

Solicitors Regulation Authority  
Education and Training Unit  
The Cube  
199 Wharfside Street  
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The logo for the Legal Services Consumer Panel is located in the top right corner. It consists of a large blue circle on the left, and the text 'LEGAL SERVICES CONSUMER PANEL' in white, stacked vertically on the right. 'LEGAL' and 'SERVICES' are in a smaller font, while 'CONSUMER' and 'PANEL' are in a larger, bold font.

LEGAL  
SERVICES  
CONSUMER  
PANEL

9 January 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Training for Tomorrow: a Competence Statement for Solicitors**

The Panel would like to make a brief response to this consultation. Panel members and staff from the secretariat have met with SRA colleagues to discuss plans in this area, and were also pleased to have been able to participate in various SRA workshops on the subject. In addition, we were impressed by the strong consumer research which the SRA carried out as part of this project. We are supportive of the SRA approach of moving away from prescribing how education and training is delivered towards an emphasis on competent practitioners who deliver good quality outcomes.

The Panel has consistently embraced the notion of day one competence and we agree that overall the statement reflects what a competent solicitor should be able to do. The Panel is particularly supportive of client centred aspects such as the focus on clear language and avoiding unnecessary technical terms; the focus on awareness of and meeting the needs of vulnerable clients; and the requirements around providing a clear basis for charging. We also considered the Threshold Standard and we agree that this will be useful in ensuring that individuals meet the required standards. It is key that the SRA approach allows for effective and consistent assessment, and the Panel was pleased to see the focus on this in the consultation.

We note the Statement of Legal Knowledge and the SRA's intention that practitioners should have a broadly based qualification and be able to recognise possible problems, even when these are outside their immediate area of practice. The Panel has previously considered the issue of broad based versus specialist training in our Submission to the Legal Education and Training Review in 2012. Our key comments then were as follows:

*There remains a need for a general legal qualification which trains individuals in the core legal subjects and skills. The Panel appreciates that this training both helps advisors to spot other issues and teaches an approach to interpreting and dealing with legal problems. We are also sensitive to the dangers of over-*

*specialisation when what consumers actually need is holistic advice.*

*However, we are not convinced that the general legal qualification should be a prerequisite for all areas of law. This should be resisted where it is not necessary to safeguard against quality risks because the costs of this training feed through to the price of legal services and can thus limit access.*

*The GP-style qualification model fails to respond to a market which is hugely varied in terms of its provider base and range of activities. It is impossible for a single qualification to prepare an individual for the sheer diversity of roles they might, perhaps much later, come to occupy. This suggests a modular approach and introducing additional, or in some cases, alternative specialist training requirements for activities where the quality risks are highest. The point of authorisation as an approved person would therefore offer a limited permission to provide certain legal services to consumers, but authorisation to provide certain other services would be granted separately.*

The Panel remains committed to maintaining a balance between a sufficiently broad base and ensuring specialist training in higher risk areas. People can be especially vulnerable in those areas of law where the information gaps between consumers and lawyers are at their widest and so specialist training may be of particular importance here. In this context we would also underline the importance of the SRA increasing its evidence base around the quality of legal work. This will enable the regulator to target those areas which most put consumers at risk.

I hope this response is helpful. As always, we would be pleased to meet with SRA colleagues to discuss these issues further. Please contact Harriet Gamper, Consumer Panel Associate, with any enquiries.

Yours sincerely



Elisabeth Davies  
Chair