

Future of SQM auditing statement

The LSC is changing the way it obtains assurance about the quality of its providers. We are determined to procure quality services for its clients, and will maintain, and improve where possible, the standard of work we require.

As a major purchaser of legal services, we want to rely on independently verified quality standards for assurance that our basic requirements are met. We believe that quality of advice can best be assured, accredited and regulated from within the profession.

Regulators should play the leading role in setting standards covering both systems and legal competence. Making quality an issue of general professional and regulatory standards improves assurance for all users of legal services.

As part of this strategy the LSC plans to outsource auditing of the Specialist Quality Mark to external providers in the autumn of 2010. Audits will be paid for by legal aid providers, but the LSC will minimise the cost.

For contracts starting in April 2010 the LSC will accept Lexcel as an alternative quality standard to the SQM. The SQM will be amended to enable this change of approach, with category specific requirements (e.g. supervisor standards) moving into the contract.

This approach will maintain assurance for clients that legal aid services are well run and capable of delivering high quality. Changes to our quality assurance processes will also reduce the administrative costs of compliance for providers.