

Minutes of CLLS Training Committee Meeting
Thursday 21 June 2023 – 16:00 – 17:30
Linklaters, 1 Silk Street, London EC2Y 3HQ and by Teams

Present (Committee members):

Patrick McCann (Chair) (PM)	Dominic Sedghi (DS)
Julia Robinson (JR)	Laura Scarlett (LS)
Richard Album (RA)	Rosie Warren-Cafferty (RWC)
Peter Carrick (PC)	Charlotte Wanendeya (CW)
Joanna Hughes (JHu)	Rachel Wevill (RW)
Greg Lascelles (GL)	Kirsty Wilkins (KW)
Louisa Mendes da Costa (LMdC)	
Catherine Moss (CM)	Camilla Brignall (clerk to the committee) (CB)

Apologies: Katie Dyer (**KD**), Lindsay Gerrand (**LG**), James Harvey (**JH**), Colin Shaw (**CS**), Frances Moore (**FM**), Ben Perry (**BP**)

Guest: Julie Swan (**JS**)

The chairman opened the meeting.

1. Minutes of 13 March 2023

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

2. SRA – Update with Julie Swan

- **Update on SQE1 and 2** – LMDc lead the discussion opposite JS to hear how the SQE is going. Is it meeting its objectives? JS stated that it is certainly well established now. The report published in March confirmed that the assessment is fair, valid and reliable and that all of the data which sits behind it points to that conclusion. Data is collected after every assessment and looks at items used in the test which could unfairly advantage candidates of a particular background – nothing stands out as doing so. What does stand out is differential performance by ethnicity (JS said she would pick up the Exeter report separately).
- **Capacity:** JS hoped the committee feel more relaxed about assessment capacity now. There is sufficient capacity for candidates to take assessments in London. During recent sittings, SQE2 venues had excess capacity. In addition, the booking window for October opened yesterday (20 June) and was very “cold” (JS was not sure if that was down to candidate behaviour or whether there were just fewer candidates - time will tell). LMDc had a question about booking: she had a Barbri candidate with a voucher which didn’t arrive in the specified time and when it finally arrived didn’t work. The candidate had a very stressful time trying to book (involving calls to the SRA and to Kaplan as well as their HR team – this is during a working day, so entirely unacceptable). In addition, the point was made that, of the SWSQF candidates (7 or 8) all had problems with booking (voucher arrived late and it took all day to book) so there is still work to be done. Was the problem because they were using vouchers? Voucher code not valid? JS was not aware of this and said she would investigate.
- **11% Price increase and impact on access to the Profession:** LMDc noted the £452 increase in the cost of assessments and questioned how this increase makes it better for social mobility? JS confirmed that this was not something that the SRA wants, but costs have gone up. The contract to provide the assessments is a commercial contract so fees have gone up in line with inflation. JS noted that there are still a range of options for undertaking SQE which are much more affordable than doing the LPC. JS wished that the fees had not gone up but noted that there are still choices available to candidates. LMDc asked about those that don’t pass – the cost to resit is the same as the initial cost, what are their choices?

LMdC commented that only around half the people undertaking the assessment are passing and stated that the SRA have a responsibility to provide better guidance to them (eg on chance of exam success, readiness), this is especially important given the SRA's stated aim of increasing access to the profession.. JS clarified that the pass rate was: 54% for 1st time sitters and was 51% "overall" (if you include resitters who tend to do less well). In terms of choice available, the SRA have made a commitment to publish data on how candidates studying with different providers are doing. By way of guidance and support, the SRA ran a webinar where candidates explained the choices they made and gave advice. JS noted that providers have a responsibility to give candidates advice on their readiness to sit the assessments. Currently, candidates are asked to give data on which provider they are using, and data will become available on those choices. However, as it stands, the clearest indicator of likely success is previous academic success and provider data might be weighted depending on which providers candidates choose (based on attainment). It was commented that it looks like the biggest indicator of success is ethnicity... JS countered that they haven't been able to provide a multivariate analysis but that data suggests previous academic attainment alongside socio-economic practice informs success.

- **Exeter Research Paper:** The literature review has been published. JS noted that is a long history of differentiation in attainment by ethnicity (not just in relation to the SQE). The research is looking at what factors impact on attainment. JS noted that on the LPC there was differential attainment, but it was difficult to compare as the assessment was not centrally assessed (this is one of the reasons the SRA was keen to move to a centrally assessed assessment). JS was asked about how confident she was that in 5- or 6-years' time there will be an exam which doesn't prejudice candidates. JS answered that the SRA are already happy that they don't have "exam prejudice" (there is no evidence that the difference in attainment is caused by the assessment) and that the difference in attainment is likely to stem back to education from primary age/early years. JS noted that the SRA believe that "Awarding Gap" terminology is more accurate than "Attainment Gap". The full Exeter Report is due out in the Spring.
- **Block Booking** – is there an update? JS confirmed that Kaplan have nothing in the pipeline around block booking and that there is a concern that an ability to block book disadvantages candidates who are not able to benefit from a block booking. JS was asked when the contract with Kaplan was due to come up for review (the ability to block book is a big deal for some firms) JS thinks the tenure of the contract is about 10 years. The question of block bookings is not a priority for the SRA.
- **Forward planning around exam results:** A query was raised about exam dates and results release dates. They do not appear on the website very far in advance (only up to 2024 and not always exact dates but "week of" and it makes it difficult to plan for future cohorts as well as ensure support is in place. Some firms cannot give candidates a start date until they know when their SQE2 results will be released. It was noted that the issue was more with assessment dates rather than results dates. JS stated that there was a statement online which states which weeks the exams will take place (in advance of the full dates being published) subject to change. The SQE2 assessment window is 4-5 weeks (you choose your preferred date when you book on).

3. Update on Committee members

PM put several matters pertaining to the Committee members "to the vote" prior to the meeting. The results of the vote were confirmed as follows:

- **RWC:** to stay on the committee for the next six months and then review (so December).
- **Vice-chairs:** CS and CW to become joint vice-chairs from 22 July following JR's stepping down from the committee. Will work out allocation of responsibility. (Thanks to JR, congrats to CW and CS.)
- **SWSQF Candidate Liaison Officer:** KW to be named as such from 22 June.
- **New committee members:** not to appoint a new committee member currently but to review this over the next few months including with a view to work needed to be done and skills potential committee members might bring.

PM noted that we were very sorry to lose JR from the Committee

4. Workshops

- **D,E & I** – CW and CS feedback: the workshop was very successful (it caused a viral social media frenzy!). The workshop followed the journey of a lawyer from the beginning of their career journey (with a neuro-diversity panel session (junior lawyers)). It moved onto NQs (with an LGBT+ session focusing on mentoring). Race Ahead looked at black underrepresentation at partnership level and finally, Hot Stuff looked at the menopause and how to retain talent during this time. Thanks to CW and CS for their care and attention in making it happen – it was very positive and unique with good vibes
- **Technical/legal training (tbc Oct 23)** – LS update: proposing 5 October (booked a space) end of the day plus drinks. Anyone want to volunteer? Suggestions still as reflected in the March 23 minutes. Topic of interest – what to do with the squeezed middle – happy to take any suggestions for topics. Richard to volunteer as co-organiser. PM – how do people “in the moment” teach the law piece to their juniors? what do the senior lawyers do? The focus of the session should be on the legal content bit.

5. **Summer reading list (update)** Not received any recommendations for the list. Any books, articles, podcasts (lacking the whirlwind of recommendations). RWC put a lot together already but it would be good to get a few more recommendations. PM requested that each member give one recommendation by the end of next week.

6. SWSQF Update

PM: There are essentially three cohorts. The March 22 cohort who started in April, April 23 cohort and 24 cohort

- **Cohort 1 Progress:** 17 took SQE1 in Jan. 8 passed and 9 failed (3 failed badly) in line with the SQE national results. The candidates are working full time and in harrowing areas of practice and don't have much money. 2 or 3 deferred and 1 had to miss the exam for medical reasons. With the 9 who have failed, we have paid for a re-take, but it is dependent on them studying with Barbri. 2 or 3 candidates are not engaging very well. There is a worry about those who are “playing with other people's money” and not engaging with the programme – conversations are being had. **Approached by Access to Justice scheme about giving extra money to studying candidates.**
- **Cohort 2 update:** raised £636k so far. A number have done the LPC so they just need to do SQE2. Have 28 or so on SQE1, also have some dropping down.
- **Cohort 3:** funding process update: about to go on third funding round (aiming to make it up to £800k) PM will “retire” after 3rd funding round.

The publicity is very positive.

7. Solicitor Apprenticeship Initiative

JHu ran through a slide deck with an update on the launch and current progress.

8. Solicitors Company Essay Prize

JR – winner was Amie Corry – all 23 applicants were all excellent: they made good points in their essays and interviews and were all active in their law firms. The judges were very inspired by the 5 finalists. Amie was the best but there were others who were also very good. It was a good experience for the judging team. Now we need to think about question for next year. The essays were quite hard to judge this year given how the question was phrased which is something to bear in mind for next year.

9. CLLS Training Committee LinkedInPage

DS – talked about the LinkedIn page. The primary purpose of the page is to promote the Committee and members of the Committee. It is primarily managed by Patrick, Dominic and Julia (helped by Liz Thomas and Project Associates) and is quite a lot of work. If anyone else wants to be involved they will be welcome! At least one other person would be helpful. In terms of looking at how it is going, a surface analysis tells us:

- **Followers:** 789 (gives us a four figure target to aim for);
- **Sectors:** 50% of our followers come from legal (practice or legal services) and the next highest sector is higher education (4%) (would be useful if this was higher).
- **Departments:** HR 22%, legal 20% (lawyers?) BD 8.7%
- **Seniority:** this is more interesting – 30% senior 17% entry 7% training) encouraging to have a high percentage at the beginning of their journey 2.8% at partner level (would be nice to improve on that because they are in positions of leadership and could set the tone from the top).
- **Content:** there are various ways you can measure popularity – impressions (likes) views (which we are less bothered about) click-throughs (a click through rate only works for posts where there is something to click through). The most popular click through was an update on cohorts 1 and 2 on SWSQF. The post that got the most impressions was a solciitor apprenticeship post (posted on 23 Jan which was a week before the deadline for joining City Century).

Overall, however, there is not a pattern. What seems to make a difference is length (the shorter the better), tagging makes a difference (it turns up on more fields). Think about as many people as you can tag as possible. Will take a break in August, but we are looking for content in July. Look for ideas on members musings.

10. Joint Conference of the Association of Professionally Responsible Lawyers & The Law Society of England & Wales – Rethinking Legal Education in the 21st Century World (27 April 2023) – Feedback from Conference

CB read BPs LinkedIn write up on the conference

11. Hook Taganza Legal Education Conference (7 July)

BP to lead a panel on how law firms are adapting to SQE – no further updates at present

12. Westminster Policy Forum on Next Steps in Legal Education (17 July)

PM provided update – speaking 5 mins online

13. Thought Leadership piece (September) for junior lawyers (how you learn on the job)

Thought leadership piece – quite nice if we have something written by a junior person – volunteer to compile it. Patrick, Charlotte, Laura, Kirsty and Catherine to provide people to interview.

14. Feedback from Learning in Law SQE Masterclass (22 June)

CB gave some feedback on the masterclass

15. AOB

Volunteers for speakers at the Exeter/Queen Mary

JR has a team member who needs a new position (end of maternity leave cover)

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 28 September at 12:30pm venue tbc – date in diaries.

16. Close

The chairman closed the meeting.