What are the routes towards qualifying as a solicitor?

Start

Do you have or are you studying towards a Scots law LLB?

Yes

Which country are you interested in working in?

England & Wales

Scotland

Other countries

No

You then follow this route

Diploma in Professional Legal Practice
(1 year full time; 2 years part time)

Traineeship
(2 years)

Solicitor
• Apply for admission to the Law Society of Scotland
• Apply for a practising certificate

Scotland

You should do a 2 year Graduate LLB after your first degree

A new system was introduced in September 2021 that replaces the traditional training route. Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) is the new system of exams that all solicitors must pass at the point of qualifying along with completing 2 years of Qualifying Work Experience (QWE). QWE could be a range of different legal experiences, rather than just the traditional training contract. This makes it possible for volunteering roles and placements through university to count towards the total.

You’re likely to want to do a conversion course in English/Welsh law – the typical route is to do a postgraduate diploma in law (PGDL) followed by an SQE preparation course.

Organisations and firms will manage the SQE and QWE in different ways so make sure you do your research.

Other countries

Routes vary – research firms recruiting into other jurisdictions. Check with the Law Society or Bar Council/Association for the country you are interested in – it usually involves passing a set of exams.

You need to meet four requirements set out by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA):
• Complete a degree (in any subject) or equivalent.
• Complete SQE parts 1 and 2 - SQE 1 must be completed before SQE 2.
• Complete 2 years of QWE - no more than 4 different organisations. QWE can be completed before, alongside, or after SQE1 and SQE2.
• Meet the SRA’s suitability requirements.

You have to meet the following requirements:

Solicitor
Apply for admission to the role of solicitors through the SRA - QWE must be completed before applying for admission

Where can you do a traineeship?
• Big law firms: tend to be large commercial firms - can recruit two years in advance
• Smaller, medium sized firms: high street firms - recruit as and when they need a trainee
• In-house organisations: private or public sector - can offer anything from current vacancies up to 1-2 years in advance

When are you due to graduate from your LLB?
I already have, and have started the Diploma:
Most of the large commercial firms advertising will be recruiting for 2025/2026 start dates so you may have a 1-2 year gap after finishing your Diploma. Through the year, opportunities for 2024 starts will arise, particularly with smaller firms and just-in-time recruitment.

2024:
Apply for traineeships starting 2025 or 2026. Look at routes in via vacation placements too.

2025:
Talk to firms about internships/vacation placements and early applications to 2026 traineeships.

2026 or later:
Some firms offer work experience opportunities for earlier year students and you can get an insight into different areas of work to help inform your future choices.