



Association of Women Solicitors

Essential for Success

SRA Consultations

Looking to the Future: Phase two of our Handbook Reforms

Looking to the Future: Better information, more choice

Response by Association of Women Solicitors, London

About Association of Women Solicitors, London

Association of Women Solicitors, London was founded in 1992 and its aims include representing, supporting and developing the interests of women solicitors. Membership is open to women solicitors and trainees and associate membership to other women lawyers including barristers, chartered legal executives and paralegals.

For further information please visit our website www.awslondon.co.uk

Response

Thank you for inviting us to attend your recent workshop on these two Consultations.

The main points that emerged were;-

1. The Equality Impact Assessments left something to be desired but you did take our point that as the majority of solicitors involved with distressed clients and in the more difficult types of work (Divorce, Mental Health, etc.) are female the inevitable greater number of complaints could adversely affect the profile of women solicitors.

Our membership includes many women solicitors working within the smaller entities (niche, Sole practitioner, small High St etc) and looking after vulnerable individuals and drawing on that specialist knowledge we have read both Responses submitted by The Law Society and agree with what they have said.

2. We agreed that regulated firms displaying a logo to demonstrate regulated status is a good idea but are concerned about the absence of enforcement of the requirement that unregulated firms disclose unregulated status. This is obviously part of the overall shifting of monitoring to solicitors whilst retaining full disciplinary powers for regulated individuals and firms. Whilst we are not averse to fair competition this proposed arrangement does seem to be unfair.

We also expressed concern that the typical consumer will not understand the distinction anyway.

Also of concern is the fact that unregulated firms with one solicitor will not be regulated by the SRA, but the solicitor shall be responsible for any issues that arise and shall be disciplined should things go wrong. Many women who may be career returners may find themselves more likely to be in this position and therefore will have increased pressure as a result.

3. On publication of prices, timelines etc. the proposal is that the information currently given in the tailored client care letter after an initial meeting with the client will now go on the regulated firm's website in advance. All agreed that publishing such information on a general basis would be extremely difficult particularly in contentious matters and it would have to be hedged about with so many qualifications as to render it useless. For example, Counsel and experts are regularly engaged in litigation and at the outset of a matter, to estimate for these costs is almost impossible.

4. A similar comment applies to publication of the Complaints record. We need to know exactly what information would have to be published and how much explanatory information could be added.

Association of Women Solicitors, London
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