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Professional Adolescence: Towards a Terminology for Liminality in Legal Education

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On qualification, the new lawyer looks backwards, drawing on their educational experiences so far, including in particular of work experience/ training contract/articles. They also look forward, to their burgeoning career. For English solicitors, this requires a balancing between the regulatory drive for minimum competence marked by the competence statement (SRA, 2022) and the personal drive to extend their “scope and quality” (Eraut, 1994: 167) towards expertise and independence (Ching, 2012, Ching et al, 2015). Especially where professional formation is sequential, developing terminology for this and other liminal stages helps young and aspiring lawyers (and other professionals) succeed in the classroom and especially in the workplace. It provides a benchmark for educators and supervisors to reflect on our own practices and how we seek to equip our students to transcend their professional adolescence and thrive.

A number of comments in respect of the LPC, BPTC and CILEx qualifications identify dissonance between classroom-based activity and what happens in practice. For example, one barrister respondent emphasised the difference between a 'real' particulars of claim drafted in chambers and 'a bar school particulars of claim'. This has a number of undesirable consequences. It creates a burden of unlearning and re-learning once in the practice environment, and reduces the value of the training in the eyes of the profession, and quite possibly the student.

A2 Maintain the level of competence and legal knowledge needed to practise effectively, taking into account changes in their role and/or practice context and developments in the law, including

Taking responsibility for personal learning and development

Reflecting on and learning from practice and learning from other people

Accurately evaluating their strengths and limitations in relation to the demands of their work

Maintaining an adequate and up-to-date understanding of relevant law, policy and practice

Adapting practice to address developments in the delivery of legal services

A3 Work within the limits of their competence and the supervision which they need, including

Disclosing when work is beyond their personal capability

Recognising when they have made mistakes or are experiencing difficulties and taking appropriate action

Seeking and making effective use of feedback, guidance and support where needed

Knowing when to seek expert advice

Solicitors Regulation Authority, 'Statement of Solicitor Competence' (*Solicitors Regulation Authority*, 9 August 2022)

<<https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/competence-statement/>> accessed 23 June 2026

Professional Adolescence

- Where and what
 - Coherence of transition (or not)
 - Toxic workplaces and qualification “blackmail”
 - Who and where are the “community”?
- Who
 - Psychological and cognitive maturity: “brain adolescence”
 - Identity and self-confidence
 - (Personal perceptions of) competence and capability, scope and quality
 - Skills/knowledge decay and ethical fading
 - (Thwarted) ambition
- Challenges of becoming an integrated reflective practitioner in a disintegrated sequence.
- Challenges of “regulated reflection”

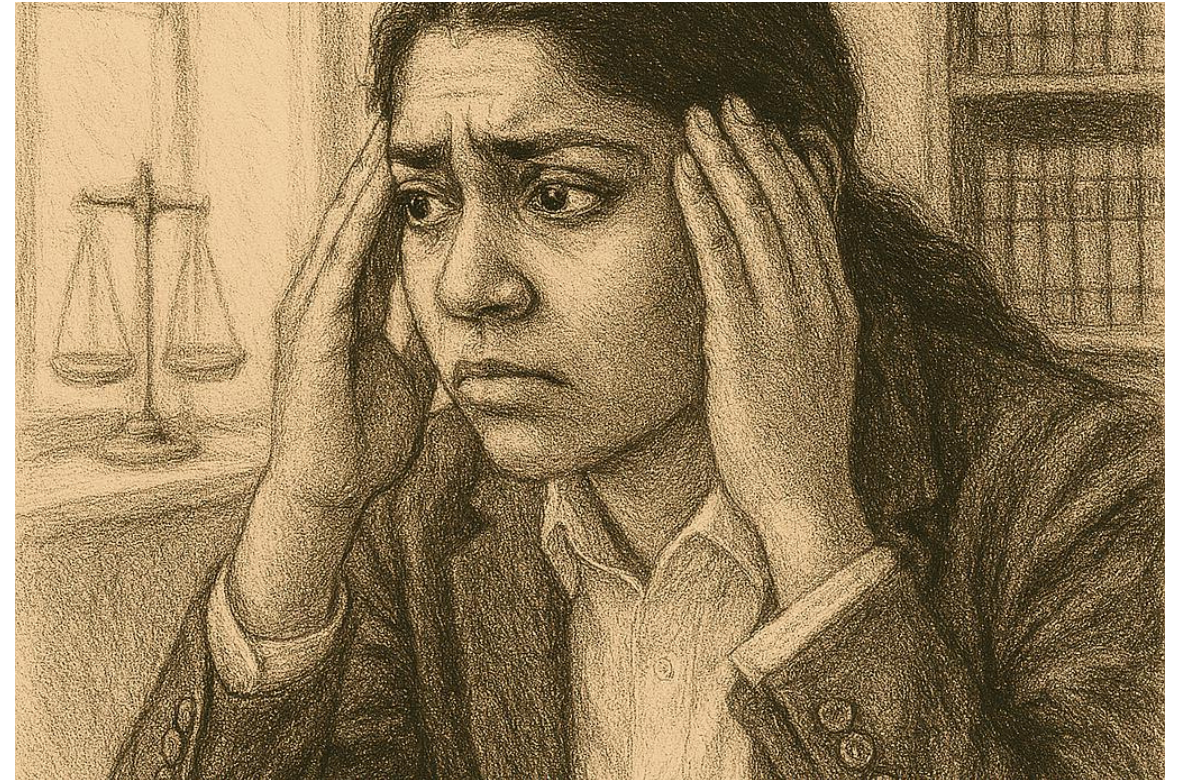


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