

Dr Helen Philips
Chair
Legal Services Board
1 Kemble Street
London
WC2B 4AN

28 August 2018

Dear Dr Philips,

SRA Handbook – application for approval of amendments

I write to you as President of Birmingham Law Society, the largest local law society in England and Wales, founded in 1818, and with a two hundred year history of representing the legal profession. The Society has over 4500 members including solicitors, barristers, paralegals, Illex fellows, students and academics.

I have sight of the submission to the Legal Services Board by the President of The Law Society, Christina Blacklaws. Rather than repeating the content of that letter, I write on behalf of Birmingham Law Society to indicate support for the views expressed by the national President and to add my concerns.

Birmingham Law Society has submitted a response to the SRA consultation with regard to the de-regulation of the profession. The consultation response is available on Birmingham Law Society's internet site via the following link:

<http://www.birminghamlawsociety.co.uk/responses-to-other-consultations?id=82>

(Submitted in September 2016: Looking to the future – flexibility and public protection)

The membership of the Birmingham Law Society consists of a wide spectrum of lawyers and practices from sole practitioners to the largest law firms. Without exception, our members are reliant in their delivery of legal services upon the reputation of the solicitors' profession and the generally held public perception that solicitors are professional in their work. A vital element of this which goes to the heart of the solicitors' profession is that they are trustworthy and regulated. If the LSB approves the SRA's proposals in de-regulating the profession, there will be irreparable damage to the reputation of the profession and client protections will be extinguished.

Not for the first time in recent years the SRA appears to have ignored the strong representations made to it by the profession and The Law Society warning that proposed changes will harm the profession and reduce protection for clients.

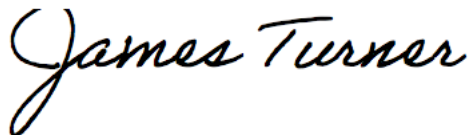
It is our view that the proposals for solicitors working within unregulated entities to deliver services to the public and for individual solicitors in sole practice to provide reserved and non-reserved services without sole practitioner authorisation will have a significant negative impact on the public's trust in the profession. These proposals threaten to damage a brand established over many years and which is clear to consumers. They threaten uncertainty and a two tier system with the risk that some clients will risk receiving a lower standard of service than provided by regulated practices whilst concurrently losing appropriate protection.

Birmingham Law Society considers that the clamour for change is created unilaterally by the SRA in pursuit of its own agenda based upon internally generated ideas for the future structure of the profession. Certainty and simplicity should be the key guiding principles here for the profession and for its clients. These proposals do nothing to enhance the reputation of the profession or protect its clients.

The Birmingham Law Society is vehemently opposed to the SRA's proposals and supports the representations made by the Law Society. The SRA is yet again seeking to sacrifice client protections upon its own altar of change.

I respectfully submit that granting the application made by the SRA would not be in the public interest.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Turner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

James Turner
President
Birmingham Law Society