

SOLICITORS DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL

IN THE MATTER OF THE SOLICITORS ACT 1974

Case No. 12674-2024

BETWEEN:

SOLICITORS REGULATION AUTHORITY LTD

Applicant

And

MAXMILLIAN ALEXANDER KNOWLES CAMPBELL

Respondent

Before:

Ms T Cullen (in the chair)

Mrs L Murphy

Dr A Richards

Date of Hearing: 07 October 2025

Appearances

Andrew Bullock, Barrister, employed by the Solicitors Regulation Authority, The Cube, 199 Wharfside Street, Birmingham, B1 1RN, instructed by the Respondent for the Applicant.

Alisdair Williamson KC, instructed by Simons Muirhead Burton LLP87-91 Newman Street, London W1T 3EY for the Respondent.

JUDGMENT

Allegations

1. The allegations against the Respondent, made by the SRA are that, while in practice as a Solicitor:
 - 1.1 Between January 2022 and April 2022 provided information on his pupillage application that he knew was inaccurate and misleading by stating:
 - 1.1.1 He attained a double first starred first degree.
 - 1.1.2 He attained the 'Slaughter and May Prize' for best overall performance.

and in doing so breached one or more of Principles 2,4 and 5 of the SRA Principles 2019 ("the Principles") and/or Paragraph 1.4 of the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs 2019 ("the Code for Solicitors").
 - 1.2 In or around April 2022 provided information to Dr Gehring which he knew was inaccurate and misleading by stating:
 - 1.2.1 He had not made an application to Erskine Chambers.
 - 1.2.2 He suspected he had been the victim of a practical joke.

and in doing so breached one or more of Principles 2,4 and 5 of the SRA Principles 2019 ("the Principles") and/or Paragraph 1.4 of the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs 2019 ("the Code for Solicitors").

Executive Summary

2. This matter concerned the Respondent, a professionally junior solicitor admitted to the Roll in March 2020, who admitted allegations of dishonesty, a lack of integrity and failure to uphold public confidence in the profession in connection with an application submitted to Erskine Chambers, during the 2022 round of pupillage applications. At the time, the Respondent was employed as an associate at Slaughter & May.
3. The first allegation was that the Respondent had provided false and misleading information in his application stating that he had attained a double starred first-class degree and had been awarded the 'Slaughter and May Prize' for best overall performance during his final undergraduate year.
4. It was further alleged that, following the completion of a second interview with the chambers, the Respondent provided inaccurate and misleading information to one of his referees, informing him that he had not made the application and suspected he had been the victim of a practical joke.
5. The Applicant alleged breaches of Principles 2, 4 and 5 of the SRA Principles 2019 and Paragraph 1.4 of the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs 2019 in respect of each allegation.

6. The Respondent admitted all of the allegations and associated breaches from the outset, but submitted that the case fell within the residual category of cases where exceptional circumstances apply, as defined in *SRA v Imran* [2020] EWHC 3151 (Admin).
7. After listening with care to the submissions of the parties, the Tribunal determined that despite accepting that the Respondent was suffering from a depressive illness at the relevant time of the misconduct, the nature and extent of the dishonesty admitted was such that it fell out of the narrow category of cases to which exceptional hardship applied.

Sanction

8. The Tribunal therefore struck the Respondent off the Roll of Solicitors and imposed costs in the sum of £6,110. The Tribunal's reasoning on Sanction can be found [\[here\]](#)

Documents

9. The Tribunal considered all of the documents in the case which included:
 - (a) The Applicant's Rule 12 Statement dated 3 September 2024 and bundle of exhibits TKD1(X1-X114).
 - (b) The Respondent's Answer to the Rule 12 Statement dated 22 October 2024.
 - (c) Medical Report by Dr Philip Hopley dated 11 October 2024.
 - (d) The Respondent's Skeleton Submission on Sanction dated 30 September 2025.

Preliminary Matters

10. The Tribunal confirmed that in accordance with its direction made on 16 December 2024, the hearing would proceed in private.

Factual Background

11. The Respondent, was born in September 1991 and was admitted to the Roll on 16 March 2020.
12. At the time these allegations arose, he was practising as an associate at Slaughter & May.
13. The Respondent does not currently have Practising Certificate and has not worked as a solicitor since 13 April 2022.

Witnesses

14. The written evidence of witnesses and oral submissions is quoted or summarised in the Findings of Fact and Law below. The evidence referred to will be that which was relevant to the findings of the Tribunal, and to facts or issues in dispute between the

parties. For the avoidance of doubt, the Tribunal read all of the documents in the case and made notes on all the evidence presented.

15. The absence of any reference to particular evidence should not be taken as an indication that the Tribunal did not read, hear or consider that evidence.
16. No witnesses gave oral evidence during the hearing.

Findings of Fact, Law and Admissions

17. The Applicant was required by Rule 5 of The Solicitors (Disciplinary Proceedings) Rules 2019 to prove the allegations to the standard applicable in civil proceedings (on the balance of probabilities). The Tribunal had due regard to its statutory duty, under section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998, to act in a manner which was compatible with the Respondent's rights to a fair trial and to respect for their private and family life under Articles 6 and 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
18. The Applicant's Case
 - 18.1 The Applicant's case is set out in the Rule 12 Statement dated 3 September 2024 which can be found here - [Click Here](#).
19. The Respondent's Case
 - 19.1 The Respondent admitted all of the allegations and breaches on the basis of the facts set out in in Rule 12 Statement.
20. The Tribunal's Findings
 - 20.1 The Tribunal reviewed all the material before it and was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the Respondents' admission to all of the allegations and the associated breaches of the Principles, Rules and Codes of Conduct were properly made.

Previous Disciplinary Matters

21. The Respondent had an unblemished regulatory record.

Mitigation

22. Mr Williamson KC set out the following mitigating facts none of which were disputed by the Applicant:
 - (a) The Respondent was a junior solicitor, having been admitted to the Roll in March 2020 and practising for only two years at the time of the misconduct.
 - (b) The Respondent's actions occurred in the context of a proposed career transition, with a stated intention to move from corporate practice to a different area of law.

- (c) He made a self-report to the SRA shortly after the events came to light.
 - (d) The Respondent demonstrated remorse and insight into his conduct, including a full admission of the allegations and breaches from the outset.
 - (e) He cooperated fully with the regulatory process and has not practised as a solicitor since April 2022.
 - (f) The Respondent has an otherwise unblemished regulatory record.
23. However, Mr Williamson KC accepted that, notwithstanding the mitigating factors, the reality was that where dishonesty is proved, the Tribunal is, save in exceptional circumstances, invariably constrained to impose the ultimate sanction of striking off. He therefore addressed the Tribunal as to the exceptional circumstances present in the Respondent's case.

The Respondent's Submissions on Exceptional Circumstances

24. Mr Williamson KC submitted that while *SRA v Sovani James [2018] EWHC 3058 (Admin)* is frequently cited for the proposition that pressure of work or extreme working conditions, even when combined with stress or depression, cannot amount to exceptional circumstances, that statement must be read in the context of the judgment as a whole. The Respondent argued that the High Court did not exclude mental health as a relevant factor, but rather emphasised the need for a proper evaluative exercise
25. The Tribunal was therefore invited, by Mr Williamson to weigh, on one hand, the nature and extent of the dishonesty and the degree of culpability, and on the other hand, the Respondent's personal mitigation. It was submitted that mental health, while traditionally considered a mitigating factor, also plays a dual role in the assessment of culpability. The Respondent relied on the implicit acknowledgment in *Sovani James* that mental health can affect culpability, provided the Tribunal properly engages with the evaluative framework.
26. The Respondent relied on the psychiatric report of Dr Hopley, which concluded that the Respondent was suffering from a major depressive disorder at the time of the misconduct. Dr Hopley opined that the Respondent's mental illness significantly impaired his ability to think clearly and rationally, and crucially, his ability to objectively appreciate the morality of his behaviour. It was submitted that this impairment reduced the Respondent's culpability in a way that was directly relevant to the Tribunal's assessment of exceptional circumstances.
27. It was further submitted that the dishonesty, while serious, was limited in scope and duration. The Respondent did not seek financial gain or a genuine pupillage placement, but rather interview experience as part of a misguided attempt to escape his deteriorating personal and professional situation. The conduct was described as irrational and self-defeating, and not the product of calculated deceit.
28. The Respondent's personal circumstances, while summarised in mitigation, were submitted to have a direct bearing on the Tribunal's assessment of culpability. It was argued that the combination of professional inexperience, the pressures of a career

transition, and the psychological impact of traumatic events—including the murder of a close friend and issues arising from isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic—contributed to a deterioration in the Respondent’s mental health that impaired his moral reasoning at the time of the misconduct

29. It was submitted that these circumstances, supported by character references and psychiatric evidence, distinguished the Respondent’s case from the typical dishonesty cases considered by the Tribunal. The conduct was described as out of character and reflective of a temporary descent into mental ill health, rather than a pattern of calculated or opportunistic behaviour.

The Applicant’s Submissions on Exceptional Hardship

30. Mr Bullock submitted that the conduct admitted by the Respondent did not meet the threshold for exceptional circumstances as defined in *SRA v Imran* [2015] EWHC 3121 (Admin) and interpreted in *SRA v Sovani James* [2018] EWHC 3058 (Admin). In support of this position, the Applicant relied on paragraph 101 of *Sovani James*, where the High Court drew a distinction between exceptional dishonesty and exceptional circumstances. It was submitted that the nature of the Respondent’s dishonesty—namely, fabricating academic achievements to secure interviews—was commonplace and therefore not exceptional.
31. In addition, Mr Bullock emphasised that paragraph 103 of *Sovani James* states that while mental health and workplace pressures may be relevant to mitigation, they carry less weight in dishonesty cases than factors such as duration, repetition, and harm. The Tribunal was reminded that the Respondent’s dishonesty was premeditated, extended over time, and involved multiple opportunities for him to correct the record, including during two interviews and subsequent communications with a referee.
32. While not disputing the existence of a depressive illness, the Mr Bullock invited the Tribunal to weigh the medical evidence carefully against the seriousness and duration of the dishonesty. It was submitted that, when properly directed, the Tribunal should conclude that there were no exceptional circumstances present which justified a departure from the normal necessary penalty for dishonesty.

The Decision of the Tribunal

33. The Tribunal listened carefully to the submissions made by the parties and reviewed the documentary evidence in detail, including the psychiatric report submitted on behalf of the Respondent.
34. The sole issue for determination, given that the facts were admitted and found proved, was whether the case disclosed exceptional circumstances such that a strike-off order should not follow in a case involving proven dishonesty
35. The Tribunal accepted that it was required to carry out a balancing exercise, weighing the nature and extent of the dishonesty and the degree of culpability against the Respondent’s personal mitigation, including his mental health and other surrounding circumstances. The Tribunal had regard to the authorities cited, in particular *SRA v*

Sovani James and SRA v Imran, and to the relevant paragraphs of its Guidance Note on Sanctions.

36. The Tribunal found that the Respondent's conduct in submitting a false application to Erskine Chambers was a deliberate and positive act, designed to gain advantage through the selection process. It was not a momentary lapse or a reaction to immediate pressure, but a sustained course of conduct. The Respondent had multiple opportunities to correct the dishonesty, including during two successive interviews and in addition, in communications with his referee, but chose not to do so.
37. While the Tribunal acknowledged the Respondent's mental health condition and accepted that he was suffering from a depressive illness at the relevant time, it did not find that this impairment was sufficient to reduce his culpability to the extent required to establish exceptional circumstances. The Tribunal concluded that the dishonesty was not isolated, and the surrounding circumstances, though unusual, did not justify a departure from the presumptive sanction.

Sanction

38. The Respondent admitted the allegation of dishonesty. The Tribunal carefully considered the mitigation advanced and the *Guidance Note on Sanctions* (11th Edition, February 2025), as well as the principles in *Fuglers and others v SRA* [2014] EWHC 179 and *Bolton v Law Society* [1994] 1 WLR 512.
39. Exceptional circumstances were invited as a basis for a lesser sanction, but none were found. In these circumstances, it was clear that there was only one appropriate and proportionate sanction: the Respondent must be struck off the Roll of Solicitors.

Costs

40. Mr Bullock, on behalf of the Applicant, claimed costs in the sum of £8,220, as set out in the costs schedule dated 24 September 2025.
41. He informed the Tribunal that the sum claimed would require adjustment given that the cost of the hearing had been calculated on the basis that the hearing would be of a 12 hour duration. He therefore invited the Tribunal to assess the costs on the basis of the hearing being of 3-hour hearing and a reduction in the preparation time from 14 hours to 7 hours.
42. On behalf of the Respondent, it was submitted that although no statement of means had been provided, he was currently resident in New York and employed. The Tribunal was invited to take into account the financial impact of the proceedings, including the loss of his legal career and ongoing personal outgoings.
43. The Tribunal determined that the costs claimed were just and reasonable. After making the appropriate adjustment to reflect the reduced hearing and preparation time, the Tribunal assessed costs in the sum of £6,110.
44. The Tribunal, concluded, given the outcome of the hearing and the nature of its findings, that its judgment would be a matter of public record.

Statement of Full Order

45. The Tribunal ORDERED that the Respondent, MAXIMILLIAN ALEXANDER KNOWLES CAMPBELL, solicitor, be STRUCK OFF the Roll of Solicitors and it further Ordered that he do pay the costs of and incidental to this application and enquiry fixed in the sum of £6,110.

Dated this 20th day of October 2025
On behalf of the Tribunal

T. Cullen

T. Cullen
Chair