

**Patricia Thom – Opening of the Legal Year
22 September 2025**

Lord President, my Lords and my Ladies, honoured guests,

It is a profound honour to stand before you as President of the Law Society of Scotland, representing the Scottish solicitor profession. I am proud of the legal sector's achievements over the past year and that solicitors have made such a strong contribution to the sector's continuing progress.

I would like to begin by once again offering congratulations to Lord Pentland at what is his first Opening of the Legal Year since becoming Lord President. Thank you for the warm and purposeful discussions you have already facilitated with the

Law Society; we look forward to working constructively with you throughout your tenure. Renewed congratulations likewise go also to the Lord Justice Clerk, Lord Beckett.

On behalf of Scotland's solicitor profession I also offer congratulations to our eminent colleagues being celebrated today as newly appointed King's Counsel and Honorary King's Counsel. The elevation of each of you reflects the significant contributions you have made to Scotland's legal sector, and we are pleased to see solicitor advocates David Dickson and Gordon Martin and Harper Macleod chairman Lorne Crerar among those recognised today.

The past year has been a period of significant change for Scotland's judiciary, and for the legal sector more broadly.

Change inevitably brings opportunities alongside challenges – it has also demonstrated the fundamental strengths of our justice and legal sectors and the calibre of the people who work within them.

Generational reforms to the regulation of legal services in Scotland have been finalised by the Scottish Parliament and work on implementation is well underway thanks to the diligence and hard work of Law Society colleagues alongside stakeholders from the Scottish Government and across the legal professions.

We have maintained a steadfast resolve throughout to ensure these reforms are fit for purpose to benefit legal practitioners and all members of the public who rely on the legal advice

and services solicitors and other legal professionals provide.

The path is laid out now for the legal sector to make an even stronger contribution to Scotland's economy and Scottish society more broadly.

Progress is also well advanced on two bills to further reform our criminal justice system which we expect to proceed before next year's Holyrood elections. The Law Society continues to engage and campaign to ensure that change in our justice system is always evidence based.

The Scottish Parliament's focus on our legal system has brought many positives, however we continue to argue strongly that legal aid reform must likewise be added to the legislative agenda. Access to justice is one of the fundamental

principles that underpins our justice system, which is why our ongoing dialogue with the Scottish Government is so important. An enduring solution must be found urgently to resolve the legal aid crisis that has been intensifying for well over a decade.

It's a problem that stands out even more because it is in such stark contrast to the general picture for the legal sector otherwise. Optimism for the future is widespread, across private practice and in-house roles and from the smallest solicitor firms through to the largest. Recruitment of trainee solicitors, quite literally the future of our profession, remains close to record highs.

As a profession we are focused not only on the advice we're giving and the services we're providing today, but of continuing on the path of progress and improvement.

The rapid pace of technological change is being felt in the legal sector just as it is in almost every other corner of modern life, as I know our judicial colleagues are all too aware. As solicitors we must be curious and open to opportunity without ignoring the potential risks and pitfalls that come with A-I and other technologies.

Decades of work to make our legal professions more diverse and inclusive must also continue, despite efforts from some quarters around the world to not only halt progress but to reverse it. The legal sector is stronger and more dynamic

when it reflects the diversity that exists amongst the people,
businesses and communities we serve.

Scotland's legal sector has been one of our nation's greatest
strengths for centuries, thanks to the people who work in it.

The Law Society and solicitor profession will continue to work
and to collaborate with our colleagues across the legal
professions to ensure that remains the case for many
centuries to come. Thank you.