

LEGAL SERVICES AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Overview

The legal sector in the UK is open to both Law and non-Law students. It's worth thinking about and planning your route as early as possible, to get plenty of work experience under your belt.

Solicitors provide advice and assistance on matters of law. Currently, to become a solicitor you first need a qualifying law degree (QLD). This is either an undergraduate law degree or, if you didn't study Law at undergraduate level, the one-year Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL). After your QLD, you need to do a one-year Legal Practice Course (LPC), and then a two-year training contract (during which you're employed at a firm and paid a salary).

Formal and competitive work experience opportunities offered by firms are known as 'vacation schemes' (sometimes 'insight schemes' for first years). It's a good idea to apply for them: they can make a big difference to the strength of your application for a training contract. It's possible to apply for a training contract which includes a funded GDL (if needed) and LPC; these are among the most competitive opportunities.

IMPORTANT: In 2021 a new qualification scheme for solicitors will replace the GDL and LPC. If you start your QLD or LPC before September 2021 you'll still be able to qualify under the previous route until 2032. Read more about the new [Solicitor Qualifying Examination](#).

Barristers advise on specific legal issues and represent clients in court. To become a barrister, you need a qualifying law degree (QLD): as for solicitors this is either the undergraduate law degree or the GDL. After this you study a one-year Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC), and then a year of on-the-job training called a 'pupillage'. It is highly competitive to attain a pupillage, with far more students completing the BPTC each year than are accepted as pupils. Success in this route requires impressive academic qualifications.

Patent Attorneys are specifically trained to support clients who wish to patent inventions, draft patents and act to enforce inventors' rights if patents are infringed. Due to the technical nature of many inventions, you'll usually need to be studying a scientific, engineering, technical or mathematical subject to get a job as a trainee patent attorney. Further degrees, including PhDs, are advantageous. As a trainee patent attorney, you'll train on the job while being paid, and take professional examinations to qualification.

Paralegals work alongside solicitors and barristers and take on similar work to trainee solicitors, supporting administration, analysing information and writing document drafts and reports. Due to competition for work in this area, many employers prefer applicants to have a law degree.

Legal Executives are 'fee earners' (like solicitors), and work in particular areas of law, and have many of the same rights as solicitors. Qualification to be a chartered legal executive can be undertaken flexibly while working (usually as a paralegal).

The [Prospects.ac.uk overview of law careers](#), has more detailed information on all these areas, as well as a range of other legal roles (including licensed conveyancer, legal secretary, barristers' clerk, being a solicitor in Scotland, trade mark attorney, company secretary and mediator).

Key Resources

[LawCareers.net](#) – leading law site which lists training contracts, pupillages, vacation schemes and other work experience opportunities. A vital tool.

[Targetjobs.co.uk/law](#) – searchable training contracts and work experience, plus useful articles for applicants.

[Allaboutlaw.co.uk](#) – useful resource similar to the above, including information for those earlier in their careers.

[thelawyer.com/lawyer2b](#) – careers advice from *The Lawyer* publication.

[Chambers and Partners \(chambers.com\)](#) – key resource for researching law firm, chose a country and search by practice area to see ranked firms – useful when researching who to apply to.

[Government Legal Service \(gov.uk\)](#) trainee and pupillage schemes – working as in-house lawyers and barristers for the national government.

[Lawcabs.ac.uk](#) – where you apply for GDLs and LPC courses.

[Barstandardsboard.org.uk](#) – guide to becoming a barrister.

[Totallylegal.com/jobs](#), [jobs.thelawyer.com](#) and [jobs.lawgazette.co.uk](#) – all good job board for law jobs, with plenty of paralegal roles and useful filters.

[legalweekjobs.com](#) – mainly qualified lawyer jobs (search by years of post-qualification experience – PQE or choose the graduate/trainee filter).

[ipcareers.co.uk](#) – patent and trademark work - filter for graduate trainee opportunities.

