

News release

First-tier complaints rule changes should help everyone improve

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We have [launched a consultation](https://jobs.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/requirements-etc/)

[\[https://jobs.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/requirements-etc/\]](https://jobs.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/requirements-etc/) on proposed changes to our rules that should help law firms further improve how they define and deal with complaints about their service.

While the overall number of complaints to law firms – known as first-tier complaints – have been increasing in recent years, so too has the percentage of those complaints resolved by the firms. But there are still areas for improvement which could lead to greater customer satisfaction, such as recognising when a complaint has been raised.

We are consulting on a number of draft changes to our rules that should achieve these aims. We are seeking views on our proposals to:

- Make changes to when complaints information must be provided to a client.
- Require complaints information to be clear, accessible and in a prominent place on firms' websites, if they have one.
- Adopt a clear definition of what a complaint is.

We are also developing guidance to help firms comply, while we are also looking to boost the information we collect about the complaints that firms receive so trends can be identified and ultimately dissatisfaction resolved at an earlier stage.

Paul Philip, SRA Chief Executive, said: 'When things do go wrong, the way solicitor firms deal with complaints is a key indicator of service quality for consumers and of whether they can have trust and confidence in their provider.

'Solicitors shouldn't be afraid of encouraging complaints - they are an opportunity to identify areas for improvement and ways to deliver more effectively for clients. Our research suggests that there's no negative connotations around firms being so open about their complaints process.

'The rule changes we've suggested should help firms to help their clients by having clearer triggers for when complaints information is provided and having a clearer definition of what a complaint is. The changes would also provide us with a better idea of how the profession can improve customer service overall.'

We have also been working with the Legal Ombudsman to develop a model complaints resolution procedure, which aims to bring consistency across the sector. The Ombudsman looks at second-tier complaints, which are those complaints that are not resolved by the firm to the client's satisfaction. The consultation asks about this area of work. Meetings to discuss the suggested changes will be arranged with key consumer groups and firms over the summer.

[The consultation \[https://jobs.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/requirements-etc/\]](https://jobs.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/requirements-etc/) runs until 1 August, with changes expected to be introduced late autumn.