

It has been an honour and a privilege to be the President of Leeds Law Society for the past twelve months. When I first started my career in law, I was unaware of any openly gay solicitors in my firm and could certainly have not imagined that an openly gay solicitor, let alone me, would be the President of the Leeds Law Society. I would therefore like to begin my report by giving each of my fellow directors a thank you for allowing me this opportunity. To have been elected by you back in 2022 was, for me, a very touching moment. I hope that going forward, my appointment will have shown to our membership that those individuals from protected characteristics can become valued directors, officers and indeed the President of our distinguished society.

My year in office has been extremely rewarding. This is the first year since the pandemic began where we have not faced restrictions. Whilst this has allowed face-to-face meetings and events to go ahead, we have been presented with a fresh challenge in the form of flexible-working and the ability to achieve the physical presence at events which we enjoyed pre-pandemic. We are often experiencing fewer attendees when physical events are held and it will be a challenge for my successor, and one which I am sure they will relish, to find workable solutions as to how we encourage more members to come along and enjoy in-person events going forward.

During my term, we have faced a cost-of-living crises on a scale not seen for over 40 years. This has presented many problems with member firms and organisations reducing sponsorship which in turn has reduced the number of free events we, as a society, can hold.

To assist our member firms during these difficult financial times, we have reviewed and re-structured our membership fees. The work of Nigel and Rachel in carrying out a full scale review and developing a revised membership plan cannot be underestimated. I would like to thank each of you for your sterling work in implementing this for the benefit of our members.

Turning to our sub-committees, it would be remiss of me not to start with our Diversity and Inclusion Sub-Committee. Rather unsurprisingly, this is an area close to my heart. Whilst it is disappointing that we were unable to continue and build upon our Diversity and Inclusion Conference held in 2020 and 2021, we have remained ahead of the curve in this area. Our flagship Pride Event was attended by almost 100 people and the presence of Bare Brass Band with us in the parade promoted our society on a scale never before achieved at Pride. Jacque's excellent disability event and the continued work of Shanika are to be commended.

Once again our Legal Tech sub-committee has been working hard to show that Leeds is at the forefront of Legal Tech. The brilliant work of Tom and Emma has demonstrated, locally as well as nationally, that Leeds is innovative and a centre of excellence in this field. Thank you both for your commitment, passion and hard work.

Catie and Sue have continued to work tirelessly, and the Court Liaison Group is simply outstanding. They are a credit to the society, and I am sure will continue their hard work over the coming year.

During the last year we have made a monumental change in the way this society operates by closing our physical office on Wellington Street. Whilst the proposed surrender of our lease did not proceed as planned, we are now in a very good position to move quickly once a new tenant or buyer for the building is found. In the long-term, the cost savings brought about by the closure of our physical office will secure the long-term financial viability of the society. Not only that, by reaching out to member firms to use their client suites for events our ties and bonds with member firms will be strengthened.

Our nominated charity for the year has been Out Together (formally Friends of Dorothy) who have grown significantly during the last 12 months culminating in a re-launch earlier this year. Their work in

supporting isolated members of the LGBTQ+ community is invaluable. The relationship between the Society and the Charity has been a strong one with representatives attending our Pride March as well as their upcoming attendance and participating in our Annual Dinner. I hope that our relationship can continue to flourish in the future thereby cementing Leeds Law Society as a Society whose D&I focus is not only one looking at the profession but in the local community.

The biggest thank you must go to Rachel, Lucia and the rest of our staff. Their patience, passion and hard work are immeasurable. Without you, Leeds Law Society simply could not function.

Looking ahead, the appointment of Nick Emerson as the President of the National Law Society of England and Wales will strengthen the bonds between the National Society and Leeds Law Society even further. I know that we will do what we can to support Nick during his term and to work with the Law Society on the national stage.

I am saddened to be leaving my post as President, but I know that we have two excellent vice Presidents and whomever takes on the mantle for the upcoming year will have the passion, drive and determination to deliver for our members.

The Leeds Law Society continues to be at the forefront of the ever-changing landscape of the law. It is blessed with talented and driven directors who continue to do the best that they can to ensure that the society continues to grow one of the most important sectors for the Leeds economy. It has been the single most important honour of my career to-date to be its President and I wish it a long and prosperous future.