

# Something up my sleeve

LET ME START with my Law Society Council hat on (a rather fine specimen, being something of a cross between that worn by Davy Crockett and a Bowler), because I want you to give serious consideration to the investigations of Lord Hunt of Wirral who addressed the most recent meeting of the Council. Recently appointed by the Law Society to carry out a review of the regulation of lawyers and law firms, he has now issued a call for evidence: "I want to encourage the widest possible debate on the future regulation of lawyers and/or law firms" he says in his introductory document.

We are one of the most heavily regulated professions in the country. Last year, according to Lord Hunt, 87 per cent of our practising certificate fee was spent on funding the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Legal Complaints Service. Only 13 per cent went to the Law Society itself. We therefore have a financial as well as a vested interest in ensuring that our voice is heard on all issues relating to regulation.

If I were less polite I would suggest that you all ought to get off your a\*\*s, download Lord Hunt's call for evidence (*to be found at* [www.legalregulationreview.com](http://www.legalregulationreview.com)) and make sure you get your submissions in by the deadline of 9 April. But I am of course extremely polite, so I will instead remove my hat and put on my coat.

In years to come, overcoat archaeologists will unearth the relic of my blue overcoat from its cairn or burial mound and (after carefully extracting the remains which have been preserved by the overwhelming dampness of the British climate) analyse the content of its pockets.

My overcoat has served me well for at least a decade and a half. It is blue and boring. My brother (who is fairly conventional himself) describes it as a "solicitor's overcoat".

The full impact of my overcoat's boringness hit me much earlier in its life, when I attended a hearing to discuss an infant interim payment before a master of the Supreme Court. My client came too. All the lawyers – two QCs, my opposite number in the defendant firm and I, arrived outside the master's room wearing identical navy blue coats.

I don't normally do old schools. I have

never been back to any of my old schools, never joined any old school club, never bought an old school tie and seldom kept up with old school friends. Despite these determined efforts I and two of the other lawyers on that day were not only wearing identical overcoats, but were also incarcerated in the same unpleasant boys' school when we were snivelling children.

It was one of those schools that leave you permanently scarred – and terrified of any judge that even remotely looks like a headmaster.

It was possibly for that reason that we all looked and felt a little sheepish as we waited outside the master's door (which bore some resemblance to another door a century or so earlier – behind which lurked the most unpleasant and perverted headmaster it has ever been my displeasure to be beaten by).

So we went in, parking our coats on the bench at the rear of the room. We stood nervously while we waited for the master to decide whether to approve the payment or give us the cane. To our relief he chose the former.

When it was over, there was considerable confusion among us as to who owned which coat. The name tapes we had had at school had not passed into adulthood.

Eventually the only way of telling for certain the owner of each coat was to go through the pockets.

The two QCs, as might be expected, had respectable things in theirs – a recent programme from Covent Garden Opera House, a stockbroker's contract confirming the sale at a substantial profit of shares in Woql-



worths and (in one case) an angry note from a junior barrister asking to be left alone and asserting that she really did not want to be at the beck and call of all members of chambers day and night.

My own pockets were significantly less interesting containing as they did one size 8 wood screw, two tap washers, a Mars Bar wrapper, a programme for a long-forgotten school concert in which a long-forgotten offspring had performed, a name badge (not my own), a photocopied map for a destination I will deny that I ever visited and an old style bus ticket.

Once the coats were restored to their rightful owners, the lawyers formed a small gaggle in the corridor and my perspicacious client announced that we all looked as though we were ready to go back to school. There is only one thing to do with a client like that: she is now my wife.

Well... have you started to think about what to say to Lord Hunt (now you know who he is)? If you visit the Law Society you will find a row of coat hooks just inside the door. We are taller now, so they are higher up; otherwise they look just like school coat hooks. There are always plenty of blue coats dangling from them.

Lord Hunt is a solicitor too, so if you want to comment anonymously, all you will need to do is to find his blue coat on his next visit and slip a note into his pocket telling him what you think.

Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff Harbour and Sinclair and can be contacted by email [Richard.barr@paston.co.uk](mailto:Richard.barr@paston.co.uk)