

# Macfarlanes Insider

Issue two – January 2021

## Welcome to the second issue of Macfarlanes Insider.

In this issue we provide an overview of some of the work highlights of 2020, share some announcements that were made at the firm's annual conference in the winter, feature two staff Q&A's, as well as provide updates on topics such as our commitment to sustainability.

### Firm conference updates

In November the firm hosted its annual conference, however, for the first time in its history, it took place virtually. Over the course of the afternoon, staff heard from Sebastian Prichard Jones (senior partner), Julian Howard (managing partner) and other speakers on several topics including the business and our financial performance, which continues to be positive. Staff also heard how the firm managed during Covid, sharing a video of our lockdown stories.

The firm also announced revised principles for agile working, which will aid the balance of work and home life for employees. Staff may work from home two days a week, with each practice/department designating up to four days a month when all members of staff, insofar as is reasonably practicable, will be expected to work from the office. The policy will be launched later this month and will come into effect when government guidelines permit a return to the office on a more normal basis.

The partners also announced that an allowance will be paid to staff in December and every three years thereafter to enable them to purchase any further home office equipment that they feel is necessary for them to work effectively from home. This is in addition to the financial support offered to staff during the first lockdown. The allowance will also be paid to all new members of permanent staff when they join.

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# Work highlights

Despite the challenging circumstances, last year was productive and successful for the firm. Some highlights from 2020 include the following.

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## Libyan Investment Authority

We guided the Libyan Investment Authority to success in a Court of Appeal decision in proceedings regarding the validity of Dr Ali Mahmoud Hassan Mohamed's appointment as the chairman of Libya's sovereign wealth fund – the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA). This judgment was a significant political victory for the internationally supported government of Libya, at a time when political and civil unrest prevails across the country.



## THE RITZ LONDON

We advised on the high-profile acquisition of the iconic Ritz Hotel by one of the firm's private Qatari investor clients.



## ASTON MARTIN

We advised a consortium led by Lawrence Stroll on a strategic investment in FTSE250 luxury British sports car manufacturer Aston Martin Lagonda.



We advised Coutts on a collaboration with a global asset manager to launch six new exclusive funds for clients of Coutts and the wider NatWest Group.





We provided tax advice to Virgin for its \$480m blank cheque fundraising. Virgin's special purpose acquisition vehicle, or SPAC, has raised funds via an initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange, with the purpose of identifying and acquiring a target business over the next two years.



We advised the senior management team of Genius Sports Group the leading provider of sports data and technology for betting operators, on its business combination agreement with NYSE-listed special purpose acquisition company dMY Technology Group, Inc. II. The newly combined company anticipates an enterprise value of approximately \$1.5bn.



We advised Legal & General on the funding and delivery of a £200m 'Life and Mind Building' at Oxford University, the largest building project in the university's history, which will house the departments of Zoology, Plant Sciences and Experimental Psychology. The building forms part of Legal & General's £4bn partnership with the University of Oxford.



We advised Castle Trust on an innovative form of scheme of arrangement which will convert bonds sold to more than 20,000 retail investors into deposit balances in new bank accounts upon completion of Castle Trust's ongoing application to become a bank. This is the first time a company has used a scheme for this purpose.

# Recent news

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## Business disability forum

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The firm has recently become a member of the [Business Disability Forum](#) (BDF) which aims to improve the experiences of those with disabilities by creating a link between businesses, disabled people and government. The BDF provides advice, training and resources to help us

develop the best possible approach to supporting our people, our clients and our contacts who have short or long-term health conditions or disabilities. Further, the firm has just gained Level 1: Disability Confident employer status.

For more information about the work we are doing in this area or to better understand how we can support prospective applicants to the firm, please contact a member of the [recruitment team](#).

## Supporting refugees

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As a firm we have a history of supporting refugees. The firm recently sponsored Refugee Nights, a virtual festival created as part of the Imperial War Museum's Refugees: Forced to Flee exhibition.

In addition, the firm launched a pro bono initiative last summer: Refugee Law Clinic. The initiative offers free legal advice to asylum seekers wishing to put forward fresh claims for asylum on the basis of important new factors. This opportunity is open to all associates at the firm, who are provided with training and support.

Furthermore, some of us have direct experience of displacement and many more have parents of grandparents who were forced to flee their country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster. We have invited our staff to discuss their own experiences and will be sharing them within the firm over the coming months.



## Sustainability

Sustainability, and environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues have never been more important. The firm is fully committed to reducing the negative environmental impact of our business operations and the continual improvement in our environmental performance to make to a more sustainable world. This year the committee will focus on setting ambitious quantified carbon reduction targets and engaging the whole firm, and its stakeholders and clients, in Macfarlanes' sustainability journey.

Last July the firm commissioned and received its first carbon footprint report. The report has allowed the environment committee to understand where our carbon emissions come from and will allow them to measure the firm's progress over the coming years.

Last month staff were invited to join a webinar in which they heard about the committee's work and their ambitious new environment policy, which includes (but is not limited to) some of the following areas:

- improving energy efficiency of our premises and operations;
- striving to reduce, reuse and recycle all aspects of our waste wherever possible;
- business travel - exploring and promoting low carbon modes of transport where travel is unavoidable;
- increasing plants and greenery in and around our premises to contribute to the improvement of urban air quality and provide habitats for local insects; and
- pursuing options for offsetting any greenhouse gas emissions that cannot be reduced.

Staff also heard of the positive impact remote working has had on going paperless; the uptake in the use of Docusign over office printing saved 2000kg of paper by October 2020, which is the equivalent of 13 trees.

In addition to our commitments, we have had success in other areas which include:

- a #PointlessPlastic campaign to significantly reduce the amount of plastic used across the firm. This included plastic cups and cutlery, which were replaced with mugs and metal cutlery, as well as the sale of water bottles, which were replaced by water dispensers and glasses. The latter resulted in a saving of 1,800 bottles per month;
- a campaign for staff to give up their desk bins, which has led to a saving of 95,000 bin bags per year;
- making the firm's annual raffle (in which paper tickets were sold) paperless;
- increasing the firm's recycling capability by adding crisp bags and battery recycling bins around the office; and
- a meat-free Monday trial by the firm's Kitchen.

## Corporate social responsibility

Each year staff are invited to nominate a charity of their choice to become the firm's new charity of the year. A shortlist of charities is created following this and staff can then vote for their preferred charity.

This year the firm decided to partner with two charities, The Trussell Trust and Harold Hill Foodbank. The charities created a Christmas campaign, a

Hunger Free Future, which aims to build a movement of people to work together to achieve the goal of a future where people have enough money to buy essentials. To support the campaign, staff donated their time at local foodbanks and donated their money. Our staff have volunteered a total of 170 hours in time at local foodbanks and the firm donated £60,000 to the campaign.



## Neurodiversity support

As part of our commitment to support neurodiversity in the workplace, the firm has designed guidelines for staff to give an overview of neurodiversity and detail the processes and support options that are in place. These include a workplace assessment via an external team of specialists who provide detailed reports, with a comprehensive set of

recommendations for both the firm and the employee. As well as implementing the recommended adjustments, we offer one-to-one tailored IT training and the option to attend training courses that are run regularly by our learning and development team on a range of areas that might be beneficial to neurodiverse employees.

As an additional source of support the EnABLE network (which was mentioned in the previous issue) can act as a platform for staff to share their personal stories and for the firm to better understand how it can improve its supports to our employees.

# Macfarlanes Academy

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The Macfarlanes Business Services Academy was launched in November 2019 and is a programme for high performing secretaries and business services staff. The talent programme allows participating employees to develop their experience in different business services functions or in roles within practice areas.

Here, Charlotte Pawsey, a paralegal within private client, shares her experience via a Q&A.

**Can you tell us about your journey from joining the firm to your role today?**

After completing my law degree at University of Canterbury, I joined Macfarlanes in July 2018 as a junior CDD and conflicts analyst in the risk management team. I enjoyed learning about the levels of risk surrounding clients at the firm and enjoyed discovering the types of work that each department engages in but found that I was interested mostly in the private client work at the firm. When I heard about trialling the Macfarlanes Academy I chose to take the opportunity to experience a different type of work within the firm. I spent two months on secondment in private client and was lucky enough to be offered a permanent role within the team after.

**What opportunity did the Macfarlanes Business Services Academy offer you?**

The opportunity offered a chance for me to develop my experience further and invest my time into a completely different and new practice area. I was one of the first individuals to take part in this programme and the secondment in private client lasted for two months. I found the work that I engaged in extremely interesting and challenging and found that I wanted to stay there permanently should the opportunity arise. When a vacancy became available the week before my secondment ended, I took the opportunity to apply and was offered the role a week later.

**Why did you decide to apply for the programme rather than apply for an internal vacancy?**

At the time, no vacancies were available, and the programme gave me a fantastic opportunity to get an insight into another department within the firm. I could expand on my current knowledge and learn entirely different work whilst returning to my original role.

**How did you transition between the two roles and how were you supported?**

At first, I met with Edward Reed (partner in private client) and James Perrott (senior counsel in private client) on separate occasions to understand how the practice worked and what to expect. It also enabled them to learn more about who I was as an individual and whether I would work well in the paralegal role. These informal meetings were very helpful and it was nice to have met them prior to starting in the team. Emma Cox (solicitor in private client) was then assigned as my mentor and she was very supportive throughout my secondment. I also had catch-up meetings with HR throughout my time in the role so there was a lot of ongoing support.

**What development opportunities are available to you as a paralegal?**

I currently attend the trainee training sessions as well as the private client educational lunches each week which provide a deeper understanding of the work within the department and develop my knowledge of the firm.

There is also a paralegal training programme which is run by the learning and development team, and paralegals also have the opportunity to apply for a training contract with the firm, which is encouraging.



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# Legal technology

Q&A with Laura Stafford and Sapheem (Saph) Meran, legal technology and innovation managers within the knowledge, innovation and legal technology department.



Saph and Laura joined the firm in May 2016 and January 2017 (respectively), both initially working as professional support assistants, before moving into the legal technology team as executives, then officers, then senior officers and now managers.

**Can you give us an overview of the legal technology team?**

Our legal technology practice (formed in 2016) is responsible for developing technological solutions for legal problems, offering new and innovative ways of tackling our clients' most complex issues and enhancing and streamlining the firm's existing services. We recognise that fusing legal and technological expertise seamlessly can help our clients solve their most challenging business problems in more innovative, sophisticated and technologically-advanced ways. By bringing together people, process and technology, we help the firm to achieve excellence in all aspects of legal practice and client service.

**How has the team developed over the years?**

The legal technology & innovation team has grown significantly over the last few years and that growth and experience in relation to technology, data, design, process

improvement and law has helped us to develop a wide range of creative and forward-thinking solutions. Recently we've seen a shift in the work we do towards more external client-facing projects. We engage directly with clients to provide custom-built solutions, often designed from the ground up, to fulfil their specific legal needs and requirements. Our approach has also developed and we are much more ambitious in our delivery, encouraging clients to test us and push the boundaries of what our technologies can do, to achieve cutting-edge and award-winning products.

Another significant development is that we now offer trainees the opportunity to complete one of their six-month seats in the legal technology and innovation team. The opportunity is of mutual benefit - our trainees get exposure to legal tech in action, as well as helping to nurture a culture of innovation and creativity across the firm, and we benefit from the fresh perspectives our trainee solicitors provide.



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### What experience did you have prior to joining Macfarlanes?

**Laura:** In our team there is such a diversity in experience and background and that is to our advantage. Before joining Macfarlanes, I worked in the graduate recruitment team at Herbert Smith Freehills LLP. Whilst I enjoyed my role there, I've always been passionate about technology and its application to legal practice. In my spare time, I trained myself on a few document automation tools and undertook work experience at a City law firm and a legal tech vendor, both of which solidified my passion. I particularly enjoy work that allows me to exercise my skills in problem solving, creativity and team collaboration so when I saw the vacancy at Macfarlanes I knew I had to apply! Four years later, I am now one of the team's managers. I think there are many transferable skills that can be applied to a legal technology role, such as project management, communication and organisation, and I am grateful that my career history has benefitted my development at Macfarlanes.

**Saph:** Immediately prior to joining Macfarlanes, I was working in the medical technology sector on a project for Medicines Sans Frontier. I also had some prior experience in legal practice and education. The opportunity to combine experience of the legal sector with my software engineering and technology management skills is what attracted me to the role, as well as the exciting shift in the legal sector towards embracing technology. Macfarlanes in particular takes a more bespoke approach to product engineering for our clients, making us stand out from other firms in the space, and over the last five years I've enjoyed playing a role in developing that practice alongside our team.

### What are your proudest achievements since joining Macfarlanes?

**Laura:** I am proud of prototyping, developing and rolling out an end-to-end digital solution for one of our real estate clients. The solution required us to stitch together various technologies and processes and required a lot of thought, ingenuity and complex technical knowhow. I am delighted to have played a part in transforming our client's work and strengthening our relationship with them.

In addition, developing our vision and strategy, contributing to the growth of the team and training and supporting junior colleagues has given me a true sense of satisfaction and achievement as I aspire to spread my passion for legal technology and act as an innovation ambassador and mentor.

**Saph:** Being recognised in the LegalWeek innovation awards 2020 and winning top prize in the "AI innovation" category was a highlight last year. Working with our derivatives and financial services practices, we used our expertise to build solutions that can leverage artificial intelligence in legal work effectively, unlocking its true capabilities for our clients. This is a good blueprint for the type of work we engage with: legal practice through the use of technology, not just to supplement our existing practices.

### What do you look for when hiring into your team?

There is no blueprint for a "typical" legal technologist at Macfarlanes. Having a variety of expertise and insight helps us challenge the status quo, see things differently and come up with innovative solutions. An enthusiasm for legal technology and understanding of the firm's work and client base is essential. We believe candidates who demonstrate that they enjoy a challenge, have a "can-do" attitude in the face of complicated or unfamiliar concepts and have a keen eye for detail are well suited to a role in our team. The work we do is exciting and varied and everyone in the team can make their mark and enhance our service offering. Our roles carry a lot of responsibility, but this is accompanied by a range of support and guidance and a friendly, inclusive culture. Everyone is valued for the contributions they make and the development opportunities and structured career progression on offer make Macfarlanes a great place to work.

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