

Completing the academic stage of training

Guidance for providers of recognised law programmes

Education and Training Unit

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August 2010

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What is the purpose of this guidance?

This guidance is specifically designed for anyone who – in a professional capacity – provides advice to individuals intending to qualify as a solicitor.

The various elements of the academic stage of training are outlined, and the process of completing the academic stage of training is explained in some detail.

The guidance describes the Solicitors Regulation Authority policies and conventions; it also attempts to address queries and problems frequently encountered by students, universities and Solicitors Regulation Authority staff.

1. Introduction and background

1.1 What is the academic stage of training?

The academic stage of training is the first stage in the two-stage process of qualifying as a solicitor.

The second stage of the process is the vocational stage of training, which comprises the Legal Practice Course (LPC), the training contract and the Professional Skills Course.

For a formal definition of the academic stage of training, please see Regulation 7 of the Training Regulations 1990.

1.2 What is a qualifying law degree?

Effectively, a qualifying law degree is a degree that is approved as such by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. For a formal definition, please see Regulation 2 of the Training Regulations 1990.

At www.sra.org.uk, the Solicitors Regulation Authority publishes an up-to-date register of qualifying law degrees, including contact details of provider institutions.

1.3 What are the seven foundations of legal knowledge?

The study of seven substantive foundation subjects is required in order to complete the academic stage of training. These subjects are collectively known as the seven foundations of legal knowledge. For a formal definition, please see Regulation 2 of the Training Regulations 1990.

The seven foundations of legal knowledge are as follows:

- Criminal Law
- Equity and Trusts
- Law of the European Union
- Obligations 1 (Contract)
- Obligations 2 (Tort)
- Property/Land Law
- Public Law (Constitutional Law, Administrative Law and Human Rights Law)

In addition, students must receive training in legal research.

Provider institutions use a variety of names for these foundation subjects, which may be studied in series of modules or units aggregated together. Regardless of course names and module or unit configurations, the curriculum is broadly equivalent across institutions.

Please be aware that study of the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects is not always a compulsory element of pure law or mixed law degree programmes.

However, the foundations of legal knowledge subjects are compulsory for all students who wish to progress to the vocational stage of training. No one can qualify as a solicitor without successfully completing the examinations and assessments in all of the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects.

1.4 Is there more than one way to complete the academic stage of training?

There are three main ways to complete the academic stage of training:

- Qualifying with a law degree ([Section 2](#) below)
- Qualifying via the Common Professional Examination ([Section 3](#) below)
- Qualifying without a degree ([Section 4](#) below)

1.5 Certification of completion of the academic stage of training

When a student completes the academic stage of training by successfully completing study of the seven foundations of legal knowledge, they are required to apply to the Solicitors Regulation Authority for certification that they have completed the academic stage of training. Applications for certification of completion of the academic stage of training are normally made simultaneously with an application for student enrolment with the Solicitors Regulation Authority – in the spring or summer prior to commencement of the Legal Practice Course (LPC).

A certifying letter from the Solicitors Regulation Authority confirms that the student has completed the academic stage of training and provides evidence of their having passed the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects and of their having received training in legal research.

When students enrol in the LPC (in any event, no later than 30 November of the year in which they commence the LPC), they are required to provide their certifying letter to the LPC provider institution.

A letter certifying completion of the academic stage of training remains valid for seven years from 1 October of the year in which the corresponding qualifying law degree or Common Professional Examination (CPE) (see [Section 3.1](#) below) was awarded. After seven years, academic stage qualifications are regarded as 'stale' for qualifying purposes.

Anyone who wishes to qualify as a solicitor more than seven years after they have completed the academic stage of training normally is required to 'reactivate' their knowledge – usually by undertaking the full CPE examinations. In exceptional cases, the Solicitors Regulation Authority may revalidate a 'stale' academic stage qualification if there is reliable, independent evidence that the applicant has undertaken ongoing legal updating. This may include evidence of the applicant having maintained a sound working knowledge of the foundations of legal knowledge by actively engaging in legal work in professional practice or as a legal educator –

throughout the period subsequent to their completion of the academic stage of training.

Revalidation of qualifications more than seven years old is a discretionary process, and such discretion is most likely to be exercised when an applicant's qualifications are no more than 10 years old.

1.6 What are the training regulations?

The Law Society Training Regulations 1990 govern the education and training of solicitors in England and Wales. The policies and conventions set out in this guidance remain subject to, and are in accordance with, the training regulations. You can download the regulations – which cover the academic stage of training and include relevant definitions – at www.sra.org.uk.

2. Qualifying with a law degree

Qualifying with a law degree remains the most popular way to qualify as a solicitor.

2.1 Content of a qualifying law degree

In order to complete the academic stage of training, students are required to pass all assessments and examinations in the foundations of legal knowledge, and must develop legal research skills, in completing a qualifying law degree.

There is a wide range of qualifying law degrees, including the following:

- Three-year and four-year full-time law degrees
- Four-to-six-year part-time law degrees
- Joint and mixed honours degrees
- Full-time and part-time senior status law degrees

2.1.1 Three-year and four-year full-time law degree

The course of study includes the study of legal subjects for the equivalent of not less than two years out of a three year or four year course of study, (for example, a student must gain not less than 240 credits in the study of legal subjects in a 360 or 480 credit degree programme.

The coverage of those legal subjects referred to as the foundations of legal knowledge must involve not less than one and a half years study i.e. the coverage of the foundation subjects shall amount to not less than 180 credits. Courses involving the study of aspects of the English Legal System will be allowed to count towards the 180 credits.

2.1.2 Part-time law degree

In a part-time degree or a part-time distance-learning degree, the seven foundation subjects must each be passed and the degree completed within a period of study of no less than four years and no more than six years. The workload requirements in relation to the seven foundations of legal knowledge and in relation to legal subjects as a whole are the same as those for full-time degrees, outlined in Section 2.1.1 above.

2.1.3 Joint honours and mixed honours degrees

In a joint honours or mixed honours degree programme, the workload for the study of legal subjects, including the seven foundation subjects, must be at least one-half of the total workload for the degree.

2.1.4 Senior status law degree

In a senior status law degree, the seven foundation subjects must all have been passed and the degree awarded in no less than two years for a full-time degree and in no less than three years for a part-time degree. The workload requirements in relation to the seven foundations of legal knowledge and in relation to legal subjects as a whole are the same as those for full-time degrees, outlined in Section 2.1.1 above.

Institutions that provide senior status law degrees are listed at www.sra.org.uk.

2.2 Number of attempts at foundation subjects

The maximum number of attempts permitted for any of the foundations of legal knowledge subjects within a qualifying law degree is normally three.

2.3 Prerequisite subjects

Students should not be permitted to study a subject unless they have passed the examination/assessment in any prerequisite subject(s).

2.4 Recognised exemptions for prior learning

2.4.1 Examinations of professional bodies

Exemptions for foundations of legal knowledge subjects may be granted by provider institutions if a student has passed law papers in the examinations of certain professional bodies such as the Institute of Legal Executives or the [Council for Licensed Conveyancers](http://www.clc.org.uk) (CLC).

Such exemptions will only be acceptable to and recognised by the Solicitors Regulation Authority if

- the examinations are of degree standard, and
- the full professional qualification has been awarded.

Examinations that are not generally regarded as being of degree standard should not be recognised as giving exemptions for foundations of legal knowledge subjects within a degree programme. An example of examinations that are not generally recognised as being of a degree standard are the Professional Diploma in Law (PDL) Level 3 membership examinations of the Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX). These are generally accepted as being equivalent to the GCE advanced level or advanced GNVQ. By contrast, the Professional Higher Diploma in Law (PHDL) Level 6 substantive law papers of the ILEX membership examinations are generally recognised as being of degree standard.

Examples

A Fellow of ILEX who has passed Level 6 law papers in contract, tort and criminal law in the ILEX membership examinations may be granted exemptions for contract, tort and criminal law within a law degree programme. The Solicitors Regulation Authority will recognise such a law degree when it is awarded as a qualifying law degree.

A licensed conveyancer who has been licensed by the CLC, having passed its assessments in land law, conveyancing, and landlord and tenant, may be granted exemption for land law within a law degree programme. The Solicitors Regulation Authority will recognise the law degree when it is awarded.

2.4.2 Single subject diplomas

The Solicitors Regulation Authority does not normally accept a law degree for the purpose of completing the academic stage of training if the degree includes exemptions for one or more foundations of legal knowledge subjects that have been completed by way of single law subject diplomas. In addition, a diploma that includes two or more but not all of the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects is not acceptable to the Solicitors Regulation Authority for the purpose of exemption.

Example

The individual Level 6 subjects of the ILEX membership examination can be taken as single subject examinations. An ILEX Single Subject Higher Diploma in Law (SSHHD) is awarded for each subject. SSHHDs are not acceptable to the Solicitors Regulation Authority for exemption purposes.

2.5 Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)

The Solicitors Regulation Authority does not recognise or accept APEL for the purpose of exemption from any or all of the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects.

2.6 Credit transfer rules

2.6.1 Transferring from one institution to another

A student who is enrolled in a qualifying law degree programme at one UK institution may transfer to a qualifying law degree programme at another UK institution and take with them the benefit of credits earned at the first institution. However, if such a student wishes to obtain a qualifying law degree at the end of their studies, they must comply with strict rules that govern such transfers.

2.6.2 Rationale for the credit transfer rules

The object of these rules is to ensure that the practice of 'shopping around' and earning a qualifying law degree by a 'mix and match' route is not possible. The Solicitors Regulation Authority is concerned to maintain the quality of entrants to the profession and to safeguard the integrity of law programmes, which could be undermined by a 'shopping around' approach.

2.6.3 Credit transfer rules

The rules are as follows:

- Only credit for one or more full years of study can be transferred.
- All assessments and examinations must have been passed in any full year of study for which credit is transferred.
- All of the seven foundations of legal knowledge must be passed at the originating institution, at the transferee institution, or in part at the originating institution and in part at the transferee institution.

If an originating institution deems that a student has failed all or part of a degree programme, no credits for any subjects passed at the originating institution can be transferred to a qualifying law degree programme at another institution.

The credit transfer rules also apply if a student wishes to transfer to a qualifying law degree from another degree programme at the same institution.

If a transfer is in breach of the credit transfer rules, the Solicitors Regulation Authority will not accept the final award as a qualifying law degree. For the full impact of a breach of the credit transfer rules, please refer to [Section 2.6.6](#) below.

Examples

A student who has passed the whole of Year 1 at Institution X can transfer Year 1 credits to Institution Y and complete Year 2 and Year 3 at Institution Y, provided that, at Institution X, they have made no attempt to complete any part of Year 2 or Year 3.

A student who has passed the whole of Year 1 and Year 2 at Institution X can transfer Year 1 credits and Year 2 credits to Institution Y and complete Year 3 at Institution Y, provided that, at Institution X, they have made no attempt to complete any part of Year 3.

A student who has passed only part of Year 1 at Institution X cannot transfer Year 1 credits to Institution Y, offering passes at Institution Y in place of subjects failed at Institution X. If the student wishes to transfer, they must recommence the programme (at the beginning) at Institution Y.

A student who has passed the whole of Year 1 but has failed part or all of Year 2 at Institution X cannot transfer Year 1 credits to Institution Y and complete Year 2 and Year 3 at Institution Y. This is prohibited in order to prevent such a student from gaining an unfair advantage by re-attempting Year 2 as a 'first sit' at Institution Y. The student must complete Year 2 at Institution X. Only on satisfactory completion of Year 2 at Institution X can the student transfer to Institution Y for the purpose of undertaking Year 3.

A student who has passed the whole of Year 1 and Year 2 at Institution X but has failed all or part of Year 3 cannot transfer Year 1 and Year 2 credits to Institution Y and undertake Year 3 at Institution Y, offering passes at Institution Y in place of subjects failed at Institution X. This is prohibited in order to prevent such a student from gaining an unfair advantage by re-attempting Year 3 as a 'first sit' at Institution Y. The student must, therefore, complete Year 3 at Institution X.

2.6.4 Transferee institution's decision and procedures

It is the responsibility of the two institutions and the student involved in the transfer to liaise among themselves; it is the responsibility of the transferee institution to ensure that it satisfies itself regarding the subject for which it proposes to give credit; the Solicitors Regulation Authority plays no part in this process.

Transferee institutions have internal procedures and conventions for recognising credits earned at other institutions; for example, students may be required to submit copies of results transcripts and subject syllabuses, attend interviews and provide academic references.

It is entirely the responsibility of the transferee institution to determine whether it can

- accommodate the needs of a transferring student
- offer a programme that allows a transferring student to complete any outstanding foundations of legal knowledge subjects

The Solicitors Regulation Authority does not play a role in this process.

2.6.5 Solicitors Regulation Authority approval of transfer not required

A transfer that complies with the credit transfer rules ([Section 2.6.3](#) above) is effective. Prior approval from the Solicitors Regulation Authority is not required. There is no requirement for a transferring student or a transferee institution to obtain certification from the Solicitors Regulation Authority to the effect that a transfer complies with the rules. Please be aware that the Solicitors Regulation Authority refuses to consider requests for such certification.

2.6.6 Breach of credit transfer rules

If a student has transferred institutions in breach of the credit transfer rules ([Section 2.6.3](#) above), they cannot obtain a qualifying law degree. In order to complete the academic stage of training, such a student must undertake a CPE programme of study (see [Section 3.1](#) below) in its entirety; and, they cannot be granted exemptions or allowances for foundation subjects previously passed as part of the non-qualifying law degree awarded.

2.7 Time limits for qualifying law degrees

2.7.1 General rule

The maximum period permitted for completion of a qualifying law degree is as follows:

- For full-time study – the normal period for completion of the degree programme plus one year
- For part-time study – the normal period for completion of the degree programme plus two years

2.7.2 Full-time degree

A full-time degree must be completed in no less than three years and in no more than four years.

2.7.3 Part-time degree and part-time distance-learning degree

A part-time degree must be completed in no less than four years and in no more than six years. This timeframe includes re-sits and deferrals – except in exceptional cases, which may be dealt with under the provisions of [Section 2.7.6](#) below.

If a student has changed from full-time study mode to part-time study module or vice versa, the maximum period permitted for completion of the degree is normally six years.

2.7.4 Sandwich degree

A sandwich degree must be completed in no less than four years and in no more than five years.

2.7.5 Senior status law degree

The maximum period permitted for completion of a senior status law degree is as follows:

- For full-time study – no less than two years and no more than three years
- For part-time study – no less than three years and no more than five years

2.7.6 Exceptional cases

If a degree is not completed in a period that falls within the range prescribed by the general rule ([Section 2.7.1](#) above), it is very unlikely to be recognised by the Solicitors Regulation Authority as a qualifying law degree.

Provider institutions should refer exceptional cases to the Solicitors Regulation Authority – with full supporting evidence. The Solicitors Regulation Authority considers exceptional cases on their merits.

Exceptional circumstances, which could justify completion of a degree in a period that exceeds the maximum prescribed by the general rule, include the following:

- Relocation to a different part of the country or overseas for domestic or occupational reasons
- Serious financial hardship
- Illness or a disability of a nature that necessitates the transfer
- Illness or disability of a dependent for whom the student is the primary carer
- Significant change in the student's circumstances that is sufficiently beyond the control of the student

2.8 Qualifying law degree pass mark

The Solicitors Regulation Authority's pass mark for a qualifying law degree is 40% – regardless of any pass mark set by provider institutions. Provider institutions that set their own pass mark at lower than 40% have a responsibility to inform all students who intend to qualify as a solicitor that the qualifying law degree pass mark set by the Solicitors Regulation Authority is 40%. In addition, provider institutions must only certify (on their annual block certificates) that a student has attained a qualifying law degree if the student in question has achieved a mark of 40% or higher.

2.9 Condonation of marginally failed examinations

2.9.1 Marginal failure

If a student 'marginally fails' one – and only one – of the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects, the Solicitors Regulation Authority may at its discretion, in exceptional circumstances, condone the single failure and confirm the award of a qualifying law degree. A student is considered to have 'marginally failed' a foundation subject if they attain a mark not more than 5% lower than the qualifying law degree pass mark of 40% (ie a mark of at least 35%).

The Solicitors Regulation Authority's discretion to condone marginal failure cannot be exercised in respect of more than one foundation of legal knowledge subject. Consequently, students who marginally fail a foundation subject in Year 1 or Year 2 of a three-year degree programme should be strongly counselled to re-sit and pass the subject in question rather than rely upon the Solicitors Regulation Authority to condone it subsequently; this effectively keeps in reserve for their final year of study a student's single opportunity to seek Solicitors Regulation Authority condonation of a marginally failed foundation subject.

2.9.2 Discretion

If a student marginally fails one – and only one – foundation subject (ie attains a mark of at least 35% in the failed subject and passes all of the other six foundation subjects), the Solicitors Regulation Authority may exercise its discretion to confirm the award of a qualifying law degree; this discretion is not exercised as of right or automatically; it is only exercised in exceptional cases.

If a student marginally fails a foundation subject and also fails or is compensated/condoned by the provider institution in one or more other subject(s) within a degree programme, the Solicitors Regulation Authority is unlikely to exercise its discretion in favour of such a student to condone the marginally failed foundation subject. Evidence of a student's academic strength elsewhere, across the degree programme, is for the Solicitors Regulation Authority an important criterion in the exercise of its discretion to condone a marginally failed subject.

If no application for exercise of the discretion is made, or if the Solicitors Regulation Authority does not exercise its discretion in the student's favour, and condonation is refused, the student must either

- pass the relevant foundation examination at the institution that awarded the degree (if this can be arranged), or
- undertake the corresponding CPE examination(s)/assessment(s) in place of the failed subject(s)

The same principle applies if the Solicitors Regulation Authority cannot condone a failed foundation subject because the mark achieved is lower than 35%.

2.9.3 Formal written request

Any request for the Solicitors Regulation Authority to condone a marginally failed subject should be submitted to the Society in a formal written application by the provider institution on behalf of the student. The application should outline any exceptional circumstances that relate to the student; such circumstances might include overall academic strength across the rest of the degree programme and/or mitigating circumstances, whether medical, personal, family or of any other kind.

The application should also include an unequivocal statement by the provider institution supporting the request to condone, along with a transcript of the student's results for the complete programme.

2.9.4 Summary

The Solicitors Regulation Authority will consider requests to condone one – and only one – marginally failed foundation subject (ie a subject in which the student has achieved a mark of at least 35%) per student. Any such request must

- be made by the provider institution in a formal written application
- outline the exceptional circumstances of the student
- include an unequivocal statement of support from the provider institution
- include a full transcript of the student's results

2.10 Deemed pass(es)

2.10.1 Discretion

If a student who has been awarded a law degree was unable to take a foundation subject or subjects because of serious illness, bereavement or other substantial cause, the Solicitors Regulation Authority has the discretion to deem the student to have passed the subject(s) and, thus, to deem their degree a qualifying law degree. This discretion is exercised in very exceptional circumstances and requires the support of the provider institution.

2.10.2 Formal written request

Any request for the Solicitors Regulation Authority to award a deemed pass must be made by the provider institution in a formal, written application that outlines the exceptional circumstances relating to the student. The application should include the relevant minute of the decision of the examination board that awarded the student's degree, along with a full transcript of the student's results for the complete programme. The application should also include an unequivocal statement by the provider institution supporting the deemed pass(es) requested.

2.10.3 Summary

The Solicitors Regulation Authority will only consider requests to award a deemed pass or passes in very exceptional circumstances. Any such request must

- be made by the provider institution in a formal written application
- outline the exceptional circumstances of the student
- include an unequivocal statement of support for the deemed pass(es) from the provider institution
- include a full transcript of the student's results
- include the relevant minute from the examination board that awarded the student's degree

2.11 Failure in foundations of legal knowledge subjects

If a student has been awarded a law degree that is not a qualifying law degree due to the fact that one or two (but no more than two) foundations of legal knowledge subjects have been failed or have not been studied, the student should normally be advised to attempt to take and pass the outstanding foundation subject examination(s) or assessment(s) at the provider institution that awarded the degree. If this is not possible, the student should arrange to take the relevant CPE examination(s) or assessment(s). The examination(s) may be undertaken at the first available sitting subsequent to graduation (ie September re-sit, if available).

Students should be made aware that they cannot commence the Legal Practice Course (LPC) until they have passed all of the foundations of legal knowledge subjects and have completed the academic stage of training. In exceptional cases, if a student has already sat or re-sat one or two foundation subjects and is merely

awaiting the result(s) of the examination(s), they may be permitted to enrol informally in an LPC programme and attend classes pending receipt of their examination result(s); however, if the student does not pass the outstanding examination(s), the Solicitors Regulation Authority requires that they immediately cease to attend LPC classes.

3. Qualifying via the Common Professional Examination

3.1 Common Professional Examination / Graduate Diploma in Law

Students who wish to complete the academic stage of training by undertaking the Common Professional Examination are required to pass the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects and one other area of legal study.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority publishes a list of institutions that offer programmes of study that are validated as the Common Professional Examination (CPE); provider institutions typically award a Graduate Diploma in Law to students who complete these programmes; please visit www.sra.org.uk.

3.2 Entry requirements for CPE

The CPE is an intense, condensed programme of study – specifically designed for graduates or students who have acquired career experience or academic/vocational qualifications that the Solicitors Regulation Authority considers to be equivalent to an undergraduate degree. Consequently, to be permitted to undertake the CPE, applicants must

- (a) hold a law degree from a UK university, or
- (b) hold a law degree from a university in the Republic of Ireland, or
- (c) hold a degree in a subject other than law from a UK university or a university in the Republic of Ireland, or
- (d) be overseas graduates who have studied for a minimum of three years full time, or
- (e) be mature students who can demonstrate at least 10 years of experience at middle-management level, or
- (f) hold academic or vocational qualifications that the Solicitors Regulation Authority considers equivalent to a degree (see [Section 4.4](#) below)

3.3 Certificates of academic standing

Anyone who wishes to undertake the CPE and has non-standard qualifications – listed as items (d) through (f) in [Section 3.2](#) above – is required to obtain a certificate of academic standing from the Solicitors Regulation Authority before they enrol in a CPE programme. The certificate is evidence that their qualifications meet the minimum requirements for admission to a CPE programme.

Applicants for a certificate of academic standing who hold a degree from an overseas university must submit to the Solicitors Regulation Authority either originals or certified true copies of their degree certificate(s) and the corresponding transcript(s) of results.

3.4 Recognised CPE exemptions

3.4.1 Exemptions from CPE subjects for degree studies

Full or part exemptions from the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects and from one further area of legal study may be granted if a student has passed corresponding subjects within a degree programme. Such exemptions are granted only if the degree has been awarded. If exemption is claimed for 'one other area of legal study' (see [Section 3.1](#) above), the applicant must have completed and passed a full law subject within the degree course.

3.4.2 'Four or more' rule

The Solicitors Regulation Authority does not grant exemptions for fewer than four CPE subjects – from among the foundation subjects and one further area of legal study (see [Section 3.1](#) above). Students who have passed no more than three subjects cannot apply for exemptions from CPE subjects; if they wish to complete the academic stage of training, they must undertake a full CPE programme.

3.4.3 Application for certificate of exemption

Applications for a certificate of exemption from the CPE for law subjects studied within a degree programme should

- be in writing, using the appropriate Solicitors Regulation Authority application form
- be addressed to the Solicitors Regulation Authority's Education and Training Unit
- include an official transcript of the degree results
- include a certified true copy of the degree certificate

An application form and detailed guidance on applying for a certificate of exemption are available at www.sra.org.uk.

3.5 Time limits for CPE

3.5.1 Full-time CPE

A full-time CPE programme should normally be completed, with all examinations and assessments passed, in not less than one year and in not more than three years.

3.5.2 Part-time CPE

A part-time CPE programme should normally be completed, with all examinations and assessments passed, in not less than two years and in not more than four years. Students are not normally permitted to interrupt their studies for one year – after the first year of the programme and before the second year.

Providers may either stipulate that all first year assessments must have been successfully completed before the student can be admitted onto the second year of the course, or may grant students the option of progressing onto the second year of the course where they have failed one or more assessments in the first year.

3.5.3 Single CPE examinations

Students who are taking only one or two CPE examinations are normally required to begin their studies no later than 1 October of the year prior to the year in which they take the examinations and assessments. Such examinations and assessments should normally be completed in the following May or June.

3.6 Transfers between CPE institutions

Students are not permitted to transfer between CPE provider institutions – except in exceptional circumstances. Students who do wish to transfer must apply in writing to the Solicitors Regulation Authority, outlining their exceptional circumstances and including supporting evidence (eg medical certification). Applications to transfer CPE provider institutions are dealt with on a case-by-case basis; each application is assessed on its merits.

3.7 Number of attempts at CPE

The maximum number of attempts permitted for each CPE subject is normally three.

If a student's circumstances are exceptional, the provider institution can decide that their third attempt to pass one or more subjects does not count and can allow the student to take the subject(s) again as a final attempt.

If a student passes all subjects but one, and fails their third attempt to pass the remaining subject, they are required to undertake again an entire CPE programme in order to complete the academic stage of training; no credit can be granted for subjects previously passed.

If a student fails a CPE programme, they are permitted to undertake it again in its entirety; they cannot claim credit for subjects previously passed. There is no limit to the number of attempts a student may make at the CPE. A student may undertake a CPE programme on more than one occasion with a single provider institution or with various provider institutions. However, on each occasion a student undertakes a CPE programme, all subjects must be attempted; no credit can be granted for subjects previously passed.

4. Qualifying without a degree

There are four main ways by which to qualify as a solicitor without a degree:

- Legal executives
- Justices' clerks' assistants
- Mature applicants
- Degree-equivalent qualifications

4.1 Legal executives

By undertaking the examinations of the [Institute of Legal Executives](#) (ILEX) during a period of qualifying legal employment, it is possible to complete the academic stage of training and qualify as a solicitor without obtaining a degree.

4.1.1 Level 3 and Level 6 membership

To attain ILEX membership, students are required to pass both Level 3 and Level 6 of the membership examinations. Level 3 examinations are set at around the GCE A-level standard. Level 6 examinations are set at a degree level. There is no time limit within which these examinations must be passed; nor is there any limit on the number of attempts permitted for each examination.

4.1.2 Membership and fellowship

Membership

No period of qualifying legal employment is required in order to become an ILEX member (MILEX); completion of the membership examinations suffices.

Fellowship

An ILEX fellow (ILEX) must

- be at least 25 years of age
- be an ILEX member
- have completed five years of qualifying legal experience, of which at least two consecutive years must have been completed as a MILEX

4.1.3 Recognised CPE exemptions

MILEX

A MILEX can claim full or partial exemption from the CPE if they have passed corresponding papers in the Level 6 membership examinations – provided they have served at least three years of qualifying legal employment while aged 18 years or older.

FILEX

A FILEX can claim full or partial exemption from the CPE if they have passed corresponding papers in the Level 6 membership examinations.

However, if a FILEX has obtained exemption from ILEX membership examinations by having passed corresponding subjects as part of a failed law degree, they cannot claim exemption from CPE subjects.

If a FILEX has obtained exemption from ILEX membership examinations by having passed corresponding law papers in a law degree that is not a qualifying law degree because it was not completed within the maximum period permitted, they cannot claim exemption from CPE subjects.

4.1.4 'Four or more' rule

The 'four or more rule' referred to in [Section 3.4.2](#) above applies to applications for exemption from the CPE from MILEX and FILEX. Anyone who has passed no more than three corresponding subjects cannot apply for exemptions from CPE subjects.

4.1.5 Application for a certificate of exemption from the CPE

Applications for a certificate of exemption from the CPE for law papers studied within the Part 6 membership examinations should

- be in writing, using the appropriate Solicitors Regulation Authority form

- be addressed to the Solicitors Regulation Authority's Education and Training Unit
- include a certified true copy of the applicant's birth certificate
- include a certified true copy of the certificate of admission as a MILEX or FILEX, as appropriate
- include certified true copies of all Part 6 examination pass certificates
- for MILEX only, include an employer's letter confirming the applicant has spent at least three years in qualifying legal employment while aged 18 years or older

Certificates of exemption for the CPE are valid for three years from the date of issue.

An application form and detailed guidance on applying for a certificate of exemption are available at www.sra.org.uk.

4.1.6 Time limit for full CPE exemption

As of 1 October 2000, MILEX and FILEX seeking full exemption from the CPE are required to have

- passed the papers necessary to gain full exemption from the CPE in one four-year block
- completed the four-year block within seven years of gaining ILEX membership
- claimed exemption from the CPE and commenced the LPC within seven years of gaining ILEX membership

Examples

Student A gained ILEX membership on 1 November 2002.

Student A wants to take a break from studying and has decided not to sit the additional CPE examinations until June 2004.

Student A has until June 2008 to complete the additional subjects (ie within one four-year block and within seven years of gaining membership).

Student A must obtain full exemption from the CPE, obtain a certifying letter of completion of the academic stage of training, and start the LPC by 1 October 2009 (ie applied for full exemption from CPE and begin the LPC within seven years of gaining membership).

Student B gained ILEX membership on 1 January 2002.

Student B wants to press ahead with studying and undertake the additional CPE examinations immediately after gaining membership.

Student B must complete the additional CPE examinations by 1 November 2006 (ie within one four-year block).

Student B can wait for up to three years before claiming full CPE exemption and starting the LPC but must do so no later than 1 November 2009 (ie within seven years of gaining membership).

4.2 Justices' clerks' assistants

Justices' clerks' assistants with a Diploma in Magisterial Law are normally eligible to undertake the CPE. They may claim partial exemption from the CPE if they have

passed corresponding subjects in the Diploma in Magisterial Law – provided that the diploma has been awarded.

Exemptions from the following foundations of legal knowledge subjects may be granted

- Public Law
- Criminal Law
- Obligations I (Contract) or Obligations II (Tort)

Applicants who have been awarded the certificate of training of the Inner London Magistrates' Courts cannot apply for exemptions from CPE subjects.

For instructions on how to apply for a certificate of exemption from the CPE, see [Section 3.4.3](#) above.

4.3 Mature applicants

The Training Regulations 1990 provide that mature non-graduates who wish to complete the academic stage of training by undertaking a CPE programme must

- be at least 25 years old
- have had considerable experience or have shown exceptional ability in an academic, professional, business or administrative field
- have achieved a sufficient standard of general education (usually, GCE A-level passes sufficient to be granted admission to a full-time LLB programme)
- have a good command of spoken and written English
- have satisfied the Solicitors Regulation Authority as to their character and suitability to be a solicitor

Any applicant who claims mature student status based on considerable experience is required to demonstrate an employment history of at least 10 years.

Any applicant who claims mature student status based on exceptional ability is required to demonstrate that they have attained at least middle-management level in their present or former employment.

4.4 Degree-equivalent qualifications

The Training Regulations 1990 provide that a person may be eligible to undertake the CPE if they have attained “such academic vocational qualifications as the Society considers to be equivalent to a first degree” (see Regulation 10).

Degree-equivalent qualifications could include qualifications obtained through the Institute of Chartered Accountants or the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. Anyone with degree-equivalent qualifications who wishes to undertake the CPE must apply to the Solicitors Regulation Authority for a certificate of academic standing, enclosing certified copies of their qualifications and membership certificates.

5. Student enrolment and completion of the academic stage of training

5.1 Completion of the academic stage of training

Regulation 7 of the Training Regulations 1990 states that a person must satisfy the academic stage of training by

- graduating with an exempting law degree
- graduating with a qualifying law degree
- passing a Common Professional Examination, or
- satisfactorily completing an integrated course

The academic stage of training requires students to study and pass the seven foundations of legal knowledge subjects (see [Section 1.3](#) above). There are three main ways in which to undertake the seven foundations of legal knowledge (see [Section 1.4](#) above).

Completion of the academic stage will only be certified if the Society is satisfied that a student has

- completed the seven foundation subjects
- obtained a pass mark of at least 40% – unless a condoned pass has been granted (see [Section 2.9](#) above)
- completed the degree within the specific time limits (a maximum of four years for a full-time course and up to six years for a part-time course), and
- been awarded the degree within the past seven years

When the Solicitors Regulation Authority grants a person student membership of the Solicitors Regulation Authority, they are sent a certifying letter, confirming that they have completed the academic stage of training.

5.2 Student membership of the Solicitors Regulation Authority

Before starting a [Legal Practice Course](#) (LPC) programme, students are required to enrol as a student member of the Solicitors Regulation Authority and obtain written confirmation from the Solicitors Regulation Authority that they have completed the academic stage of training. Students cannot progress any further in their training unless these two requirements are completed (if a part-time study training contract is to be undertaken, the requirements may differ).

Before starting an LPC programme, students must

- complete an [application for student enrolment and completion of the academic stage of training form](#)
- submit it to the Solicitors Regulation Authority
- pay a fee of £80

Students must not start an LPC programme – or enter into a full-time training contract – until written confirmation from the Solicitors Regulation Authority has been received, confirming that student membership and completion of the academic stage of training have been granted.

5.3 Character and suitability

Under the Solicitors Act 1974, the Solicitors Regulation Authority is responsible for setting and maintaining standards for all solicitors practising in England and Wales. The Solicitors Regulation Authority therefore has a duty to consider the character and suitability of anyone who wishes to enter the profession.

When making an application for student membership of the Solicitors Regulation Authority, applicants must declare any information that might affect their suitability to be a solicitor (see the Solicitors Regulation Authority publication entitled **Student membership of the Solicitors Regulation Authority and completion of the academic stage of training – What you need to know**).

Any convictions or other issues that may affect an application for student membership should be submitted to the SRA as early as possible to allow time to assess the application.

Every case is considered on its merits. The SRA will ask for written confirmation of the relevant issues, and individuals may be asked to appear before a Solicitors Regulation Authority adjudicator to explain their situation.

If matters arise after student enrolment has been granted, the SRA must be notified as soon as possible to enable such matters to be dealt with appropriately. Failure to do so may slow the process of applying for admission as a solicitor or, following admission, the process of applying for a practising certificate.

When students apply for admission as a solicitor in England and Wales, they are required to obtain a satisfactory standard disclosure from the [Criminal Records Bureau](#) (CRB). A CRB standard disclosure includes details of any current or spent convictions, police cautions, reprimands and final warnings held on the [Police National Computer](#). The SRA also makes use of overseas criminal records information services whenever appropriate.

Failure to disclose convictions and other issues at the student enrolment stage and subsequently, if necessary, is a serious matter and may result in refusal of admission as a solicitor in England and Wales.

The SRA issues in writing its response to any application for student membership.

6. Who to contact for help and advice

For general information or advice on qualifying as a solicitor, please contact

The Contact Centre, The Solicitors Regulation Authority, Ipsley Court, Redditch, Worcestershire, B98 0TD

Tel: 0870 606 2555

E-mail: contactcentre@sra.org.uk

Web: www.sra.org.uk

For **specialist advice** on the academic stage of training, please contact

The Solicitors Regulation Authority:

The Education and Training Unit (providers) or The Case-working and Applications Unit (individuals), The Solicitors Regulation Authority, Ipsley Court, Redditch, Worcestershire, B98 0TD

Tel: 01527 504450 (general number)

The Bar Standards Board:

Education Standards, Bar Standards Board, 289-293 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7HZ

Tel: 0207 611 1444

The Institute of Legal Executives:

Kempston Manor, Kempston, Bedford, MK42 7AB

Tel: 01234 845743