



The Beginner's Guide
to a Career in **Law**
2014

Your pre-university checklist

If you do decide that a career as a lawyer is for you, there are a few things you should be doing even before you start university. Here is a brief checklist to get you started and help focus your mind:

Read the business pages of the newspapers to improve your commercial awareness.

Talk to your careers adviser at school to go through your options.

Research the different paths into law – university, Chartered Institute of Legal Executives, paralegal, apprenticeships...

Get some practical work experience at a law firm, barristers' chambers or legal advice centre.

Work hard at your academic studies. Good grades are essential!

Talk to friends, parents, acquaintances – anyone with a connection to the legal profession.

Think about the kinds of extracurricular things you can do to make yourself into a well-rounded candidate. Think sport, volunteering, music...

Welcome

If you think you might be interested in law as a future career, but have little (or no) idea what that really means, *The Beginner's Guide to a Career in Law* is for you. The guide has been designed with people like you in mind – on the one hand, we've assumed no prior knowledge, while on the other, we've assumed you'll have lots of questions.

Within these pages you will find information about the job of a lawyer, the differences between the three main types of legal professional (solicitors, barristers and chartered legal executives), and the courses and training you need to complete in order to qualify. There is also a selection of key questions, a welcome reality check and – for those who want to find out more – ideas on some of the next steps to take.

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

01

Welcome to the first stage of your career!

What lawyers do

Everyone has their favourite scurrilous lawyer joke, but on the whole it's not a profession made up of conniving ambulance chasers and fat cats. Lawyers perform a valuable role, especially as law is intertwined with every aspect of our society - from the age at which you can take your driving test to the speed at which you can drive when you pass it; from the minimum wage you can expect to earn in a new job to the rights you have should you lose it.

The first thing to know is that traditionally, the profession has had two main branches – solicitors and barristers. However, in recent years the legal landscape has become much more complex, with chartered legal executives, paralegals, apprentices and more. This trend seems set to continue – read more about it in “A changing profession”. For now, however, here is a broad introduction to what solicitors and barristers do.

Solicitors

Generally speaking, solicitors provide advice and assistance on matters of law. They are the first point of contact for people and organisations (eg, companies and charities) seeking legal advice and representation. Most solicitors work together in solicitor-owned law firms, while others work in central or local government, in a legal department within a company or organisation, or in an alternative business structure (ABS) – an organisation which provides legal services, but is funded and controlled by a company (eg, the Co-operative Group).

While solicitors are found in a variety of areas of law, the fundamentals of the job remain largely the same. These include a mixture of advisory and contentious (dispute) work, such as:

- meeting clients, finding out their needs and establishing how to help;
- researching relevant areas of law and proposing courses of action to clients;
- drafting letters, contracts and other legal documents; and
- acting on behalf of clients in negotiations and occasionally 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 newly qualified solicitor to associate to partner. (NB Most of the above also describes the work of a chartered legal executive.)

02

Practice area snapshot

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

Corporate/commercial

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

Crime

Criminal lawyers advise and represent their clients in court on criminal charges that can range from minor motoring misdemeanours 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.

Barristers

On the other side of the profession, 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 a wide variety of areas of law, the fundamental elements of the job remain 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’. He or she remains a junior until such time as he or she is made a Queen’s Counsel (QC), also known as ‘taking silk’. A QC is a senior barrister with extensive experience who is regarded as having outstanding ability. The majority of barristers never become QCs.

Areas of law

The different types of law are as multitudinous as grains of sand. However, at the broadest level, you can divide lawyers between those doing commercial work (ie, work for companies) and those involved with individuals. 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 practitioner advising an individual who has had a fall. Different practice areas are like different jobs: very little connects the everyday professional life of a human rights solicitor with that of a corporate one. See the box below for more detail.

Further reading

Solicitors

www.lawcareers.net/solicitors
see sections under “Read about”

Barristers

www.lawcareers.net/barristers
see sections under “Read about”

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.

Tax

Corporate tax involves advising on the most tax-efficient means of acquiring, relinquishing or restructuring assets, negotiating and documenting the transaction. On the contentious side, corporate tax lawyers advise on all aspects of tax litigation and investigations, negotiate with tax authorities and conduct litigation in the civil courts.

Branches of the profession

One of the key questions to address when considering a legal career 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, the differences are much more complex. Some say that it comes down to whether you are an individualist (barrister) or a team player (solicitor/legal executive). While it is true that a barrister is almost always self-employed and connected to other barristers only by convenience, and a solicitor/legal executive may be just one worker 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.

The decision as to which strand would suit you best rests on a number of factors concerning your abilities, temperament and - dare we say it - 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
see sections under "Read about".

Barristers

www.lawcareers.net/barristers
see sections under "Read about".

CILEx

www.lawcareers.net/MoreLaw
see sections under "Read about".

Solicitors

As of June 2013, there were 167,267 individuals on the solicitors' roll.

Women make up around 47% of the profession. However, fewer women than men are currently at partner level - 17% compared to 40% of male solicitors in private practice.

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.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority has abolished its minimum annual trainee salary, which means that as of 2014, trainees can be paid the national minimum salary. However, many firms will continue to pay considerably more; a first-year trainee at a large City firm could earn around £37,000, rising to £65,000 on qualification.

Barristers

As of July 2012, 81.3% of barristers (ie, 12,674) were self-employed barristers (not including those in dual practice, registered European lawyers or second six pupils).

Women make up around 41% of those taking pupillage and around 49.1% of those called to the Bar (according to the *Bar Barometer* November 2012 report and based on information from 2011).

Mostly self-employed, so receive irregular (but often substantial) fees.

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.

The Bar Standards Board requires that all pupils be paid no less than £12,000 per annum. Many earn much more - upwards of £60,000 in some cases.

Chartered legal executives

As of June 2013, there were around 20,000 trainee and practising chartered legal executives.

Women make up around 74% of 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.

Since the Legal Services Act 2007, legal executives can become partners or managers in legal disciplinary practices.

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

A changing profession

Big changes are sweeping the legal profession - not least to the ways in which you can become part of it and how you will be trained once you get there. Alternative business structure (ABS) licensing has made it possible for commercial organisations, from supermarket chains to haulage companies, to hire lawyers and sell legal services to the public. Elsewhere, the recent introduction of legal apprenticeships as a new route into the profession should be on your radar, while the recent review of legal training could bring more radical change. Be aware of the following as you pursue your own legal career.

CILEx

Set up in the 1960s, today the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx) has become more relevant than ever in providing a path into law that does not require a university degree. The CILEx Level 3 and 6 qualifications (or CILEx Fast Track, for those with a law degree) are a route into the legal profession that combines study with on-the-job training. Qualified CILEx fellows are known as 'chartered legal executives' and can do much of the work traditionally done by solicitors in their chosen specialism. It costs up to £7,500 to complete Levels 3 and 6 to qualify as a chartered legal executive, and most CILEx students study part time or through distance learning. It is also possible for chartered legal executives to later qualify as solicitors by completing the LPC and a training contract.

Legal apprenticeships

Legal apprenticeships offer school leavers and those who did not or do not want to go to university the opportunity to gain formal legal qualifications and a role in the profession through paid, on-the-job training at a law firm. The higher levels of apprenticeship are awarded by CILEx, but there are some differences between legal

apprentices and budding CILEx lawyers. The most notable is that under-19s can take advantage of government funding to do an apprenticeship for free. Meanwhile, 19 to 24 year olds can expect at least some government funding, with the rest of the cost met by the employer. Over 24s must pay for the apprenticeship themselves. Those who complete apprenticeships can work as formally qualified paralegals or go on to train as chartered legal executives, but cannot become solicitors.

Paralegals

Paralegals are legal support staff working under the direction of solicitors. There is currently no legal requirement for a paralegal to have legal qualifications, but most law firms want their paralegals to be law or LPC graduates. Wannabe solicitors often work as paralegals to build up the work experience needed to land a training contract, but the role is also being increasingly professionalised by schemes such as the legal apprenticeship programme.

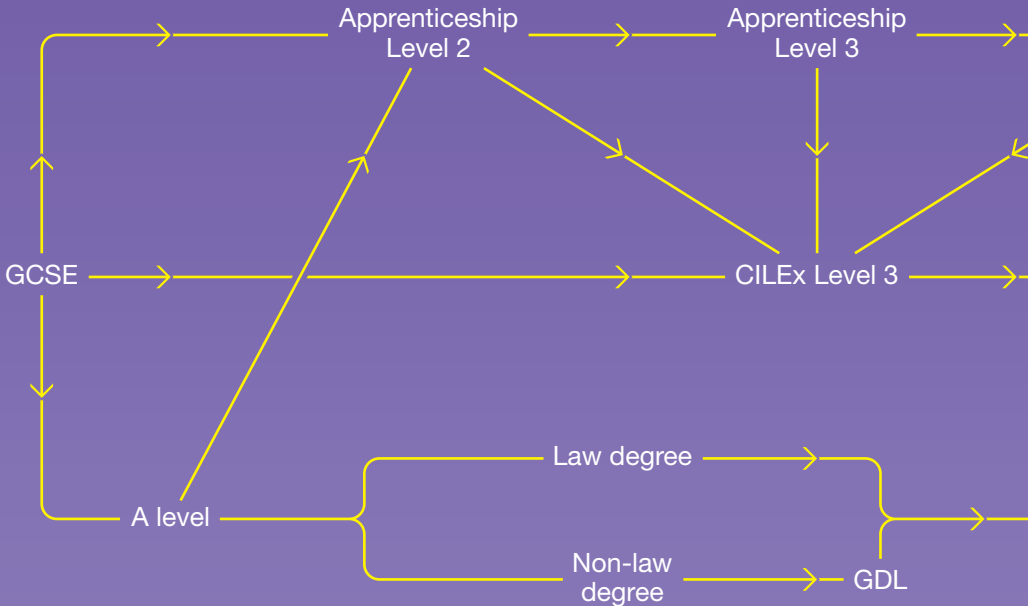
Alternative business structures

ABS are radically changing the legal services profession. Before the introduction of ABS, solicitors worked individually or together in self-owned law firm partnerships, while individual barristers came together to pay for chambers in which to base themselves. The advent of ABS (also nicknamed 'Tesco law') means that non-legal companies can now employ lawyers to provide legal services to the public. Examples of companies that are now doing this include the Co-operative and BT. High-street solicitors are likely to suffer in the same way that many small grocers and bakeries were driven out of business by cheaper, better-resourced supermarkets. Many solicitors in the future may therefore find themselves employed by an ABS.

Legal Education and Training Review

The Legal Education and Training Review (LETR) was a two-year investigation into the effectiveness of legal teaching and training methods. After much delay, the final report of the LETR was released in June 2013, offering 26 key recommendations for changes to the way that training is organised and delivered. Broadly, it recognised that while the existing system is of a high standard, there are a number of ways in which quality, accessibility and flexibility must be enhanced to ensure that the system remains fit for the future. No one currently knows exactly whether or how the report's recommendations will be implemented, so it is hard to predict what legal training will look like five years from now. The predictions are that the initial focus will be on making the current system more flexible and cutting out unnecessary regulation. For now, the system remains the same, but watch this space...

Career paths



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

The academic stage between GCSE and undergraduate level – again, good grades are essential. Some universities favour traditional, academically rigorous subjects such as history (A-level law is not usually preferred).

Non-law degree

Lawyers are not required to have studied law at university! It is possible to 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 GDL concentrates on the seven foundations of legal practice. When combined with a non-law degree, it is equivalent to a law degree.

BPTC

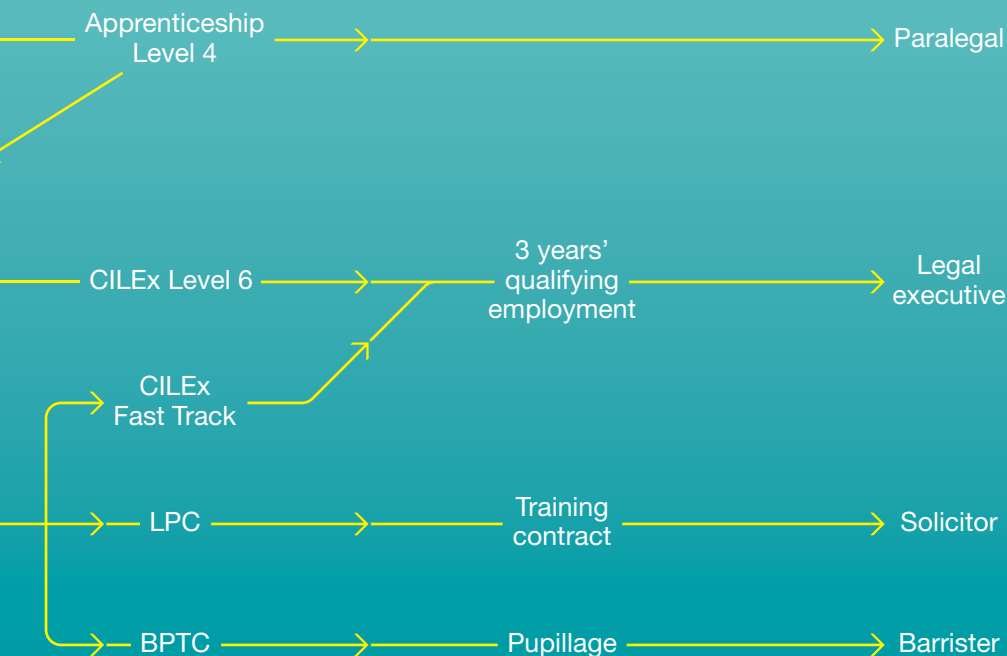
The one-year Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) is the vocational stage of training to be a barrister.

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 apprenticeship before qualification as a barrister. Pupils practise under the guidance and supervision of a pupil supervisor.



Training contract

The training contract is a compulsory, two-year paid employment contract with a law firm or other approved organisation before qualification as a solicitor.

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

It is also possible to practise law as a chartered legal executive – a qualified lawyer (though not a solicitor) 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. For more info, go to www.cilex.org.uk.

Legal apprenticeships

A legal apprentice is someone who joins a law firm straight from school, rather than going to university, to work in a role similar to that of a paralegal. Apprentices receive on-the-job, paid training that takes them towards a formal qualification. Note: this is a relatively new, developing area of the legal market, so to keep up to date with the latest on who can become an apprentice and how, visit LawCareers.Net's "More Law" section (www.lawcareers.net/morelaw).

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; you need to have a strong desire to be a lawyer if you are to succeed. Do you find law interesting? Is there a particular practice area 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 quality 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 during your academic studies and by doing 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'. This phrase can cause confusion, as it means different things to different people. However, in essence, it means that commercial lawyers deal with more than just the law. They must understand the client's business and the environment in which it operates. Commercial awareness

does not mean the same thing to a student as it will to an experienced businessperson. Nobody expects you to be a veteran of the boardroom or the shop floor; what firms are looking for is a combination of basic knowledge, 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 absolutely 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 an apprenticeship?

A Over the past year or so, the chance to work in the legal profession by way of a legal apprenticeship has become a real option. A small number of firms have started schemes whereby they take on school leavers to work in a role similar to that of a paralegal, as well as receiving on-the-job training that takes them towards a formal qualification. In addition, a new government-funded Higher Apprenticeship in Legal Services launched in 2012. This is something to consider instead of going to university to study law – your reasons for doing so may be financial or the more vocational training might suit you better. Either way, it is certainly a viable option worth investigating.

Q Why are work placement schemes so important?

A Getting work experience at law firms (to understand what lawyers do) is essential. Work placement schemes (run by many law firms during university holidays) are a good place to start; they provide an opportunity for you to find out about not only law, but also

individual firms. Firms increasingly rely on extended work placements to figure out which candidates they really want to take on as trainees.

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, these days roughly half of all solicitors are from non-law backgrounds. That 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 traditional 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 Can I take a year out after uni?

A Definitely - it's something a lot of students do, especially if they don't have a training contract or pupillage by the





time they leave uni. A year out gives you the opportunity to spend time making and enhancing your applications. Along with gaining experience (both legal and commercial), travel and/or charity work are great gap-year favourites - and provided that you end up with more to talk about than the beach, they can really enhance your applications.

Q What's the lowdown on 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 lovely sponsor, Nottingham Law School. Alternatively CILEx offers a Graduate Fast Track Diploma.

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 potential £9,000 per year that you may have to pay for

your undergraduate degree, you will fork out between £5,000 and £16,000 (plus living costs) for each of the GDL, LPC and BPTC. Not exactly small change! For this reason, it's best to have a training contract or pupillage before embarking on any of the courses - some 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; note, however, that some banks have withdrawn the preferential loan products that they used to offer to postgraduate law students. 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 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 almost incomparable. And it's the same thing 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 chatting to those in the know can you really start to get a feel for the kind of work that you think would appeal and what you would be good at.

Q What use is my careers service?
.....

A Your school or university careers service is a key resource. Some advisers specialise in the legal sector and are great for checking 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 How can I find out more?
.....

A There's lots of info out there about careers in law. Pick up a copy of *The Training Contract & Pupillage Handbook* (updated every year) 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 websites such as LawCareers.Net for news, advice, features and interviews.

Further reading

Got a question not answered here?

Go to

www.lawcareers.net/information/oracle to find out if it has come up before or to ask the Oracle direct.

Reality check

In the spirit of full disclosure, there are a few things worth mentioning (for which, read ‘hammering home’) as a reminder that a legal career is not all triumphant court victories and champagne-fuelled deal celebrations. 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 £9,000 per year undergrad fees, plus postgrad study costing around between £10,350 and £13,300 for the LPC and between £13,155 and £17,350 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, the minimum trainee salary has been abolished, so from 2014 some firms may be paying 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

Nothing but the best will do in this competitive market. You need to be getting excellent grades from your first year of university onwards – arguably, your A-level grades are just as important when it comes to applying for training contracts and pupillages, as anything less than As and Bs may prevent you from getting past the first application hurdle. Most recruiters we speak to say that excellent academics are a given, so make sure you tick this very first box. Study and study hard; even those with an Oxbridge first have no job guarantees...

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

An awareness of the pressures of time is crucial if you are to succeed; you must give the requisite amount of time (ie, lots of it) to your future career. 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. Start early, have a schedule and be strict with yourself. Last-minute, rushed efforts are almost worse than no effort at all.

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, in a quantifiable way, that you are a complete human being and worth the firm investing in you as a future employee.

Online

Your online presence may currently be dominated by photos of debauched holiday antics and lewd comments, and you need to be aware that recruiters may even be Googling your name! So it can be beneficial to build up a more 'professional' social media profile than your Facebook account offers. LinkedIn is great for maintaining a line of contact with the legal eagles you will be meeting, while Twitter can also be useful to follow the legal world's big influencers and stay up to the minute with the latest news and issues.

Commerciality

The legal world is part of the business world. If you harbour any 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.

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 **www.LawCareers.Net** (LC.N) to begin your online research. It's your one-stop shop for all things law-related.

LC.N brings you continuously updated news, features, profiles, advice, blogs and diaries, along with other crucial background information. Our free subscription email, **LC.N Weekly**, highlights the best of the site's continually updated content. There is also a comprehensive directory of firms, chambers and legal educators - with over 1,250 organisations listed, LC.N introduces you to all those who might ultimately offer you a job.

LC.N is also keen to engage directly with its readers, both in person at the many law fairs that we attend, or online via our Twitter feed and Facebook page. We try to post things that are of interest and are always keen to receive feedback and comments.

Every LC.N user also has access to a personal **MyLC.N** account. MyLC.N offers expert practical support in the search for a job, allowing you to save and order your research, and analyse your experiences to see whether you have the skills for success through the innovative **MySelf** system. Sign up at www.lawcareers.net/MyLCN.

So start your research, get proactive and good luck!



Your first-year university and onwards checklist

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

Keep up with the business pages of the newspapers to improve your commercial awareness, but also consider reading the more specific legal press.

Talk to your careers adviser at university to work on your application and interview technique, and to see if they have any contacts at local firms/chambers.

Get some practical work experience at a law firm, barristers' chambers or legal advice centre.

Think about where you might like to apply for a vac scheme/mini-pupillage next year. Vac scheme applications are usually made in the autumn term prior to your training contract applications.

Go to law fairs in October/ November and firm presentations to meet people face to face. Think about how to stand out.

Go to firm open days (for which there is sometimes an application process), often aimed specifically at first years, and held in the winter and spring terms.

Continue to work hard at your academic studies. Recruiters want to see exemplary grades and yes, your first-year grades do count!

Talk to friends, parents, acquaintances – anyone with a connection to the legal profession.

Engage with some of the extracurricular options at university (eg, sport, debating, mooting or music) in an effort to make yourself into a well-rounded candidate.

Consider whether you want to become a solicitor or barrister.
