



Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal

2020 Annual Report

**Gate House
1 Farringdon Street
London
EC4M 7LG**

Tel: 0207 329 4808

Email: Enquiries@solicitorsdt.com

Website: www.solicitorstribunal.org.uk

Contents

	Page:
Introduction from the President	1
About Us	2-6
Equality and Diversity	7-13
Our Finances	14-15
The Year Under Review	16-19
Strategic and Operational Objectives	20-24
Key Performance Measurements	25-31
Application, Sittings and Sanctions Data	32-39
The Year Ahead	40-41



Introduction from the President

Welcome to the 2020 SDT Annual Report which I hope you will find interesting and informative.

Inevitably the year has been dominated by the global pandemic. I must say that I am both pleased and proud at the speed and efficiency with which the Tribunal adapted to accommodate remote hearings. We managed not only to keep on top of the pending cases, but to move seamlessly to remote delivery in a manner which I hope has proved accessible and efficient for all users of our services.

As society slowly moves out of the full impact of the pandemic, we will continue to offer hybrid hearings. It will be interesting to see whether we can report in a year's time how the so-called 'new normal' is working!

My considered view is that there will always remain a place for the use of remote hearings in our work. It has been particularly pleasing to see how we have been able to conduct case management hearings remotely with speed and efficiency, and I see the experience that we have acquired proving invaluable in the future in respect of those types of hearings and a number of our substantive hearings for that matter.

You will read within the report the full range of activity with which the Tribunal has been involved this year. It is noteworthy that this year we have seen examples of cases where the actions of solicitors in a private capacity have come under the microscope in terms of professional misconduct. Sexual misconduct and offensive social media activity are two obvious high-profile areas, but there will no doubt be many other areas where the delicate balance between personal and professional conduct arises. My personal perspective is that it is impossible for solicitors to leave their practising certificates at home completely and expect to act with total impunity in a personal capacity. It would be most odd if appalling behaviour in a personal capacity could completely be disregarded in terms of whether it also constitutes professional misconduct, or whether it calls into question the integrity of an individual.

The Tribunal is being asked to adjudicate on these areas on occasions. The cases are fact specific, difficult and cutting edge at times. Our role is to consider where the regulatory reach of the Solicitors Regulation Authority starts and stops, and we must do that fearlessly in the public interest.



The public and the profession should expect no less of us. What I will say is that the privilege of trust and confidence that the public endows upon the profession has to be maintained. I believe that if we keep that firmly in our minds as we deliberate, we should not go far astray.

I must conclude these remarks by offering my sincere thanks to all my colleagues for their professionalism, hard work and dedication throughout a very challenging year indeed.

Edward Nally, President



About Us

The Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal is an independent statutory tribunal set up under the Solicitors Act 1974. It hears cases of alleged misconduct by solicitors, registered European lawyers, registered foreign lawyers and employees of solicitors' firms. It also decides on applications for restoration to the roll and the ending of suspension from practice. Its decisions are subject to a right of appeal to the High Court.

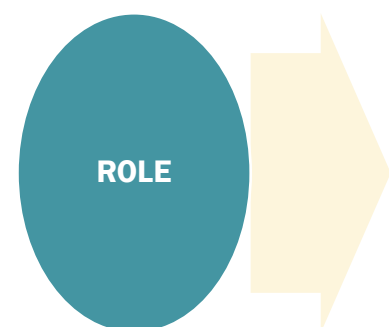
Most of the cases (about 90%) that come before the SDT are brought by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (the SRA), the body which regulates solicitors and their firms. Cases can also be brought directly by members of the public and these are known as lay applications. In 2020 we received 10 lay applications.

The SDT also hears appeals in relation to certain internal decisions by the SRA and applications to review a Section 43 order (ie an order against someone who is an employee of a solicitors' firm but is not a qualified solicitor).

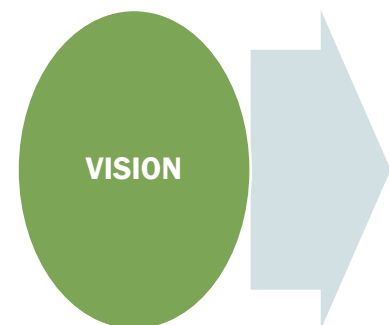
The rules and regulations which govern solicitors and their firms are the SRA Code of Conduct, the SRA Principles and the SRA Standards and Regulations. They are designed to protect the public and consumers of legal services and maintain confidence in the reputation of the solicitors profession.

The Tribunal's rules are set out in statutory instruments and are subject to approval by the Legal Services Board (the LSB). The SDT is supported by an administration company, Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal Administration Ltd.

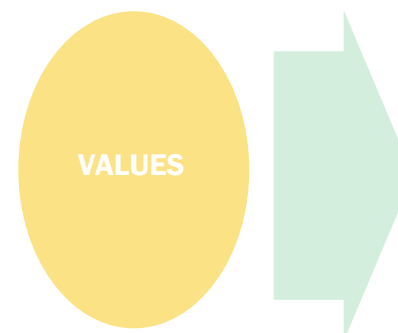
Our Role, Vision, Values and Mission



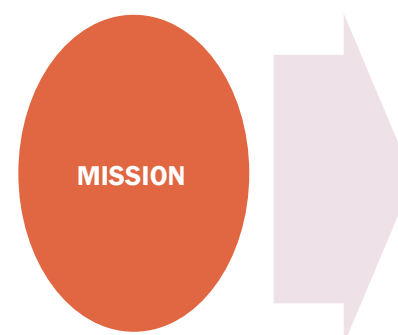
Our role is to protect the interests of the public and maintain confidence in the reputation of the solicitors profession by adjudicating on alleged disciplinary breaches of the Solicitors Regulation Authority's rules and regulations.



Our vision is to be the leader amongst professional and regulatory tribunals in the United Kingdom and to demonstrate best practice and value for money for our stakeholders.



We are committed to being independent, impartial, transparent, effective and efficient.



Our mission is to determine cases in accordance with the principles of natural justice and to protect the public from harm, to conduct our business in a way which is consistent with our values, and to contribute to the achievement of the Legal Services Act 2007 Regulatory Objectives.

Open and Transparent Hearings

The SDT's offices and its 4 courtrooms are at Gate House, 1 Farringdon Street, in the City of London, where hybrid and in person hearings take place and where the administrative team is based. Details of forthcoming hearings are published on our website, where there is also an interactive tour of the courtrooms to assist people who are not familiar with our premises and procedures.

Members of the press and public are welcome to attend hearings, unless a panel directs that all or part of the hearing should be heard in private (eg to protect the identity of a witness, or if sensitive or confidential evidence is being considered).

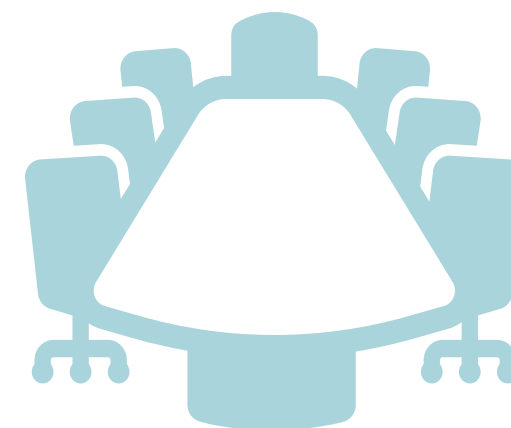
For the duration of the Covid-19 restrictions, we have made arrangements for members of the public and press to attend hearings remotely.

Judgments are published in full on our website (unless the panel directs otherwise) and audio recordings of public hearings are available free of charge after the hearing has finished.

To help us understand and act on the views of Tribunal users, there is a User Group Committee (UGC) made up of key stakeholders representing the interests of the various parties involved in cases.

The group meets to discuss issues which affect Tribunal users, to help build understanding and improve case management procedures. A review of the UGC's terms of reference was initiated during 2020.

There were 2 UGC meetings during 2020. Summaries of the meetings are published on our website.



How cases are managed

- ❖ Proceedings start with an application from the SRA or from a private individual or individuals (the 'applicant'), alleging a breach by a solicitor or a member of a solicitor's firm (the 'respondent').
- ❖ Applications can also be from former solicitors applying to be restored to the roll of solicitors after being struck off, or from solicitors applying to end a suspension or to vary practising restrictions.
- ❖ Applications from the SRA or private individuals are initially considered by a solicitor member to decide if there is a case to answer. If there is any doubt about this, the application goes to a panel of 3 members to decide.
- ❖ If there is a case to answer, the SDT's Clerk serves directions on the parties. Any party can apply to vary these standard directions.
- ❖ The directions include dates for any case management hearings and for the substantive hearing. Substantive hearings are fixed based on their time estimate (which can be anything from a day to several weeks).
- ❖ In 2020, the move to remote hearings in response to Covid-19 meant we were able to schedule hearings that need to be listed at short notice more quickly, as we were not restricted by people's availability to travel to a physical hearing.
- ❖ If the time estimate is more than 3 days, a case management hearing (CMH) is also scheduled ahead of the substantive hearing, to ensure the case is managed effectively within the necessary timescales.
- ❖ Any party can apply for the hearing date to be adjourned, supported by evidence as to why the adjournment is necessary.
- ❖ The respondent must send their answer to the allegation(s) to the Tribunal and to all of the parties in the case by a specified date, stating which allegations (if any) are admitted and which (if any) are denied.
- ❖ Following the hearing, the order of the Tribunal is produced and is read out in court, with a detailed judgment setting out the reasons for the decision published on the SDT website as soon as possible after the hearing has concluded.



More detailed information about the case management process can be found on our website.

Organisational Structure & Tribunal Membership

The SDT is a statutory body with officers elected by its members. It is supported by an administration company, Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal Administration Ltd (SDTAL), which employs a team of 16 permanent staff who provide professional and administrative support for cases.

The Tribunal's Executive Team is headed by Geraldine Newbold, who fulfils the dual role of Chief Executive of SDTAL and Clerk to the SDT and works with the SDTAL Board of Directors to lead and govern the Tribunal. Geraldine also acts as Company Secretary of SDTAL. The Board members also make up the SDT's Policy Committee, which is responsible for making and approving decisions about its policies and procedures.

The Tribunal is made of up solicitor and lay members, who are appointed by the Master of the Rolls and who are paid a fee for sitting. Solicitor members are practising solicitors with at least 10 years' experience. Lay members come from a range of personal and professional backgrounds. A key element of their role is to represent the views of the wider public and those who are not members of the legal profession.

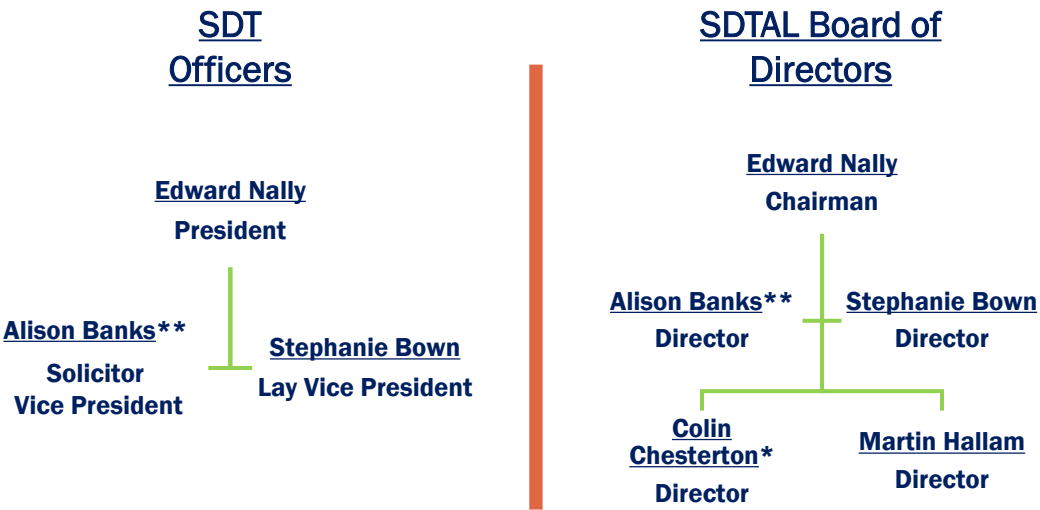
Members are initially appointed for a 5-year term (or until their 70th birthday), after which they can apply to be reappointed for further terms, until they retire under the SDT's Retirement Policy, or resign.

New members are recruited as and when the need arises, and always as part of a competitive recruitment process, to ensure there are sufficient numbers to hear cases within target timescales. The next recruitment round was expected to take place in 2020 but was delayed, in part because of the Covid-19 situation.

Changes to the Membership in 2020

During 2020, 4 members retired (2 solicitor members and 2 lay members) and a solicitor member resigned to pursue another full-time role.

As at the end of 2020, there were 40 (26 solicitor and 14 lay) members of the SDT, reducing to 35 (23 solicitor and 12 lay) members by the time of publication, following further retirements in 2021,



Tribunal Membership as At 31.12.2020

SOLICITOR MEMBERS		LAY MEMBERS
Alison Banks	Paul Housego	Lucinda Barnett*
Patrick Booth*	Claire Jones	Stephanie Bown
Colin Chesterton*	Peter Jones	Elizabeth Chapman
Teresa Cullen	Paul Lewis	Nalini Chavda
Peter Davies	Alison Kellett	Sarah Gordon
Holetta Dobson	Jane Martineau*	Martin Hallam
William Ellerton	Mark Millin	Paul Hurley
Carolyn Evans	Edward Nally	Priya Iyer
Richard Nicholas	Bhavna Patel	Steven Marquez*
Justin Evans	Andrew Spooner	Lesley McMahon-Hathway
Bellamy Forde	Gerald Sydenham	Adair Richards
Ashok Ghosh	Simon Tinkler	Jenny Rowe
Dominic Green		Robert Slack
Angela Horne		Carol Valentine

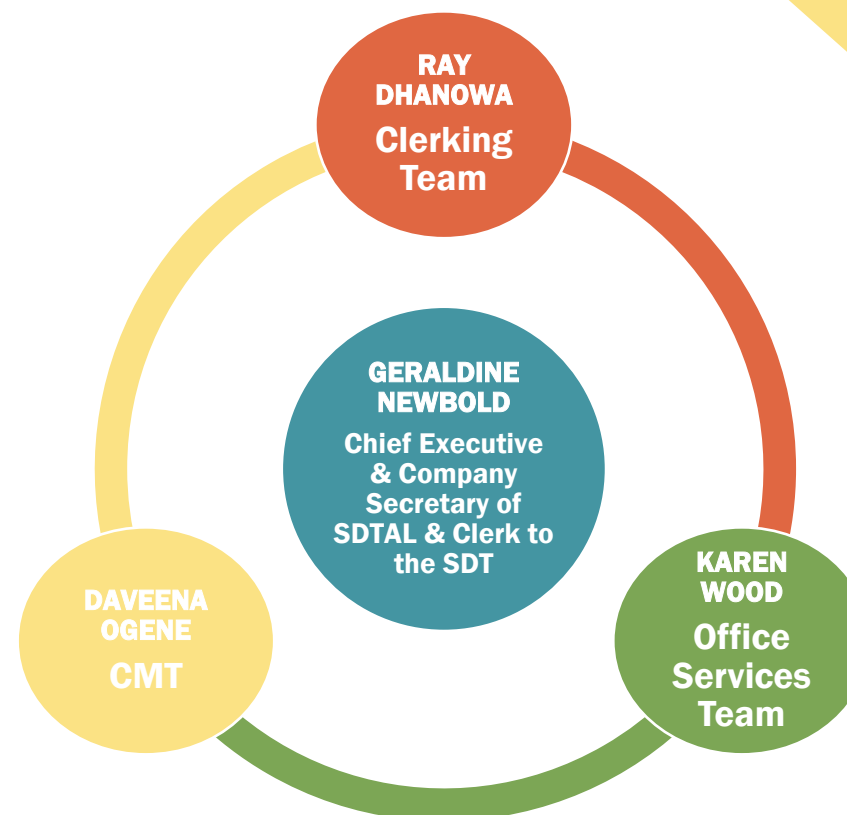
*Retired 2021

** Term ends 2021

Management Structure & Administrative Team Functions

Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal Administration Ltd employs 12 permanent full-time and 4 part-time staff, working across 3 teams. They support the running of the Tribunal by managing and clerking cases and providing overhead and administrative support. During 2020, an additional part-time employee joined on a fixed term project-based contract.

The team is led by the Chief Executive, Geraldine Newbold, who, together with the Board of Directors, provides strategic leadership and works with a small management team to oversee the operational running of the organisation.



The Case Management Team (CMT)

The CMT manages cases from receipt to conclusion, ensuring they run smoothly and efficiently. A key part of their role is ensuring that respondents, witnesses and others – especially those who are unfamiliar with the Tribunal’s proceedings - understand how to participate fully in proceedings and present their case effectively.

The team issues proceedings, directions and other case documentation to parties, advises on procedure, monitors the progress of cases and ensures compliance with deadlines and directions. They also set up the courtrooms and retiring rooms on the day of the hearing.

During 2020 a significant additional focus for the team was the procurement of a new case management system.

HR and Office Services

The HR and Office Services team carries out the administrative and support functions necessary for the smooth running of the Tribunal’s operations. As well as HR, this includes finance and payroll, IT, health and safety and facilities management.

The team deals with the logistics and technical facilities for cases and hearings, makes sure parties, visitors and callers to the Tribunal are dealt with effectively and courteously, and manages the SDT’s website, including publishing Judgments.

The Clerking Team

The 6 members of the clerking team (known as Deputy Clerks and led by the Senior Deputy Clerk) manage the hearing on the day and provide advice and guidance to the Tribunal panel on points of law and procedure, both in open court and in the retiring room.

They prepare and draft the Tribunal’s Judgments and other decisions under the direction of the panel, summarising the facts, evidence, any areas of dispute, legal issues etc in a way which can be easily understood and is accessible to the general public.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY



The SDT has an important role to play in encouraging a strong, independent and diverse legal profession. We are committed to ensuring equitable treatment for everyone, regardless of personal or professional background or of any protected characteristics. We comply with our statutory responsibilities (including the Equality Act 2010) by protecting our staff and members, parties in cases and everyone else who comes into contact with the SDT from discrimination and unfair treatment.

Our goal is to ensure that our staff and membership teams reflect the make-up of the solicitors profession and the wider population of service users across England and Wales, and to improve the representation of currently under-represented groups where necessary. This goal is supported by the provision in the Master of the Rolls revised SDT Appointment Protocol for positive action initiatives where appropriate.

In August 2020 we published, for the first time, the SDT's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy for 2020-23, setting out our diversity priorities and objectives for the next 3 years.

Our 4 diversity objectives are:

- ❖ Develop a better understanding of our regulated community
- ❖ Meet our statutory obligations with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion
- ❖ Develop a more diverse staff team and membership and create an inclusive workplace culture where everyone is treated fairly and equally and is able to contribute to the best of their ability
- ❖ Ensure that our processes, rules and procedures are accessible to everyone, including vulnerable and disabled people, and that the Tribunal's decisions are fair, proportionate and free from bias

We hope that, by documenting and publishing our strategy for the first time, we will increase awareness of our approach to diversity and inclusion and the emphasis we place on this aspect of our work.

In the following pages we have set out in more detail the work we are doing to progress each of our diversity objectives.

To develop a better understanding of our regulated community

In order to deliver our equality, diversity and inclusion goals, in particular with regard to case management processes and case outcomes, it is critical that we understand the diverse make-up of the community of people who might appear at or come into contact with the SDT.



SDT Diversity Data

We are working to increase the amount of diversity data we collect, so that we can monitor whether protected characteristics or background could result in a differential impact on disciplinary outcomes, or on how people experience our services.

However, gathering a meaningful amount of data has remained challenging, and respondents have been reluctant to provide this information. Although we introduced a more streamlined electronic monitoring questionnaire for respondents, of the 118 surveys we sent out in 2020, only 5 were returned.

We have, therefore, looked more widely at the data that is available to us, and how we can use it to monitor progress towards our diversity goals.

With limited information at an individual level about protected characteristics, we have looked at other personal and professional information that we gather as part of the case management process, such as gender prefix, legal representation at hearings and post qualification experience, in addition to the information we already gather on practice area and type of allegations.

With this in mind, we built a requirement for wide-ranging diversity data gathering into the design of our new CMS.

Engaging with the SRA

We engaged with the SRA prior to the publication of their Upholding Professional Standards Report for 2018/19. This enabled us to analyse the 144 individual disposals set out in the report.

The SRA and the SDT are independent of each other and, because of data protection considerations, the SRA was not able to share data about individuals.

However, higher level analysis of the data showed us that, during the period in question, individuals who were accused of dishonesty were sanctioned consistently by the SDT, regardless of background.



User Satisfaction Survey

We included optional questions about gender and ethnic diversity in the user satisfaction survey which we will be launching in 2021.

We hope this alternative means of gathering data will help us understand any possible link between people's experiences of the Tribunal and these 2 protected characteristics.

To meet our statutory obligations with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion

We meet our statutory obligations by ensuring that we comply fully with the Equality Act 2010, and that our policies, procedures and working practices are consistent with the regulatory requirements that govern our work, are free from discrimination or bias, and are consistently applied across the board.

In 2020 we began to review our internal employment policies and procedures to ensure they reflect prevailing legislation and acknowledged best practice. We will continue this work into 2021 and beyond.

When developing and implementing the new Case Management System, we looked for ways to maximise the information we gather during a case, to tell us as much as possible about a respondent's background.

We have introduced user guidance and a practice direction on remote and hybrid hearings, to ensure all parties have access to the information they need to participate effectively. We updated these documents during the year to reflect ongoing learning and experience.

During the pandemic, we also put measures in place to respond to the particular issues and difficulties experienced by some parties in attending hearings remotely, including providing technical support and facilitating access to IT facilities in Gate House where necessary.

We reviewed and updated the guidance available on our website on special measures applications, and published a number of information guides and other information to assist service users. More information on these can be found in the Strategic Objectives pages below.



In developing the information guides, we tried to ensure that we included responses to frequently asked questions, so that people can access all of the information they need in one place, without having to contact us directly.



We commissioned diversity training for SDT Members and the staff team from an expert in the field. The training focused on the legal framework surrounding equality, diversity and inclusion, the SDT's statutory equality duties and recognising and avoiding the effects of unconscious bias.



In February, the staff team also attended training to help them understand and respond to the particular issues that arise when dealing with service users who are vulnerable or who are facing challenging or difficult situations.



Members of the management team have also attended seminars on equality, diversity and well-being, to equip them with the skills to understand and support our EDI agenda.

To develop a more diverse staff team and membership and create an inclusive workplace culture where everyone is treated fairly and equally and is able to contribute to the best of their ability

In order to meet the needs of the solicitors profession and the public, it is important that the make-up of the SDT represents the diverse nature of the community of people which it serves. With this in mind, we continue to monitor the diversity of our staff and membership teams in order to track progress towards this goal. In 2020 we updated the diversity data we hold for members and staff in order to reflect changes in the team and improve monitoring and reporting. The results of the survey are set out on pages 14 and 15.

Member Appraisal

We launched the second round of member 360° appraisals in 2020, having reviewed and streamlined the process and questionnaire, and with 'valuing diversity and treating people with respect' as a key area for feedback.

Recruitment and Selection

We believe that fairness and objectivity in recruitment and selection is the most effective way to get the best person for the job. Although, since we published our EDI strategy, there has been no staff recruitment, we will review and document our employee recruitment processes, including attracting a diverse range of applicants, monitoring the diversity of applicants at each stage of the process and providing fair selection training for all those involved in recruitment.

The new member recruitment process will begin in 2021 and will be managed in accordance with the updated and recently published Master of the Rolls' SDT Appointment Protocol.

The Protocol now includes a strong equality and diversity statement, the creation of a new role of Appointment Panel Chair to oversee the recruitment campaign and reinforce the independence and objectivity of the process, and provision for positive action initiatives to promote diversity in the Tribunal's membership. At the time of publication, Lady Justice Carr has been appointed as the Appointment Panel Chair and we will be working closely with her, ensuring that recruitment is carried out in accordance with the new Protocol.

Once the new members are appointed, they will undergo an induction and training programme, with an appropriate focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, fair hearing procedures, making reasonable adjustments, and the Equality Act 2010.

Flexible Working

An unexpected benefit of the Covid pandemic was the emergence of an unforeseen capability for remote working, and of the potential of technology to enable new and more flexible ways of managing cases and conducting hearings. As we move forward, our intention is to incorporate this approach with more traditional in-person hearings, and to combine home and office-based working to create greater flexibility for those involved in cases, and a better work-life balance for staff and members.

Staff Involvement

We try to consult and include staff about issues which affect them, and create forums where they can contribute and challenge ideas and decisions about issues such as new remote and hybrid working practices, Covid-19 health and safety measures, staff benefits and 1-1 meeting arrangements.

We will also, as part of our Investors in People action plan, be producing a set of internal values, created by the staff team and designed to articulate the behaviours we want to see reflected in the way we work together.

To ensure that our processes, rules, and procedures are accessible to everyone, including vulnerable and disabled people, and that the Tribunal's decisions are fair, proportionate, and free from bias.

We want to ensure that everyone who comes into contact with the SDT understands how we work and how to access our services, including vulnerable people and those who are not members of the legal profession.

Suppliers

We intend, during 2021/22, to embark on a review of suppliers to ensure that those with whom we enter into business relationships have appropriate policies in place to demonstrate a commitment to equality and diversity.

Information about the Tribunal

We have developed information guides to increase transparency and understanding of the role of the SDT, and have increased the amount of information we include in the summaries of the User Group Committee meetings. All of our policies, procedures practice directions and guidance notes can be found on our website. We hope during 2021/22 to begin a review of the SDT's public facing website, covering both content and format and with the aim of making the site more user friendly and informative.

Gate House

We have started to consider the SDT's future accommodation requirements when the lease on Gate House expires in 2022, including the importance of ensuring that our courtrooms and facilities are accessible for people who are vulnerable or disabled.



User Feedback

We hope to get feedback from the user satisfaction questionnaire to help to inform future decisions about policies, procedures, and practices.

Equality Impact Assessments

We undertook equality impact assessments for the key policy decisions and projects during the year, including the CMS project and the move to remote and hybrid hearings.

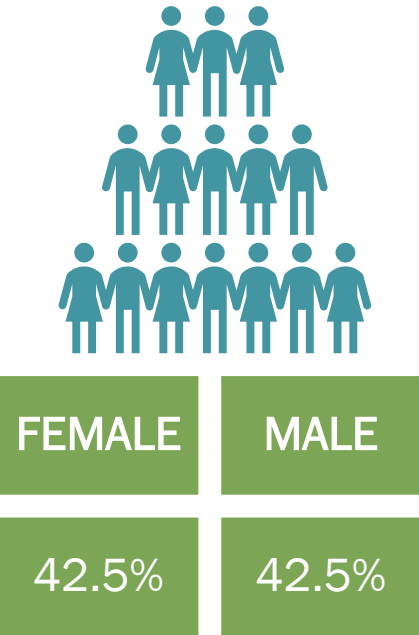
Judgments

Although work on improving the accessibility of our Judgment writing has been delayed, we try to ensure that all of our published documents are written in clear and accessible language. We will, wherever possible, provide Tribunal documents in alternative/accessible formats if requested.

Membership Profile

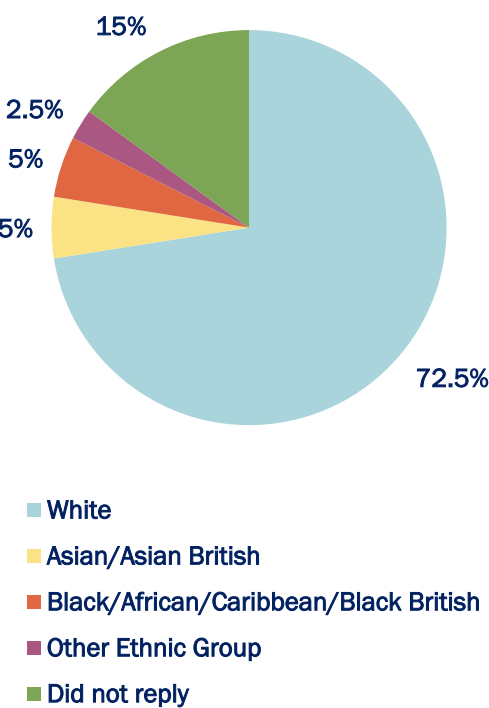
The charts on this page reflect data gathered from a diversity monitoring questionnaire sent to members in April 2020. Of the 40 members as at 31.12.20 who were surveyed, 6 did not respond.

Gender*

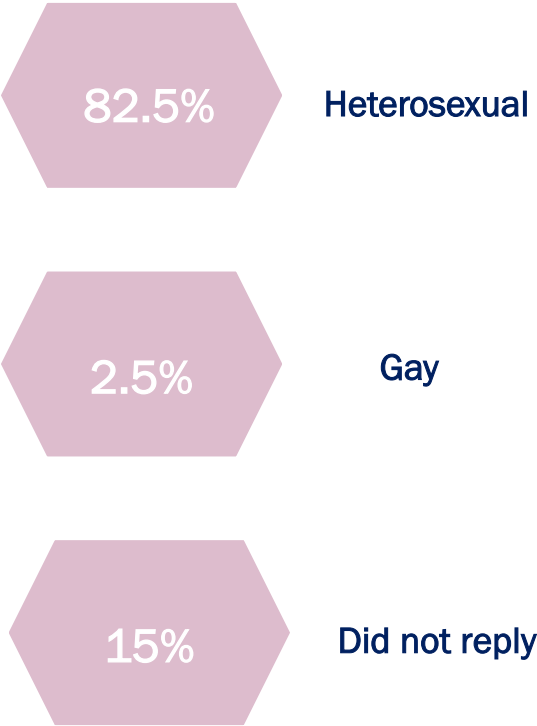


*these figures exclude the 15% who did not reply

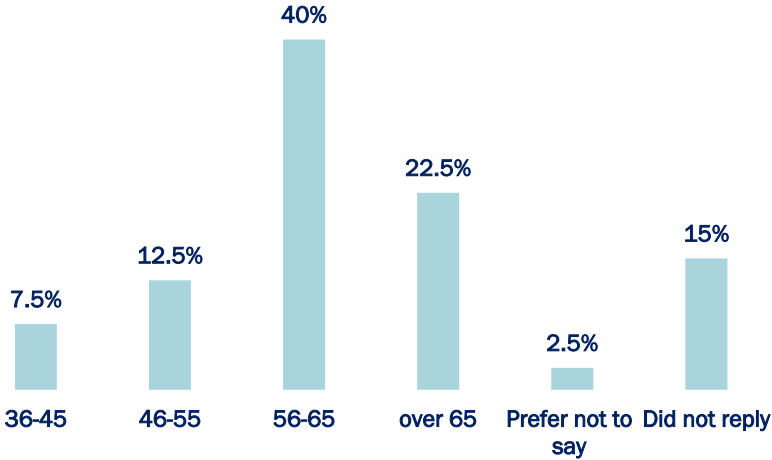
Ethnicity



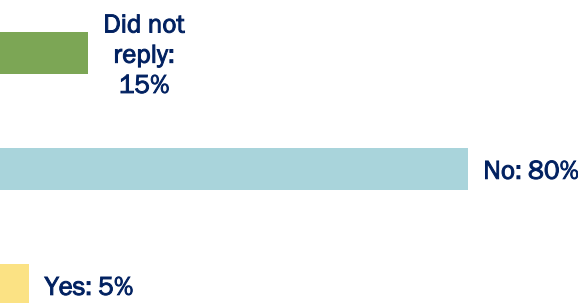
Sexual Orientation



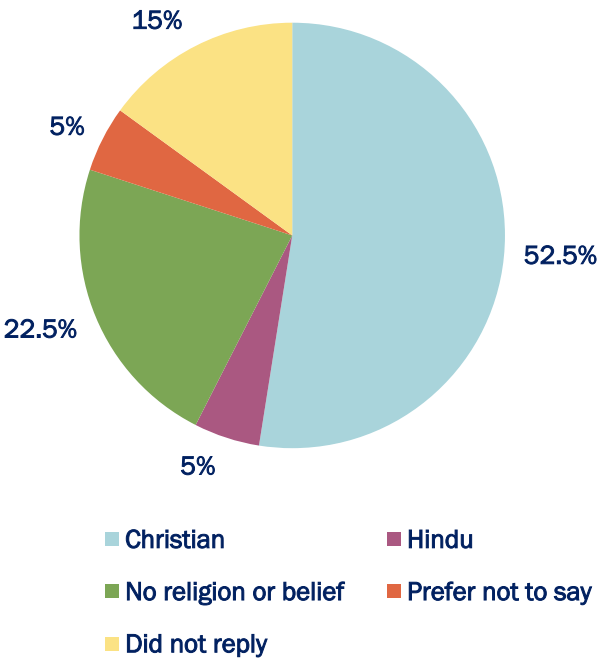
Age



Disability



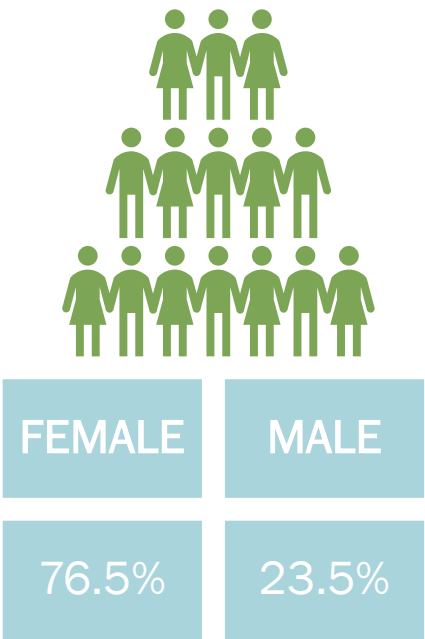
Religion



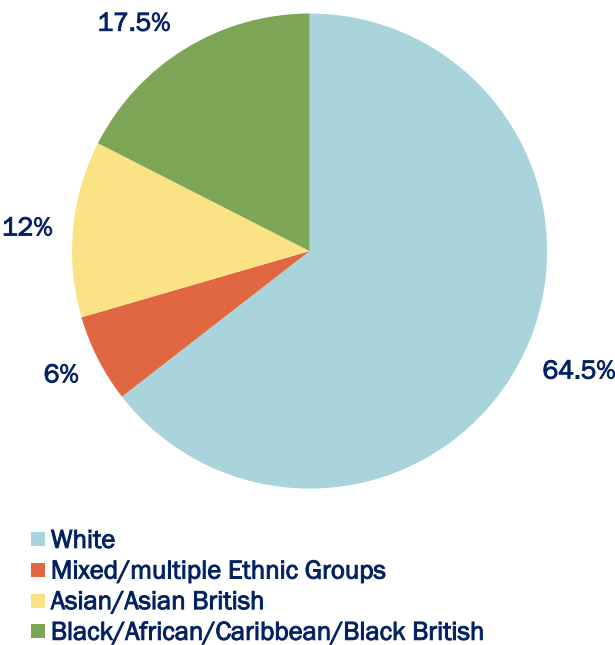
Workforce Profile

The figures reflect data gathered from a diversity monitoring questionnaire sent to all staff in 2020. All 17 staff surveyed responded to the questionnaire.

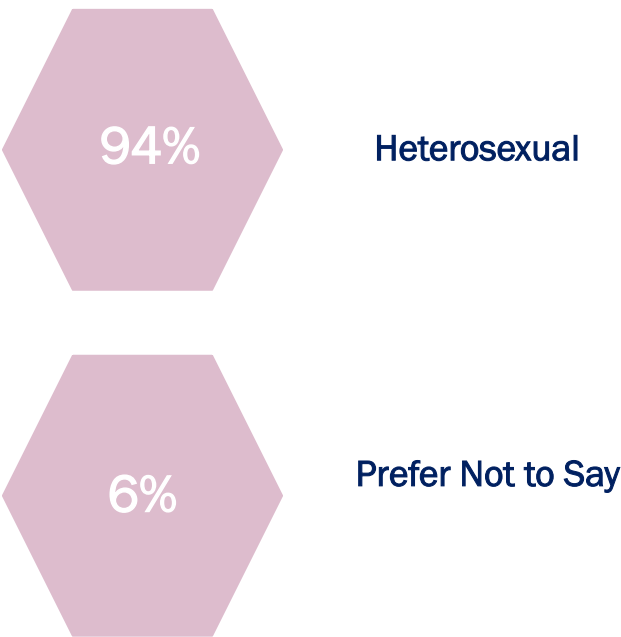
Gender



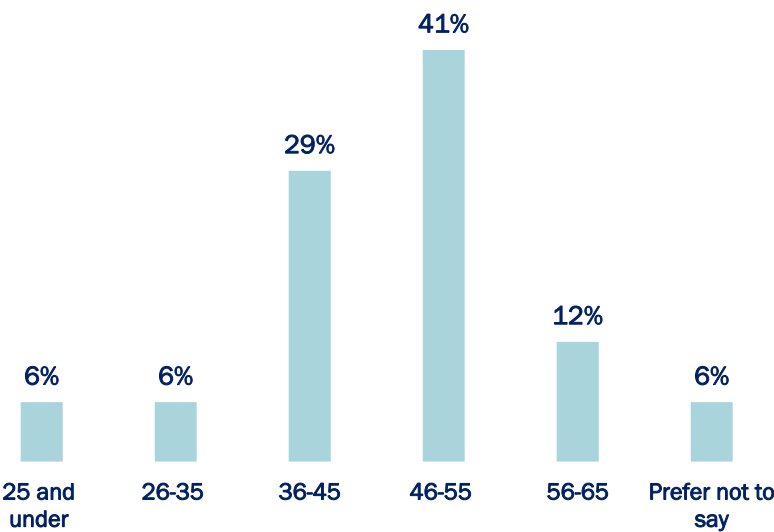
Ethnicity



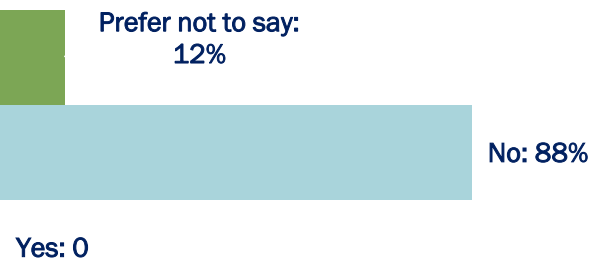
Sexual Orientation



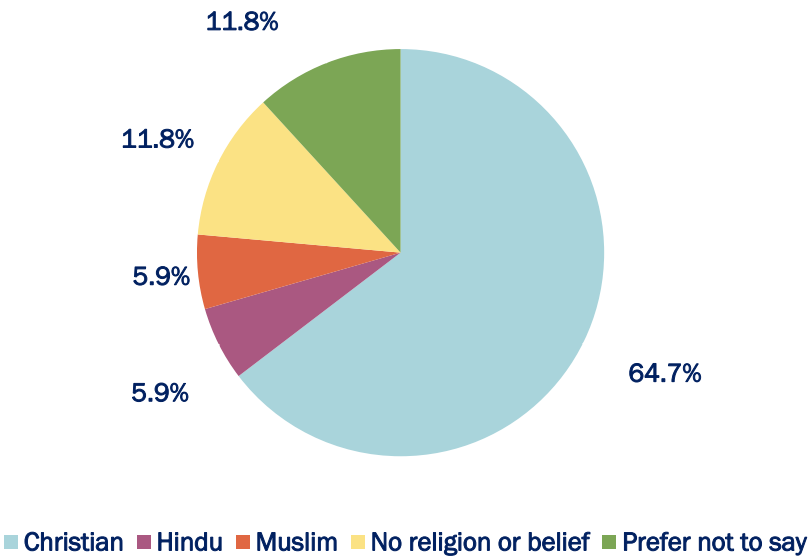
Age



Disability



Religion





TRIBUNAL FUNDING

Our Finances

The SDT is funded under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Legal Services Board and the Law Society from a levy on solicitors and other regulated persons, included in their annual practising certificate fee. A 3-year memorandum was signed in August 2019. Our audited annual accounts are filed at Companies House.

We recognise the importance of cost-effective and proportionate regulation and aim to minimise costs by maximising efficiency in working practices wherever we can. We make an annual budget application which is the subject of scrutiny and challenge by the LSB, before being approved for payment by The Law Society.

In 2020 our budget was £3.14m. This represented a decrease on the previous year of 2.7%. If the 2019 and 2020 budgets are compared on a like-for-like basis, there was an increase in budgeted funding, for 2020, of 1.1%.

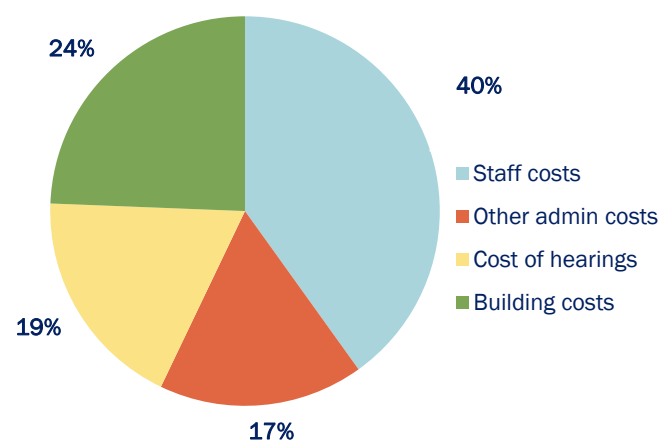
The actual cost per regulated person in 2020 fell by 6.7% on the previous year. The main factors in this were the reduction in the number of sitting days between the 2 years and a decrease in operating costs. The latter largely arose from the majority of hearings being conducted virtually, from mid-March 2020. In 2020 the Tribunal sat for 253 days, compared to 308 in 2019.

2020	2019
£18.40	£19.72

(based on 2020 and 2019 total expenditure divided by the number of regulated persons¹)

¹ Regulated persons, used in the calculations above, are made up of practising solicitors, registered European lawyers and registered foreign lawyers. Source: SRA Data for Population of Practising Solicitors.

What we spent our money on in 2020



	(£)
Staff costs	1,133,706
Other admin costs	480,941
Cost of hearings	523,554
Building costs	689,350
Grand Total	2,827,551

The impact of Covid-19 on our finances

The SDT closed its offices temporarily in March 2020 in response to the Covid pandemic. Previous technology investments meant we were able to maintain business operations by working from home and conducting hearings remotely. We were able to schedule case management and other non-substantive hearings quickly and flexibly, and established a new member fee structure with appropriately reduced fees for these shorter remote listings. Further savings were made in the area of member travel and overnight accommodation, as well as office and associated costs eg printing, stationery, courier, postage costs etc.

Savings were inevitably offset by additional costs incurred to support remote working, including Zoom licenses for remote hearings and virtual meetings and provision of office furniture and additional IT equipment for staff working from home. We were able to source health and safety training for remote workers free of charge from our regular health and safety training provider.

We also incurred unplanned capital costs to set up Covid-secure courtroom facilities for face to face and hybrid hearings in Gate House, including installing additional video conferencing facilities, making changes to room layouts to enable social distancing and minimise contact, carrying out essential safety checks and providing PPE. Although unanticipated in this financial year, this investment will support an increased remote/hybrid hearing capability, with an associated reduction in costs, in future years.



THE YEAR UNDER **REVIEW**

COVID 19

The global Covid-19 pandemic brought major changes to the SDT's working arrangements, as for many thousands of other businesses across the UK. Our priorities in 2020, and the activities we had planned, inevitably shifted as we focused on how best to adapt to the changes necessitated by the pandemic without compromising the fair and effective management of cases.

Remote Hearings

Thanks to earlier technology investments (including the CaseLines evidence management system, our IT platform, and the purchase of portable devices) we transitioned quickly and relatively easily to remote working at the beginning of the first lockdown.

After a short hiatus in order to put the necessary technical and logistical arrangements in place, we began to conduct hearings remotely using the Zoom video conferencing platform. This enabled us to continue to manage cases effectively and, for the most part, without disrupting the timely determination of applications.

Cases which were not suitable for a remote hearing were adjourned until a face-to-face hearing could be arranged. We produced user guides and issued a Practice Direction for remote and hybrid hearings and maintained the facility for the public and press to attend public hearings remotely.



Hybrid Hearings

From September, once Covid-restrictions permitted, we began the transition to hybrid (ie part remote and part in person) hearings for cases which were unsuitable for a virtual hearing.

We equipped our offices and one of our courtrooms to provide a Covid-safe hearing environment.



We installed video conferencing facilities to enable parties to join the hearing remotely, and implemented additional health and safety measures including the use of Plexiglas screens, creating extra space between participants to enable social distancing in the courtroom and meeting rooms, and providing a range of PPE, etc).

We worked with the building manager and other tenants to ensure the necessary safety requirements were in place throughout Gate House eg water supply and ventilation systems, safe movement around the building etc.

We carried out a comprehensive risk assessment to identify the potential risks associated with attendance at Gate House and put mitigating measures and actions in place to ensure the safety of staff, panel members and parties to cases and other visitors.

One of the advantages of remote working has been the ability to schedule hearings based on clerking and member capacity without having to rely on already convened panels.



This meant that matters other than substantive hearings such as agreed outcomes, disclosure applications, case management hearings pending a substantive hearing etc could be listed more flexibly and quickly.

New Case Management System

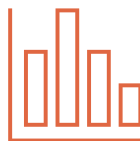
The SDT's Case Management System (CMS) is a key element of our IT infrastructure, and is fundamental to our ability to manage cases smoothly and efficiently, within existing staff resources.

In 2020 we began the process of procuring a new, more modern Case Management System (CMS) to replace our old system which was becoming obsolete and no longer met our business needs.

To benefit from in-house experience and expertise, we brought together a project group from across all of the of the staff teams, who worked remotely with the supplier to identify and implement a system which will support our specific case management and process requirements. The solution includes a powerful reporting tool to improve our ability to monitor and report on performance against targets.

We also engaged external consultants to bring the necessary project management and IT expertise to the project, and to ensure a rigorous and objective approach and advise on any technical issues and challenges.

The system which we selected can be developed to reflect our ongoing business needs and will provide a cost-effective platform for future improvements.



Although the chosen solution came at a higher overall cost than other options we considered, its potential over the long term to provide a better, more efficient service and enable us to work better and more efficiently, made it the best overall fit and the most cost-effective solution in the longer term.

Benefits of the new CMS include:

- ❖ An easy-to-use system based on modern technology, which records all the information about a case once and in one place and which can be accessed whenever and wherever necessary
- ❖ A resilient infrastructure which is fit for purpose and fit for the future
- ❖ Secure role and case-based access controls over confidential and personal data
- ❖ The ability to be more efficient through streamlined processes, workflow and automation
- ❖ Improved performance reporting and monitoring.

Investors in People

Following an online re-assessment August 2020, the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal maintained its Investors in People status at the Standard level.



Investors in People is an international standard for people management, defining what it takes to lead, support and manage people effectively to achieve sustainable results. The SDT was assessed against and met all of the 27 indicators that underpin the IiP framework, with an increase in the number of indicators achieving higher performance levels.

Accreditation lasts for 3 years and during this time we will be working with our Investors in People practitioner to implement the recommendations in our IiP report and improve people management across the organisation. In 2020 this included engaging with staff to create a set of internal values, improve meetings between staff and managers and understand what people value about our approach to reward and recognition.

The assessment process included review meetings with the IiP practitioner, an online staff survey and meetings with staff and members. Notable achievements included a collaborative approach to working, change management and modernisation, recognition and reward, and a commitment to the SDT's values.


CaseLines

Since its implementation in 2018, the use of CaseLines has increased consistently. In 2018, we estimated that CaseLines was used for around 50% of cases, increasing to around 85% in 2019. Since March 2020 all cases issued at the SDT have used CaseLines.



The use of CaseLines was instrumental in enabling us to manage and conclude cases in a timely way during the Covid pandemic. Without the ability to make evidence bundles available to the parties, members and clerks electronically, avoiding the logistical challenges of providing hard copy papers, we could not have moved so effectively to remote hearings and case management.

By using CaseLines, most respondents were able to access the papers securely online. We were able to convene panels at short notice and arrange virtual meeting rooms to consider lay and other procedural applications on the papers, without the geographical location of the certifying solicitor or panel acting as a barrier to the speed of service.



STRATEGIC AND

OPERATIONAL

OBJECTIVES

2020-23

Our strategic and operational objectives 2020-23

The SDT first published its Strategic and Operational Plans for 2020-23 in October 2019 and reviewed them at the end of 2020.

The plans set out our strategic priorities and objectives and, at a more operational level, include a yearly schedule of the activities we are planning in order to achieve them. We updated this annual activity schedule at the end of 2020 and set out planned activities for 2021.

We hope that publishing and updating our plans on an annual basis will create greater transparency and help the public and members of the solicitors profession to understand more about the role and purpose of the SDT, how we work and what we want to achieve.

Our 3 strategic objectives:

1

Increase the confidence and understanding of the public and the profession in the SDT, its powers and decision making processes, and its commitment to treating all people fairly and with respect.

2

Continuously improve the Tribunal's processes and procedures, using technology where possible, to maximise efficiency and resilience.

3

Provide value for money.

We recognise that, in a changing regulatory landscape, we will have to adapt our plans and respond flexibly to changing business needs. This was especially the case in 2020, when the impact of the Covid pandemic changed our working practices in unforeseen ways, and priorities and planned activities shifted as we adapted to the changes necessary to continue working and managing cases during lockdown.

In the following pages, we describe in more detail what we have done to progress our plans and objectives in 2020.

Increase the confidence and understanding of the public and the solicitors profession in the SDT, its powers and decision making processes, and its commitment to treating all people fairly and with respect.

Diversity Data

We refreshed our diversity data to reflect changes in the Tribunal's membership and staff teams, to improve monitoring and reporting.



Member Recruitment

The anticipated member recruitment exercise did not take place in 2020, due in part to Covid 19. During this time, however, the Master of the Rolls undertook a further consultation on the SDT Appointment Protocol and we responded along with other key stakeholders. Member recruitment will begin in 2021, following the appointment by the MR of the Appointment Panel Chair – a new role created under the revised Protocol.

Enhancing information for the public

A priority for us in 2020 has been responding to the needs of those service users who find it more difficult to engage with the SDT's processes. This might be for a number of reasons, including lack of familiarity with legal and regulatory procedures, social, educational or professional background, lack of familiarity with or access to IT facilities, or mental or physical health issues. We are especially keen to get feedback from this group of people from the new user satisfaction survey.

We have improved the range and content of information available for the public on our website, including producing or updating a number of guidance and information documents. These include Information Guides for Lay Applicants, Unrepresented Respondents, Unrepresented Applicants and Witnesses. We hope these will help people to understand and access our processes and procedures more easily.

A project to review the accessibility of Judgment writing in 2020 was delayed as we focused on Covid-related issues, and will be carried forward into 2021. We nevertheless continue to do our best to ensure our Judgments are written in clear and accessible language and can be easily understood by a wide audience.

User satisfaction survey

We developed a user satisfaction survey (for launch in 2021) to gather feedback from respondents, applicants, legal representatives and witnesses about their experience of the Tribunal. We hope that feedback from the survey will inform future decisions about ways to improve our service to stakeholders.

The survey is being administered by a third party as the most efficient and cost-effective means of delivery, and to give recipients confidence in its anonymity and objectivity. It includes optional questions about gender and ethnic diversity to help identify any differences in experience linked to these characteristics, as this is an area where we are especially keen to improve data gathering.



Continuously improve the Tribunal's processes and procedures, using technology where possible, to maximise efficiency and resilience

Capability of the staff team

We encourage staff to develop their skills via a mix of formal and informal training, attendance at seminars and networking events, and hands-on research and experience.

In 2020, this included developing skills in remote working and the use of technology to conduct virtual and hybrid hearings, to maintain business operations and support service users with minimal disruption during the pandemic.

We also provided training for staff to help them recognise, understand and respond to the needs of vulnerable people (including respondents, applicants and witnesses).

Capitalising on our experience of the case management system procurement, we commissioned bespoke project management training for key staff to improve in-house skills in delivering projects and business priorities.

Documenting our Governance framework and procedures

In 2020 we carried out a review of our business risk register, and created a Covid-specific risk assessment which we have updated regularly to keep staff, members and Tribunal users safe throughout the pandemic.

Review of policies

We reviewed and updated our data protection policies and procedures and began a review of our employment policies, including changes to the leave policy to support an equitable and consistent approach across the board and ensure an effective work/life balance for staff.

We also revised a number of external policies and associated documents, including:

- ❖ Updating our Judgment Publication Policy;
- ❖ Updating the Application Form for Special Measures and accompanying Guidance; and
- ❖ Reviewing responses to the consultation on proposed amendments to our Policy on the Supply of Documents from Tribunal Records to a Non-Party, and introducing an updated version of the policy in June 2020.



Electronic provision of information

We increased the range of information available electronically by email, on our website and via CaseLines, and reduced the amount of paper we use in our internal systems and procedures.

We completed the process of digitising our historic hard-copy Judgments, creating a more efficient, streamlined and cost-effective way of accessing Tribunal decisions. We achieved this below budget in spite of delays due to remote working.

We designed and implemented a new online application form for anyone wanting to make an application to the Tribunal under The Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (Appeals and Amendment) Rules 2011.

Value for Money

The SDT is funded by the solicitors profession, and our budget is scrutinised and approved by the LSB. We are committed to spending our money responsibly and investing in projects and activities that deliver the best possible value for money for our stakeholders. We measure the cost of each court to assess our success in this.

We delivered a number of key projects and initiatives to improve our services and deliver long term productivity benefits. We have done this within our existing staff budget and by capitalising on the wide-ranging skills and multi-tasking capability, flexibility and willingness of our staff team.



IT capability

To improve IT capability we installed internet phones with enhanced broadband and internet capacity, to support remote hearings and flexible working and reduce the overall cost of telephony services.

The transition to a Microsoft Dynamics platform and Office 365, begun in 2020 as part of the new CMS procurement, will provide a more resilient and cost-effective IT platform in the longer term.

Court utilisation data



We review court utilisation data on an ongoing basis and use this to inform potential ways to improve cost-efficiency and value for money.

Because of the pandemic, the Tribunal's physical courtrooms have not been used as much as usual this year. However, we have continued to conduct hearings remotely, thereby avoiding (for the most part) delays to proceedings. This also resulted in cost savings in the expenses associated with holding hearings in Gate House and a reduction in the amount of paper, printing, stationery and post used.

We used data from the previous year to inform our listing practices in 2020, and monitored the hearings listed to understand the reasons for hearing days not being used and identify, at an early stage, any issues arising, so that hearings remained effective. We continue to list more hearing days per month than we expect to be effective, to ensure resources are utilised as efficiently as possible.

As well as the introduction of Zoom technology and the purchase of IT equipment to support virtual hearings, our investment in Covid-secure courtroom facilities in Gate House, (including additional video conferencing facilities and changes to room layouts) will support greater flexibility and cost-savings by enabling more remote/hybrid hearings in appropriate circumstances in future years.

Ethical and environmental framework



A short-term shift in priorities due to the events of 2020 meant we did not progress as far as we had hoped in developing and publishing an ethical and environmental framework. However, some steps we did take included:

- ❖ paying the London Living Wage to cleaning and security staff from 1 January 2020;
- ❖ increasing the use of sustainable products and recycling to offset an increase in the use of disposables introduced as a Covid-19 safety measure;
- ❖ reducing reliance on paper by completing the transition to CaseLines and service by email; and
- ❖ working with contractors to ensure a responsible approach to continuity of employment during lockdown.



Review of supplier arrangements

Plans for a value for money review of supplier arrangements were delayed, as contracts in 2020 were generally renewed with existing suppliers to maintain continuity during lockdown. However, some steps we took to reduce costs included:

- ❖ discontinuing our DX service, following the shift to electronic delivery of documentation during lockdown;
- ❖ reducing the cost of our online legal resource by more than half, resulting in a saving of over £10k; and
- ❖ negotiating new printing/photocopying contracts at a reduced cost.



KEY PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS



Review Of Key Performance Measurements

The SDT has a number of key performance measurements (KPMs), against which it monitors its performance and on which it reports regularly to the Legal Services Board:

- PM1—Issue of Proceedings
- PM2—Determination by Hearing
- PM3—Cost per Court
- PM4—Production of Judgment
- PM5—Appeals

In 2020 we undertook a first principles review of these KPMs to ensure we are continuing to measure the things that are important to us and our stakeholders. In addition to our existing KPMs, from the beginning of 2021 we will have 5 new measures, 4 in relation to user satisfaction and 1 in relation to equality and diversity.

The new KPMs will be:

- ❖ Ensure that the diversity profile of the SDT’s staff team and its membership reflect the diversity of the population it serves, and the solicitors profession (of England and Wales) in particular.
- ❖ 70% of those who contacted the Tribunal’s administrative team felt that their needs were listened to and understood by the staff they contacted.
- ❖ 90% of parties and advocates could access the hearing effectively (including those hearings held remotely).
- ❖ 70% of those who are a party or advocate in a case who referred to the Tribunal’s website found the information on the website was useful/helped them prepare for their hearing/case.
- ❖ 85% of parties and advocates felt that they had sufficient time and opportunity to present their case to the Tribunal during the hearing.

We will report on these new KPMs from January 2021.

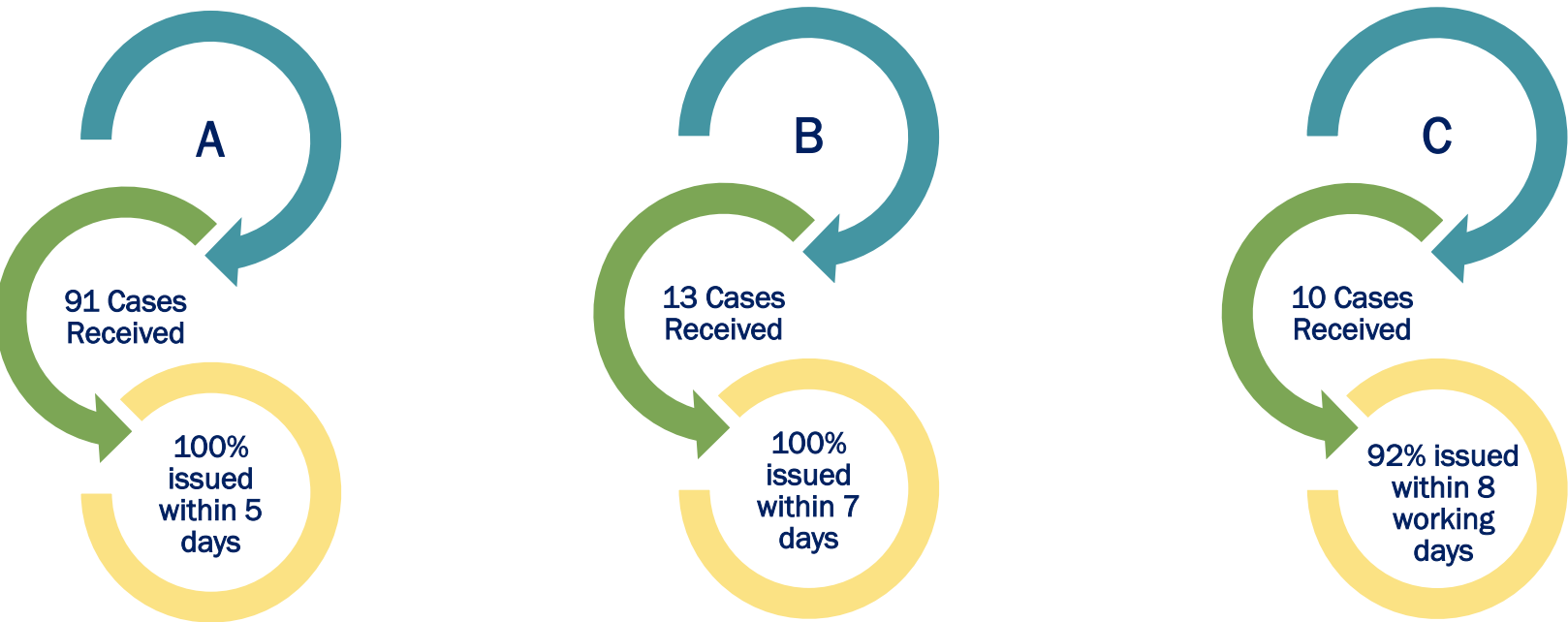


PM 1 - Issue of Proceedings

Proceedings to be issued or notification of non-certification sent to the Applicant within a set number of calendar days of date of receipt of Originating Application (in the correct format) at the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal within:

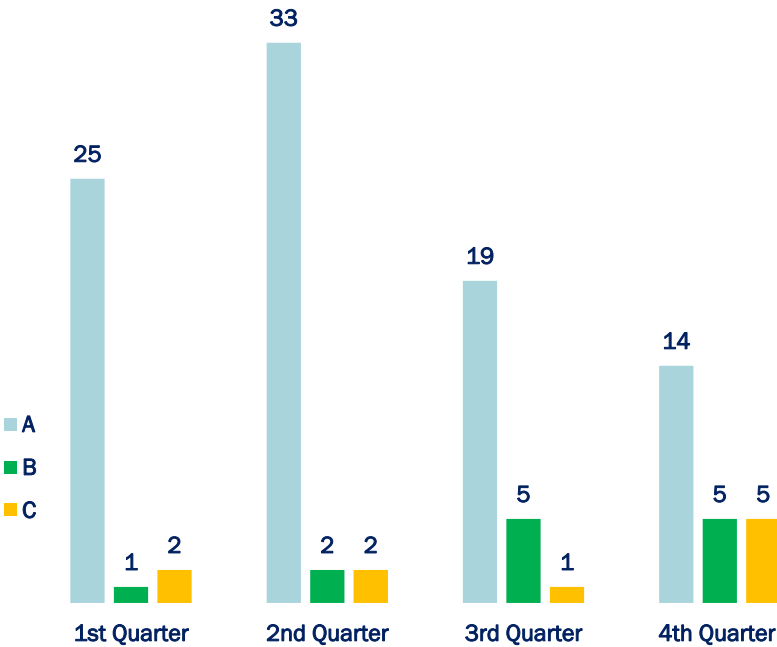
- A = 85% within 5 working days (Proceedings from SRA)
 - B = 85% within 7 working days (Other applications eg Restoration to Roll)
 - C = 90% within 8 working days* (Lay applications)
- *to be considered by a member of the Tribunal and if required a panel of the Tribunal

In 2020 this target was consistently met:



The number of weeks between the SRA's decision to refer a matter to the Tribunal and receipt of the proceedings at the Tribunal varied from 6.3 weeks to 163.1 weeks, with c57% of cases being received between 20 and 25 weeks after the decision to refer.

Number of Applications by Quarter



PM 2 - Determination by Hearing

In 2020 the SDT introduced a new Performance Measure 2(A), in order to provide more information about our ability to list matters first within 6 months.

(A) Target: 75% of cases first listed for substantive hearing within 6 months of issue



Covid 19

When Covid-19 meant that the Tribunal's courtrooms needed to close temporarily in March 2020, we moved swiftly to introduce remote hearings. These arrangements have worked well since their introduction

(B) Target: - Determination of application, by substantive hearing or otherwise, from the date of issue of proceedings to take place within:

60% of cases - 6 months 95% of cases – 9-12 months
80% of cases - 6-9 months 100% of cases – 12-24 months



By September 2020, the Tribunal had equipped one of its courtrooms to be “Covid-secure” and has been able to hold hybrid hearings since then. A hybrid hearing is one where some participants attend in person and some attend remotely. Since lockdown, we have continued to offer remote attendance at hearings, whether remote or hybrid, for the press and members of the public.

Sitting Days

The Tribunal sat for 253 hearing days in 2020 with the average length of hearing being 2 days.

96% of cases were first listed for a substantive hearing within 6 months of issue. Whilst adjournments and part-heard hearings meant that not all of these first listed hearings were concluded within 6 months, this demonstrates the Tribunal's ability to list matters in a timely manner.

PM 3 - Cost Per Court

No of Courts	253
Member Fees & Expenses	£505,857
Admin Expenses	£2,274,413
Total Expenses	£2,780,270
Average Cost Per Court	£10,989

The overall cost per court increased in 2020 by £1,543 (16%) compared to the previous year. The main reason for this increase was because administrative expenses, which are largely fixed costs, were spread over 55 (18%) fewer hearing days in 2020.

Members' fees and expenses fell by just under £146,000 in 2020. This reflected the decrease in hearing days between 2019 and 2020 and because the transfer to predominantly remote hearings during the last 9 months of 2020 resulted in substantial savings in Members' travel and accommodation costs. Administrative costs rose by just under £17,000 (0.7%) in 2020.

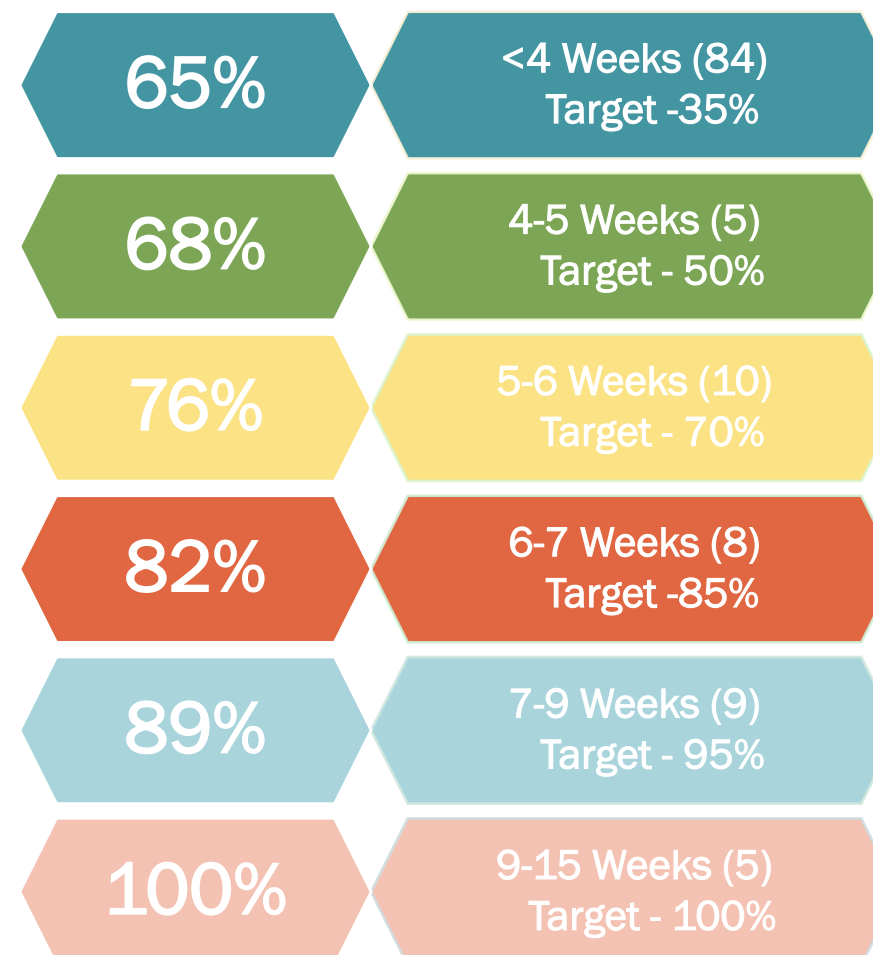
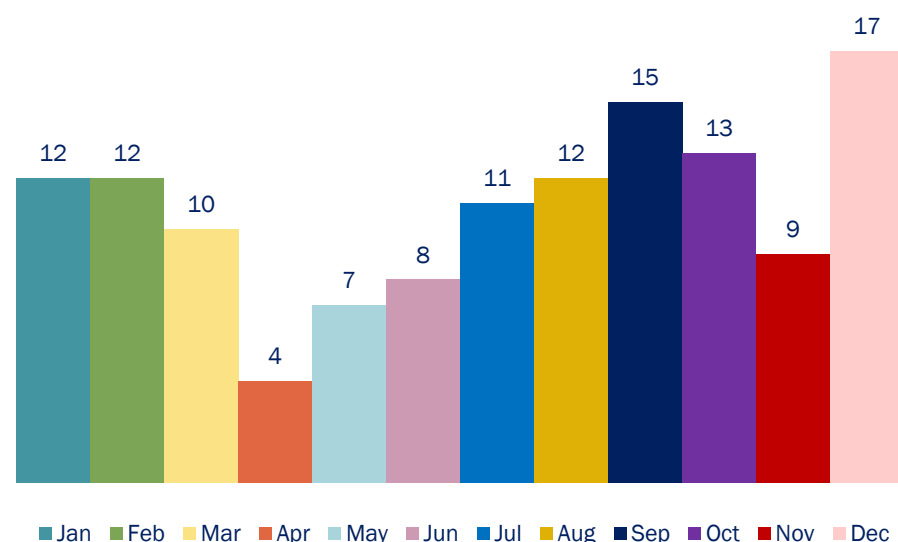
Aside from utility costs and other small items, such as photocopying, relatively little was saved on operating costs as a result of the temporary closure of the office and court rooms in March due to Covid-19 restrictions.

PM4 - Production of Judgment

The Tribunal endeavours to issue Judgments as soon as possible after the hearing, and within the target timescales indicated below, as it is important that the parties know the reasons for the Tribunal's decision as quickly as possible.

This target continues to be met consistently. Three quarters of Judgments were delivered in 6 weeks or less. During 2020 the Tribunal considered a number of complex matters including 2 lengthy cases (one relating to sexual misconduct at a work event, and the other to a non-disclosure agreement arising from a client's behaviour).

Number of Judgments Issued Per Month



The length of the hearing and/or the number of pleaded allegations has a significant impact on the time required to produce the Tribunal's Judgment.

Fewer Judgments were prepared in between April and June because there were fewer hearings. This was due to the majority of substantive hearings being adjourned for a short period during March and April, whilst we put in place the technical and logistical arrangements to enable us to move to remote hearings.

PM5 - Appeals

Decisions by the SDT are subject to appeal to the Administrative Court. The time limit for lodging an appeal is 21 days from when the Judgment is issued. The SDT is not a party in cases where its decisions are being appealed.

The Tribunal pays close attention to the guidance handed down in respect of appeals (both in relation to its own decisions and to relevant appeals cases within the wider regulatory field). We have carefully reviewed all of the grounds for appeal but, given that only a small number of the 2020 appeals have been determined at this stage, it is not yet possible to identify any thematic issues from the Judgments.

It is unlikely that all of the appeals lodged in 2020 will be heard and determined until much later in 2021 or even early 2022.

	No. of cases heard in year (129)	as % of SDT cases heard (129)	as % of total appeals lodged (16)
Appeals withdrawn/resolved by consent	1	1%	6%
Appeals dismissed	3	2%	19%
Appeals upheld in whole or part	2	1.5%	12.5%
Appeals outstanding	10	8%	62.5%
Total appeals lodged	16	12.5%	100.0%

In 2020 16 appeals were lodged against the Tribunal's decisions. Of these appeals:

- ❖ 11 were made by respondent(s).
- ❖ 1 was made by the SRA.
- ❖ 1 was made by an applicant who had applied for a review of a Section 43 Order.
- ❖ 1 was made by an applicant who had applied for a re-hearing out of time.
- ❖ 2 were made by lay applicants in relation to the decision not to certify their application as showing a case to answer.

An abstract composition of various geometric shapes, including triangles, rectangles, and trapezoids, in shades of light blue and white. The shapes are layered and arranged to create a sense of depth and three-dimensionality against a plain white background.

APPLICATION, **SITTINGS &** **SANCTIONS DATA**

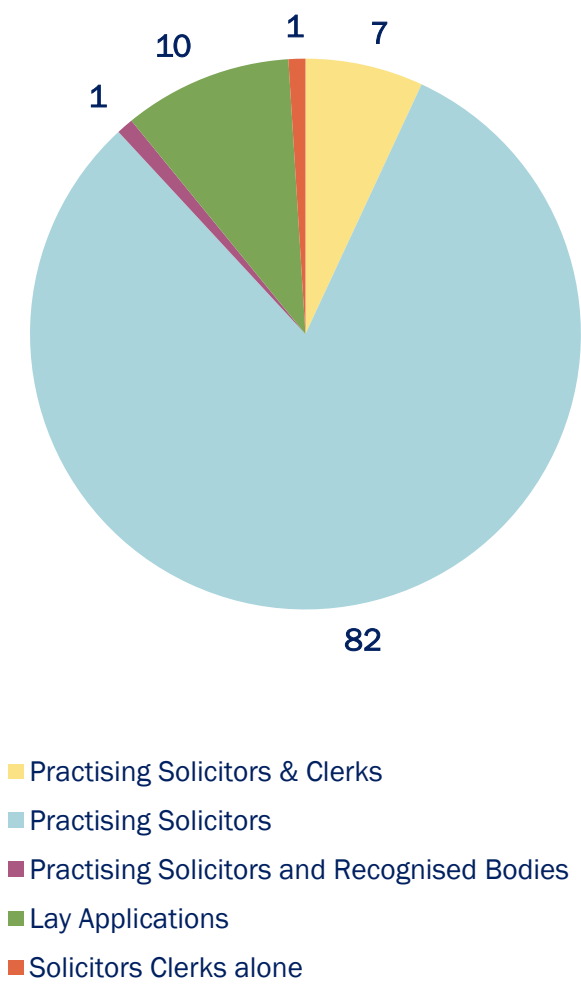
Breakdown of Applications

The SDT received 114 applications in 2020, compared to 137 in 2019. The majority of these were from the SRA and a smaller number were from lay applicants. We received 13 ‘other applications’ and 1 remitted appeal, as shown in the chart below.

Applications regarding Practising Solicitors/Clerks

There were 91 applications relating to alleged misconduct by practising solicitors/clerks made by the SRA and 10 received from members of the public (ie lay applications).

The charts below show how these applications were broken down:



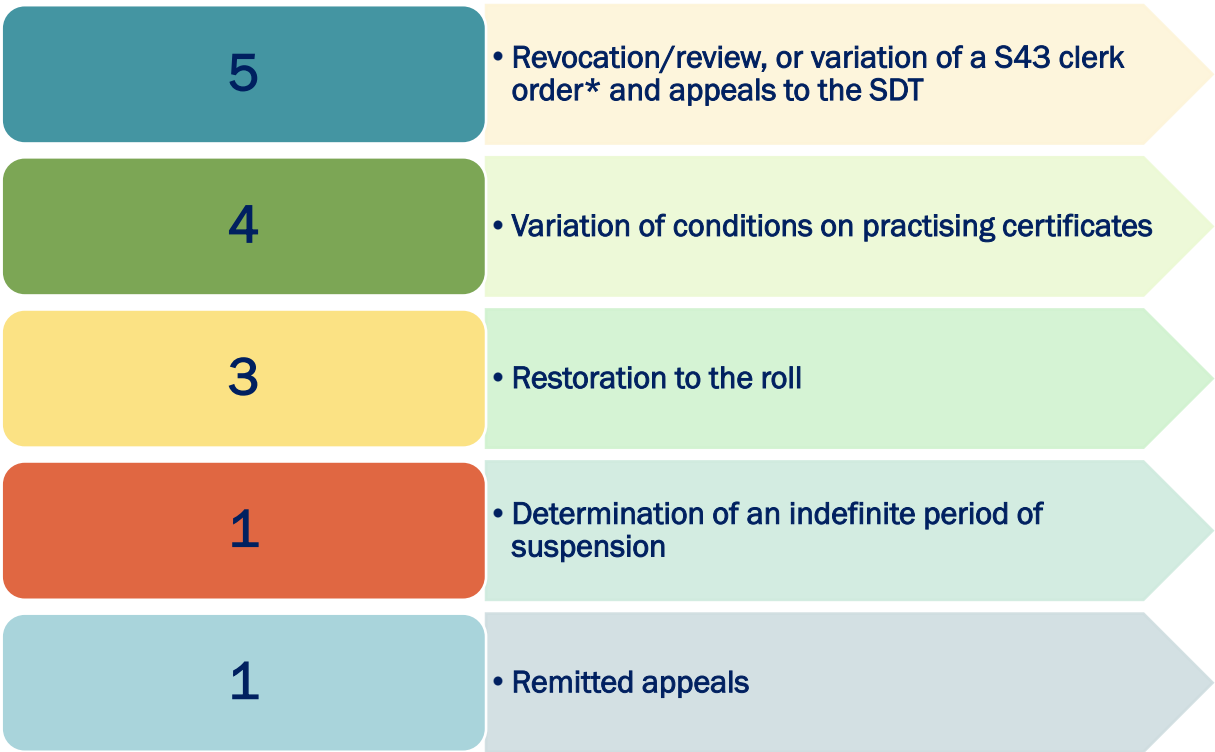
Lay Applications

The number of lay applications received in 2020 was consistent with the number received in 2019. Of the 10 lay applications received in 2020:

- 1 was withdrawn by the applicant.
- The remaining 9 were considered by a single solicitor and subsequently re-considered by one or more panels of the Tribunal.

None were certified as showing a case to answer.

Other Applications/Remitted Appeals

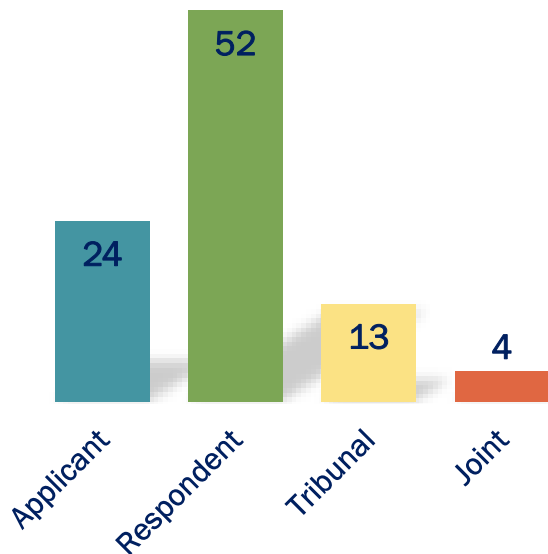


*Made either by the SDT or SRA

Hearing and Adjournment Data

In 2020, there were 93 applications made to adjourn either the substantive or case management hearing.

Adjournment Applications By Party

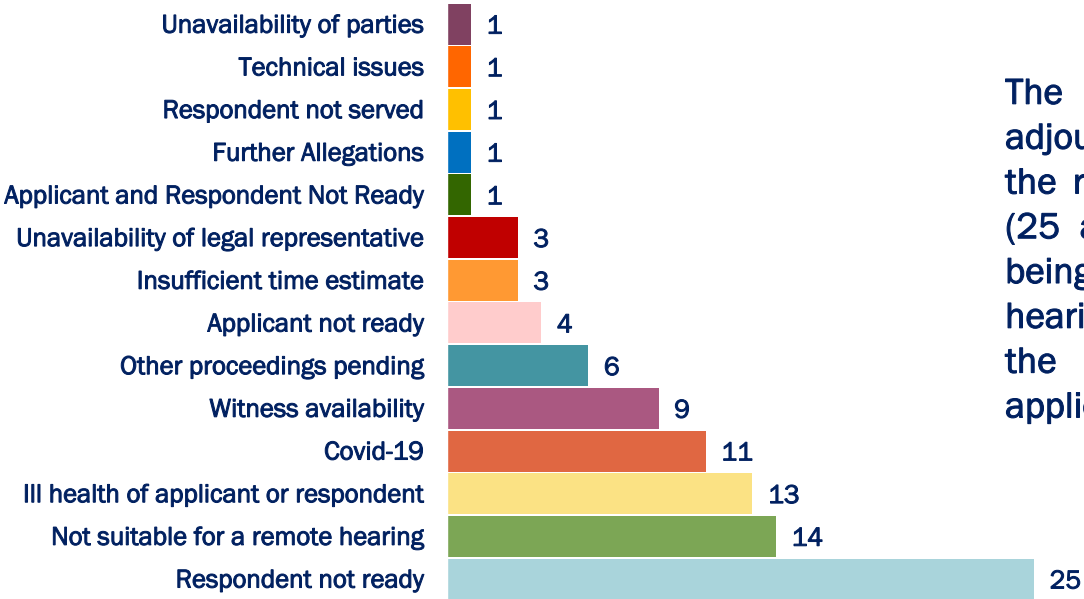


Although the number of days of court time no longer required due to adjournments increased, from c112.5 days in 2019 to 169 days in 2020, it is important to note that 70.5 of those days were attributable to Covid-19 or to the case not being suitable for a remote hearing, with a further 21 lost due to the ill-health of a party (which in some cases was Covid-19 related).

Applications - Yearly Figures 2020					
Applicant	24 (26%)	Granted	19 (28%)	Refused	5 (19%)
Respondent	52 (56%)	Granted	32 (48%)	Refused	20 (77%)
Tribunal	13 (14%)	Granted	13 (19%)	Refused	0 (0%)
Joint	4 (4%)	Granted	3 (5%)	Refused	1 (4%)
Total	93		67		26

67 cases were adjourned in 2020. Of these, 13 were adjourned by the Tribunal, including 9 for hearings in late March and April adjourned because of the shift from in-person to remote hearings.

We received 80 applications by parties for adjournments during the course of 2020. Of these applications 54 (67.5%) were granted and 26 (32.5%) were refused



The most frequent reasons for adjournment applications were the respondent not being ready (25 applications), the case not being suitable for a remote hearing (14 applications) and the ill-health of a party (13 applications).

Length of Hearing (Days)	Number of Hearings
<1	0
1	21
2	23
3	10
4	10
5	5
6	0
7	1
8	0
9	0
10	0
23	1

The table above shows a breakdown of the length of substantive hearings and applications eg for restoration to the roll or to end an indefinite suspension. Case management and agreed outcome hearings are not included in the chart.

Substantiated Allegations

57

Cases where allegations were found proved for all respondents

8

Cases where allegations were found not proved for all respondents

68

Substantive Hearings, of which:

1

case where some allegations were found proved for some respondents

2

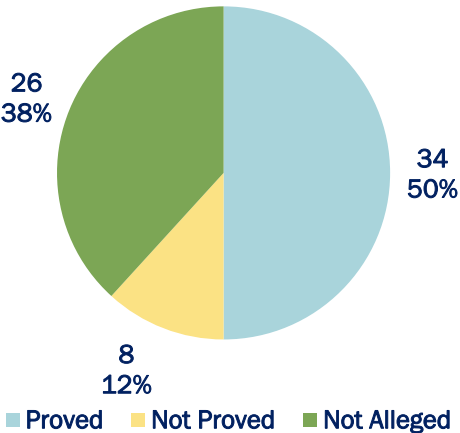
Cases where allegations were withdrawn

The cases heard in 2020 were a mix of those heard under the 2007 Rules (with the criminal standard of proof applied) and cases under the 2019 Rules (with the civil standard of proof applied). It is too early to draw firm conclusions about any impact from the change to the standard of proof, but it does not appear to have impacted on the type or outcome of allegations.

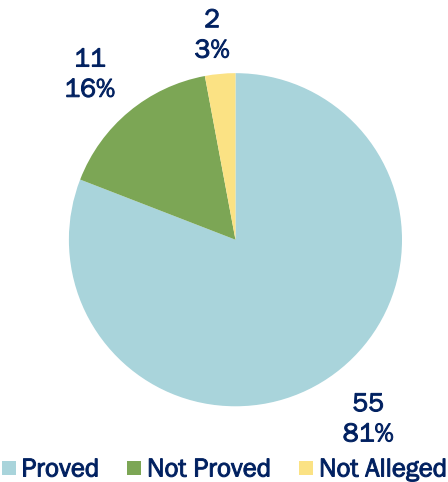
Of the 113 cases that concluded in 2020, allegations were withdrawn by the SRA in 1 case and against 1 of the 3 respondents in another case. Allegations were not proved against 9 respondents (in 8 cases) and not proved against 3 of the 4 respondents in another case. Of these cases, 5 were subject to the criminal standard and 6 to the civil standard.

There has been no noticeable shift in the range of cases received. The SRA's own enforcement strategy changed in November 2019, and this will have impacted on the applications that the SRA chooses to make to the SDT.

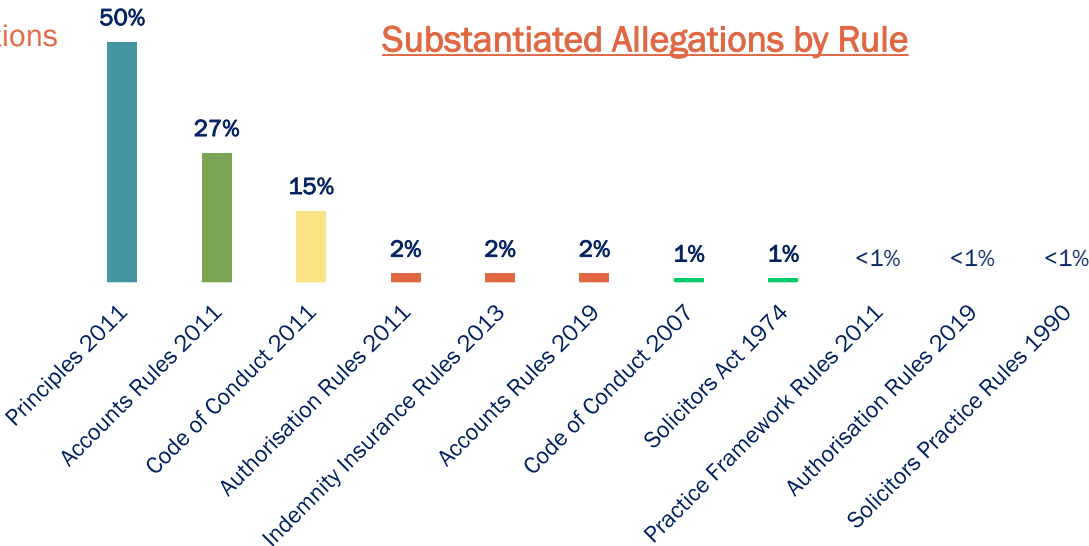
Dishonesty



Integrity

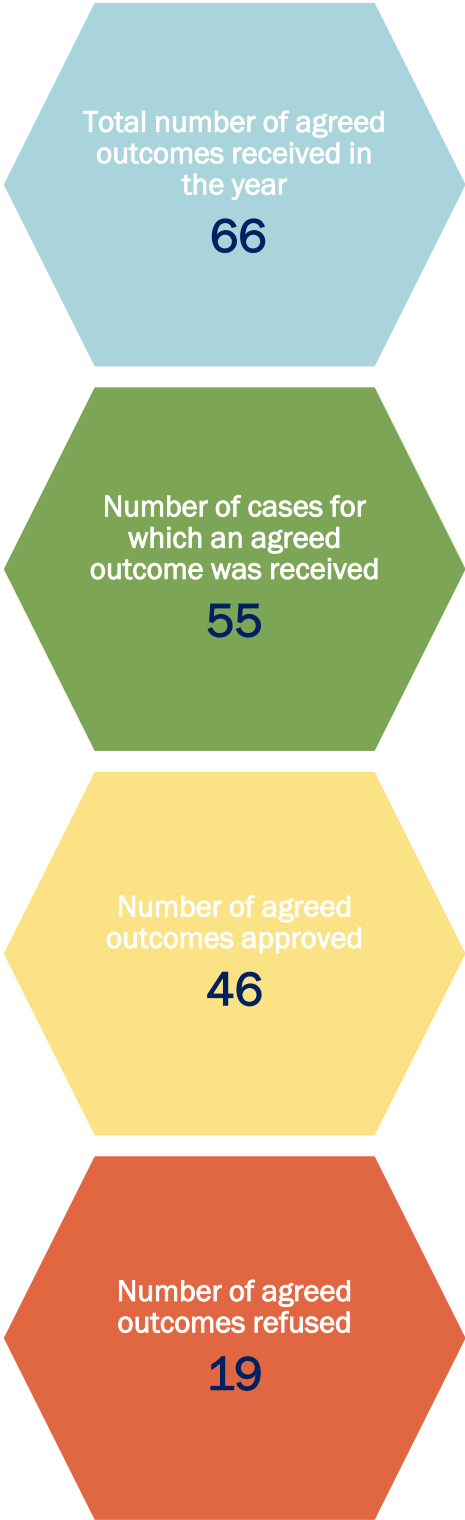


Substantiated Allegations by Rule



In some cases there was more than one allegation for a breach of the same rule by the respondent. However, for the purposes of this chart, each rule breach was recorded only once.

Agreed Outcomes

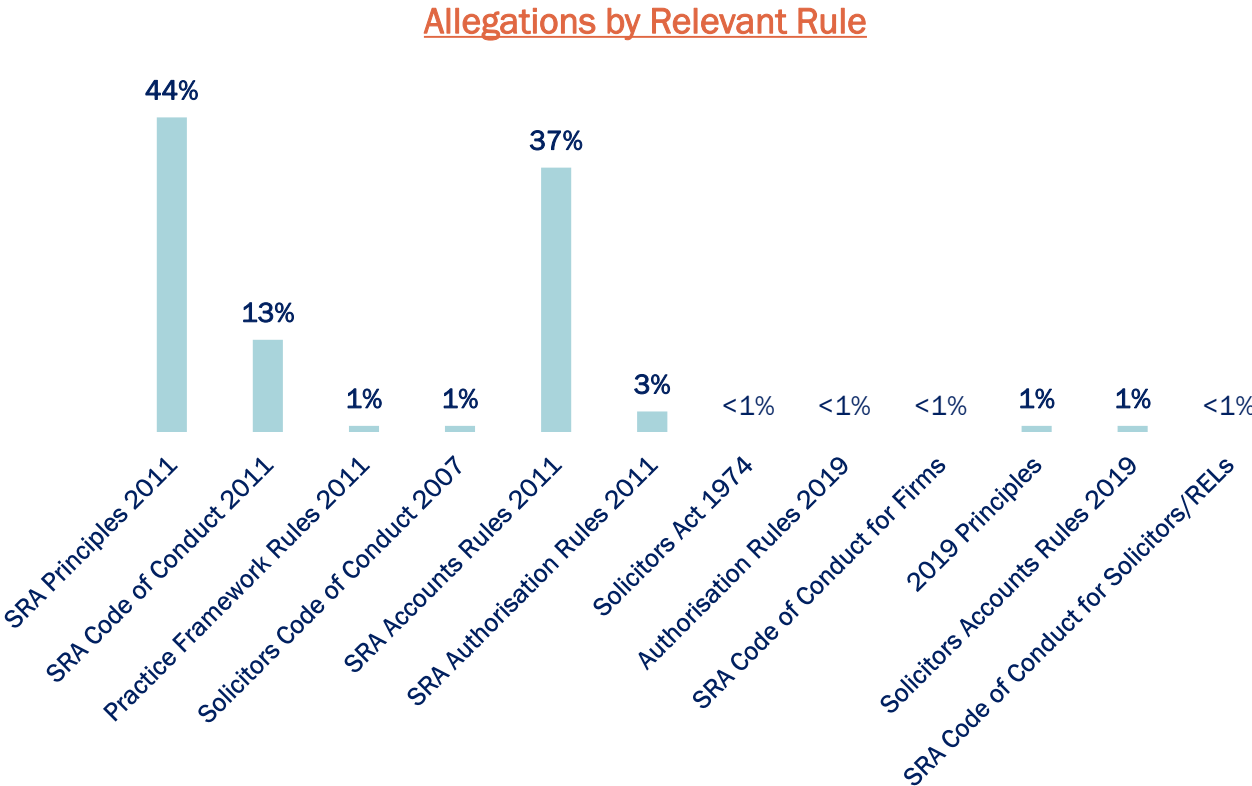


The Tribunal lists applications for agreed outcomes as soon as possible after they have been received. In most cases they are considered within a week, and in many cases within 1 or 2 days. However, this is dependent on a panel being available to consider the application. During 2020, most applications were listed before remote panels convened specifically to consider agreed outcome applications.

Applications for agreed outcomes should be made no later than 28 days before the substantive hearing but in some cases are received later than this, in which case the permission of the Tribunal to file the application out of time is required.

In 2020 there were agreed outcome applications in relation to 55 cases. There were 66 agreed outcome applications in total. Of these 46 (70%) were granted, 19 (29%) were refused and 1 (1%) was withdrawn.

Of the 65 cases that were considered by the Tribunal, 31 (48%) were filed less than 28 days before the hearing and 34 (52%) were filed more than 28 days before the hearing. There were 87.5 anticipated days (including carry-over from 2019) which, having been scheduled, were no longer required due to agreed outcomes.



Breakdown of Orders



There is always a difference between the number of cases/hearings and the number of sanctions/orders handed down.

This is because sanctions/orders relate to individual respondents and cases often have multiple respondents – so there can be more than one sanction/order per case/hearing.



The numbers in the blue boxes relate to cases where orders were handed down by the Tribunal following substantive hearings, results of agreed outcomes or applications made to the Tribunal.

The numbers in the yellow boxes relate to cases where the allegations were found not proved, stayed or dismissed.

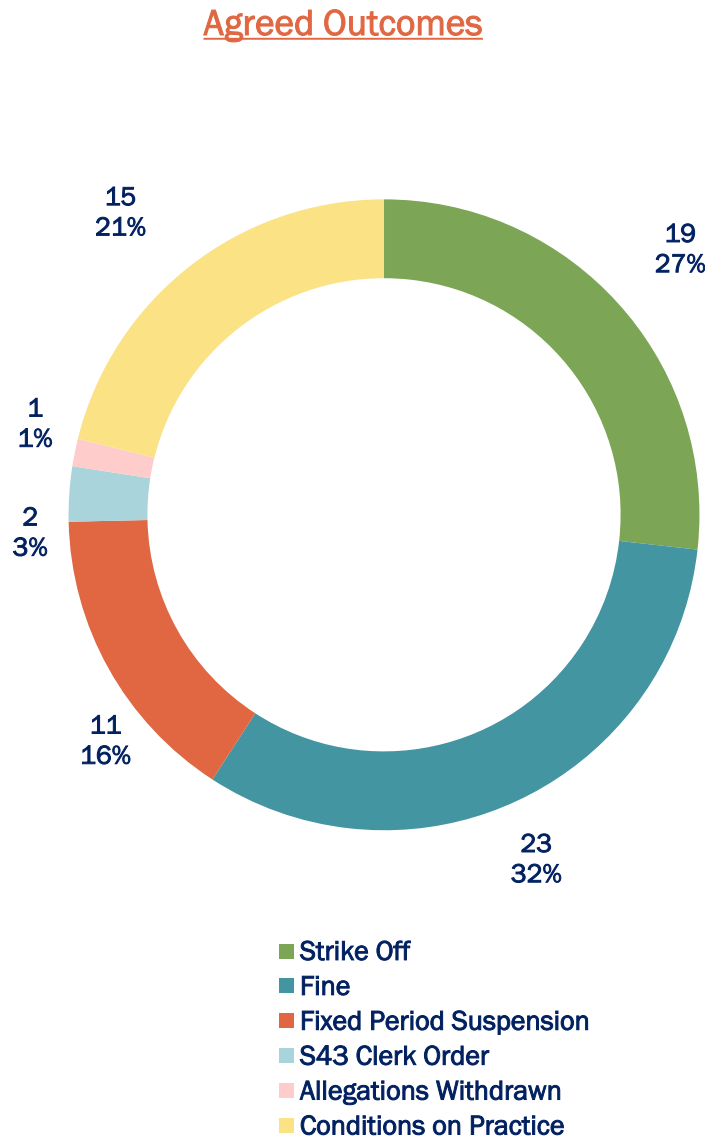
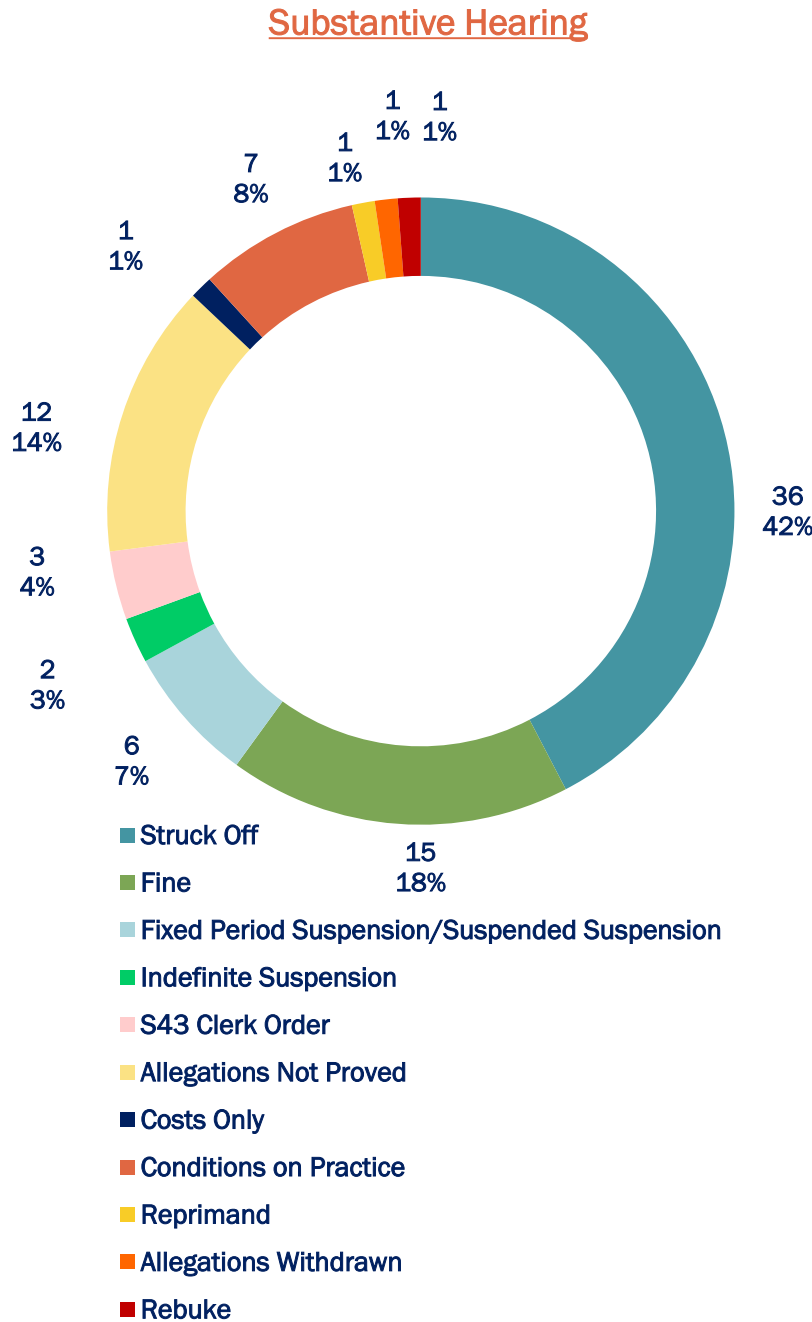
Sanctions by Hearing

The charts on this page give a broad overview of the number and type of sanctions issued following a substantive hearing or agreed outcome.

Substantive Hearings

There is a difference between the number of sanctions and the number of substantive hearings. This is because respondents might receive multiple sanctions, which are themselves also often combined with restrictions on practice. Furthermore, a proportion of cases involve one or more respondent.

In total there were 79 individual respondents who received sanctions following a substantive hearing in 2020, some of whom received multiple sanctions. The total number of sanctions received was 85 (each sanction being recorded individually).



Agreed Outcomes

During 2020, 46 SRA applications were dealt with by way of agreed outcome. In total there were 57 individual respondents who received sanctions following an agreed outcome in 2020. A proportion of these respondents received more than one sanction and the chart above shows the 71 sanctions issued (each sanction being recorded individually).

*Additionally 1 order for restriction on practice was made at other (ie not substantive or agreed outcome) hearings and is not included in the charts on this page, bringing the total to 23.

Fines & Costs

In 2020 the Tribunal ordered costs in the sum of £1,858,306.54, Of this amount, £507,471.31 was from cases concluded by Agreed Outcome and £46,400 related to costs ordered against the SRA to cover respondents' costs.

The level of costs reflects a decrease on 2019 of £676,621.46.

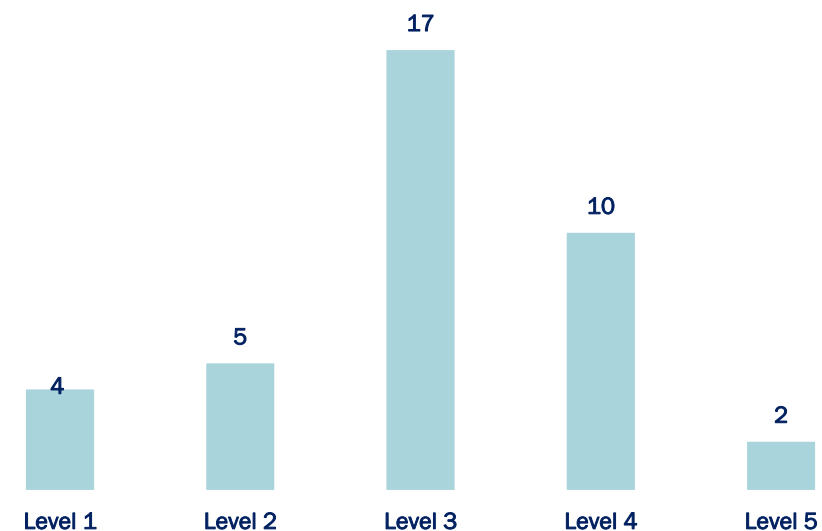
Level of Fine

Fines are imposed where the seriousness of the misconduct does not justify a suspension or strike-off, but a reprimand is insufficient. HM Treasury is provided with a copy of the fine order and is responsible for collecting and enforcing the payment of fines. The SDT has no role in enforcing fine orders. In 2020, the Tribunal ordered £515,505 in fines, £277,505 of which was from cases concluded by agreed outcome. The level of fines in 2020 represents a decrease on 2019 of £203,748.

Fines were imposed in the following indicative bands:-

Level 1	£0 - £2,000
Level 2	£2,001 - £7,500
Level 3	£7,501 - £15,000
Level 4	£15,001 - £50,000
Level 5	£50,001 - unlimited

The chart below shows the number of fines issued within each band in 2020.





THE YEAR AHEAD

The Year Ahead

Covid-19



We anticipate that, during 2021, we will be able to transition back to more face-to-face hearings, with shorter hearings initially listed remotely and parties able to apply for a face-to-face or hybrid hearing if they wish. Whilst we expect an increase in face-to-face hearings, our intention is to capitalise on what we have learned about the value of remote hearings in some circumstances to expedite the conclusion of cases and reduce costs, and the benefits of home-working to improve flexibility for staff, members and parties in cases.



IT Developments

Having selected our new Case Management System following a rigorous procurement process, we will work with the new CMS provider and our existing outsourced IT company to implement and embed the new CMS and wider IT changes. Following on from this, we will start to look at ways to develop the potential of the new systems to streamline and improve our case management and administrative processes and working practices.

We will also be reviewing our IT security arrangements with a view to achieving Cyber Essentials accreditation during 2021. Cyber Essentials is a Government backed certification scheme that helps organisations understand their cyber security level and protect themselves against common online threats.

User Satisfaction survey



We will be launching our new user satisfaction survey in 2021, aimed at gathering feedback from respondents, applicants, legal representatives and witnesses in SDT cases. We hope to be able to use the feedback we receive to help us understand and improve the experience of service users.



Gate House

In 2021 we will be starting to look at accommodation options following the end of our existing Gate House lease in December 2022. We will be exploring a number of options, including the possibility of remaining in Gate House, or moving to alternative premises. Any decisions we make will take account of market factors, balancing value for money and business continuity considerations (including the potential for savings as a result of better remote working capability) with the need to provide fit for purpose and accessible courtroom and office facilities for service users, Tribunal members and staff.

Member Recruitment

The next round of Member recruitment will start in 2021. We will work with the Appointment Panel chair, to recruit enough new Tribunal members to ensure we can continue to determine cases in a timely way and within target timescales. A key focus of the recruitment will be ensuring the necessary focus on equality and diversity at all stages of the process.



Cost per Court



In line with our strategic Value for Money objective, we will continue to review the cost of our courts in 2021 and beyond, taking account of the need to maintain costs on an even or downward trajectory, whilst ensuring that any savings and efficiencies we make now do not adversely impact our capacity to service a fluctuating number of cases and sitting days in the future.