

# Law schools in Wales must adapt to meet challenges

January 31, 2018 sees the launch of the Learned Society of Wales' position paper on the future for legal education and practice in Wales, which calls for a debate and action plan for how the Welsh law schools, judiciary, Law Society, the Bar and wider profession in Wales working together could support the growth of a globally competitive legal sector in Wales.

The position paper is being published in response to at least four pressing challenges that present both threats and opportunities to the delivery of legal services in Wales.

First among these is the size of the legal profession itself.

Although the Welsh legal sector contributes more than £700m to the economy and employs approximately 5,000 solicitors in 450 firms, the sector is characterised primarily by small-to-medium-sized practices.

Only two firms in Wales are within the top 100 legal practices, so there is an issue of scale. There is a real danger that Wales is not investing in the future with only 135 training contracts available in Wales last year.

The challenge relates to the competitiveness of legal practice in Wales - we need to develop a world outlook, rather than an inward-looking one.

Secondly, Brexit brings unknown challenges and risks, including the

**The way we teach law in Wales, and the country's legal sector must adapt in order to thrive in a time of threats and opportunities, argues Professor Iwan Davies**

risk that the supremacy of the English Common Law and courts as the international forum for commercial disputes may not survive in its current form.

There is an imperative for Wales to develop a distinctive voice and identity - and a real opportunity to plan a future for Welsh legal practice that is genuinely able to work internationally as well as nationally.

Here the Welsh Government has an important role to play to promote the role of law both in economic and civic society terms, and the appointment of the Thomas Commission bodes well in this regard.

A third challenge lies in the fact that higher education in Wales has limited resources and is strongly competitive.

A more cohesive and collaborative approach among the five law schools in Wales, through research planning as well as learning and teaching strategies at all levels, could yield deeper thinking and engagement, increasing the capacity of Wales to compete globally in terms of legal services.

Welsh law schools look like any other law school in England and

this is for a good reason, because we compete for students and research funding.

While law schools based in Wales need a global reach, they also need to develop further a strong Welsh identity within the context of an exciting and outward-looking brand.

Finally, we must recognize that

legal service delivery is being disrupted by the application of technologies such as artificial intelligence, natural language processing and machine learning.

Routine processes, such as document production and discovery, can be automated with increasing ease, delivering a faster, more efficient and more cost-effective service for clients.

The changing way in which consumers obtain legal advice, and how much they pay for that advice, requires practices to rethink their business models.

It also requires them to consider what skills they expect from their employees, as some traditional roles may quickly be consigned to history, replaced by legal engineers, legal process analysts, and legal project managers.

I believe that Wales can take a UK, if not European, lead in this respect and, as such, it is entirely fitting that the Learned Society's position paper will be launched during the inaugural LegalTech Wales conference at the Liberty Stadium (on January 31).

With speakers including Professor Richard Susskind and the Law Society's Christina Blacklaws, the conference will enable delegates from across the sector to gain insights into the application of technology in legal services and to see examples of LegalTech in practice.

Given the challenges outlined

above, there is a genuine opportunity for Wales to create an infrastructure that stimulates and empowers modern legal practice, research and education, and which is marked out by a skilled workforce able and willing to apply technology in legal practice.

In turn, this will enable the growth of a more globally competitive and vibrant legal sector that attracts more law firms to locate in Wales.

Progressive legal skills development in Wales must underpin all of this development.

Consultation with the sector is essential to inform a fit-for-future purpose, Wales-wide approach to skills development.

Similarly, we must work collaboratively to identify the specific skills and capacities that the sector will need to develop in order to drive growth and innovation across the business of law in Wales, and must build a strategy that focuses on developing legal research and development to meet these requirements in collaboration with Welsh Government.

The law is sufficiently coherent and the Welsh system is small enough to organise - it is time that we seriously got down to the legal services business in Wales.

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