

BRISTOL LAW SOCIETY
PRESIDENT'S AGM REPORT
DECEMBER 2020-NOVEMBER 2021



Well, we got there. Bristol Law Society is 251 and we did just about manage to squeeze in some celebrations for the 250th (with literally 5 days to spare).

And we also got here, back at the BLS office for a Council meeting for the first time in 21 months.

This is the first time any President has done two AGM speeches on the bounce. Some may well feel that it is more true than ever that quantity does not necessarily mean quality.

The "normal" part of my first term ended just over three months in when lockdown started. We only really started seeing each other again face to face, and in a relatively limited way, in September of this year.

But the level of activity for the Society has probably been greater than any year I can recall. There have also been significant positives to take out of the unusual times we have faced. Its only when you sit down to write a speech like this that you look at quite how much we have done over the past year. For a small business, with two staff and some volunteers, it is truly incredible. Here are just some of the highlights:

- We hosted a Nightingale Court until March 21, helping the court out and also the income from which made an enormous difference to what is a small turnover business.
- The "weekly" webinars that we started last year have continued and, on numerous occasions, there has been more than one a week, offering huge benefit to our members and probably more than a 50% increase on pre-pandemic training BLS offered - including black letter law, soft skills, and wellbeing.
- We have held a series of very popular and well received managing and senior partner briefing meetings with some superb contributions from sponsors and external expert speakers, including Mayor Marvin Rees. The advent of these being on line has, I think, really been the making of them - allowing us to lose the associated travel time for getting senior leaders to an in-person event. It has also allowed us to hear from the local legal leaders on issues they are keen to discuss and helped build on our ties within the business and local government communities.
- BLS paid a key part in the Bristol & Bath legal tech group, the highlights of which were the commissioning of the Whitecap report on legal tech in the region and speaking at the Bristol Tech Festival
- The 250th anniversary book has been produced. That was something I was personally really keen for us to do, to mark the anniversary and to capture the moment and the history for future generations of Bristol lawyers and BLS representatives - I am bowled over by the quality of the book and particular thanks, as ever to Helen, Clair and John for their work in helping to produce this. It's a fantastic history of the society.

- Our Equality Diversity and Inclusion group has gone from strength to strength and is now arguably one of the most active parts of the society, thanks in particular to the sterling work of Coralie and Salma
- We have also seen real progress and collaboration through our CE group, of which Peter Morris has recently taken over chairing from John. Amongst other things, the group has been mapping support needs against skills to try to maximise the outcome of what is being offered. On behalf of all of us, thank you for your continued efforts. And that is a really good example of what BLS is all about, promoting local lawyers working together.
- We have also been involved in a number of charitable initiatives. Special mention of course to my charity of the year, Feeding Bristol, which provides strategic support in tackling food insecurity across the city. Once again, a fantastic effort from the Bristol legal community in terms of volunteer time for supporting their summer holidays initiative of getting a decent packed lunch out to the region's less privileged children. On behalf of Bristol Law Society can I say thank you to every individual and firm that has got involved. Literally thousands have benefitted from this. Well done.
- We also thankfully managed to raise a decent amount of money for Feeding Bristol at the dinner - around £4,500 in the end, which was a great result
- I also hosted the Great Legal Quiz, which was done online this year and raised £700 for the Access to Justice Foundation which I think was the second highest amount achieved nationally.

- In a similar vein, thank you to all of those who took part in the recent Bristol Legal Walk organised by the South West Legal Support Trust. Despite the frankly awful weather, it was a great turn out to raise money and awareness for those most in need of support.
- Particular mention should also be made of the Bristol Pro Bono group and Bristol Law Centre. The work they do truly makes a difference in delivering access to justice in a world where that is becoming harder to access.
- Over the past couple of years, we have launched an in-house lawyers conference with a promise that our in-house friends won't be swamped with lots of us pesky private practice lawyers fawning over them for instructions! Well done and thanks in particular to Shahzia for taking the lead on that.
- We have continued to build our strong ties with the Joint 5 law societies - the big ones outside of London being Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool; as well as with the Association of South Western Law Societies. These collaborations of local law societies means that collectively we represent something like 50,000 members across the country - which helps to get our members voices heard. There have been round table debates with the LSB, the SRA and the national Law Society. We have contributed to the important debates on issues such as the SQE and the proposed withdrawal of the Solicitors Indemnity Fund. We have also had a number of discussions with the Law Society in relation to their change of approach to regional representation, which I am sure will continue over the next year.

- Congratulations also to our own Salma Maqsood who has taken over as the Bristol rep for on The Law Society Council - and thanks to Ian Kelcey for his many years of service as her predecessor.
- We have continued our work with Weston College on their law advisory board, and the same with UWE and also hosting one of their distinguished address lectures with Jacqueline De Rojas - on the importance of diversity in an increasingly digital world, which was particularly relevant for us
- Perhaps the most impressive achievement of the year was the Annual Award Dinner. Due to the pandemic, we left it until about July before finally making the decision to "go for it". We had some nervousness about whether we were going to hit the magic 200 attendees to break even on the event. That was not an issue. We sold out again, with over 400 attendees. But what was most notable was how Helen and Clair and the various supporters, including our events manager Ceri, turned it around - getting the whole thing done in 3 and a half months, when it normally takes about 10. What a fantastic night. Thanks to a bit of nepotism via my predecessor, Mr Nick Lee, we also managed to persuade the sixth doctor from Doctor Who, Colin Baker, to do us a video intro and he gamely agreed to regenerate into me. I am never going to top that and may as well retire. Which is convenient, given what is about to happen.
- A few final thanks before I wrap up
- To our individual and corporate members who have continued supporting us though difficult times. Rather than a reduction, we have actually managed to add a few new members. As should be clear from my

summary tonight, it is becoming increasingly easy to answer the question "*what does Bristol Law Society do for me*" and I believe and hope that our members truly recognise what a great service they get.

- Thanks also to the continuing support of our sponsors and strategic partners: Howden, Landmark, Insight Legal Software, Nine Feet Tall, LawCare, Annecto Legal, Lloyds Bank, Hays Recruitment, Wessex Searches and Milsted Langdon.
- Obviously thank you to everyone on Council who has supported and run the events and got involved in the initiatives. Council is made up of working lawyers, with limited amounts of time as volunteers. I would like to offer thanks, on behalf of the Society, for their efforts.
- Thanks also to John Moriarty for his continued support. Those who attended the dinner will be aware that he was the recipient of the President's Outstanding Achievement award to recognise all he has done for the legal community and BLS over the years. While he has stood down from an official position with the society, I am sure we haven't quite got rid of him yet! Thanks John.
- Last but most importantly, thank you to Helen and Clair. I've said similar things a number of times recently but its absolutely true - you are both superstars. Tireless dedication to the cause and lovely to work with. I am sure we will all appreciate how awful it must be to work with a committee of lawyers. But seriously, well done and thank you. You keep the ship afloat. No, more than that. You make it soar. So if we can all please thank them in the traditional way.

I am sure I will have forgotten to mention something or someone - apologies for that but I think I have spoken for long enough. My name will be on the wooden plaque. Although sadly my unique position as being the only person to have consecutive terms as president is due to be immediately equalled by my two successors.

I didn't mess the job up too much. Mission accomplished. My time is done, but BLS is in safe hands with Erin and Edd. It's been an honour. Saving cryogenics, I'll probably not be around to raise a glass in 2270 for the 500th anniversary, so here's to the first 251 years of BLS and hopefully many more to come.

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

Ben Holt

President 2019/20/21

16 November 2021