



# EMERGING FROM THE COVID STORM SENIOR MEMBERS LOOKING FORWARD

by Barbara Vaughan, Cape Bar

To approach the experiences and outlooks of members in the 10+ category as a collective would negate, to a large extent, how truly individual all of our experiences have been. Personal and home circumstances, the peculiarities of our individual practices and our chosen areas of practice have played, and will continue to play, a large role in our experience of and response to the pandemic in a work context.

Nevertheless, I think there are some general observations that apply to the more senior members of the Bar. An important *caveat* though, for all more junior colleagues who believe that senior colleagues, simply because they are more senior, are secure in their work and have sustainable practices: it may appear so, in many cases it may be so, but often it is not so and always we don't feel so.

I think the greatest advantage of being a more senior practitioner at the Bar through the Covid-19 storm has been having networks, contacts and collegial friendships firmly in place, which can sustain you without needing to be present physically and interacting in order to reinforce and build connection. It is isolating to work from home – one can easily feel you are on your own (a feeling which is paradoxically exacerbated by the close proximity of two young children “home-schooling” and your “working from home” partner). The bricks and mortar of chambers do more than house us; they bind us as colleagues in a profession in a way that is easy to overlook.

Having been at the Bar for 10+ years, I was able to ride on a continuity and depth of relationships that did not make physical presence at chambers an imperative for collegial or work relationships. I am deeply grateful for this, and sympathise with those who have not yet been here long enough for these to become entrenched. While I think this effect has a shelf-life and a return to chambers is inevitably necessary in the

interests of the profession, it has definitely contributed to a realisation among many senior practitioners, and particularly silks with whom I have worked, that they could and would like to work more from home, in the future. I think there will be fundamental shifts in how chambers are used and occupied by more senior members of the Bar as a result.

The pandemic also provided necessary impetus for changing how we work – something one instinctively resists when comfortable and settled. Many of the more senior practitioners have been forced to embrace new technologies, online research and digital solutions that hard copy briefs, secretaries and entrenched traditions have been able to keep safely at bay. Remarkably, it seems to have happened, for most, quite painlessly. The extent to which new working methodologies are embraced and how many of the older systems will continue after the pandemic remains to be seen, but the sense is that there are certainly more options available as to how one could choose to practice.

Over the course of the pandemic, many senior colleagues took the opportunity to return to chambers as soon as the lockdown regulations permitted it. Others chose to continue working from home. The choices that have been made by each of us are obviously informed by a number of personal and particular considerations. But across the board, Covid-19 has certainly given us all an opportunity to reassess what we thought we knew about how we need to work in order to be able to deliver a professional service and to maintain cohesion as a profession. I think it is important to consciously take some of these realisations forward to ensure that we can organise the Bar in such a way that maximises the flexibility that has been introduced while cementing systems and structures that continue to serve us as a collective and a profession.