

Wellbeing at the bar

Championing diversity, inclusion & wellbeing in the legal profession



Leeds JLD

While the legal profession has made significant strides in recent years, true inclusion remains a work in progress, says Schofield Sweeney's Leigh Freeman

Comment

Corrine Barnett discusses diversity in the legal profession

Regulatory

Compli's Andrea Cohen discusses rising pressures in the legal industry and the growing need to support staff wellbeing

Comment

Craig Burman discusses championing wellbeing by bridging the generation gap

Last word

We catch up with Jill McCurdy following her recent accreditation



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President's column



Nigel Brook is legal director of Tyr and current president of Leeds Law Society.

"The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."

If you missed Leeds Law Society's Annual Dinner this year, my speech opened with this oft-quoted phrase from Shakespeare's Henry VI (Pt 2), which I deployed in support of the contention that lawyers ought to be celebrated as a force for good.

In the play, it is spoken by Dick the Butcher – a villain and henchman of Jack Cade. Cade is leading a rebellion against the King. It is said in response to Cade making a series of populist promises about his new regime ("...the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, and I will make it felony to drink small beer...").

The meaning is open to interpretation (I don't claim my preferred interpretation is original), but I take it as Shakespeare's wry nod to the importance of the rule of law and of lawyers as the ultimate guardians of our freedoms. Cade's authoritarian regime would do away with those freedoms far more easily once they'd got rid of the legal profession.

As lawyers, there is nobody better placed to champion the importance of the rule of law. I hope that I have been able to do that as part of my time as President of Leeds Law Society.

This will be my final President's column, as I will imminently pass the torch on to our President-elect, Luke Corcoran. Luke formally takes up his post on 1 June. It is fantastic to have Luke as our President in the 2025/26 year. He is an in-house solicitor working for the Government Legal Department in Leeds, and this reflects well on the broader profession within our city. I hope this provides an opportunity for us to target those working in-house and those working in the public sector.

I am very grateful that I have been able to act as a steward for Leeds Law Society over the last year. It has been an intense but rewarding experience. I do not seek here to summarise all of the Society's activities, but just to pick up on a few personal highlights.

In October, I represented the Society at a series of events to mark the Opening of the Legal Year, including joining the service at Westminster Abbey and procession to the Lord Chancellor's Breakfast at Westminster Hall. I was surprised to find the experience a bit overawing – our long legal history very much in your face.

I have attended a series of other formal/ceremonial events through the year – catching up with friends and colleagues (and making new contacts) at these events has been invaluable in facilitating the sharing of ideas, and allowed me to advocate for Leeds as a centre of legal excellence.

In December, Leeds saw the official opening of its new Employment and Business & Property Courts facilities at Westgate in Leeds. This reflected years of work from a number of individuals across the sector in Leeds. Sadly, much of what we hear about the court estate and its maintenance is negative; the opening of these new facilities is a real success story for our city.

I have been particularly pleased to see our new Employment Committee launch its first successful events. This committee is comprised of lawyers with no previous connection to Leeds Law Society. They are doing fantastic work to bring together people in that specialism and this is a model which we are rolling out to other practice areas.

April saw another successful LegalTech in Leeds conference, the largest legal-tech event outside of London. This was a fantastic showcase of the strength of the legal and digital sectors in Leeds and Leeds Law Society is proud to continue supporting this initiative to bring the two together.

Throughout the year we have supported the Children's Heart Surgery Fund. CHSF is a charity local to Leeds. It does some really important work supporting kids and their families who are undergoing treatment for serious heart issues. We were lucky at the annual dinner to hear from Carin Van Doorn, Consultant Congenital Cardiac Surgeon, who explained the work done on the unit and the help CHSF provides.

Thank you very much for continuing to support the work of Leeds Law Society. I am confident that I leave you in very good hands.



Annual Dinner

Celebrating Leeds' legal community at the 2025 LLS Annual Legal Dinner

On Thursday 8 May, legal professionals from across the region gathered at The Queens Hotel in Leeds for the 2025 Leeds Law Society Annual Legal Dinner – a highlight of the legal calendar and a celebration of Leeds as a thriving centre of legal excellence.



Nigel Brook, Emma Pearmaine, David Barradough, Shanika Haynes & Sue Harris

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Hosted by Leeds Law Society President Nigel Brook, the evening offered the perfect setting to connect with colleagues, clients and peers. Guests were treated to a welcome reception with drinks, a beautifully curated three-course dinner with wine, and live entertainment to round off the evening in style.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the sponsors of this year's dinner for their generous support: Leeds Beckett University, Nuvem, Miller, Review Solicitors, Strikes Property Service Group, Quilter Cheviot, The University of Law, Landmark, BPP Law Society, and Datalaw.

Take a look through our gallery to revisit some of the highlights.



Yvonne Stocks, Councillor Abigail Marshall, Katung, Nigel Brook, Luke Corcoran, Christopher Brown OBE DL, Justice Cotter, Justice Poole, Julian Wells, Jason Pitter KC, Carin Van Doorn, Ruth Davary



Matt O'Brien, Fiona Ledden, Mrs Sarah Mansfield, Professor Deveral Capps, Coralie McKeivor, Dr Clare Young, Matthew Tomlinson, Fiona Barber, Shanika Haynes, Amanda Warrant



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Tyr



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Walker Morris advises Reward Funding on landmark £360 million refinancing



Walker Morris's Banking & Finance team has successfully advised alternative finance provider Reward Funding on a landmark £360 million refinancing of its existing debt facilities, marking a

pivotal step in Reward's ambitious growth strategy. The refinancing will help fuel Reward Funding's goal of expanding its loan book to £500 million over the next three years.

The comprehensive refinancing package comprises a £100 million private securitisation from an international bank, a £150 million senior debt facility from Quilam Capital, and an additional £110 million from existing partners Foresight and RMB. This deal strengthens Reward Funding's liquidity position and underscores confidence from both new and

existing financial partners.

Walker Morris played a central role in structuring the transaction, drawing on its deep expertise in wholesale financing and regulatory compliance. The Banking & Finance team worked in collaboration with the firm's Corporate and Regulatory & Compliance teams, and with international law firm Ashurst LLP, to ensure the success of the complex deal.

Laura Lister, Partner at Walker Morris, commented on the transaction, highlighting the firm's expertise and collaborative approach: "This deal highlights our deep expertise in wholesale financing, and it was a privilege to collaborate with the team at Reward." David Harrop, Group Finance Director at Reward Funding, called the deal a "key milestone," praising the advisory teams' support.

As Reward Funding positions itself for sustained growth, this strategic refinancing marks a major step forward: "This deal not only provides the necessary liquidity but also positions us to achieve our ambitious targets."

Hägen Wolf celebrates five years of continued success and growth, with a sizeable expansion

Leeds-based boutique property litigation firm Hägen Wolf is marking its fifth anniversary with a major office expansion, reflecting its rapid growth and continued success. Since its launch in 2020, the firm has tripled in size and now houses 11 specialist property litigation lawyers, making it one of the largest dedicated teams in this niche across Yorkshire.

The firm's ongoing growth, including the recent appointment of legal director Claire Moss, has created the need for additional space. As a result, Hägen Wolf will expand its presence at One Park Row, its long-standing base operated by premium serviced office provider Gilbanks. The firm's decision to remain at One Park Row underscores its satisfaction with the location and the services provided by Gilbanks.

Managing Partner Matt Pugh expressed pride in the firm's journey: "We have seen rapid growth in the five years since we opened our doors. The new space will provide improved facilities for our brilliant team and ensure we can

accommodate new appointments planned through 2025, as part of the next phase of our growth roadmap." He praised Gilbanks, calling it the best serviced office provider in Leeds.

Alex Duckett, Managing Director of Gilbanks, commended Hägen Wolf's progress and reaffirmed Gilbanks' commitment to supporting their expansion. Office refurbishment works are set to begin in early May, setting the stage for the firm's next chapter.

As Pugh aptly put it, "The new space will provide improved facilities for our brilliant team and ensure we can accommodate new appointments planned through 2025."



Wake Smith advises on third miniature railway acquisition for heritage rail enthusiasts



Wake Smith Solicitors has successfully advised on the acquisition of Eastleigh Lakeside Miniature Railway, marking the third purchase by heritage railway enthusiasts Peter Bryant and John

Kerr through their company, Seaside Railway Group Ltd. This latest addition joins Scarborough North Bay Railway and Cleethorpes Coast Light Railway in their growing portfolio of popular UK miniature railways.

Located in Eastleigh Country Park near Southampton, Eastleigh Lakeside Miniature Railway is a cherished family attraction. Operating for over 30 years, it features a 1.25-mile narrow gauge track, 24 locomotives, two stations, a tunnel,

signal gantry, café, shop, and workshop facilities, drawing thousands of visitors annually.

Wake Smith's commercial legal team, led by director Rebecca Robinson and solicitor Joe Creasor, managed the legal process—including due diligence, negotiation, and drafting share purchase agreements—culminating in a smooth handover from retiring founder Clive Upton. This deal not only secures the railway's future but also ensures its legacy continues under experienced new stewardship.

Rebecca Robinson commented on the significance of the transaction, noting it was the third railway acquisition the firm has facilitated for Bryant and Kerr. The acquisition further cements Seaside Railway Group's position as a leading operator in the miniature and heritage railway sector, and underscores Wake Smith's expertise in tourism, leisure, and transport law.

Bryant and Kerr stated, "We're excited to bring our experience and passion to Eastleigh and work with the brilliant team of staff and volunteers to continue Clive's legacy."

Holden Smith becomes employee-owned as growth hits £8.5m

Holden Smith, a rapidly growing Yorkshire-based law firm, has transitioned to an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT) as part of its long-term strategy to secure future growth and reward its team. The firm, founded in 2019 by James Smith and David Bancroft, reported a turnover of £8.5 million for the financial year ending October 2024 and now employs over 100 people across six offices in Yorkshire and Manchester.

The move to employee ownership marks a key milestone in the firm's evolution. While the original directors—Smith, Bancroft, Rynne Smith (residential property), and Leanne Pollard (family law)—retain full control of the business strategy and operations, the transition gives employees a tangible stake in the firm's continued success.

An EOT board has been formed, comprising Smith, Bancroft, and corporate solicitor Rob Kelly, with conveyancing solicitor Zack Baines appointed as the firm's first employee

representative. Additionally, an employee council featuring Katie Sanderson, Frances Brocklehurst, and Lauren Moody has been created to ensure broader staff involvement in firm-wide developments.

Co-founder David Bancroft described the change as a "major step forward," reinforcing the firm's founding mission to approach law differently. James Smith added that the transition reflects Holden Smith's collaborative ethos and safeguards its independence and leadership continuity.

As Smith put it, "Giving [our people] a stake in the business reinforces our collaborative culture and shared commitment to future growth."



Hat-trick of property panel reappointments for Gateley Legal



Gateley Legal has secured reappointments to the legal panels of Bellway Homes, McCarthy Stone, and Taylor Wimpey—three of the UK's most prominent residential developers—

reinforcing its long-standing partnerships and national reputation in the housing sector. These renewed appointments highlight Gateley's enduring role in supporting the legal needs of major developers across the UK.

The firm has advised Taylor Wimpey for over 30 years and recently marked two decades of collaboration with Bellway Homes. The new terms will see Gateley continue to provide a full range of legal services, including property, construction, disputes, commercial, and regulatory advice, through

streamlined national legal panels.

Gateley has also been reappointed by McCarthy Stone, the UK's leading retirement living developer, following five successful years of collaboration. The renewed agreement covers all of McCarthy Stone's regions and includes services across land acquisition, planning, plot sales, litigation, construction, and fire safety.

Gateley Legal is part of the Gateley Group, the first legal and professional services group to be listed on the London Stock Exchange. The firm's residential and mixed-tenure development team is the largest of its kind in the country, operating from eight offices nationwide. Clients also benefit from integrated consultancy support in areas such as surveying, utility management, project delivery, and capital allowances.

Callum Nuttall, Partner and National Head of Residential Development, said, "These reappointments reflect the hard work and expertise of our people, and our ability to offer a truly integrated service model that brings together legal and consultancy support under one roof."

Ison Harrison expands regional presence with the acquisition of Armstrong Luty Solicitors

Yorkshire-based law firm Ison Harrison has acquired Skipton's Armstrong Luty Solicitors, a respected personal injury practice, further strengthening its footprint in North Yorkshire and advancing its regional expansion strategy. This latest acquisition increases Ison Harrison's office count to 21, with more expected as the firm continues to grow its presence and service offerings across the region.

Armstrong Luty, founded in 1995, is known for its strong reputation in personal injury law and will continue to operate from its Skipton office, now under the Ison Harrison brand. The integration unites two firms with shared values of accessibility, expertise, and client-focused service.

The move significantly enhances Ison Harrison's personal injury practice, adding valuable local knowledge and legal experience to its team. The acquisition supports the firm's commitment to making high-quality legal advice more widely available throughout Yorkshire.

Jonathan Wearing, managing partner at Ison Harrison, noted the strategic fit, stating, "Armstrong Luty's expertise in personal injury law is a natural fit with our own... Together, we're more capable, adaptable, and better positioned to

serve our clients than ever before."

Armstrong Luty's founders also welcomed the transition. Andrew Armstrong called it an "exciting new chapter," while Nick Luty praised Ison Harrison as a "forward-thinking, employee-owned firm" that shares their client-first ethos.

Clients can expect a smooth transition with continued high-quality support, now backed by the extensive resources of Ison Harrison, which employs over 350 staff and holds 13+ Law Society accreditations.

As Wearing summed up, "Together, we're more capable, adaptable, and better positioned to serve our clients than ever before."



From tradition to transformation: Reshaping Yorkshire's legal profession

Corinne Barnett, from the committee of the Huddersfield & Dewsbury Law Society, discusses diversity in the legal profession

The legal profession has always been deep-rooted in tradition, but across Yorkshire, conversations around diversity, inclusion and wellbeing are no longer fringe concerns for firms, they are at the heart of what it means to build a modern, sustainable profession. To appreciate how far the legal profession has come, it is worth looking back ten years ago to 2015.

In 2015, the legal landscape in Yorkshire and across the UK was notably less diverse. The Law Society publish a survey on diversity in the legal profession every two years, they are yet to release the 2025 statistics, but it will be interesting to review those findings to see how the Legal Profession has adapted since 2023.

In 2023, 47% of salaried partners were women, compared to 33% in 2015. The proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic lawyers in law firms rose from 14% in 2015 to 19% in 2023.

Representation matters. When people from underrepresented groups see themselves reflected in the legal profession, it signals that they too have a place in law. But diversity is not just about who is in the room, inclusion is about what happens once they're there. Do they feel heard, supported and able to progress.

In 2024, Shanika Haynes was the first minority president of the Leeds Law Society, in the society's 154-year history. It is disappointing that despite the diversity within Leeds, that it has taken 154 years for a minority president to be elected. Shanika accounts that despite diversity having improved within the legal profession, that throughout her presidency she would often walk into a roundtable meeting or event where she would be the only minority and one of a handful of women.

"When leaders all have the same perspective, things aren't going to change. Most of our perspectives are dictated heavily from our lived experiences. It is impossible to move the profession forward if we don't have varied lived experience in our leaders as that is the only way obstacles for certain groups in society can properly be considered. If you do not have diversity in the room, you are missing a significant perspective of how to improve the profession generally and improve the experiences of people now and in the future." - Shanika Haynes

Back in 2015, conversations around gender equality, ethnic representation, disability and LGBTQ+ inclusion were only just starting to gain momentum. Many firms still relied heavily on informal networks for recruitment, which often led to the exclusion of talented individuals from underrepresented backgrounds. Fast forward to today, and while there is still progress to be made, the shift is undeniable. Firms are increasingly implementing inclusive hiring practices, and focusing on Environmental, Social and Governance policies (ESG). In 2023, the Yorkshire Legal Awards

added the prestigious award for ESG, showcasing that Yorkshire's legal profession is idolising firms who promote ESG.

Many firms are now hiring colleagues to specifically focus on ensuring that their firm promotes ESG policies.

At Ridley & Hall Solicitors, Themer Slimane, Marketing Manager, became Partner in 2024, and in 2025 was appointed as the firms Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Partner. Themer considers that his non lawyer partner status reflects diversity and inclusion at the highest level of the firm and advises that his new role supports the firm's commitment to employee wellbeing, diverse recruitment, and fair, bias-free work practices across the whole business.

Well-being too, has undergone a cultural transformation. In 2015, the idea of discussing mental health in a legal setting was still considered taboo. Burnout and long hours were often seen as the cost of success. There was little room for lawyers to be vulnerable. Today, that culture is shifting.

Well-being is no longer a private concern; it is a professional priority.

More firms across Yorkshire are introducing flexible working policies, mental health support services and structured approaches to managing workload and burnout. Previously, flexible working was a perk for senior lawyers, but since the coronavirus pandemic most firms had to implement technology that supported remote and flexible working. Promoting colleague wellbeing through better work life balance.

Of course, there is still work to be done. True progression requires continuous effort, honest reflection and a willingness to listen and adapt. But Yorkshire's legal community is rising to the challenge, in championing diversity, inclusion and wellbeing, we aren't just shaping better workplaces, we're shaping a better profession. One that is better equipped to meet the needs of modern society. The concept of justice doesn't begin and end in courtrooms. It starts in our firms, our chambers and our relationships with each other. It's about how we recruit, support and treat people. Not just when they succeed, but when they struggle.

Ten years ago, these conversations were the exception. Now, they are increasingly the norm. If Yorkshire continues on this path, with openness, humility and purpose, the profession we pass on to the next generation will be one to be proud of.



Penmoor UK Limited purchases expansive new site for £16 million at Flaxby, Knaresborough, North Yorkshire

Eaton Smith LLP has advised Huddersfield-based Penmoor (UK) Limited on its latest expansion, which will see the launch of one of the world's fastest water extraction and bottling plants by spring 2025. Penmoor, a long-established bottled water manufacturer based in Shepley, has seized the opportunity to transform the 275,000 sq ft former Ilke Homes facility in Flaxby, North Yorkshire, into a state-of-the-art production hub.

The abandoned site, once used for prefabricated home manufacturing, had fallen into disrepair following Ilke Homes' insolvency, suffering vandalism and theft. Penmoor's ambitious plan is to convert it into a fully integrated water bottling plant, where water will be extracted, filtered, bottled, and distributed from a single location. This streamlined process is expected to dramatically reduce environmental impact and improve production efficiency.

With the capacity to extract over a billion litres of water annually and manufacture 104,000 bottles per hour, the

facility represents a major leap forward in Penmoor's operational capabilities. The company has heavily invested in clearing and restoring the site, which will feature cutting-edge automated machinery designed specifically for their operations.

Eaton Smith's commercial property team, led by associate solicitor Ian Holdsworth and supported by James Burgess and Jamie Humpheson, worked swiftly and discreetly to secure the deal in just over five weeks—navigating complex legal and commercial considerations under tight timelines.

James Smith, Managing Director of Penmoor, said, "Our timescales seemed impossibly tight, but [Eaton Smith] delivered and I couldn't be happier with this outcome."



Corporate team supports founders, leaders and employees to hit £60m deals total



Wake Smith Solicitors' corporate team has delivered a standout year, completing transactions worth over £60 million in the 12 months ending April 2025—an increase of more than £15 million compared

to the previous year. Led by director Rebecca Robinson, alongside Tom Haywood, Joe Creasor, and Charlotte Wallace, the team executed 18 major deals across sectors including manufacturing, infrastructure, and property development.

Notable transactions include the sale of Moody Direct Group Holdings Ltd to AxFlow UK (a subsidiary of Swedish conglomerate Axel Johnson AB), the acquisition of Direct Track Solutions Ltd by Schwihag UK, and Sheffield-based

Armeg Ltd's transition to employee ownership. Two of these deals are shortlisted for the South Yorkshire Dealmakers Awards, while Wake Smith is again nominated for Corporate Law Firm of the Year for the seventh consecutive year.

Beyond traditional M&A, the firm advised on investment in Sheffield's first indoor Padel racquet sport facility and provided strategic support for Duke Homes' joint venture to redevelop a derelict factory site into housing. Wake Smith's ability to coordinate with internal experts across property, employment, and finance has enhanced its client offering, reinforcing its market position in the region.

Rebecca Robinson credited the firm's success to technical expertise, commercial insight, and strong regional ties: "These are challenging times for business, however we are highlighting that business owners and leaders are looking ahead and organising their companies and strategies for forward growth, many keeping their existing employees at the forefront of these plans."

Lichfields' Leeds office moves to larger premises amid continued growth

National planning consultancy Lichfields has relocated its Leeds office to a larger, centrally located space, marking a major step in the firm's regional growth. Since opening in 2011 with just three staff, the Leeds office has expanded significantly and is on track to become a 20-strong team, driven by rising demand and diversification across sectors.

The move supports continued expansion and provides enhanced collaborative facilities. Head of Office Chris Darley noted that the transition reflects not just growth in size, but in capability and client partnerships. The new location offers strategic proximity to clients, partners, and key transport links, reinforcing Leeds' role as a hub for Lichfields' work across Yorkshire, the Humber, and the North Midlands.

Lichfields' Leeds team supports major national clients, including Lidl, McDonald's, housebuilders, and infrastructure providers, advising on high-impact developments. Notable projects include planning support for over 1,600 new homes at Dyecoats on Kirkstall Road—one of the city's largest brownfield regeneration sites—and the transformation of the former Bank of England building into modern office space. The team is also advising Leeds Teaching Hospitals

NHS Trust on redeveloping Leeds General Infirmary into a globally significant health tech innovation hub.

Additionally, Lichfields is leading planning for a globally significant hydrogen gas storage facility at Aldbrough, aligned with the UK's net zero goals.

Recent internal promotions of Emma Gomersal and James Cox to Planning Directors further reflect the consultancy's commitment to growing talent.

Chris Darley concluded, "The new office gives us the space and setting we need to continue that journey – growing sustainably, delivering for clients and supporting the region's development priorities."



Sheffield's MD Law delivers advice to hit £80m corporate transaction total



Sheffield-based boutique firm MD Law has marked a milestone year, advising on transactions worth £80 million between April 2024 and March 2025. Led by Partner James

Burdekin, the firm's corporate team successfully completed 45 transactions, ranging from Management Buy Outs (MBOs) and Employee Ownership Trusts (EOTs) to acquisitions, trade sales, and share buybacks.

The standout month was October 2024, when the team handled 16 deals exceeding £35 million in value. Key highlights included supporting the transition of Abbeydale Brewery and Lyndhurst Cooling & Heating Services to employee ownership, as well as the MBO of Apex Consulting

Engineers, now a finalist in the South Yorkshire Dealmakers Awards.

James, who joined as a partner in 2021, played a pivotal role in all deals, working alongside solicitors Natalie Gibson and Luke Turner. Their collaborative approach underpinned MD Law's ability to compete with larger national firms, offering tailored expertise across share and asset sales, corporate governance, and restructures.

MD Law's decade-long success is attributed not only to its core legal strength but also its integrated services across commercial property and employment law, enabling seamless delivery on complex matters. Founding partner Matthew Dixon praised the team's work ethic, noting the critical support from a strong professional network and loyal client base.

Reflecting on the year, James Burdekin said: "We are delighted to have helped so many deals over the line in what has been difficult times for many businesses. The quality and complexity of transactions completed gives the team excellent forward momentum."

Ison Harrison opens 22nd Yorkshire office with new branch in Brighouse

Yorkshire-based law firm Ison Harrison has expanded its regional presence by opening a new office in Brighouse, bringing its total network to 22 offices across the region. Located on Clifton Road, the office reinforces the firm's commitment to delivering community-focused legal services throughout Yorkshire.

The Brighouse branch is led by Laura Walsh, a residential conveyancing specialist who joined Ison Harrison in 2019 and previously worked at the firm's Huddersfield office. She is supported by conveyancing assistant Charlotte Rackstraw and private client solicitor Holly Edwards, who specialises in wills and probate. Together, the team offers a comprehensive range of legal services to local individuals and businesses, including family law, conveyancing, personal injury, and commercial services.

Laura Walsh emphasised the significance of the new office, stating it marks a key milestone in Ison Harrison's ongoing growth and allows the firm to build strong community ties while replicating its wider regional success. Managing Director Jonathan Wearing added that the expansion aligns with the firm's ethos of providing accessible, high-quality

legal support close to home, while benefiting from the resources of a larger organisation.

Since becoming 100% employee-owned in 2022, Ison Harrison has nearly doubled its turnover, opened six new offices, and made significant profit distributions to employees. The firm now employs over 360 staff and offers the broadest range of legal services in Yorkshire.

Jonathan Wearing concluded, "Our ongoing expansion is driven by our belief that people should have high-quality legal support on their doorstep whilst benefiting from the efficiencies that can come from being part of a much bigger outfit."

A promotional banner for the Yorkshire Legal Awards 2025. It features a blue background with a collage of people's faces. On the left is a white logo consisting of six petals. To the right of the logo, the text 'YORKSHIRE LEGAL AWARDS 2025' is written in white, with 'AWARDS 2025' in a script font. At the bottom, the text 'SUBMISSIONS ARE NOW OPEN!' is written in large, bold, yellow letters, and 'Entries by 27 June 2025' is written in white below it.

YORKSHIRE LEGAL AWARDS 2025

SUBMISSIONS ARE NOW OPEN!

Entries by 27 June 2025

Regulatory burden rising: pressures mount on solicitors in 2025

Andrea Cohen, legal director in the Compli team at Weightmans, is back with our regular update on regulatory matters, risk and compliance, and added pressures on solicitors.

Working in a law firm can be stressful at times, with targets, pressures from clients, other parties, deadlines etc., as well as having to deal with regulation in various areas which changes on a regular basis, including SRA, AML obligations, Sanctions, processes, procedures etc. Providing support to colleagues and relevant, relatable training and guidance; ensuring caseloads are manageable; managers regularly checking in with staff, particularly with more people working from home at least part of the week, and listening to what is not said, as well as what is said, and making clear what is required in order to comply with regulatory requirements, rather than lengthy, detailed policies, is key to reducing risk, and stress, both to colleagues and the firm.

We mentioned in a previous article the overlap between 1.5 of the Code for Solicitors/1.6 of the Code for Firms, requiring solicitors and firms to treat colleagues fairly and with respect, and to not bully, harass or discriminate unfairly, and The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023. Firms need to carry out a risk assessment, review existing policies/draft new policies, provide training etc.

In just the last few weeks alone, there have been a number of announcements that will add to the pressure, including:

- The latest version (ominously titled version 1.1) of the LSAG AML compliance guidance was published on 23 April 2025. Helpfully, a full list of the changes is in the Schedule of Amendments at pages 221 - 228. Firms should review their FWRA and PCPs in light of the new guidance and record the fact they have done so.
- The SRA announced that it will be stepping up its enforcement of ML compliance. This follows closely on the heels of a large number of recent decisions relating to breaches of AML in the first quarter of this year. Fines for firms ranged from £1600-£300,000, and £3500 to £45,000 for individuals. If the SRA want to inspect your ML processes you will need to provide the documents within 10 days, so it's a good idea to collate them now and put them in a separate folder, with more than one person being aware of where they are kept, in case the MLRO/MLCO/COLP is away when the request lands!
- The SRA is carrying out its annual data collection exercise from all firms within scope of money laundering regulations relating to AML and sanctions in July 2025.
- The SRA biannual collection of diversity data will be carried out this summer, with firms having 4 weeks to complete the report. As well as reporting diversity data, there are questions about plans for publishing a summary of the data.
- The SRA is continuing the discussion about fining powers, (it already has the ability to impose unlimited fines for failure to prevent fraud), and has just reported its largest ever fine of almost £4 million on a former non-solicitor of a law firm.

SRA guidance and Law Society practice notes are being published on a regular basis. Recently they have included:

- SRA | Our approach to SLAPPs cases | Solicitors Regulation Authority
- SRA | SRA Update 138 prevent fraud crime | Solicitors Regulation Authority
- SRA | Compliance with the regulations and preventing money laundering Q&A | Solicitors Regulation Authority
- SRA | Understanding your continuing competence requirements | Solicitors Regulation Authority
- Implementing whistleblowing arrangements | The Law Society
- Raising concerns and whistleblowing: guidance for staff | The Law Society

In addition:

- The increase in the use of AI is affecting firms. Policies should be considered, particularly in light of recent cases where fake case authorities have been referred to in court and the judge ordered the defendant to send the transcript of the judgment to the SRA and BSB. We are seeing more complaints from clients/litigants in person written with 'the assistance' of AI, which makes them more difficult to respond to, replies to responses arrive quicker, and add to the pressure of a stressful workload. We anticipate firms may consider settling spurious complaints in order to deal with the matter quickly and avoid it being escalated to LeO/SRA.
- If the SRA decides to investigate a firm or individual it can take months, and often years, for the process with little/no progress for months at a time.

How Compli can help...

The Compli Solicitor Regulatory and Professional Discipline Team can provide expertise and advice on risk and compliance, AML, disciplinary assistance etc. If we can help in any way, please get in touch at

compli@weightmans.com



Morrish Solicitors LLP announces retirement of senior partner Tom Morrish



Morrish Solicitors LLP has announced the upcoming retirement of its Senior Partner, Tom Morrish, who will step down in March 2025 after more than 30 years in legal practice. Tom qualified as a solicitor in 1992,

initially working in personal injury litigation before becoming a specialist in wills and estates—a field he has led with distinction for over two decades. He has served as Senior Partner for the last six years, guiding the firm through a period of growth and transition.

Based at the firm's Yeadon office, Tom has been deeply

engaged with the local community, including his role as Group Scout Leader for the 14th Airedale Scout Group and regional director of the Association of Lifetime Lawyers for Yorkshire. His legal work has focused on safeguarding the rights of elderly and vulnerable clients, cementing his reputation for compassionate, client-focused service.

Morrish Solicitors, founded in 1882, remains a privately owned, Leeds-headquartered firm. Tom continued the family legacy that began with his uncle and father joining the firm in the mid-20th century. Today, the firm has nearly 70 staff across four West Yorkshire offices and serves 34 trade union and association clients nationwide.

Upon his retirement, Emma Garfitt will take over leadership of the wills and estates team and manage the Yeadon branch. Reflecting on his career, Tom shared:

"It's been a privilege to work at Morrish Solicitors during such a successful period in its history... I leave the firm in good hands."

Managing partner retires after 40 years with Yorkshire law firm

After four decades of dedicated service, Paul Joyce is retiring from Ramsdens Solicitors, marking the end of a transformative era for the Yorkshire-based law firm. Joining Ramsdens in 1985, Paul quickly made his mark—becoming the youngest partner at 25 and assuming the role of managing partner in 1997. Over the next 28 years, his visionary leadership propelled Ramsdens from a modest single-office firm with under £1 million in turnover to a major regional legal player with 11 offices, 42 partners, 250 staff, and annual revenues exceeding £25 million.

Paul's tenure saw Ramsdens evolve structurally and culturally, including the firm's conversion to LLP status and the celebration of its 150th anniversary in 2020. He built a reputation for strategic foresight and operational excellence, laying a strong foundation for future growth and stability.

To ensure a smooth transition, Ramsdens has been preparing for Paul's departure over the past year. The new leadership team comprises joint chief executives

Lindsey Frith and Lee Townsend, supported by senior partner Joanne Coen and chairman David Bradley. Together, they aim to carry forward Paul's legacy while guiding the firm into its next phase.

Reflecting on his career, Paul shared his pride in the firm's evolution and his confidence in the team that will carry it forward:

"It has been a privilege to lead Ramsdens for so many years and witness its transformation into a true regional powerhouse... I look forward to seeing its continued success in the years ahead."



Employment lawyer dubbed Grimsby's "fourth emergency service" retires



After nearly 35 years in the legal profession, Jane Eatock, a respected employment law partner at Wilkin Chapman, has retired. Jane has been a prominent figure in supporting public and private sector employers across Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire since

1991. She joined Grange Wintringham in 2001, which later merged with Wilkin Chapman in 2010, and in recent years, she led the Grimsby office with distinction.

Throughout her career, Jane became known not only

for her legal expertise but also for her deep commitment to the local community—championing young talent and supporting initiatives such as homeless shelters, food banks, and women's refuges. Her leadership helped foster a strong, community-focused culture within the Grimsby office.

On 31 March 2025, Jane officially stepped down, passing the baton to joint heads Katie Davies and Adam Ottley, both long-standing partners with deep roots in the Grimsby area. Together, they will continue Wilkin Chapman's mission to support key regional sectors such as education, renewables, and food, while also contributing to major regeneration projects, including the £13 million Horizon Youth Zone.

Jane reflected on her departure with humility and gratitude for the impact she's had: "One business said that they thought of me as the region's fourth emergency service for employers, which was especially kind. I'm not closing my door to exciting opportunities, but I know Wilkin Chapman will continue to meet every challenge head-on and support our region's employers with dedication and care."

Ison Harrison targets record-breaking growth in 2025

Ison Harrison, one of Yorkshire's leading law firms, is celebrating a record-breaking year and gearing up for even greater achievements in 2025. The Leeds-based firm reported its highest-ever turnover in 2024, reaching over £27 million—a 23% increase from the previous year. Over the past five years, the firm has more than doubled its revenue, fuelled by the acquisition of Cohen Cramer Solicitors and robust growth in its property, family, and commercial departments.

Central to Ison Harrison's success is its employee-owned model, adopted in January 2022. Now entering its third year of employee ownership, the firm continues to reward its 350-strong workforce for their contributions. Staff with more than a year of service received a £4,000 tax-free bonus, mirroring the amount distributed in 2023.

Managing Director Jonathan Wearing credited the firm's structure for enabling sustainable growth: "The move to employee ownership was a defining moment for us. It offers the flexibility and stability we need to grow, attract new talent, and support our existing team."

The firm's expansion continued in 2024 with the opening of new offices in Queensbury and Selby, bringing its total to 20 locations. More offices are planned for early 2025, further strengthening its regional presence.

Recognition for Ison Harrison's quality of service includes Lexcel accreditation and two wins at the Yorkshire Legal Awards in the Residential Property and Personal Injury & Clinical Negligence categories.

Wearing added, "Our record-breaking year has positioned us to achieve even greater success in 2025."

Cressie Killick and Amy Saunders qualify as solicitors at Harrowells



Harrowells Solicitors has proudly announced that Cressie Killick and Amy Saunders have officially qualified as solicitors and will be continuing their careers with

the firm in property law roles. Cressie will join the residential property department, while Amy moves into the commercial property team, further reinforcing Harrowells' strength across these key practice areas.

Both newly qualified solicitors have demonstrated exceptional commitment, professionalism, and client-focused service throughout their training contracts, embodying the firm's values and high standards. Their transition into qualified

roles highlights Harrowells' emphasis on nurturing emerging talent and providing early exposure to real client work and diverse legal experience.

The firm's dedication to development is further evidenced by the fact that all six of its most recent trainee solicitors have chosen to remain at Harrowells post-qualification—an affirmation of its supportive culture and career development opportunities.

A spokesperson for the firm expressed pride in the duo's achievements, stating, "We are incredibly proud of Cressie and Amy. Their dedication, expertise and passion for client service have already made a real impact. We look forward to seeing them thrive as newly qualified solicitors and continue to be an integral part of our team."

With a clear focus on internal growth and continuity, Harrowells continues to invest in its people to maintain the delivery of high-quality legal services. As the firm celebrates this important milestone for its newest solicitors, it affirms: "Supporting the next generation of legal professionals is not just our priority—it's part of who we are."

Yorkshire lawyer achieves specialist accreditation to represent vulnerable clients in the Court of Protection

Jill McCurdy, Solicitor Partner at Ramsdens, has achieved a prestigious milestone by becoming the firm's first lawyer accredited under the Law Society's Mental Capacity Accreditation Scheme as an Accredited Legal Representative (ALR). This recognition marks the highest level of accreditation for solicitors working on Health and Welfare cases within the Court of Protection.

This specialist status enables Jill to be appointed directly by the courts to represent protected parties—individuals who lack the mental capacity to make critical decisions about their own care, residence, or contact with others. Already experienced in acting for the Official Solicitor and family members, Jill's new accreditation allows her to accept direct court instructions, underscoring her authority in this complex legal field.

Jill has long championed the rights of vulnerable individuals. Alongside her Court of Protection work, she is also accredited in Children Law, representing children and families in sensitive and challenging legal matters. Her dual expertise makes her a key figure at Ramsdens, known for her compassionate approach and meticulous advocacy.

This achievement not only highlights Jill's professional dedication but also strengthens Ramsdens' offering in specialist legal services. Her accreditation reflects the firm's ongoing commitment to supporting its clients with the highest standards of care, particularly in areas requiring nuanced and expert legal handling.

Reflecting on her achievement, Jill said, "Now we can go even further for the vulnerable clients, children and families we represent. We want families in Yorkshire to receive the very best service in this specialist area."



Raworths strikes gold with Investors in People award recognition



Harrogate-based law firm Raworths has once again secured the prestigious Investors in People (IIP) 'We invest in people' Gold accreditation, reaffirming its position among the top 15% of similarly sized legal firms committed to exceptional people management. First awarded Gold status in 2021, the

firm has now retained the accolade for another three years, highlighting its sustained investment in a supportive, collaborative, and empowering workplace culture.

The Gold standard is awarded following a rigorous assessment process that evaluates an organisation's leadership, culture, and people strategies. It includes independent reviews and candid feedback from employees, making the recognition a powerful endorsement of

Raworths' internal values and practices.

With a 70-strong team, Raworths continues to provide integrated commercial and private client legal services while actively nurturing career development and work-life balance. Managing Partner Simon Morris emphasised the importance of this achievement: "Our people are our greatest asset, and we constantly strive to create a workplace that is supportive, nurturing and dynamic at every level."

The accolade coincides with Raworths' continued recruitment drive, as the firm seeks new legal talent to join its award-winning teams in Trusts, Wills and Estates, Employment, Commercial Property, and Corporate and Commercial. Notably, its TWE team was named 'Out of London Practice of the Year' at the Chambers High Net Worth Awards 2024.

Paul Devoy, CEO of Investors in People, praised the firm's achievement, saying: "Gold accreditation on 'We invest in people' is a fantastic effort for any organisation, and places Raworths in fine company with a host of organisations that understand the value of people."

Wake Smith Solicitors beat £6k target for Sheffield charity

Wake Smith Solicitors has raised an impressive £6,243 for Cavendish Cancer Care as part of its annual charity campaign, surpassing last year's total and making a meaningful contribution to a cause close to the firm's heart. The Sheffield-based law firm selected Cavendish as its 2024–25 charity in memory of its late Director of HR, Kelly Pashley-Handford, who passed away in 2023 after a cancer diagnosis.

A diverse calendar of fundraising events helped achieve the total, including beauty evenings, a tuck shop, cake sales, sweepstakes, wreath-making, and seasonal competitions. The standout fundraisers were the annual Christmas lunch, the Sheffield Half Marathon, a wine tasting event with local merchant Starmore Boss, and the ever-popular staff quiz.

Beyond fundraising, Wake Smith's Wills, Trusts and Probate team offered discounted services to Cavendish Cancer Care's clients, staff, and supporters, further extending the firm's support to the charity's community.

Kate Lax, director at Wake Smith and charitable board member, praised the team's dedication: "The charitable efforts of our staff and clients to impact positively on our

community through Cavendish Cancer Care has been really inspiring."

Kirsty White, Head of Fundraising at Cavendish Cancer Care, expressed her gratitude: "Support like this is absolutely vital. These funds will go a long way in helping us continue to be there for anyone affected by cancer in our community."

The firm's charitable board, made up of 13 dedicated staff members, continues to build on a strong tradition of giving, with plans to support more local causes in future.

"We all know this money will make a huge difference to many who need help, and to their families."



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Driving change from the ground up

Leigh Freeman, Solicitor at Schofield Sweeney and 2025 Leeds JLD Treasurer, reflects on the vital role junior lawyers play in building a more inclusive and supportive legal profession.

As the legal profession evolves, the importance of diversity, inclusion and wellbeing in the workplace has become increasingly important. While the legal profession has made significant strides in recent years, true inclusion remains a work in progress. Junior lawyers now have a unique opportunity to drive change and shape a more inclusive and supportive environment within the legal industry.

Understanding the Importance of Diversity and Inclusion

Law is a profession that serves a broad and diverse society. A legal workforce that reflects that diversity is better positioned to understand the needs of clients, bring fresh perspectives to complex issues, and promote fairness.

However, diversity without inclusion can fall short. It is not enough to hire from diverse backgrounds; for inclusion to be meaningful law firms must create environments where all voices are heard and respected.

The Role of Junior Lawyers

Junior Lawyers are not just passive recipients of D&I policies, they have significant influence in driving diversity and inclusion within their teams and firms. This can be achieved by supporting colleagues across the board by listening, advocating for equal opportunities, and ensuring all colleagues have a voice.

As junior lawyers, we also play a crucial role in holding our firms accountable. Asking questions about representation in leadership, contributing to diversity initiatives, and supporting inclusive hiring practices is not only encouraged – it's necessary for change.

Wellbeing in the Legal Profession

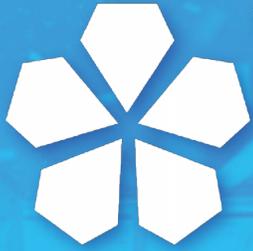
The demanding nature of the legal profession can take a toll on mental and physical wellbeing. Junior lawyers often face high expectations, long hours and significant pressure, making it essential to prioritise self-care and wellbeing.

When the stress of mental health challenges become overwhelming, junior lawyers should not hesitate to seek support from colleagues, friends and family. Speaking openly about mental health can contribute to breaking the stigma surrounding mental health in the industry, which is an important step in the right direction.

Looking Ahead

The legal profession as a whole is making strides toward promoting diversity, inclusion and wellbeing, with many firms establishing D&I committees, mental health services, and diversity-targeted hiring initiatives. Although the pace of change can be slow, individual contributions from junior lawyers can certainly accelerate these efforts.





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Switalskis Solicitors appoints first CFO to support growth

Switalskis Solicitors has appointed Alex Moore as its first-ever Chief Financial Officer (CFO), marking a key milestone in the firm's growth strategy. A chartered accountant and ICAEW member, Alex brings extensive financial leadership experience from her previous role as CFO at precision engineering company Cutwel, where she strengthened financial structures and improved operational efficiency. Her expertise in managing financial strategy within large organisations will be vital as Switalskis advances its development plans.

In her new role, Alex will focus on enhancing financial management information to support strategic decision-making. Key priorities include refining budgeting processes, improving financial reporting, managing external financial relationships, and overseeing cash and capital management. She will also coordinate with external advisers to ensure the firm's financial health as it expands.

Expressing enthusiasm for her appointment, Alex said, "Switalskis is a forward-thinking firm with a strong culture and a talented team. Throughout my career, I have

implemented financial reporting, discipline, and structures that drive success, and I am eager to apply this expertise to further strengthen Switalskis' financial controls. By providing a robust financial foundation, I aim to enable the leadership team to focus on strategic expansion while continuing to deliver exceptional client service."

John Durkan, managing director of Switalskis, welcomed Alex's arrival, noting the importance of dedicated financial leadership. He added, "Introducing the CFO role is an exciting milestone. With Alex on board, I can now fully concentrate on driving the firm forward. Her collaborative approach, enthusiasm, and wealth of experience will be invaluable as we continue to strengthen our client offering and deliver outstanding legal services."



New partner for Harrogate law practice



Leading Harrogate law firm McCormicks has promoted Iain Jenkins to Partner, recognising his significant contributions since joining in 2019 as head of the Employment Law team. Iain recently gained national attention for securing an apology

and settlement from the BBC on behalf of former presenter Liz Green, who was targeted by ex-BBC Radio Leeds host Alex Belfield—a convicted stalker involved in a high-profile case affecting multiple victims, including presenter Jeremy Vine.

With extensive experience, Iain advises clients on all aspects of contentious and non-contentious employment law, HR matters, and data protection. His expertise spans various sectors such as sport, technology, manufacturing, financial

services, recruitment, transport, logistics, and health and social care. Additionally, he is a CEDR-accredited mediator and an accredited workplace mediator, demonstrating his commitment to resolving disputes effectively.

Peter McCormick, senior partner at McCormicks, praised Iain's dedication: "We are delighted to welcome Iain as a Partner. He has worked hard for his clients and the firm, and he deserves this recognition."

Iain expressed his enthusiasm about the promotion, saying, "It is a pleasure to be part of McCormicks, a practice with a strong reputation, great work and great colleagues."

Beyond his legal career, Iain contributes to the community as a Trustee of Harrogate International Festivals and Harrogate Town AFC's Community Foundation, reflecting his commitment both professionally and personally.

As Iain steps into this new leadership role, his blend of expertise and dedication promises continued success for the firm and its clients.

Appleyard Lees announces largest-ever cohort of new partners

Appleyard Lees has announced the appointment of four new partners—Paul Roscoe, Beverley Robinson, Sarah Gibbs, and James Myatt—marking the largest-ever group to join the firm's partnership. This milestone reflects the firm's ongoing growth and the exceptional quality of its people.

Each partner brings unique technical expertise alongside a shared commitment to the firm's client-focused culture and values. Paul Roscoe is a specialist UK patent attorney in advanced computer technologies, including artificial intelligence. Beverley Robinson is a leading expert in trademarks and designs and is leading the development of Appleyard Lees' specialist designs team. Sarah Gibbs supports clients in patenting chemical and biotech inventions, focusing on the expanding ChemBio sector. James Myatt, with a background in drug discovery research, works closely with innovative companies to protect their groundbreaking developments.

Collectively, they cover a wide range of scientific and professional fields, contributing strong leadership to teams serving some of the firm's most significant clients. Their

appointments highlight both the firm's commitment to nurturing talent—two joined as trainees—and its ability to attract experienced professionals.

Managing Partner Bobby Smithson praised the new partners, stating, "I am incredibly proud of our new cohort of partners. They each embody what it means to be a partner at Appleyard Lees—an unwavering commitment to clients and colleagues, and a dedication to the firm's long-held culture and values. I have no doubt they will strengthen our partnership and continue to inspire those around them."

Their professionalism, empathy, and collaborative spirit will play a key role in shaping the future success of Appleyard Lees.



Net zero vow leads commitments as Bevan Brittan strengthens sustainability with new responsible business team



Bevan Brittan, a leading UK commercial law firm, has strengthened its dedication to sustainability, diversity, and social impact by establishing a dedicated Responsible Business

team. This initiative is supported by two senior appointments: Tamsin Danby as head of responsible business and Connie Heathfield as environmental sustainability manager. The team is led by Judith Hopper, partner and board lead for responsible business, and focuses on four key areas: Community Engagement, Environmental Sustainability, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, and Wellbeing.

Tamsin, based in Leeds, brings over 15 years of experience in ethical business practices, including senior ESG roles and leadership in social mobility. Connie, based in Bristol, joins

from a sustainability consultancy, bringing expertise in carbon accounting and net zero strategies, playing a crucial role in advancing Bevan Brittan's goal to achieve net zero by 2040.

The firm has already made significant strides, with all offices powered by renewable energy and recognition in the Legal 500 Green Guide for environmental leadership. Bevan Brittan also supports international offset schemes and local community initiatives, including donations totaling £100,000 over two years.

Judith Hopper said, "I am delighted to welcome Tamsin and Connie to Bevan Brittan. Their experience and energy reflect the importance we place on being a business that acts responsibly—towards our people, our clients and our communities."

Tamsin Danby added, "Diversity, inclusion and sustainability are essential business priorities, not just nice-to-haves. I'm excited to help drive these forward across the firm and beyond."

Switalskis promotes head of IT to CTO to drive legal tech strategy

Switalskis Solicitors has promoted Nigel Stott, its head of IT, to Chief Technology Officer (CTO), acknowledging his extensive expertise and dedication to innovation within the firm. Nigel joined Switalskis in 2022, bringing over 30 years of experience in legal IT, having worked in law firms, consultancies, and legal technology providers. Starting his career as a computer operator in 1995, he has since held senior roles focused on modernising systems and boosting operational efficiency in the legal sector.

As CTO, Nigel will lead Switalskis' 16-member IT team, collaborating closely with directors and department heads to implement strategic technological improvements. These initiatives aim to benefit both staff and clients, enhancing operational performance and the overall client experience.

Nigel remarked, "Switalskis is different to many law firms. Its non-traditional structure and agile approach allow us to be bold and decisive, enabling us to deliver meaningful, lasting improvements. There are exciting developments ahead in legal technology, including the role of AI. The key is

to harness these tools in a secure and ethical way to enhance what we do, while preserving the personal, human approach that defines how we work."

John Durkan, managing director at Switalskis, praised Nigel's leadership, saying, "Nigel brings clarity, pace and a strategic mindset to everything he does. His well-deserved promotion recognises the impact he's already made and the pivotal role he'll play as we continue to grow and invest in our future. Technology, when used thoughtfully, is a powerful enabler of excellent legal services."

With a staff of 380, Switalskis remains committed to leveraging technology to deliver exceptional legal support across Yorkshire.



Leigh Day celebrates Leeds partner promotion



Leigh Day has promoted clinical negligence lawyer Matthew Westlake to partner at its Leeds office, underscoring the firm's commitment to legal excellence and regional growth in Yorkshire. Based in Horsforth, Matt brings a strong background in neuroscience and handles a wide range of

complex clinical negligence cases, including obstetric, spinal, orthopaedic, ophthalmic, and brain injuries. He also supports bereaved families during inquests and throughout the litigation process.

Matt began his career at Leigh Day as a paralegal in 2012 and gained experience in clinical negligence and product liability during his training contract. Since qualifying as a solicitor in 2016, he has secured significant compensation in high-profile cases, such as a £30 million award for a child

who suffered near-total oxygen deprivation at birth, ensuring lifelong care, and a substantial settlement for a client who experienced irreversible kidney damage due to negligent post-surgery care.

His promotion aligns with Leigh Day's strategic efforts to build a leading legal team in Leeds, complementing recent hires like travel and cross-border litigation specialist Nathaniel Martindale.

Beth Sanders, personal injury partner and head of the Leeds office, praised Matt's dedication, stating, "Matt has been a tireless advocate for his clients, and his richly deserved promotion, along with the wider expansion of Leigh Day's office in Leeds, will help ensure that we continue to provide a range of high-quality legal services to people in Yorkshire and further afield."

Matt added, "I'm delighted to have taken the next step in my career in Leeds, and very much look forward to continuing to do all I can to support my clients and achieve the best outcomes possible for them."

Championing wellbeing by bridging the generation gap

As a Partner in the Environmental and Regulatory Team at Schofield Sweeney **Craig Burman** leads the firm's Wellbeing Team, Mental Health First Aiders and also sits on the ESG Team. Here, Craig explores how bridging the generation gap can help champion wellbeing in the legal profession.

When I started my first job as a lawyer in the early 1990s, the then Managing Partner would lament the decline of grammar, the informality of junior lawyers and he seemed permanently bewildered by the phone system and the fax machine.

He had set the workplace culture many years before. When I started, the ban on women wearing trousers had been lifted, but there were no women in senior roles. Our diversity was championed by recruiting young lawyers who had attended state schools.

Formal appraisals and development plans were unheard of. I hoped to progress if I worked hard, managed my own stress and hit my target. If I had spoken about work-life balance, wellbeing or mental health, it would have been, at best, career limiting.

Today, most of my contemporaries are in senior roles. While we can operate the phone system, the source of our bewilderment is often the generational divide. I'm no expert, and don't tar everyone with the same brush, but I do see some very different values in those nearer the start of their careers;

1. Salary is important but is rarely the sole or driving motivation.
2. Expectations around success, work-life balance, being valued, being heard and making a difference are very different to those I held at the start of my career.
3. Stress, anxiety and mental health are our collective responsibility.
4. People want to work where they feel that they belong and are accepted.
5. The culture and diversity of a firm and its social conscience are important considerations for attracting and retaining talent.

All of these factors make a positive difference to our work environment. These are the things that I should have aspired to as a young lawyer, but they were not available to us.

A multigenerational law firm championing diversity, inclusion and wellbeing needs to meet the values of its emerging talent as much as the values of its leaders, so our workplaces are an attractive and inclusive option. We all benefit, and so do our clients.

One of the gifts which the pandemic gave us was a recognition of how important wellbeing is to how an organisation functions. The future was uncertain, family life was hard to juggle, and we all had bad days. We used technology to make up for not seeing each other face to face. We knew we were all collectively responsible for making sure others were okay, and it was acceptable to

reach out and ask for help.

We sent daily emails of encouragement and weekly newsletters. We ran virtual cafes and social events so people could chat with colleagues. Wellbeing during that period was about maintaining connections and offering support in difficult times. Together, we got through it.

As a profession, four years on, have we made the most of this gift? It's easy to return to old ways of working or prioritise convenience over flexibility. I do see teams where wellbeing is part of the team fabric, but it seems to me we have lost some of the deeper understanding we had during lockdown.

In my team, we have someone born in each decade from the 1950s to the 2000s. We embrace our diversity, but we also have to navigate around our differences of thought, values and experiences. If I talk about Michael Jackson or REM, I get the same blank looks as I give those discussing Sabrina Carpenter or Vampire Weekend. Sometimes the generation gap is unbridgeable, but if we look, we can see what is happening on the other side.

We can attend the firm's entry in the annual Pride march or our annual Iftar meal, regardless of our religious beliefs or how we identify. Easter eggs and advent calendars mark either the religious or cultural occasion. We have several ways to recognise effort and reward good work. It is amazing how such small gestures have a massive impact on those who feel seen, heard and accepted.

When we champion wellbeing, we can have open conversations about personal issues and challenges without these having a negative impact on our careers. Given how much time we spend at work, it should be a place where we can bring our whole selves, without fear of judgment or criticism.

The generation gap is something we are all likely to experience in both directions. It can have a massive impact on the culture of an organisation and the experience of its workforce. Most importantly, we can all decide how we respond to this challenge.

When we set the tone to meet the needs of the leaders of tomorrow, hopefully they too will do the same, when it is their turn to lead.



Jones Myers doubles team in York city centre



Jones Myers has expanded its Divorce and Financial Remedies Department with the addition of solicitors Brittany Codling and

Katie Jennings, strengthening the firm's expertise in family law. Recognised by Legal 500 as a "leading matrimonial finance firm," the team is praised for its "first-rate client care" and "strength in depth." Joining them are legal assistants Linda Lacey and Sarah Martin, enhancing the growing York office's capacity. The York team is led by partner Nicki Mitchell, York's first qualified collaborative family lawyer and an experienced family law and child inclusive mediator.

Nicki Mitchell welcomed the new members, highlighting their arrival during a successful year for Jones Myers as it cements its reputation as a top family law firm in York. With headquarters in Leeds and offices in Harrogate and York, Jones Myers has held top-tier rankings in Legal 500 and Chambers UK for over three decades.

Brittany Codling expressed her enthusiasm, saying, "Jones Myers' standing as a respected Tier 1 family law firm is known far and wide. I am delighted to be working alongside the best family lawyers in their field on complex, high net worth cases." Sarah Martin also praised the firm's client focus and commitment to excellence, adding, "I'm really enjoying my new role."

Jones Myers is ranked in the top five percent of UK family law firms on the independent Review Solicitors platform, where clients consistently rate the firm as 'Excellent,' reflecting its dedication to outstanding service.

Nicki Mitchell concluded, "We warmly welcome our new team members and wish them every success as we continue to deliver exceptional family law support."

New trainee solicitor joins McCormicks in Harrogate

McCormicks Solicitors has welcomed Suzie Godden as a new Trainee Solicitor, strengthening the Harrogate-based firm's Crime and Fraud team. Suzie, who joined the practice last year as a criminal law executive, has recently earned accreditation as a probationary police station representative. This qualification broadens the department's capacity to support clients during police interviews under caution, as well as interviews conducted by other agencies such as the Department for Work and Pensions, HMRC, and the Environment Agency.

Partner Peter Minnikin praised Suzie's dedication and ability to foster strong client relationships, noting her valuable contribution to the firm's busy and expanding team. He expressed enthusiasm about supporting her progression towards becoming a qualified solicitor, highlighting the firm's commitment to nurturing talent from within.

The accreditation Suzie received is critical in publicly funded criminal defence work, allowing accredited representatives to provide essential legal advice and assistance to individuals who might otherwise lack representation during police station interviews. McCormicks remains a key player in the legal community, being the only Harrogate firm recognised for General Crime and Fraud in the latest UK Legal 500 guide.

Suzie's expanded role and growing expertise enhance the firm's ability to deliver high-quality legal services in criminal law, reinforcing its reputation as a trusted adviser in the region.

Peter Minnikin concluded, "Suzie has already demonstrated her ability to work hard and build important relationships with our clients. She is a valued member of the busy and growing team, and we are delighted to help her take the next step towards qualification as a solicitor."

Wrigleys Solicitors strengthens charities team with key hire



Wrigleys Solicitors LLP has strengthened its charities and social economy team with the senior hire of Nicola Evans as senior charities counsel, responding to increasing demand for specialist legal

advice. Nicola brings extensive experience, having qualified as a charity and trusts lawyer in 1996 at Herbert Smith Freehills and later becoming the first knowledge lawyer for BDB Pitmans' charity team.

Nicola's involvement in the sector is extensive. She served on the Charity Law Association (CLA) committee for over a decade, including a term as Chair from 2016 to 2019. She has led working parties addressing key consultations,

notably chairing the response to the Law Commission's 2015 consultation on charity law. Nicola also played a consultative role during the development of the Charities Act 2022, providing evidence to Parliamentary committees.

A frequent speaker and commentator, Nicola collaborates with the Charity Tax Group to advocate for fair tax policies for the sector. Wrigleys, recognised as a top-tier charity law firm by Legal 500 and Chambers UK, advises a broad range of clients including charities, social enterprises, and education institutions.

Clare Lawrence, joint head of charities and social economy at Wrigleys, praised Nicola's expertise as a valuable addition to the firm's capability to support clients through complex regulatory landscapes. Elizabeth Wilson, also joint head, added, "Nicola is a true charity law expert. Her knowledge is second to none, and she will bring huge value to not only our clients and department but the firm as a whole."

Nicola Evans reflected, "Wrigleys has built an impressive reputation within charities law, and I'm thrilled to be a part of the journey as the department continues to grow."

Ward Hadaway appoints new finance director as firm grows national presence

Ward Hadaway has appointed James Foster as its new Finance Director, bolstering its senior leadership amid a period of rapid growth. James brings significant experience in venture capital and financial services, with a proven track record of providing strategic financial guidance to businesses of all sizes. His expertise will be key to advancing the firm's expansion plans, which include opening a new Birmingham office this summer and ongoing merger talks with Teesside-based The Endeavour Partnership LLP.

The firm has already made 34 new hires in early 2025 across Leeds, Manchester, and Newcastle, including partners, directors, solicitors, and business support professionals. These new additions strengthen key practice areas such as real estate, corporate finance, and construction, with eight new hires based in Leeds.

Managing Partner Steven Petrie highlighted the firm's ambitious target to double revenue within five years and

reach £100 million by 2034. He emphasised the importance of investing in talent and infrastructure to achieve these goals and praised James Foster's commercial insight as vital for the next growth phase.

Among other recent hires are Tom Wills and Richard Bradbury, joining as partners in the Real Estate team, and Louise Masters, bringing nearly 20 years of expertise in complex financial remedy cases.

James Foster commented, "It's a very exciting time to be joining Ward Hadaway. The scale of the firm's growth plans is ambitious, but the clarity of vision and client-first approach I've seen so far gives me every confidence in what's ahead."



Walker Morris announces 20 promotions, including a new Partner in the Employment & Business Immigration Team



Walker Morris has announced 20 internal promotions, including one partner, five directors, and 14 senior associates, highlighting the firm's commitment to nurturing exceptional talent and delivering

outstanding legal services. Among the promotions, Shabana Muneer has been elevated to partner in the Employment & Business Immigration team, recognising her pivotal role in establishing a dedicated Business Immigration practice. This rapidly growing area addresses increasing client needs and enhances the firm's international capabilities.

Shabana's rise through the firm's Forge programme—a development initiative focused on equipping future partners with the skills to navigate legal changes, grow the business,

and lead teams—has been central to her success. She is proud to be the first female Muslim partner at Walker Morris and the only hijab-wearing partner among Leeds's top six law firms, hoping her achievement inspires diversity in leadership.

Her promotion not only marks a personal milestone but also reinforces the firm's strategic focus on growth and innovation through investment in its people. Managing Partner Jeanette Burgess praised the promoted individuals for their dedication and highlighted Shabana's leadership in driving the Business Immigration team's success. She expressed confidence that this new leadership team would guide Walker Morris toward continued success and sustainability.

Shabana reflected, "Being promoted to partner is a huge career milestone for me because it recognises the hard work and innovation that have gone into establishing Walker Morris' dedicated Business Immigration offering. . . I hope my achievement inspires others from diverse backgrounds to aspire to leadership."

Exchange Chambers welcomes four new barristers in Leeds

Exchange Chambers in Leeds has expanded its team with four notable barristers joining recently. Hal Watson, Angus MacDonald, and Matthew Maddison have become full members, while leading silk Jane Bewsey KC has joined as a door tenant, strengthening the chamber's expertise in financial crime, commercial litigation, and complex criminal law.

Hal Watson, called to the Bar in 2003 and ranked Band 1 by Chambers UK for financial crime, specialises in prosecuting and defending high-value fraud, tax fraud, corruption, and related confiscation cases. His work often involves international investigations and complex asset recovery, including cases under the Bribery Act 2010.

Angus MacDonald, called in 2009, is known for his work on serious organised crime, terrorism, and regulatory offences. Recognised in Legal 500 for his tenacity and meticulousness, he recently prosecuted a life sentence terrorism case involving a planned attack on an RAF base.

Jane Bewsey KC, with over three decades' experience and taking silk in 2010, primarily prosecutes corporate fraud, money laundering, and proceeds of crime cases. As

a door tenant, she continues collaborating with Hal and Angus, including their joint work on the UK's first Deferred Prosecution Agreement with Entain plc, involving a £585 million settlement.

Matthew Maddison, called in 2010, is a leading junior barrister in commercial litigation and insolvency, noted for handling significant restructuring plans outside London and regularly representing clients nationwide.

Jane Bewsey KC reflected, "Joining Exchange Chambers allows me to continue working alongside trusted colleagues and contribute to a team renowned for excellence in complex financial and commercial law."



Last Word

Jill McCurdy, Solicitor Partner at Ramsdens Solicitors, has earned the highest accreditation in Health and Welfare Court of Protection work. We reflect on her career milestones to date:

Congratulations on your recent accreditation as an Accredited Legal Representative — what does this recognition mean to you personally and professionally?

This accreditation is both a personal milestone and a professional achievement that I am extremely proud of. It reflects the years of hard work and dedication which have brought me to this point in my career. I'm particularly proud of the fact that I embraced a totally new area of law, developed a case load and went on to gain this recognised competency.

But beyond that, it's a significant step for Ramsdens too. It means we can offer more to the vulnerable clients, children, and families we represent. We are now better equipped to advocate for those who need it the most, which is incredibly important to me.

You've worked extensively in Child Care Law and the Court of Protection — what drew you to these areas of law, and what continues to inspire your work in this space?

I've been drawn to areas of law that directly impact people's lives in meaningful ways from early on in my career, no doubt shaped by my first degree in Psychology. Child Care Law and Court of Protection are both incredibly human areas of practice – they deal with vulnerability, rights, and often very difficult and emotional circumstances. That's what motivates me – the opportunity to make a real difference when it matters the most.

What continues to inspire me is the resilience of individuals and families I work with, as well as the importance of making sure their voices are heard and knowing that you can make a real difference to people's lives. Whether it's protecting a child's welfare or safeguarding the rights of someone who lacks capacity – every case is a reminder of why this work matters.

Working with vulnerable clients, particularly in sensitive and complex cases, must come with unique challenges. How do you maintain your own wellbeing while supporting others?

There is a fantastic support network at Ramsdens; we are all very fortunate to work with such a talented and skilled team. We're also able to lean on each other when needed, whether that's to help manage a heavy workload and never-ending deadlines or help with the emotional strain that can come with working on sensitive and complex cases.

Work-life balance is also key to wellbeing. Outside of work, I make a conscious effort to switch off as much as possible and make time for the things I enjoy. For me, being healthy and fit is important. I'm a keen cyclist, so there's nothing I love more than being outside on two wheels or with my dogs, friends and family. Looking after my wellbeing not only helps me stay healthy, but also allows me to be the best I can be at work, both for my colleagues and the clients who rely on me.

You've dedicated your career to advocating for vulnerable individuals. In your view, how can the legal profession do more to support diversity, inclusion and access to justice?

A crucial aspect that is often overlooked when we talk about diversity and inclusion is accessibility, not just in terms of who works in the profession, but who can access it for help. Offering expertise and support means very little if the people who need it most can't reach us. That's why, at Ramsdens, we've made a conscious choice not to base ourselves solely in a large city centre. Instead, we have regional offices across Yorkshire, rooted in the heart of communities.

When people can walk into a local office and speak to someone face to face, it helps build trust – they feel seen, heard and genuinely supported. Vulnerable individuals can often feel intimidated by legal processes, and we need to break down those barriers to make sure they never feel that support is out of reach.

As the first ALR at Ramsdens, how do you support or mentor others coming through the profession?

It's a real privilege to be able to support the more junior members of the firm as they begin their legal careers. At Ramsdens, we're proud to have several excellent programmes in place and a fantastic cohort of new talent. We see our apprentices and trainees as an expansion of our team and treat

them as such – giving them real responsibility and trust from the outset. This approach allows them to grow in confidence while drawing on the wealth of experience and knowledge we have across the firm. Mentoring them through the early stages of their careers is incredibly rewarding, and it's a key part of building a strong, supportive future for the profession.

Wellbeing is increasingly recognised as vital in the legal profession. What changes would you like to see across the sector to better support legal professionals' mental health?

There has long been a stigma in the legal profession that wellbeing is something you must sacrifice for success, but that shouldn't be the case. At Ramsdens, we take a different approach. We don't work to billable hours, which means we are not under constant pressure to justify every minute of the day. Ultimately, that helps us to do better work for our clients.

I'd like to see this kind of culture adopted more widely across the sector. It sends a message to aspiring lawyers that you can have a fulfilling legal career without compromising your wellbeing. I think leadership is key in bringing about such cultural changes to increase normalising these conversations. That's the future of the profession I want to be a part of.

Inclusion is about more than representation — it's about creating environments where people feel they belong. How do you foster that sense of belonging in your work with clients and colleagues?

A sense of belonging starts with creating a work culture that allows for individuals to feel seen, heard and respected. At Ramsdens, we make it very clear that everyone is valued, no matter their role. When people at all levels feel safe to be themselves and know that they are genuinely included, it strengthens our culture and the quality of work we deliver.

For our clients, that sense of belonging is also built through face-to-face relationships. Being based in local communities means that we can truly get to know the individuals we represent. We're not a faceless firm. There's a genuine connection, and some of our clients have been with us for years because of that trust and familiarity.

What advice would you give to young lawyers who want to build a meaningful and impactful career like yours?

My advice to young and aspiring lawyers is to find your 'why' - to understand what drives you and align your career with the causes you care about.

There will be challenging moments, and although there are ways you can protect your wellbeing, it is that core motivation that keeps you grounded and driven.

A meaningful career doesn't happen overnight – it takes time, resilience and a willingness to keep learning. Develop your non-law skills, as well as mastering your area of law. Stay curious and aim to be the best version of yourself, both for your clients and the profession.





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