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Say my name: The formation of professional identity as a solicitor

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Introduction

- Background to the SRA's Equivalent Means Route to Qualification outside the “trainee solicitor” route
 - History
 - Number of solicitors qualifying through this route
- Process of qualification – a view of the mechanics of qualification using this route
 - View from two perspectives
- Impact on professional identity formation and *reconfiguration*
 - Disconfiguration of identity/self identification
- Reflections on the process and the benefits – three themes
- Implications for future work with the advent of a new approach to qualification as a solicitor

Identity formation without the “trainee” label?

- Literature on professional identity formation points to multiple hurdles and fragmentation (e.g. Sommerlad, 2007; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009) in the workplace.
- Is there something, however, about the use of (or absence of) the trainee label that has a hidden impact at the level of the individual.
 - Does that “otherness” create a dissonance?
 - Does it create additional “competency muscle”?

Theme 1: Is flexibility an advantage

- Lack of predictable journey and rituals associated with the label?
- Beyond outcomes and competencies?
- Is there a “competence thermostat” at work given the nature of the work distribution and organisation?
- Does the “trainee” focus change or is it reformed?
- Impact of “correcting perceptions” of “the usual route” (and dissonance)
- Does flexibility foster innovation and higher order skills and self perception (“flying a desk” or creating a service)
- Additional opportunities?

Theme 2: Acceleration of technical knowledge and operational awareness

- Evidencing competence – what is the challenge for the applicant in terms of level and breadth of experience.
- Balance of “me now” and “me then” on reflection
- Is there an impetus at work on external impact or internal progression, depending on the organisation?
- Benefits of flexibility
- Benefits of the “time served” approach?
- Towards a new hybrid?

Theme 3: The need for definition - Say my name

- Use of labels beyond the trainee solicitor imprimatur
 - The welcome pack/uniform
 - The social media posts...
- Need for clarity because of inference as to skill and nature of service
 - Challenge in the legal services regulatory space
 - Maintenance of audience and litigation rights
- Personal perception and that of others

Lessons from the process and future work

- “If we had to do this all over again I would....
 - Applicant
 - Supervisor
- Themes for the new approach to qualification via the Solicitors’ Qualifying Examination and Qualifying Work Experience
- Research into the impact of those who qualified via Equivalent Means.
 - A 10 to 15 year cohort of limited numbers but diverse contexts.

References

- Bourdieu, P., *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977); translated by R Nice Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Faulconbridge, J.R. and Muzio, D., 2009. Legal education, globalization, and cultures of professional practice. *Geo. J. Legal Ethics*, 22, p.1335.
- Sommerlad, H., 2007. Researching and Theorizing the Processes of Professional Identity Formation. *Journal of Law and Society*, 34(2).
- Webb, J., Ching, J., Maharg, P. and Sherr, A., 2013. Setting standards: the future of legal services education and training regulation in England and Wales: the final report of the Legal Education and Training Review independent research team, June 2013.

SRA References and Resources

- <https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/legal-practice-course-route/equivalent-means-information-pack/>
- <https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/>
- <https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/admission/pathways-qualification/>



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Thank you