



**Informing Progress - Shaping the Future**

## **FOIL Update 12<sup>th</sup> June 2026**



## **Stronger Together: Wellbeing in the Legal Profession**

FOIL recently brought together some of the legal profession's most influential voices on mental health for an inspiring and thought-provoking event, kindly hosted at the London offices of Hill Dickinson. Timed to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Week, *Stronger Together: Wellbeing in the Legal Profession* offered an important opportunity for reflection, discussion, and shared commitment to creating a more sustainable profession.

The session was introduced by Bridget Tatham, Partner at Browne Jacobson and FOIL President, who reminded attendees that the theme of the event was not simply about raising awareness, but about taking meaningful steps to support and protect the wellbeing of those working in the legal profession, starting with yourself.

### **Mark Evans, President, The Law Society**

With almost 30 years of experience in property and private client law, Mark lectures the next generation of legal professionals at The University of Law in Manchester, in addition to his leadership position at The Law Society, making him well placed to speak to the realities of a career in law, its rewards, and its pressures.

Mark's opening remarks portrayed an honest picture of the legal profession, one characterised by an intense work culture. This has been further accelerated by the adoption of technology, which raises the pace of work and the expectations placed on practitioners.

Added to this is the growing competitiveness of the market, highlighting the considerable and sustained pressure that lawyers operate under.

Lawyers show extraordinary commitment to their firms and clients, but that same commitment does not always extend to themselves, their families, or their colleagues. Endurance, Mark highlighted, is essential to sustaining a successful career over time, and yet the personal cost of a career in law is too often overlooked. The impact on individual wellbeing, when left unaddressed, will affect performance, engagement, and motivation. Investing in wellbeing is therefore not simply a matter of personal welfare but fundamental to protecting the longevity of practitioners and the integrity of the work they provide.

The Law Society's Corporate Strategy 2025-28 places responsible business at its heart, with a clear commitment to building a profession that is diverse, inclusive, and sustainable. This means embracing technology to maintain the quality of legal services, while carefully balancing productivity with a genuine commitment to foster wellbeing. Firms, industry bodies, and regulators all have a role to play through promoting healthier working environments, strengthening leadership and culture, investing in training, and equipping individuals with the tools they need to build long and fulfilling careers in law.

There is no single solution, with each individual and firm requiring a tailored approach, and an adaptive, resilient attitude is key to developing wellbeing practices that are truly sustainable. Standards of service excellence, ethical conduct, and professionalism are all intrinsically linked to the wellbeing of the people who deliver them and the profession must do more to support lawyers at every stage of their careers to attract and retain talented people.

Mark concluded by sharing the story of Legal Runner, a social running community for legal professionals that he founded to improve mental health, foster supportive networks, and encourage a healthier work-life balance. The group gives lawyers the opportunity to exercise, de-stress, and step away from the high-pressure environments of the legal sector. With membership now approaching 2,000 and coordinated activity taking place across the UK and in multiple locations worldwide, Legal Runner supports LawCare, one of FOIL's charity partners for 2025/2026. You too can support by purchasing a [Legal Runner T-shirt](#).

### **Richard Martin, CEO, The Mindful Business Charter**

Richard Martin brings to his work a unique combination of perspectives: two decades as a senior partner at several London law firms, and first-hand experience of the mental health challenges that the legal profession often fails to acknowledge.

Richard's own experience came at a time when wellbeing wasn't part of the conversation in legal circles. It was a reminder that regardless of seniority, success, or experience, anyone can struggle with mental health. It was this deeply personal journey that set Richard on a new path dedicated to advocating for meaningful, lasting change in workplace mental health.

Since his recovery, Richard has become one of the most respected voices in this space and in 2018, he was instrumental in the launch of The Mindful Business Charter, becoming the CEO in 2022, a role that reflects his passion for the cause and his determination to drive practical progress.

The Mindful Business Charter is a framework designed with purpose and pragmatism in mind, providing organisations with tangible, actionable commitments aimed at removing unnecessary stress from the workplace and fostering an environment in which people can thrive. At its heart, the Charter is built around four pillars:

**Openness & Respect** - Organisations must ensure colleagues, clients, and suppliers are treated with respect. This includes establishing and honouring preferred methods of communication and working patterns and creating a culture in which feedback flows in a reciprocal, constructive, and considered manner.

**Smart Meetings & Communication** - Meetings should be approached with clear organisation, including clear agendas, appropriate attendee lists, and accessible formats. Distribution lists should be kept only to those relevant to the discussion, with the subject clearly highlighted, avoiding the overuse of email communications that add to the noise of a working day.

**Respecting Rest Periods** - Organisations are encouraged to be mindful of people's core working hours when sending communications, to set clear expectations around response times, and to respect the right of colleagues to take holidays and to be unreachable whilst away.

**Mindful Delegation** - Best practice in delegation means defining context and needs clearly when requesting support, seeking delivery within realistic timeframes, and creating an environment in which people feel confident to speak up when demands are unreasonable. Good delegation is as much about listening as it is about leading.

Richard was keen to acknowledge the role of personal resilience but was equally clear that resilience alone is not sufficient. Having embedded support mechanisms in place that reduce stress before it becomes unmanageable is more than good practice; it is critical. The business case for addressing poor mental health is compelling and well evidenced, with the cost of related absenteeism and presenteeism running to tens of millions annually, the equivalent of more than 10% of total staffing costs. This is not a peripheral concern, but one that sits at the heart of how organisations perform and sustain themselves.

Richard also emphasised the science underpinning stress and its effects, as The World Health Organisation defines stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. This response, when acute, can trigger what is known as the amygdala hijack, an intense overreaction that effectively overrules rational thought. In the context of legal practice, the sources of such triggers are deeply familiar and rooted in what lawyers do, how they work, and how they interact with one another. Even knowing these dynamics and their

effects, the profession often continues to operate in ways that create unnecessary triggers and contribute to deteriorating mental health.

The Mindful Business Charter now counts 140 signatory organisations worldwide, creating a community that represents a significant and growing opportunity to identify and share best practices, and to recognise the capabilities that can deliver real improvements. Richard emphasised the importance of individuals maintaining strong levels of professional self-respect, for themselves and for others, by setting clear boundaries, fostering respectful relationships, and doing so in a way that does not come at the expense of getting things done.

Richard's presentation closed with details of some of the Charter's most recent initiatives, including guidance on Litigation and Transactions, Best Practice Guidelines for the Legal Sector, and a Wellbeing Survey Tool available to member organisations, each a practical expression of the Charter's commitment to turning good intentions into meaningful, measurable action.

### **Elizabeth Rimmer, Chief Executive, LawCare**

The final speaker of the session was Elizabeth Rimmer, a former solicitor specialising in clinical negligence and one of the most committed and well-respected advocates for mental health in the UK legal sector. Since 2014, Elizabeth has served as Chief Executive of LawCare, the mental health charity supporting people across the legal community. Alongside this role, she contributes her expertise voluntarily to the Professional Wellbeing Commission, the Helplines Partnership, and the Conveyancing Foundation, a reflection of her deep commitment to this cause.

Elizabeth opened by sharing the history of LawCare, which was founded in 1997 with a specific focus on supporting solicitors struggling with alcohol addiction, a consequence of the high-stress, long-hours, high-pressure nature of legal work. In the decades since, the charity has expanded its reach to support and promote mental health across the full spectrum of workers in legal services, up to 40% of whom are not lawyers. The team at LawCare all have real-life experience of the legal sector, and its founding principle of advocating for sustainable practices for individuals and organisations remains as true today as it did in 1997.

Legal professionals are navigating an era of rapid change, with geopolitical shifts, accelerating adoption of AI, and evolving expectations of key stakeholder groups having profound effects on the sector. The relationship between Gen Z and more seasoned legal professionals is perhaps the most visible expression of a fundamental shift in workplace values; younger lawyers are entering the profession with clear priorities centred on work-life balance, mental health, and technological fluency, and creating tension with the traditional cultures of long hours and constant availability that have long defined the sector. Bridging that gap is one of the profession's most pressing challenges.

The case for prioritising mental health is not simply a moral one but also a practical one. When mental health is well supported, individuals are more productive, think with greater clarity, exercise sounder judgement, and are better equipped to recover from setbacks and meet the demands placed upon them. This kind of resilience is the foundation of a sustainable career in law, and the profession has both the opportunity and the responsibility to encourage it.

To ground these points in reality, Elizabeth drew on findings from the LawCare *Life in the Law 2025* survey, which painted a sobering picture. The results demand attention from individuals, but also from firms, regulators, and industry bodies:

- 60% of respondents reported having poor mental health;
- 50% had experienced some degree of anxiety in the previous 12 months;
- 43.3% acknowledged their work impacts their mental health, though not always negatively;
- 56.2% indicated they might look for a new role within the next 5 years;
- 32.1% said they were considering leaving the profession altogether in the coming 5 years;
- 32.3% said they were 'not likely' to recommend law as a career.

LawCare's services are designed to be accessible, and are available through a dedicated helpline, by email, or via a live web chat function, which around 30% of people now choose as their preferred means of contact. Beyond direct support, the charity offers a programme of regular events and webinars, as well as *Fit for Law*, which is a free, evidence-based training series developed in collaboration with The Open University and The University of Sheffield, designed to build emotional competence and professional resilience across the legal sector.

Elizabeth drew her session to a close with an important request to keep spreading the word. Following LawCare on social media or subscribing to its regular newsletters is an easy and meaningful way to stay connected with its work and to help amplify its reach. The charity relies on financial support from donations, with around 75% currently coming from industry bodies such as The Law Society, and further contributions from initiatives such as Legal Runner.

As demand for LawCare's services continues to grow, so too does the need for new supporters, and every contribution helps sustain the quality of care the charity provides. In recognition of its importance to the sector, FOIL has selected LawCare as one of its charity partners for 2026.

## Panel Discussion and Q&A

The presentations were followed by an engaging Q&A session, facilitated by Rohana Abeywardana of host firm Hill Dickinson. Richard Martin and Elizabeth Rimmer were joined by Hannah Brierley, Partner at Clyde & Co and, alongside Rohana, a member of the FOIL Diversity & Inclusion Committee.

The first question invited the panel to reflect on the behaviours that leaders can adopt to drive meaningful, day-to-day improvements in wellbeing. Exercise emerged once again as a theme, as it had earlier through the story of Legal Runner, with the panel noting its value as a physical activity, and a way of creating space to think, reflect, and step away from the pace of the working day. The message for leaders was that role-modelling good practice is one of the most powerful tools available to them. When those at the top of an organisation visibly prioritise their own wellbeing, it signals to others that it's OK to do the same.

Setting clear, consistent boundaries around working hours was also highlighted as a practical and important step, one that helps to reduce unnecessary stress and sets a healthy tone for the wider team. Equally, embracing a variety of communication methods, rather than defaulting to a one-size-fits-all approach, can make a significant difference in accommodating the individual needs of colleagues.

The conversation also touched on the particular pressures that accompany leadership in a profession as demanding as the law. The high-stakes nature of legal work can cultivate a culture in which the fear of failure looms large, with many practitioners setting standards for themselves so high that achievement becomes extremely difficult. In a sector as hierarchical as law, the behaviours modelled by those in senior positions carry a disproportionate influence, and the responsibility that comes with that should not be underestimated.

The panel also acknowledged that carrying the weight of a firm's success can be an isolating and lonely experience, something that is rarely said aloud. Leaders are not immune to the pressures they manage, and organisations must be as attentive to the wellbeing of those at all levels. The mutual prosperity of a firm and its leaders is often deeply connected and recognising that interdependence is the first step towards supporting it.

The next question turned to the root causes of unnecessary stress and the real difficulties involved in tackling them, which sit at the heart of the Mindful Business Charter's work and one that Richard was well placed to address, pointing to the power of ingrained mindsets as a primary culprit.

The internal behaviours and cultures that develop within firms over time have a habit of shaping, and in some cases inflating, client expectations, creating a cycle in which the pressure to perform continues to escalate, regardless of whether the targets being set are genuinely achievable. These expectations, once embedded, can be extraordinarily difficult to challenge, in part because doing so requires a degree of courage that law firm cultures do not always reward.

Richard's response was a direct call for greater bravery. Where necessary, pushing back with respect, professionalism and confidence on unrealistic targets and timelines is responsible practice and not a sign of weakness. Managing expectations is one of the most effective tools available to legal professionals in protecting both their own wellbeing and the quality of the work they deliver.

Richard also returned to a theme that had surfaced earlier in the session - the value of human connection. Fewer emails and more direct, personal contact can often cut through complexity far more effectively, defuse tension before it takes hold, and open the door to the kind of honest, productive conversations that prevent issues from developing in the first place. For all the sophistication of modern legal practice, some of the most effective solutions remain human.

The panel then turned to the question of psychological safety in legal workplaces and the gap that often exists between aspiration and action. The conversation focused on the experience of junior lawyers and those from underrepresented groups, for whom the courage required to speak up can carry far greater professional risk.

The collective view of the panel was that creating a culture in which people feel safe to raise concerns is not enough on its own. What perhaps matters more is what happens next. When people speak up and nothing changes, behaviours become normalised, apathy takes hold, and individuals are left feeling unable to meet the expectations placed upon them, yet fearful of saying so in case they are perceived as weak or incapable. Genuine psychological safety is not a passive state, it is an active commitment that must be demonstrated through consistent, visible action.

The panel reflected that lasting cultural change in the legal profession is in many ways tied to the evolution of its traditional demographic. As the profession becomes more diverse, the environment itself will shift, and with it the behaviours and assumptions that have long gone unchallenged.

The final exchanges of the session touched upon whether ego drives some behaviours in law, sometimes without any clear client benefit. Hannah Brierley took up the thread, highlighting that a person's sense of identity is often deeply interlaced with their profession. This is not something to be dismissed, and lawyers should feel proud of the work they do and of the contribution the profession makes to society.

It was highlighted that the growing prevalence of league tables and performance metrics centred on revenue and financial output subtly but significantly shifts the emphasis to law as a business rather than a profession and perhaps diminishes the value of achievements that cannot easily be quantified. In this definition, success becomes synonymous with corporate environments and financial reward, a reality that doesn't suit everyone nor reflects the full extent of what a meaningful career in law can look like.

The point underscored that what a firm chooses to measure can be a statement of its priorities. For emerging leaders looking to define their own values and areas of focus, these signals carry significant weight. Mandatory wellbeing or HR training for all staff, for example, can communicate that a firm takes these issues seriously and cares about the *how* of its work, and not only the *what*. Maintaining high standards of client service also has a practical dimension, as satisfied clients provide the confidence to hold high performers accountable when their behaviour falls short of the firm's values and reinforces the case for cultures that are excellent and sustainable.

As the session drew to a close, the conversation returned to one of collective purpose and commitment to change. Mental Health Awareness Week serves a valuable role in bringing conversations around wellbeing in the workplace into the open and reminding us of the importance of talking openly and honestly about mental health. But awareness is only a starting point.

The real measure of progress is not in the conversations that take place during dedicated awareness weeks, but in initiatives that are designed, embedded, and sustained in everyday working life. For the legal profession, it is time to move from awareness to action by translating good intentions into meaningful, lasting change that supports the wellbeing of every person working within it.

From the Law Society's strategic commitment to a more sustainable profession, to the Mindful Business Charter's practical framework for reducing unnecessary stress, and LawCare's work supporting those who are struggling, the quality of discussion offered cause for optimism. The tools, knowledge, and motivation to create a healthier legal profession are there; it now needs the collective focus to act on them.

FOIL extends its thanks to all of the speakers who gave their time and expertise, to Rohana Abeywardana and Hill Dickinson for their hospitality, and to everyone who attended, engaged, and contributed to such an open and meaningful discussion.

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