

News release

New resources issued providing law firms with support on workplace culture

08 February 2022

New resources providing law firms with support and guidance on creating healthy working environments have been issued, coinciding with the publication of a review into what solicitors say about the culture in their existing workplaces.

Based on a survey of around 200 solicitors, plus feedback from range of stakeholders, our Workplace Culture Thematic Review [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/workplace-culture-thematic-review/>] found that while three quarters of respondents reported working in a broadly positive environment, there are still concerns and issues. These included:

- working long hours, significantly beyond those contracted (half of all respondents)
- levels of stress and pressure
- focus on financial targets rather than other achievements
- anxiety around reporting mental health issues and bullying behaviour

The review also highlights best practice from a wide range of firms which are leading the way in delivering positive working environments, as well as checklists and action points firms can use to review and improve their own cultures.

While only a small number of people responding to the review had directly experienced unacceptable behaviour themselves, such as bullying or harassment, the review did identify that such issues can and do still occur within some firms.

In response to this, and released alongside the thematic review, our new 'workplace wellbeing' guidance [<https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/workplace-environment/>] sets out what is expected of firms in terms of looking after their staff's wellbeing and to protect them from bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation.

Paul Philip, Chief Executive of the SRA, said: 'As we have all experienced over the last two years, the workplace environment and culture is important for everyone. In the legal sector, a poor culture can not only affect personal wellbeing but also ethical behaviour, competence and ultimately the standard of service received by clients. That's been coming

through in our enforcement work and we are concerned that some workplaces could potentially be contributing to mistakes and misconduct.

'We are now publishing a thematic review on what's happening in the legal workplace, helping firms to consider what more they can do to ensure a positive culture, where solicitors at every level can speak up and the demands of a commercial environment are balanced with wellbeing. We also have new guidance on the risks of failing to support and protect colleagues, setting out clearly what we expect from firms. I urge solicitors and management to read these documents and take the necessary steps.'

Key themes identified in our review included:

- The importance of creating a safe environment for staff to speak up about concerns
- The value employees placed on support from line managers and colleagues
- The need to balance wellbeing with commercial requirements
- Disconnects between the actions of senior leaders and the culture they promote
- The importance of engaging and involving employees in decisions
- The benefits and challenges of remote working and its effect on trust