

Education and Training Annual Report 2022/23

20 December 2024

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). This replaced the previous routes to qualification as a solicitor, supporting consistency in standards and encouraging more flexibility and choice in training. This flexibility, which includes 'earn as you learn' options, aims to increase opportunities for the brightest and best from all backgrounds to qualify.

About this report

This report provides information from our work in this area, with a focus on data concerning how many people are qualifying through different routes into the profession. It includes new data for the period November 2022 to October 2023 and highlights key trends over a seven-year period*. It is part of a [suite of reports which cover our work for the 2022/23 year](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/corporate-reports-2022-23/) [<https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/corporate-reports-2022-23/>].

The areas the report covers are:

- routes to admission as a solicitor
- periods of recognised training
- solicitor apprenticeships
- higher rights of audience.

We publish more data and detailed information about the SQE and other training routes elsewhere. This includes [statistical reports after each SQE assessment](https://sqe.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/sqe-reports/), [including an independent reviewer's analysis](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/sqe-independent-22-23/), and [an annual quality assurance report on the Legal Practice Course \(LPC\)](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/education-training-monitoring-2021-22/).

* Please note, our business year is 1 November to 31 October. Unless otherwise stated, the figures relate to 31 October 2023 - the end of the reporting year.

[A glossary of terms is available](#) [[#heading_316e](#)].

Summary of key findings

- There has been a steady increase in the number of people qualifying as solicitors each year. Numbers have risen by around a third when comparing 2022/23 with 2016/17.
- The data shows that we are in a period of transition in terms of admission to the profession. The majority of solicitors - around 75 per cent - are still qualifying through the old LPC route. However, in the coming years, fewer



people will be eligible to take this route, and most people will have to take the SQE to qualify.

- Numbers qualifying through the SQE are already increasing, with a rise from 437 in 2021/22 to 1,469 in 2022/23. The majority of those individuals are qualified lawyers – these are lawyers who have qualified in other jurisdictions or are a qualified lawyer in England and Wales, such as a barrister.
- Solicitor apprenticeships can provide greater opportunities for people from all backgrounds to become solicitors. Numbers continue to grow, with new registrations for 2022/23 up by a third on the previous year (777 compared to 584).
- Over the seven-year period, there has been a gradual increase in the number of solicitors with a higher rights of audience qualification, which enables them to act as an advocate in the higher courts, such as the Crown Court and Court of Appeal. The increase has been driven by those gaining the qualification to appear in civil cases, while there has been a drop in those who have rights for criminal cases.

[Open all \[#\]](#)

[Routes to admission and transitional arrangements](#)

[Solicitors currently enter the profession through a range of routes](#)

[\[https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/admission/pathways-qualification/1\]](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/admission/pathways-qualification/1). Increasingly, each year, solicitors will enter the profession through taking and passing both parts of the SQE assessment (SQE1 and SQE2).

Transitional arrangements remain in place for aspiring solicitors who started their path to qualification before the SQE was introduced:

- Taking a qualifying law degree or a non-law degree and the common professional examination, followed by the LPC and then a period of recognised training (PRT).
- Qualifying as a solicitor under the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS).
- 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 (EQM). 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.

In most cases, it has no longer been possible to start a route to qualification as a solicitor using one of the above routes since late 2021.

Swiss lawyers who are also a registered European lawyer (REL) can apply through the REL route. They are the only people who can apply through this route following the UK's exit from the EU in 2020.

The table below shows the number of individuals that joined the profession from each route from 2016 to 2023. The number of new solicitors entering the profession has steadily increased over the past seven years and averages at around 7,200 per year. The number of individuals entering the profession in 2022/23 reached 8,819, the highest number we have seen in the past seven

years. This is due to the higher-than-average numbers of individuals who qualified through the LPC route. This is likely because the pandemic delayed some people from starting their PRT in 2020. This in turn delayed their admission to the profession – and we are now starting to see these individuals be admitted.

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 since January 2021, as discussed above.

The number of individuals entering the profession through the QLTS route almost doubled in 2021/22. The deadline for candidates wishing to qualify through this route was 31 March 2024, as we move towards all candidates taking the SQE. We expect QLTS numbers to tail off when we next come to report on these numbers.

Number of admissions by route

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
SQE	-	-	-	-	-	437	1,469
LPC	5,513	5,575	5,744	5,475	5,723	5,195	6,633
QLTS	541	603	521	605	688	1,307	341
CILEX and assistant justices' clerks	251	323	343	324	352	240	260
Republic of Ireland	136	131	188	124	149	See breakdown of admissions by SQE route	See breakdown of admissions by SQE route
Northern Ireland	17	28	35	31	41	See breakdown of admissions by SQE route	See breakdown of admissions by SQE route
EQM	71	85	88	99	109	114	110
REL	53	34	76	60	100	-	1
QLTT	24	7	8	5	9	5	5
Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	6,607	6,786	7,003	6,723	7,171	7,298	8,819

Please 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 (this is a term used for candidates who were part-qualified under an EU qualification and were able to apply for exemptions in our admissions process).
- Some of these figures differ slightly from those 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 which route an applicant has taken, with more routes identified in the chart above. We have corrected any past data errors in the table above.
- 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. More information can be found in our [Authorisation report](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/authorising-profession-2022-23/1) [\[https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/authorising-profession-2022-23/1\]](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/authorising-profession-2022-23/1).

Breakdown of admissions by the SQE route

The information in this section shows the breakdown of individuals who qualified through the SQE route. These individuals are made up of:

- individuals who passed SQE1 and SQE2 (excluding apprentices)
- apprentice individuals who passed SQE1 and SQE2
- qualified lawyers.

The number of individuals qualifying through the SQE route continues to grow as it becomes the main route into the profession. Numbers increased from 437 in 2021/22 to 1,469 in 2022/23.

The majority of individuals who qualified through the SQE between 2021 and 2023 were qualified lawyers. These individuals can be lawyers qualified in other jurisdictions or a qualified lawyer in England and Wales, such as a barrister. We expect to see the numbers of individuals admitted to the profession who are not already qualified lawyers (see figures in the first two columns of the table) increase in the next few years.

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland solicitors are classed as qualified lawyers, and the numbers of individuals qualifying from these jurisdictions are captured under 'qualified lawyers' in the table below.

	Individuals who qualified having passed SQE1 and SQE2 (excluding apprentices)	Apprentice individuals who qualified having passed SQE1 and SQE2	Qualified lawyers	Total number of admissions by SQE route
2021/22	162	19	256	437
2022/23	325	64	1,080	1,469

In spring 2024, we published the second year of reports from the SQE's assessment provider, Kaplan, and by the SQE's Independent Reviewer, which reviewed the SQE. They showed the exam continued to perform well. The SQE Independent Reviewer said that the delivery of the assessment had improved

year on year and the assessments were fair and reliable, while recognising there had been some operational issues.

[The SQE annual report for 2022/23 \[https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/sqa-reports/sqa-annual-report-2023\]](https://sqa.sra.org.uk/exam-arrangements/sqa-reports/sqa-annual-report-2023) does not cover the period when an error was made in the initial calculation of January 2024's SQE1 results, where 175 candidates were incorrectly told they had failed one or both parts of SQE1. All results for that sitting were reissued. The error occurred when scaled scores were used for SQE1 results for the first time. This error, together with recent changes to improve candidates' experiences, will be covered in the next set of SQE annual reports.

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. As a PRT does not form part of the SQE, we will no longer need to authorise organisations to provide it, and we will start to see these numbers decline.

2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
5,497	5,746	5,877	6,219	6,339	6,473	6,561

Solicitor apprenticeships

Qualifying through a solicitor apprenticeship offers an opportunity to earn-as-you-learn on the job. It provides greater opportunities for people from all types of backgrounds to become solicitors.

We are pleased to see that the number of individuals registering as a solicitor apprentice continues to increase. All solicitor apprentices will take SQE1 and SQE2.

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

New registrations of solicitor apprenticeships

2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
30	107	170	242	222	584	777

In the assessments we have seen so far, the SQE pass rates for solicitor apprentices have generally been higher than for other candidates.

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 who have higher rights of audience can be seen in the table below.

Over the past seven years, there has been a gradual increase in the number of solicitors with a higher rights of audience qualification. This is largely due to the increase of individuals with a qualification to appear in civil cases, while there



has been a drop in those who have rights for criminal cases and a slight decrease for those with both.

The percentages represent a proportion of how many individuals have rights to appear in civil cases, criminal cases, or both in each given year.

Please note, numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

	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
2022/23	2,851 (40%)	2,967 (41%)	1,353 (19%)	7,171

Further information

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

[Number of practising solicitors with Higher Rights of Audience \[https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/regulated-community-statistics/data/higher_rights_of_audience/\]](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/regulated-community-statistics/data/higher_rights_of_audience/)

[SRA corporate strategy 2023 to 2026 \[https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/corporate-strategy-2023-26/\]](https://upgrade.sra.org.uk/sra/consultations/consultation-listing/corporate-strategy-2023-26/)

Glossary - education and training

Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEX)

A membership body that provides training to become a legal executive. CILEx Regulation regulates CILEX members.

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 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 or in-house legal team.

Period of recognised training (PRT)

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

Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS)

This scheme involved assessments that people had to take if they were already qualified as a lawyer in another jurisdiction and wanted to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales. Barristers qualified in England and Wales and who wished to cross-qualify as a solicitor will also have been



able to qualify through this route. The QLTS has now been replaced by the SQE.

Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT)

This test pre-dated and 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 will, in due course, take to qualify as a solicitor. It is split into two parts, SQE1 and SQE2, and assesses practical legal knowledge and practical legal skills. To qualify through the SQE, candidates need to pass the SQE1 and 2, have a degree or equivalent, gain two years qualifying work experience and pass our character and suitability test.