

## Meeting our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2014 to 2017

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy 2014-17 is now complete. In this, we aimed to meet three objectives that covered these areas of work:

- Our people and the culture of the SRA
- Our organisation and the way we work
- Our activities to promote diversity in the profession.

We considered the findings from the Independent Comparative Case Review published in March 2014. We commissioned the review to understand why black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) solicitors were overrepresented in some of our investigation and disciplinary work. We wanted to be sure that we were making decisions and applying our policies fairly. The review found no evidence of discrimination, but identified a range of factors which might be contributing to the overrepresentation. We published our response to the review and set out the actions to address these factors in our strategy.

Going forward our strategic approach to EDI is part of our [Corporate Strategy](https://news.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/) [https://news.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/] 2017-20.

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### **Objective one**

To develop a more diverse workforce and promote an inclusive culture, equality of opportunity for all staff and the behaviours and capabilities required to regulate proportionately, fairly and free from bias.

Our actions and achievements in meeting this objective includes:

- Establishing our People Strategy and People Strategy Committee to oversee our work.
- Revising our recruitment strategy, training managers on best practice in recruitment and selection and monitoring trends to identify gaps where we might need to consider additional measures to promote diversity.
- Working with the Employers' Network for Equality to provide workshops for staff on inclusive leadership and inclusive working and Inclusion. This is intended to help look beyond diversity to the broader inclusion agenda and the behaviours that drive an inclusive environment, including unconscious bias.
- Joining diversity organisations which provide tools and information for staff, and where we can benchmark our own progress eg Stonewall and the Business Disability Forum.



- Establishing and supporting five internal networks set up by staff: LGBT+, women, Christian, disability, BAME as well as an Allies programme for other staff who are supportive of the networks and want to get involved. The networks help provide a safe, inclusive and diverse working environment that encourages respect and dignity for all. They provide social interaction, peer support, personal and career development through opportunities for staff to support projects and review policies.
- Embedding our values across the organisation and in our performance management process and regularly celebrating these values through activities and awards.
- Providing a varied programme of EDI events for staff to promote learning and create an inclusive environment. These include celebrating significant days for some of the main faith groups and events to mark Mental Health Week, LGBT+ history month and International Women's Day.
- Mainstreaming EDI into our core training programme, as well as providing a bespoke online module for all staff.
- Reviewing our corporate social responsibility programme which involves a range of initiatives and activities including fundraising, mentoring young people from local schools and volunteering for good causes.

## **Objective two**

To ensure that the way we operate, our rules and the decisions we make are proportionate, fair and free from bias and help firms and individuals understand and comply with our requirements.

Our actions and achievements in meeting this objective include:

- Bringing our EDI work into the heart of our governance arrangements and starting on our work to mainstream EDI. This includes:
  - discussing our approach to EDI and our public sector equalities duties with our Board
  - building EDI monitoring into our Board recruitment to encourage applications from a diverse range of backgrounds
  - standing down the EDI Committee, with support from its members, so responsibility for our EDI work sits more directly with our Board.
- Reviewing our decision-making criteria and enforcement strategy to make sure our decisions are fair and transparent and seen to be so. As part of this we:
  - published new guidance for 19 of our regulatory decisions
  - engaged with thousands of people in our Question of Trust campaign about what should happen when things go wrong. This underpins our work on regulatory decision-making and we are using the findings to inform our new Enforcement Strategy



- consulted on our draft Enforcement Strategy.
- Introducing a quality assurance framework which looks at how we are responding to any EDI matters which may arise in our casework.
- Providing support and resources to small firms which we know have a disproportionate number of people from a BAME background. These include:
  - a dedicated helpline and call back service for small firms.
  - information and resources on our small firms' webpages.
  - engaging with members of our small firms' virtual reference group.
  - regulatory workshops in London, Manchester and Cardiff to discuss practice issues which were targeted at BAME and small firms.
- Progressing our regulatory reform agenda and seeking opportunities to promote diversity in the profession by remove barriers and regulatory burdens to firms and solicitors. These include:
  - revised Principles for the new Codes of Conduct, including an EDI principle
  - proposals to change the way we assess character and suitability to make it easier to apply
  - proposed changes to our authorisation rules and regulations for firms and solicitors so they are shorter and clearer.
- Promoting diverse pathways into the profession through our Training for Tomorrow programme. These include:
  - admitting more than 500 people who have followed non-traditional routes into the profession following our amendment to the rule which allows admission through the new 'equivalent means' process
  - working with firms and the government to encourage legal apprenticeships
  - agreeing the introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination in 2020, meaning all aspiring solicitors will take the same examination regardless of their pathway into the profession. We are engaging with education providers, students and the profession about our plans and exploring the opportunities this offers to promote a diverse profession.
- Making our communications more inclusive and accessible and getting better at responding to those with a disability, health problem or mental health issue. These include:
  - publishing our new Reasonable Adjustments policy, including an easy read version
  - providing training for our staff and monitoring our response to those who need reasonable adjustments
  - launching our "Your health, your career" campaign providing resources for people who may need our help and support, as well as raising awareness of wellbeing in the profession
  - making online translation available for our website
  - introducing a new language policy to make it clear that we can provide translation services where needed



- providing more Welsh language communications and publishing key documents in Welsh, in recognition of our responsibility to Welsh speaking people.

### **Objective three**

To work with those we regulate to support them in achieving a more diverse and inclusive profession.

Our actions and achievements in meeting this objective includes:

- Collecting and publishing information and resources about diversity in the profession. These include:
  - introducing a new regulatory outcome for firms to collect report and publish diversity data for their workforce
  - collecting diversity data from firms twice over the period, with 92 percent of firms reporting their data to us in 2017
  - collecting data from law firms about gender identity and transgender for the first time
  - launching our law firm diversity tool which allows people to view the breakdown of diversity characteristics by role categories and to view this information by firm size, location and work type
  - providing resources to help make the business case for diversity and guidance on recruitment and promotion through our website and Risk Outlook publications
  - raising awareness of transgender equality in the profession, providing guidance and case studies
  - exploring our understanding of the career pathways for BAME and female solicitors in the profession through independent research and our own thematic review of diversity in law firms - 'Unlocking the benefits of diversity'.
- Working in partnership with firms and other stakeholders to promote diversity in the profession through a range of activities. These include:
  - bringing firms together to discuss wellbeing in the workplace, women in law and how to promote a lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-friendly workplace
  - expanding our engagement with representative groups in the profession so we now have regular contact with more than 10 groups across the country
  - sponsoring the annual UK Diversity Legal Awards (run by the Black Solicitors Network) and the Society of Asian Lawyers Annual Awards to demonstrate our support of the work they do to promote diversity in the profession
  - working with the Legal Services Board and other legal regulators to share good practice and improve our understanding of diversity in the legal sector



- supporting LGBT+ equality in the profession by celebrating Pride each year in Birmingham and London and persuading fellow legal regulators, law firms and other partners from the legal sector to join us.
- Challenging others to promote diversity in the legal sector and raise awareness. These include:
  - introducing discussions about diversity in our regular meetings with MPs and at party conferences
  - speaking about diversity at a range of conferences including the Sole Practitioners' Group Annual Conference.
- Developing our work on social mobility in the profession through a range of activities. These include:
  - working with law firms and students through our support for the Legal Social Mobility Partnership (now known as the Social Mobility Business Partnership), which provides opportunities and support for students coming from a less privileged background
  - supporting the Cabinet Office to establish common measures of socio-economic background and piloted their survey with our own staff.
- Promoting wellbeing in the profession alongside our own Your health, your career campaign. These include:
  - encouraging good practice in the sector and speaking to solicitors about the importance of wellbeing at several events including our Compliance Officers Conference in Birmingham, our Innovate conference in London and a workshop for firms in Cardiff
  - working with the Legal Wellbeing Taskforce, sharing experiences with others in the legal sector and promoting social media campaigns to demonstrate support for those with mental health and wellbeing issues.

## **Next steps**

- We will continue to mainstream EDI in the organisation, overseen by a new EDI programme board.
- We have five priority themes which are included in our Corporate Strategy 2017-20, alongside the work we are doing in relation to our people and culture.
- Our activities are set out in our EDI action plan, which incorporates the work needed to meet the new diversity outcomes set by the Legal Services Board.