



BAR COUNCIL NEWS UPDATE – FRIDAY 13 MARCH 2020

Budget

[Politics Home](#), [The Guardian](#) – The media reports on the Bar Council’s reaction to the new Chancellor’s first Budget.

Amanda Pinto QC, Chair of the Bar, said: “Measures announced in the Chancellor’s Budget to tackle youth crime and provide better support for victims, especially of domestic abuse, are a positive step, but they only tackle part of the problem. A fragmented approach to repairing the justice system is not the answer. We have been calling for 10 key areas of investment across the entire justice system to reverse declining confidence in justice in our country.

“Not a day goes by when we don’t read about woeful crime detection rates, with some crimes not even being investigated because of squeezed police resources, fewer prosecutions and courts sitting empty. The Treasury’s budget plans need to be implemented in addition to, not instead of, an urgent cash injection for legal aid, a freeze on court closures, improved rehabilitation of offenders and a serious commitment to better decision making across Whitehall, otherwise the whole system will breakdown.

“We hope that the extra £5billion made available for the NHS and other public services to cope with coronavirus extends to the courts, which will come under increasing pressure should virus-related restrictions take hold.”

Women at the Bar

The Times – The Times reports that whilst more women are coming to the Bar and joining the solicitors’ profession, fewer are making Silk and partner level in law firms.

The Times reports that the Bar Council is launching an ‘accelerator programme’ to tackle the problem.

Amanda Pinto, QC, Chair of the Bar, told The Times that progress has been too slow. She said: “Unless we act now to stem the loss of talented advocates at the Bar, it will take way too long to achieve anything resembling equality.”

The Times reports: “Later this year the Council will launch an accelerator programme, which includes support for those in the first seven years of practice.

“The programme also focuses on flexible working, mentoring and increasing visible role models, as we seek to tackle sexual harassment, mistreatment and bullying of barristers,” Pinto says. The scheme, she says, wants legal directories to “reflect the diverse talent at the Bar accurately, using unbiased language”. The directories, which rank barristers and solicitors, have been criticised for including too few women and using gender-biased language to describe individuals.

Elsewhere in The Times, Marian Bloodworth, deputy chair of the Employment Lawyers Association and a partner at Kemp Little, [looks at how solicitors allocate work to employment law barristers](#) and what these means for women at the Bar. Bloodworth writes that the Bar Council is looking at work allocation.

Regulation

The Times – The Times interviews Helen Phillips, Chair of the Legal Services Board (LSB), who wants to “look more closely” at the way the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) and the Bar Standards Board are dealing with high-profile prosecutions of harassment cases.

In the interview, Phillips touches on the wider issue of regulation and the LSB’s future role/existence.

The Times reports: “Phillips says that part of the reason that the board is still alive and kicking is that primary legislation is required to pack it up — and “there hasn’t been much appetite” with any recent government to make time for such an esoteric bill. However, she says that the argument for further reform of regulation in the legal professions is strong and that ministers should consider moving towards a single regulator for all lawyers in England and Wales.

“She recognises that the funding relationship between the two large “trade union” bodies for lawyers — the Law Society for solicitors and the Bar Council for barristers — and their regulators is “a bugbear” for the profession.

“The practising certificate fees for both sides of the profession fund regulation and public interest functions. Phillips says that a model that would split those functions — with the society and the council becoming voluntary membership organisations

— appeals to many lawyers who are paying the bills. She says that the board is looking at that funding structure, but cautions: “As the oversight body we are going to have to be a bit wise about how we do that review. We could go to the profession and ask, ‘Would you like [practising certificates] to be cheaper and if you wanted any public interest functions done, would you choose to send a cheque under separate cover to a voluntary membership organisation?’ But there needs to be a bit of preparatory work so that the profession knows how much that [public interest] side will cost.”

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