

SOLICITORS DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL

IN THE MATTER OF THE SOLICITORS ACT 1974

Case No. 12666-2024

BETWEEN:

SOLICITORS REGULATION AUTHORITY LTD.

Applicant

and

AHMED AJINA

Respondent

Before:

Mrs C Evans (in the chair)
Mrs L Murphy
Ms J Rowe

Date of Hearing: 07 March 2025

Appearances

Thomas Walker, Barrister, Blake Morgan LLP of Apex Plaza, Forbury Road, Reading, RG1 1AX, for the Applicant.

The Respondent did not Attend and was not Represented.

JUDGMENT

The Allegations

1. The allegations against Ahmed Ajina, the Respondent are that, whilst in practice as a Solicitor and Partner at Seddons Law LLP (“the Firm”) he:

- 1.1 Between December 2019 to March 2021, provided, misleading statements to his clients and Firm, or caused such information to be provided, about the progress of the immigration matters.

In doing so, he breached any or all of:

- 1.1.1 Principle 2 of the SRA Principles 2019;
 - 1.1.2 Principle 4 of the SRA Principles 2019;
 - 1.1.3 Principle 5 of the SRA Principles 2019;
 - 1.1.4 Principle 7 of the SRA Principles 2019;
 - 1.1.5 Paragraph 1.4 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs;
 - 1.1.6 Paragraph 7.11 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs.
- 1.2 In or around May 2020, the Respondent altered an agreement, to facilitate misleading information to be provided to the Home Office, which he knew would be relied upon but he knew not to be true.

In doing so, he breached any or all of:

- 1.2.1 Principle 2 of the SRA Principles 2019;
- 1.2.2 Principle 4 of the SRA Principles 2019;
- 1.2.3 Principle 5 of the SRA Principles 2019;
- 1.2.4 Principle 7 of the SRA Principles 2019 and
- 1.2.5 Paragraph 2.2 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs.

Executive Summary

2. The Respondent was the sole solicitor in the Firm’s Litigation Department acting on immigration matters. He was under the supervision of a Partner of the Firm.
3. On 24 March 2021, the Respondent self-reported his conduct to his supervising partner in respect of Client A, who was a client of the Firm. The Respondent reported that he had presented false information to Client A in respect of the progress of visa applications that he was retained to make on Client A’s behalf.
4. The Respondent was suspended by the Firm and the Respondent’s conduct was the subject of an internal investigation. The Firm submitted a final report to the SRA of its findings in respect of the Respondent on 24 February 2022. A Forensic Investigation Officer (FIO) employed by the SRA commenced a forensic investigation on 6 September 2022 and a Forensic Investigation Report (FIR) was produced dated 14 November 2023.
5. The FIR identified that the Respondent had provided misleading information to clients as to the status of their immigration cases and, caused his colleagues to provide misleading information to clients. In addition, The FIO noted that the Respondent had

assisted in the production of documents, containing misleading information, that were provided to the Home Office as part of an immigration application.

6. The allegations against the Respondent arose out of the FIR. The Respondent did not attend the hearing, and the Tribunal granted the application that matters proceed in his absence.
7. All of the allegations were found proved against the Respondent.

Sanction

8. The Tribunal ordered that the Respondent, be Struck off the Roll of Solicitors. The Tribunal's sanction can be found [\[here\]](#)

Documents

9. The Tribunal considered all of the documents which were contained in the electronic bundle.

Preliminary Matters

10. The Tribunal proceeded to consider the Respondent's written application for an adjournment of the proceedings which had been received on the 6 March 2025 in addition to follow up correspondence received by the Tribunal shortly before the hearing had commenced.
11. The Tribunal considered documentation, which included sensitive medical evidence in relation to an application by the Respondent to adjourn the hearing and determined that this element of the hearing would proceed in private pursuant to Rule 35(2) Solicitors Disciplinary Proceedings Rules 2019 ('SDPR').

Submissions made by the Applicant on the Respondent's Application for Adjournment

12. Mr Walker submitted that the Respondent had demonstrated a lack of engagement with the proceedings given his non-attendance at previous hearings and failure to comply with any Directions issued by the Tribunal. In his submission, the application for an adjournment of the hearing was further evidence of the Respondent's unwillingness to engage.
13. The only evidence that had been presented to the Tribunal supporting the application for an adjournment was an email written by him on 6 March 2025 which explained his inability to attend the proceedings for reasons based on his health as it affected him during the Holy month of Ramadan. It was further submitted that the evidence provided did not comply with the requirements set out in the *Tribunal's Guidance Note: Health Issues*.

The Decision of the Tribunal in Respect of the Application for an Adjournment

14. The Tribunal determined that the primary reason for the Respondent's application was the current effect the Respondent's fasting during the Holy month of Ramadan was

having on his health and inability to participate in the proceedings as he was unable to take prescribed medication. He had also suggested that he was unable to prepare for his case. The initial application received on the 6 March 2025 was followed by further correspondence to the Tribunal before the start of the present hearing explaining that he had not yet been able to seek the specialist medical assistance he needed and, was not in a fit state physically and mentally to defend the allegations

15. The Tribunal concluded that as required by Rule 23(1) SDPR the Respondent's application was not supported by documentary evidence which as specified in the Tribunal's *Guidance Note: Adjournments* (February 2025) would have been, a current medical report which complied with the Tribunal's *Guidance Note: Health Issues* (February 2025).
16. On the evidence before the Tribunal, there were no exceptional circumstances in this case that justified the grant of an adjournment in the absence of a reasoned opinion of an appropriate medical professional. Although a medical opinion was available, it did not cover the elements required by the Tribunal's guidance to include whether an adjournment would secure his attendance.
17. In the absence of any medical confirmation providing support for the assertion of the Respondent's ill-health, the Tribunal ruled that any concerns expressed by the Respondent could be adequately addressed by the provision of breaks at regular intervals and conducting periodic reviews during the course of the hearing to ensure that he was able to effectively engage with the proceedings.
18. The Tribunal therefore refused the written application by the Respondent to adjourn proceedings till any date after the 31 March 2025.
19. The Tribunal directed that the Case Management Team of the Tribunal contact the Respondent to inform him of its decision and invited him to attend the hearing should he be willing to do so.

The Application by the Applicant to Proceed in the Respondent's Absence

20. Mr Walker, with reference to the Statement of James Dank, Solicitor with conduct of the case on behalf of the Applicant, dated 15 February 2025, provided a chronology of the Respondent's lack of engagement with the proceedings. Until the present date, the Respondent had not provided an Answer to the Rule 12 Statement despite being granted an extension by the Tribunal to the Standard Directions that initially required him to file it by the 20 September 2024.
21. On the 27 September 2024 the Respondent communicated to the Applicant in writing, a brief denial of the allegations which he stated would be expanded upon in a witness statement to be provided. The witness statement had not been provided despite numerous efforts on the part of the Applicant to engage with him before and after September 2024.
22. Despite the written denial provided by the Respondent on the 27 September 2024, the case against the Respondent was compelling, with the Respondent firstly self-reporting

to his supervising partner at the Firm and subsequently making admissions during the investigation conducted by the SRA.

23. Mr Walker submitted that the only conclusion that could be reached given the Respondent's history of non-engagement with the proceedings to date meant was that he had voluntarily absented himself from the present hearing and any adjournment would not serve any useful purpose.

Update with Regards to Contact Made with the Respondent

24. Shortly before the announcement of the decision, the Clerk to the Tribunal reported that the Respondent had been contacted by a member of the Case Management Team. The Respondent confirmed that he was unable to attend the hearing via the video conferencing platform link provided to him as, "*he was not in the right frame of mind.*"
25. The Respondent had further reported that he had contacted his General Practitioner and was awaiting a call back from him. The Respondent promised to provide a medical report to the Tribunal by the afternoon.

Decision of the Tribunal on the Application to Proceed in the Respondent's Absence

26. Given both the correspondence received from the Respondent and the more recent update received from the Clerk to the Tribunal, the Respondent had demonstrated that he was aware of the present proceedings but had voluntarily decided not to attend.
27. The Tribunal considered the decisions in *General Medical Council v Adeogba*; *General Medical Council v Visvardis* [2016] EWCA Civ 16231 which in turn approved the principles set out in *R v Hayward*, *R v Jones*, *R v Purvis* QB 862 [2001], EWCA Crim 168 [2001] namely that that proceeding in the absence of a respondent was a discretion which a Tribunal should exercise with the utmost care and caution bearing in mind the following factors:
 - the nature and circumstances of the First Respondent's behaviour in absenting himself from the hearing;
 - whether an adjournment would resolve his absence;
 - the likely length of any such adjournment;
 - whether he had deliberately chosen not to exercise his right to be present or to give adequate instructions to enable lawyers to represent him.
28. It was held in *Adeogba* that in determining whether to proceed with regulatory proceedings in the absence of the respondent, the following factors should be borne in mind by a disciplinary tribunal:
 - the Tribunal's decision must be guided by the context provided by the main statutory objective of the regulatory body, namely the protection of the public;

- the fair, economical, expeditious and efficient disposal of allegations was of very real importance;
 - it would run entirely counter to the protection of the public if a respondent could effectively frustrate the process and challenge a refusal to adjourn when that practitioner had deliberately failed to engage in the process; and;
 - there was a burden on all professionals subject to a regulatory regime, to engage with the regulator, both in relation to the investigation and ultimate resolution of allegations made against them. That is part of the responsibility to which they sign up when being admitted to the profession.
29. Whilst exercising the utmost care and caution with respect to reaching a decision whether to proceed in absence, the Tribunal was satisfied that the Respondent had not engaged with proceedings for over six months. Further to this, he had failed to comply with any of the directions of the Tribunal and had not attended any of the scheduled hearings of which he had been made aware.
30. The Tribunal was satisfied that it was appropriate and in the public interest for the hearing to proceed in the Respondent's absence and therefore decided to exercise its power under Rule 36 SDPR to hear and determine the substantive hearing in the absence of the Respondent.

Factual Background

31. The Respondent was born in March 1988 and admitted as a solicitor on 3 February 2014.
32. He was employed by the Firm as a solicitor from 5 December 2016 and became a Partner at the Firm from 1 September 2019.
33. The Respondent was expelled from the partnership of the Firm on 28 May 2021.
34. The Respondent currently holds a practising certificate and is a Partner in a non-UK firm.

Witnesses

35. The written and oral evidence of witnesses is quoted or summarised in the Findings of Fact and Law below. The evidence referred to will be that which was relevant to the findings of the Tribunal, and to facts or issues in dispute between the parties. For the avoidance of doubt, the Tribunal read all of the documents in the case and made notes of the evidence heard. The absence of any reference to particular evidence should not be taken as an indication that the Tribunal did not read, hear or consider that evidence.
36. No oral evidence was heard by the Tribunal.

Findings of Fact and Law

37. The Applicant was required by Rule 5 of The Solicitors (Disciplinary Proceedings) Rules 2019 to prove the allegations to the standard applicable in civil proceedings (on the balance of probabilities). The Tribunal had due regard to its statutory duty, under section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998, to act in a manner which was compatible with the Respondent's rights to a fair trial and to respect for their private and family life under Articles 6 and 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The Applicant's Case

38. The Rule 12 Statement – [\[Click Here\]](#)

The Respondent's Case

39. The Respondent did not participate in the Hearing and provided no evidence for consideration by the Tribunal.

The Tribunal's Findings

40. **Allegation 1:1 - Between December 2019 to March 2021, provided, misleading statements to his clients and Firm, or caused such information to be provided, about the progress of the immigration matters.**

- 40.1 The Tribunal reviewed all the material before it, including the record of the admissions the Respondent had made to his Managing Partner and further admissions to the SRA Investigating Officer when he was interviewed. The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that the Respondent had:

With Regards to Client A:

- (a) in April 2020, provided misleading statements to his supervising partner Mr Ross that Client A's application was 'on hold indefinitely' due to the COVID pandemic in circumstances where the Respondent had already been notified on 3 December 2019 that the application was unsuccessful;
- (b) in October 2020, verbally informed Client A that the business plan (the first step in a two-stage process to the acquisition of UK residency through the innovator visa scheme) had been successful, in the full knowledge that it had not;
- (c) on the 8 February 2021, drafted and provided wording which was misleading for Mr Ross to update Client A with the progress of his application despite the fact that it had already been rejected.

With Regards to Client B

- (d) on the 15 January 2021, instructed a paralegal to provide Client B with misleading information that the Firm had only recently received an email from

the Home Office which the Firm had in fact received, but not acted on, since 5 November of the previous year.

- 40.2 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.1 proved, the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged Principle breaches.

Principle Breaches

Breach of Principle 2 SRA Principles 2019 (Public Confidence) and Paragraph 7.11 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs

- 40.3 The Tribunal found that members of the public would not expect a solicitor to create a misleading impression in the minds of clients. Where a mistaken impression had been formed, a solicitor would take steps to correct it promptly and transparently.
- 40.4 The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that both Client A and Client B would expect to be informed of all material facts relevant to their individual cases in a timely fashion, whether positive or adverse to their expectation.
- 40.5 Accordingly, the Tribunal found proved to the requisite standard that the Respondent (by misleading client A, misleading his Managing Partner and instructing a junior colleague to mislead Client B), had not behaved in a way that would uphold public trust and confidence in the solicitor's profession and in legal services provided.
- 40.6 As a result the Respondent breached Principle 2 SRA principles 2019 and Paragraph 7.11 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors RELs and RFLs.

Breach of Principle 4 SRA Principles (Honesty)

- 40.7 The Tribunal applied the test for dishonesty set out by the Supreme Court in Ivey v Genting Casinos [2017] UKSC 67 as follows:

When dishonesty is in question the fact-finding tribunal must first ascertain (subjectively) the actual state of the individual's knowledge or belief as to the facts. The reasonableness or otherwise of his belief is a matter of evidence (often in practice determinative) going to whether he held the belief, but it is not an additional requirement that his belief must be reasonable; the question is whether it is genuinely held. When once his actual state of mind as to knowledge or belief as to facts is established, the question whether his conduct was honest or dishonest is to be determined by the fact-finder by applying the (objective) standards of ordinary decent people. There is no requirement that the defendant must appreciate that what he has done is, by those standards, dishonest."

Client A

- 40.8 The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that when the Respondent provided Client A with an oral update on the progress of the case, and when the Respondent's Managing Partner responded to Client A's enquiry regarding the application, the Respondent knew or believed that:

- the business plan that had been submitted on behalf of Client A by the Firm had been rejected on the 5 December 2019;
- the Respondent had not made any other application on behalf of Client A following the rejection of the business plan;
- in April 2020, Client A understood that the application, as a result of the information provided to him, remained live;
- in October 2020 the business plan remained rejected;
- in December 2020 the business plan remained rejected, and he had not progressed the visa application in any way;
- in February 2021, the Respondent was not awaiting an appointment from the Home Office.

40.9 The conduct of the Respondent in making misleading statements to Client A and his Managing Partner and continuing to create the impression that the proceedings were still live when they were not, was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

Client B

40.10 The Tribunal found to the requisite standard that the Respondent knew or believed the following:

- that the Respondent had been emailed by the Home Office on 5 November 2020 for Client B's parents-in-law to provide material relevant to their application by 19 November 2020;
- that the Respondent had not asked Client B's parents-in-law for the information;
- that the Home Office had not just requested the information in January 2021;
- that his colleague, on the instructions of the Respondent, passed on information to Client B, who would be led to believe that his parents-in-law's application was still live, and the Home Office were requesting information regarding this in January 2021.

40.11 The conduct of the Respondent in instructing his colleague to make misleading statements to Client B, in order to create the impression that the request for information had only recently been received by the Home Office, was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

40.12 The Respondent was therefore in breach of Principle 4 SRA Principles 2019.

Principle 5 of the SRA Principles 2019 (Integrity)

40.13 The Tribunal considered the comments of Jackson LJ in Wingate v SRA [2018] EWCA Civ 366, where he stated:

[97] ... the term “integrity” is a useful shorthand to express the higher standards which society expects from professional persons and which the professions expect from their own members ... The underlying rationale is that the professions have a privileged and trusted role in society. In return they are required to live up to their own professional standards ... [100] Integrity connotes adherence to the ethical standards of one’s own profession. That involves more than mere honesty”.

40.14 The Respondent was in a position of trust and responsibility as a solicitor and a Partner of the Firm. A solicitor acting with integrity would not have acted in a manner that sought to protect his own position, to the detriment of others.

40.15 The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that by deliberately putting forward an incorrect position in relation to the applications of clients, misleading colleagues and instructing colleagues to conceal that he had missed an email from the Home Office, the Respondent’s conduct lacked integrity.

40.16 The Respondent therefore breached Principle 5 of the SRA Principles.

Principle 7 of the SRA Principles 2019 (Acting in the Best interests of a Client) and Paragraph 1.4 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs

40.17 Principle 7 of the SRA Principles 2019 requires a solicitor to act in the best interests of each client and in addition;

40.18 Paragraph 1.4 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs requires that a solicitor does not mislead their clients or others by their own acts or omissions.

Client A

40.19 The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that the Respondent was aware (for a period of approximately 15 months) that the business plan had been rejected, and the application could not therefore progress or succeed. Despite this knowledge, the Respondent did not inform the client of the position.

40.20 The Tribunal also found that during the 15-month period, Client A conducted himself on the mistaken assumption that the Firm was progressing the application as instructed. By not being informed of the correct position, the opportunity for Client A to explore any alternative option was lost.

40.21 The Tribunal also found proved to the requisite standard that the Respondent actively misled his colleague and Client A as a result of his actions.

Client B

- 40.22 The Tribunal found that when the Respondent became aware that the Home Office email had been missed, the Respondent did not declare this to the client. Instead, he instructed his colleague to put forward an alternative explanation to the client, which meant that an alternative route of application could not be considered by Client B.
- 40.23 The Tribunal also found, to the requisite standard, that by instructing his junior colleague to mislead Client B, the Respondent had failed to act in the best interests of his client.
The Respondent therefore breached Principle 7 of the SRA Principles and Paragraph 1.4 of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs RFLs.

The Tribunal's Findings

41. **Allegation 1.2: In or around May 2020, the Respondent altered an agreement, to facilitate misleading information to be provided to the Home Office, which he knew would be relied upon but he knew not to be true.**
- 41.1 The Tribunal reviewed all the material which included email exchanges between the Respondent and Client C in addition to the admissions made by the Respondent to the SRA Investigating Officer when interviewed, and found on the balance of probabilities that the Respondent had:
- (a) amended an existing agreement between Client C and Person A to show that the agreement was between Client C and the Company of which Person A was a director and;
 - (b) left the date of the agreement to be submitted to the Home Office unaltered, thereby showing the agreement to have been entered into in June 2017 rather than May 2020;
 - (c) altered and submitted the document providing information to the Home Office which he knew would be relied upon but was not true or accurate.
- 41.2 Having found the factual matrix of allegation 1.2 proved, the Tribunal proceeded to consider the alleged Principle breaches.

Principle Breaches

Breach of Principle 2 SRA Principles 2019 (Public Confidence)

- 41.3 Members of the public should be able to place their trust in Solicitors who are held in high regard. Any behaviour which undermines this trust damages not only the regulated person, but also the ability of the legal profession as a whole to serve society.
- 41.4 The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that in deliberately facilitating the creation of a formal document that was inaccurate, the Respondent had abused the trust that the public had in him and the legal profession as a whole.

41.5 The Respondent therefore breached Principle 2 of the SRA Principles 2019.

Breach of Principle 4 SRA Principles 2019

41.6 The Tribunal in relying on the test set out in Ivey v Genting Casinos found on the balance of probabilities that the Respondent knew or believed the following:

- That Client C had entered into an agreement with a Person A in May 2017;
- That Company A had not been a party to that agreement when it was signed in May 2017;
- Any person reading the agreement dated 1 June 2020, without reference to any earlier agreement, would believe that Client C had entered into an agreement with Company A in 2017.

41.7 Given this state of knowledge and belief of the Respondent, the Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that the Respondent had acted dishonestly by the standards of ordinary decent people. Ordinary decent people would consider it dishonest for a solicitor to facilitate the creation of a formal document which gave a misleading impression in support of an immigration application.

41.8 The Respondent therefore breached Principle 4 SRA principles 2019.

Breach of Principle 5 SRA Principles 2019 (Integrity)

41.9 The Tribunal having regards to the test set out in Wingate v SRA found on the balance of probabilities that:

- (a) the Respondent in facilitating the creation of a formal document which contained information which was untrue or inaccurate in support of an application made to the Home Office, the Respondent acted without integrity;
- (b) A solicitor acting with integrity would ensure that any documents submitted on behalf of a client were correct and accurate and would not misrepresent a client's circumstances to the Home Office;
- (c) The Respondent therefore breached Principle 5 SRA Principles 2019.

Principle 7 of the SRA Principles 2019 (Acting in the Best Interests of the Client)

41.10 The Respondent was not acting in the best interest of his clients, as he clearly provided false information to the Home Office knowing the truthful position could jeopardise the clients' applications.

41.11 By failing, as he did, to provide accurate and truthful information, the Respondent breached Principle 7 of the SRA Principles 2019.

Breach of Paragraph 2.2 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs

- 41.12 Paragraph 2.2 of the Code requires solicitors not to alter material which would generate false evidence.
- 41.13 The Tribunal found, to the requisite standard, that The Respondent's conduct, in assisting in the creation of a document that purported to reflect the Loan Agreement being between Client C and Company A, rather than Person B, for submission to the Home Office, amounted to generating false evidence.
- 41.14 The Respondent therefore breached Paragraph 2.2 of the Code.

Previous Disciplinary Matters

42. The Respondent had no previous disciplinary findings recorded against him.

Mitigation

43. The Respondent did not attend the hearing and offered no mitigation for the Tribunal to consider.

Sanction

44. The Tribunal considered the Guidance Note on Sanction (11th Edition February 2025), and the proper approach to sanctions as set out in *Fuglers and others v SRA* [2014] EWHC 179. The Tribunal's overriding objective when considering sanction, was the need to maintain public confidence in the integrity of the profession.
45. In determining sanction, the Tribunal's role was to assess the seriousness of the proven misconduct and to impose a sanction that was fair and proportionate in all the circumstances. In determining the seriousness of the misconduct, the Tribunal was to consider the Respondents' culpability and harm identified together with the aggravating and mitigating factors that existed.
46. The Tribunal considered that the Respondent that been directly responsible for his actions. His concealment of the fact that the client's application had been rejected from both his client and his managing partner involved a deliberate delay which continued for over sixteen months. His facilitation of the amendment of a document to bolster the application of another client to the Home Office demonstrated some degree of planning.
47. The Respondent's conduct, particularly in concealing information and providing false information to his managing partner and client in respect of the progress of that client's application, involved a significant abuse of trust. The pattern of concealing material facts was exacerbated by asking a junior colleague to mislead Client B about the date that documentation was received by the firm from the Home Office.
48. On a consideration of the Respondent's culpability and the level of harm caused, the Tribunal concluded that seriousness of the Respondent's misconduct was high.

49. The main aggravating feature of the Respondent's conduct was that all of the allegations proven against him involved dishonesty. The dishonest conduct, particularly in the case of Client A, continued over an extended period of time. Given the Respondent's level of experience within the profession and responsibility as a Partner in the Firm, he should have known that his conduct was a material breach of professional obligations.
50. The Tribunal noted that the Respondent had a previously unblemished career and had self-reported his conduct to his Managing Partner. It was further noted that the Respondent had cooperated with the investigation into his conduct and made prompt admissions when interviewed. The Tribunal however afforded these matters limited weight during the balancing exercise, given the likelihood of discovery at that point.
51. The Tribunal next considered the purpose for which sanctions are imposed, noting that an important purpose of a sanction is to maintain the reputation of the solicitor's profession (*Bolton v The Law Society* [1994] 1 WLR 512). The Tribunal further determined that the reputation of the profession was undermined in circumstances where a solicitor, particularly one in a senior position, misled clients, colleagues and facilitated the creation of documents, the contents of which were intended to mislead.
52. The Tribunal having determined that the Respondent's conduct was dishonest, observed that a finding of dishonesty would, absent exceptional circumstances, require an order striking the solicitor from the roll.
53. Having considered the authorities, in particular: *Solicitors Regulation Authority v Sharma* [2010] EWHC 2022 (Admin) and *SRA -v James* [2018] EWHC 2058 (Admin), the Tribunal could not find any exceptional circumstances justifying any lesser sanction other than a striking off.
54. The Tribunal found, given the finding of dishonesty against the Respondent, the only appropriate and proportionate sanction was to strike the Respondent off the Roll of solicitors.

Costs

55. Mr Walker, on behalf of the Applicant, applied for costs in the sum of £67,228.20 as set out in the Applicant's costs schedule dated the 20 February 2025. In clarifying the level of costs claimed, he explained that despite the fact that the Respondent had self-reported to his firm, the SRA had needed to investigate matters fully and this involved the consideration of lengthy transcripts and various statements. It was submitted that the volume of evidence considered by the Applicant was not reflected in the number of charges contained in the Rule 12 documentation.
56. The Tribunal identified, in relation to the investigation costs claimed by the Applicant, that the Firm had already carried out a complete audit of all of the Respondent's client files and a sizeable amount of the investigation had already been completed in a case that involve a relatively limited amount of documentation in relation to the two discrete allegations considered. In addition, the Tribunal noted that the claim time spent in the preparation of the case by three senior fee earners was disproportionate relative to the overall complexity of the case.

57. As a result, and in accordance with Rule 43(4) SDPR, the Tribunal applied a reduction to the Applicant's claim in respect of the investigation costs and the also for the work carried out in the preparation for the Tribunal.
58. The costs were therefore reduced from £67,228.20 to £39, 612.50 which the Tribunal considered to be reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.

Statement of Full Order

59. The Tribunal ORDERED that the Respondent, AHMED AJINA, solicitor, be STRUCK OFF the Roll of Solicitors and it further Ordered that he do pay the costs of and incidental to this application and enquiry fixed in the sum of £39,612.50 Plus VAT of £7,922.50.

Dated this 3rd day of April 2025
On behalf of the Tribunal

C. Evans

C. Evans
Chair