



Studying for the SQE: key insights from aspiring and qualified solicitors

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Ever wondered what it's really like to study for the SQE?

Our SQE case study series dives into the personal experiences of aspiring and qualified solicitors.

Learn the study methods that helped them prepare and pass the examination, and how they managed to balance work life with study.

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Sian Saunders: Combining SQE with a master's degree

Where are you in your journey to becoming a solicitor?

I qualified as a solicitor through the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) route in 2023 and was in one of the first cohorts to complete the SQE.

How did you study for the exam?

I chose the combined master's degree and SQE training route for practical reasons. It allowed me to study in person, which suited my learning style.

I gained my law degree four years earlier, and I knew I would benefit from additional coursework and a refresher on some of the key legal concepts and practices. This type of course enabled me to access government funding that would not have been available for standalone SQE training.

I opted to study full-time while continuing to work, though part-time options are available. Looking back, the part-time route might have been more manageable given my work commitments, but the full-time programme suited my circumstances at the time.

What help did you get from your employer?

When I decided to take the SQE, I approached my employer to discuss my training plans and any available support.

Their response exceeded my expectations – they provided paid time off for exam days and study leave. This worked well for me, given my full-time work commitments. It allowed me to make the most of my annual leave for additional study time, without having the financial pressure.

For anyone working in legal services and considering SQE training, I recommend having an open conversation with your employer early in the process.

Support doesn't have to be monetary – practical support is just as important. For example, being open with your employer can create the opportunity to develop a support network during what can be a challenging time.

Knowing that my workplace understood and supported my goals made the entire experience more manageable and enjoyable.

My journey has highlighted an important point – that becoming a solicitor is a mutual benefit. While advancing my career, I also believe I have contributed to the firm's in-house expertise.

How did you do your qualifying work experience?

I completed my qualifying work experience (QWE) in one law firm over two years. I worked very closely with the firm's head of legal to build a training programme that met the solicitors' competencies. I used the Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) training template to build a portfolio to show to the solicitor responsible for confirming my QWE.

What tips do you have for someone taking the SQE?

Revise, revise, revise!

But when it comes to the days leading up to the exam, don't try to cram all your revision. Some people may be tempted to stay up and revise until the early hours of the morning, but it won't help, and you'll only find yourself exhausted on exam day.

The exam is mentally draining, so get a good night's sleep the night before, save your energy, and just do your best.

Hear from Sian about managing full-time work while studying, support from her employer, building QWE and tips for studying for the exam.



[Amit Kapoor: How self-study for SQE worked for me](#)

Where are you in your journey to becoming a solicitor?

I qualified as a solicitor through the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) route in July 2024.

How did you study for the exam?

I took a course for SQE2 but chose to self-study for SQE1 for two reasons. The first was timing – I had a short window where I wasn't too busy at work or home to study for the SQE.

Coming from a non-traditional background, without a law degree or a Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), when I looked at the training market, most SQE training providers suggested I would need to do a lengthy training programme. But scanning the functioning legal knowledge required for the



exam and the Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) sample questions, I thought I was capable of self-studying.

Secondly, it was a personal challenge. I decided that if I could pass the SQE through self-study, that achievement would serve as a commitment to my career transition. I finished in the top quintile, which significantly helped my decision to switch to a legal career.

I doubt any SQE provider would have supported my goal of passing the SQE within four months, without a law degree and achieving top quintile results.

What were the benefits of self-study?

I had complete academic freedom and did not feel constrained by conventional approaches. I was essentially designing my educational course.

Also, I came to understand that analysing legal texts and applying that knowledge represents the predominant method of legal practice. I believed that beginning to work in this analytical way, during my studies, would prepare me for legal practice after I qualified.

Law is expressed in written form, so it's entirely logical that an aspiring solicitor should be able to read, understand and apply it. The complicating factor is that there are many laws to understand and recall across seven days of exams, but it is entirely doable.

How did you do your qualifying work experience?

All my qualifying work experience (QWE) was retrospective. I gained it as part of my role as a contracts manager in the 10 years leading up to the exam. I used examples of the work and filed documents as evidence, collating these into a portfolio for my external solicitor to view and confirm.

What tips do you have for someone taking the SQE?

I'd suggest you self-assess whether you comprehend most questions in any mock test. If you can consistently rule out at least two incorrect answers, your odds of passing SQE1 are high. I used this technique because I had known from practising the SRA sample questions that I only needed to get marginally better to pass.

My approach to SQE1 was to buy commercially available books and go through the multiple-choice questions (MCQs) at the end of every chapter. I also subscribed to an MCQs tool. I took a 20-week part-time course for SQE2, mainly because I wanted qualified solicitors to mark my work, give me feedback, plus access to model answers and videos.

When it comes to advocacy, I would encourage candidates to have more conviction in themselves. The band of what constitutes reasonable performance for a newly qualified solicitor is quite wide, and there's a good chance you're already there.

On client interviewing, I would suggest candidates take their time and not rush to the next question – instead, listen more deeply in the moment. Use your notes as a reference to ensure you have nothing more to ask before moving to the next question.

Also, don't be too hard on yourself in your SQE preparation. It is impossible to have all the law in your head. So, be kind to yourself if you find yourself frequently forgetting things you have previously studied.

Hear from Amit about self-studying for the SQE, using retrospective QWE and approaches to answering exam questions.

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[Hafsa Arif: An international student's experience of the SQE](#)

Where are you in your journey to becoming a solicitor?

I am a Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) candidate and plan to take the SQE1 in January 2026.

How are you preparing for SQE1?

I chose to study a part-time diploma course for two reasons. Firstly, as an international student, I was mindful that my home country places particular importance on Level 7 qualifications, such as postgraduate diplomas and master's degrees. Secondly, I was completing my qualifying work experience at the same time. The course provider offered flexible study options on Saturdays, either in the morning or evening, which suited my schedule. This



made it feasible for me to balance my work commitments with my part-time studies.

What were the benefits of taking the part-time diploma course?

I wanted to complete my qualifying work experience (QWE) alongside studying for the SQE. One of the main advantages of the course was that it allowed me to do exactly that. I could gain valuable practical experience while preparing for both the QWE requirements and SQE2. This practical exposure also enhanced my understanding of the SQE2 skills while I was still studying for SQE1, creating a strong connection between theory and practice. The course offered a seamless integration of academic learning and hands-on experience, which meant I didn't have to delay starting my QWE until after completing a diploma.

What advice would you give anyone preparing to sit their SQE1?

There are plenty of multiple-choice questions (MCQs) and mock exams available online, so make the most of them and practise as much as possible. Consistency and organisation are key - establish a routine and try to simulate exam conditions when practising. This will help you become familiar with the pressure and time constraints of the real exam. It's completely normal to feel anxious in the lead-up to and during the exam, but staying organised, practising regularly, and maintaining a steady approach will help you build confidence and perform at your best.

What study resources are you using to prepare for SQE1?

When I began my course, there wasn't as much information or support material available as there is now. Today, there is a wide range of revision books and a wealth of online mock MCQs to help with preparation. While the core legal content remains consistent, practising MCQs under timed conditions is particularly important. It helps you become familiar with the exam format and manage your time effectively on the day.

What approach are you taking to study for the SQE?

Being consistent, staying organised, and practising regularly. These three habits will make all the difference in my preparation and will help me stay focused and confident throughout the process.

Hear from Hafsa about her approach to studying for the SQE, as an international student, and her flexible approach to gaining QWE.



Resources

- [Watch our webinar - Studying for the SQE](https://contact.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/studying-sqe/) [https://contact.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/studying-sqe/]
- [Pathways to qualification](https://contact.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/admission/pathways-qualification/) [https://contact.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/admission/pathways-qualification/]
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