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Starting a Law Firm Operational Checklist

Authorisation, roles, insurance, records and continuity signposts.

Use it when	a new England and Wales practice is planned
Boundary	This is operational signposting, not legal, regulatory, tax, insurance or business advice.

Built for independent law firms in England and Wales

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1. Frame the decision

Treat authorisation, insurance, client money, systems and continuity as separate workstreams with specialist owners.

Specific focus	Use regulator guidance and advisers to close each workstream before opening.

Questions to answer

- For this guide: Use regulator guidance and advisers to close each workstream before opening.
- Which authorisation route?
- Which services and reserved activities?
- Who holds required roles?
- What must exist before opening?

Avoid

- assuming authorisation is automatic
- systems before services
- opening without continuity

2. Control sheet

Treat a blank evidence field as a reason to pause, not a reason to guess. Record sources and owners before changing the workflow.

Area	Evidence to collect	Pass condition
Authority	Entity and application	Route confirmed
Roles	Managers, COLP and COFA	Approvals clear
Insurance	Cover and timing	Evidence in place
Operations	Records and complaints	Routes documented
Continuity	Absence and closure	Clients protected

Fail closed

If an input, owner or approval is missing, record the gap and keep the affected step outside the proposed change.

3. Working record

Complete this page with counts, dates and named sources. Do not include client names, matter names, contract text or privileged material.

Field	Evidence or answer
Guide focus	Use regulator guidance and advisers to close each workstream before opening.
Entity	
Authorisation	
Activities	
Role holders	
Insurance	
Opening date	

Evidence quality check

- The source is named and dated.
- An estimate is labelled as an estimate.
- The owner can reproduce the measure.
- The same method can be used after a change.

4. Decision record

Select the outcome that the evidence supports. A stop or no-change decision is valid.

- Stop: a required source, owner or approval is missing.
- Fix: repair the underlying route before adding technology or cost.
- Test: run one bounded change with a baseline and review date.
- Proceed: adopt only the option supported by the recorded evidence.

Decision field	Record
Chosen outcome	
Reason and evidence	
Owner and approvers	
Review or expiry date	

Primary sources

SRA: Apply for authorisation of a new firm

SRA: Indemnity Insurance Rules

SRA: Accounts Rules

SRA: Client care letters

Source status

Links checked 18 August 2026. Confirm the current version and obtain appropriate professional advice before relying on regulated, contractual, privacy, security, insurance, financial or wellbeing conclusions.