

News from the Board

Reflections on our July 2020 Board - Anna Bradley

20 July 2020

Our Board is now well practised at coming together virtually and so we tried our hands at a different kind of more strategic discussion at a workshop on strategic risk. It worked surprisingly well and resulted in a set of about 10 high level strategic risks that the Executive are now going to work up and represent. It was of course, a reminder of all the uncertainties in our sector, not least the economic impacts of not only the pandemic but the EU exit.

Board started our formal meeting with a review of the core measures included in our performance reporting pack. We explore the rationale for them and confirmed that these were the right measures to enable us to hold the Executive account.

We will be submitting the final application for the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) to the Legal Services Board later this month. We remain on track to introduce the SQE in September 2021 but we are of course, keeping a close eye on what is currently happening with students and universities and know that Covid-19 is causing some difficulties for a few. We agreed we would explore whether there is flexibility within the transition arrangements to help aspiring solicitors and providers manage these Covid-19 impacts. Watch this space, as they say.

We also discussed the independent Bridge Group report on diversity and inclusion in relation to the introduction of the SQE. It was excellent to see that it concluded that the assessment design is fair and overall the SQE could help address diversity issues in the legal profession. Our own updated SQE equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) risk assessment will be published later this month.

Compensation Fund

As well as being asked to finalise practising fees and Compensation Fund contribution levels for 2020/21, which now go forward to the Law Society Council for agreement, we also considered responses to our recent consultations on how the Compensation Fund operates and provides consumer protection for those who need it.

Importantly, we must make sure that the Fund is properly targeted where the need is greatest, so we looked in particular at views on potential changes to who is eligible to make a claim and for what. Full details of what was decided will be published over the coming weeks, but we are

convinced that taken together they will give the right balance between proper consumer protection and the financial sustainability of the fund.

Assuring advocacy standards

We also discussed the responses to our consultation on how best to make sure that standards in advocacy meet expectations. It's an area in which our standard approach to qualification may need further strengthening because these services are so critical for so many people in vulnerable situations. We will be putting in place some additional requirements and will be publishing our thinking shortly.

Finally, it was good to hear that the programme of virtual events we have now established are in such demand and are so well received. I am looking forward to chairing one of the most topical events on developing the sector approach to race equality [<https://events.sra.org.uk/sra/frontend/reg/thome.csp?pageID=117152&eventID=497>] on the 28 July Looking further ahead, we are now planning our Compliance Officers Conference in November – it will happen, we are just working out how. More on that in due course!

But before that, I hope everyone finds time to take a well-earned break this summer.