

SQE information strategy - implementation, opportunities and evaluation

Updated 11 February 2021

About this strategy

The Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) is a single, rigorous assessment for all aspiring solicitors. It will be introduced on 1 September 2021.

This document summarises our approach to publishing information on the SQE, including information about the content of the assessments, to support people to see and understand what the new qualification process means, the opportunities the SQE presents, and its impact.

It also summarises the key information we:

- have published so far
- will publish before September 2021
- will share once the assessment has gone live, including data and analysis.

We have already undertaken extensive engagement to explain our proposed approach to sharing information, find out what further information people want and help them understand the new assessment. This strategy brings this information together in one place. This should help provide clarity around our approach so stakeholders can see what information will be available when.

Our information strategy does not cover the information we published as part of the extensive engagement we carried out developing the assessment, such as consultations, pilot exercise results, and draft documents. It focuses on practical and finalised information ahead of implementation, as well as data and analysis.

Although this is neither a consultation nor a draft, we welcome feedback [[/home/contact-us/](#)] on our approach. We will publish an updated version of our information strategy if we make changes to our approach or the timeline for key deliverables.

What we want to achieve through sharing information

We regulate in the public interest and we are committed to being transparent, accountable, proportionate and targeted, in line with the better regulation principles. We will publish information about the SQE that helps achieve that.

Openness is also crucial in helping build confidence in any new assessment. Transparency can help support and grow confidence in the validity of the SQE assessment. Confidence in the SQE - from the public, employers and international stakeholders - is crucial to its success.

It is important that everyone has access to authoritative and useful information about the new assessment. The SRA, working alongside our assessment provider Kaplan, is best placed to do that.

In its independent report, the Bridge Group [[/globalassets/documents/sra/news/sqe-monitoring-and-](#)

maximising-diversity.pdf?version=4a00fcj concludes that the SQE's success will depend on how the whole sector responds to the change. It emphasises how useful information and data will help people navigate the new training market and assess the opportunities the SQE provides.

We want to make sure that the right information is available to help people and organisations understand the SQE - the implications, practicalities, and opportunities. We want to help:

- aspiring solicitors make informed choices about qualification, training routes and providers, including understanding the support available - from explaining the approach to reasonable adjustments to whether a candidate has a choice to qualify through the current Legal Practice Course (LPC) route or SQE
- legal businesses and employers take advantage of the opportunities to develop staff internally, more flexibility for workplace training, and better information for recruitment.
- universities, training providers and candidates understand the assessment, as well as having access to information that will help them continue to make informed choices once the assessment has been introduced.

We also want the right information to be available to help academics, legal sector commentators and other stakeholders explore and understand the impacts of the SQE.

One of the major benefits of the SQE is that the introduction of a national qualifying exam will enable collection and analysis of a large data set covering all candidates who have sat the same exam. This will provide a sound basis for further analysis. Examples of the data and analysis we will publish are for instance:

- anonymised results data from candidates with information about the training providers they attended
- information on performance of the assessment including key quality indicators
- anonymised candidate results including performance by protected characteristics and socio-economic background.

The benefits of sharing this data and analysis include:

- the potential to do further work to develop a better understanding of diversity issues in the legal sector, particularly in relation to the new training and qualification process and to take measures to promote equality of opportunity and measure their effect
- the potential to stimulate a more competitive training market in which aspiring solicitors have better information to make choices
- the potential to stimulate a recruitment market where employers have better, standardised information to help them recruit talent
- having a sound basis for making informed decisions around the continued development of the SQE, working closely with our stakeholders.

Principles of our approach to publishing information

There are seven principles we will follow in publishing information:

1. Outcomes focused
2. Clear and accessible
3. Fair

4. Tailored to different audiences but available to all
5. Available in Welsh and English where possible
6. Responsive
7. Quality assured, accurate and compliant with data protection requirements

We explain these principles below.

Open all [#]

1. Outcomes focused

Our communications approach is driven by the aims we set out above. We will publish information and data that helps achieve these aims, such as helping people understand the SQE, make informed choices, take advantage of opportunities, and that promotes competition in the training market.

We will monitor the market closely to understand the extent and quality of information available on the SQE. Organisations such as the Law Society, careers advisory services and commercial organisations will provide useful, detailed information (eg on training and funding options, opportunities around recruitment).

We will focus our resource on providing information in areas where we:

- are the appropriate lead authority (eg what the assessment covers, operational processes, qualification rules, data analysis and evaluation)
- get feedback that people want more information
- see there is an information gap or potential confusion in the market.

As the new assessment becomes well established and the information available in the market matures, we would expect to increasingly focus on our work around data, analysis and evaluation of the SQE.

2. Clear and accessible

We will make information as clear and accessible as possible. We will use a range of media to communicate (eg webinars, visuals, text). While recognising some information needs to be detailed, we will aim to provide summaries of core information. Our two websites - the SRA website and new SQE website - will align with government digital accessibility standards.

3. Fair

We want to make sure that everyone has access to all relevant information. That includes making sure that all information about the content of the assessments and the regulatory changes to the qualification process is available to all.

It should be noted that we will still need to have bi-lateral conversations with universities and other organisations. This is important to help us understand how the training and legal services markets are operating. However, we will not be providing information about the assessment through this route.

4. Tailored to different audiences but available to all

It is essential that information about the assessment and changes to the qualification process is made available to all and it will be.

Effective communication means we also need to target and tailor information about the changes to qualification to meet the needs of different audiences. We also need to make sure we use a range of communication channels and methods (eg website, social media,

traditional media, e-newsletters, direct email) to help accurate, helpful information reach a diverse range of target audiences.

We will also engage with key external organisations (such as the Law Society, careers advisory services, online legal commentators, diversity and representative groups) to help achieve this.

5. Available in Welsh and English where possible

SQE1 and SQE2 assessments will be provided in both Welsh and English. The SQE in Welsh will be introduced on a phased basis, leading to full English/Welsh parity by year four of the SQE.

We will make core information on the assessment available in both Welsh and English. This will include documents explaining the SQE such as the assessment specifications and sample questions. It will also include the assessment regulations and policies such as those relating to marking and standard setting, appeals and reasonable adjustments.

We will be publishing these documents on a phased basis, making them available on the SQE website.

6. Responsive

We will continue to engage with stakeholders to make sure we get feedback on the information we publish, regularly reviewing our approach. Ahead of the SQE coming into effect, this will include user-testing for our new SQE website. This will help us assess whether we are meeting our audiences' needs and make improvements if necessary.

7. Quality assured, accurate and compliant with data protection requirements

In terms of the data we publish, we will:

- quality assure data before publication
- comply with the General Data Protection Regulations, including anonymising candidate data and excluding small data sets which could identify individuals
- put in place measures to control how the data is accessed and used in order to reduce the risk of the data being misrepresented.

Types of information we will publish

We have identified six categories of information where we have - or will - publish key information. These are:

1. Details of the SQE assessment and how it will operate
2. SQE regulations and SRA qualification processes
3. Information tailored to particular groups of stakeholders but available to all
4. Assessment data and analysis
5. Data to support candidate choice
6. Analysis and evaluation of the broader impacts of the SQE

Below we set out details of our approach in each area, milestones and the key information we have or will share. This is not, however, a summary of all the engagement we have done or will

do in each of these areas.

Open all [#]

1. Detail of the SQE assessment and how it will operate

We have already published key information about the assessment to help stakeholders prepare for the SQE. For instance, following engagement, we have published the final assessment specifications for SQE 1 and SQE2.

Working with our assessment provider Kaplan, we plan to launch an SQE website by spring 2021. A single authoritative source for candidates, training providers and other stakeholders, it will provide all the relevant details about the SQE assessment and how it will operate.

For instance, it will include details of what the assessment covers and sample questions. The website will also include key policy and procedures, as well as practical information about the assessment logistics. For example, when exam sittings will happen, when bookings will open and close, and how to apply for reasonable adjustments.

We want to continue to give information to stakeholders as far in advance as possible. Therefore, between now and the launch of the SQE website, we will continue to publish key information about the assessment and how it will operate.

What we have published so far:

- SQE assessment regulations [[/sra/policy/solicitors-qualifying-examination/sqe-assessment-regulations/](#)]
- SQE1 assessment specification [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/sqe/sqe1-functioning-legal-knowledge-assessment-specification/>]
- SQE1 sample questions [[/sra/policy/solicitors-qualifying-examination/archive/sqe1-functioning-legal-knowledge-assessment-specification/sample-questions/](#)]
- SQE2 assessment specification [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/sqe/sqe2-assessment-specification/>]
- SQE2 sample questions [[/sra/policy/solicitors-qualifying-examination/archive/sqe2-assessment-specification/sqe2-sample-questions/](#)]
- Key logistical details such as general timings, sittings, fees and approach to resits [<https://sqe.sra.org.uk/registering-and-booking>]
- Details on the registration and booking process for the SQE assessments. This will include:
 - details of the registration and payment process. Candidates will need to first register for an account on the SQE website before they can then book and pay for a place for a specific sitting.
 - booking and payment information for training providers and employers
 - details of what will happen on the day for an SQE1 assessment, including information about candidate ID and verification.
- We have published the SQE Reasonable Adjustments Policy [<https://sqe.sra.org.uk/registering-and-booking/reasonable-adjustments>] and useful Q&As [[/become-solicitor/sqe/qa/](#)].

What we will publish about the assessment ahead of the SQE website launch:

December 2020

- We will publish the specific dates for the first SQE1 sitting. We have already announced this will be in November 2021.

January 2021

- Following the publication of the SQE Assessment Regulations, we will be publishing information about handling complaints and appeals:
 - appeals policy
 - complaints policy
- SQE conflict of interest policy

March 2021

- Marking and standard setting policy

April 2021

- Announcement of specific dates and venues for SQE2 sittings. We have already announced these will be in April 2022. Further dates for subsequent SQE sittings will be announced following further stakeholder engagement.
- Bookings for the first SQE1 sittings will open in the summer. We expect to be able to confirm the specific dates for when booking will open by April.

Launch of the SQE website

Although we will have published most of the core information on the assessment, all the information will be brought together in one place through the SQE website, which is set to be launched in spring 2021. The website will offer the information in an intuitive, user-friendly way.

Additional information that will be available on the SQE website includes:

- Details of what will happen on the day for the SQE2 assessment
- Candidate privacy notice
- GDPR Protection policy
- Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking statement
- SQE candidate terms and conditions

2. SQE regulations and SRA qualification processes

Our rules and regulations bringing the SQE into force have been approved by the SRA Board and LSB and are available on our website. These do not just cover the SQE assessments, but the other three requirements candidates need to meet in order to qualify: a degree or equivalent qualification or experience, qualifying work experience and our character and suitability requirements. These rules sit alongside appropriate guidance and resources where needed.

This category also covers the practical details of what people will need to do to qualify, such as how to submit evidence of qualifying work experience and when they can seek to qualify.

What we have published so far on the SRA website:

- The regulations that bring the SQE into force [[solicitors/standards-regulations/authorisation-individuals-regulations/](#)]
- The principles for admission for Qualified Lawyers [[become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/](#)]

- Common protocol on the academic stage of training [[/become-solicitor/legal-practice-course-route/qualifying-law-degree-common-professional-examination/common-protocol/](#)], as well as guidance on our transitional arrangements [[/become-solicitor/legal-practice-course-route/transitional-arrangements/](#)]
- Our Assessment of Character and Suitability Rules [[/solicitors/standards-regulations/assessment-character-suitability-rules/](#)], alongside useful information about the process [[/become-solicitor/character-and-suitability/](#)]
- Guidance and resources on qualifying work experience for employers [[/become-solicitor/sqe/qualifying-work-experience/qualifying-work-experience-employers/](#)] and trainees [[/become-solicitor/sqe/qualifying-work-experience/qualifying-work-experience-candidates/](#)]

What we will publish ahead of September 2021:

- Further guidance on qualifying work experience (QWE) including good practice and how to maximise the benefits of QWE for trainees and firms. We will also include additional guidance on what solicitors and candidates need to consider in getting their QWE confirmed (December 2020)
- Information for qualified lawyers, including publishing the updated principles for qualified lawyers, the process of how a candidate demonstrates their language competence in English and/or Welsh, the application form and guidance on applying for exemptions (March 2021)
- New SRA qualification processes enabling potential SQE candidates to begin the new process of qualifying. This includes the process for:
 - making an application to get an equivalent to a degree recognised
 - submitting qualifying work experience and
 - qualified lawyers applying for exemptions from some or all of the SQE assessments (March 2021)
- Although the details of the process will be published in March, the processes to be able to submit QWE and applications for exemptions will open in April 2021.
- Updated information on how to:
 - qualify through equivalent means (July 2021)
 - apply for admission once the SQE regulations come into force on 1 September 2021 (August 2021)
 - complete the degree validation process (August 2021)

3. Information tailored to particular groups of stakeholders but available to all

All the information about the SQE assessment and how it will operate will be made available to all through a single, authoritative source - the new SQE website.

All information about the other changes in the qualification process will be made available to all on the SRA website.

We recognise that to help different audiences understand what the changes to the qualification process means for them, we will also need to tailor this information and reproduce it through different channels. For instance, our Career in Law Facebook [<https://www.facebook.com/careerinlaw/>] and Instagram [<https://www.instagram.com/careerinlaw/>] provide targeted information on the changes to the qualification process from the perspective of an aspiring solicitor.

By tailoring and targeting information we aim to help people and organisations make informed choices on the back of the changes to the qualification process.

While we will target information at particular stakeholder groups, it will be available to all.

For instance, we want to make sure:

- potential candidates understand the factors they may want to consider such as options around qualifying work experience, and different routes to qualification including whether they have a choice to qualify under the old Legal Practice Course (LPC) system or the new SQE.
- legal businesses and employers understand the new opportunities the SQE regulations provides, including the potential to develop staff internally, greater flexibility for workplace training and recruitment. It is also important they understand the changes from the current system, such as the removal of the need for a training principal and our expectations in terms of offering good quality qualifying work experience and confirming qualifying work experience.

What we have done so far

We have engaged extensively with thousands of stakeholders in developing and refining the SQE assessment. We have also been regularly engaging with a wide range of individuals and groups - including academics, law firms, training providers, trainees and representative groups - to understand what information they need.

Responding to feedback, we have set up a range of communication channels and resources This includes:

- Facebook Career in Law [<https://www.facebook.com/careerinlaw/>] - developed working with young people, it explains the implications of the SQE for aspiring solicitors. So far it has almost 2,800 followers, enables people to interact with us directly and get their queries answered. It has attracted more than 10,000 engagements.
- SQE Update [</sra/news/sqe-update/>] - a monthly update to provide an easily digestible snapshot of all the latest SQE news. Primarily targeted at training providers and law firms - but relevant to anyone interested in the SQE - it aims to provide an easily accessible way to keep up to date with progress on the SQE. It includes articles that explain the key implications of the SQE and highlight the various opportunities for further engagement and input. It has more than 1,700
- SRA Update [</sra/news/sra-update/>] - we regularly include tailored SQE information in our e-newsletter for the profession, which reaches more than 200,000 people, the majority solicitors.
- SQE Briefing [</globalassets/documents/sra/news/sqe-briefing.pdf?version=4a3d31>] - a number of stakeholders asked for a document that covers the early inception of the SQE right through to where we currently are. The briefing covers off core topics such as how the SQE will work, our approach to standard setting, costs and equality, diversity and inclusion. It is kept under review and updated when needed.
- An SQE LinkedIn Group [<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8548868/>] - with more than 2,200 members it offers an easy way to get regular updates on the SQE and interact with us.

We have also run a range of events including:

- our [</sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2019/>] SQE conference [</sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2019/>] - these events are targeted primarily at universities and training providers to explain progress on the SQE, get input on its development, and to cover off some of the more detailed, technical areas that are relevant for this audience (eg discussing the different approaches training providers are taking). Relevant sessions from the conference

have been live-streamed offering those who cannot attend the opportunity to see what is covered. The 2020 event takes place on 15 December, is completely virtual, and will be able to be viewed by anyone.

- our annual compliance officers conference [[/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/compliance-conference-2020/](#)] - the largest event of its kind in the legal sector, our SQE sessions have focused on the implications of the new assessment for law firms and solicitors and have seen more than 4,000 solicitors attend since 2016.
- other events - since 2018, we have run or taken part in more than 150 events on the SQE, with audiences including students, training providers, academics and law firms, both small and large.
- webinars [<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIZ7wfo3EV3ZiAZpRYkGCs0lhYL2AzpF>] - we regularly run webinars to explain specific SQE issues, often targeted primarily at particular audiences. For instance, we have run webinars on the opportunities for small businesses, our approach to reasonable adjustments, the assessment specification and sample questions, and the transitional arrangements. In total, our webinars in the last two years have attracted more than 25,000 views.

We have also published resources on our website to explain areas where people have said they want additional information or support. Extra resources we have published include:

- guidance to explain the practicalities of qualifying work experience (QWE) - tailored primarily for employers [[/become-solicitor/sqe/qualifying-work-experience/qualifying-work-experience-employers/](#)] and trainees [[/become-solicitor/sqe/qualifying-work-experience/qualifying-work-experience-candidates/](#)]. This has included developing a an LPC or SQE decision tree
- a list of SQE training providers [[/become-solicitor/sqe/training-provider-list/](#)] and producers of SQE-related study materials [[/become-solicitor/sqe/training-provider-list/](#)]
- information about solicitor apprenticeships [[/become-solicitor/sqe/solicitor-apprenticeships/](#)]
- terms and conditions governing use of the SQE Trademark by providers [[/become-solicitor/sqe/training-provider-list/trademark/terms-use/](#)]

What we will do ahead of September 2021

We will build on our work so far and carry on using the channels and products that have resulted in good engagement, such as Career in Law, SQE Update, regular webinars and speaking at events.

Many stakeholders need detailed information on the SQE but we know from feedback that others want easily understandable, headline information. We will therefore focus on producing more resources - including visuals - that do this for some key areas such as QWE and transitional arrangements.

In addition to the work we are already doing, we plan to do further work providing resources on the changes in the qualification process for specific audiences.

Primarily for students, careers advisors, aspiring solicitors and others who are interested in the qualification process from an aspiring solicitors perspective, we will:

- highlight best practice for qualifying work experience, including what aspiring solicitors should expect in a good placement, our expectation of firms, the importance of covering professionalism and ethical standards, as well as guidance on confirming QWE (December 2020)
- further develop Career in Law [<https://www.facebook.com/careerinlaw>] to increase its reach, including

building its presence on Instagram [<https://www.instagram.com/careerinlaw/>]

- increase our engagement programme with those who directly advise students on their career options (eg law schools, student law societies, career advisory services)
- working together with those who already have developed a relationship with students or aspiring solicitors (eg online legal commentators, other student focused websites specialising in law or careers) to explain the implications of the SQE to their audience. We will also publish specific resources for careers advisors (April 2021)
- focus on additional content on areas that will be crucial for helping people navigate the market - such as further information on costs, training options, transitional arrangements and qualifying work experience. This will include working closely with the Law Society. We plan to work with them to publish specific resources on costs and funding options, opportunities and practicalities around apprenticeships and advice and guidance for students who are taking internships or considering unpaid work (spring 2021).

Primarily for law firms, employers, other potential providers of QWE such as law clinics and those who are interested in the SQE from an employer perspective, we will:

- publish further support on best practice for QWE, as set out above, and guidance on confirming QWE (December 2020)
- work closely with the Law Society to help communicate the SQE to the profession, what it means for law firms, and the opportunities to maximise the benefits of its introduction. We plan to work with them to publish resources explaining how the SQE can drive changes in the recruitment of solicitors, and the opportunities around apprenticeships (spring 2021)
- publish tailored information for law clinics on the implications of the SQE, including the opportunities and expectations around QWE (April 2021)
- continue to work with specific solicitor representative groups, such as the Sole Practitioners Group, City of London Law Society, the Black Solicitors Network, the Lawyers with Disabilities Division and local law societies
- cover topics related to the SQE and what it means for law firms at our annual compliance conference
- offering tailored webinars for different types of law firms
- more resources to explain the opportunities and practicalities around apprenticeships

We also will work with the Law Society to help explain the SQE internationally - as it is relevant to those overseas who may want to qualify here, as well as the international reputation of the legal sector in England and Wales. We will also continue to engage with members of the International Conference of Legal Regulators on the SQE.

Public

The SQE aims to offer greater reassurance for everyone - including the public - that all who qualify have met a consistent, high standard.

Although the wider public may not be looking for- detailed information about the SQE and its implementation, it's important that people can be confident that all solicitors will have had to go through a rigorous qualification process and that new qualifying solicitors have had to pass a single consistent assessment. Almost four out of five members of the public said they would have more confidence in solicitors if they passed the same final examination.

We will be liaising with consumer representative groups - such as the Legal Services Consumer Panel and Citizens Advice - to make sure they know what is happening so they can

reflect accurately in their communication with the public, where relevant. We will also work with groups such as the Law Society, and others who undertake public-facing campaigns.

Once the SQE has come into effect, we will make sure our key consumer-facing information explains the standards solicitors must meet.

4. Assessment data and analysis

Our assessment provider Kaplan will publish data and analysis after each assessment sitting. An Annual Report from them will provide more detailed analysis. Topics covered will include information about the exam such as candidate numbers, pass marks and pass rates, quality statistics about the performance of the assessment, and appropriate equality analyses.

There will also be an annual report on the assessment from the SQE independent reviewer, Geoff Coombe. This will provide an independent view on how the assessment ran.

In addition to this, we will of course provide candidates with their results. This should help inform recruitment and allow candidates to highlight their achievements, regardless of the route they have taken.

5. Data to support candidate choices

In addition to the Kaplan data, the SRA will publish data to help aspiring solicitors make informed choices about qualification, training routes and providers. This data will also be available for academics, researchers and legal commentators.

This data could include anonymised information about candidates' SQE results, their A level results, their undergraduate degree institution and field of study, training organisation for SQE1 and SQE2, qualifying work experience placement(s) and some socio-economic information.

In the first years of the SQE, candidate numbers will likely be lower than subsequent years. We are mindful that the lower numbers mean that it may be harder to draw meaningful conclusions from the data. As well as lower numbers, in the first years the profile of candidates is likely to be atypical. For instance, there is likely to be a higher proportion of qualified lawyers and candidates who have previously done the LPC.

We want to make sure that we publish an appropriate and representative level of data so that aspiring solicitors and academics can draw accurate and meaningful conclusions. We also need to be sure that individual candidates cannot be identified from the data we publish.

We also need to carefully consider how to make the data accessible and easy to use. Over the coming months we will continue to work with aspiring solicitors, law firms and academics to explore the data they find most useful and how best we can present this.

We will finalise details in summer 2021 of what data we will publish.

6. Analysis and evaluation of the broader SQE impacts

Building on the analysis of the assessments, we will also carry out broader analysis of the SQE and its impacts. For instance, publishing a market impact evaluation and full post-implementation evaluation of the SQE.

Most of the analysis and evaluation of the SQE will take place after the introduction of the SQE. However, we have already published a range of analysis and research ahead of its implementation, including an:

- SQE equality, diversity and inclusion impact assessment [[/sra/policy/solicitors-qualifying-](#)

examination/edi-risk-assessment/]

- report on monitoring and maximising the diversity impacts of the SQE by the independent Bridge Group [[sra/news/press/2020-press-release-archive/sqe-for-diversity/](#)]
- international benchmarking of qualification in other jurisdictions [[globalassets/documents/sra/research/iclr-benchmarking.pdf?version=4a326f](#)]
- indicative economic impacts of a new qualification framework for solicitors by Economic Policy and Competition [[globalassets/documents/sra/research/indicative-economic-impact-assessment.pdf?version=4a1ab4](#)]
- AlphaPlus report [[globalassets/documents/sra/consultations/sqe2-alphaplus-report.pdf?version=4a1acd](#)] to evaluate the level and demand of the proposed assessment

In addition to the data set out in the previous two sections, information that will be published after the assessment goes live includes:

- initial evaluation after two and four years
- full evaluation after seven and ten years
- annual survey of individuals undertaking QWE
- focused evaluation of how QWE is working in the second year after SQE is introduced

We also recognise the challenges of differential performance by protected minority groups that exist across education. They are based on multiple factors, many of which are outside of our control. It is nevertheless of concern. In early 2021, we also will begin the process of commissioning wider research into the differential performance in relation to ethnicity that is so widely seen in professional assessments in the legal sector and elsewhere.

We will carry out this research over a two-year period.