

Maintaining standards of service and reducing complaints

1 July 2019

[Maintaining standards of service and reducing complaints \(PDF 24 pages, 1.7MB\)](https://guidance.sra.org.uk/globalassets/documents/sra/research/standards-of-service.pdf) [<https://guidance.sra.org.uk/globalassets/documents/sra/research/standards-of-service.pdf>]

[Read our report: First tier complaints](https://guidance.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/first-tier-complaints-report/) [<https://guidance.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/first-tier-complaints-report/>]

Executive summary

The standard of legal services and the actions of solicitors and firms has an impact on public confidence in the rule of law and the overall effectiveness of the operation of the legal system.

The solicitors and firms we regulate have a duty to maintain high standards of behaviour and competence. We continue to receive reports about poor standards and firms continue to receive complaints about their service, some of which are investigated by the Legal Ombudsman (LeO). Therefore 'Standards of service' remains one of our priority risks in our Risk Outlook.

This report takes a close look at that risk. It draws on a range of our research and that of third parties to:

- highlight the benefits of high standards of service
- examine how firms can maintain service standards and so limit the complaints they receive
- identify the risks involved if clients are not given the appropriate standard of service.

It also outlines how we support firms and the action we take where firms fail to uphold the standards expected of them.

We looked at areas such as:

- the importance of communicating with clients so they know what they can expect and how much it is likely to cost
- making sure solicitors are capable of carrying out the work they are assigned to do
- dealing properly with any complaints that arise.

Key findings



- The majority of clients are satisfied with the service they receive and believe it represents value for money.
- Solicitors need to be more aware of their clients' expectations – while 48% of the public said they highly value being given a clear explanation of a legal process by their solicitor, only 23% of the profession thought this would be highly valued.
- There has been an increase in complaints to firms.
- There has also been a significant increase in firms resolving those complaints, up from 72% in 2012 to 81% in 2018.
- Most complaints are about delay, advice and costs.
- There are fewer 'silent sufferers' – those that are unhappy with the service received but did not make a complaint – down from 49% in 2017 to 35% in 2018.
- Over half of firms (55%) say it is important to train staff to respond to dissatisfied clients before they make complaints.
- 40% of solicitors have increased their learning and development activities in the last two years. And 39% felt that our changes to continuing competence had improved the competence of solicitors.
- Nearly four out of five of people we surveyed said they would feel more confident in using services from a firm that displayed the new SRA clickable logo on its website.

It is important that people can have confidence and trust in the services they receive from solicitors and law firms, and have protections if things go wrong.

People look for solicitors that are efficient and give clear information. And people trust solicitors to look after their best interests and will often choose a solicitor that has been recommended to them.

Providing a good service makes business sense, as building and maintaining a good reputation is important for success. [1](#) Understanding the needs of each client means that the right service can be given to each person and clients are more likely to be satisfied with the service.

The main business benefits of high standards are:

- retaining clients
- increased recommendations
- fewer complaints.

What we are doing

Shining a light on key risks is part of our work to make sure that proper standards are maintained – this report contributes to that.

We are publishing an annual summary of our data on first tier complaints – complaints that go to law firms. Firms have to report their data on these to us. Publishing an analysis of what is happening will help the profession

to understand what are the most common causes of complaints, so they can take action to address any areas of weakness in their firms.

Where firms fall short of the standards the public should expect of them, we can and do continue to take action against them.

Delivering high standard services which are accessible to as many people as possible is one of the driving objectives behind our current reform programme.

Our Transparency Rules, introduced in 2018, require firms to publish price and service information across certain common legal services. They also require all firms to publish information on their website about their complaints procedures. We have checked, and will continue to check, firms' compliance with these rules.

Our new Standards and Regulations introduce two Codes of Conduct, for solicitors and firms, in November 2019. The Codes have a greater focus on professional and ethical standards, rather than on compliance with prescriptive rules. This will also help people understand the standards they can expect from solicitors.

November 2019 also sees the online display of the 'SRA regulated' clickable logo becoming a mandatory requirement for those we regulate. Around a quarter of firms already use it on a voluntary basis. This study shows that people place more confidence in a firm that uses the logo, which will help them to see what protections are in place.