

Solicitor apprenticeship: Dispelling the myths

📅 14 February 2024 👤 Laura Morland

Since its commencement in September 2016, the solicitor apprenticeship programme has broadened the route which individuals can take to becoming qualified solicitors. For the first time since its inception, we're beginning to see the first cohort of apprentices who have qualified through this alternative route and have taken the new Solicitors Qualifying Exams ("SQE").

Over time, it has become clear that there is no uniform approach to qualification. Aspiring solicitors now have various means to qualifying, including the more traditional route, the solicitor apprenticeship, and CILEX, to name a few. However, in a profession with such deep historical roots, changes to qualification paths can be daunting, and subsequently misconceptions can arise.

This article aims to dispel some of the myths that I have heard over the past six years in the legal profession and help those who may be considering the solicitor apprenticeship understand what the apprenticeship route truly entails.

Myth 1: an apprenticeship provides a lesser qualification than the 'traditional route'

As mentioned above, the legal industry is evolving and the traditional route to becoming a solicitor is no longer the only option. When referring to the "traditional route", it simply means obtaining a law degree at university, completing the SQEs, and then securing a training contract within a law firm. After two years of qualifying work experience, individuals on this route can apply to the Roll of Solicitors and become qualified to practice the law.

On the other hand, the solicitor apprenticeship programme is a Level 7 course that allows apprentices to complete their LLB law degree and SQEs while simultaneously working four days a week in a law firm. This programme allows apprentices to gain hands-on experience while studying, and by the time they complete their qualification, the apprentices will have gained six years of practical experience as well as the same qualifications as someone on the traditional route.

The key thing to note here is that the traditional route doesn't offer a qualification that is more valuable than the solicitor's apprenticeship. The examinations and qualifications on both paths are the same, the main difference is the solicitor apprenticeship programme additionally involves spending time working within a law firm.

Myth 2: apprenticeships are only for young people

Whilst it's currently a common theme for apprentices age range to be relatively young, apprenticeships are not exclusively available to 'young people'. For example, the current requirements for an apprenticeship at Browne Jacobson are:

- 3 A levels (or equivalent) at grade C or above (predicted or achieved)
- 5 GCSEs (or equivalent), including Maths and English at grade C/4 or above

For this reason, the assumption that apprenticeships are only for young people is false. Someone considering an apprenticeship can apply at any stage in their career.

Myth 3: apprenticeships are for people who may not have done very well in school

Many universities across the country often require prospective students to meet similar entry requirements for an LLB law degree and a solicitor apprenticeship. An individual on both the traditional and apprenticeship route may have had similar grades in school, and both individuals can excel in the legal profession no matter which route they take.

The apprenticeship route itself simply presents a different way of working, it's a more 'hands-on' approach and involves learning as you go. However, as previously mentioned, the exams completed on the solicitor apprenticeship are largely the same as those you would complete following the traditional route of qualification. The apprenticeship route therefore is not a route for people who didn't do very well in school but is instead for those who may prefer a more hands-on approach to learning.

Myth 4: apprentices only do the easy work

It is not uncommon for an apprentice to join a law firm with limited legal knowledge. They may not have studied law academically yet so they will need to spend some time learning and developing their understanding of legal matters.

Overtime as the apprentice builds their knowledge and confidence, they can apply their learnings to future work and eventually work on more complex legal matters. For this reason, I believe that 'apprentices only do the easy work' is a myth. It takes time for legal skills and knowledge to be fully developed, but once it has, apprentices can expand their workload and take on more challenging work.

Hopefully this article has helped to dispel some of the myths surrounding the solicitor apprenticeship programme. A key takeaway is that there is no such thing as the 'correct way' to qualify and in fact, the route to qualification should directly align with what best suits you as an individual.

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