



The Law Society

Becoming a solicitor
Start planning your future today

careers
information



The Law Society

113 Chancery Lane
London
WC2A 1PL

www.lawsociety.org.uk

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junior lawyers



About the Junior Lawyers Division

The Junior Lawyers Division is an exclusive new membership group for enrolled students, trainees and solicitors with up to five years active practice. It has a potential membership of over 70,000.

The Division is the voice of junior lawyers across the country and in every type of practice. Membership is free as long as you are enrolled with the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

Membership benefits

The Junior Lawyers Division is part of the Law Society, so members benefit from the Society's resources and profile. But in its representative role the Division is autonomous.

The Division offers a full package of benefits including:

- national and regional networking events
- an interactive website
- careers advice - domestic and international
- local JLD groups
- legal research advice
- national and regional skills events
- mentoring opportunities for students
- links with other international bar organisations
- a confidential freephone helpline (08000 856 131)
- discounts from leading businesses
- competitively-priced CPD training
- the opportunity to influence the future of the profession by getting involved in the Division.

Campaigning for junior lawyers

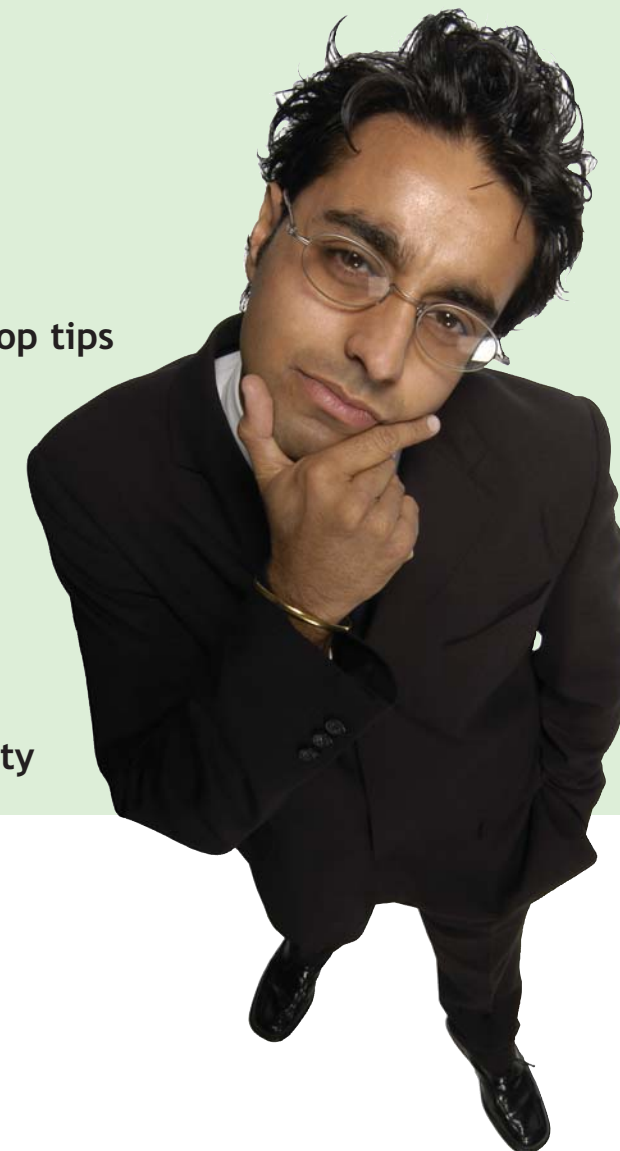
The Junior Lawyers Division will campaign on the issues that affect students, trainees and new solicitors - for example, minimum salary for trainees, debt and quality of life.

Find out more at www.lawsociety.org.uk/juniorlawyers



contents

- 4 **Getting started**
- 5 **Who becomes a solicitor?**
- 6 **What solicitors do**
- 6 **A wide range of career options**
- 8 **Routes to becoming a solicitor**
 - Law graduate route
 - Non-law graduate route
 - The ILEX routes
- 14 **Checklists**
 - Law graduate
 - Non-law graduate
- 16 **Application / selection - top tips**
 - Covering letters
 - CVs
 - Applications
 - Interviews
- 19 **Alternative options**
- 20 **Useful contacts**
- 23 **The role of the Law Society**



Getting started

This brochure aims to answer the questions you might have if you are thinking about becoming a solicitor. It covers:

- the skills and training you need
- the different routes to qualification
- career options

It also includes checklists to help you assess your progress.

Training to become a solicitor demands considerable commitment over a number of years. Do your own research to find out as much as you can about what a career as a solicitor is really like. Talk to people in the profession and try to get some work experience. Make sure you are right for the profession and the profession is right for you.

The right choice

To succeed as a solicitor, you need to be determined and highly motivated.

It will take at least three years to train if you are a law graduate, at least four years if you are a non-law graduate and at least six years if you are not a graduate.

Understanding the realities

Qualifying as a solicitor is not easy. You will face the intellectual challenge of exams and you will have to fund your studies. Many trainee solicitors finish their training with debts. Others are not able to finish their training because they cannot get a suitable job. There is no guarantee of getting a job either as a trainee or as a solicitor. However, some students are sponsored through part of their studies and the great majority of students who pass the Legal Practice Course qualify and enjoy successful careers.

You will need to:

- show you have the academic ability to cope with a demanding course
- compete with very able people to win a place
- find a firm that will supervise you while you complete your training



Who becomes a solicitor?

A career as a solicitor demands:

- Intellectual ability - the law is complex
- Versatility - no two days are the same
- A desire to work with people
- Commitment - the training is rigorous and requires substantial effort and resources

Academic excellence is important, but employers look for many other personal skills and attributes.

- Dedication, commitment and a capacity for hard work.
- Professional responsibility - personal integrity and an ethical approach - this forms the basis of solicitor/client relationships.
- Commercial awareness.
- Numeracy skills - the ability to understand financial statements and interpret accounts.
- Personal effectiveness skills - the ability to manage your time, prioritise conflicting demands, delegate and plan projects.
- Flexibility and a positive approach to new ideas and concepts.
- Problem solving skills.
- Communication skills - written and oral; the ability to understand complex language and information and to present information in plain English.
- Interpersonal skills - you will have to work well with other people and in teams. You must be cooperative, collaborative and a good listener, with the ability to communicate with people at all levels and win their confidence and respect.
- IT skills - you will need to be proficient in word processing, case management systems, spreadsheets, financial accounting packages, e-mail and information retrieval systems.
- Commitment to continuous personal development.

Taking part in voluntary as well as compulsory activities will enable you to define and refine your skills in real life situations.



What solicitors do

There are more than 100,000 solicitors currently working in England and Wales.

As a solicitor you are a confidential adviser who will have direct contact with your clients, combining legal expertise and people-skills to provide expert legal advice and assistance in a range of situations.

- Everyday issues

Solicitors provide expert guidance on the issues people regularly face such as buying and selling houses, drawing up wills, and dealing with relationship breakdown.

- Promoting business

They help businesses with the legal side of commercial transactions.

- Protecting the rights of individuals

Solicitors advise people of their rights, ensuring they are treated fairly by public or private bodies, and that they receive compensation when they have been unfairly treated.

- Supporting the community

Many solicitors spend a portion of their time providing free help for those unable to pay for legal services.

Solicitors can represent clients personally in the lower courts (magistrate court, county court and tribunal) and with specialist training are also able to represent them in higher courts (crown court, high court, court of appeal).

A wide range of career options

Once you qualify your career options are very varied. You could choose to work in private practice, within a business or organisation, in local or national government or in the court services.

Private practice

Over 80,000 solicitors in England and Wales work in private practices. These range from sole practitioners to multinational firms with hundreds of partners and offices across the world. Many solicitors in private practice work with individual clients. You may become involved in helping to buy and sell property, investigating claims for injury compensation, arranging wills, advising on divorce or representing clients in court and at tribunals.

You might work for a firm advising businesses and corporate clients in areas such as employment law, contracts or company mergers and acquisitions.

Work in overseas offices may involve advising local clients on English, EU or foreign law.

Other firms advise on insurance, the registration of patents and copyrights, shipping, banking, the media, entertainment and other specialist areas.

In private practice solicitors are employed at various levels of seniority. You may eventually become a partner or proprietor of a firm - in other words, you own the business. This carries with it the rewards of profit-sharing but also the risk of fluctuating success.

Commerce and industry

Another 5,000 solicitors are employed by commercial and industrial organisations dealing with their legal business in-house.

Legislation has considerable impact on corporate decisions and, as an in-house solicitor, you will play a key role in developing and implementing corporate strategy. Your work will be demanding and varied - ranging from multi-million pound projects such as mergers and takeovers to employment issues and industrial relations. You could also have opportunities to move into more general management roles.

Local and central government

Around 4,000 solicitors are employed in local government where their role is to advise on the services the authority provides to the community. The range of this work is diverse and you could be providing advice on everything from education and social services to planning and construction.

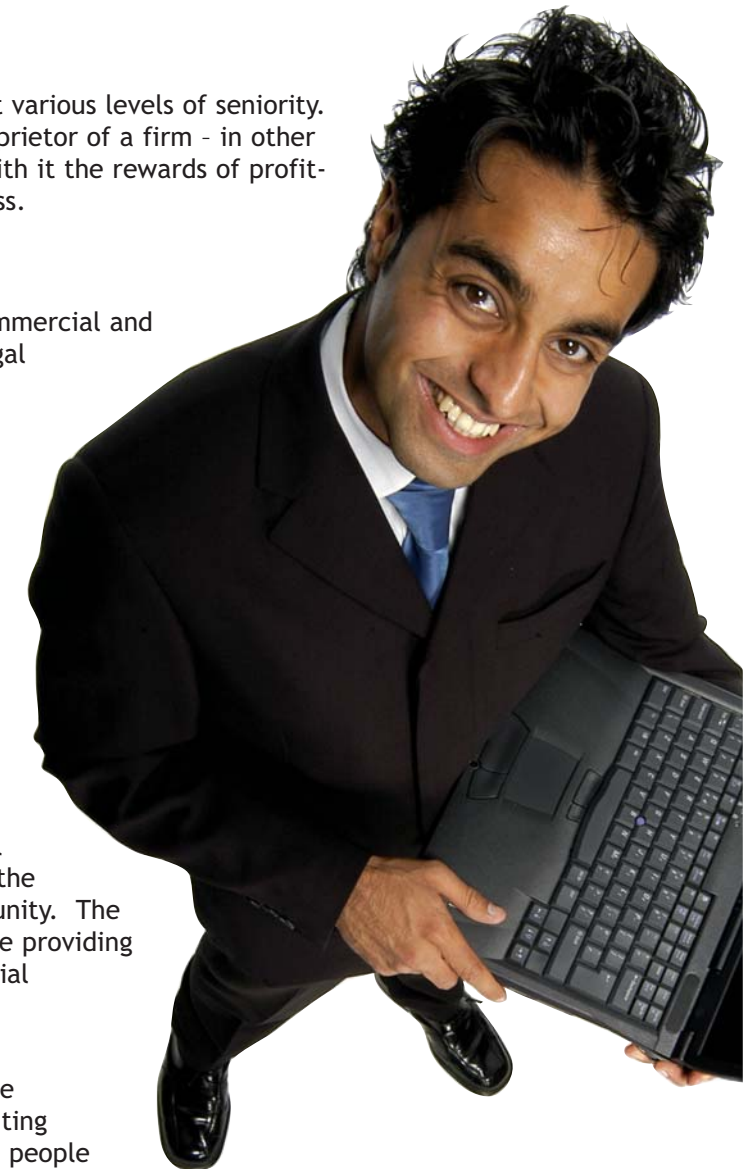
Approximately 1,000 solicitors work in the Government Legal Service. This could involve advising government ministers and implementing government decisions, as well as prosecuting people who contravene regulations.

Court services

You might choose to apply to the Crown Prosecution Service, which employs approximately 1,500 solicitors. The Service prosecutes the majority of criminal cases in England and Wales and advises the police on prosecutions. It provides the opportunity to work in all areas of the country and to practise advocacy.

Other careers

Other opportunities include the Magistrates' Court Service where you would be involved in advising magistrates on a wide range of matters, including criminal law, family law and licensing. Additional career paths include law centres, charities and the armed forces.



Routes to becoming a solicitor

There are three routes to becoming a solicitor in England and Wales:

- The law graduate route
- The non-law graduate route
- The Institute of Legal Executive (ILEX) routes

The law graduate route

The majority of solicitors qualify by this route. The key stages are:

- Degree in law - three years full-time
- Legal Practice Course - one year full-time
- Practice-based training (training contract) incorporating the Professional Skills Course - two years full-time
- Admission to the roll of solicitors

Degree in law

Your qualifying law degree will involve studying the following foundation subjects:

Obligations including Contract, Restitution and Tort

Criminal Law

Equity and the Law of Trusts

Law of European Union

Property Law

Public Law including Constitutional Law, Administrative Law and Human Rights

In addition, students are expected to have received training in legal research.

Legal Practice Course (LPC)

After completing your law degree you will have to take the LPC, which ensures you have the necessary skills to work in a solicitor's office. The LPC comprises:

- Compulsory areas - Business Law and Practice, Property Law and Practice and Civil/Criminal Litigation and Advocacy
- Core areas / Pervasive areas - Accounts, Professional Conduct, Client Care, European Union Law, Probate, Revenue Law and Human Rights
- Skills areas - Advocacy, Interviewing and Advising, Practical Legal Research, Problem Solving, Writing and Drafting
- Elective subjects - You must study three from a range of subjects and private and corporate client work

Applying for a course

There are a number of colleges and universities across the country offering the Legal Practice Course. Applications must be submitted in the autumn before the September in which you wish to start the LPC. You can take the LPC as a full-time or part-time course. For full-time courses, you should apply to the Legal Practice Course Central Applications Board (*see Useful contacts*). For part-time courses, you should contact the academic institutions direct. Details of the institutions can be found on the Solicitors Regulation Authority website (*see Useful contacts*).

Practice-based training (training contract)

Once you have completed the academic and vocational stages, the next step to qualification is to undertake practice-based training, known as a training contract.

This part of the qualification process will enable you, under supervision, to apply the skills and knowledge you have acquired during the academic and vocational stages. You may have the opportunity to handle your own cases, see clients and carry out many of the responsibilities of a solicitor. Your work will be closely supervised and regularly reviewed. Usually this training can be undertaken full-time over two years, or part-time over a longer period.

Most trainees undertake this training in private practice, but you can train within local and central government, commerce and industry, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Magistrates' Court Service or other approved organisations. Competition for training contracts is strong and you should start applying in the second year of your undergraduate studies.

Professional Skills Course (PSC)

This is normally taken during the training contract and must be completed to qualify as a solicitor.

The PSC requires up to twenty days of full-time attendance, and builds on vocational training provided by the LPC and training contract. It comprises three core modules:

- Financial and Business Skills
- Advocacy and Communication Skills
- Client Care and Professional Standards

Admission to the roll

Once you have successfully completed your degree, Legal Practice Course, Professional Skills Course and practice-based training, you can apply to the roll of solicitors in England and Wales, which entitles you to practise as a solicitor.



The non-law graduate route

About 20 per cent of solicitors qualify via the non-law graduate route. The key stages are:

- Degree in any subject - three years full-time
- Common Professional Examination / Graduate Diploma in Law - one year full-time
- Legal Practice Course - one year full-time
- Practice-based training (training contract) incorporating the Professional Skills Course - two years full-time
- Admission to the roll of solicitors

Common Professional Examination or Graduate Diploma in Law (CPE/GDL)

This course prepares non-law graduates for the Legal Practice Course and covers the foundation subjects. You may be able to apply to the Solicitors Regulation Authority for exemptions if you have previously studied some law at university.

The CPE/GDL is offered by many academic institutions as a one-year full-time or two-year part-time course or by distance learning over two years.

A CPE/GDL is valid for seven years only.

Applying for a course

Your application for the Common Professional Examination/Graduate Diploma in Law will be assessed on academic merit. Lists of institutions offering the courses and entry criteria are available from your careers adviser. Details of the institutions can also be found on the Solicitors Regulation Authority website (*see Useful contacts*).

Places on full-time courses are allocated through the Central Applications Board and application forms are available from the Board (*see Useful contacts*). For part-time courses, contact the academic institution direct.

Legal Practice Course (LPC) See page 8

Practice-based training (Training Contract) See page 9

Professional Skills Course (PSC) See page 9

Admission to the roll See page 9



The ILEX routes

There are two routes to qualifying as a solicitor through the Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX), ILEX fellowship route and ILEX membership route. These routes are based on exams set and authorised by the ILEX.

Qualification by the ILEX routes is longer than the other routes because it is designed to enable you to study while working.

The key stages you pass through on your route to qualification are:

- ILEX examinations undertaken while you are working under the supervision of a solicitor or ILEX Fellow
- Common Professional Examination / Graduate Diploma in Law (exemptions may be available on a subject for subject basis)
- Legal Practice Course
- Practice-based training (training contract) - **ILEX membership route only**
- Professional Skills Course
- Admission to the roll of solicitors

ILEX examinations

To qualify for the ILEX routes, you will need four GCSEs (including English language) or equivalent. If you are already employed in the legal profession, you can simply apply to take the ILEX Professional Diploma in Law Level 3 when you feel you are ready. Alternatively, if you are not working in the legal profession, you can enrol as a student member of the Institute and take the ILEX Professional Diploma in Law Level 3 before applying for employment.

The ILEX routes take a minimum of five years. During those five years you will have to take the ILEX Professional Higher Diploma in Law Level 6 examinations.

In order to go on to qualify as a solicitor, a legal executive (ILEX fellow or member) must then go on to complete the academic and vocational training as above.

ILEX membership route - No period of qualifying legal employment is required in order to become an ILEX member you would therefore be required to undertake a training contract after completion of the academic stage.

ILEX fellowship route - This route involves working and training under the supervision of a solicitor for two years after gaining membership. ILEX fellows are exempted from the training contract.

For further details on this route to qualification, or for information on a career as a legal executive, contact the Institute of Legal Executives (*see Useful contacts*).

Common Professional Examination or Graduate Diploma in Law (CPE/GDL) See page 10

Legal Practice Course (LPC) See page 8

Practice-based training (Training Contract) - ILEX Membership route

See page 9

Professional Skills Course (PSC) See page 9

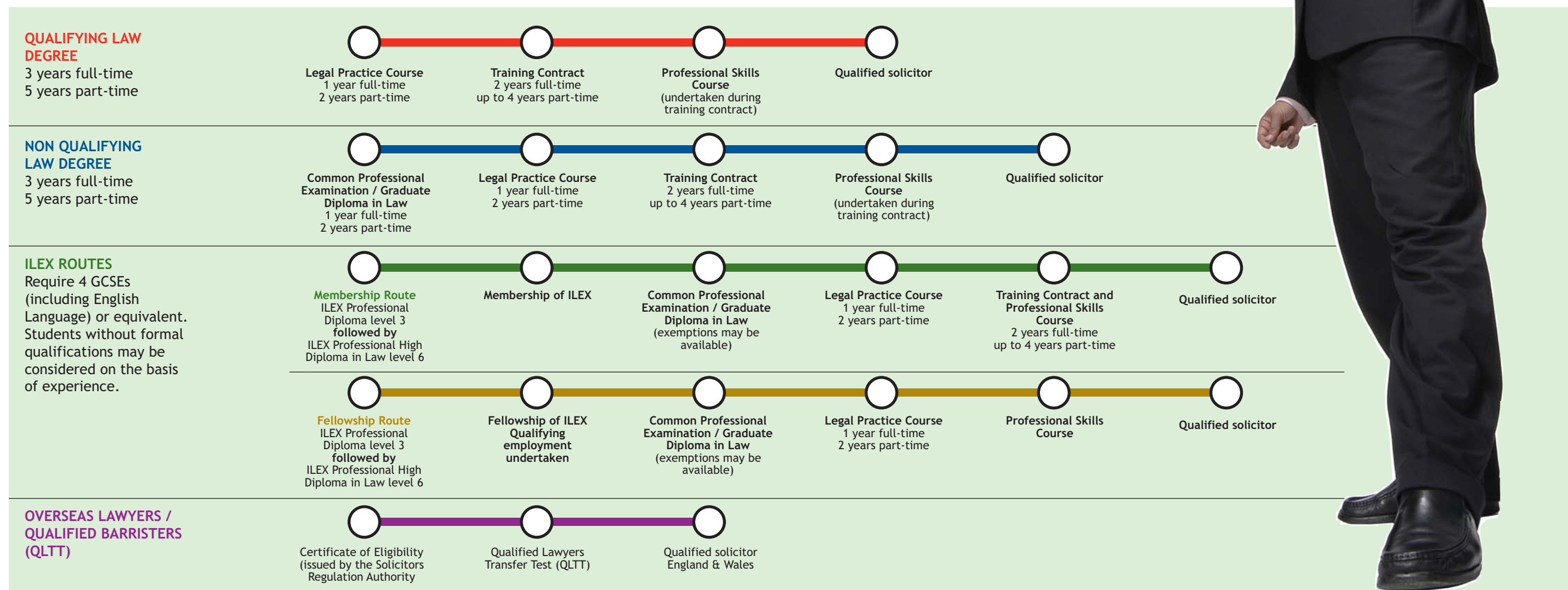
Admission to the roll

ILEX Fellows are exempt from the training contract as they qualify by passing exams administered by ILEX whilst working under the supervision of a solicitor. Once you have successfully completed the required training you can apply to the roll of solicitors in England and Wales, which entitles you to practise as a solicitor.

Routes to becoming a solicitor

NO A LEVELS OR EQUIVALENT

- ILEX route (see below)
- Access / Introductory Programme - 1 year full-time (Access Certificate qualifies you for university entry)



Checklists

Law undergraduate

First year

1. When you choose your options for your second and third years, ensure that you will cover the foundation subjects (see page 8).
2. Talk to career advisers, they will have information on the profession, career fairs/open days and work placement schemes.
3. Find vacation placement work - this will give you an insight in to the different types of firms and assist you in knowing whether the profession is right for you.
4. Give thought to where you want to work and the area of law you would wish to practise.

Second year

1. Make full use of your careers service to discuss the profession generally to ascertain whether the profession is right for you.
2. Talk to members of the profession.
3. Explore funding possibilities for your legal training.
4. Apply for vacation placement work - this will give you an insight into the different types of firms and assist you in knowing whether the profession is right for you. This will also demonstrate to recruiters that you are serious about a career in law.
5. Attend law fairs / open days. This is your opportunity to meet firms face to face.
6. Research the type of firm or organisation that interests you and prepare your CV carefully.
7. Apply for a training contract in your final term.

In your third/final year (autumn)

1. Attend interviews for a training contract.
2. Apply for a place on the Legal Practice Course.

Spring term

1. Enrol as a student member of the Solicitors Regulation Authority. This must be done before you start the LPC.
2. Obtain a certificate of completion for the academic stage of your training.
3. Apply for a training contract if not already secured.

During the LPC year

1. Apply to firms for a training contract if not already secured.
2. Check for advertisements in the Law Society Gazette.
3. Talk to members of the profession.

Starting your training contract

1. Sign your training contract and ensure that the registration form is sent to the Solicitors Regulation Authority.
2. Attend the Professional Skills Course.

At the end of your training contract

1. If the firm is not keeping you on after completion of the training contract, apply for a post as an assistant solicitor.
2. Apply for admission to the roll of solicitors in England and Wales.

Non-law undergraduate

In your first degree - third/final year

1. Apply for a place on the Common Professional Examination / Graduate Diploma in Law Course.
2. Arrange funding for the conversion course.
3. Try to organise work experience - this will give you an insight in to the different types of firms and assist you in knowing whether the profession is right for you. This will also demonstrate to recruiters that you are serious about a career in law.
4. Research the type of firm/organisation that interests you and prepare your CV carefully.
5. Attend law fairs/open days. This is your opportunity to meet firms face to face.
6. Apply for a training contract in your final term.

In your CPE / GDL year

Autumn

1. Apply for your place on the Legal Practice Course for the following year.
2. Apply for a training contract if not already secured.



Spring term

1. Enrol as a student member of the Solicitors Regulation Authority.
2. Obtain a certificate of completion for the academic stage of your training.
3. July / August - Arrange funding for the Legal Practice Course.

During the LPC year See page 15

Starting your training contract See page 15

At the end of your training contract See page 15

Application / selection - top tips

By the time you reach the stage of applying for training contracts you should have carried out extensive research and know where you want to work. When submitting applications for a training contract bear in mind that many firms look to fill their places two years in advance.

Keep copies of all the applications you submit.

Covering letter

- Every CV requires a covering letter
- Ensure your letter is addressed to an individual
- Research the firm/organisation - consider whether you have the skills, abilities and qualities required. Consider how you are suited to the firm/organisation and how this can be best conveyed
- Indicate evidence for the claims you make about yourself in your CV
- Explain why you are applying to the firm/organisation
- Highlight the best things you can offer the firm/organisation
- Your letter should persuade the employer that you are the best candidate for the job
- Express what you need to say as concisely as you can
- First impressions are important - check for spelling and other errors

Letter format

Beginning

A brief introduction to who you are, the job you are applying for, where you saw the advertisement and why you are applying to that particular firm/organisation. Say that your CV is enclosed.

Middle

Say why you are interested in the job and firm/organisation. Demonstrate that you understand the requirements of the role and firm/organisation. Sell yourself - why are you right for the role? Demonstrate your strengths and why you are right for the role. The letter should be tailored to the specific role and firm/organisation.

End

Be positive and say that you look forward to hearing from them.

CV writing

- Your CV should be two to three pages in length at most
- It should be easy to read in a clear font size on good quality paper
- Personal details - these should be on the first page so that a potential employer can contact you with ease
- Education and experience - these should be arranged clearly with the most recent first
- Key skills - ensure you highlight the key skills you have that are relevant to the role
- Career history - give details of your role, status and achievements
- List professional memberships and qualifications
- Put information that is relevant and demonstrates your suitability for the role near the beginning
- It is not necessary to include referees on your CV. Should you choose to include referees ensure any you include are happy to provide a reference
- First impressions are important - check for spelling and other errors



CV format

Contact details

Education and qualifications

Work experience (dates, organisation, job title, achievements)

IT skills

Interests and activities

Referees (optional)

Applications

Many firms/organisations use application forms or online applications to select candidates for interview.

- Be clear and concise - this is your opportunity to demonstrate your written communication skills.
- Prepare by researching about the firm/organisation and its recruitment criteria.
- Gauge your answers by the size of the space provided.
- The word count specified on online applications indicates how much detail is required.
- Read through the form and carefully follow instructions.
- Prepare a draft first to ensure you can fit the information into the boxes.
- Ensure your application is neat. Do not resort to tiny writing to squeeze more in.
- Be clear about the selection criteria and match your skills, knowledge and experience to them closely.
- Do not leave gaps in your life. It is better to explain time spent travelling for example.

Interviews

Prepare thoroughly for interviews. Find out as much as you can about the firm/organisation and try to get a feeling of the ethos of the firm/organisation. Consider:

- why you want a career in law
- what areas interest you
- what type of firm you want to practise in
- why this firm/organisation in particular
- what you can offer

The interview is your opportunity to demonstrate that you have the criteria required.



Interview tips:

- Arrive on time. Dress smartly. Be polite.
- Ensure you are familiar with your CV/application and able to talk about it.
- Listen carefully to the questions.
- Be succinct, whilst also ensuring that you 'sell' yourself.
- If there is more than one interviewer try to address your answers to each equally.
- If you don't understand something, don't be afraid to say so.
- It is normal to be asked whether you have any questions - think about them in advance. If your questions are answered during the interview, cross them off mentally. Don't ask anything you should already know from information given to you by the firm/organisation.
- At the end of the interview thank the interviewers for seeing you.
- Reflect on the interview - do you want to work for that firm/organisation? Are you content with your performance? Could you do better next time?
- If you are not successful, try to seek feedback.

Alternative options

Some law graduates decide that becoming a solicitor is not for them. This might be because of a lack of practice-based training places or jobs, or financial pressure, or just a change of mind.

However law graduates are sought after by a wide variety of employers and the training includes many transferable skills including the ability to:

- conduct research
- collect and analyse large amounts of information
- weigh-up points and counter points
- create a logical argument and reasoned conclusion from a set of facts
- communicate clearly
- be discrete
- work under pressure
- remember a lot of facts

Alternatively you could choose another legal career. You might consider a legal support role, such as paralegal, law costs draftsmen, legal secretary or barrister's clerk. Or you might decide on one of a number of administrative and advisory roles, such as executive officer in the Court and Crown Prosecution Services, or adviser in a citizen's advice bureau, welfare rights or social organisation.

Remember, your law degree is valid for entry to the Legal Practice Course for up to seven years after graduation.

Useful contacts

Courses

For entrance requirements for admission to full-time undergraduate law degree courses at universities of higher education you should apply to:

The Universities and Colleges Admission Services (UCAS)

PO Box 28
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL50 3SA
Telephone 0870 112 2211
www.ucas.ac.uk

Applications for full-time places on the Legal Practice Course and Common Professional Examination / Graduate Diploma in Law course are administered by the Central Application Board.

To apply for a full-time place on the Legal Practice Course telephone 01483 301 282. For a full-time place on the Common Professional Examination / Graduate Diploma in Law Course, telephone 01483 451 080.

For details on LPC, CPE and GDL courses, write to:

The Central Applications Board

PO Box 84
Guildford
Surrey
GU3 1YX
www.lawcabs.ac.uk

The Institute of Legal Executives

If you are interested in following the legal executive routes, contact:

The Institute of Legal Executives

Kempston Manor
Kempston
Bedfordshire
MK42 7AB
Telephone 01234 841 000
www.ilex.org.uk

Institute of Paralegals

2nd Floor, Berkeley Square House
Berkeley Square
Mayfair
London W1J 6BD
Tel: 0870 243 2308
www.instituteofparalegals.org/

The Bar Council

For more information on a career as a barrister, contact:

Education and Training Department

General Council of the Bar
289 High Holborn
London
WC1V 7HZ
Telephone 020 7242 0082
www.barcouncil.org.uk and www.legaleducation.org.uk

Careers Service

Your careers adviser at your teaching institution will have a wide range of reading material

Local authorities / commerce and industry

If you wish to train within commerce, industry or a local authority, you should contact relevant organisations direct.

Law Society Gazette

The Gazette jobs provides access to the latest legal jobs

www.lawgazettejobs.co.uk

The Magistrates' Association

For more information on a career in the Magistrates' Court Service, contact:

The Magistrates Association

28 Fitzroy Square
London
W1T 6DD
Telephone 020 7387 2353
www.magistrates-association.org.uk

Crown Prosecution Service

For training details, contact:

The Staff Management Unit

Crown Prosecution Service
50 Ludgate Hill
London EC4M 7GG
www.cps.gov.uk



Government

For details, about a career as a solicitor in government contact:

The Recruitment Team
Chancery House
53-64 Chancery Lane
London
WC2A 1QS
Telephone 020 7649 6023
www.gls.gov.uk

The Law Society

For information on how the Law Society can provide support throughout your career

www.lawsociety.org.uk

Junior Lawyers Division of the Law Society

Support, advice and networking opportunities for students, trainees and newly qualified solicitors

www.lawsociety.org.uk/juniorlawyers

Solicitors Regulation Authority

For additional information on qualification requirements and a list of firms authorised to take trainee solicitors

Telephone 0870 606 2555

www.sra.org.uk



The role of the Law Society

As the representative body for solicitors in England and Wales, the Law Society is here to support you at every stage of your training, qualifying and throughout your career as a solicitor.

The Law Society is committed to attracting the most able candidates into the legal profession and to promoting equality at all stages. Solicitors are drawn from all walks of life and around 6,000 qualify each year in England and Wales.

A career as a solicitor is open to anyone and the Law Society is actively promoting diversity in entrants to the profession. In recent years more women than men have been qualifying as solicitors and at least 18 per cent of people qualifying have been from minority ethnic groups.

Equality in the profession

The Law Society has developed two important schemes to aid diversity in the profession.

- Diversity Access Scheme

This scheme provides support to talented people who face particular obstacles to qualifying as a solicitor. These might relate to social, educational, financial or family circumstances or a disability. The scheme has two elements - sponsorship to cover fees for the Common Professional Examination, the Graduate Diploma in Law or the Legal Practice Course - and a mentoring scheme which puts individuals in touch with a solicitor who can advise and support them.

- Bursary Scheme

The Bursary Scheme is funded by a number of trusts and scholarships. Awards are given exclusively to students who have secured a place on the Common Professional Examination, the Graduate Diploma in Law or the Legal Practice Course. To be eligible to apply for an award, you must be able to demonstrate that your financial position would make it difficult for you to further your legal studies.

