

News from the Board

Reflections on our January Board - Anna Bradley

23 January 2019 | Anna Bradley

We are only one month into the new year and it is already clear that it is going to be a busy one. While everyone was still getting used to our new Standards and Regulations, as introduced at the end of last year, the Government's new money laundering regulations came into force. We are also, of course, preparing for the implementation of the new Solicitors Qualifying Examination and developing our new three-year corporate strategy, alongside business as usual, so there was lots for the Board to discuss.

We started with a deep dive into the development of SQE in a workshop session. Board found it hugely helpful to be reminded of all the background to the SQE over the last five years and we are planning to provide a summary of where we are up to for everyone to use, so watch this space.

Promoting a diverse profession

A diverse profession helps to both increase access to justice and law firms to thrive and we have a strong record of work that supports this ambition. The Board reviewed our work in this area and received draft findings from our biennial data collection from the profession.

We looked at what we have been doing to promote diversity in the profession, including recent work to provide resources on LGBTQ+ and disability inclusion. Board also talked about work we have been doing to understand the impact of our policy work on diverse groups, and to make sure that our systems are accessible and fair.

The data collection was carried out last year and we had a fantastic response - 96 percent of firms compared to 92 percent in 2017. It's very good to see that firms are supporting this work. It's clear that there are shifts in the data over time towards an increasingly diverse profession, but progress is still slow and there is much to do.

The Board agreed that it was timely to bring all of this work and the data together in one place and take a strategic look at how we can make a difference on some of the key issues. This will be discussed at our March meeting and published.

Corporate strategy

The consultation on our corporate strategy for 2020 – 2023 closes this week – so if you haven't responded yet, please do try to find time to do so. So far we have had an excellent response.

In addition to written responses, we have held a number of meetings and focus groups which I know that staff and Board members have found really helpful. We have heard from a diverse range of people, including different branches of the profession, those with experience of homelessness to older British Asians; young people who have been through the criminal justice system to small business owners. We will need to review what people have said and finalise our plans.

But that is far from the end of the story – we need to agree what outcomes we are looking for, what we are going to do to deliver them and what the three-year financial envelope will be. So, we had a useful discussion around the process for doing the necessary work, including plans for an April strategy session to bring all this together. Following that we plan to consult for the first time on our work programme and a longer-term budget.

Developing policy

At our last meeting we decided to stand down our Policy Committee, so this time we discussed some proposed changes to our policy development processes including a picture of how and when Board will be engaged.

We also agreed to establish a new expert panel to provide access to a range of people who can bring focused expertise in a range of areas to our policy development work. Terms of reference for this group will be developed shortly so recruitment of the first panel can begin. We will also then publish a full policy development process on our website as part of our commitment to transparency. This will be in addition to our current engagement activity of course.

Solicitors Indemnity Fund

Finally, we were delighted to have the Chair and CEO of SIF to the Board. SIF was established in 1987 to provide compulsory professional indemnity cover for solicitors, and ran until late 2000. They provided a useful update on the work of the SIF, including preparation for the end of September, when the Fund will no longer provide supplementary run off cover to law firms that have closed or are closing without a successor practice.

All in all, a positive beginning to the new year.