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Cascade communication – July 2020

Hello again!

As you all know, there has been a huge amount of work going on to allow us to exit successfully from 10 Old Bailey, and as I record this cascade the office is practically empty and pretty much everything we wanted to move is now where it needs to be. So a huge thank you to all of the Business Continuity team for your efforts, and in particular to Vince who had to dig deep in his negotiations with BT this last weekend, and never gave up, to ensure it has been business as usual for us all this week. Also, thank you to everyone else as well for pulling together in supporting the BC team in meeting this challenge within such short timescales.

Our new temporary registered address is 15 Old Bailey, which will provide us with the services we need in the short term for receiving post and for scanning and printing etc., and which will also provide some flexible office space should we need it. I should stress again that this is a temporary position but it will save on costs for office space we cannot use at the moment and give us some time to take stock of the ongoing difficult business environment and to make steps towards transforming our ways of working in the future, ensuring we are as agile and adaptable as we can be.

Further to the comments provided in the Office Space and Working Arrangements SurveyMonkey, we are aware that some of you find working from home more challenging than others. Our new flexible office space will provide us with some options for helping with that in due course once lockdown is lifted. But meanwhile, we remain in an ongoing and unprecedented situation, and everyone will have unique challenges. So we are determined not to lose sight of the awareness raised within the firm as part of Mental Health Awareness Week and I would like to stress how important it is that you talk to your line manager, or any other manager or member of the people team if you are finding things difficult and need any additional support.

So the move from 10 Old Bailey is close to being complete, and the communication to our clients about our temporary office arrangements is being prepared and we will let you know when that has been sent.

So looking forward to the next phase of the office project, some work has already taken place on looking at the options for a new long term office space, and this will ramp up further over the coming weeks and months. We will be using the information you all provided via the SurveyMonkey on the office and flexible working to inform our choices, and in parallel we will aim to create an agile working policy that will accommodate differing needs and circumstances across the business. And of course we want to ensure that any office spaces that make our shortlist, can facilitate the maintenance of AAT’s excellent and much valued culture.

In mentioning about our culture, I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the partnership and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee to echo Marianne’s recent words of reassurance following the terrible suffering of George Floyd. As you know, as a firm we do not tolerate racist activity or any other kind of discrimination and are committed to creating and maintaining a diverse and talented workforce that we believe drives competitive advantage and creates the culture that we all enjoy and value. We will continue to ensure that diversity and inclusion remains central to our culture in the future and that we celebrate our differences, such as Black History Month and our most recent celebration of Pride month in June.

Turning attention now to other business matters, the management team met in June and I want to share with you some of the key points coming out of our discussions.

On the finances, April and May have been very poor billing months, partly due to WIP having been billed at year end in March, but it is recovering slowly and it remains critical for fee earners to focus on fee earning work and to meet logged time targets to ensure we begin to meet billed time targets in the coming months.

The Inpro billing project has moved into the detailed testing phase and Alok and Claire are working hard in getting us where we need to be for a full roll out and I expect you will hear more about this over the next few weeks.

As you will know from previous communications, the Government has confirmed that the Job Retention Scheme has been extended to the end of October, which we welcome to help us respond to reductions in work. The Government has also confirmed some changes to the furlough grant arrangements whereby employers will contribute more, and the Government has also introduced a Flexible Furloughing Scheme which is effective from 1 July. The flexibility that the revised scheme offers, provides us with some additional options for utilising the scheme. You can access more detailed information on the Flexible Furlough arrangements, and the updated Furlough arrangements which are in place through to the end of July, in the updated COVID-19 Temporary Policy Changes document and the Furlough FAQs, which are now available via HR General. We will assess the ongoing changes to the grant funding arrangements in the coming weeks and update our policies as needed.

We will also continue to be in regular contact with everyone who is furloughed or has previously been furloughed to discuss the ongoing options and seek consent for ongoing furloughing or flexible furloughing where that may be applicable. As I have said before, our aim is to do our very best to ensure you are supported and you feel connected with your team and the firm whist you support the firm by being on furlough. I encourage you to make use of the virtual social events we have on offer such as the film and book clubs and the Wellness Wednesday Virtual Kitchen and there will be more events too coming up.

Another change you can see in the Temporary Policy Changes Document, is the use of 2020 annual leave entitlement.

For those of you who were planning holidays away in the coming few months, and who now cannot go away because of the coronavirus outbreak, you may have cancelled or changed your booked annual leave. This is, of course, understandable, but we would still encourage you to get some well-earned rest and take a break from time to time. We have discussed the operational risks of a large amount of annual leave entitlement being accumulated and taken in the last few months of the calendar year. In order to avoid this, we have agreed that that you should take at least two weeks’ of your 2020 annual leave entitlement by the end of August 2020 if you haven’t planned to do that already. There may be a business reason or agreed personal reason that means this is not reasonably practical, which you can discuss with your line manager, but otherwise please do take an opportunity to plan in some leave. This also applies to those of you who are furloughed, and the updated FAQ document provides more information on this.

I talked in a previous cascade about the temporary arrangements for dealing with promotions, ensuring that we support those who have been planning a promotion case where we can. Some progress has been made on this, and I am delighted to announce two promotions that are effective from 1 July. The first is Sarah Neil who is promoted to Senior Associate in the Trade Mark team and also Kirsty Bulman who will become Principal Secretary across the Litigation and Patent teams. I should also mention Kirsty’s impressive 99% pass mark in the CIPA administrator exam. Congratulations to both Sarah and Kirsty who become our first lockdown promotees.

There is some less positive news for the firm to share with you, and that is that Soizic will be leaving the firm at the end of July to take up a new role with a Swiss law firm based in Geneva. Soizic has made a huge contribution to the firm and has transformed the BD and marketing function during her time with us and we will very much miss the energy and colour that she has brought to the firm and the management team. However, we wish Soizic all the very best for her future as she embarks on her exciting move and we will say our virtual goodbye’s to Soizic before she leaves.

In the meantime, we continue to work on developing relationships with our existing clients and potential new ones, and looking for ways to find new emerging opportunities. Earlier this month, Mike joined the EPO Director of Patent Law in a webinar explaining the EPO’s approach to AI patenting and Mike will also be taking part in further webinars as part of what would have been the CIPA Roadshow, now going ahead as an online platform due to restrictions on travel to the USA. Also in June, Louise and Varuni wrote the UK section of the ‘global guide to anti-counterfeiting’ published in the WTR annual guide, and we were included in the FT’s list of leading European Patent Law Firms. In addition to this Rachel, Mike, Craig, Lawrence and Vanessa also were ranked IP Stars for 2020 by Managing IP.

Remember, you can help the firm to reach as many people as possible by sharing and liking any articles that are posted on LinkedIn and Twitter, and by exploring your own networks and passing on any potential ideas and leads.

So, thank you everyone; we will continue to keep you all updated on how our plans are progressing and we appreciate everything you are doing.

Stay safe and well, and see you again very soon.