

News release

Year two review of SQE shows continued improvements

10 April 2024

The latest reports reviewing the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) have shown it continues to perform well and there can be confidence in this rigorous assessment.

The SQE Independent Reviewer [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/sqe-independent-22-23/>] concluded that the delivery of the assessment had overall gone well, had improved year on year and the assessments were fair and reliable. He recognised that there had been some operational issues, but Kaplan had been proactive in dealing with issues when they arose and considered the impact on candidates.

Key findings from Kaplan's own report included [<https://sqe.sra.org.uk/docs/default-source/pdfs/reports/sqe-annual-report-2022-23.pdf>] :

- The overall pass rates for SQE1 was 51% (January sitting) and 53% (July) – broadly in line with last year's results, with higher pass rates for candidates sitting for the first time.
- The overall pass rate for SQE2 was 75%. Pass rates were higher for those who had previously sat SQE1 (88%) than for those who had not (66%).
- Apprentices continued to perform comparatively well across both assessments, especially in terms of SQE2 which tests legal skills as well as knowledge. 97% passed SQE2 in April 2023, compared to 75% of non-apprentice candidates.
- Candidates with higher university degree classifications were more likely to perform better in the assessments.

Paul Philip, SRA Chief Executive: 'It's good to see that once again the reports and analyses, including from the independent reviewer, provide assurances that the SQE is a robust, fair and valid assessment. As numbers taking the SQE route continue to increase we, and the public and wider profession, can have confidence that newly qualified solicitors meet the high standards that we all expect of them.'

While the reports found no evidence of bias in the SQE assessments, pass rate data continues to highlight differences in performance between ethnic groups. White and mixed/multiple ethnicity candidates generally performed better than Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British candidates.

This trend reflects a long-standing and widespread feature in examinations in the legal and other sectors. We are due to publish research from the University of Exeter later this year which looks at the complex factors that might contribute to these differing performances.

Alongside the assessment reports [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/sqe-qa-report-22-23/>] , we have also published a report into qualifying work experience (QWE) [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/qualifying-work-experience-survey-findings/>] , based on feedback from both aspiring solicitors and those who employ them. Key findings from this feedback included:

- QWE is, overall, easy to secure, with just over 5,000 QWE confirmations recorded with the SRA by November 2023.
- Approximately 90% of candidates who had completed some QWE said they were very satisfied or satisfied with it.
- 70% of organisations said their QWE offer allows candidates to develop a broad range of the competencies needed to become a solicitor.

SQE Fees

While publishing the annual reports we have also announced that fees for the SQE are set to increase by 5% from September 2024.

Our contract with our assessment provider Kaplan allows for an annual inflation-linked increase in fees. The new fee also includes an additional charge towards the costs of providing for candidates to sit the SQE in Welsh if they wish.

The fees for 2024/25 will be:

- SQE1: £1,888 (£1,798 previously)
- SQE2: £2,902 (£2,766 previously)