and is able to put together the most effective team for her clients.

Des Mannion, chief executive officer at Langleys, commented: "Claire is a fantastic addition to the team, and will be an excellent asset as we increase our presence in East Yorkshire."

"She is known for her sensible and pragmatic approach to cases, allowing her to resolve complex cases quickly and amicably, and with compassion. I have no doubt she is the right person to help lead the team as we develop our family law and wider private client offering in Yorkshire."

Commenting on her appointment, Ward said: "I'm delighted to be joining Langleys and helping the family law team expand further into the East Yorkshire area. I am looking forward to developing a leading team of specialist

family lawyers providing first class service. I always have the best interests of my client's and their family at heart, and strive to achieve the best possible results for them throughout what can be an extremely difficult process."



Family lawyer Siddique Patel has joined Leeds-based law firm **gunnercooke** as a partner.

Moving to the firm from Shoosmiths, he will bring a wealth of experience in family law to gunnercooke, specialising in all areas of matrimonial work.

Patel advises a diverse range of clients from the UK and overseas.

Specifically, he advises on issues including domestic violence, forced marriage, international child relocation, prenuptial agreements, Islamic divorce, child abduction, and the validity of marriages and divorces conducted overseas.

As deputy director of the Register Our Marriage campaign, he is regularly consulted by government and non-government departments, including the Law Commission on issues relating to unregistered faith marriages (also known as non-qualifying ceremonies).

Patel, who is based in Leeds, bolsters gunnercooke's family team, which now stands at three partners and legal professionals. His extensive legal experience includes two years at Shoosmiths and two years at Kamrans Solicitors, where he was head of the family law team.

Commenting on his appointment, Patel said: "I am delighted to join the gunnercooke family of forward-thinking and progressive lawyers. The gunnercooke business model enables me to provide holistic and bespoke solutions to my clients, often within a niche area of family law. Combined with the flexibility which is not normally found in a traditional law firm model, I hope to provide a superior client experience."

Sarah Goulbourne, co-founder of gunnercooke, added: "We're pleased to announce the recruitment of Siddique to our firm. His extensive experience in a niche area of family law brings something new to our portfolio, which covers a range of practice areas and specialisms."

Yorkshire law firm **Lupton Fawcett** has boosted its employment team with the appointments of Glenn Jaques and Sabrina Rahman.

Jaques joins as a partner in the Sheffield office, bringing more than 25 years of employment law experience. He has advised companies on large-scale redundancies and restructures, TUPE and discrimination issues, defending tribunal claims and HR. He also advises directors and senior executives.

Rahman graduated from the University of Sheffield and qualified as a solicitor this year. She advises employers and employees on contracts, service and settlement agreements, sickness absence management, conduct and



capability procedures, and discrimination. She has acted for clients in manufacturing, education, property, charities and engineering.

James Richardson, managing partner at Lupton Fawcett, which has offices in Leeds, Sheffield and York, said: "I'm delighted to welcome two excellent additions to our multi-award winning employment law team in Sheffield."

"Glenn is a skilled negotiator and tenacious litigator with a deep understanding of employment law, which he uses in a practical and pragmatic way to help clients achieve their objectives."

"Sabrina has already gained considerable experience while completing her training and is a rising star in her field."

Richardson added: "I am always looking for excellent commercial and ambitious lawyers at all levels with a real understanding of the Yorkshire market we serve from our three offices. So do contact me to discuss the next step on your career path."



Keebles has promoted Bonita Wolfenden, Charlotte Harris and Carys Thompson to partner.

They join 17 other members of the team who have partner status at the firm.

Wolfenden leads the residential property department and has achieved her third promotion since joining in 2016. Her new role will involve managing a team of lawyers, legal executives, paralegals and legal assistants.

She said: "I feel very fortunate to become a partner—Keebles is a fantastic place to work. My aim is to continue to grow the residential property team and help it become the largest in South Yorkshire."

Harris is part of the commercial property team at Keebles and has worked for the firm for five years.

She commented: "The fact that all of our new partners are women is a clear demonstration of Keebles' ongoing commitment to gender diversity within the legal profession."

"As well as continuing to develop my area of practice in commercial property, I am looking forward to getting the chance to contribute to the running of the firm as a whole."

Thompson joined the commercial team Keebles in 2017 and specialises in commercial arrangements and contracts. She has more than 15 years of experience.

She said: "I am looking forward to continuing to work within a very talented team and building on the fantastic client base that we have in providing commercial legal advice and assistance regionally, nationally and internationally."

Keebles partner Paul Trudgill said: "Bonita, Charlotte and Carys are all talented individuals who have provided several years of fantastic service to our clients, so their promotion to become a partner is richly deserved."

"As partners, their skills and experience will prove invaluable as we look to continue to progress all areas of the firm."



Sheffield law firm **Wake Smith Solicitors** has announced a series of promotions in several of its specialist departments.

Wake Smith unveiled four promotions from within the firm to director and associate levels.

Solicitor Scott Haslam, who specialises in clinical negligence, and litigation solicitor Mike Doherty, who joined the firm earlier this year, become directors, while solicitor Jessica Rowbotham and chartered legal executive Shaun Talbot become associates in Wake Smith's private client team.

John Baddeley, chairman and director in the company commercial team at Wake Smith, said: "These promotions are richly deserved. People are our most important strength and their commitment to clients, and each other, has helped us navigate our way through challenging times over recent months."

"With our latest promotions, we are strengthening the firm's offering to help both businesses and individuals. Demand for a range of legal services continues to be driven as we adapt to the changes that the Covid-19 pandemic brings at work and at home."

Wake Smith strengthened its litigation and dispute resolution department earlier this year.

The law firm appointed Mike Doherty as an associate in its litigation and dispute resolution department.



St John's Buildings has welcomed six new barristers after successful completion of their pupillage, including Rebecca Carr in Sheffield.

Of the six new barristers, three will have a civil practice, two will focus on family law and one will build a common law practice.

Carr will join the St John's Buildings criminal team in Sheffield. Prior to the Bar, she worked as a public law caseworker in a leading judicial review team where she gained significant experience at conducting civil litigation and immigration cases.

Carr graduated with a degree in law from the London School of Economics and Political Science, she was awarded a master's degree in law from the University of Toronto, and she achieved an 'Outstanding' grade on the Bar Professional Training Course.

St John's Buildings in Manchester will welcome three of the newly ratified barristers. Helen Crowell will practice family law, while Alex Platts and Urd Larsen will both have a civil practice with a focus on personal injury and clinical negligence.

Daniel Currie will boost St John's Buildings in Chester with his family practice, and the Liverpool chambers will welcome Laura Halsall, who will have a primary focus on employment law.

The six newly ratified barristers have already completed a 12-month pupillage at St John's Buildings, under the guidance of experienced barristers who acted as pupil supervisors.

Speaking about the raft of newly ratified barristers, Chris Ronan, chief executive at St John's Buildings, said: "Covid-19 has proved a challenge for many in the legal sector, despite this we are proud to have adapted quickly to facilitate a new type of pupillage. Using a range of technologies we continued to offer consistent, high-quality work and experience to all six of our pupils this year."

"Pupillage is a vital route to developing high-calibre tenants who will ensure our continued success. It's great to see our investment in pupillage paying off by generating excellent barristers for the future of St John's Buildings."



Experienced commercial property lawyer Parul Hargreaves has joined the real estate team at **Clarion**.

Taking up the position of legal director with Clarion, Hargreaves has 20 years of experience in commercial property, acting for both private and public sector clients. She has spent the past 15 years working for an international law firm, based at its Leeds office.

Specialising in landlord and tenant matters, Hargreaves has a strong track record acting for a variety of high-profile clients across a diverse range of business sectors, including retail, manufacturing and business services.

Commenting on her appointment at Clarion, Hargreaves said: "As I already know a number of lawyers in Clarion's real estate team, I am well aware of the quality of its people and am looking forward to being part of such a talented, well-respected and ambitious team."

Martin Grange, head of Clarion's real estate practice, said: "Despite the impact of the pandemic, the commercial property sector appears to be weathering the storm and, at Clarion, we have continued to be busy. We are, therefore, pleased to have someone with Parul's extensive experience joining us. She will further strengthen our offering, complementing the specialist skills we are able to offer across the full spectrum of real estate matters."

Clarion's 26-strong real estate team provides a range of property expertise, from development, investment, asset management, business lease and owner/occupier work, through to retail, leisure and secured lending.

Looking inside the honesty box

Patrick Walker looks for an effective treatment for truth decay



Patrick Walker is
an independent
mediator:
www.imediate.co.uk

The amount of rubbish on our roadsides seems undiminished, even when travel restrictions have been at their height. Cycling through the Dales, my eye caught a discarded metal bin with neat writing on it. Partly nosy, and partly glad to find any excuse for a rest, I examined it further and discovered it was the Honesty Box from the toilets in Malham, savagely ripped from its mountings and prised open.

I wondered whether it had been worth the effort: was it full of generous donations from appreciative visitors willing to spend more than a penny, or did it rattle with a few buttons and a large 50 pence coin that ceased to be legal tender years ago? I hoped for the best, and it even passed my mind that the thief might have been desperate for some basic food, but given the box had been abandoned 10 miles from its home, it is fairly clear that a motor vehicle was used, and that no sympathy was appropriate.

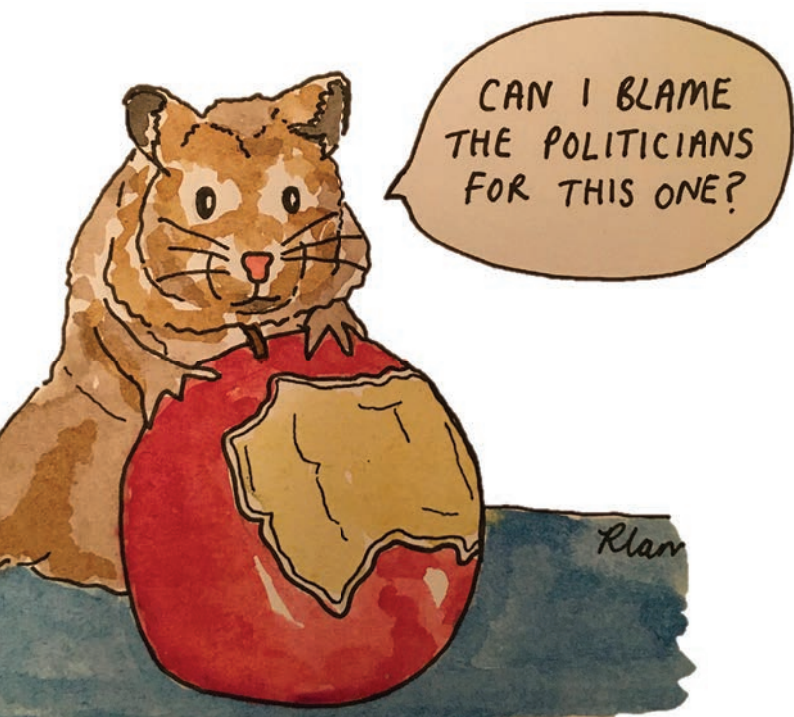
If that sounds too cynical then I blame the politicians. If truth decay is defined as "a blurring of the line between opinion and fact", then Trump must have resorted to dentures decades ago. And does

Corbyn believe that concerns in a Labour Party report about anti-semitism were exaggerated, or as he can apparently claim with equal sincerity, that they were not exaggerated? Please be reassured, I am not seeking to make party political comment and we seem awash with political leaders who instantly remind me of an early and spectacularly unsuccessful foray into Bradford County Court.

My client was in the witness box: her account of events troubled me and I hoped she would withstand cross-examination. I need not have worried for there was to be no such challenge to her evidence. Half-way through my examination in chief, His Honour Judge Henry Suddards threw down his pen, fixed my client with an icy stare and pronounced: "Madam, I have come to the conclusion that you only tell the truth by accident." I can't help feeling that if Boris was in that witness box, he would have used some hitherto undiscovered governmental power, sacked the judge, and told the press that the matter was now closed.

I suppose that even some 'facts' are capable of subjective interpretation, but I have been struck by the power of scientific and mathematical analysis during the Covid pandemic. Of course, politicians are queuing up to put a spin on the statistics, but some figures, such as those that promoted the second lockdown, were clear and inescapable. And while some seem determined to judge the risks of injecting a vaccine according to debate on Facebook, I am content to let the medical scientists make that decision for me. They will not be able to state as fact that a vaccine is safe, but their opinion will be informed directly, and I hope independently, by factual statistics.

Vaccines or not, it is clearly going to be some time before 'normality' is restored. In the meantime, I find myself strangely encouraged by nature. Of course, storms and floods are a challenge, but the regularity of sunrise, the wonderful shades of autumn leaves and the ingenuity of mice to find my apple store and gorge themselves before winter sets in—all of this makes me think that I can disbelieve almost everything our prime minister has to say, but still believe there are better times to come.





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Recognition and management key to protecting mental health



Jonathan Foster, a trainee patent attorney at Appleyard Lees and the recently appointed CIPA welfare officer, on mental health in the legal profession

How would you characterise mental health awareness in the legal profession right now? Is the subject talked about enough?

I think awareness is definitely improving. There are plenty of resources out there, and lots aimed specifically at those in the legal profession. Obviously there is always more to be done, but I am hearing mental health come up in everyday conversation a lot more now, and the stigma is definitely fading away. People seem more willing to answer the question 'how are you' more honestly than in the past, which leads to more positive discussion. However, now that I'm involved with a lot of mental health awareness activities, I'm cautious to say it's in a good place, because I might be creating my own echo chamber!

How are the Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys (CIPA) and Jonathan's Voice working to raise awareness and understanding?

I know that CIPA and Jonathan's Voice have been working together closely to find the best ways in which to raise awareness. Jonathan's Voice recently published a wellbeing guide entitled 'Protecting your mental health and wellbeing: A guide for patent and trademark professionals'. This guide is focused towards intellectual property professionals, helping them to manage the stresses that

come with the job, and allowing them to better recognise when they are starting to struggle. Jonathan's Voice is working on loads more projects that are even more far reaching than this, but I'll leave that for them to announce.

In addition to this, IP Inclusive has long been doing amazing work relating to mental health awareness, especially how mental health issues can be amplified in those people who are under-represented in the intellectual property/legal community.

Speaking in particular about the CIPA Informals (the trainee arm of CIPA), the new role of Welfare Officer was created this year largely through the great work and ideas of Jonathan's Voice.

What does your role as CIPA welfare officer entail and what do you hope to achieve?

The broad aim of the role is to ensure that all trainee patent attorneys have access to the right tools and resources to manage their mental wellbeing. The first step towards this was creating a Welfare and Wellbeing section on the Yellow Sheet Blog. This section offers information and resources for all trainees, and is also home to any welfare-related articles and events.

In addition to this, a welfare email was created (informalswelfare@gmail.com). This email address is a point of contact for any trainee patent attorney to get in touch,



if they feel they need to talk to someone about their mental health. The email address is exclusively accessible by trained mental health first aiders, and any emails will be treated as strictly confidential, unless we feel there is a serious risk of harm. The training was kindly paid for by Jonathan's Voice, CIPA and Appleyard Lees.

We have also created the Welfare Coffee Club, which is a very informal networking event for trainees (online, of course!). The welfare coffee club happens every six weeks, and randomly assigns trainees into small groups to chat over a coffee (or other suitable drink) and discuss different welfare themes. For example, the first coffee club saw more than 35 trainees come together to loosely discuss how they would define 'mental health' and what positive (or negative) coping strategies they have used throughout a turbulent 2020.

There is loads more work to be done, such as talks throughout the year on various themes, including how the winter affects people's mental health. Watch this space!

All in all, hopefully we can build a community of trainees who are more open and willing to talk about mental health and wellbeing. This, in turn, should help them throughout their careers, especially when they come to managing people themselves.

How common are mental health first aiders in Yorkshire?

This is difficult to answer, but only for good reason. In

the past year, networks have become, in general, less geographically focused, and so it is much easier now to reach out to networks of mental health first aiders across the country.

Of course, there is always a need for mental health first aiders to look after their own mental health, and so we are encouraged to speak to each other, and reach out to other services, if we feel we need to.

For me personally, there are several networks available, such as mental health first aiders within my own firm, those who I trained with and were trained by, and the IP Inclusive mental health first aid support network.

There is always more to learn, and it's always useful to listen to advice based on the experience of others. There are also many further training courses that can be attended, such as Suicide First Aid, a course I am attending later this month.

How much of a negative impact is the pandemic having on mental health and are there any steps you'd like to see law firms take as employers to protect their employees?

This year has obviously been difficult for everyone. The shorter days and dull light of winter will no doubt affect many, in particular those who suffer from seasonal affective disorder. But to combat this, there is also an increasing focus on making mental wellbeing as important as physical health.

Firms need to ensure that they are looking after their employees, and are promoting positive mental wellbeing. Mind published a great resource on improving mental health in the workplace here.

Links to helpful resources and groups

'Protecting your mental health and wellbeing: A guide for patent and trademark professionals':
<https://jonathansvoice.org.uk/guide-for-patent-and-trade-mark-professionals>

Welfare and Wellbeing section on the Yellow Sheet Blog: <https://yellowsheet.wordpress.com/welfare/>

Video explaining the CIPA welfare officer role and work: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jonathan-foster-ip_ip-intellectualproperty-cipa-activity-6730109560557768704-B-MT/

Welfare Coffee Club: <https://yellowsheet.wordpress.com/2020/11/11/trainee-series-wellbeing-coffee-club/>

Mind's resource on improving mental health in the workplace: https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4662/resource3_howtopromotewellbeingfinal.pdf



Digital transformation is a necessity

John Espley, chief executive officer of LEAP UK, puts forward the case that the pandemic has created an opportunity for law firms to become more agile and offer a better service to their clients as a result

At the start of the pandemic many law firms were still over reliant on old and traditional systems and methodologies, relying on paper-based systems and face to face contact.

Covid created an immediate need for new software solutions to ensure business continuity for law firms, which required a smooth transition and the right tools for staff to work efficiently. Many firms have used any downtime created by lockdown to turn to new ways of working. Investing in new technology and training staff in new procedures that will help overcome the challenges that have arisen coming in and out of lockdown.

Many law firms have found this an exceptionally busy time, with a noticeable spike in conveyancing instructions in part due to the government's stamp duty changes, and also in areas of family law. This has also provided an incentive for firms to reinvent themselves, putting new processes in place, and investing in the right technology to enable a digital working environment.

Digital transformation has become a necessity for law firms, and the speed of its adoption has been accelerated by the pandemic. Changes that may have taken years to implement have occurred in months: such as the courts now accepting digital bundles and the Land Registry allowing digital witnessed signatures.

For those firms that have been agile and become more digital, it has created an opportunity for them to improve their brand's standing showing less reliance on an old



paper-based system so boosting confidence among customers. Cloud technology is by no means new, but it has become a game changer in terms of enabling the same productivity when working remotely. Cloud-based practice management software is empowering legal professionals to work anywhere at any time from any connected device. LEAP has been committed to developing software that supports small to mid-sized law firms, and has fast tracked the implementation of a number of services, such as a 24/7 help desk, and the earlier integration of teams to help clients collaborate remotely.

For a firm to become more agile and benefit from the changing landscape, there are a number of points to consider:

- Use the pandemic as an opportunity to transform to a digital firm, and so increase efficiency by investing in the right technology
- Upskill staff and provide them with the right tools. For example, make it easy to get access to legal guidance which can be harder to find when working remotely
- Be more accessible to your customers, digitising the client journey from enquiry to instruction
- Introduce tools that aid the collaboration on documents with clients digitally, and share via a secure portal
- Accept online payments and improve cash flow

The pandemic has created this opportunity for law firms to become more efficient, more agile and more in tune with their clients.

Local law societies play an increasingly important role

President Martin Legg explains how the Yorkshire Law Society supports and maintains the local profession



I am very pleased to be asked to write a piece on the Yorkshire Law Society for the Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer this month and would thank the editor for their kind invitation. We are all continuing to practise in these difficult times, although for the first time in a very long while, there would appear to be some light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

I am in the unusual position of having been in post for more than 12 months due to our AGM being postponed for Covid reasons. In the intervening period, our president-elect was unable to continue in the role for personal reasons. I will have to ask those with a better historical knowledge than me if there is any precedent for this.

The Yorkshire Law Society is the second oldest law society in the country, having been founded on the 21 March 1786. George III was on the throne and William Pitt the Younger was our prime minister. My knowledge of the latter is limited to the little I was told in history in school many years ago and his more recent portrayal in Blackadder. The oldest local law society is the Bristol Law Society, which was founded in 1770. The Law Society of England & Wales lagged behind, having only been founded in 1825.

The Yorkshire Law Society is governed by a council that

meets every two months and we employ an administrator who assists us in the administration of the society.

Geographically, the society is centred around York and covers what I would describe as greater North Yorkshire, but stopping short of the coastal towns of Scarborough, Bridlington and Hull, which are all served by their own local law societies, reaching up to Thirsk in the north and Goole to the South and the A1 to the west.

The main event of our social calendar is our annual dinner, which is usually held on the second Friday in November. This was traditionally to coincide when there was a High Court judge sitting at York Crown Court. In recent years, while the links with the judiciary have been maintained, there has been a greater variation of speakers to try and keep abreast of changing times and the needs of our membership.

We run a social calendar throughout the year in normal times with the usual suspects of wine tastings, gin nights and quizzes. There is an annual legal walk to raise funds for access to justice and we also raise funds for the President's Charity from year to year. Peter Kay challenged the membership to a mini-triathlon but I am not that brave. We also have a junior lawyers division, which has its own committee and active social programme.

We have a programme of continuing education courses. With generous support from our sponsors, they are available to all members, other local solicitors who want to attend and members of all other law societies.

An important part of our role is the response to consultations from the government and Chancery Lane, although the time limits within which we need to respond are often eye watering. We are a member of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies, which has been resurrected in recent years, and being actively involved provides an important part of being able to put forward our members' views. The profile of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies is growing and the roll of speakers in the last 18 months has been very impressive.

In these times of electronic communication and centralisation, I believe that the role of the local law society is becoming more important in maintaining the local profession and indeed maintaining our position as a profession. We are in danger of having our professional status eroded, although we are still expected to maintain the liability, and relationships fostered through a strong local law society are an important part of that and are also beneficial to all practitioners working in the local area.

No one day tends to be the same

Tom Watkins, a newly appointed consultant solicitor at York-based Torque Law, discusses the pandemic's impact on employers and employees



Congratulations on your appointment at Torque Law, particularly amid so much uncertainty. How is it going at the firm?

Thank you. Lockdown presented obvious practical challenges when it came to meeting new colleagues,

but in practice the move has been seamless. We have even managed a few remote team 'nights out'.

I'm fortunate to have joined Torque Law at a time when the practice is going from strength to strength. We celebrated a firm listing in both The Legal 500 2021 and Chambers & Partners earlier this year.

As any employment lawyer will tell you, it is a very busy time and that certainly has been my experience over the last nine months.

How would you describe the employment law landscape right now? Is there an increasing demand for advice?

Even for an area of law which is characterised by change, the last few months have been unprecedented both in terms of the implementation of and subsequent changes to the furlough scheme, and also the significant impact of lockdown on the already under strain employment tribunals. Hearings have been delayed bringing greater uncertainty and worry for the parties (particularly acute for employees).

Added to that is the impact of the pandemic on clients' businesses, both in terms of the financial impact, but also the ability to plan. You only have to turn on the news to see that redundancies have been one inevitable consequence and that trend is likely to continue into next year. Employer clients are also having to deal with increases in absenteeism and investing significant time and resources in ensuring the workplace is safe.

There is no doubt that demand for advice has increased and I do not see it dropping off as businesses prepare for the new normal, whatever that looks like.

Is this new ground for you as an employment lawyer? Are the current rules and legislation capable in the face of something as novel as a pandemic?

It is indeed. One of the reasons I chose to specialise in employment law was because no one day tends to be the same. That said, the last nine months have redefined the definition of variety.

We are in a time of extraordinary change and the government/HMRC has, in my view, done a pretty impressive job in putting in place a workable scheme that provides support to businesses and employees. Inevitably, given the speed with which the scheme has had to be implemented, there are issues that have had to be addressed, or are in the process of being addressed.

With the benefit of hindsight, some of these issues could have been avoided, however, on the whole, it has progressed relatively smoothly.

You specialise in the education sector—how hard has this situation been for your clients in this area, particularly regarding the school-teacher relationship?

The practicalities of getting schools open and safe has been a huge undertaking. So too has provision of remote teaching. Herculean efforts have been made by all involved while working under the constant threat that all could change in an instant if pupils or staff test positive. If it had ever been in doubt previously, the importance of schools remaining open if employees with children are to work productively couldn't be clearer.

Independent schools have faced particular challenges. Many reduced their fees during lockdown, (particularly those offering boarding provision and/or with a high proportion of pupils from overseas), which left a sizable hole in their finances. Parents have lost jobs or faced significant drops in income leading to pressure on meeting fees. There is also a degree of uncertainty among prospective parents as to what the future holds so they are delaying enrolling their children. All of this at a time when such schools are already having to deal with significantly increased contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

The school-teacher dynamic has been interesting. In addition to managing absenteeism, the reliance on remote teaching and the setting of expectations regarding travel during school holidays (so as not to fall foul of quarantine requirements), has brought to the fore the importance of trust and open communication.

It has been a tough time for the sector, however, with careful planning and resilience all of my clients have a clear path through the current challenges.

Finally, what do you see as the main challenges and opportunities for the legal profession in Yorkshire next year?

It has to be remote working and whether employees need, or want, to go back to the 'old ways'. Lockdown has opened the door to new possibilities (and expectations) for employees and clients alike.

While desirable to some, a continuation of remote working raises many questions such as how to tackle the impact on collaborative working, firm culture, performance management and team ethos. Will firms be comfortable casting their net further afield for new recruits who may be geographically distant and who may rarely set foot in the office? Do you need that city centre office space? Are your IT systems fit for purpose? Do you need to restructure your back-office support?

All of the above are likely to be particularly acute challenges for larger practices while opportunities abound for agile businesses such as Torque Law that already have the ability to work flexibly.

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