

# Upholding Professional Ethics

16 October 2025

We expect every solicitor to be committed to behaving ethically at all times.

For a solicitor, behaving ethically includes:

- serving the interests of consumers of legal services
- acting in the interests of justice
- acting with honesty and integrity
- protecting and promoting the public interest.

Our ethical standards are enshrined in the [SRA Principles](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/principles/1) [<https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/principles/1>].

## Why this is important

Conduct falling short of our ethical standards can range from unintentional behaviour with limited consequences through to deliberate acts causing serious consumer detriment. Failure by solicitors to act ethically can significantly erode public trust and confidence, undermining the rule of law and the administration of justice.

## When things go wrong

Recent high-profile examples of poor ethical conduct include the misuse of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and the use of Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs). The ongoing public inquiry into the Post Office Horizon IT scandal has raised a number of concerns regarding the conduct of members of the legal profession.

## Our Principles

The SRA Principles set out the fundamental tenets of behaviour that we expect all those that we regulate to uphold. Where the Principles come into conflict, those which safeguard the wider public interest (such as the rule of law, and public confidence in a trustworthy solicitors' profession and a safe and effective market for regulated legal services) will always take precedence over an individual client's interests. This means there may be situations in which a solicitor will have to inform a client that their duty to the court and/or other professional obligations will outweigh their duty to them.

We have published a variety of materials to help those that we regulate understand and comply with our ethical standards. We have grouped

these materials below by topic.

## Specific issues

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### **Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs)**

In recent years we have seen a growth in the use of SLAPPs. The key aim of a SLAPP is to prevent publication of, or remove from the public domain, information that relates to a matter of public interest. SLAPPs are a misuse of the legal system.

In April 2024, we published the result of our [Thematic Review on SLAPPs](https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/strategic-lawsuits-against-public-participation-thematic-review/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/strategic-lawsuits-against-public-participation-thematic-review/]. In May 2024, we updated our [warning notice](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/slapps-warning-notice/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/slapps-warning-notice/] on SLAPPs. Most recently, in March 2025, we published a statement on [our approach to SLAPPs cases](https://referral.sra.org.uk/news/news/press/approach-slapps/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/news/news/press/approach-slapps/].

### **Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)**

In the vast majority of cases, non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) provide a legitimate legal means for protecting the interests of a business or individual. They can restrict the disclosure of specific sensitive, commercial or confidential information. When used properly, such agreements can operate to the mutual benefit of both parties. While these agreements can be standalone, they are commonly put in place as part of the settlement of employment, commercial or other disputes.

However, NDAs can be used to restrict the disclosure of misconduct to a regulator or restrict reporting of a criminal offence to the police. While such clauses would, in practice, be unenforceable, their inclusion can still have a significant detrimental effect on the person signing the NDA and in public trust in the legal profession.

In August 2023, we published the results of [our Thematic Review on the use of NDAs in workplace complaints](https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/thematic-review-nda/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/thematic-review-nda/]. In August 2024, we updated [our warning notice on the use of NDAs](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/non-disclosure-agreements-ndas/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/non-disclosure-agreements-ndas/].

### **In-house solicitors**

A solicitor is first and foremost an officer of the court. A solicitor's duty to the court may override other duties or principles, such as the duty to act in a client's best interests.



In-house solicitors face a unique set of challenges in their work. In instances where a solicitor's responsibilities to the court come into conflict with their employer's priorities, they might feel pressured to act in an unethical way.

In March 2023, we published a [thematic review addressing the challenges facing in-house solicitors](https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/in-house-solicitors-thematic-review/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/in-house-solicitors-thematic-review/].

In November 2024, we published the following guidance for in-house solicitors:

- [Understanding in-house solicitor's professional obligations as an employer](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/understanding-in-house-solicitors-professional-obligations-employer/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/understanding-in-house-solicitors-professional-obligations-employer/].
- [Identifying your client when working in-house](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/identifying-client-working-in-house-guidance/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/identifying-client-working-in-house-guidance/].
- [Legal professional privilege when working in-house](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/professional-privilege-in-house/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/professional-privilege-in-house/].
- [Key points for governing boards, chief executives and senior officers in organisations employing in-house solicitors](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/governing-boards-chief-executives-senior-officers/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/governing-boards-chief-executives-senior-officers/].
- [Reporting concerns about wrongdoing when working in-house](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/reporting-concerns-wrong-doing-working-in-house-guidance/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/reporting-concerns-wrong-doing-working-in-house-guidance/].

We have also published a [Hot Topics page on working in-house](https://referral.sra.org.uk/home/hot-topics/working-in-house/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/home/hot-topics/working-in-house/].

## **Conflicts of Interest**

A conflict of interest arises where a solicitor has separate duties to act in the best interests of two or more clients, and their clients' interests are in conflict. An own interest conflict of interest arises where the work a client asks a solicitor to carry out conflicts with the solicitor's own financial interests or the interests of a friend or relative. An own interest conflict of interest can also arise when a solicitor is asked to act against the interests of their employer, because the solicitor might feel that this threatens their own employment.

In November 2019, we published [guidance focusing on own interest conflicts of interest](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/putting-matters-right-own-interest-conflicts/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/putting-matters-right-own-interest-conflicts/]. In March 2020, we published [updated guidance on conflicts of interest](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/conflicts-interest/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/conflicts-interest/].

## **Immigration**



Solicitors play an important role in the functioning of the immigration system through their involvement in giving advice and assisting with applications and appeals on their client's behalf. A solicitor who is involved in the falsification or fabrication of information relating to an application or an appeal undermines public trust in both the legal profession and the effective administration of immigration and asylum law.

In July 2024, we published a [Thematic Review of asylum legal services](https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/thematic-review-asylum-legal-services/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/thematic-review-asylum-legal-services/]. This refers to an [earlier Thematic Review into immigration services](https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/immigration-asylum-thematic-review/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/immigration-asylum-thematic-review/]. (November 2022), updated [guidance on performing immigration work](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/immigration-work-guidance/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/immigration-work-guidance/]. (November 2022) and [a warning notice](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/immigration-work/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/immigration-work/] regarding solicitors potentially advising clients to falsify or fabricate information to support their applications (September 2023).

## **Sexual Misconduct**

Unethical behaviour includes the situation where a solicitor abuses their professional position to initiate or pursue an improper sexual or emotional relationship or encounter with a client, a colleague or anyone else.

In September 2022, we published [guidance on sexual misconduct](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/sexual-misconduct/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/sexual-misconduct/].

## **Reporting obligations and whistleblowing**

Our guidance on your reporting obligations and on whistleblowing sets out what you need to tell us, how and when. It also includes information about disclosing material to us which might be sensitive, confidential or privileged, and having appropriate protections for those who make reports to us.

## **Supporting firms and solicitors**

Solicitors must understand their ethical obligations, which are set out in our [Standards and Regulations](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/], [guidance](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/] and warning notices.

If you require assistance in understanding our rules or your ethical obligations, you should contact our Professional Ethics Guidance Service by email, telephone or via webchat.



Our [Professional Ethics Helpline](https://referral.sra.org.uk/contactus) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/contactus] is open from Monday to Friday 10.00 - 13:00 and 14:00-16:00 and you can choose to remain anonymous.

Web chat can be accessed from [our Guidance page](https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/] and is open Monday to Friday: 09.00 -10.00 [closed Wednesday], 13.00 -14.00 and 16.00 -17.00

You can also contact us by emailing our [Professional Ethics team](https://referral.sra.org.uk/contactus) [https://referral.sra.org.uk/contactus] and we will triage and respond to your enquiry, typically within 5 -10 working days.