



## Statement on SQE-1 Booking, October 2023

Young Legal Aid Lawyers ('YLAL') is calling on the SRA and Kaplan (the company contracted to administer the Solicitors Qualifying Exam, SQE) to carry out an urgent review of the booking process for SQE-1 exams and confirm what changes will be implemented, following feedback from our members that they had to wait between 2.5 and 6.5 hours yesterday (4 October) to secure an exam spot.

Yesterday marked the opening of the booking window to secure a seat in the January 2024 sitting of the SQE-1. There have been concerns raised previously [about the booking process for the SOE](#), as well as the [actual administration of the exams](#), and its [troubling ethnicity attainment gap](#).

Our members who tried to book an exam place yesterday have reported a number of issues to us, including:

- Having to queue online for up to 6.5 hours to book a place. The earliest anyone from the cohort we have spoken to managed to book was after 2.5 hours of queuing online;
- The website crashing once candidates made it to the front of the queue. The website then directed candidates to call Kaplan, where they were left on hold for hours (at times in a queue of 650 people);
- The online system simply not being fit for purpose for those with a voucher<sup>1</sup>, with mixed messaging on the booking system only contributing to the overall feeling of uncertainty.

We were particularly concerned to hear what happened to candidates who are taking the exam with reasonable adjustments, who had been told that a Kaplan 'liaison' would book

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<sup>1</sup> Voucher codes are given out to those who do not have to pay to sit the exam

on their behalf. Kaplan's communication was particularly inadequate for this group of people. Individuals who were relying on a 'liaison' to book their exams reported feeling stripped of agency and found it impossible to make contact with their liaison on the day. Those relying on a liaison did not receive confirmation at the end of the day to reassure them that they had been booked onto an exam. This made an already stressful situation worse.

Our members, who are studying for the SQE alongside working in legal aid (often with very vulnerable clients), had to unexpectedly take time off work due to the issues with the booking system and the long delays. Many simply could not afford to miss booking on to the January 2024 sitting of the exam.

Some members who were able to make it through to book were left with no choice but to book a spot on the other side of the country, and will have to incur train and accommodation fees to sit their exams. One of our members in the North East of England will have to travel to London for two days to sit their exams. They will not receive any compensation.

We know that not all SQE candidates experienced what our members did. Kaplan and the SRA offer a block booking system to 'selected' providers. The block booking system allows selected providers to book, en-masse, places for their candidates. Candidates going through block booking will not have had to endure a 6.5-hour queue, a day full of uncertainty, or having to take much of a working day off with no notice. None of our members benefited from block booking, and we have serious concerns that the block booking system effectively creates a two-tiered system.

The SQE is meant to widen access and reduce barriers to the legal profession. SRA/Kaplan's shortcomings in administering *booking onto* the exam, which has introduced unfairness into the booking process are contrary to that stated ambition. It is not unreasonable to expect better.

**Young Legal Aid Lawyers**

**5 October 2023**

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## About Young Legal Aid Lawyers

Young Legal Aid Lawyers ('YLAL') is a group of aspiring and junior lawyers committed to practising in those areas of law, both criminal and civil, that have traditionally been publicly funded. We have around 3500 members including students, paralegals, trainee solicitors, pupil barristers, and qualified junior lawyers throughout England and Wales.

We believe that the provision of good quality, publicly funded legal assistance is essential to protecting the interests of the vulnerable in society and upholding the rule of law. As well as campaigning for a sustainable legal aid system, our core objectives are to increase social mobility and diversity within the legal aid sector, to promote the interests of new entrants and junior lawyers, and to provide a network for people beginning their careers in the legal aid sector

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