

Education and training authorisation and monitoring activity September 2021 - August 2022

20 December 2023

Introduction and overview 2021-22

We have a statutory responsibility for the education and training of solicitors, as set out in the Solicitors Act 1974 and the Legal Services Act 2007. Our education and training requirements are a key regulatory tool to protect consumers of legal services.

This report summarises our quality assurance activity in relation to the Legal Practice Course (LPC) route to qualification. Here we use the 'LPC route' to refer to qualification before the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) was introduced.

Usually this means obtaining:

- a Qualifying Law Degree (QLD) or Common Professional Examination (CPE) - the academic stage of training
- the LPC, a period of recognised training (PRT) and the Professional Skills Course (PSC) - the vocational stage of training.

Unless otherwise stated, the report relates to the period 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022.

The CPE is also known as the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL). In this report, we refer to it as the CPE throughout.

SQE introduction and transitional arrangements

In September 2021, we introduced a new single assessment for all aspiring solicitors, the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). The SQE means that everyone who becomes a solicitor will be assessed in a consistent way and to the same high standards.

The SQE replaces the LPC route to qualification. However, we have transitional regulations in place to allow anyone who had begun studying or training when we introduced the SQE, to continue to qualify through the LPC route. Consequently, people could be qualifying through this route for some years, potentially until 2032. However, we expect most courses to come to an end over the next few years.

Monitoring the LPC route

We will continue to monitor the LPC route and to report on our activities for as long as the numbers qualifying this way remain high enough for us to do so. We are mindful that as LPC providers wind down their courses, new risks to the quality and standard of LPCs could arise. We will monitor the extent to which they might arise and take appropriate mitigating action.

The transitional regulations for SQE also mean that this is the last time we will report on a full-time CPE cohort. We will continue to report on the part-time cohort and those who complete the course after deferring/referring.

This report covers a period when Covid-19 restrictions were lifted. We relaxed some of our requirements for the teaching and assessment of the QLD, CPE and the LPC at the start of the pandemic in 2020 and for the whole of the 2020/21 academic year.

We continued to allow some flexibility in how courses were taught and assessed in the academic year 2021/22 in limited circumstances, where we were satisfied that the arrangements put in place by providers maintained the security and integrity of the qualification. For the period covered in this report, all providers had indicated a return to pre-pandemic delivery.

This report looks at the information we receive from the LPC and CPE providers that we have approved or authorised to deliver the courses. It also considers information we hold as a regulator on the qualification routes on which students have chosen to study and eventually qualify.

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Key findings

LPC

In the year covered by this report, the numbers of students taking the LPC increased by 12.5% compared to the previous year.

Rates of successful completion for the LPC fell compared to the previous year - 47.8% of students completed in 2021/22 compared to 53.5% in 2020/21. This trend may, in part, be due to an increase in students who referred/deferred during the pandemic, compared to previous years (39% of students referred/deferred in 2021/22, compared to 37% in 2020/21, 28% in 2019/20 and 13% in 2018/19).

We define 'successful completion' as being where a student has passed the LPC in the period under consideration. Students who have not successfully completed may have additional attempts available to them. They may be 'referred', meaning they have failed one or more assessments and may resit, or they may have 'deferred'. This means they have postponed their assessment because of exceptional circumstances,

in one or more subjects. These students may successfully go on to complete the LPC in future.

CPE

There was an increase of 26% in the numbers who took the CPE in 2020/21. This could have been a contributing factor in the increase in those taking the LPC during 2021/22.

The number of students taking the CPE has fluctuated over the last four years: This started with 5,353 in 2018/19, increasing to 5,723 in 2019/20, reaching a peak at 7,234 in 2020/21, and then decreasing to 6,475 in 2021/22.

CPE completion increased compared with the previous year – 54.6% of students completed the CPE in 2021/22 compared to 49.6% in 2020/21.

In the same two-year period, the number of students who referred/deferred decreased – 36.7% in 2021/22 compared to 40% in 2020/21. In 2019/20, 22% referred/deferred whereas 15% referred/deferred during 2018/19.

Successful completion rates by providers

There continues to be significant differences in the successful completion rates between providers, with pass rates for the LPC ranging from 21% to 100%. There are a number of different factors which may influence pass rates, including student ability and engagement, teaching quality and assessment arrangements. However, we are unable to draw firm conclusions from the data available.

In addition to the differences in successful completion rates between providers, there are significant differences between providers in the proportion of students who achieve 'pass', 'commendation' or 'distinction' grades.

Successful completion rates by ethnicity

Data shows that students from ethnic groups other than White are less likely to successfully complete the CPE and the LPC, as has been the case since we began monitoring the provision of these courses. This gap in outcomes is widely seen across higher education and professional assessments. We have commissioned research to help us better understand the reasons for the differential outcomes in professional assessments, including professional legal assessments, which will conclude in 2024.

Successful completion rates by gender

October 2015	5,303 51	345	136	-	206	6,109
October 2016	5,501 24	421	204	-	274	6,460
October 2017	5,513 24	541	240	-	277	6,607
October 2018	5,775 7	603	251	-	278	6,786
October 2019	5,742 8	521	323	-	387	7,001
October 2020	5,474 5	605	343	-	313	6,721
October 2021	5,723 9	685	352	-	399	7,168
October 2022	5,196 -	1,306	240	433	120	7.300

Key findings from this period are:

- 7,300 solicitors were admitted
- Approximately 70% of those admitted followed the LPC route to qualification
- The Qualified Lawyer Transfer Test (QLTT) and Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS) accounted for approximately 14% of those admitted.
- QLTS admission is significantly higher than in previous years as individuals likely sought admission before transitional arrangements end.
- The number for 'other' is lower this year than previous years. This is explained by the 31 December 2021 deadline for eligible registered European lawyers to apply to become solicitors. This was a result of the UK's exit from the European Union.

The QLTS is a two-stage assessment of the knowledge and skills needed to be a solicitor. It was the route to admission for barristers of England and Wales and lawyers qualified in other jurisdictions wishing to become solicitors. The QLTS was replaced by the SQE.

The QLTS assessment replaced the QLTT in 2010. However, those who completed the QLTT may still apply for admission under the transitional arrangements. A small number were admitted in the reporting period using this route.

Providers of legal education and training

The majority of those who qualify as solicitors under the LPC route will have completed:

- the academic stage of training - QLD or CPE

- the vocational stage of training - the LPC, a PRT and Professional Skills Course (PSC).

Providers of the CPE and the LPC offering courses during the period covered by this report ranged from universities that only offer QLD courses to those who offer a full range of pre and post qualification courses. All education providers that we authorise are subject to regulation by the Office for Students (OfS).

Since 2014, providers of QLD and CPE courses have been required to confirm to us that they meet the requirements of the Academic Stage Handbook if they wish for us to validate new programmes, revalidate existing programmes or make major modifications to existing programmes.

The Academic Stage Handbook sets out the requirements for all QLDs, CPEs and Exempting Law Degrees (ELD) that lead to the completion of the academic stage of training for those wishing to become solicitors.

These arrangements continue to apply to all validated programmes that started by 31 December 2021. The SRA ceased to be involved in the approval or recognition of new QLD or CPE courses that started after 31 December 2021.

Trainees undertake a PRT in firms and organisations that we authorise to provide training.

SRA monitoring

When monitoring the quality and standards of education and training, we focus on the two professional qualifications within the framework. These are the CPE and the LPC.

For the CPE and the LPC, our monitoring involves initial validation (CPE) or authorisation (LPC). Each provider must also submit to us an annual course monitoring report consisting of monitoring data and a narrative report. Our main quality assurance activity is reviewing these reports. If we identify issues, we follow up with the provider. We also have the power to make a monitoring visit to a provider.

We are committed to improving our understanding of, and encouraging, equality and diversity in the solicitors' profession. In 2019/20, we expanded the information that we ask providers to collect about students on the LPC to include socio-economic data. This additional information and data will help us evaluate the impact of the SQE.

This newer data still includes a large number of 'unknown' responses. While the number of 'unknowns' has decreased from the previous year, it is still difficult to draw any firm conclusions from it. We will work with providers to understand how we can improve the quality of the data for the remaining years of the courses.

We have included in this report data showing the breakdown of LPC students by two socio-economic categories:

- the type of school that students mainly attended between the ages of 11 and 16
- the highest level of qualifications achieved by parents or guardians by the time the student was 18 years old.

While the information includes a large number of 'unknowns', it does provide some indication of the socio-economic background of LPC students.

For the LPC in 2021/22, the key figures indicate that:

- 9,055 (8% of enrolled students) successfully completed the LPC (compared with 53.5% in 2020/21)
- 5% failed the LPC in 2021/22
- the remaining students were either withdrawn or suspended or were referred or deferred from their assessments.

For the CPE in 2021/22, the key figures indicate that:

- 3,537 (54.6% of enrolled students) successfully completed the CPE (compared with 49.6% in 2020/21)
- 1% failed the CPE in 2021/22
- the remaining students were either withdrawn, suspended, referred or deferred from their assessments.

Legal Practice Course

LPC results by provider

Figure 3: LPC results by provider

Successful completion rates by provider vary from 21% to 100%. Providers did not report results and classification for 2% of candidates. In addition to varying completion rates, there is significant variation between providers in terms of the proportion of students obtaining pass, commendation and distinction grades. It is unclear what the reasons are for such a wide disparity in grades awarded.

The number of deferrals returned to pre-pandemic levels for the first time in two years, falling to 13% in 2021/22 compared to 36.8% of candidates deferred in 2020/21 and 28% in 2019/20.

There are very large differences in the size of different providers and the number of students on different LPCs. LPC cohorts range from fewer than ten students to many thousands of students, spread over different locations.

The largest providers, BPP University and the University of Law, offer the LPC across different locations. Between them, they shared approximately 87% of the total number of students enrolled to take assessments (81% in 2020/21).

LPC results by gender

Figure 4: LPC results by gender

Our data shows 68.3% of students in this cohort were female, 31.6% were male. Figure 4 above does not include the 0.05% who identified as 'other' or 'preferred not to say'.

There remains little difference in successful completion rates by gender on the LPC, with 51% of male students and 49% of female students completed. Both continue to receive similar rates of 'pass', 'commendation' and 'distinction' awards.

LPC results by ethnicity

Figure 5: LPC results by ethnicity

For the reporting period, the data shows that:

- 21% of students identified themselves as Asian/Asian British, the same as in 2020/21
- 11% of students identified as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, compared to 10% in 2020/21
- 5% of students identified as being from Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, the same as in 2020/21
- 8% of students 'preferred not to say' compared to 11% in 2020/21
- Students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds were less likely to obtain a distinction on the LPC than White students.
- Successful completion of the LPC for each ethnicity group was:
 - 5% White
 - 6% Asian/Asian British
 - 8% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
 - 50% of those from Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups.

Such differential outcomes are found across higher education and in other professional assessments. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to these outcomes in professional assessments, we have commissioned external research. We expect the final report will be published in 2024.

LPC results by disability

Figure 6: LPC results by disability

Approximately 18% of students identified themselves as having a disability. A further 5.2% preferred not to say. Of those who identified themselves as having a disability, 22.4% identified as having a learning disability or difficulty. This data, however, does not necessarily reflect the proportion of students who had special arrangements for their learning and/or assessment.

There appears to be a gap in outcomes for those who have identified as having a disability. For this reporting year, the successful completion rate was 40% for those who have identified as having a disability, whereas the rate for those who did not declare a disability was 54%. Those who preferred not to tell us whether they have a disability had a successful completion rate of 44%.

We do not have any further information from the providers on why the successful completion rate is lower for those who have identified as having a disability.

LPC results by socio-economic categories

Figure 7: LPC results by what type of school candidates mainly attended between the ages of 11 and 16

For the reporting period, the data shows that:

- 32% of responses were 'unknown', making it difficult to draw any firm conclusions from these figures
- 27% of students identified themselves as attending state-run/state-funded-non selective or selective schools, compared to 21% in 2020/21
- Approximately 8.7% attended an independent or fee-paying school, compared to 7% in 2020/21
- Students who attended independent or fee-paying schools with or without a bursary were most likely to pass the LPC and with a distinction.

Figure 8: LPC results by highest level of qualifications achieved by either parents or guardians by the time the candidate was 18

For the reporting period, the data shows that:

- 38% of responses were 'unknown', making it difficult to draw any firm conclusions from these figures
- 21% of students enrolled onto the LPC identified themselves as having a parent or guardian with at least one degree level qualification compared to 24% in 2020/21
- Approximately 8% reported parents or guardians with no formal qualifications compared to 7% in 2020/21
- Response rates were low and we cannot draw any firm conclusions. However, the figures show that those students identified as having a parent or guardian with at least one degree level qualification were more likely to obtain a distinction. This is compared with those who indicated their parents or guardians had no formal qualifications or no qualifications at or above degree level.

Summary of narrative reports from LPC providers

All LPC providers must provide us with an annual report on their course delivery for each year; this is known as an Annual Course Monitoring Report (ACMR). In addition to the ACMR, providers appoint external examiners to review the quality and standards of their assessments. Each provider appoints its own external examiners, who report to the LPC provider rather than to us.

In their ACMR, providers include a summary and analysis of issues raised by the external examiners and the provider's response to those issues. We also ask providers to send copies of the full external examiners' reports to us.

Although we prescribe a template for the ACMR, there are differences in the amount of information provided by different providers.

Some smaller providers reported a slight decrease in the number of full-time and/or part-time LPC students compared to the previous year, but overall there was an increase.

The providers' reports also covered their approach to resuming on-site, face-to-face delivery after Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.

Providers observed some resistance, particularly from part-time first-year students, to participate in face-to-face delivery. However, the majority of providers also noted that students generally viewed this change positively, as it facilitated increased interaction within their cohort and support from staff.

Overall, the external examiners were largely positive about LPC delivery in the reporting period. Feedback included:

- the quality and consistency of marking and moderation

- assessment processes measuring achievement appropriately against the intended learning outcomes
- issues identified in previous years being promptly and effectively resolved
- learning and teaching strategies and materials were of the required standard
- good student feedback and prompt resolution of complaints.

Some external examiners identified general areas of concern, including:

- administrative issues for external examiners
- being unable to visit campus and speak to students due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Common Professional Examination

CPE results by provider

Figure 9: CPE results by provider

The total number of students who were enrolled and eligible to sit assessments, enabling them to complete the CPE, was 6,475, compared with 7,234 in 2020/21.

The overall successful completion rate in 2021/222 was 54.6%, compared to 50% in 2020/21.

As with the LPC, the CPE is offered by a range of providers, all of which are also subject to regulation by the OfS. The size of the student cohort varies considerably.

The largest providers, BPP University and the University of Law, offer the CPE across multiple locations. As with the LPC, these are the two largest

providers in the market.

Rates of successful completion of the CPE by provider shown in figure 9 vary significantly, from 19% to 92%. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the reasons for the significant difference in successful completion rates from each provider based on the information provided. There is significant variation in size of providers. The differences might be explained by student cohorts of different academic ability, differences in the quality of teaching and/or in the approach to assessment.

The number of deferrals decreased considerably, to pre-pandemic levels -14.4% of students deferred during 2021/22, compared to 40% in 2020/21 and 22% in 2019/20.

Providers supply us with a summary and evaluation of issues raised by their external examiners in their annual reports. These did not raise any concerns about quality and standards on CPE courses.

CPE results by gender

Figure 10: CPE results by gender

Figure 10 provides a breakdown of CPE successful completion rates by gender. These numbers indicate largely consistent grades awarded on the CPE by gender.

Of this group, 37.6% of students were men and 62.3% women.

The successful completion rate for male students was 54.7% and 55.4% for female students. In the reporting year, successful completion rates highlight significant increases from last year (2021/22), when the same figures were 19% for males and 31% for females.

CPE results by ethnicity

Figure 11: CPE results by ethnicity

Figure 11 shows CPE successful completion rates by ethnicity. Some 17.5% of students identified themselves as Asian/Asian British, approximately 9.4% identified as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and approximately 5.4% as Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups.

The data shows that students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds were less likely to pass the CPE. White students form approximately 53% of the cohort and have a successful completion rate of 64.6%.

Asian/Asian British students accounted for 17.5% of the cohort and had a successful completion rate of 44.7%. Black (African/Caribbean/Black British) formed 9.4% of the cohort and their successful completion rate was 32.7%.

CPE results by disability

Figure 12: CPE results by disability

Figure 12 shows comparative results on the CPE of students with disabilities. Approximately 19% of students identified themselves as having a disability, compared with 22% last year. (This does not necessarily reflect the proportion of students who had special arrangements for learning and assessment.)

The successful completion rate for students declaring a disability was 53% in comparison to 55% for students who did not declare a disability.

Periods of recognised training

The final stage of the qualification pathway is completing a period of recognised training (PRT), often referred to as a 'training contract', and the Professional Skills Course.

A PRT takes place in an organisation that we have approved to take trainees. If the training is carried out on a full-time basis, it will usually last for two years, although other arrangements are possible, for example, for part time.

The number of PRTs registered with us in 2021/22 was 6,809. Figure 13 below shows this to be a five-year high. The figures shown are for the start of a PRT. Some individuals may not complete their training or may start a PRT more than once. This accounts for a small difference in the total number of PRTs and the numbers for those shown in Figure 2 to have been admitted to the roll, having successfully passed the LPC.

Data for previous years is refreshed at the point a candidate is admitted so there may be some minor differences when compared to previous reports.

Figure 13 also shows PRT data by age. Percentages are based on the total known population. This data set shows the spread of ages for trainees undertaking PRT has remained broadly stable over a five-year period. For

2021/22, 88% of the PRTs registered with us were for those aged 30 or under.

Figure 13: PRT age breakdown

Figure 13: PRT age breakdown

Age	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
18 - 21	40	1%	44	1%	31	1%	44	1%	46	1%
22 - 25	3,422	57%	3,484	57%	3,513	58%	3,380	57%	3,894	57%
26 - 30	1,821	30%	1,798	30%	1,789	30%	1,807	30%	2,094	31%
31 - 35	391	7%	399	7%	378	6%	375	6%	394	6%
36 - 40	150	3%	165	3%	157	3%	150	3%	173	3%
41 - 45	85	1%	86	1%	86	1%	106	2%	101	1%
46 - 50	37	1%	53	1%	54	1%	47	1%	56	1%
51 - 55	25	0%	24	0%	22	0%	22	0%	35	0%
56 - 60	6	0%	14	0%	10	0%	9	0%	10	0%
61+							7	0%	6	0%
Total known	5,978	100%	6,070	100%	6,046	100%	5,938	100%	6,809	100%
Declaration rate	100%		100%		100%		100%		100%	
Unknown	1	0%	2	0%	1	0%		0%		0%
Total	5,979	100%	6,070	100%	6,045	100%	5,958	100%	6,809	100%

We recently changed the way we collect equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data about trainees on this route to qualification. Previously, data was collected at the point of registering a PRT but it is now collected once the trainee has been admitted as a solicitor. This change means that we are unable to report on the EDI characteristics of ethnicity, disability, and gender for trainees registering their PRT from this reporting year. However, the changes that we have made mean that information we do collect, at admission to the roll, is more reliable. From 2022/23, these reports will include EDI data as part of the routes to admission section.

[Qualifying through equivalent means](#)

Since 2014, aspiring solicitors can apply to have their qualifications and experience assessed against the academic or vocational requirements of training by an equivalent means application.

We may recognise prior learning and grant exemptions where:

- the level, standard, volume and content of prior learning achieved is equivalent to all or part of a stage of education and training and

- there is relevant, sufficient and adequate evidence of such achievement.

We may also grant exemptions based on prior experiential learning. The key principle here is that we consider the achievement of learning and outcomes, and not simply evidence that an applicant has had experience doing something.

The number of those qualifying with part of their training satisfied through equivalent means has been steadily increasing. We make decisions about these following our assessment of applicants' workplace experience and/or qualifications against the relevant academic or vocational stage requirement.

Figure 18 shows the number of individuals who qualified with part of their training satisfied through equivalent means for the period from 2015/16 to 2021/22.

Individuals will continue to be able to apply to qualify through equivalent means during the transition period.

Figure 18: Number of individuals who qualified through equivalent means 2015/16 to 2021/22

Figure 18: Number of individuals who qualified through equivalent means 2015/16 to 2021/22

2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
66	71	85	88	98	109	114

These figures are for our financial year: 1 November to 31 October.