

# Access and Reinvestment Fund guidance for applicants

Published 11 March 2025

## Eligibility criteria

1. Organisations will need to show:
  - a. they are an established organisation with a track record of supporting candidates to qualify as a solicitor of England and Wales through the SQE
  - b. they are based in England and Wales
  - c. they are running a scheme assisting aspiring solicitors:
    - who have the commitment and ability to qualify
    - who are self-funding
    - whose means to do so are limited by significant personal barriers.

Organisations will not be deemed eligible if they intend to use the funding to support any existing scheme which is in place for the purpose of existing recruitment and training of future/current employees.

## Commitment and ability to qualify

The organisation will need to demonstrate that they are running a scheme supporting candidates to qualify as a solicitor of England and Wales. And that in doing so they make reasonable enquiries that the supported candidates are committed to qualifying as a solicitor. This could, for example, be through the candidate application and selection process.

The organisation could show this by evidencing the scheme's application and selection process detailing that they have considered, for example:

- the candidate's education to date
- have they gained any work experience (paid or voluntary) in the legal profession
- the candidate's drive and rationale to qualify as a solicitor.

Organisations to be supported must consider whether applicants applying for support have the ability to pass the SQE.

## Self-funding candidates

The organisation will need to demonstrate that they make reasonable enquiries that the candidate is self-funding and has no/limited access to

other means of paying for the SQE assessments. This could include familial loans or financial gifts, access to savings, access to loans.

The funds in the Access and Reinvestment Fund should be used to provide candidates with financial provision in relation to the cost of the SQE where the candidate is financially disadvantaged.

## **Whose means to do so are limited by significant personal barriers**

This could include but is not limited to having faced exceptional circumstances in pursuing their studies and aim to qualify as a solicitor. This could be due to:

- a disability
- the candidates having spent time in local authority care
- family estrangement.

## **Assessment criteria**

2. The SRA will assess each bid against the following criteria:
  - i. the organisation has appropriate selection criteria for candidates
  - ii. the organisation has the necessary due diligence processes in place to ensure that candidates meet the eligibility criteria
  - iii. the organisation has the necessary infrastructure and processes in place to administer the scheme.

### **Criterion 1 - The organisation has appropriate selection criteria for candidates.**

3. The SRA will assess whether the organisation's selection criteria is:
  - a. clear
  - b. well-reasoned (ie sensible and rational in ensuring that candidates are appropriate) and
  - c. robust (ie aligns with the SRA's goals of supporting aspiring solicitors who satisfy 1(c) of the eligibility criteria).

### **Criterion 2 - The organisation has the necessary due diligence processes in place to ensure that candidates meet the eligibility criteria**

4. The application form asks organisations to provide information about how they select individuals to support, including any criteria applied and due diligence carried out to verify selected individuals have met the selection criteria.
5. In determining whether this criterion has been met, we will assess:



- a. the application process
- b. the type(s) of evidence submitted by candidates to prove their circumstances
- c. what references and/or checks are made by the organisation to ensure that the candidate fulfils the eligibility criteria under its scheme
- d. any past failures by the organisation in relation to checking candidates' circumstances.

### **Criterion 3 - The organisation has the necessary infrastructure and processes in place to administer the scheme.**

6. This criterion assesses whether the organisation has the infrastructure and necessary processes in place to be able to administer the scheme.
7. We will look at whether the organisation has the infrastructure in place to deliver the scheme. We will consider:
  - a. how long has the organisation been running a scheme
  - b. what funds the organisation currently has in place
  - c. how many candidates the organisation want to, and have capacity to support
  - d. whether the organisation has the administrative support in place to deliver the scheme.
8. We will look at whether the organisation has the necessary processes in place to deliver the scheme. We will consider:
  - a. how the organisation intends to inform candidates
  - b. how the organisation will monitor candidates
  - c. how has the organisation dealt with its scheme(s) in the past.

### **Timeframe**

9. Organisations must complete all sections of the online application form, providing information as required.
10. Applications must be received from organisations by 30 April 2025. Organisations will receive an acknowledgement of its application.
11. Organisations will be notified of the outcome and whether they are successful by 11 July 2025.
12. If successful, the organisation must spend the allocation by 30 September 2026. The earlier organisations identify which candidates they wish to support; the more opportunity it will provide them to sit the SQE assessments.
13. We cannot commit to running the programme in future years.

### **Selection process**

14. The selection process will take place after the closing date for applications.



15. Applications will firstly be shortlisted by the Education and Training Team at the SRA, based on whether they meet the eligibility criteria.
16. If the eligibility criteria are met, the application will be assessed against the assessment criteria in paragraph 2 above and scored against the scoring criteria (see below in paragraphs 20-26).
17. Applications will be assessed by a panel from the SRA. The decision on which organisation(s) to support and the proportion of the fund they should receive will be taken by a panel comprising at least three members, two of whom will be of the following:
  - a Board member
  - a Deputy Executive Director
  - the Director or Head of Education and Training
18. The panel will aim to select the organisation(s) and allocate the funding in a way that will:
  - maximise the benefits that can be provided to the aspiring solicitors we wish to support
  - minimise the risk that fund will not be appropriately used or targeted
  - minimise any reputational risks
  - offer support to organisations who support a broad range of candidates and who we consider best meet the assessment criteria.
19. As the SRA reserves the right to use the Access and Reinvestment Fund for any of the designated purposes, allocation of funds is entirely discretionary. Therefore, it is not possible for you to appeal against decisions taken at any stage of the application process.

## **Scoring criteria**

20. We will assess each application using the scoring matrix below.
21. Organisations will be scored against each of the criteria on a scale of 0-3.
22. The maximum score will be 9.
23. The organisations with the highest scores will be considered for an allocation of the funds available.
24. If an organisation scores zero against any of the three criteria, they will not be eligible for any award.
25. If we are unable to support all organisations who have meet the eligibility criteria and who have obtained the same score, we will look to the factors in paragraph 26 in making a decision.
26. We will aim to support a range of organisations where possible, taking into account:
  - a. geographical spread - we will look to support organisations who have a wider geographical reach, and/or a range of organisations who support candidates across the whole of England and Wales
  - b. funding available in the Access and Reinvestment Fund, to be distributed by the SRA

- c. how well the applications have been presented to the SRA, by reference to, but not limited to:
  - i. the manner in which the application has been put together
  - ii. the ease of navigating the application and
  - iii. the depth of evidence presented.
- d. diversity of candidates that the organisations are supporting.

## **Scoring matrix**

27. Applications from organisations will be scored using the scoring matrix below, against each of the assessment criteria.

<b>Score</b>	<b>Description</b>
3	The response provided strong evidence that the Criterion would be met.
2	The response provided adequate evidence that the Criterion would be met.
1	The response provided limited evidence that the Criterion would be met.
0	The response failed to provide evidence that the Criterion would be met.