

News release

New guidance spells out SRA approach to sexual misconduct cases

01 September 2022

We have produced [new guidance on sexual misconduct](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/sexual-misconduct/) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/sexual-misconduct/] within law firms that sets out what we expect from firms and individuals and illustrates the types of behaviours that are unacceptable and may potentially lead to regulatory action.

The number of complaints about sexual misconduct at law firms made to us has risen significantly since we issued a warning notice about non-disclosure agreements in March 2018.

Since 2018 there have been 251 reports made to us relating to potential sexual misconduct, compared to just 30 in the preceding five years. Meanwhile, we have 117 ongoing investigations.

One of the recurring issues in many of these cases, which is addressed in the new guidance via a number of illustrative examples, is in relation to how far a solicitor's regulatory obligations apply to both their professional and private lives.

The new guidance has been produced after extensive engagement with a wide range of law firms and both public and professional representative groups. We also looked at the relevant parts of recent court judgements.

To accompany this new guidance we have updated our existing [guidance on acting with integrity](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/acting-with-integrity/) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/acting-with-integrity/].

Paul Philip, SRA Chief Executive, said: 'We take reports of sexual misconduct seriously. These can be sensitive and difficult issues and we want to be clear about our expectations, not least for firms, as people often come to us because they are dissatisfied with the way their firm has dealt with their concerns.

'Importantly, as we [said in 2020](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/press/2020-press-release-archive/ryan-beckwith-appeal-statement/) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/press/2020-press-release-archive/ryan-beckwith-appeal-statement/], the Beckwith judgment made it clear that it was "common sense" that upholding our principles of acting with integrity could reach into a solicitor's private life. So alongside, we are also publishing updated guidance on acting with integrity. I urge everyone to take time to read the new guidance.'

We have also [published new guidance](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/convictions-arising-social-conscience/) on our approach to considering regulatory action where a solicitor is convicted of a criminal offence in relation to matters of principle or social conscience, for example when involved in a protest or demonstration.

The guidance outlines what kind of disciplinary action solicitors might face in such circumstances, depending on what happened and whether they have any previous history of similar incidents.