

Continuing Professional Development in the Legal Profession in Dubai

by Chris Lipscomb - c.lipscomb@tamimi.com -

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CPD in any professional discipline is always a subject that is high on the people related agenda. Within the legal profession, a number of countries such as the UK, Canada and Australia already have a requirement for some form of continuing study as part of the requirement for practicing law.

In the Middle East, the government of Dubai has now cautiously begun to look at this issue in more detail and recently hosted a workshop on 6th December at the Dubai Police Academy to discuss the desirability of implementing compulsory CPD requirements for all lawyers in Dubai.

In recognition of the importance of the workshop, the event managed to attract a number of well known keynote speakers including the firm's own Senior Partner, Essam Al Tamimi and other significant key legal figures in Dubai including Dr Jamal Al Sumaiti, Director General of the Dubai Judicial Institute and Dr Mohammed Kamali, General Director of the Institute of Training and Judicial Studies. A sprinkling of international speakers and senior representatives from other major law firms in the region added to the quality of the debate.

The workshop began with some opening remarks by Mark Beer, DIFC Courts Registrar who really re-emphasized the fact that our clients have the right to expect the highest standards of professionalism from lawyers in a similar way that we take for granted when seeking medical attention or going for dental treatment. He emphasized the importance of professionals maintaining and developing their knowledge in line with legislative changes and best practice but also noted that different levels of lawyers understandably have varying development needs which do not just revolve around pure technical skills. Other speakers who followed Mark noted the importance of fostering a culture that actively encouraged CPD and also noted that those jurisdictions where CPD for lawyers is compulsory generally attracted a more positive impression of the legal profession overall.

Some speakers highlighted the variety and portability of different training media available that could aid CPD including e-learning, a form of development that could potentially prevent a cost effective solution for lawyers in smaller firms. A subsequent session focused specifically on the challenges and benefits for law firms in developing internal training programs. Not surprisingly, this was a topic on which Essam Al Tamimi had a lot to say on given that Al Tamimi is the only firm in the region that has its own locally based Training Academy. In his presentation, Essam picked up on the fact that for him having a structured approach to learning & development was not only desirable but essential if you wanted to attract the most talented lawyers to your firm from other major international players with large numbers of staff who invest significant resources in their CPD propositions.

During the course of the workshop it was clear from everyone present both speakers and delegates alike that they accepted the value and the need for CPD and also commended the Government of Dubai for looking to make this a compulsory part of a lawyer's ability to practice in the Emirate. What was perhaps understandably less clear is exactly the form this would take. It was recognized that there are a myriad of internal and external training bodies that currently provide resources to the legal profession in Dubai and this in itself raised the question of how training providers are regulated or licensed.

Not surprisingly, this workshop was designed to promote debate before more detailed proposals are launched which will no doubt be informed by some of the issues that were discussed at this workshop. In the interim, attendees were asked to explore ways in which they could network best practice through this and similar forums. Al Tamimi itself will be participating in a GCC wide initiative that will help raise standards in the region.

No specific timescales were indicated as to when CPD will become a mandatory requirement in Dubai but there is no question that it will happen. As in almost everything else, Dubai is keen to be seen as a leader in the region when it comes to raising professional standards. Happily, this is one area where Al Tamimi as a firm is also well placed to help shape the future.