

SRA BOARD
3 December 2019

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Solicitors Regulation Authority – Accountability Statement

What accountability means to us

This statement sets out the SRA Board's commitment to accountability in its oversight of the organisation. Accountability is about taking responsibility for all of the SRA's activities and representing a fair, balanced, and clear assessment of the organisation's position when reporting it to stakeholders and others.

Our role

The SRA is the regulator of solicitors and law firms in England and Wales. We work to protect members of the public and support the rule of law and the administration of justice. We do this by overseeing all education and training requirements necessary to practise as a solicitor, licensing individuals and firms to practise, setting the standards of the profession and regulating and enforcing compliance against these standards. Further information is available [on our website](#).

Our powers

In fulfilling our role, we exercise the statutory regulatory functions of the Law Society of England and Wales (the Law Society) under legislation including the Solicitors Act 1974, Administration of Justice Act 1984 and Legal Services Act 2007. The Law Society is named as an Approved Regulator under the Legal Services Act. These powers are delegated to us as a Board of the Council of the Law Society, as set out in the Law Society's General Regulations¹.

To whom we are accountable

As a public interest regulator, we have a wide accountability to society and the public.

We discharge that accountability in variety of ways.

We make ourselves accountable through publishing a wide range of information. That includes information on our regulatory decisions, as set out in our [Publishing Disciplinary and Regulatory Decisions guidance](#). We also publish our [Standards and Regulations](#) and [Enforcement Strategy](#) and material on our processes and procedures. We report on our work through our publications, including [our Annual Reviews](#), topic specific reports, such as our [Upholding Professional Standards report](#), [Compensation Fund](#) financial statements and [a SRA costs statement](#).

People's views are important to us because we want to make sure that what we do meets their needs. So we engage and [consult widely](#) and report in detail on what we have heard and how we respond. Our [Public Engagement Charter](#) sets out what people can expect from us. Talking with people and fully understanding what they say matters, so we also hold

¹ The Board's Terms of Reference are set out in Regulation 31 of the Law Society's General Regulations and further details of the role and responsibilities of the Board and its members and committees are set out in the [SRA Governance Handbook](#)

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events to discuss our work with stakeholders, such as our annual Compliance Officers conference, our annual Solicitors Qualifying Examination event, and roadshows with the public and support groups. We regularly give evidence at parliamentary committees and work closely with elected representatives.

As a Board of the Law Society Council (the Law Society is the Applicable Approved Regulator under the Legal Services Act 2007) and therefore part of the Law Society Group, we are accountable to the Council both directly and through the Group's Audit Committee and Business and Oversight Board. We are also governed by the General Regulations, which set the framework for how we work. Our work and financial reporting is published through [the Law Society Group Annual Report and consolidated financial statements](#).

We are also accountable to a range of regulators including the legal oversight regulator, the Legal Services Board (LSB), through its Internal Governance Rules made under section 30 of the Legal Services Act 2007 to safeguard the independence of the regulatory functions from the representative functions of approved regulators (in our case the Law Society). Our work is formally assessed by the LSB and [it publishes annual reports on our performance](#) as well as themed reports on specific areas of regulators work.

We are required to provide the Office of Professional Body Anti-Money Laundering Supervision (OPBAS) with information upon request. OPBAS sets out its expectations for supervisors, such as us in relation to governance, staff training, supervision and information sharing [in its Sourcebook](#). We also contribute to the Treasury annual report on anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist finance supervision.

We are a Designated Professional Body in relation to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), which means that many firms we authorise are exempt from the statutory requirement to be regulated by the FCA to undertake certain financial services and activities. We are required to provide the FCA with an annual report on our work in this area.

We are required to comply with other legislation which applies to bodies of our size and nature, such as the Public Sector Equality Duty and [requirements relating to reporting annually on the gender pay gap](#).

The work of our Board

A key part of our accountability is that the work of the Board is clear and transparent. There are a number of ways in which we ensure this, including:

- a) Through our decision-making framework, which explains the process and considerations that the Board employs in making its decisions.
- b) Through the publication of Board papers and our transparency statement [\[link to be included once approved and published\]](#), which sets out how we provide information on how our Board works what we publish in relation to Board meetings.
- c) Through our Board members' direct engagement with our stakeholders at events around England and Wales, regular meeting with key groups and our wider outreach work.

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- d) Through our commitment to consultation and engagement on our Corporate Strategy, policies, plans and work programmes, as set out in our consultation policy and our [Public Engagement Charter](#).
- e) [Through our Governance Handbook](#), which underpins all the work the Board does and which includes terms of reference for the Board and its committees, the roles and responsibilities of Chair and Board members, and conduct and appraisal of Board members (and includes this accountability statement).
- f) Through our [Delegation Framework](#). This sets out how the Board, Committees and Executive work together to discharge our functions. This includes the underpinning principles that support transparency and effective oversight.

Our staff

We make clear to those who work for us how they are accountable and the standards that are expected of them. This includes:

- Our staff code of conduct (which reflects the standards expected by our Board members).
- Our behavioural competencies – leading and engaging, collaborating with stakeholders, delivering quality results, culture of improvement and demonstrating judgment.
- Our values. These define what is important in the way we interact with stakeholders, both internally and externally
- Our defined ways of working – Writing the SRA Way, Safety and Security, Working Together, Delivering Customer Service, Supporting each other and Supporting the environment.

All of the above are set out in a defined area of our intranet – Working at the SRA – and are integral to our culture and how we recruit, train and manage and our staff.

How we share information about our work

We publish information about our work and performance in a wide range of documents including:

- Annual Reviews
- Upholding Professional Standards
- costs statement
- Risk Outlook
- risk papers
- thematic reviews
- research
- scam alerts
- firm diversity profile
- our own annual workforce diversity profile
- our gender pay gap report
- key policies, such as on reasonable adjustments

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- Compensation Fund financial reports
- Group Annual report and financial statements
- annual report on corporate complaint handling by our Independent Reviewer.

We publish key information in Welsh and/or in easy read, and we provide full translation facilities on our website.

In addition to website publication, we have a range of digital communication channels that we use to provide information to different audiences. We are increasingly using digital, mobile-first communication, allowing real-time reporting and reducing the need for printed publications with their environmental impact and constraints on accessibility.

Our Transparency Code and Publication Scheme

Although we are not covered by the Freedom of Information Act, we apply our own code as we believe in being as open and transparent as possible about what we do. Our core principle is to make information available unless there is a good reason not to.

Our transparency code sets out how we respond to requests from individuals and organisations for information held by us and which is not included in our Publication Scheme. It applies to information such as documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings

Our publication scheme sets out what we make available as a matter of course. It is [available on our website](#) as is the detail of our [Transparency Code](#).

External benchmarking and assurance

In addition to the above, we take voluntary steps to satisfy ourselves that our work, and the way in which we carry it out, is to a good standard. We do this by using the services of appropriate external organisations to scrutinise our work and, where appropriate, by seeking accreditation against recognised national/international standards, such as:

- Environmental certification with Lloyds Register Quality Assurance against International Standards.
- Assurance activities by the British Standards Institution on our information security.
- Independent scrutiny of our corporate complaints handling by an Independent Reviewer.
- A programme of internal audits covering key areas of our work undertaken by an independent audit firm
- Use of external agents to assure quality on key projects.
- Adoption (and in some areas accreditation against) the standards of the Institute of Customer Service.
- Our annual submission to Stonewall for benchmarking against the UK Workplace Equality Index to assess progress on lesbian, gay, bi and trans inclusion in the workplace.