

CLLS TRAINING COMMITTEE MEETING NOTE

28 June 2018: 10-11.30am
BCLP's offices

Attendees:

In person: Hannah Kozlova Lindsay (Chair), Frances Moore, Lindsay Gerrand, Stephanie Tidball, Patrick McCann, David Hobart, Ruth Grant, Caroline Pearce.

Apologies: Catherine Moss, Caroline Janes, Ben Perry

Update from those who have attended recent SQE related fora and events

1. HKL gave a brief update of recent SQE-related events. Members of the Committee had attended Barbri and UoL events and an event at Travers Smith. There was an event shortly due to take place at the Southbank University. Members noted the following:
 - a) There appeared to be an appetite for a City-wide SQE preparation course.
 - b) There are a number of universities who are not going to run SQE courses, or who are not going to have courses up-and-running in time. In the short term, they do not have the staff, it takes them 2-3 years to implement changes and universities generally don't like modular concepts. (PM was to circulate a note on this.)
2. ST took the committee through an email from Sarah Hutchinson of Barbri (that followed the Travers Smith event), which with input from the SRA, sought to clarify some of the outstanding queries in relation to the SQE implementation.
 - a) With respect to implementation date (2020 or 2021): the SRA is keen not to delay implementation. ST stated that the SRA would review with the assessment provider (once appointed) if 2020 was attainable and expects to confirm timing by the end of 2018.
 - b) With respect to the draft specification that "*All candidates must take all Stage 1 assessments in a single window*": the SRA confirmed that their current intention is that all candidates had to take all stage 1 assessments in a single assessment window. This is the model that will be tested but the approach will be reviewed during testing. In any event, the SRA stated that re-sits of failed papers are permitted and, with respect to that, the Committee noted that this was a sort of modularisation.
 - c) With regard to eligibility to sit the Stage 1 assessments: there was a question concerning whether candidates needed a degree before or after they took SQE1. The SRA confirmed that there was no particular order and that, for example, a candidate could take the SQE2 before their workplace experience. It was noted that the only exception to the order of things was that SQE1 would need to come before SQE2.
 - d) With regard to question format: in terms of assessment examples, there is nothing beyond the draft assessment specification. The SRA confirmed that the main way of testing at SQE1 would be multiple choice.

- e) With regard to whether the SQE assessment will be designed to be benchmarked at level 7: the SRA said there would not be an official benchmark. It was thought that it may be difficult for universities to incorporate SQE1 into their law degrees. Universities were apparently thinking of offering summer schools at the end of their degree, potentially with a partner (e.g. UoL, Barbri and BPP). It was thought that one likely outcome would be that universities would feed crammers.

3. From this, the Committee noted the following:

- a) While the committee had recently heard that the SRA would require candidates to get a year's experience before they took SQE2, it was clear that was not the case. It was noted that the first year of training contracts might need to focus on SQE2 friendly seats.
- b) The Committee queried whether there was a choice of which of the five skills would be tested at SQE2. It was understood that candidates may know the skills in advance, but not the context (and they would be given the law around the context, given that the law would be examined on SQE1).
- c) If there was no benchmarking at Level 7 that might cause problems for apprenticeships (as apprenticeship funding rates depend on the academic level of each apprenticeship).
- d) With regard to when the SQE1 would be taken, the current position appeared to be that it would be taken twice a year in England and Wales (and the online part could be taken elsewhere around the world). It was noted that all law firms will be running courses with the same providers anticipating those twice a year sittings, such that -- due to the large numbers of students and limited numbers of providers -- it would probably not be possible to prepare for the SQE1 in small groupings of students.
- e) The two assessment periods for SQE2 would likely be a few weeks long.
- f) [Since the meeting, the appointment of Kaplan as the assessment provider was announced.]

SQE timings

- 4. On timing, initially the SRA said they would not be able to confirm timings until the end of 2018. At the Barbri event it was suggested that the SRA be written to on this point.
- 5. PM said that we should check whether, with respect to the 2020 start date, this referred to August or September.
- 6. It was queried whether, if the assessment specification would only be ready at the end of the year, that gives anyone enough time to prepare a course.
- 7. It was noted that Barbri had expressed the view that it was possible to do a four-month course prior to taking SQE1, and possibly that it would only take a year from 'point zero' to getting a qualified lawyer into the office (based on their US experience, Barbri's view is that can be done).

8. There was a question of whether the Committee wanted to sign up to a proposed email/letter to the SRA. Subsequently it was decided that a letter was not required as it is likely that GDL providers will start their courses early in 2020, so GDL students starting in the summer 2020 can follow the existing route to qualification. This will effectively provide a further year for firms and providers to prepare an SQE course.
9. DH raised the point that if there is no requirement of a degree-or-equivalent before taking SQE1, it implies that one can do SQE1 first. He said this raised the possibility that post-event, the SQE1 would be made degree-equivalent. That might affect the reputation of the solicitor brand.
10. There was therefore a query whether a degree should be a pre-requisite, as there was a suggestion that people would come to think that the SQE1 was a law degree. RG said that it probably came back to the level of the SQE1 test.
11. In terms of immediate points:
 - a) It was felt that firms should know that the implementation of SQE1 may mean that the requirement for a law degree would be dropped. This could devalue the brand. By comparison, while California accepts a liberal arts degree and the GDL as legal qualifications, New York doesn't.
 - b) We will want the SRA to confirm the position -- in particular when the draft assessments are ready in January.
 - c) There was a query raised as to what the agreement between the SRA and Kaplan was on the examination.
 - d) On cost, it was thought that the SQE2 would be the more expensive one.
 - e) The Committee agreed with PM that the five main concerns for law firms were the content of SQE1 and 2, how one teaches law to non-lawyers, missing electives, and ensuring that the various 'soft' skills that were taught in the current system (as part of the PSC and elsewhere) were taught in the new.

What could be done to help support member firms?

12. The Committee thought it might be helpful to put together a note for member firms along the lines of: this is where we are at, this is what you need to know, this is what we don't know, here are the five main points and what you have to plan for, this is what the providers are offering, and here are some of the options.
13. There was a question in this regard of whether it would be beneficial to have a consortium-approach among firms to provide training in the missing parts of the LPC (e.g. the electives). The responses to the note would let us know if there was an appetite for this.
14. There may then be (i) a meeting with the law faculties; and (ii) a larger meeting with the three main providers. With respect to the latter, it was thought that, as part of the note to member firms, we could ask the three providers what their take on the future was, and append that to the note.

15. We would also get Julie Brannan to provide her comments and updates by the end of summer. Further, we might also discuss with Kaplan (or have them present on) the question of, "What do City firms need to propose to the students of the next generation of solicitors".
16. It was felt to be of benefit to have the note out, and responses, and any meeting with providers, before the symposium on 13 November, so that there would be a more informed discussion with the SRA. It was thought that we should aim for a meeting in September early October with the providers and broader group.

Brexit

17. The Committee discussed Brexit working groups. HKL had been in touch with Julie Brannan about what the SRA were thinking. DH stated that the Law Society was setting up working groups and that some useful work had been done by other committees.

Committee membership

18. As RG is retiring, it was agreed to advertise for new members.