

## A golden year for the Scottish Law Commission



Fiftieth anniversary was an opportunity to reflect, writes Lord Pentland

**2**015 is the golden anniversary of the Scottish Law Commission, set up in 1965 by an Act of the UK Parliament. Its role as an independent body is to recommend reforms to improve and modernise the law of Scotland – and most of its work has been implemented by the UK Parliament before devolution in 1999, then by both the UK and Scottish Parliaments following devolution.

This has brought about sweeping changes over 50 years to update Scots law – for example in family law and property law.

It presented the opportunity to celebrate 50 years of Commission-driven law reform for Scotland with events reflecting the high standing of the Scottish Law Commission internationally, within the UK, and in Scotland.

In the international law reform world,

the Commission hosted an international conference which attracted key law reformers from across the Commonwealth and beyond. The Commission is active in promoting the value of systematic law reform, and sharing best practice in law reform internationally, and the conference showcased recent law reform achievements in Scotland. This included the new law reform process in the Scottish Parliament for implementing Commission Bills.

With the UK, things changed on devolution in 1999, but the Commission continued to address areas of Scots law reserved to the UK Parliament. It took part in a leading academic conference about 50 years of the Law Commissions in the UK, held at the UK Supreme Court in London, in July. The value of the Commission's work to the UK Government was recognised when Secre-

tary of State for Scotland, David Mundell MP, visited in November.

As regards Scotland, the strength of the Commission's relationship with Scottish Ministers was recognised by two special visits this year. We were honoured to welcome First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, to the Commission's office in August.

On 15 June, our anniversary date, Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Michael Matheson MSP, visited the Commission, and discussed our work and the value of law reform to Scotland.

Stronger links have also been developed between the Commission and the Scottish Parliament. The Parliament has developed its approach to law reform, with a committee established in 2013 with a remit in relation to law reform and Commission Bills. A Commission Bill can be referred to the Del-

egated Powers and Law Reform Committee, who can then take the lead in considering the Bill. This has enhanced the capacity of the Parliament to deal with Commission Bills, and will increase the rate of implementation of Commission recommendations. Convener, Nigel Don MSP, and committee members, visited the Commission in May to mark the anniversary.

The Commission's role and close engagement with the Scottish legal profession was recognised further by a Law Society of Scotland reception at its conference in October. And a special event was organised by the Scottish Public Law Group in November, at Parliament House in Edinburgh. The Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, James Wolffe QC, opening the event, described the Commission as an "example par excellence" of what can be achieved for our

legal system by the legal community working together in the public interest. Presentations by me as chairman, David Johnston QC, one of our Commissioners, and a former Commissioner, Laura Dunlop QC focused on the Commission and its work.

● Lord Pentland (Paul Cullen QC) is Chairman of the Scottish Law Commission: [www.scotlawcom.gov.uk](http://www.scotlawcom.gov.uk)



Scottish Law Commission

2015: 50 years promoting law reform



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