Specialist Accreditation Scheme

Information Guide for Applicants – General

This guide is for legal professionals on how to apply for specialist accreditation

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Version Control Record

Version	Effective date	Changes	Author
1.00	1 January 2022		GC
1.01	25 August 2022	Paragraph 2.3 amended by inserting the following: For 2022, the closing date for Senior Accredited Specialist applications is Wednesday 14 September 2022, 5pm.	GC
2.01	10 January 2023	Paragraph 3.2 amended by updating the practice areas for the 2023 accreditation scheme.	GC
		Paragraph 2.3 amended by deleting the following: **For 2022**, the closing date for Senior Accredited Specialist applications is Wednesday 14 September 2022, 5pm.	GC
		Paragraph 10 deleted. **10. Examination Preparatory Course** 10.1 The SAL offers a preparatory course for candidates required to sit for the examination. 10.2 Course attendance is not compulsory. Candidates are free to self-study or attend other relevant courses to prepare for the examination. 10.3 It is assumed that candidates who undertake this course have knowledge in the practice area expected of a 5-year PQE legal professional. 10.4 Due to limited resources, the SAL cannot guarantee that all candidates will secure a place on the course. 10.5 Candidates are advised to register for the course once their candidature is confirmed. Reservations are on a first-come-first-served basis. 10.6 Reservations are confirmed only when candidates have registered and made payment for the course. 10.7 Whether the course is conducted depends on demand. The SAL does not guarantee that the course will be conducted in any given year. 10.8 The examination will be conducted whether or not the preparatory course is run.	GC
		Paragraphs 14.4 and 14.5 deleted. **14.4 Examination preparatory course fee.** The course fee is S$2,568 including GST unless otherwise specified. 14.5 Registration is open after confirmation of candidature.	GC
		Paragraph 14.10 amended to account for rise in Goods and Services Tax (GST) and delete the fee schedule for the exam preparatory course:	GC

Service	Accredited Specialist	Senior Accredited Specialist
Exam preparatory course (optional)	S$2,568*	-

Paragraph 15.2 deleted. **15.2 Examination preparatory course fee.** Candidates may cancel their registration at any stage prior to the start of the course. Refunds are available depending on the stage at which registration is cancelled.	GC

Paragraph 15.5 amended to account for rise in GST and delete the refund schedule for the examination preparatory course: GC

Service	Accredited Specialist	Senior Accredited Specialist
Exam preparatory course (optional)	Refunds available if: a. cancellations made prior to confirmation email OR b. cancellations made after confirmation email but more than 30 calendar days from commencement of course All refunds subject to S$21.40 (including GST) administration fee.	-

Paragraph 16.1 amended by deleting references to the examination preparatory course: GC

Date	Event
2 May	Exam preparatory course registration opens
One week prior to start of course	Exam preparatory course registration closes
July/August	Exam preparatory course

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1. Definitions

1.1. *Applicant.* A legal professional who has submitted his or her application to be an Accredited Specialist or a Senior Accredited Specialist to the Singapore Academy of Law (SAL) but whose candidature is unconfirmed.

1.2. *Candidate.* A legal professional who has applied to be an Accredited Specialist or a Senior Accredited Specialist and whose candidature has been confirmed by the SAL and is in the process of being assessed by the Selection Panel.

1.3. *In-house counsel*. Lawyers who practice in the legal departments of corporations, associations, non-profits and other public- and private-sector organisations.

1.4. *Legal practitioner.* Advocate and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Singapore with a currently valid practising certificate.

1.5. *Legal professional.* Refers collectively to both legal practitioners and in-house counsel.

1.6. *Selection Panel*. The committee that reviews applications, and assesses and recommends to the Specialist Accreditation Board legal professionals for accreditation as either an Accredited

Specialist or Senior Accredited Specialist for a practice area under the Specialist Accreditation Scheme (the "Scheme").

1.7. *Singapore Academy of Law (SAL).* The entity that oversees the Specialist Accreditation Scheme.

1.8. *Specialist.* A legal professional who is either an Accredited Specialist or a Senior Accredited Specialist.

1.9. *Specialist Accreditation Board (SAB)*. The body that administers the Specialist Accreditation Scheme under the Singapore Academy of Law Rules (Cap 294A, R 1) r 10.

2. Applying for Accreditation

2.1 The SAL's Specialist Accreditation Scheme offers legal professionals a channel to be recognised for their expertise in their chosen specialisation and thus are expected to be legal ambassadors of that specialisation locally and abroad. Specialist accreditation is also a means for the legal industry and consumers of legal services to identify legal professionals with proven competency in their chosen practice area.

2.2 Legal professionals may apply to be:

a. an Accredited Specialist

or

b. a Senior Accredited Specialist

2.3 **Closing date**. Interested applicants must submit their application, reference statements, supporting documents and the payment confirmation by the following dates depending on the tier of accreditation they apply for:

a. Accredited Specialist: **31 March, 5pm**

b. Senior Accredited Specialist: **31 August, 5pm**

2.4 If either date is a public holiday or falls over a weekend, the deadline for submission will be the next working day.

2.5 Applications are to be completed and submitted online.

2.6 The SAL will send an acknowledgment of receipt of application ONLY if the application form is fully completed and accompanied by all the required documentation, and the application fee paid.

2.7 The onus is on applicants to ensure that their application has been received by the SAL.

3. Practice Areas

3.1 Legal professionals may apply to be accredited in one or more of the following practice areas:

Building and Construction Law

Data and Digital Economy Law

Maritime and Shipping Law

3.2 The 2023 accreditation programme offers accreditation in the following practice areas:

Data and Digital Economy Law (legal practitioners and in-house counsel)

Maritime and Shipping Law (legal practitioners)

4. Eligibility Criteria

4.1 Applicants should familiarise themselves with:

a. the general accreditation criteria in this Guide AND

b. the accreditation criteria for the practice area for which they are seeking specialist accreditation, if any, for any additions or deviations from the accreditation framework herein.

4.2 Applicants must satisfy the following eligibility criteria:

a. Have been admitted to the Singapore Bar as an Advocate and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Singapore

b. For legal practitioners: Hold a currently valid practising certificate

c. Have a minimum full-time post-qualification experience (PQE)

d. Have not been subject to professional disciplinary proceedings or charged and convicted of a serious crime

e. Have been substantially involved in the full-time practice of the practice area in question

f. Have been engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) in this area of practice

g. Provide favourable reference statements

h. Successfully complete an assessment programme comprising an examination and/or a selection panel interview

Accredited Specialist

4.3 **Post-qualification experience.** Legal professionals with at least **5 years** of full-time PQE as at **1 January** may apply to become an Accredited Specialist.

4.4 For example, for 2022 applications, applicants would need to have commenced full-time practice on 1 January 2017 or earlier.

Substantial involvement

4.5 Legal practitioners: Applicants must show that, in the immediate 3 years prior to application, they have been engaged in full-time practice in the practice area by having dedicated a **minimum billable amount of S$200,000 or 450 billable hours** a year to the said practice area.

4.6 In-house counsel: Applicants must show that, in the immediate 3 years prior to application, they have been engaged in full-time legal work in the said practice area.

4.7 Legal practitioners: As part of their substantial involvement in this practice area, applicants must have been involved in a trial, or arbitration at least as second chair, and/or performed front-end work which can include but is not limited to detailed review, drafting and preparation of contracts.

4.8 If applicants have been involved only in front-end work, whether this criterion is met shall depend on the complexity of the work done.

4.9 **Continuing professional development.** In the immediate 3 years prior to application, applicants must have accumulated at least **6 public and/or private CPD points** a year in this practice area.

4.10 **References.** Applicants shall be required to submit two favourable reference statements from legal practitioners, in-house counsel or arbitrators in this practice area who can attest to the applicants' involvement and competence in the said practice area, and character.

4.11 Legal practitioner and in-house counsel referees must have more than 5 years' PQE and have known the applicants for at least 3 years prior to application.

4.12 Legal practitioner applicants: In-house counsel referees must have been advised by the applicants in the immediate 3 years prior to application.

4.13 Arbitrator referees must have arbitrated matters in the practice area before whom the applicants have appeared.

4.14 **Examination.** Candidates are to sit and pass an open-book examination which shall test their knowledge on all aspects of the law and processes.

4.15 **Selection panel interview.** Candidates, who achieve a satisfactory examination grade, are required to undergo a selection panel interview.

Senior Accredited Specialist

4.16 **Post-qualification experience (PQE).** Legal professionals with at least **10 years** of full-time PQE as at **1 July** may apply to become a Senior Accredited Specialist.

4.17 For example, for 2022 applications, applicants would need to have commenced full-time practice on 1 July 2012 or earlier.

Substantial involvement

4.18 Legal practitioners: Applicants must show that, in the immediate 5 years prior to application, they have been engaged in full-time practice in the practice area by having dedicated a **minimum billable amount of S$500,000 or 600 billable hours** a year to the said area of practice.

4.19 In-house counsel: Applicants must show that, in the immediate 5 years prior to application, they have been engaged in full-time legal work in the said practice area.

4.20 Legal practitioners: Applicants must have, in the immediate 5 years prior to application, been involved in a trial or arbitration as lead counsel, arbitrator, and/or performed front-end work which can include but is not limited to detailed review, drafting and preparation of contracts.

4.21 Applicants are expected to have undertaken work that deals with more complex issues.

4.22 **Continuing professional development (CPD).** In the immediate 5 years prior to application, applicants must have accumulated at least **6 public and/or private CPD points** a year in this specialisation.

4.23 **References.** Applicants shall be required to submit two favourable reference statements from legal practitioners, in-house counsel or arbitrators who can attest to the applicants' involvement and competence in the specialisation, and character.

4.24 Legal practitioner and in-house counsel referees must have more than 10 years' PQE and have known the applicants for at least 5 years immediately prior to application.

4.25 Legal practitioner applicants: In-house counsel referees must have been advised by the applicants in the immediate 5 years prior to application.

4.26 Arbitrator referees must have arbitrated matters in the practice area before whom the applicants have appeared.

4.27 **Selection panel interview.** Candidates are required to undergo a selection panel interview.

5. Post-qualification Experience

5.1 Legal practitioner applicants: Applicants who, in the 3 or 5 years prior to application, supervised a team of practitioners in handling matters or files may fall short of the benchmark set by the criteria. In deciding if the applicant meets the criteria, the following will be considered, besides the nature and complexity of the matters handled:

a. The number of legal practitioners in the team that worked directly under the applicant on each matter or file.

b. The post-qualification experience (PQE) of the members of that team.

c. The overall billable amount/hours for each matter or file and the proportion of the amount/hours that can be attributed to the applicant.

5.2 The following work may also be included when calculating the billable amount/hours:

a. Work done in relation to originating summons applications.

b. Pro bono work.

6. Continuing Professional Development

6.1 Applicants must show that they have kept abreast of legal developments in the practice area for which they are seeking specialist accreditation by accumulating public and/or private CPD points.

6.2 Other than participating in Singapore Institute of Legal Education (SILE)-accredited programmes, the CPD criteria can be met by participating in other non-SILE accredited activities (local and overseas) including, but not limited to, attending, teaching, guest lecturing or being on a discussion panel in a course, seminar or conference, conducting in-house seminars, authoring, contributing and/or editing publications and post-graduate degree studies at a reputable institution in the said practice area.

6.3 The following activities will be considered by the panel on a case-by-case basis. They must include a component of the practice area:

a. Seminars and conferences on arbitration and ADR

b. Presentations to clients

6.4 Applicants are advised to provide as much information as possible with their applications:

a. Programme details including topics covered and the course tutors and presenters

b. For presentations to clients, presentation slides and materials prepared by the applicant

6.5 To assist them in calculating the required 6 public and/or private CPD points, the following table provides an inexhaustive list of activities and their respective points.

6.6 For the full list of public and private CPD activities and points that can be included in the application, please refer to the Singapore Institute of Legal Education Continuing Professional Development Scheme Guide.

6.7 Activities must relate to the practice area for which accreditation is sought.

Activity	Points
Attending a conference, lecture, seminar, course or workshop in Singapore, overseas or online asynchronously	1 point per hour
Lecturing or participating as a panellist at a conference, lecture, seminar, course or workshop including in-house	3 points per hour
Teaching or contributing in various roles in the preparatory course for the Singapore Bar examinations Parts A and B, Foreign Practitioner Examination (FPE)	• Subject Coordinator or Deputy Subject Coordinator – 8 points per session • Tutor/Facilitator – 2 points per practice session, seminar, workshop or class conducted • Instructional Designer – 2 points for developing teaching materials for each practice session, workshop or class • Lecturer – 1 point per 0.5 hour • External Examiner – 2 points per examination session • FPE: Chief/Principal Examiner – 8 points per session
Attending an in-house seminar	1 point per hour

Reviewing a multimedia, Internet-based, audio-visual, audio or video structured programme or material	1 point per hour (minimum programme length of 20 minutes)
Writing an article relating to that is published in an approved publication (as defined by Guidelines on the SILE Continuing Professional Development Scheme)	1 point for the first 1,000 words; 0.5 point for every subsequent block of 500 words
Serving as a member of any committee, subcommittee, working party or advisory panel of Law Society of Singapore, SAL or legal professional body for at least four months	Maximum 2 points per year for all committees served
Presentations to clients	3 points per hour

7. Professional Conduct

7.1. Applicants must declare if, throughout their professional legal career, they have been:

a. subject to proceedings, due process or sanctions for professional misconduct by the Law Society, the Disciplinary Tribunal or any authorised disciplinary authority such as a court of law, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act (Cap 161), Legal Profession (Disciplinary Tribunal) Rules (Cap 161, R 2) or Legal Profession (Inadequate Professional Services Complaint Inquiry) Rules, or any proceedings, due process or sanctions for any professional misconduct that may bring the profession and the Scheme into disrepute, or

b. charged and convicted for committing or abetting to commit a criminal offence, implying a defect of character which makes them unfit for their profession.

7.2. Applicants must also inform the SAL if, at any time during the application process or thereafter, proceedings have been instituted against them for professional misconduct or commission or abetment to commit a criminal offence.

7.3. The SAL may make enquires of the Disciplinary Tribunal as to any findings of misconduct or unsatisfactory conduct concerning the applicants.

7.4. The SAL may decline to accept an application on the grounds stated in **paragraphs 7.1** and **7.2.**

8. References – Considerations

8.1. Applicants must provide reference statements attesting to their competency in the practice area.

8.2. Referees may be legal practitioners and in-house counsel involved in the practice area, who can attest to the applicants' involvement and competence in the said practice area.

8.3. Referees may also be arbitrators before whom the applicants have appeared in arbitration proceedings.

8.4. At least one referee must be a legal practitioner.

8.5. Referees cannot be relatives of the applicants, judges of the Supreme and State Courts of Singapore, personnel of the same law practice or employer as the applicants, and selection panel.

8.6. Applicants applying for the same specialist accreditation in the same year cannot serve as referees, unless it is the first run of the specialist accreditation scheme for the practice area in question.

8.7. Applicants cannot provide references for each other.

8.8. Applicants must inform their referees that they have the option of submitting **confidential reference statements** directly to the SAL.

9. Examinations

9.1. Candidates who have applied to be Accredited Specialists must sit for an examination.

9.2. Candidates should refer to the information guide for the practice area for information on the examination topics.

9.3. The overall pass mark is 60%. If the examination has more than one part, candidates must pass all parts (at least 50%) and attain the overall pass mark before they are considered to have passed the examination.

10. Selection Panel Interviews

10.1 Candidates who have applied to be Accredited Specialists and Senior Accredited Specialists must attend a Selection Panel interview.

10.2 The interview will be conducted by a panel of three assessors who are involved in the practice area.

10.3 It will last between 15 to 30 minutes.

10.4 The interview may revolve around the following:

a. the candidates' legal practice as detailed in the application form
b. the candidates' knowledge of the law and practice including, but not limited to, theoretical principles and concepts, practical applications, and procedures and methodology
c. the candidates' examination scripts (for Accredited Specialist candidates)

10.5 The Selection Panel will assess the candidates' ability to:

a. engage the panel in a constructive dialogue through clarity of thought and expression
b. use their knowledge of the law and practice in this dialogue to demonstrate their understanding of the legal developments and issues surrounding the area of practice

10.6 The interview may be conducted in-person or online and will be voice and/or video recorded.

11 Exemptions

11.1 **Substantial involvement**. Applicants who cannot meet this criterion due to a leave of absence may apply for an exemption so long as they can demonstrate:

a. for the Accredited Specialist tier, not less than 3 years of substantial involvement in the practice area within the immediate 5 years prior to application

b. for the Senior Accredited Specialist tier, not less than 5 years of substantial involvement in the practice area within the immediate 7 years prior to application.

11.2 **Continuing professional development (CPD)**. Applicants must fulfil the CPD requirement even if they have been on a leave of absence within the relevant years prior to application, unless they were physically unable to do so due to illness or accident, in which case CPD activities in the immediate 5 (Accredited Specialist tier) or 7 (Senior Accredited Specialist tier) years prior to application shall be assessed.

11.3 **Examinations**. Candidates may be exempted from sitting the examination if in the immediate 3 years prior to application, they successfully completed full-time post-graduate studies, for example, an LLM, in the practice area.

11.4 The SAL shall consider the educational institution from which the post-graduate qualification was conferred, the syllabus if the post-graduate studies was a taught course, theses or dissertations written in conjunction with the post-graduate studies and academic transcripts.

11.5 The SAL will have the discretion to approve or reject applications for exemptions. All decisions will be final.

12 Assessment and Accreditation of Candidates

12.1 The Selection Panel will review all applications received.

12.2 Applicants that the Selection Panel considers as having met criteria a. to g. set out in paragraph 4.2 may be considered for candidature.

12.3 Candidates who have applied to be an Accredited Specialist will be required to sit for an open-book examination.

12.4 Candidates who pass the examination will undergo a Selection Panel interview. Candidates who have applied to be a Senior Accredited Specialist will also be interviewed.

12.5 Candidates who do not perform satisfactorily in either the examination or the panel interview will not be accredited.

12.6 The SAB, on the advice of the selection panel, will determine if a candidate should be accredited.

12.7 Successful candidates will be accredited the following designations, for example:

Acc. Spec. ([Practice Area]), Singapore Academy of Law

or

Snr. Acc. Spec. ([Practice Area]), Singapore Academy of Law

12.8 The SAL's decision to confirm or deny candidature, or award or deny specialist accreditation, is final and is not required to provide reasons for the said decision.

12.9 There is no right of appeal against a decision not to confirm candidature or accredit a candidate.

13 Fees

13.1 All fees are to be paid via SAL's payment gateway.

13.2 **Application fee.** Applications should be accompanied by the payment of a one-time application fee of:

a. Accredited Specialist: S$430 including GST

b. Senior Accredited Specialist: S$1,080 including GST

13.3 All applications must be accompanied by the payment confirmation email or invoice payment receipt.

13.4 **Examination fee.** The examination fee is S$430 including GST.

13.5 Registration for the examination is open after confirmation of candidature.

13.6 The examination fee must be paid at least 7 days prior to the examination date.

13.7 Non-payment of the examination fee by the deadline assumes that the candidate does not wish to sit for the examination and thus withdraws their candidature.

13.8 The **fee schedule** is as follows (fees are in Singapore dollars and inclusive of GST):

Service	Accredited Specialist	Senior Accredited Specialist
Application	S$430	S$1,080
Examination	S$430	-

*Registration fee may vary by practice area.

13.9 The SAL will consider late payments at its discretion.

14 Refunds

14.1 **Application fee**. Applications may be withdrawn at any stage during the assessment process. Refunds are available only if the application is withdrawn before candidature is confirmed or if candidature is denied. No refunds are available thereafter.

14.2 **Examination fee.** If candidates wish to withdraw from sitting for the examination before the closing date, they may seek a partial refund of the examination fee. There will be no refund after the closing date.

14.3 The current refund schedule is as follows (refunds are in Singapore dollars and inclusive of GST):

Service	Accredited Specialist	Senior Accredited Specialist
Application	S$324	S$756
Examination	S$324	-

15 Timelines

15.1 Timelines are generally as follows:

Date	Event
Opening of Legal Year	Accredited Specialist applications open
31 March*	Accredited Specialist applications close 5pm
30 April	Accredited Specialist candidature confirmed
2 May	Exam registration opens
1 July	Senior Accredited Specialist applications open
One week prior to examination date	Exam registration closes
August/September	Examination
31 August*	Senior Accredited Specialist applications close 5pm
30 September	Senior Accredited Specialist candidature confirmed
October/November	Selection panel interview
Opening of Legal Year the following year	Results released to all candidates

*If the date falls on a public holiday or over a weekend, the deadline for submission will be the next working day.