

CLASSIFICATION – PUBLIC

**SOLICITORS REGULATION AUTHORITY
Minutes of the SRA Board meeting
held on 2 December 2015 at 1:30pm
at the Grange Holborn Hotel, 50-60 Southampton Row, London, WC1B 4AR
PUBLIC**

Present: Enid Rowlands (Chair)
Julia Black
Graham Chisnall
Martin Coleman
Jane Furniss
Bill Galvin
David Heath
Paul Marsh
Peter Phippen
Chris Randall
Shamit Saggar
David Willis

In attendance: Paul Philip, Richard Collins, Robert Loughlin, Jane Malcolm, David Middleton, Juliet Oliver, Crispin Passmore and Dominic Tambling

1 APOLOGIES

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including the journalists in attendance and Law Society observer. Apologies had been received from Cindy Leslie, Moni Mannings and Elaine Williams.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 OCTOBER 2015

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2015 were agreed.

3 MATTERS ARISING AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no matters arising that were not covered on the agenda. The Board reviewed the action log and noted that:

- i a recommendation on possible extension of post six year run off cover would come to the Board in March 2016;
- ii the SRA self assessment for the LSB had been amended, signed off by the Chair and Senior Independent Director and submitted to the LSB on 30 October 2015; and
- iii a note from the Chair reviewing the 21 October 2015 meeting had been circulated to the Board on 23 October 2015.

3.2 The solicitor members had previously declared their interests as solicitors and therefore part of the regulated profession. No other interests were declared.

SRA BOARD

4 CHAIR'S UPDATE

- 4.1 The Chair reported that she had spent some time with the staff dealing with the annual Practising Certificate Renewal Exercise (PCRE). She had listened in to some of the calls and although a large number of them were anything but straight forward the support systems were in place to deal with these and the staff had done very well. She understood that 99% of calls had been answered within two minutes and overall an exercise which had been very difficult in the past had gone very smoothly. She passed on the thanks of the Board to all those who had been involved in the planning and execution of the PCRE.
- 4.2 The final round of interviews for new members of the Board would take place on Monday 7 December and the Chair was grateful for Martin Coleman's assistance in the process.
- 4.3 The Chair had received an interim report from the consultants who were undertaking the governance review and would be speaking to them the following week. There was still a good deal to do but the work was on track for a report to come to the Board at its meeting on 20 January 2016.
- 4.4 The Chair had also been pleased to meet, with Paul Marsh, the new Chair of the TLS Group Audit Committee, Gautam Dalal, who had attended an "A Question of Trust" event in Chester.

5 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

- 5.1 Paul Philip introduced his report and asked the Board to focus on paragraphs 6 to 12 which dealt with the launch of SRA Innovate. This would provide support to organisations that wished to launch innovative legal services. The initiative should help to make the SRA more approachable and would be supported by an external Reference Group.
- 5.2 Paragraphs 18 to 22 dealt with education issues and the Board had that morning approved the launch of a consultation on a new common professional assessment for intending solicitors. Paragraph 29 reported on the appointment of a new independent reviewer to consider complaints that reached stage 3 of our complaints procedure. The Ombudsman Service Limited had been appointed following an open tender process and had taken over from the Independent Complaints Resolution Service on 26 October 2015.
- 5.3 The Chair thanked Paul Philip and the Board members for the time they had committed to attending various "Question of Trust" and other events around the country which were essential in maintaining links with the profession.

6 THE SRA BUSINESS PLAN 2015/16

- 6.1 Richard Collins reminded the Board that it had considered a draft of the Business Plan at its meeting on 21 October and final approval was now being sought to publish the version before the Board.
- 6.2 The Plan set out at a high level the areas of activity on which the organisation would focus in the coming year, based on the four strategic objectives set out in the Corporate Strategy. The first objective related to regulatory reform and work in this area would focus on changes to the structure of the Handbook and rules on solicitors working in-house. There was also a commitment to work with other

SRA BOARD

regulators to implement the Quality Assurance Scheme for Advocates (QASA) in April 2016.

- 6.3 Objective 2 related to standards and the Board had that morning agreed a consultation as part of the Training for Tomorrow programme on assessing individuals for entry to the profession. The Question of Trust work was also a key part of this strand.
- 6.4 Objective 3 related to operational performance and decision making. Great strides had been made in relation to efficiency of operations and the focus was now shifting to the quality of decision making. There would also be a focus on getting the necessary IT infrastructure onto place.
- 6.5 Objective 4 was about working with stakeholders and the enhanced programme of external engagement would continue.
- 6.6 In discussion Board members emphasised the importance of the planned move to a three year planning cycle and the need to ensure that links were made with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
- 6.7 The Board agreed to the publication of the Business Plan 2015/16.

7 SRA RESEARCH PROGRAMME 2015/16

- 7.1 Crispin Passmore explained that the paper set out the research programme for the coming year which would help to build the evidence to support our regulatory and supervisory activity. A good deal of work had been done with those at the front line of the organisation to ensure that research was focused in the right areas. The programme had also been formulated after discussions with other regulators, especially the Legal Services Board (LSB), and with others including academics. An Economic Impact Assessment would also be carried out to looking at all of the regulatory changes that we had made in recent years.
- 7.2 In discussion Board members asked what research was being done to look ahead at things like market changes and the impact of technology as well as demand and behavioural aspects of the market. Board members also asked whether the sample sizes for the various projects would be large enough for diversity issues to be considered as they should be and suggested that the LSB could help with meta analysis of research being undertaken by others such as the European Commission.
- 7.3 Crispin Passmore replied that the LSB was more properly the body to look forward into issues such as market change and had already done some useful work on the demand and behavioural sides. Diversity was built into all of the projects and some used other organisation's data which provided sufficient sample sizes.
- 7.4 Crispin Passmore said that to date most research had been reported to the Regulatory Risk Committee which had requested a review of how research was commissioned, signed off and published. This review would include proposals on how the Board as well as committees were kept informed about research. Notwithstanding this, the Chair asked for an update report in 6 months time.

SRA BOARD

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 8.1 The Chair said that she would like to briefly touch on the recent HM Treasury/ Department for Business and Skills announcement about the desirability for the independence of legal regulators which had been made two days previously. A great deal of careful thought would need to be given to this, including our thoughts on what a really good regulator looked like. The key responsibility for any regulator was to regulate in the public interest and to do that it was vital for the public to have confidence in what we did.
- 8.2 The SRA took the way it was perceived very seriously, and a report on the Perception Tracking Survey which had been undertaken would come to the Board in early 2016. Against this background the Chair welcomed the Government announcement and looked forward to the likely consultation process to which the SRA would respond. There would be further opportunities for the Board to engage with this process in due course.
- 8.3 The Chair would circulate a note reviewing the meeting and would be grateful for any thoughts from members on making meetings as effective as possible.
- 8.4 The Chair thanked the five Board members for whom this was their last Board meeting: Graham Chisnall; Martin Coleman; Bill Galvin; Cindy Leslie; and Peter Phippen, and on behalf of the Board thanked them all for their phenomenal contributions to the SRA.
- 8.5 The Board noted the minutes of the Regulatory Risk Committee on 7 October 2015.

NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY 20 JANUARY AT THE CUBE, 199 WHARFSIDE STREET, BIRMINGHAM, B1 COMMENCING AT 1:30PM

SRA BOARD

Solicitors Regulation Authority Action Log: Public - 20 January 2016

Meeting date	Paragraph	Action	Owner	Date for action
3 Dec 2014	6.4	Bring further recommendations to Board on possible extension of post six year run off cover for one or two years	Crispin Passmore	March 2016
2 Dec 2015	7.4	Update Board on SRA Research Programme	Crispin Passmore	1 June 2016
2 Dec 2015	8.3	Chair to circulate a note reviewing the meeting	Enid Rowlands	9 December 2015

Solicitors Regulation Authority Board Record of Actions Completed: Public

Meeting date	Paragraph	Action	Owner	Date completed
21 October 2015	6.6	Amendments to be made to LSB self assessment and then signed off by the Chair and Senior Independent Director	Paul Philip	30 October 2015
21 October 2015	8.1	Chair to circulate a note reviewing the meeting	Enid Rowlands	23 October 2015