

Solicitors Qualifying Examination

What is the SQE?

The Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) is a centralised assessment for anyone who wants to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales. It will provide a fair and consistent assessment for all candidates regardless of whether they have taken a law degree or qualified through new routes like the solicitor apprenticeship.

Why are we introducing the SQE?

We are introducing the new system so there will be a consistent assessment for all. This will be fairer for students and give the public confidence that their solicitor is competent.

The SQE will offer new opportunities - it should help law firms get access to the best talent; help the best education providers excel; and help the best candidates, from all backgrounds, succeed.

When will the SQE be introduced?

We are working towards an introduction date of 2020. SQE will not be introduced before 2020. We will not introduce it until it is thoroughly tested and it is possible this may mean introducing it in 2021, instead of 2020. We aim to announce the implementation date before the end of 2018.

What if I have already started a law degree?

If you have already started your law degree, or will do so before the SQE is introduced, you will be able to finish and qualify under the current system or qualify under the new SQE system. If you fall into this group, you will have until at least 2031 to qualify under the old system.

What if I have started a non-law degree?

If you are a non-law graduate looking to start a Common Professional Assessment (CPE), also known as the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), in autumn 2018 or 2019 on a full-time basis and wish to qualify as soon as possible, you can do so under the current system. To do this you will take the CPE/GDL in academic year 2018-19 or 2019-20 and then the Legal Practice Course (LPC) in academic year 2019-20 or 2020-21, to be followed by a two period of recognised training, often called a training contract.

It would also be open to you, if you wished, to qualify by taking the SQE.

But if you start your non-law degree in or after academic year 2017-18, you are likely to have to take the SQE and qualify under the new system, if it is introduced in 2020. This is because the CPE/GDL will no longer count towards qualification in the new system once the SQE has been introduced. Instead, universities and training providers will introduce new SQE preparation courses for non-law graduates.

If the introduction of the SQE is moved to 2021, all these dates will be moved back a year.

What will I need to do to qualify after the SQE is introduced?

You will need to:

- Have a degree or equivalent qualification (for example, a solicitor apprenticeship).
- Pass the two stages of the SQE.
- Have at least two years Qualifying Work Experience in the delivery of legal services.

- Meet our character and suitability requirements to become a solicitor.

How much will the new system cost?

There will be the cost for sitting the SQE assessments and the cost of any training courses for the SQE.

Information about the cost of the SQE assessments is not yet available because we have not decided exactly what the final examinations will look like.

If SQE training is included as part of a degree, then there will be no additional charge for that training. But there is likely to be an additional charge for the SQE assessments.

SQE training courses which are not part of a degree will be available by the time the SQE is introduced. But because they have not yet been launched, we don't yet know how much this type of SQE training will cost.

Should I do an LPC now or wait for the SQE?

Here are some pros and cons of the current system versus the new:

- 1. Current system of qualification: QLD/CPE, followed by a LPC and training contract**
 - If you get the offer of a training contract, particularly if the LPC is funded by the law firm, you should probably take it because you would know that you could qualify through this system.
 - If you take the LPC, without the offer of a training contract, you would have to pay for the LPC yourself and you risk not being able to qualify through the current system if you don't then go on to get a training contract.
- 2. New SQE system of qualification:**
 - You would avoid the LPC costs but remember there will be some cost for sitting the SQE assessments and any training courses for the SQE. However, we expect this to cost less overall than taking the LPC (which can cost over £16,000).
 - Through Qualifying Work Experience, we will allow a wider range of experience in the delivery of legal services to count towards qualification. It could include time spent on placement during your law degree, time spent in a student law clinic, or time spent working as a paralegal, as well as a traditional two-year training contract. But, you can only count experience gained in a maximum of four different organisations and your experience must give you the opportunity to develop the competences needed to practise as a solicitor.
 - So, if you do not manage to secure a training contract by the time you graduate with a law degree, the SQE may be a better route for you. It is potentially cheaper, as you won't have to take the LPC, and it gives you more flexibility to gain relevant work experience.

But you should find out what approach prospective employers are taking towards recruitment, training, Qualifying Work Experience and funding before making any decisions.

Where can I get more information?

You should talk to your target universities and law firms about the plans they are making for the SQE. You may wish to ask them:

Universities

- How will you help your students prepare for the SQE?
- Are you changing your law courses? If so, how? When will it happen?

- Will your students have to take an additional SQE training course after they have completed their law degree with you or is SQE training included as part of the law degree?
- Do you have a student law clinic?
- Do you work with law firms?
- Are you planning to offer SQE training courses for non-law graduates, to replace the current GDL/CPE?

Law firms

- For the period of time when there is a choice of qualification systems, would you prefer me to have the LPC or the SQE?
- Will you pay for me to take the LPC?
- Once the SQE has been introduced:
 - Are you planning to change how and when you recruit trainee solicitors?
 - Will you support paralegal staff to qualify as a solicitor?
 - Are you planning to change your approach to training? Will you still require/offer a traditional two-year training contract? Will you take account of experience candidates may have gained during their degree or in other job roles?
 - Will you expect me to have passed SQE stage 1 before I start work as a trainee solicitor?
 - Will you pay for the SQE assessments and/or SQE training?

We already provide information about how to qualify in the future and more will be coming shortly. Take a look at our website - www.sra.org.uk/sqe