



YLAL Statement: Launch of the Social Welfare Solicitors Qualifying Fund

Young Legal Aid Lawyers ('YLAL') is pleased to announce the launch of a national fund which will help to improve social mobility within the legal profession, address the recruitment and retention crisis faced by the Social Welfare and Legal Aid sector and as a result improve access to justice for those who need it most.

This fund has been developed by City of London Law Society, BARBRI and YLAL with the support of Legal Aid Practitioners Group ('LAPG') and Law Centres Network ('LCN'). It seeks to use the introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Exam ('SQE') to provide the next generation of qualified Social Welfare solicitors.

Legal Aid and Social Welfare law are in the midst of a recruitment, retention and succession crisis. YLAL has recognised that a lack of career progression is a major reason that junior practitioners leave the sector. The prohibitive costs of qualification, combined with low wages, often exclude those who have no independent means and as a result are unable to fund their professional training. Though the SQE presents some opportunity to reduce the costs of qualification, in the Legal Aid sector the cost burden will continue to fall upon the candidate. This scheme seeks to overcome this financial burden for a significant number of candidates, and hopes to maximise the new flexibility created by the decision to replace Training Contracts with Qualifying Work Experience, to support those working within the sector as advice workers, case workers and paralegals to qualify as solicitors.

Chris Minnoch, CEO, Legal Aid Practitioners Group said *“Legal aid providers have been subject to decades of fee cuts and, for those still brave enough to do legal aid, this squeeze on their income has a real, practical and adverse impact on their businesses. One of the most damaging effects of fee cuts is on the ability to recruit new staff and provide the level of support required to retain staff. This includes being able to bring through the next generation of legal aid lawyers – to help them to qualify and to ensure there is clear progression and an attractive career path. Our members are consistently telling us that they need more help in this area because the legal aid scheme simply doesn't provide them with the resources they need to do so. This Scheme will be of enormous benefit to our member organisations and to those seeking to qualify into social welfare law. It will also greatly benefit clients – many of whom will not be able to access the legal help they so desperately need without initiatives such as this to address the recruitment and retention crisis engulfing the legal aid sector”.*

The fund has been developed, designed and launched by City of London Law Society, BARBRI and YLAL in consultation with LAPG, LCN and The Legal Education Foundation (TLEF). Over a dozen city law firms have agreed to donate over a hundred thousand pounds to this fund which seeks to provide grant funding for both the BARBRI SQE preparatory course and the SQE 1 and 2 exams for more than a dozen individuals. This scheme will allow those with precious talent, expertise and experience, who may have been lost to the sector, to reach their potential and qualify as solicitors.

Matthew Smerdon, Chief Executive, TLEF said *“The CLLS Social Welfare Solicitor Qualification Fund...presents an opportunity for City law firms to harness the opportunity of SQE to widen access to qualification and contribute to increasing the numbers of expert social welfare lawyers at a time when their work is so desperately needed.”*

YLAL is extremely excited about the benefits this scheme could have to our members and the sector more widely. We are grateful for the work and investment of BARBRI, CLLS and the city law firms involved and are encouraged by this cross-sector approach to working to address the issues we face, particularly at this time of growing national demand for our services as social welfare and legal aid lawyers.

Applications to the SWSQF are now open until 17 January 2022.

For further information please contact YLAL on YLALSQEfund@gmail.com

***** ENDS *****

NOTE TO EDITORS

Young Legal Aid Lawyers (‘YLAL’) is a group of lawyers who are committed to practising in those areas of law, both criminal and civil, that have traditionally been publicly funded. YLAL members include students, paralegals, trainee solicitors, pupil barristers and qualified junior lawyers based throughout England and Wales. We believe that the provision of good quality publicly funded legal help is essential to protecting the interests of the vulnerable in society and upholding the rule of law.

YLAL’s objectives are:

- To campaign for a sustainable legal aid system which provides good quality legal help to those who could not otherwise afford to pay for it.
- To promote the interests of new entrants and junior lawyers and to increase social mobility and diversity within the legal aid sector.
- To provide a network for like-minded people beginning their careers in the legal aid sector.

Please see our SQE hub for additional information on the SQE and the grant scheme <http://www.younglegalaidlawyers.org/sqe>

Please see CLLS website for all details regarding the scheme application process and criteria. <https://www.citysolicitors.org.uk/social-welfare-solicitor-qualification-fund/>

Young Legal Aid Lawyers
06 December 2021
www.younglegalaidlawyers.org
ylalinfo@gmail.com
[@YLALawyers](https://twitter.com/YLALawyers)