

News

Coronavirus update - Education and Training Q&A

Updated 21 May 2020 (first published 25 March 2020)

We recognise that students, trainees and law firms are concerned about the impact on their training and assessments.

Our aim is to help by being as flexible as possible in this area, while still making sure solicitors who qualify have met the required standard.

Here are answers to commonly asked questions.

Qualifying Law Degree (QLD) / Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)

Open all [#]

Can we make alternative arrangements for assessments on these courses during the pandemic?

Yes, we do not specify or approve the form that assessments take on these courses. However, some form of assessment is required, for example online, open book or remote assessments. Training providers should let us know [\[contactus\]](#) (for our information, not approval) if they are introducing alternative assessment arrangements.

Can we cancel our assessments?

No, there must be some assessment for Foundation of Legal Knowledge (FLK) subjects. We do not specify the form it needs to take, but an assessment is required. For example, online, open book or remote assessments.

We are also content if you wish to postpone assessment of subjects into later academic years. However, by the time your students graduate, they must be properly assessed in all FLK subjects.

Some universities are implementing a 'no detriment policy' for the remainder of the academic year. What is the SRA's view about a no detriment policy in relation to the QLD and GDL?

We do not specify or approve the form that assessments take for the QLD and GDL. It is up to providers of those courses to decide how they assess the QLD and GDL, including whether a no detriment policy would be appropriate for those courses.

Universities can make their own decisions about assessing students through alternative arrangements, such as coursework assessments, or take-home, open-book examinations or online, timed examinations. However, some form of assessment for Foundation of Legal Knowledge (FLK) subjects is required. By the time students graduate they should have been properly assessed in all FLK subjects. All foundation subjects on a QLD must be passed with at least 40% to fulfil the requirements of the academic stage of training.

Legal Practice Course (LPC)

Open all [#]

How will the LPC be assessed during the period of the

How will the LPC be assessed during the period of the outbreak?

We have a statutory duty to make sure that those who are admitted as solicitors have the knowledge and skills necessary for practice. This means we need to be assured that students who pass an LPC have the necessary knowledge and skills for the early stage of their career in practice.

One of the ways we do this is through our requirements for supervised assessments on the LPC. It will of course be challenging to meet these requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic and so for this period, we are relaxing our current assessment requirements for all parts of the LPC.

This means that for skills assessments and elective subjects, LPC providers may make alternative assessment arrangements.

For the core LPC subjects, we will maintain our requirements for supervised assessment, but we will consider applications for online or remote proctoring of supervised assessments.

LPC providers must apply to us for approval before making any changes to assessments. We will consider changes to our current requirements on a provider by provider basis. Approval will be subject to review by us at any stage.

We will decide quickly on applications to make changes to LPC assessments.

In all cases, we will expect any application to us to set out how the proposed approach will maintain the security and integrity of the LPC qualification.

If you wish to make a change to your assessment arrangements, please apply to us using this form [<https://form.sra.org.uk/s3/changes>].

Trainees are also permitted to start their training contract before they have completed the LPC. Therefore training providers may need to consider and plan for trainees to complete the LPC later on.

Are LPC course providers able to apply a no detriment policy for grading or classification of the LPC during the Covid-19 outbreak?

We recognise that the Covid-19 outbreak has presented significant challenges to LPC students and course providers. We have supported them by allowing changes to teaching and assessment methods for the LPC during the outbreak.

While we do not stipulate how an provider has chosen to grade or classify an LPC - in normal times or during the Covid-19 outbreak - we would expect any decisions they make about classifications during this period to maintain the integrity of the LPC qualification.

The pass mark for all core and elective assessments of the LPC is 50%. A candidate cannot be awarded the LPC unless they have scored at least 50% in all assessments. A pass/fail award decision must be calculated on the basis of all assessments, including those taken in the current Covid-19 outbreak, and course providers can therefore not apply any policy that undermines this.

Marks for assessments, and the number of attempts at the assessment, must be recorded on separate transcripts. However these should not include reference to any grading or classification system the provider has chosen to use, although this may be recorded on a certificate.

Therefore training providers and employers should check LPC qualifications against a

transcript when considering how individuals performed on the LPC, rather than the grade or classification on an award certificate, as how a distinction or commendation is calculated may vary between providers.

Professional Skills Course (PSC)

Open all [#]

You have said that we can provide teaching online. Can we move to online assessments for parts of the PSC?

Certain parts of the compulsory core subjects for the PSC require face to face assessment. We appreciate that it will be challenging to meet these requirements during the outbreak.

We have therefore decided to consider applications for online or remote proctoring of assessments for the PSC, or assessment of oral skills by video-link.

PSC providers must apply to us for approval before making any changes to assessments. We will consider changes to our current requirements on a provider by provider basis. Approval will be subject to review by us at any stage.

We will decide quickly on applications to make changes to PSC assessments.

In all cases, we will expect any application to us to set out how the proposed approach will maintain the security and integrity of the PSC qualification.

If you wish to make a change to your assessment arrangements, please apply to us using this form [<https://form.sra.org.uk/s3/changes>].

I need to complete the PSC for admission as a solicitor but there is currently no way of attending the assessment parts of the course. What should I do?

We are accepting applications from Professional Skills Course (PSC) providers to temporarily move to online or remote proctoring of assessments for the PSC, or assessment of oral skills by video-link. However we know that it still may not be possible to complete the course in time for your planned admission point.

If you are not able to complete the PSC due to the Covid-19 outbreak, you can apply to us to defer completion of the PSC for admission as a solicitor. You will still need to successfully complete this within 12 months of being admitted.

If you wish to complete the PSC after you have been admitted as a solicitor, you must first apply to us for a 'waiver', using this form [globalassets/documents/solicitors/innovate/waivers-application.pdf?version=4a5d0d]. Your application will be for a waiver of part of regulation 3A.1(a) (ii) of the Authorisation of Individual Regulations.

If we decide to grant you a waiver in these circumstances:

- You will need to provide evidence to us within 12 months that you have successfully completed the PSC. This could be a certificate or a note on headed paper from your PSC provider. We will then check this with them.
- We may take regulatory action against you if you breach the conditions of the waiver.
- Your training principal should contact us [[contact-us](#)] before certifying your period of recognised training.

Our rules require organisations to pay for a trainee's first attempt at the PSC. This obligation continues should you find that as a result of us having granted you a waiver, you have to take the PSC after admission. You will therefore need to discuss the position with the organisation

you are currently training with and confirm the payment arrangements with them.

I am a training principal and have been asked to certify a period of recognised training for a trainee who has not been able to complete the PSC. What should I do?

If you are in this position, please contact us [\[contact-us\]](#) to check whether the trainee has been granted a waiver to defer completion of the PSC for admission.

Please see the question above for more information on deferring the PSC completion.

My training provider is extending my period of recognised training for business reasons due to the Covid-19 outbreak. But I have completed my period of recognised training and wish to be admitted. What should I do?

Under the SRA Training Regulations 2014 - Qualification and Provider Regulations [\[solicitors/handbook/introAuthPrac/trainingregs2014/part1/\]](#) (2014 regulations) a trainee should be able to apply for admission when they are in a position to do so. They should not be delayed if they have met our requirements for admission. If necessary, we have the power to recognise the period of training under regulation 5.6 in these circumstances.

We can't comment on the terms and conditions of a trainee's contract of employment and we would suggest seeking employment legal advice.

I am a training principal with trainees due to qualify this year who are unable to gain experience in three distinct areas of law due to Covid-19. Can these trainees still be admitted?

If you are in this situation, you can apply for a waiver

[\[globalassets/documents/solicitors/innovate/waivers-application.pdf?version=4a5d0d\]](#) of our requirements for:

- you to provide trainees with experience of three distinct areas of English and Welsh practice (regulation 12.1(b) of the SRA Training Regulations 2014 - Qualification and Provider Regulations [\[solicitors/handbook/introAuthPrac/trainingregs2014/part1/\]](#))
- those trainees to meet the requirement to complete a period of recognised training (regulation 5.1).

We would expect you to complete one application that covers all affected trainees (rather than one per trainee). This needs to include all relevant trainees' names and SRA numbers (where available).

You will need to confirm in your application that these trainees will still meet the Practice Skills Standards [\[trainees/resources/authorised-training-provider-information-pack/authorised-training-provider-information-pack-2019/#collapse_8d86\]](#) , despite not completing three distinct seats.

If you cannot confirm this, you should discuss this with the individual(s) and consider whether their training needs to be extended. If you do extend a trainee's period of recognised training, you must email us [\[contact-us\]](#) to confirm the new end date.

Trainees / period of recognised training

Open all [#]

My firm has put me on furlough. What should I do next?

We recognise that trainees, law firms and organisations which employ trainees are concerned about the impact of furlough on training. Our aim is to help by being as flexible as possible in

this area, while still making sure solicitors who qualify have met the required standard.

We require a period of recognised training to:

- Be for at least two years' full time, or equivalent (unless there has been previous relevant work-based experience).
- Make sure that the trainee has applied and developed the skills as set out in the Practice Skills Standards.
- Be appropriately supervised by solicitors and other individuals who have adequate legal knowledge and experience in the practice area they are supervising and the necessary skills to provide effective supervision.
- Have regular appraisal of the trainee's performance and development, and review of the trainee's record of training.

An employer may find that it is unable to provide the required level of training or appropriate supervision of a trainees' work, during the coronavirus outbreak. It may be appropriate, in those circumstances, to put a trainee on furlough.

If your firm decides to put you on furlough, you do not need to do anything. When you are taken off furlough, your firm will discuss with you whether your period of recognised training needs to be extended. The decision to extend and the length of any extension is at the discretion of your training principal and would depend on:

- the amount of time you have been on furlough
- whether your training principal can confirm to us that you have otherwise met our requirements for a period of recognised training by the time you apply for admission. If your training principal is not confident of this due to furlough, they should extend your period of recognised training.

In the exceptional circumstances of the Covid-19 outbreak, we will accept a period of furlough of up to three months as counting towards completion of the period of recognised training. This is provided that your training principal is satisfied that you have met the requirements set out above.

We would usually expect a furlough lasting longer than three months to lead to an extension of your training period. There will be a range of individual circumstances that may impact on this, for example whether you have had any previous relevant work-based experience that would, under our regulations, count towards a period of recognised training. Find out more about this on our trainee information page [[/trainees/resources/trainee-information-pack/](#)].

If your period of recognised training needs to be extended, your firm will need to notify us [[/home/contact-us/](#)] of the extension period and that this has been agreed with you.

Can trainee solicitors work from home? Can trainees be supervised online?

Our regulations require trainees must be 'appropriately supervised'. Therefore, we would accept firms putting sensible arrangements in place for supervisors to review trainees' work remotely.

Is there a maximum amount of time for which a trainee can be supervised remotely?

No, there is no maximum amount of time a trainee can be supervised remotely. As long as firms put in place sensible arrangements for supervisors to review trainees' work remotely, an

extended period of remote supervision, particularly in the current circumstances, we would not expect this to impact on the duration of a period of recognised training.

If a trainee must self-isolate due to Covid-19, will this impact on the duration of their training contract?

Trainees may need to self-isolate due to Covid-19, in line with Government advice. If a trainee can work, then firms may put in place sensible arrangements for appropriate supervision of trainees self-isolating. We would not expect this to impact on the duration of a training contract. If a trainee becomes sick during their period of self-isolation, they should be treated in line with any arrangements for sickness leave covered by their terms and conditions of employment (see below).

If a trainee must take sickness leave due to Covid-19, does this mean that their training contract will have to be extended?

We would expect firms to treat any period of sickness leave due to Covid-19 the same as any other period of sickness leave during a training contract would be treated. Any arrangements for sickness leave should already be covered under the terms and conditions of employment.

The approach for any long-term sick leave related to Covid-19 is also the same as for any other period of long-term sick leave. In these circumstances, a training period may be extended where a trainee is unable to meet the requirements of the Practice Skills Standards [trainees/resources/authorised-training-provider-information-pack/authorised-training-provider-information-pack-2019]. The duration of the extension is at the discretion of the training principal. If a training period needs to be extended, the training principal must email us [home/contact-us] to confirm the new end date.

Can pre-admission ID checks be completed electronically/via video link?

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has announced a temporary relaxation in the requirements for a face to face ID check for standard applications. This change came into effect on 24 March 2020.

The nominated solicitor can now complete the ID verification process via video using either scanned images of the ID documents or the applicant can present/show them to the nominated solicitor during the video call. View the DBS announcement [https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-dbs-id-checking-guidelines].

Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS)

Open all [#]

Will the QLTS assessments (MCT and OSCE) face to face assessments still be taking place?

These assessments are run by Kaplan. They have cancelled all assessments until July and have provided an update about this on their website. [https://qlts.kaplan.co.uk/home]

Will you extend the cut off point for individuals wishing to apply for admission under the QLTS route before SQE?

We keep the situation under review, depending on how Kaplan decide to manage the cancelled assessments.

Solicitors Qualifying Examination

How will the Covid-19 outbreak affect the SQE assessments?

The first SQE assessments will be no earlier than Autumn 2021. We continue to work towards this and at this stage, we do not expect the Covid-19 outbreak to affect our timeline. We will continue to monitor the situation carefully.

Read our coronavirus update [\[/sra/news/coronavirus-update/\]](#)