

News from the Board

Reflections on our May Board meeting - Anna Bradley, SRA Chair

20 May 2024

Our strategy establishes a defining purpose for everything we do: driving confidence and trust in legal services. A fundamental part of our role as a Board is having oversight of the SRA's work and making sure it is performing well and delivering against our strategy. The focus of this meeting was the first six months of the new strategy.

The Solicitors Qualifying Examination

A key area of discussion was the SQE, in particular the [results error for January's sitting of SQE1](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/news-item/2024/04/15/january-sqe1-results-issue) [https://sqa.sra.org.uk/news-item/2024/04/15/january-sqe1-results-issue]. The introduction of a consistent assessment, the SQE, is crucial in building trust that all qualifying solicitors have met the same, high standard. And although implementation in the [first two years has generally gone well](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/press/2024-press-releases/sqe-year-two-reports/1) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/press/2024-press-releases/sqe-year-two-reports/1], this type of mistake, where some candidates were given the wrong result, risks undermining trust in the assessment.

Steps were taken by Kaplan to put this right and make sure candidates could get redress. They have also just published the results of an independent review of the results – this should give candidates added reassurance that they have the correct results.

There are also clearly some more strategic questions about what lessons can be learned. We must be confident that Kaplan have all the right assurance processes in place to avoid the risk of future errors. Kaplan will be commissioning independent experts to carry out a wider review on this, and as a Board we will be wanting to know that any necessary improvements have been swiftly implemented.

Investigations

We also discussed our investigation work, including progress with the investigation and enforcement development plan, and a number of the SRA's higher profile cases. We noted the progress made with the timeliness of some of the older work and hope to meet the targets the Board set. It is important that the Board provides challenge that we are moving as quickly as is appropriate, while at the same time getting things right.

We heard from the executive about some of the challenges with the higher profile cases. One significant issue relates to large adverse costs

orders for clients linked to cavity wall insulation claims. These cases cut across the work of multiple organisations, including several regulators and government, so I am keen that the SRA works closely with others to explore all options for redress where clients have been impacted. We also need to work with others to understand what wider public policy changes might be needed to avoid such things happening again.

Finally, we continue to progress our investigation into the role of some of the lawyers and firms involved in the Horizon Post Office scandal, informed by the ongoing revelations from the public Inquiry, which we are watching very closely, so we can be ready to act as swiftly as possible.

Business plan and budget

We discussed the business plan for next year, including the importance of work to improve how we collect and use data. Our data strategy looks to build capability to turn data and information into more focused insights. Improving what we do here will have many benefits - whether it's helping us identify risks and target our enforcement or inform policy and help us evaluate the impact of our actions.

As I set out in [my last blog \[https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/our-board/news-from-the-board/board-march-2024/\]](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/our-board/news-from-the-board/board-march-2024/), new work, such as our Consumer Protection Review, means that we have had to make changes to some discrete packages of work in this years' plan, while keeping the same focus on core priorities. We will set these changes out alongside the new business plan proposals when we consult later this month.

We also approved the year end accounts – a key part of good corporate governance. It is essential as a Board that we offer assurance that the accounts are in good order and there are no issues of concern.

We must be effective in delivering our work, but it is also vital that we are as efficient as possible. Our intention is therefore to keep the SRA part of the next practising certificate fee flat. We will publish further detail on that, as well as where Compensation Fund contributions are heading, at the end of the month.

More broadly we continue conversations with the profession and the public, as part of the Consumer Protection Review, around the Compensation Fund, and whether we need to make changes to make sure it provides appropriate, sustainable protection for the public in the context of shifting risks in the sector.

We have had excellent engagement so far from the public, consumer groups and the profession on the review, and I would encourage you to [continue to let us know your views. \[https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/discussion-papers/consumer-protection-review/\]](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/discussion-papers/consumer-protection-review/)