

Careers in Law



Image credit: Investors Champion

What types of jobs are there in law?

The word 'lawyer' is a handy umbrella term for anyone who practises law. Most UK lawyers choose to work as either a solicitor or as a barrister.

- **Solicitors.** Individuals or companies usually approach solicitors for legal advice in the first instance. There are over 136,000 solicitors in the UK. Most solicitors work for a law firm or partnership and, unlike other industries, not for a company. Firms, including law firms, are managed and owned by partners and senior partners; companies, on the other hand, are run by directors and owned by shareholders.
- **Barristers.** Solicitors bring in a barrister for specialist advice or representation in court if needed. Barristers need to be good at thinking on their feet and persuading a judge in court why they should decide in favour of a client. The barristers' profession is much smaller and more competitive to get into than the solicitors' profession; there are only 15,000 barristers in the UK - and most of them are self-employed.
- **In-house lawyers.** A minority of qualified solicitors and barristers choose to work for the government or as an in-house lawyer in a local authority or company's legal department. All big companies, such as Vodafone, Amazon and BT have in-house legal departments. In-house lawyers advise colleagues in their company rather than external clients off the street.
- **Paralegals.** Paralegals assist in law firms and carry out various legal tasks, from admin support to research. They are not able to give legal advice but have some interaction with clients. Law firms take on teams of paralegals to support their solicitors on big cases or deals.
- **Chartered legal executives.** Chartered legal executives are qualified lawyers, specialising in particular areas of law. The number of legal executives is growing. Many study the qualifications needed to be a chartered legal executive while working as a paralegal. Legal executives are able to give legal advice to clients.
- **Legal secretaries.** Legal secretaries provide admin support to solicitors. They help produce legal documents such as wills and contracts.
- **Judges.** Judges decide cases in a law court. In the UK, you have to practise as a solicitor or barrister for several years before becoming a judge.

Source Target Careers <https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/law/92-what-types-of-jobs-and-employers-are-there-in-law>

Why choose a career in law?

- **Diverse career opportunities.** There are a wide variety of career choices available (solicitors, barristers, paralegals, judges, consultants, academics, mediators). There are also many options open to those who choose to be a solicitor.
- **Diverse practice areas.** You can specialise in a type of law that really interests you (such as tax, crime, family, civil, IP, competition and many more).
- **Intellectual challenge.** You have to do lots of thinking! It is a very intellectually challenging job which keeps you on your toes.
- **Status.** You will be highly educated and qualified, and you will belong to an elite profession. Helping people! (Client facing). You will develop the expertise, knowledge and professional skills to help people from a variety of backgrounds. You may work with big business clients, local authorities, or those accused of criminal activity. Whoever they are, they are your client and you will help resolve their legal problems.
- **Global interaction.** Law crosses borders and is not just confined to the UK. You may, therefore, get the chance to interact with lawyers in other countries, or even work overseas.
- **Fast moving environment.** The law is always changing! This keeps things fresh and exciting.

Source: The Law Society <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/law-careers/>

The top law firms to work at:

'Magic Circle' law firms

The Magic Circle is an informal term for the five most prestigious law firms headquartered in the UK. Based in London, these firms are:

- Allen & Overy
- Clifford Chance
- Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer
- Linklaters
- Slaughter and May

Four Magic Circle firms - Clifford Chance, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Allen & Overy, and Linklaters

- fall within the ten largest law firms in the world by revenue, with Slaughter and May appearing within the top 50. Magic Circle members are extremely prestigious, and consistently rank among the highest earnings per-partner and earnings per-lawyer in the UK. What's more, such large law firms usually give their employees a narrower remit - meaning that they suit those who are certain of their preferred specialism.

However, entry into the Magic Circle is notoriously competitive. In addition, short-term promotion

prospects are fairly low, you'll work under fairly close supervision, and working hours can be extremely long.

Source: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/jobsectors/law-sector/top-uk-law-firms>

How to get into law

Once you've decided that you'd like to pursue a career in law, the next decision is whether you would like to complete a law degree or study another subject at university followed by a conversion course.

Studying for a law degree: The law degree is designed to cover the areas of law you are likely to come across as a qualified lawyer. By opting to study a law degree, you are choosing the quickest route into your career.

Studying for a non-law degree: You don't need to study a law degree at university to work as a lawyer. In fact, approximately 500/0 of lawyers did not do an undergraduate law degree. If you study a non-law degree at university (e.g. history

French or maths) you will need to complete a one-year conversion course, also known as the GDL (graduate diploma in law). This conversion course condenses the three-year law degree into one year. You are not putting yourself at a disadvantage in choosing a non-law degree!

On-the-job training to qualify as a solicitor: You can't dive straight into a job as a solicitor straight after university, even if you've studied law. Between



Image credit: Radio Times

graduating from your law degree (or GDL) and starting work at a solicitors' firm you need to complete the postgraduate course known as the legal practice course or LPC. You can then start your training contract at a law firm. During the two-year training contract, employees are known as trainee solicitors. You will be known as an associate once qualified and work towards becoming a partner, when you'll help run the firm with your fellow partners.

On-the-job training to qualify as a barrister: Aspiring barristers have to complete the Bar professional training course (or BPTC) after their degree or GDL. They then need to secure a one-year pupillage at a barristers' chambers - barristers in training are known as pupil barristers. They become tenants on qualification and, as their career progresses, aim to become a QC (Queen's Counsel). A limited number of senior barristers are made QCs each year in recognition of outstanding ability and experience. The process is also known as 'taking silk' due to the tradition of being allowed to wear a silk gown once the barrister is awarded this honour.

Source: <https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/law/202-how-do-i-get-into-law>

Careers in Government

Working for central or local government

Want to work for central government? Consider applying for the Civil Service, which does the practical and administrative work of government. The highly sought-after Civil Service Fast Stream recruits graduates to work in many different roles in a range of government departments, with specialist programmes in everything from providing the government with statistics to training to work in the Houses of Parliament. Around half of all civil servants are involved in providing services directly to the public, such as paying benefits and pensions, running employment services, staffing prisons and issuing driving licences. Other civil servants work on government policy and include analysts and project managers.

The Civil Service is politically impartial and independent of government. Professionals from a range of specialist backgrounds, such as lawyers and scientists, are recruited to work for central government. There are currently 25 recognised professions within the Civil Service, covering areas such as corporate finance, law, tax, IT, communication, internal audit, planning inspection and social research.

Alternatively, you might want to work in local government, playing a part in delivering services to people in a particular location. Local authorities employ staff in strategic roles, such as devising policy; support services, such as human resources and finance; and frontline delivery of services to the public, such as housing.

Source (<https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/public-sector-and-charity/810-what-types-of-jobs-and-employers-are-there-in-public-service>)



Photo by [Michael D Beckwith](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Why choose a career in government?

Diverse career opportunities. A wide variety of career choices across government can be pursued. The UK government consists of more than 20 ministerial departments plus a similar number of non-ministerial departments as well as more than 300 agencies and other public bodies.

Wide variety of skills are sought. Whether your strength is your language skills, numeracy and administration, or the ability to use programming skills to solve problems, there's a public service role that would be a good fit. There are also opportunities in intelligence for applicants who have a knack for building relationships with people and are curious about their beliefs. There are also vacancies suitable for graduates of all degree subjects, though some specialisms require a background in science, maths or technology.

Public Sector Ethos. Those working in the public sector, of which government is a part of, are said to have a strong 'public sector ethos'. By this, they mean that they are committed to working for the good of the public, and are united by a common sense of

purpose to do a public good.

Flexibility. Public service employers are typically committed to supporting their employees' work/life balance and willing to take a flexible approach. They may offer flexitime, part-time working and job sharing arrangements to employees, which might not be an advantage to you at the beginning of your career but could be useful in the long term. Terms and conditions (what you are paid, how much holiday you get, how much pension you earn) are generally good and pay is broadly comparable to the private sector, though if you have highly sought-after professional or technical skills you're likely to be able to earn more in the private sector.

Locations. Although many jobs working for central government are based in London, there are also plenty of opportunities elsewhere. For example, the HM Revenue & Customs tax specialist programme recruits graduates to work in cities across the UK, including Belfast, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Bristol, and Manchester.

Source: <https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/public-sector-and-charity/810-what-types-of-jobs-and-employers-are-there-in-public-service>

Working for the intelligence agencies: MI5, MI6 and GCHQ

MI5, the Security Service, protects national security, safeguards the economic well-being of the UK and supports law enforcement agencies in the prevention of serious crime. It runs graduate schemes for intelligence officers, intelligence and data analysts and for technology.

MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service, is responsible for obtaining secret information and conducting operations in support of the UK's foreign policy objectives.

How to get into government jobs

For most of these careers you do not need a specific degree. Instead you join a graduate scheme after completing university. Some will require specific subject specialisms at university, but most just require a 2.2 or 2.1 (degree grade). Examples of these schemes include:

- The NGDP. The national graduate scheme for local government, the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP), accepts applicants with a 2.2 in any degree subject.
- The Civil Service Fast Stream. This is the grad scheme for the central government civil services, and most positions are open to applicants from any degree background (there are some exceptions).
- The Defence Engineering and Science Group (DESG) graduate scheme trains recruits to work as civil servants within the Ministry of Defence to equip and support the armed forces with technology. You'll need to be on track for a 2.2 in an engineering, maths, science or technology-related degree subject.
- MI5's intelligence officer development programme recruits graduates with a 2.2 in any subject.

Source: <https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/public-sector-and-charity/810-what-types-of-jobs-and-employers-are-there-in-public-service>



Image credit: Robert Harding

It recruits both graduates and non-graduates into areas such as intelligence, business support, language specialisms and science and technology.

GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) protects the UK from online threats from criminals and terrorists. It offers roles in areas ranging from mathematics and cryptography to language analysis and project management, and runs both graduate and higher apprenticeship schemes.

Source: <https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/public-sector-and-charity/810-what-types-of-jobs-and-employers-are-there-in-public-service>

Civil Service departments, agencies on public bodies include:

- Diplomatic Service
- Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO)
- Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ)
- Government Economic Service (GES)
- Government Legal Service (GLS)
- Government Operational Research Service (GORS)
- Government Social Research (GSR)
- Government Statistical Service (GSS)
- HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)
- HM Treasury
- Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), MI6
- Security Service, MI5.

In local government, roles can be found in areas of work including:

- architecture, heritage and housing
- environmental health
- media and communications
- social services
- surveying and town planning
- Trading Standards
- youth and community work.

Other notable employers in the public services include:

- armed forces
- Bank of England
- British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
- British Museum
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)
- Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)
- National Audit Office
- National Probation Service
- NHS
- ONS.

Source: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/public-services-and-administration/overview-of-the-public-services-sector-in-the-uk>