

*This paper will be published*

**Report on the fourth full year of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE)**

<b>Reason for paper</b>	This paper updates the Board on the fourth year of the delivery of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE).
<b>Decisions(s)</b>	<p>The Board is asked to:</p> <p>a) consider the fourth year of the SQE, including as set out in the following reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the SQE annual report prepared by Kaplan (annex 1)</li> <li>● the annual report of the Independent Reviewer (annex 2)</li> <li>● our quality assurance report (annex 3)</li> </ul> <p>b) note key developments since the Board considered the third year of delivery at its meeting in February 2025</p> <p>c) confirm the SQE fees for the academic year 2026/2027 of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● SQE1: £2,006 (£1,934 for 2025/26)</li> <li>● SQE2: £3,086 (£2,974 for 2025/26)</li> </ul> <p>d) note progress against our actions to address the causes of differential outcomes (annex 4).</p>
<b>Previous Board and committee consideration</b>	The Board considered the third year of the SQE's delivery in February 2025.
<b>Next steps</b>	We will publish the annual reports in early April.

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## **Report on the fourth full year of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE)**

### **Summary**

- 1 This paper invites the Board to consider the fourth year of the delivery of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE).
- 2 The Board is also invited to note and confirm the SQE fees for 2026/2027, which, in accordance with our contract with Kaplan, will be increased in line with inflation, with a small supplementary increase towards Welsh translation costs.
- 3 The paper also reports on some more recent developments.
- 4 Zoe Robinson, Managing Director at Kaplan Assessments, Soren Kroon, Managing Director, Kaplan Professional, Richard Hankins, Kaplan's Quality and Standards Director and Mike O'Rorke, Kaplan's Service and Operations Director, will present key aspects from Kaplan's report to the Board, plans for the future and take questions.

### **Background**

- 5 The SQE has been available since November 2021. Our objectives, when we introduced the SQE route to qualification, were to:
  - provide greater assurance of consistent high standards at the point of qualification as a solicitor
  - create new and diverse pathways to qualification that:
    - respond to the changing legal services market
    - promote a more diverse profession by removing artificial and unjustifiable barriers.
- 6 The SQE is delivered in two parts. SQE1 was delivered, and results were issued on two occasions (January and July 2025) in the period covered by Kaplan's annual report. SQE2 was delivered and results were issued on four occasions during the period covered by the report (October 2024 and January, April and July 2025). This paper focuses on the assessments covered by the reports, however, there is also information on wider developments.
- 7 During 2024/25 more than 16,200 individual candidates took part in the SQE. This compares with 14,600 in the previous year. The largest SQE1 sitting was in January 2025; the largest SQE2 sitting was in April 2025.
- 8 The total number of solicitors who have been admitted to the roll having taken one or both parts of the SQE is naturally increasing and includes, to the end of December 2025:

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- a. 2,879 who qualified using the standard SQE route to qualification (passing SQE1 and SQE2, and undertaking qualifying work experience)
- b. an additional 795 passed SQE1 and SQE2 as solicitor apprentices
- c. 5,374 who were already qualified as a lawyer in England and Wales or another jurisdiction. Qualified lawyers do not have to undertake QWE. Many are granted an exemption from SQE2 and, in some limited cases, from SQE1 as well.
- d. 957 who had completed an LPC but passed SQE2 and undertook qualifying work experience under the transitional arrangements

**Discussion**

**How the assessments and candidates have performed**

- 9 Kaplan's annual report draws together materials previously presented in statistical reports published after each exam sitting. It includes analyses of how the assessments performed, on how candidates overall have performed, including with reference to their prior attainment and experience and their demographic and protected characteristics.
- 10 The analyses show the assessments have performed well. The assessments are valid and reliable, successfully differentiating between candidates who are competent and those who are not. The Independent Reviewer's report supports this conclusion. Our quality assurance report summarises the steps we take to assure ourselves the assessments are fit for purpose.
- 11 The pass rates for candidates taking SQE1 for the first time were 60% for January 2025 (59% for January 2024) and 46% for July 2025 (48% for July 2024). The overall pass rates, including re-sitting candidates, were 56% and 41% respectively (56% and 44% in 2024). The pass rate for July 2025's SQE1 was lower than previously seen. There is no pre-determined pass rate for the assessments. The rate simply reflects the percentage of candidates in any sitting who meet the standard for a competent day one solicitor.
- 12 The proportion of re-sitting candidates taking SQE1 in July 2025 was the highest of any sitting to date. Re-sitting candidates generally have lower pass rates than candidates sitting for the first time. This explains, in part, the low pass rate for this sitting. Analysis also showed that first-time sitters in the July 2025 cohort were generally weaker than first-time sitters in January 2025. Kaplan published additional information when it released the July 2025 results: [July 2025 SQE1 Statistical Report published](#). We further explained how pass rates are affected by the make-up of the candidate cohort in a report published in January on the first four years of the SQE [SRA | The SQE four years on – facts and figures | Solicitors Regulation Authority](#). We have assured candidates that they will be assessed to the same standard whenever they sit.
- 13 The overall pass rates for the four SQE2 sittings for which results were released during the reporting period ranged from 75%-82%. The range for

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candidates sitting for the first time was 77%-84%. However, as seen in previous years, this masks significant differences in pass rates between candidates who had passed SQE1 and candidates qualifying under the transitional arrangements and, therefore, not required to pass SQE1. The range of pass rates for candidates who had passed SQE1 was 79%-85%. For those not required to pass SQE1 pass rates ranged from 47%-62%.

- 14 The transitional arrangements allow candidates who have completed the LPC to take SQE2 and complete Qualifying Work Experience. The SQE assesses a candidate's competence to practise as a solicitor, whereas the LPC assessed a candidate's readiness to undertake a period of recognised training, i.e. to work as a trainee. SQE2 assesses both skills and knowledge. The knowledge aspects of the assessment are drawn from SQE1 – the Functioning Legal Knowledge.
- 15 We continue to remind candidates considering qualifying under the transitional provisions of the differences between the LPC and SQE and encourage them to prepare fully before entering SQE2. Despite the relatively low pass rate for candidates following the transitional route to qualification, by the end of 2025 957 individuals had been admitted in this way. These are likely to be candidates whose ambition to qualify had previously been hampered by the requirement to complete a training contract or a period of recognised training.
- 16 Approaching 8.5% of assessments taken in the reporting period were by solicitor apprentice candidates (5% in the previous reporting period). Solicitor apprentices generally performed better than other candidates in both SQE1 and SQE2. Kaplan published a detailed analysis of solicitor apprentice performance in October 2025 [sqe-report-on-apprentices---17-october-2025.pdf](#)
- 17 Trends seen in previous years have continued. The data shows that, generally:
  - Candidates who are not qualified lawyers perform better than those who are.
  - Candidates with higher university degree classifications perform better than those with lower degree classifications.
  - Younger candidates perform better than older ones.
  - Men perform better than women in SQE1, with the position reversed for SQE2.
  - Candidates who have declared a disability and candidates who have a reasonable adjustment perform at least as well as those without a disability and/or a reasonable adjustment.
  - The differential outcomes by ethnicity seen on the LPC, which are also evident in other sectors, stages of education and countries, are continuing in the SQE.
- 18 The Annual Report includes a special focus on disabled candidates. This covers the type and number of reasonable adjustments, an analysis of characteristics of candidates for whom reasonable adjustments are made and an analysis of the performance of candidates who had a reasonable

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adjustment. Overall, candidates with a reasonable adjustment achieved higher scores (and pass rates) than candidates without.

- 19 An additional analysis, published by Kaplan in January 2026, provides assurance that candidates for whom reasonable adjustments are made because of their neurodivergence are performing well in the assessments [SQE neurodivergent candidate performance report](#)
- 20 During the reporting year, Kaplan simplified the process by which candidates apply for a reasonable adjustment. This has also reduced the number of applications candidates will generally need to make, as one application can cover both SQE1 and SQE2 and re-sits. The changes were made in light of feedback from, and testing with, candidates.
- 21 The proportion of candidates for whom reasonable adjustments were made in any sitting in the reporting period ranged from 9 – 15%. Kaplan implemented 2,596 reasonable adjustment plans in the reporting period, an increase of 46% on the previous year. The report illustrated the types of adjustment being made for candidates, including adjustments that involve the use of assistive technology. The report includes information on the nature of the disabilities that are most frequently disclosed, with disabilities relating to learning, understanding and concentration being most common.

**Differential outcomes**

- 22 At its meeting in February 2025, the Board noted the actions we planned to take, with others, in response to the findings of the research we commissioned from the University of Exeter into the potential causes of differential outcomes. The research showed the causes are complex and interrelated and link to social and economic backgrounds, school and university outcomes, fitting in while studying law, perceptions of the profession and access to legal work experience.
- 23 One of these actions was for Kaplan to undertake and publish an analysis that considered the factors that affect performance. This was published in November 2025 [SQE MVA-Report Nov2025](#)
- 24 The University of Exeter researchers highlighted the need to ‘keep the conversation going’ on the causes of differential outcomes and how these could be addressed. It suggested we should play a facilitating role in this and that we should also have a role in highlighting and in disseminating relevant research. Since March 2025 we have arranged and hosted discussion forums every other month. These are open to anyone with an interest in addressing the causes of differential outcomes in professional assessments. We use the forum to hear from people who are taking action to address the identified causes of differential outcomes. We aim to include a ‘student voice’ too.
- 25 The full list of actions to which we committed, the progress made so far and our next steps are attached at annex 4. We will evaluate the impact of the actions to inform our understanding of what works and what we should do in the future.

**CLASSIFICATION – PUBLIC****Increased demand**

- 26 To accommodate the growing number of candidates, and the demand for places in London, Kaplan has expanded the number of oral assessment centres it utilises. Subject to the demand for seats for each sitting, it is now using up to five centres in London and, for all sittings, one centre in each of Birmingham, Cardiff and Manchester. It has considered the provision of oral assessment venues in other parts of the country, but its analysis of the candidate population does not provide evidence of sufficient demand.
- 27 For the first time, Kaplan ran two sets of written assessments for the SQE2 sitting in April 2025. This enabled it to accommodate the large number of candidates who wished to sit (c.2,750 compared with c.1,000 for the other sittings in the year). In 2025, Kaplan introduced the use of scaled scores for SQE2 (in line with the approach used for SQE1). This makes it easier to make comparisons between candidates' performance across different sittings.

**Delivery of the assessments**

- 28 During the reporting period the written assessments were taken in 37 countries. The SQE2 oral assessments can only be taken in England and Wales
- 29 In the main, the delivery of the assessments went to plan. 33,085 SQE assessments (FLK1, FLK2, SQE2) were delivered to the 16,200 candidates taking assessments this year. Inevitably, during a large-scale sitting of on-screen assessments, there were some isolated incidents of disruption. Where these occurred, and the assessment could not proceed as planned, candidates were offered a rescheduled assessment during the same sitting. Most minor disruptions can be rectified on the day and the candidate is able to complete their assessment as scheduled. Where this is not possible an Assessment Delivery Failure (ADF) is declared and the candidate is offered the opportunity to reschedule within the window or to receive a refund and move their assessment to the next window. In the period, 146 ADFs occurred. This equates to just 0.4% of assessments being rescheduled or refunded. The majority of candidates accept a rescheduled assessment during the window.
- 30 The annual report includes a section on candidate responses to the post exam survey they are asked to complete and on changes Kaplan has made to its delivery arrangements in light of feedback and in the interests of continuous improvement. This shows improved candidate feedback.
- 31 There is notable improvement in candidate satisfaction with the booking process, which was transformed in 2024/2025 to improve the candidate experience and address concerns about queuing. There is also improved candidate satisfaction with the process to request reasonable adjustments. Candidates remained generally satisfied with administration on assessment days.

**CLASSIFICATION – PUBLIC****Developing Assessment Literacy**

- 32 In his report, the SQE Independent Reviewer encourages a continued emphasis on developing the assessment literacy of stakeholders. He explains that understanding of the objectives and the rationale for assessment design can help with preparation.
- 33 During the reporting period, Kaplan ran two sets of workshops for SQE training providers and publishers, to help them understand how SQE1 questions are written. This initiative was prompted, in part, by feedback from candidates that the practice questions written by some providers and publishers did not reflect the questions used in live exams. It was also undertaken in the context of actions to address the causes of differential outcomes identified by the Exeter research.
- 34 Participant feedback on the sessions was positive. Kaplan plans to run a further workshop this year. Materials from the workshop can be found on the SQE website, together with an explanation for the use of Single Best Answer Multiple Choice questions [Single best answer multiple choice questions in SQE1](#)
- 35 In January 2026 Kaplan ran a session for the same audience on marking skills in SQE2 assessments. It will publish materials used at that session.
- 36 Kaplan published a further 50 new SQE1 sample questions towards the end of 2025. These were split evenly between FLK1 and FLK2. The SQE1 sample questions illustrate the type of questions that appear on the FLK1 and FLK2 assessments.
- 37 There are now 130 published sample questions that were used in live SQE1 assessments, in other words they are 'past questions'. Kaplan selected the questions to be representative of the SQE1 assessments, both in terms of their difficulty and length. Kaplan also published the percentage of candidates who correctly answered each question and the word count of the 130 pre-tested sample questions compared with data from actual SQE1 assessments. The publication of this data is intended to reassure candidates that the published sample questions are truly representative of the questions used in live exams. A further 90 questions (the original questions published when the SQE launched) are sample questions that have not been used in live assessments; they have not been 'pre-tested' and so performance data is not available for them.
- 38 Kaplan also published two new SQE2 sample questions in December 2025 and guidance on their use.
- 39 We continue to engage regularly with SQE stakeholders, as summarised below. We will use these engagements to help develop their understanding of assessment design and delivery.

**CLASSIFICATION – PUBLIC****SQE fees for 2026/2027**

- 40 The contract with Kaplan provides for an annual increase in the fees for the SQE to reflect inflation and a small annual additional uplift towards the costs of translating the assessments into Welsh.
- 41 The fees for 2026/2027 will be:
- SQE1: £2,006 (£1,934 for 2025/26)
  - SQE2: £3,086 (£2,974 for 2025/26)

**Wider developments**

- 42 The growing bank of data on the SQE is enabling more and more sophisticated analysis. In line with our commitment to transparency, we and Kaplan have published a number of reports using this data, including:
- a. A report on the first four years of the SQE [SRA | The SQE four years on – facts and figures | Solicitors Regulation Authority](#)
  - b. A report on candidate characteristics and factors that have an impact on candidate performance [SQE MVA-Report Nov2025](#)
  - c. A report on the performance of neurodivergent candidates [SQE outcomes for neurodivergent candidates with reasonable adjustments](#)
- 43 Kaplan has made good progress towards the introduction of spell check functionality for SQE2 written assessments in line with the update presented to the SRA Board last year and as noted by the Independent Reviewer in his most recent report. Pending successful completion of the final phase of testing and piloting, spell check is expected to be available for deliveries later in 2026.
- 44 In response to candidate feedback, we have made the list of SQE training providers and their courses searchable [SRA | SQE training and course finder | Solicitors Regulation Authority](#). This will help candidates find and compare the options that will be best for them and has been positively received.
- 45 We have published a number of case studies to illustrate the different ways candidates can prepare for the SQE [Case studies | SQE | Solicitors Regulation Authority](#)
- 46 In response to candidate feedback a new webpage to support and signpost candidates preparing for the SQE has been introduced [Preparing to take your SQE assessment | SQE](#).

**The Access and Reinvestment Fund**

- 47 During 2025 we allocated £360,000 in the SQE Access and Reinvestment Fund to the eleven organisations that successfully applied for a share of the funding. Those organisations each run schemes to support candidates who need to overcome particular obstacles to qualify as a solicitor.

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- 48 The first candidates whose SQE assessment fees have been paid for by the scheme sat either SQE1 or SQE2 in January 2026. In due course we will publish more information about how the funding has been used.

**Conclusion**

- 49 SQE candidate numbers have continued to grow, as expected. Delivery has been well-matched to demand. Candidate feedback on the SQE arrangements has improved, particularly with regard to booking and requesting, and delivery of, reasonable adjustments.
- 50 The Independent Reviewer has confirmed that we can have confidence in the assessments.
- 51 As more candidates are assessed, so the bank of data has grown. This has enabled more analyses of candidate performance and of factors associated with their performance. Publication of these analyses, coupled with work to build assessment literacy, should help candidates, the profession and others to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the SQE and of the data published after each sitting.
- 52 The SQE training market continues to offer candidates wide choice. We will continue to provide information to help candidates find the options that are best for them.
- 53 The technical review of the assessments, to be undertaken this year, will bring a new degree of scrutiny on the extent to which the SQE is a valid, reliable and fair assessment.

**Recommendations: the Board is asked to:**

- (a) consider the fourth year of the SQE, including as set out in the following reports:**
- the SQE annual report prepared by Kaplan (annex 1)
  - the annual report of the Independent Reviewer (annex 2)
  - our quality assurance report (annex 3)
- (b) note key developments since the Board considered the third year of delivery at its meeting in February 2025**
- (c) confirm the SQE fees for the academic year 2026/2027 of:**
- SQE1: £2,006 (£1,934 for 2025/26)
  - SQE2: £3,086 (£2,974 for 2025/26)
- (d) Note our progress against actions to address the causes of differential outcomes.**

### **Supporting information**

#### **Links to the Corporate Strategy and/or Business Plan and impact on strategic and mid-tier risks**

- 54 The SQE was introduced to make sure all solicitors were assessed against the same high standard before being admitted to the profession, in line with our strategic priority to set and maintain high standards for the profession.

#### **How the issues support the regulatory objectives and best regulatory practice**

- 55 When we introduced the SQE we removed unnecessary regulatory barriers to qualification and placed our regulatory focus on making sure solicitors had demonstrated their competence before they qualified, rather than on prescribing the education and training route they had to follow.

#### **Public/Consumer impact**

- 56 The SQE provides an assurance to the public that all newly qualified solicitors have demonstrated their competence to practise.

#### **What engagement approach has been used to inform the work and what further communication and engagement is needed?**

- 57 We regularly engage with stakeholders and consider their feedback. For example, candidates are invited to complete a survey when they have taken their assessments. There are also opportunities for them to participate in regular focus groups. We meet with training providers. We also join meetings of the Solicitor Apprenticeship Trailblazer Group.
- 58 We are working with The Law Society to set up an employer focused SQE stakeholder group.

#### **What equality and diversity considerations relate to this issue?**

- 59 The troubling gap in outcomes between candidates of different ethnicities that was seen in the legacy qualification arrangements, as well as in other sectors and different stages of education, in the UK and internationally, has continued on the SQE. We are taking action to address some of the causes of differential outcomes by ethnicity, to the extent these are within our influence. Our actions are informed by the research we commissioned from the University of Exeter. The results do not flag concerns with regard to the relative outcomes of males and females or the relative outcomes of candidates with or without a disability.

#### **How the work will be evaluated**

- 60 We have a ten-year evaluation framework that we are following.

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**Annexes**

- Annex 1** Kaplan's annual report
- Annex 2** The annual report of the Independent Reviewer
- Annex 3** Our quality assurance report
- Annex 4** Actions to address the causes of differential outcomes

*NB: annexes 1 to 3 will be published in early April.*