The City of London Law Society

Paper prepared by the Training Committee on the Joint Legal Education & Training Review of the SRA, the Bar Standards Board and ILEX Professional Standards (the "Review")

Executive Summary

- The "solicitor" qualification should be available only to those who have been trained to a high standard, as achieving excellence should be the ultimate aim for all solicitors if the public is to receive the service it deserves from the profession.
- City solicitors (like specialist solicitors in a number of sectors of the profession) need to be able to offer "premium quality" service to demanding clients above any regulatory minimum so this must be capable of being recognised at all the stages of the training continuum.
- Law degree and GDL courses should be reviewed for content and consistent standards.
- A period of work-based learning must be retained as part of the solicitor's qualification process.
- The consolidation of legal education providers carries risks which should be addressed.
- The mis-match between the number of students choosing to do the GDL/LPC in order to become solicitors and the number of traineeships available each year should be addressed.
- There should be multiple entry points to becoming a solicitor.

Introduction

The City of London Law Society ("CLLS") represents approximately 15,000 City lawyers through individual and corporate membership, including some of the largest international law firms in the world. These law firms advise a variety of clients from multinational companies and financial institutions to Government departments, often in relation to complex, multi-jurisdictional, multi-party legal issues.

The CLLS member firms are knowledge businesses and so unsurprisingly they invest heavily in the development of their people at all levels and in all roles.

For most of the CLLS member firms, that investment begins before the trainee solicitors they have recruited begin their Training Contracts as the firms fund their post-graduate studies (fees and maintenance) on the GDL & LPC. Furthermore, a number of CLLS member firms have felt the need to become involved in the design of LPCs tailored to their particular requirements.

This investment is significant in time and cash terms. Taking law school fees and maintenance payments, salaries and the other costs of recruitment and training (net of fees generated) into account, we estimate that the CLLS member firms collectively invest many hundreds of millions of pounds each year in taking their trainees from the academic stage of training to qualification. Our member firms recruit, in aggregate, approximately 1,750 trainees each year. As a result, the CLLS is a significant stakeholder in the education and training process so it has a strong interest in the Review and the effect it will have on the future education and training of the legal workforce.

The purpose of this Paper is to set out the views of the CLLS on the future of the training continuum as a contribution to the thinking of the Review Team.

The bulk of our comments focus on the training continuum as it relates to solicitors i.e. the law degree/GDL stage through the LPC and Training Contract stages to CPD from qualification up to retirement. However, the Paper first touches on some broader issues affecting the wider legal workforce.

The approach adopted for the Review of looking at the training continuum of the entire legal workforce is one we wholeheartedly support. If society is to be certain that the legal services needs of the many and varied types of "consumer" will be met, the training of all of the "deliverers" of those services must be fit for purpose. It must be designed to ensure each category of "deliverer" meets a standard which is appropriately high for the services they are offering. We have not attempted to define the range of standards for all the "deliverers" but they must cover technical expertise, intellectual capability, professionalism/ethics, client service and business understanding and management (including people management).

Given the segmentation and "layering" of legal services – from simple debt-funded flat purchase through to complex, international, multi-party, multi-jurisdictional transactions - those standards will inevitably differ. For example, the breadth of legal technical knowledge which a solicitor working in the City is expected to possess on qualification will be different from that expected of a licensed conveyancer. The work of solicitors in different legal sectors may vary but appropriately high standards should be the objective for all of them and

there should be a common standard for all at the point of qualification. (Post-qualification CPD will need to be tailored to meet the different requirements of the range of areas of practice of solicitors.)

The different requirements of different sectors of the legal services market may lead to the risk of lack of mobility with the different sectors becoming "silo-ed" and allowing little or no opportunity for movement between them. The CLLS feels very strongly that the future training continuum must be structured in a way which allows movement both across sectors and up through the hierarchy.

To facilitate this, we envisage the future training continuum being made up of a range of interlinked regulated training pathways for all members of the legal workforce. Each pathway must require participants to undergo suitable training and assessment to ensure quality standards are maintained at each step. Furthermore, while those pathways need to be designed so that they give training for the specific area of activity, they also must be designed to allow transfers between sectors. Therefore, for example, a licensed conveyancer's qualification should lead to exemptions from appropriate parts of the solicitor's qualification process. Furthermore, assuming "paralegals" will be subject to some form of regulation and recognising at least some of them who work in solicitors' firms (including CLLS member firms) will aspire to becoming solicitors, the training requirements to which they are subject should fit in with those applicable to trainees and qualified solicitors. "Disconnected" training obligations would be burdensome and could potentially be a disincentive to recruitment. Furthermore, care would have to taken with the application of any paralegal-specific regulation. Depending on the nature and scope of that regulation, it would be odd if it caught "temporary" visitors to firms (such as vacation scheme students) or those more distant from the delivery of legal services. Those groups are already adequately covered by the current regulatory regime.

From this flows the issue of non-graduate entry into the solicitor's profession. While the abolition of the "five year route" drastically cut the number of non-graduates entering the profession, the FILEX route to qualification is proof that a degree is not an absolute pre-requisite for being an effective solicitor.

The CLLS supports that route being retained and would support it being expanded to would-be solicitors who have followed other training pathways designed for members of the legal workforce. We do, however, feel that for the brand of "solicitor" to maintain its status as one of the "senior" legal qualifications both domestically and internationally, the standards set for entrants to that profession need to be at degree level, whether or not a formal academic qualification is awarded as a result.

It will then be a matter of suitability and market forces which will determine where graduates and non-graduates alike will find employment.

Looking to the future, it is possible that the changes in university funding will deter numbers of talented would-be entrants to the legal workforce from entering tertiary education. This reinforces our support for the multiple/integrated pathways approach to each stage of the progression of their careers. It also leads onto the issue of cost.

To the extent this is a regulatory issue, we would expect the training and assessment processes for each of the qualification pathways to allow the training and assessment

providers to construct their offerings in a way which recognised the differing financial status of their students. Therefore, while "traditional" full-time study might be a highly effective way of bringing students up to the desired standards, fast-track programmes (such as two year law degrees), part-time courses or distance learning methods must continue to be allowed.

It is, of course, true that even with such flexible delivery methods, the cost of the GDL and LPC in their current form may be beyond the pockets of some would-be entrants. The CLLS would support methods of addressing that whether through the forms of bursary or charitable award already in existence or from new sources of charitable funding.

Going on from that, the Review's laudable focus on social mobility will, we assume, lead to debate on issues of access. The debate should look at ways of ensuring that the right standards are set and assessed properly as that will address issues of access irrespective of the individual's background. We would not readily support any regulatory framework which attempted to manipulate the market artificially, for example, through quota systems or other interference with employers' recruitment processes or any lessening of standards.

Accepting that standards must be maintained, we strongly support the initiatives to encourage talented students whatever their backgrounds to enter the profession in which many solicitors from all sectors of the profession are involved. One such initiative is the PRIME initiative (aimed at promoting careers in law firms to disadvantaged students) in which some [50 or so] City firms are involved but there are a number of others.

Our intention with these initial comments is to make plain that we will regard the Review as a success if it ultimately results in a regulatory framework which ensures open access to all sectors and levels of the legal services market for individuals of proven talent, knowledge and ability, regardless of their personal circumstances. The regulatory framework does and will continue to set "minimum" standards to be achieved at each stage in the training continuum. These need to be at a sufficiently high level to ensure the clients receive the quality legal services they need.

However, the regulatory framework post-Review should permit (and indeed encourage) "excellence" to emerge in all sectors of the profession to ensure that the provision of English legal services (and so English law) is seen as the global "gold standard". In order to achieve the latter, the Review should have as one of its aims the goal of making the “solicitor” qualification synonymous with the highest worldwide standards of training, legal ability, knowledge, expertise and probity.

The latter issue is particularly important to CLLS member firms, many of which have significant international practices. Aside the obvious benefits those practices bring to the members of those firms, they support the continued success of British business on the international stage (vital to the national economy), the pre-eminence of London as a centre for "City law" (from complex, multi-jurisdictional, multi-party legal issues to international dispute resolution) and the status of English law as a global legal system. It is, therefore, important that changes to the training continuum support that, not undermine it.

The Paper now sets out below the CLLS's specific views on:

- the Academic Stage (the Qualifying Law Degree/GDL);

- the Vocational Stage (the LPC);

- the Practical Stage (the Training Contract); and

- the Post-qualification Stage (CPD).

Taking those in turn:

1) The Academic Stage (the Qualifying Law Degree/GDL)

Looking at graduate entrants, the current position is that their law degree or GDL courses must meet the standards set by the Joint Statement of the Joint Academic Stage Board. In our view, the principal issue is whether the Joint Statement requirements are fit for purpose and we consider the breadth and depth of the Statement is in urgent need of review.

While the Statement lists the seven "Foundation" topics (contract, tort, crime, etc.,) which all "Qualifying Law Degrees" ("QLDs") and GDL courses must cover, it does not specify the syllabi in any detail.

The result is that the coverage on law courses can be different, institution to institution. (For example, while all QLD graduates & GDL students will have studied contract law, there is no guarantee they will have studied the subject to the same breadth/depth and so the detailed coverage may differ to some extent from institution to institution.) Therefore, the view of the CLLS is that there should be common requirements and standards for the Foundation topics. We do, however, see that specifying a precise syllabus for each topic may be overly prescriptive.

Going on from that, are the Foundation topics the right ones?

The CLLS would like to see professional ethics (in the sense of the "philosophy" of ethics, not the Code of Conduct) and the law of organisations included as Foundation topics.

We do, of course, accept that implementing these ideas could overload the courses. Whilst we do not wish to turn all law degrees into “vocational” courses, we would support a rebalancing of the Foundation topics in some way (by, for example, dropping topics or reducing the coverage of some of the existing topics to make the necessary "space").

We recognise that not all law faculties will have the capability or capacity to teach these new topics. Therefore, the CLLS would support initiatives to share knowledge and/or teaching materials to facilitate this change.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, we understand this will raise concerns over interference with "academic freedom". We have no wish to interfere at all with the teaching of subjects outside the list of Foundation topics and nor do we want to interfere with how the Foundation topics are taught. That is a matter for the individual teaching institution to decide so we feel that institutions should, for example, be free to decide to teach ethics either as a stand alone topic or as part of some other course(s), should it be added to the list of

Foundation topics. We merely wish to ensure there is greater consistency in the "products" of institutions offering QLD/GDL courses.

We are well aware that only 50%-60% of law graduates enter one of the arms of the profession. However, this does not alter the fact that a sound and consistent foundation knowledge of key areas of law is essential for the development of a strong legal profession, capable of meeting the needs of the public. (This argument holds equally well, if not better, for GDL students, the vast majority of whom will enter the profession.) Furthermore, wherever law graduates may work, most will enter careers where, for example, a solid foundation knowledge of contract and ethics will be invaluable.

Whatever the subsequent career paths of the graduates, the CLLS wants the QLD/GDL to start the students down the path of "thinking like lawyers", a process which many courses do well. From the perspective of City firms, we need lawyers who can handle intellectually demanding work and who can offer clients ethically sound and legally effective solutions.

Moving onto wider issues for this stage of the training continuum, it will be evident from the references to the GDL in the previous paragraphs that we support the continuance of a non-law graduate entry route. Non-law graduates bring an invaluable range of skills to the profession which complement the skills of law graduates.

We know the Review Team is carrying out research on a global basis into options for the training of this country's legal workforce. Therefore, one option which may be considered is whether combined law & business degrees (following the Australian model) could become the norm. Another would be for the Review Team to consider whether law could become a post-graduate degree only (following the US model).

Although both these options have some attractions and some disadvantages, the cost implications in the current economic climate militate against them.

2) The Vocational Stage (the LPC)

Some of the CLLS member firms have worked with LPC providers to develop tailored LPCs, taking advantage of the increased flexibility as regards delivery allowed by the SRA. This means that the current programme with the particular providers who serve the City firms is probably now largely fit for purpose from the CLLS's viewpoint (within the constraints currently imposed by the SRA), subject to what we say below on costs.

Some more flexibility on the contents of the compulsory courses would be welcome to the extent that is permissible given the need to meet the regulatory obligations flowing from the reserved areas of activity (such as probate).

It is already possible to merge the Stage Two subjects with the traineeship, a development which has pedagogic benefits in that the trainees can link the learning to their practical experience. It does, however, carry corresponding difficulties. Even if the trainees' study time is properly "protected" from the fee-earning demands of their employers, what if they fail the exams? Nevertheless, we would not want to see this flexibility removed.

Turning to a more general issue on the LPC, we have concerns over the cost of the courses across the country and the impact it is having on entry to the profession. We do recognise that the practical nature of the LPC makes it a relatively costly programme to run and that the fees charged by the different institutions can vary markedly. For example, the headline costs at the College of Law and BPP for the full-time GDL courses are from £6930 to £9310 for the College and from £7,150 to £8950 for BPP. For the full-time LPC programmes, the costs are from £10,480 to £13,180 for the College and from £9,450 to £12,900 for BPP although other modes of tuition are cheaper. In contrast, for example, Staffordshire University charges £4,500 for the GDL and £6,500 for the LPC.

Whatever the cost of any programme, it could be a deterrent to a financially disadvantaged student. This may, therefore, lose the profession talented entrants and/or have an adverse impact on mobility and diversity.

We do not claim to know what direction the LPC market will take. However, we would hope that there will continue to be a range of providers (with the market determining how many) offering high quality courses at a range of prices so enabling a broad range of students access to this stage of the training continuum. Desirable from a societal perspective though this is, we see this may not be a regulatory issue.

For the students who are prepared to take on the financial burden of the GDL/LPC, they face the added problem of the mismatch between the respective numbers of GDL/LPC graduates and of traineeships. Some LPC graduates (admittedly, a minority) are adding quite significantly to their student debts without being able to secure a Training Contract and so are unable to qualify as solicitors. (We have covered the Training Contract side of this in Section 3 below.)

The SRA should not interfere with numbers of either LPC places or traineeships and neither should the profession seek to impose limits on numbers entering the profession for a number of obvious reasons. Instead, it should be left to a properly informed market to determine what is the "right" number for both. For the market to be "properly informed", all the stakeholders (the teaching institutions, the employers, the regulators and the representative bodies) need to take action by providing adequate and appropriate information . With the right information, the students should be able to take sensible, well-informed decisions.

We hold this view not least because of the difficulty of deciding the right number, given the length of the training "pipeline". An arbitrary limit on LPC numbers imposed in the current economic environment could be proved totally wrong when economic circumstances change in the future. We are, however, deeply concerned about the number of students who spend large amounts of money, one or two years of their time studying for the professional qualification and often as many as four or more years applying for Training Contracts before realising that they are wasting their time.

What, therefore, could be done?

One option which has been put forward in the press and elsewhere is to award the title of "solicitor" on completion of the LPC rather than at the end of the Training Contract.

We strongly oppose such a move. We see it as undermining our objective of ensuring that the title "solicitor" is a badge of excellence. The work based learning element of the qualification

process is vital in turning academically trained students into effective professionals (see Section 3 below).

Having the title of solicitor at this earlier stage will not necessarily lead to employment as a solicitor, so such a move may merely result in an increase in the number of unemployed "solicitors". It is, of course, true that the GDL/LPC may lead to improved chances of employment outside the traditional law firm arena but we query the benefit of this if this is not the student's ultimate goal.

We would add that the public would be confused as to what the designation “solicitor” means if this change was introduced. Does it indicate the person has gone through "full" training or not? Would there be any restriction placed on the ability to practise of a "post-LPC solicitor"? Perhaps not being allowed to engage in reserved work so creating avoidable regulatory issues.

Were the change to be introduced, we would advocate that a new title be found for this category of "solicitors". We are concerned that that would result in the new title merely becoming synonymous with "LPC graduate" (within the profession, at least) so not helping the holders of the title.

Finally, one argument which has been put forward in support of this change is that it will enhance the international status of English law as a leading global legal system.

The argument turns on the competition between New York law and English law as global legal systems coupled with the idea that whichever legal system has the most qualified lawyers practising internationally is more likely to dominate.

By way of explanation, it is possible for qualified lawyers from many jurisdictions around the world to re-qualify in New York by completing an LLM and sitting the New York Bar exam. Therefore, the process can typically be completed in less than two years. In contrast (and prior to the introduction of the QLTS), a fully qualified lawyer unable to follow the QLTT faced a 4 year road to requalification in England as he/she followed the English domestic route for non-law graduates. The introduction of the QLTS has opened a faster track to the English qualification for a much wider group of international lawyers than was the case under the old QLTT process. Therefore, the problem of the difference in time to qualification for fully qualified international lawyers has already been partly addressed.

It is true that the QLTS does not help international non-law graduates wishing to gain a reputable international legal qualification so for that group (whatever size it may be), the English domestic qualification route may be unattractive.

We cannot comment on the comparative numerical advantage (or disadvantage) which this change might overall give "English solicitors" (whatever their qualification history) over "New York attorneys". However, the CLLS's view is that English law will succeed in securing its status as a global legal system by the quality of its members, not the quantity.

There are, no doubt, other options which might be considered and we have offered a couple below, just to contribute to the debate. (They are not, however, ones which we would particularly advocate.)

The entry requirements on LPC courses could be raised to, say, a 2:1 degree or an aptitude test could be introduced. Attractive though these ideas may appear, they have flaws.

Even if we take it as read that the assessment standards of all degrees (not just QLDs) are consistent, the number of students who achieve 2:1s are such that this move would probably not place a significant limit on entry on LPC programmes.

Aptitude tests are notoriously difficult to get right. At best, such a test would be an indicator of whether the student could pass the LPC. That is no bad thing in that it could prevent some students wasting their money. (The teaching institutions are able to spot a student who is struggling once on the course and will offer support. However, the student will by then have already made the financial commitment.) However, if it was effective, it should lead to no change in the actual numbers of students who pass the LPC; the only change would be in the percentage of successful students on each programme. Therefore, it would have little or no impact on the mismatch and could lead to courses being offered on how to pass the test, something which would only benefit the providers of those courses.

If none of these ideas can be implemented, a more flexible approach to work-based learning might be considered (see Section 3 below).

3) The Practical Stage (the Training Contract)

In the view of the CLLS, it is essential that the training continuum include a period of practical, supervised training. This view is strongly held.

Indeed, we regard this stage as the "jewel in the crown" of a solicitor's training and anecdotally we have heard that lawyers in other jurisdictions regard it as making the qualification the international "gold standard". (Many CLLS member firms have international offices and they have successfully introduced versions of the traineeship even though it is not required locally. Both the local partners and the "trainees" have welcomed these initiatives.)

This period is vital in the "socialisation" of future solicitors as professionals. It enables them to put their academic studies into a practical context as they learn their "craft" from more senior, experienced practitioners.

This "traineeship" helps the trainees gain the practical technical knowledge they will use throughout their careers. However, they also gain important skills - client handling, matter management, to say nothing of seeing how ethical professionals practise.

The current required length of this "traineeship" (of two years) ensures trainees in the CLLS member firms have reached a satisfactory level of development. However, the length of the traineeship should be determined by the time taken for the trainee to achieve required standards, not a fixed period. Therefore, we support an outcomes based approach to deciding when a trainee is ready to qualify though we consider setting a minimum is appropriate to avoid abuse. There will be differing views on what that minimum should be but we have found from experience that two years works well and have long invested in our trainees' development on that basis.

The CLLS member firms have the numbers and resources to "rotate" their trainees round different practice areas. This is in part designed to satisfy the SRA's work experience requirements. However, it is also invaluable as a way of exposing the trainees to a wide range of practice areas. That awareness of other areas of practice supports their future careers and also enables them to pick the area of practice for which they are best suited on qualification.

The period of the traineeship also creates a dynamic or culture of teaching and learning during that time for the benefit of the trainee, rather than a dynamic purely of working to earn fees. This dynamic of "being a trainee" provides a significant amount of leeway for trainees, and encourages their employers, more senior colleagues and clients to contribute to the trainees' learning and experience.

For these reasons, we support retaining the requirement of a spread of experience during the traineeship.

However, we recognise that given the specialisation in legal practice, some firms have difficulty meeting the experience requirements so it may be preventing some firms taking on trainees even though they may wish to do so.

One effective solution to this problem has been the option for trainees to attend external programmes (combining classroom training with supervised work experience) which satisfy some of the experience requirements. Care is needed to ensure trainees continue to get adequate experience in the office but we would advocate such programmes continuing, subject to their meeting suitable regulatory requirements.

We are aware of the SRA's work on alternative approaches to "work based learning", although the flexibility designed into that initiative is not generally directly relevant to many CLLS member firms. Nevertheless, we support the concept as a way of giving "trainees" who are unable to secure (for whatever reasons) a traditional Training Contract the ability to qualify. This is a sensible way of addressing the mismatch between the numbers of LPC graduates and the number of Training Contracts on offer, if that is a justifiable regulatory objective. However, action earlier in the training continuum may be more appropriate if this merely leads to the undesirable outcome of there being more unemployed solicitors.

If we are mistaken about that potential outcome of this initiative (which we trust we are), care must be taken to ensure standards do not actually decline nor (and this is more difficult to achieve) are perceived to have declined.

The initiative carries with it the risk of a "two-tier system" developing if trainees qualifying via a traditional Training Contract are perceived as being better trained than those following a more flexible work-based learning approach. To avoid that, clear universal standards have to be set which everyone has to meet (and which are seen to be fairly and consistently assessed across all sectors), whichever route to qualification they follow.

The SRA have those in place (the "Day One Outcomes"). However, they have had to go through a number of iterations as the SRA have tried to address the challenge of producing a single set of Outcomes which all employers of trainees can meet. Furthermore, many of the skills needed by successful solicitors are "softer" skills which can be difficult to measure consistently.

Returning to the point about when a would-be solicitor is ready for admission, on the face of it, the Outcomes should enable rigour to be applied consistently, something which is vital if the "two tier" risk is to be avoided.

The problem is how to ensure consistency across the profession.

We see that giving the employers of trainees the ability to "sign off" trainees against the Outcomes risks its degeneration into a "tick box" exercise with no guarantee (aside from introducing an expensive monitoring system) that the standards are met. The answer to that might be to require all trainees to sit a test before they can apply for admission. However, that is likely to create an industry in training them to pass the test, rather than the trainees having gained the skills in the course of their traineeships.

It may be that some firms are not providing adequate training while others are. Given that, we would advocate that a system of authorisation be set up under which firms could be granted the right to assess their own trainees. Trainees working in "unauthorised" organisations would have to go through an external pre-qualification assessment.

The advantage of this is that it should counter the "two tier" risk; the disadvantage is that it adds cost to the training of a segment of the trainee "community".

A further issue is the QLTS route to qualification which does not require a period of regulated work experience prior to qualification. Our support for that requalification route is not at odds with our support for the continued retention of a period of work based learning for domestic entrants to the profession. The design of the QLTS assessments is based on the assumption that the applicants will need to have had prior practical experience.

Finally, what is the future for the Professional Skills Course? We would advocate the topics it covers being subsumed into the LPC and/or the Day One Outcomes. Removing this discrete course will reduce the financial burden of qualification. If it is retained in some form, any client-specific elements should be run during the traineeship, not before the trainee has had experience of working for clients.

4) The Post-qualification Stage (CPD)

Ensuring members of the "legal workforce" maintain/develop their knowledge and skills is crucial for the protection of the public.

Lawyers at all levels in CLLS member firms have little difficulty meeting their CPD obligations in ways which are relevant to their practices. However, reasonably flexible though the current scheme is, it could be made more flexible as we do not advocate heavy prescription, rather more reliance on the professionalism of solicitors.

While lawyers learn by "doing the day job", we accept that an effective CPD scheme should require more of professionals.

The current requirement on solicitors to gain a minimum number of "accredited" Hours has the advantage of encouraging the sharing of knowledge.

The "unaccredited Hours" aspect of the current scheme could be extended to allow the updating reading/research which all conscientious solicitors do (including reading the internal updating e-mail many firms produce as well as reading journals etc) to count though perhaps with a consequent increase in the required annual Hours total.

We see that this would be difficult to prove so the SRA would have to rely on self-certification. This is not unusual in many professions around the world which rely on the probity and conscientiousness of their members. However, we accept this may be open to abuse by a minority in which case a system of certification by the firms might be a solution, rather than introducing an expensive monitoring system albeit that we realise the SRA may want to retain an oversight role.

While we favour flexibility in how solicitors can continue to develop themselves, no doubt there may be suggestions that some prescribed training be included in the scheme.

If so, we would advocate limiting this to some form of ethics training (whether annually for all or some lesser obligation) and/or management training including financial management training (improving the current compulsory course for mid-level associates and on top of the training for those holding management roles in the new ABS world).

Picking up the point we have already made that the regulatory regime should give all members of the legal workforce the possibility of progressing to the highest reaches of the profession, the CPD scheme has a role to play in maintaining standards.

Post-qualification, the majority of solicitors specialise, sometimes in very narrow, highly technical fields.

Expanding the current structure of (re)accreditation scheme(s) could have advantages. It would mean relevant training could be provided to specialists. It would also ensure that all solicitors "claiming" the accredited expertise had all achieved a requisite minimum standard, irrespective of their route to qualification so removing any risk of a perceived "second class" qualification.

Whatever changes may be made to the CPD scheme, the objective must be for solicitors to achieve high standards in whatever may be their chosen area of practice. That inevitably takes time in most areas of practice and the scheme must support new qualified solicitors in acquiring expertise in their chosen field and encourage more senior solicitors to maintain and develop their expertise.

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