

SRA BOARD  
20 January 2016

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## Chief Executive's Report

### Purpose

- 1 This report sets out progress against our strategic objectives and provides an update on operational performance.
  - Section 1: reports on our priorities and progress against the 2015/16 Business Plan.
  - Section 2: provides an update on operational performance.
  - Section 3: provides details on publication and engagement activity.

**If you have any questions about this paper please contact: Paul Philip, Chief Executive, [paul.philip@sra.org.uk](mailto:paul.philip@sra.org.uk), 0121 329 6940.**

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### Section 1: Priorities for 2015/16

- 2 This section provides an update to the Board on our key priorities, starting with an update on any key developments and then moving onto an update against our 2015/16 Business Plan.

#### *Progress against our 2015/16 Business Plan*

- 3 We are progressing well on the activities being undertaken to deliver our objectives in the Business Plan. Below, I highlight to the Board whether objectives are on track and provide any further updates on key activities that the Board needs to be aware of.

<p><b>Objective 1: We will reform our regulation to enable growth and innovation in the market and to strike the right balance between reducing regulatory burdens and ensuring consumer protection</b></p>	<p>On track</p>
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- 4 Overall we are on track to achieve this objective.

#### *Consumer Credit*

- 5 On Friday 4 December 2015 the Legal Services Board approved our proposed arrangements for regulating consumer credit activities. This is the last stage of the approval process to allow the arrangements to come into effect, as planned, on 1 April 2016. A news release has been issued and is on the SRA's website: <http://www.sra.org.uk/sra/news/press/consumer-credit-final-hurdle.page>
- 6 We have published an online compliance toolkit for firms involved in, or considering becoming involved in, the carrying on of consumer credit activities which will be communicated to the profession over the coming weeks.  
<http://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/code-of-conduct/financial-services-rules/regulation-consumer-credit-activities.page>

<p><b>Objective 2: We will work with solicitors and firms to raise standards and uphold core professional principles</b></p>	<p>On track</p>
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- 7 Overall we are on track to achieve this objective

#### **Training for Tomorrow - Solicitors Competence Assessment Framework**

- 8 The Training for Tomorrow consultation on the introduction of a centralised assessment for intending solicitors, the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE), was launched on 7 December

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2015 ([http://www.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/training-for-tomorrow/work-streams.page#Collection\\_2](http://www.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/training-for-tomorrow/work-streams.page#Collection_2)). There has been extensive legal and general press coverage of our proposal and we will engage with stakeholders throughout the consultation period through open regional workshops and road-shows, targeted engagement with specific groups (including BAME solicitors and trainee solicitors), attending stakeholder events and through social media.

- 9 Many stakeholders have accepted the case for change, but as might be expected, some disagree with the detail of our proposals. Universities are challenging our proposal not to allow exemptions from the SQE; other stakeholders have raised concerns about the cost of the new assessment and the potential impact on access to the profession. The possibility that we will no longer regulate training pathways and the potential impact on students is also a concern to some.
- 10 We will use social media in particular to respond to emerging themes or areas of confusion during the consultation, for example blogging about transitional arrangements. The consultation closes on 4 March 2016.

***Training for Tomorrow - Equivalent means***

- 11 As at 15/12/2015, the following numbers of equivalent means applications had been received since 01/07/2014, when the new regulations came into force:

EQ App Oct	Received	Granted	Refused	Withdrawn	Work in progress	Unallocated
Common Professional examination	83	32	17	16	17	2
CPE for non graduates	27	17	0	1	8	1
Legal Practice course	8	1	0	4	2	1
Period of recognised training	88	29	6	15	38	0
Professional Skills Course	4	2	0	1	0	1
Morgenbesser	3	0	0	2	1	0

**Objective 3: We will improve our operational performance and make justifiable decisions promptly, effectively and efficiently**

**On track**

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***Practising Certificate renewal***

- 12 The 2015/16 practising certificate renewal exercise concluded successfully with 130,574 certificates approved. The remaining income will be collected throughout the financial year and planning for the 2016/17 renewal exercise has commenced. The bulk revocation process was also completed on 7 December 2015 with 3,537 individual practising certificates revoked. Checks are underway to ensure that these individuals are no longer practising (disciplinary proceedings will commence if they are).

<b>Objective 4: We will work with our stakeholders to improve the quality of our services and their experience when using them</b>	<b>On track</b>
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**Section 2: Operational Performance**

- 13 We continued to make good progress against our key end-to-end 12 month KPI target by achieving 91% against the 90% target. This was the same level of performance as we achieved in October and is up from 87% in November 2014.
- 14 We experienced a slight dip in performance against the Legal and Enforcement KPI in November due to high volumes of cases being issued, achieving 74% against the 90% rolling 12 month target (down from 81% in October). We issued 11 matters in November (up from 5 in October and 5 in September). We expect the situation to continue in December and January as we maintain our focus on the timely progression of cases to the Tribunal (we currently expect to issue around 14 cases in December), but should be back on track in February, with an improving position against the KPI. This has also had an impact on the end-to-end Lifecycle figure with the average number of days from assessment to SDT proceedings increasing from 581 to 591 days. Analysis of cases that have missed the KPI has been undertaken and will feed into our ongoing programme of operational improvement.
- 15 Authorisation performance remains strong. During the last 12 months 40,895 regulatory applications were received (excluding PCRE) and 46,972 decisions have been made.

**Section 3: Publications and Engagement Activity**

***SRA in Parliament***

- 16 Labour MP for Newcastle Upon Tyne Central Chi Onwurah asked the Ministry for Justice what steps are being taken to raise awareness amongst solicitors of the risks of their clients being targeted in scams and on the number taking place. In replying, the Justice Minister Shailesh Vara referenced the SRA saying, "The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), as an independent regulator, is well aware of the risks identified by the honourable member. It regularly issues scam alerts and in July this year published a paper outlining key risks. This paper will be updated again next spring. The SRA has advised that in 2014 it issued 183 scam alerts."

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***Wales political contact***

- 17 Our series of meetings with key Welsh stakeholders is set to continue with a January reception in the Welsh Assembly Senedd building - *Looking to the future: regulating solicitors and protecting the public in Wales* - where we expect to be joined by Minister for Economy, Science and Transport Edwina Hart AM, senior legal representatives from the Welsh Assembly and Head of Justice Policy for the Welsh Government Andrew Felton.

***Events***

***A Question of Trust***

- 18 January is the final month of the A Question of Trust campaign with the five events; starting with Southern Area Association of Law Societies in Andover, then to Liverpool for a consumer event followed by an event with Liverpool Law Society. The final two events are in Nottingham with consumers and Nottingham Law Society.
- 19 'Meet the Board Roadshows' start again in February with a visit to Sheffield Law Society. The programme will continue throughout 2016 with planned visits to West Bromwich, Norwich and Norfolk, and Bournemouth and Shropshire Law Societies in the first half of the year. Other events planned include the launch of SRA Innovate in March, a conference in June where we will be launching the Reference Framework for Regulation (the results for the A Question of Trust campaign), followed by the fourth Compliance Officers Conference in October 2016.

***Internal Communications***

***Christmas celebrations***

- 20 Our own Cube choir performed for the first time with a festive carol concert in December. We are hoping the choir, which is well supported, will continue next year. We also organised a cathedral visit and our Christian Network hosted a drop-in event.

***Equality, Diversion and Inclusion***

- 21 Jemima Coleman, a member of the EDI Committee spoke at a seminar 'Women in Legal. Empowering female voices in a dynamic legal world' in London on 3 December 2015.
- 22 We published a report about the diversity data of our staff, based on data from 2014, looking at the protected characteristics of gender, age, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

***Digital Communications***

***Social Media***

- 23 Twitter engagement continues to grow with a steady increase of followers, now over 25K, and engagement with the community has increased, with more people linking to our account

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or referring to the website in tweets. Our biggest engagement figures in December have been over the #solicitorexam announcement. Facebook growth also continues with page followers nearly up to 7K and increased engagement with consumers.

- 24 We have seen an increase in consumers responding to scam alerts and making us and other followers aware when they have received scam emails that the SRA has warned about. Our scam alerts on Facebook and Twitter are high up in Google rankings, combining our search engine optimisation skills and the reach of Facebook and Twitter.
- 25 The Question of Trust campaign organised by our social media consultants DTW has reached over 100K people. DTW also conducted a series of one-to-one interviews and workshops this month, speaking to over 30 members of staff. In addition, they undertook a survey of staff perception of social media, which received 80 responses.

**SRA website redesign**

- 26 Phase 1 of the website redesign is close to launch, bringing many technical improvements including additional usability support through more modern web standards (currently we use HTML4). For non-disabled users the redesign features many improvements, making the website more visually pleasing and easier to read, with typographical and functional changes improving the overall experience.
- 27 Phase 2 of the redesign is under way with proof of concept work on a fully responsive website (a flexible design that works on all screen sizes).

**ICLR.net**

- 28 The pilot site is constructed and is in a phase of testing with early adopters who are providing useful feedback on the functions and the sample content that is currently available on the website. The pilot has been extended with the aim of the site being fully ready before the 2016 conference.

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