

News release

Apprentices perform well on new solicitors' exam

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As part of National Apprenticeship Week, we have announced that apprentices are outperforming other candidates seeking to qualify as solicitors.

In the first year (September 2021 – August 2022), more than 100 apprentices took the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) across three assessment sittings. Apprentice pass rates were on average 26% higher than the overall pass rate. Across SQE1 and SQE2 apprentices gained marks that were on average 8% higher than other candidates.

The results suggest that the mix of classroom and practical workplace learning is preparing apprentices well for the SQE. However, we did caution that sample sizes are limited at this stage, and we will be able to draw firmer conclusions in the coming years when many more candidates and apprentices have taken the SQE.

So far 21 apprentices have qualified as solicitors since the SQE was introduced in September 2021 and there are more than 1,300 solicitor apprentices going through the programme in England.

This pathway, created in 2015, provides an alternative to the traditional qualification route through university and offers aspiring solicitors in England the chance to 'earn as they learn', while their training and exam costs are covered. Typically, it takes five to six years to complete. All apprentices must pass the SQE assessment to qualify. Last June also saw the introduction of a legal apprenticeship framework up to Level 5 in Wales.

Employers also benefit as up to 95% of the costs of the training can be covered through the apprenticeship levy fund.

Paul Philip, SRA Chief Executive, said: 'Apprenticeships are a great way to encourage more talented people from all backgrounds to become solicitors. They are an attractive option for those who want a more affordable way into the profession, and who want to gain early experience of legal practice. It can also be a good option for employers looking to recruit and shape new talent.

'The SQE provides assurance that all qualifying solicitors have been assessed to the same standard. It is early days for this pathway, but the initial signs are positive. The mix of learning and 'on the job' experience

is helping apprentices gain the skills and knowledge they need to be a solicitor.'

Jennifer Coupland, chief executive of government apprenticeships agency IfATE, said: 'It is fantastic to see that solicitor apprentices are performing so well. Solicitor apprenticeships are a prime example of how we are opening out professions to a much broader mix of people, and studies show that it's really good for business to have a diverse workforce that reflects the true mix of our nation's population.'

'These high performing apprentices are proving that this isn't just token sentiment. Solicitor apprentices are leading the way with results and as trailblazers for many more people from all walks of life to enter this vital profession.'

Holly Moore, Legal Advisor, ITV and one of the first to qualify through an apprenticeship, said: 'I chose an apprenticeship as it allowed me to qualify with six years of work experience already. I also obtained my law degree and SQE, all without any university debt! It's also not only helped me to develop professionally and personally - I feel much further ahead than I would have had I taken the traditional route.'

'Apprenticeships also make the profession more accessible and diverse. They encourage students like me, first-generation and from non-traditional backgrounds, to enter the legal industry.'

We and Kaplan will be publishing more detailed data around candidates' performance in the SQE in its first annual report this spring.