Report on the 5th Annual National Equalities Conference: 'Promoting Equal Access to the Legal Profession and Justice'

The conference aims were to promote equal access to justice and the legal profession across all levels of the profession. It also aimed to encourage discussions between barristers, solicitors, policymakers and future lawyers. The conference brought together lawyers and law students from across the UK and from abroad.

The Conference also brought together policymakers and members of the Bar Council, the Law Society of England and Wales and the Judiciary, including the Chair of the Bar Council, President of the Law Society.

Talks by Chantal-Aimee Doerries QC (Chairman of the Bar); Jonathan Smithers (President of the Law Society) and Sir Robin Knowles CBE provided excellent, informative and inspiring insights into access to justice, which is currently a pressing issue. Sir Robin Knowles CBE shared invaluable knowledge from his longstanding contribution towards improving access to justice. He noted that even though this country has one of the most sophisticated and respected justice systems, it cannot be taken for granted. Every lawyer – even an aspiring one – has a responsibility to preserve and continue to perfect an equal and accessible legal system.

> *"Justice without access is no justice"*
> **Sir Robin Knowles CBE**

Chantal-Aimee Doerries QC and Jonathan Smithers informed the audience of the work the Bar Council and the Law Society of England and Wales are doing in this area and showed their support and enthusiasm for further improvements in access to justice. They also informed the audience about actions that the Law Society and the Bar Council are taking to promote equality and improve social mobility among solicitors and barristers. They emphasised the importance of ensuring that the composition of the legal profession reflects that of the society it is serving, stating what the Bar Council and the Law Society are doing to meet this objective. Further inspiring and informative talks about access to the profession were given by Hilary Heilbron QC and Koser Shaheen. Hilary Heilbron QC, being the daughter of the first female judge in Britain and a leading Arbitrator, shared her invaluable experience in regard to gender equality providing an outstanding factual outline of gender inequality in the last 100 years. A different angle on equal access to the profession -

> *"I have always worked from the premise that I am a barrister that happened to be a woman, not a woman that happened to be a barrister"*
> **Hilary Heilbron QC**

that of practical tips on how to overcome obstacles - was brought to the audience by Koser Shaheen. Ms Shaheen shared invaluable insights into factors that affect access to the profession, including age, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status.

The speakers shared a similar view that while a lot has been done to improve equal access to the legal profession and justice, it is still a work in progress and events like this are important in reducing inequality. After the talks, attendees had an opportunity to continue discussions on equality with the speakers and among each other. The social also provided opportunities to build contacts and share experiences. The conference was also attended by representatives of the Junior Chamber of Advocates (JCA) of Malta - Saman Bugeja, President and Matthew Xuereb, Vice President.

> *"Equality is at the heart of justice"*
> **Fatos Selita**

Overall the conference was a great success. We were delighted to receive excellent feedback on the conference from both the speakers and attendees. The UKLSA is committed to equality and will make even stronger efforts to continue promoting it. Fatos Selita, the President of the UKLSA, said that even though over many years the UKLSA has focused on promoting equal access to justice and the profession, its work aims to promote equality in general because equality is a similar concept in all walks of life.

The UKLSA would like to thank the Law Society and its Junior Lawyers Division for supporting and hosting the conference, the Chair of the Conference for his invaluable contribution and the speakers for the fascinating talks.

Organisers:
UKLSA, Supported by the Junior Lawyers Division of the Law Society

Conference Chair:
Fergus Randolph QC, Brick Court Chambers

Organising Committee:
Fatos Selita, President of the UKLSA
Max Harris, Immediate Past Chair of the Junior Lawyers Division of the Law Society
Yvonne Treacy, The Law Society
Olga Popova, Equalities Co-ordinator, UKLSA