

BRISTOL LAW SOCIETY
PRESIDENT'S AGM REPORT
DECEMBER 2019-NOVEMBER 2020



One thing is for sure, we won't forget Bristol Law Society's 250th anniversary year.

It all started as you would expect with lots of networking events including the excellent sponsors evening, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester annual dinners, the High Sheriff's reception, chairing a Joint 5 meeting, and even hosting the pub quiz: remember those? It was particularly interesting to look how busy it was with "in-person" events right up to mid-March. And then of course lockdown happened.

But that showed just what a brilliant, resilient team we have at BLS. Clair, Helen and John have all adapted and contributed in ways they could not have guessed at just 8 months ago. We have gone from being a small business that largely relies upon face to face events to running an amazing series of online webinars and forum meetings (and launching our own YouTube channel) as well as hosting a Nightingale Court.

It has been challenging for everyone and its certainly not been the year that I had anticipated. But as Helen has pointed out we are 250 until next October and the celebrations are hopefully just on hold. We have the next AAD booked in for 14 October 2021 when we will be 250 years (and 360 days old). Fingers crossed that will go ahead.

The letters will be going out soon to our corporate members for the next year's subscriptions. I really feel that this year, the message of what we have delivered for members will be stronger than ever. I was really pleased to see how much the Society has achieved against the aims set at the start of the year and in particular:

1. Promoting the legal sector in Bristol

- a. Nightingale Court
- b. Building relations with the local judiciary including co-hosting their regional "back to court" post lockdown webinar session;
- c. Numerous Managing Partner and Chambers Directors' webinars with various guest speakers;
- d. Working with UWE and Weston College as part of their law advisory boards;
- e. Taking part in the WECA recovery task force professional services steering group;
- f. Several Joint 5 sessions including a round table event with the Law Society Gazette as well as several national Law Society sessions. Helen has also had weekly / bi-weekly meetings with TLS VP and Joint 5 during lockdown, making Bristol's voice heard.

2. Progressing the Bristol & Bath Legal Tech initiative

- a. This was going great guns just before lockdown. The fourth main meeting was particularly well attended and launched the "President's Design Challenge": hopefully we can get back to that;
- b. We have now got behind the Whitecap report which has been commissioned and I was recently involved in a panel session for the Bristol Technology Festival;
- c. We have also strengthened our relationship with WECA and are firmly on the radar of mayor Tim Bowles, both for BBLT and BLS generally;
- d. The changes in working patterns over the past few months have presented some really interesting opportunities in the legal tech field and I am excited to see how this progresses over the next year.

3. Continuing the important work done in raising awareness and progressing the dialogue on diversity and inclusion and wellbeing:
 - a. ED&I website & content
 - b. BLS statement of commitment to ED&I following the BLM movement on the website
 - c. successful ED&I webinars
 - d. the recent formation of a BAME sub-committee
 - e. 3 webinars on coaching and adapting to the "new normal" and a focus on menopause awareness.

Obviously thank you to everyone on Council who has supported and run the events and got involved in the initiatives.

Particular thanks obviously have to go to Helen, Clair and John. At this point we would normally present them with flowers - clearly that isn't physically possible this year so sincere apologies for that. We will make up for that as soon as we can. But can we all please formally recognise what they have done to keep the society going and if anything enhance its relevance and support offered to members through these strange times. In a very short period, there has been a huge amount of upskilling involved. Our webinars are really slick and professional and we are now up to at least one, and sometimes up to three, a week. We have been discussing for some time the changing approach to training and lockdown has allowed us to embrace that and hopefully find a platform that can secure an income stream for the long term.

We only have two employees and resourcing has been an issue for some time. Nick commented last year that we ideally needed to increase our resources. That remains true but clearly the additional financial constraints of lockdown have forced us to put that on hold. Helen and Clair have done so well this year to also cover the additional

challenges that lockdown has brought. On behalf of the Society, well done and thank you.

This has been a challenging time for almost all businesses. If it were not for the efforts of John in particular in introducing the opportunity to bring the Court in as paying licensee - and then making it happen - we would be in a very precarious position. I can now have a real sense of optimism for the next 12 months for the Society. John, we all owe you one. I am well aware it has not been easy, but you may well have saved the Society. Thank you also to everyone else who has been involved in helping on that project - with a special mention to Coralie who assisted with the licence.

Sadly we have not had much opportunity to do a great deal with our Charity of the Year, Feeding Bristol - but Helen and I have continued our dialogue and I would like them to continue as our Charity for next year as well, which will hopefully allow us to make a meaningful contribution.

We have however seen real progress and collaboration through our CE group, of which Peter Morris has recently taken over chairing from John. And that a really good example of what BLS is all about, promoting local lawyers working together. Bristol Pro Bono Group has also launched, another cross firm collaboration, and BLS was pleased to be able to support them in their recent pro bono week event. Collectively these two organisations have created Bristol Trustee Group which BLS support administratively.

Thanks also to the continuing support of our sponsors and strategic partners: Landmark, Insight Legal Software, Warner McCall Resillience, Marsh JLT, UWE, LawCare, Annecto, Lloyds, Hays, Wessex and Milsted Langdon.

It has clearly been a strange year. It's tricky to set targets for the next year given that we don't know when we are going to be out of lockdowns. But that won't stop us. Let's build on what we have achieved. I would love it if we can:

- build on the webinar programme to make it a commercially viable replacement for the all-day seminars;
- take the BBLT initiative to the next level and work towards cementing Bristol and Bath as a key hub for innovation and legal tech;
- identify and deliver on ED&I goals;
- have an annual dinner!

It may not have been the year I was expecting, but it's been an interesting one.

I am sure I will have forgotten to mention something or someone - apologies for that but I think I have spoken for long enough.

Council is made up of a great bunch of people and I look forward to continuing working with you to get us out the other side of this even stronger than we were before and setting us up for the start of the next 250 years.

Thanks again for all your support and please continue to support BLS moving forward.

Ben Holt

President 2019/20

17 November 2020