

ANNEX A

Law Society's Accreditation Schemes

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Overview

The Law Society awards accreditations to legal practices and individuals who meet the highest standards of technical expertise and client service in specific areas of law. Maintaining quality and assuring competences and standards underpin each accreditation. The accreditations are recognised by stakeholders as clear quality marks.

Individual accreditations

The individual accreditations are committed to robustly assessing individuals' demonstrable knowledge, skill and expertise in law, ensuring quality representation of some of the most vulnerable people in the legal system.

The Law Society awards accreditations to individuals who in the following areas:

- Children Law
- Clinical Negligence
- Criminal Litigation
- Family Law
- Family Mediation
- Immigration and Asylum
- Mental Health
- Mental Capacity
- Personal Injury

We also award a diploma in Local Government.

Each individual accreditation has eligibility requirements setting out the expected standard of competence including knowledge, skills and experience.

The accreditation process requires applicants to demonstrate through an application and assessment process that they meet the suitability requirements and have attained the accreditation standards in a particular area of law. For certain accreditations, there are mandatory training requirements which need to be completed before applying for accreditation.

Each accreditation has a rigorous assessment process testing both 'black letter' law and skills. Only applicants who meet the requirements of probity and knowledge and skills requirements will be accredited. There are requirements related to experience:

- personal conduct of cases and personal representation of parties
- personally undertaking the advocacy for clients, including conducting contested hearings and undertaking cross examination of lay witnesses and professionals such as experts
- drafting
- having a thorough knowledge of practice and procedures in the appropriate courts
- thorough awareness of ethical issues
- up-to-date knowledge of the various guidance, rules and regulations, statutes, case law and practice developments
- ability to work directly with vulnerable clients and establish their instructions

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We have quality assurance processes to ensure that assessment materials and the assessors conducting the assessments are of a high standard and relevant to the issues faced in practice.

During the assessment process, competence levels are measured by the completion of case studies, case reports or undertaking interview assessment with a Law Society approved assessor.

All individual accredited members are required to maintain the standards of the accreditation through the course of their membership. There are conditions to the membership, including requirements to ensure ongoing competence by way of professional development, ensuring that they are maintaining their suitability and eligibility requirements, and for certain accreditations adhering to a code of practice. Professional development (PD) undertaken needs to demonstrate that it is relevant in ensuring that the accredited member has maintained their competency in that specific area of law.

Whilst all solicitors are subject to the SRA's requirement in respect of continuing competence, all accredited members, whether solicitors, chartered legal executives or non-qualified practitioners, must ensure that they undertake the required amount of PD for their respective accreditation and record their learning outcomes and how this training has contributed to their development in their area of practice. Applicants are required to complete a record of PD hours when applying for accreditation or re-accreditation to evidence that they have met this requirement. These records are checked as part of the assessment process. Failure to comply with specific requirements (structured learning vs unstructured learning) or to acquire the requisite number of PD hours may constitute grounds for refusal, revocation or non-re-accreditation. Although there is an hours requirement, this is not 'box-ticking' as the applicant needs to demonstrate the development undertaken, describe what they learnt and how it contributed to their ongoing competence in the specific area of practice.

On achieving accreditation, accredited members will be able to display the logo indicating that they have achieved the quality mark. This is also displayed on the Find a Solicitor website and member lists on the Law Society website.

Membership lasts for a set period of time and requires period re-accreditation (for example, three years). Re-accreditation is a formal process of application and assessment.

Legal practice accreditations

We award legal practice accreditations to legal practices who meet the highest standards of technical expertise and client service in specific areas of law. We have three types of legal practice accreditations:

- Lexcel England and Wales, which consists of three Standards for legal practices, in-house legal departments and international legal practices/departments
- Conveyancing Quality Scheme
- Wills and Inheritance Quality Scheme

Lexcel is our legal practice quality mark for client care, compliance and practice management. It sets the standard for:

- client care
- risk management

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- people management
- structure and strategy
- financial management
- information management
- file and case management

Lexcel is recognised as a quality mark in the legal aid contracts.

The Lexcel Standard requires practices to actively monitor client satisfaction and has clear requirements for client care and levels of service. Further, Lexcel sets regular training requirements ensuring that appropriate training is provided to personnel within the practice.

Conveyancing Quality Scheme (CQS) is a recognised quality standard for residential conveyancing practices. It is awarded to practices that have demonstrated the expertise to deliver quality residential conveyancing advice. CQS supports practices to manage their risk and use standardised processes. CQS has clear requirements for levels of service and client, while supporting practices educate clients about what to expect. The accreditation is recognised by the UK's largest lenders and by stakeholders.

The accreditations have eligibility requirements setting out the expected standard which promotes best practice in residential conveyancing and in client care. The accreditation process requires applicants to demonstrate through an application and assessment process that they meet the suitability requirements and have attained the accreditation standards. The application process assesses the practices eligibility and suitability, including financial stability, probity, complaints and claims history.

The requirements of the Lexcel Standard are assessed annually by an independent assessor. On CQS, we have internal technical assessments and have introduced random on-site assessments. On CQS, legal practices are required to adhere to a client service charter. Legal practices are required to re-accredit annually.

Having clear standards and requirements around training and client care contributes to the culture of compliance that we aim to achieve with the legal practice accreditations. It sets a basis for active risk management.

All accredited legal practices are required to maintain the standards of the accreditation through the course of their membership. There are conditions to the membership, including requirements to ensure ongoing competence by way of professional development, ensuring that they are maintaining their suitability and eligibility requirements.

These accreditations aid both individuals and practices in demonstrating expertise to potential clients, helping them to make an informed buying decision. The schemes promote high standards in legal service provision and ensure that clients are easily able to identify legal practitioners with proven competency in given areas of law. We also ensure that scheme members maintain relevant standards of competency and expertise by means of periodic re-accreditation.

Quality assurance is an important element of all our accreditation schemes. We run a range of activities to promote accreditation scheme membership as a mark of excellence for consumers of legal services and as such ensuring competence is an area constantly reviewed and developed by the accreditation team.