



**Office of the Legal Services
Complaints Commissioner**



The Law Society

Zahida Manzoor CBE
Commissioner

PRESS NOTICE

4 MARCH 2009

**EMBARGOED TO 9.00AM WEDNESDAY
4 MARCH 2009**

**LAW SOCIETY AND COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCE A RANGE OF
CLIENT CARE MEASURES**

The Law Society and the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner are pleased to announce a range of client care measures costing £275,000, which are designed to boost capability and capacity to deal with clients in the solicitors' profession.

In June 2008 the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, Zahida Manzoor CBE, announced that she would be imposing a penalty of £275,000 on the Law Society following her decision to declare the complaints handling plan submitted by the Legal Complaints Service as inadequate.

The Commissioner and the Law Society have been discussing ways forward, considering in particular measures to improve client care. Today (4 March 2009), the Commissioner and the Law Society are pleased to announce that they have reached a regulatory settlement with the monies devoted to a range of measures primarily aimed at improving client care by solicitors.

- Impartiality • Transparency • Efficiency • Effective remedy •

Appointed under the Access to Justice Act 1999 as an independent regulator working with the Law Society on behalf of the consumer to improve standards in complaints handling

The measures agreed by the Commissioner include the Law Society committing £100,000 to establish a consultancy service, which, when rolled out will look to support around 200 solicitors' firms who have been identified as most in need of client care assistance.

The aim of the consultancy service is to provide support and information on best practice in client care and complaints handling and evaluate and monitor firms' progress as they implement the necessary changes. The Society will also launch a client care and complaints handling helpline as part of its existing helpline services.

The Commissioner said:

“I am very pleased that I have been able, with the Law Society, to find a pragmatic solution to ensure that the money from the penalty, that would otherwise have not been made available for complaints handling, is being used to assist the profession and will ultimately benefit the consumer. This can only be seen as good news.”

Des Hudson, Law Society Chief Executive, said: “We are pleased that the Commissioner has accepted proposals from the Society to use the funds to promote diversity and excellence in the profession and improve client care. The initiative will have links to the existing and substantial range of Law Society activities to broaden access to the profession and improve standards of client care and complaints handling within the profession.”

Another aspect of the agreement will provide additional funding to the Solicitors' Diversity Access Scheme. With the support of the Law Society Charity, the Solicitors' Diversity Access Scheme is able to award scholarships to a number of students to enable them to undertake courses leading to qualification as a solicitor. The Law Society will make an additional £105,000 to fund two additional places per year for five years.



Des Hudson, said: “The Society is extremely pleased that alongside the Law Society charity we will be able to invest in the future of new entrants to the profession, through the vehicle of the Diversity Access Scheme. We know there are factors that can stand in the way of talented individuals taking up a career in law. With the support of this scheme we hope that individuals, who would have otherwise struggled, can now break through. It is vital that the solicitors profession embraces people from every kind of background and experience.”

The Commissioner commented:

“I am particularly pleased that the Diversity Access Scheme enables those who otherwise would not be able to study to be a solicitor realise their ambitions. This additional funding will extend the Scheme further and mean ten deserving people will be able to join the legal profession over the next five years.”

The Law Society has also agreed to make quarterly reports to the Commissioner to update her on progress and expenditure under the programme of agreed measures. The first report will cover the period ending 31 March 2009.

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Notes to Editors

1. Ms Manzoor CBE was appointed Legal Services Complaints Commissioner (the Commissioner) in February 2004 in addition to her role as Legal Services Ombudsman (LSO). The Commissioner only has powers in relation to the Law Society of England and Wales.
2. The roles of the LSO and the Commissioner are distinct. The LSO examines the handling of individual complaints by the legal professional bodies on behalf of members of the public. The Commissioner examines the Law Society’s capability to handle complaints made about its members efficiently and effectively.
3. On 3 June 2008, the Commissioner announced that she would be imposing a penalty of £275,000 on the Law Society following her decision to declare its complaints handling Plan for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009 inadequate to secure the effective and efficient handling of complaints.



4. The Commissioner and the Law Society have reached a regulatory settlement, which has resulted in the sum of £275,000 being put towards a range of measures. The Law Society has agreed to:

- Establish a Consultancy Service, costing £100,000 which will involve the recruitment and training of 20 consultants nationally. These consultants will work alongside the Solicitors Regulation Authority to target around 200 firms it has identified need help with client care and complaints handling.
- Set up a dedicated client care and complaints helpline, which will involve taking over the Legal Complaints Service's telephone helpline for solicitors (Lawyerline) and relocating it to its very successful Helplines team, staffed by solicitors. It has committed £30,000 to recruit additional resource, train the existing team and launch the new complaints helpline.
- Make available an additional £105,000 to fund two additional places per year over five years on its Diversity Access Scheme.
- Recruit a Client Care Project Manager at a cost of £40,000, who will be responsible for overseeing the range of measures agreed, providing project plans and reporting to the Commissioner on a quarterly basis.

5. Additional background information on the measures is available on the Commissioner's website at www.olsc.gov.uk

6. For more details and to apply for the Diversity Access Scheme please visit <http://juniorlawyers.lawsociety.org.uk/node/140>

7. For media enquiries please contact

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