

Sent by email only to consultation@sra.org.uk



25 July 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

A new route to qualification: New regulations for the Solicitors Qualifying Examination.

The Legal Services Consumer Panel welcomes the opportunity to respond to the SRA's consultation on regulations to bring the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) into force. In January 2017, the Consumer Panel responded to the SRA's consultation on the same subject. In that response we raised concerns around flexibility, diversity, funding and the timings for implementation. Some of these concerns remain valid for the Panel, particularly the timing for implementation.

Timings

The SRA has moved the target date for full implementation of the SQE from September 2019 to September 2020. The Panel welcomes this postponement, but continues to believe that this is an ambitious target which risks putting the SQE in jeopardy should it be followed slavishly. We note that the SRA still has to choose an assessor. The procurement process for an assessor, the development of training content, and test setting will require time to get right. Moreover, the SRA, and the assessor would want to consult widely and build in time for testing. Time will also need to be allocated for refinement based on inescapable shortcomings discovered in the piloting phase, or highlighted by stakeholders. We are not convinced that three years is adequate for all the stages outlined above.

Training

We welcome the SRA's proposal to offer online support to help candidates and employers understand the requirements for qualification. We would also recommend online provision of familiarisation tests and stimulations for both stages (SQE1 and SQE2). This would help candidates to prepare better.

This month the Legal Services Board published the research findings into how vulnerable consumers (consumers with mental health problems and dementia) experience legal services.¹ At a roundtable event to launch the report, regulators and consumer groups unanimously agreed that legal services professionals need sound interpersonal skills when delivering services to vulnerable consumers. The Panel strongly encourages the SRA to include mandatory vulnerability training and testing at both stages of the SQE.

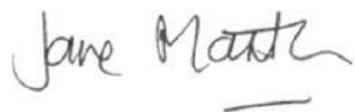
¹ *The LSB launches research into vulnerable consumers' experience of legal services*, 14 July 2017, http://www.legalservicesboard.org.uk/news_publications/LSB_News/PDF/2017/20170614_LSB_launches_research_into_vulnerable_consumers_experience_of_legal_services.html

We would be very happy to meet and discuss any aspect of this response in further detail. Please contact Lau Ciocan for further queries at lau.ciocan@legalservicesconsumerpanel.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jane Martin

Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Martin". The signature is written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a short horizontal line.