

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS WITH

ALISON CROSLAND, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER



Alison Crosland joined Keating Chambers in June 2021 as Chief Operating Officer. Her wide-ranging role includes strategic development, leadership of the staff team, compliance with regulatory requirements, and championing diversity and inclusion. In this interview, we discuss with Alison what her experience to date brings to Keating, and what the future looks like for Keating and the wider Bar.

What prompted you to join Keating Chambers?

I've spent my working life in professional services. I've been interested for a while in the unique business model of the Bar and how it serves clients. Keating appeals as a commercial set with a strong reputation and an international as well as a domestic focus. I value that Keating Chambers is successful, but not complacent. It is keen to continue to improve, for its clients, its members and its staff.

What are some of the challenges you have faced in getting to where you are today?

One of the challenges has been choosing where to focus when there are so many interesting opportunities. Unlike many in the world of the Bar, I haven't spent my entire career in one industry. I've had a varied journey to where I am today. I started my career in a specialist risk consultancy, working in international political and security risk analysis before making the transition into COO roles and business operations. I've also experienced a range of sectors, working in risk consultancy, start-ups, a law firm and the regulatory sector. Every organisation is different, and I love the challenge of getting to understand a new culture and how to enable each unique organisation to be at its best.

What are your interests outside of work, and how do you ensure a good work/life balance in your demanding role?

I have a number of passions, pandemics allowing. I am a big theatre fan and try to take advantage of living in London to go at least once a week. I am also passionate about food (eating out and cooking), travel and seeing exhibitions. I'm also a trustee for a London-based charity BANG Edutainment, which provides support to help vulnerable young people thrive and build sustainable communities.

I love getting to the gym, which helps keep me sane, and is particularly needed since the Keating team introduced me to Crosstown doughnuts. I'm also a trained professional coach, and endeavour to use those skills to keep balance and perspective, as well as to support my team.

What do you think the biggest challenges are for barristers' chambers over the next few years?

Different areas of the Bar face different challenges, and those facing a commercial set such as Keating are not the same as those facing criminal or family sets for example. For me, key challenges include delivering greater diversity and creating an inclusive environment so that we reflect the community we serve, and benefit from the creativity and innovation that diversity of experience and approach brings.

I am also interested in how we evolve the provision of legal services with technological and market changes. Keating has proved resilient and flexible to responding to the challenges of the last couple of years and I am excited about how we can use those skills to continue to evolve.

What have you been your priorities during your first nine months?

My first few months have been focused on building relationships and getting to know everyone, working on how to bring staff and barristers back to Chambers safely as the pandemic evolves, and addressing the increased cyber security threat that the sector has faced.

What do you think is Keating's biggest strength?

It's a cliché, but nonetheless true. Keating's biggest strength is its people, both the quality of its barristers and a dedicated staff team. It is a successful chambers with a clear raison d'être and collegiate spirit, that is fostered by shared expertise and knowledge.

What is the current strategic focus of Keating's leadership team?

We have several specific focuses through Keating's various committees, including our Executive committee, Equality and Diversity committee, Marketing committee, and Pupillage committee, each with a unique role. But there is one clear thread that runs throughout; that is the focus on quality. And I believe that an essential part of this is diversity and inclusion - both attracting more diverse talent, and ensuring diversity can flourish at Keating. There is too much to talk about in one answer, but this ranges from

a focus on outreach, encouraging those who might not consider a career at the Bar as an option to think again, to how we develop the practices of our barristers at every stage of their career.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and why do you personally care about championing a culture of diversity and inclusion?

For me it means attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing the best talent regardless of background and differences, whether of gender, sex, socioeconomic background, upbringing, religion, education, sexual orientation, ethnicity, neurodiversity or life experience. And the critical part is inclusion. An organisation can only truly benefit from diversity if everyone is equally able to contribute and be valued.

I value different experiences and different voices in making Keating a more rewarding and interesting place to work. I also believe it helps us to deliver better and more innovative client service.

What are you most looking forward to at Keating in 2022?

I hope that in 2022 I can meet as many of our instructing solicitors and clients as possible in person to understand what they value most from Keating, and how our clerking and professional support teams can continue to provide the best possible assistance.