

Our equality, diversity and inclusion work (2017/18)

Introduction and summary

At the Solicitors Regulation Authority, we take our work on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) seriously. Over the past few years we have achieved a lot but we know there is still more to do.

Our vision is to make a leading contribution in all areas of EDI across the legal sector. One way we are doing this is by building our EDI approach into everything we do. This includes making it part of our Corporate Strategy and embedding it into our strategic aims.

Recently, we have seen a shift in law firms' attitudes towards EDI, not just in relation to gender diversity, but on making workplaces inclusive for all. We have encouraged this change - not just because it is the right thing to do - but because it makes business sense to realise the potential of the widest talent pool possible.

This update demonstrates how we meet our:

- public sector equality duties
- regulatory objective to encouraging a diverse legal profession
- wider commitment to EDI.

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Our people

Our People is one of our priority EDI themes. We develop and support our workforce and promote a fair and inclusive culture. For more information about diversity in the SRA, please read our Staff Annual Diversity Report [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/archive/annual-diversity-report-2017/>] .

A diverse profession

Diversity in the legal profession plays an important role by allowing law firms to reflect the cultures, values, and diversity of their workforce and their clients. It leads to more innovation, better risk management and increases a company's bottom line.

In our work, we looked at where greater legal profession diversity needs to be encouraged and how this changes over time. In the past year, we published several pieces of work on areas of equality including:



- how to achieve better representation of female and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) solicitors in senior roles [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/unlocking-benefits-diversity/>]
- the importance of health and wellbeing in the profession [<https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/your-health-your-career/>]

We have also looked at ways to increase the impact of our work in encouraging a diverse workforce and promoting social mobility.

What we did

BAME solicitors in senior leadership

We encourage and highlight what better representation of female and BAME solicitors means. This includes putting in place fair recruitment and promotion policies or more of these solicitors in senior leadership positions.

We do this by providing resources and information showcasing good practice, in line with our regulatory expectations, to deliver impactful change.

Collecting diversity data

In 2018, we published information from 180,000 people working at 9,000 law firms than we collected the previous year.

What did we found

Read our latest findings about diversity in the profession [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/>]

Working collaboratively

Disability and mental health

We carried out further work to encourage law firms to consider disability and mental health in their workforce. We continue to participate in the Legal Professions Wellbeing Taskforce, a group supporting good mental health and wellbeing across the legal community.

Transgender

We worked extensively with trans experts and organisations such as the Office for National Statistics, the Government Equalities Office and Stonewall to review our trans questions for the 2019 diversity data collection. We are looking to include the socio-economic background measures published by Cabinet in future collections.

We published further resources, videos and case studies encouraging the profession to proactively promote a trans inclusive workplace. The resources include information from trans experts and law firms about how to encourage and create environments where the best talent can succeed.

Sexual harassment and non-disclosure agreements

One of our most important collaborations this year was around how to promote good practice on sexual harassment and the use of non-disclosure agreement (NDAs). Organisations we worked with included the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Bar Standards Board and City of London Law Society.

We responded to increased reports of sexual harassment and the improper use of NDAs by publishing a warning notice

[<https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/non-disclosure-agreements-ndas/>] and

highlighting concerns in our latest Risk Outlook

[<https://www.sra.org.uk/archive/risk/risk-outlook/>] report.

In addition, we have set up a specialist team to respond to these reports, as well as monitoring trends and issues around the use of NDAs.

LGBT law firm mentoring scheme

Last year saw the launch of our LGBT law firm mentoring scheme - the first of its kind - in collaboration with 11 law firms, Stonewall and the Law Society.

Mentoring is underway with law firms, who will be supported in attracting the best staff, as well as other business benefits such as advocacy and policy development.

Next steps

- Continue to build a clear and thorough understanding of the diversity profile of solicitors and law firms.
- Raise awareness of EDI good practice.
- Work with law firms and others to raise awareness of disability inclusion in the profession.

Fair decision making

Making sure our decisions are fair is very important to us. We use a range of tools and methods, such as quality assurance, mentoring and training, to make sure our decisions are made in a fair and unbiased way.

As well as promoting fair outcomes for solicitors, we are conscious the decisions we make protect the safety of the public.

What we did

Standards and Regulations

When drafting the new Standards and Regulations - due to come into force in 2019, we considered in detail the impact of EDI. This work was published as part of our consultation process.

SRA Board members

We strengthened our governance process by putting in place an EDI Programme Board where managers and leaders share best practice on EDI.

Working with BAME groups

We held six small firms' events with legal sector equality groups to discuss changes to our rules and key issues affecting their firms. We ran these events across England and Wales with organisations such as the Black Solicitors Network, Society of British Bangladeshi Solicitors, the Society of Asian Lawyers and the British Nigeria Law Forum.

Support for small firms

Over the last few years, we have been providing further support and resources to small firms, which includes a dedicated helpline and resources on our website.

As an employer, we updated our trans inclusion statement to make it accessible and easier to understand.

We have also continued to promote our 'Your health, your career' campaign to encourage solicitors to seek help with their regulatory issues before they get out of hand.

Next steps

- Continue to make sure our decision-making guidance and processes are clear and transparent.
- Implement our Enforcement Strategy and monitor the impact of the new strategy, including its impact on our regulatory outcomes across the whole range of protected characteristics.
- Continue our work to mainstream EDI in everything we do.
- Carry out further work providing our Board and committees with the right information to assess the EDI implications of their decisions.

EDI implications of our regulatory reforms

We are committed to developing policy in a clear and transparent way and in accordance with good practice EDI principles. Following consultation on a range of regulatory reforms we aim to make sure best regulatory practice is established and that we are accountable, proportionate and consistent in our delivery.

What we did

Standards and Regulations

Using evidence about diversity in the profession, we looked at how changes to how we regulate can help reduce the burden of our rules on law firms and support access to legal services. We also developed a diversity evaluation to assess and monitor the impact of our regulatory reform programme.

Informed by our own research and engagement with legal sector equality groups, we looked at EDI impacts on different groups as we set our priorities and developed policy. For example, we took into consideration the impact on BAME-owned law firms when changing our accountants reports requirements [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/accounts-rules-review/>].

Solicitors Qualifying Examination

We spoke to educators, law firms, solicitors and students about the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). This is one of the main ways we are supporting diversity and social mobility in the legal sector. The SQE, coming in 2021, will mean high consistent standards, supporting the brightest and best from every background to join the profession, regardless of training route.

We continued to encourage access to the profession through our involvement in legal apprenticeships and our Equivalent Means route, helping people from non-traditional backgrounds to become solicitors.

We also engaged with Welsh Government and others to discuss the possibility of SQE being offered in Welsh.

We shared best practice to help create the kind of inclusive working environment that enables people to reach the top in whatever type of work they do.

Next steps

- Continue to use data, evidence and intelligence about diversity to inform the development and effectiveness of our regulatory arrangements and operational processes.



- Support small firms, where we know there is over representation of BAME solicitors, by sharing information about our regulatory reform programme.
- Work with the SQE assessment provider to make sure the examination is fair and encouraged the development of innovative and inclusive pathways into the profession.

Inclusive engagement

We know that building relationships with the profession and wider legal sector is essential in making a difference to encouraging a diverse and effective legal sector.

What we did

Face-to-face events

We engaged with the profession by holding or speaking at events and talking to MPs and EDI sector leads.

We also held events with firms to raise awareness and share good practice on EDI. These focussed on wellbeing in the workplace, women in law and how to promote a LGBTQ+ workplace, which we followed up with resources and guidance.

Engaging with BAME groups and wider communities

BAME groups help and develop their members to achieve their career aspirations. To show our support for these groups we sponsored the:

- Black Solicitors Network UK Diversity Legal Awards
- Society of Asian Lawyers Legal Awards
- British Nigeria Law forum Annual Awards and Dinner.

We also supported LGBTQ+ equality in the profession by celebrating Pride in Birmingham, London and Cardiff where fellow legal regulators and other partners from the legal sector join us.

We collaborated with several diversity groups, such as the Hindu Lawyers Association to organise an annual event to celebrate Black History Month. Chaired by SRA Board Member, Elaine Williams, this focused on targets to support more women and BAME solicitors into leadership roles.

Social Mobility Business Partnership

For the third year running, we supported the Social Mobility Business Partnership (SMBP), a national scheme to provide work experience to students from less affluent backgrounds who are interested in a career in law or finance.

We provided an interactive day for SMBP students on our work and worked with CILEx Regulation and the Bar Standards Board to design a joint session about law careers.

Translation and easy read

Other work included publishing our language policy statement [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/contact-us/difficulties-english/>] , introducing the facility to translate content on our website and providing information in easy read format.

Next steps

- Create more opportunities for engaging with in-house solicitors and offer tailored resources for small firms.
- Develop further opportunities for collaborative work with law firms, representative groups and others to promote diversity.

Accessible IT and business systems

We worked to build good EDI practice into our business systems and IT to make sure we are accessible and inclusive. This included creating processes for how we:

- collect and monitor the diversity of people we regulate, so we can better monitor the impact of our work and decisions
- record, monitor and review reasonable adjustments requests.

Our customers are at the heart of this development and we are involving them through research, joint development, user testing and consultation events. These include the public, representative groups, law firms of every type and individual solicitors.

What did we do?

Focus groups

We spoke with the public and customer representative groups to develop our new IT systems through events across the country. We held seven public focus groups involving 145 people this year and five sessions with consumer advocacy groups. These sessions involved 42 representatives from 31 different organisations.

Diversity data and our Compensation Fund

We updated the diversity data collected from people making a claim on our Compensation Fund. This is so we can look at areas where additional information would be helpful to different groups, especially those who are vulnerable.

Personal data

We improved how we manage data about a person's trans history and improved our records of those who need reasonable adjustments.

Our website has been improved and is now more accessible for disabled people. Part of this was making sure we conformed to the highest level, AAA, standards of web content accessibility guidelines. We also regularly test access to content and functionality using assistive technology, such as speech browsers and keyboard shortcuts.

Next steps

- Develop good EDI practice into our business systems and IT – making sure we are accessible and inclusive.
- Build the systems we need to collect and monitor the diversity of people we regulate.

Infographic: Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work 2017/18