

SRA BOARD  
21 October 2015

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## Chief Executive's Report

### Purpose

- 1 This report sets out progress against the SRA's strategic objectives and provides an update on operational performance.
  - Section 1: reports on our priorities and progress against the 2014/15 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 2014/15

- 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 2014/15 Business Plan.

#### *Practising Certificate (PC) Fees for 2015/16*

- 3 The PC renewal exercise went live on 1 October. The exercise is going smoothly so far with the volume and performance testing that has taken place ensuring that the system is stable and can manage the demand. There was also a drive prior to the 1 October to ensure that all regulatory notifications, such as new manager applications, new branches and name changes etc are up to date to ensure that firms' data is as accurate as possible for the renewal online service.
- 4 During this period, the aim for the Contact Centre will be to continue to reduce the time taken to answer calls and respond to emails. In 2014, the targets were to answer 70% of calls within two minutes and to respond to 95% of emails within ten days. In 2015, the aim is to answer 80% of calls within two minutes and respond to 95% of emails within seven days. The most up to date performance figures will be provided at the Board meeting.

#### Progress against our 2014/15 Business Plan

- 5 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.

<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>	<b>On track</b>
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- 6 Overall we are on track to achieve this objective.
- 7 The November Handbook release will include amendments to our arrangements relating to separate businesses, accounts rules and accountants' reports, and overseas accounts, and will simplify our authorisation of sole practitioners, as well as bringing in the "Improving Regulation" regulation changes approved by the Board at its last meeting. The LSB has now also approved the rules to bring in the changes to accountants' reports agreed by the Board in July 2015.
- 8 A 12-week consultation on minor changes to the rules for the QASA was published on 2 October 2015. This is to assist us, along with the Bar Standards Board and CILEx Regulation,

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which together form the Joint Advocacy Group (JAG), to prepare for the implementation of the Quality Assurance Scheme for Advocates by launching a new consultation - <http://www.sra.org.uk/sra/news/gasa-consultation-october-2015.page>. On the same day, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) published its own consultation on Preserving and Enhancing the Quality of Criminal Advocacy. We are in close contact with the MoJ about their proposals, and will be submitting a response to their consultation.

**Objective 2: We will work with solicitors and firms to raise standards and uphold core professional principles**

**On track**

- 9 Overall we are on track to achieve this objective. We launched our Question of Trust campaign on 30 September with separate events in Newcastle for consumers and solicitors and with the Legal Services Consumer Panel. This is the start of a sustained communications campaign with the consultation running up until the end of January that will inform the development of our professional standards framework. The second phase of the survey will be open to the public, consumers, and the profession, and will run during the course of the consultation period. The events were well received and secured a good press response. Social media posts (on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) generated 70,000 impressions and 1,500 engagements (likes, shares, clicks, etc). Three further events featuring 'A Question of Trust' have been scheduled to take place during October, including visits to Birmingham and Bristol.
- 10 The Diversity Workforce Data exercise closed on 30 September with 75% of firms having reported their data to us. 2,346 firms submitted their data in the final three days and a final reminder was sent to firms on 5 October.
- 11 Following approval by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills of the Trailblazer apprenticeship for solicitors in September, the employers' group is holding engagement events for employers and providers in the autumn. Next steps are to prepare an employers' briefing pack and, subject to LSB approval, to make the rule change permitting this route to qualification as part of the 1 November handbook change.

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

**On track**

- 12 Work is progressing with the OneView programme to address the issues identified through user (internal and external) and accessibility testing. As a result of the testing, a wider number of issues have been identified and we are currently prioritising those issues that need to be addressed before the go live date in March 2016.
- 13 We are continuing to provide a range of inclusive events for staff to support the delivery of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. We are marking Black History Month in October with informative displays and a series of talks, including from Equality Diversity and

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Inclusion (EDI) Committee member Mike Franklin, Derrick Campbell who will be speaking about his role as Commissioner at the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), and author Monica Brown. Plans are underway to mark Diwali in November 2015.

**Objective 4: We will work with our stakeholders to improve the quality of our services and their experience when using them**

**On track**

- 14 Work on the stakeholder perceptions tracking survey continues with the fieldwork for the public, firms, solicitors and trainees completed in early September, with a final 1,928 interviews. We expect to receive the results by the end of November. We will be surveying students over the next few weeks and undertaking an omnibus survey of the public. We expect to receive the results by the end of November.
- 15 Our 'Writing the SRA Way' guidance is now complete for our new corporate tone of voice. Core letter templates are also being redrafted alongside a wider programme of training and familiarisation with the new tone of voice for staff, which started on 15 September with presentations to all line managers at their off-site event. This is one of the key pieces of work taking place to improve the experience of stakeholders when they engage with us.

**Section 2: Operational Performance**

- 16 We continue to report against our end to end KPIs. At the end of August, the percentage of files closed within 12 months of receipt remained the same as July at 92% against our target of 90%. The average number of days from assessment to Tribunal proceedings issued increased from 567 days in July to 573 in August. This figure can be influenced by the low number of cases actually issued (the point at which a case is sent to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal) in any given month. It can take only one or two newly issued cases to be older than the norm, which could be due to the complexity of the case and the material that needs to be collated, to have an impact on the reporting. Given this, we do expect monthly fluctuations with this KPI. The figure is down from 616 in April 2015.
- 17 Work to improve the process by which firms are authorised continues. A simplified form for firms changing legal entity was successfully introduced in August 2015. There has also been additional work to simplify the main firm application (FA1) form. These changes should enable us to further reduce the time it takes to be authorised. The current average time to make a decision is less than three months and we have significantly reduced work in progress levels to 186 (from a comparative September 2014 figure of 346).

**Section 3: Publications and Engagement Activity**

- 18 In order to reach out to those supporting people with concerns about legal services, we had a stand at the Citizens Advice (CA) annual conference on 8-9 September. CA organisers complimented our stand as one of the best and most interactive at the event and indicated that it had attracted the highest number of delegates over the two days. Delegates were particularly interested in detail on the Question of Trust campaign.

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- 19 Measures of reach and engagement for content published by the consumer-targeted Legal Choices website, which we operate on behalf of the joint regulators, rose sharply in the third quarter of the 2015 calendar year. While the absolute figure remained modest, visits to the site during the last quarter were up more than 300% from a year earlier to 8,500, with visitors to the site up 370% to 7,300. Average daily likes of the Legal Choices Facebook page rose to 15, from zero a year earlier, and the total reach of Legal Choices Facebook posts topped 1.4 million, up from figures too low for native Facebook Analytics to report a year earlier. In September, a two-week paid Facebook campaign targeted at small business owners also reached 105,000 users and generated more than 2,500 engagements (like, shares, clicks, etc).
- 20 Board members may have seen my interview with The Law Society Gazette, published on 5 October: <http://www.lawgazette.co.uk/people/interview-paul-philip/5051348.article>. I took the opportunity to promote our regulatory reform work and to set out our overall position and approach.
- 21 We had to close registration for the Compliance Conference on 14 October as we reached our capacity and target of 750 registered delegates. An oral update on the event will be provided at the meeting.

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**Author** Paul Philip, Chief Executive  
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