

# The Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE): approach to qualified lawyers seeking admission as a solicitor of England and Wales

June 2024

The Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) is single, rigorous assessment for all aspiring solicitors. After this date, all qualified lawyers will need to do the following to become a solicitor of England and Wales:

- have a [degree in any subject or an equivalent qualification or experience](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/sqe/check-validate-qualification/degree-equivalent/) [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/sqe/check-validate-qualification/degree-equivalent/>]
- pass the [SQE1 and SQE2 assessments](https://sqe.sra.org.uk/registering-and-booking/) [<https://sqe.sra.org.uk/registering-and-booking/>], unless you wish to apply for an exemption
- meet our [character and suitability requirements](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/character-and-suitability/) [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/character-and-suitability/>].

As a starting point, we envisage that qualified lawyers will typically have at least two years' professional experience. However, this is not a requirement for you to become a solicitor. This means you do not need to do qualifying work experience, as we will recognise your existing qualification and experience.

If a qualified lawyer is granted an exemption from SQE2, we may also require them to demonstrate their English or Welsh language competence.

## The principles

### Overarching requirements

1. Qualified lawyers who wish to be admitted as a solicitor of England and Wales will need to:
  - a. hold a legal professional qualification that we recognise which confers rights to practise in England and Wales or in an overseas jurisdiction;
  - b. demonstrate that they have the competences set out in the [Statement of Solicitor Competence](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources-archived/continuing-competence/cpd/competence-statement/) [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources-archived/continuing-competence/cpd/competence-statement/>] (SoSC), and the knowledge of English and Welsh law set out in the Statement of Legal Knowledge either on the basis of the principles set out below and/or through successful completion of the [SQE](https://sqe.sra.org.uk/registering-and-booking/) [<https://sqe.sra.org.uk/registering-and-booking/>];



- c. have a degree or qualifications or experience which we are satisfied are equivalent to a degree;
  - d. satisfy our character and suitability requirements; and
  - e. have evidenced proficiency in English or Welsh.
2. The SQE consists of two parts, SQE1 and SQE2. SQE1 consists of two components, FLK1 and FLK2. We will consider the knowledge, skills and competences qualified lawyers have gained when deciding whether to grant an exemption from any component or part of the SQE.<sup>1</sup> [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n1>]. An exemption decision may relate to SQE1 and/or SQE2 in full, or individual components<sup>2</sup> [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n2>], which make up SQE1. We will only grant an exemption where the knowledge, skills and competences correspond to the whole of SQE2 or an individual component of SQE1. We will not grant an exemption for only part of SQE2 or part of an individual component of SQE1 as it is not possible to assess all candidates on a reliable and accurate basis where some candidates are only being assessed on some aspects of SQE2 or some aspects of an individual component of SQE1.
3. Subject to Principle 4 below, we will not grant an exemption for an individual component or part of the SQE where a qualified lawyer has previously taken and failed that component.
4. Principle 3 above applies to a lawyer who has qualified in Switzerland where there exists a substantial difference between the qualified lawyer's professional qualifications and the essential knowledge or skills required to practise in England and Wales, as set out in [Statement of Solicitor Competence](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources-archived/continuing-competence/cpd/competence-statement/) [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources-archived/continuing-competence/cpd/competence-statement/>], (SoSC), and the knowledge of English and Welsh law set out in the Statement of Legal Knowledge.

## Professional qualifications

5. For us to grant an exemption from part or all of the SQE (SQE1 and/or SQE2), qualified lawyers will need to demonstrate that the qualification they hold is equivalent to SQE1 and/or SQE2 in full, or individual components of SQE1 in the following ways:
  - Content: the professional qualification will need to cover content which is not substantially different to the areas of English and Welsh law set out in the Statement of Legal Knowledge and the competences set out in the SoSC.
  - Standard: the professional qualification will need to be of an equivalent standard – it will have to assess to a level which is comparable to level three of the SRA threshold standard.<sup>3</sup> [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n3>]

## Professional experience



6. Where qualified lawyers have acquired professional experience in legal practice<sup>4</sup> [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n4>] through practising under their home title and/or in their home jurisdiction, we will consider whether the knowledge, skills and competences developed by this professional experience are equivalent to corresponding components of SQE1 and/or SQE2. For us to grant an exemption on the basis of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through professional experience, qualified lawyers will need to demonstrate that the knowledge, skills and competences acquired are equivalent to SQE1 and/or SQE2 in full or individual components of SQE1 in the following ways:
- Content: the knowledge, skills and competences acquired through the professional experience will need to cover content which is not substantially different to the areas of English and Welsh law set out in the Statement of Legal Knowledge and the competences set out in the SoSC.
  - Standard: the knowledge, skills and competences acquired through the professional experience will need to be developed to a level which is comparable to level three of the SRA threshold standard.<sup>5</sup> [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n5>]
7. Qualified lawyers will typically have a minimum of two years' professional experience in order to show us that they have satisfactorily developed to an equivalent standard the competences assessed by the part(s) or component(s) of the SQE for which they are seeking an exemption. However, some candidates may be able to demonstrate to our satisfaction that they have developed the respective competences to an equivalent standard within a shorter period of professional experience or through lifelong learning (or through a combination of both).<sup>6</sup> [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n6>]. Qualified lawyers can still apply to us for an exemption by submitting formal evidence and we will assess the evidence to determine whether their knowledge, skills and competences meet our content and standard requirements.

## English or Welsh language requirement

8. There is an English or Welsh language requirement for all solicitors, including qualified lawyers who have received an exemption from SQE2. This must be verified before applicants may be admitted to the roll. Qualified lawyers can submit evidence that they are proficient in English or Welsh in one of the following ways:
- passing SQE2; or
  - holding a certificate of language assessment from a [Secure English Language Test](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-Language-Test) [[https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-Language-Test)



[abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt#find-an-approved-test](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n7)<sup>7</sup>  
[<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n7>] (SELT) (or an equivalent test in Welsh) showing

attainment to the equivalent of at least IELTS level 7.5 (or an equivalent standard in Welsh) and issued no more than three years prior to the date submitted as evidence; or

- relying upon a professional legal qualification for an exemption from SQE2 that was taught and assessed in English or Welsh; or
- passing the Legal Practice Course (LPC) where they are eligible to apply for admission to the roll under the transitional provision in regulation 11.6.

## Notes on the principles

### Regulatory/professional bodies

9. A regulatory/professional body may make an application to us for exemption from a component or part(s) of the SQE.
10. We will continue to recognise legal qualifications and titles which we have recognised previously. However, a regulatory/professional body applying for exemption for the whole or components of SQE1 and/or SQE2 for their profession will need to undertake a mapping exercise and submit evidence to us showing how their members' professional qualification is equivalent to the relevant component or part(s) of the SQE in content and standard.
11. We will review the mapping exercise the regulatory/professional body has undertaken and grant exemption for the professional qualifications of a regulatory/professional body as equivalent to the SQE or individual parts or components of it, where we assess that the content and standard of the qualification scheme is not substantially different to the corresponding component or part(s) of the SQE. We will look at the content and standard of the profession's qualification scheme only,<sup>8</sup> [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n8>] and whether the exemption sought covers the entirety of an individual component and/or the whole of SQE1 and/or SQE2.

### Individuals

12. Qualified lawyers who are seeking admission will have to contact us and demonstrate how their professional qualification or professional experience is equivalent to the SQE, or part of it, based either on the areas of exemption agreed with us by their regulatory/professional body, and/or their individual circumstances. In order to do this, they will be required to submit formal evidence, including an explanation of how their professional experience has enabled them to develop the competences in relation to which they



are seeking exemption.<sup>9</sup> [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/qualified-lawyers/principle-admission/#n9>]

13. Qualified lawyers may make an application to us for exemption using a professional title that they hold and which confers practice rights in England and Wales or in an overseas jurisdiction which has not previously been assessed by us and has not been the subject of an application to us by the regulatory/professional body. If the qualification has not already been assessed sufficient information will need to be provided to enable the mapping exercise referred to in paragraphs 8 and 9 above to be carried out.

## Notes

1. We will consider applications for exemption from qualified lawyers who hold a professional legal title we recognise for exemption. Where an exemption is granted, the qualified lawyer will not be required to sit the corresponding component or part(s) of the SQE assessment(s).
2. "Component" of the SQE means an individual assessed element of the SQE for which a separate standard is set and a mark provided.
3. [www.sra.org.uk/threshold](http://www.sra.org.uk/threshold) [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources-archived/continuing-competence/cpd/competence-statement/threshold-standard/>]
4. Periods of professional experience in legal practice which are undertaken either pre or post qualification can be taken into consideration.
5. [www.sra.org.uk/threshold](http://www.sra.org.uk/threshold) [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources-archived/continuing-competence/cpd/competence-statement/threshold-standard/>].
6. 'lifelong learning': all general education, vocational education and training, non-formal education and informal learning undertaken throughout life, resulting in an improvement in knowledge, skills and competences, which may include professional ethics.
7. If an English or Welsh language certificate is being relied upon, qualified lawyers must ensure it was issued no more than three years from the time it is submitted as evidence and that it is a [SELT](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt#find-an-approved-test) [<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt#find-an-approved-test>] assessment awarded by a Home Office approved test provider. [SELT](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt#find-an-approved-test) [<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prove-your-english-language-abilities-with-a-secure-english-language-test-selt#find-an-approved-test>] certificates can be uploaded when applying to be admitted to the roll in [mySRA](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/mysra/) [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/mysra/>].
8. ie - we will not look at features such as the assessment methodology or the format of the assessment.
9. In practice this could be achieved either on the basis of confirming to us that they are a member of a profession which has pre-agreed areas of exemption in place (based on the standard qualification route of the profession), and/or by submitting evidence in support of 'less typical' periods of professional experience.
10. Evidence of English or Welsh proficiency from the Legal Practice Course may only be relied upon until 2032 when the transitional

provisions come to an end, in accordance with regulation 11.3.