

SRA BOARD

3 March 2020

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This paper will be published

**Corporate Strategy 2020-2023:
consultation feedback and next steps**

Purpose

- 1 The purpose of this paper is to summarise consultation responses and other stakeholder feedback received in relation to our draft Corporate Strategy for 2020 – 2023, and to confirm next steps.

Recommendations

- 2 The Board is asked:
 - (a) to note the summary of feedback received, and our intention to publish an analysis of consultation responses and stakeholder views
 - (b) to approve the publication of our Corporate Strategy for 2020-2023.

If you have any questions about this paper please contact: Chris Handford, Director Regulatory Policy, Chris.Handford@sra.org.uk

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations

Consideration	Paragraph nos
Our Corporate Strategy includes an overarching focus on improving access to justice and introducing new technology solutions, which have potential to benefit people from disadvantaged communities.	
Our consultation approach included engagement events with a range of stakeholders including older people, small business owners, young people and consumer groups.	

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Corporate Strategy 2020-2023: consultation feedback and next steps

Background

- 3 We consulted on our draft Corporate Strategy between 3 October 2019 and 23 January 2020.
- 4 The strategy had been developed following the SRA Board's away day in April 2019 and subsequent discussions around current and emerging issues in the legal services sector and wider environment.
- 5 The draft Strategy included an overarching aim to improve access to justice and to focus on three objectives:
 - setting and maintaining high standards for the profession and ourselves
 - technology and innovation
 - anticipating and responding to change.
- 6 Each objective is supported by information about our approach towards collaboration and stakeholder engagement, and an outcome statement describing how we will work to deliver it.

Our consultation approach

- 7 We received 17 formal written responses to our consultation, including responses from the Law Society, the Legal Ombudsman and the Legal Services Consumer Panel. We also received responses from regional law societies, consumer groups, law firms and individual solicitors.
- 8 During the consultation period we also delivered a programme of events that were attended by a number of SRA Board members. The events focused on discussion about our draft strategic objectives and priorities with a range of stakeholder communities, and they included:
 - focus groups with young people and service users from St Basils, and Just For Kids Law
 - a workshop with 30+ frontline advice services delivered in partnership with Age UK London
 - roundtable meetings in Birmingham and London with consumer groups, small business owners, and Legal Access Challenge finalists.
- 9 We also sought views from our stakeholders through our social media channels, and through online surveys carried out at events in 2019 including the Citizens Advice conference, and our Compliance Officers Conference.

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CLASSIFICATION – PUBLIC**Key themes**

- 10 Our responses document is attached at annex 1.
- 11 We received broad overall support for our strategic focus across all three proposed areas. In particular we received strong support from the majority of our stakeholders regarding:
- the references throughout our corporate strategy to building stakeholder relationships and exploring opportunities for partnership working
 - our focus on technology and innovation and the benefits advancements can bring for members of the public
 - our commitment to start speaking with greater authority in policy debates, and to be prepared to speak out more generally on a broader range of issues
 - the overarching focus across our three objectives towards improving access to justice.
- 12 As part of the consultation process we also asked for views regarding other areas of focus that our stakeholders might wish to see incorporated into our strategic approach. Some of the suggestions included:
- considering digital exclusion and other barriers that can otherwise limit the benefits of new technology for some people
 - exploring further ways of communicating and helping understanding of our regulatory expectations for solicitors and consumers
 - specific themes and subjects to help inform our future horizon scanning activities, and other research and analysis initiatives.
- 13 We will be giving further consideration to these areas and other feedback received during the consultation process as we begin thinking about our next business plan.

Summary of proposed changes

- 14 As we received a broad level of support for our three draft strategic objectives we are not proposing to make amendments to them.
- 15 In light of feedback we received regarding our areas of strategic focus under some of our objectives, we are proposing to make three small amendments:
- in the '*How we work*' section of the strategy we have further strengthened our commitment to focus on building new stakeholder relationships
 - in the '*How we will achieve our aims*' section we confirm that we are including a specific focus on clarity about our regulatory expectations
 - under strategic objective one we have now made reference to environmental sustainability.
- 16 We also received feedback from some respondents including the Law Society and Junior Lawyer's division arguing that maintaining high professional standards for solicitors and law firms, as well as providing a high level of

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operational service, should remain our focus. We agree that this is our core work and it will continue to be the main focus of our resources. In setting high professional standards for the profession, we are also committed to ensuring high standards of customer service in all we do. We propose to make this clear in the final document.

- 17 Our third proposed objective includes the outcome that we will be ‘an authoritative commentator on and a valued voice in policy debates around regulation, access to legal services and the wider consumer protection landscape.’ In delivering this objective and outcome we will work closely to complement a range of voices in the sector, including the Law Society and other expert commentators. Our purpose is to add value where there are challenges or shortfalls in the current framework rather than duplicate or distract from the role of others, including established groups and the representative bodies. We will make this clear in the final document.
- 18 An amended version of our Corporate Strategy is at annex 2 – with the proposed changes ‘tracked’. A full version will be prepared for publication with an updated foreword after the Board meeting.

Next steps

- 19 Subject to Board comments we will now finalise the Corporate Strategy and arrange for publication during March 2020.

Recommendations: the Board is asked:

- a) to note the summary of feedback received, and our intention to publish an analysis of consultation responses and stakeholder views**
- b) to approve the publication of our Corporate Strategy for 2020-2023.**

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Supporting information

Links to the Corporate Strategy and/or Business Plan

- 20 The Corporate Strategy 2020-2023 builds on our previous Strategy and modernises our strategic priorities in light of emerging issues and factors within the legal services market and wider environment.

How the issues support the regulatory objectives and best regulatory practice

- 21 The new Strategy and its objectives have been developed with the eight regulatory objectives from the Legal Services Act 2007 in mind, as well as the better regulation principles. In particular the Strategy includes a focus throughout on the Act's regulatory objective to improve access to justice.

Public/Consumer impact

- 22 The Strategy has access to justice as a cross cutting theme. We believe this will help to frame our work and set a strong strategic direction for us in bringing improvements for members of the public and small business owners, across the three areas of focus described by the Strategy.

What engagement approach has been used to inform the work and what further communication and engagement is needed

- 23 As part of our consultation approach we have directly engaged with a range of consumer groups, members of the public from vulnerable and harder-to-reach communities, and with charities representing diverse groups. We have developed stronger working relationships with many more not for profit organisations as a result. In order to deliver our new Strategy, we will continue to engage widely and seek to collaborate where appropriate, for example on public protection challenges and areas where we can add value by commenting, including on the regulatory framework.

What equality and diversity considerations relate to this issue

- 24 Access to justice is a prevalent theme running through our Strategy, and this should support us to focus on better understanding and supporting vulnerable groups and the points at which they need to engage with the legal services market. The stronger strategic focus on horizon scanning and evaluation will help us to explore diversity and inclusion considerations in areas of the profession, and to explore related impacts associated with our regulatory functions.

How the work will be evaluated

- 25 The new Corporate Strategy will be supported by a business plan, against which the success of the Strategy can be assessed.

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Annexes

Annex 1 [Our consultation responses document](#)

Annex 2 [Our Corporate Strategy 2020-2023](#)