

Leader's report

1. This report sets out the main events and developments since I became leader of Circuit on 1/1/17

Bar Council meetings / other principal meetings

2. I have attended numerous meetings on behalf of Circuit, see Annex A for further details

Representation of Circuit

3. I have represented Circuit at various events, see Annex B for further details

Changes in the Circuit 'team'

4. The Circuit management committee ("mancom") lost through retirement towards the end of 2017 Janet Gedrych (Angel) and Nia Gowman (30PP). Many thanks to them for their contribution. Following nomination (but no election) David Elias QC (9PP) and Catrin Jenkins (Angel) joined the committee.
5. David Harris (Iscoed) retired as Circuit election officer at the end of 2017. Many thanks to him for all his work over the years. He was replaced by Ben Blakemore (Iscoed)
6. Ian Wright (Iscoed) retired as the Swansea junior in 2017. Many thanks to him for his contribution over many years). I appointed Dominic Boothroyd (Angel) as his successor.
7. Caroline Rees QC (9PP) continues as the Cardiff 'junior' for now. Following her appointment to silk, I will appoint a replacement shortly

Circuit Administrator

8. As you know Dee Baily resigned from her post as administrator in the Spring of 2017.
9. Following an open recruitment process, Abi Hobson was appointed as administrator, initially on a 1 year fixed term contract, in June 2017.
10. However, members of Mancom and other members of Circuit have all been delighted and impressed at how Abi has settled into the role.
11. Abi has recently accepted Circuit's offer to make her contract of employment permanent

Finances

12. See separate report from Rhodri Williams QC (30PP) Circuit Treasurer

Education / Training

13. See separate report by Heath Edwards (9PP) Director of Education

AGFS

14. The new Advocates Graduated Fees Scheme ("AGFS") for criminal practitioners has come into effect.
15. The CBA held a survey of its members in March in relation to the new AGFS. The result of the survey led the CBA to call for action in response to the new scheme. In particular, the CBA called for its members to decline to accept briefs with legal aid certificates dated after 1/4/18.
16. With very few exceptions, Circuit members have individually decided to support the call for action. Further action may follow

Bar Mess / Dinners / Social events

17. Details of Bar mess / Circuit dinners held since 1/1/17 are set out in Annex C.
18. Hopefully, there will be an informal mess arranged shortly in each of the 3 Circuit centres.
19. Circuit cricket: I am delighted (apart from some mildly disastrous personal consequences) to report a 'successful' cricket season last year. Circuit took part in an excellent tournament with the Western Circuit last July.

Visit of the Chairs of the Bar

20. Circuit hosted successful visits by Andrew Langdon QC (Bar Chair 2017) and Andrew Walker QC (Bar Chair 2018) in 2017 and 2018 respectively to Cardiff and Swansea.
21. Each visit followed the established pattern. The chairs visited 9PP, 30PP, Apex and Civitas in Cardiff on the first day and Pendragon, Angel and Iscoed chambers in Swansea on the second day. There were also meetings in the robing room at Cardiff and Swansea Crown Courts in both years.
22. The Chairs and their respective parties were also guests of Circuit on the first night of their visits at which all chambers on Circuit were represented.
23. Andrew Walker QC had already visited Chester before his visit to south Wales.

The Circuit Website

24. The Circuit website has been overhauled. There is also now an excellent Twitter feed, which is attributable to Abi.
25. We have added a library section to the website for members to post articles on recent unusual cases / developments in the law etc (with links to the relevant members and their chambers). This was the result of a suggestion raised at a meeting of the South West Wales Group of local authorities. Can I please encourage members to submit articles to Abi for posting onto the website.

26. This library facility will also be used to post training material in the future.

Circuit Publicity

27. Mancom has approved a new logo for Circuit, which is now used on the website and all communication from Circuit.

28. Mancom has also approved new promotional material for Circuit to use to (a) raise the profile of Circuit generally and (b) promote the diverse range of services offered by members of Circuit

The Welsh Government / Use of Circuit members

29. Following a number of complaints from members, Paul Lewis QC and I wrote a joint letter at the turn of 2016/7 to Mick Antoniw AM, then Counsel General for Wales, expressing our disappointment that the WG had not instructed any circuit member as part of its team to represent it at the 'Brexit' hearings.

30. I received a substantive response seeking to justify the choice on the grounds of the need for particular expertise and shortage of time, but also indicating a willingness to use Circuit based counsel. There was also an indication that there would be a competition later in the year for further counsel to be appointed to the WG panel of advocates.

31. I thereafter adopted a somewhat more conciliatory approach by inviting him and Jeff Godfrey (WG Director for Legal Services) to attend the Circuit Dinner in May 2017. Both attended the dinner and a relatively good rapport as established. Jeff Godfrey delivered a Thursday night seminar.

32. I remained in contact with Mick Antoniw until he was unexpectedly replaced later in 2017.

33. I am pleased to report that Circuit has established a very good rapport with his successor, Jeremy Miles AM. He attended the Circuit dinner as our guest in January 2018. Later Rhodri Williams QC, Jonathan Rees and I

attended a meeting with him and his officials in February 2018. I have had a further follow up meeting with him in April.

34. He appears to be genuinely supportive of supporting the profession in Wales. He has written to the QC organisation at our request with a view urging that organisation to take account of the need for some applicants to have knowledge of 'Welsh' law.

35. There was a WG Panel of Approved Advocates competition in 2017. A further 6 members of Circuit were added to the Panel.

Engagement with the CPS

36. I attended my first CPS grading panels before taking over as leader in late 2016.

37. I held my first annual meeting with Karen Dixon, Senior Crown Prosecutor for North Wales, in Mold in February 2017. The second meeting took place in Mold in February 2018.

38. I had a meeting with Deborah Rogers (Swansea CPS) on 20/4/17 regarding their use of off circuit counsel in a child cruelty case. I was reassured that the circumstances relating to the case were exceptional and that use of Circuit based counsel remained a priority for the CPS.

39. I then had cause to make a similar inquiry of the Cardiff office in relation to another case.

40. I attended a 'CALC' meeting with the temporary Chief Prosecutor for Wales and other CPS officials on 5/6/17

41. David Elias QC represented Circuit at CPS grading panel in 2017. In future I will be involved in any appeals from the panel.

42. I attended a 'CJAC' meeting with the new Chief Crown Prosecutor for Wales in December 2017.

Consultations Exercises

43. The Circuit has submitted a response to the following consultation exercises:

- i) The BSB review of vocational legal education;
- ii) The AGFS scheme;
- iii) The Jackson review on costs;
- iv) The GLS review of regional panels.

The Lord Thomas Commission on Justice in Wales

44. The Circuit was invited by Lord Thomas to contribute evidence to his Commission in January. He asked for an outline paper within a very short deadline.

45. I set up a working party to file a draft submission to the Commission. As part of the exercise, the working party made a fact finding visit to Belfast. This took place on 11/1/18 for 2 days. The party consisted of Rhodri Williams QC, Jonathan Rees, Ben Blakemore, Abi and me. It was an extremely useful visit.

46. The proposed Circuit submission is enclosed with this report for consideration at the AGM

JAC Mentoring Schemes

47. Circuit has set up an informal and confidential mentoring service for Circuit members intending to apply for part time judicial appointments. Abi has had some very favourable feedback. I am delighted to confirm that all members of Circuit recently appointed as Recorders have agreed to join the panel.

48. Please contact Abi who you are interested in taking advantage of this service.

Women's Mentoring Scheme

49. Circuit mancom has approved funding to establish a Circuit Women's mentoring scheme, aimed at keeping women at the Bar, based upon the Western Circuit model.
50. Caroline Rees QC has agreed to lead this initiative. Further details to follow.

Wellbeing / Court Operating Hours

51. Circuit has sought to promote the Bar's Wellbeing agenda. I am currently dealing with an issue as to court opening hours in North Wales (currently on the 'back burner' due to AGFS)
52. Please approach either myself or other senior members of the Circuit Mancom if you have any issues with wellbeing.

Group / Combined Purchase Opportunities

53. Circuit is investigating the possibility of obtaining potential economies of scale for Circuit chambers by group purchasing services (e.g. library facilities, private health membership, data protection insurance). Further details to follow

National Eisteddfod in Cardiff in August 2018

54. Circuit supported a fundraising dinner for the Eisteddfod on 20/4/18 at which approximately 50 members of circuit attended.
55. Approximately 12 Circuit members have agreed to take part in mock trials in Welsh in a combined HMCTS / Circuit / Law Society open evening at Cardiff Crown court during the 10 days of the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff this August. Circuit will also have a stand at the event with Circuit promotional material.
56. Hopefully this will mark the start of a new association for Circuit.

Recorder appointments

57. The much maligned Recorder competition 2017 eventually came to an end towards the end of last year. There were 5 members of circuit appointed as Recorders (3 are allocated to Wales / 2 to the Northern Circuit). I have sent congratulations to them all on behalf of Circuit.
58. All 3 new criminal Recorders allocated to Wales are Circuit members. Sadly none of the 3 new Family Recorders are Circuit members (with 2 of the 3 seemingly without any connections to Wales at all)

Circuit Members / Members List

59. Abi is close to finalising an up to date Circuit members list. Circuit will be providing framed copies to HMCTS, who have agreed to display a copy at each Crown Court and principal Civil Justice Centre robing room on Circuit
60. Circuit mancom has approved setting up a 'retired members' category to Circuit membership. However, this requires an amendment to the Circuit constitution at an AGM to allow for the election of retired members at an AGM or mancom meeting.
61. Mancom would also like to confirm provision for "honorary" members of Circuit. It is understood that we have at least 1 honorary member already (Lord Judge). However, this provision does appear to require an amendment to the Circuit constitution at an AGM to allow for an election at an AGM or mancom.
62. If this honorary provision is approved, mancom has provisionally invited the Solicitor General. I would also wish Circuit to invite Lord Thomas and Carwyn Jones to become honorary members. Further suggestions are also welcome

ANNEX A

Attendance at regular / other meetings on behalf of the Circuit as follows:

1. Bar Council meetings (with Rhodri and Chris Rees) every 6 to 8 weeks in London;
2. The majority of the 3 weekly Bar Council management committee meetings (via video link);
3. Bar leaders / MoJ group meetings (some in person / others by telephone conference call);
4. Various video / telephone meetings with Fulford LJ and Burnett LJ (as he then was) in relation to the Recorder competition in 2017;
5. Various meetings in 2017 with the Nicola Davies J as senior presider / several informal meetings with both Lewis and Picken JJ;
6. Donna Mulhern, head judicial support group and manager of the Courts Estate in Wales, on 5/7/17;
7. The Lord Chancellor's Standing Committee meeting on the Welsh Language in the Justice System at Cardiff on 8/11/17;
8. Bar leaders meeting with the Lord Chief Justice and Sir Brian Leveson at the RCJ on 28/11/17;
9. Circuit meeting in Cardiff (and by link to Swansea and Chester) with a representative from the CBA executive committee (re AGFS) on 26/3/18;
10. Circuit meeting of the Heads of Chambers / Heads of criminal teams (Re AGFS) on 4/4/18
11. Bar leaders meeting with Senior Presiding judge (Macur LJ) regarding AGFS by conference call on 11/4/18
12. Meeting with the QC organisation on the 02/05/18;
13. AGFS meeting with the MOJ and Macur LJ on 02/05/18

ANNEX B

Represented Circuit at the following :

1. The valediction of HHJ Seys-Llewelyn QC outgoing Designated Civil Judge for Wales;
2. The welcome ceremony for HHJ Harrison incoming Designated Civil Judge for Wales;
3. The Swansea University Court;
4. The reception and dinner (with Heath Edwards and Marian Lewis) hosted by the Inns of Court College of Advocacy held in Cardiff in February 2017;
5. The finals of the Citizenship Foundation national schools mock trial competition at the RCJ in March 2017 and (with Jonathan Rees) at the Cardiff Crown Court in March 2018;
6. The swearing in ceremony for Hickinbottom LJ at the Court of Appeal;
7. The Cardiff Law Society dinner on 12/5/17;
8. Due to my injury I was sadly unable to represent Circuit at the inauguration ceremony of the Business and Property Court in Wales at the Cardiff Civil Justice Centre on 24/7/17. However, Rhodri Williams QC was able to represent Circuit;
9. The funeral and later valediction for Martyn Kelly;
10. The Legal Wales Conference (along with Rhodri Williams QC) on 15/9/17;
11. A dinner held by the Midland Circuit at Gray's Inn on 15/9/17;
12. The valediction and later memorial for Sir Christopher Pitchford;
13. The retirement dinner (along with other members of mancom) at the Senedd for Lord Thomas on 27/10/17;
14. The Bar Council / Law Society Annual international reception and dinner on 1/10/17;
15. The swearing in of the Lord Chief Justice on 2/10/17;

16. The annual service at Westminster Abbey to mark the start of the legal year and the Lord Chancellor's breakfast on 2/10/17;
17. The annual service (along with other members of mancom) to mark the start of the legal year on Circuit at Llandaf Cathedral on 8/10/17;
18. The Annual Conference of the Bar (along with Rhodri Williams QC and Ben Blakemore) on 4/11/17;
19. Reception for the Court of Appeal in Cardiff on 7/11/17;
20. The visit to Belfast (along with other members of the working party on the Lord Thomas Commission) on 11/1/18 for 2 days;
21. The AG assessment panel for appointment of junior counsel to the AG Regional Treasury Counsel Panel in London on 15/2/18;
22. The ceremony for the 4 Circuit silks at the RCJ on 26/2/18
23. The welcome ceremony for the new Circuit silks (along with other members of mancom) at Cardiff Crown Court on 1/3/18

ANNEX C

The following Bar mess / Circuit dinners / other social events have been held since 1/1/17:-

1. The 3 successful 'informal' bar messes in Cardiff, Chester and Swansea in the opening term of 2017. Many thanks to the respective 3 local juniors for organising these events;
2. The Circuit dinner at Cardiff Castle in May 2017 to mark the appointment of Hickinbottom LJ to the Court of Appeal and Paul Lewis's 3 years as leader. Many thanks once again to Caroline Rees QC for helping last meeting to organise that dinner with me in Dee's unexpected absence;
3. A number of circuit members took part in the Western Circuit Grand Dinner in Winchester Great Hall on 7/7/17 and the inter-circuit cricket tournament on 8/7/17;
4. The Circuit dinner at Gray's Inn in November 2017;
5. The Circuit Dinner at the 'Coal Exchange' to mark Lord Lloyd -Jones' appointment to the Supreme Court and the end / start of the presiership of Nicola Davies and Picken JJ respectively;
6. The Circuit (with Abi's assistance) was instrumental in the successful organisation of the combined retirement dinner held at the Senedd for Lord Thomas of Cwmgeidd in October 2017;
7. There was a very well attended Bar Human Rights seminar / social evening event in Swansea University on 19/4/18.