

Getting into Law and Legal Services

The legal sector is a popular and varied industry. There are many jobs in the industry, ranging from legal executives to paralegals and patent attorneys. However, 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).

As with all professions, it is important to research the different jobs available and consider how they match your own skills and interests. This will lead to a more informed career decision and a solid understanding of the work involved during the application and interview process to convince the recruiter that you are a suitable candidate.

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.

Remember that while reading about a specific role is important, speaking to someone with first-hand experience can provide invaluable insight, so keep an eye on the School of Law and QM Careers Events calendars for opportunities such as careers events, Q&A sessions and mentoring programmes.

What type of jobs can I do?

Solicitor

With 146,913 practising solicitors in England and Wales in July 2019 (around 92% of all lawyers), it is definitely one of the most popular roles within the sector.

Solicitors 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. Solicitors are expected to be good with people, have business/commercial awareness (see below), have strong organisational skills and be a team player.

For further information about solicitor qualification routes see www.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/sqe

Barrister

There were around 16,598 self-employed barristers in 2018 and it is one of the most competitive and popular legal careers. Barristers work primarily in court or tribunals and predominately 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 seen as the in-house equivalent to solicitors who are employed by companies. Barristers are expected to be self-confident, be able to think quickly on their feet, be flexible and self-motivated.

For further information about barrister qualification routes, see www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/training-qualification/becoming-a-barrister.html

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. Find out more at the Institute of Paralegals: www.theiop.org/becoming-a-paralegal/

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. Find out more from the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives:

www.cilexlawschool.ac.uk/study-with-us/law-careers/chartered-legal-executive/

Barristers' Clerk: run the day to day business of a Chambers. For more information, see the Institute of Barristers' Clerks: www.ibc.org.uk/

Chartered Secretary: trained to work with regulation, legislation and compliance, a chartered company secretary works at senior levels within companies and other organisations to ensure they are legally compliant and operating effectively. Find out more from the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators:

www.icsaglobal.org/about/

Business function roles: remember that law firms are not just staffed by lawyers. Like other organisations, they require staff in Human Resources, Finance, Marketing, Business Development and Information services.

The Law Careers website has a detailed section on a wide range of alternative careers:

www.lawcareers.net/MoreLaw/AlternativeCareers

'Start finding out about the sector as early as possible by registering on recommended websites and attending career events both on and off campus. Keep your options open and seek opportunities to gain first-hand insight through work experience, discussing your career options with a Careers Consultant or speaking to and meeting those who work in the sector.'

Afua, Careers Consultant

Where can I work?

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
- Small high street firms

Most barristers are self-employed and take tenancy in a set of chambers.

In-House: Some large organisations such as major companies and banks 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 www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-government-legal-profession, the Crown Prosecution Service www.cps.gov.uk or local government www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk.

Alternative Business Structures (ABS): ABS is a relatively new development in the legal sector. It is a licence which allows a non-legal organisation to offer legal services alongside its other areas of business. This has given rise to companies such as Tesco and the Co-operative launching their own legal services. Training in an ABS may mean more emphasis on business and commercial understanding than in a traditionally structured law firm. You can read more about ABS here www.lawcareers.net/Explore/Features/05032013-Whats-the-alternative.

What skills do I need?

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? You will be expected to be able to adapt to change and think on your feet, often in incredibly pressurised circumstances.

For more information on sought after skills in the legal sector:

7 skills for a successful law career:

www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/law-sector/7-skills-for-a-successful-law-career

Key skills for lawyers:

www.lawcareers.net/Explore/Key-skills-for-successful-legal-professionals

Where To Start?

The tips below are relevant to all career options and will help you work out what you want to do and how to get there. Whether you know what you want to do, or have not yet decided, you are welcome to book an appointment with a Careers Consultant to discuss your options and get feedback on your applications.

EXPLORE your job options

Research the sector to gain a good understanding of the different opportunities and what kind of roles would be a good match for you

- **Attend** 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
- **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
- **Apply** for mentoring schemes. Look out for opportunities advertised by QM, the firms themselves or other organisations

ACQUIRE skills and work experience

Gain first-hand experience to build relevant skills which can be used in applications

- **Develop** skills and experience through undertaking formal work experience (such as a vacation scheme or mini pupillage)
- **Volunteer** at a Legal Advice Centre, through a pro-bono opportunity or by joining a QM society (law or non-law)
- **Undertake** formal work experience such as a vacation scheme at a solicitor's firm or mini pupillage at a barrister's chamber

SELL effectively to an employer or further study course provider

Articulate your knowledge, skills, experience and qualities clearly and persuasively

- **Utilise** all the practical tools and support available to you both on and off campus through the Careers & Enterprise team and online resources
- **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
- **Organise** a 1-1 careers appointment to discuss your individual questions and gain tailored guidance

TELL others about your experience

Share your career journey with the next generation of students to provide inspiration and practical support

- **Write** a blog post for students in the lower years
- **Capture** your story in a case study which can be shared with others
- **Participate** in a student panel to help others in their career journey
- **Become** a mentor, speak at a careers panel event and where possible, host internships and work placements

Commercial awareness

Put simply, this 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. 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. A good place to start is reading the business section on BBC news www.bbc.co.uk/news/business and business news stories in the Financial Times www.ft.com. You may also wish to subscribe to magazines such as The Economist www.economist.com and should also look at the news and media sections for individual organisations you may like to work for.

This is a good starting place for more information on what commercial awareness is and how to develop it: www.lawcareers.net/commercial-awareness. You should also set up an alert with Finimize www.finimize.com so that the 3 minute daily updates on financial news come to you directly.

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.

Attending events organised by the School of Law and QM Careers, as well as undertaking placements and work experience, will allow you to meet a number of individuals who may be well placed to offer advice or further contacts, so make use of these opportunities. Think about how you will introduce yourself to new contacts. Make a good impression by preparing a quick outline of who you are, what you do and how it relates to the contact.

If you meet someone interesting at an event or during work experience, follow up with a short email afterwards. Ask questions or offer responses which show that you've listened to and thought about what they've said. Students have found work experience by introducing themselves to employers at events - but make sure you do this diplomatically so you don't cause offence.

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

Many websites have useful guidance and tips on how to network effectively and this is a good place to start: www.lawcareers.net/Explore/Oracle/25112014-Networking-a-crucial-skill-for-success

FAQs

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 (LPC).

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.

How can I get work experience? For legal roles, relevant experience is essential. It convinces future employers of your dedication and enhances your understanding of the sector and its different job areas. It can lead to offers of employment, and many large corporate solicitors firms recruit trainees from those who completed their vacation schemes. Legal experience helps you understand the different roles (such as barrister and solicitor) so you can articulate during the application process why you want to do the job.

Start seeking placements and work experience in your first year. Many large corporate firms offer paid vacation schemes to 2nd year students and 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, volunteering roles may also provide opportunities to build on and demonstrate skills that legal work experience does not cover.

See the essential websites below to find out more:

For information on vacation scheme deadlines: www.lawcareers.net/Solicitors/WorkPlacementDeadlines

For information on mini-pupillages: www.lawcareers.net/barristers/minipupillages

For more information on volunteering at the QM Legal Advice Centre: www.lac.qmul.ac.uk/

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 become a lawyer, you will need to gain the relevant academic foundation, such as completing an additional course (this is currently the 2-year Graduate Entry LLB or 1-year Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), which will be replaced by the SQE for solicitors from 2021) before going down the training route for becoming a barrister or solicitor (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.

See this action plan for those studying non-law degrees www.lawcareers.net/Solicitors/Non-Law-Degree-Students/Action-Plan

How do I develop transferable skills? There are a number of ways to develop skills employers are looking for both on and off campus. Below are some of the opportunities available through Queen Mary.

Apply for QTaster to gain insight into companies known and new to you. Learn about the day-to-day culture, their application process and get hands-on experience with employers in their own offices: www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs-and-experience/items/qtaster.html

Apply for QConsult where you will work in a small multi-functional team to tackle a real business or charity project. It will provide great experience for the realities of teamwork, as it involves working with a diverse group to achieve a project goal to a timetable and present a proposal to a client: www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs-and-experience/items/qconsult.html

Apply for QTemps for paid temporary work, including roles on campus and in the local area: <https://q-temps.co.uk/>

Join clubs and societies, either law or non-law related to build practical experience of running events and undertaking activities that build administration, organisation and communication skills.

Become an Ambassador. Use and develop your communication skills and introduce QM to future students: www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs-and-experience/items/queen-mary-student-ambassador.html

Visit the Careers and Enterprise website for more work experience opportunities: www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs-and-experience

Useful websites

The websites below have been categorised for the purposes of this leaflet. Do explore each one fully as they have multiple functions and answer a wide range of queries

Essential student guides for detailed information about the legal sector

Law Careers: www.lawcareers.net

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

Chambers Student: www.chambersstudent.co.uk

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

Lawyer2B: www.thelawyer.com/lawyer2b

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

Law Society: www.lawsociety.org.uk - the representative body for solicitors in England and Wales, with careers section

Bar Council: www.barcouncil.org.uk/careers

- 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: www.cipa.org.uk

- (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)

For finding practical work experience

Queen Mary Legal Advice Centre: www.lac.qmul.ac.uk (on campus)

Free Representation Unit: www.thefru.org.uk (advocacy experience for junior lawyers)

Law Works: www.lawworks.org.uk (pro-bono opportunities for law students)

Citizens Advice Bureau: www.citizensadvice.org.uk (advisory experience for students)

Bar Pro Bono Unit: www.barprobono.org.uk (work experience opportunity for law students)

Student Pro Bono: www.studentprobono.net (provides help for law students seeking pro bono work)

Young Legal Aid Lawyers: www.younglegalaidlawyers.org/jobs (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: www.lawcentres.org.uk (may find opportunities for case work or administration especially in areas like housing, crime, employment and immigration; check each centre carefully)

For finding jobs

Prospects: www.prospects.ac.uk

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

QM JobsOnline: www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs - Full & part time work and internships in a range of sectors

Target Jobs: www.targetjobs.co.uk/law - tends to focus more on the large firms

Legal 500: www.legal500.com - international directory of solicitors firms

The Lawyer: <https://jobs.thelawyer.com/> - tip - use the Browse rather than Search option and look under the last 4 categories in the 'Vacancy Type' tab

Totally Legal: www.totallylegal.com/ - a range of law related roles, included admin and paralegal

For information on diversity and inclusion, including access schemes and scholarships

The Law Society's Diversity Access Scheme: www.lawsociety.org.uk/law-careers/equality-and-diversity/diversity-access-scheme/

Pegasus Access and Support Scheme (PASS): www.innertemple.org.uk/becoming-a-barrister/how-to-get-involved/pass - scheme aimed at improving diversity of barristers, mainly through mini-pupillages

Rare Recruitment: www.rarerecruitment.co.uk - supports diverse talent into top companies, including legal sector

Reach (not law specific): <https://reach.equalapproach.com> - links job seekers to inclusive organisations and schemes

Group for Solicitors with Disabilities: www.lawsociety.org.uk/support-services/practice-management/diversity-inclusion/lawyers-with-disabilities-division

Other useful websites for finding out more about the industry

Junior Lawyers Division (Law Society): <https://communities.lawsociety.org.uk/junior-lawyers> - useful resources for students and trainees, including information on conferences, workshops and webinars

Roll On Friday: www.rollonfriday.com - informal inside information on law firms from trainees and junior lawyers

All About Law: www.allaboutlaw.co.uk

Her Majesty's Courts Service: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-courts-and-tribunals-service

Accutrainee: www.accutrainee.com - new alternative to the conventional Training Contract provision

Top tips and a final checklist

- Start early as there are often many stages involved in the application process. Familiarise yourself with all of the different deadlines within each year of your degree progression.
- Be proactive with gaining insights into the sector and practical work experience from year 1. As well as developing vital skills, it will boost your confidence and provide exposure to the range of roles available. It will also give you access to networks and help you get your foot in the door.
- Finding work experience can be challenging, so tap into your networks and try a wide range of organisations, including local high street firms, legal advice centres and citizens advice bureaus.
- Develop transferable skills (see box above for examples) and get as much practical experience in a range of different settings as possible. This will build your portfolio of experience and is an excellent opportunity to make contacts.
- Build your online professional profile by creating or updating your profile on LinkedIn and following organisations and individuals you are interested in on Twitter, to keep up with current trends, industry news, make contacts, develop your understanding of the sector and be the first to hear about work experience/opportunities.
- Build your understanding of commercial awareness and what is happening in the industry by following news stories relevant to the sector(s) and business areas you are interested in.