

Professional ethics and the rule of law

An overview of changes within legal services regulation
March 2026



The Legal Services Board (LSB) oversees the regulation of legal services in England and Wales. We are independent from Government and the profession.

We are introducing changes to strengthen how legal professionals understand and uphold their professional ethical duties. Our aim is for consistent, high-quality ethical practice that protects the public interest, supports the rule of law, and maintains trust in the profession.

What needs to change?

Evidence shows that some legal professionals do not always uphold their ethical duties. This can be due to misunderstanding, workplace pressures, or a lack of support.

What are we doing?

We have set new expectations for the regulators of solicitors, barristers, chartered legal executives, and other authorised legal professionals.

Regulators will need to pursue three key outcomes:

1. **Education and training.** Legal professionals must have the right knowledge and skills relating to their ethical duties, throughout their careers.
2. **Rules, standards and guidance.** Regulators must make clear that ethical duties are integral to the way legal professionals – and their managers and employees – carry out their roles.
3. **Support and empowerment.** Legal professionals must be supported and empowered to uphold their ethical duties, including when they are challenged.

Two further outcomes, on **supervision and enforcement** and **evaluation and improvement**, aim to make sure regulators' actions are effective.

Shouldn't this be happening anyway?

Yes, and some regulators already meet most of our expectations. What we're doing is improving consistency and making sure that ethical practice is emphasised, expected, and supported at all levels.

We are also providing clarity around what ethical duties mean in practice. In particular, we have provided a definition of "professional ethical duties" that confirms **lawyers' duty to the court, and their duties to act with independence and integrity, override their duty to the client when these conflict**. This responds to stakeholder requests for greater clarity about the hierarchy of these duties.

What does this mean for the legal services sector?

These changes signal a cultural shift towards greater prioritisation of ethics, stronger support for professionals, and clearer expectations for employers. It encourages legal services providers to create workplaces in which ethical concerns can be raised safely.

Stronger ethical standards will support fairer outcomes for consumers and will reinforce public confidence in legal services.

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