



———— **LawCareers.Net**™ ————

THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO A CAREER IN

LAW

———— 2020 ————



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Your 'first steps' checklist:

If you decide that a career as a lawyer is for you, there are a few things you should be doing even before you begin university. Here is a checklist to get you started:

- Talk to your careers adviser at school to go through your options.
- Research the different paths into law – university, chartered legal executive, paralegal, apprenticeship (read *The Law Apprenticeships Guide 2020*) – and decide which is right for you.
- Get some practical work experience at a law firm, barristers' chambers or legal advice centre; it will help you to decide what suits you best and will also improve any applications you make later.
- Work hard at your academic studies. Excellent grades are essential!
- Talk to friends, parents, acquaintances – anyone with a connection to the legal profession; they may also be able to help you get some work experience.
- Think about the kinds of extracurricular activities you can do, or have done, to make yourself into a well-rounded candidate. Think sport, volunteering, drama, music...
- Sign up to a free LawCareers.Net account. You will receive our weekly email newsletter with news and information about the profession, plus gain access to MyLCN.
- Read the business pages of the newspapers to improve your commercial awareness and get you starting to 'think business'.

Welcome

If you might be interested in a future career as a lawyer, but don't know where to start, *The Beginner's Guide to a Career in Law* is for you.

In this guide you will find information about what a job in law involves, the differences between the three main types of lawyer (solicitors, barristers and chartered legal executives), and the courses and training you need to complete to qualify. There are also some key questions to ask yourself and information about the next steps to take for those who want to find out more.

The Beginner's Guide is brought to you by LawCareers.Net (LCN), the number one resource for those interested in joining the legal profession. On the website you will find employer profiles; interviews with law firm recruiters, trainees, associates and partners; advice from LCN's resident agony aunt, the Oracle; blogs and videos from people at different stages of their legal careers; information on law courses (undergraduate and postgraduate); and a searchable database of training contract and pupillage vacancies.

Welcome to the first stage of your legal career!

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What lawyers do

Lawyers perform a valuable role, as law is involved in every aspect of society – from the age you can take your driving test to the speed you can drive when you qualify; from the minimum wage you can expect to earn in a job to the cleanness of the water you drink.

The first thing to know is that traditionally, the legal profession is divided into two main branches – solicitors and barristers. However, these are not the only types of lawyer and there are chartered legal executives, paralegals, apprentices and more – find out more in “Apprenticeships and paralegals” on p6 and in the companion to this booklet, *The Law Apprenticeships Guide 2020*, which is available free at schools and online at www.lawcareers.net. For now, here is a broad introduction to what solicitors and barristers do.

Solicitors

Solicitors provide advice and assistance on legal issues. They are the first point of contact for people and organisations (eg, companies and charities) seeking legal advice and

representation. Most solicitors are employed by law firms, while others work in central or local government, in companies’ legal departments or in an alternative business structure (ABS) – a type of business which provides the same services as a law firm, but is funded and controlled by non-lawyers (eg, the Co-operative Group).

Solicitors’ jobs can be very different depending on what area of law you work in (eg, crime or family) and whether your work is advisory (eg, helping one company acquire another) or involves legal disputes. All solicitors’ jobs involve some or all of the following:

- meeting clients, finding out their needs and establishing how to help;
- researching relevant areas of law and advising clients of their options;
- drafting letters, contracts and other legal documents; and
- acting on behalf of clients in negotiations and representing them at tribunals or in court.

Being a solicitor is a tough but rewarding job. Many of those entering the profession work their way up through the ranks from trainee to associate to partner. Please note that the job of a chartered legal executive is also very similar to that of a solicitor.

Barristers

Barristers advise on specific legal issues and represent clients in court. They receive their information and instructions through a solicitor and are essentially self-employed. When not appearing in court, they work in chambers where they prepare their court cases and arguments. Again, although barristers work in many different areas of law, the key elements of the job are largely the same. These include:

- advising clients on the law and the strength of their case;
- holding ‘conferences’ with clients to discuss their case;
- representing clients in court, including presenting the case and cross-examining witnesses; and
- negotiating settlements with the other side (when a legal dispute is resolved privately outside of court).

Upon being called to the Bar, a barrister is known formally as a ‘junior’. They remain a junior until they are made a Queen’s Counsel (QC) – this is also known as ‘taking silk’. A QC is a senior barrister with extensive experience who is regarded as having outstanding ability. Most barristers never become QCs.

Areas of law

There are hundreds of different types of law. At the broadest level, you can divide lawyers between those doing commercial work (ie, work for companies) and those involved with individual people. On the one hand, you could be a banking lawyer scrutinising a major loan by a bank to a corporation; on the other, you could be a personal injury lawyer advising someone who was injured at work. Different practice areas are like different jobs: a typical day for a human rights solicitor will feel very different to that of a corporate one. See the “practice area snapshot” below for more detail.

Further reading

Solicitors

www.lawcareers.net/solicitors

Barristers

www.lawcareers.net/barristers

Practice area snapshot

Below is just a small selection of the vast array of work areas out there:

Corporate/ commercial



Commercial and corporate solicitors advise on complex transactions and act for businesses of all sizes, from international corporations to small start-ups. General company law might involve advising on company directors’ rights and responsibilities, board meetings and shareholders’ rights. Corporate work often concerns mergers and acquisitions, demergers, joint ventures and share issues.

Crime



Criminal lawyers advise and represent their clients in court on criminal charges that can range from minor motoring offences to more serious crimes, including murder. Barristers may be called on to act for either the defence or the prosecution.

Employment



As a solicitor, you’ll be working on disputes that end up in employment tribunals or in the High Court, helping to draft contracts of employment or advising on working hours. Your client could be the employer or employee. As a barrister, you will be appearing on behalf of your client in either a tribunal or court, often in different parts of the country.

Family



Family lawyers deal with all legal matters relating to marriage, separation, divorce, cohabitation and legal issues relating to children. Family law also encompasses financial negotiations, inheritance issues and prenuptial contracts.

Human rights



This practice area is incredibly wide ranging and includes immigration and asylum cases, privacy cases affecting celebrities and international law issues. Clients may range from low-income refugees and prisoners through to large news organisations and government departments.

Intellectual property



This involves protecting the exploitation of intellectual ideas, normally by way of copyright, trademarks and patents. IP lawyers advise on issues ranging from commercial exploitation to infringement disputes, and agreements that deal either exclusively with intellectual property or with IP rights as part of larger commercial transactions.

Private client



Private client lawyers advise on all aspects of the financial affairs of clients, including capital gains tax, inheritance tax planning, setting up lifetime trusts and preparing wills. Private client lawyers also handle a wide range of charity work.

Public law



Public law concerns relationships between people and government. This might mean challenging the level of care provided to a disabled person by a local authority, or on a larger scale, advising the government on national infrastructure development, such as a new energy or transport project.

Branches of the profession

One of the key questions to ask yourself is what type of lawyer you want to be. For many, that will mean deciding between becoming a solicitor or a barrister. For some, the option to 'earn while you learn' as a chartered legal executive will appeal.

Simply put, a barrister appears in court, while a solicitor or chartered legal executive works in a law firm. The term 'lawyer' applies to all three. However, there are key differences. Some say that it comes down to whether you are an individual (barrister) or a team player (solicitor/legal executive). But while it is true that a

barrister is almost always self-employed and a solicitor/legal executive may be in a law firm of thousands of people, in reality the situation is less black and white. Barristers are often involved in teamwork and some solicitors/legal executives spend many hours on their own in a room drafting documents.

Deciding which career path would suit you best could be a challenge – factors to bear in mind include school grades, your key interests and financial circumstances. Over the page is a brief guide with some key facts, which may help you to decide.

Further reading

Solicitors

www.lawcareers.net/solicitors

Barristers

www.lawcareers.net/barristers

The CILEx section on
www.lawcareers.net

Solicitors

As of May 2019, there were 146,046 practising solicitors. The total number of solicitors on the roll was 195,334.

Women make up around 48% of all practising solicitors.

However, many fewer women than men are currently at partner level – an average split in private practice is 67% male partners compared to 33% female.

BAME individuals make up 21% of all solicitors, as well as 20% at partner level.

Mostly employed in private law firms, so receive regular monthly salary.

Work mainly with individuals, companies and barristers.

Office-based, although have some rights of audience. Engage more in ongoing advisory and one-to-one client work.

Aspire to become partner – that is, part-ownership of firm and entitlement to a percentage of its profits.

Trainee salaries vary widely. A small firm could pay £20,000. Trainees at regional firms earn around £27,000 while City firms pay much more – from £35,000 upwards.

Barristers

As of July 2018, there were 16,598 practising barristers. Of those, 13,171 were self-employed (not including those in dual practice, registered European lawyers or second six pupils).

Women make up around 37% of all practising barristers (ie, 6,158 women compared to 10,348 men).

BAME individuals make up 14% of all practising barristers (ie, 2,146).

Mostly self-employed, so receive irregular (but often substantial) fees. The early years can be hard.

Work mainly with solicitors and other barristers.

Chambers and court-based. Engage more in one-off advocacy (ie, court cases).

Aspire to become Queen's Counsel (QC) – that is, a top barrister, normally instructed in very serious and complex cases.

As of 1 September 2019, all pupil barristers must be paid a minimum of £15,728 (outside London) or £18,436 (in London). Many earn much more – upwards of £50,000 in some cases.

Chartered legal executives

As of May 2019, there were around 20,000 trainee and practising chartered legal executives.

Women make up around 74% of all CILEx members.

BAME individuals make up around 13% of all CILEx members.

Mostly employed in private law firms or in-house, so receive regular monthly salary.

Work mainly with solicitors and individuals.

Office-based, although they have some of the same rights of audience as solicitors. Engage more in ongoing advisory and one-to-one client work.

Should they choose to do so, legal executives can go on to become coroners, judges or partners.

Starting salaries are usually £15,000 – £28,000 per year while qualifying, while qualified chartered legal executives can expect to earn £35,000 – £55,000, and can earn much higher.

Apprenticeships

You don't have to go to university to start a career in the legal profession – a legal apprenticeship provides the opportunity to gain qualifications while in paid work, through on-the-job training at a law firm. Legal apprentices can eventually become solicitors, chartered legal executives or paralegals without the tuition fees and living costs involved with going to university. Some types of apprenticeship take 18 months to complete, but the more advanced levels provide training over five or six years – around the same amount of time as it would take to qualify through the university route.

You don't have to start paying a student loan back until you are in a job paying at least £25,000 a year, so high fees should not necessarily put you off higher education. But there are many reasons why you might decide that going to university is not right for you – and a legal apprenticeship is a genuine – and free – alternative. This section is a basic introduction to legal apprenticeships. To learn more, read the companion to this guide, *The Law Apprenticeships Guide 2020*, which explains everything you need to know about the different types of apprenticeship. Pick up a free copy from your school or read it online at LawCareers.Net.

Am I eligible?

To become a legal apprentice, you must be 16 or over, not in full-time education and a UK citizen/someone who has right of residency in the United Kingdom. Most legal apprenticeships require candidates to have five GCSEs (or equivalent) graded A* - C, including maths and English. The paralegal apprenticeship requires at least two A levels, while the solicitor apprenticeship requires three A levels, but grade requirements vary between employers.

Earn and learn

The minimum wage for a legal apprentice is £3.90 (as of 1 April 2019) an hour for people aged under 19, as well as for people aged over 19 who are in the first year of their apprenticeship. All other apprentices over

the age of 19 are paid at least the National Minimum Wage. There are four levels of legal apprenticeship.

Intermediate apprenticeship

The Intermediate Apprenticeship provides training in a legal administrative role. Such roles involve administrative tasks such as research, secretarial work and dealing with confidential information.

Paralegal apprenticeship

The Paralegal Apprenticeship trains apprentices in the skills needed to work in a certain area of law (eg, personal injury) – paralegals support solicitors on legal matters and do many of the same tasks. Find out more about paralegals on the next page.

Chartered legal executive apprenticeship

This programme trains apprentices to qualify as chartered legal executives, a type of lawyer that is similar to a solicitor. Candidates must first complete the Paralegal Apprenticeship before progressing onto this.

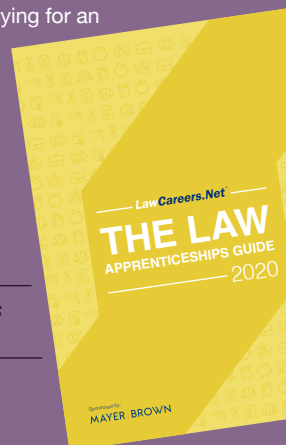
Solicitor apprenticeship

This apprenticeship is a six-year programme which integrates studying for a law degree with on-the-job training at a law firm, ending in qualification as a solicitor – a role which was previously reserved for those who took the traditional university route.

If you are considering applying for an apprenticeship, you can learn more by reading *The Law Apprenticeships Guide 2020* and then start your search for the right employer on LawCareers.Net's apprenticeship jobs board.

Further reading

The Law Apprenticeships Guide 2020



Paralegals

Paralegals work in law firms, but are not qualified as solicitors or chartered legal executives. Although paralegals used to be seen purely as support staff, the role of paralegal has moved beyond just assisting solicitors. Paralegals are becoming a distinct group of legal professionals in their own right, although this kind of role is often still used as a stepping stone to becoming a solicitor or chartered legal executive.

Some paralegals' roles are often little different from those of solicitors. This means that you can apply to qualify as a solicitor while working as a paralegal, provided that you can satisfy the Solicitors Regulation Authority that you have gained the same knowledge and skills in your role as you would have through a training contract. This is called the 'equivalent means' route to qualifying.

Another common reason why many graduates work as paralegals is that this is a good way to gain the crucial legal work experience needed to get a training contract. Some paralegals gain experience and then apply for a training contract at the same firm, while others move on from firms where this is not an option and go on to apply successfully elsewhere.

However, a note of caution: paralegals perform many of the same tasks as solicitors, but are generally not paid as much and there is not the same clear career progression that solicitors can pursue. Be careful and stay mindful of your prospects for career progression.

Further reading

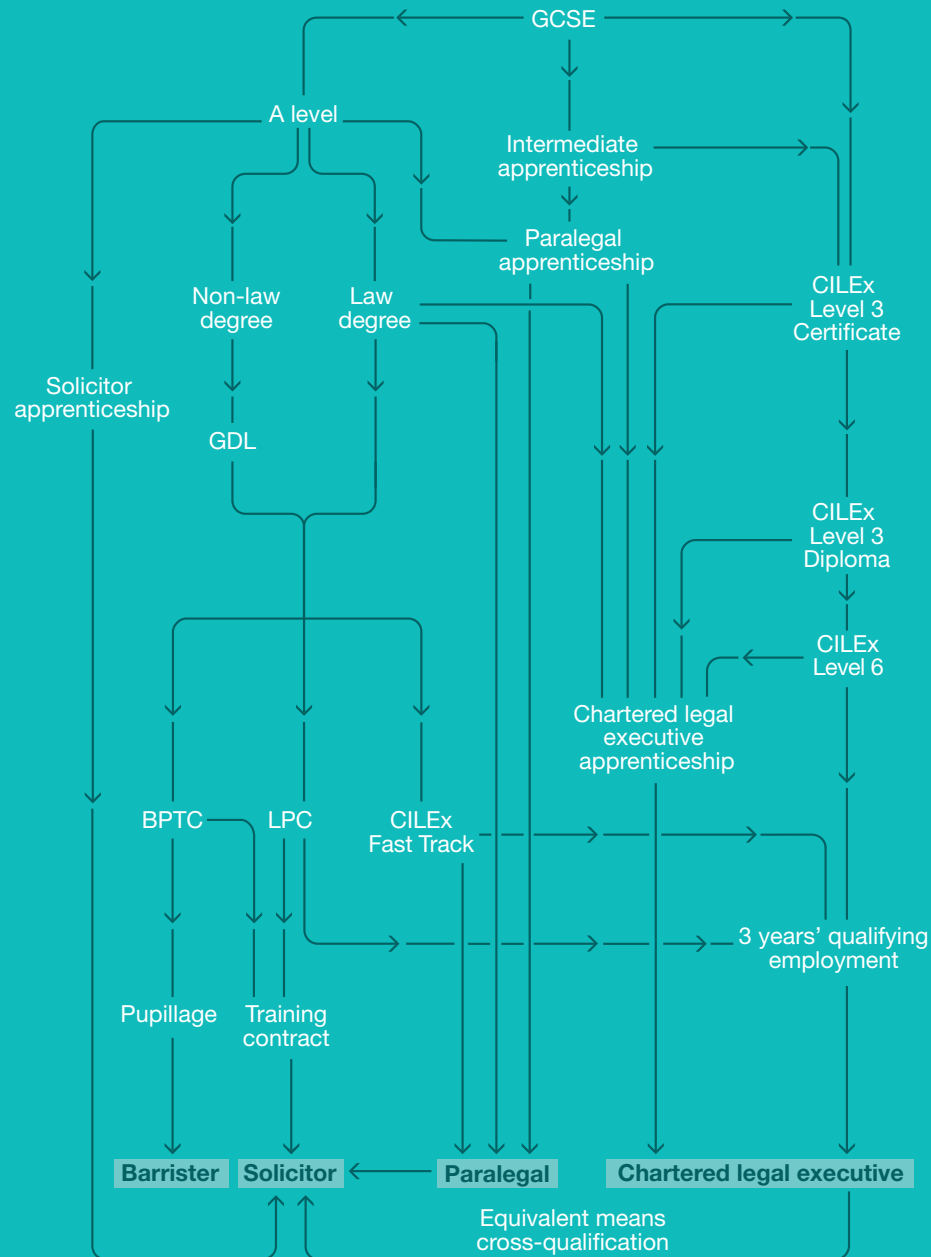
The Paralegal section on www.lawcareers.net

'Equivalent means' offers alternative path to qualification

It is possible to use experience gained in a paralegal role to qualify as a solicitor, as long as you have a university degree and have completed the LPC. In 2015 Shaun Lawler was one of the first solicitors to qualify in this new way. He says: "If people have the necessary qualifications and experience, then they should be able to qualify as solicitors without needing a law firm's say so. Paralegal work effectively got

my foot in the door of the legal profession. I moved away from home to London and applied for a few different paralegal roles with the aim of getting some experience while completing the LPC. Working and studying at the same time was hard, but it definitely gave me the experience that I needed to move forward, without which I would have found it much harder to pursue qualification as a solicitor."

Career paths



The following describes the various stages along the path to formal legal qualifications:

GCSE

The foundation of your career and the essential first step – good grades are vital if you want to progress in your legal career.

A level

Again, good grades are essential. Some universities favour traditional, academically rigorous subjects such as history (A-level law is not usually specified).

Non-law degree

Lawyers are not required to have studied law at university! You can do a non-law degree and then do the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL).

Law degree

The qualifying law degree, or LLB, covers seven compulsory subjects: public, criminal, contract, tort, property, equity and trusts, and EU law.

GDL

Like the law degree, the one-year Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) concentrates on the seven foundations of legal practice. When combined with a non-law degree, it is equivalent to a law degree.

BPTC

The one-year Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) is the vocational stage of training to be a barrister.

LPC

The one-year Legal Practice Course (LPC) is the vocational stage of training to be a solicitor.

Pupillage

Pupillage is a compulsory, year-long period of training before qualification as a barrister. Pupils practise under the guidance and supervision of a pupil supervisor.

Period of recognised training/training contract

The period of recognised training ("training contract") is a period of paid employment and training with a law firm or other approved organisation before qualification as a solicitor. In most cases this will take the form of a two-year formal traineeship.

Barrister

Barristers offer advice on specific legal issues and are on the front line, representing clients in court.

Solicitor

Solicitors give advice and assistance on matters of law; they are the first point of contact for those seeking legal advice and representation.

CILEx chartered legal executive

A chartered legal executive is a qualified lawyer who is trained to specialise as an expert in a particular area of law. The route to qualification is to complete CILEx 3 and CILEx 6 (or CILEx Graduate Fast Track for those with a law degree) and three years' qualifying employment. You can also do a chartered legal executive apprenticeship.

Intermediate legal and paralegal apprenticeships

A legal apprentice is someone who joins a law firm straight from school, rather than going to university. You receive paid, on-the-job training and gain competence in legal skills, commercial skills and professional conduct. For more info, see p6 or visit our Legal apprenticeships section on LawCareers.Net.

Solicitor apprenticeship

The solicitor apprenticeship is a six-year programme of paid, on-the-job training, integrating a law degree, which ends in qualification as a solicitor. The general entry requirements are five GCSEs graded A* - C and three A levels graded B or above (or equivalent work experience) – but academic requirements can vary between employers.

Paralegals

Paralegals work alongside solicitors in law firms as support staff, although in practice many paralegals do the same work as trainees or newly-qualified solicitors. Paralegal roles provide a good route into the profession for graduates, either as valuable work experience before applying for a training contract or as a way to fulfil the SRA's qualifying requirements without doing a training contract.

Change ahead: the Solicitors Qualifying Examination

Anyone who starts an undergraduate degree after Autumn 2021 will have to take the Solicitors Qualifying Examination, a new assessment that must be passed to qualify as a solicitor. This will replace the current GDL and LPC courses, and the period of recognised training may also change. For more information, go to LawCareers.Net and search "Solicitors Qualifying Examination".

Key questions

Below are some of the most commonly asked questions about a career in the law. If you want to ask something not covered here, email your query to oracle@lawcareers.net.

Q Why should I choose law over other professions?

A Don't pursue a legal career for the sake of it or because you've heard that it pays well; you need to have a strong desire to be a lawyer in order to succeed. Do you find law interesting? Is there a particular area of law that has already caught your attention? Are you the kind of person who would thrive in a legal environment? The only way to really find out whether law is for you is by doing some work experience within and outside of the legal profession.

Q What skills and strengths do you need to be a good lawyer?

A A number of core skills are needed to be a good lawyer – many of them you can hone through your academic studies and work experience. The core strengths sought by legal recruiters are:

- intellectual ability;
- motivation;
- resilience;
- accuracy/attention to detail;
- teamwork;
- leadership;
- commercial awareness; and
- communication skills.

If you have the majority of these, law could be a good option for you!

Q What is commercial awareness?

A Law firms often stress that their lawyers need to be 'commercially aware', which is a phrase that can cause confusion. In essence, it means that commercial lawyers deal with more than just the law. They must understand the client's business and the market/environment in which it operates, and be proactive in spotting and suggesting ways to avoid potential problems that the client might face. Commercial awareness does not mean the same thing to a student as it will to an experienced businessperson, and nobody expects you to be an economic expert. What firms are looking for is a combination of basic knowledge, common sense, interest and enthusiasm for commercial matters, and, most importantly, the ability and willingness to 'think business'.

Q How important are grades at A level and uni?

A Law is an intellectually rigorous career, which is why firms and chambers require excellent academics; in fact, many simply won't look at applicants who have less than a 2.1 degree, and As and Bs at A level. It is therefore vital that you get the best grades you possibly can.

Q Should I go to university or try one of the new routes, such as a legal apprenticeship?

A Over the past couple of years, the chance to join the legal profession as a legal apprentice has become a real option to launch a career in law. Apprentices join firms as school leavers and work in roles similar to that of a paralegal, while receiving on-the-job training that takes them towards a formal qualification. Solicitor apprenticeships also allow those with A levels to qualify as a solicitor without going to university. See the 'Apprenticeships' section on p6 for more detail and our companion publication, *The Law Apprenticeships Guide 2020*.

Q How do I go about getting legal work experience?

A Work placement schemes are a great way to learn more about the profession and many firms run schemes specifically for first years. You can get a comprehensive list of firm schemes on LawCareers.Net's work placement deadlines page. But you are not restricted to these structured programmes – you may be able to get a day or two shadowing a trainee or lawyer simply by writing speculatively to firms/chambers you're interested in or which are local to you. You should also get involved with university pro bono schemes or legal advice centres. Even if you're stuffing envelopes or answering phones, it's all a valuable introduction to the types of work and client interactions that lawyers are involved with every day.

Q Why are work placement schemes so important?

A Getting work experience at law firms is essential. Work placement/vacation schemes (usually run during university holidays) are a good place to start; they provide an opportunity for you to find out about not only the law, but also individual firms. Firms increasingly rely on extended work placement schemes to select which candidates they want to take on as trainees, so getting on a scheme is a great chance to impress and earn the offer of a training contract.

Q Do law firms prefer candidates to have a law degree?

A Most firms are looking to recruit a balance of law and non-law graduates – in fact, roughly half of all solicitors are from non-law backgrounds. Studying another subject at university may help to make you a more well-rounded individual. This means that if you have a burning desire to study English literature, but think you might want a career as a lawyer, it's fine to do English at uni and convert to law by doing the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL). This postgraduate course squeezes the seven foundations of legal knowledge into one year. You then join the law graduates and do either the Legal Practice Course (LPC) or the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC), followed by a training contract in a law firm or a pupillage in a set of chambers. But note: most firms do favour traditional academic subjects (eg, history or sciences) over more modern options (eg, media studies or drama).

Q What do I need to know about the postgraduate law courses?

A In brief, this is the compulsory vocational stage that must be completed before you do either the training contract (solicitor) or pupillage (barrister). The LPC and the BPTC are usually one-year courses, but each can be done two years part time, or by distance learning. Many providers around the country offer the courses, including our sponsor, Nottingham Law School. Alternatively, CILEx offers a Graduate Fast Track Diploma.

Q I keep hearing about the new SQE: what is it and how will it affect me?

A The Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) plans to introduce the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) in 2021, which will replace the GDL and LPC as the exam that all solicitors will need to pass in order to qualify. The idea is to ensure that all qualified solicitors are of the same high standard, regardless of which route (ie, university, equivalent means or apprenticeship) they take to get there. Unlike the GDL and LPC, the SQE is not a course but a series of exams, which are divided into two stages. Universities and law schools are currently developing new courses to prepare students for the SQE. There is still uncertainty around its implementation, including potential new SQE preparation courses, affordability and quality of training. Anyone who commences a law degree, GDL or LPC before September 2021 can qualify through the old system. Take a look at our SQE page on LawCareers.Net for the latest information as we find out more.

Q How much longer will it take to qualify if I choose a non-law undergraduate degree?

A It only takes one year longer to qualify if you study a degree other than law. After graduating, you will need to complete the Graduate Diploma in Law, a one-year course covering all the key parts of an undergraduate law degree, before progressing onto the LPC or BPTC.

Q Are postgraduate law courses expensive? Do I have to pay for them myself?

A The total cost of qualifying as a solicitor or barrister is not to be underestimated. Over and above the £9,250 per year that you are likely to have to pay for your undergraduate degree, you will have to pay as much as £11,650, £16,750 or £19,400 (plus living costs) for, respectively, each of the GDL, LPC and BPTC in 2019-20. And unlike undergraduate and master's degrees, postgraduate loans are unavailable for the GDL, LPC and BPTC. For this reason, it's best to have a training contract or pupillage before embarking on any of the courses – many large firms/chambers offer sponsorship (usually covering course fees and maintenance grant) to their future trainees/pupils. At the very least, you'll have a job at the end of all the study. Bank loans are usually the preferred option for those who self-fund. For more detailed funding advice, look at the 'Finances' section on LawCareers.Net.

Q Have all lawyers been to private school and Oxbridge?

A No. Most firms and chambers fully understand the benefits of a representative workforce, which means recruiting the best candidates regardless of background. These days, most go further by establishing their own diversity policies to ensure that they provide a welcoming and supportive environment for people whatever their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, socioeconomic background and so on. That said, different firms and chambers do have different personalities and it's important to find one that suits you – a compelling reason to attend law fairs, open days and get work experience.

Q How can my careers service help me?

A Your school or university careers service is a key resource. Some advisers specialise in the legal sector and can help check through work placement and training contract/pupillage applications (or speculative CVs and letters, if you're trying to secure informal work experience). Some also have contacts at local law firms and chambers, so might even be able to help you set up some work shadowing.

Q Is the role of lawyers essentially the same in all law firms and chambers?

A No. Take solicitors' firms – the work and lifestyle that you would experience in a large City firm and a small high-street practice are completely different. And it's the same with a London-based commercial barristers' chambers and a small regional crime chambers. It's therefore vitally important that you find out which type and size of practice would suit you, by doing work experience and speaking to people in the profession. Only by getting first-hand experience and speaking to those in the know can you really start to get a feel for the kind of work that you think would appeal and that you would be good at.

Q How can I find out more?

A There's lots of information out there about careers in law. Pick up a copy of this year's *The LawCareers.Net Handbook* or our companion publication, *The Law Apprenticeships Guide 2020*, from your careers service or a law fair (held at universities in autumn). Fairs are also a great place to speak to recruiters and current trainees/pupils. In addition, check out LawCareers.Net for news, advice, features and interviews.

Further reading

Got a question not answered here? Go to the Oracle page on www.lawcareers.net to find out if it has come up before. Alternatively, email the Oracle direct at oracle@lawcareers.net for a personalised response to your question.

Reality check

There are a few things worth mentioning as a reminder that starting a legal career is competitive and expensive. So without wanting to detract from the exciting and challenging career on offer, here follows some food for thought...



Finances

We cannot stress this enough – with up to £9,250 per year undergrad fees, plus postgraduate study in 2018-19 costing up to £16,750 for the LPC and up to £19,895 for the BPTC, the road to qualification is not cheap and there are no guarantees of a job at the end of it. In addition, some firms at the smaller end of the market may pay trainees no more than the National Minimum Wage. Your ability to afford the courses and a potentially low starting wage must be a factor in deciding whether to pursue law as a career.



Academics

There is real competition for training contracts and pupillages. You need to be getting strong grades from your first year of university onwards. Your A-level grades are also important, as anything less than As and Bs may stop an employer considering your application. Most recruiters we speak to say that excellent academics are a given, so make sure that you put in the time when studying.



Experience

You need a combination of work experience (both legal and otherwise) and extracurricular activities to become the all-rounder that firms/chambers want to hire. One without the other isn't enough; having both strings to your bow is what will help you demonstrate that you have the skills the employer is looking for.



Online

Make sure you set up a LinkedIn profile to connect with employers and other contacts you will be making, and start to build up the 'professional' side of your social media presence. Remember when you apply, recruiters may Google your name, so don't have anything too crazy available to view publicly on Facebook. Meanwhile, legal Twitter is a great place to learn about the profession and start building your knowledge.



Commerciality

The legal world is part of the business world. If you have ambitions to work for a commercial law firm, it is essential to develop a good understanding of the issues and events affecting businesses. Read the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* from time to time, and try to appreciate the appropriate legal issues thrown up by your studies from a commercial perspective.



Diversity

Historically, the legal profession was overwhelmingly white, male and privately educated, and more still needs to be done to improve equal representation, particularly at the senior end of the profession. This is not to say that if you don't meet those outdated, narrow criteria, you should be put off – quite the opposite. What it does mean is that you should have your eyes open to the opportunities available. The legal profession is much, much more diverse than it used to be. There are also organisations which work to help students from less-privileged backgrounds access the career opportunities that law has to offer. Aspiring Solicitors, LawCareers.Net's diversity partner, works for free with students to provide one-to-one advice on CVs, application forms and interview practice, while also working with employers to provide work experience opportunities and improve openness. Find out more by visiting www.aspiringsolicitors.co.uk.



Competition

The numbers are stacked against you – there are many fewer training contract and pupillage places than there are people with the necessary qualifications. You have to find a way to stand out among thousands angling for the same job, so make sure you shine through by being resourceful, determined and committed to the profession and a career in law.



Time

You must spend time researching firms/chambers you like; planning how to get work experience; and filling out, refining, checking (and having someone else check) your application forms. In every case, start early, have a schedule and be strict with yourself. Last-minute, rushed efforts are almost worse than no effort at all.

The law is an incredibly competitive profession and it's never too early to start trying to boost your chances of success. One of the best ways to do that is to visit **LawCareers.Net** (LCN) to begin your online research. It's your one-stop shop for all things law-related.

On **LawCareers.Net** you'll find:

-  A directory of over 1,000 law firms, barristers' chambers and legal educators
-  Features providing information and advice about pursuing a legal career
-  Profiles of lawyers and recruiters
-  The latest legal news
-  A range of videos
-  Blog posts from law students
-  Personalised careers advice via The Oracle
-  Tips and articles to boost your commercial awareness

Make sure to sign up to MyLCN on **LawCareers.Net** so you can manage your research into a legal career. You will also receive the LCN Weekly email newsletter, which is packed with useful information and insights.

Find us on:

-  Facebook
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-  LinkedIn
-  The LawCareers.Net Podcast

If you would like more copies of *The Beginner's Guide to a Career in Law 2020* or its companion publication, *The Law Apprenticeships Guide 2020*, please contact info@lawcareers.net.

Your first-year university checklist:

You're at university (studying a law or non-law degree) and you want to know what you should be doing. Here is a brief checklist to get you started:

- Keep up with the business sections on newspapers' websites to improve your commercial awareness, but also read the more specific legal press – a couple of the more reputable broadsheet newspapers also have great law sections.
- Work with your university careers adviser on your application and interview technique, and start to think about where you might like to apply for a vac scheme/mini-pupillage next year.
- Sign up to a free LawCareers.Net account. You will receive our weekly email newsletter with news and information about the profession, plus gain access to MyLCN.
- Get some practical work experience at a law firm, barristers' chambers or legal advice centre. Talk to friends, family, acquaintances – anyone with a connection to the legal profession.
- Go to law fairs, firm presentations and open days to meet people face to face. Think about how to stand out by asking good questions (eg, about a recent deal, case or merger).
- Continue to work hard at your academic studies. Recruiters want to see exemplary grades and yes, your first-year grades do count!
- Join your university's student law society who will be able to support you with events, presentations, information sessions and more. Plus, you will be able to meet other students in the same position as you.
- Engage with some of the extracurricular options at university (eg, sport, debating, mooting or music) to make yourself into a well-rounded candidate.
- Become a member of Aspiring Solicitors for free access, opportunity and assistance for students from underrepresented groups.



YOUR TIME OUR PLACE

We'll prepare you for your legal career

We are one of the largest law schools in the UK, providing courses for every stage of legal training. We offer a wide range of undergraduate Law courses, from single honours to joint honours and distance learning options. All of our LLB courses are Qualifying Law Degrees, enabling you to progress on to further legal training to become a solicitor or barrister.

Visit www.ntu.ac.uk/startlaw to find out more.