

The light at the end of the tunnel: qualification

Hina Ali tell us about her last two years at Browne Jacobson - whether you have found it a whirling blur of excitement or if you've had an experience akin to the start-stop development of HS2, at some point the great legal conveyor belt will take you to your final destination: qualification.

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No matter whether you've found the last two years to be a whirling blur of excitement or if you've had an experience akin to the start-stop development of HS2, at some point the great legal conveyor belt will take you to your final destination: qualification.

It's finally here. You've completed your two years of moving around various departments, teams and offices and you're now a highly-skilled legal whizz, just days away from snatching (and eating!) the golden carrot. But when the clock strikes midnight, could it be that your job title and salary are magically upgraded with no input from you? Sadly not!

Hopefully by this stage, many of you will be having your final interviews for the NQ role of your dreams or — even better — have secured your NQ position already. When the ink is dry on your job offer acceptance letter, the time will come to initiate your relationship with the legal regulator, the [Solicitors Regulation Authority](#) (SRA).

(Usually!) the SRA will contact you up approximately 8 weeks before you're due to qualify and will send out all of the relevant paperwork (discussed in more detail below). Your HR team will also have these deadlines on their radar. However, delays can — and do — happen, so I strongly recommend starting early and keeping in touch with the SRA to ensure things are progressing smoothly.

Optional step: if you're qualifying early

If you're taking 'time to count' and qualifying early, the first thing you will need to do is complete a 'reduction in period of recognised training' form and submit it to the SRA.

In this form you will need to confirm:

- your name
- the original end date of your training contract
- the name and address of the organisation where you gained your 'equivalent work-based experience'
- the dates of your employment at this organisation (and whether you worked there on a full-time or part-time basis)
- the name, job title and department of your supervisor at the time
- the requested reduction in time for your training contract (maximum 6 months).

Your former supervisor will also need to sign the form to certify that your work-based experience was equivalent to that undertaken during a training contract and has:

- been gained in the previous 3 years
- been in English & Welsh law and practice, and in one or more areas of law
- enabled the acquisition of one or more of the SRA's prescribed practice skills standards and/or the principles
- been adequately supervised and appraised

(Official) Step 1: consent form & screening

The process starts when the SRA sends you a form requesting your consent for 'pre-admission applicant screening'. By completing and returning the form, you give your consent for the SRA to assess your character and suitability to be a solicitor.

If you're applying for admission to the roll of solicitors and you've continuously lived in the UK for the last 12 months and during the last 5 years, you must complete this form. If you've lived abroad in that time, the process is slightly different — [the SRA website](#) outlines the additional steps that you will need to take.

When you've completed the consent form, you will need to return it to the SRA along with a fee of £39. Once it has been processed, you will receive an email from a company called Atlantic Data Ltd (ATL) which will contain a link to a second (electronic) form that you will need to complete. This starts the screening process. ATL will ask you to nominate another solicitor (full name and SRA ID required) to verify your identity documents in person. Although it might be a nice thought to ask your long-standing supervisor to do this, do keep their capacity and availability in mind! It is better to nominate someone who is likely to be in the office and can complete this quickly for you. At the same time, ATL will check your identity, financial information and also conduct the standard Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) criminal record check. This process can take up to 6 weeks to complete.

(If you believe that any of the above will reveal something unsavoury, I recommend applying to the SRA for an early assessment of your character and suitability. You can do this at any time, but to be on the safe side I recommend submitting it around 6-8 months before you are due to qualify)

When your identity documents have been verified and ATL has completed the necessary checks, you will receive a Standard Certificate from the DBS in the post. If there are disclosures then the SRA will require the original certificate from you, but if not then you can store this away.

Step 2: AD1 form

Next, you will need to complete the AD1 form. The SRA will send you the form by post, but it can also be downloaded directly from the [SRA's website](#).

Top tip: there are sections within the AD1 form for completion by you and your training principal and it takes approximately 30 days for the SRA to process the form, so it's best to make an early start!

Within the form you can indicate what your preferred admission date (of which there are only 2 per month) will be. You can also request (and pay for) your Practising Certificate, which can cost up to £338. Luckily, most law firms cover the cost of this (even if you're moving on to another firm, your new employer will likely reimburse you).

When your AD1 form is finalised, you will need to return it to the SRA along with a fee of £100 (and the applicable fee for your practising certificate).

Once all the checks have been completed and the SRA are satisfied that you're suitable to join the legal profession, you will receive an email or — more grandly — a "certificate of satisfaction" confirming your admission date.

Step 3: admission to the roll

Admission day ceremonies are organised and held at the Law Society in London.

After the ceremonial handshake and obligatory selfie with a scroll, you and your guests will be invited to a special drinks reception.

Getting to qualification day is no mean feat and the admission ceremony is a great opportunity to reflect upon your journey and thank those who have supported you along the way. Whether or not you choose to attend, do take the time to celebrate this amazing milestone and of course enjoy the golden glow which will follow you for the next 24 hours!

The SRA will then publish a list of individuals who have been admitted to the roll of solicitors with you on their website and you will be able to activate your "[mySRA](#)" account.

Congratulations to all March 2020 qualifiers, you made it!

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