



Education and training authorisation and monitoring activity

September 2018 – August 2019

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Introduction and overview of 2018 - 19

1. We have a statutory responsibility for the education and training of solicitors, as set out in the Solicitors Act 1974 and the Legal Services Act 2007. Education and training requirements are a key regulatory tool to protect consumers of legal services. The purpose of this report is to tell our stakeholders about the outcomes of our quality assurance activity in relation to education and training. Unless otherwise stated, it relates to the period 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019.
2. During 2018/19, we continued to prepare for the new [Solicitors Qualifying Examination](#) (SQE). This will be introduced on 1 September 2021 and the first assessments - for SQE1 - will take place in November 2021. The SQE will mean that anyone wishing to qualify as a solicitor will have to meet consistent high standards by taking the same rigorous assessment.
3. To prepare for the SQE, in November 2019 we introduced [transition regulations](#) as part of our new Standards and Regulations. These allow anyone already studying, or training, to continue to qualify through the existing routes, or they can choose to do the SQE instead.
4. These regulations mean that there will be people qualifying through existing routes for some years after the introduction of the SQE. We will continue our monitoring and reporting work of these routes for as long as the numbers qualifying remain high enough to do so.
5. Our new Standards and Regulations also introduced the new SRA Education, Training and Assessment Provider Regulations. These new regulations do not cover the period of this report and our monitoring work during 2018/19 was undertaken under Training Regulations 2014 and Qualified Solicitors Transfer Regulations 2011.

Executive summary

6. The vast majority of those who qualify as solicitors will have completed:
 - the academic stage of training - qualifying law degree (QLD) or Common Professional Examination (CPE¹)
 - the vocational stage of training - the Legal Practice Course (LPC), period of recognised training (PRT) and Professional Skills Course (PSC).

This report looks at the information we receive from the course providers that we approve or authorise. It also considers information we hold as a regulator on the qualification routes people have been admitted through.

Key findings

7. This year, rates of successful completion² for the LPC remained broadly consistent with last year - 58% of students passed in 2018/19 compared to 56% in 2017/18.
8. Successful completion of the CPE was also broadly in line with last year – 58% of students passed in 2018/19 compared to 60% in 2017/18.
9. There continue to be significant differences in the successful completion rates between providers, with pass rates for the LPC ranging from 100% to 23%. We are unable to draw firm conclusions about why there is such a broad range in successful completion rates. However, pass rates can be influenced by candidate ability and engagement, as well as teaching quality and assessment arrangements.
10. In addition to the differences in rates between providers, there are significant differences between providers in the proportion of students who achieve pass, commendation or distinction grades.
11. Data shows that students from ethnic groups other than white are less likely to successfully complete the CPE and the LPC, as has been the case throughout our monitoring. This attainment gap is widely seen across higher education and professional assessments. We are commissioning independent research to look at the societal and structural factors that may be driving this gap, so that we can look at what we, and others, could do to make a difference.
12. Male and female students appear to perform equally well on the CPE and LPC, and women outnumber men on both courses and at the point of admission.

¹ The CPE is also known as the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL). In this report, we refer to it as the CPE throughout.

² We define 'successful completion' as being where a student has passed the LPC in the period under consideration. Students who have not successfully completed may have additional attempts available to them. They may be 'referred', meaning they have failed one or more assessments and may resit, or they may have 'deferred', meaning they have postponed their assessment because of exceptional circumstances, in one or more subjects. This means that those students may successfully go on to complete the LPC in future.

13. Our data on the ethnic origin and disability of those undertaking PRTs is less comprehensive. As shown in figures 12 and 13 below, large numbers of training contracts registered indicated ethnic background as ‘unknown’ and few declared a disability.

The routes to qualification

Numbers admitted by route

14. Figure 1 sets out the routes to qualification as a solicitor under our existing training regulations. The graduate route takes a minimum of six years for those who study full time and undertake a PRT of two years (full time). Figure 1 also illustrates the routes available to legal executives and lawyers qualified in other jurisdictions.

Figure 1: Routes to qualification

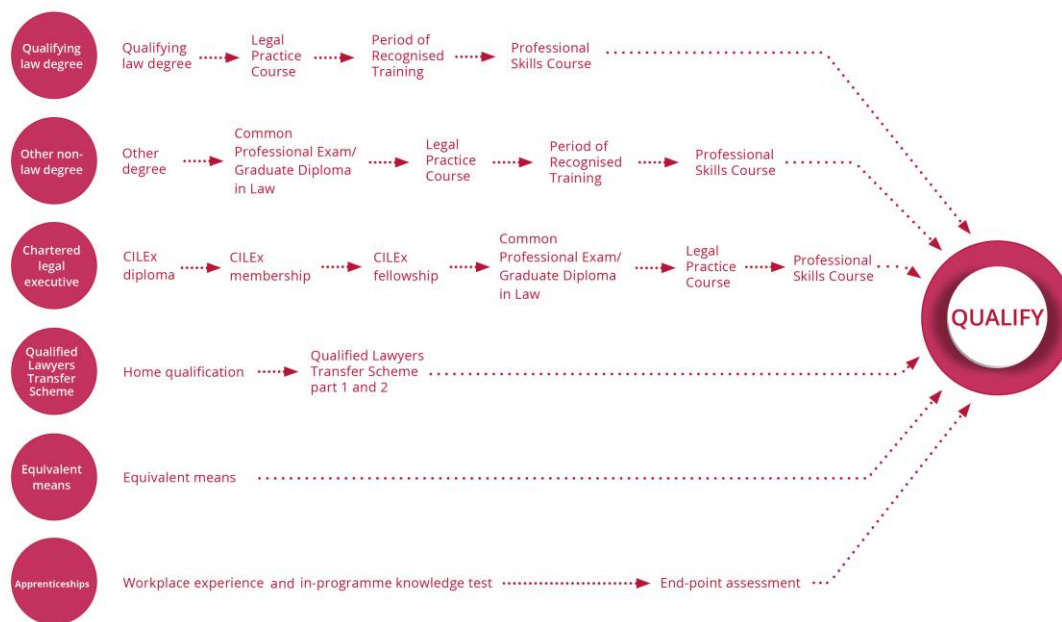


Figure 2: Numbers admitted to the roll by route

12 months to end of...	LPC	Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test	Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme	Chartered Institute of Legal Executive routes	Other	Total
Jun-2015	5,327	89	441	136	35	6,028
Jun-2016	5,420	36	580	239	38	6,313
Jun-2017	5,566	27	673	228	58	6,552
Jun-2018	5,713	8	714	319	30	6,784
Jun-2019	5,756	16	814	345	69	7,000

15. Key findings from this period are:

- 7,000 solicitors were admitted
- Approximately 82% of those admitted followed the route to qualification as set out in the SRA Training Regulations 2014 (completion of the academic and vocational stages of training)
- The Qualified Lawyer Transfer Test (QLTT) and Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS) account for approximately 12% those admitted.

16. The QLTS qualification is taken by barristers of England and Wales and lawyers qualified in other jurisdictions who wish to become solicitors of England and Wales. It is a two-stage assessment of the knowledge and skills needed to be a solicitor.

17. The QLTS assessment replaced the QLTT in 2010. However, candidates who completed the QLTT may still apply for admission, so a small number are still admitted by this route.

Providers of legal education and training

18. Providers ranged from universities that offer only the QLD to those who offer a full range of pre and post qualification courses.

19. In 2018/19, all education providers that we authorise were subject to regulation by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

20. The PRT takes place in firms and organisations that we authorise to provide training.

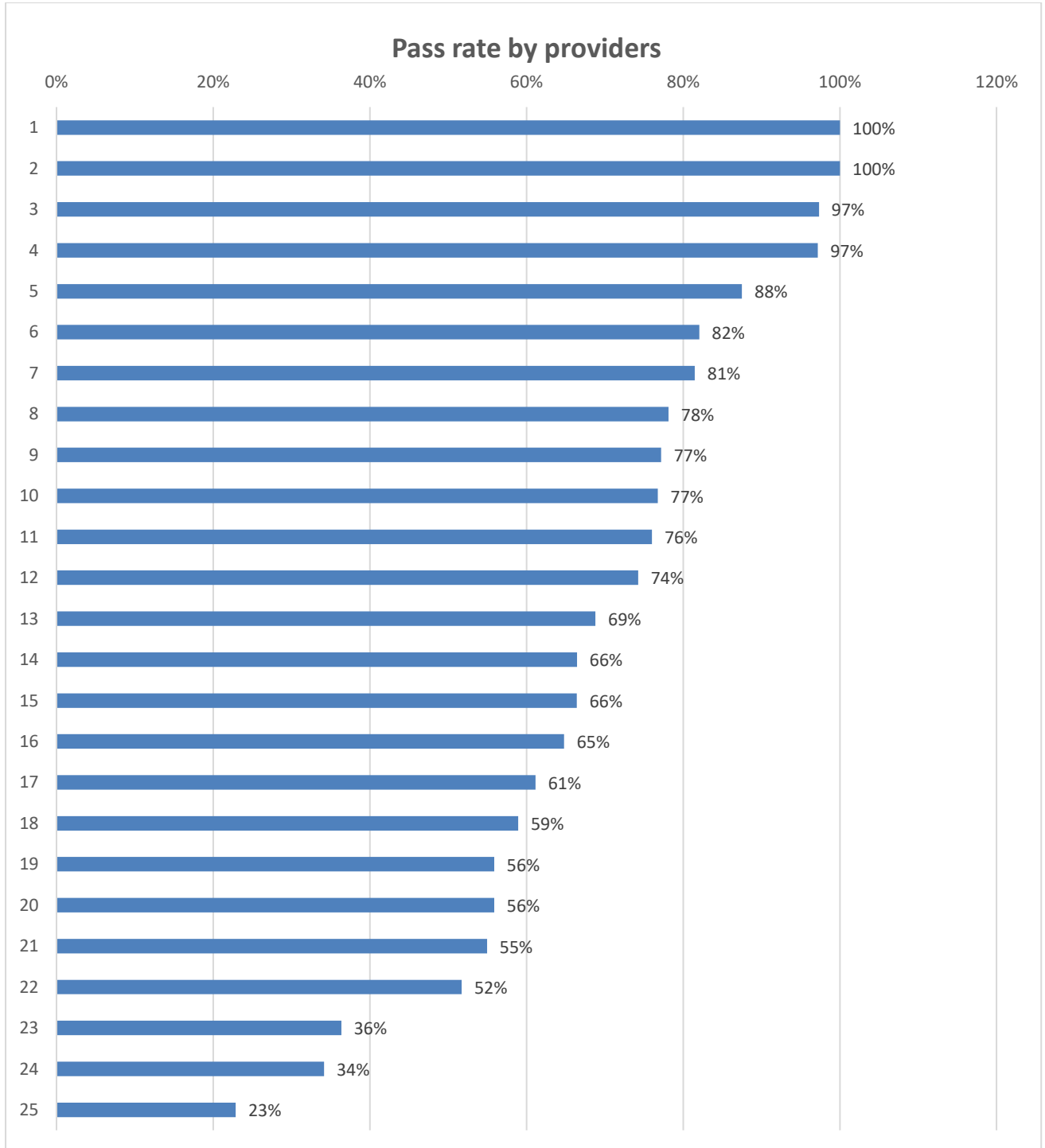
SRA Monitoring

21. When monitoring the quality and standards of education and training, we focus on the two professional qualifications within the framework. These are the CPE (for which the academic award is often a post-graduate diploma in law, the Graduate Diploma in Law) and the LPC.
22. For the CPE and the LPC, our monitoring involves initial approval (CPE) or authorisation (LPC). Each provider must also submit an annual course monitoring report consisting of monitoring data and a narrative report. Our main quality assurance activity is reviewing these reports. If we identify issues, we can follow up with the provider and we have the power to make a monitoring visit to a provider.
23. In summary for the LPC, the figures indicate that overall:
- 7,887 (58% of enrolled students) successfully completed the LPC (compared with 56% in 2017/18)
 - 3.3% failed the LPC in 2018/19
 - the remaining students were either withdrawn or suspended or were referred or deferred from their assessments.
24. In summary, for the CPE, the figures indicate that overall:
- 2,960 (58% of enrolled students) successfully completed the CPE (compared with 60% in 2017/18)
 - 6% failed the CPE in 2018/19
 - the remaining students were either withdrawn or suspended or were referred or deferred from their assessments.

Legal Practice Course

Figure 3: LPC results by provider

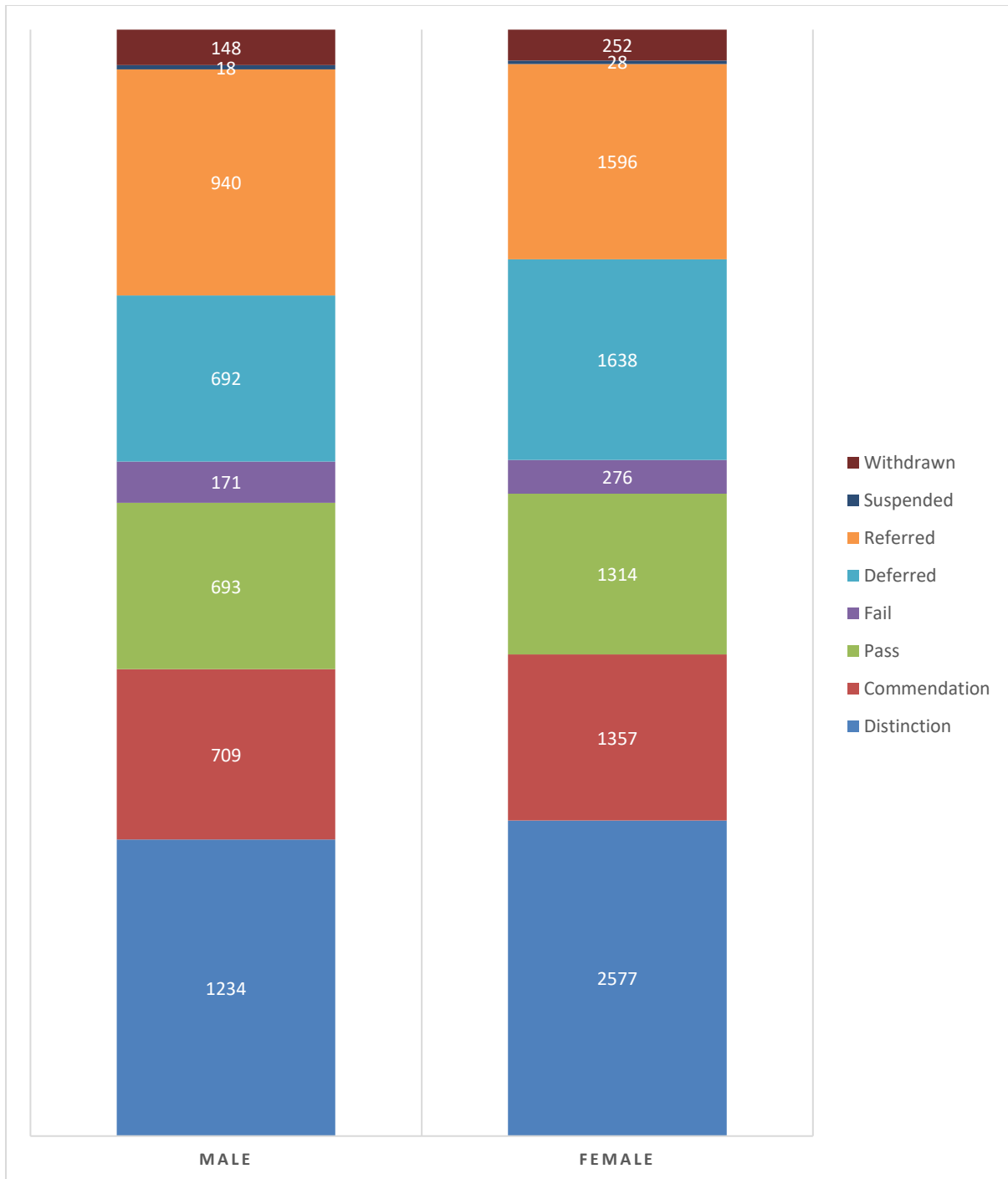
Each column represents an individual provider



25. Successful completion rates by provider vary from 23% to 100%. In addition to variation in completion rates, there is significant variation between providers in terms of the proportion of students obtaining pass, commendation and distinction grades. It is unclear what the reasons are for such a wide disparity in performance.
26. There may also be variation in academic ability between different intakes; variable quality of teaching; and/or different approaches to assessment. This makes it difficult to be confident about consistent outcomes. These are some of the reasons why we are introducing the SQE.
27. There are also very large differences in the size of different providers and the number of students on LPC courses. LPC groups range from fewer than ten students to many thousands of students, spread over different locations.
28. The largest providers, BPP University and the University of Law, offer the LPC across different locations. Between them, they shared approximately 79% (10,745) of the total number of students enrolled to take assessments (80% in 2017/18).

LPC results by gender

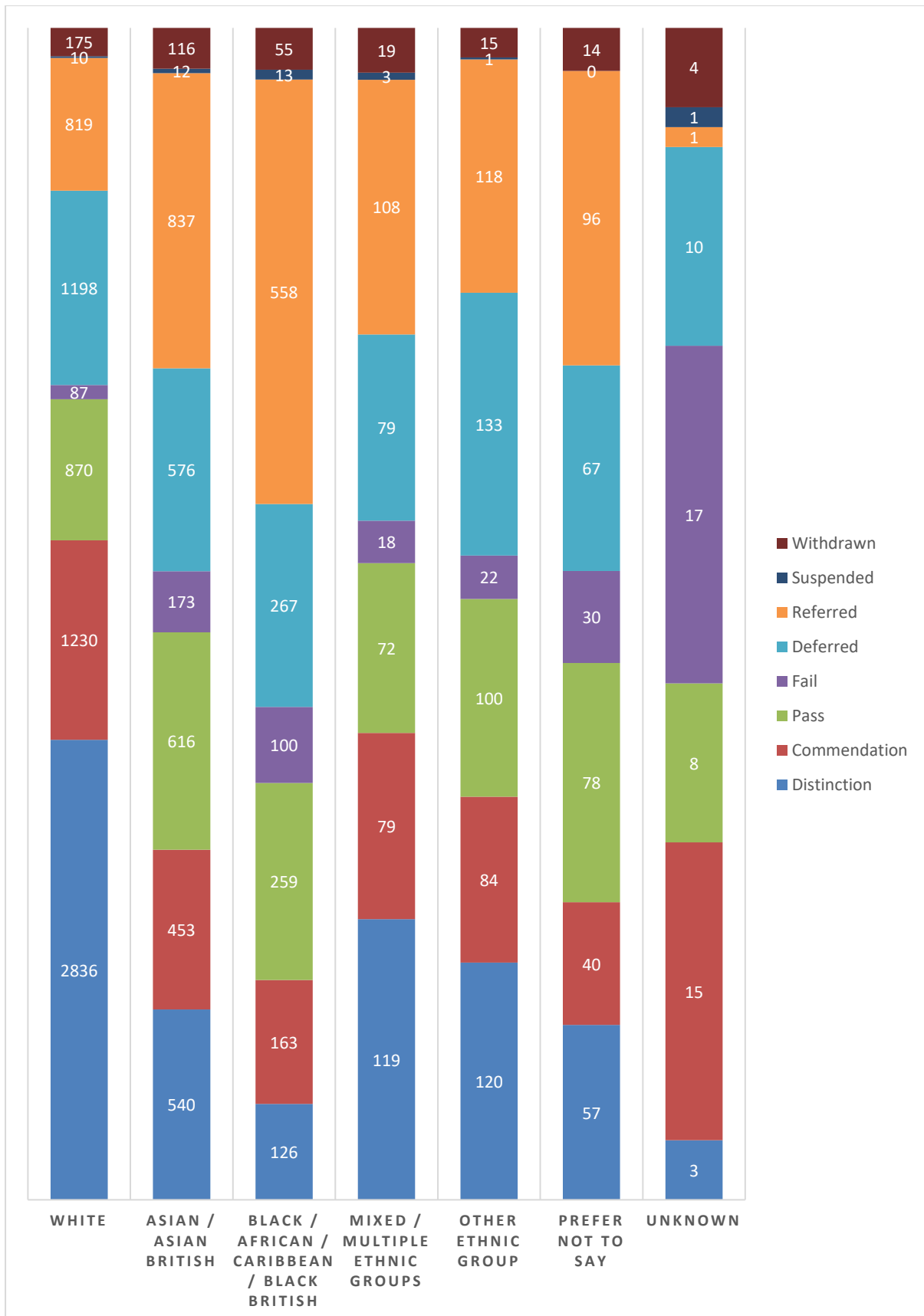
Figure 4: LPC results by gender



29. Some 66% of students in this cohort were female and 34% were male. There remains little difference in performance on the LPC by gender – more than 57% of male and 58% of female candidates successfully completed the LPC. Male and female candidates received similar rates of distinctions, commendations and pass grades.

LPC results by ethnicity

Figure 5: LPC results by ethnicity



30. The monitoring data shows that:

- 25% of students identified themselves as Asian/Asian British, which is comparable with previous years
- approximately 11% as Black/African/Caribbean/black British
- approximately 4% as mixed/multiple ethnic groups.

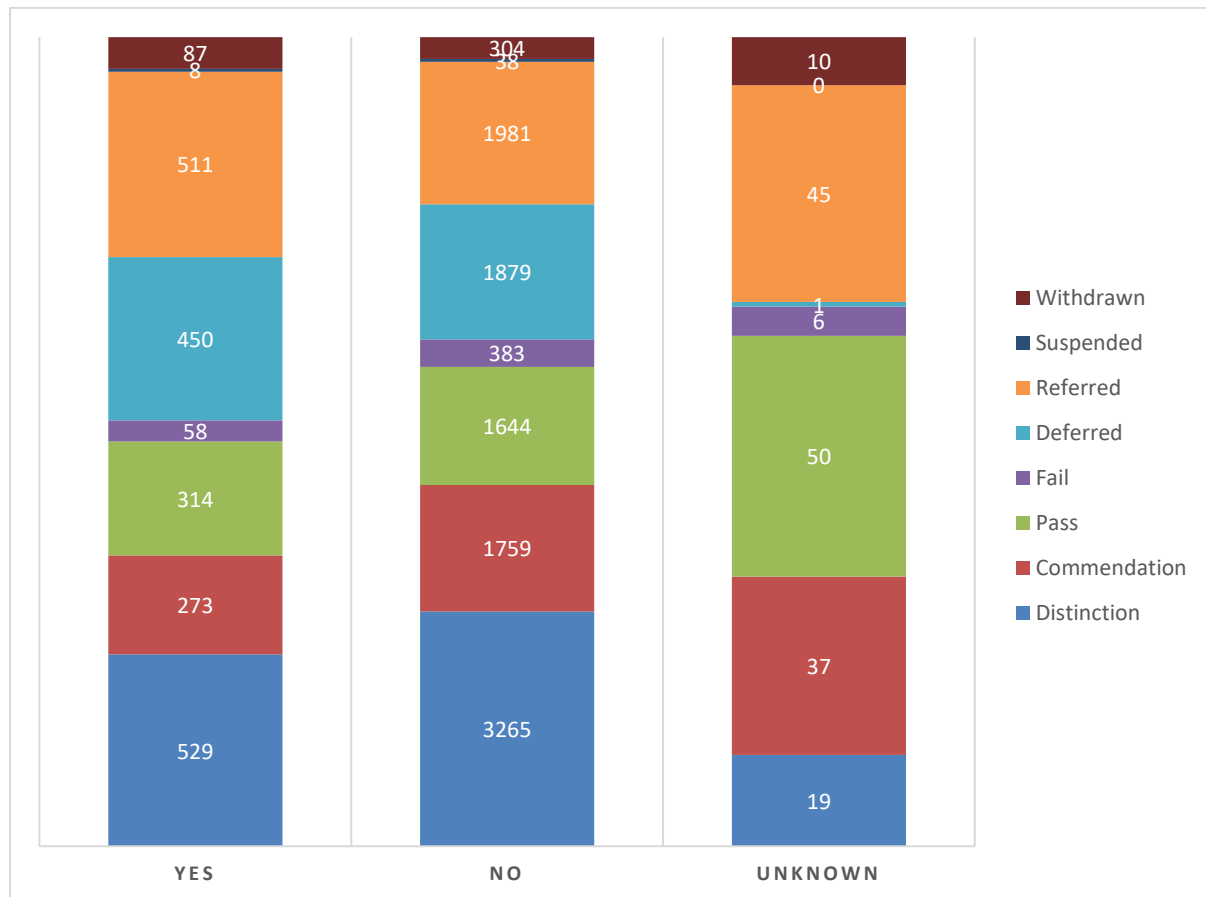
31. The table indicates that students from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are less likely to obtain a distinction in the LPC.

32. Almost 68% of white students successfully completed the LPC in the period in comparison with approximately 49% of Asian/Asian British students and 36% of black students. The table indicates both higher 'fail' rates among these groups and also significantly higher rates of both referral and deferral.

33. We know there is an attainment gap affecting BAME students in legal education. This attainment gap is widely seen across higher education and professional assessments. We are commissioning independent research to look at the societal and structural factors that may be driving this attainment gap, so that we can look at whether we and others can take steps to make a difference.

LPC results by disability

Figure 6: LPC results by disability



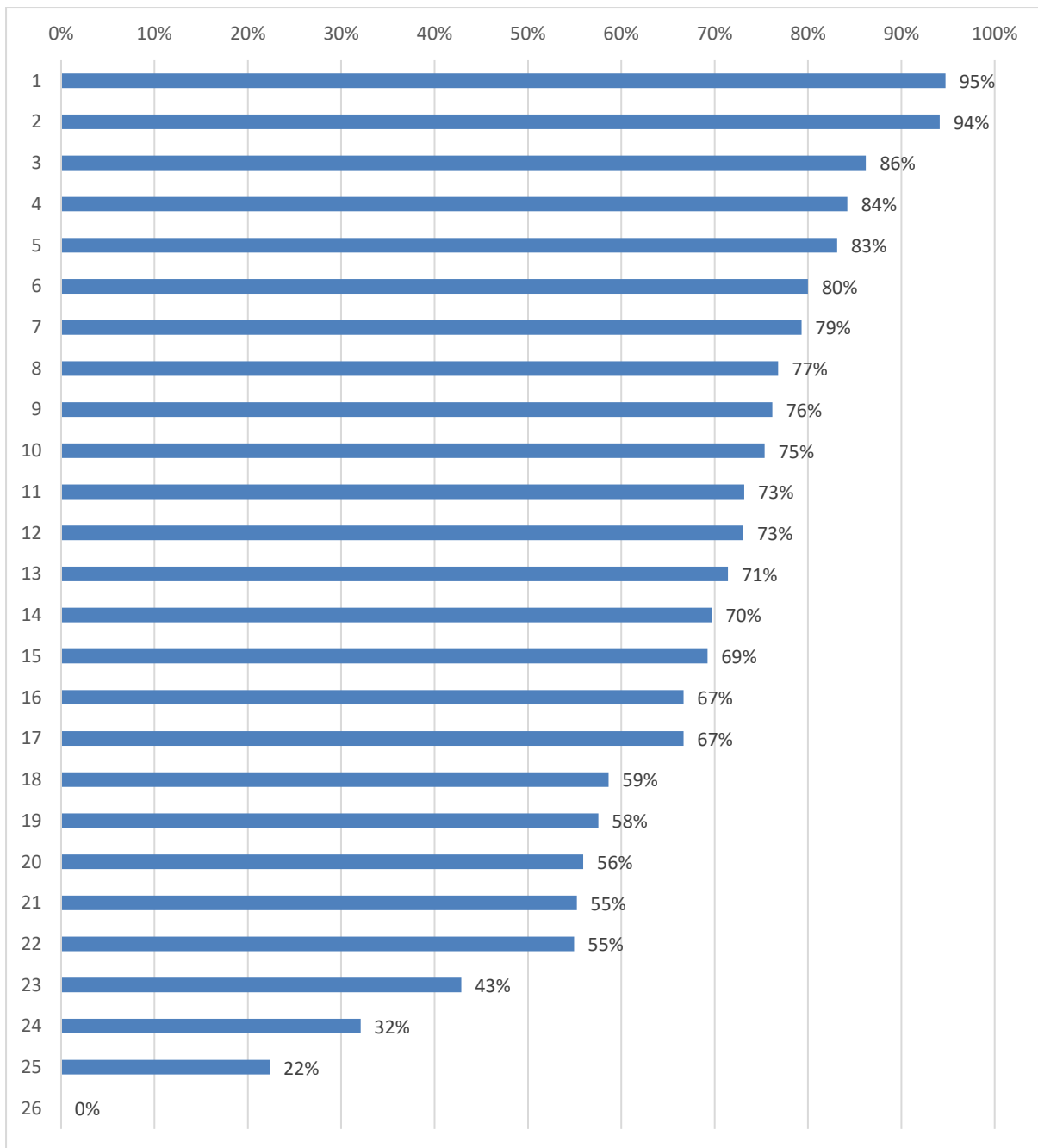
34. Figure 6 illustrates comparative performance on the LPC of students with disabilities. Approximately 17% of students identified themselves as having a disability, compared with 15% last year. (Although this does not necessarily reflect the proportion of students who had special arrangements for learning and assessment).
35. The table also shows that students who have disabilities are more likely than those who do not have disabilities to be referred or deferred in their assessments. Students who defer or refer assessments may later go on to attempt and pass the assessment.

Summary of narrative reports from LPC providers

36. All LPC providers must provide us with a narrative annual report on the LPC course. In addition, providers appoint external examiners to review the quality and standards of their assessments. Each provider appoints its own external examiner and the external examiners report to the LPC provider (rather than to us). In their narrative Annual Course Monitoring Reports, the providers include a summary and analysis of issues raised by the external examiners and the provider's response to those issues. We also ask providers to send copies of the full external examiners' reports to us.
37. Although we prescribe a template for the narrative report, there are nevertheless differences in the amount of information provided by different providers.
38. The external examiners were largely positive about the LPC overall, with providers reporting positive comment in relation to:
- Quality and consistency of marking and moderation
 - Assessment processes measuring achievement appropriately against the intended learning outcomes
 - Issues identified in previous years being promptly and effectively resolved
 - Learning and teaching strategies and materials
 - Student feedback was positive, and complaints promptly resolved.
39. Some general areas of concern identified were:
- A delay in some providers sending us their annual reports. We have taken steps to remind providers of their obligations to report to us promptly and do not expect to see a repeat of this issue next year
 - Administrative issues for external examiners
 - Concerns about staffing, which were subsequently resolved
 - Differences between the pass rates of white students and those of other ethnic backgrounds and a decrease in the number of students with a disability for some providers (although the overall percentage of students declaring a disability has increased – see paragraph 34 above).

Common Professional Examination

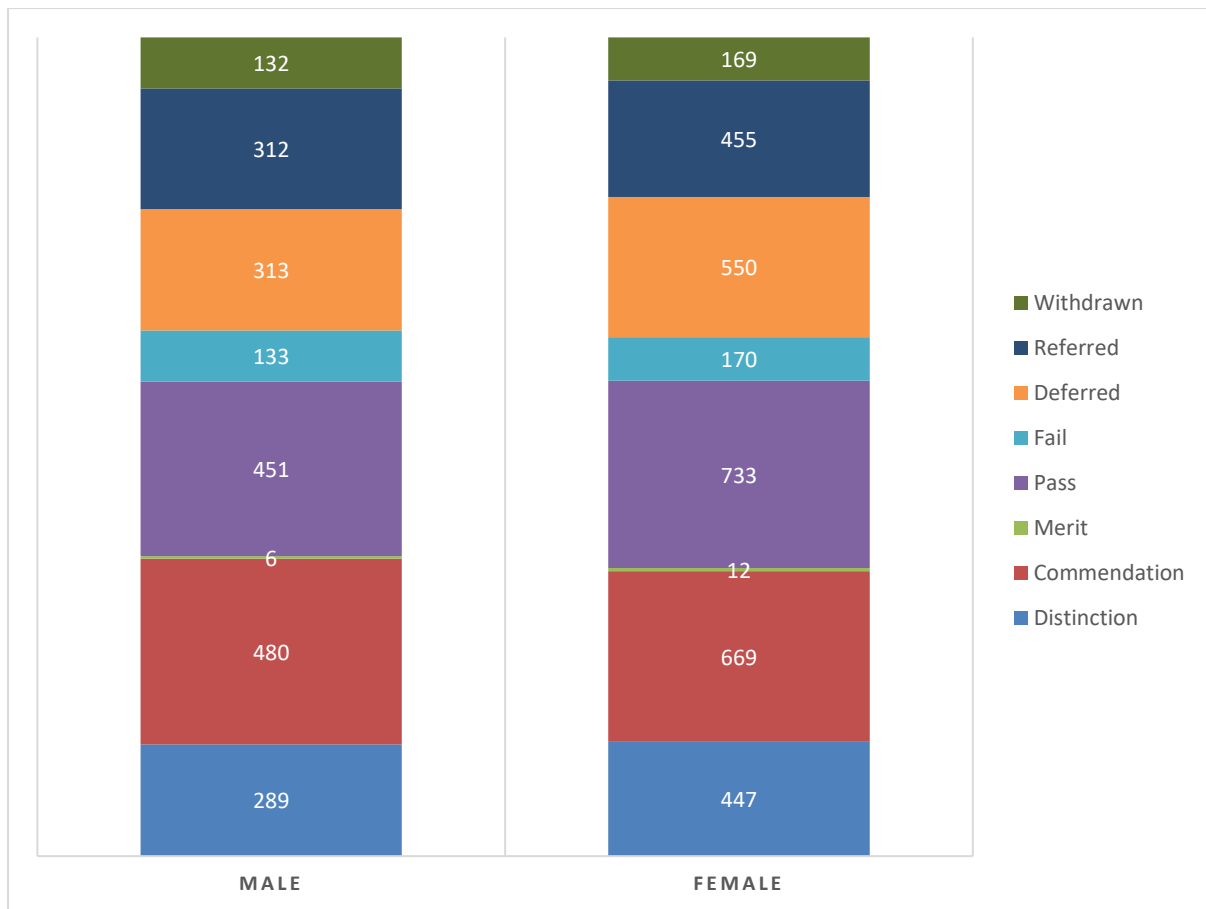
Figure 7: CPE results by provider. Each column represents an individual provider



40. Figure 7 shows CPE results. The total number of students who were enrolled and eligible to sit assessments which would enable them to complete the CPE was 5,353 (compared with 5,479 in the previous academic year). This includes full-time students enrolling for the first time in September 2018 (or later), part-time students in their second year of study and students who had deferred assessment attempts. CPE assessment rules permit three attempts at each assessment. Figure 10 indicates overall outcomes for the CPE. The overall completion rate in 2018/19 was 58%, which is similar to previous years.
41. As with the LPC, the CPE is offered by a range of providers, all of which are also subject to regulation by QAA. The size of the student cohort varies considerably. The largest providers, BPP University and the University of Law, offer the CPE across a range of locations. As with the LPC, BPP and the University of Law dominate the market. Together, they account for approximately 76% of student recruitment. The smallest provider recruited only two students, who subsequently withdrew.
42. Rates of successful completion of the CPE by provider shown in figure 7 also vary significantly, from zero for one provider who recruited only two candidates who subsequently withdrew, to 95% for another provider. In addition to the differences in rates of successful completion, it is again apparent that (among those who do successfully complete) there are very significant differences in the proportion of students who obtain a pass, commendation or distinction grade. Once again, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the reasons for this. There is significant variation in size of providers. There may also be student cohorts of different academic ability, differences in the quality of teaching and/or in the approach to assessment.
43. Providers supply us with a summary and evaluation of issues raised by their external examiners in their annual narrative reports. These did not raise any concerns about quality and standards on the CPE.

CPE results by gender

Figure 8: CPE results by gender



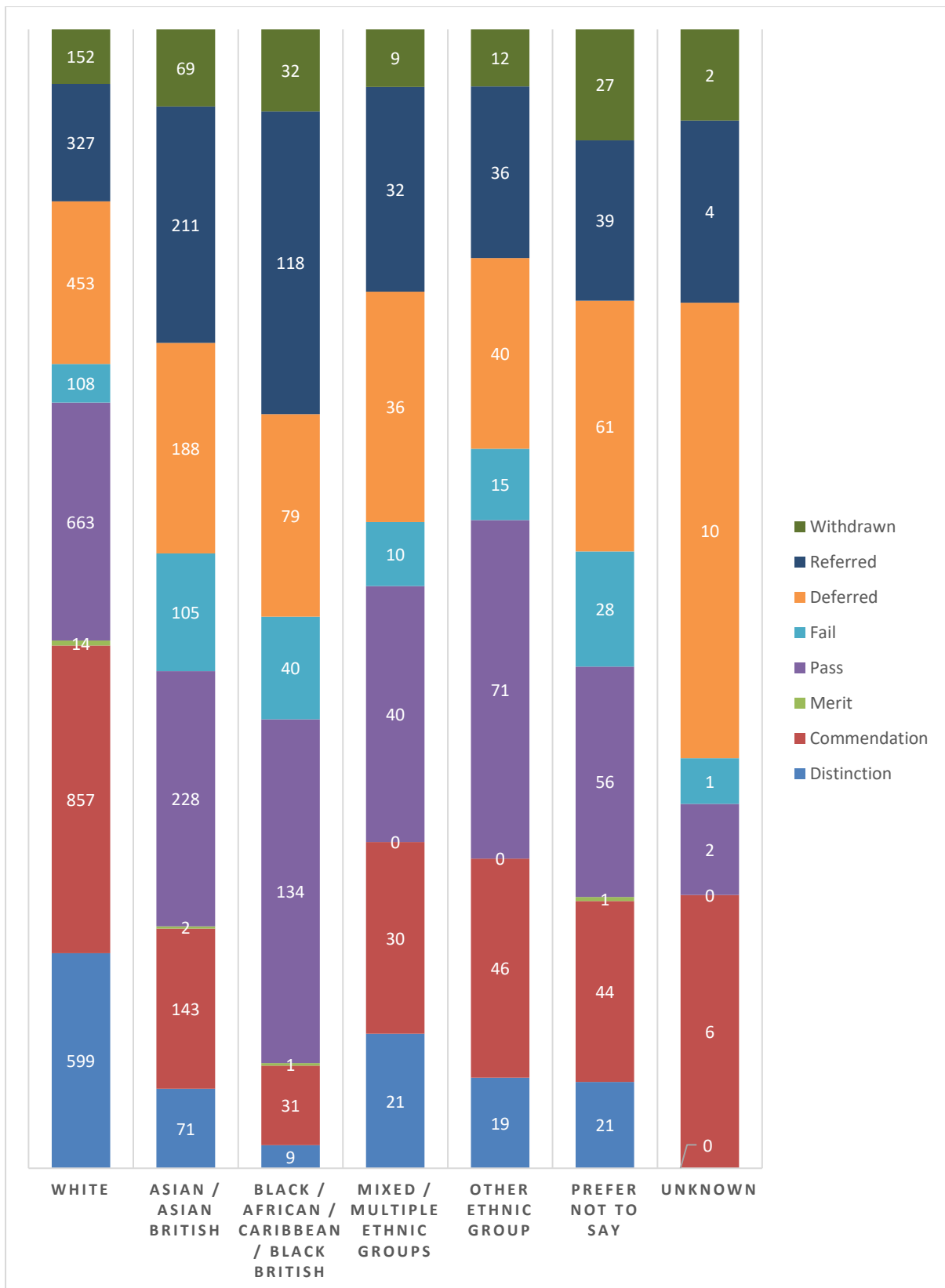
44. Figure 8 provides a breakdown of CPE completion rates by gender. These numbers indicate largely consistent performance in the CPE by gender.

45. Of this group, 40% of candidates were male and 60% female.

46. The successful completion rate for male candidates was 58% and for female candidates 58%.

CPE results by ethnicity

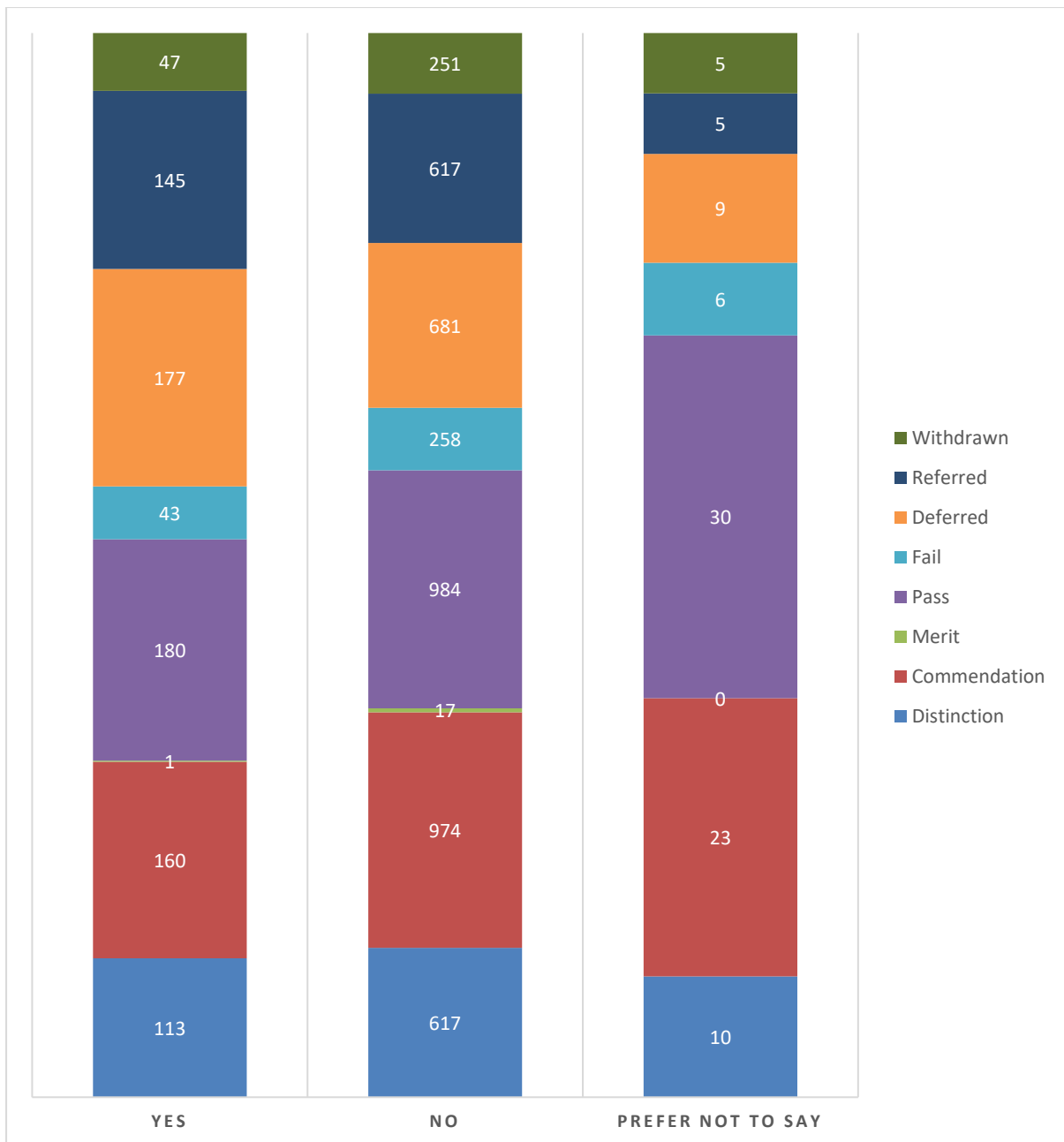
Figure 9: CPE results by ethnicity



47. Figure 9 shows breakdown of CPE completion rates by ethnicity. 19% of students identified themselves as Asian/Asian British, approximately 8% identified as black/African/Caribbean/black British and approximately 3% as mixed/multiple ethnic groups.
48. As with the LPC, these numbers indicate that students from BAME backgrounds are less likely to pass the CPE. White students form approximately 59% of the cohort and have a successful completion rate of 67%. Asian/Asian British students account for 19% of the cohort and have a successful completion rate of 44%. Black (African/Caribbean/black British) form 8% of the cohort and the successful completion rate is 39%. In addition, where white students are successful, they are more likely to be awarded commendations or distinctions. Our planned independent research in this area (see paragraph 11) will look into the factors that might be driving these differences.

CPE results by disability

Figure 10: CPE results by disability



49. Figure 10 shows comparative performance on the CPE of students with disabilities. Approximately 16% of students identified themselves as having a disability, compared with 14% last year. (Although this does not necessarily reflect the proportion of students who had special arrangements for learning and assessment).
50. The successful completion rate for students declaring a disability was 52% in comparison with 59% for students who did not declare a disability. Students declaring a disability have higher rates of withdrawal from the course, referral for re-sit and deferral of assessment.

Periods of recognised training

Training contracts registered

51. The final stage of the qualification pathway is the requirement to complete a PRT (when trainees will also undertake the PSC). Training will take place in a firm or organisation that we have approved to take in trainees. If the training is carried out on a full-time basis, it will usually be for a period of two years.
52. The following tables provide details of the number of training contracts registered with us in 2018/19, compared to the preceding three years, broken down by age, ethnicity, disability and gender. Percentages are based on the total known population.
53. Data for previous years has been refreshed so there may be some minor differences when compared to previous reports.
54. The figures shown are for the start of a PRT. Some individuals may not complete the PRT or may start a PRT more than once. This accounts for a small difference in the total number of PRTs and the numbers for those shown at Figure 2 to have been admitted having taken the LPC.

Figure 11: PRT age breakdown

Age band	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
18 - 21	52	0.9%	39	0.7%	41	0.7%	47	0.8%
22 - 25	3422	57.7%	3401	57.3%	3435	57.3%	3469	57.4%
26 - 30	1823	30.7%	1892	31.9%	1824	30.4%	1788	29.6%
31 - 35	377	6.4%	320	5.4%	392	6.5%	397	6.6%
36 - 40	144	2.4%	142	2.4%	150	2.5%	163	2.7%
41 - 45	63	1.1%	70	1.2%	85	1.4%	86	1.4%
46 - 50	33	0.6%	45	0.8%	36	0.6%	54	0.9%
51 - 55	13	0.2%	9	0.2%	25	0.4%	26	0.4%
56 - 60	3	0.1%	10	0.2%	6	0.1%	14	0.2%
61+	1	0.0%	4	0.1%	1	0.0%	2	0.0%
Total known	5931	100%	5932	100%	5995	100%	6046	100%
Unknown	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%	5	0%
Total	5931	100%	5932	100%	5996	100%	6051	100%

55. Figure 11 shows that the spread of the age of those taking a PRT has remained broadly stable over a four-year period. For 2018/19, 88% of the training contracts registered with us were for those aged 30 or under.

Figure 12: PRT ethnicity breakdown

Ethnicity	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
BAME	334	43.1%	245	50.8%	159	50.0%	107	56.9%
Asian	236	30.5%	169	35.1%	106	33.3%	75	39.9%
Black	47	6.1%	45	9.3%	35	11.0%	23	12.2%
Mixed	39	5.0%	19	3.9%	8	2.5%	6	3.2%
Other	12	1.5%	12	2.5%	10	3.1%	3	1.6%
White	441	56.9%	237	49.2%	159	50.0%	81	43.1%
Total known	775	100%	482	100%	318	100%	188	100%
Unknown	5156	87%³	5450	92%	5678	95%	5863	97%
Total	5931	100%	5932	100%	5996	100%	6051	100%

56. Figure 12 indicates that for 87% of trainees their ethnicity is recorded as ‘unknown’. This is a gap in our understanding of our trainee solicitor population and the progression of students from university into workplace learning.

57. As part of our preparations for the introduction of the SQE, we are reviewing our approach to data collection so that we can better understand the diversity and socio-economic background of those seeking to be admitted as solicitors.

³ Percentages are based on the total known population. There is a very high number of unknowns for ethnicity, as we do not collect this data routinely about trainees. Where the ethnicity is known, it is likely the individual has either now been admitted (and hence entered their EDI data via their mySRA profile) or they were known to the SRA previously for another reason.

Figure 13: PRT disability breakdown

Disability	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Physical	2	0	0	2
Mental	0	0	0	1
Learning	3	3	3	2
Sensory	0	0	0	0
Hearing	2	0	0	0
Visual	0	0	0	0
Long standing illness	1	1	1	2
Other	0	0	0	0
Not specified	6	5	0	1
Total declaring disability	14	9	4	8

58. Numbers declaring a disability continue to be very low, reflecting the trend of previous years and, as with previous years, do not reflect numbers declaring a disability on the CPE or LPC. As part of our wider work, we will be encouraging aspiring solicitors and solicitors to declare disability in all our data collection exercises.

Figure 14: PRT gender breakdown

Gender	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Female	3699	62.4%	3776	63.7%	3873	64.6%	3949	65.3%
Male	2232	37.6%	2156	36.3%	2123	35.4%	2100	34.7%
Total	5931	100%	5932	100%	5996	100%	6049	100%
Unknown	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0%
Total	5931	100%	5932	100%	5996	100%	6051	100%

59. This data indicates that firms and organisations are continuing to recruit more female than male trainees.

Qualified Lawyer Transfer Scheme results data

60. Individuals may be admitted through the qualified lawyers' route if they are a qualified lawyer in a jurisdiction that we recognise and complete the QLTS assessments, or if they are a barrister of England and Wales.
61. The QLTS assesses an individual's competence by way of multiple-choice testing (MCT) of legal knowledge and skills-based assessments, called the objective structured clinical examination (OSCE). Candidates pass the MCT (stage1) before being able to progress to the OSCE (stage 2). The assessments are operated by Kaplan and the MCT assessment is offered at multiple centres around the world. The OSCE assessments take place in London.
62. Between 1 January 2019 and 1 December 2019, 1,828 candidates attempted the MCT assessment and 991 candidates attempted the OSCE.
63. The pass rates in percentages from the total number of candidates achieved by candidates in different groups are set out in figure 15.

Figure 15: QLTS results data and percentage pass rates (calendar year 2019)

(Numbers are of candidates sitting the assessment. Percentages are pass rate of the candidates in each group)

Gender				
Assessment	Number of Candidates	Male	Female	Not stated
MCT	1,828	791 (51.8%)	1012 (55.4%)	25 (84%)
OSCE	991	433 (63.5%)	533 (67.4%)	25 (84%)
Ethnic Group				
Assessment	Number of Candidates	BAME	White	Not stated
MCT	1,828	961 (46.2%)	575 (63.5%)	292 (62.7%)
OSCE	991	431 (60.3%)	382 (69.1%)	178 (73.6%)
First language English				
Assessment	Number of Candidates	Yes	No	Not stated
MCT	1,828	772 (63.7%)	1056 (47.3%)	0
OSCE	991	475 (75.8%)	516 (57.2%)	0
Candidates declaring a Disability				
Assessment	Number of Candidates	Yes	No	Not stated
MCT	1,828	16 (62.5%)	1812 (54.2%)	0
OSCE	991	22 (50%)	969 (66.5%)	0

Some 814 barristers and lawyers qualified via this route in the year to June 2019.

64. The information in figure 15 is for the period January 2019 to December 2019. Candidates from 99 jurisdictions undertook a QLTS assessment in 2019. We currently recognise more than 170 jurisdictions, which include, as separate jurisdictions, the states of America and territories of Canada.

65. 51.8% of male candidates and 55.4% of female candidates who sat the first stage of the QLTS, the MCT, were successful and eligible to progress to the second stage, the OSCE.
66. The pass rate for the OSCE was 63.5% for male candidates and 67.4% for female candidates.
67. Pass rates by gender, ethnicity and first language are shown in figure 15. Sixteen candidates declared a disability for the MCT and 22 for the OSCE.
68. The results indicate that the pass rate on the MCT for white candidates is 63.5%, whereas for black and minority ethnic candidates it is 46.2%, showing the same attainment gap we have touched on elsewhere in this report and will be looking into through independent research.
69. We also have information about the first language of candidates. The pass rate on the MCT for those with English as their first language is 63.7 %, whereas for those for do not have English as a first language, the pass rate is 47.3%.
70. Once candidates have passed the MCT, however, the discrepancy in performance by ethnic group reduces in the OSCE. The pass rate is 69.1% for white candidates and 60.3%% for black and minority ethnic. The pass rate in the OSCE is 75.8% for those whose first language is English and 57.2% for those whose first language is not English.

Qualifying through equivalent means

71. Since the introduction of the SRA Training Regulations 2014, applicants have been able to meet the academic or vocational requirements of training by an equivalent means application.

72. We may recognise prior learning and grant exemptions where:

- the level, standard, volume and content of prior learning achieved is equivalent to all or part of a stage of education and training
- there is relevant, sufficient and adequate evidence of such achievement.

73. We may also grant exemptions based on prior experiential learning. The key principle here is that we will recognise the achievement of learning and outcomes and not simply evidence that an applicant has had experience of doing something.

74. The numbers of those qualifying with part of their training satisfied through equivalent means have been steadily increasing. We make decisions about equivalent means following our assessment of applicants' workplace experience and/or qualifications, considering if these are equivalent to the relevant academic or vocational stage requirement.

75. Figure 16 shows the number of individuals who qualified with part of their training satisfied through equivalent means for the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19.

76. Individuals will continue to be able to apply to qualify through equivalent means during the transition period following the introduction of the SQE.

Figure 16: Number of equivalent 2014/15 to 2018/19⁴

2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
8	63	70	85	88

⁴ Figures are for SRA financial years, which run from 1 November to 31 October.