

News from the board

Reflections on September Board - Anna Bradley

13 September 2019 | Anna Bradley

We always look forward to Board meetings around the country because they give us such a good opportunity to meet with and hear from local voices across England and Wales. This week we had the pleasure of visiting Bristol.

Meeting people in and around Bristol

Before our Board meeting, we held several workshops with the public looking at issues such as how to help people get to grips with what consumer protections solicitors and law firms offer. It might sound a bit technical but as always, it was impressive to see just how quickly people understand the implications and articulate what they need.

We also tested some ideas about our new register of firms and solicitors. We already publish firms' details through our Law Firm Search service, and disciplinary information through Check a Solicitor – but our new register will pull all that together with even more information. We have already spoken to more than 2,000 members of the public about this project and the focus group session confirmed how useful people would find key regulatory information about solicitors. I'd encourage all firms to make sure their details are fully up-to-date in mySRA, so they don't risk any confusion when we launch the register in the next few months.

The Board also met with around 20 different local organisations - from local law societies to charities dealing with issues such as homelessness, mental health and domestic abuse.

We asked them what legal issues they are seeing. Key themes were the impact of legal aid cuts, the growth of technology and the importance of investment in digital infrastructure, and the importance of diversity in the profession to meet the needs of different communities.

The SRA is not going to solve any of these issues alone, but we can play our part in achieving wider access to expert legal help.

Legal Access Challenge

Our Legal Access Challenge aims to help do that. It includes funding for new legal tech solutions to help the public and small businesses. This week I have been reviewing entries, which have exceeded expectations;

we on the judging panel have a tough job whittling it down to eight award winners.

At the Board meeting itself, we agreed to consult on our draft Corporate Strategy for 2020 - 2023, in October. Not surprisingly, technology will be a key theme.

SQE in Welsh

We also discussed how we best serve the needs of any candidates who may want to take the Solicitors Qualifying Examination in Welsh. This means finding the right balance between ensuring the standard of examination is consistent regardless of which language it is provided in and that the costs of delivery help us to achieve our ambition of wider access to legal qualifications.

Our new Standards and Regulations

Finally, Board looked at the preparation for our new Standards and Regulations, which will come into effect on 25 November. We have already done a lot of work to help firms and solicitors get ready and will be doing more in the next 10 weeks, including launching a new webpage targeted at the profession to help them easily understand the key changes and the support available. But much of this discussion was about the extensive programme of work that is ongoing inside the organisation to ensure that every SRA staff member is ready to implement the new standards consistently.