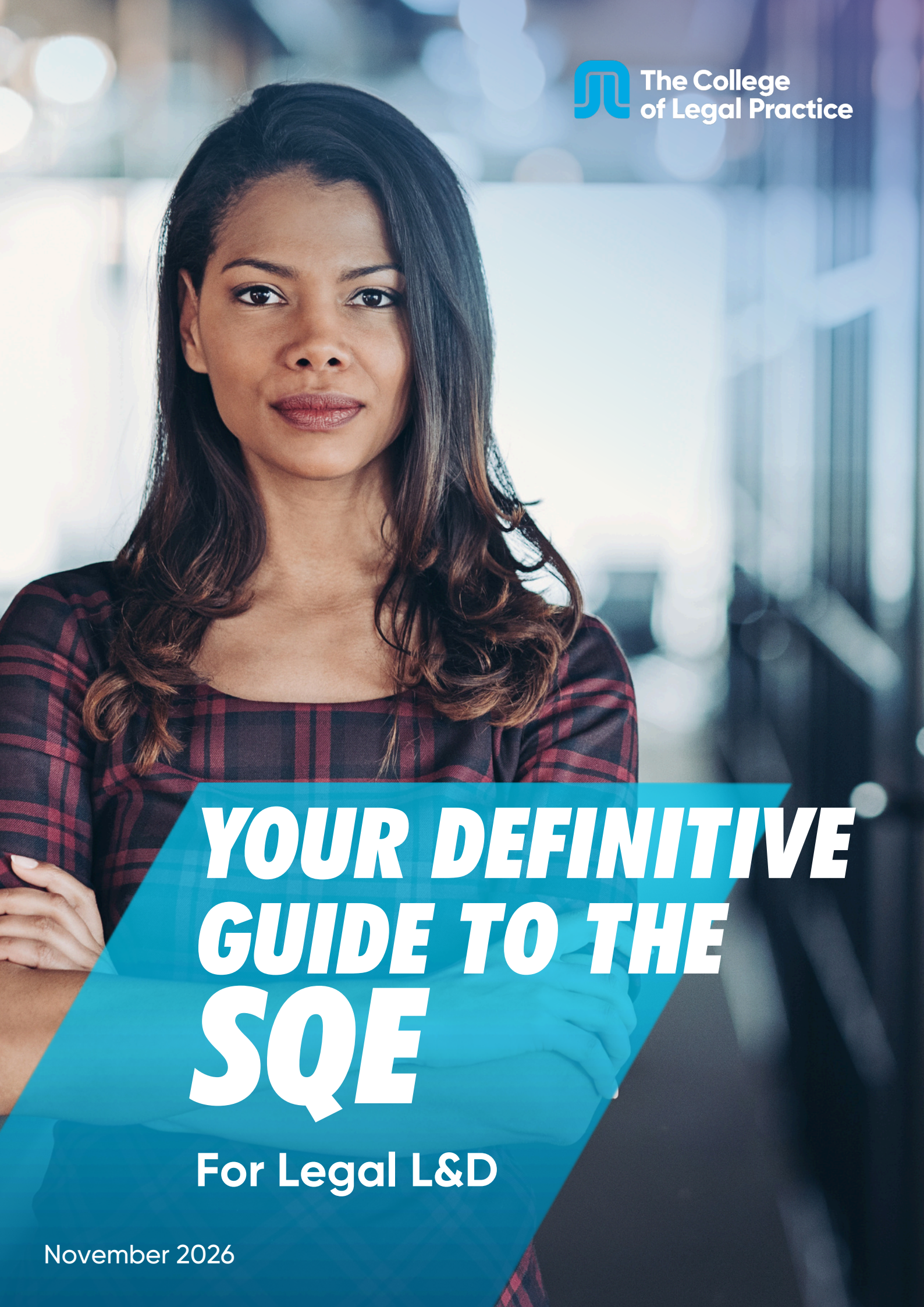


The College of Legal Practice

YOUR DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE SQE

For Legal L&D

November 2026

WELCOME TO THE SQE

We, at The College of Legal Practice (CoLP) have produced this definitive guide to the SQE to help and support those who are delivering SQE Programmes. It will give you a concise yet comprehensive overview of the changes brought by the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) and how they are being implemented across the sector.

All future graduates now need to take the SQE route, and very few providers are still offering the LPC. Within this guide, we have pulled together our experiences and reflections from delivering SQE preparation training and firm partnerships since the first assessments back in 2021.

Over this time, we have learnt a lot about how we can best support students to prepare and pass these challenging exams, and how collaborative partnerships can make a significant difference to their success.

For example, we know that our online learning structure works, it builds up students' skills and confidence to be fully ready for these exams, and consistent weekly engagement puts them in a strong position to pass the exams. We have also recognised that employers can play an important role in setting expectations and encouragement for your trainees, alongside individual support from our experienced supervisor team.



I hope that this guide proves insightful for you and please get in touch if you would like to find out more about how we can help you with your SQE programme.

Giles Proctor

Dr Giles Proctor
CEO, The College of Legal Practice

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. Why was the SQE introduced? p.04

2. The SQE route to qualification p.06

3. What's different from the LPC? p.08

4. Qualifying Work Experience (QWE) p.10

5. The opportunities the SQE gives your organisation p.12

6. Checklist: Helping your candidates pass the SQE p.14

7. Top tips for introducing the SQE to your organisation p.18

8. Collaborating with you p.20

9. About The College of Legal Practice p.22

WHY WAS THE SQE INTRODUCED?

High standards

The SQE was developed to simplify and standardise the solicitor qualification process, while introducing more flexibility and setting high professional standards. It introduced rigorous centralised assessments that must be taken by all prospective solicitors and seeks to establish a universal quality benchmark. The aim of the SQE is that, in time, employers can be assured that trainees have attained a consistently high level of competence designed to equip them for a successful career in 21st century legal practice. We are already finding this through the low pass rates and feedback from firms on the quality of trainees who have passed the SQE1.

Diversity

The SQE was set up to help diversify the legal profession. We know there's currently a significant under-representation of certain ethnic groups, people from low-income households, and those with disabilities. The SQE aimed to widen access to legal training by making qualification more accessible and affordable. Alternative pathways such as "earn while you learn" and apprenticeships are helping in this respect.

There is much more choice now in terms of training for the SQE, including "earn while you learn" and apprenticeships. However, many providers are charging training costs similar to LPC levels, with exam fees on top, your choice of provider can make this route even more expensive.

There are also ongoing variations in pass rates in the SQE for some under-represented groups, such as black candidates, that are concerning and require more research and understanding.



ReedSmith

Reed Smith's innovative Professional SQE Programme offers work placements, SQE preparation and legal skills modules delivered by The College of Legal Practice over a three-year period.

"We are delighted to continue working with The College of Legal Practice on our Professional SQE Programme. This innovative route will equip the next generation of exceptionally talented Reed Smith Trainees with the skills, knowledge and practical experience to hit the ground running and excel during their QWE and beyond."

David Ashmore,
Training Principal

THE SQE ROUTE TO QUALIFICATION

To qualify via the SQE, everyone needs to:

- have a degree in any subject or equivalent Level 6 qualification
- pass both stages of the SQE assessment, in order, within six years
- complete two years' full-time (or equivalent) qualifying work experience (QWE)
- pass the SRA's character and suitability requirements



Source: Solicitors Regulation Authority



WHAT'S DIFFERENT FROM THE LPC?



There are five key differences between LPC and the new SQE:

1. The SQE is at a higher standard. It prepares candidates for their first day as a qualified solicitor, not for a training contract.
2. A much broader range of subjects are covered.
3. The style and frequency of assessments are very different, it is closed book and runs multiple times a year.
4. The training contract has been replaced by a much more flexible period of qualifying work experience (QWE).
5. For the SQE there are separate fees for training and the SQE exams and many different course lengths and options.

Practice areas covered

The SQE intends to produce lawyers with a grasp of legal principle and a thorough legal skills training who can contextualise law within today's business and societal needs.

Instead of the four Stage 1 subjects and Stage 2 electives under the LPC, it covers the 13 areas of law mandated in the SRA's Statement of Legal Knowledge so trainees will have a baseline understanding of all that solicitors must know at the point of qualification.

Some training providers, including The College of Legal Practice, are offering additional modules covering practice areas in more depth. These additional modules are not part of the SQE qualification regime.

Assessments

The SQE has a two-stage assessment process. Candidates must pass SQE1 before they can sit SQE2. Unlike the LPC, there's no formal requirement for SQE sitters to do a preparation course, but completing one with a reputable provider will considerably increase the likelihood of success.



SQE1

- Run by Kaplan for the SRA*
- Tests Functional Legal Knowledge (FLK)
- 340 "single-best-answer" multiple choice questions (MCQs) over two timed exams (FLK1 and FLK2) in two days
- FLK1 covers: Business Law and Practice, Dispute Resolution, Legal Services and session 2 covers Tort, Contract Law, Legal Systems (Legal System of England and Wales; Constitutional and Administrative Law and EU Law)
- FLK2 covers: covers Wills and the Administration of Estates, Solicitors Accounts (in the context of Wills), Trusts Law, Land Law and session 2 covers Property Law and Practice. Solicitors Accounts (in the context of Property), Criminal Liability and Criminal Law and Practice
- Exams are sat at Pearson Vue Test Centres globally
- Assessments run every January and July
- Assessment fees are currently £2,006**

SQE2

- Run by Kaplan for the SRA*
- Tests six oral and written legal skills in the context of five practice areas over a three-week period
- Covers: Business, Dispute resolution, Property, Criminal, and Wills
- There are 16 skills assessments, called 'stations'
- SQE Written: 12 written stations – available globally at Pearson Vue Test Centres
- SQE Oral: four oral stations – tested in four locations in England and Wales.
- Assessments running every three months
- Assessment fees are currently £3,086**
- Unlike LPC, SQE2 prepares candidates for their first day of qualified work

*In 2018, the SRA appointed Kaplan to develop and run all SQE assessments. This built on the existing arrangements for Kaplan to design and run the Qualifying Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS) for the SRA.

**Exam fees for 2026-2027. Likely to rise from 1st September 2026.

Source: Solicitors Regulation Authority, correct as of November 2026



QUALIFYING WORK EXPERIENCE (QWE)

Capsticks

Capsticks LLP have been partnering with the College since 2022 to prepare their paralegals for the SQE exams. They offer their trainees 1 study day a week and fund their 20 or 40 week preparation courses alongside development as a paralegal. They have also set up a comprehensive QWE system.

"When we moved to the SQE, we knew we'd need a robust approach with clear parameters to signing off QWE. As a People First firm, we prioritise development and growth to ensure Motivated Teams. This is the same for qualified staff, paralegals and trainees."



Patricia Birkedale, Early Careers Business Partner

One of the main changes from the LPC is that the SQE has removed the "training contract" requirement, giving control of qualification to the individual, not the organisation. Likewise, QWE is not regulated by the SRA, nor is there a requirement for trainees to work in a specified number of practice areas, or to undertake contentious and non-contentious work. Instead, there's more flexibility.

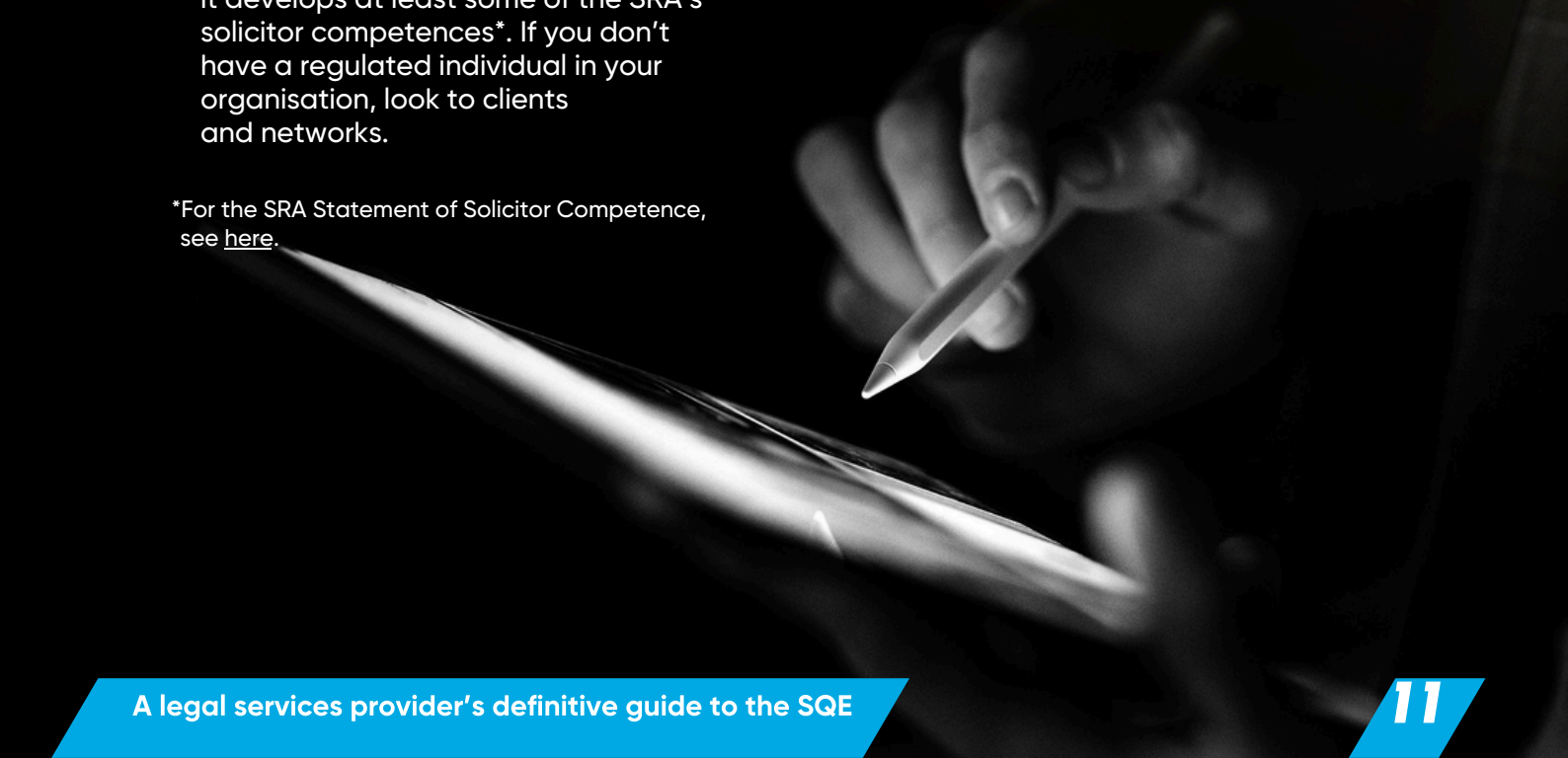
QWE Requirements

- To be recognised as QWE, the work undertaken must develop some of the competences outlined by the SRA in the Statement of Solicitor Competence*.
- Candidates must complete at least 24 months of full-time work.
- QWE can be obtained in up to four different organisations, anywhere in the world.
- To circumvent bottlenecks, QWE can start at any time during training, including before, between or after assessments are passed.
- The onus is on individuals to record the details and length of the work experience accurately.
- Work must be confirmed by an SRA regulated solicitor or compliance officer, who's not confirming whether an individual is competent to practice, just the length of the work and whether it develops at least some of the SRA's solicitor competences*. If you don't have a regulated individual in your organisation, look to clients and networks.

*For the SRA Statement of Solicitor Competence, see here.

Cost and timing of SQE v LPC

- The SQE route can be quicker than LPC, depending on the candidate's ability and whether they have qualifying work experience already. For example, candidates can take SQE2 within three months of SQE1, but this may not be the best route for everyone.
- The frequency of the SQE assessments also differs from the LPC, reducing the need to have a "one size fits all' SQE programme. If you have trainees with differing abilities or experience, their SQE pathways can vary to accommodate their needs.
- Also, depending on the provider that you choose for your preparation training, the costs can be considerably less than the LPC, which can cost up to £18,000. When considering the costs of your training programme, you'll need to include assessment fees, preparation training course costs and travel and accommodation for the SQE assessments.



THE OPPORTUNITIES THE SQE GIVES YOUR ORGANISATION

SQE simultaneously deepens the talent pool from which trainees can be drawn and seeks to assure their quality. In addition, the big news for all kinds of legal service provider is that SQE provides a once-in-a- generation opportunity to revisit and remodel existing training programmes to take advantage of the changes.



Quality

An understanding of the way in which the SQE is structured and assessed should give organisations confidence in the entry level quality of future junior lawyers. Organisations can be confident that SQE qualified lawyers will bring both the core knowledge of legal principle and the relevant legal skills needed for 21st century practice.



A universal qualification

In addition, organisations won't have to differentiate between domestic assessments undertaken as part of the LPC and those taken by foreign lawyers, who were formerly required to complete the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme. Everyone will now need to be SQE qualified to practice in England and Wales.



Tailored programmes

With the ending of regulated training contracts, organisations that provide QWE have the scope to tailor training programmes to meet their own needs. Significantly, they no longer need to ensure that trainees rotate through a range of practice areas, although they retain the option to put trainees through elective modules alongside or after their SQE preparation. Graduate Solicitor Apprenticeships are another pathway to consider.



Placements

Given that QWE can be split across up to four organisations, employers have scope to think more creatively about placements within training programmes. For instance, firms can arrange secondments to a client, or vice versa. Some trainees want to develop a specialism in one area of practice, other firms want to give trainees a wider set of experiences through the traditional four seat rotation.



Internal talent

Many organisations are using the SQE as an opportunity to identify internal talent and progress their careers. They're selecting their top performing paralegals, who are known to the firm and already have qualifying work experience, to take through the SQE. For example, Ashfords are running internal and external recruitment pathways for their trainee programmes to find the strongest cohort of trainees.



Timing

Because the SQE assessments can be taken more frequently, there are no restrictions on when trainee programmes can start. It liberates those in charge of solicitor qualification from the constraints of the academic year and gives employers the chance to bring trainees into their organisations sooner, or train up their own. It also means candidates can have breaks between SQE1 and SQE2 and choose different length courses for each step in the process.



Sequencing

Another bonus of SQE is that – as long as trainees pass SQE1 before their SQE2 – organisations can sequence programmes in whichever order works best for them. A programme can start with full-time study, or with part-time study and QWE; and the programme can be interspersed with electives at any time. In particular, the opportunity to offer a "work as you learn" model can help organisations attract a deeper and more diverse pool of potential trainees. Reed Smith for example, have modules before and after SQE1 preparation to help the trainees with their wider development and readiness for working within Reed Smith.



CHECKLIST: HELPING YOUR CANDIDATES PASS THE SQE

Through monitoring the evolving SQE landscape and preparing hundreds of students for the SQE, we have curated a checklist to add the development of your SQE programme.

- Understand each trainee, how academic are they? How resilient are they? Carefully consider how much time you give trainees to study and perform in the SQE assessments. We've seen that adequate and consistent study time contributes significantly to exam passes. We recommend at least 1 day a week if trainees are working alongside their study, but don't be afraid to flex to individual needs.
- Don't just consider the preparation course time, give your trainees additional revision days in the run up to, and during the exams.
- Choose learning that supports and guides candidates with SQE assessment technique and guidance and multiple mock tests and assessments, in addition to providing legal knowledge and materials.
- Candidates studying part-time need some flexibility in their weekly learning schedule to attend key learning activities live. Find a training provider that understands the needs of working legal professionals, for example that records live sessions and gives flexibility in day-to-day deadlines.
- Make sure that your trainees have high levels of individual supervision in both their learning and in the workplace so every trainee has the best chance of passing. Build in regular opportunities for reflecting with the candidate on their performance, strengths and weaknesses, and include regular feedback that gives candidates confidence in their performance (particularly for SQE2) and a safe space for discussion.
- Regularly review candidates' progress with your training provider and your trainees. The College's regular reporting back to you on trainees' progress and SQE Ready Reviews, helps both the candidates and the firms understand how they are progressing, and whether they are ready to take the SQE assessment. We've found that our internal assessments closely mirror the SQE, so we can predict the likelihood of a student passing, saving considerable time, effort and cost.
- For SQE2, half of the exam focuses on legal knowledge, so be sure your candidates have that knowledge at their fingertips. If they've taken an LPC some time ago, they might need more study time.
- At the beginning of their training, agree clear expectations for engagement and performance on training courses with each trainee. Agree what you need to see in terms of their progress to fund their SQE exams and what will happen if they don't pass the SQE first time. Your training provider should help with this communication and information.
- At the beginning of placements, expectations and a supervisory and development plan with the candidate, be clear who'll confirm the QWE and the information that needs to be recorded throughout to be able to confirm it as QWE at the end.

SAMPLE PROGRAMME TIMELINES



Examples of SQE Programmes delivered by the College for partners

These timelines are just three common examples of SQE programmes. There are many more options, particularly if students are studying part-time. Speak to the College to help you design your SQE programme.

UP-FRONT



HYBRID



INTEGRATED INTO QWE: PARALEGAL ROUTE



QWE can begin at any time alongside study



TOP TIPS FOR INTRODUCING THE SQE TO YOUR ORGANISATION



- **Start thinking early about your new programme**, factoring in the timelines leading up to the SQE booking windows and assessments and with a view to minimising operational disruptions.

- **Engage with those in the business who are unfamiliar with the SQE**, and help them understand the shift in curriculum and competencies for your trainees. Involve them in discussions on electives and focus for QWE, to help build and deliver your programme. Ask your training provider to run SQE inductions for your colleagues so they know how to support your trainees.

- **Give thought to including people and legal skills** as part of your talent development strategy, such practice specific skills modules and O Shaped Lawyer competencies. These are elements that can attract and retain both staff and clients, and that differentiate more progressive programmes.

SHAPED

- **Consider recruiting non-law graduates.** They now only need to do a 20- or 40-week Graduate Diploma in Law programme with the College prior to preparing for SQE1.

- **Remember you have options to develop in-house talent**, as opposed to shopping externally. They can earn while they learn, you already know how they will perform and they know your business. Some may already have the LPC, and they will also have QWE. More and more firms are looking internally at their paralegal pools to find their next trainees.

- **Set up trainee agreements from the beginning.** Your trainees need direction and clear expectations on engagement and performance in their SQE preparation courses. What study hours are you expecting, what progress do you want to see to invest in paying for their SQE exam place? What happens if they don't pass first time?



COLLABORATING WITH YOU

Choose your training provider based on their SQE expertise and their level of client service

We will offer you:

- Quick application and enrolment services for your trainees
- Bulk purchasing of SQE vouchers and dissemination to students to timelines
- Tailored reporting schedule that works for your SQE pathway
- Regular meetings to show your trainees' engagement and performance directly on the College's learning portal and strategic meetings with CEO
- Timed feedback to assist in decision making on trainees taking SQE exam sittings
- Quick replies and efficient customer services
- Discounted course fees across College programmes

ACUITY LAW.

Acuity Law support their trainees through part-time preparation courses for SQE1 and SQE2 alongside working in the business. Trainees are given a month to kick start their study before they start their training contract.

"Acuity recognises the importance of creating more open and innovative pathways for candidates to join the legal industry and develop their careers in different ways. The "one fits all approach" of the traditional training contract limits both law firms and candidates and we want to break those traditional barriers."

Claire Knowles, Senior Employment Partner

ashfords

"We are looking forward to collaborating with The College of Legal Practice in order to provide our trainees with the very best preparation for their SQE exams. From our conversations with Giles and the team, we have been impressed with the level of personalised support and training offered to students, which will undoubtedly ensure each of our future lawyers have the best chance of succeeding in their exams and beyond."

Toby Tompkins, Talent Attraction Manager, Ashfords

ABOUT THE COLLEGE OF LEGAL PRACTICE

The College of Legal Practice is a fully accredited, fully virtual, UK-based, postgraduate law school. We're also a not-for-profit organisation.

We are dedicated to providing high-quality, accessible and affordable SQE preparation training. The team at the College are already seeing the potential of the SQE, through the diversity of our students achieving their career goals and bringing wider access to solicitor qualification.

Our aim is to develop each student's unique potential. With no campus, we have lower overheads so our courses are around half the price of the equivalent training at a university and we also provide access to student loans and scholarships. Our SQE preparation course fees start at £2,200 and are some of the most affordable on the market.

Preparing students for the SQE

Our training is entirely online, using a purpose-built platform. It's also very flexible, with full and part-time programmes. Drawing on over 25 years of digital learning experience, our experts have developed innovative online learning modules that thoroughly prepare each student to pass the SQE, as well as to develop the transactional business skills and competencies they need to succeed in the industry.

At the time of day that suits them, students complete a set weekly calendar of units consisting of step-by step activities and exercises that progress all the way to full-scale mock assessments. They are supported all the way with scheduled live personal supervisions with experienced practitioners.

Moreover, our students become part of a collegiate environment that ensures they're never isolated or adrift. Each has a personal tutor and takes part in regular tutorials, weekly information sessions and group seminars.

We stay close to students throughout, assessing their well-being, progress and building their confidence and knowledge. Our highly rated student services team are all trained in mental health first aid and we offer free wellbeing and counselling services for all our students.

Aspiring Solicitors Programmes

The College offers a comprehensive set of training alongside the SQE preparation modules, giving you everything you need for your trainee programme. It includes:

1. **The Graduate Diploma in Law:**
   A unique law conversion course that runs prior to SQE1 preparation.
   Price: £3,950

2. **SQE Preparation Modules:**
   Part-time and full-time options available for every SQE sitting.
   Price: £2,200 & £2,700

3. **Graduate Solicitor Apprenticeships:**
   Two and three year programmes, running every six months, funded by the Levy.

4. **LLM in Legal Practice:**
   A full programme of SQE preparation and electives giving your aspiring solicitor an excellent platform for their career.
   Price: £7,245



FIND OUT MORE

Support for your SQE programme

If you're now reviewing or developing your organisation's SQE programmes, don't hesitate to get in touch with us for a no obligations chat about your next move.

For a one-to-one SQE consultation, email gproctor@collegalpractice.com or call 020 3884 4112.

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