

# SQE Business readiness review report (Geoff Coombe)

April 2021

## *Executive Summary*

### *About this report*

- As the Independent Reviewer for the SQE, I have reviewed progress on preparations for the implementation of the new SQE assessment, with the first sittings of SQE1 in November
- I have developed this report through a range of work including meetings with stakeholders, reviewing key documents, and observations of activities such as training sessions for
- This report provides an overview of assurance of the progress to date (March 2021), but it only provides a snapshot of progress on the preparations - new issues or risks can and will emerge. I will be carrying out further reviews and seeking further assurance in the coming months.

### *Overall findings*

- I have found no significant impediment to continue with plans to 'go live' with the first SQE1 exams in November 2021. My conclusion is that preparations are fit for purpose and plans are in place to deliver high quality, fair, reliable, defensible
- I consider the overall preparedness as 'good'. For this stage of set up, I would assess most aspects of operational and academic planning as 'excellent', with some areas currently 'satisfactory'.
- Areas where plans are progressing well include:
  - advanced plans for delivery of the SQE1 exams including the booking of the relevant test centres and plans for the creation, formatting, rendering and delivery of the on-screen exams, as well as
  - the recruitment of question writers has delivered highly knowledgeable professionals with wide-ranging and relevant experience
  - the observation of SQE1 question writing activities provided for a high degree of assurance. The training of SQE question writers and exam creation processes should support delivery of high quality live SQE1 exams
  - overall the internal quality assurance plans appear fit for purpose
  - there are appropriate processes for customer contact management, and appropriate service performance measures are being put in
- I have also been satisfied that in the context of current (March 2021) public health advice and restrictions regarding Covid-19 that the SQE1 exams can take place.

### *Areas for improvement*

- A thorough design, build and testing process has been followed in developing the SQE website, which will be a single authoritative source for information about the assessment, as well as where candidates will register and book
- Yet there is still more work to do to make sure the website will fully achieve the AA [<https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag>] standard of

accessibility [<https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag>]. It is unlikely that the standard will be fully achieved before the planned website launch. If that is the case, it is very important the requirement to achieve an AA standard is met at the earliest

- Everyone connected with this issue in the SRA and Kaplan shares a strong commitment to achieve the full AA access standard, as quickly as
- Another area I will be monitoring progress closely relates to plans for equality, diversity and inclusion. Kaplan need to progress comprehensive plans to recruit a more diverse group of Kaplan staff, as well as
- I am satisfied that the policy, process, and recruitment plans should deliver a high standard of fair and equal provision to all candidates, while maintaining fairness by ensuring consistency in decision making.

### *Next steps*

- Overall preparations are fit for purpose and on track. Section 4 of this document sets out my recommendations and where I will seek further assurance in the coming
- A key area I will continue to look at is management of the risks that for SQE1 any question set will demonstrate fair and accurate assessment of functioning legal knowledge, as would be expected of a day one solicitor, and appropriate coverage of the syllabus, as the first exams are collated and
- In addition to reviewing progress on the SQE website achieving the highest accessibility standards, and progress on recruitment in specific areas, I will also continue to seek assurance that the policy and processes are being delivered as planned, and that the first exam will be fit for
- The first SQE2 assessment takes place in April 2022. My assurance work on the preparedness for SQE2 will focus on:
  - the quality of the facilities to be used
  - the creation of the assessment tasks
  - arrangements for Welsh speaking candidates
  - the recruitment and training planned for markers and

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