RTPI

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LEGAL ASSOCIATE ASSESSOR HANDBOOK

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1. The role of an assessor

1.1 Introduction

Becoming a Legal Associate of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is a sign of expertise and excellence within planning law. Employers, clients and the wider community recognise the high quality of skills and experience that are held by Legal Associates (LARTPI). They know that they can rely upon the designation LARTPI as a sign of competence and professionalism within the field of planning law.

To become a Legal Associate, candidates must complete a competency-based written submission, assessed by two assessors who are Legal Associates or Legal Members. The assessment model is consistent with that used for the Assessments of Professional Competence (APCs) to become a Chartered Member. There are three APCs, all of which are assessed by assessors:

- **Licentiate Assessment of Professional Competence (L-APC)** – for those who graduated from a fully RTPI accredited degree in 2005 or afterwards.
- **Associate Assessment of Professional Competence (A-APC)** – for Associates (who will not have a fully RTPI accredited degree) to progress from Associate to Chartered membership.
- **Experienced Practitioner Assessment of Professional Competence (EP-APC)** – for experienced planners to apply directly for Chartered membership.

Candidates applying to become an Associate (AssocRTPI) or are also assessed by assessors, as their submissions follow the same format as the APC process and require the demonstration of competencies at a level appropriate to this partial professional qualification.

Assessors are selected and trained by the RTPI on an annual basis. They are central to ensuring that the RTPI's high professional standards are maintained. It is vital that assessors carry out assessments in a thorough and professional manner. This ensures that all candidates receive both a consistent standard of assessment and constructive feedback on their submissions.

First-time submissions are accepted on four submission dates within the year. There are also four dates on which candidates who have been unsuccessful can make resubmissions of their initial applications.

1.2 Assessment overview

All applications require the same core submission documents, but the word count, number of case studies and competencies will vary according to the class and route.

As the assessment process is consistent across all these applications, this handbook includes advice and information which is relevant for all assessors but also some specific information relevant to assessing candidates for the Legal Associate class.

1.3 Purpose of the handbook

The assessor handbook includes:

- the details of the various stakeholders involved;
- the practicalities of the assessment process and annual schedule;
- advice on completing the Candidate Feedback Forms;
- the role of the log book or examples of professional work in the assessment;
- the key differences in assessing the different routes and classes; and
- the assessor monitoring process and the restrictions on advising candidates.

The RTPI publishes guidance to support candidates applying for membership. Assessors will also need to make use of this when reviewing submissions against requirements. In addition to this guidance, the RTPI's webpages contain podcasts and other resources for candidates. These can be found at: www.rtpi.org.uk/apc.

1.4 Assessor service agreement with the RTPI

Assessors are vital to the membership assessment process and to ensure that roles and expectations are clear, assessors enter into a formal agreement with the RTPI. This also ensures that applications are assessed in a timely and accurate manner. The details of the formal agreement between the RTPI and the assessors are set out in the Assessor Service Agreement document. The service agreement includes the requirements for assessors to:

- attend an annual training session in January prior to undertaking assessments;
- complete mid-year online training at the request of the RTPI;
- agree to assess applications within the assessment periods of the four rounds for first-time applications within the year (the actual number will vary depending on number of applications submitted and the total number of assessors);
- review resubmissions from candidates, whose first-time submissions they have assessed previously, within the resubmission assessment periods;
- undertake these assessments within the time-frames indicated in the schedule.

Please read the service agreement for further details of the expectations for the relationship between the assessor and the RTPI. The service agreement must be signed by the assessor, on an annual basis, and countersigned by the RTPI's Head of Membership.

2. The assessment process

2.1 The people involved

The assessment process involves a number of different stakeholders including candidates, assessors, the RTPI Membership Team and the Membership Assessment Advisory Panel.

2.1.2 Candidates

In order for candidates to apply for membership, they must meet certain requirements. Details of these requirements are in the relevant guidance document for the class or route.

2.1.3 Assessors

Assessors work in pairs to review submissions. At the beginning of each year assessors will be paired with a co-assessor who they will work with to review submissions for that year. The assessors will be informed of their pairings by the Membership Team – usually at the annual training day in January. Assessors will be required to continue to work with their previous co-assessors on previous years' resubmissions.

Assessors are asked to complete a Contact Availability Form that will be returned to the RTPI and forwarded to their co-assessor. The form includes the assessor's contact details as well as their availability to discuss submissions with their co-assessor (in terms of contact methods and types of times e.g. during business hours / evenings / weekends). It is vital that assessors notify the team of any changes to their contact details and if they have any restrictions on their availability.

NOTE

Assessor pairs should make contact initially to determine the most convenient way to complete the assessments. As the pairing will be assessing together throughout the year, it is important that assessors maintain a dialogue with each other.

2.1.4 RTPI Membership Team

The Membership Team manages the assessment process and supports stakeholders in meeting the relevant requirements and deadlines. This includes carrying out pre-assessment checks on all applications and checking feedback forms. Any specific queries about the process can be directed to the team who can also provide additional support to assessors and candidates upon request. The Membership Team can be contacted on +44 (0)20 7929 9462 or at membership@rtpi.org.uk.

2.1.5 The Membership Assessment Advisory Panel (MAAP)

The MAAP works closely with the RTPI Membership Team. The panel is a sub-committee of the RTPI Membership and Ethics Committee and takes delegated responsibility on its behalf for scrutinising routes to Chartered membership and inputting into the management of all Assessments of Professional Competence (APCs). It also oversees all assessors.

The MAAP provides a formal mechanism for stakeholder input into the management of the membership assessment process. The Panel consists of representatives from various stakeholder groups, including assessors, Learning Partner employers and Young Planners. The responsibilities of the panel include:

- recommending strategic and operational changes to the requirements and application processes for Chartered, Associate and Legal Associate membership;
- monitoring access, pass rates and any complaints or feedback;
- reviewing candidate and assessor guidance;
- reviewing and confirming L-APC Commendations;
- supporting RTPI officers to ensure quality and consistency of assessments, including monitoring the performance of assessors;
- monitoring feedback from stakeholders including nations and regions; and
- ensuring the membership assessment process remains current and relevant.

2.2 The assessment schedule

In the third quarter of each year the RTPI publishes a schedule of the submission deadlines and timeframes of assessment rounds for the following calendar year. This schedule allows assessors and candidates to plan their commitments more effectively and to ensure the process is managed in tight time-frames. It is necessary for all stakeholders to strictly adhere to the deadlines to achieve these time-frames. The full schedule (including details of the administration and assessment periods) are set out in the annual Assessor Service Agreement document. The candidate submissions and results dates are listed the website: www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/assessment-of-professional-competence/submission-dates/.

NOTE

If an assessor has any restrictions on their availability to assess in any of the rounds, or are concerned about meeting a particular assessment deadline, they must inform a member of the Membership Team immediately.

2.3 Submissions

Candidates submit their applications to the RTPI electronically as PDF files or Word documents. The RTPI Membership Team processes these application documents and records the details of each application. RTPI officers also carry out a number of pre-assessment checks before forwarding the relevant submission documents to the assessor pairings (via email) to carry out the assessment.

2.3.1 The submission documents

Core submission documents

Candidates are required to submit the following documents to the RTPI:

- a completed application form;
- a personal details and payment form;
- a written submission comprising of three sections
  - Practical Experience Statement (PES)
  - Professional Competence Statement (PCS)
  - Professional Development Plan (PDP)
- a sponsor declaration form;
- corroboration covering all experience covered in the written application[1];
- scanned copies of proof of legal qualification as specified in the guidance document; and
- proof of payment of the assessment fees.

[1] All experience detailed to support an application must be corroborated by the relevant line manager or senior colleague. Corroboration is submitted by the corroborator as a letter (on company letterhead) or an email (from a work email address), or using a corroboration form produced by the RTPI. The statement of corroboration must confirm the dates of employment and explicitly state that the corroborator has read the candidate's submission documents and agrees with the claims contained in it (it cannot be a generic letter). Detailed information on the corroboration requirements are in the relevant guidance.

2.3.2 The pre-assessment checks

The RTPI Membership Team conducts a number of pre-assessment checks on each application and records the details of the application received.

Core pre-assessment checks ensure that the candidate has:

- listed the required amount of experience on their application form;
- produced a written submission that is within the word count and of the correct standard stipulated in the relevant guidance document[2];
- provided a sponsor declaration form from a current Chartered Town Planner (the details are cross-referenced against the RTPI membership database);
- provided corroboration for each period of experience included in their submission;
- used the correct format for the Professional Development Plan (PDP) and that the plan is current at the point of submission covering the next two years; and
- submitted the application fee, proof of legal qualification and all other application components as required.

NOTE

The Membership Team deals with a large volume of applications. Whilst every effort is undertaken to ensure that all checks are carried out thoroughly it is vital that assessors also pay close attention to the documents submitted to them. Corroboration will be checked by RTPI staff before the application is forwarded to the assessors, however, assessors should read the corroborating documents and check that the information contained is consistent with the work set out by the candidate in their submission.

2.4 Receiving the submissions and confirming receipt

The RTPI Membership Team will forward the application documents to assessors via email. Due to data protection requirements the payment information and personal details form will be retained by the RTPI.

IMPORTANT

Assessors must confirm receipt of the submissions and that they have checked for any potential conflicts of interest within two working days to both their co-assessor and the Membership Team. This allows the Membership Team to know that there have not been any technical problems and resolve conflicts of interest.

[2] The guidance documents state an overall required word count and also contain suggested word counts for each of the three sections of the written submission. However, it is ultimately up to each candidate to decide how to divide the word count between the three sections. Footnotes are not included in the word count. It is not acceptable, however, for a candidate to over use or misuse footnotes primarily to increase their word count. The Membership Team checks the word count as one of the standard pre-assessment checks; this is not something assessors are required to do.

Assessors must notify the Membership Team immediately if they move jobs or change email address to ensure the RTPI has the correct contact details to use when sending the assessments. When receiving the assessments, assessors must check:

- That they can open all the attachments. The submissions are sent as individual zipped files.
- That there is no conflict of interest with any of the submissions.

The RTPI administration periods are fixed dates before and after the assessment period. Following the assessment period (but within the administration period), the Membership Team will contact assessors to confirm receipt of feedback and, if required, will ask for errors to be amended, clarification provided if unclear, or tone to be made more appropriate. Due to limited resources, confirmation of receipt to assessors can take between 1-2 weeks.

2.5 Reimbursement

Along with the submissions the assessors will receive a copy of the Assessor Payment Request form. Assessors receive an honorarium for each submission assessed to cover the assessment, providing feedback on the initial submission and any first-time resubmissions received (the fee also covers any incidental printing costs). This honorarium is subject to tax and should be declared. Further details of the honoraria amounts are in the Assessor Service Agreement.

The payments for each round are normally processed after the published results date, once all the feedback forms, welcome packs and letters have been posted. Once the Membership Team has processed the information, the payment request will be passed to the Finance department who will make the payment within two weeks' time. Please note that BACS payments are made in batches on a two week cycle, so assessors should allow 4-6 weeks for payments to reach their accounts.

Assessors must contact the RTPI Finance department directly if their bank account information or contact details change, or they have specific requests about the payment of the honorarium.

2.6 Conflict of interest

The application form lists the candidate's name, their place(s) of study as well as details of their current and previous employers.

If assessors feel that there is a potential conflict of interest that would prevent them from assessing a particular submission they must inform the Membership Team within two working days of receiving the submissions. If assessors are unsure whether their knowledge of the candidate constitutes a conflict of interest they should check with the Membership Team.

Possible conflicts of interest may be that an assessor:

- knows the candidate personally;
- taught the candidate;
- attended university with the candidate;

- currently works with the candidate (this could be working for the same organisation even if the assessor and candidate do not work in the same office or branch); or
- has worked with the candidate in the past.

2.7 Assessing submissions

2.7.1 Assessing submissions against the requirements

Candidates' submissions must be assessed against the requirements within the relevant guidance documents. These can be downloaded from the membership pages of the RTPI website: www.rtpi.org.uk/membership. Occasionally, the RTPI will update the guidance documents and this will be indicated in the publication date. It is important that you always refer to the relevant publication date in feedback.

2.7.2 Assessment outcomes

Assessors will formally assess and provide outcomes for the following parts of the submission:

- Professional Experience Statement (PES)
- Professional Competence Statement (PCS)
- Professional Development Plan (PDP)
- General Presentation.

Applications can be assessed as:

- **Successful** (if all elements are assessed as successful)
- **Successful – PDP Support Phase** (if only the PDP does not meet the requirements)
- **Unsuccessful/Deferred** (if either the PES and/or PCS do not meet the requirements)

Occasionally, there is also the possibility of **Rejection** for applications to the Legal Associate class

2.7.3 PDP advice

If the assessors have found a candidate's PES and PCS to be successful (and therefore the candidate has demonstrated their competence) but one or more elements of the PDP to be unsuccessful then they will be elected as a Legal Associate and required to submit another PDP to the RTPI for further comment. These candidates will need submit an updated PDP addressing the feedback from the assessors and will then enter a period of CPD monitoring. **If the PDP is successful, candidates cannot be referred for PDP advice.**

2.7.4 Feedback format

The outcome for all the assessed criteria will be recorded on a Candidate Feedback Form (both on the front sheet and the main body of the feedback report). A blank feedback form will be emailed to all assessors at the beginning of each round with the submissions. The Membership Team will review all final draft feedback forms and may return the form to the assessors and seek clarification if there are inconsistencies within the form, the feedback is ambiguous or the feedback does not provide candidates with enough details.

Best practice on providing feedback to candidates can be found in section 3.

2.7.5 Resubmission requirements

Assessors should also detail the resubmission requirements for unsuccessful candidates on the feedback form. Candidates who have not met any or some of the PES or PCS criteria can be asked to resubmit either the full section or provide a supplementary statement. (See sections 3.3 and 3.4 for further details and word counts). If any part of the PDP is unsuccessful the assessors can only request a full resubmission of the section.

For a full resubmission, candidates will rework the outstanding competencies within the body of the original text, but cannot be reassessed on any of the criteria in which they were deemed successful. When resubmitting a full section, candidates can place less emphasis on the criteria that have been successful, but the section must still make sense as a whole.

2.8 Agreeing the outcome and feedback with a co-assessor

Both assessors in the pairing will consider the submission independently of each other and then arrange to confer and agree on the outcome and feedback. It is up to each assessor pairing to agree how they will work together to do this. The RTPI would recommend that both assessors in the pairing must first individually review the applications against the requirements. To inform discussion with their co-assessor, each assessor is recommended to complete an initial draft of the Candidate Feedback Form as they assess so that they record their initial thoughts and findings. They must then contact their co-assessor to agree the outcomes for each application.

Assessors will agree between themselves who will have responsibility for compiling the feedback and completing the final feedback report for each candidate – this role should be shared throughout the year.

When completing the Candidate Feedback Form assessors must ensure that **the outcomes recorded in the boxes on the front sheet match the results contained in the body of the feedback report**. Carrying out this check will save time in the long run, as the Membership Team will require further confirmation of the outcomes from assessors if the outcomes do not match. Assessors should also proof read the written feedback reports.

Once the final feedback form has been drafted it must be sent to the co-assessor for approval and a final proof read of the written content. The assessors should then forward the feedback forms, along with their payment request forms, by email to the Membership Team by the relevant assessment deadline.

NOTE

If the assessor pairing cannot agree on an outcome they must contact the Membership Team in advance of the assessment deadline and outline the reasons why an agreement could not be reached. The Membership Team will seek to resolve the situation and provide additional input as appropriate to aid agreement of the outcome.

2.9 Essential stages in working with your co-assessor

- Confirm receipt of submissions with your co-assessor.
- Agree on the best available times to discuss your initial thoughts.
- Share out taking the 'lead' on assessments.
- Keep in touch with each other throughout the assessment period.
- Reply promptly to emails or calls.
- Make suggestions and offer guidance to your co-assessor where necessary.
- Proof read each other's feedback, ensuring professional standards are followed.
- Get approval from your co-assessor before forwarding the final version to the RTPI.

2.10 Resubmission process

All candidates will receive their assessment and feedback report on the published results day. Those who are successful will be elected as Legal Associates. The candidates who have not been successful will have to resubmit the parts of their submission that have not met the criteria, focusing on the specific competencies or criteria that were not demonstrated. If the candidate is unsuccessful, they will be required to resubmit any revised or supplementary materials for assessment by the original assessor pairing. Candidates have up to two years to complete the resubmission process; after two years, candidates are required to make a full new application. If the candidates include any new experience and/or case studies within their resubmission then they are required to provide new corroboration for this.

- If the candidate is unsuccessful in demonstrating criteria in all sections, they will resubmit all sections. If they are unsuccessful in one, they will only resubmit the one section. The candidate can continue to resubmit until they are successful.

- A candidate cannot be reassessed on a competency or criterion that has previously been deemed to be successful. The assessment of the resubmission will only focus on the elements of the submission that were marked as unsuccessful in the previous round.

Candidates can only resubmit their applications for the published resubmission dates. The Membership Team will send the resubmission documents to the original assessor pairing at the start of the relevant resubmission assessment period. Assessors should again check for any possible new conflict of interest as well as confirming receipt to the Membership Team and their co-assessor within two working days.

Assessors will not be sent a copy of the original submission as they will only be reassessing the issues they raised for concern in the previous assessment. If an assessor does, however, feel that they need to refer to the original submission they should contact the Membership Team.

Assessors should record the outcome of the resubmission on the original Candidate Feedback Form which will be emailed to them with the resubmission material. Assessors should detail their findings in the 'Resubmission Feedback Report' that will be found on the last page of the form and **update the boxes on the front sheet** to reflect the resubmission outcomes. The detailed feedback report for the initial submission should be left unchanged.

Assessors do not receive an additional fee for assessing the material provided at the candidate's first resubmission attempt as this activity is included in the initial assessment fee payment. If the candidate is then unsuccessful for a second time an additional fee will be paid to the assessor to review the application again, to be repeated for any additional resubmission attempts. Full details of the honorarium fees are available in the Service Agreement.

3. Providing feedback on submissions

3.1 Purpose of the feedback

The Candidate Feedback Form provides advice and guidance to the candidate, regardless of whether they are successful or unsuccessful. Assessors should take a professional and constructive approach to providing the feedback, as well as including a good level of detail throughout.

If the candidate has been marked unsuccessful on any element, it is vital that as much information as possible is provided. The candidate needs to know why a competency or section was deemed to be unsuccessful. The RTPI does not expect assessors to "spoon-feed" the answers to candidates in order for them to produce a successful resubmission. Assessors should, however, provide prompts to unsuccessful candidates to point them in the right direction.

If assessors are concerned that a candidate has not addressed, or even may not have read, the published guidance it may be appropriate to refer the candidate to the published material rather than provide detailed advice in the feedback if this would duplicate the guidance. To assist candidates, references to the guidance in feedback should refer to the title of the guidance (including the publication date) and include specific references to particular sections, pages or paragraphs within it.

NOTE

Providing feedback on elements that have been successfully demonstrated is also very important. The assessment is the culmination of education, experience and a substantial written submission. If the candidate has done something well, let them know - in doing this, assessors are encouraging the next generation of Legal Associates.

3.2 Providing constructive feedback

Providing detailed and clear feedback to the candidate reduces the need for candidates to contact the RTPI (and therefore, indirectly, the assessors) for additional clarification at a later date. When providing feedback, assessors should:

- Refer back to the submission (using either paragraph or case study numbers or referring to specific content). This builds confidence that the assessors have carried out a thorough and professional assessment.

- For unsuccessful elements, explain why the evidence provided does not meet the requirements.
- Indicate whether the candidate could build on case studies already provided or if they should introduce new case studies in their resubmission.

Assessors can use either bold or italics for emphasis in their feedback, however, they should not use exclamation marks or block capitals as this can easily lead to candidates misinterpreting the tone of the feedback. For the same reason we ask that assessors avoid using phrases such as: "The assessors were frustrated that the candidate…"; "This is not acceptable for a submission of this nature..."; "It was disappointing for the assessors that ...". Some candidates may be in senior roles and the feedback should reflect this and avoid a tone which may be perceived as patronising.

Assessors are also recommended not to refer to the candidate using their first name and to instead use either "you" or "the candidate",. If assessors are unsure of the candidate's gender, they should use "their" rather than guessing at "his" or "her".

3.3 Feedback on the Practical Experience Statement (PES)

In the PES, candidates should detail how they meet the planning law experience requirements as outlined in the relevant guidance. The Membership Team will check the application to ensure the dates of employment provided add up to the required amount of experience, however, it is assessors' responsibility to ensure the work described by the candidate in the submission is of a **suitable type** and **level** as defined in the relevant guidance for the class or route.

If the candidate is successful, the feedback should outline how they demonstrated the experience requirement. If the candidate is unsuccessful, the feedback should explain what parts (if any) of the experience is acceptable and where experience is lacking. For unsuccessful candidates, the feedback should also outline in the resubmission requirements what extra information they need to provide in their resubmission, and how much more experience (or experience of a different type) they need to gain before resubmitting. If the candidate needs to clarify an element of the PES, assessors should request a supplementary statement of 400-1,000 words. A full resubmission should be requested if clarification on the majority of their experience is required.

Regardless of whether the PES was successful or not, the remainder of the application should be assessed and feedback provided. If an assessor has any concerns or queries about assessing the remainder of the application after determining the PES to be unsuccessful then they should please contact the Membership Team.

3.4 Feedback on the Professional Competence Statement (PCS)

The PCS should demonstrate how the candidate meets all of the required competencies as outlined in the relevant guidance using the required number of case studies.

To ensure clarity, assessors should provide feedback under each of the competency headings provided for an initial assessment and indicate in brackets after each heading whether the competency was successful or unsuccessful. There are also check boxes for each of the competencies on the front page of the Candidate Feedback Form to be selected to indicate outcomes within the results summary. Assessors should give specific feedback about how candidates have demonstrated each competency (for example, through a case study), rather than just stating that the competency has been demonstrated. More detail may be needed where candidates have been unsuccessful to help them understand where further work is required.

The resubmission requirements should clearly indicate to the candidate whether they need to provide a complete resubmission or a supplementary statement of a defined word limit. If the candidate is unsuccessful on four or more PCS competencies, assessors should normally request a complete resubmission. The assessors are given discretion to request a full resubmission if fewer than four competencies were unsuccessful, if they feel this is more appropriate (for example, if the candidate is unsuccessful on 'core' competencies). For a full resubmission, the candidate will rework the outstanding competencies within the body of the original text, but cannot be reassessed on any of the competencies they were deemed successful in.

If the candidate is unsuccessful on three competencies or fewer, assessors should normally request a supplementary statement of between 400-1,000 words. The minimum length of 400 words should be sufficient for the candidate to cover one competency (as well as setting the context), with an additional 300 words requested for the second and third competencies, if required, as shown below:

Number of unsuccessful competencies	**Minimum type of resubmission**
One	400 words supplementary statement
Two	700 words supplementary statement
Three	1,000 words supplementary statement
Four or more	Complete resubmission

The resubmission requirements should also indicate whether the candidate could build on existing case studies to demonstrate the outstanding competencies or if it is recommended that they introduce new case studies.

3.5 Feedback on the Professional Development Plan (PDP)

The PDP should be current at the point of submission and should outline the plan for the subsequent two years. The content should cover the requirements and checklist outlined in the relevant guidance. Candidates are required to use the PDP template that can be downloaded from the RTPI website. The PDP is assessed on the three elements:

1. SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis
2. Goal and Objectives
3. Action Plan.

Assessors should provide their feedback to candidates on their PDP under each of the three headings provided and indicate in brackets after each heading whether the element was successful. There are also check boxes for each of the three elements on the front page of the Candidate Feedback Form, within the results summary, to be selected to indicate outcomes.

Assessors are reminded that **the level of candidates' career aspirations will vary**. Assessors should therefore be assessing the relevance of candidates' goals, objectives and actions to their development as professionals and their weaknesses (not the level of ambition).

If any element of the PDP is unsuccessful then the candidate is required to resubmit the entire PDP. It is difficult to treat the three elements of the PDP separately as they flow from one to the next. The submission may provide an acceptable SWOT, for example, but the Goals and Objectives and Action Plan may be unsuccessful. In this case the whole PDP is still resubmitted but only elements 2 and 3 would be reassessed.

Unsuccessful areas might include:

- a lack of linkage between SWOT weaknesses and the goals, objectives or actions;
- lack of specificity and depth of goals and objectives; or
- lack of SMART characteristics within the action plan. (Full details of the SMART model are in the guidance.)

Feedback and resubmission requirements should be sufficiently detailed to enable candidates to understand why they have been unsuccessful. For example it is not enough to say that an action is not SMART, it would be more useful to explain *why* the action is not SMART.

3.5.1 Feedback for candidates requiring PDP Advice

If the assessors have found a candidate's PES, PCS and general presentation to be successful, but one or more elements of the PDP to be unsuccessful, then they will be elected as a Legal Associate, and required to submit another PDP to the RTPI for further comment. **If assessors have determined the PDP to be successful then the candidate cannot be referred for PDP advice.** Assessors can, however, make suggestions and provide advice that could aid candidates with future PDPs and this can be particularly useful for borderline cases.

Assessors are still required to provide full feedback, including resubmission requirements, for the PDPs of candidates referred for PDP advice. Assessors may find it useful to add the following wording (or similar) to their PDP feedback:

"Given that the PDP needs improvement the candidate will be required to submit another PDP to the RTPI for further comment. The candidate is encouraged to use the RTPI's PDP resources together with the feedback from the assessors to prepare a revised PDP which should be submitted within one month. Having produced a successful PDP, candidates will enter CPD monitoring and be expected to submit CPD records in two years' time. Further details are available in [please insert the title and date of the relevant guidance document for the class or route]."

3.6 Feedback on the General Presentation

The general presentation of the candidate's submission is assessed in addition to the assessment criteria. The submission is expected to be of a high professional standard and meet the requirements outlined in the relevant guidance.

Assessors are expected to provide written feedback on general presentation for all candidates. Even if the candidate is successful in this section, feedback should be included to acknowledge when they have been successful – this could be a simple comment i.e. "Overall good presentation".

If all the criteria have been demonstrated, but the submission is not of a professional standard, then it should be assessed as unsuccessful and a full resubmission requested. A candidate should not be unsuccessful solely because of an out of place comma, however if grammatical errors were repeated throughout the submission that would suggest a lack of care and attention and the assessors would be justified in requesting that the submission is proof read and resubmitted to a professional standard.

Assessors are able to show some discretion with this part of the assessment especially in instances where it is suspected, or maybe known, that English is not the first language for example. If assessors are in any doubt as to how to proceed please contact the Membership Team, before completing the Candidate Feedback Form, to discuss the appropriate course of action.

3.6.1 Learning difficulties and disabilities

If a candidate has indicated to the Membership Team that they have a disability or learning difficulty then a note will be made when logging their application. To prevent the possibility of prejudgement of the candidate's submission, and due to the confidential nature of this information, this will not initially be disclosed to the assessors.

The Membership Team will review the assessors' feedback for these candidates before it is sent out to ensure that the learning difficulty or disability has not had an impact on the assessment and check that the feedback is not in any way insensitive to the candidate. The Membership Team may inform the assessors at this point and ask for the feedback to be amended if necessary. Again, if assessors are unsure or have any concerns relating to learning difficulties and disabilities then they should contact the Membership Team.

3.7 Feedback on resubmissions

When a candidate makes a resubmission, the Membership Team will insert an additional page with a 'Resubmission Feedback Report' section into the back of the original feedback form. The Membership Team will also retain an unamended copy of the original feedback form on file for internal audit purposes. Assessors will be sent the candidate's original Candidate Feedback Form (with an inserted 'Resubmission Feedback Report') along with any resubmitted sections, supplementary statements, additional corroboration or log book if relevant.

Assessors should detail the findings of their assessment of the resubmission documents into this 'Resubmission Feedback Report' (that will be found on the last page of the form) and **update the boxes on the front sheet to reflect the resubmission outcomes**. The detailed feedback report for the initial submission (or previous resubmissions) should be left unchanged.

When providing feedback on resubmissions assessors should follow the best practice guidance outlined in sections 3.1-3.6. Assessors are also recommended to add the relevant PCS competency headings and PDP element headings to the resubmission feedback report when providing feedback on PCS and PDP resubmissions. Assessors are also reminded that when reviewing resubmissions on the PCS or PDP, the candidate cannot be reassessed as unsuccessful on an area of the PCS or PDP that was previously determined to be successful (as stated in section 2.11).

3.8 Top tips on providing feedback

- Identify and explain how or where the candidate has gone wrong.

- Provide prompts to point the candidate in the right direction.
- Consider appropriate resubmission requirements – is it a supplementary statement with an appropriate word limit or a complete resubmission?
- Proof read your feedback – ensure the correct boxes are marked, there are no spelling or grammatical errors, and that all sentences make sense.
- Make specific reference to paragraph numbers or events outlined in case study.
- Be encouraging – if a candidate has done something well, congratulate them.

4. Key differences (Legal Associate class)

Assessors for the Legal Associate class will need to familiarise themselves with their guidance documents. The following points summarise key specifics of which assessors need to be aware.

4.1 Eligibility: amount of eligible experience

Candidates applying to the Legal Associate class do not just need to be qualified legal practitioners, but to have enough experience to show that they are able to give specialist advice in planning law. Candidates who practise only a very small amount of planning law will not meet the criteria for this specialist class (but may apply to the Affiliate or Associate class instead).

Candidates will set out on their application form the numbers of hours a year they have been spending on planning law. The Membership Team, as part of the pre-assessment checks, will check that these accord to the number of hours required to become a Legal Associate, as set out in section 1.2 of the guidance.

Assessors must assess the candidate's PES to ensure that the description of the work and experience undertaken is what would be expected from a qualified lawyer spending at least 60% of their time on planning law. If assessors are uncertain as to whether the candidate has sufficient experience they should defer the submission and ask for further clarification from the candidate.

4.2 Eligibility: nature of eligible experience

Candidates applying to the Legal Associate class need to demonstrate that they have sufficient breadth of experience in planning law to give quality advice. This instils confidence in clients and other professionals.

Assessors must assess the candidate's PES to make sure that the candidate has covered all the areas of planning law set out in List A of section 1.5 of the guidance. Candidates may **also** demonstrate areas in List B but do not have to do so. Candidates cannot demonstrate List B in place of List A: List A is mandatory. If assessors are uncertain as to whether the candidate has the right type of experience they should defer the submission and ask for further clarification from the candidate.

4.3 Assessment outcomes

It is possible for candidates applying to the Legal Associate class to be rejected. Assessors can only reject a candidate's submission subject to the following criteria:

- The candidate’s experience, demonstrated in the PES, is short of the experience requirements by two years or more.
- A submission cannot be rejected the first time it is made. If assessors think that the candidate’s experience does not meet the requirements, the candidate must be given the opportunity to clarify his/her experience in a resubmission.
- A submission cannot be rejected because the PCS and/or PDP do not meet the requirements. If the PCS and/or PDP do not meet the requirements, the submission will be deferred.

5. Assessor monitoring

5.1 The monitoring process

The Membership Team, supported by the MAAP, carries out a monitoring process in order to ensure the consistency of the assessment and feedback provided to candidates. A sample of assessor pairings will be selected for monitoring after each first time or resubmission round. The Membership Team will review the assessors’ feedback forms alongside the candidates’ submissions noting whether the assessment and feedback were provided in a **clear, accurate, detailed, professional and constructive manner**. The outcome and any points raised by the monitoring process will then be summarised and presented to the MAAP. It should be noted that assessors on the MAAP are subject to the same monitoring process as all other assessors.

5.2 Follow up

The assessor pairings will be notified of the findings of the monitoring process including any issues identified with their assessments and how they can address these issues. The assessors will be encouraged to discuss any points raised with both the Membership Team and their co-assessor.

If any specific and serious concerns have been raised in the initial monitoring, the assessor pairing will be picked up again for monitoring in the next round to ensure that the issues with the assessments have been remedied. If the previously identified issues with the assessments persist, or if additional issues are identified, the pairings will be notified by the Membership Team. The assessors will be contacted individually to discuss the issues prior to the next round to determine if there are any underlying problems that can be resolved.

The assessors will then have a second opportunity to remedy any issues at the following round. After that round, if the issues are not addressed, then the assessors will be referred to the MAAP who will decide whether to suspend their role as an assessor or whether there is further feedback, support or training that could be provided in order to resolve the issues. The assessors would then be notified of the decision and recommendations of the MAAP.

6. Advising candidates

Assessors are often approached to advise or mentor candidates through their application process. While the RTPI encourages candidates to use the resources available to them, managing such a relationship can be difficult. **Assessors must not mentor individual**

candidates or comment on individual submissions, in order to maintain the overall integrity of the process.

When approached to act as a mentor or read a candidate's submission, assessors can offer to provide general guidance but cannot agree to take on the candidate as a mentee or comment on the submission. Any new assessors who have been mentoring candidates should immediately advise their mentees of this and, where possible, aid them in finding a new mentor.

As a manager of candidates, there may be a need for an assessor to engage with their employees, however, they must remain within the requirements listed in sections 6.1 and 6.2 below. Assessors are sometimes invited by the Membership Team to take part in membership related events. This is perfectly acceptable as long as assessors comply with the requirements set out below.

The types of advice listed in sections 6.1 and 6.2 should provide clarity to assessors on managing relationships with candidates and understanding of what constitutes appropriate involvement. Ultimately, assessors should remain impartial and objective at all times.

NOTE

While assessors are not able to be mentors, they are able to sponsor and corroborate membership applications.

6.1 Types of advice assessors can provide

- Offer general advice on the assessment processes.
- Give general advice on what makes a good submission.
- Give candidates career advice if requested.
- Discuss the competencies and how these can be demonstrated generally.
- Give examples of common mistakes that candidates make.
- Encourage candidates to use support structures that are available to them (e.g. refer to guidance, attend a membership related event).

6.2 Types of advice assessors cannot provide

- Offer specific advice on individual submissions.
- Recommend specific case studies for submissions.
- Proof read individual submissions.
- Mentor individual candidates.
- Comment on whether they think a candidate has or has not demonstrated a particular competency.
- Comment on feedback made by other assessors.

We hope that you find this resource helpful and thank you for your support in maintaining the integrity of our assessment process. Please do not hesitate to contact the Membership Team if you have any queries or concerns.

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For further information please visit: www.rtpi.org.uk/membership

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