

Business Plan and budget 2023-24:

Summary of responses and
feedback

October 2023

Background

On 10 May 2023 we published '[Business Plan and budget 2023-24](#)' as part of a consultation process that ran until 21 June 2023.

The consultation invited views from our stakeholders on:

- our proposed Business Plan and work priorities between 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024
- our proposed budget for 2023-24
- our proposed share of the practising certificate fee and Compensation Fund contribution for 2023-24, including impacts towards equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Feedback received during the consultation is used to shape and finalise our Business Plan and budget for 2023-24.

Who did we hear from?

We received written responses from:

- The Law Society (TLS)
- The Legal Services Consumer Panel (LSCP)
- Two members of the public
- Liverpool Law Society

We also connected with stakeholders through an engagement programme focused on our Business Plan and budget, and our Corporate Strategy for 2023-26. Through this programme we discussed our work and budget proposals for 2023-24, within the context of our longer-term strategy and approach for the coming three years.

Our engagement programme featured:

- social media engagement and polls delivered through our LinkedIn and Twitter channels
- a YouTube webinar broadcast that outlined our plans and key areas of focus from November 2023 onwards
- in-person and online focus groups with members of the public
- roundtable meetings with stakeholders, including:
 - local law societies
 - groups representing specific diverse communities in legal services
 - in-house-solicitors and lawyers in local government
 - consumer groups
- discussion at events that included:
 - Legal Eye conference
 - Legal Geek conference
 - Solicitor Sole Practitioners Group annual conference.

- engagement with MPs and peers
- discussion with SRA employees through a digital roundtable.

We thank everyone who took part in our consultation process, using any of the available channels. Following the consultation we reviewed all feedback that we received and it informed the final version of our Business Plan and budget for 2023-24.

In the remainder of this report we summarise some of the main areas of feedback we received through our consultation process.

Comments and feedback for question one

Our first question was:

‘Do you have any views on our proposed work commitments for 2023-24 under our first strategic priority?’

We set out work proposals for delivering the first year of activity under our first proposed new strategic priority for 2023-26 – ‘We will deliver high professional standards’.

Our proposals included commitments relating to the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) that were well received. TLS welcomed our continued prioritisation of the SQE in our work plans for 2023-24, particularly the emergence of an independent evaluation study, and our commitments to publish new datasets on the SQE. The LSCP was also supportive, stating ‘Monitoring the impact of this seismic shift in education and training will continue to be important for some years to come’.

This area of our work was also broadly supported by members of the public taking part in our focus group, many of whom ranked solicitor education and training requirements highly in a list of possible SRA priorities.

Our consultation included work proposals under strategic priority one around continuing competence, and they were also welcomed by respondents. TLS acknowledged our ‘...proportional approach to engaging with this work and looking at ways it can maintain high standards and better support the profession, without adding unnecessary additional burdens on it.’ It also made suggestions for collaborative work with us, and specific areas of knowledge and training we might explore together.

In other areas we heard calls for action, including from the LSCP during its feedback on our proposals to consult on changes to our transparency requirements. It expressed some concern about the pace of progress and urged that ‘...transparency measures should now be extended to other pressing and important areas of law, areas of law where we know consumers are struggling.’ TLS confirmed it awaited our consultation with interest, particularly any proposals to extend practice areas that fall within the scope of transparency requirements.

TLS commented on our proposals for anti-money laundering (AML), suggesting opportunities to collaborate with us on new AML guidance prior to its issue. Some

members of the public in our focus groups were interested in this area too. And keen to hear and understand more about risks of economic crime during their interactions with solicitors.

Liverpool Law Society highlighted proposed key deliverables in our draft Corporate Strategy around the quality and timeliness of our investigation and enforcement work and felt this area of focus should be built into our workplan commitments.

In this section of our draft Business Plan we also described work proposals focused on EDI. There was positive feedback from TLS which welcomed our commitments to improve diversity data collection. And expressed interest in knowing more about our proposals around retention and career progression for women and solicitors from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. The LSCP thought we needed a much clearer vision and strategy for EDI and called on us to deliver 'concrete commitments and targets to deliver tangible improvements to diversity and inclusion.'

Comments and feedback for question two

Our second question was:

'Do you have any views on our proposed work commitments for 2023-24 under our second strategic priority?'

Under this question we described work proposals for a first year of activity under our second proposed new strategic priority for 2023-26 – 'We will strengthen our risk based and proactive regulation'.

Feedback on our proposed work was broadly supportive. The LSCP felt that this focus could strengthen our role, with learnings that could '...loop back into the policy cycle and lead to better regulation.' It also welcomed our proposals to expand our programme of thematic work.

We described our proposal to introduce a new data strategy in this section of our draft Business Plan, and TLS was supportive – commenting that improved quality of data on solicitors could hold value for understanding impacts of regulation. It confirmed it would welcome close engagement between respective teams at TLS and SRA on data analysis initiatives.

Comments and feedback for question three

Our third question was:

'Do you have any views on our proposed work commitments for 2023-24 under our third strategic priority?'

This section of our draft Business Plan described plans for our first year of work under our third proposed new strategic priority for 2023-26 – 'We will support innovation and technology'.

We heard strong levels of support for this proposed area of focus – including from participants in our LinkedIn polls who ranked technology as the most important priority for us. This carried through into feedback we received about our proposed workstreams, which was generally supportive of our work proposals.

Attendees at the Legal Geek conference and participants in our technology stakeholders meeting were enthusiastic about opportunities to strengthen collaboration between lawtech providers and legal service regulators. This included our proposals to build our sandbox capacity, and the LSCP was also supportive of this proposal while recommending that we consider pooling resources with other regulators to do so. TLS offered further support, highlighting the importance of good communication about learning points and outcomes arising from future sandbox initiatives.

Other areas of our proposed work were also well-received by our stakeholders. The LSCP, TLS and Liverpool Law Society supported our proposals for building awareness of technology with smaller law firms. TLS felt we should make sure risks around the use of artificial intelligence (AI) are factored into our work in 2023-24. Some members of the public in our focus groups also felt this was an important consideration for us.

Comments and feedback for question four

Our fourth question was:

‘Do you have any views on our proposed work commitments for 2023-24 under our fourth strategic priority?’

We asked for feedback on our proposed workplans for our first year of work under our fourth proposed new strategic priority for 2023-26 – ‘We will be an authoritative and inclusive organisation, meeting the needs of the public, consumers, those we regulate and our staff’.

In this area of our draft Business Plan we described proposals to launch a stakeholder perception survey. TLS was positive and suggested potential areas of focus for this.

We received good levels of support for our proposal to deliver regulatory position statements on environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations. TLS confirmed it fully endorsed this workstream and it highlighted engagement that was already progressing with the SRA, alongside suggestions for continued collaboration.

Comments and feedback for question five

Our fifth question was:

‘Do you have any views about our budget for 2023-24?’

In this section of the draft Business Plan we asked our stakeholders for any views about our budget proposals for 2023-24.

Members of the public attending our focus groups agreed that it was important for us to use our budget responsibly. They were also interested to hear about the ways in which we are funded.

Liverpool Law Society meanwhile asked about interest-earning funds and their potential deployment to ward against rises to regulatory fees. In our consultation we described approaches we proposed to take to work efficiently.

Comments and feedback for question six

Our sixth question was:

'Do you agree that the SRA proportion of the practising certificate fee is reasonable and appropriate?'

Under this question we explained our proposals for the share of the practising certificate that we planned to request to fund regulation in 2023-24. TLS noted the proposed increase from the portion requested and it confirmed its interest in hearing more about mitigating efficiency savings we had highlighted in our draft budget.

Comments and feedback for question seven

Our seventh question was:

'Do you agree with the Compensation Fund contribution for individuals for 2023-24?'

In this section of our consultation we described our proposal to reduce the required Compensation Fund contribution for 2023-24.

TLS confirmed it agreed with the contribution as outlined, while the LSCP called for clarity and increased transparency about the evidence used to determine reductions to the contribution.

Comments and feedback for question eight

Our eighth question was:

'Do you have any comments on the equality impact assessment of our proposed fees for 2023-24 or EDI-related work commitments in our proposed draft Business Plan for 2023-24? Do you have information that will help us to further build our understanding in relation to impacts on different groups of solicitors?'

In the final section of our consultation we requested views on any EDI impacts and considerations relating to our proposals for the practising fee and Compensation

Fund contribution for 2023-24. We had prepared an equality impact assessment that formed part of the consultation process.

TLS confirmed that it welcomed the equality impact assessment. It also recommended further assessment of impacts for disabled solicitors, and exploration of impacts for people on long-term sick leave, statutory parental or adoption leave.