

Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer

The Official Journal of Leeds Law Society

 Leeds
Law Society

February 2024
Issue 186

Attracting and retaining talent in the legal landscape

Our community's experts provide insight on
cultivating legal excellence



Leeds JLD

Danielle Hutchison and Sophie Hudson comment on the year ahead at Leeds JLD and opportunities for young lawyers

News

Brabners' corporate team achieves 50% surge in annual dealmaking

Society

Leeds Law Society extends its invitations to the Annual Legal Dinner

Last Word

Jodie Hill, founder and managing partner of Thrive Law discusses her route into employment law

Yorkshire Union

Natalie Cosgrove, president of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies, on retaining legal talent



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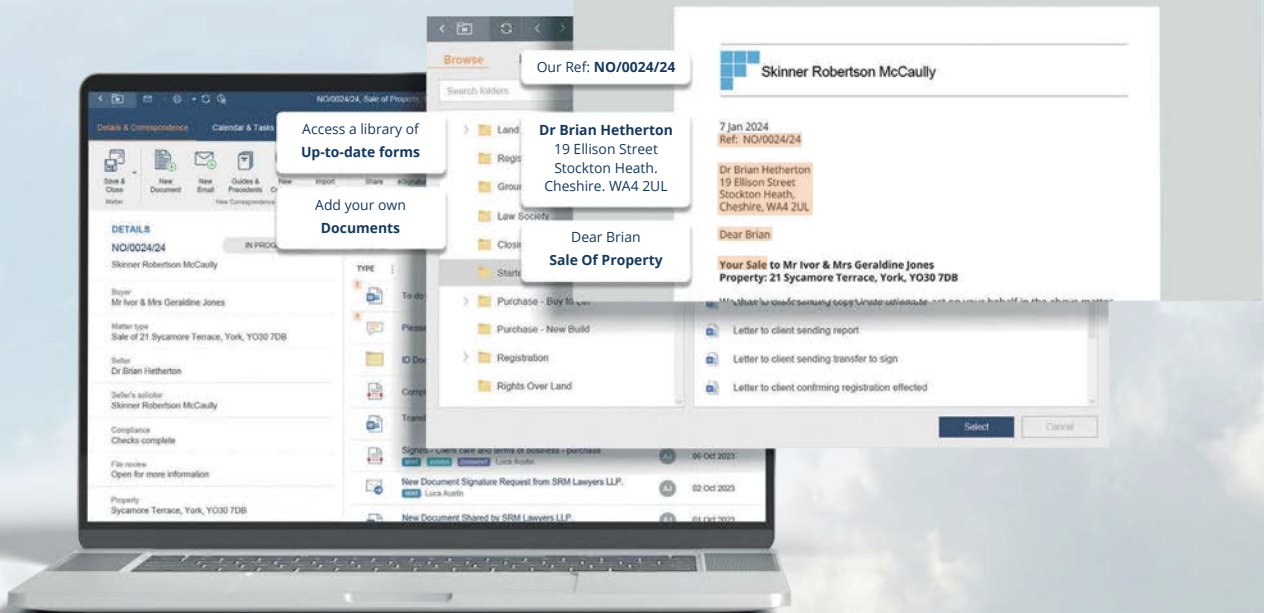
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New year reflections and looking forward



Shanika Haynes is a partner at Stowe Family Law and president of Leeds Law Society

I know it's February but as this is my first article of the year, I wanted to take the opportunity to wish you all a happy new year!

The start of the new year, for me, is a time to look forward and think about what I want life to look like in 12 months' time. Naturally, when doing so I find myself reflecting on the past year and how things have changed.

As we trundle through daily life it is easy to forget just how far we have come. That particularly applies to our profession, which is ever-changing. Even the most established of professionals will find their approach and style will change over the years as the law moves forward and develops.

The past six months have been life-changing and naturally I have spent more time looking back and reflecting on the early stages of my career. I never imagined that within 11 years of graduating from university that I would be a partner and the first minority ethnic president of the Leeds Law Society. I think I gave myself a ten-year plan just to get into any legal role!

I first realised I wanted a career in law when I was 15 and had just completed my year ten work experience at a high street law firm. I did not apply for law degrees and with hindsight, I should have. I dropped out of university within the first two months. I worked for the rest of the year and tried again the following September. This time signed up for an LLB. After my degree I needed a break from the books so worked for two sole practitioners for 12 months and then started the LPC at the University of Law in York. I managed to secure a legal secretary position at a legal aid firm to start at the end of my LPC and then secured my training contract at Stowe Family Law LLP a few weeks later. My training contract commenced and the rest, as they say, is history.

My journey into law has been much smoother than most and I am not naive to that. Albeit my time in law has not been plain sailing!

It is incredibly hard for the next generation to get a foot in the

door and then to progress at pace. Many would say it is quite right that a career in law should not be easy to attain. It is an incredibly important profession and standards must be high. However, many of the barriers are not related to these standards. I spoke about the exclusivity of the law in an earlier article so I will not repeat myself here, but it is something that those of us in the profession should be aware of. We need to create opportunities, wherever possible, to help the next generation to get into the law and want to stay in the profession.

Retention of talent will be an ongoing concern for most firms. It is well-documented that women are more likely to leave the profession than men. Covid, to a certain extent, has forced firms to change their working practices with flexible working being far more common than it was pre-2020. This addresses some, but not all, the challenges that working parents in particular face. On a positive note, it has also made the law more accessible to those with disabilities and health conditions, but there is still work to be done. It is important that progress continues at this pace. We all adapted extremely quickly in difficult circumstances during the pandemic, demonstrating that change does not have to be slow.

Another common reason for people leaving the profession is burnout and/or the impact the pressures the job can have on mental wellbeing. I have been open about my previous struggles with my mental health. They were directly linked to particularly difficult cases I had and I know I am not alone in that. The law historically has not been great in addressing demands of our profession and the high levels of stress we all experience. The industry is getting better at prioritising mental health and moving away from harmful cultures and practices that do not support wellbeing. But, if we are to retain talent long term, this really needs to be an ongoing commitment and priority for the profession. I doubt we will ever see the abolition of targets, but our focus needs to be on tackling the main causes of stress, rather than having a reactive approach. In the past the focus has been on putting a plaster on the issue after it has arisen. Part of this change will come in the form of giving the next generation the tools to manage the stresses of the profession before they enter it.

When I was really struggling, I was ready to walk away from my career and start again doing something entirely different. I did not, because I got much needed professional help. However, I do wonder whether I would have got to that point had I been better equipped to deal with the worst aspects of the job before I started my career. My tough time was the making of me, but it could have been very different. My experience helped me to find my motivation and a new purpose. That has kept me going through some difficult periods over the past five years. I spent a long time thinking that my career defined me and that all I wanted in life was to be the best lawyer I could be. I do still find a huge amount of satisfaction in being a family lawyer, but I have also found a real passion for trying to improve the diversity and wellbeing of the profession and it's often those projects that keep me pushing on through the difficult cases. If you had said that to me seven years ago, I would have laughed; I would have seen it as a distraction from what I thought was my main purpose.

So, what is the message behind my rambles? I guess it is a call to arms for those in the profession to make sure that you're checking on your friends and colleagues, that you're creating opportunities for the next generation and being a force for change by challenging old fashioned practices. We also must all remember to reflect on our journey and how far we've come and share that journey to inspire others.

Leeds Law Society Annual Legal Dinner on Thursday 2 May 2024 at The Queen's Hotel, Leeds

Bring colleagues, clients and friends to join us at Leeds Law Society's flagship black-tie event, hosted by the president of Leeds Law Society, Shanika Haynes.

This will be a spectacular evening with speeches from highly acclaimed guests and some light entertainment.

A welcome drink will be served on arrival followed by a scrumptious three course meal. Each table will be provided with a half bottle of wine per person.

Tables of 10 - If you require a table then please contact events@leedslawsociety.org.uk

Members: £1000 + VAT

Non-Members: £1300 + VAT

Individual tickets - Please book online

Members: £100 + VAT

Non-Members: £130 + VAT



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Brabners' corporate team achieves 50% surge in annual dealmaking

Brabners' corporate team has seen a 50% increase in annual dealmaking volumes, having advised on £789 million-worth of deals in 2023.

Brabners' 67-strong corporate team is one of the largest in the North and have delivered a sixth consecutive year of growth.

The firm's teams in Liverpool, Manchester, Lancashire, and Leeds drove last year's dealmaking activity, encompassing over 190 transactions.

The team also supported Happy Days day nurseries with its growth plans, completing two acquisitions in a consolidating market. Its dealmakers also continued to support a number of private equity transactions including advising specialist bicycle and e-mobility insurer Bikmo on a £3.4m investment round.

Mark Rathbone, partner and head of corporate at Brabners, said: "Many M&A strategies held firm in 2023 as businesses

pushed forward with their plans for innovation, expansion and progression – despite facing high input costs, an uncertain political backdrop and increased interest rates.

Mark explained that Brabners is pleased to have assisted innovators in emerging industries in attracting growth funding. He believes that strategic investment will help to accelerate the creation of skilled jobs.

Recently recognised as the "Best Law Firm to Work For" in the UK by Best Companies, Brabners has grown to over 500 colleagues. The firm has also secured a place in The Times' Best Law Firms rankings and earned the title of Firm of the Year at the Liverpool Law Society Awards.



Torque Law continues to grow with new appointments



Torque Law, a specialist employment law firm based in York, is continuing to grow as it moves into expanded office space. They are also celebrating the arrival of several new hires.

Laura Gillhespy joins Torque Law as an associate solicitor, after 5 years at Pinsent Masons.

Emma Whiting, partner, commented: "We are delighted to welcome Laura, who adds to our exceptional bench-strength here at Torque Law. We owe our continued success to carefully appointing solicitors who can deliver superior quality whilst keeping our clients' needs at the forefront – and we know Laura fits the bill."

"Feeling you must choose between family and ambition is common in the legal industry", Laura said. "As a mother of two young children, the progressive culture at Torque Law offers a more flexible opportunity to work collaboratively with amazing lawyers, without compromising my ambition or family commitments".

Integral to Torque Law's growth is its client roster and commitment to client service. In line with this, the firm has also appointed Emma Egerton-Jones, consultant, as client development lead. Emma, a former employment solicitor who has transitioned into a client experience professional, will dedicate her time to ensuring the firm continues shaping its services around its clients.

Tiggy Clifford, partner, commented: "We know periods of rapid growth can dilute quality. This appointment was a strategic decision to guard against that proactively, protect our dedication to quality and ensure we continue to develop our unique approach to client relationships as we continue to grow."

Hill Dickinson expands presence in Leeds

Commercial law firm Hill Dickinson has begun 2024 with a move into brand new offices at 11 Wellington Place, Leeds.

The move follows the signing of a lease agreement in May 2023 and forms part of the firm's wider growth and sustainability strategy. It has relocated into one of the most sustainable office developments in Yorkshire.

Since establishing a presence in Leeds in 2017, the firm has grown its team to over 40 people in the city and expanded its service lines. Originally focused purely on healthcare, Hill Dickinson's Leeds offering now includes corporate, banking, real estate, construction, employment and restructuring.

Craig Scott, CEO elect and head of business services group, said: "At Hill Dickinson, we're continually seeking new opportunities for growth across all our offices. Leeds is a city that is seeing rapid expansion across a range of industries and sectors, which means there's increased demand for legal

services in the city – and we are responding to that."

Esther Venning, Hill Dickinson partner and head of Leeds office, said: "It has been

incredibly rewarding to see our Leeds office grow at such pace recently, now housing a team of more than 40 across a range of services. The Wellington Place move is an exciting next step to continue delivering on this growth."



Pearsons & Ward Solicitors to rebrand as Ware & Kay

Malton-based Pearsons & Ward Solicitors will undergo a transformation on 1 April 2024. The firm will be changing its name to Ware & Kay Solicitors following its 2015 merger with Ware & Kay.

Despite a shared ethos and approach, Pearsons & Ward retained its original name until now. Both practices are now set to operate under the unified name Ware & Kay, led by managing director David Hyams.

Hyams explains, "The primary driving force behind the name change was about the firm unifying itself under one name to enhance the client service and streamline our operations."

The move aims to eliminate confusion and establish a cohesive brand identity in the legal market, reflecting a commitment to growth, innovation, and adaptability in the evolving legal landscape.

Hyams reassures clients that the change signifies a continuation of exceptional service and legal expertise, now amplified through the synergy of a unified entity.

Emma Elwess, director and head of the Malton office, adds,



"In analysing our collective strengths, objectives, and the needs of our clients, the change of name seemed the most natural step forward."

Elwess emphasised the benefits for families, individuals, and business clients, ensuring the continued availability of services such as wills & probate, residential property, family law, corporate & commercial services, commercial property, employment, and extensive litigation capability. She expresses optimism about the future, stating, "As we embark on this new chapter together, we aim to set even higher standards of legal service, guided by a shared ethos of integrity, effectiveness, and client-centric values."

Hall Brown launches mediation service led by new partner



Hall Brown Family Law has announced the launch of a national mediation service, which will be led from its Leeds office.

Hall Brown's co-founder and senior partner, Sam Hall, described how the service is being headed by new partner recruit, Sarah Manning.

He stated; "We have offered various forms of dispute resolution, including mediation, since we launched. That is down to our conviction that we really should be trying to help couples deal with very sensitive and sometimes difficult problems in their lives as swiftly and with as little stress as possible. It's no coincidence, I think, that those services have been in increasing demand as the pressure on the family court system has grown, resulting in matters which do

require court proceedings taking ever longer to conclude. We decided, therefore, to expand our provision of mediation, making it a truly nationwide offer and, in Sarah, we have found the ideal person to lead that service."

Sarah, who has become Hall Brown's thirteenth partner, qualified as a mediator more than a decade ago and has focused on building her practice ever since.

Although based at the Leeds office which had seen a "tremendous" growth in work since opening less than two years ago, Sam outlined that her role would include developing and co-ordinating the firm's mediation work across all its offices.

Further senior appointments to assist the roll-out are likely, he said, in the coming months.

Only last month, Hall Brown opened premises in Birmingham, something which he explained was a "logical step" for the firm, which also has offices in Manchester, London and Sheffield.

Holden Smith celebrates first Horsforth office anniversary

Holden Smith, a firm founded in Huddersfield, has marked the first anniversary of its Horsforth office and family law department.

Holden Smith, headquartered in Denby Dale, opened its Horsforth office in January 2023. The office is headed by family law solicitor, Leanne Pollard.

Leanne commented: "Our family law team has grown significantly in the past 12 months, and we have supported more than over one thousand clients with matters including divorce and separation agreements, children matters, and contested finances.

"Our Horsforth office has helped bolster and expand our services across all areas of family law, and it has been a pleasure to lead the team to help deliver our ambitious

growth plans."

Co-founder and director, David Bancroft, said: "We launched Holden Smith with residential and commercial conveyancing services, but demand meant we grew quickly and organically, launching wills and probate and corporate and commercial departments, followed most recently by our family department last year.

"Our Horsforth office and family law team has been very well-received, and we are looking forward to further growth in 2024."





YORKSHIRE LEGAL WEBINAR

Attracting and retaining legal talent in Yorkshire
6 March 2024 at 2pm GMT

MEET THE PANEL



James Richardson is the managing partner at Lupton Fawcett. As well as managing the people and business, James is a well-known and respected lawyer with over 30 years' experience in advising on all aspects of restructuring and corporate insolvency.



Nadia Hemmings is the talent manager at Clarion Solicitors. She is responsible for helping the firm attract and retain the best legal talent in Yorkshire and beyond. Nadia has a solid understanding of why people move roles and what employers can do to keep hold of their most talented individuals.



Toby Harper is the founder & CEO of Harper James. Toby founded Harper James in 2014 with a clear vision to offer a true work-life balance for lawyers and an entirely different culture to that of traditional law firms, one without politics and bureaucracy.



AND YOUR HOST...

Jodie Hill is a neurodivergent solicitor, ED&I consultant, coach and trainer, author and campaigner. She is passionate about employment law, mental health & wellbeing, equality and diversity & inclusion.

Register now on Yorkshire Legal News!

New committee, more opportunities

Leeds JLD's chair, Danielle Hutchison, and vice-chair, Sophie Hudson, comment on the year ahead at Leeds JLD and opportunities for young lawyers



Success in 2023

We had a fantastic year in 2023, with over 30 events hosted for the junior lawyers' network in Leeds. We've had some of our best feedback on events to date! We gained valuable insights that revealed how our hosting choices, both in terms of what and where, have opened new opportunities for our members at a personal career level.

Whilst we like to focus on everyone having a good time, we also made sure to boost everyone's skills with our education offerings. This included hosting events such as our 'Advocacy and How to Instruct Counsel' workshop, the 'Recognising Your Imposter Syndrome' talk and the popular 'Financial Wellbeing' panel. Plus, we had more mental health-centric events than ever before. May 2023 was very busy and active with puppy yoga and a trib3 fitness class, alongside mental health talks by Andy's Man Club and the Leeds Law Society resilience webinar.



Thinking of the Future

We already have several events lined up and lots more in the pipeline. There will be plenty of potential for young lawyers to expand their network, improve their skills and find out what opportunities are on the market. Our launch event on Thursday 25 January 2024, kindly sponsored by Sett Mortgages, at Dirty Martini kicked off our year with cheerful bang!

We have a Junior Lawyers Division and Leeds Law Society networking event arranged on 8 February at Angelica's. The wonderful Workplace Collective will also be joining us on 21 February to talk about handling stress and anxiety in the workplace. Our 2023 winter ball sponsors will also be speaking with our members (and non-members welcome!) at the end of February about new qualified roles. If you're qualifying in 2024, make sure to check this event out to hear everything you need to know about your next steps and what the future can hold for you!

There will be some strong favourites returning for 2024, with the Easter, summer and winter socials making a comeback, as well as the annual winter ball. Keep an eye out for more educational, mental wellbeing and sports events too, as we have plenty being organised in the background that we can't wait to tell you about!

Make sure to keep up with our events on Instagram and X (Twitter) @JLDLeeds and on LinkedIn at 'Leeds Junior Lawyers Division'. We regularly share what we have coming up and snippets of what we've recently been involved in. Plus, there will be plenty more Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer contributions from Leeds JLD to keep you up to date.

Everyone is welcome

JLD is a wonderful network of junior lawyers – we have students, paralegals, trainees, apprentices, pupils, solicitors and barristers up to 5 years qualified/call. We love getting to know our members and seeing how they flourish through the years. It is a great way to expand both your social and professional network, so why not come along to an event and see what we are all about!

Don't forget that our members receive exclusive access to events, discounted or free tickets and extra members-only perks.

Rachel Roche emphasises the importance of futureproofing



Rachel Roche is the owner of Roche Legal, a specialist will and probate law firm. She believes the most important new year resolution families can make is to ensure they have made or updated their wills. This is to help avoid lengthy probate delays that have triggered a House of Commons inquiry.

The House of Commons justice committee has reacted

to concerns over the growing processing time for probate applications. They have submitted a call for evidence. The waiting time for probate almost doubled from April 2022 to April 2023. Reports cited cases of probate taking more than eleven months and practitioners advising clients that probate will take at least nine months.

Rachel said: "During the height of the pandemic, making a will became a significant factor but we have now slipped back into concentrating on other things."

Sir Bob Neill MP, chair of the justice committee, revealed their concerns. He said: "Families across the country have faced challenges in navigating the probate system, with reports of rogue traders and poor practice, as well as significant delays."

More than 30 million people in the UK are still without a will despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even those people who have made a will need to regularly check that the details are up to date. This is to recognise any changes in circumstance, including remarriage. "Regularly updating your will makes sure your wishes are recognised and can reflect any changes such as disputes with family members," Rachel explained.

In addition to making a will, individuals need to address the question of arranging a lasting power of attorney (LPA). Rachel explains: "An LPA could help to protect you and your family if you were left unable to make decisions for yourself. Making a will or an LPA just in case could make all the difference to your loved ones if they were ever needed."

Wake Smith joins forces with local business community

South Yorkshire solicitors Wake Smith has joined a regional business community to further its presence across the region.

Wake Smith has served businesses and individuals in the region since 1802. They have become the latest company to sign up as a platinum member of Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber of Commerce.

Wake Smith hopes to collaborate with the Chamber and its members on a range of initiatives targeting the area's diverse business community.

John Baddeley, head of the corporate team at Wake Smith Solicitors, said: "As well as making, and reinforcing important business connections, we will be looking to further increase our profile in the region, meet new contacts and increase the number of commercial partnership opportunities for our business.

"Our legal services fit perfectly with many existing chamber members including advice around corporate, banking and finance, employment, commercial property, business litigation and data protection as well as individual needs such as family law, wills and trusts and conveyancing."

The Wake Smith team is also looking forward to working with the chamber team. This includes membership executive Rachel Nunn, membership manager Lynne Urpeth and chief executive Carrie Sudbury. Together, they will make important business introductions and make the most of networking events and seminars, using Chamber services and accessing directories



and databases.

Lynne Urpeth, membership manager at Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, said: "We are delighted to welcome Wake Smith to our platinum level membership which forms part of over 1,100 active members. Wake Smith is joining a Chamber which operates in the heart of the Barnsley, Rotherham and South Yorkshire region.

"Our business community is diverse, and we collaborate with our members on all levels to act as the voice of local business right up to the heart of government, to campaign for positive change and action on their behalf. We look forward to working with the team at Wake Smith this year."

Banner Jones celebrates 145 years

More than 130 members of staff from Chesterfield-based Banner Jones came together in February 2024 for its annual celebration of achievements, and to mark the firm's 145th anniversary. Banner Jones has offices in Sheffield, Chesterfield, Mansfield and Dronfield.

The event took place at Chesterfield football ground on Friday 1 December. The celebration saw CEO Simon Wright take to the stage to thank all the employees from across the firm's four locations for their contribution to the ongoing success of the business. He also paid tribute to those who played a pivotal role in supporting organisations and individuals across the East Midlands in the past.

Banner Jones (previously Jones Middleton) moved into its offices on Chesterfield's Glumangate in 1878 and is one of the oldest surviving businesses in the town today.

Over the years Banner Jones has supported numerous local charities through fundraising. These include Ashgate Hospice, St Luke's Hospice and The Samaritans. They also participate in events such as Free Wills Month, Mission Christmas and the Kingsmill Toy Appeal.

Banner Jones invests in the health and well-being of their team and professional development.

The firm has a robust internal training programme, with nine trainee solicitors currently undertaking their solicitor training, two apprentice solicitors and various others working on CILEX qualifications, licensed conveyancer exams and legal diplomas.

15% of employees have been with the business for over 20 years, and eight for over 30 years. One such individual is CEO Simon Wright, who undertook work experience with the firm aged 16 years old, before ultimately joining the firm in September 1987.

Commenting on the anniversary milestone, Simon said: "The firm's journey to date has been long and impressive and the ongoing development of its people and its IT infrastructure are continuing to make it a great place to work and, I believe, a great firm with which to do business."



Neil Hudgell guides subpostmasters through legal ordeal



An ITV drama titled 'Mr Bates v The Post Office' has been released this new year. The story of the Post Office Horizon Scandal unfolds, shedding light on the persecution of subpostmasters and postmistresses

over the past two decades. The storyline reveals the Post Office's pursuit of these individuals, holding them responsible for financial discrepancies from the unreliable Horizon computerised accounting system.

Neil Hudgell, executive chairman at Hudgell Solicitors, has been actively overturning convictions related to the scandal. Reflecting on the legal battle, he expresses hope that the television drama will encourage more individuals to come forward and clear their names.

Hudgell joined the cause in 2019, following a high court victory by the Justice For Subpostmasters Alliance (JFSA). This established that flaws in the Horizon system led to accounting discrepancies. Since then, legal proceedings have not only overturned convictions but also sought compensation for the victims. The Post Office has committed to paying a minimum of £600,000 to those declared innocent.

Hudgell remains frustrated that over 600 individuals are yet to seek justice. He attributes this to lack of awareness, individuals leaving the jurisdiction, or the elderly being out of touch socially. Fear and skepticism also play a role, fuelled by the trauma inflicted by the Post Office.

Hudgell emphasises the established process for appeal and compensation. He reassures potential claimants that legal aid

or the Post Office covers the costs. He highlights the supportive network of former subpostmasters who have successfully navigated the legal process.

Jo Hamilton, aged 66, found herself among the 700 subpostmasters who faced prosecution between 2000 and 2014. Hudgell Solicitors assisted Mrs. Hamilton, one of the 73 individuals, as her legal ordeal began in 2006 when she was accused of a £36,000 shortfall in her accounts. Falsely informed that she was the sole individual having issues with the accounting system, she, like many others, was pressured to rectify the shortfalls in her accounts repeatedly.

Mrs. Hamilton had to remortgage her home and borrow from friends to cover the alleged missing amount. The persistent demands and accusations ultimately led her to plead guilty to a charge of false accounting. To avoid prison time, she made this decision. This meant less severe consequences than the initial theft charge she had denied in the first court hearing.

She stated, "The Post Office destroyed lives. Even now, with evidence being heard at the public inquiry, I sit and think 'how on earth could someone do that to people and then go home and sleep at night'."

Asked about his unwavering passion for the case, Hudgell describes subpostmasters as a "special group of people." He sees their representation as a mission to right the biggest miscarriage of justice in British legal history. The goal is not just financial compensation but justice, clearing names, and restoring peace of mind for those wrongly labelled as criminals.

In Hudgell's words, "There can be no greater use of our skills and time than helping former subpostmasters affected by this scandal. Hopefully this will now open the door to helping many more. Those people who have not come forward are to this day unjustifiably living with tarnished characters and living a life they should not be living"

A call to action for fairness, equity, and happiness in the legal space



YORKSHIRE
UNION OF
LAW SOCIETIES

Natalie Cosgrove, president of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies and a partner at Ashtons Legal in Leeds, on access and opportunity in the legal world

What are you doing to promote a fair and equitable entry into the legal profession?

"Me?" I hear you ask. "I'm not a HR manager, training principle, or recruiter!"

The fact is that all legal professionals have a responsibility to do everything that we can to enable a proper and fair entry to the legal world, no matter what our role. When recruiting recently, it became abundantly clear that the pool of potential legal candidates is growing smaller and yet we are told more and more graduates are looking to enter the profession. It makes no sense that the pool of talent is dwindling to the point that we are all clambering for the same candidates in a bidding war I have never known.

There is something adrift. Are we not bringing enough talent through from junior level? Is the world of law toxic and we have become apathetic to it? Is it, and I hate to say it, the aftermath of Covid?

Introspection and reflection are important, but even more effective is active recruitment into law at all levels. Focus should be spread right across the board. It is all well and good to say that you have an equality policy, but what about equitable. Where do you work? How does your firm look? Does it look like the place that actively promotes, equality, diversity and equity? Do you hold space and assistance for your neurodiverse colleagues? Do you have a fertility policy?

We cannot simply look at gaps in the market and complain. This is something we see up and down the county in the Yorkshire Union. There are obvious challenges; who wants to work in the provinces if you can earn more in business centres? There are conversations with practitioners in the North of Yorkshire where they cannot retain junior criminal defence solicitors because they cannot compete with the CPS salaries. But there are things that we can do to change, starting from within our firms.

What we know, and have known for a long time, is that what



keeps people in jobs is more than just salary, a health scheme and a high street shopping voucher at Christmas (this is where half of the readership exclaim that they didn't even get this). A workplace people want to remain in starts with the workforce itself. Get your people right, and you can make positive, tangible improvements. Not only this, but a happy workforce will promote your business far more than your marketing budget will. People want to work for, work with, and be clients of, places where people happily work.

There is no simple answer to the question: what makes a great workplace? I noticed this when joining Ashtons Legal in 2022. It's difficult for me to put my finger on what makes it such a good place to work. And if you can't put your finger on it, how can other firms create the right environment or tweak their own policies? We need to take a good hard look at what makes our firms amazing and make that an industry standard.

The truth is, it's the people that make the legal profession a space that we can celebrate as an industry, and it's the people that are going to make new lawyers want to join us and stay. If we don't all make a conscious effort to make it this way, the numbers will continue to dwindle. If your staff get the 'Sunday scaries', you need to look at what you're doing to support them. If they're scared off too much, other industries are going to benefit from the talent we want, and desperately need to attract.



Embrace online reviews or risk falling behind

Michael Hanney, CEO and co-founder of ReviewSolicitors, has been running the company since its outset in 2014. ReviewSolicitors are proudly sponsoring the Yorkshire Legal Awards 2024.



Michael, tell us about yourself and ReviewSolicitors!

I founded ReviewSolicitors in 2014 and like many people, my first dealing with a solicitor was in a time of distress and complication. I didn't really know what I was doing. I was buying a house when I first needed legal help and I thought to myself, "Okay, great, I've got my deposit". Then it came to the point where someone turned to me

and told me I needed a solicitor to do my legal work.

Back in the day, I got out the Yellow Pages and started scrambling through! I phoned up all these solicitors and asked how much they would charge for this and that. At the time, cost was a big thing for me, and I didn't really think about anything else. So, I made the mistake that a lot of people make: thinking the solicitor would just do the paperwork, and it would be fine. That came round to bite me.

After that, I started to wonder why there wasn't a website out there that allowed me to make an informed decision and help me understand what the process would look like. I needed to know what the quality of service would be like, what I was going to get, and what my likely experience would be.

It's clear how the site can help clients, but how can ReviewSolicitors help law firms?

The problem is that in the legal services market, a client doesn't necessarily know what they're going to get. They don't really understand what the experience is going to be. So, when they're choosing a solicitor, they're using a lot of information from the law firm's own website. They may not understand the terminology on the website, they may even speak with a solicitor and come away still not understanding what they're signing up for. Reading other peoples' experiences with that solicitor could help a client's decision-making process.

There are lots of review websites out there, but none of them are tailored to the legal services market. It's very different. You're not reviewing a takeaway, or a t-shirt. You're reviewing something that often has quite a profound impact on your life!

The other major benefit of ReviewSolicitors is the way we handle negative reviews. The whole premise is that we are a very fair and transparent platform in a legal battle, there are two sides to a transaction: one who will win and one who will lose. That's it.

Good firms will pick up negative reviews from the other side of the transaction because they've done their job so well that the disgruntled client on the opposing side doesn't have another avenue to go down. On ReviewSolicitors, if there is a negative review from someone on the other side of the transaction, you can mark this person as not your client with the click of a button. The review is then removed from the public-facing site and will only go back up if that individual can send us proof that they were a client. This system gives a lot of control to lawyers who are in departments like litigation and family.

How do success stories from participating law firms inspire your team and your future plans?

We catch up with all of our premium firms, to get to the bottom of how reviews are being used. We're inspired when we hear how a firm has used its reviews to get better access to its local market, or how they've made changes based on the feedback they've been given.

Many of the features of our review systems come from the feedback we get. For example, we now collect reviews on individuals. That came from an idea that a firm gave us and asked if we would be able to implement. It was only a passing comment, but we thought it was a brilliant idea, so we ran with it! We have lots of changes in the pipeline based on the feedback that we're given.

What advice would you give to law firms that haven't yet embraced online reviews?

Honestly? There is no running away from it. You can bury your head in the sand for a little bit of time, but there are hundreds of platforms out there where clients will still go on and leave feedback, with or without your blessing. You might want something that's a little more tailored than a generic review site like TrustPilot. You might want to ask your conveyancing clients conveyancing questions, and your family clients family questions. Perhaps start thinking about what is important to you when collecting reviews. What do you want to achieve? And if you haven't even thought of that question, give us a call and we'll have that discussion to help you understand that.

What drew you to sponsor the Yorkshire Legal Awards?

One of the reasons why the Yorkshire Legal Awards stood out is because I personally really like Yorkshire! Everyone that I've spoken to from the region, even from the very start of ReviewSolicitors, is very genuine and down to earth. It's a lovely place and you can have a frank conversation with the people there. There are many talented solicitors in Yorkshire. Doing our own research, we found that Yorkshire was one of the top five performing areas in the country for legal services. The feedback about solicitors in the area is generally higher compared to other regions.

Legal firms don't have to pay to use our platform and can respond to reviews for free. We'd like to start talking to firms that have never had a conversation with us before and have shied away from collecting reviews. Great client service is important to us, so it's great to have a platform to show that.

Moving on up

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



Yorkshire law firm, **LCF Law**, has appointed contentious probate solicitor, Kelly Gilbert, as an associate in its disputes team.

Kelly has spent the past 15 years at Lupton Fawcett and specialises in disputes involving wills, trusts and inheritance provision. She has also successfully completed the Association of Contentious Trusts and Probate Specialists (ACTAPS) course.

Kelly is based in the firm's Bradford office and will work alongside LCF Law partner and disputes specialist, Ragan Montgomery, and solicitor Catherine Schofield.

Kelly said: "Joining LCF Law is an opportunity to further my career at a firm that is widely recognised as a leading employer in Yorkshire and beyond. Working alongside Ragan and Catherine, who have a formidable reputation in the field of contentious probate, is also an exciting prospect and I'm looking forward to working with them."

Ragan Montgomery said: "In recent years contentious probate has become a significant area for us. This is partly down to an increase in the number of challenges being made to wills, which is often due to more complex family structures and blended families, as well as an aging population, where mental health and whether people have the capacity to make decisions come into play.

"Kelly's experience in this field will enable us to enhance our services and expertise to clients throughout the UK. Crucially, Kelly has a solid track record working across all areas of contentious probate, and especially when it comes to inheritance provision claims, where people have been left with very little or even nothing in a will, so she's a very welcome addition to our team."

Blacks Solicitors has grown its commercial dispute resolution (CDR) team with the appointment of three new solicitors.

Alannah Crux, Victoria Tynan and Christopher Connell, along with chartered legal executive, Michelle Eyre, make up the firm's latest intake. This brings



the total number of team members in the CDR team to 24.

Alannah Crux has joined the holiday & home parks team.

Christopher Connell has a particular interest in litigation. This includes cryptocurrency, non-fungible tokens and litigation arising from the use and abuse of AI. Given advances in technology and digital currency, this has become a key area for growth for the CDR team at Blacks.

Commenting on his appointment, Christopher said, "Blacks Solicitors is well known for offering a wide range of services and specialisms to its clients. Blacks also has a strong reputation in the market and a great workplace culture. It felt like an obvious next step for me to join the firm."

Michelle Eyre brings her expertise to the real estate litigation team. She specialises in a broad spectrum of commercial landlord and tenant matters.

Victoria Tynan will support Ian Scobbie in the insolvency team.

Luke Patel, partner and head of commercial dispute resolution, commented: "Our CDR team has gone from strength to strength since its inception in 2000. The demand for litigation and support services continues to increase from both new and existing clients due to a host of factors, including continued economic uncertainty, political factors and our reputation in the market.

"Our team offers a host of specialist services, working collaboratively in close partnership with other teams from across the firm to deliver a high-quality, integrated service, which is something we're hugely proud of. We're all excited and looking forward to Alannah, Victoria, Christopher and Michelle settling into the CDR team and the firm."

Mills & Reeve has recruited Jane Ingleby as a partner to boost its Leeds family team.

Jane joins from Clarion Solicitors where she was head of family law. Jane advises high net worth individuals (HNW) in all issues relating to relationship breakdown.

This includes complex financial remedy and children proceedings, international work, pre and post marital agreements and issues relating to cohabitants, including contentious trusts and probate.

Jane is a qualified child arbitrator and has in-depth expertise in private children proceedings. This includes child arrangements applications, international relocation work and matters regarding the financial needs of children.

Elsewhere, she has a developing surrogacy practice, a particular growth area for the firm. Jane is a member of Resolution and an accredited specialist.

Philip Way, head of family at Mills & Reeve's Leeds office, said: "Jane's practice and wealth of experience perfectly mirrors our UK leading family law offering. Her appointment will further



strengthen our strategic growth plans across all areas, particularly in complex children proceedings and surrogacy.

“Jane’s reputation in both the Yorkshire market and across the UK is excellent and I’m confident she will be a valuable addition to our growing family team.”

Jane said: “I’m delighted to be joining Mills & Reeve’s talented national family law team. Mills & Reeve is a client focused firm and I’m very much looking forward to working with new colleagues across the offices to continue to provide the excellent client service that they’re renowned for.”

Leeds-based property litigation boutique firm, **Hägen Wolf**, have appointed Dominic Tetherington as an associate solicitor. This takes its growing team of specialist lawyers up to ten.

Dominic joins the firm from Lyons Davidson where he trained. He has extensive experience advising clients on a wide range of property disputes, including covenants, leases, boundary disputes, rights of way and nuisance.

Managing partner, Matt Pugh, said of the appointment: “Dom is a great guy and brings a wealth of trial and mediation experience to the team. He is a valuable addition to the wolf pack. With his appointment, we now have one of the largest single site property litigation teams in the region enabling us to provide clients with real strength and depth in all areas including the biggest and most complex cases.”



Dominic commented; “I am delighted to join such a dynamic and supportive business, undertaking exciting and challenging work and with such a clear vision as to where it is going. I am incredibly excited about the journey ahead and very much looking forward to working with and getting to know my new colleagues.”

Lewis Silkin has announced the appointment of Aaron Trebble as legal director in the firm’s intellectual property team based in Leeds. Aaron’s appointment marks the expansion of Lewis Silkin’s IP360 service to the city, further enhancing its offering to creative and innovative businesses in the north of England.

Joining Lewis Silkin from DLA Piper, Aaron is an experienced IP litigator as well as an expert in contentious data protection matters. Whilst his experience covers a broad range of sectors, he has a particular focus on issues affecting software, video games

and technology businesses, including technology issues in the public sector.

Lewis Silkin was launched in Leeds in May 2023, and the firm’s IP practice has expanded in the north of England under the leadership of partner Laura Harper. Laura joined the firm’s Manchester office in 2023.

Jo Farmer, joint managing partner at Lewis Silkin, commented: “We are very pleased to welcome Aaron to Lewis Silkin. We’ve seen real momentum building following our launch in Leeds, and the addition of an IP offering in the city is the logical next step to enhance our client offering in the region – supported by Laura Harper in Manchester.”

Aaron Trebble, legal director at Lewis Silkin, commented: “Lewis Silkin has built an enviable reputation for working with technology and IP-rich businesses, ranging from dynamic startups to complex multinational brands. Joining the firm and helping to bring this offering and experience into Leeds, and beyond, is incredibly exciting.”



Clarion is continuing to grow its specialist team with the appointment of Gresa Bakolli as an associate solicitor.

Gresa trained at an international law firm where she worked with several UK clearing banks and corporate borrowers on transactions involving debt, development, real estate and acquisition finance.

The firm also promoted Andrew Curtis from senior associate to legal director. He joined the firm’s banking and finance practice four years earlier. With 13 years’ banking experience, he has worked with debt and equity providers and corporates on a wide variety of finance deals.

Ben Slack, partner in Clarion’s banking and finance team, said: “In 2023, we completed transactions with a combined debt value in excess of £950m, and our work streams and client base are continuing to grow. It is vital that we continue to develop the careers of the lawyers within the team and recruit new talent to keep pace with the growth of our clients and our client base. The arrival of Gresa is a welcome boost to the team, and we are delighted to see Andrew’s well-deserved progression.”



Holden Smith to support Forget Me Not Children's Hospice



Yorkshire-based law firm Holden Smith announced that they would be donating a percentage of fees from their wills and probate department to Forget Me Not Children's Hospice throughout the months of November and February 2024.

Holden Smith has offices in Huddersfield, Elland, Leeds, and Horsforth. The firm aims to assist Forget Me Not, a charity dedicated to aiding families navigating the challenges of child loss.

Before the close of 2023 clients making a will, applying for probate, or utilising the firm for a lasting power of attorney

(LPA) generated Holden Smith's contribution through a percentage of the fees they paid.

Dominic Cronshaw, a specialist in wills and probate at Holden Smith, expressed his enthusiasm for the initiative, stating, "The work delivered by Forget Me Not to support children and families facing or living with the loss of their child is inspiring - and so vitally important. Holden Smith is delighted to be able to play a part in helping the charity to continue this work by partnering with them on this initiative, which will benefit children and families across the whole of West Yorkshire."

Michelle Heaney-Firth, corporate partnerships lead at Forget Me Not, expressed gratitude, noting, "We're so grateful to Holden Smith for supporting us in this way. As a charity, only a tiny proportion of the funds we need each year are guaranteed, meaning that we rely on donations and fundraising from organisations like Holden Smith to be able to continue to do our vital work. Thank you."

Blacks Solicitors supports charity in establishing premises

Blacks Solicitors has advised the mental health charity, Battle Scars, on taking a new lease for its headquarters in Leeds. This has enabled the charity to acquire their first ever premises and also create opportunities for other mental health charities and not-for-profit organisations in the city to thrive.

Battle Scars is a survivor-led charity offering support around self-harm. Under the newly secured lease, Battle Scars has gained a pre-approved licence to occupy, empowering the charity to extend the range of the support it can offer to similar organisations and services.

Battle Scars sought headquarters to serve as a hub for mental health support. The vision extended beyond its own organisation, aiming to create a welcoming space for other mental health charities to use.

Blacks Solicitors' real estate team assisted the Battle Scars team on the acquisition of the new lease. Nick Dyson headed up the venture with support from senior associate Jennifer Gillespie and paralegal Samuel Morgan-Wynee.

Nick Dyson, partner in the real estate team at Blacks, commented: "We are delighted to support a local mental health charity doing incredible work within the community, which is increasingly needed. The deal will not only help Battle Scars to widen its support, it will also create a space where other charities can collaborate and provide further services to communities in Leeds and beyond."



Jenny Groves, chief executive officer at Battle Scars, added: "Our dream is to create a welcoming, safe space with a strong lived experience element. We are so grateful to have received the expert guidance from Blacks Solicitors in this endeavour."

Hudgell Solicitors' donation aids trauma support in Leeds



Hudgell Solicitors has made a £10,000 donation to Leeds-based charity, Day One Trauma Support.

The funding supports families in the aftermath of a life changing injury. This includes providing accommodation so that loved ones can remain near to a hospital and providing clothes for patients.

Each family's circumstances are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and assistance of up to £250 a day could be available.

Michelle Maltby of Hudgell Solicitors, who oversees the firm's community grants, said:

"We're very grateful that we have this opportunity to make a difference to what we know can be a traumatic time. These grants are hugely important as they allow families to be at a patient's bedside when they are most needed."

Day One Trauma Support also offers patients and families counselling, legal, benefits and welfare advice. They also provide peer support from those who have been through a similar situation.

During a visit to The Leeds Major Trauma Centre, they announced the financial support. The centre is one of 23 similar ones across England and is their second busiest.

Craig Linton, director of fundraising and marketing at Day One Trauma Support, said:

"We're so grateful for this generous donation that will make such a difference to those who need support when their life has been turned upside down following a catastrophic injury."

Bevan Brittan pledges donation to Leeds Women's Aid



Bevan Brittan, a law firm expanding its office in Leeds, has donated £25,000 to Leeds Women's Aid. The charity supports women affected by domestic violence and abuse. They celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2022 and offer support services to vulnerable women and their families.

Bevan Brittan has designated its £25,000 donation to contribute to funding a new children and young people's hub. This space aims to serve as a secure environment for young people. Additionally, it will provide specialised trauma-informed support for those affected by domestic violence.

This charitable initiative is part of Bevan Brittan's broader

commitment. The firm has pledged a total of £100,000 to four charities and not-for-profit organisations. The £25,000 allocated to Leeds Women's Aid represents the largest single donation by the firm in a single year.

Julie Cowan-Clark, partner and community engagement lead at Bevan Brittan's Leeds office, commented.

"We are delighted to be able to increase the funds we can provide to Leeds Women's Aid to support the important work they do for vulnerable women and their families."

Nik Peasgood, CEO of Leeds Women's Aid, also commented on the donation.

"We are absolutely delighted that Bevan Brittan has chosen to support Leeds Women's Aid through donating an amazing £25,000 towards our new children & young people's hub. Almost every adult accessing our refuge accommodation brings at least one child with them, so this generous contribution brings us closer to our goal of developing a dedicated space to support over 70 children and young people. Thank you on behalf of Leeds Women's Aid."

Taylor Emmet supports Sheffield Children's Hospital

Sheffield law firm, Taylor Emmet, launched its annual staff present collection scheme in support of the Sheffield Children's Hospital in February 2024.

The firm's staff members collected a wide range of gifts on the hospital's behalf. The staff carefully selected these gifts to bring joy to children aged between 0 and 18 years within the hospital, ensuring that each child received a Christmas present.

The Sheffield Children's Hospital, a charity known for its exceptional healthcare services, goes above and beyond to provide specialised medical equipment to ensure that every child receives the best possible care.

The charity also strives to enhance its facilities, allowing them to offer an even wider range of treatments. They commit to continuously researching and developing, ensuring that they stay at the forefront of pediatric healthcare and can offer the latest advancements in medical treatments.

A member of Taylor Emmet's charity committee, Josh Proud, commented: "I am thrilled about the opportunity we have to positively impact young patients at Sheffield Children's Hospital.



"We firmly believe in the power of community and the importance of giving back, especially in times of adversity. That's why we have invited each member of Taylor Emmet to contribute to this heart-warming initiative. Whether it's by donating gifts, volunteering time, or making a financial contribution."

Hallmark Solicitors pedals to success



Hull-based commercial law firm Hallmark Solicitors has raised over £1,000 for Breast Cancer Now. This follows their participation in a national law firm challenge, the Tour de Law.

Describing the two-day virtual challenge as a 'David and Goliath' battle, the team at Hallmark cycled against top national and international law firms. They ranked within the top 20 for both distance cycled (646.3km) and money raised - against over 70 competitors.

Uche Akali, managing director at Hallmark Solicitors, said: "I am so proud of my team for the hard work they put into the Tour de Law challenge. As the only law firm taking part in the region, and with fewer cyclists compared to most of our competitors, we gave it our all and that showed in our place on the leaderboard. The team said they would have cycled for a third day if they could!"

The challenge took place outside of Hallmark's head office located at Chandler's Court on High Street, Hull city centre, and saw the solicitors close the office for two days to dedicate themselves to the event. They also handed out 100 breast health leaflets to attendees and passers-by.

Mr Augustine Akali, a leading breast reconstruction surgeon at Castle Hill Hospital, also joined in with the effort along with a number of his colleagues, who were on-hand to provide support and advice to those who needed it.

Jodie Hill, Thrive Law

Jodie Hill is the founder and managing partner at Thrive Law and host of the first Yorkshire Legal Webinar. Jodie discusses her passion for employment law in the wake of the event on 6 March.

What inspired you to specialise in employment law, and how did you enter this field?

I really wanted to specialise in employment law after doing a mini pupillage with a barrister and getting to go to a tribunal. I always wanted to advocate for people who were more vulnerable and really took an interest in disability discrimination and discrimination legislation more generally within the employment field.

I eventually secured work experience at a law firm and, off the back of that, they offered me a job and to cross-qualify me. At the time, I was looking for pupillage and hadn't appreciated that I could cross-qualify and become a solicitor. I've never looked back.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance in a demanding field like employment law, and what advice would you give to others in similar professions?

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance in a profession such as employment law, which can be highly demanding, involves a few key strategies (and I speak from experience): prioritising tasks, delegating when possible, setting boundaries and taking regular breaks!

You must look after your own wellbeing: engage in activities that promote mental and physical health, like exercise and spending time with loved ones.

Journalling is also great. Keeping track of your wellbeing in a journal is a great way of maintaining a work-life balance. Work-life balance isn't just a buzzword; it's a sustainable practice for long-term success and wellbeing!

Can you share any personal lessons learned from your career that have shaped your perspective on work, life, and the intersection of the two?

When I launched Thrive Law in 2018, I wanted to set up a law firm with a unique brand and identity that best reflected the change I wanted to effect: a bigger and better focus on mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. I wanted mental health to have parity with physical health and to have a place much higher in business agendas. This was because, in 2017, while

working full-time as a solicitor, I started to experience a serious decline in my mental health. This decline was the result of a build-up and combination of life events, work issues and a feeling of being completely overwhelmed, unworthy and unable to cope.

As a result, I had to take a significant amount off work on sick leave. I needed to be off work to recover but, conversely, it made me feel awful; I was filled with guilt and shame—it was the first time I had been 'off sick' long-term.

Worse still, all I could think about was getting back to work. I was deeply unwell, so much so I could not leave the house at times; I was incredibly emotional, breaking into tears at the smallest thing. The hardest part was I felt like I couldn't be a lawyer anymore and that I wasn't worthy of being in the legal profession. My brain had fully taken over and thoughts of hopelessness and despair were common.

This is why I am so passionate about mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. I wanted to create a place where I could be psychologically safe and where I could thrive in the hope that other lawyers would share the same values and I could grow my team.

How do you foster a supportive and healthy work culture within your own practice, and what steps do you take to ensure the well-being of your team members?

In the almost six years since I launched Thrive, we have prized the mental health and wellbeing of our employees, implementing reasonable adjustments above and beyond what most employers would do, encouraging employees to work 'smart' and from anywhere they wish (so long as tasks continue to be completed to a high standard), and introducing the latest products and services to help colleagues better understand one another, reduce their workloads, and improve their health.

We are also committed to maintaining and enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of our employees. We are working on the introduction of new products and services internally that will support this, including behavioural insights and analytics to help colleagues better understand one another, admin automation to reduce their workloads, and health-focused platforms that measure and support their physical and mental health.

I am happy to talk to anyone who wants to improve their team's wellbeing and share some of the great work we have done internally and externally—just get in touch.



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