

# Paralegal News

## Stores show little interest as delay hits 'Tesco' law



The Co-op is the only major high street chain so far to commit itself publicly to applying for ABS

Picture: Co-op

### By Gavin O'Toole

A major landmark in the sweeping deregulation of the UK legal profession that offers promising opportunities for paralegals will be delayed while the Solicitors' Regulation Authority awaits parliamentary approval.

Haggling with the Ministry of Justice over the details of alternative business structures (ABS) means the solicitors' body will still not have the power to license these by the long-awaited 6 October launch date.

The MoJ is hoping to give the green light by the end of the year, and the SRA now expects to start licensing in early 2012, enabling groups such as the Co-op to kick off the high street legal revolution.

A war of words about the delay broke out in early September when Professor Stephen Mayson, director of the Legal Services Policy Institute, branded the inability to meet the target date for

launching ABS, which enable legal services providers to be owned by non-lawyers, as a "shambles".

His comments forced SRA chairman Charles Plant to deny strenuously that his authority was responsible. The SRA says the delay was caused by the need to finalise details of appeals in cases where a licence is not granted and provisions allowing the SRA to check spent convictions.

It says it has had "firm discussions" with 50 organisations looking at becoming ABS and insists that it has the administrative capacity to deal with all applications within statutory deadlines. An SRA spokesman said: "The ABS

**'We're still working to set up an ABS and we will work around whatever the new timetable will be'**

A spokesman for the Co-op

team is well set up to deal with whatever number of organisations contact us."

Some legal professionals were expecting a scramble among supermarkets to take advantage of ABS and the Legal Services Board has reported high interest among banks and private equity houses.

However, while reports about the latest delay suggested some firms were angered by the hold-up, leading supermarket chains and banks are in fact showing little interest. Spokesmen for Tesco, Sainsburys, NatWest bank and Lloyds TSB all said they had no plans to offer ABS services.

In 2009 Bloomberg reported that the 2007 Legal Services Act, dubbed "Tesco law", that created ABS had prompted private equity funds to consider investing in UK law firms and that Lyceum Capital, a London-based leveraged buyout firm, might also invest in other legal services models. However, a Lyceum spokesman asked last week whether it was pursuing ABS declined to comment.

The Co-op is the only major high street chain so far to commit itself publicly to applying for ABS. When Co-operative Legal Services was launched in 2006 it planned to employ 150 people within five years – but it has grown rapidly and now employs 400.

Customers are serviced through a call centre in Bristol but a pilot project in June offering legal advice at branches of the Co-op and Britannia banks is to be extended. Although this pilot pioneers existing legal services provided by the Co-op, ABS would enable it to expand these significantly.

A Co-op spokesman said they were aware of the latest delay, adding: "We're still working to set up an ABS and we will work around whatever the new timetable will be."

Other groups that have reportedly expressed an interest in deregulation include insurer Abbey Protection and Yorkshire law firm Last Cawthra Feather in association with Freeserve founder Ajaz Ahmed.



# NALP board structure reformed

The NALP has reformed the structure of its advisory board, in order for the Association to focus on specific areas and ensure that proper governance and regulations are met.

The advisory board has been divided into two, with one covering the academic side of the business and the other overseeing strategy and planning.

'The role of the academic board is to ensure that our qualifications are fit for purpose, compliant with regulatory and legal requirements and that assessments are checked and approved for consistency, level, clarity, equality and diversity,' Amanda Hamilton, NALP chief executive, said.

The executive board will assist Ms Hamilton with the overall governance and strategic planning of the NALP.

On the academic board, members include Professor Tom Mortimer, head of Anglia Law School and director of the International Law Unit, both at Anglia Ruskin University.

Members of the executive board include Professor Mike Molan, executive dean of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences at London South Bank university, and Rita Leat, managing director of Leat Services, a business training consultancy. She is also a former commercial lawyer and chief executive of a professional representative and regulatory body.

"We are very pleased to welcome new members onto both boards and we are very grateful for the expertise they are bringing to the association and for the time they are devoting to helping us expand and develop the NALP," Ms Hamilton said.

## Contact us

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## Letter from the chief executive

# We aim to help you develop your career



'The practical paralegal course is designed to enhance your chance of finding work'

We have been working very hard to expand our training with a view to offering our members a broader range of courses so that you can improve and develop your practical paralegal skills.

We decided to make this move because of the high demand for this type of career development from our members.

The practical paralegal course not only provides insight into the legal profession but also into the kind of work you can be called on to perform as a paralegal. It is designed to enhance your chance of finding work and encourage you to work as a freelance. For more information on this, please read our article on Page 3.

This year we have also been ensuring that the NALP fulfills and complies with its regulatory demands.

The NALP was successfully awarded the nationally recognised Ofqual status in December 2009. As a result of this and the continued growth of our membership, we have decided to restructure the make-up of our boards to ensure best practice and good governance at all times.

As you can read in more detail opposite, the current advisory board will be split into two – the executive board and the academic board. I would like to welcome all the new board members and also thank them for their continued support of the NALP.

And finally, we are urging our members to support Breast Cancer Awareness month (see page 3). This is a great cause and if you do hold a fundraising event, we'd love to hear how it went and how much you raised. Email us at: [info@nationalparalegals.co.uk](mailto:info@nationalparalegals.co.uk).

We look forward to hearing from you.

Amanda Hamilton, Chief Executive

## Pink pounds Raise money for cancer care



Put your boss on tea-making duties for the day and charge everyone £2 for a cuppa to help raise money for charity. Or sell some pink cakes. Or ask your colleagues to donate £2 to guess the amount of sweets in a jar. The closest estimate wins the sweets.

These are just some of the activities you can do in your office in October to help raise cash for Breast Cancer Care.

To support the 50,000 people who are diagnosed with the disease every year in the UK, you are being encouraged to take part in the charity's Pink Friday fundraising campaign throughout Breast Cancer Awareness month.

The aim is to help fund services, such as the charity's helpline, information points in hospitals and support groups for breast

cancer patients. Becoming involved with Pink Fridays is easy to do and can include anything from a tea break in the office with pink food, to a pink pamper party with your friends at home.

Lisa Snowdon, Breast Cancer Care ambassador, said: "Did you know that every day in the UK more than 130 people are diagnosed with breast cancer? By holding a Pink Friday pamper party or selling some pink cupcakes (my personal favourites!) in your office, you will help to ensure Breast Cancer Care can be there for each and every one of them."

To register for a free Pink Fridays fundraising kit, full of party ideas and fundraising tips, visit [www.breastcancercare.org.uk/pinkfridays](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/pinkfridays) or call 0870 164 9422.

## Tie-ups with new partners expand training options

By Lyndsey Jones

The NALP is expanding its professional development courses due to high demand by launching several tie-ups with new training partners nationwide.

The Association has created the company NALP Training, which offers a wide range of courses accredited by the NALP. NALP Training has agreed deals with Reed Learning and Learning 4 Legals to offer professional development courses and an introduction to law.

Other tie-ups include those with Accounting Comes Alive, Stonebridge Associated Colleges and AH Paralegal. All offer courses that can help paralegals to develop their practical skills and enhance their career path.

Every year, thousands of students on our training partners' courses become more effective in their jobs after learning how to improve their skill sets.

If, for example, you would like to learn more about what it takes to be an effective freelance, the AH Paralegal

Practical Skills course is worth a look. The training company, founded by NALP chief executive Amanda Hamilton, is branching out into more cities, such as Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol and Cardiff, because of high demand and oversubscription of places.

Courses run by Learning 4 Legals and accredited by the NALP are aimed at paralegals, legal secretaries and at those just entering the legal profession.

With online legal tutors, they will guide you through your chosen disciplines and will aim to give you a background to law, with high-street practice experience, to-

gether with an understanding of the legal processes involved.

"We hope to tutor legal professionals by helping them achieve a more practical understanding of their desired chosen discipline," the Learning 4 Legals website says. "Our aim is constantly to help in your learning."

Reed Learning offers a range of courses including time management and essential business writing skills. "Both our permanent trainers and faculty members are experts in their respective fields, and the overall quality of our training is in the ca-

Every year, thousands of students on our training partners' courses become more effective in their jobs

pable hands of an independent standards board," Reed Learning says.

Accounting Comes Alive aims to improve financial literacy. Its courses enable "the translation of the accounting jargon that appears in legal documents into understandable, logical and meaningful information", the company says.

"This is an exciting time for the NALP and its members. We are continuing to expand our training and this will give our members a greater choice in how to improve their skills and develop their career," Ms Hamilton says.

For more information, go to the courses section at: [www.nationalparalegals.co.uk](http://www.nationalparalegals.co.uk)

### Courses at a glance

#### Training on offer includes:

Level 1 entry such as Wills and Probate and Employment law; and professional development, such as negotiation skills and the art of being brilliant.

# Paralegal support groups appeal for members to join

By Patrick Surlis

NALP members, who are setting up support groups across the country in an effort to pool resources and knowledge, are appealing for other paralegals to join them.

Three groups have so far been set up in Surrey, Hampshire and Lincolnshire and all of them are looking to expand their membership. Each is coordinated by enthusiastic paralegals eager to create an informal environment for mentoring and peer-to-peer support.

They also offer the chance to share ideas, experiences and potential job opportunities with like-minded people.

Surrey group coordinator Romolu Rivera said that “with a limited number of opportunities for work in Britain, paralegals need to be more responsive to the demands of the job and coordination can help achieve that”.

“Just like in any industry, if people act as individuals it is harder to be noticed but by coming together paralegals can support one another,” he added.

Mr Rivera said he was considering holding either monthly or quarterly meetings, which could act as a forum to share ideas and information regarding work experience and job opportunities.

At the moment the three support groups are still in their infancy in terms of mem-

bership and infrastructure. But paralegals interested in networking with other professionals in the legal sector are encouraged to join or set up their own group in their local area. Any new member of one of these support groups is also urged to join the NALP.

NALP associate member Mark Reed has recently joined the Surrey group. He said that “the benefit of local meetings is being able to share experiences both



**‘By coming together, paralegals can support one another’**

**Romolu Rivera,  
Surrey group  
coordinator**

in terms of work and in terms of social events.

“Keeping in touch with like-minded people with similar qualifications helps to expand the strength of the message about the paralegal profession,” Mr Reed said.

Keith Layton-Barnett, an independent paralegal based in Lincolnshire, shares those feelings. He is keen to set up a support group that meets quarterly or monthly depending on demand and which could become part of a network spreading across the county and beyond.

He said that “paralegals often have different specialisations and a support group would be an excellent way to alert one another to potential work opportunities in different legal areas”.

These groups represent just the start of a large network to be spread across England and Wales. Whether your motivation is to develop contacts, to share potential work opportunities or to establish friendships, you are welcome to join. For more information, email the contact listed closest to your home town.

## Letters

### Thank you for your excellent feedback

I would very much like to convey my heartfelt thanks to Maria Richards [Level 4 Diploma in Paralegal Studies tutor] who has provided excellent feedback throughout this course, as well as food for thought. Maria is so very good and very measured.

Jane Warren, recent graduate in Level 4 Diploma in Paralegal Studies

### Embark on this road of knowledge

My experience in undertaking to do NALP courses has been a road of satisfaction and passion. For non-lawyers who wish to embark on the legal foundation of knowledge but lack either the funds or the confidence, the NALP route is a must. The courses turned my legal comprehension (as well as my life) around in a rewarding way. I am not only able to offer some assistance to those who seek my help but am more confident and aware of legal rights, policies and legislations.

Deena Stephens,  
Fellowship Award graduate

### I feel equal to my solicitor colleagues

The Level 4 Diploma in Paralegal Studies has added credibility to my position as a contract manager. I can speak to clients with the knowledge that I am able to do so on an equal basis as my solicitor colleagues. The course is a flexible way to learn without the need to sit many exams, which require a lot of time and are hard to accommodate when working.

Mark Reed, recent NALP graduate

### Please get in touch

Tell us what you think of Paralegal News, or comment on our training courses and let us know how they have helped you. Letters and articles may be edited at the discretion of the editor. Please email us at: [info@national.paralegals.co.uk](mailto:info@national.paralegals.co.uk)

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