



From the President

24 April 2020

Dear Fellow Members,

On the occasion of the Opening of Legal Year when leaders of the international legal community gather in Hong Kong to attend the Ceremony every year, the Law Society is honoured to have the opportunity to host a Presidents' Roundtable for an exchange of updates in the legal landscape around the globe.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has shaken the world. Legal professional bodies and associations are all looking at ways to assist their members. We have written to over 130 legal bodies to share our experiences in Hong Kong and updated the international community on what the Law Society has done for the profession in early March 2020. Having an interactive platform to discuss and learn from each other's experiences, similar to the Presidents' Roundtable that we host in the Opening of the Legal Year every year, will be even better. Although a face-to-face discussion is not possible in the current public health condition, technology has enabled us to continue effective exchanges in another form. The Law Society is taking the lead to organise a Presidents' Roundtable by video conferencing on 27 April. We are grateful for the overwhelming responses from our overseas counterparts. I will report further after the event.

It may be a good opportunity for me to share with you an update of the measures that we have put in place for members in these difficult times.

- (a) The membership fee for 2021 will be reduced from \$800 to \$100.
- (b) The Council has also resolved to reduce the practising certificate fee for 2021 by 70% to \$1,950. However, as the practising certificate fee is fixed by statute, we need to amend the legislation to effect the fee reduction which requires approval by the Chief Justice and LegCo by negative vetting. We have just obtained the approval in principle by the Chief Justice to the proposed amendments and we are working with the Drafting Division of the Department of Justice to finalise the drafting of the legislative amendments.
- (c) The CPD course fees have generally been waived, except for some special courses.
- (d) The Council has approved in principle to effectively waive the CPD and RME elective obligations for 2019/20 so that practitioners are only required to complete 15 CPD points (including 3 RME elective hours) across 2 practice years 2019/20 and 2020/2021, subject to some exceptions. The relevant committees are examining the technicalities and further details will be announced shortly.

.../2

From the President

-2-

- (e) The Law Society has sourced financial support offers from two banks and details have been disseminated to the general membership via our Weekly Circulars on 16 March 2020.
- (f) The Law Society has prepared a general letter to landlords to urge for support for law firm tenants as well as letters of tailored content upon request to facilitate members' negotiation with their landlords.
- (g) The Law Society has requested the Legal Aid Department to speed up the processing of payments of fees to assigned solicitors and solicitor advocates in legal aid matters, to which we have received positive replies.
- (h) The Law Society keeps close liaison with the Judiciary reflecting views of members on the general adjournment of court proceedings.
- (i) In particular, The Law Society has been actively urging the Judiciary to have a medium to long-term strategy in place and to consider special measures to deal with the possibility of a prolonged outbreak of COVID-19. The efforts suggested by the Law Society include expediting the introduction of appropriate technology to facilitate the administration of justice (e.g. e-service and e-filing, telephone/video conference hearings, sending judgments by email instead of adjourning the handing down of judgments etc), utilising the time during the general adjournment period to quicken the delivery of outstanding judgments which are long awaited and adopting paper-based hearings more widely.
- (j) The Law Society has also written to the Department of Justice urging speedy settlement of solicitors' fees and briefing out of more cases to solicitors. We have also asked the Secretary for Justice to lobby for an extension of the Government's Anti-epidemic Fund or any government scheme to cover law firms.
- (k) Similarly, we have written to the Financial Secretary lobbying for allocation of funding from the Anti-epidemic Fund to law firms to assist them through these difficult times.
- (l) In response to our lobbying, the Government has proposed relief measures including the set up of the LAWTECH Fund to assist members to equip themselves with technological tools that enable them to continue business, notwithstanding the public health condition.
- (m) We are working closely with the Department of Justice and the Bar Association on the implementation of the LAWTECH Fund which will benefit around 617 law firms with 5 or fewer practising solicitors, representing 66% of the total number of law firms.

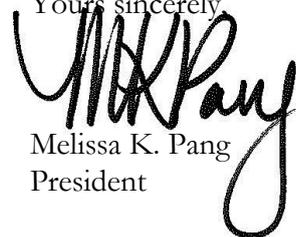
From the President

-3-

- (n) The Law Society has distributed surgical masks to members for free. A total of 714 firms and 1,774 members have benefited so far. We will also be distributing mask keepers to members shortly. The details will be announced shortly.
- (o) The Law Society has also been giving general advice on practice management issues arising from the outbreak of the pandemic, including guidance on the formulation of a disaster recovery plan.
- (p) The Law Society has recently initiated the participation of a number of professional bodies in TVB's production of a song titled <疫境同行>. The song production aimed at promoting, through music, the positive values of love, care and unity in community when faced with the challenges arising from the outbreak of COVID-19 and supporting the medical profession which is in the frontline selflessly fighting for the health of the people of Hong Kong.

Attached is a [summary](#) of the relief measures we have implemented or are working on so far. Knowing that our members are undergoing difficult times, the Law Society has been working very hard to assist them in different ways to the best of our ability. We will be sending a survey to members gauging further views on the difficulties that members have and how the Law Society can assist, please spare a little time to complete it as it will be very helpful to us in planning ahead.

Yours sincerely,



Melissa K. Pang
President

[This President's Letter is in bilingual text.]