

Common Protocol on the Academic Stage of training

Updated 25 October 2023

The academic stage of training is a requirement of the LPC route which has now been replaced by the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). Candidates can only qualify through this route if they meet our [transitional requirements](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/legal-practice-course-route/becoming-solicitor-legal-practice-course-transitional-requirements/) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/legal-practice-course-route/becoming-solicitor-legal-practice-course-transitional-requirements/].

Version 4

Please note that this is the fourth version of the Common Protocol and supersedes the last version published in July 2020.

Scope

This protocol concerns the Bar Standards Board's (BSB) and the Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) Joint Statement on the academic stage of training. It concerns both regulators' new training regulations that will impact on the current Qualifying Law Degree (QLD) and Common Professional Examination (CPE) courses, eg Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL). It is the policy position for both the BSB and the SRA.

Transitional arrangements

Following the introduction of the BSB's new rules in 2019 and the introduction of the SRA's Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) in autumn 2021, the Joint Statement requirements will be as follows:

- **For those wishing to qualify as a barrister:** the requirements will remain in force for QLD/CPEs that start in or before the academic year 2018/19 and last until students on those courses complete their studies, in accordance with the requirements of the Academic Stage Handbook.
- **For those wishing to qualify as a solicitor:** the requirements will remain in force for QLD/CPEs that start up to and including 31 December 2021. Students must have accepted their offers on such courses:
 - up to and including 31 August 2021 for CPEs
 - up to and including 21 September 2021 for QLDs
 - and the requirements last until students on those courses complete their studies, in accordance with the requirements of the Academic Stage Handbook.

Administering the academic stage of training

The SRA will continue to administer the academic stage of education and training for solicitors and barristers on behalf of both regulators. Since 2014, providers of QLD and CPE courses have been required to self-certify compliance with the Joint Statement to the SRA in the event of:

- a. validation of new programmes;
- b. re-validation of existing programmes; and
- c. major modification to existing programmes.

These arrangements will continue to apply for all approved programmes beginning up to and including 31 December 2021, until students have completed their course in accordance with the requirements of the SRA's Academic Stage Handbook. Students must have accepted their offers on CPE courses up to and including 31 August 2021 and on QLD courses up to and including 21 September 2021.

Extension of approvals

The BSB extended approvals for QLD/GDL courses up to and including the 2018/19 academic year. After this, the BSB reduced its regulatory involvement in legal academic learning to a minimum.

The SRA is now extending approvals for QLD/CPE courses that start up to and including the 31 December 2021, as long as the offer to start the course has been accepted by the student up to and including 31 August 2021 for CPE courses and up to and including 21 September 2021 for QLD courses. The SRA will cease to be involved in the approval or recognition of new QLD/CPE courses that start after 31 December 2021.

Course providers may make student offers for courses under the existing Joint Statement on that basis.

The BSB's future training arrangements

For undergraduate law degree courses which started in or after 2019/20, current Joint Statement requirements will no longer apply.

Subject to approval, the BSB's only regulatory involvement in undergraduate law degrees or CPE courses (ie Graduate Diploma in Law) which will start in or after academic year 2019/20 will be the continuing requirements that law degrees are compliant with the QAA subject benchmark statement for law and that degree courses contain the seven "Foundations of Legal Knowledge" subjects as well as the skills associated with graduate legal work such as legal research.

Please be aware that the seven "foundations of legal knowledge" subjects are not always a compulsory element of pure law or mixed law degree programmes. However, the foundations of legal knowledge subjects remain compulsory for all students who wish to be called to the Bar and practise as a barrister in England and Wales. It will be the responsibility of Authorised Education and Training Organisations (AETOs) to ensure compliance with these arrangements.

The SRA's future training arrangements

For undergraduate law degree courses that start after the introduction of the SQE (1 September 2021), the current Joint Statement requirements will only apply to courses that start up to and including 31 December 2021 (as long as the offer to start the course has been accepted by the student up to and including 21 September 2021).

Under the proposed SQE, students will need to hold a degree or equivalent qualification or experience, but they will no longer need to study for a QLD or CPE recognised or approved by the SRA. The SRA will no longer specify the academic content of law degrees. However, the SQE will ask students to demonstrate the knowledge set out in the Statement of Legal Knowledge. This includes the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects currently specified in the Joint Statement (in addition to other areas of law and practice).

The seven foundations of legal knowledge are:

- Criminal Law,
- Equity and Trusts,
- Law of the European Union,
- Obligations 1 (Contract),
- Obligations 2 (Tort),
- Property/Land Law,
- Public Law (Constitutional Law, Administrative Law and Human Rights Law).

European Law will continue as one of the foundation subjects for the foreseeable future. However, this will be subject to the future developments in relation to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union and/or any future agreement made on European Law in the future.