

News release

Positive response ahead of new solicitor exam's first sitting

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More than a thousand people have signed up to take the first ever Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) assessment in November.

The new single rigorous examination means that all aspiring solicitors will have to meet consistent, high standards at point of entry into the profession.

Bookings for the first SQE1 assessment closed last week. Kaplan, the SQE's assessment provider, has reported that as at the close of bookings 1,155 candidates had booked. The majority of bookings – 74 per cent – are for candidates to take the assessment in the UK. The remaining candidates will be taking their SQE1 exam overseas, with bookings in 47 other countries. One in twelve candidates requested reasonable adjustments.

Testing practical legal knowledge, SQE1 consists of just over ten hours of assessment taken over two separate days: 8 and 11 November 2021. SQE2 assesses practical legal skills and knowledge, with the first assessments scheduled for April next year.

The first assessments take place during the transition period to the new SQE. Anyone who has started on their training journey to become a solicitor – such as those who have begun a law degree, law conversion or training contract – can choose to carry on through the Legal Practice Course (LPC) route. A range of law firms have already committed to taking on SQE trainees, with many starting next year. It is anticipated that candidate numbers will rise significantly as these candidates begin taking the assessment.

Julie Brannan, SRA Director of Education and Training said: 'It is encouraging to see such strong take up for the first sitting. Whether it is apprentices, overseas lawyers or law students who see the benefits of choosing to do the SQE, this shows there is already strong demand for the SQE.'

We are also encouraged by the initial signs in the SQE training market. In addition to universities who are planning to incorporate SQE into their courses, there are 12 training providers offering specific SQE1 and SQE2 training. These range from short online courses to extensive face-to-face teaching, enabling candidates to choose a course that suits them.

Many of these SQE courses would enable a candidate to train for under or around £10,000. That includes the total assessment fees of £3,980 - for SQE1 (£1,558) and SQE2 (£2,422). This means SQE candidates will have more options to train affordably, while also having greater opportunities to earn-as-they learn, with greater flexibility around how they gain relevant work experience. In England, solicitor apprenticeships also offer a zero-cost option for people to qualify through the SQE.

LPC candidates have to pay up to £17,000 - often investing large amounts up front with no guarantee of a training contract.

Julie Brannan, SRA Director of Education and Training said: 'It's early days, but the SQE training market is clearly developing. More choice, more flexibility and more affordable options should enable more talented people, from all backgrounds, to have a fairer shot at qualifying as a solicitor.'