

# Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer

The Official Journal of Leeds Law Society

 Leeds  
Law Society

April 2024  
Issue 187

## The women shaping Yorkshire's legal scene

Inspirational female legal professionals  
share their stories

### Leeds JLD

Sarina-Leone Mazza discusses inspirational women in her life, and how they've impacted her career.

### News

News from Blacks Solicitors, Mills and Reeve and Wake Smith.

### Society

Leeds Law Society's education programme aims to support young people in Leeds to learn about legal career opportunities.

### Last Word

Natalie Foster, founder and CEO of Inspire Legal Group, shares her advice for female entrepreneurs.

### Yorkshire Union

Natalie Cosgrove, president of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies, on her legal journey.



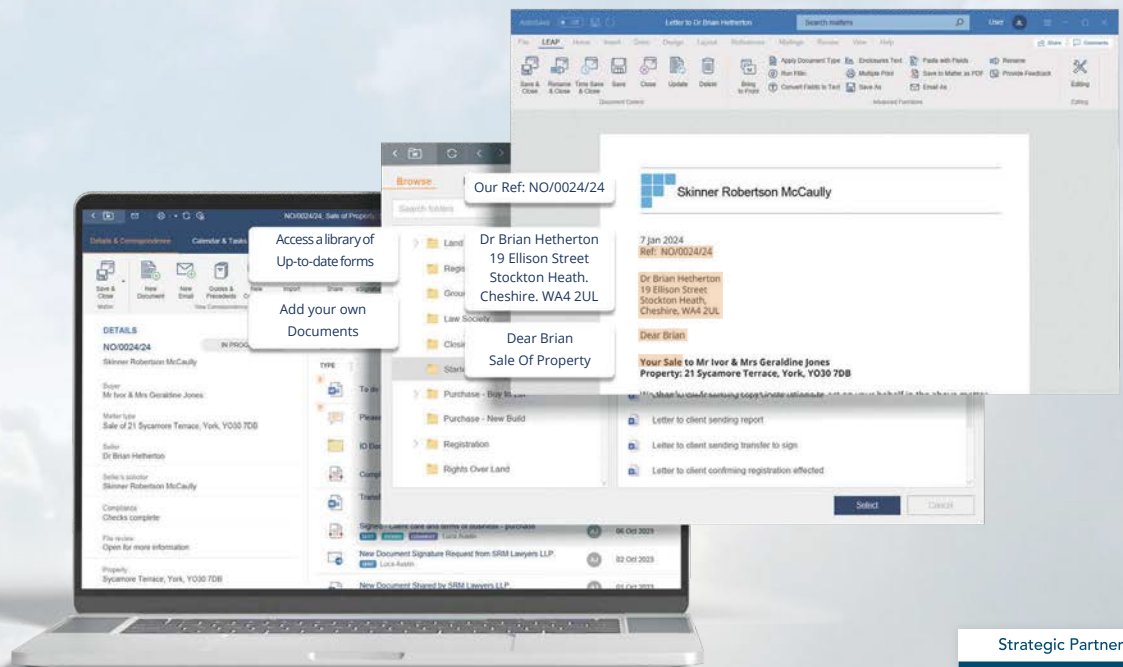


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Barker Brooks Communications Ltd  
26 Airedale House, 423 Kirkstall Road,  
Leeds, LS4 2EW  
Tel: 0113 5216092  
*www.barkerbrooks.co.uk*  
*info@barkerbrooks.co.uk*  
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The Official Journal of Leeds Law Society

April 2024 | Issue 187

**Society: President's column**.....4

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

**Society: Events**.....5

Leeds Law Society's education programme aims to support young people in Leeds to learn about career opportunities in the legal sector.

**News: Business development**.....6

- Decathlon selects Gordons LLP for regulatory advice
- Wrigleys' impact investment team achieves record-breaking year
- Ison Harrison launches new Bradford office

**Yorkshire Legal Jobs**.....7

**Focus: Leeds JLD**.....8

Sarina-Leone Mazza, legal counsel at BUPA and Leeds JLD FELT/in-house officer, reflects on the inspirational women in her life.

**News: Community**.....9

- John Baddeley to assume high sheriff role, exiting Wake Smith Solicitors
- Leeds crowned best place to live in the north and legal centre of the region
- Attracting and retaining talent: 5 key lessons from Yorkshire Legal Webinar

**Focus: Yorkshire Union of Law Societies**.....11

Natalie Cosgrove, president of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies and partner at Ashtons Legal on her legal journey.

**JM Glendinning: Professional indemnity insurance: how did the April 2024 renewal look?**.....15

**News: Appointments**.....14

The latest promotions and appointments from across Yorkshire.

**Focus: Harrogate and District Law Society**.....15

Wendy Donnan, president of HDLS, on her upcoming term.

**News: Social and charity**.....16

- Best Solicitors' paw-fect Valentine's Day charity event
- LCF Law set to raise thousands for Yorkshire Cancer Research
- Law students offer support to vulnerable individuals in family court

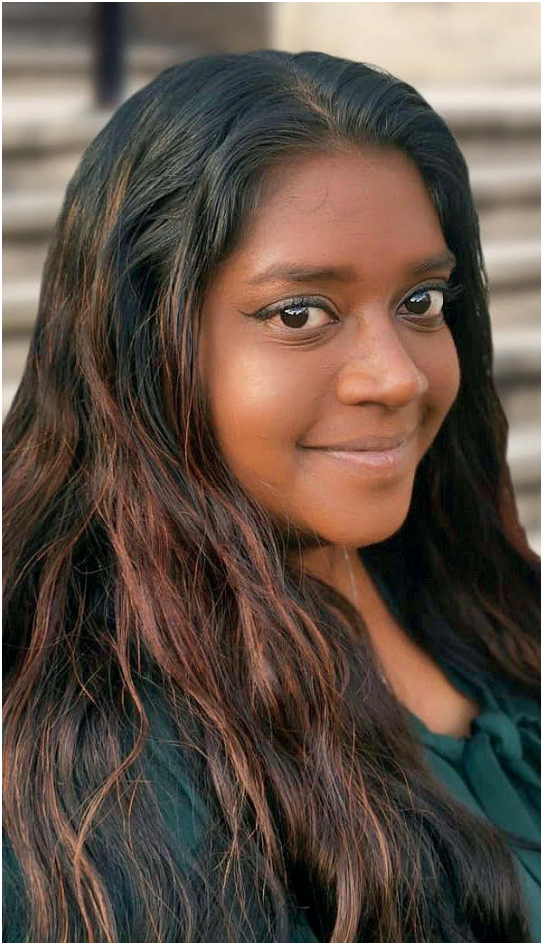
**Last word: Natalie Foster**.....18

Natalie Foster, founder and CEO of Inspire Legal Group, discusses female entrepreneurship.

**Yorkshire Legal Careers Fair**.....19



# The continuing struggle for gender equality in the legal sector



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

The theme for this edition is women in law, which is not only pertinent but an extremely important topic. All of us that work within the legal sector are entrusted with upholding justice. To do this effectively we must have a diverse profession that provides equal opportunities for all.

I recently attended the Women and Diversity in Law Awards. Whilst it was one of the most uplifting and positive events I have ever attended, it was also a reminder of how far we still have to go. For over one hundred years women have pushed boundaries and paved the way for future

generations, but it begs the question; has the profession progressed as much as it should have?

Women continue to face systemic barriers for entry and advancement in the law. It wasn't until 1919 that women were permitted to enter the legal profession. It took another three years for three women to become the first female solicitors. Females now make up over 50% of the profession but only 30% of partners in private practice are female. Women are outnumbering men entering the profession, but the number of females leaving the profession is much higher than males.

Only a few weeks ago it was revealed that judges and other legal professionals were part of a male-only private members club in London. The bar council warned that this may add to gender disparity and hinted that in the future barristers may not be permitted to be members of clubs of this nature. Whilst its extremely positive to see the bar council recognise the issue and take a robust stance in support of female professionals, it's a shame that in 2024 it needed to be said at all.

Moreover, we must recognise that gender, with other aspects of identity such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and socioeconomic status, can create even larger challenges and barriers for many. A one size fits all approach will not do.

I have spoken on several occasions about how imperative it is that our profession reflects the society it serves. Our contributions are invaluable, bringing a different perspective and lived experience to the table.

So, what can we do to make sure progress continues? We should all do what we can to promote policies and practices that support diversity and inclusion and challenge those that do not. Create opportunities where we can for the incoming generation to have the support and mentorship we wished we had in the early stages of our careers and call out bad behaviour when it happens. As lawyers, we are in a privileged position. Our profession is (largely) respected and many of us have platforms that extend beyond our day jobs. When we speak, people listen, and we can force change. We all have a duty to advocate for equality and justice.

Women have persevered, breaking down barriers and reshaping the legal landscape for generations to come. In the words of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, "Women belong in all places where decisions are being made." It is time to ensure that women not only belong but thrive in the legal sector and real equality isn't just a goal but a reality.



The Leeds Law Society education programme aims to support young people in Leeds to learn about all the amazing career opportunities within the legal sector. Facilitated and organised by Ahead Partnership, law firms are invited to sponsor either a Careers Panel with students aged 11-18, or a World of Work day with 9-11 year olds

### The programme activities aim to:

- Help pupils understand the different roles within the legal sector.
- Encourage social mobility through a focus on underrepresented groups.
- Develop the essential skills of the future workforce to ensure a diverse talent pipeline with the confidence to succeed.
- Provide industry professionals with the opportunity to develop their confidence, communication and teamwork skills.

**98% OF PARTICIPANTS IN 2023 SAID THEY HAD INCREASED THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF DIFFERENT LEGAL JOBS ✓**

#### WORLD OF WORK DAYS

**World of Work days take place across a whole school day with a class of primary school students, usually from year 5 or 6 (9-11 years old)**

- Activity with a class of 30 students
- Bring a team of 5+ volunteers to spend the school day (8.30-3.00) with your primary age group.
- Ahead Partnership will provide all resources, and manage the day and all logistical planning.
- The cost of a World of Work day is £1,500+VAT

#### CAREERS PANELS

**Our Question Time style Q&A sessions are a fun way for young people aged 11-18 to discover the legal sector.**

- Reach up to 400 students over two lessons (up to 3 hours.)
- Bring a team of 4+ volunteers
- Ahead Partnership will host and manage the event and all logistical planning.
- The cost of a Careers Panel is £1,000+VAT

**"I learned about teamwork, communication and what it's like being a lawyer!"**

**2021-22 Student**

**If you're interested in taking part in the programme or want to learn more, contact**

**[info@aheadpartnership.org.uk](mailto:info@aheadpartnership.org.uk)**

## Decathlon selects Gordons LLP for regulatory advice

The UK subsidiary of global sports and outdoor equipment and apparel retailer Decathlon has hired Gordons LLP. The firm has been appointed to provide regulatory advice amidst growing sales.

The firm will advise Decathlon UK on product stewardship and consumer law.

Decathlon UK, which is seen as a priority territory by the global business, operates 50 stores and employs more than 1,500 people. In August, the UK business reported its revenue had reached £300 million for the first time in its history.

Decathlon's UK conformity & quality leader, Dorota Wypych, said: "Gordons, especially Simon, has been instrumental in our ongoing product compliance efforts. Their in-depth knowledge of regulation has been invaluable, helping to navigate the complexities in dealing with product compliance enquiries. Their expertise and clear communication made the whole process smooth and

successful."

Gordons partner and head of regulatory, Simon

Tingle, said:

"Decathlon has become one of the

most prominent names in the global sports retail space. We are looking forward to playing our part to help the UK business tackle continually evolving regulatory challenges with our straight-talking advice grounded in retail expertise."

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.



## Wrigleys' impact investment team achieves record-breaking year



The impact investment team at Wrigleys Solicitors has advised on investments worth more than £429 million cumulatively in 2023. The firm continues to support financial institutions, impact investors, and charitable

foundations seeking to invest their money in a way which delivers positive change.

Having supported 26 investments with an average value of more than £16.5 million, Wrigleys surpassed the number and value of transactions it advised on in 2022.

The firm's impact investment team acts for several social impact investors. Throughout 2023, experts advised on matters involving debt, equity, revenue participation, grants and blended finance.

Speaking of the team's success, partner at Wrigleys, Peter Parker, said: "The demand we continue to see demonstrates the growing appetite for investors to use their funds for good – supporting communities and those causes that really matter and generating positive, measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return in the process.

"ESG is no longer just a buzzword; it sits at the heart of economic and societal prosperity, and the success we saw in 2023 is a testament to that. We're already well underway with an active start to the year, which promises to continue healthily as investors pledge their commitment to making an impact in society."

## Ison Harrison launches new Bradford office

Ison Harrison has opened its first regional office in Bradford, taking its total network of offices to 19.

Based in Queensbury, Ison Harrison's new office will be managed by Susan Ram. Susan is a solicitor specialising in residential conveyancing, who completed her training contract with the firm. She has recently re-joined in January to manage the Queensbury branch.

Ison Harrison became a 100% employee-owned business in January 2022. Since becoming owned by its employees, the firm has experienced significant growth in the number of clients that it acts for, with this latest office launch further cementing its presence in the region.

Queensbury is the third new office the firm has opened since becoming entirely employee-owned, after Doncaster last year and Wakefield in 2022.

Queensbury's new manager, Susan Ram, commented: "The whole team is looking forward to building a presence across Bradford and beyond. Opening our new office is the next phase of Ison Harrison's ongoing success and it also enables us to connect with the local community, create relationships

and provide full legal support, mirroring what we've achieved across the region. As part of our local relationship-building activity, we are offering our first 100 customers a £20 voucher that they can spend at selected local businesses."

Ison Harrison managing partner Jonathan Wearing, said: "Opening our 19th office in the region is very exciting and gets the year off to the best possible start. It's also our first office in Bradford so we're very much looking forward to growing our presence here.

"This latest office sees us further strengthening our growing stature in Yorkshire. It continues our growth strategy, allowing us to offer an even broader range of legal expertise through our expanding network of offices."





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# Lessons from inspirational women



**Sarina-Leone Mazza**, legal counsel at BUPA and Leeds JLD FELT/in-house officer, reflects on the inspirational women in her life for the women in law edition of the Leeds and Yorkshire Lawyer.

8 March marked International Women's Day; this day brings all women together to reflect on the progression of women's rights over the years. Despite having a long way to go, it's necessary to reflect on the positive movement there has been in the legal industry.

The SRA's diversity report from 2023 confirmed the number of women in the profession increased from 48% in 2015, to 52% in 2021 and 53% in 2023. The fact that over 50% of lawyers in the UK are now women is a huge achievement and something to be proud of. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done as only 37% of partners are women, and women are still less represented at the most senior level of the largest law firms.

These statistics made me think about inspirational women in my life and how they have impacted me. I am the first generation of my family to attend university and the only person who has pursued a career in law, yet I have been lucky enough to be surrounded by inspirational women who have worked extremely hard to reach their positions in life.

Firstly, my mum, she started her retail career in a local sandwich shop in Huddersfield and worked her way up to be retail director of an international women's clothing brand. She travelled to London from Huddersfield four to five times a week, flew around the world and regularly

commuted to hundreds of stores across the country. She did all of this whilst raising two children on her own and having two stepchildren. I know this lifestyle was not without its challenges, however, not once did I feel I missed out on a relationship with my mum, which I think is very powerful. It shows the capability of the modern woman and demonstrates that with hard work and dedication you can have a successful career and a happy family.

However, climbing the corporate ladder is not the only way to demonstrate successful women in leadership. Women who own their businesses, like my sister, also fit into this category. My sister owns a small but highly successful hair salon in Mirfield called Rubens. After working abroad in the Caribbean in her early twenties, where she worked with few A-list celebrity clients, she took the salon over from my dad. She has no interest in expanding the salon or opening further premises, but she has built a successful business with a very loyal clientele whilst bringing up my three-year-old nephew. My sister shows that working your way up the corporate ladder is not the only definition of success. Success is defined by building a career and life that you want and that makes you happy. This is just as inspirational as being a leader in the corporate world.

Bringing it back to law, another inspirational leadership role is the chair of the Leeds Junior Lawyers Division (JLD). I became a member of the JLD just over three years ago and each year the JLD chair position has been held by a woman. I am now a JLD committee member, and I see first-hand how committed you must be to hold this role. All committee roles are filled on a voluntary basis and all the work is done on top of your day job and other personal commitments. As many people are aware, the path to qualification is not an easy one, it takes a lot of determination, hard work, and resilience to work through university (undergraduate and postgraduate), training contract or bar applications and now SQE exams (just to name a few of the challenges facing junior lawyers). Each of these women worked through these challenges whilst managing JLD, all with great enthusiasm. These women show that successful leadership is not limited to senior positions or big wages, they are also represented in the junior community.

Even though there is still a way to go to improve equality across the legal industry, it's important to consider how far the community has come. We must have gratitude for those who came before us and helped to forge our path as modern professional women.

Women are supportive, caring and determined individuals who continuously support one another. This alone is an achievement we should all be proud of. Whenever you are having a tough day, just remember you don't know how many people you have, and continue to, silently support and inspire.



## John Baddeley to assume high sheriff role, exiting Wake Smith Solicitors



John Baddeley is to step down in his role as chairman, shareholder and director at Wake Smith Solicitors to become high sheriff of South Yorkshire.

John, who has been at Sheffield-based Wake Smith for 36 years, will take up the ceremonial role from 8 April 2024. He will retire and not work for the firm for 12 months while he undertakes his duties.

Head of property, Neil Salter, becomes the new Wake Smith chairman from 1 January.

John Baddeley said:

"I am very proud to be taking up the role as the high sheriff of south Yorkshire. My decision to leave Wake Smith has been an incredibly difficult one; however, the office of high sheriff is a high honour and it is an immense privilege to be selected. I hand over the role of chairman in Neil Salter's capable hands.

I wish him all the best in his new role."

Neil Salter commented:

"John being chosen as high sheriff is a remarkable recognition of his profile in the city and, to an extent, that of Wake Smith. Sadly, for us, John will be stepping down from the firm whilst he undertakes his duties, as he will be spending substantial amounts of time with the judiciary, and this has the potential for a conflict of interest.

"John has been integral to the development of the spirit and culture of Wake Smith and its continued success, and I would not be surprised if, after his time as high sheriff, his involvement with the firm may re-commence in some way, shape or form."

"We wish him a fond farewell for now, with a huge sense of pride and admiration on his appointment."

## Leeds crowned best place to live in the north and legal centre of the region



Leeds has been recognised as the top place to live in the north and north-east, according to the Sunday Times' Best Places to Live guide. Among its various strengths, the city's legal sector plays a significant role in its appeal.

Judges praised Leeds for its strong job market, citing it as the best-paying city outside of London. With five universities, the city boasts a youthful energy.

With an estimated 1,560 legal firms and over 14,400 professionals, Leeds boasts one of the most robust and diverse legal sectors in the region. The presence of renowned firms

like the 'Big Six' contributes to its status as a centre for legal activities.

Economically, the legal sector is substantial, with an estimated gross value add (GVA) of £925 million, comprising 4% of the UK's total GVA for legal services. Also, Leeds attracts many law graduates, with 3,700 entering the workforce annually.

However, the legal sector in Leeds faces challenges, particularly regarding technology adoption. While some larger firms are more advanced in their digital transformation, the sector is in the early stages of embracing technology. Despite this, there is growing potential for LegalTech activity, as highlighted in the 2020 Leeds City Region LegalTech & Innovation report.

Leeds' position as a legal hub is further reinforced by its attraction of top law firms, with 28 of the top 100 having a presence in the city. Moreover, nearly 59,000 individuals are employed in legal services across the north, emphasising the city's regional influence.

The city's legal sector not only contributes significantly to its economy but also offers ample opportunities for legal talent, further solidifying its appeal as the best place to live in the north.

## Attracting and retaining talent: five key lessons from the Yorkshire Legal Webinar



**The Yorkshire Legal Webinar, sponsored by Yorkshire Legal Jobs, gave experts a chance to share insights and best practices, and field questions from the live audience.**

The panel was hosted by Thrive Law founder and managing partner, Jodie Hill, and featured insights from managing partner of Lupton Fawcett, James Richardson; talent manager for Clarion Solicitors, Nadia Hemmings; and founder and CEO of Harper James, Toby Harper.

Here are five key takeaways from the session:

### **1) Listening to your team is key**

"I think it's really important that we hear what staff want because we can often assume what people need," Jodie Hill, from Thrive Law, said.

If you don't, you might waste time and cash on stuff they don't really want: "It's really good [to get] thoughts from individuals on an EDI committee and beyond that, from younger generations. We can actually waste so much time and money on things we assume everybody wants, and that's not helpful for them."

Further, the panellists pointed out that people's needs change as they enter different life stages.

Toby Harper commented, "You'd only implement something if you could see that people would value it – whether that's people [who are already] here or whether it would be a tool for attracting other people."

"It isn't just about talking to existing employees," countered Nadia Hemmings, from Clarion Solicitors, "it's also listening to the wider market. If you want to attract people, it's about listening to what people don't like about where they currently are."

Management shouldn't shy away from feedback from brand-new employees either, continued Jodie: "There's no better information from a new starter than about your processes, right? Because they're fresh eyes."

### **2) Be flexible with work, when it works**

Toby Harper of Harper James highlighted the need for flexibility across different life stages. His firm offers a policy called 'flexibility without judgement'. This means that "90% of our people currently work flexible; 39% work part-time," Harper said.

However, it's not an approach that will work for everyone. Nadia Hemmings, talent manager at Clarion Solicitors, was quick to point out that: "It depends on what people want,

though. Not everybody fits every law firm. [Clarion has] grown quickly but we're a Leeds-based law firm ... we do, for the vast majority of our people, have an expectation that they will be in the office for a couple of days a week.

"It is a true hybrid model. If you are set up as a remote business, that is a very different proposition to if you're a business that was five days in an office and then now is navigating a new [remote] world," added Hemmings.

Harper agreed, commenting, "I couldn't agree with you more Nadia. If you look at our values, it's a self-selecting process. People who would be attracted to you and to James's firm wouldn't be attracted to our firm, because they're looking for something different."

"Both models work but it depends on what you're setting your stall out to attract. A lot of people in our firm like to be in the office for some of the time," commented James Richardson, from Lupton Fawcett, "It's part of the culture, and people want it."

### **3) Customisation over one-size-fits-all**

Speakers emphasised the need for tailored solutions that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of employees.

"Obviously, in law today, you recognise the diversity of the people who join you," said James Richardson of Lupton Fawcett, whose firm has introduced a menopause policy and improved maternity and paternity leave provision.

It's also about recognising that employees' needs change over time. As Nadia Hemmings from Clarion Solicitors puts it, "They might have different requirements to what they had five years ago when they weren't in that stage of life."

### **4) Onboarding sets the tone**

"Onboarding starts the day the offer is made," Nadia Hemmings from Clarion Solicitors pointed out. "It's not given the attention sometimes that it should have."

People in legal professions can often have long notice periods in their roles, often lasting three to six months. This can have a knock-on effect on maintaining a new starter's interest and excitement about their new role.

"It's very important because people need to be valued and they need to feel wanted," said James Richardson, of Lupton Fawcett, "and it's very important that you get that part absolutely bang-on."

### **5) Make sure everyone's on the same page**

The panellists were clear that not every law firm will appeal to every kind of legal professional.

As James Richardson put it, "We're not comparing apples with apples when we talk about the types of people joining [Harper James] and the type of people joining Clarion or Lupton Fawcett."

"I know the type of people that will fit the firm and I know the type of people I want. Someone might be a fantastic lawyer but, well, how well will they fit into our values? Our culture? What we're trying to achieve?"

Jodie Hill of Thrive Law agreed: "Ultimately, you don't want to be doing hundreds of interviews for people who are like, Oh, I didn't realise that's what you stood for. If you can get the right people attracted at the initial stage, it's going to save you loads of time, and they're more likely to stay."

# The continuing legacy of women in law



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**Natalie Cosgrove**, president of the Yorkshire Union of Law Societies and partner at Ashtons Legal.

As I write this on the eve of my return to work after my second parental leave, I can say that the experience has been very different in many ways. I am, however, grateful that I could take a period of complete leave from work. In fact, my line manager, Sharon, has been very clear about setting boundaries and support. There was never a sense that this was because she felt she had a duty to allow me space and support (a fine balance) but because her personal experience made her want to provide a better experience than she had.

I felt that. I feel that. I will repeat that going forward.

I'd like to discuss Barbie (the movie, not the mechanism for burning sausages on your patio in the summer months). In particular, a monologue. If you're not familiar, read it. I have never known anything explain the conundrum of womanhood quite like it.

In the Barbie conundrum of life there are a multitude of quotes that will resonate, but this one did in particular:

"You're supposed to love being a mother, but don't talk about your kids all the damn time. You have to be a career woman but also always be looking out for other people."

Often the last line gets missed. It's not about looking out for other women at a detriment to yourself, but rather striking a balance. When you reach the top of where you are going, don't build a wall to that route, send the elevator down for the others to follow you.

We live in a world where the balance really isn't there yet for women, but I believe with effort and time, it will be. For now, whilst we're not 'there yet', the worst thing women can do to each other is build that wall.

I don't want any men reading this to say, 'aha, I knew it was women doing this to themselves this whole time.' That's not my point. If you have interpreted that then you have misread everything else in this piece too. In a world where you can be anything, be more like Sharon. We all should be. Fostering a world where you can start as a secretary and progress to lead a department, then nurture the needs of your team to be their very best.

Actively support professionals with real flexibility, real support and a collegiate sense of working and real success will follow. It has always been women like Sharon who have lifted me up. Often women who had to go through the trenches to get where they are now. But those women also took the time to smooth the path and come back to give others, like me, the road map.

I have come across many women who have torn up that map and carried on. There will always be people from all sexes and genders who will do that. I won't. I strive to bend and form and support people no matter their sex or gender identity. I suspect that the struggles that women have historically faced are now the blueprint for others who don't conform to what a typical lawyer looks like. We all have a duty to make our profession about the law, and not pronouns, gender, personal backgrounds, race or ethnicity.

I feel I have a responsibility not only to the women I know, manage or work alongside but also to women who I do not know and those who are yet to join the industry. We will never really know the sacrifices, the challenges and the obstacles those women who came before us faced. They opened doors so that we could walk through them without hesitation or boundary, and now it's our generation's turn to do the same.

# Professional indemnity insurance: How did the April 2024 renewal look?



1 April sees many solicitors renewing their professional indemnity insurance (PII) and this renewal period can often be a good indication of what will happen when the bulk of law firms come to renew their PII policies on 1 October. In April 2024, we have started to see more capacity and competition in the PII market, downward pressure on rates and better premium value for most practices. So, what exactly has happened, what's driving this and how should you plan for your firm's next renewal?

## Market conditions

From around 2019 to 2022, PII market conditions were extremely tough, especially for law firms. Claims costs for the profession in any given year were only just being met by premiums collected from the profession, many solicitors were experiencing large claims due to a variety of issues (the growth of cyber breaches, buyer funded developments going awry and conveyancing becoming more commoditised, to name a few) and PII as a class was performing badly for most insurers, as highlighted by Lloyd's of London's thematic review in 2019. A slightly brighter economic outlook post-Covid, coupled with most white-collar professions (including law firms) performing well financially in the last couple of years, has relieved the pressure on insurers' books of PII business somewhat and enabled new entrants to consider coming into the market too. Since October 2023, we have seen existing solicitors' insurers willing to write more business by way of total premium (increased capacity) and be able to consider law firms undertaking more work such as conveyancing (increased appetite). There have also been new insurers entering the PII space for solicitors, as well as new facilities created by some insurers already in the space combining their capacity.

## April 2024 – PII pricing & competition

For the April 2024 renewal, insurers' desire for business and keen pricing increased again somewhat. Across JMG's law firm clients, the average premium reduction on primary layer cover was 25.5%\* based on like-for-like fee income and renewal periods for firms renewing on 1st April, the average client premium reducing from £77,785 to £57,897\*.

Across excess layer premiums, there was a similar story albeit with slightly less reduction in premiums, with JMG clients seeing an average reduction of 18.5%\* on cover purchased above the mandatory £2M or £3M limit.

These savings for clients were driven by a combination of competition from alternative insurers and incumbent insurers generally responding to that competition. Most PII providers now seem to recognise that we are in softer market conditions and that they may not be able to carry the rates of recent years if they want to retain clients.

## Looking towards October

A softer market also often means some additional challenges in managing the renewal process; there are likely to be more brokers attempting to win market share, often with different, sometimes confusing messaging about which insurers have appetite for your firm and how they can be accessed.

## This means it is even more important to have a clear plan. Firms should:

- Engage with brokers early to understand their experience of dealing with law firms, which insurers they have relationships with and how they access them (direct or via another broker).
- Where possible, meet their existing and potential insurers during the coming months, either virtually or in person.
- Form a clear strategy as to which insurers they want to approach for quotations, and which brokers they will use – ensuring there is no duplication between brokers and insurers. Even with increased appetite, the market is still relatively small and there is no benefit to approaching the same insurers via multiple brokers.
- Prepare proposal forms, financial and supplementary information in good time to submit 2 to 3 months prior to renewal.
- Discuss any quotations coming back in full with your broker, including the merits of switching insurers if you are considering this
- Similarly, constructively question any brokers you engage with and try to make a separate decision about their value, as opposed to the actual insurer and premium. You should always understand the brokers' specific experience with law firms' PII, what they will provide beyond just placing your insurance and how they are remunerated.

By taking time to understand the market dynamics and how they affect your firm, most practices should be able to expect more competitive PII terms at their next renewal.

JM Glendinning Professional Risks remains a fully independent, specialist professional indemnity broker working with law firms of all sizes throughout England and Wales. If you would like to discuss your PII renewal, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

*\*Statistics taken from JMG's law firm client base with a PII renewal date of 01.04.2024.*



# Moving on up

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



**Mills & Reeve** has recruited Stephanie Douthwaite to its growing family team.

Stephanie has joined as a principal associate. She advises high-net-worth individuals across family law matters including complex financial remedies, pre and post marital agreements and children proceedings. She holds resolution specialist accreditation and is also a qualified collaborative family lawyer.

Stephanie joins from Clarion Solicitors where she was a legal director.

Philip Way, head of the family team in Leeds, said:

"As our practice in the region continues to grow, we need lawyers with a wealth of experience to advise our client base of high-net-worth individuals with complex needs across children, international, wealth protection, business, pensions and cohabitation law. Stephanie's experience in these areas will significantly boost our strategic expansion plans as she brings unrivalled expertise to our Leeds team."

Stephanie added: "I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know my new Mills & Reeve colleagues since joining the firm and I'm very much looking forward to opportunities to collaborate with some exceptional lawyers. I'll be offering a safe pair of hands to those clients looking to resolve complex family-related issues, promising dedication to resolving matters constructively. My work will be further enhanced by being able to draw in the unparalleled expertise from across the firm, to add value when working with my family clients."

**Irwin Mitchell's** financial planning business, IM Asset Management Limited, has appointed wealth manager, Stewart Sanderson, as its new chief executive officer (subject to regulatory approvals). This follows his predecessor, Richard Potts' retirement. Richard was based in the firm's Sheffield office.

Stewart has over 25 years' experience of UK wealth management gained at institutions such as Seven Investment Management LLP, Lloyds Private Banking and Coutts & Co. He has also developed and led other private client businesses across London, Edinburgh, and Jersey.

Stewart holds several industry qualifications, is a fellow of the Chartered Institute for Securities & Investment (Chartered FCSI) and is a recommended



wealth manager in the Spears 500 guide.

Simon Hynes, chair of IMAML, said:

"We want to thank Richard for his outstanding service to IM Asset Management. His legacy is in building the strong business we have today. Net promoter scores are truly impressive and the financial contribution to the Irwin Mitchell Group has become increasingly significant over Richard's tenure. IM Asset Management colleagues and clients will certainly miss him, and we all wish him well in his retirement.

"Equally, Stewart has tremendous experience in growing private client businesses and his expertise will be invaluable as we seek to grow our share of the broader wealth management market."

Stewart commented on his appointment:

"It's an exciting time to join IM Asset Management Limited. They have a strong flow of AUM coming into the business. The team has expanded in recent years through M&A activity and there is a great opportunity to bring all of our expertise together and grow the business significantly."

**ALT Legal**, based in Wetherby, has hired two new recruits.

Heather Robertson and Alex Cooper both took an unusual pathways to become qualified lawyers. Alex studied pharmacology before qualifying as a corporate lawyer, while Heather did a law degree, but spent many years as a project manager in the tech industry.

Alex, who has joined from Clarion, commented:

"I was really attracted to ALT Legal's ethos and values. It has a refreshing approach to innovate the sector's traditional models, coupled with a flexibility for working parents."

Anna Ashford, head of ALT Legal, commended the new hires:

"Heather and Alex's diverse backgrounds accentuate ALT Legal's commitment to a very different approach to problem solving. Heather's role, in particular, will see her utilising those tech skills to bring new products, such as visual contracts, to life."

Heather commented on her recruitment:

"After my experience in the more creative, disruptive tech sector before working in traditional law firms, it's exciting to join a firm with such an innovative approach that isn't fixated on billable hours. The subscription model gives breathing space to build genuine client relationships without them worrying about unexpected bills for every six-minute unit of advice."

ALT Legal, founded almost 10 years ago by Richard Turner and Rob Ashall, remains committed to creating a 21st century law firm. The founders insist that there is space for a law firm which can provide the same quality of advice, wrapped in a less formal



and perhaps even irreverent approach, which better reflects the tone of voice and culture of many modern businesses.

Rob Ashall, founder of ALT Legal, said:

“Just because we don’t take ourselves too seriously doesn’t mean we don’t take what we do seriously. Our lawyers, as proven by the recent hires of Alex and Heather, are first rate – they just feel the same as we do, that law is a tool to help businesses. It doesn’t need to be the business prevention unit.”

Since 2021, when ALT Legal was relaunched as a spin-out from Alpaca, Anna Ashford has led the day-to-day operations.

According to Anna, the change is being driven by clients: “What we hear most often from clients is that they want us to go further. They’re crying out for contracts which make sense to somebody who isn’t legally trained. They want to see visual contracts, automation, and efficiency. They love that we communicate with them in plain English using tools like Slack. It’s really not rocket science, but it seems to be a gap in the market.”



Yorkshire-based **Han Law** has bolstered its team with the appointment of Natalie Saunders, a HR director and employment lawyer with nearly 25 years of experience.

Natalie has worked with a range of businesses, from start-ups to global household names, in financial services, professional services, higher education, food and drink, and manufacturing. She also has the invaluable experience of running her own businesses.

Pragmatic and highly commercial, Natalie recognises the value and impact of prioritising people’s experience on crucial KPIs such as attraction, recruitment, retention, and individual as well as organisational performance.

On the appointment, Hannah Strawbridge, founder and CEO of Han Law, said:

“I’m thrilled to welcome Natalie to Han Law, and I’m very excited about what she can bring to the table. Natalie has a huge depth of HR knowledge, particularly in the field of EDI, that will add so much value to our clients. She’s also a naturally curious and empathetic ‘people’ person, making her the perfect fit for us and our clients. She’s a brilliant addition to the team.”

On her appointment, Natalie commented;

“Hannah and the Han Law team are disrupting the market for employment law and HR advice, reimagining the relationship between providers of professional services and their clients. It’s a truly exciting business to be a part of and I’m delighted to supplement their legal advisory services with my HR expertise, making our offer even more compelling.”



The real estate team at **Blacks Solicitors** is celebrating a strong start to 2024 with the announcement of a series of new appointments and promotions.

The team has recently appointed Rowan Thomas as senior associate solicitor and Lucy Storey as associate solicitor, along with Joshua Ackroyd as a paralegal.

Rowan brings 14 years of commercial property experience from an international firm to lead the department in offering expertise in development work.

Conor Tobin and Victoria Adamson have also joined the cohort as newly qualified solicitors, after starting at the firm as trainees in 2021.

Marcus Kaye, who joined the firm in 2017, has been promoted to partner.

Commenting on his promotion, Marcus Kaye said: “It’s been a pleasure to have assisted in the expansion of our real estate specialism and witness the team’s involvement in some cutting-edge work across the energy, parks and development sectors. I’m committed to continuing to deliver expert and high-quality services to our clients as the real estate offering continues to grow.”

Another promotion has seen Ben Finley, who trained and qualified with Blacks, being promoted to senior associate solicitor.

Discussing the recent expansion, Beth Laidler, partner in real estate at Blacks, commented:

“We remain dedicated to consolidating our offering in the property sector and building a strong reputation in the market. We’re excited and looking forward to Conor, Rowan, Victoria, Lucy and Josh settling into the real estate division.”

Nick Dyson, head of real estate at Blacks Solicitors, added:

“Our cohort has gone from strength to strength and it’s a privilege to lead one of the finest, specialist real estate legal divisions in the region. I am extremely proud of the team for their ongoing hard work, which is reflected in the significant number of matters dealt with and the increase in turnover that we have generated in the last financial year. Our team’s commitment, great spirit, and passion have continued to shine as we deliver high-quality and specialist services to our clients.”

# Breaking barriers: HDLS president shares her journey into law



## Wendy Donnan, president of the Harrogate & District Law Society (HDLS) and partner at Hartlaw LLP.

Anyone who knows me knows that I am feeling quite out of my comfort zone being president of the HDLS. However, I am absolutely determined to push the society forward during my term and I'm looking forward to seeing you all very soon at one of our events.

President's drinks are to be held on St George's day (Tuesday 23 April) at Hotel Du Vin Harrogate, so make sure you get your ticket early from Eventbrite and enjoy a free drink!

I am a product of the HDLS community, home grown shall we say. Dragged up, lived, trained and now working within Harrogate. I am proof that learning and succeeding in law is possible and accessible in our district no matter your education or background. Training, learning and working in law as a single mum with two small children feels like sheer madness now when I look back, but it is with that same determination (or madness) that I want to push forward with the HDLS. I could not have achieved what I have today without the Harrogate and District legal profession behind me. I have been so very lucky in my career to have worked with some amazing professionals and firms in our district who continue to support my career.

As this issue is focused on women in law, I did also want to share a little of my journey into the legal profession. It wasn't conventional and I did face challenges, as we all do, whether

we are male or female.

I left school with no qualifications- let's just say I fell out with the educational system. It didn't work for me; I had no ambition, and no ambitions were instilled within me coming from a working-class family. It was always understood that I would leave school and get a job.

So, I found myself as a young single mum at 23, working full time. It was at this time I began to question everything. Life felt pretty rubbish and I didn't know how to, or have the skills to, change it.

But I dared to wonder, can I be, or do something more? That is honestly exactly how it felt, daring to believe and have the confidence to enrol myself into education, to want to try to better myself and my sons' futures. And so, my educational journey began. Who did I think I was! Fast forward a few years and here I am. We all know the journey and we all experienced the highs and lows, but I remain determined to tackle those barriers head on. Lean on friends and family when you need to, and nothing is unachievable.

This sense of resilience and hope is what I hope to create with the HDLS for my term. I'd like to bring the Harrogate legal community together.

We have exceptional solicitors and experienced professionals, both in and outside of law, within our community. I would like to create an environment where likeminded professionals can meet, get to know one another, celebrate each other's successes and be there for each another in any times of need.

Law societies are great environments to build friendships that can be relied upon (maybe assisted by an odd drink or two). With that in mind, my primary goal is to build a community for the legal industry within the Harrogate and District area. I wish to create a network of trust and reliability where you can always pick up the phone to a likeminded person.

HDLS events allow for cross selling and marketing on a whole new level, from making referrals to promoting specialist niche areas of law. This collaborative environment ensures that we can build on the district's exceptional legal standards and utilise the best professionals within our local area. These events are also a great place for young up and coming lawyers to meet with the oldies (oops, sorry, I meant experienced solicitors!), who can offer a wealth of advice and experience.

As president, I have introduced a Charity of the Year. This will be Horticap in Harrogate. If you don't know who they are, search them now! They are an amazing charity in Harrogate who are celebrating their 40th anniversary this year. We will also be hosting Harrogate's first legal walk later in the year.

So, keep your eyes peeled! If you are in the Harrogate area, either me or a fellow committee member will be in touch shortly. If not, please contact me if you are interested in being a member of the HDLS.

## Best Solicitors' paw-fect Valentine's Day charity event

Yorkshire-based law firm, Best Solicitors, showcased its commitment to community support by joining forces with the Sheffield-based charity, Support Dogs.

Best Solicitors offered a complimentary will-writing service to individuals interested in supporting the charity through legacy donations.

On 14 February 2024, the firm's head office on West Street, Sheffield, played host to a special event. Attendees met some of the assistance dogs and chatted with Support Dogs' dedicated staff.

A charity cake sale was also held. All proceeds went towards Support Dogs' mission of enhancing the quality of life for individuals living with autism, epilepsy, or physical disabilities.

Support Dogs, a member of the National Free Wills Network, specialises in training assistance dogs to provide essential support to those in need, enabling them to lead safer and more independent lives. Remarkably, one in three of these support dogs owes its role to the generosity of donations left in wills and legacies.

Danny Anderson, head of fundraising at Support Dogs, said, "We are so grateful to Best Solicitors for supporting us in this



way – we're two long-established local organisations working together so this is a real match made in heaven."

Anne Rogers, solicitor and director of wills and probate at Best Solicitors, echoed this sentiment. She said, "Best Solicitors are very invested in the well-being of our community and committed to making a positive impact. We appreciate how important it is to support and give back to our local charities who get limited support."

## Bowel care crisis: SIA and Hudgell Solicitors increase advocacy efforts



Hudgell Solicitors is supporting calls for a parliamentary inquiry to be held into the 'inadequate and dangerous' state of bowel care for patients with spinal cord injuries in healthcare settings.

The enquiry follows MPs, NHS representatives and government officials being told how in some cases patients are left feeling 'humiliated' as they are unable to go to the toilet for days. In extreme cases patients are left lying in their own excrement in hospital beds due to a lack of dedicated, specialist care.

The issue was discussed at a recent parliamentary roundtable meeting, hosted by the Spinal Injuries Association (SIA). The roundtable was attended by more than 30 representatives of the NHS, MPs and the spinal cord injury sector.

Campaign for Change has partnered with the SIA on this issue.

Solicitor Elizabeth Maliakal, of Hudgell Solicitors' specialist medical negligence team, also attended and says the firm supports many people whose bowel care is 'delayed or not attended to at all'.

### Patients left feeling 'humiliated and terrified'

Proper bowel care management is a basic human right, yet it is consistently the most challenging aspect of living with a spinal cord injury, the SIA says.

Now, the charity is calling for a parliamentary select committee inquiry into the matter. This inquiry highlights how patients are being left 'humiliated' and 'terrified' when going into hospital, with the situation potentially becoming 'life-threatening'. Their 'This is #SeriousSh1t' campaign is calling for a commitment to ensure all NHS healthcare providers have a fully implemented bowel care policy in place.

Campaigns manager Dharshana Sridhar said: "Our research proves that there is a post code lottery at present in terms of the level of bowel care provided across the country."

"We are now pushing for a parliamentary select committee inquiry so that consensus can be reached on what actions need to be taken to affect the change that so many people desperately need."

"We need to ensure there is a consistently good level of care for these patients, a national bowel care policy and adequately trained nursing staff in all hospitals and healthcare settings."

### Solicitors see impact on patients 'physically and psychologically'

As 'Campaign for Change' partners, Hudgell Solicitors is supporting the SIA's call for a parliamentary inquiry.

Solicitor Elizabeth Maliakal says lawyers at the firm commonly represent patients who have suffered both physically and psychologically due to a lack of bowel care policies at hospitals, and a lack of fully trained bowel care nurses within the NHS.

"We see in our cases that very often when someone is admitted to hospital their bowel care can be delayed or not attended to at all, often impacting on their dignity and self-esteem, ultimately leading to poorer final outcomes," she said.

"We fully support SIA's call for an inquiry into this issue. The campaign is shining a light on bowel care in hospitals and improvements will benefit not only those with spinal cord injuries but also other patients that are in hospital and require bowel care, for example the elderly and patients who have had abdominal surgery."



## Law students offer support to vulnerable individuals in family court



Teesside University law students are providing support to vulnerable people without access to legal advice in a north-east family court.

Teesside University Law Clinic will now have a base at family court sessions at Middlesbrough Family Court. They will offer emotional support and procedural advice to people representing themselves in private law family cases.

The initiative is the one of only two similar schemes in the whole country and the only one in the north of England.

The Law Clinic, offering free community legal services, has received special permission from the court to attend and work with unrepresented people in person. The Law Clinic

has been running for several years at Teesside University and has consistently offered free legal advice to members of the community in areas including employment, civil disputes, landlord and tenant, and wills.

The final year LLB law students will be supported by staff from the Law Clinic, who are all trained legal professionals.

The students will offer procedural advice at the hearings, explaining the court process and the next stages. They will also offer emotional support to those involved.

Emma Harbron, senior lecturer in legal practice at Teesside University, pioneered the new scheme. She said: "As well as helping those members of the public who are struggling to access justice, this initiative will be invaluable for our students, offering them an opportunity to gain real-world experience of court proceedings, interact with other legal professionals and deal with clients.

"All of these will be vital skills in their future careers."

Judge Harvey Murray, a local family court judge, said: "This is an exciting new service aimed at providing those who are attending before our family court with the support and assistance they might need. This collaboration between the university and the court centre will hopefully give members of our community more confidence when attending what could be an emotionally demanding hearing."

## LCF Law set to raise thousands for Yorkshire Cancer Research

Yorkshire law firm, LCF Law, has announced it will be fundraising for Yorkshire Cancer Research, its nominated charity for 2024. The firm has a packed calendar of activities to raise thousands of pounds for the organisation.

LCF's team members are invited to give a presentation on a charity that they would like to nominate for the firm's annual fundraising efforts each year. The firm then invites colleagues to vote on which charity to support.

Last year LCF Law raised £10,000 for the Bone Cancer Trust following a presentation from Sarah McCann from the firm's conveyancing team. LCF has chosen Yorkshire Cancer Research for 2024. One of the fundraising activities planned will see 13 members of the team taking part in the Leeds half marathon on 13 May.

Members of the firm are also taking part in a sponsored 'Tour De LCF Law' cycle challenge and have collaborated with PureGym to set up static bikes in the offices. They hope to cover the distance from Yorkshire to the Tour De France finishing point in Nice, which is 1,064 miles. LCF will include miles completed on static bikes in the offices and miles completed outside of the office through cycling, running, walking, or rowing, for anyone participating.

Sarah McCann comments;

"Cancer is a horrible disease, and everyone will know someone close to them who has or is fighting a fight against it. I have a close friend who was shockingly diagnosed with breast cancer last year at the age of 39. She completed her chemotherapy treatment and has undergone surgery but



devastatingly she's now been told her cancer is incurable.

"I nominated Yorkshire Cancer Research because it does the most amazing job of funding research to help prevent cancer. The number of people surviving cancer has doubled in the last 40 years and research is continuing to change what it means to have cancer. Everything we raise this year will help leading researchers in Yorkshire, along with experts across the UK and throughout the world, to improve cancer survival.

"Our main fundraiser is the half marathon, which my friend will also be taking part in, which goes to show you what a determined person she is and that anything is possible, even with a life-limiting disease."

# Natalie Foster's insights on empowering women in law



**Natalie Foster** is the founder and CEO of Inspire Legal Group. With a passion for challenging norms, Natalie brings a wealth of experience and a fresh perspective to the industry. As an SRA regulated owner of her firm, Natalie champions alternative routes into the legal industry, as living proof that the LPC is not the only option.

## *What motivated you to create Inspire Legal Group?*

Establishing an alternative business structure within the legal sector was driven by a passion for innovation, a commitment to diversity, and a desire to create collaborative opportunities within the industry. Traditional law firms often operate within rigid structures that can stifle creativity.

At Inspire Legal Group, we saw an opportunity to break away from these constraints. Our motivation stems from a belief that by embracing new ways of thinking and working, we can better serve our clients and drive positive change within the legal profession.

We also encourage our team members to think creatively, take initiative, and push the boundaries of what is possible within the legal industry. By embracing technology and change, we provide our clients with efficient, effective, and forward-thinking legal services.

## *As a female entrepreneur, what challenges have you faced in your career?*

Building and growing Inspire Legal Group has certainly presented its challenges, but I've always believed that success is not determined by gender but rather by tenacity and the support of the team around you.

One of the primary challenges I've faced is navigating the traditionally male-dominated corporate legal industry and understanding that personal brand is not something you can ride forever, results and integrity are what matters.

Another challenge has been balancing the demands of running a business with other responsibilities, such as family and personal commitments. However, I firmly believe that embracing technology and flexible working arrangements can help overcome these challenges.

## *What advice would you give to people who are looking to foster change in the legal industry?*

**Embrace innovation:** The legal industry is evolving rapidly, driven by technological advancements and changing client expectations. Be open to adopting new technologies and methodologies that can improve efficiency, enhance client experiences, and drive positive outcomes.

**Foster collaboration:** Meaningful change often requires cooperation among legal professionals, firms, and other stakeholders. Foster a culture of collaboration within your organisation and seek out opportunities to collaborate with industry experts.

**Prioritise diversity and inclusion:** Embrace diversity in all its forms and strive to create an inclusive and equitable work environment where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents.

## *What do you think are the most pressing issues facing women in law today?*

One of the most pressing issues facing women in law today is the persistent illusion that we are not as powerful or capable as our male counterparts.

Despite significant progress, there is still an undercurrent of bias and discrimination that can make it challenging for women to advance in their careers and be taken seriously as legal professionals.

Another issue is the perception that male colleagues may be against us or unsupportive of our success. While this may be true in some cases, I have found that some of my best business partners have been male.

Finally, one of our most significant challenges is the pervasive sense of guilt that many of us experience, particularly when trying to balance our professional and personal responsibilities. It's essential to lose this guilt as it only serves to hinder us.

## *What message would you like to convey to fellow female entrepreneurs?*

My message to fellow female entrepreneurs is this: focus on what you end result will look like and work backwards from there. Create a plan with very real, almost pessimistic expectations, and be prepared to adapt and pivot along the way.

Most importantly, surround yourself with the right people who share your vision and values. Working with the wrong people can not only hinder your firm's progression but also be hugely damaging to any success you've achieved. Hold others and yourself accountable, and measure, measure, measure. Knowledge of your position is crucial to ensure you are achieving what you set out to do.

Remember, success is not just about reaching your goals; it's also about the journey and the lessons you learn along the way. You have what it takes to succeed, so keep pushing forward and never give up on your dreams. It sounds corny, but one of my favourite quotes ever was by Denzel Washington at the Oscars when he said, "fall down seven times, get up eight".



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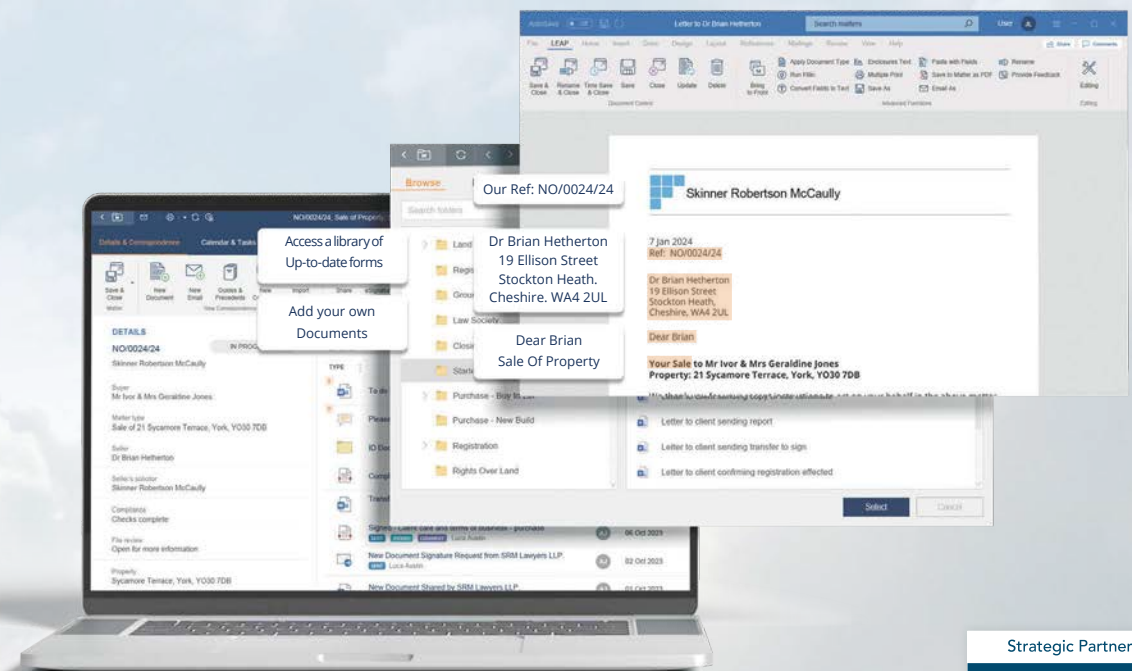


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