

News from the Board

Reflections on July Board - Anna Bradley

07 July 2019

It was a pleasure to kick off this month's meeting with a workshop with a range of staff from across the SRA. We were joined by people who are responsible for helping legal services users as well as the profession, plus the teams who collect intelligence about some of the concerns that come into us and decide what sort of action we need to take.

Set up as a market place, it was a great opportunity for us to spend time with people right at the heart of what we do. I particularly enjoyed hearing about how our new enforcement strategy is changing the mix of our work and helping us to focus on the most serious issues quickly.

Testing the SQE assessment

Our longest Board discussion was on the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) - specifically the pilot on the SQE1 assessment we ran in March.

We are committed to developing a world class assessment system to a single, consistent standard. But you can't do that without testing and learning, which is why a pilot is so important. We cannot truly replicate the real exam, not least because education providers are not yet preparing people. But the next best thing is to take a diverse group of 300 candidates and see how they perform on a model assessment.

The good news is that running the pilot was a very helpful exercise. It has given us considerable assurance that we can deliver something fair and robust, which the public and law firms can trust. We have some more work to be done to close on the final design and I am looking forward to publishing the details in due course.

Ensuring the standards of advocacy

On the theme of consistent standards, we also discussed higher rights of advocacy.

We are already doing a lot of work in this area. For instance, support for those working in the youth courts. Yet there is more to do, and an acceptance that that the Quality Assurance Scheme for Advocates (QASA) isn't the answer.

There are three areas we are exploring - how we improve assessment; how we provide support post-qualification, and how we better



understand the scale and nature of the issues. We will be publishing a consultation on the detailed proposals in August.

Increasing Openness

I have already shared our emerging thinking on how the SRA Board can be more open about our decision making. We made decisions today about making information on what we do, why and how much fuller and clearer. This blog is not output from our new approach, but I am also looking forward to doing much more on social media and improving everyone's access to more of the detail of our work. That includes increasing our existing programme of Board outreach work with stakeholders – next stop a Board meeting in Bristol in September.

The Legal Access Challenge

Finally we also discussed our Legal Access Challenge. As Chair of the judging panel, I'm delighted that we have already had 85 expressions of interest in applying for funding for technology solutions that could help increase access to legal services for ordinary people and businesses.

There are only a few weeks left to apply, but whether you're a charity with legal expertise or a technologist, I'd encourage you to get involved even if you are not after funding. This programme is about much more than headline grabbing prizes – it's just as much about bringing people together to build networks, to tap into expertise, to identify and tackle barriers.

I can't wait to see what ideas – and collaborations – emerge.