Hello, and welcome to this presentation at this All About Law event.

My name is Sarah Pooley and I’m an associate professor at the University of Law and the Dean of the Guildford and Reading campuses.

I’m going to talk to you today about which professional training course you should do in light of the changes which are going to impact on the solicitor’s profession.

So as you can see from the slide the choices are whether you are to do the Solicitors Qualifying Examination only, or whether you do a law degree or a conversion course and then the SQE, or whether you do a law degree or a conversion course and the LPC – the Legal Practice Course.

So you can see that the agenda for today I’m going to talk about what the Solicitors Qualifying Examination is, I’m going to do that quite briefly before I then look at the current routes into the profession. I think it’s really important that you can see what the current routes are so that you know what the changes are. I’m then going to look at the timeline for the introduction of the SQE, and at that stage I’m going to return to the detail of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination so, again, you can compare and contrast with the existing routes into the profession. And at the end I’m going to talk about the pros and cons of each route I’ve spoken about and hopefully give you a little bit of guidance in terms of making this very important decision.

So what is it then, the SQE? Well, it is the Solicitors Qualifying Examination. So it is a completely new route and process by which you will qualify to be a solicitor. But I can’t emphasise enough, it is a system of examinations. It’s going to be introduced in 2021 and it’s a system of examinations which all prospective solicitors will need to take in order to qualify. That means it will encompass those who are, perhaps, apprentices and even foreign qualified lawyers will need to come through this particular new system.

So from 2021 the Legal Practice Course will be phased out. So there are quite long transitional arrangements, so we can expect to see the Legal Practice Course still with us into at least the mid-2020s although, in theory, the Legal Practice Course isn't completely phased out until 2032. And of course it is replaced by this centralised exam system.

So what you’ll see from this is that I’m talking consistently about a centralised exam. I’m not talking about a course because, of course, the Legal Practice Course is both a programme of study and encompasses the examinations at the end of it. The SQE is a system of examinations only, and I’ll come to the various preparatory courses which will be available in order to assist you in passing that examination shortly.

The new system also encompasses work experience. Of course, on the old system there was the training contract that went hand-in-hand with the Legal Practice Course, I’ll be talking today about something new called Qualifying Work Experience which goes hand-in-hand with the SQE.

Well, let’s take a look at the current routes into practice so that you can really understand what exists now and then compare and contrast with what is coming in 2021 and beyond.
So from the slide you can see that at the moment there are two ways into the profession. Either you are a graduate – on the far left-hand side there – with a degree in something other than law, whether that’s an art, a humanity or a science, it really doesn’t matter, you have a degree. And you are required by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and, indeed, the Bar Standards Board – if you wish to be a barrister – you are required to take a conversion course, that is either a Graduate Diploma in Law, or some providers – like the University of Law – now have a Masters level qualification, an MA in Law. Alternatively, you’re a law graduate, you have taken what the Solicitors Regulation Authority and Bar Standards Board call a qualifying law degree. It’s a law degree which, in particular, covers off the seven key foundation subjects, and we’ll remind ourselves in a moment of what they are.

So a qualifying law degree puts you in a position to be able to start your professional training. So the law graduates and the non-law graduates then decide: do I want to be a solicitor or do I want to be a barrister.

I’m not going to cover the barrister route today, you can see that on the slide, I’m going to focus on the top row, the solicitor route, and there you can see the existing process. So law graduates and non-law graduates with their conversion course need to take the Legal Practice Course, which is a 9 month course full-time or 2 years part-time. They study, and I’ll show you what subjects they do study in a moment, take their examinations and at the end of that they’re still not qualified, they need to complete a 2 year training contract with an employer, and it is only at the end of that – when they’re signed off on their training contract – that they become a qualified solicitor. They are admitted to the role.

So let’s just home in a little bit more on the current courses. So just to reminder then, you need to have – at the moment – an LLB, a qualifying law degree or a degree in something else, and a conversion course, whether that is a Graduate Diploma in Law or a Master’s version of that. That’s an absolute prerequisite that’s put in place. You cannot then move onto the LPC until you have one or other of those – the degree or the conversion course.

The Legal Practice Course itself has variants, so there is an ordinary Legal Practice Course if you like, it’s a highly practical course, I’ll show you what the subjects are in just a moment that are studied and the skills that are covered on it or, indeed, with the University of Law you can bolt on a Masters for no extra cost, so you could do an LPC with an LLM, and I’ll show you how one would achieve that or, indeed, an LPC with an MSc. But the main point here is that it is a course which is highly practical, it is required by the Solicitors Regulation Authority at the moment in order to be able to tackle a training contract at all.

Let’s drill down then into those courses. So I’m not going to look at an undergraduate law degree, but suffice it to say when I show you the conversion course what you’ve got there are the seven foundation subjects and a qualifying law degree must have as part of it. So this just gives you a feel of the University of Law’s conversion course, its GDL or its MA Law. I think what you can see from this is that it’s a very thorough course, it is required to be 9 months in duration by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Bar Standards Board and it anticipates about 40 hours’ worth of work, whether by way of preparation, and then of course your face to face for the Graduate Diploma in Law, and a further 5 hours – a 45 hour week effectively for the MA Law.

Now I think the key point here is for you to have a look at the subjects because we need to see these, these are the foundation subjects and we need to see how they are tested in the long-run in the Solicitors Qualifying Examination as well. On a conversion course you can anticipate studying the seven foundation subjects of: Public Law, EU, Crime, Contract, Tort, Equity and Land. So any qualifying law degree will have those seven subjects and any conversion course currently will have those seven subjects. At the University of Law we also study Ethics, but within crucially that Ethics module is actually the legal system of England.
and Wales, which is something that you'll spot again because it turns up in the Solicitors Qualifying Examination.

Now on a conversion course and certainly on our conversion course you will study a module and you take an examination, unsurprisingly, at the end of that module – a 3 hour examination answering a number of questions in relation to the module – closed book examinations.

There is an addition to that coursework, and you can see that for a Graduate Diploma in Law – certainly with the University of Law – there’s a research project or an opportunity to study Law of Organisations which really covers off business organisations, in particular company law. Now that levels up the playing field with undergraduate students of law, because they also get an opportunity to study modules and many will choose company law. But interestingly enough, business organisations is also a very important subject on the SQE. The MA Law doesn't offer that opportunity or the research project, it has a much more substantial legal research and independent project that runs throughout the course.

So I think the key point I want to make here is that there are the seven foundation subjects that you will find in a law degree and in any conversion at the moment, and that it is a rigorous and thorough 9 month course that is deemed necessary to get those of us – and I was one of them with my history degree – those of us without a law degree to a position where we can tackle the Legal Practice Course.

And here is the Legal Practice Course. So we’re looking at a full-time course here – of course it can be done part-time as, indeed, could the conversion course – it’s about 45 hours of study incorporating face-to-face. And what I really want you to home in on here are the subjects that are taught because, again, it's about compare and contrast with the Solicitors Qualifying Examination.

So assuming one does the full-time Legal Practice Course starting in September, that first section – September-February – you do the Stage 1 subjects, the core areas that the Solicitors Regulation Authority currently insist that all potential solicitors study. So IPP stands for Introduction to Professional Practice, and that covers some key skills, again, you'll spot these on the SQE, so key skills of practical legal research, legal writing, legal drafting and the oral skill of interviewing, as well as some key subjects such as business accounts, solicitors accounts, professional conduct and some tax law. In addition during that phase students are studying business law, dispute resolution – which has a little bit of criminal litigation in it – and real estate. And at the end of that period they take a combination of short closed book MCQ exams and then much more substantial open book exams where they're really allowed to not show what they can remember, it’s more about how they can apply the knowledge that they have learnt to key tasks that are very reminiscent of work they would do in a solicitor’s practice.

You’ll see there in blue, law and business, and that’s short for law, business & management, and this is an option which students who wish to take a Masters course can bolt on at this point. So if you're doing the MSc in law, business & management you would take this module and you would be really homing in on very practical issues surrounding business accounts, the business of being in a law firm looking at key marketing and key management strategies, that sort of thing.

Then between March and May – on a September start – there is an option there to choose three electives on the main LPC. And I’ll show you the selection of electives shortly. At the end of that phase those electives, again, are tested and, again, in an open book environment where you can be really tested on your ability to apply the law as you might do in the office.
Now you can see, again, in blue a fourth elective. That’s if you want to do the LLM and bolt that onto the LPC. So you can choose a fourth elective. And then after the exams you’ll see it says additional assessment. So either you do a case study, and that goes hand-in-hand with the law of business and management module, or you do an extended professional practice report that goes hand-in-hand with the LLM.

So again, the key point I want you to take away here is the sort of breadth of the subjects, the fact that you’ve got those core subjects as well as the electives, you’ve got a lot of skills in there and there is a big range of assessments that give people a chance to shine in the areas that suit them, so coursework for example, for the skills of legal writing and legal drafting, and then open book examinations where you’re able to show your ability to apply law and practice.

And then just worth looking at electives, all providers will have, I know, a big choice of electives, and I think the key point I want to make here is that the firms like electives, they really like the fact that a student can choose something that they, themselves, are heavily involved in and so the student is tailoring their LPC to their future employer, or if they don’t yet have a training contract they’re able to choose a selection of electives that – a) interest them, and – b) perhaps keep their options open. And you can see the choice here ranges from private clients, so high street areas of law through more mainstream commercial law to the corporate electives there of banking, M&A and public companies.

So as I say, firms really like that and, interestingly, as you’ll see when you come to the Solicitors Qualifying Examination, it is the electives in particular that fall away. The Solicitors Qualifying Examination sticks very firmly with that Stage 1, those core areas, and does not have the opportunity to specialise in this way.

Let’s take a look at the SQE and in particular the timeline for it. But before I do that let’s just stop and think for just a moment as to why the Solicitors Regulation Authority has decided to devise and introduce the SQE.

Well, there are a number of reasons, and one of them is that the SQE was initially devised with apprenticeships in mind. This is a new area for the law, and over the last few years solicitor apprentices are starting to become quite an important part of the way people can enter the profession. So for an apprenticeship you need a gateway assessment to the profession, and the SQE was, indeed, devised to be that gateway assessment. But the SRA liked the idea of their assessment, they liked the idea of it being centralised because at the moment the Legal Practice Course is taught across a number of providers who set their own exams albeit that those exams are overseen by external examiners appointed by the SRA but, nonetheless, the SRA felt that they would like something which was much more uniform. They also hoped that the SQE would be potentially cheaper and, perhaps, might also be more inclusive, and they were hoping that it would open up the profession and take away the bottleneck that exists at the moment at the training contract stage.

So here is the timeline. I think the crucial thing to see is that there is an introduction point at 1st September 2021. So from September 2021 the SQE effectively becomes available. In actual fact, the first sitting is in November of 2021.

Now the key point is do I have to do the SQE. Well, it really rather depends on where you are on your legal journey. Because if you have – as you can see on the left-hand side of the slide where it says up to 1st September 2021 – so if you have accepted a place or, indeed, paid a deposit on a place on a law degree, on a conversion course, a Legal Practice Course or, indeed, you have accepted a training contract before that date you can continue on the old regime. So this is particularly important for people who’ve yet to start a law degree or
have a degree or are doing a degree in something else and are thinking about doing a conversion course.

So if you have accepted a place on a law degree or a conversion course prior to 1st September 2021, and that course starts before 31st December 2021, then you have a choice. You can switch onto the SQE if you want to, but you could also remain on the old system and match up your law degree or your conversion course with the Legal Practice Course. Indeed, because you can do that then you will see that there are transitional arrangements all the way up to 2032. Because if you allow people who have applied and accepted a place on a law degree which could be part-time, you need to allow for them, perhaps, to intermit and so on and so forth, then you need transitional arrangements that go quite a long way into the future. And indeed, the cut-off point for the LPC falling away and training contracts falling away is 2032.

Now I think the reality is that the Legal Practice Course will be run by fewer and fewer providers during the 2020s, but I suspect it will be around and pretty hale and hearty until the mid-2020s.

You have to do the SQE though – looking now on the right-hand side of the slide – you will have to do the SQE from 1st September 2021 if you’re an apprentice, if you are a foreign lawyer who has yet to set off on the Qualifying Lawyers Transfer Scheme or, indeed, you are, perhaps, doing a degree is something else, you’re only a 1st or 2nd year at the moment and you won’t get to your conversion course by 1st September 2021. So for those people then the SQE is necessary, it is required.

Let’s take a look at the SQE and let’s remind ourselves that it’s not a course. The Solicitors Qualifying Examination is just that. All the SRA is proposing here is a centralised exam. So there are the components of the exam, and I think the crucial thing that I’d like you to look at here is you can see there’s SQE Stage 1 and SQE Stage 2, and then running along the top you can see this Qualifying Work Experience, so effectively, what is replacing the training contract.

So why is that sort of sitting across the whole SQE if you like? Well, the answer to that is that unlike the training contract which, under pretty much most circumstances and very much generally, people would do after the Legal Practice Course, Qualifying Work Experience is much more flexible. I think most of the firms, certainly the more substantial firms, are rather hoping that people will do SQE Stage 1 and Stage 2 and get those under their belt before they do their Qualifying Work Experience. However, the SRA would rather students did SQE Stage 1 then did their Qualifying Work Experience and after that did Stage 2. That said, it is perfectly possible for a student to go straight into Qualifying Work Experience and do that first, and then do Stage 1 and Stage 2 at the end. So it is incredibly flexible. And that, of course, was the SRA’s key point, they want to make access to the profession as flexible as possible.

So here is the examination and, as you can see, it is made up of two assessments. So in the Stage 1 assessment you will see that there are going to be two papers, and each paper has 180 – I won’t say multiple choice questions, actually, the SRA is calling them single best answer questions – so 180 questions over each paper, so a total of 360 single best answer questions for students to tackle.

What’s a single best answer question? Well, each question will have a short scenario and then you will be offered five options. The whole point with a single best answer question is that there are five correct answers and that you select the best of those five options.
So SQE Stage 1. The first paper with its first 180 single best answer questions covers – and these subjects will look very familiar – business and dispute resolution, all drawn, aren't they, both of those drawn from that first section of the Legal Practice Course, those core practice areas. But then the rest of the paper is drawn from those foundation subjects. So contract, tort, the legal system of England and Wales and public law, as well as legal services. And you'll see that ethics and professional conduct are pervasive, they could turn up on any paper. So it's an interesting mish-mash of first half of the LPC and subjects drawn from your law degree or your conversion course effectively.

And the second paper does the same thing, it mixes property, law & practice, wills and administration of estates and solicitors accounts from the LPC – at least the first half of the LPC – and then land, equity & trusts and crime drawn from those foundation subjects.

The SQE Stage 1 assessments – the two papers – will cost – as you can see at the foot of the slide – £1,500 to sit. So that is the cost that the SRA will charge for you to sit the exam. It does not cover any preparatory course that you may wish to study.

Now SQE Stage 2. You can't even apply to do SQE Stage 2 until you've passed SQE Stage 1. So you can't go onto Stage 2 unless Stage 1 is under your belt. Hopefully that's been successful, but there will be resit opportunities. The SRA have yet to give us much detail about that, but there will be resit opportunities.

SQE Stage 2 is very different. Stage 1 is all about knowledge, what the SRA called functioning legal knowledge. Stage 2 is a mish-mash of the skills that you will see in the Legal Practice Course and the functioning legal knowledge practice areas. So a lot of SQE Stage 2 is about getting yourself ready to be able to show your ability in these key skills, the sort of skills you need in practice.

So there we can see we have 6 skills of interviewing and advocacy, they're oral skills, and then more written skills, so case matter analysis, legal research, legal writing, legal drafting, so 6 skills. And those 6 skills will be cited in these practical contexts that are drawn from the functioning legal knowledge. So crime and dispute resolution, property, wills, administration of estates, and there's the company law – yes, the business organisations.

So as you can see from the foot of the slide there's going to be a number of assessments here – 16 assessments within SQE Stage 2. So how that's going to work is that there will be four assessments in the oral skills, so you'll do client interviewing and you'll do that within the practice areas of property and wills, so two sets of client interviewing and two sets of advocacy, one in criminal practice, one in disput resolution. Then your 4 written skills will be tested on day 1, they'll be tested within the litigation context, so crime and dispute resolution. Then you'll come back and those 4 skills will be tested again in property and wills. And then you'll come back and those 4 skills will be tested again in business organisations. So all told, 16 written and oral assessments. And the cost for sitting those assessments is £2,422. So £3,980 to sit the two stages.

So having achieved Stage 1 and Stage 2 and completed 2 years of Qualifying Work Experience well, then you are in a position to be admitted to the profession.

Let's stop for a moment and think about that Qualifying Work Experience. You may be familiar with the training contract, the training contract lasts 2 years and it is a requirement that an employer that is giving you that training allows you to experience both contentious work, so litigation work and non-contentious work. Qualifying Work Experience is different, there is no requirement on your employer to give you that variety of experience. It's a tradition with training contracts that you move around the firm and, often, you'll be offered four seats, so four 6 month seats or opportunities to learn, or maybe you're given six seats
over those 2 years, so lots of variety. There’s no requirement to offer you that variety in Qualifying Work Experience. You could simply spend 2 years in a particular department. That said, I think a lot of firms would like their Qualifying Work Experience to be highly reflective of the training contract, and so I think you can expect a lot of firms to offer that variety nonetheless.

Now Qualifying Work Experience is more flexible though. With a training contract you will go along to one employer and do your 2 years with them. They then sign you off. Qualifying Work Experience is different. You can get Qualifying Work Experience in up to four organisations. So you could, for example, get Qualifying Work Experience from your work on a pro bono matter, say, for example, in a university’s legal advice clinic. So it is possible to acquire Qualifying Work Experience perhaps in a little bit more of a piecemeal way.

We can cover that off when we come to the pros and cons in a little bit more detail, but I suppose there is just one thing to think about there, and that is it is more flexible, but will a law firm accept your Qualifying Work Experience from another organisation? Some law firms are already saying that whilst they will look at a person’s CV and see they’ve done this work experience elsewhere, they won’t count it for their period of training, they would like people to start again so that they are trained with their Qualifying Work Experience in their firm in the way their firm likes. And so they will not effectively accept Work Experience signed off from another organisation. Now not all firms will do that, perhaps some firms will be more flexible.

So at the end of the Qualifying Work Experience the combination of that and Stage 1 and Stage 2 means that you are now ready to be admitted to the profession as a solicitor.

So let’s drill down now into a preparatory course. So far we’ve been focusing on the fact that this is an examination rather than a programme of study. In theory, you could just arrive at the Solicitors Qualification Stage 1 and Stage 2 and have a go, because the difference here is that whilst the SRA – until now – has prescribed that you must do a qualifying law degree or a conversion course and then you must do the Legal Practice course, you must both study the course and pass the exams, this time they’re saying you just must pass the exams. So in theory you could mug up in your bedroom and have a go.

The reality is – as I’m sure you’re already appreciating – 360 single best answer questions across the foundation subjects and those sort of core practice areas of the LPC that we’ve been looking at, plus those 16 assessments set in those practice areas across a variety of skills is quite a tall order. It’s a particularly tall order if you don’t have a law degree or a conversion. So I think we need to be realistic here, that it’s going to be an enormous challenge to pass a Solicitor’s Qualifying Examination of you don’t have a law degree or a conversion under your belt.

The conversion course is no longer required by the SRA but it will live on. Certainly the University of Law’s Graduate Diploma in Law is going to change into a PGDL – a Postgraduate Diploma in Law – and will offer the opportunity to study those key foundation subjects and, indeed, business organisations in readiness for SQE preparation.

So that would be my advice on this, that it is going to be extremely challenging to pass the SQE without some form of either a law degree or a conversion course, because those foundation subjects are going to be rigorously tested in SQE Stage 1.

So equally, whether you’ve got a law degree or a conversion under your belt, it’s going to be equally challenging to be successful in those 360 single best answer questions and those 16 skills assessment if you haven’t had preparation to do so. And so you can anticipate all
providers, including the University of Law, will be offering preparation courses. And this just gives you a feel for the sort of thing that you would be looking at by way of preparation.

So here is the University of Law’s draft SQE programme. And you will see that in order to sit the first SQE assessment in November 2021 you would need to start in August 2021. If you were going for the second assessment in May 2022 you’d need to start in February 2022.

So the SQE 1 preparation starts with an induction. And we’re putting a lot of stall by way of learner analytics and diagnostic testing. We want to make sure that as you come in we know where you are in terms of your background knowledge on the foundation subjects so that we can help you to brush up on those foundation subjects. You can see that on the bottom left-hand side. There’ll be revision of the foundation subjects and there’ll be more revision if you need it because your diagnostic testing shows that, perhaps, you’re not as strong as you should be in, let’s say, land law.

And then the SQE programme over the course of about 12 weeks, so rather similar to that core practice study that you do on the LPC, will cover off those new areas for you: business, dispute resolution and criminal practice, property, solicitors accounts, tax, ethics and wills. Then lots of preparation for that really quite challenging two papers for SQE1. So some practice, practice, practice in the run-up to that November assessment.

After that then, of course, you – having been successful – you can move onto SQE2. What I’m showing here is the option – at the University of Law – to bolt on a Masters just like we do with our Legal Practice Course. So if you take SQE 2 with the plus, with the add-on, well then you can choose other key practice areas such as the electives, which we’ve offered for the LPC, or other additional modules that you feel will bolster your CV and be important in order to secure your employment going forward or, indeed, to give you a really thorough base for your Qualifying Work Experience. And we know that firms particularly like the electives, they like that stretching and specialist study, so this may be something that appeals to you, and certainly a number of firms are insisting that their incoming trainees – if that’s what we’re going to call them – will do these additional plus modules.

But the bare bones SQE2 subjects are there on the left-hand side of the green area, the interviewing and advocacy, case matter analysis, research, drafting and writing. And remember, they’re cited within those practice areas from the functioning legal knowledge of SQE1, so you’ll be needing to brush up on that knowledge as well as the skill, because the SRA are saying they’re testing you 50/50 on your knowledge, so the context of the skill as well as the skill itself. And then a 2 week push, a revision, getting yourself ready for the SQE2 assessments.

In addition, there would be University of Law assessments too if you were doing the Masters programme. And then there’s your Qualifying Work Experience which you would do after SQE2 if that’s your choice and your firm’s choice, or you could do it between SQE1 and SQE2 or, indeed, as we’ve said, before. So a very, very flexible way of qualifying into the profession.

Let’s now think about the pros and cons and start to think about key things that you’ll want to have at the top of your mind when you are deciding which way to go.

So what are the benefits of the current rout? Well, inevitably when there’s change people are nervous and people like what they know, and that is true of the law firms. They know all about the undergraduate law degree, the qualifying law degree, they know about the GDL, the conversion course, and they’re very, very familiar with the Legal Practice Course route. It’s tried, it’s tested, they know what they’re getting. They know that it’s thorough, they know that there are specialisms, this opportunity to choose electives and study specialism and they like that. And they like the fact that the skills are dotted throughout the course and,
equally, are rigorously assessed. So the firms know what they’re getting with that, and there is no element a – for want of a better word – guinea pig about that, they know what they’re getting. Whereas, of course, the SQE is new to everyone and so there is an element of everybody’s not quite sure how that’s going to work in the first time it’s run.

Fees and funding. Well, of course, the SQE we know is going to cost £3,980 just for the exams. The LPC of course is different, as is the conversion course, as indeed was your law degree if you’ve done one, in that it was a course of study that you paid for and the exam fee was wound up in that, you didn’t pay separately for your assessments. So you knew where you were in terms of fees from the outset.

Of course, funding can be challenging for the Legal Practice Course, but firms do sponsor and, indeed, the high street banks offer career development loans. But of course, in addition, if you bolt on a Masters qualification, for example, the LLM or the MSc to the LPC then that opens the door to the government’s Masters funding by way of the Student Loan Company. So a number of students were pleased to be able to bolt on – at no extra cost – a Masters and also access that funding.

Of course, both firms and students alike like the opportunity to spread their wings and study a specialist area that the Legal Practice Course offered them which, of course, the SQE no longer does. But I suppose what you’ll be worried about will be what do the firms want. And the firms, at the moment, they’re a little bit reticent about the SQE. As we’ve said, they know what they’re getting with the LPC, so in the immediate short-term I think they’ve got a bit of a watching brief on the SQE. Some firms have been upfront, particularly City firms, that they’re not actually engaging with the SQE for the first year, they’re going to wait a year and see how it goes before they switch onto it. They’re going to stick with the LPC.

So in the immediate short-term you’ll certainly be at no disadvantage doing the LPC, in fact, it may even be an advantage for the first year or so, because firms are familiar with it.

Now what about the SQE, what about the other side of the coin? Well, we’ve talked about the fact that it’s more flexible. It’s meant to be more flexible in terms of accessing the profession. So there may well be more opportunities for you to gain Qualifying Work Experience than there are – out there – to get a training contract, because we know Qualifying Work Experience actually can be created from working in a firm as, say, a paralegal, and the firm is willing at the end of, say, 2 years to say yeah, I’m prepared to accept your time as a paralegal as Qualifying Work Experience, I will sign you off as having achieved that Qualifying Work Experience. Perhaps now I will encourage you to do the SQE1 and SQE2. Maybe I’ll sponsor you through the SQE1 and SQE2 so that you can become a qualified solicitor. So it may well be that little bit more flexible and, as we know, you can build up Qualifying Work Experience across more than one organisation, although the jury’s out as to whether every firm would accept that.

So the SQE route more flexible and it may be cheaper. Certainly the exams we know how much they will cost. Not many people in terms of the providers have been clear yet as to what their fees will be. And, of course, there would be no fee for a training course if you didn’t do a training course. But as I think we’ve established very few people think that SQE1 and SQE2 is doable without a preparatory course. And, indeed, if you look on the Law Society’s website they have a lot to say about the SQE and they anticipate that students will, indeed, need to take a preparatory course in order to succeed.

So more flexible. Potentially more opportunities to get Qualifying Work Experience and to qualify.
But what will law firms expect of you if you’re on this route? Well, they’ll certainly, obviously, expect you to be able to have passed the Solicitors Qualifying Examinations Stage 1 and Stage 2. Some firms may well say that they feel that you should have a grounding in those foundation subjects. So you should have a law degree or a conversion, one of the courses that will replace the GDL, perhaps the PGDL.

Certainly some firms are nervous about students seeking to qualify merely by way of the SQE without having some sort of preparation dedicated to those foundation subjects. So I do think that a law degree or a conversion course will probably be attractive on your CV to give them comfort that you have a thorough grounding in the academics of law. But they will certainly want to see SQE1 and SQE2. Some firms will be very enthusiastic about extra bolt ons that I discussed with that Masters option, because they do as we know like electives. Other things to think about. Will the law firms have a big bang? Will they just move wholesale to SQE and abandon the LPC? Well, it’s certainly possible that law firms will want to move in one big jump on the SQE and the bigger firms in the city are indicating, as I’ve said, that they’ll do that but they’re not going to do it in 2021, they’re probably going to wait a year.

Other firms may be more flexible. It’s more convenient, yes, to have everybody on the same route, but some of the medium sized firms actually have a big variety already. They already have students coming in through the traditional LPC training contract route, mixed in with solicitor apprentices, mixed in with legal executives who are going the CILEx route. So actually, to have an extra layer of sort of complexity doesn’t bother them if for a while they’ve got students with LPC and training contracts, along with people coming in with SQE who are doing Qualifying Work Experience. In fact, most firms see, I think, that Qualifying Work Experience in their firm will probably look pretty similar to a training contract, so they may be prepared to have a sort of a mixed economy, if you like, of training contract and Qualifying Work Experience.

But I think we have to be ready for eventually, of course, they will all move, not least because the number of people who have the option to do the LPC will start to fall away.

So what should you do? You should, wherever possible, keep your ear to the ground and see what firms are doing as time moves on and we get beyond September 2021. Be clear as to what firms are looking for and be ready to do that route.

Of course, as I’ve said, it’s going to be challenging to do the SQE without prep courses, so you’ll want to, won’t you, have a look at what’s available in the market place, but my advice would be that it’s going to be extremely challenging to achieve this without some sort of preparatory course.

Well, I very much hope that that has given you some background. As the slide says, inevitably, it’s an individual decision. If you are able because you are already doing a law degree or you will have accepted a place on a law degree or a law conversion by the 1st September 2021, well, then you will still have the option to do the LPC. Whether you choose to do that, as I say, will be your decision, but you will want to weigh up all the various pros and cons that we’ve talked about today.

You may not have that choice, in which case you will be doing the SQE and I hope that the detail I’ve given you has been helpful.

Well, that concludes this presentation. I very much hope that it’s been useful for you and that you enjoy the rest of the event.