

Becoming a distance-learning CPD provider

Guidance on applying for authorisation

Education & Training Unit
Version 1

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in becoming a continuing professional development (CPD) course provider.

This document contains details of the procedures for authorisation by the Solicitors Regulation Authority as a provider of distance-learning CPD courses, including the requirements and criteria CPD courses must meet and the terms and conditions of authorisation.

You can download and complete an application form to become an authorised distance-learning course provider for CPD purposes.

Please download the application form, and send the completed form, together with a cheque for £350 made payable to "The Law Society," to

The Finance Department
The Solicitors Regulation Authority
Ipsley Court
Berrington Close
Redditch
Worcestershire
B98 0TD

DX 19114 Redditch

Requirements and procedures of authorisation as a distance-learning CPD provider

Procedure of authorisation

The Solicitors Regulation Authority authorises course providers to self accredit courses that are suitable for solicitors. The aim of the authorisation procedure is to satisfy the SRA that prospective providers will offer appropriate courses that meet the criteria.

Distance-learning authorisation applies to courses that are relevant to the work of solicitors, meet the criteria, and open to the general public but of relevance and benefit to solicitors or are public courses specifically designed for solicitors or designed specifically for the staff of solicitors' firms or in-house legal departments.

Applicants are required to complete an application form, provide full details of a future appropriate course, and pay a non-refundable fee of £350 for consideration of the application. The application fee is waived for Local Law Societies, Young Solicitors Groups and Law Society Recognised Groups. The authorisation period is 1 November to 31 October of each year. A list of recognised groups is available at the Law Society's website, www.lawsociety.org.uk.

Providers will be asked to pay an annual fee of £350, which is payable in advance of the next 12 months.

Applications will not be processed unless all of the information and the fee are supplied with the application form. **Note: the application will be rejected if the course materials contain out-of-date information.** Therefore, applicants should ensure that as much detail as possible is given when the application is made.

Providers should allow a minimum of six weeks for the application process to be completed and the application should relate to a course which is scheduled to take place within this timeframe and for which accreditation is sought. If 6 weeks' notice is not given prior to the course date, the course will not be accredited for CPD purposes. Please note that delays will inevitably occur if the required information is not supplied.

The course materials will be sent to specialists for assessment, and the SRA may request references. It may be necessary for you to provide access to your system so the assessor is able to view its effectiveness.

Course materials and any other relevant information provided to the SRA will be treated as confidential by the SRA and/or anyone requested to assess the materials.

Satisfactory monitoring of the first course accredited by newly authorised providers is a condition of the authorisation approval.

Separate applications

Authorisation does not include the following types of courses:

- long term courses, eg post-graduate diplomas and masters degrees
- external courses requiring attendance
- compulsory courses, ie the Management Course Stage 1
- other courses that may be designated by the SRA from time to time

Providers of such courses should make separate application to the SRA.

Requirements of authorisation

An authorised provider may self-accredit courses that are suitable for solicitors, eg law, legal practice, professional skills and management courses.

Providers must ensure that accredited courses meet the criteria for authorisation as a distance-learning CPD course provider.

Providers must also

- **calculate the number of CPD hours for each suitable course and notify solicitors of the number**

The number of hours is calculated by adding up the number of hours of tuition time, excluding registration and any breaks. It is not necessary to round the time up or down, as courses may be credited with hours and minutes.

Please note: Allocation of credit is the responsibility of the provider.

- **grade each course to indicate the level of expertise expected of the delegates**
The course grade should be clearly indicated on advertising materials and other course literature. Providers should allocate a grade according to the following table:

- Introductory level
- Intermediate level – for delegates with some prior knowledge of the subject
- Advanced level – for delegates with substantial prior knowledge of the subject
- Update level – for delegates with or without prior knowledge of the subject

- **notify solicitors of the Solicitors Regulation Authority reference**

All providers are allocated a Solicitors Regulation Authority reference, which should be used for all courses accredited and notified to solicitors when attending courses.

- **keep records of solicitors who undertake courses**

The Solicitors Regulation Authority does not keep records of individual solicitors' course attendance. Delegates should enter the details of the course in their personal CPD training record.

Providers are required to keep attendance records for at least two years from the date of each course. The SRA may request sight of attendance lists or confirmation of an individual solicitor's attendance.

Continued authorisation is subject to satisfactory routine monitoring of courses by the SRA and continued compliance with the terms and conditions. In the first instance, this would normally be done by Solicitors Regulation Authority delegate questionnaires. However, monitoring may be undertaken by assessment of course materials or by a Solicitors Regulation Authority observer visiting the system.

A list of authorised distance-learning providers is maintained by the SRA, and is available on its website at www.cpd.sra.org.uk.

Please contact the Validation and Monitoring Team on +44 (0)870 606 2500 if you have any further queries.

There are specific criteria attached to the authorisation of distance-learning courses.

Criteria for authorisation of distance-learning and computer-based courses

Time spent on distance-learning courses can qualify for up to 75 per cent of a solicitor's CPD requirement, ie for up to 12 hours per year.

Level of the course

1. The aims and intended learning outcomes of the course should be made clear – for example, to provide updates or detailed knowledge on specific subject areas.
2. Providers should pay particular attention to the course level. It should be remembered that the CPD scheme applies to qualified solicitors. Therefore, the questions and/or case studies should be set at an appropriate level and marked by suitably qualified persons.
3. It should be made clear the level of previous knowledge/experience that would be expected from the course participants.

Assessment

4. Providers should bear in mind that 'reading' on its own does not count for CPD credit. Courses that require delegates simply to read written materials will not count for CPD. Consideration should be given, therefore, to ensuring that participants have not only read material, for example, but that they have understood the information. Providers are also reminded that all distance-learning courses must have provision for the answering of enquiries or for discussion to enable participants to raise queries.
5. It is recommended that providers adopt one of the following:
 - 5.1 Solicitors should be required to answer a sufficient number of questions per subject that would demonstrate they had gained an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of the subject content.
 - 5.2 Each course could build on a previous one, so that, over a period of time, the level of knowledge and understanding of solicitors undertaking the courses would be developed. This may be achieved by setting a start and finish date/time for completion of each course and indicating the level that participants could expect to achieve.
6. It should be noted that asking only one or two questions per subject on a diverse range of subjects may result in each subject being dealt with at a superficial level. This might not be suitable for more experienced/specialist solicitors, for example, and providers should make clear the level at which the course is aimed.
7. Providers should ensure that it is necessary to study the materials in detail in order to answer the questions satisfactorily. There should be no indication in any of the materials as to where the answers may be found.

8. Providers should ensure that, for courses with more than one method of presentation (eg video, audio cassette, CD ROM and/or written materials), it is necessary for solicitors to study all the materials in order to answer the questions satisfactorily.
9. Providers need to decide how many questions need to be answered correctly in order for participants to claim credit.
10. Providers need to be aware of the time-scale for advising participants of the answers to the questions. Providers should advise individuals of their own marks, but the overall answers should be published using the same media as the course.

Allocating CPD credit

11. Providers should give consideration to how participation in the courses will be recorded. Providers are required to maintain a record of the names of those who wish to claim CPD credit for participation in the courses. These records should be available to the SRA on request.
12. Providers should assess the average amount of time it should take to complete the course. Please note that the SRA accepts that the time taken by individual solicitors would depend on their own level of expertise in each subject. However, it is recommended that the average time be based on the course being tested by a number of individuals with varying levels of knowledge. Providers will be asked to demonstrate how the average time has been calculated.

General

13. All documents should be dated to ensure that the information is the most up to date. This is particularly important where the information will be downloaded from the internet and referred to at a later date.
14. Providers should ensure that the courses are evaluated and feedback is obtained from course participants on a regular basis. Details and analysis of this evaluation should be made available to the Solicitors Regulation Authority annually.
15. Providers should bear in mind that many participants will embark on this type of training outside of office hours. Consideration should be given to providing technical support both within and outside office hours, where it is necessary to use electronic equipment.
16. Applicants should provide the following information:
 - 16.1 A copy of the course materials; where relevant this should include video and/or audio cassettes, CD Rom, access to the internet site.
 - 16.2 Details of the aims and intended learning outcomes of the course
 - 16.3 Details of the level of the course and the level of expertise that would be expected of the participants
 - 16.4 Details of the names and experience of the persons who set the questions and answers and/or who write the course material

- 16.5 The time-scale of the course – for example, weekly, monthly, longer term
- 16.6 The average amount of time it should take to complete the course satisfactorily; please indicate how this amount of time was arrived at.
- 16.7 Details of how the course will be assessed, a sample of the questions and answers, and an indication of the pass mark
- 16.8 Details of how the questions will be marked and how the participants will be advised of their marks
- 16.9 Details of the evaluation and feedback procedures with sample evaluation and analysis forms
- 16.10 Details of any technical support services available to participants if appropriate
- 16.11 Details of provision for answering enquiries or for discussion
- 16.12 Details of how participation on the course will be recorded

All applications will be assessed by the SRA. Providers who are offering training through an internet site or by CD ROM will need to provide access to the site or CD ROM before authorisation will be finalised. Following authorisation, routine monitoring will be undertaken on a regular basis.

General criteria for authorisation as a CPD course provider

Course details

Providers should demonstrate that their courses and administration meet the criteria shown below. For the purposes of authorisation, 'a course' is a training session that is relevant to the work of a solicitor, accredited for CPD and lasts for one hour or longer. (Sessions lasting between 30 minutes and an hour will count for a maximum of 75 per cent of the CPD requirement.)

Aims and intended learning outcomes

The course aims and intended learning outcomes should be clearly set out and should include

- the course content and its purpose
- who the course is designed for and the level of prior knowledge/experience assumed
- the level of knowledge/understanding that should be achieved on completion of the course
- whether the subject would be taught in depth or dealt with as an overview
- what delegates should be able to do on completion of the course

Content

The content should meet the aims and intended learning outcomes and should therefore be

- relevant and suitable to the work of a solicitor
- set at the correct level for the intended delegates
- up-to-date and factually correct
- concise and clearly set out

Course presentation

The method of presentation used should be

- appropriate to meet the course aims and intended learning outcomes
- relevant to the needs of the delegates
- properly thought out
- set at the correct level
- where possible, varied to encourage learning

Course materials

All accredited courses of more than one hour must include supporting course materials.

It should be made clear how the materials will be used – for example, to be worked through, as background material or as a source of reference for use afterwards.

The course materials should relate to a future course and should cover the aims and intended learning outcomes and be

- clearly organised
- up-to-date (out of date materials will be rejected)
- well presented
- accurate
- comprehensive

and should include

- a course programme/timetable indicating the length of the course and time that will be spent on each section
- relevant cases and legislation where appropriate
- details of method of presentation including where appropriate
 - a) exercises, or
 - b) case studies

The course materials should not infringe copyright or contain any defamatory material.

Advise delegates if the information contained in the course is readily available elsewhere on the internet, especially if it is free of charge.

Course designers

The course designers should have

- relevant qualifications/experience in the subject area
- the necessary practical skills/experience to present the course effectively

Administrative arrangements and support services

Course providers should ensure there are appropriate and effective administrative arrangements and support services for delegates.

These should include

- nominated persons, or the system used, to deal with enquiries from delegates
- the provision of advice for prospective delegates on the most appropriate course(s) to meet their needs
- appropriate and effective record keeping of delegates using the system
- allocation of the relevant CPD credit for accredited courses
- notification of the Solicitors Regulation Authority reference to delegates
- details of the cancellation policy

Assessment

Please note that this criterion refers to assessment of the course work – for example, by examination, completion of a project, assignments, multiple-choice questionnaires, etc – which the provider is responsible for assessing.

For example, the assessment arrangements must be appropriate, clearly set out and easy to understand.

Internet-based providers should ensure regular reassessment of the standard of the course(s), given the rapid developments in the area.

Evaluation

Providers must have a system in place for evaluation by the delegates of the quality of each course. This should include

- a method of obtaining feedback from delegates of whether the course(s) met the standards set out above
- analysis of the feedback received, over each 12-month period, which would be made available to the SRA on request
- administrative arrangements for monitoring individual courses by the SRA

Administration

Providers should nominate a person who will take responsibility for ensuring that courses/seminars will comply with the terms and conditions of authorisation. This person should be a partner, senior manager or senior officer of the organisation, although the day-to-day running of the courses may be delegated.

Termination of authorisation

Providers may terminate their authorisation at any time by notification in writing to the Validation and Monitoring Team.

The SRA may terminate the authorisation if

- the SRA considers that continuation of the authorisation would be detrimental to the interests of the profession or those who attend courses, or
- there is evidence of a poor standard of administration by the provider, or
- there is evidence that the provision of courses is below a standard which is acceptable to the SRA, or
- a bankruptcy order or voluntary arrangement is made in respect of the provider or is entered into administration, receivership or liquidation or is dissolved or has a receiving order made against it or enters into an arrangement with creditors.
- the annual fees are not paid

Terms and conditions of authorisation

The provider should undertake to

- Pay the appropriate annual authorisation fees.
- Only accredit qualifying courses which meet the criteria laid down by the SRA.
- Maintain a record of the names of those solicitors who wish to claim CPD credit for undertaking a course and submit copies of the records to the SRA on request.
- For the purposes of monitoring, on request, make available details of programmes and, without charge, co-operate with the SRA in the monitoring of courses.
- Where the SRA is investigating a complaint, provide course materials and all relevant details as requested.
- Notify the Validation and Monitoring Team, in writing, of any changes to the business address or the nominated person

Please note: The Solicitors Regulation Authority's logo is only for use with its own products and services and is not available or permitted for use by outside organisations.

The SRA may change the criteria for accreditation of courses upon three months' notice.

Enquiries

All enquiries about these arrangements should be addressed to

Information Services
Ipsley Court
Berrington Close
Redditch
Worcestershire
B98 0TD

or

DX 19114 Redditch

Telephone 0870 606 2555, or if calling from overseas please telephone +44 (0)1527 504450.

Lines are open 09.00 hours – 17.00 hours, Monday to Friday