

Getting into...

Law and Legal Services



The main types of qualified lawyers in England and Wales are those of solicitor and barrister (Northern Ireland, Scotland and the offshore islands have different legal systems). However, there are many other roles in the industry, including legal executives, paralegals and patent attorneys.

Routes into law can often be complex, so it is vital to be aware of key deadlines and what experience you should be seeking along each stage of your career progression.

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Exploring Your Options

Find out about the different jobs available and how they match your skills and interests. This will allow you to make informed decisions about what to do next and will help you produce targeted applications, where you convince the recruiter of your suitability for the role.

Typical roles

Solicitor

Around 92% of all practising lawyers in England and Wales are solicitors. They mainly provide legal services directly to the client and the majority of work is office-based in some kind of private practice. Some solicitors also work 'in-house' in legal departments of companies.

Barrister

There are roughly 17,000 self-employed barristers in England and Wales. Barristers work primarily in court or tribunals and provide one-off advocacy. They are normally self-employed as part of a 'set' and work from the same 'chambers' (such as an Inn of Court) as other barristers (whilst also working very closely with solicitors). A minority of barristers also work at the 'employed bar', which is the in-house equivalent to solicitors employed by companies.

Find out more about the [difference between a barrister and a solicitor](#).

Alternative Legal Roles

The majority of roles in the legal sector are for roles other than qualified lawyers.

Paralegal

These roles support the work of a solicitor, and responsibility and work will vary from firm to firm.

Legal Executives

A chartered legal executive also supports the work of solicitors and barristers undertaking 'reserved legal activities'. Fully qualified, and well experienced, they can undertake the same work as solicitors.

Barristers' Clerk

Run the day-to-day business of a Chambers.

Chartered Secretary

Trained to work with regulation, legislation and compliance, a chartered company secretary works at senior levels within organisations to ensure that they are legally compliant and operating effectively.

Business function roles

Law firms are not just staffed by lawyers. Like other organisations, they require staff in Human Resources, Finance, Marketing, Business Development and Information services.

This Chambers Student article provides a good overview of [alternative legal careers](#).

Emerging roles in legal technology

As the legal sector continues to innovate, technology will continue to play an increasingly important role. Look out for emerging roles and companies focused on maximising the use of technology in legal processes and the delivery of services.

Typical Employers

Legal services are mainly delivered via law firms (solicitors) and chambers (barristers). However there are various legal roles in nearly all companies and organisations, including commercial businesses, local/national government, public bodies and charities. This immediately increases the number of potential jobs open to you.

Private Practice

Most solicitors work in private practice. These include: large corporate practices who have an international reach, regional firms (many with a presence in London), niche firms in specialist areas of law and small high street firms. Most barristers are self-employed and take tenancy in a set of chambers.

In-House

Some large organisations (from banks to electricity companies) employ their own in-house lawyers (both solicitors and barristers). Many lawyers also work in-house in the public sector for organisations such as the Government Legal Profession, the Crown Prosecution Service or local government.

You can find out more about getting into law in [Prospects' Law sector guide](#).

Getting Industry Ready

What employers are looking for will vary depending on the role, but this is a general overview of key areas you might like to think about. It is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required.

What employers want

Qualifications

Do I need a law degree?

Roles within the legal sector are open to students of all undergraduate subjects. Non-law graduates can be very desirable to firms as they bring specialist knowledge in areas such as languages, business/finance, analysis and research.

If you do plan to qualify as a lawyer, you will need to complete the relevant vocational training, which may include the Postgraduate Diploma in Law (PGDL) for non-law graduates and Bar Training Courses or the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) for law and non-law students, before going down the training route (see separate [information sheet on training requirements](#)).

The main thing is to be proactive and start early by attending as many events as possible (such as law fairs and networking events), undertaking legal work experience and utilising all the support available on making applications. [The Beginners Guide to Law](#) produced by LawCareers.net has information for both law and non-law students and contains a useful checklist.

Do I need a masters?

A masters is not required and will not necessarily give you a competitive advantage. It is also not a substitute for work experience (where you develop skills in a professional environment) and will not guarantee you a job.

Think carefully before beginning postgraduate study and read job descriptions for junior and senior positions in the area you're interested in to find out what qualifications are typically required.

If you do decide to go on to further study, consider the resources the university has, the experience of those teaching the course and what their alumni have achieved. Also consider the wider benefits such as whether they have industry links or a placement option or whether

they are endorsed by a relevant professional association. Consider also whether student loan funding is available for the masters, as it is available for certain courses (LLM) but not others (Bar Training Courses, SQE).

If you do decide to do a masters, don't feel you have to take a course straight after your undergraduate degree. Gaining practical training and further experience is a great way to find out which (if any) qualifications are valued by employers in your area of interest.

Skills

Understanding the skills required for a job can help you decide whether it is right for you. It also helps you understand what employers look for in applications and interviews. For most jobs in this industry, employers are likely to be looking for:

Excellent communication skills

Can you articulate points clearly in both written and verbal communication? The ability to construct accurate and persuasive arguments in impeccable written English is essential, especially in advocacy for a client.

Interpersonal skills

Will you enjoy meeting and building relationships with clients? You will be expected to build rapport and establish trust very quickly.

Planning and organisational skills

Can you manage your time well to meet deadlines and maintain a busy schedule. You will be expected to manage conflicting priorities and use your time effectively.

Problem solving skills

Do you like to evaluate a problem and suggest suitable solutions, especially when confronted with something new/unfamiliar? This is an important asset within all aspects of this industry.

Research skills

Can you carry out thorough, accurate and high-quality research? This is a key skill and will feed into activities such as investigating precedents in previous cases or determining the novelty of something submitted for patent.

Teamwork skills

Do you enjoy working within and across different teams? This is important for all lawyers, especially those working in commercial firms who work with a range of specialist teams.

Ability to be flexible and cope under pressure

Are you able to thrive in a fast-paced, high-pressure industry with tight deadlines? The ability to adapt to change and think on your feet, often in incredibly pressurised circumstances, will be very much welcomed.

Take a look at Prospect's [Seven Skills for a Successful Law Career](#) and Law Careers' [Key Skills for Lawyers](#).

Commercial awareness

Put simply, commercial awareness refers to gaining knowledge of how specific companies you are interested in operate (such as their structure, functions, vision and mission), what the key priorities are for their industry and recent developments that may impact their work. Commercial awareness is important for all areas of the sector and not just those working in commercial organisations or practice areas. The ability to speak knowledgeably on these things at interview will help you to stand out as a serious candidate, especially for commercial law firms who are looking for potential 'business advisors' for their clients.

It is important to remember that law firms themselves are businesses, with the same commercial concerns as other businesses. The best way to develop commercial awareness is to keep up to date with news within the sector and in the wider field of current affairs. Take a look at LawCareers.Net to find out more about [building commercial awareness](#).

How to gain relevant skills and experiences

Law firm insight and open days

These are a great way to network and find out what it would really be like working in that firm

Events

Meet potential employers by [attending events](#) (on and off campus) put on by firms/ chambers, the School of Law, Careers and Enterprise team and QM law societies

Volunteering and work experience

Develop skills and experience through undertaking formal work experience (such as a vacation scheme or mini pupillage). You can also volunteer at a Legal Advice Centre through a [pro-bono](#) opportunity or by joining a [QM society](#) (law or non-law)

Build your online presence

Build an online professional profile and brand through platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter, as a way to develop your network and gain useful industry insights. You can also use this as a

way of developing commercial awareness.

Be creative

Don't just focus on law firms and chambers – also consider things like asking to shadow someone in the legal team where you work part-time or exploring experiences that are law related (such as advocacy, research or policy work for a charity focused on an area of legal practice, such as human rights)

Explore informal and virtual experiences

Some places may only be able to offer you work shadowing for 1-2 days or virtual experience, which you should always accept

Think globally

Legal experience from other countries is incredibly valuable, even if you plan on working in the UK

Ask around

Ask your friends, family or people within your professional network if they can connect you with anyone who may be able to let you know about possible opportunities.

How can Careers and Enterprise help you?

There are a number of ways Careers and Enterprise can help you build skills and prepare for applying to opportunities.

Appointments

We run one-to-one appointments with expert career consultants who can talk to you about a variety of topics including your CV and applications, as well as give you career guidance and advice surrounding making career decisions. You can also book [Practice Interview appointments](#) to test your skills, for when you have an upcoming interview

Events

We hold a range of [careers events](#) throughout the year where you can learn more about an industry, network with employers and find out what people look for in a graduate.

Programmes

If you are looking to develop your skills, Careers & Enterprise is home to the [Aspire Programme](#): Queen Mary's Student Career Development Programme. These programmes take place alongside your degree, allowing you to gain vital employability skills to add to your CV, as well as raise your commercial awareness. Please note: Eligibility requirements apply

Online Resources

Our bank of [online resources](#) is a great place to go for careers support. We have guides (such as this one), templates for things like CVs and applications, as well as tools that you can use to build or improve a CV ([QM CareerSet](#)), practice for a psychometric test ([Graduates First](#)) or practice for a video interview ([ShortlistMe](#)).

Make the most of work experience opportunities

Once you have found a work experience opportunity, it is important to make the most of it! Here are some things to keep in mind before, during and after the opportunity.

1. Discuss your expectations with the employer at the start, so that you have the same understanding of what the experience will involve.
2. Always be polite, motivated and interested. Work experience can involve boring tasks, but being flexible, helpful and willing to get involved will make a good impression and could lead to more opportunities.
3. Be inquisitive and learn everything you can about the way the organisation works. How do they hire? What key skills are they looking for? What are the main issues affecting the organisation at the moment?
4. Talk to people who work at the organisation and find out what they do and how they got there. You might uncover job roles and employers that are new to you, as well as pick up some helpful tips. Keeping in touch with people you meet can be a great way of finding out about future opportunities and expanding your network.
5. Ask for feedback at the end of the placement to identify your strengths and the skills you need to develop further.

For more information on where you can develop your skills and experiences, see the Resources section.

Finding Opportunities

For legal roles, relevant experience is essential. It enhances your understanding of the sector and its different job areas and convinces future employers of your dedication to the industry. It can lead to offers of employment, and many firms recruit trainees from those who completed their vacation schemes.

Start looking for placements and work experience in your first year. Many large firms offer paid vacation schemes to 2nd year law students and final year non-law students. Most barristers' chambers can be approached for mini-pupillages (the Bar's version of work experience). Many students also find placements through making speculative applications. Although it is important to gain relevant legal work experience, non-legal experience and volunteering roles may also provide opportunities to build on and demonstrate skills that legal work experience does not cover.

Networking

Networking is about building rapport and links with professionals in your field(s) of interest. This will create a group of work-related contacts who may be able to give you help, information and advice. Networking is also an excellent source of information about trends and developments in the industry that you can use to build your commercial awareness.

Consider who you already know within your personal, academic or professional networks and how they could help you. This might include colleagues from a part time job, college or university lecturers, former colleagues from work experience or volunteering, or friends of friends. Make a list and keep in touch using social media or email. They may have tips and be able to put you in touch with their own contacts, or let you know about future opportunities.

Searching Online

You can use social media and your digital presence to strengthen your search as more and more employers are using LinkedIn and Instagram as part of the recruitment process. It is also a good idea to follow firms or organisations that interest you on Twitter.

See the Resources section for links to where you can look for opportunities.

Resources

Exploring Your Career Options

[Law Careers](#)

News, advice and profiles of firms and vacancies for those considering law careers as solicitors or barristers

[Chambers Student](#)

Great companion to 'Law Careers' with articles on becoming a lawyer in different practice areas in the UK and abroad

[Lawyer2B](#)

Wide range of advice and insight into the legal profession for anyone interested in a career in law

[Law Society](#)

The representative body for solicitors in England and Wales, with careers section

[All About Law](#)

[Bar Council](#)

If you are interested in becoming a barrister, this website provides information on the ratios of candidates to successful applications at each step of the process

[Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys](#)

Patent attorneys train in different way to solicitors and barristers and firms often recruit directly from applications by final year students, many of them with a scientific background

[Her Majesty's Courts Service](#)

[Accutrainee](#)

Alternative to the conventional Training Contract provision

Acquiring experience

[Queen Mary Legal Advice Centre](#)

(On campus and for LLB law students only)

[Free Representation Unit](#)

Advocacy experience for junior lawyers

[Law Works](#)

Pro-bono opportunities for law students

[Citizens Advice Bureau](#)

Advisory experience for students

[Bar Pro Bono Unit](#)

Work experience opportunity for law students

[Student Pro Bono](#)

Provides help for law students seeking pro bono work

[Young Legal Aid Lawyers](#)

Useful for finding qualified and non-qualified roles in non-commercial practice areas such as criminal law, human rights, immigration, and mental health

[The Law Centres Federation](#)

May find opportunities for case work or administration especially in areas like housing, crime, employment and immigration; check each centre carefully

Finding Opportunitites

[Prospects](#)

For general careers advice, practical tips and industry specific guides on law and non-law roles

[Target Jobs](#)

Tends to focus more on the large firms

[Legal 500](#)

International directory of solicitors firms

[The Lawyer](#)

Tip - use the Browse rather than Search option and look under the last 4 categories in the 'Vacancy Type' tab

[Totally Legal](#)

A range of law related roles, included admin and paralegal including access schemes and scholarships

Diversity and Inclusion, including access schemes and scholarships

[The Law Society's Diversity Access Scheme](#)

[Pegasus Access and Support Scheme \(PASS\)](#)

Scheme aimed at improving diversity of barristers, mainly through mini-pupillages

[Aspiring Solicitors](#)

Increasing diversity in the legal profession through information, advice, events and mentoring

[Rare Recruitment](#)

Supports diverse talent into top companies, including legal sector (sign up to Vantage to connect with top legal employers)

[Reach \(not law specific\)](#)

Links job seekers to inclusive organisations and schemes

[Bridging the Bar](#)

For aspiring barristers

[AllAboutLaw Diversity schemes](#)

[The Law Society Lawyers with Disabilities Division](#)