What you should know about file reviews…

Do you love file reviews? Not many people answer "Yes"!

But, done well, they can be so useful and can keep firms on the right path. The SRA fed back at their COLP/COFA conference in 2025 that during AML audits, they noticed that firms with effective file review processes had a higher proportion of AML compliant files.

I've got loads of ways firms can make file reviews work, but here's a few tips:

🔸 Keep it relevant → Standard template forms try and cover all types of work and firm, but often end up suiting neither. Make sure your process covers what you do and what you want to find out.

🔸 Focus on what matters → Is it only legal advice you're checking, or compliance, or both?

🔸 Choose the right reviewers → It doesn't have to fall to Partners or compliance teams, but whoever does it must have knowledge of what a good file looks like and have the authority to feed back any corrective action.

🔸 Choose the right frequency → Not everyone needs 3 files reviewing every month.

🔸 Include everyone → Even senior Partners or managers. No-one is perfect and making sure everyone's files are reviewed sends a great message about the importance of compliance. It's about culture, not seniority!

🔸 Choose files wisely → Random is great, but what works better is a random selection from a more limited range of files, such as higher risk files, dormant files, files with retentions. This could be every time, or every so often. Again, it's about what works for you.

🔸 Review, review, review! → The data produced from file reviews is invaluable in giving a snapshot of how things are working in real life. It's so easy to spot if there is something that isn't working across the firm, in a particular department, or for one individual. It leads to targeted reminders, or a change in process to make things work better for everyone.

Each set of file reviews can give you reassurance that things are going well, or help you pick up a one-off or regular problem that can be fixed before it becomes an issue. It is a brilliant part of demonstrating effective supervision. The data as a whole can feed into reviews of your overall practices, to help keep you efficient and compliant.

And in case you're wondering…I do love file reviews!