

Response to feedback in the SQE2 results workshop

16 November 2022

Our response to queries and feedback raised in the SQE2 results workshop with education and training providers that followed the webinar.

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The assessments

Issue

Some candidates did not know they could copy and paste sections until they found out themselves.

Response

There is guidance on this in the pre-assessment tutorial on the day of the assessment. We have provided [further guidance on the copy and paste functionality](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/assessment-information/sqa2-sample-questions/sqa2-copy-and-paste-functionality) [https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/assessment-information/sqa2-sample-questions/sqa2-copy-and-paste-functionality] and in the assessment answer templates. We also wrote to all candidates sitting SQE2 in October 2022 telling them about this guidance and will continue to do so before each SQE2 assessment.

Issue

One provider had received back from a candidate that when taking legal research materials exercises there were around ten different tabs to navigate at the same time. They suggested it would be better if they were printed.

Response

The assessments are designed to be taken online using the Pearson VUE assessment platform. Providing printed material for assessment is not practical given that SQE2 is taken at test centres across the UK and internationally. This also helps maintain the security of the questions and materials.

Issue

One provider asked whether model answers would be made available?

Response

Model answers are on our website. We provide a range of sample questions to help candidates prepare for SQE2. The sample questions can also help providers plan SQE training. We provide a discussion of the answer for each question, with two sample answers provided. Please see the [SQE2 sample questions \[https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/assessment-information/sqe2-sample-questions\]](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/assessment-information/sqe2-sample-questions).

Issue

Candidates asked why spell check is disabled given that this does not represent modern working practices.

Response

The Pearson Vue platform does not have a spell check function. The assessment criteria for the SQE2 written assessments refer to clear, precise, concise and acceptable language rather than correct spelling. Guidance on this is provided in the [SQE2 assessment specification \[https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/assessment-information/sqe2-assessment-specification\]](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/assessment-information/sqe2-assessment-specification). Minor spelling mistakes are not penalised per se and the focus is on the assessment criteria mentioned and how spelling mistakes impact that. Performance in each of the assessment criteria is assessed by trained assessors making global professional judgments related to the required standard for the assessment. We believe this is an inclusive approach for those with dyslexia and similar specific learning difficulties and those for whom English is not a first language. It also ensures parity between the English and Welsh language assessments.

Issue

One provider reported that candidates were surprised that oral assessments had taken place in hotel rooms

Response

Some SQE2 venues are hotels and they have been chosen because they have the infrastructure to host the assessments. We configure rooms and venues to meet the requirements for the assessment. We do state that assessments take place in hotels and we will add further guidance on the website to highlight this to candidates.

Timing of the assessments

Issue

Providers suggested looking at the timings of the SQE2 assessments. Candidates reported that:

- attending assessment centres for two days for oral assessments with very few breaks in between was difficult
- the written skills assessments were a challenging experience and they would have liked to have had that staggered, with some gaps between the assessment days.

Response

The SQE is a rigorous professional assessment. We try to timetable assessments to balance breaks during an assessment day with not keeping candidates at an assessment centre longer than is necessary.

Currently, SQE2 written assessments take place on three consecutive days. If we were to stagger these further, with some gaps between the assessment days, it would lengthen the assessment window. We understand from stakeholders that to lengthen the window could impact existing training course structures. It will also impact on the current timetable for release of results, which could ultimately lead to results being released later. Stakeholders have told us that this would not be welcome.

We will continue to keep this under review.

Technical issues

Issue

One provider had feedback that computer issues had caused a delay of about an hour and a half and unwanted stress.

Response

We continue to work with Pearson VUE, our test centre network provider, regarding issues raised by candidates. Technical issues do occasionally arise but Pearson VUE try to resolve them as quickly as possible. All reported issues are investigated to establish what happened and how we can improve. Candidates can also use the mitigating circumstances [PROCESS \[https://sqa.sra.org.uk/policies/mitigating-circumstances-policy\]](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/policies/mitigating-circumstances-policy) if something has happened that they believe has had an impact on their performance during an assessment.

Results

Issue

Some candidates did not understand why they received zero marks for some questions.

Response

We provided an explanation in the recent [webinar \[https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe2-feedback-first-assessment/\]](https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe2-feedback-first-assessment/) on SQE2. We are also working on further materials for the website to help candidates understand their marks better. These will be available on the website before the next SQE2 results are released.

Pearson VUE test centres

Issue

Candidates raised a range of concerns about Pearson VUE test centres including:

- hardware/equipment feeling outdated
- centres feeling old
- staff in some centres not having enough knowledge. Some staff were:
 - not always clear what they should be doing
 - unable to provide any guidance to candidates on start times
 - not able to deal with candidates who had issues with hardware
 - on telephones trying to sort issues whilst other students were taking the assessment.

Response

We follow up with Pearson VUE on issues that are reported or provided to us by candidates. Thanks to this feedback we have been liaising with Pearson VUE to provide them with clarity on some of the issues raised so that they can improve the service. We provide the test centres with clear instructions on the issues above, but we have reinforced this and highlighted the importance to Pearson VUE.

For the areas that have been identified to us, we have investigated and asked Pearson VUE to implement further training of their assessment centre teams. We encourage all candidates to continue to raise issues on the day with Pearson VUE staff. Candidates can also provide feedback on this and any aspect of the assessment either by contacting our [candidate services team \[https://sqa.sra.org.uk/help#candidate\]](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/help#candidate) or through their candidate feedback survey.

Timing of assessment windows

Issue

Providers said they were concerned about candidates being able to progress from SQE1 to the next SQE2.

Response

The timetabling of the SQE from January 2023 onwards does allow for this progression. Results will now be released in time for candidates to book on to the next sitting of SQE2.

We have plans for the release of SQE2 spaces to allow candidates that are waiting for SQE1 results because they have just taken it an opportunity to book, subject to availability.

We will organise more meetings with training providers to discuss this topic of progression further.

Availability of assessments

Issue

Providers reported that they expect a significant increase in candidates wanting to take SQE assessments in 2024. They were concerned that there will not be capacity for the increase.

Response

We continue to work on capacity planning and are preparing for this potential increase in demand. We will also continue working with training providers to get their insight on anticipated demand. We cannot however guarantee a space for every candidate that wants to take an assessment each time as seats are naturally limited. We work closely with Pearson VUE to source seats and we'll try to do this during a booking window where possible.

Issue

Providers reported concerns that candidates on shorter preparatory courses may not be able to secure the most appropriate sitting.

Response

The SQE timetable is now established, with quarterly sittings of SQE2 from April 2023. The dates are also [published \[https://sqa.sra.org.uk/about-sqa/what-is-the-sqa/timings\]](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/about-sqa/what-is-the-sqa/timings) so that candidates can plan appropriately but noting that spaces are subject to availability.

Issue

One provider raised concerns with capacity in areas such as Hong Kong and seats being sold out quickly.

Response

During the booking window for the January 2023 SQE1, some assessment locations proved to be very popular, such as Hong Kong, Singapore and London. We continue to liaise with Pearson VUE in an attempt to provide greater capacity in these areas.

Recently during the booking window for the January 2023 SQE1 Pearson VUE were able to add more capacity, in particular for the London area.

Booking process

Issue

Providers reported concerns about waiting times for bookings.

Response

We use a queuing system to allow for fair access to the booking process should a large number of candidates want to access their accounts when the window opens. If this facility is used, the waiting page indicates a candidate's estimated waiting time. [Find out more about this \[https://sqa.sra.org.uk/registering-and-booking/booking-assessments\]](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/registering-and-booking/booking-assessments)

We understand that this is not ideal and that candidates do not have a lot of time to spend waiting in a virtual queue. However, the queuing tool does allow candidates to navigate away from the waiting page and not lose their place.

Issue

One provider raised concerns about reasonable adjustment arrangements causing a delay in candidates being able to book.

Response

We recognise the importance for candidates to have a clear and timely agreement on what reasonable adjustments will be put in place. We aim to agree the position as quickly as possible on receipt of an application and all the information in support of the application. The time it takes us to process a request for reasonable adjustment will depend on the nature and complexity of the request. As well as the supporting information and evidence candidates provide.

In most cases the reasonable adjustment requested will be straightforward to put in place. For example, the average time from receipt of all the candidate's information to us making a reasonable adjustment plan proposal was six working days for the October 2022 SQE2. In some cases, we may need to ask for clarification or further evidence and so this process can take longer.

Delays can occur from our test centre provider to locate the suitable test centre and we are working with Pearson VUE to reduce the amount of time taken for this.

We encourage all candidates that require reasonable adjustment to apply as early as possible, and ideally before the relevant booking window opens. This is so that we can agree the reasonable adjustment plan with the candidate and locate a suitable test centre that can accommodate the requirements. There is no fee for making such an application.

The candidate's plan could also be discussed with their training provider to see if similar provision could be replicated in their training course, mock assessments etc.

[Data on candidate pass marks and provider pass rates](#)

Issue

One provider reported that they provide niche training in one area. Would this type of provider appear in the provider data that is published in the future?

Response

Candidates confirm their primary SQE1 and SQE2 training provider when completing the monitoring and diversity survey. We intend to publish which, if any, provider a candidate trained with subject to General Data Protection Regulations. We recognise that organisations offer different provision, and we will clearly explain this in any data we publish. We will work with providers to help us contextualise data.

Issue

Providers were concerned that data will not be verified with the providers before publication

Response

We have amended the monitoring and diversity survey to improve the quality and accuracy of data provided by a candidate. We are exploring what else we can do to improve accuracy including the possibility of

verifying data with providers before publication. We will continue to engage with providers on this issue.

Issue

Providers were concerned that the data we publish might cause them reputational damage, particularly if it does not align with the data they had collected. They suggested that the candidate results should be sent directly to providers.

Response

We contact each provider with more than 100 candidates to tell them if their candidates' average pass rate was above, in line with or below the assessment pass rate.

We also tell all providers the number of candidates that told us they trained with them.

We are exploring what else we can do to improve accuracy of the data including the possibility of verifying data with providers before publication. We will continue to engage with providers on this issue

Issue

Providers suggested that it would be useful for the SRA to publish data from candidates who had not undertaken any training.

Response

A candidate tells us about any training when they complete the monitoring and diversity survey. We are exploring what data we will publish and will consider this issue.