Industry insight - Law

In a nutshell
The legal services industry incorporates a range of services for clients requiring legal assistance. Opportunities are available in private practice, the public sector, in-house in industry and commerce.

Global recession and economic factors have resulted in law firms restructuring, downsizing and in some cases merging or closing. Further changes within the industry are emerging following the Legal Services Act 2007 enabling law and non-law firms to merge to form alternative business structures. Cuts within the Legal Services Budget have resulted in a reduction in firms offering publicly funded work being awarded contracts putting greater pressure on the pro bono and voluntary legal advice sector.

Legal sector graduate vacancies in 2011 were predicted to rise by 4% compared to 2010 rates (High Fliers Graduate Market Survey, 2011). Law is the highest paid graduate job with salaries at an average of £36,000 (AGR Summer Survey, 2010). This makes law an attractive profession and competition for training contract places is high; almost three times as many applicants for each available vacancy. (Law Society Annual Statistical report, 2010)

Key areas of practice affected by the recession include banking, finance and property law. Legal practice growth areas include energy and environmental law, intellectual property law, international law, alternative dispute resolution, insolvency, shipping, insurance and employment law. There has been a rise in niche law firms and emergence of virtual law firms operating on a consultancy basis.

What kind of work can I do?

- **Solicitors**: provide a wide range of legal support and advice to clients. They take instructions and advise on necessary courses of legal action.
- **Solicitor advocate**: solicitors with higher rights of audience who can represent clients in higher courts.
- **Barristers and advocates (Scotland)**: act as advocates in court and provide written legal opinions.
- **Legal executives**: fee-earning, qualified lawyers with a role similar to solicitors. They frequently specialise in conveyancing, civil and criminal litigation, family law and probate.
- **Paralegals**: support solicitors with legal transactions, mainly in an administrative capacity, with varying levels of responsibility.

**What’s it like working in this industry?**

Many solicitors and barristers, particularly early in their career, frequently have to work long, unsocial hours involving evenings and weekends. Solicitors are usually employed and barristers are self-employed. Legal executives are now able to become partners in law firms and solicitor advocates can represent clients in higher courts without instructing counsel in non-specialist cases.

**Solicitors**

- The Law Society of England and Wales recommends that trainee solicitors earn a minimum salary of £18,590 in central London and £16,650 outside London. The Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) states that median starting salaries in 2009 were £37,000 in London. Starting salary and progression depends on the size of firm and type of work.
- From 1 June 2011, the Law Society of Scotland, recommends that rates for trainee salaries are £15,965 for a first year trainee and £19,107 for a second year trainee.
- In Northern Ireland, apprentices earn between £10,600 and £18,000, depending on the stage of their training (Law Society of Northern Ireland).

**Barristers**

- In England and Wales, pupil barristers earn a minimum of £10,000 per annum, although some sets pay up to £40,000 (The Training Contract and Pupillage Handbook). Starting salaries range from £20,000 - £90,000.
- In Scotland, intending advocates (known as ‘devils’) are unpaid during their ten-month training period.
- Employed bar starting salaries range from £25,000 - £75,000 depending on location, area of practice and employer. Salaries can double in ten years time (Bar Council).

**Ancillary professions**

- Salaries for legal executives just entering the profession range from £14,000 - £22,000 (ILEX,), rising to an average of £35,000 for fellows of the The Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX). Salary progression will vary depending on location, size and specialist area of the firm.
- Paralegal jobs with higher salaries are usually offered to Legal Practice Course (LPC) graduates with at least six months relevant experience. The average paralegal salary at the start of 2011 was £21,000, with a typical salary range of £15,000 - £50,000. Around 75% of paralegals tend to earn more than £20,000 and 10% of paralegals tend to earn more than £35,000 (SalaryTrack).
Diversity

- There continue to be concerns about diversity across the legal sector, but the situation is changing slowly. Approximately 20% of new trainees with known ethnicity were from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups (Law Society Annual Statistical Report, 2010)
- There is a slightly higher proportion of men than women in the sector, particularly among barristers. Since 2000, female solicitors holding practising certificates has risen by 80%.
- Diversity bursary schemes are available to fund postgraduate law courses and more law firms are offering diversity mentoring schemes.
- In April 2011, the government introduced the social mobility initiative Opening Doors, Breaking Down Barriers, which offers internships to young people from deprived backgrounds.

How big is this industry?

According to figures released by the relevant legal professional bodies, there are a total of just over 200,000 people employed in a professional or ancillary role in the UK legal industry. This is about 0.7% of the total UK working population (Office for National Statistics, 2009). Of these, 150,000 are solicitors with practising certificates and 12,700 practising barristers (Bar Council 2010).

Where can I work?

England and Wales

- Over a quarter of private practice firms are located in London employing around 45% of all private practice solicitors. There are large regional legal centres outside of London for example Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham, where national, regional and local firms are based covering all practice areas.
- In-house work is mainly found in London.
- The majority of practising barristers are based in London with over one third based elsewhere. (Bar Council, 2010).
- Government Legal Service (GLS) employ trainee barristers/solicitors in London. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) recruit trainees and pupils throughout the UK.

Scotland

Work is available throughout Scotland, though most opportunities, particularly in commercial and corporate work, are located in the larger cities, especially Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Northern Ireland

Work is available throughout Northern Ireland, though most opportunities, especially in commercial and corporate work, are located in the larger cities, particularly Belfast.
UK-qualified solicitors who wish to practise elsewhere in the UK or in the EU can re-qualify in other jurisdictions by taking appropriate tests. Contact the relevant law society for assistance. To practise outside of the EU, check with the relevant law society for advice.

Entry and progression

How do I find a job?

Solicitors

- Vacancies are mostly advertised via professional body websites, firm websites, university and post graduate provider careers services, law school noticeboards, online and printed legal recruitment publications.

- A formal training contract usual, although some firms dealing with high volume work tend to recruit at paralegal level first. Competition for apprenticeships in Northern Ireland is high where a speculative approach to finding work is required.

- Law graduates are often recruited for training contracts before starting the final year of their undergraduate degree by large corporate and commercial firms. Non-law graduates are recruited in their final year. Applications are also received from students on their conversion year or during their Legal Practice Course (LPC). Training contracts within commercial firms and in-house opportunities are usually advertised two years in advance of commencement.

- Many smaller firms only recruit in response to business need and often in the year they want the training contract to begin. They advertise in the legal press, local press, careers services or on their websites. Many do not advertise at all, so speculative applications are a must.

- The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) recruits both trainee solicitors and pupil barristers one year in advance of the October start date.

- In Scotland, smaller law firms, local authorities, the Scottish Government and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service generally recruit during the diploma year.

- The Government Legal Service recruits trainee solicitors and pupil barristers two years in advance.

- The majority of vacancies are in large national and international commercial firms. Annual recruitment deadlines tend to be 31st January and 31st July.
Barristers

- **Pupillage Portal** (formerly called the Online Pupillages Application System, or OLPAS) invites first applications one to two years before the pupillage start date.

- A twelve month pupillage is usual, which is split into two sixes, on successful completion the pupil hopes to secure tenancy with the chambers.

- All available pupillages are advertised on the Pupillage Portal which operates one season, which starts in March each year. There is also a clearing system in September that allows chambers with remaining vacancies to search and view all clearing applications in the system.

- For chambers who don’t process their vacancies through the Pupillage Portal, students need to undertake a pupillage search.

- A list of organisations offering pupillages at the employed bar is available from the Bar Standards Board (BSB).

Ancillary professions
Legal executive/paralegal jobs are advertised through university careers services, firm websites, local and regional newspapers and recruitment agencies. See also Legal Executive Recruitment and Paralegal.net.

What skills do I need?
Employers are looking for the following:

- interest, and preferably experience, in their kind of law;
- commercial awareness;
- achievements;
- evidence of teamwork abilities;
- good people skills;
- common sense;
- willingness to learn;
- attention to detail and analytical skills;
- work experience, such as pro bono or community work and mini-pupillages or marshalling;
- research and writing skills;
- debating/mooting/public speaking experience is useful if you want to be a barrister.
High academic performance is important, i.e. 2:1 or above (although medium-sized or high-street firms may accept a 2:2). For mature students, employers are interested in your previous career experience and what you could bring to the role.

Experience in a relevant industry may help, as may general business experience and evidence of client care skills.

Employers often have a corporate social responsibility profile so will be seeking candidates who have had experience in community or pro bono projects.

Commercial awareness gained through extra-curricular activities is valued by commercial law firms.

For paralegals, agencies often require six months’ relevant work experience in addition to experience in administration, document management and research.

**Where can I find work experience?**

- **Vacation schemes** - with larger firms, government organisations and some legal aid firms.

- **Mini pupillages** - one or two-week schemes are available. You can apply in advance usually anytime of year but some chambers have specific application periods.

- **Voluntary work** - e.g. schemes such as the Citizens Advice. Research your own opportunities at Law Centres Federation, Scottish Association of Law Centres, Law Centre NI, Free Representation Unit, YouthNet, Volunteer Now, or Volunteer Centre Network Scotland. Or your university or post graduate provider may have pro bono projects you can get involved in.

- **Internships** - try an internet search for legal internships or look for those related to a relevant industry such as finance. Recruitment can be very competitive. For overseas internships, see the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), Fulbright Commission, Idealist and opportunities abroad.

- **Other** - engage in pro bono work (see LawWorks) or attend a court or tribunal and take notes - this will provide useful material for application forms and interviews.

- Relevant work experience is increasingly important to succeed in entering the industry. Employers are aware of the competition to gain work experience so they accept commercial experience or customer service roles that have relevant transferrable skills.

- Formal work experience can be difficult to obtain. A creative approach may be required. Shadowing legal professionals (to gain insight into day to day work) or marshalling a judge may be helpful. Use your networks to find contacts. Try a speculative approach with a good CV, or telephone or email.
Is postgraduate study useful?
Postgraduate study is usually necessary to enter the professions of barrister/advocate (Scotland) and solicitor. Routes differ due to the different legal systems in the UK. England and Wales have separate training requirements to Northern Ireland and Scotland.
For paralegal positions, many large commercial firms value the Legal Practice Course (LPC) or the vocational certificate (Northern Ireland). The Institute of Paralegals has introduced a new route to qualification (RTQ). The aim is to provide a structured recognised route to qualification as a paralegal benefiting employers and employees.

England and Wales
Law graduates take a Legal Practice Course (LPC), or a Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC). Non-law graduates can take a one-year (two year part-time) Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)/Common Professional Examination (CPE) and then the LPC. Some providers have recently introduced fast track courses completed in seven months. For more information see the Law Central Admissions Board (LCAB).
For details of training for legal executives and paralegals in England and Wales, see The Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX) and the National Association of Licensed Paralegals.

Scotland
From September 2011 the current LLB will be replaced with a foundation programme which will involve changes to the programme structure and professional subjects. The Diploma in Legal Practice will become professional education and training stage 1 and the traineeship will form stage 2. Details are available from the Law Society of Scotland.
For details of training for paralegals in Scotland, see the Scottish Paralegal Association.

Northern Ireland
Law graduates wishing to practise in Northern Ireland should apply for the one-year vocational certificate course at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies. Trainee barristers study the Certificate in Professional Legal Studies.
Non-law graduates study for the two-year law degree at Queen's University Belfast School of Law and then follow the routes above.

How can my career develop?

Solicitors
- Over time, you take on increasing responsibilities, becoming a senior solicitor and then associate.
- Attaining partnership in large firms is becoming more difficult as they seek to preserve their profits. The smaller the firm, the fewer steps to partnership there may be.
• The Law Society of England and Wales regulations require solicitors to maintain their continuing professional development (CPD). Training is provided either in-house or via external courses.

• Solicitors may qualify as solicitor-advocates by taking additional qualifications to appear in the higher courts (see the Society of Solicitor Advocates).

• Career development for in-house and local and central government solicitors generally is structured to lead to a management position. Many Scottish solicitors move to in-house work.

• The Legal Services Act may enable other routes of progression in the future if solicitors practice within an alternative business structure.

Barristers
• Career progression as a barrister/advocate is constrained by finance, time and self management. With time, you will take on more complex cases.

• For some, the aim is to 'take silk' and become a Queen's Counsel (QC) and then a judge.

• Barristers practising at the employed bar usually work for a company or public sector organisation as part of a legal team. Career progression may involve heading such a team or moving into the higher levels of general management.

Legal executive
Recent legislation has allowed legal executives to progress to partners within law firms and can become advocates appearing in county and magistrates courts.

Paralegals
• The role of paralegal is becoming increasingly recognised as a professional fee earner within a law firm. Formal paralegal qualifications are now required through the RTQ. |See Institute of Paralegals for more information.

Typical employers

Big players

Private practice: corporate and commercial firms
The private sector is made up of the magic circle firms, national and international firms, city firms and regional firms.
The five magic circle law firms are:

- Allen & Overy LLP - recruits 105 trainees;
- Clifford Chance - recruits 100 trainees;
- Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP - recruits 90 trainees;
- Linklaters LLP - recruits 110 trainees;
- Slaughter and May - recruits 95 trainees.

The magic circle, as well as Herbert Smith LLP (recruits 85 trainees), make up the top six UK law firms. The average starting salaries at these firms is £38,000. Other large commercial firms include DLA (85 trainee places), Pinsent Mason (60 trainee places), Eversheds, Addleshaw Goddard (40-45 trainee places). The average starting salary at these firms is £36,000.

**Public sector**

- The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) offers both training contracts and pupillages, the number of which depends on business needs. Total staff is approximately 8,800.
- The Government Legal Service (GLS) typically recruits 20-30 trainees and pupil barristers annually. Retention rates are 95% on completion of traineeship or pupillage.
- Government Legal Service for Scotland (GLSS), the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and the Scottish Government provide over half of all vacancies for trainee solicitors in Scotland.
- The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPSNI) currently employs around 300 staff including approximately 100 lawyers.
- Local government employs around 4,000 solicitors across 400 local authorities. There are 1,500 training contracts available some offering part-time options.

**In- house legal departments**

Training contracts and other legal service opportunities are available within in-house legal departments. This is a different role in that you will be advising your employer on relevant legal issues faced by them and your employer will be your sole client.

**Chambers**

London and regional bar circuits made up of individual sets of chambers recruit general and specialist pupils depending on their area of practice. Most only recruit a pupil if it is likely to lead to tenancy. 460 pupillages were registered between 2009 - 2010 (The BSB Pilot Statistical Report, March 2011). There are 15,500 practising barristers and 80% of the bar is self-employed.
Professional bodies

- The Solicitors Regulatory Authority (SRA)
- Bar Standards Board (BSB)
- Law Society of Scotland
- Law Society of Northern Ireland - recruit graduates occasionally in administrative and/or compliance roles
- Institute of Legal Executives
- Institute of Paralegals

Small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

SMEs are organisations with less than 250 employees and an annual turnover of not more than £26 million. Working for a smaller company can be rewarding because you are more likely to forge a path for yourself within the company, although opportunities to try other departments may be limited.

SMEs are unlikely to use the testing and assessment techniques of larger companies, or follow lengthy recruitment procedures. SMEs are more likely to advertise their vacancies through the local press, university careers service bulletins, local graduate vacancy listings, jobcentres, and word of mouth, rather than rely on their reputation and a presence at graduate recruitment fairs. Careers services should have listings of jobs with small firms. See also the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

Self-employment

Most barristers and advocates (Scotland) are self-employed. Solicitors can be promoted to self-employed, profit-sharing partner within a firm. Solicitors can set up as a sole practitioner after being in practice for a number of years.

Opportunities abroad

What are my chances of getting a job overseas?

Despite differences between the legal systems of different countries, legal personnel are surprisingly mobile. See the Chambers Student Guide to the Legal Profession, the UK Legal 500, Hieros Gamos Worldwide Law Firms Directory and Waterlow Legal to find out about European and global opportunities.

Where are the opportunities?
The Court of Justice of the European Communities employs a number of experienced ‘lawyer linguists’, responsible for translating court documents between EU languages.

The European Commission employs lawyers at its offices in Brussels in all of the Commission’s directorates, ranging from agriculture to home affairs.

Large international and European law firms and companies may offer opportunities to serve periods of time in their international and European branches, some offering a placement abroad during traineeship.

The United Nations (UN) offers opportunities for experienced lawyers. Internships are offered at its headquarters in New York to students studying at Masters or PhD level, with recruitment taking place by competitive examination.

The International Court of Justice operates in a similar way to the Court of Justice of the European Communities and offers internships for those interested in international law.

The Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) can facilitate internships in the USA.

‘Stages’ are periods of training for new graduates within one of the EU institutions. Lasting up to six months, they provide a starting point for graduates considering a career in European law. For further details, see The European Commission (Representation in the UK) and EuroBrussels.

Courses leading to the New York Bar examinations are taught in the UK. Students sit the final examinations in New York. However, completing this qualification is no guarantee of obtaining employment. Further information on qualifying in the USA can be found at the Fulbright Commission.

There are many internships available to students in non-governmental organisations as well as political and campaigning organisations. Idealist also places students in internships.

The Army also employs lawyers, with the chance of international postings.

If you are seeking employment in other jurisdictions, contact the relevant bar association or law society for details of additional qualifications and employment opportunities.

Will my qualifications be recognised?
- Recognition of qualifications will depend on the country and/or state you are seeking to work in.
- European directives make it possible for individuals to qualify in one member state and practise in another. This should enable lawyers to advise on the law of their home state,
European and international law, and the law of their host state. EU states may involve taking additional aptitude tests or serving a period of probation in the new state. For further information, contact the relevant bar association or law society. The Council of Bar and Law Societies of Europe gives details of all relevant law societies and professional bodies for each member state.

For Further Information:
International Bar Association

Future trends
Legislation
The Legal Services Act 2007 is a major piece of legislation affecting the traditional set up of the legal industry. The act enables the setting up of alternative business structures (ABSs) from October 2011 and allows non-legal enterprises to offer legal services to businesses and individual clients. By opening up the industry, law firms can seek external funding through floatation on the stock exchange and can merge with other professional service organisations.

With the introduction of ABSs, high street companies, like the Co-operative, are able to offer legal advice, undercutting the traditional legal firm’s fees and providing a more cost effective service.

Developments in the legal profession
- Legal Practice Course (LPC) providers can offer more tailored LPC programmes, fast track options and programmes designed in partnership with employers such as commercial and high street focussed LPCs. It is divided into two stages, compulsory and elective, and you can study with different providers at each stage. For the second stage, it is possible to study each of the three electives at different institutions.

- The Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) replaced the Bar Vocational Course (BVC) in September 2010. The Bar Standards Board (BSB) introduced measures to make the application process and study of the BPTC more rigorous. This included a voluntary aptitude test and increased pass mark. From 2012, the BSB will set three examinations as part of the qualification in civil litigation, criminal litigation and ethics.
- The **Institute of Paralegals** introduced a new structured and recognised route to qualification (RTQ) from 1 October 2009. On completion, a paralegal will hold the title of qualified paralegal. There are four stages: affiliate, associate, certified and qualified.

**Technology**

Firms need to improve electronic communication, as clients value ease of contact, reduced costs and speed of response over face-to-face contact and local offices. Increasingly, services such as legal advice in personal injury cases and conveyancing are being delivered electronically.

**Market developments**

- The Law Society Management Section Annual survey shows legal practices recovering from the global financial downturn with a slight increase (0.2%) in practice fee income in 2010 compared with a 6.5% reduction in 2009. Law firms are starting to recruit again based on the 200 firms involved in the survey.

- Many in-house legal teams in non-contentious areas of law, especially in construction, banking, and the financial and insurance industries, are planning to expand in the near future. This could lead to a reduction in outsourcing to external firms.

- Law firm investment in China is likely to increase as economic growth there generates work. Many international law firms have already opened offices in China. For example, Eversheds, Ashursts, SJ Berwin and US firm Goodwin Procter.

- Firms are hoping for the liberalisation of the legal services market in India and South Korea, which would allow for expansion into the market in those countries. In the shorter term, Vietnam with its underdeveloped legal market, may be a potential prospect.

- The public bar is being encouraged to move into more general advisory work as legal aid cuts are indicating less work for barristers in these areas. The bar has created new business units to enable barristers to provide direct advice and for chambers to employ Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) graduates without pupillage to undertake basic legal tasks within chambers.

- There has been an increase in the number of paralegal roles filled by LPC/BPTC graduates without training contracts. This could result in certain practice areas operating more call centre type operations with more less qualified legal advisers and fewer qualified specialists.

**For Further Information:**

[The Lawyer](#)

[LegalWeek](#)
**Jargon buster**

- **BPTC** - Bar Professional Training Course, which replaced the Bar Vocational Course (BVC) in September 2010.
- **BSB** - Bar Standards Board – the regulatory professional body of the bar.
- **Call to the bar** - formal ceremony following successful completion of the BPTC during which title of barrister is given.
- **Certificate in Professional Legal Studies** - professional training course followed by intending barristers and solicitors in Northern Ireland after completion of a qualifying degree.
- **CPE/GDL** - Common Professional Examination/Graduate Diploma in Law. One-year conversion course in England and Wales, covering core law subjects for non-law graduates.
- **Devilling** - period spent as a trainee advocate in Scotland.
- **Diploma in Legal Practice** - professional training course followed by both intending advocates and intending solicitors in Scotland after completion of an LLB.
- **Inns of Court** - the four recognised legal societies for the bar. Students must become a member of an Inn before commencing their postgraduate legal studies.
- **JLD** – Junior Lawyers Division. Law Society Group for trainee solicitors, young lawyers and legal students.
- **LPC** - Legal Practice Course. Vocational course for intending solicitors in England and Wales.
- **LPQ** – Legal Professional Qualification. Foundation certificate in paralegal practice to teach law graduates practical skills to become paralegals.
- **Mini-pupillage** - short period spent observing a barrister’s chambers at work prior to completing your degree (often assessed).
- **Pupillage** - one year of supervised work undertaken by trainee barristers in England and Wales.
- **Pupillage Portal** - the bar's online pupillage application system. Allows you to apply to up to 12 Pupillage Portal online system chambers as well as make one ‘clearing’ application. You can personalise your application to each of your target pupillage providers.
- **RTQ** - the route to qualification introduced by the Institute of Paralegals to become a qualified paralegal. The four stages include affiliate, associate, certified and qualified.
- **PSC** – Professional Skills Course, completed by trainee solicitors during their training contract.
- **Seats** - three to four-month periods spent as part of the training contract in different areas of legal practice.
- **Set of chambers** - where self employed barristers work.
- **Silk** - a senior barrister who has attained the rank of Queen's Counsel.
- **Sixes** - the term used for the two periods of six months spent as a pupil barrister. During the first six, a pupil cannot earn fees. During the second six, a pupil can start to earn fees and appear on behalf of clients.
- **Solicitor advocate** - a qualified solicitor who has gained further accreditation to represent clients as an advocate in the higher courts of England, Wales or Scotland.
• **SRA** - the Solicitors Regulatory Authority of England and Wales.
• **Stable** - administrative grouping of advocates in Scotland.
• **Tenant** – Acceptance into chambers following pupillage.
• **Training contract/traineeship** - two-year period of supervised work with a firm of solicitors or other authorised organisation, which is required for qualification as a solicitor.
• **WBL** – Work Based Learning programme. A two year pilot scheme introduced by the SRA as an alternative assessment based programme to the vocational training contract.

**Case Studies**

**Barrister: Clare Benson**

Clare is a tenant and practicing barrister at the criminal bar at Broadway House Chambers. She studied the graduate diploma in law (GDL) and the bar vocational course (BVC) at BPP Law School in Leeds from 2007 - 2009.

After studying classics at university I decided I wanted to join a ‘profession’ and looked into both law and teaching. Due to my background in public speaking and debating I was drawn towards the law. I went to several careers events and quickly became aware that I had no interest in commercial law but I knew I wanted a job that involved plenty of time in court. I did a couple of mini-pupillages while still at university and continued with these while studying for the GDL. I also spent some time observing at magistrates’ courts and shadowing a number of barristers who worked in various fields.

I applied for pupillages while still on the GDL in the hope that I could obtain a pupillage which would start as soon as I’d finished the BVC. I applied through the online pupillage system to 12 different sets. I knew I wanted to do criminal law so I applied to every criminal set in West Yorkshire and then filled up my application form with medium-sized criminal sets in London.

I was asked to interview at five sets (four in West Yorkshire and one in London) and eventually was offered a pupillage by Broadway House in Bradford. The fact that my first degree was in classics rather than law didn’t seem to make any difference to the sets who interviewed me - if anything it helped as it was a talking point at interview. I’m sure that the fact I had a 2.1 from a good university did open the door for me in terms of getting an interview at most chambers. The West Yorkshire sets also favoured me because I had moved to Leeds for the GDL and had already committed to the BVC there too so I had some connection to the area.

After a year’s pupillage at Broadway House they offered me a tenancy and I have now been a tenant there for almost a year. Being offered tenancy after pupillage is really just a formality in most sets on the northeastern circuit but it is still a relief to get it! I practice exclusively in criminal
law and hope to continue in this way. As time goes by you get increasingly complex and more serious cases to deal with so there’s always something new to learn.

As a barrister, I am self-employed. Unfortunately that means that your income can be very irregular (so if you don’t have a case in court on any given day then you’ve not earned any money that day) and you have to remember to set aside half of all the money you earn for tax and chambers rent rather than just spending it all. However, it also means that once you have finished in court there is no obligation to stay in court or at chambers, so if you’ve got something else you want to do – whether it’s going shopping or cleaning your house – you can do it then so long as the work gets done at some point.

Trainee solicitor: Claire Hill

Claire is a trainee solicitor at Beachcroft LLP. She studied English at undergraduate level and then studied for the graduate diploma in law (GDL), the LLB top-up and legal practice course (LPC) at BPP Law School, Leeds.

I studied English at university and obtained an LLB by ‘topping-up’ my GDL course. I am currently a trainee solicitor at Beachcroft. I attended BPP Law School to complete a conversion course and used the careers service there to ensure I targeted the correct firms. I really targeted my applications to specific firms that would recruit me taking into account my working experience and academic results.

I don’t feel that my original degree was relevant to my chosen career but I do believe it gave me a thorough grounding in grammar and legal writing.

In my typical working day I begin work at around 8am and immediately in the morning I write a task list for the day and ensure I prioritise all urgent tasks. My job role as a trainee is to work for the team in general if urgent work arrives at my desk that I can still ensure that the other work is prioritised. I often have to work under pressure and to complete tasks for strict deadlines while still ensuring that I remain calm.

I hope to continue to learn and develop in my role as a trainee. I will be qualifying next September and my current ambition is to become a competent solicitor within my department; someone who can really assist the team. I also hope that eventually I will develop enough skills and experience within my legal area so I can assist others and take on a management position.

The most rewarding aspect to being a trainee is receiving praise from clients and the partners that you have completed tasks for. There are still times where I see how my research or work has contributed to a matter and I feel really proud.
The most challenging aspect to my job is managing my time efficiently. I have found it is very important to communicate with all the team members so they are aware of my workload and the time I have available.

While the job can be stressful there is a real opportunity to work directly with clients which to me is a huge attraction. There is also great opportunity for young ambitious people to progress quickly.

I would advise other people that are aiming to enter the legal profession that this will be one of the most challenging careers you could pursue. Gaining a training contract is extremely tough but once you are working you realise that every aspect of your career as a lawyer involves competition. You will need a ‘thick skin’, the ability to take rejection and be extremely determined.

**E-business consultant: Peter Mills**

Peter became a consultant with the e-business team at Eversheds solicitors when he moved from a trainee solicitor position. He has a BA in History and has studied for a graduate diploma in law (GDL) and the Legal Practice Course (LPC) as well.

I studied at the University of Leeds and gained a history degree with honours. I then completed my postgraduate studies at BPP Law School, undertaking the graduate diploma of law and the Legal Practice Course.

I started at Eversheds as a trainee solicitor and then moved into a consultancy role with the e-business team as the result of winning the firms internal innovation competition.

While studying for my GDL, I managed to secure a training contract with Eversheds. It was during this time that the firm launched an internal innovation competition and another trainee and I created a proposal on the provision of online legal services. This product was then developed (I moved roles to help deliver it) and has been put submitted for the 2011 Financial Times Innovation award.

History is a good all rounder in terms of giving you a good academic background. Furthermore, skills such as research, writing and developing complex arguments from various sources, all provide a solid foundation for a career in business or law. For example, a historian looking for an answer has to sift through sources and develop their own conclusions. That to me is the same process that any decision maker has to go through in a commercial environment.

As the role is focused on project delivery I usually find myself working to deadlines set by our lawyers, which can be quite demanding. I am often involved on teleconferences with clients (both internal and external) and my delivery team (such as the project manager, CIO, and developers). It all depends on the specific projects that I might be involved with. For the past six months my
role has been focused on Client Console, which is a platform for Eversheds new and existing online legal services such as e-learning and extranets.

I never expected I would have joined Eversheds as a trainee but then ended up going down the consultancy route. That was quite a unique change and it does not happen very often! However, this route suited my skill set and interests more and Eversheds is the type of employer that wants to get the best out of its people. Consultancy, especially in the IT and legal world is fast growing and my ambitions are to continue learning and progressing in this area.

Eversheds attracts clients that have often complex and multi-jurisdictional issues. Senior management place great emphasis on making the firm a great place to work. No one should be under any illusion that the environment cannot be very demanding and at times stressful, but I am sure that is the same situation at any other large business. I find the most challenging parts of my job managing competing deadlines.

If I were to give any advice to students I would suggest to do your homework. For me what attracted me to law in the first instance was the opportunity to have a career that was both academic and commercial. Eversheds was one of the firms I was looking at and after completing a week’s vacation scheme there, it was clear to me it was an environment that I could succeed in.