

Timetable for **Aspiring Lawyers**

The main types of qualified lawyers in England and Wales are those of solicitor and barrister (Northern Ireland, Scotland and the offshore islands have different legal systems). The training and qualification routes to becoming a lawyer are currently in a time of transition. In this document we will explain the different routes to becoming a solicitor or barrister, how you can have your training funded and the timeline you should follow.



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How do I become a solicitor?

With 149,621 practising solicitors in England and Wales in 2020 (around 90% of all lawyers), it is definitely one of the most popular roles within the sector.

Solicitors mainly provide legal services directly to the client and the majority of work is office based in some kind of private practice. Some solicitors also work 'in-house' in legal departments of companies or the government.

The route to becoming a solicitor will change from 1 September 2021:

Most common route pre-September 2021	New route from 1st September 2021
UK qualifying law degree (OR non-law degree followed by the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL))	Degree in any subject
Legal Practice Course (LPC) 1 year	Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) – two sets of exams SQE 1 (legal knowledge) SQE 2 (practical legal skills)
Training contract (2 years)	Qualifying Work Experience (QWE) of 2 years – either via a training contract with one firm or placements with up to 4 different organisations
Qualified solicitor	Qualified solicitor

Anyone who starts a law degree, GDL, LPC or period of recognised training (e.g. training contract) before the SQE is introduced in September 2021, can choose to qualify under the LPC (subject to availability) or SQE route. If they take the SQE, they must meet all the requirements.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority is in charge of overseeing the solicitor qualification process and has the [**most up to date information on SQE developments**](#).

You may also find this [**SQE article on the Law Careers website**](#) helpful .

You can complete solicitor or barrister training with the Government Legal Profession in a number of different government departments. See the [**Government's website**](#) for more information.

How do I become a barrister?

There were 16,258 registered barristers in 2020 and it is one of the most competitive and popular legal careers. Barristers work primarily in court or tribunals and predominately provide one-off advocacy. They are normally self-employed as part of a 'set' and work from the same 'chambers' (such as an Inn of Court) as other barristers (whilst also working very closely with solicitors). A minority of barristers also work at the 'employed bar', which is the in-house equivalent to solicitors employed by companies.

A number of new Bar training courses were introduced in autumn 2020:



Before enrolling onto a Bar Practice/Training Course, you need to be a member of one of the Inns of Court and have passed the Bar Course Aptitude Test (BCAT). You must also attend qualifying sessions with your Inn of Court whilst completing your Bar Practice/Training Course.

Pupillages are likely to continue to be the main way of undertaking the work-based learning element of Bar training but more organisations may offer training for the Employed Bar.

The Bar Standards Board (BSB) is in charge of overseeing the barrister qualification process and has the **most up to date information on these developments**.

Another good website to visit is **Pupillage and How to Get It**

How can my training be funded?

Training to become any type of lawyer is expensive. Course fees for the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) can cost £7,000 - £11,650. The Legal Practice Course (LPC) can range from £8,500 - £15,000 and the Bar Practice/Training Course costs around £13,000 or more, depending on where you complete it.

Sponsorship of solicitor training – training contracts

Some law firms, especially international, city or large regional ones, often sponsor GDL and LPC/SQE courses as part of securing a training contract with them. Sponsorship may also be available from other bodies such as the Government Legal Profession or in-house training opportunities with other types of organisations.

Use LawCareers.Net's [**Advanced Search**](#) to find out about training contract opportunities.

Sponsorship of a Bar course - Inns of Court scholarships

The four Inns of Court have scholarships, bursaries and awards to help you complete a Bar course. Each Inn has different rules, amounts vary from £100 - £22,000 and you can only apply for a scholarship from one Inn.

Applications for scholarships are often made in the final year of your degree or in the year before starting the GDL or Bar training course.

LawCareers.Net has information on [**scholarships available at each of the four Inns**](#).

Funding during barrister training – pupillage awards

You can apply for a pupillage award from your set of chambers, which effectively covers your costs during the work-related learning part of your training. These are highly competitive and the amount will vary from set to set (chamber) depending on the size of the set and practice area of law.

Visit [**Pupillage Gateway**](#) to find out about the online application system for applying for pupillage.

Academic scholarships, awards and bursaries

All universities and law schools offer a limited amount of scholarships, awards and bursaries, either based on exceptional ability or your financial situation. Make sure to research what is available on the firm, university or law school's website or by contacting the scholarships or graduate recruitment team directly.

Other financial support

Some charities and grant-making trusts may provide financial support for aspiring barristers. Visit your local education authority awards officer for information on grants, loans and other funding.

Postgraduate loans

Postgraduate loans from the government are only available for courses that include an LLM component as only master's courses (not diplomas or professional certificates) are eligible for government funding.

You can read more about course fees and funding support available on LawCareers.Net's **[Fee Guide for Students](#)**

Timeline for aspiring lawyers

Many solicitor's firms recruit 2 years ahead of you starting your training with them. For barrister's chambers, recruitment can be 18 months – 2 years in advance of starting your pupillage.

It is often the large corporate/commercial solicitors firms that tend to work to the below deadlines. A high street firm or a niche solicitors practice may recruit much closer to the start date of the training contract or vacation scheme - it is important to check all deadlines with the individual firms and chambers on their websites. If in doubt, contact them directly.

First year

- Get involved in debating, mooting, pro bono and voluntary law related activities (such as legal advice clinics)
- Get involved in other student societies (preferably in a position of responsibility)
- Look into summer work experience opportunities – work shadowing with local law firms and volunteering Citizen Advice Bureau and legal advice centres are good starting points
- Apply for First Year Programmes (some may only be for law students, so check first), Insight events and Open Days during the autumn and spring terms
- Over the summer vacation, do your research on a variety of law firms and chambers to understand what/who they are looking for, work experience opportunities they offer and their application deadlines (LawCareers.net and [Chamber Student](http://ChamberStudent.com) are excellent resources)

Second or penultimate year (or final year for non-law students)

Autumn term

- Continue to research firms and chambers and attend employer events on and off campus
- Start applying for work experience such as vacation schemes (solicitor) and mini-pupillages (barrister)
- Look out for opportunities to complete virtual experience programmes with organisations such as Bright Network
- The larger solicitors firms generally open their vacation scheme applications from 1st October but the deadlines are different for winter, spring and summer schemes. Make sure to apply before the deadlines, ensuring that your applications are of a very high standard (the [Careers and Enterprise team](#) can support you with applications and have very useful guidance sheets)

Spring term

- Complete applications with later deadlines for work experience and attend interviews

Summer term

- Participate in vacation schemes and mini-pupillages over the summer, and attend interviews for training contracts in August and September
- Apply speculatively for work experience if you haven't managed to secure a formal placement
- Try to gain as much professional experience as possible to improve your CV and applications (visit our **Jobs and Experience section** and websites such as **Prospects** and **Target Jobs**)
- Apply for training contracts - many firms now close their applications before the 31st July deadline so check each deadline for the firms you are interested in applying to

Final year

- Participate in vacation schemes (preferably winter or spring, although summer may be the only option for international students) and attend interviews for training contracts
- Start applying for vocational training (you do not need to have secured a training contract or pupillage first). Check the preferred vocational training provider of the firm or chamber you plan to apply to and see the 'Law schools' section on **Chamber Student** and the 'Education/Courses' section on **LawCareers.Net** for guidance
- Apply for pupillage – if applying through Pupillage Gateway, vacancies usually go live at the end of November, with applications opening in January and closing in February
- Continue to apply for training contracts - many firms now close their applications before 31st July so you must check deadline dates directly with firms
- Explore funding options for your vocational training (e.g. LPC, SQE or Bar Training Course)
- The deadline to apply for a scholarship for a Bar Training Course is always the first Friday in November and the scholarship deadline for the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL – non-law students only) is 1st May
- Visit (or meet at a Law Fair if attending) the vocational training institutions you are interested in applying to by attending their open days or arranging a visit yourself

Remember

Law is a competitive field so manage your study schedule to ensure you get a 2:1 or above.

Attend the **Queen Mary Law Fair** held every October to meet a wide range of firms and other organisations. A number of other law fairs often take place in the autumn term, such as the Pupillage Fair or ones run by organisations such as Legal Cheek and AllAboutLaw, so do look out for these.