

Legal Services Board
1 Kemble Street
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London
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By email only to: matthew.hill@legalservicesboard.org.uk

10 September 2020

Application to Legal Services Board (LSB) for the approval of amendments to the Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) Authorisation of Individuals regulatory arrangements related to the proposed introduction of a Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE)

Dear Matthew

I am writing to you with regards to the above application by the SRA. As you are aware, the Law Society is supportive of the SQE's objectives of ensuring consistent high standards and making the profession accessible to diverse candidates. Your role in considering this application and, in the event that you approve the application, any requirements you set in relation to implementation, will be key to ensuring the SQE meets these objectives.

The Society recognises the collaborative way in which the SRA has worked to improve its proposals for the SQE in the light of feedback from the Law Society and others. The SQE is the better for this additional work.

The SRA has a regulatory objective to encourage an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession and the work to meet this does not finish with this application. We expect that action is taken to monitor and address the impact on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) when the SQE is implemented. The independent report from the Bridge Group provides a good overview of the issues raised by stakeholders and makes a series of recommendations in relation to EDI. We note that the work on a number of these areas has begun.

The LSB has an important role to play in holding the SRA to account for action to monitor and promote EDI by setting out clear expectations, as well as a timetable for review to monitor compliance with those expectations, at approval stage in line with the regulatory framework. We enclose a list of the specific actions we feel are necessary for the SRA to ensure the SQE does not negatively impact EDI in the profession, which is informed by our EDI expert members. These actions are aimed at ensuring adequate monitoring and understanding of potential impacts on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic candidates, disabled students, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ensuring that the particular needs of disabled candidates are anticipated, and reasonable adjustments are made in a timely way. We believe the LSB should set expectations for the SRA that these actions will be met in a transparent and collaborative way.

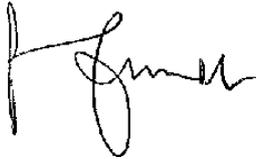
One outstanding issue is the potential for the introduction of the SQE to negatively impact social mobility within the profession because of the lack of funding available for the costs associated with the assessments and for disabled students with the Disabled Students Allowance. The Law Society has been engaging with the government to seek a solution for the problem of a lack of available

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loans. We recognise that this is not something within the SRA's control. We welcome the SRA's offer to support our engagement with Government on this very important issue. Unfortunately, this does not mean that the potential for negative impact is lessened and it is essential that the SRA include impact of the availability of funding on social mobility and disability access in their post-implementation reviews.

I am happy to discuss the contents of this letter and any other concerns.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Tennant', written in a cursive style.

Paul Tennant
Chief Executive
The Law Society of England and Wales