

News release

Law firms issued guidance on new wellbeing at work rules

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We have issued [updated guidance \[https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/workplace-environment/\]](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/workplace-environment/) to help law firms and those who work for them understand what new rules on health and wellbeing in the workplace mean for them.

The new rules were introduced earlier this month following approval by the Legal Services Board (LSB). They include specific obligations in the Codes of Conduct for both firms and individuals to treat colleagues fairly and with respect, and not to engage in bullying, harassment or unfair discrimination. They also clarify our approach to situations where a solicitor's health issues may affect their ability to practise or to participate in our enforcement processes.

Before submitting the new rules to the LSB, we carried out an extensive consultation. As a result of feedback, we amended initial proposals to require all solicitors to challenge any unfair treatment they witnessed. The rules now place this requirement on the top managers of firms such as partners. The new guidance also explains how we expect firms to build a working culture in which more junior staff feel able to complain without fear of recriminations.

SRA Chief Executive, Paul Philip, said: 'The legal sector can be a very fast-paced and demanding environment in which to work. While it is up to firms how they run their individual businesses, it does become a regulatory issue if poor working cultures start to impact staff wellbeing, behaviour and ultimately standards of service to the public. That is where we have a duty to act.

'In order to make sure the public are protected, the rules also clarify the position where a solicitor's health raises regulatory risks. This can include situations where a solicitor is too unwell to take part in an enforcement process.'

Our [Workplace Culture Thematic Review \[https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/workplace-culture-thematic-review/\]](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/workplace-culture-thematic-review/), published last year, found that while three quarters of respondents reported working in a broadly positive environment, there were still concerns and issues about the pressures on solicitors.

Previous research, including by the charity LawCare and the Junior Lawyers Division of the Law Society, had already highlighted high levels

of stress, and even bullying and discrimination in the sector. There have been a number of cases in recent years where it has been suggested that a firm's working culture has contributed to individuals, especially junior solicitors, committing misconduct.