

# Getting our heads together

by Ian McCombie, President, Leeds Law Society



I have attended two indirectly related events in recent weeks. The President's Conference at Chancery Lane, and the Yorkshire Lawyer Awards hosted by our worthy publishers Barker Brooks Media, and organised by Jackie Boole and Rachel Greenwood.

I recall that a couple of years after qualifying, I discovered that by simply filling in a form I could become a member of The Law Society. I applied, and was duly accepted, and have the certificate to prove it. By applying, I was joining a representative body having already, by qualifying and obtaining my first practising certificate, agreed to comply with the regulations administered and enforced by the Law Society.

For years, the argument raged as to whether there should be a segregation of the two functions of the Law Society, and the issue has of course now been put to rest by the Clementi Report with which we are all too familiar. I am confident that the regulation of our profession will continue efficiently and effectively in the hands of 'RegCo', which is accountable to the profession and to the Legal Services Board, primarily through the New Law Society. They deserve our support, which could justifiably be cautious at first, and I am sure will soon earn our full respect. We should be confident that both the lawyer and lay members of 'RegCo' understand the unique requirements of our profession, the ethics and professional rules which govern it, which are the glue that makes us a cohesive, effective and formidable profession, with arguably the highest and most exacting standards of all professions.

Ours is a complicated life, and our judgment has to be exercised every single day in our practice as solicitors.

We all recognise that we require from our professional colleagues, not just a minimum standard of compliance with professional rules, but integrity and a strong sense of fairness, which wrap like a cloak around our technical expertise. The members of 'RegCo' are entitled to expect our support, but at the same should anticipate an exceedingly strong reaction from more than 100,000 qualified solicitors should they let us down. They know, and we know, that while they operate as a safety net to catch those whose conduct lets down their professional colleagues, their primary role is to ensure that we all strive to work at the highest possible standards for the benefit of our clients, with whose affairs we are fortunate enough to have been entrusted. This is a great responsibility, of which we should be proud.

## Deserving recognition

And so it was with some considerable pride that I was witness to the acknowledgment of the professional and extra-curricular activities of a most select group of individuals, the recipients of the Yorkshire Lawyer Awards (details of whom are to be found among these pages). It struck me that we were publicly acknowledging performances at exceedingly high levels of competence and professionalism, which could not have been achieved without technical expertise – even brilliance – dedication to the client, and an ability to know instinctively, through a thorough understanding of the role of a solicitor in the 21st century, how to deliver for the client the desired result. I told the great and good at the ceremony that it was my view that one of the objectives of the awards was to ensure that we set targets high, that we all strive to achieve the very best for our clients

with this combination of technical ability and ethical code, and that we not only maintain but improve the standards of the entire profession. We have a phenomenally gifted group of lawyers in Leeds and Yorkshire, although few will ever be publicly acknowledged. We know that, for the most part, it is satisfaction enough that the client achieves the best possible result, even if this was not their stated objective.

We all look to the Law Society, and the New Law Society, to continue to provide proper regulation. While this is far more important than the menu of membership services the Law Society can deliver, the latter cannot be ignored, not least because of the direct and indirect benefit that we derive from such services as the ethics helpline and international practice advice, through to the Gazette and specialist support for practice areas.

I am a strong supporter of both functions of the Law Society, but the Law Society itself needs to know and understand your views, so that its decisions are fully informed. Please send your comments to [transition.feedback@lawsociety.org.uk](mailto:transition.feedback@lawsociety.org.uk) or to me at [ianmccombie@mccombie.co.uk](mailto:ianmccombie@mccombie.co.uk), and I shall compile and forward them on. But I warn you: although the Law Society may well be accused of consulting within too short a time frame, or of not informing its members of the good things it is actually doing, it is a fact that it is very hard for both them and me to obtain feedback from members of the profession, all of whom are understandably swamped with more immediate daily problems. I urge you all, from judge through to trainee, to consider these issues carefully, consult your Gazette, browse the Law Society website, inform yourself, and present your views. I look forward to hearing from you. ◻