

Solicitors' professional standards (A Question of Trust)

Research report

We commissioned academics from University College London to help us develop and delivery a survey of solicitors to test their approach to ethical and regulatory scenarios. That work led to a much wider campaign called A Question of Trust in which we asked solicitors and the public how serious they thought different issues were, such as misusing client money, mishandling clients confidential information or being rude to clients. This work is now being used to help us develop our approach to regulation and in particular how we set, maintain and enforce against professional standards.

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[<https://qitt.sra.org.uk/globalassets/documents/sra/research/ucl-report-question-of-trust.pdf>]

Solicitors' professional standards: results from the professional standards survey

A report commissioned by the SRA and produced by Christina Godinho and Richard Moorhead from University College London.

This report presents results and analysis from a survey of 744 solicitors. The survey consisted of a series of scenarios of solicitor misconduct, and the participants had to rate how serious they thought each scenario was.

This is part of our wider work on professional standards – A Question of Trust – that has involved widespread engagement with solicitors and members of the public to understand their views on a range of professional standards issues. Read more information on A Question of Trust.

Why did we commission this?

- To test the viability of a professional standards survey.
- To understand more about solicitors' views on aspects of professional ethics.
- To take expert advice from Professor Richard Moorhead, who is a leader in the field of professional ethics, and has a particular interest in the legal profession. His work focuses on lawyers' ethics, professional competence, the regulation of legal services and access to justice.

What does it tell us?



- Those solicitors who completed the UCL survey voted self-dealing, money laundering, bribery and falsifying a CV as the most serious matters, and bringing weak cases and mismanagement problems as the least serious.
- Intent to commit misconduct, higher levels of harm, and whether the lawyer was more experienced were all associated with a matter being viewed as more serious. However, this was not the case for every scenario –there were some matters where this did not apply.
- Vulnerability of the client and the impact of peer pressure on the solicitors guilty of misconduct did not appear to have an effect on whether or not a matter was viewed as serious.
- The personal characteristics of those who completed the survey sometimes had an association with how seriously they rated the scenarios, but these associations were generally modest.

How have we used it?

This survey and report informed the design and data analysis of our larger Question of Trust online survey and events, and informed our Question of Trust consultation.