

HOT TIPS - Legal Training Contracts

A legal training contract is a period of employment-based, salaried training designed to give practical experience of law in which you will apply and develop your legal skills and knowledge.

N.B. All legal training has recently been reviewed and changes may be implemented in academic year 2008/2009. A portfolio approach to qualifying as a solicitor will be piloted from this academic year.

Many smaller firms recruit paralegals rather than trainee solicitors - this gives them a close insight into your abilities and can reduce the length of the training contract. Given the competition for training contracts (and paralegal posts), it is essential to time and target your applications appropriately.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What type of firm do I want to work for?
- What area of law interests me?
- What type of client do I want to work with?
- Am I interested in private practice or the public sector?
- What level of starting salary am I seeking?
- How do my skills, experience and academic qualifications match recruiters' expectations?

The role of the solicitor varies greatly depending on the size and type of employer. The skills mix and academic background required will differ substantially between firms. Research this effectively before putting pen to paper. Check the information sources below and speak to a Careers Adviser at a drop-in session.

Where do I find information on solicitors?

Large firms and organisations will advertise vacancies but smaller firms and companies should be contacted directly with a speculative application.

There is a wide range of sources to identify potential employers. These include:

[The Law Society's Directory of Solicitors](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law)

(<http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law>) provides information on all law firms and solicitors, based in the UK. You can search by specialisation, geographic area and firm or company name.

[The Legal Services Commission](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/) (<http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/>) provides details of Legal Aid firms and some [funding to support training](http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/public/support_training)

(http://www.legalservices.gov.uk/public/working_legal_aid.asp) Some of the vacancies are advertised on [Legal Aid Practitioners Group](http://www.lapg.co.uk/index.cfm) (<http://www.lapg.co.uk/index.cfm>)

[Chambers and Partners](http://www.chambersandpartners.com/) (<http://www.chambersandpartners.com/>) includes details of the top 1,000 law firms and Chambers in England, Wales and Scotland as well as guides to other countries.

[The Lawyer](http://www.thelawyer.com/) (<http://www.thelawyer.com/>) useful information on areas of specialisation and law firm recruitment listings.

[The Legal 500](http://www.legal500.com/index.php) (<http://www.legal500.com/index.php>) - similar information to Chambers with worldwide listings.

[LawCareers.Net](http://www.lawcareers.net/) (<http://www.lawcareers.net/>) The Training Contract & Pupillage Handbook provides an overview of specialisms, recruiter listings nationally and current vacancies. [Prospects Legal](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Law/p/ejmL)

(http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Law/p/ejmL) - information and a guide to advertised training contract vacancies on a national basis.

[Crown Prosecution Service](http://www.cps.gov.uk/about/index.html) (<http://www.cps.gov.uk/about/index.html>) CPS has recruited Legal Trainees externally, seeking applicants who can start almost immediately i.e. straight from the LPC or BVC. Graduates also join as case workers and can apply for traineeships internally making them eligible for LPC sponsorship.

Government Legal Service (<http://www.gls.gov.uk/>) The GLS provides legal services throughout government, currently recruits 2 years in advance with a July deadline.

Magistrates' Courts Service (<http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/index.htm>) HMCS administers the magistrates' courts with a central vacancy listing and a searchable database of courts and contacts for individual enquiries.

Solicitors in Local Government (<http://www.slgov.org.uk/helpandadvice.asp>) - professional association representing 4,000 solicitors and trainees in England and Wales. The site contains information on the role of solicitors in local government and links to authorities but no vacancies. Vacancies in local government can be found at www.lqjobs.com
"In-house" legal departments in commerce and industry - there are a few opportunities in this field for trainees; use the 'organisation' search tool on the Law Society **Find a Solicitor** (<http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law>) website. Speculative applications are advised.

How do I apply?

Large firms or public sector traineeships usually require completion of an application form in paper format or online. The form may be very straightforward with direct questions regarding motivation for being a solicitor and applying to this organisation. Alternatively, it may be designed along the lines of graduate training scheme forms which ask for specific examples of core skills and again probe motivation. It is essential to directly answer the questions and pay particular attention to accuracy and mode of expression.

Smaller firms usually expect a CV and covering letter. A legal CV should have your law degree/GDL as your first qualification and, you should give a breakdown of your modules and results. All descriptions of work experience and voluntary work should draw out skills and insight relevant to law. Your CV should not exceed two sides of A4.

When do I apply?

Large city/commercial firms begin to advertise in the early summer for vacancies two years in advance. Many invite applications from June onwards - most large firms have closing dates in July/August. Occasionally deadlines can be as early as the end of June. Interviews for such firms are usually held in September. Smaller firms cannot necessarily predict their recruitment needs two years in advance but it is worth contacting them at this stage in order to gauge their possible recruitment plans and anticipated recruitment timetable. Many high street firms may not recruit until you are on the LPC.

Why should my chosen firm/s select me?

Ask yourself these questions - make sure you can answer them.

- What evidence can I display of real interest in their specialist areas?
- How can I persuade them that I have an insight into the reality of the solicitor's role?
- Do I have the academic and/or skills profile they are seeking?
- Is this the type of law to which I am best suited and why?

Research is critical. It is vital that you are applying for traineeships that match what you have to offer and that you make this match explicit.

What can I expect at the interview stage?

Some firms still recruit via informal one-to-one interviews. Others may use panel interviews and/or a number of interviews. Large firms may possibly require a presentation and/or group exercises as part of the selection procedure.

All firms will expect a good understanding of their work, high levels of motivation and evidence of appropriate skills.

Is vacation work relevant?

Yes, very. Increasingly both large and small firms like to base appointment decisions on vacation work knowledge of a student. Also, vacation work demonstrates a practical knowledge of law. It can be very difficult to convince a recruiter of your commitment to be a solicitor if you have not spent any time with a law firm.

Non-law work experience is also of value in developing relevant skills and associated knowledge.