

This year's practising certificate renewal exercise will take place between 1-31 October, the Solicitors Regulation Authority announced. Further communications will be issued in early September. All mySRA account-holders are urged to update their profiles to save time and resources when the renewals window opens.

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Andrew Parker, head of strategic litigation at international firm DAC Beachcroft, has been appointed as the solicitor member of the Civil Justice Council.

Former diplomat **Sir Andrew Burns** will become the third chair of the Bar Standards Board on 1 January after **Lady Deech** steps down at the end of the year after the maximum six years in office.

'The government's reduction of public funding, contrary to Lord Justice Jackson's advice, needs to be scrutinised'

Desmond Hudson, Law Society chief executive
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'The jury wanted to send a statement that tobacco [companies] cannot continue to lie'

Florida attorney Christopher Chestnut
See page 6

'Prospective clients regularly ask if we have an extranet and then they never use it'

Jan Durrant, IT director, Lewis Silkin
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Top 50 firms see lower growth

By Kathleen Hall » The pace of recovery across top-50 firms started to slow in the first half of 2014, research from the Law Society and Legal Monitor City Legal Index suggested this week.

In the first two quarters of 2014 the total number of deals involving the top 50 increased by 7.1% to 1,491, according to the City Legal Index Quarter 2, 2014 (mid-year update) report. This was a drop in the overall pace of growth for 2013, when the number of deals rose 12.4% on the

previous year, to 2,890.

The main reason for the slow-down was a decline in finance and banking deals.

Law Society president Andrew Caplen said the figures raise questions about how long the recovery will continue at its current rate.

'Given the legal services sector's wider economic links to the rest of the UK, a slow-down in the City Legal Index is a sobering reminder that the economy is not completely out of the woods yet,' he said.

David Kekwick, director of Legal Monitor, said: 'Lower growth in the financial sector over the next few years could force City law firms to identify new business opportunities. It is therefore very encouraging to see increased activity in the energy, utilities and natural resources and technology, media and telecoms sectors.'

According to *Gazette* research profit per equity partner (PEP) at top-40 firms grew by an average of more than 10% in 2013/14.

One-third of litigators are not *Mitchell*-proof

By John Hyde » Almost one-third of litigators at top 200 firms have yet to review their compliance systems since last year's *Mitchell* judgment, a new survey has revealed.

The research, by costs specialist Just Costs Solicitors, found just 31% had re-analysed internal systems to ensure compliance with rules, practice directions and court orders since November.

Master of the Rolls Lord Dyson (pictured) used last year's *Mitchell* judgment to usher in a new era of sanctions for those who did not comply with rules unless the breach was trivial and for good reason. The position was clarified in the *Denton* judgment last month when Dyson said parties had to show a breach was serious and significant to justify sanctions.

Despite the perceived harsh nature



of the *Mitchell* judgment, the survey of 612 partners spread over 117 firms suggests that some lawyers were slow to respond to its implications.

Paul Shenton, managing director of Just Costs, said the results were 'alarming' and warned firms are potentially leaving themselves open to professional negligence claims by not

responding to *Mitchell*. 'Spending the time to put measures in place in order to ensure compliance is by far preferable to running the risk of destroying a client's case and being exposed to a negligence claim,' he added.

The poll did find a pro-active response to *Mitchell* from the majority of the profession, with 56% of firms saying they are now more likely to outsource the responsibility of preparing costs budgets. The survey also found 55% of respondents did not believe costs management and budgeting – a key aspect of the Jackson reforms – were having a positive effect on case management.

But most were content that they would survive the new regime of costs management and budgeting, with just 10% seeing it as a threat to their firm.

Sex discrimination cases hit four-year high

By Kathleen Hall » The number of sex discrimination claims going to employment tribunals has reached the highest level in four years, according to research from an employment law firm.

GQ Employment Law said that sex discrimination claims now make up 55% of discrimination claims, up from 38% two years ago. The overall number of sex discrimination claims reached 13,722 in 2013/14.

The overall number of claims has fallen by 80% since the introduction of

employment tribunal fees in July 2013, but this appears to have mostly affected lower-value claims, the firm found.

As there is no upper limit on the compensation that can be claimed for discrimination, individuals still consider it worth making these claims despite the fees disincentive, the firm suggested.

Darren Issacs, partner at GQ Employment Law, said: 'Over recent years there's been a big effort in the City to improve equality at a senior level, and undoubtedly there are now

many more women working in senior positions within these companies.

'However, many female employees feel that the same efforts have not been made at a lower level, and this feeling has contributed to an increase in the number of sex discrimination claims.

'Some City women perceive that while every effort is made to promote and support female superstars, women who are not quite part of that elite are less valued than their male peers and find it harder to progress.'