

Speech: Times Law Awards 2019: David Gauke speech

I am delighted to be here tonight as we recognise and reward the writing abilities of a new generation of legal thinkers.

It has become a tradition for the Lord Chancellor to be on the judging panel for this competition. But such has been the longevity of those in this post in recent years that I am the first Lord Chancellor for some time to have the honour of judging the competition 2 years in a row.

Last year I was struck both by the quality of the essays and might I add how enjoyable it was to take a break from the day to day issues facing the government to participate in the judging.

So, imagine my delight when I learnt that this year's essay question focused on Brexit – whether leaving Europe is a threat or an opportunity for the legal profession. I was relieved, however that the quality of the essays continued to be very high.

So high was the quality of the answers that I wonder whether I could convince the entrants to consider taking jobs at the Department for Exiting the European Union.

There was a real variety in the answers, a lot of original thought, and some creative arguments. Some were positively enthusiastic about the potential opportunities that lay ahead in Brexit for lawyers and legal London.

Others made the case for cautious optimism. Others focused on the risks – and there are real risks – if we get this wrong.

One common feature of the essays was an acceptance that, the implications for legal services of Brexit depend on how the UK reacts to it – what we do next in response to our changing position in the world.

Our justice system is one that is envied across the globe. So much so that the world looks to us to be their counsel and courtroom. Brexit should not change that. And in fact, the reason our system maintains that reputation is because of its ability to adapt and evolve; to react as the world changes.

English Law, legal services and UK courts give businesses around the world the certainty, clarity and flexibility they require. A small window into its wider value is that we know English Law is used in 40% of all global corporate arbitrations.

If we want to carry on building on that success and continue to be a global, outward looking nation then we must carry on embracing change. That's what will enable us to seize every opportunity associated with Brexit and remain a competitive and attractive legal centre internationally.

One essay in particular made reference to Britain's LawTech sector as one factor that gives us an edge to seek new opportunities in Brexit.

I couldn't agree more.

As we all know, LawTech is changing the way the law is done. Functions that were previously carried out by legal professionals are now becoming automated. Consumers increasingly expect not just to be able to access services virtually and digitally but to see technology embedded in service delivery.

I understand that some are even refusing to pay for junior associates' time – expecting firms to use technology to deliver functions they would have previously carried out.

Around the world LawTech is a fledgling sector but in the UK it is already flourishing and the government is determined to support that. We want to create an environment that fosters innovation and allows LawTech to thrive.

That's why we created the LawTech Delivery panel – so that experts from the legal sector could identify both barriers and catalysts to growth and support the UK to become a LawTech centre of excellence.

Other essays in this competition pointed to the robustness of the English legal system.

It is undoubtedly true that our legal services sector is in good shape, with an annual contribution to the economy of around £25 billion and a trade surplus that has doubled over the past decade to £4 billion in 2016.

The government continues to work with the sector to understand how we can best support that success and we are utilising our international relationships to help the sector to grow overseas – securing and improving its international market share.

We have been clear that our future relationship with the EU should preserve the mutual benefits and stability of our uniquely integrated markets and protect consumers and businesses across the UK. That must include a new economic and regulatory partnership that strikes a balance between stable and predictable access to each other's markets and autonomy over regulatory decisions through domestic equivalence processes.

We will continue to work with the EU to improve our domestic market access frameworks to the greatest economic benefit and keep our equivalence frameworks under review.

Ultimately, our flexible common law system, world leading judiciary and support for the growth and adoption of LawTech in the legal services market will ensure we continue to be a world leading legal centre through Brexit and beyond.

I only wish I could have said all that with the same elegance employed by the legal scholars we are honouring this evening. The essays they entered into

this competition all made well-conceived, interesting arguments that were a real pleasure to read. I am certain that all those who entered have very bright futures ahead of them.

Our runners up this year are:

- William Beddows
- Sam Dayan
- Elijah Bossa

In third place:

And in second place:

Congratulations to all!

Our winner this year made the argument that disentangling ourselves from the European Union represents an opportunity to underpin the Rule of Law, improve on legal clarity and improve access to justice.

What's clear is that this bright young man will have no problem whatsoever accessing career opportunities in the law.

Please join me in congratulating George Croft.