

News release

SQE to be introduced in autumn 2021

08 November 2018

The new assessment to ensure consistent, high standards for qualifying solicitors - the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) - will be introduced in autumn 2021, with the candidate fee likely to range between £3,000 - £4,500.

We had previously proposed a launch date of no earlier than autumn 2020. We have now responded to feedback from education providers and law firms who indicated a strong preference for a September 2021 launch, allowing them more time to develop training and transition to the new system.

We have also published the provisional fee range for the examinations. The total estimated cost for the two stages of assessment is between £3,000 - £4,500:

- SQE1 will primarily test the application of legal knowledge. The fees range estimate is £1,100 - £1,650.
- SQE2 will test practical legal skills, with a fee range of £1,900 - £2,850.

The costs are based on an estimated 35 hours of assessment, including written tests, computer-based assessments and simulations such as mock client interviews. These costs are indicative, as we continue our work with Kaplan to develop and test the assessments. The eventual fee may be inside or outside this range.

Factors that could change the costs include the length and amount of assessment and whether it is offered in both English and Welsh.

The SQE offers more flexibility around training and work-based experience. This should help establish a competitive legal education market and give candidates more genuine choices about the route they take, such as solicitor apprenticeships, or law degrees that incorporate SQE training.

The SQE structure also aims to address the problem of the need to pay large up-front costs, up to £16,700 for a Legal Practice Course (LPC), with no guarantee of a training contract or becoming a solicitor. Some aspiring solicitors find they cannot progress, while others are put off trying to qualify altogether.

Paul Philip, SRA Chief Executive, said: "We want everyone to be ready to make the most of the SQE. We have listened to law firms and universities, who have told us that 2021 gives them the right amount of time to prepare.

"Our priority is creating a rigorous, value for money assessment that drives consistent high standards. The SQE also offers a fresh opportunity to increase access to the profession. A competitive training market, offering real choices, will help the profession attract the best talent."

Kaplan will be running pilots in 2019 to test the effectiveness of the assessment. Following analysis of the current design of SQE1, it has concluded that it is possible to design a rigorous assessment which is shorter than originally proposed. Its pilot of SQE1 will therefore include 360 questions split over three separate examination papers (instead of 680 questions split over six separate examination papers).

We will launch candidate recruitment for the pilot of SQE1 with Kaplan in November.

We have also launched Career in Law to help inform aspiring solicitors about the SQE changes. It has been developed through working closely with young people, including college and university students.

Go to Career in Law [<https://www.facebook.com/careerinlaw>]

The new SQE launch date means that people who have started a qualifying law degree or law conversion (CPE) before September 2021 will be able to decide to qualify under the old system up until 2032, or alternatively under the SQE. From September 2021 all other aspiring solicitors would need to qualify through the SQE.