

Solicitors Regulation Authority criticised over endorsement of Law Society's sharia wills guidance

Posted: Fri, 6th Jun 2014

The regulatory body for solicitors in England and Wales has been criticised by the Lawyers Secular Society for endorsing the Law Society's controversial guidance on sharia wills.

In its recently published '[ethics guidance](#)' on the drafting and preparation of wills, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) states "If you are acting for clients for whom sharia succession rules may be relevant you will find the Law Society's practice note on the subject helpful."

In the [practice note](#), solicitors are advised that under sharia "male heirs in most cases receive double the amount inherited by a female heir of the same class" and that "non-Muslims may not inherit at all".

The SRA is a public authority for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 and is fully bound by the public sector equality duty (PSED).

The PSED requires public bodies such as the SRA to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

In an [open letter to SRA](#), the Lawyers Secular Society (LSS) has called on the regulator to explain how, in endorsing the Law Society's guidance on sharia succession rules, it has discharged its PSED.

In the letter to SRA chief executive Paul Philip, LSS secretary Charlie Klendjian argued that it is no more appropriate for the SRA to endorse guidance to solicitors on how to draft wills which give effect to a set of rules which discriminate on the grounds of gender and religion, as it would be for it endorse guidance on writing racist wills, or homophobic wills.

The SRA was formed in 2007 by the Legal Services Act to act as the independent regulatory arm of the Law Society. It aims to "provide authoritative guidance and rules to solicitors on ethical issues" and "give the public full confidence in the solicitors' profession".

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager at the National Secular Society, called on the SRA to delete the reference. "It's deeply regrettable that the body charged with setting standards for solicitors has deemed it appropriate to in effect unreservedly endorse a deeply discriminatory form of inheritance rules", said Mr Evans.

"The Solicitors Regulation Authority should play no part in legitimising religious codes as if they were law, or recommending guidance that encourages discrimination. This 'ethics guidance' does both."

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