

**“T**he future of the Bar”: a subject of some interest to all of us as practitioners, but also to the public at large. The Clementi Review, and the Legal Services Bill, due for publication in the next few weeks, have established that the Bar, as a separate branch of the legal profession, is in the public interest. This is because the skills of the Bar – employed and self-employed – in case analysis, advice, drafting and case presentation are vital in a civilised and democratic society, where disputes are decided after considering the views which the parties wish to advance.

But how, in the future, will the Bar seek to deliver its services? What will the Bar look like in the coming decades? Is it a career into which one would encourage the younger generation? At this year's Bar Conference on Saturday 4 November at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London, we shall attempt to answer these questions. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer, will give the keynote speech, and Ed Stourton, presenter of the Today Programme will moderate an Open Forum. I myself will participate on this panel together with Lord Falconer, Ruth Evans the Chair of the Bar Standards Board, the journalist Linda Tsang and the Rt Hon Lord Justice Moses.

#### Something for everyone

There will also be individual workshops of interest to practitioners at every stage of seniority and in every subject area. Some of the workshops are organised by the specialist Bars, eg the CBA, COMBAR and ALBA. Some are organised by Bar Council or other representative groups such as the South Eastern Circuit, the Employed Barristers Committee, the Young Barristers Committee and the Bar Human Rights Committee. You can be assured of lively and informative discussion and debate.

Among the more significant themes of the day must be the following:

# THE FUTURE OF THE BAR

Stephen Hockman QC addresses a mighty subject

#### Entry to the profession

It is critical for the future of the Bar that the traditional role of the Inns of Court in training, supporting and admitting new entrants be preserved and indeed enhanced. However, we do need to re-examine whether there are any avoidable financial or other barriers to entry which deter potentially eligible individuals from becoming barristers. At the same time we need to continue to address the problem created by the very popularity of the profession itself, namely the fact that there are several times more applicants for every pupillage place each year than there are places available. This is not the place to discuss such issues in detail. Suffice it to say that I have invited Sir David Neuberger to chair a high powered new working group on this issue. Recent statistics show that two thirds of all Bar students come from state schools and 85% come from non Oxbridge universities. We have to ensure that nonetheless that the Bar continues to attract and retain the widest range of talent.

#### Public funding

I said at the beginning of the year that the Bar needed to carve out a new relationship with the community which it serves, so that its reputation within that community could be preserved and enhanced. It is important for the Bar to speak out in support of minorities on human rights issues and so forth. But it is equally crucial for the Bar to show its support for issues which are of concern to the majority. The fact that probably up to one third

of the profession is engaged in publicly funded work shows in itself the commitment of the Bar to the interests of the community. We need to ensure that this contribution is recognised, and indeed that the community's own contribution, in terms of public resources, to the legal system is itself enhanced. This continues to be the most significant political issue affecting the profession today.

#### Cohesion

Even more important than attracting the right entrants, and ensuring that their role in the community is properly recognised, is the need for the Bar to remain a united and cohesive profession. The most acute danger for the profession in the years to come will be the risk of fragmentation. By this I mean any the risk, for instance, that the Circuits will become increasingly disillusioned with the London Bar; or the risk that ethnic minority practitioners will cease to regard the profession as one in which they can receive total fairness of treatment; or the risk that, because of continual pressures on public funding, or competition from other advocates, barristers doing publicly funded work lose confidence and leave the field of battle.

Only the most determined leadership by us all will save the Bar from succumbing to these risks. I urge everyone who can, to come to the Bar Conference\* and help us in our quest to articulate that leadership.

*\*To register your attendance email: [jlcoffice@btinternet.com](mailto:jlcoffice@btinternet.com) tel: 01202 699 488*

[Chairman@BarCouncil.org.uk](mailto:Chairman@BarCouncil.org.uk)



Hockman: united we stand