

# Careers in Law



## A guide for law and non-law students considering a legal career

The Legal Sector is diverse, dynamic and challenging. Law impacts every aspect of society, reflected in diverse opportunities and employers. The word 'lawyer' is a general term used to describe solicitors, barristers, legal executives and others – it's often used to describe the whole legal profession. There are almost eight times as many solicitors as barristers. Getting into the industry can be competitive and during your time at university you should engage in work experience or volunteering in addition to having a good academic record.

## Solicitor

Solicitors act on behalf of their client(s) to provide advice on how the law applies to their problem or situation. They can work in as many areas as there are laws and can be in large corporate organisations and smaller regional firms. In 2021 there are currently 9488 different firms in total.

Currently, the majority (74%) of solicitors work in private practice firms owned and managed by the partners and of these, 34% of solicitors work for large firms (80+ partners)

As firms vary tremendously in size and specialisation, the working environment, life-style and work/life balance of solicitors within each firm can be very different. When considering a career as a solicitor it is really important that you carry out careful research to decide which would be the best environment for you. When starting your research you may want to focus on the following three areas.

What a solicitor does; what areas of law you are interested in; what type of employers there are.

## Types of Solicitor Roles

If you are interested in business and finance, explore commercial law firms in the City, regions and internationally, or in house legal teams in a business. If public service is attractive, then consider local and national government or public prosecutions. If motivated by supporting individuals, communities or charities, then explore law firms providing personal services for individuals, as well as charitable and third sectors.

**Acting for corporate clients on corporate activity.** Employers range from large international firms based in the City; large regional firms with offices in the UK and overseas; smaller regional firms specialising in regional corporate work for smaller, entrepreneurial

businesses; and 'mixed' firms, based in the regions advising businesses, as well as advice to individuals on personal matters.

**Acting for individuals on personal matters.** Employers can be large national firms, smaller High Street offices acting for local communities or Law Centres providing publicly funded legal advice. Areas of work can include property, family, criminal, wills & estates, landlord & tenant, social justice.

**Public Sector Solicitors** are employed by local, regional or national government or for international organisations globally.

**Social justice** legal matters are handled by charities and niche, legally-aided organisations. These employers act as advocates to preserve the rights and freedoms of the individual, nationally and internationally.

**In-house Solicitors** are employed by an organisation, rather than a firm of solicitors, and act for that one client on diverse legal matters.

## Skills & Experience

The legal sector is competitive and firms look for good academic ability. Many firms stipulate a 2:1 minimum requirement, although not all. For students making applications to vacation schemes in their second year, firms will want to see strong grades from first year onwards.

You will also need to demonstrate an interest in law outside of your academic studies so becoming an active member of the law society or commercial awareness society could be helpful.

It is vital that solicitors know and understand their clients and the environments in which the clients operate. Depending on the type of firm or organisation in which you would like to practice, securing some related work or volunteer experience

can be valuable and help you develop and demonstrate you have the skills an employer is looking for.

**Vacation schemes** (second year LLB students and third year non law students) and **Insight Days** (first year LLB and second year non-law) are usually offered by the larger commercial law firms. These can offer valuable insights into life as a Solicitor and vacation scheme can in some cases, lead to an offer of a Training Contract.

Working as a **brand ambassador** for a law organisation or firm can also help you to develop your communication and interpersonal skills.

**Any work experience is valuable** – remember that law firms represent their clients, so work experience in a sector related to their area of business can be very useful. If you have a weekend job at a major supermarket, there is a law firm somewhere who represents them.

Equally, **volunteer experiences** are highly valued by legal employers across all areas. If you are interested in working with private clients and community law then **Law Clinics, committee positions in student societies and sports teams, advice centres** such as **Citizens Advice Bureau or charities** supporting and advocating for specific client groups can demonstrate commitment, teamwork, motivation and interpersonal skills.

## Diversity & Inclusion

Recruiters are keen to have a diverse workforce and many will have policies and processes that are proactive in recruiting students and graduates from diverse backgrounds. An increasing number of recruiters are offering traineeships, internships and Insight events and many are being recognized for their approach to being inclusive employers. Law firms are particularly active in this area of diversity and some have well established programmes in place.

To find out the policies and attitudes of the recruiters that you are interested in, explore their equality, diversity and inclusion policy. Search their website to see if they have any specific staff networks, look out for external accreditation such as whether they are a Disability Confident employer, a Stonewall Diversity Champion or part of the Mindful Employer charter promoting mental health at work. A key place to look is to see what they do to celebrate diversity on their Facebook and Twitter pages.

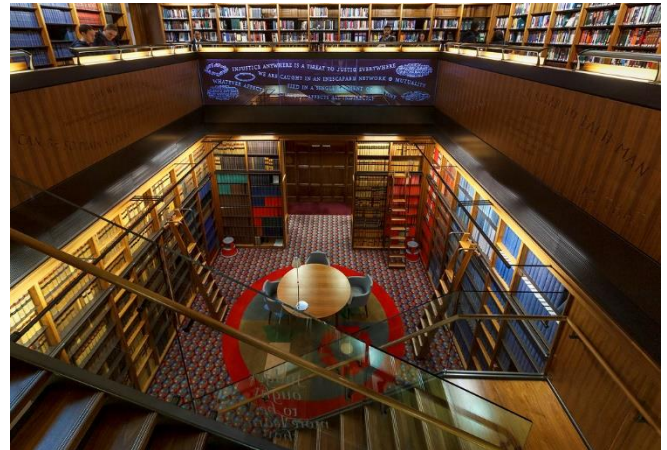
Organisations such as [Aspiring Solicitors](#) provides mentoring and CV/application help for any students in its target groups.

The Law Society has a [Lawyers with disabilities division](#). They regularly run a series of informative talks throughout the year to which students are usually invited for free.

Further information from the Law Society [ethnic-minority-lawyers](#)

The [black solicitors' network](#) is committed to achieving equality of access, retention and promotion of black solicitors

The [Society of Asian lawyers \(SAL\)](#) offers free membership and represents over 2000 members



## Qualifications & Training

The routes into law are changing and as of September 2021 the new **Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE)** is being introduced.

In order to qualify, you will need:

- A degree in any subject
- Pass the SQE 1 (multiple choice based test of legal knowledge)
- Pass the SQE 2 (Practical legal skills assessment)
- Complete a 2 year Period of Recognised Training. This can be either under a 2 year contract as before, or gained in up to four placements at different organisations, and may include volunteering at a law clinic or working in a paralegal role
- Pass a character and suitability test

Although the cost of the SQE is considerably less than for the GDL and LPC, you must factor in that the SQE is an exam only, and it will be the preparatory courses that will be the added expense

From September 2021 **non law students** will be required to take the SQE route

**Law students:** If you have accepted a place on the LLB on or before 21 September 2021, you can choose to qualify by either the old (LPC) or new (SQE) route. From 2023 the old LPC route will start to be phased out and after 2025/6, everyone will qualify via the SQE route.

### More information about the qualification routes

<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/career-advice/becoming-a-solicitor/solicitors-qualifying-examination-sqe/>

<https://www.lawcareers.net/Courses/Solicitors-Qualifying-Exam>

### Further Resources

<https://www.lawcareers.net/Starting-Out/Beginners-Guide-Career-Law> Beginners guide to law is a good starting point for most students

<https://www.lawcareers.net/Solicitors> one of the most comprehensive list of training contracts and firms offering vacation placements plus news, profiles and advice.

<https://www.thelawyer.com/careers-hub/> news and information designed especially for students

<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/> information to help you access the profession

<https://www.chambersstudent.co.uk/> Law firm and chambers information, designed for students

<https://www.allaboutlaw.co.uk/> Inside information, tips and advice, discussion and blogs from trainees, pupils and lawyers, a find a training contract section and a jobs board.

<https://www.legalcheek.com/> legal news and careers fairs and events.

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/law-sector>

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/law-solicitors>

[Vantage](#) sign up to hear from law firms about their vacation scheme opportunities

<https://www.theforage.com/> Virtual work experience with a range of commercial law firms

Royal Holloway careers service has recordings from law week and additional resources for law [here](#)