

GAZETTE



The Law Society

The minimum salary survives – for now

By Jonathan Rayner

Law firms must continue to pay trainee solicitors at least a minimum salary, the board of the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) decided last week.

Despite saying that 'the regulatory arguments for minimum salaries remain unresolved', the board bowed to overwhelming support for the minimum expressed in a consultation.

Meanwhile, the SRA has also announced a delay to 2008 of the pilot of its work-based learning programme for trainee solicitors, an outcomes-based approach to replace the training contract, which could see some trainees qualify in 16 months.

The minimum salary has existed since 1982 and is currently £17,110 for central London and £15,332 elsewhere.

The consultation showed that most respondents believed the minimum salary protected trainees from exploita-



LSC chief Carolyn Regan (l), Gateshead Council deputy leader Ian Mearns and legal aid minister Vera Baird at 'one-stop' CLAC launch, p3

tion and helped ensure diversity among those joining the profession.

Trainee Solicitors Group president Melissa Worth welcomed the decision and said she would like to see the protection extended to others – 'such as paralegals who have completed their legal practice course and yet are still being paid just

£10,000 a year by certain law firms.'

Law Society chief executive Des Hudson: 'We support the decision to keep the minimum salary because it's a vital protection for new entrants of the profession. We believe a minimum salary helps promote diversity for intake to the profession.'

The SRA will review the minimum again in the light of forthcoming changes to solicitors' training, including the work-based learning system of qualification.

However, the pilot has now been delayed from autumn 2007 to an unspecified date in 2008.

Dr Jonathan Spencer, chairman of the SRA's education and training committee, said it decided 'it would be wise to spend a little more time in developing the arrangements'. A less traditional route to qualification is to be opened up by the reforms and he said the challenge was to make it robust enough not to be seen as 'second class', but not so bureaucratic that

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Defendant PI lawyers 'defeating mediation'

By Rupert White

Defendant personal injury (PI) lawyers are to blame for continuing high court caseloads by opting out of mediation as a matter of course, according to a government report.

After studying voluntary and automatic referral mediation schemes from 1994, a team led by the highly respected Professor Dame Hazel Genn concluded that lawyers' strategies in personal injury cases were defeating mediation schemes.

The report, *Twisting arms*, is damning

about how much PI lawyers have held back the growth of mediation. In one analysis of a London-based automatic referral scheme, around 90% of PI cases were pulled out of mediation.

'Unless the defence side of the personal

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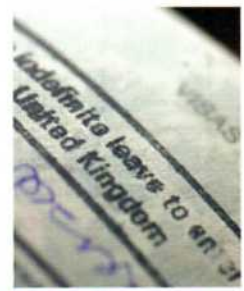
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