

One year on: bar ‘entities’ pleased they broke away

11 July 2016 By [Chloe Smith](#)

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Last spring a development in legal regulation opened up new ways for barristers to compete with conventional law firms.

More than a year on, early adopters of the bar’s ‘entity model’ say the structure has allowed them to embrace a more corporate and increasingly fused future – but acknowledge that they are still outliers.

So far, just 54 entities have been set up, against a projected 400, with many adopting the structure for tax purposes.

The Reflective Practice was one of the first entities consisting of a barrister and solicitor. Its co-founder, litigator Colin Henderson, said the model has allowed him to develop a more streamlined and flexible practice. He set up the entity alongside regulatory barrister Andrew Faux.

But while Henderson said he thought the future of the profession would see barristers and solicitors working together, he admitted that few colleagues had moved towards that goal. ‘We thought everyone would come and follow us,’ he told the *Gazette*.

Civil and commercial barrister Richard O’Sullivan, who was among the first to set up an entity, said at the time that the development was a milestone towards a united profession.

A year on, he says that a fused profession is still inevitable, but that he is less certain about its benefits: ‘I still think it is going this way but I was more positive about that before.’

Since setting up the entity he has shelved plans to hire a solicitor as that would involve more time managing people than working with the law. ‘For the time being I am sticking with what I know,’ he said.

But others in the first wave of entities were more bullish. Mark Johnson (pictured), a solicitor who used the entity model to seek more ‘proportionate’ regulation for Elderflower Legal, said he would ‘never go back’ to the Solicitors Regulation Authority unless it reformed radically.

He said clients appreciate the lower overheads and ‘more time’ spent on service rather than worrying about rules and paperwork.

David Bowden, a solicitor specialising in consumer credit law who set up his entity this year to get away from the ‘complex’ SRA handbook, said the move has cut his insurance premium by 90%.

Family barrister Ashley Murray said clients found the corporate presentation of his entity to be ‘appropriately modern and a break from the traditional and somewhat detached and aloof old style’.

But he said that other barristers were less keen on embracing the change, and that he had so far not managed to get others to come on board.

However he has no regrets about the venture. ‘For me, it has been the best thing I have done in decades of practice and has kept me at the forefront of what I do,’ he said.