

RECORDING, CONFIRMING AND REGISTERING QWE FROM UNIVERSITY LAW CLINICS:

A 'TEN TOP TIPS' TOOLKIT FOR STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

AND

GUIDANCE ON COMPLETING THE SRA QWE TEMPLATE FOR CLINIC WORK

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1. WHAT ARE THE RULES ABOUT APPLYING TO BE A SOLICITOR?

If you want to be registered as a qualified solicitor, you need to apply to the Solicitors' Regulation Authority (SRA) (the organisation that regulates solicitors in England & Wales) to be admitted to the roll of solicitors. This means that your name appears on the 'roll', which is an online list of qualified solicitors held by the SRA. You also get a 'practising certificate' to show you are qualified. This needs to be renewed every year to allow you to carry on practising as a solicitor. The annual individual practising certificate currently (2021-22) costs £306 and is usually funded by the employer.

In September 2021, a new set of rules were introduced setting out what you need to show the SRA when you apply to be admitted to the roll. This new set of rules is called the Solicitors' Qualifying Examination (SQE) route to qualifying as a solicitor.

Under the old rules, which applied to everyone before September 2021, students used to:

1. Get a law degree (or a different undergraduate degree plus the GDL);
2. Do the Legal Practice Course (LPC) and the Professional Skills Course (PSC);
3. Do a two-year Period of Recognised Training (Training Contract) with a firm of solicitors; and
4. Show that they met the character and suitability requirements of the SRA (i.e. that they were sufficiently honest and trustworthy to be a solicitor).

At the end of the two-year training contract, you (or more likely your firm, on your behalf) would then apply, and pay a fee, for you to be registered with the SRA as a qualified solicitor.

Under the new rules, when you apply for admission as a solicitor you need to show that you:

1. Have an undergraduate degree (it does not have to be in law);
2. Have passed the SQE 1 and SQE 2 central assessments;
3. Have completed two years' full-time equivalent of Qualifying Work Experience ('QWE'); and
4. Meet the SRA's character and suitability requirements.

Everyone who starts a degree (in law or in anything else) from September 2022 must take the SQE route if they want to qualify as a solicitor.

Anyone who had finished, started, or accepted a place on a qualifying law degree by 21 September 2021 or on the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) by 1 September 2021 has a choice: they can take the SQE route, or they (currently) have until 31 December 2032 to take the LPC (subject to institutions continuing to offer the LPC).¹

Here is a bit more information about the SQE route:

SQE 1 tests your legal knowledge by way of two multiple-choice assessments, each containing 180 questions. SQE 2 tests your practical client-facing skills, such as interviewing, advocacy and drafting. The standard for these assessments is that of a newly qualified solicitor on their first day at work. Students will usually (but don't have to) sit SQE 1 before they sit SQE 2.

QWE can be collected from working in up to four organisations. The university's legal advice clinic may be one such organisation. You can collect QWE at any time, even before you sit any of the SQE

¹ There is also the option for students who have completed the LPC to do the SQE 2 assessment and two years of QWE instead of doing a training contract.



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assessments. You can do QWE in an organisation outside of England and Wales so long as a solicitor qualified in England and Wales is able to confirm that you have done this.

There is no longer any official requirement to do a two-year training contract. Being able to collect QWE from up to four different organisations replaces this training contract. However, some law firms may still want you to do a two-year period of training with them so that they feel that you've been properly 'trained up' in how the firm works before they will give you a permanent job as a solicitor. This is their decision.

If you have not yet decided whether to go down the route of becoming a solicitor, you should still keep records of any QWE you have been involved in, and have these confirmed by your 'Clinic supervisor' (this is a solicitor who works at your university and who is responsible for confirming that you have completed QWE by being involved in a pro bono project). Even if you decide not to be a solicitor (or if you do but decide not to use that particular piece of work experience as one of your pieces of QWE), you will be able to talk about the transferable skills and experiences that you have been exposed to during your clinic work in job interviews and on application forms.

2. WHAT IS QWE?

For work to count as QWE, you must:

1. Be providing 'legal services'; and
2. Have the opportunity, when providing these services, to develop two or more of the competencies in the Solicitor Statement of Competence (a list put together by the SRA showing what you need to be able to do to be a competent solicitor: you can access the list [here](#)); and
3. Have the work signed off by a qualified solicitor.

Providing 'legal services' means giving legal advice on a specific matter to an identifiable person. If you provide advice to a real-life clinic client, you will be providing legal services.

...AND WHAT IS NOT QWE?

Many Streetlaw-type projects (where you typically deliver interactive sessions about the law to community groups and schools) will not count as QWE. Whilst you might be developing some of the items in the Statement of Solicitor Competence when you research the law and present information to, for example, a community group, it won't generally count because you're not providing advice on a specific legal problem to a specific person. This is something that your Clinic supervisor will be able to confirm for you, depending on the specific activities of the project.

Mediation won't count, as this is not providing advice even though many of the skills developed will be within the Statement of Solicitor Competence.

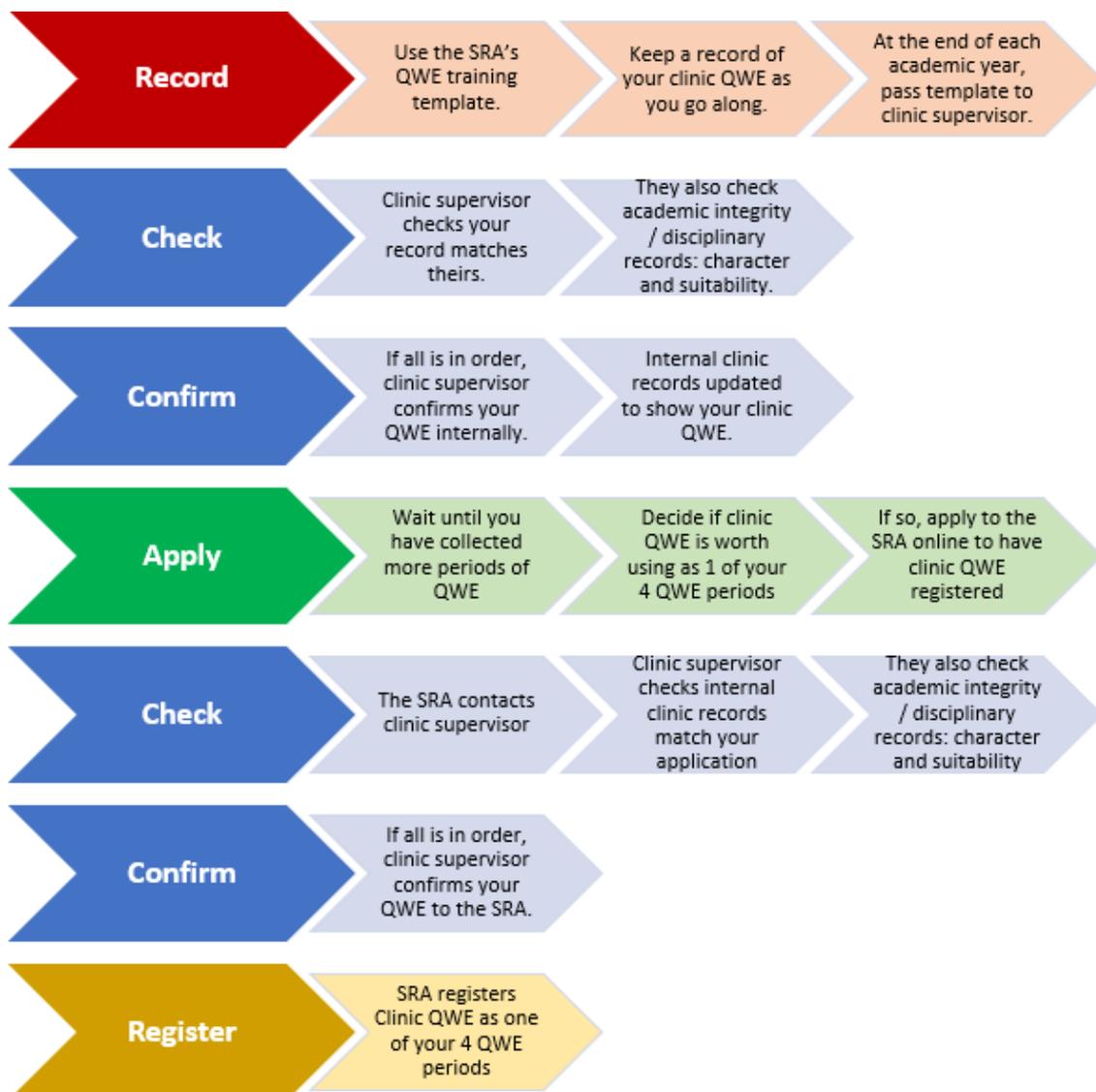
Work done in a simulated clinic (i.e. for an invented client) also does not fall within the definition of QWE. Work done in policy clinics (typically involving researching an area of potential law reform) will also, generally, not count unless there are specific circumstances bringing this activity within the definition of 'legal services'. Again, your Clinic supervisor will be able to confirm this for you, depending on the exact activities of the project.



You may get involved in work organised by your clinic that has you doing a placement within a law firm or other organisation. If this work is QWE, it might be that a qualified solicitor within that organisation is happy to sign off on your QWE, but this is not guaranteed. They may want this sign-off to come from the clinic supervisor. It may also be the case that whilst you are being exposed to particular competencies, there is no qualified solicitor within that organisation and as such the QWE cannot be signed off by that organisation. You will need to speak to the clinic supervisor about how QWE can be claimed for these placements.

3. WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR CLAIMING QWE?

Below is a quick summary of what happens from when you start recording your clinic QWE to when you have it registered with the SRA. Each of the steps is explained in more detail in the rest of this guide.





4. HOW DO I KEEP A RECORD OF MY QWE?

You will need to keep a record of the competencies you have been exposed to during your clinic work using the SRA's QWE training template, available on the SRA website [here](#). You should keep a careful note as you go along of the competencies you believe you have been exposed to, and how to evidence them, as it will be very difficult to look back on this at a later point to try to pinpoint these. We recommend therefore that you should always have the training template close to hand so that you can fill it in as you go along.

IMPORTANT: see the guidance attached to this toolkit for recommendations on how to fill in the SRA's QWE training template for clinic work.

All of your clinic QWE should go on the same QWE training template (available [here](#)).

You need to take personal responsibility for this. The keeping of a personal QWE record is a student-led process and it is up to you to explain to the clinic supervisor, on the template, what competencies you have been exposed to. They will then need to decide whether they can confirm this period. If you have provided enough evidence of the competencies you have been exposed to, and there are no character or suitability issues, then they will sign off the QWE period for internal record-keeping purposes.

5. HOW MUCH QWE TIME WILL I GET FOR CLINIC WORK?

Let's be clear: one academic year of participating in a clinic module or volunteering in clinic does not equate to one year of QWE. A year of QWE is a 'full time equivalent' year, which means it's equivalent to having worked full time (e.g. 9am until 5pm, five days a week) for a full year.

The time that you spend on providing the legal advice to your client (interviewing, researching, drafting a letter of advice), even though it may be spent over several weeks, may only equate to a matter of hours or days of QWE.

Similarly, if you advise several clients during an academic year, this work will likely attract at most a week, or perhaps a few weeks, of QWE (i.e. the QWE work you have done that year adds up to enough hours to fill a working week, or a few working weeks, in total). It is for your clinic supervisor to tell you how much QWE a clinic module, or volunteering in clinic for one year, or taking a client from the start to the end of their matter in clinic, will usually attract. They should tell you this at the start of your period of volunteering.

You will need to think very carefully, later on, about which periods of QWE you want to register with the SRA, because it is not possible to 'take back' a period that you have registered. For this reason, we strongly recommend that you wait until you have more periods of QWE to claim before making a decision about whether you use the relatively short period that will be provided by your work in clinic.

6. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTER AND SUITABILITY RULES?

When signing off your QWE, the clinic supervisor will need to confirm that during the period of QWE, no issues arose around your character or suitability. This will include any issues that arise within clinic (for example breaching client confidentiality rules) but also, importantly, anything else that happens during the period that you are claiming QWE for (which in some cases will be the whole of your time spent at university).

You are a student when you volunteer in clinic, but you will be held to the standards expected of a practising lawyer during the period that you are volunteering for clinic. Character and suitability issues could include incidents relating to academic integrity or to the university's student disciplinary process. It could include things like you making ill-informed posts on social media, so this is something to be particularly cautious about. If something does occur related to academic integrity or the student disciplinary process during the period for which you are volunteering for clinic, we strongly recommend that you discuss this with your supervisor, because in all likelihood the supervisor will not be able to confirm your character and suitability when they are asked to internally confirm your QWE nor when they receive a message from the SRA asking them to confirm your QWE.

7. WHEN AND HOW SHOULD I ASK FOR CONFIRMATION FROM MY SUPERVISOR?

We recommend that you submit your QWE training template to the clinic supervisor at the end of each academic year (or earlier if your university has expressed an alternative preference) so they can sign off that year's QWE. This is important in case the clinic supervisor changes between academic years.

Even if you think you may not want to use your clinic QWE as one of your four periods when you apply to the SRA to register QWE, you should still get each year's QWE confirmed internally at the university, as this creates a record which the clinic supervisor can check against if you do in fact end up using your clinic QWE as one of your periods. If there is no internal record, the clinic supervisor has nothing to check your application to the SRA against, so it is always best to get the period internally confirmed, just in case.

If you are on a course lasting more than one year, and you volunteer again at the same institution in a later year, record the details on the same template, but make clear that the information is from a different year. See the attached guidance on completing the QWE training template for how this might look on your record.

Don't wait until after your involvement in clinic has ended to fill in your QWE training template. There is no limit on how far back you can claim QWE, but if you leave it too long to record the QWE and to request for it to be confirmed, the supervisor may legitimately say that they can't sign it off if the template doesn't contain enough detail of the competencies you were exposed to, and/or because they can't check the client records given the amount of time that has passed, and/or because disciplinary or academic integrity records aren't available to confirm your character and suitability.

8. WHEN AND HOW SHOULD I APPLY TO REGISTER QWE WITH THE SRA?

You only need to register your two years' QWE by the time you apply to be admitted as a solicitor. You do so by applying online via the [mySRA](#) system: you need to create an account to do this.

Whilst it's possible to apply to register a period of SQE as soon as you have completed it, we strongly recommend that you don't apply to the SRA to register your clinic work until a later date. This is because by using your clinic QWE, you may use up one of the four periods of QWE on a very short QWE period. You may later regret having registered a very short period of clinic QWE with the SRA if you get the opportunity to gain a longer period of QWE with another organisation that you could have used instead, and as we noted above, this can't be swapped later. There is no rush to apply for registration of clinic QWE at the SRA as there is no time limit on when you gained the period of QWE. Your best bet is to get your clinic QWE confirmed internally, but to hold off on applying to the SRA to register it until later, when you have other periods of QWE under your belt.

When you apply to register QWE in the SRA system, you need to provide a start date and an end date. If you have worked in clinic for several years, you do not separate out each year of clinic. Instead, you put the start date as the first date you started volunteering for clinic, and the end date as the last date you volunteered. For example, if you were an undergraduate student from September 2021 until June 2024, you would use these as the start and end dates. You would not however be claiming for all that time. You would be claiming the number of weeks the clinic supervisor signed off as being QWE as you went along. As an example, this could be five weeks (perhaps you had two weeks QWE from your involvement in first year, one week from second year, and two weeks from third year). Whilst these were collected at different times, they are still counted as one block, with one organisation. This block of five weeks used in the example would only be counted as one of your four periods of QWE.

9. HOW WILL EMPLOYERS VIEW MY QWE?

Be aware that any employment relationship between a law firm - or other organisation - and its employee has nothing to do with the SRA. The SRA can intervene when a supervisor refuses to sign off valid QWE, but they won't intervene if you find yourself in a position where you already have, for example, a month of QWE from volunteering in clinic, but your employer is still insisting that you undertake a period of training with them for a full two years.

Technically, you would be able to qualify as a solicitor after 23 months of working for that firm, if you've also passed SQE1 and 2 and are of good character. However, if your employer doesn't want to pay for you to apply to the SRA to be admitted as a solicitor until the two-year period of training with them is over, then they are free to include this in any contract of employment, and once signed, you would be contractually bound by its contents.

It would of course be open to you to apply to the SRA to be admitted to the roll of solicitors after 23 months, but if your employer has made it clear to you that they will not pay for your practising certificate (nor will they include you on their list of individuals charged out to clients at the hourly rate of a solicitor) until you have completed two years with them, then you would need to pay for the practising certificate yourself. You should also consider the potentially negative impact this

would have on your relationship with your employer if you plan to continue working with them post-qualification.

10. HAVE YOU GOT ANY FINAL TIPS FOR ME?

Yes, we have three final things for you to keep in mind:

First, QWE should be seen as useful preparation for SQE2, as well as a really valuable opportunity to get exposure to a wide range of competencies. When planning the work that you do in clinic or elsewhere, make sure that you have the opportunity to develop a full range of the competencies that will be tested in SQE2 so your QWE helps you prepare for that (these competencies are listed on the SRA website [here](#)).

Second, remember that Streetlaw activities that do not attract QWE, and indeed other non-QWE pro bono work, are incredibly important pro bono activities, enabling you to gain some great skills (not least researching, working in a team, presenting, dealing with diverse audiences), notwithstanding that they do not attract QWE. There are many compelling reasons why you should still do non-QWE pro bono work, not least being able to talk about all these skills in interviews and in job applications. You may even wish to keep a separate, non-clinic, version of the SRA training template to make a note of the skills you are developing in your Streetlaw, and other non-QWE, activities. This could prove incredibly useful when you're applying for a job, whether in the legal field or not.

Finally, don't forget your reasons for doing clinic! It will of course give you the benefit of collecting QWE, but the primary aim of pro bono clinics - and therefore your activity within them - is to provide assistance to people in society who may otherwise be left without any legal help. You are in a privileged position as a law student: remember that the overriding reason we do pro bono work is to make a difference to people's lives. Please remember that and take the sentiment with you when you go out into the world of work!

SEE OVERLEAF FOR CLINIC-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON HOW TO FILL IN THE SRA'S QWE TRAINING TEMPLATE.



GUIDANCE ON COMPLETING THE SRA’S QWE TRAINING TEMPLATE FOR CLINIC WORK.

This guidance is to be read in conjunction with the SRA’s QWE Training Template. You do not have to follow the guidance in this document, but it has been produced to help students, and clinic supervisors, to take a consistent approach to completing this form, so we do recommend that you follow it where you can.

Before reading further, please consider the details in the box below about our fictitious student volunteer, Noor:

Noor starts volunteering in clinic when she starts a three-year course at Southdale University in October 2021. She volunteers during her first year (2021-22), her second year (2022-23) and her third year (2023-24). She collects two weeks of QWE in her first year, one week in her second year and two weeks in third year.

Below is an example of how Noor’s QWE training template may be filled in across the years. Extracts from the QWE training template are reproduced with kind permission of the SRA.

We recommend you open the QWE training template from the SRA website (available [here](#)) so you can consider it in conjunction with this guidance note.

AT THE END OF 2021-22:

At the end of 2021-22, Noor fills in the boxes explaining the competencies she has been exposed to during that year. To allow the supervisor to identify the cases she has been working on, she includes the client number and the academic year. An extract is provided below of how one of the sections of her SRA template might look:

Competence	Have I had experience? What was it/what did I do?	How can I evidence my experience?	What did I learn?	Do I need more experience?
Obtain relevant facts in a matter	2021-22: LAC.21-001 I interviewed this client about her employment law matter and produced an attendance note afterwards	2021-22: LAC.21-001 The attendance note on file provides evidence of this	2021-22: LAC.21-001 I learnt the importance of not interrupting so that I can gather all necessary facts from the client.	Yes, I will benefit from more experience on this



Noor also completes several other sections of the template in the same manner, some relating to this case and some to other cases she has worked on that year (using the client number again).

TIP: remember client confidentiality and data protection! Do not include matters in this template that might compromise the client’s confidentiality or personal data. Do not include any reference to the client’s name or the names of other parties in the matter, nor to the nature of the advice given (e.g. ‘I wrote a letter telling the client her case was weak’). It is better to just use the client number if your clinic generates these. If it does not, speak to your clinic supervisor about the best way to identify the client in the template, so that they can identify the case for which you are claiming QWE without using the client’s name.

Once the supervisor has checked this, she completes Noor’s template as follows:

Section 1 - Placement details

	Placement 1	Placement 2	Placement 3	Placement 4
Organisation	Southdale University Legal Advice Clinic			
Start date	Oct 2021			
End date	June 2022			
How much of this time counts towards overall QWE requirement	2021-22: 2 weeks			



AT THE END OF 2022-23:

At the end of her second year, in 2022-23, Noor again fills in the boxes explaining the competencies she has been exposed to during that year.

An extract is provided below of how one of the sections of her template might look (she also fills in other sections of the template reflecting the work she has done that year). NOTE: Noor keeps the previous year's details in the form and adds this year's. This is so that all detail is provided in just one form, which is easier for the supervisor as it enables them to add up the QWE undertaken last year and this year into one block (see the 'Section 1' extract on the next page).

Competence	Have I had experience? What was it/what did I do?	How can I evidence my experience?	What did I learn?	Do I need more experience?
Obtain relevant facts in a matter	2021-22: LAC.21-001 I interviewed this client about her employment law matter and produced an attendance note afterwards	2021-22: LAC.21-001 The attendance note on file provides evidence of this	2021-22: LAC.21-001 I learnt the importance of giving the client room to speak and not interrupting so that I can gather all necessary facts from the client.	Yes, I will benefit from more experience on this
	2022-23: LAC.22-006 I interviewed the client about his family law matter	2022-23: LAC.22-006 See the attendance note on file	2022-23: LAC.22-006 I learnt the importance of dealing with a client when they become very upset during the interview.	I feel that I am improving at client interviewing but need to concentrate now on making sure I keep interviews to time.

Once the supervisor has checked this, she completes Noor's template as follows:



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Section 1 - Placement details

	Placement 1	Placement 2	Placement 3	Placement 4
Organisation	Southdale University Legal Advice Clinic			
Start date	Oct 2021			
End date	June 2022 June 2023			
How much of this time counts towards overall QWE requirement	2021-22: 2 weeks 2022-23: 1 week Total: 3 weeks			

AT THE END OF 2023-24:

At the end of her third year, in 2023-24, Noor again fills in the boxes explaining the competencies she has been exposed to during that year.

An extract is provided below of how one of the sections of her template might look (she also fills in others reflecting the work she has done that year):

Competence	Have I had experience? What was it/what did I do?	How can I evidence my experience?	What did I learn?	Do I need more experience?
Obtain relevant facts in a matter	2021-22: LAC.21-001 I interviewed this client about her employment law matter and produced an attendance note afterwards	2021-22: LAC.21-001 The attendance note on file provides evidence of this	2021-22: LAC.21-001 I learnt the importance of giving the client room to speak and not interrupting so that I can gather all necessary facts from the client.	Yes, I will benefit from more experience on this
	2022-23: LAC.22-006 I interviewed the client about his family law matter	2022-23: LAC.22-006 See the attendance note on file	2022-23: LAC.22-006 I learnt the importance of dealing with a client when they	I feel that I am improving at client interviewing, but need to concentrate now



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	<p>2023-24: LAC.23-008 I interviewed the client about her small business query</p>	<p>2023-24: LAC.23-008 See attendance note on file</p>	<p>become very upset during the interview.</p> <p>2023-24: LAC.23-008 I learnt the importance of reminding the client at the beginning of the length of time we have available for the interview.</p>	<p>on making sure I keep interviews to time.</p> <p>I am happy with my experience of interviewing clients, but appreciate that it is always good to gain more experience so will seek these out at my next place of work.</p>
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Once the supervisor has checked this, she completes Noor's template as follows:

Section 1 - Placement details

	Placement 1	Placement 2	Placement 3	Placement 4
Organisation	Southdale University Legal Advice Clinic			
Start date	Oct 2021			
End date	June 2022 June 2023 June 2024			
How much of this time counts towards overall QWE requirement	2021-22: 2 weeks 2022-23: 1 week 2023-24: 2 weeks Total: 3 weeks Total: 5 weeks			

Noor and the supervisor both keep a copy of this template:



- Noor now has a record of one block of 5 weeks of QWE that she could use as one period of QWE when applying to the SRA to register her QWE, if she chose to.
- The supervisor has a full record of Noor's activity that can be used to check against if the SRA contacts her (or her successor) to ask for confirmation that Noor completed the QWE she has applied to register.