

## News release

# Annual conference gives SQE updates

11 April 2025

More than 900 delegates joined this year's SQE Virtual Conference live online. Many more are expected to catch up with the three sessions on YouTube over the coming weeks.

The conference gave updates on the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE), more than three years on from its launch in late 2021. After 30 years of following the same path to becoming a solicitor, the SQE still feels new and confusing to some. The conference gave clarity on both assessments and qualifying work experience (QWE).

It was attended by training providers, SQE candidates, law firms and other organisations providing QWE. Delegates were able to submit questions during the conference and the speakers did their best to answer them.

The three sessions at this year's conference were:

- [SQE three years on: Lessons and reflections](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2025/#heading_f2c21) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2025/#heading\_f2c21]
- [Practical solutions to improve candidate experience](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2025/#heading_7f931) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2025/#heading\_7f931]
- [QWE: Ensuring a positive candidate experience](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2025/#heading_39ee1) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2025/#heading\_39ee1]

## SQE three years on: Lessons and reflections

Since its launch, the SQE route has reshaped solicitor training, removed unnecessary barriers and provided more flexibility. It makes sure every aspiring solicitor is assessed to the same high standard, regardless of their background or route to qualification.

Generally, the roll out of the SQE has gone well, although of course with any big change, involving tens-of-thousands of candidates across dozens of countries, there have been some teething problems.

Chairing the event, **Julie Swan, Director of Education and Training, SRA**, first touched on the highlights of the year, as well some challenges along the way. But she said the year was a largely positive one, with improvements being made across the board.



Headlines include more than 14,600 individual candidates taking at least one assessment in 2023/24. There are now more than 3,000 solicitor apprentices, and the evidence shows they are generally younger, more likely to be working class, state-educated and not have had parents who went to university.

**Ricardo Lé, SQE Independent Reviewer**, fed back his view that the SQE is a largely positive and an improved experience for everyone involved. He said:

'Looking at the assessment, the crucial aspect is that the assessments really measure the appropriate knowledge and skills that a day one solicitor is required to have. So you want an appropriate mix of reliability and validity, and we do see that across the various aspects of the assessment. I think the diversity of assessment type is really a strength of the assessment.'

## **Practical solutions to improve candidate experience**

The second session focused on ways to improve the candidate experience of SQE.

Talking about changes to the booking system, after candidate feedback in previous years, **Tim Allen, Head of Candidate Services at assessment provider Kaplan**, said:

'We introduced the use of a seat reservation form for the January 2024 SQE1. This has now become the default process for booking a seat for an assessment. Essentially candidates indicate their preferred date and locations, and we try to match them as best as we can.'

'This reduces concerns that they will not be allocated space, as our aim is that every person that completes a form is allocated a seat.'

**Jackie Panter, Kaplan's Head of Quality and Equality**, talked in depth about mitigating circumstances for the SQE, saying:

'Mitigating circumstances are issues that a candidate could not have reasonably expected, which have impacted the candidate's ability to sit the assessment at all or may have impacted their performance in the assessment.'

She also described the processes and support available if the unexpected arises – from illness to bereavement.

Responding to live questions from delegates about the availability of sample questions to help preparation, Kaplan confirmed that more SQE1 questions from past papers have recently been added to the SQE website. This takes the total to 170 sample questions.

## **QWE: Ensuring a positive candidate experience**

The final session of the day focused on QWE and how employers are making it work in the real world.

**Richard Williams, Policy Manager** and the SRA's QWE expert, reminded delegates of what QWE entails and how organisations and candidates can keep a record of their work.

He also reiterated that an employer doesn't need to make a judgment on the competence of a candidate. The requirement is to confirm that they have completed the two years, covering a range of the competencies in the Statement of solicitor competence. It is the SQE assessment which makes a judgment on whether a candidate has the knowledge and skills to qualify to qualify.

External panellist Matt Doyle, Senior Legal Counsel, Vodafone and Samantha Hope, Emerging Talent Manager, at law firm Shoosmiths, talked about their experiences of providing QWE.

Matt explained how before introduction of the SQE, the Vodafone Group didn't directly support people through to qualification as a solicitor, unlike other parts of the group. However, since the SQE came online, Vodafone has been learning and adapting to make the new route work for the business and candidates alike.

Kieran Ng, Legal Counsel, Vodafone, has just qualified, having been through his QWE with the company. He said: 'I'd always made it clear to the company that my ambition was to eventually qualify as a solicitor. I was grateful when they were able to offer the SQE route to me.'

Recording of all three sessions from the day, plus supporting materials [are available to view on-demand](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2025/) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/sqe-conference-2025/].