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## GUIDE TO A CAREER IN LAW



## TIPS AND GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS



# THINKING OF A CAREER IN LAW?

Despite what you might have seen on the TV, there is more to law than the stereotype of people in wigs; so much more!



Whether it's barristers commanding the court room with a stirring speech or solicitors winning a hard fought legal battle for their clients, there is something for everyone in the legal field.

## TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

Lawyer is a catchall term applying to three different professions: solicitors, barristers and legal executives. It is important to pursue the profession that aligns with your strengths.

Barristers (the ones who wear the wigs) handle all court matters: from preparing documents to delivering their case to the judge. A barrister must be quick-thinking, comfortable with public speaking and have a deep knowledge of the law.

Solicitors and legal executives handle all aspects of law outside of the court room. Most specialise in one or two areas. For example, a private client solicitor could handle a divorce, write wills and act on house sales; a commercial solicitor might negotiate business contracts and the sale of companies. Alongside the relevant qualifications, a solicitor needs to be organised, straight-talking and have a good helping of common sense.

## THE JOURNEY

Thankfully the days of needing to go a prestigious university to be a lawyer are long gone. Anyone can become a lawyer regardless of university, school or background.

**Solicitor** – to become a solicitor you will need to complete:

- A-Levels (or equivalent qualification)
- Law Degree or non-Law Degree
- Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE)
- Training Contract

For your A-Levels (or equivalent qualification) it does not matter which subjects you choose, and there is no need to study A-Level Law. A degree will last between 3-4 years depending on your university choice, and again you can choose whether you study law or not. Following your degree, you will then need to sit an SQE. This is a new qualification that is being introduced from 2021. Universities and professional qualification providers offer courses that help you the material needed to sit the SQE. You will also need to undertake two years of 'qualifying work experience' which can either be through work experience at a law firm, or through a two year 'training contract' at a law firm.



**Barrister** – to become a barrister you will need to complete:

- A-Levels
- Law Degree or non-Law Degree
- Bar Course Aptitude Test
- Bar Professional Training Course
- Pupillage

The A-Levels and degree are the same for the barrister as the solicitor. The aptitude test doesn't check test your legal knowledge. Instead, it's a one-hour multiple choice test designed to see if you're suited to working as



a barrister. The professional training course is a degree-like course lasting one year full-time or two years part-time. You can then complete a one year pupillage, shadowing barristers. You will then be called to the bar.

**Legal executive** – the Legal Executive route is slightly different. There are two options. Option one is to complete A-Levels and then to complete a Graduate-Fast track Diploma. After that, you would then gain experience in a law firm for five years and complete a structured training programme whilst working.

Option two is to become a legal apprentice after GCSEs or A-Levels and work in a law firm to gain experience whilst also completing the Professional Diploma in Law and Practice and the Professional Higher Diploma in Law which is the equivalent to a Law Degree. You would then undergo the same period of five years of structured training to qualify as Chartered Legal Executive.



### Favourite thing about working in the legal field:

Instructing a solicitor is quite daunting for many people. They're usually facing a tough decision in their lives. The sense of reward when you can help them and provide answers to their questions is unmatched.

Edward Gill, Trainee Solicitor



**Worst thing about working in the legal field:** The paperwork. Unfortunately in the legal sector there is always lots of paperwork, despite the electronic resources we have available. It can be time consuming.

Victoria Grant, Trainee Solicitor



### What advice would you give to students considering pursuing a career in law:

Always be proactive, use your initiative, and be resilient. It can be disappointing if you are unsuccessful

at first, but if you persist, the right opportunity will come along.

It's worth considering getting involved with activities and societies whilst you're at school and university to develop transferable skills. These will be useful to discuss in both the interview and application process.

Radha Chauhan, Trainee Solicitor