



The new path to legal qualification - how your business is affected and how Reed Smith can help

Contents

What is the SQE?	04
How does this affect my business?	05
A breakdown of the new route	06
What are the differences between the existing route and the new route?	08
How are law firms and legal education providers responding to the changes?	10
Why shouldn't new SQE courses replicate the LPC?	11
An overview of the Reed Smith Professional SQE	12
How the Reed Smith Professional SQE works in practice	14
A model for in-house training	16
How can we help you?	17
A detailed comparison	18
Key contacts	19

What is happening to qualification?

In September 2021, the Solicitors Regulation Authority are introducing a new path to qualification in England and Wales which will replace the existing qualification routes. The Legal Practice Course (LPC), Graduate Diploma in Law conversion course (GDL), Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme for overseas qualified lawyers (QLTS), and the Professional Skills Course (PSC) will all be replaced by the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE), although there will be a transition period where both routes are available.

How to qualify under the new route:

- Have a degree in any subject
- Pass both stages of the SQE assessment
- Have two years' qualifying work experience (QWE)
- Pass the SQE character and suitability requirements

Existing qualification route:



New qualification route:



What is the SQE?

The SQE consists of two sets of assessments that applicants must pass in order to qualify as a solicitor, split into SQE 1 (functioning legal knowledge) and SQE 2 (practical legal skills). There is no mandated programme of education or training required in order to pass the SQE, although preparation training and additional knowledge and skills courses will be offered at a price by legal education providers.



How does this affect my business?

The SQE is being introduced in September 2021. However, applicants will have the option to choose between the LPC or SQE route provided that they have started their legal education prior to the introduction of the SQE, with a provisional longstop date of September 2031.

If you recruit trainees or intend to do so in the future

The transition period means that you can continue to send applicants on the existing LPC route for a number of years. At Reed Smith we believe that the changes provide an opportunity to train future lawyers in a new way and will be taking advantage of the new route from September 2022. Depending on how far in advance you recruit your future trainees, you may very soon need to consider when you want to switch to the SQE route, and what sorts of additional preparation and training are available.

If you do not recruit trainees and have no intention to do so in the future

Even if you have no plans to train solicitors in-house, from 2021 you may have paralegals or other legal professionals who wish to qualify as a solicitor, or you may encounter potential future joiners who have chosen to complete the SQE route. In light of this, it would be helpful to understand the new route in order to evaluate the differences.

How we can help

No matter how you recruit solicitors, students who begin their legal education in 2022 will be required to follow the SQE route. This brochure provides key information about the new route and Reed Smith's unique commercially-focused programme that is designed to revolutionise legal education and training, which may provide you with an option for training your own future joiners, should you wish to do so.

A breakdown of the new route

The SQE assessments are divided between functioning legal knowledge in SQE 1 and practical legal skills in SQE 2. The first SQE assessments will take place in September 2021 and from 2022 there will be two sitting dates for the assessments each year. Note that students will need to apply to sit the exams themselves and that each assessment involves a fee: £1,558 for SQE 1 and £2,422 for SQE 2. It is up to an individual employer whether they cover this cost on behalf of future joiners or existing staff who wish to qualify as solicitors.

Assessment structure

SQE 1 (functioning legal knowledge)	SQE 2 (practical legal skills)
<p>Assesment style 2 x 180 multiple choice question assessments 10 hours in total Ethics pervasive</p>	<p>Assessment style 16 written and oral simulated solicitor tasks 14 hours in total Ethics pervasive</p>
<p>Knowledge Assessed – Assessment 1 Business Law and Practice Dispute Resolution Contract Tort Legal System of England and Wales Public Law Legal Services</p>	<p>Skills Assessed – Content Client interviewing and attendance note Advocacy Case and matter analysis Legal research Legal writing Legal drafting Negotiation may be examined in any of the above except research and drafting</p>
<p>Knowledge Assessed – Assessment 2 Property Law and Practice Wills and Administration of Estates Solicitors Accounts Land Law Trusts Criminal Law and Practice</p>	<p>Skills Assessed – Context Criminal Litigation Dispute Resolution Property Practice Wills and Intestacy, Probate Administration and Practice Business Organisation Rules and Procedures</p>

Assessment dates

Year	Assessment	Final booking date	Exam sitting	Results published
2021	SQE 1	September	November	6 weeks later
2022	SQE 2	February	April	14 weeks later
2022	SQE 1	March	May	6 weeks later
2022	SQE 2	August	October	14 weeks later
2022	SQE 1	September	November	6 weeks later

Source: <https://www.sra.org.uk/students/sqe/sqe-assessments/>



What are the differences between the existing route and the new route?

The introduction of the new route represents the biggest change to legal education in three decades. The key differences between the old and new routes are set out below.

Assessment

The assessment is the clearest difference between the existing and new routes.

- i. **Existing route:** Generally, modules are assessed via 3-hour long-form written assessments which may be open-book or closed-book. Skills are assessed using a combination of oral and written assessments and research projects.
- ii. **SQE:** SQE 1 is assessed via two multiple choice question papers consisting of 180 questions each. SQE 2 is assessed using a combination of oral and written assessments and research projects over a single block of 5 days of assessments.

Course Content

The concept of a Qualifying Law Degree and a Legal Practice Course do not exist in the new route. Below is a summary of the content covered. For an in-depth comparison see the detailed comparison on page 18.

- i. **Existing route:** For most, the qualification route involves a law degree or GDL conversion course covering the seven foundations of legal knowledge, followed by the LPC Core Practice Areas and Electives and the PSC Core Modules and Electives. Others qualify via apprenticeships or the QLTS route.
- ii. **SQE:** There is no prescribed course content, though the assessments test skills and knowledge covering elements of both the GDL and the LPC. There is no specific requirement for a qualifying law degree or law conversion course. The SQE is also the end point assessment for legal apprenticeships. There are no equivalents to the electives in the SQE structure and SQE 2 is designed to assess a combination of LPC and PSC skills. Due to the nature of the assessments, the SQE coverage is wide and shallow. For example, Business Law and Practice in the LPC is taught in a single module taking around 52 hours and being assessed by four hours of examinations. Under the SQE, Business Law and Practice forms part of SQE 1 where it is one of 13 subjects covered in a total of ten hours of assessments.

Training contract

- i. **Existing route:** A two-year period of recognised training provided by a single law firm or organisation and regulated by the SRA. The training contract must cover three distinct areas of law and practice. Normally the trainee will undertake a number of “seats” of 3-6 months in different areas of legal practice, including contentious experience or an equivalent litigation training course. The training contract begins after the LPC is completed.
- ii. **New route:** Two years of full-time or equivalent work experience, defined as “any experience of providing legal services that offers a candidate the opportunity to develop some or all of the competences needed to practise as a solicitor” obtained in England, Wales, or overseas ([Source: SRA](#)). A solicitor must sign off the qualifying work experience (QWE) on a form like [this](#) to confirm:
 - the length of QWE;
 - the opportunity was provided to develop some or all of the prescribed solicitor competences; and
 - there are no character or suitability issues.

The two years’ experience can be accrued at a single law firm or organisation or in stages in up to four organisations. It can be paid or unpaid work. The QWE can be accrued at any time prior to applying for admission as a solicitor. Applicants can even start to gain experience now in order to apply toward the new route from September 2021.



How are law firms and legal education providers responding to the changes?

Traditional legal education providers such as BPP and the University of Law have announced their intention to continue with courses that align broadly to the existing LPC in terms of content and structure, and a number of firms have already announced their intention to continue with such a route.

At Reed Smith, we believe that this is not the time to replicate the LPC and the past, but to use the SQE route as a foundation upon which to build a new form of education and training which works equally well for in-house and law firms.



Why shouldn't new SQE courses replicate the LPC?

There are a number of reasons that the existing LPC is ripe for innovation but one of its key detriments is that the course does not involve on-the-job training in order to contextualise learning and build the business skills of a future lawyer. In addition:

- The LPC has remained largely untouched since its introduction almost 30 years ago.
- The educational content and scenarios in the LPC are divorced from training and practice
- Neither three-hour essay questions nor multiple-choice assessments adequately prepare students for practice
- The content and application is not always well-suited for in-house training and practice
- Commercial business, personal effectiveness and innovation skills do not form an intrinsic part of current legal education, as shown by initiatives such as the [O Shaped Lawyer](#), the T Shaped Lawyer, [the Delta model](#), and the Bionic Lawyer
- The only ways for students to get applied work experience in the current system are to work on top of studying full-time, or to engage in an apprenticeship or part-time course. Neither part-time courses nor apprenticeships are ideally suited to the SQE because:
 - Part-time courses can take a prohibitively long period of time; and
 - Apprenticeships require SQE 2 as an end point assessment, meaning that students will not be assessed on their skills until after completing two years of QWE. SQE 2 also involves legal knowledge from SQE 1, and it is unlikely that any work experience will cover all of the areas of SQE 1 meaning that additional preparation will need to be undertaken to remind students of the SQE 1 knowledge areas.

An overview of the Reed Smith Professional SQE

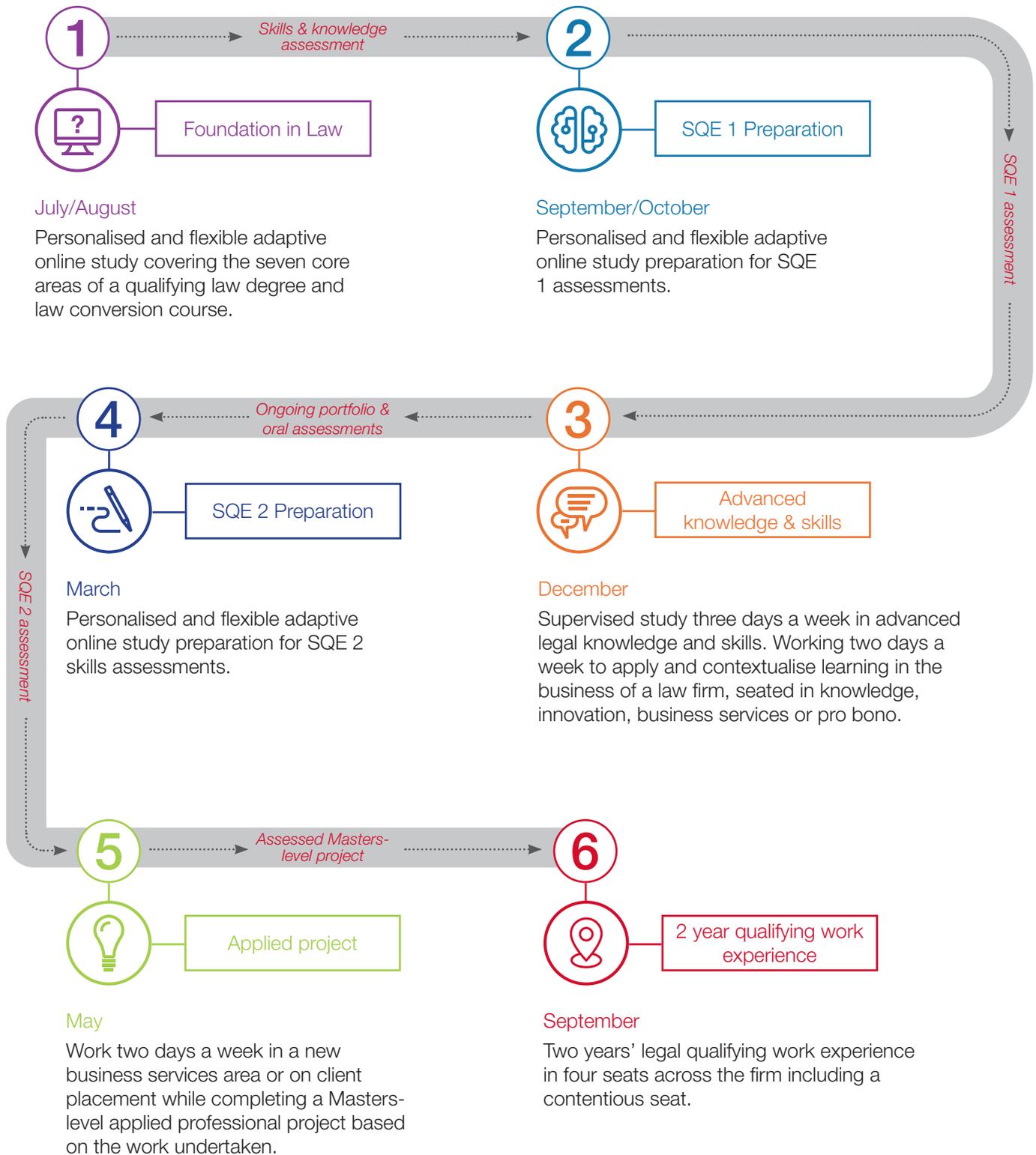
The Reed Smith Professional SQE is designed to keep the in-depth knowledge of the LPC while preparing students for the SQE assessments and building business and innovation skills through portfolio and oral assessments and real-world business placements. Students will obtain a Masters qualification upon the completion of the course and will have undertaken 9 months of part-time work. The entire course is completed in the same time to qualification as the LPC.

Our Professional SQE will prepare students for their SQE 1 examinations in a personalised and adaptive manner. Following the SQE 1 assessments, students will study advanced legal knowledge and skills while working within the knowledge management, innovation, pro bono, or business areas of Reed Smith. Our Professional SQE will also enable our students to undertake placements with clients, during which they can complete a commercial project within a real business situation. Client placements are well-established at the firm - as part of the Reed Smith-developed LLM Commercial LPC programme, our LPC graduates partake in a four-week placement with a client before they commence their Training Contracts. The Professional SQE builds on the success of this initiative.



How the Reed Smith Professional SQE works in practice

The Professional SQE involves six steps that take place across a year:





Step 1: Foundation in law

A legal foundations course provided to all future joiners in order to cover the seven foundational concepts of law.



Step 2: SQE 1 Preparation

A 10-week programme designed to prepare students for the SQE 1 examination. Training is delivered online in a flexible manner, combining individual supervision with artificial intelligence-powered personalisation in order to best prepare students for the assessment.



Step 3: Advanced Knowledge & Skills + Professional Placement 1

A four-month course covering the knowledge and skills previously covered at LPC elective level, with business skills as a pervasive topic. Assessment is via portfolio and oral assessment in a series of “appraisal” style meetings with an academic supervisor. During this step, students will work two days a week and study three days a week. At Reed Smith, the two days will involve working in a “seat” within our KM, innovation, business services or pro bono departments.



Step 4: SQE 2 Preparation

A short course of study designed to prepare students for the SQE 2 knowledge, skills and methods of assessments. As with SQE 1 preparation, training is delivered in a personalised online adaptive manner combined with individual supervision and assessment simulations.



Step 5: Applied Project + Professional Placement 2

A supervised Masters-level applied professional project to be completed within the context of the student’s work. For this four-month “seat” Reed Smith students can be offered the chance to work on client placements in addition to the areas listed in step 3, tailoring the content of their project appropriately.



Step 6: 2 year qualifying work experiences

We still believe there is great value in future joiners having the opportunity to train in four different “seats” in different legal areas over a two-year period, and our QWE model will match the existing trainee system.

A model for in-house training

We believe that the Professional SQE is not only the right route for our future joiners but could also be a new route for in-house teams looking to recruit and train their own solicitors.

The Professional SQE provides a combination of on-the-job learning with day release teaching delivered in an adaptive personalised online manner. This provides flexibility in the location of future joiners, and the ability to keep existing paralegals and legal support roles working in your business if they are training to qualify, without having to entirely release them from work for a period of time or proceed with an extended part-time course.

At Reed Smith, we are taking the opportunity of the part-time work to give students a foundation in the business aspects of law firms and our clients before engaging in their two years of legal training, but you could count the time worked toward QWE thereby reducing the period required following completion of the applied project.

How can we help you?

We believe that the Professional SQE is a revolutionary approach to legal education and would welcome the opportunity to:

- update you on the upcoming changes and what they mean for the business;
- explain the detail of the Professional SQE and explore whether it is a route you would consider for your own future joiners;
- explore placing a student to work with you for two days a week while undertaking a commercial project to benefit your business in their study days;
- seek your input and feedback as we create the detailed curriculum of the Professional SQE, in order to ensure our future joiners are best equipped to deliver for you.

We can work with you to design the course, to build in and capitalise on flexibility, and to provide and/or host secondees.



A detailed comparison

Below is a content gap analysis between the LPC, SQE, and Reed Smith Professional SQE. Note that the areas covered in the SQE column refer to what is assessed and not the content of any course, as no course of study is required in order to undertake the SQE assessments.

Content	Existing regulated route	New SQE route	Reed Smith Professional SQE
2 years' legal training	Training contract	Qualifying Work Experience	Qualifying Work Experience
9-month business services / client placement			Professional Placement
Masters-level applied project			Applied Professional Project + Professional Placement
Business and Professional Skills	PSC		Advanced Knowledge & Skills Course + Professional Placement
Specialist Elective 3	LPC Electives		Advanced Knowledge & Skills Course
Specialist Elective 2	LPC Electives		Advanced Knowledge & Skills Course
Specialist Elective 1	LPC Electives		Advanced Knowledge & Skills Course
Personal effectiveness skills			Advanced Knowledge & Skills Course + Professional Placement
Innovation Skills			Advanced Knowledge & Skills Course + Professional Placement
Case and matter analysis		SQE 2	SQE 2 Preparation Course + SQE 2
Legal research	LPC Core Skill	SQE 2	SQE 2 Preparation Course + SQE 2
Legal drafting	LPC Core Skill	SQE 2	SQE 2 Preparation Course + SQE 2
Legal writing	LPC Core Skill	SQE 2	SQE 2 Preparation Course + SQE 2
Advocacy	LPC Core Skill	SQE 2	SQE 2 Preparation Course + SQE 2
Interviewing & Advising	LPC Core Skill	SQE 2	SQE 2 Preparation Course + SQE 2
Solicitors Accounts	LPC Core Skill	SQE 1 – Assessment 2	SQE 1 Preparation Course + SQE 1 – Assessment 2
Professional Conduct and Regulation	LPC Core Practice Area	SQE 1 & 2	SQE 1 Preparation Course + SQE 1 & 2
Wills and Administration of Trusts and Estates	LPC Core Practice Area	SQE 1 – Assessment 2	SQE 1 Preparation Course + SQE 1 – Assessment 2
Litigation (Criminal and Civil) / Dispute Resolution	LPC Core Practice Area	SQE 1 – Assessment 1	SQE 1 Preparation Course + SQE 1 – Assessment 1
Property Law and Practice	LPC Core Practice Area	SQE 1 – Assessment 2	SQE 1 Preparation Course + SQE 1 – Assessment 2
Business Law and Practice	LPC Core Practice Area	SQE 1 – Assessment 1	SQE 1 Preparation Course + SQE 1 – Assessment 1
Contract Law	GDL/ Law degree	SQE 1 – Assessment 1	Foundations in Law Module + SQE 1 – Assessment 1
EU Law	GDL/ Law degree	SQE 1 – Assessment 1	Foundations in Law Module + SQE 1 – Assessment 1
Land Law	GDL/ Law degree	SQE 1 – Assessment 2	Foundations in Law Module + SQE 1 – Assessment 2
Criminal Law	GDL/ Law degree	SQE 1 – Assessment 2	Foundations in Law Module + SQE 1 – Assessment 2
Tort	GDL/ Law degree	SQE 1 – Assessment 1	Foundations in Law Module + SQE 1 – Assessment 1
Constitutional and Administrative Law	GDL/ Law degree	SQE 1 – Assessment 1	Foundations in Law Module + SQE 1 – Assessment 1
Equity & Trusts	GDL/ Law degree	SQE 1 – Assessment 1	Foundations in Law Module + SQE 1 – Assessment 1

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