

Annual assessment of continuing competence 2025

28 July 2025

Our role is to protect the public. One way we do this is to seek assurance that all solicitors are competent to provide good quality legal services when they qualify and throughout their careers. We also require firms we regulate to make sure solicitors they employ are competent to provide the services they offer.

We require solicitors to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. To do this, we expect them to regularly reflect on their practice. Reflection promotes meaningful learning and development. By thinking critically about their practice, solicitors can remain competent by identifying and then addressing all their learning and development needs.

Since 2023, we have published an annual report sharing our insights into how solicitors are keeping their knowledge and skills up to date to maintain their competence.

Each report is designed to drive positive learning and development behaviour. We highlight examples of good practice, as well as challenges some face. We encourage solicitors and firms to consider our findings carefully and assess potential risks to how they maintain their competence.

In this 2025 report, we present our findings and analysis from the last 12 months and outline the action we will take in response. We also set out what we expect solicitors and firms to do in response to the report.

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Headline findings

Our monitoring shows that most solicitors keep their knowledge and skills up to date. From the sample of solicitors and firms we engaged with over the last 12 months, we also know that most firms have effective systems and controls in place. And that the solicitors they employ are competent and capable of delivering good quality legal services.

We have seen excellent examples of solicitors demonstrating the learning and development behaviours we expect to see. This includes regularly reflecting on all aspects of their roles and recording the outcome. We also see many solicitors carrying out a wide range of activities to address their identified learning and development needs.

The public, clients, and other stakeholders can report concerns to us about a solicitor or firm. These reports can arise for various reasons—for example, alleged delays in handling a matter or concerns about a solicitor's conduct or competence.

Our Statement of Solicitor Competence outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours we expect of solicitors. Given the broad scope it encompasses, it is likely that issues of competence will be reflected in many of the reports we receive.



We have analysed the reports we received from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2024 to help us identify competence risks and challenges across the profession. This data includes reasons why the report was made.

The total number of reports we received increased from 11,177 in 2023 to 12,046 in 2024.

Our analysis shows that there was a decrease in reports received for some areas of law during this period. These included residential conveyancing and commercial law.

However, there was also an increase for some areas of law compared with the previous year. Criminal and civil law are examples of where there were notable increases. We will now explore the findings in more detail to understand if and how solicitors practising in these areas are maintaining their competence.

We have also identified wider shortcomings in how some solicitors approach their obligation to maintain their competence. These include solicitors not fully reflecting on all aspects of their practice and limited awareness and use of our warning notices and guidance in maintaining competence. We outline in this report how we will address these issues.

How we seek assurance that solicitors and firms maintain their competence

Our approach to continuing competence is designed to make sure solicitors and firms take ownership and responsibility for keeping their skills and knowledge up to date.

We do this by:

- defining competence – we outline the required skills, knowledge, and behaviours in our [Statement of Solicitor Competence](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/competence-statement/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/competence-statement/], which we assess before solicitors are admitted through the Solicitors Qualifying Examination
- setting standards – our [Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-solicitors/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-solicitors/] requires solicitors to maintain their competence. Similarly, our [Code of Conduct for Firms](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-firms/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-firms/] requires regulated firms to make sure their solicitors and employees keep their knowledge and skills up to date
- annual declarations – solicitors must confirm each year when renewing their practising certificate that they have reflected on their practice and addressed any learning and development needs. We monitor compliance and may prevent a solicitor from practising unsupervised if they do not confirm that they have done this.

We do not prescribe how a solicitor or firm should meet their continuing competence obligations. We do, however, outline our expectations in our [resources](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/understanding-continuing-competence/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/understanding-continuing-competence/] and through our [warning notices and guidance](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/topic/all-topics/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/topic/all-topics/].

To assess whether these obligations are being met, we carry out a programme of monitoring work, including:



- Thematic reviews and inspections – we conduct targeted reviews and inspections when we have concerns about competence in specific areas of practice or types of practice settings. We look at how firms' approach training and supervision and evaluate how they make sure their solicitors remain competent. Over the past year, we undertook thematic reviews on areas identified in our [2024 annual competence assessment \[https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/annual-assessment-continuing-competence-2024/\]](https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/annual-assessment-continuing-competence-2024/) – family law and landlord and tenant law. We will publish these reviews later this year. We have also completed a thematic review to explore how compliance officers for legal practice (COLPs) approach their roles and responsibilities. This is following a commitment in our 2024 annual assessment of competence and will be published over the next 12 months.
- Ongoing inspections for anti-money laundering compliance – we run a rolling programme of inspections to assess how well firms are complying with anti-money laundering regulations.
- Review of training records – we examine a sample of solicitors' records to determine:
 - whether they are engaging in learning and development activities.
 - the types of learning and development being undertaken.
 - the extent to which they are meeting our expectations, such as regularly reflecting on their practice.

Over the last 12 months, we have reviewed training records or other learning development evidence from a sample of solicitors providing family law and landlord and tenant law. We will publish our findings and next steps over the next 12 months.

- Horizon scanning – through our horizon scanning programme, we monitor developments and identify emerging risks to competence.
- Ongoing engagement with stakeholders to identify competence concerns.
- Regular analysis of data we hold relating to competence concerns and risks.

Where we identify concerns that a solicitor or firm is not meeting our requirements, we take appropriate action. The nature of our response – and any sanctions imposed – depends on the seriousness of the issue and any mitigating or aggravating factors.

Our actions may include:

- early intervention – where we identify potential or emerging competence issues, we may engage with a solicitor or firm to influence behaviour before problems escalate
- publishing guidance and notices – we issue guidance, warning notices and other resources to clarify our expectations. We also contact solicitors and firms directly to remind them of their competence obligations
- enforcement measures – when we determine that a solicitor or firm is not meeting the competence requirements, we may:
 - require additional training, remediation, or supervision arrangements
 - impose interim conditions or restrictions to prevent the solicitor or firm from delivering certain services.

Our approach to continuing competence

We regularly review our approach and assess evidence from our monitoring work to help us understand if it continues to drive the learning behaviours we expect to



see. And whether we need to provide further support to solicitors and firms to help them meet their obligations.

We have evidence from our monitoring to suggest that most solicitors and firms take steps to maintain their competence. They reflect on all aspects of their practice and address identified learning and development needs. And we know that they record their reflection and the learning and development they have completed.

However, this is not always the case. We know there are wider shortcomings in how some solicitors maintain their competence. The consistency with which we find these issues suggests our current approach is not driving the learning and development behaviours we expect to see for some solicitors. This means some are failing to meet their continuing competence requirements.

The consistent challenges from some solicitors we have identified include:

- not making time to reflect effectively or not reflecting on all aspects of their practice. As a result, there is a risk that some solicitors do not identify all their learning and development needs
- focussing their learning and development on maintaining their technical legal knowledge rather than other areas of their practice that may be required to maintain their competence
- not regularly carrying out learning and development to understand, develop and uphold their ethical and professional duties.

We have already taken steps over the last 12 months to address a number of these issues. We outline these below.

However, given this evidence, we now think there is more we can do to address these issues. We will consult on proposals to strengthen our continuing competence requirements. These will look to further embed and drive the learning and development behaviours we expect to see.

Steps taken in the last 12 months to address issues we have identified

Increased communications

We have continued to use our communication channels to remind and support solicitors and firms about their continuing competence obligations. We have:

- regularly reminded solicitors of their regulatory obligation and provided links to our continuing competence resources in our profession wide communications. There have been more than 234,000 visits to our resources in the last 12 months. There has been a higher-than-average time spent on these resources when compared to other parts of our website
- delivered a social media campaign to increase awareness of solicitors' continuing competence requirements. We have seen a 158 per cent increase in web traffic to our continuing competence resources over the last 12 months
- contacted all firms providing [probate services following completion of our training record review and thematic review](https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/probate-training-records-review/#:~:text=Probate%20law%20can%20be%20complex,and%20skills%20up%20to%20date.) [https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/probate-training-records-review/#:~:text=Probate%20law%20can%20be%20complex,and%20skills%20up%20to%20date.] . We reminded them of relevant warning notices and guidance, their



obligation to supervise their employees and that solicitors they employ need to maintain their competence.

At our annual Compliance Officers Conference in 2024, we delivered a session outlining our continuing competence requirements and how solicitors and firms are or are not meeting them. Several firms also explained how they make sure their solicitors remain competent. More than 350 compliance officers and solicitors attended this session. There were also more than 750 virtual views of the session.

We will also be contacting all firms providing family law and landlord and tenant law following publication of our training record review and thematic reviews. We will draw attention to the findings and remind them of their, and their solicitors', continuing competence obligations.

Responding to the declaration made by solicitors when renewing their practising certificate

In autumn 2024, we strengthened the declaration solicitors must make when renewing their practising certificate. This requires solicitors to confirm that they:

- are up to date with all legal, ethical, and regulatory obligations relevant to their role
- have reflected on their practice and addressed any identified learning and development needs
- are competent to perform their role.

This is an important regulatory declaration. If a solicitor fails to confirm they meet the new requirements, we may impose a condition on their practising certificate that prevents them from practising unsupervised.

To have this condition removed, the solicitor must provide evidence – subject to our assessment – that they have maintained their competence and understand their professional obligations.

We identified 16 solicitors from the 2024 practising certificate renewals who did not confirm they had met the requirements of the declaration. We contacted these solicitors, and as a result, imposed conditions to restrict the practice of 10 solicitors who did not assure us they were maintaining their competence.

Responding to competence concerns

We continue to follow up on competence-related reports made to us that do not meet our threshold for enforcement action. This is in addition to investigating the most serious cases reported to us.

Over the last 12 months, we have assessed 78 competence reports that did not meet our threshold for enforcement and engaged with each firm named in the report. We have required them to either make a declaration that:

- they have taken steps to address the issue or
- the firm's managers and employees involved in delivering the work outlined in the report have the required professional knowledge and skills to carry out their roles.



We monitor our reports to identify if we receive further competence reports about the firms we have engaged with.

We outline this strengthened approach in our updated [Competence Topic Guide](https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/sra-enforcement-strategy/enforcement-practice/competence-standard-service/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/sra-enforcement-strategy/enforcement-practice/competence-standard-service/], published in November 2024.

Proactive thematic work

Understanding if the root cause of an alleged lack of competence is more widespread within a firm is key to our work. We now use findings from our ongoing work to proactively engage with a firm where we have a competence concern. We engage to understand how they make sure that the solicitors they employ are competent.

Over the last 12 months, we have engaged with 36 firms in this context. This work is ongoing. Where we identify that a firm is not meeting our standards, we work with them to bring them into compliance. We will take enforcement action against those who fail to respond to our engagement activity.

Engagement with COLPs

COLPs play a key role in disseminating our resources, warning notices and guidance. Understanding and applying these can help solicitors keep their knowledge and skills up to date including their ethical and professional duties.

We previously said in our 2024 annual assessment of competence that we would engage with COLPs to better understand any challenges they face in raising awareness of, disseminating, and encouraging use of, these resources. We held several workshops and meetings with COLPs to understand the issues they face and provide the opportunity for them to share approaches on addressing some of the challenges they face.

We have also carried out a thematic review looking at how compliance officers carry out their role and any challenges they face supporting continuing competence in their firms. We have used findings from the review to inform this report.

Through our recent consultation on [client money in legal services](https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/client-money-legal-services/?s=c) [https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/client-money-legal-services/?s=c], we sought views from COLPs on whether we should develop a support package for compliance officers. This would potentially help to improve the effectiveness and impact of their role.

We engaged with COLPs through meetings and online events. We will publish our response at a future date. But we recognise the support from COLPs to produce a support package and will continue to work with them to explore how this could work.

Updated resources

Over the last 12 months, we have worked with solicitors and firms to understand if our [continuing competence resources](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/reflect-identify/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/reflect-identify/] help increase understanding of, and compliance with, our requirements. We have also



gathered views on whether there are any other issues relating to maintaining competence on which we can provide support.

We have updated our resources as a result. This includes:

- clarifying who our requirements apply ie solicitors working overseas
- the steps a solicitor must take to keep their knowledge and skills up to date, for example, reflecting on all aspects of practice.

We have also reiterated the importance of understanding and applying warning notices and guidance in keeping ethical and professional obligations up to date. We included video content from our 2024 Compliance Officers Conference, where firms shared how they embed ethics learning and development within their firms.

We will continue to engage with solicitors and firms to understand whether we should do more to support them to meet their continuing competence requirements.

Clarifying regulatory obligations

We also continue to outline a solicitor's obligations. And how they can comply with them, to practice risks we have identified that may be associated with a potential lack of competence.

We do this by publishing warning notices and guidance. We expect all solicitors to identify, understand and apply any guidance or warning notices we have issued that relates to their work.

A key focus over the last 12 months has been to help solicitors and firms understand their regulatory and professional obligations. And how to comply with them in relation to claims management activity. We have issued:

- a warning notice in relation to [high-financial services claims](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/high-volume-financial-service-claims/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/high-volume-financial-service-claims/]
- guidance outlining the [professional duties and key risks for solicitors, law firms and their employees when representing clients during claims](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/claims-management-activity/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/claims-management-activity/]
- guidance for solicitors and for firms when [representing clients during claims for financial services or products](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/representing-clients-during-claims-for-financial-services-or-products/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/representing-clients-during-claims-for-financial-services-or-products/]
- guidance for solicitors and firms to remind them of their regulatory responsibilities and obligations when [marketing their services to members of the public](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/topic/all-topics/?Sort=Last+updated&Sort=Last+updated&query=&year=2024). [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/topic/all-topics/?Sort=Last+updated&Sort=Last+updated&query=&year=2024]

We know high volume consumer claims is an area of ongoing concern and have continued to monitor this closely. We said previously we would carry out a thematic review to develop our understanding of the work being undertaken by solicitors in this market and its associated risks. We have completed this work and will publish this report and our next steps later this year.

We have also issued other guidance documents over the last 12 months. These provide clarity to solicitors and firms on our rules and how they can meet them and cover a range of topics, including:



- [a suite of documents \[https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/identifying-client-working-in-house-guidance/\]](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/identifying-client-working-in-house-guidance/) to support solicitors working in-house
- the steps solicitors and firms can take to protect themselves from [sham litigation \[https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/sham-litigation/\]](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/sham-litigation/)
- how to understand and manage regulatory risks and issues associated with conducting an [internal investigation \[https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/internal-investigations/\]](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/guidance/internal-investigations/).

Areas of law we will focus on over the next 12 months

We analysed our data to identify increases in the number of reports we received over the last 12 months.

We have also drawn on broader information we hold to inform our approach. This includes potential consumer vulnerability, feedback from stakeholders and the risk of harm arising from a lack of competence. We analysed these reports to identify prevalent competence risks and themes.

We have now identified the areas on which we will focus our efforts to assess whether solicitors are maintaining their competence, and to take appropriate action if we find they are not.

Reports relating to criminal law

There was a 28% increase in the number of competence-related reports we received in 2024 when compared with 2023.

We found that the reports we received relating to a lack of competence in this area of law most commonly included:

- inadequate case preparation
- failure to explain legal processes or outcomes clearly, for example, the consequences of pleading guilty
- failure to identify and accommodate clients' mental health conditions, learning disabilities, or those who were otherwise vulnerable.

A small number of reports also referred to solicitors giving incorrect legal advice to clients.

Criminal law is a high-risk area of legal practice. Poor representation or advice can lead to wrongful convictions, missed opportunities for appeal, delays or adjournments to hearings or clients unknowingly waiving their rights.

Consumers, even the most sophisticated and empowered clients, can be vulnerable when they are dealing with critical, often life-changing and distressing circumstances. With so much at stake, it is crucial that solicitors' practice is of a high standard.

Reports relating to civil law

There was a 25% increase in the number of competence-related reports we received in 2024 when compared with 2023.

We found that the reports we received relating to a lack of competence in this area of law most commonly included:



- clients receiving advice that was unclear or not tailored to their situation
- inadequate representation in court
- procedural failures including inadequate case preparation and failure to comply with court directions.

Civil law includes a wide range of areas of law, offences and activities with outcomes that can harm the client, another person and/or their rights or property. Consumers involved in civil law matters are often vulnerable because the legal issues involved are complex, emotional and highly stressful. It is vital therefore that solicitors practising in this area are competent to do so.

Our next steps

Criminal and civil law

We already have in place mechanisms to help solicitors practising criminal and civil law meet the standard of competence we require. These include:

- outlining our expectations for [good practice](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/good-practice-guide/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/good-practice-guide/] for solicitors practising in youth courts
- providing [resources](https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/specific-areas-of-practice/about-resources/) [https://update.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/specific-areas-of-practice/about-resources/] to help solicitors to improve their advocacy skills.
- requiring solicitors to pass the criminal and civil Higher Rights of Audience assessments before they can practice advocacy in the higher courts. We recently updated the standards for the assessments, and we are strengthening the arrangements for these assessments by [moving to a single assessment provider](https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/changes-regulations-hra/?s=0) [https://update.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/changes-regulations-hra/?s=0]
- ongoing monitoring of the assessments delivered by approved Police Station Representative Accreditation Scheme providers.

We will now deliver a package of work to understand if criminal and civil law solicitors are taking appropriate steps to keep their knowledge and skills and understanding of their legal, ethical, and regulatory obligations up to date.

This includes:

- reviewing a sample of training records of criminal and civil law solicitors. We will focus on understanding if solicitors are reflecting on their practice and carrying out learning and development. We will look at the extent to which solicitors are carrying out learning and development in relation to maintaining their knowledge and skills about vulnerable clients. We will publish our findings and any next steps by the end of 2026
- engaging with firms, stakeholders, representative groups and consumer bodies in these areas to further understand if the issues we have identified are widespread and the impact on consumers of a lack of competence. We will complete this by the end of 2026
- exploring how we can work more collaboratively with other organisations to better share intelligence and data on competence issues they may be aware of. We will carry this out by the end of 2025.

We will also use our ongoing communications and engagement work to remind solicitors and firms providing these services of their continuing competence obligations.

Our work will help us better understand the extent to which solicitors providing these services are maintaining their competence. We will use our findings to consider if there is a need for further action or regulation in relation to these areas of law.

We will take action where we identify a solicitor who is not meeting their competence requirements.

Shortcomings solicitors and firms face in meeting their competence obligations

We have identified wider shortcomings in how some solicitors and firms maintain their competence. We are considering how best we address these as part of our review of our continuing competence arrangements.

Solicitors and firms should consider whether the challenges identified are relevant to them and, if so, take steps to address them.

Using our warning notices and guidance to support ongoing competence and compliance

We require solicitors to act honestly and with integrity, in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. To do this, solicitors have a responsibility to identify, understand, and apply relevant SRA principles, rules of professional conduct and any guidance or warning notices related to their work.

What we found

We considered a range of information to understand the extent to which solicitors meet this requirement. This includes findings from:

- our thematic reviews carried out over the last 12 months
- our landlord and tenant and family law training record reviews
- wider data we hold
- engagement with solicitors and firms.

We found examples of good awareness and use of our resources, guidance and warning notices amongst some solicitors and firms to support their ongoing learning and development.

However, this was not always the case. We know that there is limited engagement and application of our warning notices and guidance from some solicitors. Some firms also rely overly on COLPs to distribute or provide access to warning notices and guidance we have issued.

Some solicitors have also told us they do not always engage with our warning notices and guidance because they are difficult to locate on our website. And some solicitors say they are not confident they have found all warning notices and guidance relevant to them.

What we will do next

We already use a range of approaches to promote our warning notices and guidance to solicitors and firms and to understand if they have been used as part of maintaining their competence. These include:



- requiring solicitors to declare they have an up to date understanding of the legal, ethical and regulatory obligations relevant to their role when renewing their practising certificate
- highlighting all new and updated guidance and warning notices in our SRA Update enewsletter, in social media posts, on high-level website pages
- highlighting new guidance and warning notices in news releases
- using search engine optimisation measures to make sure guidance and warning notices are easy to find using public search engines
- using a search taxonomy which was designed with input from solicitors that is applied to all SRA web content, including guidance and warning notices.

Solicitors must comply with their regulatory obligations to keep their professional knowledge up to date. One way they can do this is to identify and apply to their work relevant warning notices and guidance we have issued.

We recognise some solicitors have reported difficulties identifying all relevant warning notices and guidance. We want to further increase awareness and application. Over the next 12 months, we will explore:

- piloting persona-based pages on our website to display an overview of, and links to, key warning notices, guidance and compliance information for that persona. If we adopt this approach, we will initially pilot this for sole practitioners and in-house solicitors
- working with compliance and training organisations and the Law Society to alert them to new warning notices and guidance we have issued. This could include setting up a subscription service where compliance organisations are alerted when we issue new or make substantive amendments to existing warning notices or guidance
- engaging with solicitors and COLPs through our reference and working groups when drafting and naming our warning notices to better title our warning notices and guidance to improve recognition and searchability.

We will also strengthen our approaches to our training record reviews to understand if solicitors have incorporated warning notices and guidance into their learning and development.

Narrow reflection and learning and development

Reflection is key to being a competent solicitor as it enables learning and development needs to be identified and addressed. We expect solicitors to regularly reflect on their practice. This involves thinking about their practice, gathering feedback, identifying their strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement.

We also expect solicitors to reflect on and keep their understanding of professional obligations and ethical competence up to date.

Our Statement of Solicitor Competence outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours that solicitors must demonstrate upon qualification and maintain throughout their careers. It covers key areas of practice such as ethics, professionalism and judgment, technical legal practice, collaboration and workload management.

Solicitors can use this as a tool to help direct their reflection to consider all aspects of their practice. And to make sure they have identified all learning and development needs.



What we found

There is evidence from our training record and thematic reviews to suggest that some solicitors are regularly reflecting on all aspects of their practice. For example, some solicitors had clearly documented that they had reflected on all aspects of their practice by using the statement to identify learning and development needs.

We also found evidence to suggest that some solicitors were regularly reflecting on their professional and ethical obligations when considering how they maintain their competence. There were some examples of good awareness and application of our resources, guidance and warning notices to support their learning and development.

The most common approaches we found used by solicitors over the last 12 months to reflect on their practice and identify learning and development needs included one or more of:

- self-analysis of their strengths and weaknesses
- identifying changes in the law or procedures relating to their specific area of practice
- reviewing client files or case discussion
- considering feedback from colleagues, supervisors, judges or clients.

Almost all the training records we reviewed demonstrated that solicitors had completed at least one learning and development activity to maintain their competence. Many solicitors completed multiple learning and development activities. For example, we sampled the records of 108 solicitors as part of our family law review. Between them they had completed 1,471 learning and development activities between 1 January and 6 December 2024.

The most common approaches used to address learning and development needs identified over the last 12 months were:

- using self-study materials, for example, reading books and articles
- completing an online course
- attending a conference or seminar.

However, it was unclear from most of the evidence whether the learning and development activities had been informed by meaningful reflection on all aspects of their practice.

A significant proportion of evidence provided simply listed the learning and development activity carried out and the date it was completed. This does not provide us with appropriate assurance that solicitors are taking steps needed to fully reflect on their practice.

We also found that there was a narrow focus to the learning and development carried out by some solicitors. For most evidence, learning and development was focused on maintaining technical legal knowledge rather than other areas that may be relevant to performing their role competently.

There was limited evidence to suggest that solicitors were regularly carrying out learning and development to keep their understanding of their ethical and professional obligations up to date.

What we will do next

Solicitors must maintain their competence. One way a solicitor can achieve this is to make sure that they are up to date with all legal, ethical, and regulatory obligations relevant to their role.

We require solicitors to confirm that they are up to date when they renew their practising certificate. This is an important regulatory declaration.

We recognise that there are some solicitors who regularly reflect on all aspects of their practice and address their identified learning and development needs.

However, given the evidence we have found, there is more we can do to drive the learning and development behaviours we expect to see. Over the next 12 months, we will:

- consult on strengthened continuing competence requirements with a particular focus on reflection and maintaining professional ethics obligations
- seek further assurances from solicitors we identified through our training record reviews who simply listed training activities and did not provide us with sufficient assurance they are maintaining their competence. We will explain what we expect in a training record and understand the steps they are taking to maintain their competence. We will also contact their firm to understand how they maintain competence of their solicitors
- update our guidance for when solicitors renew their practising certificate, so they are clear that when confirming that they reflected on their practice they need to consider if they have reflected on all aspects of their practice.