

SRA BOARD
9 September 2015

CLASSIFICATION – PUBLIC



Chief Executive's Report

Purpose

- 1 This report sets out progress against the SRA's strategic objectives and provides an update on operational performance.
 - Section 1: reports on our priorities and progress against the 2014/15 Business Plan.
 - Section 2: provides an update on operational performance.
 - Section 3: provides details on publication and engagement activity.

If you have any questions about this paper please contact: Paul Philip, Chief Executive, paul.philip@sra.org.uk, 0121 329 6940.

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Section 1: Priorities for 2014/15

- 2 This section provides an update to the Board on our key priorities, starting with an update on any key developments and then moving onto an update against our 2014/15 Business Plan.

Practising Certificate (PC) Fees for 2015/16

- 3 At the last meeting, the Board approved the PC fees for 2015/16. We subsequently submitted our application on behalf of the Law Society Group to the Legal Services Board (LSB) under section 51 of the Legal Services Act 2007 for the level of practising fees for 2015/16 and it has been approved. The 2015/16 PC Renewal Exercise remains on track. Testing is currently being completed and we will be contacting individuals this month to provide them with an overview of this year's project. The renewal period will run from 1 October to 31 October 2015.

Criminal Legal Aid

- 4 We published a warning notice in response to the protocol issued by the London Criminal Courts Solicitors Association (LCCSA) about taking action over criminal legal aid changes and the dispute with Government over pay rates. Our warning notice reminded solicitors that the required standards must continue to be met and that their clients must remain protected. The LCCSA amended the protocol in light of this warning notice, but we continue to have concerns about risks to clients' interests and have written to the association's chair, Jonathan Black, to outline those concerns. Our focus has been on ensuring that whatever commercial decisions firms want to make, they maintain their obligations to their clients and the rule of law.

Progress against our 2014/15 Business Plan

- 5 We are progressing well on the activities being undertaken to deliver our objectives in the Business Plan. Below, I highlight to the Board whether objectives are on track and provide any further updates on key activities that the Board needs to be aware of.

Objective 1: We will reform our regulation to enable growth and innovation in the market and to strike the right balance between reducing regulatory burdens and ensuring consumer protection	On track
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- 6 Overall we are on track to achieve this objective.
- 7 The LSB approved the proposed changes for Sole Practitioners which will come into force on 1 November 2015. This follows consideration by the Board at its meetings in March and June.

SRA BOARD
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- 8 At the beginning of September we went live with a new section within the consumer facing Legal Choices web-site (that we run on behalf of all of the legal services approved regulators) to help Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) better choose and use legal services. This could improve access to justice for this group and help them to get the legal support they need to run, develop and expand their businesses. This is work that we had already identified for future development and follows the commitment made by the Chancellor in the March 2015 Budget to support customers to make informed choices and to improve the information for SMEs on access to legal services. We agreed to deliver this commitment through the website on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Business Industry and Skills. Our work was also supported by the LSB and the Legal Services Consumer Panel.
- 9 The site has been built using focus groups to tailor content to meet SME's needs and the development process for the site will be used as a forerunner for developing tools to support consumers to understand the different options open to them following the change to the Separate Business Rule. There has been a soft launch of these pages with a view to higher profile communication taking place over the next few months. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is also supporting us in promoting the site to SMEs.

Objective 2: We will work with solicitors and firms to raise standards and uphold core professional principles	On track
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- 10 The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills has now approved three apprenticeships in law which will allow individuals to qualify as paralegals, legal executives and solicitors. There has been significant interest from law firms and other employers in the development of this work and the first apprenticeship starts will be from September 2016 with the apprenticeship leading to qualification as a solicitor taking 5 or 6 years to complete. Individuals who qualify as a solicitor through this route will have to demonstrate the competences in the Competence Statement, through an assessment which we specify. This will be available from September 2018.
- 11 As at 19 August 2015, we had granted 40 applications for qualification through equivalent means since the new regulations came into force in July 2014 with a further 75 applications currently being considered.
- 12 On 12 August, we launched our Diversity Workforce Data exercise. Significant numbers of firms have already uploaded their data. The new web tool has received positive comments following our awareness campaign via social media.

SRA BOARD
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CLASSIFICATION – PUBLIC

Objective 3: We will improve our operational performance and make justifiable decisions promptly, effectively and efficiently

On track

- 13 An updated [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) action plan for 2014/15](#) was approved by the EDI Committee at its July meeting and was published on our website on 26 August. The action plan for 2015/16 is now also under development to support the delivery of our [EDI Strategy](#) published last year.
- 14 We have also been progressing our inclusion agenda within the organisation. Our Eid celebrations were well attended and several staff have raised money for our corporate charity, Birmingham and Solihull's Women's Aid, by holding a one day fast alongside colleagues during Ramadan. We also now have five staff networks in place – Christian, Disability, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, Women and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT).
- 15 We have reviewed our overall approach to Corporate Social Responsibility to ensure that we are supporting a range of community interests. The work of our Charity Committee, work with local schools and environmental and waste management are well supported by staff and are welcomed by the organisations we work with.

Objective 4: We will work with our stakeholders to improve the quality of our services and their experience when using them

On track

- 16 The quantitative fieldwork continues for the stakeholder perceptions tracking survey, with a total of 1426 interviews completed at 13 August.
- 17 We are developing a revised Interpreting and Translation Policy which will be published externally. This will include a commitment to, where practicable, translate some of our key corporate documents in Welsh, including the Corporate and EDI strategies; ensure that the areas of our website most used by the public are available in Welsh and exploring using more Welsh in our social media activity.

Section 2: Operational Performance

- 18 We continue to report against our end to end KPIs. The percentage of files closed within 12 months of receipt was 94% at the end of July against our target of 90% and up from 92% in June. The average number of days from assessment to Tribunal proceedings issued has reduced to 567 days in July from 589 in June, 593 in May and 616 days in April.
- 19 We have now launched our email and call back service for small firms which will be available to all regulated firms, but is initially focussed on small firms. Announced at the Sole Practitioners Group Conference on 8 May, it is part of our wider package of support for small firms that we are rolling out.

SRA BOARD
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- 20 Following the data submission to the LSB in June, we have now received the formal request from the LSB to complete our self assessment as part of its assessment of us against the Regulatory Standards. Whilst their request asks us for our general view of progress against each standard, it also asks targeted questions for us to respond to. We are currently compiling our response, which will be submitted to the LSB at the end of October.

Section 3: Publications and Engagement Activity

- 21 We already have over 500 delegates registered to attend the Compliance Conference on 14th October and we anticipate numbers will rise further. Attendance last year was around 360. In terms of external speaking engagements, I have spoken at the LAWASIA Risk Management and Professional Indemnity Insurance Conference in Hong Kong, the 4th International Conference of Legal Regulators in Toronto and at the National Organisation of Bar Counsel annual meeting in Chicago. These conferences enabled mutual learning from the legal sector in other jurisdictions and we are planning to do more on the international stage to promote our work.
- 22 We launched the report on our research into [innovation in legal services](#) at a joint press briefing with the LSB in Martin Lane in July. Seven journalists attended and detail from the report was covered positively in the sector press.

Author Paul Philip, Chief Executive
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