

# Education and training authorisation and monitoring activity - September 2022 - August 2023

16 December 2024

## Introduction and overview of 2022-23

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. This route usually involves obtaining a qualifying law degree or Common Practice Examination, an LPC and a period of recognised training.

Unless otherwise stated, the report relates to the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023.

In 2021, the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) replaced 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.

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.

In previous years, we have reported headline figures for students qualifying through the various routes, including the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT), the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS), the LPC and the SQE. This report will continue to provide headline figures for those seeking to qualify as a solicitor but focuses solely on the information we receive from LPC providers each year.

The number of solicitors qualifying has increased by about 33% from 2016/17 to 2022/23. In 2022/2023, 75% of those admitted had taken the LPC, but this is shifting towards the SQE route. SQE admissions have risen significantly from 437 in 2021/22 to 1,469 in 2022/23, mostly involving qualified lawyers from other jurisdictions or barristers qualified in England and Wales. Further information is in our [annual education and training corporate report](https://sra/research-publications/education-training-2021-22/) [\[sra/research-publications/education-training-2021-22/\]](https://sra/research-publications/education-training-2021-22/).

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## **Key findings**

The number of students enrolling on a LPC decreased by 35% in this reporting year – from 18,934 in 2021/22 to 12,227 in 2022/23.

Successful completion rates for the LPC increased, with 57% of students completing the course in 2022/23. This rate is up from 48% in 2021/22, returning to pre-Covid levels (57% in 2019/20 and 58% in 2018/19).

Significant differences in successful completion rates between providers persisted, ranging from 32% to 100%. Various factors, such as student ability, engagement, teaching quality and assessment arrangements, may influence these rates. However, firm conclusions cannot be drawn from the available data. The wide differences in completion rates between providers was one of the reasons we introduced the SQE.

In addition to varying completion rates, there are significant differences in the proportion of students achieving 'pass', 'commendation' or 'distinction' grades across providers.

The data received indicates there is less of a difference in outcomes according to student ethnicity. However, students from ethnic groups other than White remained less likely to have successfully completed the LPC. This gap is observed across higher education and professional assessments. To better understand the potential reasons for these differential outcomes, we commissioned [research from the University of Exeter \[sra/research-publications/potential-causes-differential-outcomes-legal-professional-assessments/\]](https://www.sra.org.uk/research-publications/potential-causes-differential-outcomes-legal-professional-assessments/), which was published in June 2024.

Male students had a slightly higher successful completion rate of 58% compared to 56% for female students. Despite this, female students outnumbered male students on LPCs as they also do at the point of admission to the profession.

20% of LPC providers reported that their last intake of LPC students would be the 2022/23 academic year.

## **SRA Monitoring**

The LPC can only be delivered by organisations we have authorised to do so. When monitoring the quality and standards of education and training for the LPC, each provider must submit to us an annual course monitoring report. This consists of data and a narrative account of the previous year.

We use these reports as a basis for our quality assurance activities. If we identify issues, we follow up with the provider. We can also visit a provider.

For the LPC in 2022/23, the key figures indicate that:

- 6,942 (57% of students) successfully completed the LPC (compared with 48% in 2020/21)
- 42% of students were withdrawn, suspended, referred or deferred from their assessments in 2022/23



- 1% of students exhausted all their resit attempts and failed the LPC in 2022/23.

## **Legal Practice Course**

### **LPC results by provider**

Successful completion rates by provider vary from 32% to 100%. In addition to this, 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.

There are large differences in the size of course providers and the number of students studying. LPC cohorts range from fewer than ten students to many thousands of students, spread over multiple locations.

The largest providers, BPP University and The University of Law, offer the LPC across multiple locations. Between them, they shared approximately 84% of the total number of students enrolled to take assessments (87% in 2021/22).

### **LPC results by gender**

Our data shows 68% of students in this cohort were female, 31% were male. Figure 2 above does not include the 1% who identified as 'other' or 'preferred not to say'.

There was little difference in successful completion rates on the LPC between male and female students – 58% of male students and 56% of female students completed.

Male and female students continued to receive similar rates of 'pass', 'commendation' and 'distinction' awards.

### **LPC results by ethnicity**

The data shows that:

- 23% of students identified themselves as Asian/Asian British, compared to 21% in 2021/22
- 10% of students identified as Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, compared to 11% in 2021/22
- 9% of students 'preferred not to say' compared to 8% in 2021/22
- 5% of students identified as being from Mixed/multiple ethnic groups, the same as in 2021/22



- students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds were less likely to obtain a distinction on the LPC than White students
- successful completion rates of the LPC for each ethnicity group was:
  - 63% White (57.5% in 2021/22)
  - 55% of those from mixed/multiple ethnic groups (50% in 2021/22)
  - 49% Asian/Asian British (39.6% in 2021/22)
  - 41% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (28.8% in 2021/22).

Such differential outcomes are found across higher education and in other professional assessments. We [commissioned research \[sra/research-publications/potential-causes-differential-outcomes-legal-professional-assessments/\]](https://www.sra.org.uk/research-publications/potential-causes-differential-outcomes-legal-professional-assessments/) to inform our understanding of the potential causes of these differential outcomes in legal professional assessments. Published in June 2024, this found that the potential causes are complex and are likely to be explained by multiple factors combined.

## **LPC results by disability**

Approximately 21% of students identified themselves as having a disability. A further 6% preferred not to say. Of those who identified themselves as having a disability, 22% identified as having a learning disability or difficulty. This data, however, does not necessarily reflect the proportion of students who had special arrangements or reasonable adjustments for their learning and/or assessment.

As seen in previous years, there was a gap in completion rates between those who identified as having a disability and those who did not, although the difference was a little lower than seen before. For this reporting year, the successful completion rate was 49% for those who identified as having a disability. This is up from 40% in the previous year.

For those who did not declare a disability, it was 59%. This is up from the previous reporting year's rate of 54%. Those who preferred not to tell us whether they have a disability had a successful completion rate of 51%. This is also up from 44% in the previous year.

We do not have any further information from the providers on why the successful completion rate was lower for those who have identified as having a disability. However, the difference has reduced compared to the previous year.

## **LPC results by socio-economic categories**

The data shows that:

- 43% of students identified themselves as attending state-run/state-funded, compared to 27% in 2021/22



- approximately 8% attended an independent or fee-paying school, compared to 9% in 2021/22
- students who attended independent or fee-paying schools were most likely to receive a passing grade, including a distinction
- 22% of responses were 'unknown', making it difficult to draw any firm conclusions from these figures.

The data shows that:

- 68% of students said they had a parent or guardian with at least one degree level qualification, compared to 21% in 2021/22. Although it should be noted that 15% more students answered this question than in the previous year
- approximately 0.5% reported parents or guardians with no formal qualifications, compared to 8% in 2021/22
- While the response rates were low and we cannot draw any firm conclusions, the figures show those who have a parent or guardian with at least one degree level qualification were more likely to obtain a distinction. This is when compared with those who said their parents or guardians had no formal qualifications or no qualifications at or above degree level.
- 23% of responses were 'unknown', making it difficult to draw any firm conclusions from these figures (38% of responses were unknown in 2021/22).

## **Summary of narrative reports and one-to-one meetings**

All LPC providers must provide us with an annual report on their course delivery; 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. They 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 external examiners' reports to us.

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

Overall, the external examiners were largely positive about LPC quality and standards in the reporting period, highlighting the:

- quality and consistency of marking and moderation
- appropriateness of assessment processes in measuring achievement against intended learning outcomes
- required standard of learning and teaching strategies and materials
- time taken to provide feedback to students.

However, some external examiners identified general administrative issues, which providers have told us have since been addressed.

As part of our monitoring activities this year (2024), we held individual meetings with providers to gain insights into their plans for delivering the LPC until their final validation date. Nearly half of the LPC providers reported that their final student intake was in September 2023.

Most providers reported the 2024 intake would be the final year they would offer the LPC. However, some indicated that there was some demand for the LPC among cohorts still eligible to take the LPC under the transitional arrangements, and so they would submit plans for extending their course validation beyond 2026.

All providers demonstrated that they are informing students about the phase-out of the LPC, clearly indicating when resit assessments will be available and outlining options for students who wish to qualify through the LPC route before 2032 deadline. Additionally, providers reported that they will continue to offer pastoral care and career guidance to all LPC students until they have completed their assessments.

## **Periods of recognised training**

The final stage of the qualification pathway is the requirement to complete a period of recognised training (PRT) during which trainees must also undertake the Professional Skills Course (PSC).

This training period is often referred to as a 'training contract' by trainee solicitors and firms. This takes place in a law firm or organisation that we have approved to take trainees. If the training is on a full-time basis, it will usually take two years but other arrangements may be drawn up, for example, part time.

The number of PRTs registered with us in 2022/23 was 6,835. Figure 7 below shows this to be a five-year high for the start of a PRT. Some individuals may not complete their training or may start more than one. This accounts for a small difference in PRTs registered and those being admitted to the roll having completed a PRT. Data for previous years is refreshed at the point a trainee is admitted, so there may be some minor differences when compared to previous reports.

Figure 7 also shows trainees' ages at the time of registering PRT. 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 2022/23, 90% of the PRTs registered with us were for trainees aged 30 or under.

|            | <b>2018/19</b> |          | <b>2019/20</b> |          | <b>2020/21</b> |          | <b>2021/22</b> |          | <b>2022/23</b> |          |
|------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| <b>Age</b> | <b>Count</b>   | <b>%</b> | <b>Count</b>   | <b>%</b> | <b>Count</b>   | <b>%</b> | <b>Count</b>   | <b>%</b> | <b>Count</b>   | <b>%</b> |
| 18 - 21    | 44             | 1%       | 31             | 1%       | 44             | 1%       | 46             | 1%       | 51             | 1%       |
| 22 - 25    | 3,484          | 57%      | 3,513          | 58%      | 3,380          | 57%      | 3,904          | 57%      | 3,955          | 58%      |
| 26 - 30    | 1,797          | 30%      | 3,512          | 58%      | 1,812          | 30%      | 2,102          | 31%      | 2,102          | 31%      |
| 31 - 35    | 399            | 7%       | 378            | 6%       | 379            | 6%       | 398            | 6%       | 381            | 6%       |
| 36 - 40    | 165            | 3%       | 157            | 3%       | 152            | 3%       | 175            | 3%       | 164            | 2%       |



|                  |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |
|------------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
| 41 - 45          | 86    | 1%   | 85    | 1%   | 107   | 2%   | 102   | 1%   | 81    | 1%   |
| 46 - 50          | 53    | 1%   | 55    | 1%   | 47    | 1%   | 56    | 1%   | 49    | 1%   |
| 51 - 55          | 24    | 0%   | 22    | 0%   | 22    | 0%   | 36    | 1%   | 20    | 0%   |
| 56+              | 16    | 0%   | 14    | 0%   | 16    | 0%   | 16    | 0%   | 14    | 0%   |
| Total known      | 6,068 | 100% | 6,044 | 100% | 5,959 | 100% | 6,835 | 100% | 6,835 | 100% |
| Declaration rate | 100%  |      | 100%  |      | 100%  |      | 100%  |      | 100%  |      |
| Unknown          | 1     | 0%   | 1     | 0%   | 0     | 0%   | 0     | 0%   | 0     | 0%   |
| Total            | 6,069 | 100% | 6,045 | 100% | 5,959 | 100% | 6,835 | 100% | 6,835 | 100% |

We recently changed the way we collect equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data about trainees on this route to qualification. This means that we are unable to report on the EDI characteristics of ethnicity, disability, and gender for trainees registering their PRT. However, we will work to increase the number of individuals who disclose information concerning their diversity characteristics to us.

We are upgrading the platform which hosts our individual diversity questionnaire on mySRA to improve its functionality and will encourage trainees to complete this when available. In the meantime, we are also looking at ways we can communicate directly with aspiring solicitors as they progress through the authorisation process. This will draw their attention to the diversity questions and explain how the data helps them and the profession and encourage disclosure.

### Qualifying through equivalent means

Since the introduction of the SRA Training Regulations 2014, applicants may 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 will recognise the achievement of learning and outcomes and not simply evidence that an applicant has had experience of doing something.

The number of those qualifying with part of their training satisfied through equivalent means has decreased relative to the previous two years. We make decisions about equivalent means following our assessment of applicants' workplace experience and/or qualifications, considering if these are equivalent to the relevant academic and/or vocational stage requirements.



Figure 8 shows the number of individuals who qualified with part of their training satisfied through equivalent means for the period from 2016/17 to 2022/23.

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

**Figure 8: Number of individuals who qualified through equivalent means 2016/17 to 2022/23**

|                |     |
|----------------|-----|
| <b>2016/17</b> | 71  |
| <b>2017/18</b> | 85  |
| <b>2018/19</b> | 88  |
| <b>2019/20</b> | 98  |
| <b>2020/21</b> | 109 |
| <b>2021/22</b> | 114 |
| <b>2022/23</b> | 101 |

Figures are for SRA financial years, which run from 1 November to 31 October.