

LEGAL WALES CONFERENCE 2018

This year's conference was held at Aberystwyth University on 12th October 2018. Aberystwyth was the first university in Wales, this year celebrating 146 years.

There were over 130 delegates. The programme had an incredible line-up of speakers on topics affecting Wales.

The Conference Chair, Professor John Williams welcomed the delegates to the conference. The Right Hon Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd (past Lord Chief Justice) welcomed delegates to the University as Chancellor of the University. HHJ Milwyn Jarman QC, as Chair of the Legal Wales Foundation welcomed delegates to what was to be his last conference before retiring from the role of Chair after 8 years.

The first address was from Lord Thomas on "The role of the Commission on Justice in Wales", as Chair of the Commission. He advised that there had been 150 submissions to the Commission. The Commission has travelled around Wales to obtain information on such matters as the denial of access to justice in Wales, lack of Legal Aid, court closures and the need for better joined up working with agencies and the need to develop a digital centre in Wales. The next stage is to hear oral evidence on these issues and on governance, criminal justice, civil justice, development of the legal profession and legal education. There is to be a consultation on the need for a Law Council for Wales involving key stakeholders.

The Counsel General for Wales, Jeremy Miles AM gave an address on "Law in Wales : Access and Accountability.". He reported that the National Assembly has come a long way since the 1998 Act by increasing law. The 2017 Act changed the law making powers and restricted powers of the National Assembly but law is diverging. He said there needs to be a clear division of powers and law needs to be accessible to use, eg in a statute book, to consolidate and codify Welsh law with a draft set of codes on Welsh law. There is a growing body of legislation which should be published to make it easier to find.

Simon Davies, the Vice President of The Law Society spoke about the role of The Law Society and the difficulty facing the profession with a call for early advice Legal Aid to be reinstated, particularly in family and housing matters.

“The administration of law in a devolved system” in Scotland was discussed by The Right Hon Lord Carlaway, Lord President of the Court of Session in Scotland.

Throughout the day, there were breakout sessions on topics such as Housing Law in Wales, Agricultural Law in Wales, Coercive control – from policy to practice, the Insurance Distribution Directive, The Law Commission, Access to Justice for Victims of Elder Abuse, Expert Witnesses – the US Approach, Borders and Cross Brdr Trade, Crime Courts and Communities in Mid Victorian Wales.

The Access to Justice Foundation had a stand at the conference and Clare Carter, the Deputy CEO of Access to Justice Foundation and Frances Edwards, Trustee of the Access to Justice Foundation and committee member of Reaching Justice Wales spoke to the delegates about the work done by Access to Justice Foundation and Reaching Justice Wales.

Lord Chief Justice, Right Hon Lord Burnett of Maldon gave thanks to Lord Thomas for the work he has done and is doing in Wales. He talked about the cross ticketing of Tribunal Judges who can sit in England and Wales which widens experience and skills of judges and noted Sir Wyn Williams appointment as President of Welsh Tribunals. He agreed with the comments of the Counsel General that there is a duty to improve accessibility to Welsh law. He said Judges want to ensure Welsh cases are heard in Wales and supported the use of the Welsh language in Welsh Courts. He passed his congratulations to Lady Justice Nicola Davies who is the first welsh woman to be appointed to the Court of Appeal and gave the oath in English and Welsh. He said there is a need for modernisation and to widen access to justice using IT, eg for on-line divorce and Grant of Probate and that there is a need to improve conditions in the Courts and Tribunals.

Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice Chancellor of the University closed the conference and gave thanks to the retiring members of the committee, Chair, HHJ Milwyn Jarman, Secretary Dylan Lloyd Jones and Treasurer Lowri Morgan for their many years of service and welcomed the new committee Chair, Huw Williams, Secretary Frances Edwards and Treasurer Keith Bush.

With thanks to the sponsors 30 Park Place, The Law Society, Wales & Chester Circuit and Aberystwyth University and of course the Conference organiser, Keith Bush.
