

City of London Law Society – Training Committee

MINUTES of a meeting of the CLLS Training Committee with the SRA at 4 pm on Wednesday 27 September at Berwin Leighton Paisner, Adelaide House, London Bridge, London EC4R 9HA

CLLS TRAINING COMMITTEE

Hannah Kozlova Lindsay, Berwin Leighton Paisner (Chair)
Ben Perry, Sullivan & Cromwell
Caroline Janes, Herbert Smith Freehills
Caroline Pearce
Catherine Moss, Winckworth Sherwood
Frances Moore, Slaughter and May
Lindsay Gerrand, DLA Piper
Patrick McCann, Linklaters
Ruth Grant, Hogan Lovells

APOLOGIES:

Greg Lascelles, Covington & Burling
Rita Dev, Allen & Overy
Stephanie Tidball, Macfarlanes

David Hobart, CLLS

ALSO PRESENT:

Members of the Graduate Recruitment teams from Berwin Leighton Paisner, DLA Piper, Herbert Smith Freehills, Hogan Lovells, Linklaters, Macfarlanes, Slaughter and May and Sullivan & Cromwell

SRA

Julie Brannan, SRA Director of Education and Training and Liz Walters, SRA Policy Associate.

MEETING NOTES:

Julie Brannan explained that the purpose of the meeting was to explore some of the practical implications of the SQE in terms of timings.

Related to this, Julie also mentioned that the consultation on the transitional arrangements for the SQE had now been launched as part of the consultation on the SRA Handbook with a deadline for submissions on 20 December 2017.

SQE start date

Julie explained that the current proposed start date for the SQE is September 2020. This still needs to be confirmed by the SRA Board and is, therefore, a target start date. The date may be moved back depending on the outcome of the current pitching process for the SQE assessment organisation and the organisation's plans

for piloting and testing. Julie also explained that this date is being driven by the need for the SQE assessment to be in place for those seeking to qualify under the apprenticeship route from September 2020.

Existing qualification route long-stop date

Assuming the September 2020 start date for the SQE, the SRA is proposing that the last date on which aspiring solicitors will be able to start the process to qualification under the existing route (either QLD or CPE) will be the 2019/20 academic year. On that basis the proposed longstop date for the existing route to qualification will be 2031. This will leave enough time for students to take the QLD and LPC on a part-time basis. During this period the SRA is proposing that the equivalent means route to qualification will also remain in place.

Implications of running parallel approaches to qualification

Julie asked whether the firms would want to have recruits in the same cohort qualifying under the old and new systems. The consensus in the room was that firms would not want this because there would be a significant cost to running two systems in parallel and it would be unattractive to have people in the same intake being treated differently.

Therefore, firms are likely to switch to the new approach for all their recruits on the earliest date that the non-law students have to go on to the new system.

Expectation for numbers taking SQE in 2020

Julie explained that it may be that only a small number may be sitting the SQE in academic year 2020- 21: as anyone completing a law degree would only have the summer months to prepare. Those taking the SQE in academic year 2020-21 are likely to comprise apprentices and overseas lawyers. Some traditional QLD students may choose to take the SQE instead of the LPC, to save themselves money and because of the wider work experience which it will open up. But it will depend on what training is then available to them.

Recruitment messaging

Given that firms are already talking to first year law and non-law students on campus there was a discussion about what, at this stage, the firms could say to the students interested in qualifying as solicitors. Julie suggested that firms should give the following messages:

- Assuming the 2020 target date is not moved, these students will have the opportunity to qualify under the new system, but may continue under the old system, too, at their choice. Firms who offer students a training contract before they have chosen either SQE or LPC may direct them along one route or the other, so students should make sure they discuss this with their target firms; and
- An explanation of what the system might look like.

Uncertainty regarding the start date for the SQE

The firms raised concerns about the uncertainty created by the lack of a confirmed start date for the SQE. The firms explained that they would need a significant lead-in period to prepare for the new approach to qualification after the start date is announced. There was uncertainty about how much time would be needed, views ranged from at least 24 -30 months.

Designing preparatory courses for the SQE

There was a discussion about what additional information was needed for firms and providers to start designing their SQE preparation courses. The firms expressed the view that more information is needed on the syllabus so that they can understand how much time will need to be devoted to the courses.

Julie believes that work can already start on designing the courses, since the assessments will be based on the Statement of Solicitor Competence, the Statement of Legal Knowledge, and the draft Assessment Specification. However, Julie also confirmed that there was still work to be done in terms some of the detail of the syllabus, including looking at the balance between procedural and substantial knowledge being examined in the SQE.

Transition and the timings for the SQE assessments

Liz Walters shared the attached frameworks with the firms and the discussion that followed was in the context of these frameworks.

Timing for the SQE1 assessment

Julie explained that the current intention is to run two assessment windows for the SQE1 assessment, although in the future the SRA aspires to moving to an on demand assessment process.

Based on the assumption that firms would still want trainees to arrive in September and March, the SRA suggested that the two SQE1 assessment windows could be in May/June and November/December, respectively. This would allow for law graduates to complete an SQE1 preparation course and for time between the completion of the SQE1 and the start of the qualifying work experience for law firms to cover/teach the topics currently included as part of the electives in the LPC, should they wish to.

Timing for the SQE2 assessments

Julie suggested that these might run in September and March. Whilst Julie thought that substantial work experience would be required to pass SQE2, she did not think that a lengthy preparation course would be needed. Julie suggested that something akin to a weekend mock course could suffice if candidates had had the opportunity to develop their skills in the workplace. Julie also suggested that the SQE2 could be modularised, so that, for example, the litigation module might be completed immediately after a contentious seat.

The consensus from the firms was that it would be helpful to have more assessment slots, in case people were unable to pass first time round. It was also thought that

firms are likely to try to get their trainees through SQE1 and SQE2 before joining the firm for qualifying work experience.

Looking forward

Julie said that she had found the discussion very helpful and hoped to be able to continue in the future, including, where appropriate, with members of the firm's Graduate Recruitment teams.