

SRA Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy – progress in 2015/16

Introduction

This report provides information on the progress we have made during the second year of our three-year Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy, based on the following objectives:

1. To develop a more diverse workforce and promote an inclusive culture, equality of opportunity for all staff and the behaviours and capabilities required to regulate proportionately, fairly and free from bias.
2. To ensure that the way we operate, our rules and the decisions we make are proportionate, fair and free from bias and help firms and individuals understand and comply with our requirements.
3. To work with those we regulate to support them in achieving a more diverse and inclusive profession.

We set ourselves some challenging actions for 2015/16 to meet our three EDI objectives.

Objective one – governance and our people

We continue to encourage diversity in Board and Committee applications by taking steps to attract a wide and diverse range of applicants and publish diversity data about our Board (action 1.1)

We rolled out the Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI), a self assessment tool enabling staff to identify what motivates them and how they relate to others. This has been introduced as part of our EDI plan and aims to improve working relationships for managers and staff for example through better appreciation of difference (action 1.2).

We have run workshops on inclusive leadership a series of workshops with all staff on inclusive working. We partnered with enei – Equality Network for Equality and Inclusion to work with us to develop and deliver the programme which is aimed at shifting the focus from looking only at diversity to the broader inclusion agenda and the behaviours that drive an inclusive environment, including unconscious bias (action 1.2).

During the year we ran a number of EDI events to promote learning and creating an inclusive environment. These included a synagogue tour and celebration of significant days for some of the main faith groups in addition to events to mark LGBT+ history month and International Women's Day. (action 1.2).

We continue to work with our Technical Training and Learning and Development teams to ensure that EDI is mainstreamed into our core training programme for staff. This will include supplementing and enhancing our existing training on reasonable adjustments, trans equality and the Equality Act (2010) with an e learning tool (action 1.3).

We worked with members of the leadership team, our LGBT+ network Nexus, staff forum representatives and external organisations on input into our Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) application submitted in September 2016. (action 1.4)

In terms of benchmarking, our focus this year has been the Stonewall WEI, however we recently became a member of the Business Disability Forum. We plan to explore other benchmarks in 2017 (action 1.5)

Our corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme features a range of initiatives that takes into account how we support our staff and engage with our stakeholders. This has meant taking account of our social, economic and environmental impact, as well as consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion.

One of the ways in which we have sought to make a difference is through fundraising, mentoring and volunteering for good causes. Our key highlights over the last two years has been:

- Working in partnership with local communities, such as mentoring 40 young people, aged 16 - 18.
- Raising over £15,000 for Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid.
- Supporting environmental protection and sustainability, such as improving our recycling target and donating 45 bags of work wear (action 1.6).

Objective two – the way we operate, our rules and decisions

We had a very full programme of regulatory reform work in 2015/16, including our two major programmes Training for Tomorrow and Looking to the Future. Under both programmes we are considering the impact on EDI and continue to engage with a diverse range of solicitors, consumer groups and others as we develop these proposals (action 2.2).

Our Looking to the Future programme is about making sure our regulation is up to date and fit for purpose. We want solicitors to be able to provide flexible, accessible and affordable legal services to meet consumer need and small firms have a valuable place in this. We provided support and resources to small firms which we know have a disproportionate number of people from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. This included:

- providing a dedicated helpline and a call back service for small firms
- updating the information and resources on our small firms' website
- engaging with members of our small firms virtual reference group, and
- holding a series of regulatory workshops requested by the Black Solicitors Network to discuss practice issues of interest to small firms.

As part of our work to make sure our decisions are fair and transparent and seen to be so, we reviewed our decision-making criteria and published new guidance documents for 19 of our regulatory decisions (action 2.3).

We introduced a quality assurance framework which looks at how we are responding to any EDI matters which may arise in our casework (action 2.4).

We are undergoing a major reform of our business systems and IT, which started in 2016, and will provide access to much better data in the future. In the interim we are looking at better ways to approach diversity monitoring of our regulatory decisions and will be carrying this work forward in line with our IT transformation work (actions 2.5 and 2.6).

We started a review of our outward facing EDI policies. As a result we updated our Reasonable Adjustments policy and improved how we track and monitor our provision of reasonable adjustments for people using our services (action 2.7).

Our Question of Trust campaign involved us engaging with thousands of people about what should happen when things go wrong. We are using the findings from the campaign to inform our enforcement strategy. This underpins our work on regulatory decision-making and will improve the consistency and quality of our decisions, benefitting those involved and increasing confidence in the profession (action 2.8).

We continued to work with other legal regulators on issues that affect us. For example, we have exchanged information and ideas about our shared responsibility to collect diversity data in the legal sector, and we held a seminar with the Bar Standards Board, Law Society and Bar Council to discuss the barriers to race equality in the profession.

We carried forward our work to update our interpretation and translation policy to promote our commitment to providing appropriate material in Welsh and other languages (action 2.10).

We continue to consider EDI in relation to our Risk Outlook work, publishing a paper in the spring with resources and case studies for firms providing services to people who are vulnerable. We identified consumer vulnerability as one of the priority risks in our 2016/17 Risk Outlook and have commissioned research to look at this in the context of legal services in family law (action 2.11).

Objective three – working to achieve a more diverse and representative profession

We worked closely with firms and others to engage in and promote the debate about EDI in the profession (action 3.1). Some of our actions are set out below:

- Organising events with firms to raise awareness and share good practice on EDI. Firms came together to hear how to promote a lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-friendly work place. We are building on this through a programme of workshops with firms to identify good practice we can share with the profession, focusing in particular on the experience of trans solicitors.
- Engaging with law firms and students through our support for the Legal Social Mobility Partnership, which provides opportunities and support for students coming from a less privileged background.
- Supporting the Cabinet Office to establish common measures of socio-economic background through a survey with our own staff in October 2016.
- Engaging with equality groups in the profession and sponsored the BSN's UK Diversity Legal Awards in 2016 to celebrate good practice promoting diversity in the legal sector.
- Talking about diversity in the profession with MPs and at party conferences. We have spoken about diversity at a range of opportunities, including at the General Counsel conference in Portugal.
- Establishing an EDI virtual reference group 'Diversity matters' and launching it as a LinkedIn discussion group involving a diverse range of people in our thinking and discussions about diversity in the profession.
- Continuing the dialogue we have with large firms to understand the barriers to diversity in the profession and encourage them to challenge themselves.
- We have a programme of visits to nearly 100 firms and will use the information we gather from this work to identify and share good practice.



- Celebrating LGBT Pride in both Birmingham and London for the second year. We were joined in London by the Bar Standards Board, BPP students and the Legal Services Board Consumer Panel to show support for LGBT+ equality in the profession.
- Launching a Wellbeing programme in May, recognising that working in the legal profession is challenging and the pressures and demands can sometimes be overwhelming. The programme promotes the things that we might be able to do to help solicitors whose health and wellbeing issues are having an impact on their work.

There is a range of work that we are doing under our Training for Tomorrow programme to promote diverse pathways into the profession (action 3.2). In addition to our proposals for a new approach to qualification through the Solicitors Qualifying Examination, we can now admit applicants who demonstrate they have the required skills and experience gained through non-traditional routes (our equivalent means process). We have also been working with firms and the government to encourage legal apprenticeships and updated our regulations in November 2015 to enable admission as a solicitor through an apprenticeship route.

We carried out our third survey of firm diversity in late 2015 and in May 2016. We published the findings and made the data available through our diversity data tool to encourage firms to benchmark themselves (action 3.3). We reviewed our approach to the collection of data and decided to move to a biennial cycle, collecting again in May 2017.

We commissioned the Leeds University Business School to help us gain a deeper understanding of diversity in the profession. They propose to use a variety of advanced statistical modelling techniques to look at how the diversity of the profession has changed and examine the relationship between career progression and diversity characteristics (action 3.5). We also started planning a qualitative research project with a sample of law firms about career progression, looking in particular at gender and ethnicity. The project will proceed in 2017 and we will use this engagement with firms to explore their approach to publishing their diversity data (action 3.4). We will use the data that we gather through this research to provide a richer understanding of how diversity impacts on career progression and to identify good practice that we can share (action 3.6).