

News from the Board

Reflections on exceptional March board meeting - Anna Bradley

25 March 2020 | Anna Bradley

In these extraordinary times, we held an additional Board meeting to discuss our response to COVID-19. This was our first ever online meeting. Video conferencing is the new normal, so I am pleased that the technology and format worked well.

We discussed the work to date to keep our staff safe. That started with robust hygiene arrangements and the introduction of flexible travel times. As the situation has developed, we have moved our staff to homeworking. We closed our London office last week; our Birmingham office is closed except for when any maintenance services are needed onsite. My thanks to all the staff for making this happen at pace and continuing to deliver what is necessary.

We also looked at some of the implications for the work we do and the speed at which we do it. We, like every other organisation, have staff who are ill, self-isolating, or caring which means that not everyone is available for remote working. Nor does all our work lend itself to working remotely. Our aim will clearly be to continue to provide as good a service as possible to the public and profession. But we are going to have to prioritise and adapt our plans for the year. No decisions made yet, but a good reality check and something for our April Board to discuss.

More immediately we had to make some important decisions about the education and training arrangements that are critical to ensuring standards are maintained. It is clear that the current situation presents real challenges for students, training providers and firms, so we need to be pragmatic and flexible where appropriate. Many key qualifications, including the LPC, have supervised assessments, taken in exam conditions. In normal times, this would be entirely right for what are high stakes professional licensing qualifications. Right now, these traditional examinations taken in an exam hall just can't happen and that could delay the start of training contracts or admission onto our register and so affect the supply of solicitors for those who need them.

We want to balance public protection with the new reality for students and education and training providers. So, we decided to allow alternative assessment arrangements on the LPC for skills and elective subjects. For the core LPC subjects we will recognise a particular form of online assessment invigilation called remote proctoring. We will also allow remote proctoring and oral skills assessments by video-link on other types of course. This should enable the vast majority of students to

qualify on time and pursue their careers and training contracts. Many law degree providers have already made alternative arrangements and we are keeping in touch with their plans. [Read detail of these new arrangements](https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/news/coronavirus-questions-answers/) [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/news/coronavirus-questions-answers/>].

The Board also heard that we have published a range of information on what we are doing in response to COVID-19, including answers to common queries we are seeing from the profession. Please keep the questions coming in. We are co-ordinating with the Law Society to make sure we all know what's happening.

This is a worrying time for everyone but a strong legal sector is vital to upholding the rule of law and enabling people to access expert legal help when they need it. We will be focused on doing what is necessary to play our part in delivering this.