

The SQE in the spotlight...an early view

The Solicitor Qualifying Exam (SQE) Annual Report 2021/22 was published in March 2023 by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. It contains some analysis of the SQE candidate cohorts who took the SQE1 in November 2021, the SQE2 in April 2022 and the SQE1 in July 2022. This briefing contains information from the report in so far as it is relevant to the not-for-profit sector.

The SQE is a single vigorous assessment designed to assure consistent, high standards for all qualifying solicitors. It consists of two parts: SQE1, which tests candidates functioning legal knowledge, and SQE2, which tests candidates practical legal skills and knowledge. In the near future, the SQE will be the only pathway to becoming a qualifying solicitor as it is set to, in effect, replace the Legal Practice Course (LPC).

Under this new pathway, the SQE can be undertaken as part of an apprenticeship.

Solicitor apprentices made up a small proportion of overall candidate numbers for the SQE in 2021/22. That said, early indications are that solicitor apprentices do better when compared with all SQE candidates.

The SQE pass mark is around 55% (varies each sitting). Early analysis strongly suggests that candidates with better undergraduate university degrees were more likely to cope with the demands of the SQE.

Undergraduate law degree	FLK1 pass rate	FLK2 pass rate
1st	80	77
2:1	60	58
2:2	31	27

Early cohorts include large numbers of transitional candidates not required to take SQE1 because they already have the LPC. However, candidates were more likely to pass SQE2 if they had taken the SQE1 or had done some form of Qualifying Work Experience (QWE).

My take-away from the report for our sector is our own solicitor apprentice candidates should ideally have a mix of academic excellence and practical skills. The SQE is a tough set of exams which ask a great deal from those who sit it.

One very practical thing to bear in mind here is that under the apprenticeship route the apprentice employer must be prepared to release supported members of staff for 20% of their time to undertake study at BPP or some other institution.

Corporate law firms and any other qualifying organisation, can transfer up to 25% of their Levy to organisations in the advice sector to fund apprenticeships. This means

that all the training fees (including assessment and exam fees) can be met by Apprenticeship Levy transfers.

BPP charges £13K for their 30-month apprenticeships, and £27K for their 6-year apprenticeships. The 30-month apprenticeships are for candidates with a law undergraduate degree, whereas the 6-year route is for those candidates who have a non-law undergraduate degree.

Eddie Coppinger

University House