

SOLICITORS DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL

IN THE MATTER OF THE SOLICITORS ACT 1974

Case No. 12679-2024

BETWEEN:

and

JOANNE ELIZABETH TAPPIN First Respondent

RIA LAKHANI Second Respondent

Before:

Mr G Sydenham (in the chair)

Mrs L Boyce

Mr R Slack

Date of Hearing: 10 -17 November 2025

Appearances

Michael Colledge, Solicitor, Blake Morgan LLP, of New Kings Court, Tollgate, Chandler's Ford, Eastleigh SO53 3LG. Instructed by the Applicant.

Matthew McDonagh, Barrister, Outer Temple Chambers, 222 Strand, Temple, London WC2R 1BA. Instructed by Kingsley Napley LLP, 20 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4DN, on behalf of the First Respondent.

The Second Respondent was represented on 11-12 November 2025 by Calum Macdonald, Barrister, instructed by Advocate, International Dispute Resolution Centre, 1 Paternoster Lane, St. Paul's, London, EC4M 7BQ.

JUDGMENT

Allegations

First Respondent

1 The allegations against the First Respondent, Joanne Elizabeth Tappin, made by the SRA are that, whilst in practice as a Solicitor at Mackrell Solicitors (“the Firm”):

1.1 On 8 October 2021 she caused or allowed an email to be sent to Roberts Crossley Solicitors (“RCS”) which contained information that she knew or ought to have known was misleading;

In doing so, she breached any or all of:

1.1.1 Paragraph 1.4 of the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs 2019; and

1.1.2 Principle 2 (Public Trust) of the SRA Principles 2019;

1.1.3 Principle 4 (Dishonesty) of the SRA Principles 2019; and

1.1.4 Principle 5 (Integrity) of the SRA Principles 2019

1.2 On 7 October 2021 caused or allowed an email to be sent to Mr B which she knew or ought to have known was misleading. In doing so, she breached any or all of:

1.2.1 Paragraph 1.4 of the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs 2019;

1.2.2 Principle 2 of the SRA Principles 2019;

1.2.3 Principle 4 of the SRA Principles 2019; and

1.2.4 Principle 5 of the SRA Principles 2019

Withdrawal of Breaches of Principle 4 SRA Principles

1.3 At the outset of the hearing, the Tribunal granted an application for the dishonesty elements of allegations 1.1 and 1.2, namely 1.1.3 and 1.2.3, to be withdrawn against the First Respondent.

Second Respondent

2. The allegations against the Second Respondent, Ria Lakhani, who is not a solicitor, are that she has been guilty of conduct of such a nature that in the opinion of the SRA it would be undesirable for her to be involved in a legal practice in that, whilst the Second Respondent was employed as a paralegal by the Firm:

2.1 On 8 October 2021 caused or allowed an email to be sent to Roberts Crossley Solicitors (“RCS”) which contained information that she knew or ought to have known was misleading;

In doing so, she breached any or all of:

- 2.1.1 Principle 2 of the SRA Principles 2019;
- 2.1.2 Principle 4 of the SRA Principles 2019; and
- 2.1.3 Principle 5 of the of the SRA Principles 2019

2.2 On 07 October 2021 caused or allowed an email to be sent to Mr B which she knew or ought to have known was misleading.

In doing so, she breached any or all of:

- 2.2.1 Principle 2 of the SRA Principles 2019;
- 2.2.2 Principle 4 of the SRA Principles 2019; and
- 2.2.3 Principle 5 of the SRA Principles 2019

Executive Summary

- 3. This case involved two respondents, The First Respondent (a solicitor) and the Second Respondent (a paralegal), were alleged to have been responsible for misleading representations made during the course of two separate conveyancing transactions. The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) brought proceedings against both individuals under the Solicitors Act 1974, citing breaches of Principles 2, 4, and 5 of the SRA Principles 2019 (“the Principles”), and Paragraph 1.4 of the Code of Conduct (“the Code) in the case of the First Respondent.
- 4. In the first transaction, the sale of the First Property was completed without a grant of probate for one of the deceased co-owners. The contract and transfer documents incorrectly named the deceased individuals as sellers. It was alleged that an email was sent to the buyer’s solicitors on 8 October 2021 falsely claiming that the signed transfer had been lost in the post and that a fresh deed was awaited, omitting the critical fact that probate had not yet been granted. This email was sent by the Second Respondent but was allegedly drafted with the First Respondent’s involvement and sent with her approval.
- 5. In the second transaction, involving the sale of the Second Property, it was alleged that the Second Respondent emailed a client of the Firm on 7 October 2021, falsely stating that the buyer’s solicitors had misplaced the signed transfer deed. It was further alleged that in reality, no such deed had ever been executed or sent and the misrepresentation was intended to induce the client to sign a new transfer without questioning the delay. It was alleged in respect of the First Respondent, that as the fee earner, she was aware of the situation and responded to the Second Respondent’s email with apparent approval.
- 6. Both Respondents provided conflicting accounts in relation to the two transactions. In respect of the first transaction, the First Respondent denied authorising the misleading email and claimed that the Second Respondent acted against her instructions, while the

Second Respondent asserted that she acted under the First Respondent's direction and that the First Respondent drafted the misleading content. In relation to the Second Transaction, the First Respondent denied knowledge that the email sent to the client was misleading and maintained that she believed the transfer had been signed and sent. The Second Respondent, by contrast, admitted sending the email and acknowledged that it was misleading, but claimed she was acting under the First Respondent's supervision and in accordance with her instructions.

7. At the commencement of the hearing, the Tribunal granted an application to withdraw the aspect of the allegations against the First Respondent concerning dishonesty, based on independent medical expert evidence received by the Applicant. The Tribunal also considered, and refused, an application for adjournment supported by all parties. The application was made on the grounds that the Second Respondent had only recently secured representation, which would not be available at critical stages of the scheduled hearing, and that an adjournment would enable her legal team to address unresolved case management issues and ensure she was represented at a future hearing.
8. A further application by the First Respondent for the cases against each Respondent to be heard separately was opposed by the Applicant and the Second Respondent and was refused by the Tribunal. The Tribunal then dealt with the outstanding preliminary issues and commenced the hearing. On the third day of the proceedings, the Second Respondent withdrew, stating that she could not effectively participate following the refusal of her earlier adjournment application.
9. The Tribunal heard evidence from the Applicant's witnesses and from the First Respondent. It determined that the Applicant had not proved the allegations against the First Respondent to the requisite standard and dismissed them. In light of that finding, the Tribunal did not proceed to consider the breaches alleged against her. In respect of the Second Respondent, the Tribunal found all allegations and breaches proved on the balance of probabilities. It therefore acquitted the First Respondent and made an order pursuant to s.43 Solicitors Act 1974 against the Second Respondent.
10. The Tribunal granted the Applicant's application for costs against each Respondent, but significantly reduced the amounts ordered after considering their respective means.

Sanction

The First Respondent

11. No sanction was ordered against the First Respondent as the Allegations against her were dismissed.

The Second Respondent

12. Pursuant to section 43 of the Solicitors Act 1974, the Tribunal ordered that, with effect from 17 November 2025, the Second Respondent be prohibited from employment by or remuneration from, acting as a manager of, or from holding any interest in a solicitor's practice or recognised body without the Law Society's permission. The full Order made by the Tribunal pursuant to s.43 Solicitors Act 1974 is set out below.

Documents

13. The Tribunal considered all of the documents contained in the electronic bundle of the case which included:
 - (a) The Applicant's Rule 12 Statement (R12 Statement) dated 5 September 2024 and the exhibit bundles MJC1 and MJC2;
 - (b) The First Respondent's Answer to the R12 Statement dated 20 December 2024;
 - (c) The Second Respondent's Answer to the R12 Statement undated, received on 21 November 2024 and Annexes;
 - (d) The First Applicant's Witness Statement dated 17 April 2025; and
 - (e) The Second Respondent's Witness Statement dated 17 April 2024.

Preliminary Matters

14. Application to Withdraw Allegations 1.1.2 and 1.2.3 Against the First Respondent
 - 14.1 At the outset of the hearing, the Applicant, applied to withdraw allegations 1.1.2 and 1.2.3 of the R12 Statement, which alleged dishonesty by the First Respondent. The application was based on medical reports from Dr Banfield and Dr Dimitriev.
 - 14.2 The Applicant submitted that the First Respondent's diagnosis and the medical evidence were material to assessing her state of knowledge or belief. Having considered the reports and their implications, the Applicant concluded that the evidential test for dishonesty was not met and therefore applied to withdraw all aspects of the allegation relating to dishonesty.
 - 14.3 The Tribunal was satisfied that the application was properly made and granted leave for the withdrawal of allegations 1.1.2 and 1.2.3.
 - 14.4 In granting the application, the Tribunal carefully considered the Second Respondent's objections that it had been made late in the proceedings, that Dr Banford's report exceeded her expertise and ventured into factual determinations for the Tribunal, and that the conclusions were reached without reviewing contemporaneous evidence, including significant WhatsApp messaging.
 - 14.5 Notwithstanding these objections, the Tribunal determined that the Applicant's decision to withdraw the dishonesty allegations was appropriate, noting that the Applicant could not be compelled to pursue allegations where, in compliance with its duty to review the evidence, it had concluded there was an insufficiency of evidence. The withdrawal was therefore permitted pursuant to Rule 24 of the SDPR 2019.

Application for Adjournment

- 15.1 The First Respondent invited the Tribunal to adjourn the proceedings noting that the Second Respondent had secured limited representation to address the remainder of the

preliminary issues before it, including whether the hearings should be a severed at a Case Management Hearing (CMH) which could be listed within the current adjourned trial window.

- 15.2 The First Respondent further expressed concern that if the representation available to the Second Respondent did not cover entirety of the hearing, the First Respondent would be exposed to cross-examination by the Second Respondent on matters the Applicant was no longer pursuing, as part of her attempt to advance her own case.
- 15.3 Supporting the application, Mr Macdonald, on behalf of the Second Respondent, supported the application, confirmed his availability to deal with the remaining preliminary issues at a CMH on Friday and indicated that he could commit to three further days attendance if the substantive hearing were relisted before April 2026.
- 15.4 The Applicant stated that it had taken the decision reluctantly not to oppose the application, recognising the importance of the Second Respondent being represented during the proceedings.
- 15.5 The Tribunal carefully considered the submissions but refused the application. It noted the risk that the Second Respondent's limited representation might not cover the remainder of the proceedings and the implications of her cross-examining the First Respondent as a litigant in person. However, it did not consider an adjournment to a non-effective date to be in the interests of justice, given that the substantive hearing could be concluded within the current listing window.
- 15.6 Applying the Overriding Objective, the Tribunal concluded that fairness required affording the Second Respondent—who is neither a solicitor nor an experienced litigator—appropriate leeway in presenting her case and assistance insofar as permissible. This was balanced against the need for expedition, given the age of the allegations and the fact that the previous hearing in May 2025 had already been adjourned shortly after it commenced at the First Respondent's request.

16. Application for Severance

- 16.1 The First Respondent applied for the cases to be heard separately, citing the uncertainty caused by the withdrawal of the dishonesty allegations, the refusal of the Second Respondent's adjournment application, and the likelihood that she would be unrepresented for the remainder of the proceedings.
- 16.2 The First Respondent further argued that, following the withdrawal of the more serious allegations against her, and given the adversarial nature of the defences, the Second Respondent would struggle to question her — a vulnerable witness under medical evidence and special measures—and that severance was therefore in the interests of all parties.
- 16.3 The Applicant opposed the application, submitting that the entire case had proceeded on the basis of there being a joint hearing, as reflected in the Rule 12 Statement, and that severance would confer no real advantage or avoid prejudice. The Applicant further argued that the Second Respondent's case remained focused on challenging the First Respondent's account and that severance would amount to a further adjournment.

- 16.4 The Tribunal refused the application for a severance of the hearing. In reaching the decision, it noted the submissions made on the behalf of the Applicant and the Second Respondent who opposed the application.
- 16.5 The Tribunal determined that severing the hearing would be contrary to the Overriding Objective, which required that cases are dealt with efficiently and expeditiously as it would require witnesses who were scheduled to give evidence at the present hearing to be recalled for a further hearing.
- 16.6 It concluded that the case against both Respondents arose from the same facts for which they had been jointly referred to the Tribunal by the SRA, and the withdrawal of dishonesty allegations against the First Respondent did not justify a severance of the proceedings.

17. Application to Admit Further Evidence by the First Respondent

- 17.1 The First Respondent applied for permission to adduce her further witness statement dated 24 October 2025, with exhibits, including audio recordings and documents relating to five property transactions involving Orchard Road Reversions Ltd (“ORR”).
- 17.2 She submitted that the evidence demonstrated firm-wide practices in conveyancing and probate, including sales progressed before probate, which were instigated or approved by senior figures. She argued it supported her case that the conduct alleged was systemic and not initiated by her.
- 17.3 The Applicant opposed the application, submitting that the evidence was late, irrelevant to the transactions in issue, and comprised selective recordings lacking context that should have been disclosed earlier. The Second Respondent adopted these submissions.
- 17.4 The Tribunal, exercising its powers under Rule 27(2)(a) SDPR 2019 and having regard to the overriding objective, determined it was not fair or proportionate to admit the statement and exhibits. In coming to this decision, it noted the Second Respondent’s readiness to proceed with the substantive hearing on 22 May 2025, the absence of any prior indication that further evidence was required, and the uncertain provenance of the exhibits. It concluded that admission would risk further applications and undermine fairness and expedition.

18. The First Respondent’s Application to Adduce Bad Character Evidence

- 18.1 The First Respondent applied to adduce misconduct findings against a key witness, Ms Taram Khan, made by the Council for Licensed Conveyancers and the Solicitors Regulation Authority. She submitted that the findings, arising from Ms Khan’s work at the same firm, were relevant to her credibility and reliability.
- 18.2 The Applicant opposed the application, arguing the evidence was inadmissible or of limited relevance, risked unfair prejudice, and could distract from the central issues. The Second Respondent adopted these objections.
- 18.3 The Tribunal exercising its powers under Rule 27(2)(a) of the Solicitors (Disciplinary Proceedings) Rules 2019 and having regard to the overriding objective admitted the

evidence. It found the misconduct findings specific, recent and directly relevant to credibility and permitted cross examination limited to that issue. In coming to the decision, the Tribunal applied established principles set out in *R (Bonhoeffer) v General Medical Council* [2011] EWHC 1585 (Admin) and *R (H) v Nursing and Midwifery Council* [2013] EWHC 4258 (Admin), that relevant and probative evidence of misconduct may be admitted where fairness is preserved by the Tribunal's ability to assess its weight.

18.4 The Tribunal also carefully considered the concerns about prejudice to the Second Respondent, but was satisfied that this could be managed appropriately during the hearing.

19. Withdrawal of the Second Respondent From the Proceedings

19.1 On third day of the hearing, the Second Respondent notified the Tribunal of her withdrawal from the proceedings.

19.2 The hearing was rescheduled, but the Tribunal had refused an adjournment.

19.3 She stated that she felt overwhelmed and distressed, was unable to make submissions effectively, and was concerned about cross-examining her former line manager, a vulnerable witness, without representation. She submitted that these factors made her effective participation impossible.

19.4 The Second Respondent took no further part in the proceedings.

20. Application to Proceed in Absence

20.1 The Applicant, submitted that the Respondent had been served notice of the hearing. She had attended and made an unsuccessful application for the hearing to be adjourned. Following the refusal of that application she chose to withdraw from participation.

20.2 The First Respondent made no submissions on the Application.

20.3 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.

20.4 The Tribunal reminded itself of its overarching statutory objective—protection of the public—and that, in accordance with the Overriding Objective, the fair, economical, and expeditious disposal of allegations is of real importance. In this regard, the Tribunal noted:

(a) The Second Respondent was aware of the hearing, attended the first three days, and was represented by counsel during the last two of those days.

(b) She voluntarily absented herself from the proceedings after the refusal of the adjournment application having received advice from counsel.

- (c) Throughout the proceedings, she had expressed a desire for the matter to be concluded promptly, opposing the First Respondent's earlier adjournment application in May 2025.
- (d) It was expected that the Second Respondent would have resolved issues concerning her representation since the adjournment in May 2025.
- (e) Although the withdrawal of dishonesty allegations altered the case she would have put to the First Respondent, the Tribunal recognised that she might be unrepresented and lacked litigation experience. It would therefore afford her appropriate leeway and assistance, as permissible, to present her case. The Tribunal had allowed the second respondent the assistance of a friend to assist her during the adjourned hearing and would have been willing to grant her such support during the substantive hearing had an application been made.

- 20.5 The Tribunal considered that it would run entirely counter to statutory objective of the protection of the public if a respondent could frustrate the process and challenge a refusal to adjourn by deliberately disengaging.
- 20.6 In reaching its decision the Tribunal also took account of the age of the allegations—arising four years ago—and the availability of witnesses to attend and give evidence.
- 20.7 The Tribunal concluded that any decision other than proceeding with the hearing would effectively undermine the earlier decision of the Tribunal to refuse an adjournment.
- 20.8 Accordingly, the Tribunal granted the application for the hearing to proceed in the absence of the Second Respondent pursuant to Rule 36 of the SDPR.

21. Application for Disclosure

- 21.1 The First Respondent applied for disclosure of five contracts and transfers in unredacted form. The application was made on the basis that the material might reasonably undermine the Applicant's case or assist the Respondent's defence, particularly regarding overreaching and the consistency of names between the contracts of exchange and the Transfers of Whole of Registered Title (TR1s). The Respondent argued that the redactions prevented a proper comparison and that any inconsistency could support her explanation for advising that the matter be escalated to Mr Gunduz Misiri rather than sending the email in question.
- 21.2 The Applicant opposed the application, submitting that the evidence had been reviewed and did not meet the threshold for disclosure. It stated that four of the five transfers were consistent with the contracts or memorandum of exchange, and that the remaining transfer (Z153–Z154) included an additional party, but appeared consistent with the principle of overreaching.
- 21.3 Having considered the general nature of the First Respondent's defence, the Tribunal accepted that the material had the potential to undermine the Applicant's case and therefore directed the Applicant to disclose the transfer at Z153–Z154 in unredacted form. The Tribunal considered this proportionate and necessary to ensure fairness.

Factual Background

22. First Respondent

- 22.1 The First Respondent was admitted as a solicitor on 16 January 2012.
- 22.2 The First Respondent was a fee earner at the Firm, within the property department, from 06 April 2021 until 11 March 2022.
- 22.3 The First Respondent currently holds a practising certificate free from conditions and is currently employed as a solicitor at Pinney Talfourd LLP.

23. The Second Respondent

- 23.1 The Second Respondent is not a solicitor and as an unadmitted person does not appear on the Roll.
- 23.2 The Second Respondent was employed as a paralegal at the Firm, within the property department, until the termination of her employment by the Firm on the grounds of gross misconduct on 12 October 2021.
- 23.3 The Second Respondent is currently employed at Spencer Lockwood Solicitors (a trading name of Ackroyd Legal (London) LLP).

Witnesses

- 24. 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.
- 25. For the avoidance of doubt, the Tribunal had considered all of the documents in the case and made notes of the oral evidence of all witnesses.
- 26. The following witnesses gave oral evidence during the course of the hearing:
 - (a) Mr Gunduz Misiri called by the Applicant;
 - (b) Ms Julie Pryor called by the Applicant;
 - (c) Ms Taram Khan called by the Applicant; and
 - (d) The First Respondent.

Findings of Fact and Law

- 27. 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.
- 28. The absence of any reference to particular evidence in its findings should not be taken as an indication that the Tribunal did not read, hear or consider that evidence.

29. The Tribunal had regard to the following authorities:

- (a) In assessing dishonesty under **Allegations 2.1 , 2.2** the Tribunal applied the test set explained by the Supreme Court at paragraph 74 of *Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd t/a Crockfords* [2017] UKSC 67.
- (b) In relation to lack of integrity in **Allegations 1.1, 1.2, and Allegations 2.1 , 2.2**, the Tribunal applied the test set out at paragraphs 97 to 107 of *Wingate v SRA* [2018] EWCA Civ 366.

30. The Applicant's Case

30.1 The Applicant's case is set out in the Applicant's Rule 12 Statement dated 5 September 2024 which can be found here – [\[Here\]](#)

31. The First Respondent's Case

31.1 The First Respondent's case is set out in her Response to the R12 Statement dated 20 December 2024 which can be found here –[\[Here\]](#)

31.2 The First Respondent provided a Statement dated 17 April 2025 which can be found here –[\[Here\]](#)

31.3 The First Respondent gave evidence during the hearing. In summary she stated:

The 2 King Georges Road Matter

- (a) With regards to 2 King Georges Road, she agreed that she was responsible for Matter, but explained that she believed the necessary documents were in place before exchange. She accepted that she did not check the contract or Transfers of Whole of Registered Title (TR1) thoroughly and acknowledged this as an oversight.
- (b) When asked about delegating the exchange to the Second Respondent, she confirmed that she instructed her to check the file and proceed only if all documents were present. She denied blaming the Second Respondent for the subsequent error, describing it as a miscommunication compounded by departmental pressures.
- (c) She accepted that she referred to deceased individuals as “executors” in correspondence and agreed this could have been clearer. She acknowledged that she did not verify details on the contract before exchange and accepted that this was a failing on her part.
- (d) She further maintained, contrary to what had been asserted by Gunduz Misiri, that on receipt of the email from RCS threatening to report the Firm on 8 October 2021, she emailed him asking how she should resolve the problem and forwarded the email received.

- (e) In relation to the misleading email sent by the Second Respondent to the buyer's solicitors, she denied drafting, authorising, or encouraging the sending of a dishonest email. She stated that after being shown the email she told the Second Respondent to "leave it" and wait for instructions from Gunduz Misiri, the Head of Department.
- (f) She asserted that the Second Respondent said, "someone has to do something" and had acted contrary to her advice.
- (g) She stated that she did not expect the Second Respondent to act contrary to her advice.
- (h) She further stated that the Second Respondent had acted on advice from her colleague, Taram Khan, who suggested that the email could be sent and that the Second Respondent, as a paralegal, could "get away with it."
- (i) She confirmed that she and the Second Respondent had remained in contact after the Second Respondent's dismissal from the Firm. She stated that at one point during their WhatsApp exchange, she had not responded to the invitation to her "to tell the truth" as it was an invitation to lie and she was not prepared to lie, even if it was to preserve their friendship.

The Harrington Road Matter

- (j) With regards to the Harrington Road matter, she explained that she had sent an email to the Second Respondent instructing that the transfer be sent to the buyers solicitors on the Harrington Road transaction which had been completed a while ago. She acknowledged that the Second Respondent had responded to the email by attaching the transfer and seeking guidance which she had not provided prior to the Second Respondent dispatching the misleading email to the Firm's client.
- (k) She accepted that her WhatsApp message saying, "*Well done*" followed by a smiling face emoji and "*you wait till we send out 2 King Georges!*" after being forwarded a copy of the misleading email, reflected her anxiety about departmental chaos and were not endorsements of dishonesty.

32. The Second Respondent's Case

32.1 The Second Respondent's Case is set out in her Response to the R12 Statement which was received by the Tribunal on 12 November 2024 and which can be found here – [\[Here\]](#)

32.2 The Second Respondent gave no oral evidence during the hearing having withdrawn from the proceedings on 12 November 2025:

33. The Tribunals Findings – The First Respondent – Allegations 1.1 – 1.2

33.1 The Tribunal considered the evidence presented on behalf of the Applicant and the First Respondent, including the oral evidence heard and documentary exhibits. It also took into account the relevant provisions of the Principles, the Code and the various authorities provided by the parties.

33.2 The Tribunal applied in all of its reasoning and findings, the burden of proof on the civil standard.

Allegation 1.1

33.3 On 08 October 2021 she caused or allowed an email to be sent to Roberts Crossley Solicitors (“RCS”) which contained information that she knew or ought to have known was misleading;

33.4 Determining this allegation required a close scrutiny of the contemporaneous communications, the witness statements and the oral evidence. Having considered all of these, the Tribunal concluded that Applicant’s witnesses did not materially assist the Tribunal in resolving the central issue. The Tribunal made the following determinations with regards to the evidence of the Applicant’s witnesses:

- (a) Very limited weight, if any, was attached to the evidence of Taram Khan. She had been subject of adverse findings and sanctions for dishonesty in conveyancing transactions around the relevant period, which undermined her reliability as an independent witness of truth. Her account was inconsistent and proved unreliable when tested in cross-examination.
- (b) Julie Prior’s documentary and account of the events of the 8 October 2021, which was not taken any further in oral testimony, was prepared approximately six weeks after the events in question. While it provided narrative context to the investigation of the matter by the Firm it lacked contemporaneity and the absence of supporting documentation rendered it insufficiently reliable.
- (c) Gunduz Misiri’s evidence did not materially assist the Tribunal in determining the central issue. His account, was limited and did not corroborate any version of events.

33.5 The First Respondent under cross examination provided an account that contained some contradictions and inconsistencies but overall, the Tribunal found her to be a broadly credible witness. She accepted a significant failing in relation to supervision and document checking and her concessions were made without any apparent evasion.

33.6 Certain WhatsApp messages, some of which were incomplete, and emails had passed between the First and Second Respondent in the aftermath of the incident. These were unattractive and capable of alternative explanations. However, they were not in the Tribunal’s judgment capable of establishing the Applicant’s case to the requisite standard.

33.7 The contemporaneous emails were examined closely and the following were noted:

- (a) At 15:39hrs on 8 October 2021 RCS had emailed the First Respondent copying in the Second Respondent threatening to report the Firm to the SRA if the signed TR1 was not received by 11 October 2021
- (b) At 15: 41hrs on 8 October 2021 the First Respondent had responded stating she would look into it

- (c) At 16:34hrs an email was sent from the Second Respondent's account stating that the signed contract and transfer had been mistakenly sent to another firm and lost in the post and there had been IT issues within the Firm.
- (d) At 17:18hrs on the 7 October 2021, in response to the email sent in the subject of a separate allegation in the proceedings in which the First Respondent sent an email containing the message: "*you wait till we send out 2 King Georges!*" and the Second Respondent immediately replied "*omg this hasn't gone yet? I'm made anxious about that one too!!*"

33.8 The Tribunal found uncertainty as to what occurred between 15:41hrs and 16:34hrs. Given that the contemporaneous evidence was circumstantial and equivocal, and in light of the weight attached to the First Respondent's tested evidence, the Tribunal was not satisfied to the required standard that she caused or allowed the misleading email to be sent.

33.9 Allegation 1.1 was therefore found not to be proved and was dismissed.

Breaches

33.10 In the light of the factual matrix of allegation 1.1 not being proved, the Tribunal did not proceed to consider any of the breaches alleged.

Allegation 1.2

33.11 On 07 October 2021 caused or allowed an email to be sent to Mr B which she knew or ought to have known was misleading.

33.12 The Tribunal found that None of the Applicant's witnesses addressed this allegation in their oral evidence. The Tribunal therefore relied primarily on the contemporaneous documentary evidence.

33.13 In considering the contemporaneous documentary evidence the Tribunal found the Following:

- (a) At 14.21hrs On 4 October 2021, Gunduz Misiri emailed the First Respondent instructing her to arrange for the TR1 for the Harrington Road transaction to be sent to the buyer's solicitors.
- (b) Shortly after, the First Respondent instructed the Second Respondent to carry out the instructions given to her by Gunduz Misiri.
- (c) The Second Respondent at 15:42hrs responded to the email asking, "*Let me know otherwise can send them to the client now as they have already been drafted in the contract folder (followed by a smiling face emoji).*" She attached the TR1 to the email.
- (d) At 17:15hrs the Second Respondent sent the email to the Mr B (Client B's son) advising him that "*Following completion, unfortunately the buyer's solicitors*

have misplaced you [sic] signed part of the Transfer Deed.” The Second Respondent attached the TR1 for signature.

- (d) The email sent to Mr B was forwarded by the Second Respondent to the First Respondent who at 17:15 responded with the words, “*Well done*” accompanied by a smiling face emoji. The Second Respondent immediately replied with, “*the Maddest anxiety sending this one ha-ha.*”
- (e) The First Respondent sent a further email to the Second Respondent stating, “*you wait till we send out 2 King Georges!*”

33.14 The Tribunal found that beyond the First Respondent’s “*well done*” endorsement of the Second Respondent’s email after it had already been dispatched, and the subsequent “*you wait till we send out 2 King Georges!*” message there was no cogent evidence that established she had caused or allowed the misleading email to be sent by the Second Respondent. The Second Respondent’s messages though disquieting, were inconclusive.

33.15 Accordingly, the Tribunal found that the Allegation had not been proved to the requisite standard and was dismissed.

Breaches

33.16 In the light of the factual matrix of allegation 1.2 not being proved, the Tribunal did not proceed to consider any of the breaches alleged.

34. The Tribunals Findings – The Second Respondent – Allegations 2.1 – 2.2

Allegation 2.1 - On 08 October 2021 caused or allowed an email to be sent to Roberts Crossley Solicitors (“RCS”) which contained information that she knew or ought to have known was misleading.

34.1 The Second Respondent disengaged from the proceedings and did not give oral evidence. Her written statements were not tested in cross-examination and were afforded limited weight. The Tribunal therefore relied on the uncontested facts and the documentary evidence in reaching the following conclusions:

- (a) After the First Respondent had responded to the RCS at 15:41hrs stating that she would look into the matter of the TR1 that had not been received, at approximately 16:23hrs the Second Respondent sent a WhatsApp message to Gunduz Misiri, forwarding the RCS email and asking for guidance. Gunduz Misiri was on annual leave and did not respond.
- (b) At 16:34hrs on 8 October 2021 the Second Respondent emailed RCS from her own account stating that the signed contract and TR1 had been sent to another Firm and lost in the post and that the Firm had suffered an IT crash.
- (c) The assertions made by the Second Respondent in that email that were both false and misleading.

34.2 Accordingly, the Tribunal found Allegation 2.1 to be proved to the requisite Standard

Breaches

34.3 As a consequence of the Tribunal's findings in respect of Allegation 2.1, the Tribunal found the Second Respondent to be in breach Principle 2 of the Principles (failing to uphold public trust and Confidence in the profession);

34.4 The Tribunal applied the test outlined in *Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd t/a Crockfords* [2017] UKSC 67 and found:

- (a) That the Second Respondent knew at the time that she sent the email from her account that:
 - (i) There was no signed transfer on the file received from the executors and that the grant of probate had not yet been issued;
 - (ii) The assertions in the email that the TR1 had been sent to the wrong Firm of solicitors and lost in the post was false;
 - (iii) The Email was a deliberate attempt to mislead RCS and conceal errors that had been made on the file by the First Respondent and herself;
- (b) That ordinary decent people would regard the contents of and the action of sending the email to be dishonest.

34.5 Accordingly, the Tribunal found that the Respondent had breached Principle 4 of the Principles to the requisite Standard.

34.6 The Tribunal further found on the balance of probabilities having due regard to the *Wingate v SRA* [2018] EWCA Civ 366 that by her conduct, the Second Respondent lacked integrity and was therefore breached Principle 5 of the SRA Principles.

Allegation 2.2 - On 07 October 2021 caused or allowed an email to be sent to Mr B which she knew or ought to have known was misleading.

34.7 The Tribunal therefore relied entirely on the contemporaneous documentary evidence and uncontested facts and found as follows:

- (a) On receipt of instructions from the First Respondent instructing her to arrange for the transfer to be sent to the buyer's solicitor, the Second Respondent responded sending the First Respondent an 15:42hrs enclosing the TR1 asking for guidance.
- (b) At 17:15hrs the Second Respondent emailed Mr B informing him that the buyer's solicitors stating that "*Following completion, unfortunately the buyer's solicitors have misplaced you (sic) signed part of the Transfer Deed*" and requesting that his mother (the Firm's client) sign the TR1 attached.

- (c) The First Respondent, who was copied into the email, responded with a “*well Done*”, accompanied by a smiling face emoji.
- (d) The Second Respondent replied to the endorsement by the First Respondent by stating, “*maddest anxiety sending this one ha-ha.*”
- (e) The First Respondent then emailed the Second Respondent stating, “*You wait till we send out 2 King Georges,*” to which she replied “*omg this hasn't gone yet? I'm mad anxious about that one too!!*”

34.8 The Tribunal found to the requisite standard that the Second Respondent sent the email knowing that it contained false or misleading information.

Breaches

34.9 As a consequence of the Tribunal’s findings in respect of Allegation 2.2, the Tribunal found the Second Respondent to be in breach Principle 2 of the Principles (failing to uphold public trust and Confidence in the profession).

34.10 The Tribunal applied the test outlined in *Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd t/a Crockfords* [2017] UKSC 67 and found:

- (a) At the time that The Second Respondent sent the email to Mr B for his mother to sign the TR1 Form the Second Respondent knew that:
 - (i) There had never been a signed transfer deed by Client B;
 - (iii) The buyers solicitors had not misplaced the transfer deed because they had never received it from the Firm;
 - (vi) The email was sent to Mr B to conceal errors on the file made by the First and Second Respondent.
- (b) That ordinary decent people would regard the contents of and the action of sending the email to be dishonest.

34.11 Accordingly the Tribunal found that the Respondent had breached Principle 4 of the SRA Principles.

34.12 The Tribunal further found on the balance of probabilities having due regard to *Wingate v SRA* [2018] EWCA Civ 366 that by her conduct, the Second Respondent lacked integrity and was therefore breached Principle 5 of the Principles.

Previous Disciplinary Matters

35. The First Respondent has no regulatory findings on her record.

36. The Second Respondent has no regulatory findings on her record.

Mitigation

37. No mitigation was considered on behalf of the Second Respondent as she had withdrawn from the proceedings.

Sanction

38. The Tribunal referred to its Guidance Note on Sanctions (11th Edition February 2025) when considering sanction 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.

39. In determining the appropriate sanction in respect of the Second Respondent, the Tribunal's role was to evaluate the gravity of the proven misconduct and impose a penalty that was fair and proportionate to the circumstances. In assessing the seriousness of the misconduct, the Tribunal considered the Respondent's level of culpability and the harm caused, alongside any aggravating or mitigating factors

40. The Tribunal found both the culpability and harm of the Second Respondent's conduct to be high. She had direct control over the circumstances giving rise to repeated misconduct within a short period of time. The misconduct in question involved a breach of trust in lying to solicitors in one incident, and lying to a client's relative about solicitors in the other. The aggravating feature involved in both incidents was the Second Respondent's deliberate dishonesty.

41. The Tribunal had regard to the comments of Lord Bingham in *Bolton v Law Society* [1994] 1WLR 512 at paragraph 14:

"It is required of lawyers practising in this country that they should discharge their professional duties with integrity, probity and complete trustworthiness...Any solicitor who is shown to have discharged his professional duties with anything less than complete integrity, probity and trustworthiness must expect severe sanctions to be imposed upon him by the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal. Lapses from the required high standard may, of course, take different forms and be of varying degrees. The most serious involves proven dishonesty, whether or not leading to criminal proceedings and criminal penalties. In such cases the tribunal has almost invariably, no matter how strong the mitigation advanced for the solicitor, ordered that he be struck off the Roll of Solicitors."

42. The Tribunal determined that all those involved in the administration and delivery of legal services—including unadmitted persons—must act with complete probity, honesty, and integrity. These standards are essential to maintaining public confidence in the reputation of the legal profession.

43. The Tribunal keeping in mind the purpose of imposing sanction, determined that the public interest required protection by the imposition of an Order pursuant to s.43 of the Solicitors Act 1974 on the Second Respondent. The order was to be for an indefinite duration.

Costs

44. Mr Colledge made an application for costs in the sum of £54,147.50 as set out in the costs schedule dated 4 November 2025. He sought a joint and several order against both Respondents for the sum claimed which reflected a fixed fee of £37,900 plus VAT. He also explained that the sum included investigation costs of £6,487.
45. Mr Colledge submitted that the prosecution against both Respondents had been reasonably and properly brought and despite the findings of the Tribunal against the First Respondent not determinative of misconduct, the Applicant should not be exposed to the risk of non-recovery of its costs.
46. On behalf of the First Respondent, Mr McDonagh argued that not only had the dishonesty allegations been withdrawn at the outset, but at the end of the hearing the First Respondent had been exonerated of all of matters alleged against her. He submitted that in the circumstances, the Tribunal should apply the principle that costs follow the event and determine that no order for costs should be made against the First Respondent.
47. The Tribunal considered its powers Pursuant to Rule 43(1) of the Solicitors (Disciplinary Proceedings) Rules 2019 (“the SDPR”), to make such order as to costs as it thinks fit, including the payment by any party of costs or a contribution towards costs, in such amount (if any) as it considers reasonable.
48. In accordance with Rule 43(4) of the SDPR, the Tribunal considered all of the relevant circumstances when determining the issue of costs and in particular found the following to be relevant to the determination of costs of this case:
 - (a) the proportionality and reasonableness of the time spent and costs claimed; and
 - (b) the means of the Respondent.
49. The Tribunal had due regard to the principle in *Baxendale Walker v The Law Society* [2007] that the usual rule that “costs follow the event” does not apply directly to disciplinary proceedings against a solicitor. It accepted that the fixed fee increase arising from the Applicant’s reclassification of the case due to its complexity was justified. Accordingly, the Tribunal concluded that the costs claimed for the hearing, extended from four to six days, were reasonable and proportionate.
50. In determining quantum, the Tribunal noted the Second Respondent’s statement of means. She had no assets and substantial liabilities, including loans, and recognised that, as a result of the order imposed, she would no longer be able to pursue a career in law. However, given the findings of dishonesty against her, it was determined that she bear some responsibility for the costs claimed. The Tribunal also noted that the First Respondent had been represented by her solicitors pro bono as a result of financial difficulties and was in significant debt which involved the remortgage of her residence.
51. Accordingly, the Tribunal adjusted the costs claimed ordering that the First Respondent to pay the sum of £10,000 and the Second Respondent to pay the sum of £4,500

Statement of Full Order

The First Respondent

52. The Tribunal ORDERED that the allegations against JOANNE ELIZABETH TAPPIN be DISMISSED. The Tribunal further ORDERED that the Respondent pay the costs of and incidental to this application and enquiry fixed in the sum of £10,000.00.

The Second Respondent

53. The Tribunal ORDERED that as from 17 November 2025 except in accordance with Law Society permission: -

- (i) no solicitor shall employ or remunerate, in connection with his practice as a solicitor RIA LAKHANI ;
- (ii) no employee of a solicitor shall employ or remunerate, in connection with the solicitor's practice the said Ria Lakhani;
- (iii) no recognised body shall employ or remunerate the said Ria Lakhani;
- (iv) no manager or employee of a recognised body shall employ or remunerate the said Ria Lakhani in connection with the business of that body;
- (v) no recognised body or manager or employee of such a body shall permit the said Ria Lakhani to be a manager of the body;
- (vi) no recognised body or manager or employee of such a body shall permit the said Ria Lakhani to have an interest in the body;

5.31 The Tribunal further Ordered that the said Ria Lakhani do pay the costs of and incidental to this application and enquiry fixed in the sum of £4,500.00

Dated this 17th day of December 2025
On behalf of the Tribunal

G. Sydenham

G. Sydenham
Chair