

# 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.







### [Hannah Watson: The SQE route supports a career change](#)

#### **Where are you in your journey to becoming a solicitor?**

The introduction of the SQE made it possible for me to change careers from teaching geography to becoming a solicitor. It will allow me to qualify as a solicitor in three and a half years.

I passed, with distinction, an LLM that incorporated preparation for SQE1 and SQE2.

I am 15 months into my qualifying work experience and have nine months to complete before this is confirmed. So, all being well, I should qualify in April 2026.

#### **How did you study for the exam?**

I enrolled on a LLM in September 2022.



The course prepared me for the SQE and contained additional modules, including alternative dispute resolution, family law, employment law and law firm practice that made up the LLM.

Coming from a non-law background, self-study would have been too much of a challenge, so I took a preparatory course. I wanted to take a face-to-face course, and my university of choice offered amazing facilities and was near to where I lived.

As part of the course, I read case studies and textbooks and answered the SRA's multiple choice questions – as well as those developed by the university, for SQE1. The exam practice was particularly useful.

My preparation for SQE2 was more practical and the university provided simulated court room advocacy and insightful lectures.

### **How did you complete your qualifying work experience?**

I began my qualifying work experience with the Environment Agency (EA) in April 2024.

I had applied for paralegal roles, but many firms didn't recognise what the SQE meant, even 18 months ago. I think that has changed a lot in the last year.

I was lucky that the EA were early in recognising the value of the SQE and had incorporated this into their recruitment process.

This has been an amazing opportunity to learn and retrain. So far, I have completed seats in the Commercial and Flood Law teams. The work has been so interesting and has allowed my interest in geography and law to co-develop. I feel very lucky to have had this chance.

### **How are you evidencing and confirming your QWE?**

I am using the SRA's template featured on their website. I have been matching the work and research I have completed to the competencies. I also have objectives that are linked to each competency to make sure I am meeting the QWE criteria. My supervisor has been monitoring my progress and supporting me in the process. Although the document doesn't have to be submitted, it is a useful learning record.

### **What tips do you have for someone taking the SQE?**

The exams are mentally and physically challenging, so you must fully prepare for them. You need to commit the time to revise and practise, often. As a mum of three children, I created a detailed study schedule and found studying little and often worked for me.

There's a range of revision guides and resources available to study and practise for the exams. I also watched YouTube videos, visited court and attended free CPD where possible, for example at barristers' chambers.

I found the interpersonal and communication skills gained as a teacher key to passing SQE2. All work experience, even non-legal, is valuable because interacting with people is a key requirement for SQE2.

Hear from Hannah about how SQE has allowed her to change career and her approach to balancing family life with work and study.

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### **Kadija Conteh: Self study for SQE is possible with the knowledge gained on a law and politics degree**

My name is Kadija Conteh, and I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Law with Politics in 2022.

I am just over halfway to qualifying as a solicitor. I completed SQE1 in July 2024 and recently completed my SQE2 [2025]. Subject to those results, I am on track to qualify as a solicitor in November 2025.

#### **How did you study for the Exams?**

I self-studied for both SQE1 and SQE2. I purchased a set of textbooks and studied from them exclusively. I used lots of free resources, including free mock questions on the SRA website and completed as many multiple-choice questions as I could. I created a study plan to make use of every bit of my spare time while I work full-time to gain my qualifying work experience.



## **What were the benefits of self-study?**

I think the biggest benefit for me was the flexibility. I was able to continue working full-time without having to take any time off work, so I could apportion my time to each topic as needed—it was just easier for me in that way.

Cost was another factor in my decision to self-study. Since I've self-funded everything, including my SQE exams and textbooks, I couldn't necessarily afford to fund a prep course.

I perform better when I self-study for exams, and this method allowed me to learn at my own pace. I was able to identify areas where I needed to focus more time.

Having a law degree meant I already had a good foundation of legal knowledge, so I just had to fill in the gaps. I think if I had taken a prep course, I wouldn't have been able to tailor my learning to how I needed to process the information.

## **How did you gain your QWE?**

I work as a paralegal for a charity. The charity owns several different organisations, so I get to rotate between departments. Essentially, the business has created a training plan for me to experience different areas of law, like I would have experienced in a traditional training contract.

As a paralegal, I have my own caseload, which involves cases that touch on contract law, property and land-related law, and business law.

I work under the supervision of a team of in-house solicitors. I have one principal solicitor who is my supervisor, but the entire team supports me and reviews my work. However, the cases are essentially mine to manage.

## **How are you evidencing and confirming your QWE?**

I am using a modified version of the SRA's template for recording qualifying work experience. It lists all the competencies that you can demonstrate during your qualifying work experience.

I log every different case I have worked on, detailing what I have done and learned, and link this to every competency in the template. This log is reviewed every month in my one-to-one meeting with my supervisor. At the end of my QWE, this will be confirmed by my manager, who is my supervising solicitor.

## **What support have you received from your employer?**

My employer has been very generous in giving me study-leave and supporting me through the process. They helped me focus my learning and development on areas that aligned with the SQE content. Allowing me to attend court frequently to see the process live has been invaluable and giving me constructive advice on where I can improve.

They also reduced my workload closer to my exams understanding that after a full day's work, I would then be going home to study for around five hours for the SQE.

### **What advice would you give to anyone taking the SQE?**

You must make sure you find a study method that works for you. If you choose to self-study, you need to have the discipline to manage your time and work independently, because it can be lonely and challenging. Regularly practise questions and mark yourself. Essentially, the SQE is a test of your determination and commitment to qualifying as a solicitor.

Hear from Kadija about how her law and politics degree gave her the confidence and background knowledge to self-study for SQE1 and SQE2.



### **Kieran Ng: In-house support for SQE candidate leads to promotion and retains talent**

#### **Where are you on your journey to becoming a solicitor?**

I qualified as a solicitor this year [2025] – starting my career as a paralegal within Vodafone Group before transitioning to a trainee solicitor role. I acquired my QWE while working full-time and studied part-time for the SQE.

#### **How did you study for the exam?**

I registered with an online course provider and used their resources, including textbooks, recorded lectures, practice questions, and tutor groups. The main technique I used to develop my knowledge was through practice questions.

I found that I learned concepts best through application, and answering practice questions familiarised me with the exam format.





## **What support did you receive from your employer?**

Vodafone Group covered the costs of the SQE preparation course and exam fees.

I had monthly check-ins with my training supervisor where we would discuss how things were going, what competencies I was developing, and opportunities for rotations and secondments.

This demonstrated Vodafone's active interest in my career development.

The meetings were also an opportunity to ensure that my QWE was providing me with the necessary skills that would be tested in the SQE2.

As part of Vodafone Group's first SQE trainee cohort, we were breaking new ground. I was very appreciative of this opportunity and hope I've demonstrated its success.

It is possible to complete your QWE full-time and study for the exams part-time and qualify as a solicitor through this route, in-house.

## **How did you complete your QWE?**

I gained my QWE experience through several rotations within the Vodafone Group Legal and Business Integrity function. I also undertook an external secondment at one of our panel law firms to gain private practice experience.

I used an online QWE journaling platform to record my QWE. I created monthly entries describing what I did, what I learnt, and what competencies I met during that period. All entries were then signed off by my supervising solicitor who worked within Vodafone Group.

## **What advice would you give someone taking the SQE?**

My top tip would be to keep track of the competencies you are meeting as you record your QWE journal. Identify any gaps or areas where you could do with more experience and then speak to your employer about how you can gain these additional competencies.

Whether that's through internal rotations, secondments, or through engaging in stretch projects, the result is that you have a broad range of competencies to be reflected within your journal entries.

Hear from Kieran about how his employer supported him to transition from paralegal to SQE candidate, how he evidenced his QWE and the benefits of rotating internal and secondment seats.





### **Richard Hood: Claiming retrospective QWE**

#### **How did you study for the SQE?**

I prepared for SQE1 with book study. I was about a day late signing up for a course, but I bought the textbooks and started reading them and found them to be really engaging and easy to use.

About six-months later, I booked my exam. I signed up for an SQE1 weekend revision course that I found helpful because, studying alone, you really don't know how you're progressing because you have nothing to gauge it against. There's also a danger that you're seeing the same questions in the course materials, too.

In preparation for SQE2, I enrolled in a formal course. I found the course useful because we received input from the course provider and weekly student group discussions. I found the course to be well coordinated and



enjoyed the engagement between students. For me, the SQE2 prep course was essential.

For SQE1, I developed a study schedule that covered all the functional learning areas. I read all the course materials in detail and answered lots of multiple-choice questions leading up to the exams. Becoming familiar with the questions, the different ways they are posed, and delving deep into the details to prepare for the exam. So, when you are faced with the screen in the exam, you know what kind of questions to expect.

There are sample questions on the SQE website as well as those supplied by the course providers.

For SQE2, it is more about developing your skills in areas such as oral and written communication. But there's more to it than that – it is a lot more involving. You need to demonstrate those skills along with the legal knowledge.

I found the IRAC approach worked well for me in preparation for the assessments – the Issue, Rule, Analysis, and Conclusion. With this method, I was able to spot scenarios that could arise in the exam and discussed these with other people. For example, with business law, there's probably about 20 scenarios you can revise for. There's so much you need to know for the exams, you need to be smart in spotting what's likely to come up.

## **How did you manage home and work life with study?**

I was studying while working. At the time, I was working as an interim consultant, so I managed my own work time. I didn't need or receive any support from my employer as I was self-funding and self-studying. But I did take a day off every week to dedicate to my studies.

Working and studying at the same time can be overwhelming, so it's important to strike a balance.

## **How did you evidence and confirm your QWE?**

I've been managing legal teams as a director for a few years, in different organisations. So, I was able to go back and retrospectively claim QWE from three employers – one of the great things that SQE allows you to do.

For someone like me to do a training contract and work at that level for two years to gain QWE or the post-qualification experience is just not possible. My employers recognised that my past experience would count as QWE. This was made possible by the flexibility introduced by the SQE. Because I had worked at a senior level, I wasn't directly reporting to the head or the director of legal. So, I contacted an external solicitor I had previously worked with. They were aware of the work I had delivered in various roles. I also contacted previous employers for references.

I also had job descriptions that outlined my roles and responsibilities required for each of my previous roles. Using all these resources, I collated a portfolio of evidence. I sent this to my external solicitor to review. They asked some



questions to clarify a few things, so they could validate and verify my portfolio.

## **What tips would you give someone studying for the SQE?**

The tips I'd give to anyone thinking of doing the SQE are, first, sit down and work out a study plan.

You have a timescale when you're preparing for the exam, so look at the time you've got available and use it wisely.

Be organised. Most people are working while studying and juggling home-life with kids, social life, and other commitments. It's essential to have a plan in place to allow you to maintain your focus. Also, build in some flexibility so that you can deal with unexpected things that may come up.

Be kind to yourself and build in some treats and rewards – things to look forward to.

I enjoy exercise, getting outdoors, running, and cycling. Exercise is a good and healthy alternative to sitting when you're studying.

And I would tell any student to enjoy the learning, because the law is a fascinating area of study. I particularly liked the criminal law. Having little knowledge in this area, I began watching TV programs like 24 Hours in Police Custody to see how the law was being applied.

I sat in the magistrates' courts, which I found a bit depressing. But it was an insightful experience. I also sat in the Supreme Court and watched an interesting civil case play out.

If you can, join or form a study group. Such groups are useful to discuss study techniques, tackle questions together, and bounce ideas off one another. There will be details that you've forgotten or topics you need to further explore that others in the group can support with.

Group discussions also helped me embed and recall information more easily. And, of course, practice, practice, practice.

Hear from Richard Hood about how he claimed retrospective QWE, methods for preparing for SQE1 and SQE2, and how he used exercise to counteract sitting while studying.





## Resources

- [Watch our webinar - Studying for the SQE](https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/studying-sqe/) [https://consultations.sra.org.uk/sra/news/events/on-demand-events/studying-sqe/]
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