

From the Chief Executive

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Committee of Heads of University Law Schools

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Dear Professors Gearey, Harding, Probert, Stychin and Ms Strevens,

Thank you for your letter dated 30 January 2020, which we received on 4 February.

I note your concerns and your request for a delay in the introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE).

On your points about the choices that young people will be making, we have made it clear that there will be a lengthy - 11 year - transition period for students.

Anyone who has started - or accepted an offer to start - a Qualifying Law Degree (QLD) before the SQE regulations come into force will have the choice between qualifying through the current route or taking the SQE. We have also said that we will continue to recognise QLDs which start up to and including academic year 2020/21.

As you will be aware, we have been clear that universities do not need to make any changes to their curriculum in September 2021. If they decide to change their curriculum in light of SQE, it is up to them to decide when they want to do so. We expect that some universities will not make any changes. We also know that many others (from both the university and private sectors) will incorporate SQE training and already have preparations well in hand for a September 2021 start.

You refer to Competition and Markets Authority guidance which rightly requires universities not to mislead students taking decisions about which programme to choose. How universities comply with that guidance is of course a matter for them, as was the case ahead of the Bar Standards Board (BSB) receiving Legal Services Board approval in March 2019 to remove recognition of QLDs for BSB purposes from September 2019.

In explaining any proposed 2021 curriculum changes aligning with the SQE, the transitional arrangements and the removal of QLD status, universities can also choose to make it clear that those changes are dependent on the introduction of the SQE, which is subject to final regulatory approval. As you know, the LSB decision on the further rule changes is expected before the end of this year.

For completeness, on the issues you raise about the examination itself, we published the [Assessment Specification for the Functioning Legal Knowledge](#) assessment at SQE1 in Autumn 2019. Therefore, we have provided the detail of the law curriculum which SQE will assess two years ahead of the first live assessment. We have also published [sample questions](#) and broadcast a [webinar](#) with further guidance on the questions.

You raise the question of assessing skills. If we do decide to include a skills element in SQE1, it would assess the application of the same legal knowledge through a piece of discursive writing. And, of course, the SQE2 assessment is of less relevance for undergraduate degrees, as it is intended to assess day one legal skills, probably following two years qualifying work experience.

In response to your request that we delay the introduction of SQE, you will appreciate that we have already moved the introduction by a year, from 2020 to Autumn 2021, to allow universities and others plenty of time to prepare.

We do not agree that any further delay is necessary or desirable.

There is a clear public interest in moving as soon as possible to a system which assures standards more rigorously than at present. The well-advertised transitional arrangements, detailed information on the assessment of those parts of the legal curriculum taught by universities available two years in advance and the progress already made by many universities and providers all point to the need to move ahead as planned.

Further postponement in the implementation of the SQE could also prolong any potential uncertainty for students and young people, as your letter describes

To ensure that everyone can keep abreast of the development of SQE, we have produced a new ebulletin, [SQE Update](#), providing monthly information on SQE progress. You will already have seen our full [SQE briefing](#), which will be updated regularly. We have also developed resources and a decision tree for [students](#) - please feel free to use these resources.

We look forward to working closely with you, the universities and training providers as we progress towards the implementation of the SQE.

Yours sincerely



Paul Philip
Chief Executive
Solicitors Regulation Authority