

News release

Independent report finds complex picture behind overrepresentation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic solicitors in our enforcement processes

31 October 2024

An [independent report](https://publications.sra.org.uk/overrepresentation-of-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-solicitors/) [https://publications.sra.org.uk/overrepresentation-of-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-solicitors/] into the overrepresentation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic solicitors in the early stages of our enforcement process has found a complex issue with no single or simple solution.

Research by a consortium of the Universities of York, Lancaster and Cardiff provides fresh insight into understanding the factors which affect these overrepresentations, but the picture is complex. The study found that some factors intersect with ethnicity, including the size of the firm where the solicitor works and the firm's practice area. These affect but do not fully account for the overrepresentation seen, and the relationship between these factors is complex and difficult to unpick.

In their review of our assessment processes, the universities concluded that our approaches are, for the most part, as robust as they can be and are designed to ensure fairness and consistency in decision making.

Paul Philip, Chief Executive of the SRA, said: 'This research confirms that the overrepresentation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic solicitors in our enforcement processes is a multifaceted issue, influenced by a range of factors. We are committed to taking meaningful action to address this issue and to work collaboratively with others, across the sector and beyond, to ensure fairness for all solicitors.'

'We are reassured that the researchers did not find any evidence of direct bias within our processes, but recognise there are actions we can take to review our approach further.'

A spokesperson for the universities commented: 'Our research reveals a number of concerning trends in relation to the overrepresentation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic solicitors in enforcement processes. The research shows that combinations of factors, many of which relate to the context in which a solicitor practises, result in a disproportionate number of reports both being submitted to the Solicitors Regulation Authority and progressed to investigation. We have also used our findings to identify a number of areas to be considered as part of future action to address the concerning trends.'

In response to the report, we outlined a range of measures aimed at addressing the underlying issues. These include:

- More effectively tailoring compliance and support materials to smaller and one partner firms, in light of the challenges they might face.
- Building on the strengths identified in our assessment process by developing guidance for staff on handling complex borderline cases and taking forward a process for improving the systematic recording of relevant information.
- Improving how we collect and use data, to enable us to have better insights, spot issues and trends, and respond more effectively.

We have committed to keeping this issue under review, including by improving our approach to handling data, as part of developing our organisation wide data strategy. This will help enhance our understanding of the reasons for the overrepresentation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic solicitors going forward. We continue to publish our annual review of diversity in relation to our enforcement processes.