

Paralegal News



Guests listen to speakers at the NALP's inaugural achievement awards ceremony held at the House of Commons

Photo: Wendy Mszyca

Paralegal role is gaining in significance, says Cherie Booth

By Lyndsey Jones

The role of the paralegal is becoming more significant, Cherie Booth QC said at the National Association of Licensed Paralegal's inaugural achievement awards ceremony, held at the House of Commons.

Via a video appearance, Ms Booth, wife of former prime minister Tony Blair, told an audience of about 100 people from law societies and legal groups across the country: "Paralegals are often seen as the Cinderella of the legal profession, but with the changes that are taking place within the profession, the role of a paralegal is becoming more and more significant."

The NALP was celebrating its 23rd anniversary of offering paralegal courses alongside gaining their recent awarding body accreditation from the Office of

the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator, the watchdog for qualifications in England.

Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief executive, who co-hosted the event with her brother Fabian Hamilton, the Labour MP for Leeds north-east, said: "We have come a very long way in 23 years and now we want to raise the profile of professional paralegals. We are about to see a licensed paralegal take on a 25 per cent partnership. That will take on a different significance for the paralegal profession. We are also hoping to become recognised as a regulatory body for paralegals in England and Wales."



Ms Booth offered her support to the Association, saying: "Established in 1987, the NALP has

grown from strength to strength and has an expanding membership."

The inaugural event also aimed to recognize outstanding students who had excelled at NALP courses in 2009. The eight students who won awards were: Laetitia Lugnier, Kelly Millington, Sytha Sor, Hong Li, Rosemary Dack, Pauline Kika, Elsa Gibson and Matthew Ward-Mason.

Ms Booth sent a message of support to the NALP and the award winners. "I am sorry that I am unable to attend the achievement awards, but I would like to congratulate Amanda Hamilton on the recent achievements of the NALP and also send my congratulations to the students for their achievement awards – everyone is a winner."

Matthew Ward-Mason, from

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Cherie Booth supports paralegals

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Manchester, won a Fellowship Award 2009 for demonstrating specialist knowledge in a particular area of law and/or practice.

He said: "It was nice to see so many paralegals in one place at the same time and it was a really enjoyable day at the House of Commons. Winning the award means that all the work I have done over the last seven years has been completely worthwhile. I would recommend the courses to anyone who has an interest in law."

Sytha Sor, from Oldham, Manchester, was presented with an Achievement Award for her Post Graduate Diploma in Paralegal Practice Distance Learning course 2009.

She said: "It was an unexpected yet pleasant surprise to receive an award at The House of Commons. It's an honor to be recognised for my achievement. Studying at NALP allowed me flexibility, with courses that would suit anyone, specifically aimed at various levels of experience both practical and academically.

"The tutors steered me in the right direction throughout my studying rather than spoon feeding me, which allowed me to think about exactly what the assignment wanted."

John Stacey-Hibbert, who was the founder of the NALP and was the General Secretary from 1994 to 2008, was honoured with a life achievement award for the paralegal profession.

"This is a great honour for me. I have loved my work. Lawyers have had something of a bad press over the years. But the British legal system is the best in the world and I am so proud and so blessed to have been part of it. Receiving this award at this place [the House of Commons], the fountainhead of law in this country, is such a joy."

While guests enjoyed canapés and champagne, Fabian Hamilton, who was delighted to be co-hosting the event, joked: "Lawyers can be unpopular but not as unpopular as MPs."

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Left: NALP chief executive Amanda Hamilton with Hong Li. Right: Labour MP Fabian Hamilton congratulates Sytha Sor Photo: Wendy Mszyca

Stress 'poison chalice' of promotion

One in three lawyers suffers from alcohol abuse, drug addiction or depression, Hilary Tilby, the chief executive of counselling charity LawCare said.

Alcohol abuse is double the national average among lawyers and 26 per cent have used cocaine at least once. They are four times more likely to suffer from depression and six times more likely to commit suicide than the general population, she told the NALP's inaugural awards ceremony at the House of Commons.

"It's something of a poison chalice as you move up the slippery pole. You can succumb to pressures there such as eating disorders, drugs and alcohol. Employees suffer in an increasingly pressured world."

The recession has had a major impact of people's stress

levels, she said. LawCare has seen an increase in stress cases and 65 per cent of people suffering stress said it was related to financial problems.

"We need to get to people before they hit a brick wall," Ms Tilby said. "We can talk things through with people and help them to come to their own solutions."

LawCare was set up as a charity 13 years ago by "one man and three dogs in his kitchen". In the first year, the charity dealt with 15 calls mainly from solicitors with drink problems. Now it covers 14 groups, from students to paralegals and judges across the UK. NALP members can turn to the confidential freephone helpline to benefit from the advice.

For more details on LawCare, go to: www.lawcare.org.uk

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Everyone's a winner NALP awards ceremony at House of Commons



High achievers (clockwise from far left): Pauline Kika, Kelly Millington, Rosemary Dack, Matthew Ward-Mason, John Stacey-Hibbert, and Elsa Gibson were honoured at the NALP's achievement awards ceremony Photos: Wendy Mszyca

Woolf reforms ten years on

By Seamus Ryan

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Civil Procedural Rules (CPR). Before they were introduced, civil litigation was seen as too slow, expensive, uncertain and adversarial. The implementation of the CPR was the result of Woolf's famous "Access to Justice" report, commissioned in 1994. The name of the report speaks volumes and supports the view that the old rules of civil litigation were not delivering justice. So ten years on, have things changed for the better?

The rise and rise of litigation: You will probably be familiar with the accusation that Britain has developed a compensation culture. This is the opposite of what Lord Woolf hoped for. Litigation was supposed to be a last resort. So what has happened?

Between 1998 and 2005, the number of claims issued in the County Court fell from 2,245,324 to 1,870,374. Over a similar period of time High Court (Queen's Bench Division) claims fell a staggering amount, just short of 900 per cent. So where have these claims gone?

It is not that we have become a more forgiving society, because there is some truth to the accusation that we are more willing to seek compensation. What seems to have happened is that many more claims are settled before getting anywhere near a trial. The CPR provides a range of pre-action protocols which have proved very successful in encouraging parties to settle claims rather than resort to legal proceedings. So on this point you could regard the CPR as being effective.

Still a slow and costly exercise?

By pushing parties to reach settlements without resorting to the courts, another of Lord Woolf's aims was achieved, namely reducing the time proceedings took. In 1998 it took, on average, 79 weeks to reach trial from the date of issue. In 2005 this fell to 58 weeks. By "front-loading" litigation, settlements are being reached faster and without resorting to full-blown litigation: another success.

Unfortunately, there has been a trade-off for these successes. It is widely accepted that the CPR has not made

legal costs more affordable or predictable. In relation to personal injury claims paid out by the UK motor insurers, legal costs have risen by 840 per cent over a 20-year period. It would be unfair to blame this rise entirely on the CPR, but the rules have had an effect. The problem of excessive costs in litigation is so serious that Lord Justice Rupert Jackson has been conducting a year-long review into legal costs. His preliminary report runs to 663 pages, so no one will be able to accuse him of not being thorough!

The Civil Justice Council has also started a three-year programme, entitled "A Vision for Civil Justice", which will try to continue the work that Lord Woolf began. The conclusion of all this study of and research into the CPR will hopefully be a fairer system of justice that allows the rich and poor to enforce their rights.

Seamus Ryan has been working in the legal industry for more than ten years. He is a qualified solicitor, Law society accredited Lexcel consultant, and experienced law lecturer.



Treat yourself to some luxury and save cash

Whether you enjoy playing golf, dining at fabulous restaurants or just want to relax at a spa, you can now treat yourself and save money at the same time.

The NALP has teamed up with the website Keep it Hush to give qualified members free, exclusive access to fantastic offers, at prices that are not available elsewhere on the web or other sales channels.

On Keep it Hush you will find brands such as top hotels Malmaison; Hotel du Vin; London department store Liberty; Searcy – with restaurants such as The Gherkin, St Pancras Grand, National Portrait Restaurant; De Vere – luxury resort hotels with many championship golf courses and fabulous spas; De Vere

Venues; Village Hotels; Greens Health & Fitness Clubs and several more.

As a member you could be enjoying, for example, luxury at a De Vere Hotel from just £39 B&B per room; staying at the gorgeous Hotel du Vin in Henley for just £65 B&B per room; or treating yourself to the latest handbag from Liberty at up to an amazing 70 per cent off.

Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief executive, said: “We are delighted to be able to offer this fantastic new benefit to members. You will be able to enjoy your leisure time for a fraction of the price.”

Membership is open only to Associate, Graduate and Fellow members of the NALP.

New arrivals

Our course administrator and membership secretary, Sandra Perex-Carrion, is leaving to have a baby. Julia Collier will be taking over the role.

“We would like to thank Sandra for all the work she has done over the last year and we wish her all the best,” Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief executive, said. “We’d also like to welcome Julia to the team.”

On the cards

Membership cards will soon be issued quarterly for all NALP members on the following dates: February 1, May 1, August 1 and November 1. “Membership cards are being introduced after a few suggestions made by members. It will be an added benefit for members to provide proof of membership of a professional body, and ID,” Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief executive, said.

I love the course and wish I could study faster

This is really good news (Paralegal News, Winter 2010). Well done all of you at NALP. I am LOVING this course and it is already proving of immense benefit in my work with victims of domestic violence. Recently I sat in a Directions hearing, and the solicitor with whom I have worked for nearly two years for my client asked if I would consider joining the firm when I have finished my studies as an expert paralegal in domestic violence cases. I am only frustrated (an understatement!) that I work full time and so do not have enough hours in the day to study faster.

An NALP student who started studying in late January 2010

Reflexology helps to beat stress

Thank you for the newsletter (Paralegal News, Winter 2010) and the promising information contained in it. It has just brightened up my lunch hour! I am interested in the confidential helpline and assistance to those many pressured paralegals. This has provoked me into a thought that I work four days a week and trained as a colour reflexologist some years back now so see clients to give treatments on my day off. Reflexology is an excellent treatment for stress.

Judy Talbot, Farnham, Surrey

Get in touch

Whether you have a comment about an article in Paralegal News or want to share your views on paralegal issues, Paralegal News would like to hear from you. Email us at: info@nationalparalegals.co.uk