

SQE Briefing

August 2020

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Introduction

The solicitor profession is used and trusted by people at some of the most difficult times in their lives. The work of the profession is key to the delivery of the legal services that support the rule of law and underpin social and economic transactions across different sectors and jurisdictions.

We set the standards for the profession in the public interest. It is critical that everyone can have confidence that people joining the profession all meet the same high standards. In order to do that, we must be sure that entry into the profession is consistent, up to date and fit for purpose

This briefing sets out the story of the development of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) to date, covering the rationale, the objective and the detail of the work that has been undertaken on a range of important components of this new approach to qualification. We will update this briefing regularly.

The first steps towards the SQE were taken in 2011 when the Legal Education and Training Review was commissioned. Significant work in the intervening years has identified problems with the current system of qualification. There are inconsistencies in how routes into the profession are currently assessed, meaning we cannot be confident that everyone is meeting the same standards at point of entry. The current system is also expensive and inflexible, which creates difficulties for many aspiring solicitors, particularly those from less affluent and diverse backgrounds.

Our proposals are designed to deliver a single, rigorous assessment for all those who want to join the profession.

Our first objective is the greater assurance of consistent, high standards at the point of admission.

We also want the SQE to result in the development of new and diverse pathways to qualification, which are responsive to the changing legal services market and promote a diverse profession by removing artificial and unjustifiable barriers.

We are committed to working with a wide range of key stakeholders throughout the development of the SQE, not least through our SQE Reference Group, the membership of which includes The Law Society,

the Junior Lawyers Division, the Young Legal Aid Lawyers, the Association of Law Teachers, the Society of Legal Scholars and the City of London Law Society.

Changing the way that a profession qualifies is a complex task. We have been listening and responding to the concerns that people have shared and will continue to do so.

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