

News release

SRA asks University of Exeter to research examination attainment gap

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We have commissioned the University of Exeter's Schools of Law and Business to look at what causes different levels of attainment for ethnic groups in professional assessments.

Our [annual education and training monitoring reports](https://guidance.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/education-training-authorisation-monitoring-activity/) [<https://guidance.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/archive/reports/education-training-authorisation-monitoring-activity/>] show a widely-acknowledged and persistent difference in legal qualification outcomes by ethnicity in the UK and other countries. This is often known as an 'attainment gap'.

The research, led by Professor Greta Bosch, should help to increase understanding about the factors that are driving this picture and to identify steps that could be taken to make a difference and help to close the attainment gap. It will be an extensive programme that take until the end of 2023 to complete. It will involve:

- measuring the attainment gap in a range of professional services qualifications
- identifying the long-lasting and intersectional causes of the attainment gap in professional services qualification
- exploring where we can learn lessons from other countries and sectors
- understanding where we can make changes to help close the gap.

Paul Philip, Chief Executive of the SRA said: 'We know that there is a longstanding picture of different outcomes for candidates from different ethnicities in legal qualifications and more widely. The solicitor profession needs to reflect the diverse society that it serves so we want to know why and what the barriers are.

'This research is the first part in that process. By finding out why certain groups don't do so well in professional assessments, we can increase understanding and look at how best to work with others to address some of the factors, helping to close the attainment gap.

'It's not a problem that is unique to the solicitor profession. The attainment gap is found in other types of qualifications too, so the research should produce insights that are useful well beyond the legal market.'

Professor Greta Bosch added: 'We look forward to our two-year collaboration with the SRA and our consultations with stakeholders to

understand causes and lived experiences behind disparate performance in legal services qualifications, with the aim of informing decision-making, stimulating thinking and inspiring change.

'We believe our interdisciplinary and multi-level approach can be drawn on to change outcomes and reduce inequalities in this area. We are excited about the opportunity this project gives us to conduct evidence-based research with the potential to inform policy and practice that can make a real difference to people's lives.'

Anyone interested in taking part in the project or hearing more about it can do so via this [short survey \[https://form.sra.org.uk/s3/Expressions-of-interest-in-the-research-to-understand-the-ethnicity-differences-in-legal-qualification-outcomes\]](https://form.sra.org.uk/s3/Expressions-of-interest-in-the-research-to-understand-the-ethnicity-differences-in-legal-qualification-outcomes).

We committed to undertake the research in our [2020/21 Business Plan \[https://guidance.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/business-plans/\]](https://guidance.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/business-plans/). Encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal services profession is one of our seven regulatory objective, and improving diversity is part of our [Corporate Strategy for 2020/23 \[https://guidance.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/\]](https://guidance.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/).