

# Becoming a Solicitor

A handy  
guide.



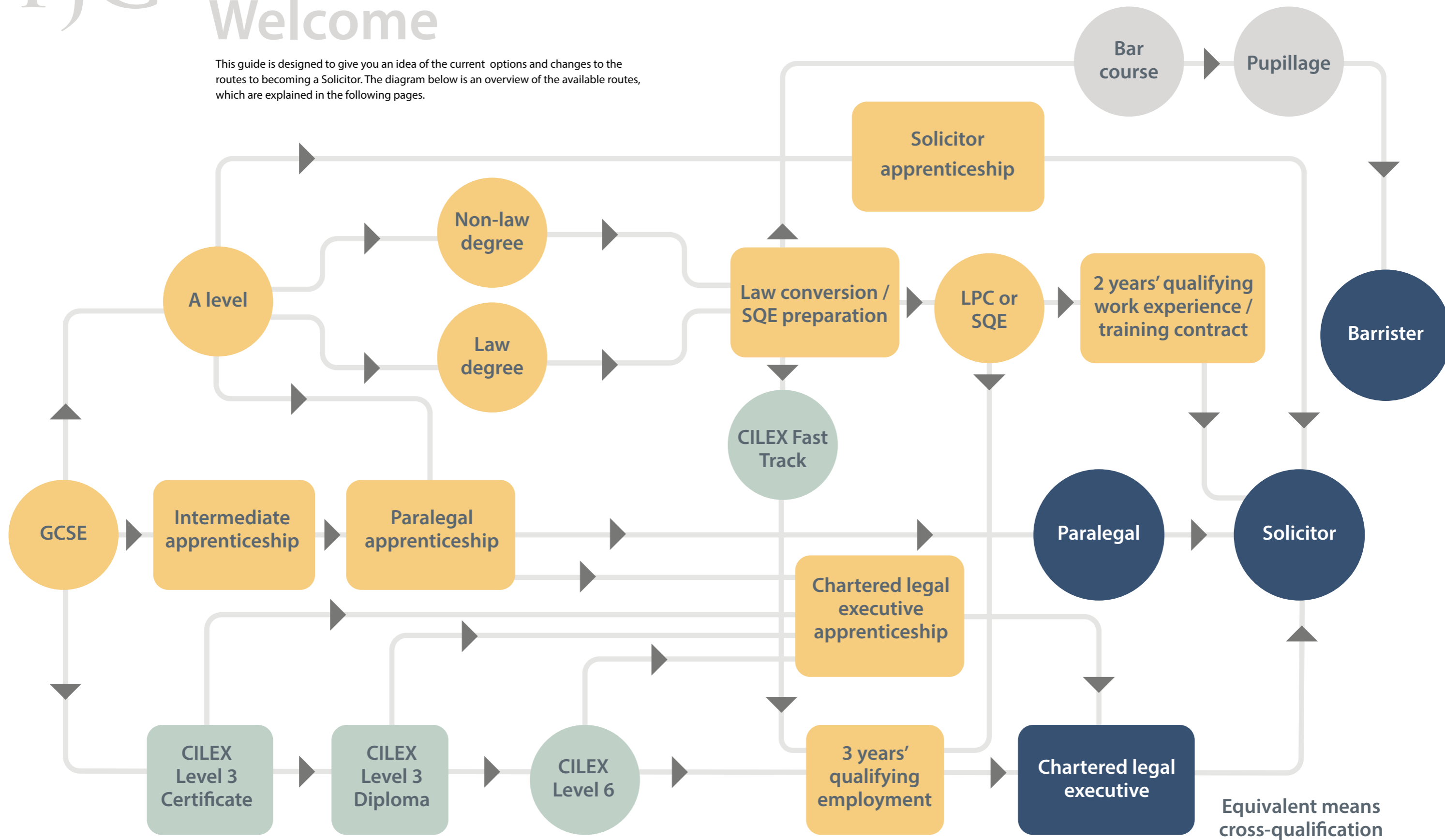
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# Welcome

This guide is designed to give you an idea of the current options and changes to the routes to becoming a Solicitor. The diagram below is an overview of the available routes, which are explained in the following pages.



## A-Levels or equivalent

There is no requirement for particular/essential A levels to be able to follow a Law route. However, note the following recommendations:

- Subjects of which you have an interest in and can obtain good grades;
- Subjects which develop the skills required in Law, i.e. good research, communication and analytical skills. Such skills can be found in History, English, Science, Maths or of course Law!

Grade requirements vary depending on the University you apply to. UCAS points will also play a role in this. It is recommended that you check the entry requirements for your chosen University and take it from there.

## Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE)

The Solicitors Qualifying Exam will replace the existing route of qualifying as a Solicitor. GDL and LPC will no longer be required as part of the qualifying process as they will be replaced by the SQE. The SQE was introduced in 2021 with the LPC and GDL being phased out.

The SQE will be the final, centralised assessment at the end of different pathways to ensure all qualifying Solicitors are tested consistently regardless of which route they have taken.

You can take these exams following the completion of a law degree, a non-law degree or as the last step on an apprenticeship scheme.

The SQE entails:

- Pass stages 1 and 2 of the SQE (first stage focuses on legal knowledge and the second stage on practical skills);
- Have a degree (in any subject) or equivalent qualification;
- Pass the SRA's character and suitability requirements;
- Have two years qualifying legal experience (QLE) or qualifying work experience (QWE).

### Stages of the SQE assessment

The first stage is based on functioning legal knowledge and is assessed by single best answer multiple choice questions over a two-day period.

The second stage is the practical legal skills assessment which is taken over five days and involves a combination of oral and written based tasks.

You have 6 years in which to complete both stages and this starts from the first day you sit your first SQE assessment. You can also have up to 3 attempts at each stage within this period.

### Qualifying Work Experience (QWE)

According to the University of Law, QWE is similar to a training contract and can be completed at any point during the qualification process (although it is anticipated that most students will complete this after SQE1).

QWE may be completed with up to four different legal employers. The type of work which qualifies as QWE includes placements while studying for your degree, time spent as a paralegal or working in a law clinic, as well as working for a two year period with a single law firm.

All QWE is signed off by the legal employer, who must be a solicitor, and is usually also the compliance officer.

### Costs

From October 2022 the cost for the SQE 1 assessment will be £1,622 and the cost for the SQE 2 assessment will be £2,493. A total of £4,115; however, this does not include the cost of any training courses for the SQE assessments. Those will differ based on the providers, but the simple cost of the assessments is listed above.

### Why the change?

The SQE exam ensures standardisation between solicitors. All trainee Solicitors, no matter which route they take, sit the same qualifying exam.

Accessibility is improved by replacing training contracts with 2 years of QWE. This can be done at any legal firm or department, and can be done before exams are taken. This new method makes the route to law less competitive and more accessible.

Furthermore, the SQE more than halves the cost of previously used routes. This allows more people to gain the chance to become a Solicitor.

## Traditional route

### University Degree and/or Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)

You are free to study a law degree or non-law degree. The university course is likely to be three or four years (if it includes a placement year), subject to the discipline.

A law degree is part of the traditional route and is considered to be the fastest way to qualify. Note that if you studied a non-law degree, you have had to undertake the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) besides your undergraduate degree (this conversion is no longer required for the SQE). The course length is 1 year.

You may be eligible for Student Finance in connection with your tuition fees for your undergraduate degree. Subject to circumstances, Student Finance can cover the whole amount of your tuition and you may be eligible for maintenance allowance. More information can be found on the gov website.

### Legal Practice Course (LPC)

Although the SQE is now in force, until 2032 the LPC will remain a valid step in qualification to become a solicitor. However, you are no longer able to apply for the LPC. This means, if you have already undertaken the LPC, or are currently undertaking the LPC then you have until 2032 to complete your training contract in order to qualify as a solicitor under the previous traditional route.

If you have not qualified by 2032, then your LPC will unfortunately be invalidated, and you will need to complete the SQE in order to qualify as a solicitor.

LawCareers.Net recommended only taking the LPC if you had secured a training contract, because of the high cost of the course and the intense competition for legal roles. If you are currently on the LPC and have yet to find a training contract, keep making further applications throughout your LPC year until you get one. If you don't get one during your LPC year don't fret, as stated above you have until 2032 – so plenty of time!

**If you start your law degree, GDL or LPC before August 2021, you will be able to continue the qualification via the traditional route.**

**If you start your law degree, GDL, or apprenticeship after August 2021, the LPC and GDL will no longer exist and you will automatically be enrolled onto the SQE. You will not have the option of qualifying via the traditional route.**

**Anyone who started a law degree or GDL up to September 2021 has until as late as 2032 to complete the LPC and qualify as a solicitor through the 'traditional' route.**

**If you started a law degree or GDL before September 2021 you have until 2032 to complete the LPC.**

## Modern approach to training

### CILEX Professional Qualification (CPQ)

The CILEX Professional Qualification (CPQ) has been engineered to support the development of specialist lawyers. CPQ is flexible and practical, and you can study it regardless of whether you have a degree. It is a new approach to training which is designed to produce lawyers equipped with the skills they need to meet the changing demands of the modern legal market.

#### CPQ Foundation - Approx. 12-18 months

This is suitable for school leavers, new-to-law graduate or professional.

- 5 compulsory modules
- Ethics and Professional Responsibility
- Professional Experience
- Assessments

#### CPQ Advanced - Approx. 12-18 months

This is suitable for a Law graduate or CILEX Paralegal.

- 4 compulsory modules
- 1 optional module
- Ethics and Responsibility
- Professional Experience
- Assessments

#### CPQ Professional - Approx. 12 months

This is suitable for a trainee CILEX Lawyer, CILEX Advanced Paralegal, LPC, BPTC or equivalent.

- 1 optional module
- Ethics and Professional Responsibility (if not previously completed)
- Professional Experience
- Assessments

### Solicitors Apprenticeship

This is a 6 year programme of paid, on-the-job training which ends in qualification as a solicitor. It integrates a law degree, obtained at the end of the 4th year as apprentices learn law and legal practice alongside gaining competence in legal skills, commercial skills and professional conduct.

From September 2021, all solicitor apprentices will be required to also pass the SQE as described above.

According to the SRA, some employers also offer solicitor apprenticeships to individuals who have already completed some legal training, such as a law degree, the Legal Practice Course or the Trailblazer level 3 paralegal apprenticeship. These candidates also need to complete all the elements of the SQE. However, depending on their experience and skills, they may not take the full 5 to 6 years.

There is detailed information on apprenticeships on the GOV.UK website, where you can also search and apply for apprenticeships in England.

You can study CPQ regardless of whether you have a degree.

## Things to bear in mind

**There will be a long period of transition from the traditional route to the modern approach. During the period of transition, you may want to ask potential employers whether they have adapted to the new qualification approach.**

**These are some questions you may wish to ask your potential employer:**

- Whether they are willing to pay for your tuition to undertake the SQE assessments/training;
- Whether they would support Paralegals to qualify as a Solicitor;
- Whether you would still require and they would offer a traditional two-year period of recognised training;
- Whether they would take into account experience you may have gained during your degree or other job roles;
- Whether they would expect you to have your SQE stage 1 completed before starting work as a trainee Solicitor.

Will your potential employer support the modern approach?

### Helpful websites

You can find out more by visiting these helpful websites:

<https://www.lawcareers.net/>

<https://www.sra.org.uk/become-solicitor/>

<https://www.cilex.org.uk/>





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to becoming a  
Solicitor starts  
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