



Law Careers.Net

LawCareers.Net gives you the low-down on how to get the most from the law fair season. Fairs are an opportunity for firms and chambers to show you their wares. They also give you the chance to practise your powers of self-promotion and impress some potential employers. Thus, you should consider your attendance mandatory; law fairs are an essential step on the path to a successful legal career.

All's Fair in Love and Law

Law fairs are a valuable source of information about opportunities in the legal profession, both for those who are studying law and for non-law students who are toying with a career in law.

The law fair calendar starts in late October and continues until February. Held at universities nationwide, many of the fairs are open to all. However, others restrict entrance to students of the host institution - so check before you go.

Exhibitors

Firms

If you are interested in training as a solicitor, the fairs will give you an opportunity to talk informally to a range of professionals (from trainees to qualified staff). Some of the more obvious areas to explore are:

- the size and style of firm that might suit you;
- the types of client and range of business;
- the location (eg, London or the regions);
- the style of training and range of experience offered to trainees; and
- the opportunities for trainees in firms with overseas offices.

If you're still unsure, you might like to consider any advantages in training outside the traditional practices (eg, with the Crown Prosecution Service). What do they do that is unique? Do they appeal?

You may also like to ask about funding. Not all firms will offer financial support for the CPE and LPC. Will this affect your choices?

If you are an international student, you may be keen to lean about special opportunities that are available to you – remember, not all firms will accept applications from international students.

Chambers

If you are interested in training as a barrister you may wish to consider:

- the cost of training for the Bar and how you will fund yourself - all chambers now offer a minimum wage for pupillage, but not all offer funding;
- opportunities for mini-pupillages and pupillages; and
- how you feel about being self-employed.

Again, if you're an international student you may wish to look into any opportunities for you to complete your training in the United Kingdom.

Course providers

Many of the fairs will be attended by representatives of institutions that run the CPE, LPC and BVC. When talking to course providers you may wish to ask the following:

- Approximately what percentage of students completes the course without either a training contract or pupillage?
- What type of firm/organisation approaches the course provider with vacancy information? Remember that not all law firms advertise vacancies two years in advance.
- How realistic is it to hope for backdated funding if I start a course without an offer?
- I am considering a year out; will the course provider defer entry in this case?

Preparation

With around 25 law fairs, it's simply impossible (and pointless!) to attend them all. The trick is to be selective. Start by looking for the fair that's nearest to you, and find out from the relevant careers service which organisations will be attending. If you don't yet know what sort of law you want to practise, look for fairs with a good cross-section of firms, chambers and employers such as the Government Legal Service to get yourself a broad overview. It may be useful for you to make a list of those exhibitors that you are most interested in seeing, so that your time at the fair is targeted and you don't find yourself on an aimless wander.

The best place for you to find out what's happening where and when is the LC.N Diary. This provides dates of upcoming law fairs, including lists of exhibitors, and other events near you.

By doing this sort of preparation, you'll choose the fairs that will be the most beneficial to you. And don't forget to check whether your own institution is having a fair – you should consider this unmissable as it might mean that the exhibitors are targeting graduates of your university.

Questions

Don't approach potential employers with a casual attitude, as if you aren't really sure why you're there or as if the idea of a career in law is just a passing whim. Questions like "So what do you do then?" or "Why should I consider working for you?" don't go down well with professionals who have given up valuable time for your benefit. Equally unimpressive is the question "Where are your offices?" when the answer is emblazoned across the firm's stand!

One idea that may be useful is the "three-minute study". Before approaching a firm's stand, spend three minutes of intense research looking at *The Training Contract & Pupillage Handbook*, other directories and the fair programme to cram as much information as possible about that firm into your brain. Your aim should be to come up with two intelligent questions and two facts on the firm so that they will be more inclined to take you seriously. Equally, you will be able to extract much more from the encounter than if you are just approaching them cold.

You may like to take a few notes after each chat, so as to clarify what you've found out and to avoid the situation whereby it all blurs into one big giant firm!

Attitude

Approach the law fairs with a professional attitude – after all, it's a profession that you are considering as a potential future career. We reckon that if you put some serious time into researching just one firm, you can go along and have a 'quality' conversation with that firm. This will in turn give you an idea of how you can interact with any other firm that you are interested in.

Be confident in your approach – the firms are trying to impress you, so you have every right to bowl on up and start a dialogue. You may find it less intimidating to talk to the trainees, who occupy the very position to which you aspire.

On a frivolous note, we like firm freebies as much as the next guy (see our feature, Freebie Idol), but don't let these shiny baubles cloud your judgement! They are not a terribly reliable indicator of the quality of the training or the firm itself. Having said that, you may as well grab some free stuff where you can – you can never have too many free pens/stress balls/lollipops/frisbees ...

Attire

It's not necessary to rush out and buy a new suit for the occasion. Law fairs are information events and unless you have pre-arranged a summer placement interview with an exhibitor, you need not dress formally. Accordingly, many of you will be attending a fair in the clothes you wear on an everyday basis, which is fine, although nothing too bizarre or outrageous please!

Finally...

Make the most of law fairs to help you decide if law is the right career for you and to identify which practice area will suit you best. Fairs really are ideal opportunities to meet professionals and address the issues that are relevant to you. The experience can help inform your choice of firm/chambers later on and will certainly help you feel more confident at the interview stage.

And who knows ... it might be you representing your employer at a law fair in a year or two!