



The Solicitor's Qualifying Examination (SQE)

The Solicitors Regulation Authority (the SRA) has introduced, with effect from September 2021, a new route to qualify as a solicitor. This is known as the Solicitor's Qualifying Examination (SQE).

Requirements

Candidates must: -

- (a) Complete both stages of an assessment, SQE 1 and SQE 2.
- (b) Complete a degree level qualification or equivalent.
- (c) Complete 2 years of qualifying work experience (QWE).
- (d) Satisfy the Solicitors Regulation Authority's character and suitability requirements.

SQE 1

This consists of 2 exams of 180 questions. It tests legal knowledge through multiple choice questions. It is anticipated that students will take the SQE slightly after they have completed their academic education (i.e. degree).

SQE2

This is a single assessment for candidates. It consists of 15-18 exercises which sample across all skills and practice areas. This will test candidates legal skills through written and oral simulations of the tasks a newly qualified solicitors might be required to undertake in practice, across 5 following practice areas: -

- (a) Criminal litigation.
- (b) Dispute resolution/civil litigation.
- (c) Property practice.
- (d) Wills and intestacy, probate administration and practice.
- (e) Business organisations, rules and procedures.

It is anticipated that the SQE 2 will be completed near the end of the candidates qualifying work experience. The QWE replaces the previous training contract. Some employers may want their employees to complete the SQE at an earlier point in their training, however. There is no specific order for the elements that are invoiced with qualification, except that the SQE 1 must be passed before sitting the SQE 2.



Degree Level Qualification or Equivalent

To become a solicitor, candidates must hold a degree level qualification or an equivalent. For example: -

- (a) A level 6 Apprenticeship .
- (b) A level 6 CILEx Qualification.

The degree level qualification does not have to be in law. However, if a non-law degree is obtained then candidates will need an education of some kind in law in order to be able to pass the SQE assessments. It is anticipated that some universities will incorporate training for the SQE 1 assessments into their law degree or Masters law programmes. In addition, it is thought that many current providers of legal education will offer courses which prepare candidates for the SQE 1 and SQE 2 assessments.

Two Years of Qualifying Work Experience

All candidates will need to complete at least 2 years full time (or equivalent) qualifying work experience (QWE).

The QWE aims to have a more flexible approach than the previous training contract programme. The QWE will give candidates the opportunity to: -

- (a) Interact with clients
- (b) See how solicitors work in practice.
- (c) Consider ethical challenges.
- (d) Develop competencies set out in the statement of solicitor competence.

There is no longer a requirement that there should be both contentious (e.g. litigation) and non-contentious work (e.g. conveyancing) carried out. Nor is there any longer a requirement to have worked in a specific number of legal areas.

Confirmation that a candidate has undertaken QWE will need to be provided by the relevant organisation that it was completed with, (e.g. a solicitor's firm). The QWE is not assessed by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. The SQE assessments will determine whether a candidate meets the required standard for entry into the profession.

Organisations where QWE can be carried out

QWE can be done at a maximum of 4 separate organisations, including: -

- (a) Law firms.
- (b) Legal clinics in academic institutions.
- (c) Law Centres.
- (d) Other appropriate organisations.



There is no minimum length for each time spent at a placement.

Trainee solicitors in the past tended to gain experience as a trainee solicitor in one block directly before qualifying as a solicitor. However, there is no obligation to complete the QWE in one block. A candidate can gain experience as they progress through their education. For example, including summer work placements or work as a paralegal, so long as it is signed off.

Cost

As at October 2022, the cost of the QWE assessments is broken down as follows: -

SQE 1 - £1,558 increasing to £1,622 for assessments from January 2023.

SQE 2 - £2,493.

The costs of the SQE assessments is much more affordable than the fees for the previous Legal Practice Course. However, it is likely that you would need to complete a postgraduate course to assist you in passing the SQEs at an additional cost.

As this is a very newly introduced method of qualifying as a solicitor, I would advise that you regularly check the position. Information can be obtained at www.lawsociety.org.uk/career-advice.

The University of Law is one course provider for degrees in law and post graduate courses. More information about SQEs can be found at www.law.ac.uk.