

ANNUAL REPORT

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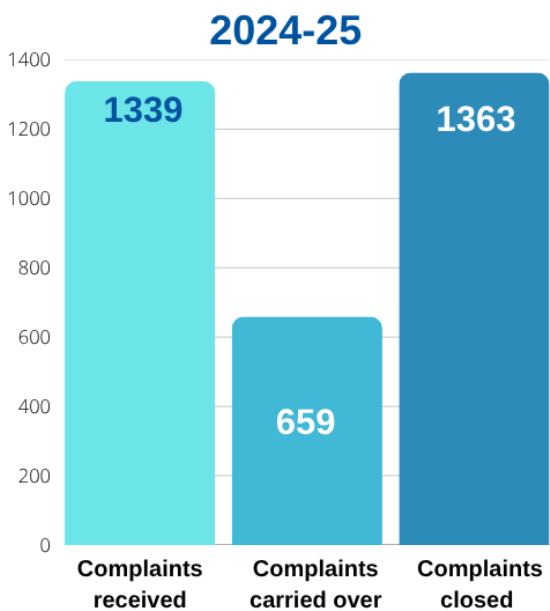
**Scottish Legal Complaints
Commission**



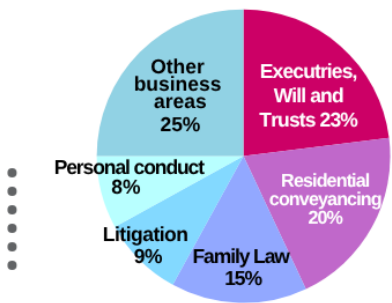
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SLCC 2024-25 Annual Report



Top five areas of law we received complaints about



Chair foreword

It has been a busy, challenging and exciting year at the SLCC as we've managed a high complaints caseload while engaging with government, stakeholders and MSPs across the political spectrum in support of the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2025.

We're pleased to see the legislation passed and welcome the improvements it will deliver for people using legal services in Scotland. Looking at the many changes the legislation brings, it's clear the SLCC is being given more flexibility and additional powers, not least in relation to the valuable contribution made by our independent Consumer Panel. We are committed to meeting Parliament's expectations of us, and the Board is already working to ensure we can implement those changes as swiftly as possible.

Throughout the year the Board has also worked to ensure that the external scrutiny of our work and our own governance is fit for purpose, as we looked ahead to delivering whatever the new legislation brought us. We commissioned an independent governance review to hold ourselves to the highest standards and we are now implementing its findings. We also approved a new framework agreement with Scottish Government which updates our arrangements and recognises both our role as a public body and our independence as an adjudicative body.

We drew on helpful learning from other members of the Ombudsman Association to inform our input to the reform debate, so we were also pleased to submit our application for re-validation as a member, which brings additional external scrutiny as well as significant learning and support for our organisation.

This report, and our last annual report, highlight the specific issues the organisation has faced over recent years in dealing with the fallout of a single firm failure and the resulting surge in complaints and support needed for those affected. That has been a defining feature of our work in recent years, and its impact continues to be felt within the organisation and beyond. This year, in order to draw learning while memories were fresh, we concluded a lessons learnt exercise which identified areas which worked well, and others which didn't, to inform our approach in future.

That approach to rapid learning and improvement will continue to serve us well as we enter this new phase. As ever, my thanks go to our staff team, who have stepped up to every challenge with professionalism, expertise and enthusiasm. My thanks also go to our Board for its ongoing commitment to strong governance, agility and ambition. We are excited about what lies ahead and the increasingly positive contribution we can make to public confidence in the legal sector in Scotland.

Chief Executive introduction

At the beginning of this year, it was hard to know what to expect.

A draft Bill to implement long awaited and much debated reform of legal regulation had completed its Stage 1 consideration, but then Stage 2 consideration was delayed. This gave us some idea of the future role envisaged for the SLCC, and on the original timetable we might even have been moving to implementation within the year. However, we also knew it would be a long debate and the contents could change substantially.

On an operational level we were coming out of a peak year of incoming cases, largely driven by the failure of a single firm, and were dealing with very high levels of work in progress. Would this trend continue, or had we now seen the majority of cases and issues from this incident?

Faced with a higher level of uncertainty than ever before, we planned accordingly. We extended our 2020-24 strategy for a year to provide stability and allow longer term planning to take place once the legislation was finalised. Our operating plan set goals that would drive delivery if reform was delayed, but which could be adjusted if implementation started. Operationally we planned new work to meet increased demand within our resource.

Uncertainty can be unsettling, and I therefore want to say a particular thanks to all of the SLCC team for their effort, enthusiasm, care, and resilience. We continue to be a team which sees change as an opportunity and full of possibilities to improve what we deliver for the public and sector.

We were delighted that, despite delays, the new legislation was passed, setting a new future for the SLCC I will comment on further later in this report.

Complaints from the failure of a single firm continued to impact us but numbers started to reduce, and although we continue to have a large live active caseload coming from high incoming in the previous year, we have found ways to manage that. However, this year has seen sustained pressure from victims groups and engagement with them, with other regulators, ongoing media and political interest has continued to require our attention. Although reducing, there has been an ongoing impact this year, and this is likely to continue into next year.

We saw a small improvement in solicitors responding to requests for information and files this year. This is positive, although we need to see this sustained, and it is only being achieved through considerable additional cost, including on court action. We are continuing to engage with stakeholders on how we could improve this situation.

Following some recent court decisions, and in preparation for implementing reform, we have also been piloting new, and more efficient, ways of managing the preliminary decisions we make about the eligibility of complaints for investigation. This work is still evolving, but we've been grateful for the positive engagement of practitioners to the new approach.

This report also covers our work across a whole range of other areas of operation. For example, we reviewed equality data from the census and other sources to help us reflect on how we deliver our services and have published the outcome of this work. We also took cautious steps in testing AI, using anonymised data and making sure colleagues verified output. This is part of ensuring we're open and inquisitive about development which may help improve our work or efficiency.

I hope the report gives you a flavour of everything we must deliver to fulfil our role.

The SLCC at a glance

Our mission is to resolve complaints, prevent the common causes of complaints, and enable quality improvement. Our vision is that ‘every client receives a professional service, and every lawyer adheres to professional standards’.

Every year we receive over a thousand complaints about legal practitioners in Scotland.

Normally we will only look at a complaint where the complaint has already been made to the lawyer, and they’ve had a chance to respond (there are some exceptions).

Our process is a mix of dispute resolution such as conciliation/mediation with formal, legally binding arbitration.



SLCC complaint journey diagram

So, what happens to complaints made to the SLCC?

Let's see what happened to the complaints made to us in our previous annual report year: 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024.

(Due to complaint timescales, not all of the complaints received in this annual report year have been concluded yet, so last year's numbers give a more detailed picture).

Outcome	% of cases
Prematurity	8%
Conduct	11%
Resolved at eligibility	21%
Closed before accept/reject decision	7%
Rejected at eligibility	14%
Service/hybrid - closed at Mediation	5%
Service/hybrid - closed at Investigation	18%
Service/hybrid - closed at Determination	12%
Ongoing	5%

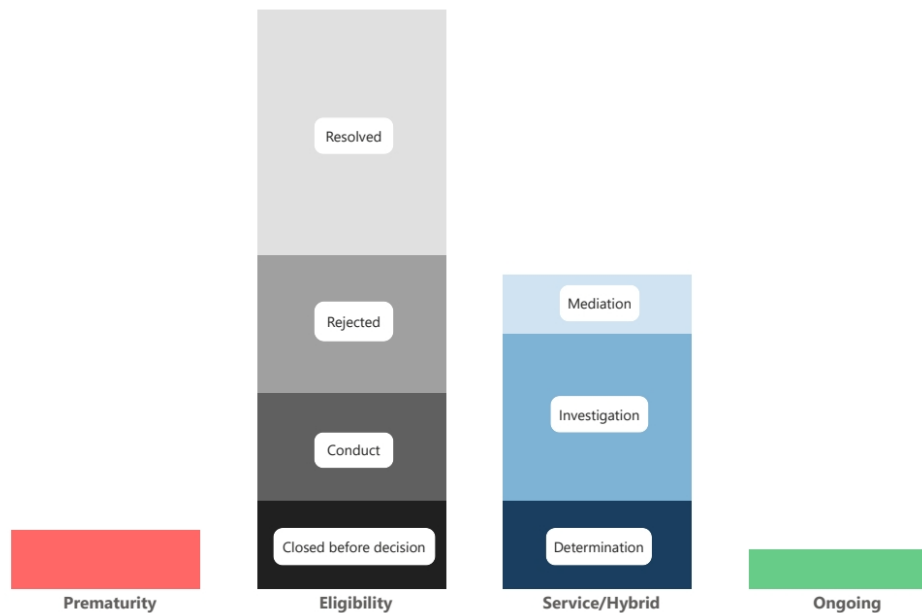


Chart visualising data in the table. The columns are prematurity, eligibility, service/hybrid complaints and ongoing.

What types of things do people make complaints to the SLCC about?

Here are the top five areas of law we received complaints about in our 2024-25 year:

Area of law	% of complaints
Executries, wills and trusts	23%
Residential conveyancing	20%
Family law	15%
Litigation	9%
Personal conduct	8%

Here are the top five subject areas we received complaints about in our 2024-25 year:

Complaint about	% of complaints
Failure to act in the best interests of the client	26%
Failure to communicate effectively	24%
Trust and personal integrity	10%
Failure to advise adequately	7%
Failure to provide information	7%

What settlements have we agreed/ decided?

We resolve complaints throughout our process and make final binding decisions on service complaints at the end of our process.

- £385,586.00 compensation for inconvenience and distress
- £178,537.73 compensation for financial loss
- £77,774.50 in fee reductions and fee or outlay refunds.

Our Board

The [Board](#) of the SLCC sets strategy, ensures good governance is in place and that the performance of the business is being managed, and engages on major issues of policy.

The Board's work this year

There is an annual cycle, set in statute, of planning, consulting on, finalising and then laying our budgets and operating plan in the Scottish Parliament. We then report at year end through externally audited annual accounts, which are also laid in parliament.

On a quarterly basis the Board reviews key performance indicators and performance data, risk registers, financial reports, progress against our operating plan, customer service feedback and reports from the audit and remuneration committees.

The Board also debates key issues of relevance to the SLCC. This year the Board tracked progress in the passage of the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2025 and discussed initial plans for implementation. The Board also considered the new Regulatory Objectives set out in the Act and their implications for the SLCC's work and agreed a draft Regulatory Statement to address them.

The Board commissioned an independent review of our governance. The main finding was that:

“There is positive evidence that supports the view that performance across all areas of SLCC's governance is strong and (having reviewed many other organisation's governance arrangements) beyond the standard of many similar bodies. In risk management terms it achieves, at least, reasonable assurance and significantly better in a number of areas. There is not a great deal to be done to achieve excellence in governance. However, as is to be expected from such a project, some potential improvement opportunities were identified in the course of this review.”

We published a [summary and action plan](#) in response.

Other issues considered this year include an updated quality management framework, lessons learnt from the impact of the recent high profile firm failure, the SLCC's reasonable adjustments processes and a report on equality data.

Our Board and Audit Committee continued to monitor our cyber security preparedness, as a significant risk to our business and Board Members completed mandatory cyber security training.

As well as their governance role, our Board Members also make important decisions on complaints as non-staff commissioners. Members undertook refresh training on determination decision making.

Board Member changes

In February 2025 we welcomed new lay member, Thane Lawrie, to the organisation.

SLCC Consumer Panel

The SLCC Consumer Panel is an independent advisory panel, with its remit set out in statute.

The Panel brings a wealth of experience and insight on consumer interests. It uses that to advise, challenge and assist the SLCC in delivering a complaints system which is accessible, provides clear and understandable information and decisions, and delivers a good customer experience.

A strong voice for consumers

The Panel's key focus this year has been providing a strong voice for consumers in the legislative debates leading to the passage of the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2025. This included correspondence and meetings with the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee and a [briefing](#) in advance of the Committee's Stage 2 consideration.

The Panel also met and corresponded with the Minister for Victims and Community Safety and her officials throughout the Bill's passage and provided a [briefing](#) for MSPs in advance of the Stage 3 debate in Parliament.

The Panel secured a strong recognition from across the political spectrum of the need for the consumer voice to be heard to ensure regulation truly meets consumer needs and inspires public confidence.

This led to a significant expansion of the Panel's remit and functions, and a clear requirement for the Panel's work to be sufficiently funded by the regulated community. Work to consider how to implement these changes is underway.

Consumer insight to inform improvement

This year saw the Consumer Panel advising the SLCC on a number of areas of improvement work. Throughout the year, the Panel provides reflections on the customer feedback the SLCC receives, which informs the development of forthcoming service experience improvements. It also fed into the Service Experience Team's work on child friendly complaints, withdrawing from acting and early thinking on further work to address perceptions of bias.

The Panel also published a report on [demographic data about those who complain to the SLCC](#), and [responded to the Scottish Solicitors' Discipline Tribunal's consultation on its standard of proof](#).

Our performance and improvement

Maintenance of core performance in complaints handling and improvements to the effectiveness and efficiency of our work have remained a key focus for us this year.

Complaint timescales

We continued to closely monitor timescales in the complaint process. We started the year with a high number of cases in progress following last year's record high incoming, based on a long-term upward trend plus a single event driving higher than expected case numbers. Although cases dropped slightly this year, the upward trend continues, and our caseload remains high.

We were able to keep pace with incoming demand and closed the year in a similar position to last year. However, we are aware that our timescales have a significant impact on complaint parties, so further work is underway to ensure we have the right resource and the right approach to managing our caseload and reducing our timescales (see for example, our new approach to our sifting function, outlined below).

Failures to respond

One issue which continues to affect timely resolution of complaints is solicitors not co-operating with our investigations. This includes not providing information or a file when we make a statutory request for it because we need it to consider a complaint.

This has been a key focus for us over the year, as in previous years. We have tested an approach to proceeding to investigate the complaint in the absence of the file, where that is possible and does not detriment the complainer. However, while this has been possible in a small number of cases, it masks and does not address the root cause of the issue.

We have continued to raise legal actions in the Court of Session to obtain files. Where cases have proceeded as far as contempt of court hearings we have seen the [court raising concerns about the tools available to deal with this issue](#), particularly where the evidence led in court raises public protection concerns about the impact on vulnerable clients, the management of legal practices and solicitors' abilities to meet their professional duties.

We have discussed this issue with the Lord President and hope to continue to work with Lord Pentland, and the Law Society of Scotland, to consider a way forward.

A swift sift

Following a Court of Session appeal decision and to help prepare for the implementation of reform, we have been testing significant [changes](#) to our procedures for the preliminary steps we take to determine the eligibility of complaints.

We believe the new approach makes this initial sift swifter and less onerous, and ensures complaints move quickly to being resolved, investigated or dismissed.

We also think there will be benefits for practitioners, complainers and the regulators who investigate conduct complaints.

Changes to our caseload and outcomes this year

Last year we reported on an unusual caseload driven by the fallout from one ceased firm. This year we have seen a number of new changes to our caseload and case outcomes which we continue to monitor.

This includes a significant rise in complaints about advocates – both their conduct and the service provided. Advocates make up a small proportion of the total legal profession and we have historically seen a small number and a smaller proportion of complaints made to us about advocates, with an even smaller proportion accepted for investigation. However, this year we have seen a significant rise in the number of complaints made about advocates and the proportions of complaints made and accepted for investigation now more closely mirrors that of the solicitor profession. We must be particularly cautious when numbers are small, and so we will monitor this trend into the coming year.

In addition, this year we have seen a higher number and percentage of investigated cases going unresolved and requiring a determination decision by one of our commissioners. This includes a high number of cases which are ultimately not upheld, potentially suggesting a change in complainer behaviour.

Finally, following unusually high levels of compensation awarded for actual loss and refunds of fees last year, we have seen our awarded compensation return to levels more in line with previous years.

Customer service and accessibility

Alongside our continued focus on efficiency, we want to drive improvements in our customer service to make sure we are as accessible and helpful as possible for all of our service users.

Our Service Experience Team

Our cross-organisational Service Experience Team (SET) continues to drive innovation in customer service. Drawing on the team's own experience and input from the Consumer Panel and others, they develop and test improvements in our processes and provide a source of support and challenge to the wider organisation in improving our customer service.

Improvements for our users

This year the Service Experience Team embedded our new approach to collecting and analysing customer feedback from a variety of sources. This new system ensures we can identify trends or emerging issues where we can take action to improve our customer service.

This year SET also introduced a pilot scheme called PAL – Process Assistance Line. It addresses the fact that many smaller firms will not be familiar with our process when they get a complaint and offers specific support for them to understand and engage with our complaints process.

SET also identified a key issue around solicitors withdrawing from acting when a complaint is made and developed communications for both [solicitors](#) and [consumers](#) considering making a complaint about this issue. We promoted key messages from this through our social media channels.

Following last year's refresh of the '[for consumers](#)' section of our website, we developed videos to accompany the pages and shared key messages on our social media channels.

Accessibility

We held an all staff meeting on accessibility, reminding staff of some key accessibility concerns for our users and how we can make our services as accessible as possible for everyone. We shared the improvements we have made in recent years and discussed areas where further work is required.

Drawing on a dip sample of our cases where reasonable adjustments were requested, we looked at the adjustments we can make and reminded staff where to find information and help if a request is made or an adjustment is required.

We commissioned a [report reviewing research on equalities](#) to build a better understanding of what contemporary Scotland looks like. The work will inform our strategy and operational planning in the coming years, as well as work to implement legislative reform.

We also ensured new templates developed as part of recent changes to our process were tested for accessibility.

Customer feedback

We ask everyone who makes or is the subject of a complaint what they thought of our service. We ask for feedback while the complaint is in process and once it has closed so we can make improvements along the way. We ask about the quality of the information we provided to them, how well we explained things, the time we took to deal with the complaint, if we dealt with it fairly and impartially and how helpful we were. We also provide an opportunity for free text comments. In addition, service users can provide feedback at any time on our [website](#) and on our [Trustpilot](#) page, which we monitor and respond to.

You said, we did

A report on our customer feedback, including all of the free text comments, is considered quarterly by our Board, Service Experience Team and independent Consumer Panel.

Those discussions help us to identify improvements we could make to our service or actions we could take based on the feedback received. Some of the key actions from the past year are outlined below. Our thanks go to everyone who took the time to provide us with helpful feedback this year.

Positive comments

We were pleased to receive a lot of positive comments in our feedback from members of the public and lawyers. These are a real morale boost to staff who work hard dealing daily with challenging issues. Some examples from this year include:

- “I really appreciate your input into solving the situation. You have been so approachable and understanding of my dilemma and I thank you for everything you have done for me.” (*complainer*)
- “The service I received has been excellent. I was kept updated with personal phone calls and emails. I can now close the door on my complaint thanks to your prompt actions and outcome.” (*complainer*)
- “I feel that the SLCC have been very efficient and professional in dealing with the complaint made against my firm.” (*practitioner*)
- “The service I received was first class and although it did not get the result that I hoped for I have no complaints about the very professional way my case was dealt with.” (*complainer*)
- “Your caseworker was very understanding about how the company that I complained about has affected my mental health and actually saved me from doing something stupid to myself.” (*complainer*)
- “We feel that we are being treated with total understanding and curtesy. Not understanding the legal terms we have had everything explained to us in a very reasonable way.” (*complainer*)

Feedback on our work to help resolve complaints

We were also pleased to receive feedback about our work to help resolve complaints, which is a core focus of our approach. For example:

- “Although I did not need to take my complaint further due to a satisfactory resolution, I do believe that informing my solicitor of my intentions to lodge a complaint with you helped to settle my dispute.” (*complainer*)
- “I don't what you did, but the solicitor concerned returned my documents to me after two or three weeks, which is what I wanted as there had been no correspondence from her.” (*complainer*)
- “Overall the service was excellent and I have no complaints. I'm still waiting for the firm to act on the agreement but I feel confident that I can come back to the SLCC should they not fulfil their side of things.” (*complainer*)
- “My main disappointment was that we were unable to resolve this at mediation but following that process probably assisted in subsequently resolving.” (*practitioner*)

Comments on what we could do better

We also receive a lot of comments on what we could do better. We also saw a significant rise in complaints to us about our service this year, although we have not yet identified key common themes in these. Some issues are repeated each year but often relate to areas where we agree it's important we continue to strive to make improvements. For example:

- “The procedure was clear and the SLCC always adhered to their own deadlines. Communication was also clear. I feel the length of the process is far too long and simply prolongs what is already a very stressful time.” (*complainer*)

We continued to receive feedback on our timescales. Even where people were complimentary about our service, they often said timescales were too long. We will continue to make contact with parties regularly to share updates and we are looking at our resourcing to ensure we can meet demand and bring timescales down. We also continue to pursue firms who delay providing information to us which causes delays in complaint handling.

- “My complaint was sanitized and distilled so that it didn't resemble the original complaint.” (complainer) and “I feel the complaint was handled professionally but I also feel more can be done to screen out the few complaints that are clearly vexatious or ill-conceived and without merit”. (*practitioner*)

We receive regular feedback from complainers and practitioners about the preliminary steps we take when we receive a complaint. We have been considering updates to this approach and impending reform and the outcome of a court case this year has led to us [testing a new approach](#) to streamline the preliminary steps of our process which will help to address these concerns.

- “In my case the complainer was not even a client, but a third party. Extra consideration should be given to such complaints being driven by disappointment or anger at the outcome, rather than any actual conduct by the solicitor involved.” (*practitioner*)

We regularly receive feedback from practitioners about how difficult non-client or third-party complaints are to deal with. While non-client complaints are allowed under our system, we do carefully consider whether the complaint raises a concern about the practitioner's conduct or whether the complainer has been directly affected by the practitioner's service. It's an issue we continue to monitor closely as we look towards implementing the changes in the 2025 Act.

- “The whole process appears weighted more towards the solicitor and their opinion rather than viewing how this has affected the person who complained and addressing my concerns. The process does not appear to be impartial and independent and looks to me more like a boys club to protect the interests of its members rather than review and deal with the issues raised by the public.” (*complainer*) and “This whole system is weighted against solicitors and gives clients (and even third parties we've had nothing to do with) a "free hit". The whole system isn't fit for purpose and should be overhauled entirely.” (*practitioner*).

Every year we receive comments from both consumer and lawyers who perceive the system as biased against them. We take bias seriously. We provide mandatory unconscious bias training for our complaints staff. We also have a robust quality assurance process in place where cases can be reviewed by peers or managers to identify any potential bias or issues needing addressed. This year we also started scoping work to address perceptions of bias, drawing on learning from other complaints bodies and regulators.

New issues tackled in the year

Some new issues came up which we tackled within the year.

- “I find it stressful that everything has to be done online. I cannot talk to anyone human and I do not have the know-how to upload documents.” (*complainer*)

We received a small number of concerns about our accessibility for those unable or less confident using our website or online forms. While we do already offer offline alternatives across our service, we made sure that option was clearly visible in our communications and signposted people to our enquiries line for help as required. We ran a staff discussion session on accessibility and reshared our guidance. We also continue to make alternative channels and adjustments available to anyone who needs them.

- “The only issue I have is the SLCC having the power to impose a levy. This means that the SLCC has a financial interest in the outcome of a complaint and because of that, though it may wish to act impartially, any finding in favour of a complainer is tainted by the possibility of bias, particularly in marginal cases.” (*practitioner*)

We regularly receive feedback from practitioners about the complaints levy they pay when a complaint is upheld and the feeling that “there is nothing to deter the complainer from taking the matter further even though they are acting unreasonably” (*practitioner*). However, we were concerned to see some comments from practitioners which suggest confusion about our funding arrangements so we will be updating our communications about our funding to help address this misunderstanding.

Issues to consider taking forward

In addition, we have identified a number of issues we will consider taking forward in the coming year.

Finally, there are some issues which are simply a matter of the current law. Much of that feedback over recent years – for example where we can offer swifter resolution and how people can appeal our decisions – has fed into our proposals for legislative reform and we’re looking forward to being able to implement them soon.

Our oversight and outreach

Alongside its complaint handling functions, the SLCC has a range of powers and duties to oversee and bring an independent view to the entire complaints and redress system.

We have a published [statement](#) on our approach to discharging these powers which sets out our intention to work collaboratively and constructively with others in the sector to drive improvement and ensure public confidence.

Improving conduct complaint handling

Following a rise last year, the number of handling complaints we received remains high. These included complaints made by the original complainer and by the practitioner complained about.

As well as investigating individual complaints about relevant professional bodies' complaint handling, we look at trends in conduct complaint handling and make recommendations for improvements.

We followed up on our recommendations to both the Faculty of Advocates and the Law Society of Scotland on improving conduct complaint handling.

We [urged Faculty to implement improvements to its complaints process](#) in line with the recommendations in our 2024 [report](#). While Faculty has committed to making improvements and we know work is underway, this work is not yet concluded. Until this happens, neither complainers nor advocates complained about will benefit from the planned improvements to Faculty's complaints process.

We also [welcomed continued improvements to Law Society of Scotland conduct complaint investigation timescales](#) following recommendations in our 2023 [report](#).

Arrangements for redress

We have powers to consider provisions for ensuing consumer redress, including the effectiveness of the Client Protection Fund and indemnity arrangements.

In 2021 we made a number of recommendations to the Law Society of Scotland regarding the Master Policy indemnity arrangements, and we have continued to monitor this, publishing a [further update report](#) in January 2025. We were also invited by the Society to observe part of the retendering of the Master Policy brokering for the coming five-year period.

We published a [report on the Law Society of Scotland's Client Protection Fund arrangements](#). We concluded that overall the Fund operates well, that the public facing information about the Fund is clear and easy to understand, and that guidance is

offered to claimants to support them to make claims which the sub-committee can consider and assess. However, we recommended that the sub-committee ensures claimants are kept updated regularly on the progress of their claims and suggested that seeking feedback from claimants on the quality and accessibility of its communications could provide suggestions for potential improvements. We also raised a specific concern that the sub-committee was not meeting the requirement that at least 50% of its membership should be lay members, and we were pleased to see further recruitment take place to address this.

Improving complaint handling across the sector

We took part in a number of conferences and events across the sector on the common causes of complaints and how to deal effectively with them, drawing on case study examples from our caseload. We also spoke directly to firms on issues relating to risk management and complaint handling.

This year we developed and tested new complaint handling workshops for practitioners, which have received good feedback from those who have taken part.

We continued to provide our guidance on good complaint handling in different formats and through different channels, including our [website](#), [practitioner newsletter](#) and social media channels, to reach out across the profession.

We shared key messages from last year's [report on price transparency](#) and our guidance on [preventing the common causes of complaints](#) as part of a series of social media campaigns.

This year we also launched a [new podcast series](#) aimed at practitioners and updated our published information on [what practitioners should expect when we receive a complaint about them](#).

Our work on policy and reform

We use our experience, insight and learning to influence, inform and implement policy change on matters relating to our complaints and regulatory functions.

Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2025

The [Regulation of Legal Services \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#) was introduced in Parliament in April 2023, passed on 20 May 2025 and became an Act on 27 June 2025.

Original proposals, stemming from an independent review, suggested more radical reform of regulatory structures and new legislation and we supported this approach. However, we campaigned in support of the Act's measures and have [welcomed](#) the opportunity for more limited modernisation of structures and processes.

We submitted [written evidence](#) to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee at Stage 2 of the Bill. We worked closely with the Minister for Victims and Community Safety and her officials to make further improvements to the Bill at Stage 2 and Stage 3.

We shared [a briefing with MSPs](#) in advance of the Stage 3 debate and met with a number of members to explain our views on different aspects of the Bill.

In parallel we started initial planning for implementation of the proposed changes to ensure we were in a strong position to bring key provisions into operation as swiftly as possible.

Given the significant changes to our legislative framework, and the impact of this across our business, this will continue to be a key focus for our Board and executive team over the coming year.

Alternative Business Structures

The Law Society of Scotland was fully approved and authorised as an Approved Regulator in December 2021 but the regulatory scheme is not yet operational. The SLCC has been preparing for the introduction of ABS since the Act was passed in 2010. This preparation needs to be updated each year and comes at significant cost to the organisation each time.

At the time of writing, we know the Society has confirmed that further work to implement ABS has now been deferred for the next two years.

Other policy work

We have undertaken other policy work where it relates directly to our statutory functions. That includes engaging with stakeholders across the legal services sector, other regulated sectors, consumer group and advice agencies.

We take part in the Consumer Scotland Consumer Network alongside other ombudsmen, advice bodies and regulators. This has proved a helpful forum for sharing expertise and identifying key stakeholders to help inform different areas of our work.

We have also taken part in the Scottish Government's Working Group on Child Welfare Reporters.

We provided input to the Scottish Solicitors' Discipline Tribunal's consultation on its standard of proof.

Sharing information on our work and achievements

We use our website, articles and social media channels to share more information about our work and to help shape the debate on complaints and regulation. This includes regular articles on issues relevant to the public in the Scotsman newspaper as well as articles targeting the profession in the legal press. We have continued to share regular video blogs with our Chief Executive and other staff to highlight key aspects of our work and to bring a human face to the organisation.

Consumer Duty

From 1 April 2024 we have been subject to the [Consumer Duty](#) which places a duty on public bodies in Scotland to consider the impact their strategic decisions will have on consumers including reducing harm.

In line with these duties, we published an [impact assessment](#) on the development of our 2025/26 Budget and Operating Plan.

We will continue to identify decisions where the duty should apply and draw learning from this first assessment in using the duty to inform our decision.

Our organisation

2024-25 saw us improve our digital methods of work, and while continuing to strive for best value.

Digital Files

With a move to a fully cloud-based infrastructure, we introduced SharePoint to the organisation and this year we started accepting files digitally in our SharePoint tenancy. We hope this will make it easier for law firms to provide their files to us and has saved us the cost of third-party products to support receiving files.

IT and cyber security

This year we rolled out new laptops as part of our Capital Replacement Plan. Our migration to new laptops was made simpler by last year's move to a cloud infrastructure.

We also developed apps to support our Board members in their work and updated our purchase order app based on feedback from an internal audit.

We ran further vulnerability assessments, and we were successful in our Cyber Essentials Plus reaccreditation.

Best value

This year we undertook a review of 'Best Value' within the SLCC. The Board, Audit Committee and executive worked to review the Scottish Public Finance Manual Best Value framework. A formal Best Value policy was developed to guide our work, and a matrix created of how the SLCC reflects the delivery of Best Value in each of its core areas of operations.

Data and insight

We continued to seek ways to get the best possible insight from the rich data we collect on complaints and legal services. We invested in our data capacity through recruitment and training for existing staff. We developed a new dashboard to help us analyse our customer feedback data to identify trends and areas for improvement.

Our people

Our people are at the heart of the service that we deliver.

Recruitment

This year we developed our own in-house app to manage our recruitment process. The app helps us track an application through the recruitment process, capture our diversity statistics and send update emails to applicants. The app also sends applicants a link to upload their applications. This has helped save administrative time and system costs.

We ran various recruitment campaigns over the year and welcomed nine new colleagues to the team.

Staff training and development

We identified training needs based on staff consultation and key and emerging issues in our work. We delivered a training and development programme to staff including legal updates, training on reasonable adjustments, unconscious bias, equality, agile change management, trauma informed practice, GDPR, bereavement, kindness and motivations. Staff members ran sessions and we also welcomed speakers from a range of partner organisations including the Public Defence Solicitors Office and LawCare.

Staff wellbeing and inclusion

It was another busy year for our staff-led wellbeing and inclusion group, who ran a number of events for staff including World First Aid Day, International Men's Day, Fertility Awareness, Ovarian and Prostate Cancer, Autism Awareness and Tartan Day.

For Mental Health Awareness Week we focused on how being part of a safe, positive community is vital for our mental health and wellbeing. Focusing on that community theme we had a coffee morning, a lunchtime walk and celebrated national cocktail day to bring staff together. We also encouraged staff to look at volunteering opportunities and shared some stories from staff who currently volunteer.

Staff charity

Charity is always close to our staff's hearts and this year the chosen charity was CHAS. We started the year by hearing about the services CHAS provide and it really hit home what the money raised could do. This inspired staff to raise an amazing £5,022 plus £1,151.13 in Gift Aid. Staff took part in sponsored cycling, charity auctions, Christmas Raffles and more to raise this incredible amount of money.

For 2025-26 the staff charity will be Scottish Autism.

Industrial relations

We continue to value our relationship with PCS as our recognised trade union. This year discussions have focused on pay and terms and conditions.

Our contribution to national performance

While the SLCC is an independent body, the work we do is influenced by the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework.

We contribute through the delivery of our functions to the following outcomes:

- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely
- We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination

We strive to ensure our service is inclusive and as accessible as possible for all members of the community. Making a complaint is free for those raising issues. Information and guidance on making a complaint, and our statutory duty to provide advice, ensures we empower citizens. By resolving disputes, we ensure parties do not resort to other means, and that fair redress is awarded where appropriate, assisting resilience and safety. We make sure an approachable and professional service is provided, which is especially important for vulnerable users. Resilience for communities includes ensuring their access to justice, and we continue to ensure we deliver all our services as accessibly as possible to support this.

We actively support diversity and inclusivity, and this work is acknowledged in our staff equality survey results. We have an active staff wellbeing and inclusion group and annual staff-initiated charity fundraising, which are vital tools in supporting individual staff, teams and an inclusive organisational culture.

- We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy
- We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone

The legal sector is a large employer and net contributor to the Scottish economy. Effective redress mechanisms, as provided by the SLCC, encourage consumer confidence and consumer spending. We ensure our rules and statutory guidance do not artificially limit growth or innovation. Our outreach work aims to improve law firms' risk management, customer service and complaint handling, which can all help to create thriving businesses. We continue to support reforms to legal services regulation in line with better regulation principles to support innovation.

Our statistics

We analyse statistics on our caseload to monitor and report on our performance and to identify and share trends in complaints.

Complaints about lawyers and law firms

How many complaints did we receive and how many complaints did we close?

Group:	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Complaints still open from previous year	659	554	486
New complaints received	1339	1385	1281
Complaints reopened	19	38	70
Complaints closed at all stages	1363	1318	1183
Complaints open at end of year	654	659	587

*There are some complaints that may be opened or closed for other reasons, this is why the numbers here do not reconcile completely.

What process stage were complaints closed at?

Stage:	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Prematurity	101	118	133
Eligibility (including accepted conduct)	737	734	701
Mediation	99	89	57
Investigation	232	245	203
Determination	194	132	123

Who were the complaints about?

Solicitors or firms of solicitors

- 1302 complaints we received were about solicitors or firms of solicitors (1359 in 2023/24)
- 689 complaints we accepted for investigation were about solicitors or firms of solicitors (567 in 2023/24)
- 651 complaints we did not accept for investigation (including at prematurity stage) were about solicitors or firms of solicitors (563 in 2023/24)

Advocates

- 33 complaints we received were about advocates (12 in 2023/24)
- 14 complaints we accepted for investigation were about advocates (9 in 2023/24)
- 13 complaints we did not accept for investigation (including at prematurity stage) were about advocates (8 in 2023/24)

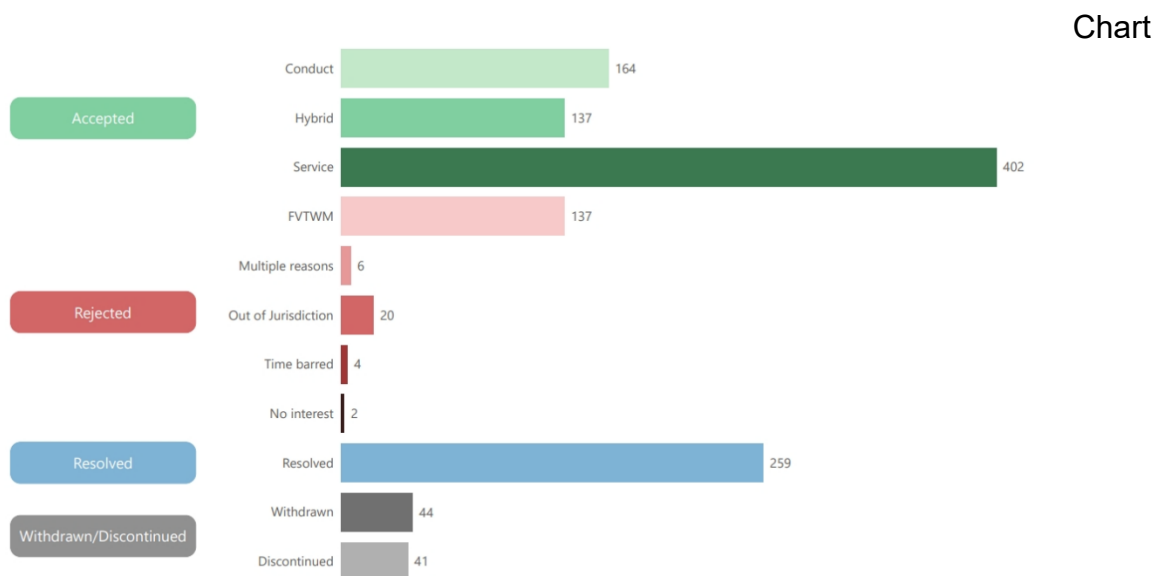
There were no complaints against construction attorneys (members of the Association of Construction Attorneys).

Outcomes at eligibility stage

Once a complaint has been made to us, we will then assess whether or not it is a complaint that we can accept for further investigation. We may also be able to negotiate a settlement between the complainer and the lawyer or firm before a formal decision to accept or reject – if the complaint doesn't raise serious conduct issues.

How many complaints did we accept, reject or resolve at the eligibility stage?

Eligibility outcome	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Complaints accepted for investigation	703	664	491
Complaints rejected for investigation	169	147	182
Complaints resolved before a decision to accept/reject	259	301	284
Complaints withdrawn or discontinued before a decision to accept/reject	85	99	107



summarising the table grouped by eligibility outcome with bars for each sub-type (FVTWM stands for 'frivolous, vexatious or totally without merit').

What kind of complaints did we accept for investigation?

Accepted type	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Service complaints accepted for an investigation by the SLCC	402	417	291
Conduct complaints accepted for an investigation by the Law Society of Scotland or the Faculty of Advocates	164	153	127
Hybrid complaints where the service parts are investigated by the SLCC. The conduct parts are investigated by the Law Society of Scotland or the Faculty of Advocates	137	103	73

What formal, appealable decisions to reject complaints for investigation did we make?

Reject type	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
The whole complaint was made after the time limit	4	16	16
The whole complaint was 'frivolous, vexatious or totally without merit'	137	91	112
Some parts were after the time limit. The rest were 'frivolous, vexatious or totally without merit'	8	6	13
The complaint wasn't about a regulated legal practitioner in Scotland	20	34	41

What complaints were closed before a decision to accept or reject?

Closure type	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Resolved (see below for details)	259	301	284
Withdrawn (see below for details)	44	59	79
Discontinued (see below for details)	41	40	28

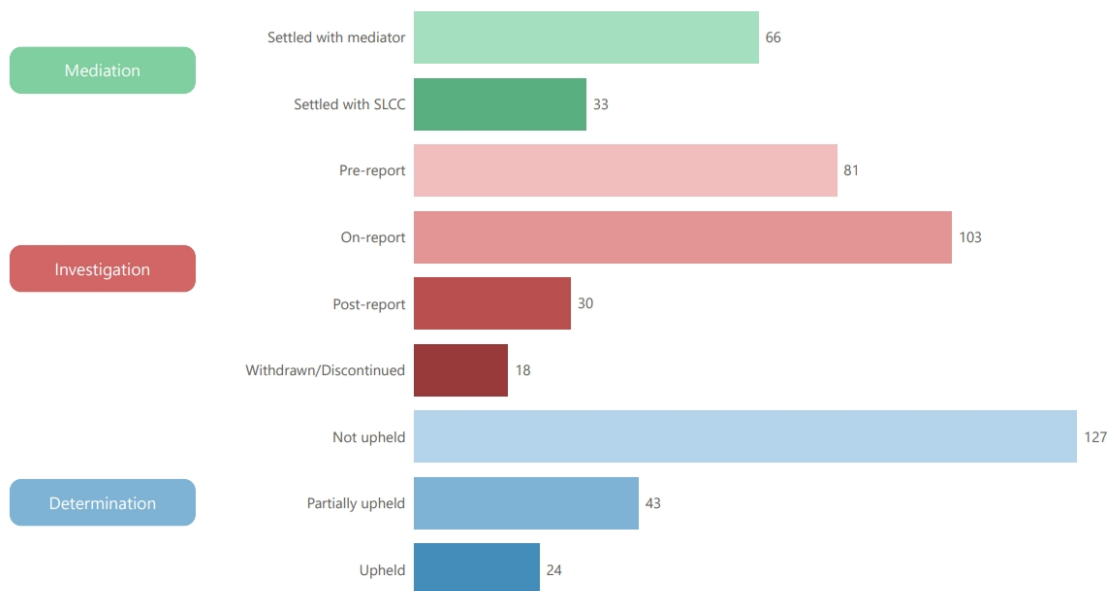
What these terms mean:

Resolved: The complainer requested or agreed to the closure of complaint as a result of action taken by lawyer/firm **OR** the complainer accepted our initial view is that complaint is time-barred or incapable of being upheld (based on merits), or failed to responded to the initial view.

Withdrawn: The complainer requested closure of their complaint for unknown reasons, or reasons not related to action taken by lawyer/firm.

Discontinued: The complainer has not responded to request for further information about their complaint, despite a reminder and a warning their complaint will be closed.

Outcomes of accepted service complaints



How many complaints were settled at the mediation stage?

Before we start investigating a service complaint, we give the complainer and the lawyer or firm an opportunity to attend a mediation meeting, led by an independent external mediator.

Outcome	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Both sides agreed a settlement at a meeting with the help of an independent mediator	66	66	40
Both sides agreed a settlement with the help of the SLCC's mediation co-ordinator	33	21	17

How successful were mediations?

Outcome	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Both sides agreed to a mediation meeting	30%	26%	27%
The mediation meeting was successful	52%	66%	67%

How were complaints settled at the investigation stage?

At investigation stage, an SLCC investigator will work with both parties to agree a settlement to the complaint.

This can be the settlement recommended by the investigator in a detailed investigation report, for example, to uphold the complaint, to pay compensation or refund fees, or a recommendation to not uphold the complaint and take no action.

The investigator can also help agree a settlement before they've written the report.

Other times, a settlement is agreed after the investigation, but on different terms to the investigation report.

Outcome	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Settlement agreed before the investigation report	81	59	63
Settled as recommended by investigation report	103	107	85
Settlement agreed after the investigation report on different terms	30	46	36
Withdrawn by complainer or discontinued by the SLCC due to lack of contact from the complainer	18	33	19

How were complaints decided on at the determination stage?

If one or both of the parties don't agree to the investigation report, the complaint will be passed to a determination committee. This is a committee of three of our [Commissioners](#), which looks at the complaint and makes a binding decision on whether it should be upheld as inadequate professional service.

Outcome	2024/25	2023/24	2022/23
Whole complaint was upheld by the determination committee	24	12	28
Parts of the complaint were upheld by the determination committee	43	42	40
None of the complaint was upheld by the determination committee	127	78	55

What were the outcomes of appeals against the SLCC's decisions at the eligibility and determination stages?

Decisions to accept or reject complaints at eligibility and determination committee decisions are appealable to the Court of Session.

Outcome	Eligibility	Determination	Total
In progress at the start of the year	3	2	5
Received	12	4	16
Won	1	3	4
Conceded	3	1	4
Court substituted decision	1	0	1
In progress at end	10	2	12

Other types of complaints

What happened with handling complaints about the professional bodies?

We also receive complaints about the way the professional bodies carry out conduct investigations.

Outcome	Law Society of Scotland	Faculty of Advocates	Total
In progress at the start of the year	9	0	9
New	13	0	13
Rejected - with reason	3	0	3
Closed on report	14	0	14
Withdrawn	1	0	1
In progress at the end of the year	4	0	4

What were the outcomes of complaints about our service?

We received 46 complaints about the way we'd handled a complaint made to us. These 'service delivery complaints' are dealt with by a manager who has not been involved with the case. If these aren't resolved, or the person complaining isn't happy with the response at 'stage 1', they are escalated to a senior manager for 'stage 2'.

Service delivery complaint outcomes

Outcomes	Stage 1	Stage 2
Upheld	2	0
Partly Upheld	5	0
Not upheld	39	0
Total SDCs	46	0

Freedom of Information and data protection

How did the SLCC deal with Freedom of Information enquiries made?

We are a public authority under the *Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act*. We received 33 requests for information during our year.

Requests and responses

Outcome	Number
Requests received in year	33
Requests responded to on time in year	33

Requests dealt with in year

Outcome	Number
Information not held	7
Information not supplied	3
Information part supplied	10
Information supplied	13

Exemptions used in year

Exemption	Number of times used
s25(1) Otherwise accessible	5
s33(1)(b) Substantial prejudice to commercial interests	2
s30(c) Substantial prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs	1
s26(a) Disclosure prohibited; enactment	1

Reviews of our responses to Freedom of Information requests

There were 4 FOISA reviews.

Data protection

We received 26 Subject Access Requests.

Looking to the future

Every year the SLCC develops an operating plan for the year ahead, spanning all our powers and functions and setting out key workstreams and areas of focus for the coming year.

Regulatory reform has been a key workstream for the past decade as we've made the case for updates to our legislation, then supported the Bill to achieve them through Parliament. The current phase of that work concluded with the passage of the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2025, just before year end.

Our [2025-26 operating plan](#), currently in progress as we publish this report, details the initial stages of our work to implement and operationalise those changes. We started initial planning for this work in 2024-25, with 25 projects in development and a comprehensive programme management approach to ensure coherent and consistent implementation.

This is a significant, multi-year and whole system process. It will involve all of our staff, Board and stakeholders. Through this work we will review, update and refresh almost every aspect of our business. We will draw on our tried and tested approach to agile, continuous improvement and apply it to this work while ensuring we bring rigour and strong governance to these important changes.

This will inform our strategic and operational planning for several years to come.

At the time of writing, we are still in discussions with Scottish Government about the commencement orders and funding needed to allow us to implement these changes.

We are also in discussion with the other regulatory authorities named in the Act – the Lord President and the regulators – to share thinking on implementation. This is in the context of new overarching regulatory objectives set out in the Act, which will apply to all of our work.

The Act amends many of our processes, changing what we do and how we can do it. It gives us new powers and sets new requirements. It takes us into new areas of legal services regulation and brings providers currently outwith existing legal services regulation within our remit.

We believe these changes bring significant opportunities for improvement in efficiency and effectiveness for the public and the regulated sector, as well as new public protections. After a decade of debate, our job now is to deliver the changes Parliament has agreed. This will change the face of legal services regulation, and the SLCC will become a fundamentally different organisation once this is complete. It's a major piece of work, but one we're confident we can deliver.

Chief Executive closing statement

I started this report with a theme of uncertainty, the dominant factor affecting this reporting year.

I hope the information and examples we have shared have demonstrated our continued aspiration and focus on delivery, despite not knowing what the year held.

However, I'm pleased that my closing theme can be the exact opposite, one of certainty.

The new legislation means two big challenges for the SLCC:

1. Deliver a complex programme of transformation – including changed and new functions
2. Continue to deliver a high quality, efficient and effective service throughout that transition.

I have joked with stakeholders this is similar to changing the tyres on a bus, whilst adding a top deck, sticking to the timetable, and with no dip in passenger numbers allowed.

Every stage of our core complaints processes will need amended. Alongside that we take on significant new responsibilities – a complaints function for any legal advice given by any provider for fee, gain or reward, a role as frontline regulator holding a register of providers, new standard setting powers, new powers to support public protection through publishing information, an enhanced independent Consumer Panel, the list goes on...

We will become a body with a core role in making legal services work for everyone; resolving complaints, raising standards in legal services and regulation, and using consumer and sector insight to support improvement.

Our 2025-26 operating plan maps out our preparation for achieving this, including working with government on commencement orders and funding.

During the course of the year we expect to consult on a four-year transformation strategy, focussed on these two big challenges. We are keen to hear views and are already in liaison with key stakeholders to understand how they expect to deliver the reform envisaged by the Act.

I look forward to working with the SLCC Board, team, and our colleagues across the consumer and legal landscape to deliver real and meaningful change in the years ahead.