



The City of London Law Society Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF)

"Delivering front-line social welfare solicitors"

Guidance for Applicants 2026 Fund

1 About the Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF)

The SWSQF provides financial assistance for the Solicitors Qualifying Exam preparation courses and assessments (Parts 1 & 2), starting in 2026 and concluding in 2027 to outstanding applicants currently working in or contracted to work in social welfare law for organisations serving disadvantaged communities.

Guidance information about the criteria, process and timetable is detailed in this document, along with guidance on completing the separate SWSQF online Application Form (at Appendix 1). Any queries that are not addressed by the Guidance may be emailed to SWSQF@cills.org.

2 Application Eligibility Criteria

An applicant must fulfil the criteria set out in The Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF) Eligibility Criteria 2026 document to be eligible to be considered for the SWSQF. The applicant will be asked to provide written confirmation of the statements in the Eligibility Criteria 2026 document in the Application Form during the application process.

3 Scope of the Scheme

- 3.1** The SWSQF 2025 is only open to applicants seeking to start the SQE preparation course in April 2026 and sit the SQE part 1 in January 2027; and seeking to start the SQE part 2 preparation course (likely in May 2027) and sit the SQE part 2 before the end of October 2027. We anticipate, and are working on the assumption, that applicants complete both SQE1 and 2 within a two-year period.
- 3.2** Funding provided through the SWSQF is exclusively for the SQE Parts 1 and 2 preparation course and attendant SQE assessments and will be paid directly to (1) BARBRI with whom the applicant will sit the SQE preparation course and (2) Kaplan, who are the assessment provider. You may specify the amount that you wish to apply for up to the full cost of the SQE assessments/SQE preparation course fees. Funds will be allocated on the assumption that you will pass the SQE assessments at the first attempt. See section 5 of the SWSQF Eligibility Criteria for details of how the funds for each stage of the preparation course and exams will be released and the confirmations required from BARBRI to release funding for the next stage.
- 3.3** No additional funding is available to assist with any living expenses such as accommodation, childcare, transport; nor for any other costs which may be incurred in undertaking the SQE assessments/SQE preparation course.
- 3.4** While it is not necessary to have a confirmed place on the SQE Part 1 preparation course before submitting a SWSQF application, all awards will be subject to acceptance onto a BARBRI SQE preparation course and a place on an SQE assessment with Kaplan, both parts anticipated to be passed by the end of October 2026.

4 Financial eligibility

- 4.1** Awards made under the SWSQF represent an investment in successful applicants by the City of London Law Society (CLLS) and the SWSQF's city law firm sponsors. As the scheme only provides financial assistance towards SQE preparation course fees and assessments, you must be able to support yourself and your dependants.
- 4.2** If shortlisted, you will be required to provide evidence of your financial position, as detailed in your application at the interview including:
 - 4.2.1** Three months of bank statements (covering all relevant accounts to establish that you meet the financial eligibility criteria, including but not limited to your current

account, any savings account, ISA or other way of evidencing that you do not have more than £21,500 in savings).

4.2.2 Loan rejection or acceptances, as appropriate.

4.3 If shortlisted, you will be required to provide evidence you meet the following:

4.3.1 Either;

- (i) I currently earn £45,000 per annum or less (in London) or £38,000 per annum or less (outside London) or
- (ii) my earnings are higher than in figures in paragraph 4.3.1 (i) but I am also in receipt of Universal Credit and/or Working Tax Credits (and my salary is not in excess of £45,000 (in London) and £38,000 (outside London)).

4.3.2 I do not have access to familial loans or financial gifts exceeding £11,500 in total.

4.3.3 I do not have more than £21,500 in my savings account, current account, ISA or held elsewhere.

4.3.4 I am able to meet all living expenses and any other costs incurred in undertaking the SQE (other than tuition and exam fees) during the course of study, including for any dependents.

5 Process

5.1 Applications to the SWSQF must be made by completing the online Application Form in full. If you are shortlisted, you will be invited to an interview with a selection panel before a final decision is made.

5.2 Part of the Application Form asks you to complete 4 essay questions. Your application will only be considered if those essay questions are completed in full. Please ensure that you adhere to the word limit prescribed for each question.

5.3 The Application Form will be made available in the materials advertising the SWSQF and from the CLLS website from **13 October 2025**.

5.4 Completed applications must be submitted by **5pm on Wednesday 12 November 2025**. No applications will be accepted after this deadline.

5.5 Your employer or prospective employer will be required to confirm the matters set out in section 6 of The Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF) Eligibility Criteria 2025 document in the Employer Support Letter, which should be submitted with your online Application Form. Applications not accompanied by your Employer Support Letter will not be accepted; neither will applications where your employer is not able to confirm all the statements in the Employer Support Template or which are otherwise incomplete.

5.6 Completed applications should be completed using the online Application Form. In exceptional circumstances, such as you do not have sufficient access to a computer, the Application Form may be downloaded as a PDF, completed and sent by email to SWSQF@clls.org. If you wish to apply by PDF, please contact SWSQF@clls.org **at least a week before the application deadline and before submitting your application** to outline your reasons, giving us time to confirm your eligibility to submit via PDF. Applications that are submitted in more than one document/file will not be accepted.

5.7 No extenuating circumstances whatsoever, including technical issues, will be considered for the submission of late applications so you should make sure you send your application in good time.

- 5.8** It will not be possible to amend applications in any way once submitted except in order to update contact details.
- 5.9** We will inform you whether you have been shortlisted for an interview 10 days before the interview date and during **w/c 06 January 2025**. Please do not follow up before then.
- 5.10** If you are unsuccessful in being shortlisted for an interview, we are sorry we will not be able to provide individual feedback.

6 Interview and assessment arrangements

- 6.1** If shortlisted, you must be available to attend an interview with our selection panel (which will be conducted online) during the weeks commencing **26 January, 2 February 2026**. If you are unable to attend the interview you will be withdrawn from the process and no extenuating circumstances will be considered.
- 6.2** Please let us know in advance if you have accessibility requirements. We will do our best to ensure all requests for reasonable adjustments are met at all stages of the process. Please let us know if you need additional support at any stage by emailing SWSQF@cls.org.
- 6.3** We envisage that the shortlisting panel will comprise of representatives from the CLLS including its Training Committee, BARBRI, the Social Welfare Advisory Group (consisting of practitioners within the sector), and Young Legal Aid Lawyers. Our intention is that each application is marked by up to two of the shortlisting panel to ensure fairness, consistency, and good practice.
- 6.4** Please ensure you have access to the relevant technology. If you do not have access to a computer for the online interview, please contact SWSQF@cls.org **at least 10 days before the interview dates** to explain the situation in fewer than 250 words, and we will contact you to discuss what is possible. While in exceptional circumstances we will endeavour to arrange a face-to-face interview, whether we are able to do so depends on the availability of our interviewing panel and we are not able to guarantee a face-to-face alternative.
- 6.5** If shortlisted for an interview, you will be required to supply **at least one week ahead of the interview**, relevant documentation to support the circumstances detailed in your application including qualification certificate(s) and three months' worth of bank statements (covering current account, any savings account, ISA and any loan rejection or acceptances or other way of evidencing that you do not have more than **£21,500** in savings). If you are unable to provide this evidence within the specified timelines, we will not be able to proceed with your application. Screenshots will not be accepted; full electronic copies will be required. Please do not send these until advised.
- 6.6** You will be advised of the final award decision during **w/c 2 March 2026** if you have been through the interview process. Please do not follow up before this time.
- 6.7** As the awards are entirely discretionary, it is not possible for you to appeal against decisions taken at any stage of the application process.

7 Data protection

- 7.1** The application process requires personal and financial information to be disclosed. This information will be kept confidential by the selection panel and staff administering the scheme. All personal and financial information will be deleted at the point at which an applicant requests to be removed from the process (by email to: SWSQF@cls.org) or when an applicant's application has been processed in full.

- 7.2** Applicants are asked to provide diversity information so that equal opportunity and the effectiveness of the scheme may be monitored. This information will be separated from the application upon receipt and will not be used in any part of the selection process.

8 Diversity and Inclusion

- 8.1** Our shortlisting process is conducted 'blind'. This means that the shortlisting panel will not have access to information on your application including your name, gender or the name of your educational institutions.
- 8.2** The diversity questionnaire on the application form is for monitoring purposes. It is separated from your application form before shortlisting and kept in a password protected file that will not be seen by the selection panel.
- 8.3** We particularly encourage applications from those who are not traditionally represented in the legal profession.
- 8.4** We will do our best to ensure all requests for reasonable adjustments are met at all stages of the process. Please let us know if you need additional support at any stage by emailing SWSQF@cils.org.

9 Conditions of support

- 9.1** We anticipate applicants completing SQE part 1 (including the assessment) before the end of January 2027 and starting the SQE part 2 preparation course and sitting the SQE part 2 before the end of October 2027. Completion of both the SQE1 and 2 is expected to be achieved within a two-year period.
- 9.2** Under no circumstances will deferral of a start date be considered outside these dates and the award will be withdrawn if a candidate cannot begin the SQE at the specified dates or complete the SQE within the specified time limit.
- 9.3** It is the SWSQF application committee's fiduciary duty to ensure that award funds are applied in pursuit of the qualification of committed social welfare lawyers and so it is important that applicants comply with all obligations to qualify (including engaging with the preparatory work for the SQE courses and exams promptly and diligently). It is also imperative that students engage with the course as it is supposed to be taught/learned using the online BARBRI Personal Study Plan. This is because reading textbooks will not imbed sufficiently deeply the retained knowledge required for a 16-subject, 360-question MCQ exam. BARBRI will share each applicant's progress in completing the SQE preparatory courses using trackable completion rates on the online BARBRI Personal Study Plan with the SWSQF application committee. In the event of an applicant's:
- 9.3.1** failure to use the online BARBRI Personal Study Plan; and/or
 - 9.3.2** repeated failure to complete preparatory work in a timely manner; and/or
 - 9.3.3** significant variability in an applicant's engagement or prompt completion of preparatory work

(in each case without extenuating circumstances), the SWSQF application committee may exercise its discretion not to fund the next stage of the SQE (exam or preparatory course, as appropriate) and claw back fees already incurred. If an applicant needs to defer his/her progress to the next stage of the preparatory course or exam, such that a deferral fee is incurred, the applicant will be personally responsible for paying the deferral fee to BARBRI before they can progress to the next stage and the SWSQF application committee releases the next stage of funding.

- 9.4** If the applicant should fail their SQE 1 and/or SQE 2 exam it will be at the discretion of the SWSQF Committee whether the cost of the resit will be covered by the fund. The committee will consider applicant engagement with their BARBRI PSP in their decision making.
- 9.5** If an applicant needs to defer their SQE preparation course, the applicant will be personally responsible for paying the deferral fee to BARBRI before they can progress to the next stage and the SWSQF application committee releases the next stage of funding. Further details regarding deferrals and guarantees can be found in paragraphs 9 and 10 of BARBRI's terms and conditions: www.barbri.com/sqe/contract-details-requirements

10 Timetable 2024-2025

Monday 13 October 2025 at midday	Applications open. The Application Form, Guidance to Applicants and SWSQF Eligibility Criteria documents will be available from the CLLS website: www.clls.org/initiatives/swsqf/applicants
Wednesday 12 November 2025	Applications close at 5pm
w/c 12 January 2026	All applicants will be notified whether they have been shortlisted for an interview
w/c 26 January, 2 February 2026	Interviews with shortlisted applicants
w/c 02 March 2026	All shortlisted applicants advised whether they have been successful

11 Reviewing the SWSQF

The CLLS reserves the right in its absolute discretion to make appropriate enhancements and amendments to the SWSQF in line with its experience of operating the SWSQF and in line with sponsor financial commitments

Appendix 1

Completing the Online Application Form

This section contains further guidance on completing the online application form.

The Application Form must be completed in a single sitting. There is no option to save your work and complete it later.

We strongly suggest that you read the SWSQF Eligibility Criteria 2026, this Guidance for Applicants Document, the Employer Support Letter and the online Application Form carefully first and gather in advance everything you need to complete the Application Form. You may wish to consider completing the 4 essay questions in section 5 of the application form separately, copying over your completed answers when you complete the Application Form. That will allow you to give the questions the thought they require. You should also ensure that you have your Employer

Support Letter (outlined in section 7 of the Application Form) ready to upload as you complete the Application Form.

Complete Applications

Please ensure you answer all the questions on the application form. Incomplete applications will be withdrawn from the application process, as will applications where plagiarism is suspected.

We expect application forms to be completed online. In exceptional circumstances, such as you do not have sufficient access to a computer, the application form may be downloaded as a PDF, completed by hand and sent by email to SWSQF@cls.org. If you wish to apply by PDF, please contact SWSQF@cls.org **at least a week before the application deadline and before submitting your application** to outline your reasons giving us time to confirm your eligibility to submit via PDF. Applications that are submitted in more than one document/file will not be accepted. If we have given you permission to complete a PDF application form by hand, please ensure that your handwriting is legible. If we cannot read your application form, it will be withdrawn from the application process.

Part 1: Your Details

Please complete all the questions in this section ensuring all the details you enter are correct and that we will be able to contact you using the details you submit.

Part 2: Education

Please complete as appropriate, noting that there is no eligibility requirement for a first class or upper second-class degree. Guidance on UK and overseas qualifications and degree equivalents is in section 2 of The Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF) Eligibility Criteria 2026 document.

Part 3: Application and Commitment

Please complete these questions, using the guidance above and in The Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF) Eligibility Criteria 2026 document.

Part 4: Eligibility Criteria

Please complete these questions fully, using the guidance above and in The Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF) Eligibility Criteria 2026 document.

Please note if you are shortlisted for an interview, you will be expected to provide evidence of:

- **Your degree or equivalent qualification.** Guidance on UK and overseas qualifications and degree equivalents is in section 2 of The Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF) Eligibility Criteria 2026 document.
- The SWSQF provides financial assistance for the SQE. No assistance is provided towards your living costs. Please ensure that you are able to meet all expenses incurred in undertaking the SQE (other than tuition and exam fees) during the course of study, including for any dependents. You will be expected to provide evidence of **your financial circumstances** as outlined in section 4.2 above.

Part 5: Your commitment to becoming a Social Welfare Solicitor

Note the word limit for each of these questions. If you exceed the limit, you will not be able to submit your application. You can check how many words you have written by clicking on the words "TO BE CONFIRMED" under the 'current character count' heading below each text box.

What benefit will your solicitor qualification have for society, your clients, your firm and you?

In answering this question, please be specific about any work you will be able to do or services you will be able to deliver only with this solicitor qualification in the context of your social welfare practice. Please address all stakeholders (your clients, your firm, you and wider society). Please draw on all factors you feel are relevant, including personal experiences you may have had or witnessed growing up and why you chose to study law and specialise in social welfare law. This list is not exhaustive and you may draw on other reasons.

What do you see as being the key challenges facing the social welfare legal sector over the next five years, and what can be done to overcome them?

In answering this question, please focus on the core challenges you think the sector may have and consider potential practical, technological, and campaigning solutions, explaining why you think those solutions could work.

Describe how you anticipate managing study alongside your work and the processes you have put in place to support your intention to pass SQE 1 and 2 at the first attempt.

In answering this question, consider that you will be studying for at least some of the SQE part-time alongside your work. As an approximate guide, the part time SQE requires a commitment of approximately 10 hours per week over 40 weeks for SQE 1 and approximately 10 hours over 12 weeks for SQE 2, plus the time preparing for the assessments. If you elect for the full-time SQE 1 preparation course, it is 20 hours of study per week, plus the assessment study time. It is important that you promptly complete the preparatory work and do so online as the course is designed in this way to help you meet the challenges of the MCQ style exam. You will quickly accumulate a backlog of work if you don't complete the work as it is due.

Please be specific about the processes you will put in place to support this arrangement enabling you to successfully pass SQE 1 and 2 at the first attempt and within the timelines described above.

Please read each of the questions carefully and ensure your answer to each is no longer than the word count specified in the relevant section of the application form. Please do not include footnotes as part of the word count. If you include any text from somebody else's work, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If we suspect parts of your answer to have been plagiarised, your application will be withdrawn from the application process. Please do not contact us to ask how you should answer the questions – you should decide what angle to take and what to focus on.

Why should you receive the award?

Please draw on all factors you feel are relevant.

Part 6: Qualifying work experience

Please complete the questions as per the Application Form. Please familiarise yourself with the rules regarding the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) assessments and Qualifying Work Experience (QWE) Please note that not all work experience, work placements and internships will count towards

QWE. Please see: www.sra.org.uk/trainees/qualifying-work-experience/qualifying-work-experience-employers/meeting-standards/ for further guidance on what counts as good QWE.

Part 7: Employer Support

We will require your employer (or if contracted to work in the future, your prospective employer) to confirm all the matters outlined in section 6 of The Social Welfare Solicitors Qualification Fund (SWSQF) Eligibility Criteria 2026 document. If your application form is returned without this confirmation or the answers do not meet all the criteria, you will be withdrawn from the process.