

# FAQs for consumers of legal services

As a consumer of legal services or a member of public, you may have questions about using a solicitor. We hope these frequently asked questions help. To begin, select a topic below.

## *Finding a solicitor*

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### *I am looking for a "no win, no fee" solicitor. Can you help?*

You will need to contact each firm of solicitors directly to find out if they are willing to review your case on a "no win, no fee" basis. We do not hold this information.

Read more about costs [consumers/instructing/costs-legal-aid/] and "no win, no fee" agreements.

To find solicitors who might be able to help in specific areas of law, use the Law Society's directory, Find a solicitor [http://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/].

### *I've never used a solicitor before. How do I find one and what should I expect?*

If you have never used a solicitor before, you may find it useful to read advice on finding and using a solicitor from us and from the Law Society:

- Searching for a solicitor [consumers/choosing/#finding] using the Solicitors Register [consumers/register/].
- How to get the best service for your needs by narrowing down your search results
- What to expect from a lawyer [consumers/choosing/what-to-expect/]
- How to get the best from a lawyer [consumers/choosing/get-best-solicitor/]
- Guidance on costs [consumers/instructing/costs-legal-aid/]

### *Can you find me a legal aid solicitor?*

No. We are unable to help you find a legal aid solicitor.

To find out if you are eligible for legal aid and free and confidential legal advice, contact Civil Legal Advice (CLA) on 0345 345 4345 or visit [www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice](http://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice) [https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice/].

There are several ways to access cheap or free legal advice. Read more about costs and legal aid [consumers/instructing/costs-legal-aid/]

To find solicitors who might be able to help in a particular area of law, use the Law Society's directory, Find a solicitor [http://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/].

## *Checking a solicitor's records*

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### *I have looked on 'Find a Solicitor' but cannot find my solicitor. What can I do?*

You can search for your solicitor on our Solicitors Register [consumers/register/].

The Law Society's Find a Solicitor [http://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/] search will help you if you are

looking for a solicitor who specialises in a particular area of law. It is optional for solicitors to appear on this search.

### *How do I check a solicitor's record with the SRA?*

All published regulatory decisions remain on the site for three years.

You can check a solicitor's record [\[consumers/solicitor-check/\]](#) to find out if we have published decisions about a firm or individual.

For information prior to the three year period, [\[http://www.sra.org.uk/contact-us\]](http://www.sra.org.uk/contact-us) **contact us** [\[home/contact-us/\]](#) .

### *I used a solicitor several years ago. Now, I need my files but cannot find the solicitor. Can you help me?*

Your solicitor may have changed address.

To find the current contact details of a solicitor you can check our Solicitors Register. [\[consumers/register/\]](#)

If you are unable to find the solicitor or firm, please contact us [\[contact-us\]](#) .

Please provide us with as much information as possible to help us complete a search, including: the name and address of the firm of solicitors you used, the name of any solicitor with whom you had dealings, and the date on which you last had dealings with the firm. (Even an approximate year will help us with the search.)

### *I checked the record of my solicitor, but couldn't find them on your solicitor check. Does this mean they're not a real solicitor?*

No, this means that they do not have any published regulatory decisions on their record for the past three years.

Not all solicitors have regulatory decisions against them, and not all regulatory decisions are published.

Look up your solicitor in the SRA's Solicitors Register [\[consumers/register/\]](#) to confirm their status.

## *Using a solicitor*

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### *I'm purchasing a house. My solicitor says I need to pay his bill now, but we do not complete until next week. Is this allowed?*

Yes. In conveyancing transactions, because the solicitor needs to pay stamp duty and land registry fees on the day of completion or shortly thereafter, they tend to issue one bill/completion statement to clients asking for monies just before completion.

This bill normally includes their costs, and this is acceptable practice.

### *I am purchasing my neighbour's house, and they are purchasing mine. The solicitor, who neither of us has used before, says he cannot act for both of us. Is this correct?*

Yes. A solicitor can only act for both parties to a conveyancing transaction if

- the parties are connected or related in law, or
- they are both established clients, or
- the transaction is for less than £10,000, or
- each client by chance went to a different office of the same law firm.

*I am the executor of my mother's will. I requested the will from the solicitor, as my mother has gone into a nursing home. But the solicitor says "no". Is he right?*

Yes. A solicitor owes a duty of confidentiality to their client. Therefore, until your mother dies (and at that time the duty to keep matters confidential will pass to the executors), the solicitor cannot hand over the will. The solicitor could give you a copy of the will if your mother gives her written consent and has full mental capacity to give that consent. The solicitor may have to visit her to assess capacity before handing over the will.

*How can I find out how much it will cost to use a solicitor?*

Talk to the solicitor or firm to find out how the costs will be calculated. Fees vary widely, depending on the type of work and how long it will take.

This is a discussion that you need to have with each solicitor or firm that you use, to fully understand the costs involved. Read more about costs [\[consumers/instructing/costs-legal-aid/\]](#) and what to expect from a solicitor [\[consumers/choosing/what-to-expect/\]](#).

*I have my first meeting with a solicitor but I'm not sure what to expect, what to ask or what to take along. What can I do to get the most out of our meeting?*

Preparation is essential, and you should get as much relevant information together as possible, including relevant paperwork.

For more about what you may need to consider for your first meeting with a solicitor, including the sort of information you can expect to receive, read our information on finding a solicitor [\[consumers/choosing/\]](#) and what to expect from a solicitor [\[consumers/choosing/what-to-expect/\]](#).

*How can I find out if a solicitor is regulated by the SRA?*

You can check our Solicitors Register [\[consumers/register/\]](#).

## *Problems with a solicitor*

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*How do I make a complaint about my solicitor?*

You must complain to your solicitor or firm of solicitors first.

How to complain to your solicitor [\[consumers/problems/report-solicitor.page#how-complain\]](#)

If you have complained to your solicitor or firm and you are not satisfied with their response, you can take things further.

- **If your concerns are about poor service**, such as a problem relating to fees or delayed communication, **contact the** Legal Ombudsman [\[https://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/how-we-work/consumer-journey/\]](https://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/how-we-work/consumer-journey/).
- If you have concerns about a solicitor who you have not instructed, or if your complaint relates

to a breach of SRA Standards and Regulations [[solicitors/standards-regulations/principles/](#)] or to an allegation of dishonesty or discrimination, you should report the matter to us [[consumers/problems/report-solicitor.page#how-report-sra](#)].

### *I am not happy about the fees that I have been charged. What can I do?*

Before you query your fees, ask your solicitor how the fees were calculated.

If you still feel you have been charged incorrectly or misled about the costs, the first thing you must do is complain directly to the solicitor or firm of solicitors. The solicitor or firm should have given you details of their complaints procedure when you started using them, and you can request information about their complaints procedure at any time. It should also appear on a firm's website.

How to complain to your solicitor [[consumers/problems/report-solicitor/#how-complain](#)]

If you do not get a satisfactory answer from the solicitor or firm, take your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman [<https://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/how-we-work/consumer-journey/>] (LeO), an independent organisation dealing with complaints about poor service from lawyers and legal services. LeO agrees that you have been overcharged, it may make the solicitor or firm refund or reduce your legal fees. If you have lost out due to other aspects of poor service, LeO may award compensation.

You can also ask a court to examine your bill; you may incur further costs, and you should get independent legal advice beforehand. For more advice on legal fees, read our information about costs [[consumers/using-solicitor/costs-legal-aid.page](#)].

### *You have closed my solicitor down, but they had my money and papers. What do I do now?*

If we have closed down the solicitor or firm that you were using (known as an "intervention"), we will have appointed intervention agents to go through the files and accounts of the firm to return them to clients wherever possible. If you do not have the details of the intervention officers, contact us.

If you are the client of a firm closed by us, read our advice about implications for you [[consumers/problems/solicitor-closed-down/intervention/](#)].

### *I can't get in contact with my solicitor. What should I do?*

Your solicitor may have changed address.

To find the current contact details of a solicitor you can check our Solicitors Register.

If your solicitor's contact details have not changed, you will need to contact us [[contact-us](#)].

We can tell you if the firm has closed, been abandoned [[consumers/problems/fraud-dishonesty/abandonment-closure.page](#)] or if we have closed the firm [[consumers/problems/solicitor-closed-down/intervention/](#)].

### *You have closed a solicitor down, but they owe my company money. Who is liable?*

All trade debts are the liability of the owners of the firm or sole practitioner in question. We do not take any responsibility for the trade debts of those we regulate. We recommend seeking independent legal advice on this matter.

## *I don't think my solicitor is regulated by the SRA. What does this mean?*

It is a criminal offence for anyone who is not on the roll of solicitors to call themselves a solicitor or act as a solicitor.

To check that a solicitor is genuine, or if you think you are dealing with a bogus solicitor, contact us [\[home/contact-us/\]](#) immediately.

## *Solicitors closed down*

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### *What is an intervention?*

An intervention takes place when the SRA closes down a solicitor's practice. This power is given to us by Parliament. It enables us to take from the firm documents and money that belong to clients. We can only intervene in the public interest.

An intervened firm is completely closed down. It is no longer able to act for its clients. Usually, we hire a specialist firm of solicitors to help us close down a practice, and we call such firms SRA intervention agents.

### *Why does the SRA intervene?*

We intervene into solicitors' firms to protect the interests of clients, the public and the solicitors' profession.

Before closing down a firm, we must have concerns about the firm that make us believe clients' interests are at risk. So, intervention is a protective step; it does not always mean we have made a finding against a firm or an individual.

There are several grounds on which we may intervene, which may include:

- Protecting the interests of clients (or former or potential clients)
- We suspect dishonesty on the part of someone at the firm.
- The only solicitor at the firm has been made bankrupt, sent to prison or struck off the roll of solicitors.
- The practice has been abandoned.
- There have been serious breaches of the SRA Standards and Regulations.

Learn about the law governing intervention [\[consumers/solicitor-check/closures##egislation\]](#)

When we intervene into a firm, we sum up the reasons behind this action in a record of the decision on our website.

A solicitor or firm that we have closed down can apply to the High Court to have our decision to intervene overturned.

### *We have closed down a firm, what happens now?*

When we close down a firm, we take the documents and money controlled by the practice.

- We freeze the firm's bank accounts and arrange for the funds to be transferred to the us.
- We ask an intervention agent to act for us. The agent takes the firm's papers so they can be held safely.

- We or the agent tries to return the papers and money held by the practice to the people they belong to.

Our intervention agent tries to contact all clients who have ongoing, current cases that were being handled by an intervened firm to tell them we have closed down the firm. Our Intervention Archives Department contacts clients if we find a will, deed or other document of record, such as a power of attorney, that is theirs. The intervention agent asks the client for instructions about what should happen to their file or document.

We keep safe the documents and money taken from an intervened firm until we are able to return them to the people they belong to. We may not be able to return papers and money straight away if

- the firm's accounts have not been kept properly,
- money or papers have gone missing,
- we cannot contact the people they belong to.

### *What we do not do*

- We do not take over and run the intervened firm or do legal work on behalf of its clients, except in an emergency.
- We cannot help employees or trade creditors of firms that we have closed down. (See our advice for employees [[consumers/problems/solicitor-closed-down/intervention-employees-effect/](#)] or our information for trade creditors [[consumers/problems/solicitor-closed-down/intervention-debt-creditors/](#)].)

### *What happens to my money?*

The money in an intervened firm's bank accounts is transferred to us. Then, we or the intervention agent looks at the intervened firm's accounts to work out who the money belongs to.

We or the agent will try to return any money the firm was holding for you.

### *Claiming your money from the firm's bank accounts*

**You need to make an application for money to be returned to you.**

To claim your money from the bank accounts of a firm we have closed down, contact us [[home/contact-us/](#)].

If the firm's accounts are not in good order, it might be hard to work out exactly how much money is owed—and to whom. For that reason, it might take us or the agent some time to return your money.

### *Applying to our Compensation Fund*

If we cannot return money you are owed from the firm's bank accounts, or if we can only return part of the money, you can apply to our Compensation Fund [[consumers/compensation-fund/](#)].

If you urgently need money that a firm we have closed down was holding for you, and you cannot wait for us to look at the firm's accounts, you can apply to our Compensation Fund [[consumers/compensation-fund/](#)].

We cannot guarantee that you will get a grant, and you must prove that the solicitor was holding your money and you have or are likely to suffer a financial loss. For more information, contact us [[home/contact-us/](#)].

## *Where are my documents?*

### *Ongoing cases*

If you have an ongoing business with a solicitor firm that we have closed down and your file can be found, our intervention agent will contact you to ask what you want done with your papers.

If you have not heard from our intervention agent yet and want to talk to them about your case, get the agent's contact details by following the instructions under Find out if a firm has been closed down [</consumers/problems/solicitor-closed-down/intervened-firms/>].

You can tell our intervention agent who your new solicitor is or where you would like them to send your papers.

Our intervention agents do not take over and run intervened firms or do legal work on behalf of their clients, except in an emergency.

Our intervention agents do not take over and run intervened firms or do legal work on behalf of their clients, except in an emergency.

### *Wills and other documents of record*

If a firm that we have closed down was holding a will or other document of record for you (deeds to a property, for example) and your file can be found, our Intervention Archives Department will contact you to ask what you want done with your papers. Depending on the volumes this may take some time. Please be assured your documents are safely stored in the meantime.

If you have not heard from our Intervention Archives Department yet you can arrange to complete a file request form [</consumers/problems/claim-papers/#intervention-archive>].

We can send the documents to your new solicitor or where you would like us to send your papers.

### *Do I need legal advice or new solicitors?*

If a firm we have closed down was handling a case for you that was ongoing on the date of our intervention, you must instruct new solicitors to act on your behalf if you want to carry on with the case.

You can choose any solicitor to carry on your case, unless your case is publicly funded (for example, you have legal aid). We can only hand over a publicly funded case to a firm of solicitors with a Legal Aid Agency franchise in the right area of law.

To find out about solicitors in your area, use the Law Society's Find a solicitor [<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/find-a-solicitor/>] directory.

For legal advice, try your local Citizens Advice Bureau or Law Centre.

### *What if my case is urgent?*

The intervention agent tries to find and contact clients with urgent cases straight away. Each client needs to instruct another firm to represent them. If there is no time for this—for example, if the client is due to complete on a house sale or purchase on the day of the intervention or the next day—the agent acts on behalf of the client on an emergency basis only.

### *Papers*

The intervention agent does its best to identify urgent cases straight away. If you have an

urgent matter, the agent will try to contact you to tell you what is happening and ask you what you want.

The intervention agent may fail to identify your file as urgent. So, if you have an urgent case, it is important for you to contact the agent quickly. If you do not have the contact details of our intervention agent, contact us [\[/home/contact-us/\]](#).

## *Money*

If you urgently need money that a firm we have closed down was holding for you, and you cannot wait for us to look at the firm's accounts, you can apply to our Compensation Fund for a grant [\[/claim\]](#).

We cannot guarantee that you will get a grant, and you must prove that the solicitor was holding your money or that you are suffering hardship because we closed down your solicitor's firm. For more information, contact us [\[/home/contact-us/\]](#).

## *What happens to closed files?*

If a firm that we have intervened into acted for you in the past and your case finished before the date of the intervention, you will not be contacted as a matter of course.

If we recover your file from the intervened firm, we will keep it safe in our Intervention Archive Department.

Please complete and return the form [\[/consumers/problems/claim-papers/#intervention-archive\]](#) if you want to see whether Intervention Archives took possession of any of your papers together with proof of identity.

Intervention Archives aim to process 85% of these requests within 16 weeks. This does depend on the volume of requests.

## *You have closed a solicitor down, but they owe my company money. Who is liable?*

All trade debts are the liability of the owners of the firm or sole practitioner in question. We do not take any responsibility for the trade debts of those we regulate. We recommend seeking independent legal advice on this matter.

## *My firm has closed*

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### *I cannot contact my solicitor. Has the firm closed down?*

Your solicitor may have changed address.

To find the current contact details of firms we regulate, you can use our Law firm search [\[/consumers/using-solicitor/law-firm-search\]](#).

To find the current contact details of an individual solicitor, use the Law Society's directory at Find a solicitor [\[http://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk\]](http://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk).

If you are unable to find the solicitor or firm, please contact us [\[/home/contact-us/\]](#).

### *I was an employee at a firm that has closed. What can I do to get wages owed?*

Your contract of employment is personal to you and your former employer. We are unable to assume any rights or obligations in relation to your contract.



You may wish to consider seeking independent legal advice. Contacting Citizens Advice [<http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>] might be a good place to start. Or, if you are a member of a trade union, it may be able to help.

### *The firm of solicitors that I used is now closed. How can I get my files?*

For help finding your files, please complete and return the form [[consumers/problems/claim-papers/#intervention-archive](#)].

Please provide as much information as possible to help us complete a search, including the name and address of the firm of solicitors you used, the name of any solicitor with whom you had dealings, and the date on which you last had dealings with the firm. (Even an approximate year will help us with the search.)

## *Accessibility*

### *I am blind and would like a Braille copy of some information on your website. Do you provide this and, if so, how can I get it?*

We have taken care to make sure that the content on our website is as accessible as reasonably possible and compatible with assistive technology such as screen readers—for more, see our accessibility information.

However, if you do need information in other formats, please phone or email our Contact Centre [[home/contact-us/](#)] with details of your request.

## *Cold calling and canvassing*

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### *I have been telephoned a number of times by people offering legal services, is this allowed?*

No.

Neither solicitors nor anyone working for them are allowed to telephone people offering their legal services. Some companies offering help with Wills, Personal Injury Claims or Payment Protection Insurance (PPI) claims for example may not be solicitors that we regulate. If you find out who is calling, or who the person is calling on behalf of, we can tell you if we regulate them and if we can take action. Please email us [[home/contact-us/](#)] if this has happened to you.

### *A solicitor has approached me in my local shopping area offering legal services, I felt pressured, is this allowed?*

No.

Neither solicitors nor anyone working for them should approach people offering their services. No one should be pressured into choosing a firm. Please email us [[home/contact-us/](#)] if this has happened to you.

### *I was approached by a solicitor offering legal services, and signed documentation without understanding it. What can I do?*

Raise this with your lawyer who can explain things to you and the process if you change your

mind. If you are not happy with the response, you can contact the Legal Ombudsman - it resolves disputes between lawyers and consumers.

Please email us [\[/home/contact-us/\]](#) if you felt pressured into signing documentation or otherwise felt the solicitor behaved unethically.