

Education and training - corporate report 2021/22

20 July 2023

[Read in Welsh](#) [<https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/addysg-hyfforddiant-2122/>]

We set the standards needed to make sure the people we allow into the profession are competent. This is so that people who use legal services get a proper standard of service from their solicitor.

People who use legal services want to know that they can have trust and confidence in solicitors. We set the standards to make sure those who enter the profession are competent.

We want everyone who joins the profession to meet the same high professional standards. September 2021 marked the introduction of a single rigorous assessment, [the Solicitors Qualifying Examination \(SQE\)](#) [<https://sqa.sra.org.uk/>]. This replaces the previous routes to qualification as a solicitor, supporting confidence in the profession and encouraging more flexibility and choice in training. The flexibility, which includes 'earn as you learn' options, will also help to encourage a diverse profession, attracting the brightest and the best from every community.

The charts in this section detail our work in education and training and highlight key trends and patterns. A glossary of terms can be found at the end of this section.

Please note, our business year is 1 November to 31 October. Unless otherwise stated, these figures are as of the October in the latter year - ie, the figures for 2021/22 are as at 31 October 2022.

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Routes to admission

[Solicitors currently enter the profession through a range of routes](#) [<https://www.sra.org.uk/trainees/admission/admission-criteria/>]. The vast majority of solicitors will enter the profession through taking and passing both parts 1 and 2 of the SQE assessment. Transitional arrangements (see below) remain in place for aspiring solicitors who have started their path to qualification on another route. And there are some exceptions:

- Swiss lawyers, who apply as a registered European lawyer (REL).
- Applying as a solicitor already admitted in Northern Ireland or Ireland.

Transitional arrangements



- Taking a traditional law degree or a non-law degree and the common professional examination, followed by the legal practice course (LPC) and then a period of recognised training (PRT).
- Qualifying as a solicitor under the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS).
- Applying as a REL (conditions apply). Following the UK’s exit from the EU in 2020 only Swiss lawyers have been able to qualify through this route from January 2021.
- Qualifying as a Chartered Legal Executive and then going on to take the LPC.
- Applying as an assistant justice’s clerk (conditions apply).
- Equivalent means. This allows individuals to qualify by showing they have met our requirements for a particular stage of training by demonstrating that they have equivalent experience.

Since September 2021, it has no longer been possible to start a route to qualification as a solicitor using one of the above routes.

The table below shows the number of individuals that joined the profession from each route from 2014 to 2022. The number of new solicitors entering the profession has steadily increased over the past seven years and averages at around 6,750 per year. The number of individuals entering the profession was above 7,000 for 2020/21 and 2021/22.

The number of RELs admitted to the profession flatlined in 2021/22. Following the UK's exit from the EU in 2020, only Swiss lawyers have been able to qualify through this route from January 2021.

There also appears to have been a drop in the number of individuals qualifying from the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland. However, many individuals looking to qualify from these jurisdictions will do so through the SQE route.

As the first SQE2 assessment did not take place until August 2022, those admitted through the SQE route from 1 Nov 2021 to the end of April 2022 were all qualified lawyers from other jurisdictions. These individuals qualify through this route due to either full exemption from both SQE assessments or by sitting SQE1 and having an SQE2 exemption.

The number of individuals entering the profession through the QLTS route almost doubled in 2021/22. As we move towards all candidates taking the SQE, candidates on the QLTS route now have a limited time in which to complete it. It is likely many candidates will be looking to qualify through this route before the deadline.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
SQE	-	-	-	-	-	-	433
LPC then PRT	5,501	5,513	5,575	5,742	5,474	5,723	5,196
QLTS	421	541	603	521	605	685	1,306



CILEX and assistant justices' clerks Republic of Ireland	240	251	323	343	324	352	240
Northern Ireland	148	136	131	188	124	149	4
EQM (from 2014/15)	31	17	28	35	31	41	2
REL	66	71	85	88	98	109	114
QLTT	29	53	34	76	60	100	-
Other	24	24	7	8	5	9	5
Totals	-	1	-	-	0	-	-
	6,460	6,607	6,786	7,001	6,721	7,168	7,300

Note:

- The Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT) was a precursor to and was largely phased out and replaced by the QLTS. A small number of individuals still enter the profession by this route.
- 'Other' can mean the individual was admitted via a Morgenbesser exemption application (for those who were part-qualified under an EU qualification).
- Some of these figures differ slightly with what we have reported in previous years. We are now collecting this information in a new way and have reviewed past data. This new approach allows for greater clarity on what route an applicant has taken, with more routes identified in the chart above. We have corrected any past data errors.

SQE admissions 2021/22

In its first year of running we saw 433 individuals enter the profession through the SQE. We expect to see the number of individuals qualifying through other paths to drop off in the years to come, as this becomes the main route to the profession.

[In spring 2023, we published a one-year review of the SQE. \[https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/press/2023-press-releases/sqe-annual-reports-2023/\]](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/news/press/2023-press-releases/sqe-annual-reports-2023/) It showed that overall implementation of the new assessment, which saw 3,000 candidates take the SQE across 42 countries, had gone well. The review included reports from the SQE's assessment provider, Kaplan, and by the SQE's Independent Reviewer.

Organisations carrying out a period of recognised training

Under the LPC route, we authorise organisations to provide a PRT, the work-based part of a solicitor's training. Around three-quarters of these are law firms, and the rest are in-house legal teams or law centres. We will start to see these numbers decline as the LPC route is phased out, as we will no longer need to authorise these organisations under the SQE route.

The increasing number of organisations authorised to carry out a PRT from 2014 to 2022 reflects a growing demand from firms to develop talent and train aspiring solicitors within their own business.

2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
5,163	5,497	5,746	5,877	6,219	6,339	6,473

Solicitor apprenticeships

Qualifying through the solicitor apprenticeship offers an opportunity to earn-as-you-learn on the job, while removing the expense of training and the cost of taking exams. It encourages people from all types of backgrounds to become solicitors. We developed the Trailblazer apprenticeship in law with employers to make sure it provides the training they need and want.

We are pleased to see that the number of solicitor apprenticeships continues to increase, and more than doubled in 2021/22. All solicitor apprentices will qualify through taking the SQE.

The figures below are taken from the summer of each year.

2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
30	107	170	242	222	584

In its first year more than 100 apprentices took the SQE across three assessment sittings. Apprentice pass rates were, on average, 26% higher than the overall pass rate.

Please note that, due to a data error, we previously misreported the number of solicitor apprenticeships in 2021/22 as 208. The figures shown are correct.

Character and suitability

We assess whether candidates for admission as a solicitor are fit to enter the profession through our [character and suitability test](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/assessment-character-suitability-rules/) [https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/assessment-character-suitability-rules/].

The questions we ask include whether the applicant has been convicted of any criminal offence, whether they have been subject to any enforcement action by another regulator and whether they have ever been declared bankrupt. In making our decisions, we consider all the information applicants give to us and, where there are potential concerns as to their suitability, any evidence to show they have taken steps to reform their character.

Individuals refused entry to the profession 2015-2022

Each year, we refuse a handful of applicants. The reasons are, generally, that the applicant has failed to disclose an important piece of information relating to their character or suitability, or they have failed to meet our requirements. The refusals we make each year are limited in number as some people withdraw their applications when they cannot meet our requirements.

2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
2	5	4	3	3	7	2

Higher rights of audience

A higher rights of audience qualification allows solicitors to act as an advocate in the higher courts. These are the Crown Court, High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court in England and Wales. The number of solicitors we regulate that have higher rights of audience can be seen in the table below.

There has been a gradual increase in the number of solicitors with a higher rights of audience qualification over the past seven years. This rise is driven by increases in those with a qualification to appear in civil cases, while there has been a slight drop in those who have rights for criminal cases or both.

The percentages represent a proportion of how many individuals have rights to appear in civil cases, criminal cases, or both for the year shown on the left.

	Civil	Criminal	Both	Total
2015/16	1,947 (29%)	3,305 (49%)	1,483 (22%)	6,735
2016/17	2,131 (31%)	3,272 (48%)	1,464 (21%)	6,867
2017/18	2,279 (33%)	3,200 (46%)	1,437 (21%)	6,916
2018/19	2,439 (35%)	3,153 (45%)	1,417 (20%)	7,009
2019/20	2,533 (35%)	3,160 (44%)	1,444 (20%)	7,137
2020/21	2,714 (38%)	3,087 (43%)	1,408 (20%)	7,209
2021/22	2,804 (39%)	3,017 (42%)	1,388 (19%)	7,209

Further information

[The Solicitors Qualifying Examination \[https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/sqe/\]](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/sqe/)

[Solicitors Qualifying Examination Annual Report 2021/22 \[https://sqe.sra.org.uk/docs/default-source/pdfs/reports/sqe-annual-report-2022.pdf\]](https://sqe.sra.org.uk/docs/default-source/pdfs/reports/sqe-annual-report-2022.pdf)

[SQE Independent Reviewer Annual Report 2021-22 \[https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/sqe-independent-21-22/\]](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/sqe-independent-21-22/)



[Number of practising solicitors having Higher Rights of Audience](https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/reports/statistics/regulated-community-statistics/data/higher_rights_of_audience/)

[https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/how-we-work/reports/statistics/regulated-community-statistics/data/higher_rights_of_audience/]

[SRA corporate strategy 2020 to 2023](https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/) [<https://higher-rights.sra.org.uk/sra/corporate-strategy/>]

Glossary - education and training

Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx)

Provides training to become a legal executive.

Common Professional Examination (CPE)

A postgraduate law course taken by non-law graduates who wish to become a solicitor or barrister in England and Wales. Also known as the Graduate Diploma in Law.

Equivalent means (EQM)

A route to admission as a solicitor which allows individuals to show they have met our requirements for a particular stage of training by demonstrating that they have equivalent experience.

Legal Practice Course (LPC)

A compulsory vocational training course usually taken just before the PRT under the LPC route transitional arrangements. It combines academic and practical training, to prepare students for work in a law firm.

Period of recognised training (PRT)

Compulsory work-based learning under the LPC transitional route, typically in a law firm, which forms part of the vocational stage in the route to qualifying as a solicitor.

Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS)

The scheme involved assessments that people must take if they were already qualified as a lawyer in another jurisdiction and want to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales. Barristers practising in England and Wales and who wish to cross-qualify as a solicitor will also qualify through this route. The QLTS has now been replaced by the SQE.

Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT)

This test performed the same role as the QLTS. It was largely phased out and replaced by the QLTS. A small number of individuals still enter the profession by this route.

Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE)

A single rigorous assessment introduced in September 2021 that all new aspiring solicitors need to take to qualify as a solicitor. It is split into two parts, SQE1 and SQE2, and assesses practical legal knowledge and practical legal skills.