



Statement on Qualifying Work Experience

YLAL is disappointed that our concerns about exploitative Qualifying Work Experience ('QWE') as part of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination ('SQE') have been realised.

Since the SQE was proposed, YLAL has been worried about the impact this will have upon prospective solicitors and their route to qualification, particularly those of limited financial means. We have repeatedly raised concerns that the new route to qualification will have a detrimental impact upon social mobility and therefore an equivalent negative impact on social mobility within the sector.

QWE differs from the traditional training contract route (rebranded as Period of Recognised Training, or 'PRT'), as there is no longer a requirement for the PRT to be completed at one provider. Instead, the QWE can be made up of periods of time at up to four different providers. There is no minimum time for each placement.

The SRA had already removed the mandatory minimum salary for trainee solicitors making it simply a recommendation, which we raised concerns about at the time. However, trainee solicitors remained employees, meaning that they were at least entitled to earn the minimum wage. Often, trainee salaries in legal aid firms did not far exceed this.

There is no longer a requirement to pay those candidates who are undertaking QWE. This was purportedly to allow candidates to use time spent volunteering, for example in a legal advice clinic whilst at university, towards their QWE.

At the time this was announced, YLAL was concerned that this may lead to prospective solicitors being exploited by organisations who may take advantage of their free labour. You can read more about our concerns on the removal of employment status [here](#).

YLAL is now aware that there are organisations who not only ask for free work; in fact, they are asking workers to pay them for the pleasure. One of these opportunities is published on the SRA's website. We note that the SRA has stated that they do not endorse training providers or organisations. However, YLAL believes these caveats fall far short of what is required, and given that they are effectively promoting providers to prospective solicitors.

YLAL believes that this constitutes a devastating blow to social mobility and diversity for the profession.

YLAL calls on the SRA to require all organisations at which QWE is offered to pay candidates a fair wage.

YLAL asks the Law Society, as our representative body, to condemn these exploitative practices and join us in calling for a fair wage for SQE candidates.

QWE must give candidates to opportunity to develop some or all of the competencies of a solicitor.

Workers completing QWE will be advising, litigating, and strategising on real life cases. Their clients will be real human beings, whose lives will be impacted, and maybe even completely changed, by the outcome of these cases.

It should not be controversial for candidates to be paid for the work they do. They should certainly not be paying to work.

**Young Legal Aid Lawyers
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