

# Supporting Legal Compliance Roles in Law Firms: What Every Firm Needs to Get Right

Regulatory compliance is the backbone of every law firm's reputation.

Yet the COLP, COFA, MLRO and MLCO who uphold that standard (together with the wider risk and compliance team) often face immense pressure.

Their remit stretches across anti-money laundering (AML), data protection, client money, conflicts, governance, and professional ethics.

To perform these roles effectively, firms must provide tangible, ongoing support. Without it, compliance risks quickly turn into business risks.

This article suggests how law firms can create the right environment for compliance officers to succeed.

## Authority and Independence

Compliance officers need both authority and independence to do their jobs properly. Their responsibilities and powers should be clearly defined and recognised at board or partnership level.

They must have direct access to senior management and freedom to escalate issues without fear of commercial or internal pressure. When compliance advice is marginalised, regulatory breaches and reputational damage often follow.

We can [help](#) with drafting role profiles and advising on efficient reporting processes, because we understand how precious everyone's time is.

## Adequate Resourcing

Compliance cannot be managed 'on the side'.

Firms should ensure compliance staff have the time, staff, and budget to carry out their functions effectively. That includes:

- Dedicated compliance professionals, where possible.
- Protected time for compliance duties (not squeezed around fee-earning and other management).
- Budget for external experts, if necessary.

The SRA expects firms to *empower* compliance officers, not overburden them.

## Ongoing Training and Development

Regulations evolve constantly. Compliance officers (and all relevant people in the firm) need regular updates and training on compliance, for example AML, data protection, ethics, and SRA rules.

Good practice includes:

- Annual firm-wide compliance training. Click [here](#) for more information about our training.
- Access to SRA updates and professional development resources.
- Specialist courses for compliance leads and MLROs.

Ongoing education ensures the firm stays ahead of regulatory change and fosters a proactive compliance culture.

## Systems and Documentation

Every firm should maintain robust policies and written procedures covering each area of compliance, including:

- AML and client due diligence
- Information security and data protection
- Conflicts and confidentiality
- Client money and accounts
- Complaints handling
- Breach reporting and record keeping

Templates tailored for individual circumstances, checklists, and registers help create consistency and evidence compliance in the event of an audit or SRA visit. We are experienced in providing documentation that's useful, without being just a 'tick-box'. More information can be found [here](#).

## Technology and Tools

Modern compliance demands modern tools. Investing in compliance technology can significantly reduce risk, improve efficiency, and enhance reporting.

Firms should consider:

- Automated client onboarding and AML/KYC systems
- Responsive risk assessment records
- Document and workflow management software
- Compliance dashboards or tracking tools
- Cybersecurity and data protection solutions

These systems support compliance staff and reduce human error. We work with several providers of technology to assist with these areas, and you can [contact us](#) for details.

## Reporting and Oversight

Compliance should be a standing item at management meetings. Regular reports from the COLP, COFA, or compliance officer ensure transparency and accountability.

Internal or external audits, coupled with mechanisms for feedback and 'lessons learned', help strengthen compliance and risk management.

Our experience allows us to offer [independent Regulation 21 AML Audits](#) for firms, which provide effective, useful insights into areas for improvement and what is already working well. We can also offer [gap-analysis reports](#) on compliance processes, allowing firms to take advantage of our experience of different ways to manage compliance.

## Regulatory Change Management

The regulatory landscape never stands still.

Law firms must track, interpret, and implement new rules and guidance, whether from the SRA, the Legal Sector Affinity Group (LSAG), or data protection authorities.

A structured change-management process ensures updates are applied consistently across policies, procedures, and training materials. Finding a way of staying updated is essential for all compliance roles.

## Culture and Leadership

A genuine culture of compliance starts from the top. When partners and directors visibly support ethical practice, employees follow suit. Ethics is an area increasingly coming into focus for the SRA.

Encourage open communication, reward integrity, and make compliance a shared value rather than a policing function. Firms that embed compliance into everyday behaviours rarely face systemic breaches.

## Clear Roles and Accountability

Define each compliance role clearly. Clarifying responsibilities and reporting lines prevents overlap, ensures accountability, and strengthens governance.

## Building a Stronger Compliance Foundation

Supporting your compliance function isn't simply about avoiding regulatory breaches. Strong compliance is about protecting your firm's integrity, reputation, and long-term success.

By providing proper authority, resourcing, technology, and training, firms enable compliance officers to perform their roles effectively and confidently.

Ultimately, that benefits clients, colleagues, and the profession as a whole.

## **Need Expert Help?**

If your firm needs guidance on compliance systems, regulatory audits, or practical support for COLP and COFA roles, we can help.

[Contact us](#) to discuss how we can strengthen your firm's compliance foundation.