

News release

Research suggests smooth transition to new rules

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The majority of solicitors and law firms are positive about new codes of conduct and rules, with increasing numbers taking advantage of opportunities to work in new ways and deliver their services more flexibly.

These are among the headline findings of our research to evaluate how the profession is finding working to our new Standards and Regulations – which were introduced in November 2019.

The rules are shorter, simpler and less prescriptive. They place greater trust in a solicitor's professional judgement, reducing regulatory burdens and providing them with greater flexibility about how and where they practise.

The SRA Standards and Regulations saw the creation of separate codes of conduct for firms and individuals, adoption of simplified Accounts Rules, and the introduction of the SRA Transparency Rules and new enforcement strategy,

Independent research [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/year-one-evaluation-standards-regulations/>] undertaken by the Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services, which included results from a survey to which more than 3,000 solicitors replied, found that:

- Three quarters (74%) of practising solicitors were familiar with the changes made, with the majority positive about the overall effects of the reforms
- The majority felt that having separate codes of conduct for firms and individuals was helpful and made it clearer what was expected of each
- More than half (54%) of practising respondents said the new rules provided greater flexibility, and a third (37%) felt that new flexibilities had helped them cope better with the constraints brought in by the Covid-19 pandemic
- There are now over 400 SRA-regulated freelance solicitors
- There is also a small, but growing number of solicitors offering services direct to the public while working within non SRA-regulated organisations.

Paul Philip, SRA Chief Executive, said 'We are pleased to see that the majority of the profession have not only found the transition to the new rules largely seamless, but that solicitors and firms are also beginning to take advantage of the flexibility they were designed to deliver.

'At a time when the Covid-19 pandemic has placed huge pressures on both consumers and law firms, removing unnecessary regulatory burdens and allowing solicitors to be more agile and adaptable in how they work day-to-day looks to have been of direct benefit to many.

'Of course, it's still early days, and we won't truly see the impact these changes will deliver for the public for some time to come, but overall the findings of this research suggest encouraging signs that we are moving in the right direction.'

As well as a survey of solicitors the independent research included one-to-one interviews with both solicitors and consumers and detailed consultations with consumer and legal service representative groups.

The research was designed to give early indications on how the Standards and Regulations reforms were settling in, and their 'direction of travel'. Further evaluation once the new rules have been in place for three and five years will follow.

We previously published a separate report looking at the early impact of adoption of our new transparency rules

[<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/news/press/transparency-research-2020/>] .