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11th June 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

Response of the CLLS Training Committee to the SRA's consultation "SRA Regulatory Reform Programme (the "Consultation")"

The City of London Law Society ("CLLS") represents approximately 15,000 City lawyers through individual and corporate membership including some of the largest international law firms in the world. These law firms advise a variety of clients from multinational companies and financial institutions to Government departments, often in relation to complex, multi-jurisdictional legal issues.

The CLLS responds to a variety of consultations on issues of importance to its members through its 19 specialist committees. This response to the consultation has been prepared by the CLLS Training Committee. This Committee is aware that the CLLS Professional Rules and Regulation Committee has submitted a response to other parts of the Consultation and this response is confined to Question 18 on Apprenticeships.

CQ18: Do you agree with our proposal to enable qualification as a solicitor through an apprenticeship route?

We understand that the rationale for the change outlined in paragraph 67 of the Consultation is designed to facilitate the implementation of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' Trailblazer Apprenticeship scheme and the new Welsh Apprenticeship scheme for legal practice. But the wording in Annex C and the Solicitor Apprenticeship Standard is capable of applying to any apprenticeship scheme. Furthermore, Question 18 is of general application and asks a question which heralds a major reform in the qualification requirements for solicitors. Consequently, in our view, such a question goes well beyond the remit of a consultation that is aimed at reducing unnecessary burdens and cost on regulated firms and one that is intended to ensure proportionate and targeted regulation (a red tape consultation). Consequently, this is not the place for such a question.

To us, the real issue is that we are being asked to agree to something which:

- (i) does not require a period of recognised training, only "Relevant employer led work experience";
- (ii) does not meet the equivalent means test; and
- (iii) consists of an unknown assessment process.

The CLLS is considering the issue of apprenticeships in the wider context of the SRA's Training for Tomorrow reforms and we are addressing the apprenticeships issue in the context of those reforms. However, in its broadest terms, we are looking for graduate level entry to the profession and a mandated period of recognised training (in a regulated entity under the supervision of a practising solicitor) or equivalent. We wish to reserve judgment on the assessment proposal until we see the final form of the assessment.

But for the purpose of our response to Question 18, the CLLS is supportive of the concept of apprenticeships as a means of broadening access to the profession as long as standards are maintained, that is without a dilution of standards, diminution of quality or creation of a two tier profession. Whilst the Solicitor Apprenticeship Standard attached to the Consultation refers to the scheme as a Level 7 Apprenticeship, it is not clear to us from the Standard, how the equivalence to Level 7 (post-graduate level) will be assured.

The amendments to the Training Regulations outline in Annex C and the Solicitor Apprenticeship Standard signal a fundamental change (and not a minor change). In the light of the stated objective for these changes, the first principle should be that the changes are limited to facilitating Trailblazer Apprenticeships. The proposed generic changes pre-empt the outcome of the Training for Tomorrow proposed reforms. In our view, it is premature to be changing the Regulations on a generic basis.

By way of illustration, Regulation 2.5 and the Entry Requirements listed in the Solicitor Apprenticeship Standard at paragraph 5 are not limited to equivalent means to facilitate Trailblazer Apprenticeships alone, but instead apprenticeship schemes by any means. This would for example, include "Relevant employer led work experience", rather than a period of recognised training.

Furthermore, the changes facilitate entry (onto the apprenticeship scheme) with no academic qualifications at all, not even GCSEs or "A" Levels (or equivalent, see below), owing to the "And/or" wording. This is inconceivable. Even if this is corrected, and for the reasons mentioned above, we are far from being reassured that standards will be maintained.

As a point of detail, is the requirement for “A” levels in itself a barrier to entry? It may be appropriate to refer to “equivalence to “A” levels” but, of course, academic equivalence.

Yours faithfully

THE CITY OF LONDON LAW SOCIETY
Training Committee

**THE CITY OF LONDON LAW SOCIETY
TRAINING COMMITTEE**

Individuals and firms represented on this Committee are as follows:

Caroline Pearce (Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP) (Chair)
Rita Dev (Allen & Overy LLP)
Ruth Grant (Hogan Lovells International LLP)
Hannah Kozlova-Lindsay (Slaughter and May)
Patrick McCann (Herbert Smith Freehills LLP)
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