

## News release

### *Checks reveal law firms need to do more to comply with transparency rules*

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A review of law firms has found that almost one-in-five have made no effort to comply with rules to help the public understand law firm's prices and services.

We reviewed a random sample of 500 law firms' websites to see whether they were complying with new rules that came into effect last December. The Transparency Rules require firms to publish price and service information for a range of common legal services, as well as information about complaints.

Not all firms selected had a website that worked, but of the 447 that did most were either fully complying (25%) or partially complying (58%). The remaining 17% were not complying with the rules at all. There were particular issues for firms providing immigration services, with more than three out of ten failing to comply in any way.

Generally, firms who were partially complying were getting most things right, including publishing relevant price information, but fell short in a small number of areas. Most commonly they failed by not displaying complaints information, with more than half (52%) not complying. Other areas where firms fell short included not specifying the amount of VAT applied to costs or failing to display information on key stages or likely timescales.

There were also issues around disbursements. Disbursements are typically costs to be paid to third parties to help progress legal work, such as Land Registry or court fees. Many firms were not providing a description or estimated costs of likely disbursements, and again not specifying where VAT applied.

We are following up with all firms where there were issues. We have given the 78 firms who are not complying at all two months to do so. We will then consider enforcement action if they continue to fall short. If a firm was only partially complying, we have highlighted to them what they need to do to fully comply. These firms will be targeted in future webs sweeps, which we plan to carry out a least twice a year.

**Anna Bradley, SRA Chair**, said: "Most people struggle to access legal services, and even when they do, they find it tough to shop around. Our new rules aim to give people a fighting chance of understanding up-front the costs of different law firms, and what they will get for their money.

"It's obviously a mixed picture. We could see that most firms were genuinely trying to comply, but there is no excuse for those who have done nothing. If they don't get their website in order promptly, then we will need to consider enforcement action."

The results of the checks can be found here:

Go to the checks information [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/web-sweep/>]

We have also today published a range of tips for firms to help them comply, targeted on the most common issues. We already published guidance to firms last autumn to firms, which included sample templates for presenting price information:

Go to the resources page [<https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/transparency/>]

### **The checks**

We selected a sample of 500 law firm websites to review. This sample featured websites operated by a variety of firm types, location, size. We specifically targeted firms who provided at least one of the services covered by our rules, but 118 firms included in the web sweep did not publicise that they offered one of those services and therefore for those firms our review was confined to checking whether they provided the required complaints information.

Of the selected sample, 53 sites were found to either not be working or were still under construction. The results are based on our review of the remaining 447 sites.