

## YOUR FUTURE IN LAW

### Where to Look for Training Contract Vacancies

You will first have to decide which area of law you are most interested in. This will normally be a decision between working in the more commercial/corporate sector, the public sector or a high street practice. There are also niche firms offering specialist practice areas.

#### Important points

- Selecting the right firm/organisation for you is a crucial decision because the client base, work and reputation of the firm you train at will determine the experience you gain and your future marketability as a lawyer.
- You really do need to give considerable thought to the area of law you are most interested in and the type of firm/organisation you want to apply to. Thinking about this and doing your research is very time consuming so you will need to start early and set time aside to do this. It is worth drawing up a timetable and a plan of action. If you are unsure you can get advice from your tutors or the careers adviser in Futures.
- *In general* the larger firms (commercial and company) usually recruit two years in advance and the smaller high street firms as and when they need someone, which will normally be while you are on your LPC. *NB this is a general guide only and you will have to do your research well in advance to ensure you do not miss any application deadlines.*
- If you have missed any of the closing dates it is still worth contacting firms, as sometimes the people they have already offered training contracts to may not pass their LPC, or may want to take a year out to travel, or firms are expanding and decide to take on more trainees - so firms do sometimes have late vacancies.

#### WHAT TYPE OF FIRM?

Many students find it difficult to distinguish between the different types of firms and public sector organisations and without wishing to generalise too much they can be broadly categorized as follows:-

##### International Firms

Based in the city of London, these top 10 or so firms are the world's major players. They handle all aspects of company and commercial law, with all the complications involved in multi-jurisdictional business. Clients may include governments, international organisations and multinational corporations. You will need to understand the workings of the global marketplace as much as you will need to be a very able lawyer. With offices throughout the world's major financial centres, you are unlikely to spend your career exclusively in the UK with a firm like this. Top international firms include the 'magic circle' firms and also Baker & McKenzie, Lovells, Herbert Smith, Norton Rose, Denton Wilde Sapte, Ashurst Morris Crisp. **Recruit 2 yrs in advance.**

##### Magic Circle firms

The term 'magic circle' refers to the top 5 UK firms comprising Allen and Overy, Clifford Chance, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Linklaters and Slaughter and May. Based in London all these firms are very competitive to get into, requiring high academic ability and often selecting on 'A' Level points. They are seen by many as the elite and are high paying, hard working and corporate/finance orientated. They have their pick of the very brightest and best students. **Recruit 2 yrs in advance.**

### **City Firms**

The workload at a city (i.e. London) firm will be as intellectually challenging as it is with the major international players. City firms handle wide-ranging caseloads for FTSE 100+ companies and also multinational corporations. The difference between the city firms and the international firms is mostly one of size. Travel is still most likely to be on the agenda and your work will be well rewarded. All are based in London and the work is almost entirely focused around business law although a tiny number retain specialist in family law and private client work. Hours are long and money is good. Again this will need a consistently high academic record. **Recruit 2yrs in advance.**

### **U.S. Firms**

The last few years have seen an influx of U.S. firms to the city scene. They compete with the established city firms for international finance work. Lately they have been particularly strong in securitisation and restructuring. They see themselves as international firms rather than U.S. firms with a London office. They only want high fliers with excellent academic backgrounds. Firms include Cadwalader Wickersham & Taft LLP, Shearman & Sterling, White & Case. **Very competitive to get into. Recruit 2 years in advance.**

### **National firms**

These are firms with multiple UK offices, usually including a London office, handling mainly commercial work. Many are larger regional firms handling similar work to the city firms. Entry is competitive with a high starting salary. Locally the big national firms are DLA in Liverpool and Eversheds in Manchester. If applying to national firms you will need to check if you will be moved around to different offices around the country as part of your training. **Recruit 2 years in advance.**

### **Regional firms**

In each UK city a handful of firms do the majority of local commercial work and some have developed particular areas of expertise. Some firms operate throughout the country from a number of regional commercial centres i.e. they are really 'National' firms, while others have offices in just one particular region. For example, in Liverpool the largest regional firms are Hill Dickinson, Weightman Vizards and DWF and also DLA (see above). Clients are mostly UK public and private companies and local and public authorities – although many firms represent and advise international clients regarding their concerns in the particular region. National and regional firms also offer services to individuals. The smaller firms tend to concentrate on private client work. Entry is competitive.

Commitment to the local region is important as the regional firms do not want to spend a fortune training you up for you to move to the city (London). **Tend to recruit 2 years in advance but double check application deadlines.**

### **Specialist/niche firms**

These are also referred to as 'boutiques' and are generally small sized, offering high quality work in a specialised, through limited field. Although lacking in size, they have plenty of clout though their expertise in a particular area – perhaps an aspect of IT or media work, life sciences, intellectual property – and their advice will be sought from prestigious clients. Target these firms only if you are interested in their particular specialism. They are often London based and very competitive to get into. A non law degree in a relevant subject e.g. scientific or engineering is sometimes a bonus. **Recruit 2yrs in advance but double check application deadlines.**

### **High Street/legal aid firms**

High street and legal aid firms usually act for individuals and sometimes for small private companies. Hours and salaries will be lower than their equivalents in other firms, but many such lawyers claim to work in the most rewarding practice area of law. Mainly in high streets up and down the UK these firms act for legally aided clients, individuals funding themselves and local businesses. Staple work includes matrimonial, landlord and tenant, conveyancing, personal injury, employment, family, wills and probate and crime. Some firms have additional specialism in doing small scale commercial work for local businesses e.g. contracts, employment law. However there are a handful of small firms (in London) who have particularly high profile clients. In this kind of firm you will get to handle clients and real work from a very early stage. **Do not recruit two years in advance - recruiting on an ad hoc basis when they need someone.** They do not sponsor students through the LPC.

### **Government Legal Service**

About 30 positions are available within the GLS every year. The majority are in London with the occasional one in Manchester. Various government departments take on trainees every year e.g. Customs and Excise, Inland Revenue, the DTI, Dept of Work and Pensions, Dept of Health, The

Treasury Solicitors Department, Home Office, Dept for Rural Affairs, Dept for Constitutional Affairs and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Dept for Transport. Successful candidates are asked to nominate the area in which they would like to work. The work involves a variety of work concerned with both public and private work including learning about litigation, working on government contracts and giving advice to ministers or administrators. The GLS **recruits two years in advance** and does give sponsorship for the LPC. A vacation scheme offering 2/3 weeks work placements is also available. See [www.gls.gov.uk](http://www.gls.gov.uk)

### **Local Government**

There are hundreds of local authority legal departments in the UK many offering training contracts. There is no centralised list of vacancies, no single recruitment office and they recruit at different times, so you will need to check recruitment plans and closing dates by keeping in contact with each legal department separately and also by keeping an eye open for vacancy ads in the national press. The range of work offered could include property, planning and environmental law, litigation and prosecution work, consumer protection, housing, education and childcare, employment, personal injury, administrative and commercial contracts. LA trainees also have rights of audience before judges in chambers, something, for which your peers in private practice must wait until after qualification. Your client will always be local authority, although instruction will come from the different officers within the authority. The experience and the variety of work is wide and there can be a real appeal working for a public sector organisation closely involved with the local environment and community. LPC sponsorship is rare but there are opportunities for vacation work and paralegalling. For further information see [www.lgcareers.com](http://www.lgcareers.com)

### **Crown Prosecution Service**

If you have a passion for criminal law and the idea of billable hours and contract drafting leaves you cold then the CPS may appeal. CPS departments are based all over the country. Prosecutors review and prosecute criminal cases following investigation by the police and advise the police on matters of criminal evidence and law. Although they do not have the same degree of intense client contact as defence lawyers they do interact with everyone from magistrates, clerks, solicitors, probation officers, police and also with victims' support and racial equality agencies. For information on local recruitment plans contact the NW Service Centre on 0151 239 6400. Address: CPS, North West Service Centre, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor (South), Royal Liver Building, Pier Head, Liverpool, L3 1HN. The CPS also employs caseworkers, who support the work of the prosecutors. This is a very varied role. For more information see the CPS website [www.cps.gov.uk](http://www.cps.gov.uk)

### **Law Centres**

There are 54 law centres around the country, each set up as a registered charity. Advice is given to the public free of charge as funding comes from local government grants. The majority of the work is in social and welfare law. Employment, discrimination, housing, immigration and public law e.g. education and community care are all handled. The majority of law centre lawyers will have come from working in private practice although some will have qualified by working part time at a law centre and combining this with part time study. From last year the Legal Services Commission has funded some 20 or so training contracts and sponsorship for the LPC in 14 centres up and down the country and this is possibly set to continue. For more information look on the website [www.lawcentres.org.uk](http://www.lawcentres.org.uk) and check 'The Guardian' on a Wednesday.

### **In-House**

A small number of companies and banks offer training contracts. Last year the following North West companies offered training contracts: M&S financial services, MBNA (both in Chester), Merseytravel, Littlewoods (Liverpool), BNFL (Warrington).

### **Court work**

The Magistrates' Courts recruit for court clerks/legal advisers and they also recruit to trainee legal adviser positions. The legal advisers are there to advise the lay magistrates and managers of the courts. To apply for trainee posts you will need a 2.2 or above and the LPC. Last year Merseyside Magistrates Courts recruited several trainee legal advisers. For further information see [www.ccmcc.co.uk](http://www.ccmcc.co.uk) It is also possible to register your details by emailing [recruitment@ccmcc.co.uk](mailto:recruitment@ccmcc.co.uk) in order that you are notified when trainee vacancies become available.

### **MAIN SOURCES OF VACANCIES**

The majority of training contract vacancies and vacation schemes are published in the '**Training Contract Handbook**' (Trainee Solicitors Group) free copies of which are available from the Careers Service. Not all firms are in here, particularly smaller firms, so you may also have to make a speculative approach.

### Other sources of vacancies:-

- Your tutors are often notified of training contract vacancies and these are advertised on the notice boards in your department and circulated via email.
- 'Futures' also sometimes receives job vacancy information and this is usually passed on to the Law School for advertising on notice boards and circulated via email. All vacancies we receive are published on our GVP vacancy website.
- The annual Law Recruitment Fairs held in Liverpool and Manchester in October/November every year are a good way of finding out about opportunities. Many of the largest regional firms attend and a few of the London city firms are also usually present. It is a chance to find out about the sort of work and culture of different firms.
- There are several websites that publish training contract vacancies, so it may be worth bookmarking them and keep checking them regularly. *Remember that there is not one comprehensive source of all vacancies*
  - [www.lawcareers.net](http://www.lawcareers.net)
  - [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)
  - [www.doctorjob.co.uk](http://www.doctorjob.co.uk)
- You may also want to bookmark the websites of any firms that you are interested in working for and check their application timetables. For the largest firms check [www.legal500.com](http://www.legal500.com) to get websites.

### Doing a vacation placement

- Many of the larger firms offer structured vacation placements and often if you do well you may be invited back for a training contract interview.
- The same is true of doing work experience with a local firm. It means they get to know you and what you are capable of and many training contracts have been offered in this way.

### The speculative approach

- If you want to make speculative applications there are several ways of getting information on possible firms to contact. You could look at [www.solicitors-online.com](http://www.solicitors-online.com) which is a database maintained by the Law Society. It is mainly for the public to find a specialist in a particular area, but you can use it to identify firms to approach. You can search for firms in a particular place e.g. Manchester and using the drop down menu you can click on your areas of legal interest. Remember also to tick the box which says training contracts. *NB This does not mean that these firms have vacancies, just that they are accredited by the law society to offer training contracts and will have done so before.*
- For speculative applications you will have to send a CV and a covering letter. You could also close your letter by writing something like 'I will telephone you in two week's time to discuss any possible openings you may have. I would also welcome any advice and information you could give me on getting a training contract in this area of law' or words to that effect.

### The paralegal options

- If you are having trouble getting a training contract you may want to try finding work as a paralegal. This has several advantages as some firms promote their paralegals to trainee solicitors. Please note that this is not always the case as there are some firms who have a policy of not doing this and will closely question your motivations to work as a paralegal. Don't forget that the GLS, Local Authority legal departments and in-house legal departments will also employ paralegals and the CPS employs caseworkers.
- There are some firms, mainly the smaller firms, who will offer you work as a paralegal first as a work trial and if they are happy with your work then you will be offered a training contract at a later stage. This means that they do not have to pay you the law society minimum wage.
- Whatever happens you will doubtless gain some useful experience and it is possible to gain credit for paralegal work by getting time off your training contract. You will probably have to keep some evidence of your work and the most you can claim is 6 months off your training contract and for this you would have to work in the role for a year. It also depends on the discretion of your training manager who supervises you while you do your training contract.

Getting a training contract can be a long and frustrating process. You will doubtless receive rejection letters, or worse still hear nothing at all, from lots of applications and will have to have your nerves tested to the limits with interviews and assessments. You do not have to do all this on your own. Remember futures in the Library Building can help you at every stage of the process.

Contact **futures** for advice and guidance on 01772 8925858 or [Futures@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:Futures@uclan.ac.uk)

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