

# REGIONAL FOCUS

## ALL CHANGE!

**Phillip Griffiths explains why the rise of ABSs, an increase in technological innovations, remote working, strategic marketing and collaborative partnerships from the regional bar has put Wales centre stage for legal services provision.**



**S**peak to any clerk in a Welsh barristers' chambers about what it's like to do business here and the conversation will usually turn to competition with London chambers.

Speak to most Welsh firms and those with the capacity to deliver complex commercial law advice (for instance) will tell you a similar

story – that it's generally assumed 'London is better'. It's often the reason existing regional talent migrates to the City and why many professionals at the Bar have dual chambers tenancies straddling the 'quality of life' regions to the 'big money' smoke. However, to my mind and to the minds of the more positive, go-getting practitioners, there are plenty of things to be excited about in the regions. These include some unique positions thanks to the implementation of the Legal Services Act 2007, which has played a significant role in the redistribution of success in the business of law.

Over the past five years in Wales alone, we have seen the meteoric rise of home grown Alternative Business Structures, white-labelled and outsourced legal services, 'on-shoring' of legal service brands and the sustainable expansion of leading Welsh legal brands into London. ABSs, such as NewLaw (based in Cardiff), have created joint ventures with national brands - allowing them to obtain work beyond their Welsh headquarters. Combine this with an increase in technological innovations, remote working, more strategic marketing and collaborative partnerships from the regional bar, and the result is a blurring of boundaries and nationwide competition!

As far as we're concerned, blurring the boundaries is a long-awaited and fantastic outcome. We're able to open doors in parts of England that have remained somewhat inaccessible for us in previous years. This is due to the fact that we're able to evidence our work with successful national brands here in Wales as well as specialist cases and client referrals of quality care and practice. This is how it should be.

### **Cymru am Byth (Wales Forever)?**

Wales is always an interesting place to practice law and increasingly so thanks to mounting 'Wexit' discussions regarding the continued separation of powers to the Welsh jurisdiction. As a chambers we want what's best for our clients, wherever they come from. However, we can't ignore these discussions, nor the impact that the wider separation of powers has had and will have.

However, the Welsh Government cannot control the legal market (yet) and parts of Wales are taking the brunt of the impact from LASPO and, to some extent, consolidation. A

recent publication has confirmed what many of us here have long known about deserts of legal provision in Wales. *The Wales Manifesto for Advice*, published by the Law Commission (established by the Legal Action Group) says recruitment into training, legal practice and specialisation in the rural legal economy is 'inadequate' to provide for the longer term. We're not sure that specialisation is always key for vulnerable communities but we know that Access to Justice Wales, the judiciary, academia, the Bar and practitioners are all working hard to find a solution while ensuring access to justice.

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### **On stage**

Welsh chambers have been on the national stage for a while now, thanks to some strategic and well-placed business development campaigns over the past few years. Like any business, we identify growing markets and target our relationship development and efforts to understand where our clients plan to be in the next 10 years; what kind of support they will need, where our fees sit within that framework and what type of expertise (from legal to people skills) we need to attract.

We're incredibly lucky and you won't hear us complaining. Two of the largest legal capitals outside of the overburdened and sometimes overpriced London are Manchester and Cardiff – both regarded for their high level of civil litigation instructions. These cities have (perhaps unwittingly) supported each other in the perception battle regarding 'London is best'. The success of other large regional sets that have expanded and, like us, are used by clients far outside their original base, have all proved the value of hard work, marketing, effective client relationships and quality products. Collectively, the success of regional sets has also had a positive impact on perceptions of (and level of instructions to) barristers practicing outside of London.

It is our belief that 'it's the people that make the place' and, like a true B2B, feel this has been the core of our success here in Wales and now across the bridge. The level of trust and honesty clients have with us, combined with our ability to service a business-focused brief and provide the right product, has paid off over the years and we don't intend to let our doubters stop us. Vive le revolution!

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