

Career paths in law

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Did you know that being a solicitor and a barrister are the best known of several career options in the legal profession?

Solicitors

There are about 100,000 solicitors in England and Wales.

A solicitor provides clients (individuals, businesses, charities, etc) with skilled legal advice and representation, often appearing in court on clients' behalf.

Solicitors mainly work in private practice. But solicitors also work in central and local government, law enforcement, the courts, companies and other organisations.

If you're thinking about a career in the law, it's important to bear in mind the difference between solicitors and barristers.

Barristers

Barristers typically have no direct contact with the public. They appear in court when instructed by a solicitor.

Barristers put legal arguments to judges, magistrates and juries. They cross-examine witnesses and otherwise attempt to sway the outcome of a court case.

Only barristers (or qualified solicitor advocates) may represent clients in the higher courts.

For more information, contact the General Council of the Bar – www.barcouncil.org.uk.

Legal executives

Non-graduates (and graduates) can qualify as a solicitor by working in a legal office, joining the Institute of Legal Executives, and passing exams to qualify, first, as a member and, later, as a fellow of the institute.

Being a legal executive is a career in its own right. Further vocational training is a prerequisite of qualification as a solicitor. The process is arduous, but allows non-graduates to earn while they learn.

For more information, contact the Institute of Legal Executives – www.ilex.org.uk.

Justices' clerks

Justices' clerks are qualified solicitors or barristers who manage the Magistrates' Courts Service and provide legal advice to lay magistrates.

They also train newly appointed magistrates, act as secretaries to management and selection committees, and liaise with other professionals in the criminal justice system.

For more information, contact the Justices' Clerks' Society – www.jc-society.co.uk.

Law costs draftsmen

Law costs draftsmen ensure that a firm's clients are properly charged for work undertaken on clients' behalf.

They also help apportion costs between the two sets of legal advisers at the end of long and complex cases. In some instances, they represent clients in court when there is an issue over costs.

Many law costs draftsmen are school-leavers. Completion of a two-year, learn-while-you-earn course is required to qualify.

For more information, contact the Association of Law Costs Draftsmen –

www.alcd.org.uk.

Legal cashiers

Legal cashiers usually work in solicitors' practices. They keep financial records and keep solicitors informed of the financial position of the firm.

For more information, contact the Institute of Legal Cashiers and Administrators –

www.ilca.org.uk.

Legal secretaries

Legal secretaries provide secretarial and clerical support to solicitors, barristers, the law courts, and in other areas directly concerned with the law. They deal with large quantities of correspondence and help prepare documents such as wills, divorce petitions and witness statements.

Legal secretaries are specialists, because legal documents are composed differently from other commercial documents.

Judges

Both solicitors and barristers may be appointed as judges. The Judicial Appointments Commission (www.judicialappointments.gov.uk) selects candidates for judicial office on merit.

The Lord Chancellor provides the resources for judges pay and pensions and sets their terms and conditions – www.dca.gov.uk/judges.htm.

For more information about the judiciary, who they are and what they do, visit

www.judiciary.gov.uk.