

Natalie Salunke

Solicitor

430338

Agreement Date: 11 November 2021

Decision - Agreement

Outcome: Regulatory settlement agreement

Outcome date: 11 November 2021

Published date: 15 November 2021

Firm details

Firm or organisation at date of publication and at time of matters giving rise to outcome

Name: RVU

Address(es): The Cooperage, 5 Copper Row, London SE1 2LH

Firm ID: 662108

Outcome details

This outcome was reached by agreement.

Decision details

1. Agreed outcome

1.1 Natalie Salunke ("Miss Salunke"), an inhouse solicitor at RVU, agrees to the following outcome to the investigation of her conduct by the Solicitors Regulation Authority ("SRA"):

- a. she is fined £1,100
- b. to the publication of this agreement
- c. to pay costs of the investigation fixed at £300.

2. Summary of facts

2.1 On 3 October 2020, Miss Salunke collided with a sign on a roundabout and was subsequently arrested by the police and charged with driving while under the influence of excess alcohol.

2.2 An evidential sample of breath provided by Miss Salunke at the police station showed an alcohol level of 77ug per 100ml of breath. The

prescribed limit in England & Wales is 35ug per 100ml of breath.

2.3 On 23 October 2020, Miss Salunke pleaded guilty at Cornwall Magistrates Court to driving while under the influence of excess alcohol.

2.4 The sentence was:

- a. disqualification from holding or obtaining a driving licence for 20 months (reduced by 20 weeks if Miss Salunke completed a course approved by the Secretary of State), and
- b. a fine of £1,380.

2.5 Miss Salunke was also ordered to pay:

- a. victim surcharge of £138, and
- b. costs of £85.

2.6 Miss Salunke notified the SRA of her conviction on 23 October 2020.

3. Admissions

3.1 Miss Salunke makes the following admissions which the SRA accepts:

- a. That by virtue of her conduct and conviction for driving while under the influence of excess alcohol, she failed to behave in a way that upholds public trust and confidence in the solicitors' profession in breach of Principle 2 of the SRA Principles 2019.

4. Why a fine is an appropriate outcome

4.1 The SRA's Enforcement Strategy and its topic guide on driving with excess alcohol convictions sets out its approach to the use of its enforcement powers where there has been a failure to meet its standards or requirements.

4.2 When considering an appropriate outcome in this matter, the SRA has taken into account Miss Salunke's admissions and the following mitigation which she has put forward:

- a. This is an isolated incident.
- b. Miss Salunke pleaded guilty at the earliest opportunity.
- c. Miss Salunke has successfully completed a drink-drive offenders course approved by the Secretary of State.
- d. Miss Salunke has expressed regret for her actions and has shown insight and remorse in respect of her conduct.



- e. Miss Salunke promptly reported her conviction to the SRA and cooperated fully with its investigation.

4.3 The SRA considers that a fine is the appropriate outcome because:

- a. Miss Salunke was over twice the legal limit for alcohol at the time of providing an evidential sample of breath and her conduct had the potential to cause harm to other road users.
- b. there was a disregard to the risk or potential risk of harm to the public trust and confidence in the solicitors' profession as a result of her actions.
- c. Miss Salunke had direct control / responsibility for her conduct.

4.4 A fine is appropriate to uphold public confidence in the solicitors' profession and in legal services provided by authorised persons. Any lesser sanction would not sufficiently address the conduct and provide a credible deterrent to Miss Salunke and others.

4.5 The amount of the fine has been calculated in line with the SRA's published guidance on its approach to setting an appropriate financial penalty (the Guidance).

4.6 Having regard to the Guidance, the SRA and Miss Salunke agree that the nature of the misconduct was low/medium. Whilst the conduct was intentional or arose as a result of recklessness, it was an isolated incident. There is no evidence that this forms a pattern of misconduct and Miss Salunke has co-operated with the SRA investigation. The Guidance give this type of misconduct a score of one.

4.7 The SRA considers that the impact of the misconduct was medium. Whilst damage was caused to road furniture, there was no harm caused to other road users and so the impact was not significant. Consequently, any harm to the public trust and confidence in the solicitors' profession due to her actions is also not significant. The Guidance gives this level of impact a score of four.

4.8 The nature and impact scores add up to five. The Guidance indicates a broad penalty bracket of £1,001 to £5,000 is appropriate.

4.9 In deciding the level of fine within this bracket, the SRA has considered the mitigation put forward by Miss Salunke at paragraph 4.2 above.

4.10 Miss Salunke promptly reported her conviction to the SRA and has fully co-operated with the investigation. She has shown insight and remorse into her conduct, which was reckless; however, no significant harm or loss was caused to other persons or property. In light of this, the SRA considers

a basic penalty of £2,000, which is at the lower end of the bracket, to be appropriate.

4.11 The SRA considers that the basic penalty should be reduced to £1,100. This reduction reflects the fact that Miss Salunke promptly reported the misconduct to the SRA, expressly admitted the conduct at the time of reporting and completed an approved training course to address her offending.

5. Publication

5.1 The SRA considers it appropriate that this agreement is published in the interests of transparency in the regulatory process. Miss Salunke agrees to the publication of this agreement.

6. Acting in a way which is inconsistent with this agreement

6.1 Miss Salunke agrees that she will not deny the admissions made in this agreement or act in any way which is inconsistent with it.

7. Costs

7.1 Miss Salunke agrees to pay the costs of the SRA's investigation in the sum of £300. Such costs are due within 28 days of a statement of costs due being issued by the SRA.

Search again [<https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/solicitor-check/>]