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# Law school

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## The Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE)

From 2021 there's going to be an entirely new way of qualifying as a solicitor replacing the GDL, LPC and training contract. If you're thinking 'SQE OMG!' –don't fear: here's a quick guide.

### What's going on?

In winter 2016/17 the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) dropped a bombshell on the legal profession: it was going ahead with its plan for the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). Over the next decade the entire process by which you qualify as a solicitor will change. The GDL and LPC will disappear and – for some – so will the training contract as we know it. The new system is coming into force soon: the SQE will start from 2021. Originally the super-exam was slated to start in 2020, but in response to feedback from law schools and firms this was pushed back to 2021 by the SRA in November 2018. The SQE has also confirmed that the coronavirus outbreak will not affect the rollout of the new training regime.

We've spoken to law schools and law firms to get their take on the changes and see how they are responding. The details on this page are being updated as more info is released by the SRA.

### How will the SQE work?

Under the new system you'll need to do just four things to qualify:

- Hold a degree (in any subject) or equivalent qualification.
- Pass stages 1 and 2 of the SQE: the first focuses on legal knowledge and the second on practical legal skills.
- Complete 24 months of legal work experience (not necessarily with a single employer).
- Meet the SRA's character and suitability requirements.

That's it – no law degree, no GDL, no LPC, and no training contract! In August 2018 the SRA appointed Kaplan Law school as assessor and adjudicator for the SQE. (Kaplan previously offered the BPTC, LPC and GDL but ditched them in 2014 and 2015 as unprofitable. Kaplan is the provider of the Qualified Lawyer Transfer Scheme for overseas qualified lawyers seeking to cross-qualify in the UK. The SQE will replace the QLTS as the route to qualification for foreign lawyers when it's introduced.)

The SRA has been working with Kaplan to finalise the content, structure and timing of the SQE, which will in-

volve a practical testing 'pilot' with students. The regulator has stated that it expects various *other* providers (i.e. probably law schools and the current GDL/LPC providers) to offer preparatory courses for both stages of the SQE.

The SRA has provided a rough outline of the order in which it expects you to complete the requirements above: most individuals will take SQE1 after completing a degree and before the start of the work experience period and SQE2 at the end of it.

To sit SQE1 you will need to have completed a degree (in any subject). There's more on what the actual exam will involve below, but the SRA points out that it will cover roughly the content of the current GDL or an undergraduate law degree, *plus* the more practical elements of the LPC. The SRA expects that aspiring lawyers will complete a preparatory course for SQE1, and that this could be a 'Level 7' Master's degree course assessed *separately* from the SQE. We also heard that some universities may offer that SQE1 prep as part of their undergraduate LLBs.

The SQE1 preparatory course will be longer for non-law students than for law students, as it will need to cover much of the content of what is now the GDL. Beyond this relative difference nobody – not the SRA, law schools or firms – could tell us exactly how long the SQE1 preparatory courses will last. At the moment the GDL and LPC both last a year (more or less), linking up nicely with many law firms' habit of recruiting two years in advance. One thing we did hear from firms we spoke to is that they still intend to recruit trainees two years in advance, leaving a two-year window for SQE1 prep to be completed.

*The large law firms we spoke to said they had no plans to get rid of or alter their formal traineeship.*

As well as abolishing the GDL and LPC, the SQE is taking the radical step of abolishing the requirement to do a formal training contract. However, a traineeship is still one way of getting the required work experience you'll need, and the large law firms we spoke to said they had no plans to get rid of or alter their formal traineeship. There are other ways you can gain the requisite 24 months' work experience though. Here are the four ways:

- a training contract
- as an apprentice or paralegal
- at a student law clinic
- through a sandwich placement

The requisite work experience can be completed with up to four different employers (as long as you spend at least six months with each). Some of this work experience can even be acquired before you sit SQE1. So one big thing to be aware of if you're going down the new route is that legal work experience you gain casually – as a paralegal or in your student law clinic – may count towards the work experience you need to do to qualify as a lawyer.

We say *may*, as firms with established training contracts may not want to shorten your traineeship with them just because you've already done a year's work experience. But for those seeking to work in high-street, small or general-practice firms, the option of qualifying as a solicitor after doing legal work experience with different employers could become very real.

The system of firms being recognised as training providers by the SRA will disappear. Instead, any qualified solicitor or a firm's compliance officer (who deals with overall regulation by the SRA) can sign off on a trainee's period of work experience.

### When are these changes happening?

The SQE was originally set to be introduced for all aspiring solicitors by summer 2020. But in November 2018 the SRA announced the start date of the super-exam would be pushed back to autumn 2021 in response to feedback from law firms and law schools that they needed more time to prepare – the regulator had warned from the outset that a delay was likely.

Anyone who starts (or has started) the GDL, LPC or a law degree before autumn 2021 can still follow the old route to qualification. Take note: this means that if you started a *non-law* degree in 2018, 2019 or later you will have to follow the new route to qualification (as you won't be able to start your law studies till autumn 2021 at the earliest). This is also true if you started a four-year non-law degree in 2017. However, if you are already doing (or have done) a qualifying law degree, the GDL or the LPC or are due to start any of those courses in 2019 or 2020 you can still follow the old route to qualification. The SRA expects this old route to be fully phased out by 2032.

***In the future there will no longer be a single route into the profession. There will be routes.***

This is a lot to take on board, so we advise keeping a close eye out for further information about the new system from the SRA, law schools and firms during 2020 and 2021. Law schools and firms are working frantically to try to understand what all the changes mean and how the transition will work.

One thing the SQE means is that in the future there will no longer be a single *route* into the profession. There will be *routes*. It remains true that both law and non-law students can enter the profession on equal standing, but the route you follow to qualification might be very different depending on whether you're aiming for a big City or national player, a regional outfit or a high-street firm. The SRA anticipates that the route into the profession for those joining larger commercial firms may not change very much. But the option of gaining work experience at different times from different employers and sitting exams with whatever prep you deem necessary could open up new routes to qualifications for those aiming to work as solicitors at high-street firms or with other employers, especially ones which have not traditionally recruited trainees.

### What's on the exam?

Despite its name, SQE is not actually a single exam but a series of exams taken in two stages, SQE1 and SQE2, totalling 35 hours of assessment (that's a lot!). The SRA has said there's some flexibility on when you can take each stage but essentially you'll do SQE1 before you start your two-year period of work experience and SQE2 at or towards the end of that period. Passing SQE2 will mark the point at which you qualify as a solicitor.

Look familiar? This list covers all seven foundational areas of the GDL or a qualifying law degree, except EU law. The SRA could not confirm to us whether EU law would be on the syllabus for SQE1, though press reports suggest it will be. The more noticeable thing is that SQE1 contains content currently covered in Stage 1 of the LPC (litigation, commercial law, interviewing and research), making the title 'super-exam' appropriate.

The SRA says SQE1 will utilise 'computer-based testing' including single best answer questions, extended matching questions and multiple choice questions, with ethical questions sprinkled throughout to catch you out. SQE1 will include 360 (!) multiple choice questions split over two exam papers of 180 questions each.

Once you've passed SQE1 the clock starts ticking and you have six years to gain the necessary two years' work experience and pass SQE2 before the exam loses its validity.

Each of these assessments, says the SRA, must be passed in two practice contexts picked by the candidates from this list: crime; dispute resolution; property; wills, trusts and estates; and corporate/commercial. SQE2 will involve 15–18 tasks or ‘stations’, and will be more extensive (and more expensive) than SQE1 as it will involve some practical role-playing exercises with actors.

Sources told us that, rather oddly, their understanding is that the SRA intends SQE2 to be suitable for “*anyone to walk into regardless of practice experience*” – in other words, that no preparation would be required. After speaking to students who’d participated in the pilot, the Junior Lawyers Division voiced fears “*that the multiple choice questions are not overly difficult, confirming the current concerns of the profession, and that the SRA is potentially setting the level of legal knowledge and/or question standard too low.*” That said, you’d be pretty stupid to “*go into a high-stakes assessment – especially an oral assessment – without training and probably mock exams too,*” as one firm put it.

In 2020, the SRA announced it was consulting on exemptions for qualified lawyers to elements of SQE2. This means lawyers with qualifications in other jurisdictions, or other legal qualifications in the UK (barristers, for example) will not need to complete SQE2 provided they can prove proficiency in the English or Welsh language.

As SQE2 will be taken at the end of your period of work experience – i.e. at the end of the training contract – firms will need to release their trainees for a period to cram and sit the exam. This is similar to the path trainee accountants and doctors follow to qualification. However, one graduate recruiter at a City firm was concerned about this system: “*It will be tricky to give trainees enough time for study leave, as the exam preparation is likely to be pretty intensive.*”

The SRA previously said it expected SQE1 to involve 17.5 hours of exams – that’s about a month of intensive examination. It has since quietly dropped this exact figure as exam content is finalised with Kaplan, but it gives you some idea of how chunky SQE1 will be. So don’t expect to be able to pass it with a week of cramming the way Frank Abagnale passed the Louisiana Bar exam in *Catch Me If You Can*.

## Preparatory training

The SRA said in its consultation on the SQE that it “*do[es] not propose to specify how candidates prepare for the SQE,*” but all the law schools we spoke to said they were looking into how to offer prep courses for both SQE1 and SQE2. The SRA did say in its consultation that ‘extended prep’ for SQE1 will be needed for non-law students – law and non-law grads are likely to find themselves on dif-

ferent ‘SQE1 prep’ courses rather than taking the LPC together as they do now. In December 2019 a group of six firms – Freshfields, Herbert Smith Freehills, Hogan Lovells, Linklaters, Norton Rose Fulbright and Slaughter and May – called on current legal education provider BPP to run a prep course for future trainees due to sit the SQE.

*“Under the new system you could theoretically go straight from, say, a geography degree onto a training contract.”*

Each module will be scored but the SQE as a whole will only be marked pass or fail. For both SQE1 and SQE2 there will be at least two assessment moments throughout the year – the SRA has hinted it’s likely to be more.

One thing you’ll notice is that SQE1 does not contain any electives, unlike the GDL and LPC. But, as is presently the case, you can be sure that some firms will want their future trainees to have specialist legal knowledge of certain areas relevant to them, like immigration, finance, M&A or intellectual property. One law school source speculated that firms may want to provide this training in house, but extra training on areas outside SQE1 is likely to be available from law schools for those wanting it off their own bat. A City law firm told us in stark terms that they’d certainly want incoming trainees to have studied extra electives relevant to them: “*Under the new system you could theoretically go straight from, say, a geography degree onto a training contract, but if someone did that they’d be of no value to a firm whatsoever!*”

## Why are these changes being introduced?

The SRA’s consultation outlined three reasons for introducing the new qualification model:

- To provide ‘a more reliable and rigorous test of competence than is possible at present.’
- To ‘introduce transparency and competitive pressures to drive up standards and reduce cost.’
- To ‘remove the LPC gamble in which some students pay up to £15,000 for an LPC in the hope of securing a training contract.’

The SRA also said it found the old system ‘difficult’ to administer: dealing with all the universities offering qualifying law degrees, GDL and LPC providers, and firms offering training contracts was a bit of a mess, the SRA felt. In the spirit of deregulation, a single universal exam seemed to the SRA the most straightforward solution.

Almost all the graduate recruitment and law school sources we spoke to were sceptical as to whether the SQE

would improve standards and access to the profession, as the SRA suggests it will. One source said they were concerned the SQE could in fact compromise standards, by allowing individuals to call themselves qualified solicitors without having been through a formal training contract with a firm or undertaken a vocational training course. The same source also expressed their concern that some may fund their own prep for the SQE, pass SQE1 and SQE2, “scramble around for work experience,” and then qualify without an NQ job or the skills required to get one. “The training contract bottleneck may just be replaced by one at qualification level,” they said.

This same source, and others, were also concerned about the SQE providing “more opportunity for unscrupulous course providers” as the SRA does not propose to police or mandate the content of SQE prep courses. The rigour of the SQE is also a concern. “SQE1 doesn’t mirror practice,” one law school source told us. “The LPC has been built up over the past ten to 15 years to mirror what trainees do in practice. The SQE will be a regulatory requirement, but that will not be enough for most big law firms.” A graduate recruitment contact in the City put it more bluntly: “SQE1 is of no use to us.”

### What will it cost?

A key reason the SRA gave in 2017 for changing the system of qualification is to make the route into the profession cheaper. In summer 2020 the regulator finally confirmed the costs for the super-exam: both stages of the SQE will cost a total of £3,980. Provisional estimates had put the cost between £3,000 and £4,500.

That breaks down to £1,558 for SQE1 and £2,422 for SQE2. One thing to remember is that you don’t need to sit SQE2 until the end of your work experience/training period. One law school source points out that this means that “if you don’t get through the cheaper SQE1 you can give up and not incur the cost of SQE2.” That should help prevent no-hopers wasting their money.

***“If you don’t get through the cheaper SQE1 you can give up and not incur the cost of SQE2.”***

If you know anything about the GDL and LPC, you’ll immediately notice that these stated costs are significantly lower than those of the GDL and LPC. *But*—and this a big but—you need to bear in mind that there will be an extra cost for the preparatory courses for both SQE1 and SQE2 which will be provided by law schools other than Kaplan. When we last asked these law schools what they might charge for their SQE prep courses they were tight-lipped, but we think they are likely to charge as much for a GDL or LPC-like course as they do currently for the GDL or LPC. We could be wrong: the SRA claims to have ‘modelled costs’ and concluded the SQE would be cheaper than the GDL/LPC, though one law school source was surprised to hear this since they had not been asked how much their law school intended to charge for SQE prep courses.

Another point to note is that law firms that currently offer sponsorship of the GDL and LPC are likely to continue to pay for future trainees to sit SQE1 and SQE2 and do the necessary prep.

**We recommend you pay close attention to further reports on how the SQE will work in 2020 and 2021, as well as speaking to firms you are interested in about what approach they will be taking to training in the future.**

## An introduction to the SQE with ULaw

An introduction to the SQE with Peter Crisp, Pro Vice Chancellor at The University of Law

### The winds of change

Autumn 2021 will see the dawn of a new era in the legal profession. The tried and tested route to becoming a solicitor in England and Wales will be replaced by a new system known as the Solicitors Qualifying Exam – or more snappily, the SQE. A lot is set to change and nitty-gritty details on this ‘super-exam’ have been hard to come by, but the Solicitors Regulation Authority (aka the SRA) hopes to make the legal profession more accessible and make things easier for students who want to become solicitors.

The SQE will be assessed by Kaplan, the current administrator of the QLTS (which allows lawyers from overseas to qualify in the UK and will also be replaced by the new super-exam). Current providers of the LPC and GDL will be running preparatory courses for the SQE – The University of Law (ULaw) will be one of the most popular options for students. We spoke to ULaw Pro Vice Chancellor Peter Crisp to get more detail on what the SQE will involve, and how students can prepare for the new regime.

*“...the foundations of legal knowledge tested by multiple choice questions.”*

You may well know the current route to qualifying as a solicitor like the back of your hand, but if not, we can bring you up to speed – you must complete a qualifying law degree or the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) conversion course, then the Legal Practice Course (LPC). Upon successful completion of the LPC, you would spend two years in a law firm as a trainee prior to being admitted as a solicitor. Crisp explains how things will change: *“Under the new system you must be a graduate in any discipline, and successfully pass two central assessments set by the SRA.”* SQE 1 includes *“the foundations of legal knowledge tested by multiple choice questions,”* and SQE 2 is the *“skills”* portion. *“You must also undertake two years’ qualifying work experience prior to admission.”*

Crisp notes that *“according to the SRA, the SQE will mean everyone meets the same consistent standards at the point they become a solicitor.”* In the system as it stands today, many different providers have their own courses through which students can get the neces-

sary qualifications to begin a training contract. Once the SQE is in place, everyone will have to sit the same exams before (and after) completing their on-the-job training, theoretically ensuring they’ll all have the same skills. The regulator also hopes to bring more diversity to the legal profession, by offering more different ways of becoming a solicitor and encouraging applicants from non-traditional backgrounds.

### SQEasy does it

*“The SRA’s Statement of Solicitor Competence sets out what solicitors need to be able to do to perform their role effectively,”* Crisp says. *“This statement of competence is supported by a Statement of Legal Knowledge and a Threshold Standard, both of which shows the standards for practising and using the title of solicitor. Combined, these documents provide everyone with a clear indication of what they can expect from their solicitor.”* The good news for lawyers and clients alike is that these exact standards are *“what the SQE assessments will be testing and successful candidates will be demonstrating.”*

It’s important to point out that passing the SQE won’t be enough in itself to get you the perfect legal job you desire. *“The SQE covers the basic foundations of legal knowledge,”* according to Crisp. *“Passing SQE 1 and 2 alone will not be enough for many firms who will expect students to have also studied additional content – such as is in current LPC electives – which is relevant to their practice areas.”* These could include *“corporate finance, mergers and acquisitions, employment law and intellectual property.”* Different firms will have different bespoke requirements for their trainees, so keep in mind what your dream firm might require when you’re gearing up for the SQE.

*“This could reduce the risk of talented people getting stuck in the qualification process.”*

The jury’s out on whether or not the new super-exam will in fact make becoming a solicitor easier and more accessible. Crisp points out that *“providing a level playing field, where every candidate is assessed to the same standard regardless of training or prior achievement,”* while introducing *“modern best practice and consistent*

*design to assess candidates fairly*” will give students the same opportunities regardless of their background.

He also suggests that the SQE’s introduction could help alleviate a persistent problem in the legal industry: growing numbers of LPC graduates failing to secure a relatively small number of training contracts. *“Having a more flexible approach to qualifying work experience may help tackle the training contract bottleneck,”* Crisp argues. *“This could reduce the risk of talented people getting stuck in the qualification process.”* He continues: *“The creation of a more competitive training market, where people have more choice and more opportunities to earn and learn, may lead to more affordable options than in the current admission route.”*

### Cue the training montage

You could theoretically apply to sit the SQE with no legal training or prep, but we’d never endorse such a risky proposition. So how can students and the wannabe lawyers of the future prepare themselves for the new route to becoming a solicitor? *“We recommend students study a rigorous preparation course of training either online or face-to-face for both SQE 1 and SQE 2, with a well-established university provider,”* Peter Crisp says, *“ULaw will have a variety of programmes available to support students to exam success on the SQE.”*

Before you dive in, consider whether you’ll have multiple options: though the SQE will start from 2021, anyone who starts (or has started) the GDL, LPC or a law degree before autumn 2021 can still follow the old route to qualification. The SRA expects the old route to be fully phased out by 2032. We asked Crisp whether the LPC or SQE would be the better bet: *“Many students who we speak with prefer the certainty of the LPC, which is a tried and tested route to qualification as a solicitor,”* he says. *“The SQE is still subject to final approval by the Legal Services Board and uncertainty about many of the details of the SQE may persuade many students to stick with the current route.”* Some major firms have confirmed that they will move to focus on SQE graduates in the coming years, but the LPC will remain a valid qualification and both routes will have their respective advantages.

***“We recommend students study a rigorous preparation course of training either online or face-to-face for both SQE 1 and SQE 2.”***

We’ve spoken to various law firms who’ve touted the SQE as a potential means to shake up their training contracts, allowing for innovation in a profession that’s often accused of failing to keep with the times. Crisp notes that employers will *“not immediately”* revolutionise their training programmes but may find opportunities in the future. Confirming that *“most large law firms are still recruiting up to two years in advance of the training contract or qualifying work experience,”* he predicts *“one possible result of the introduction of the SQE might be to encourage smaller firms to take on more trainees.”*

### Why The University of Law?

*“Later in 2020, ULaw will be launching an impressive suite of programmes to support students to exam success,”* Crisp says. *“They include a Postgraduate Diploma in Law which acts as a replacement for the GDL; and a Master’s degree in law which combines rigorous preparation for both SQE 1 and 2 with the option to study the additional legal and business content required by many law firms.”* Keep an eye on The University of Law’s website for updates on the new courses as they’re announced.

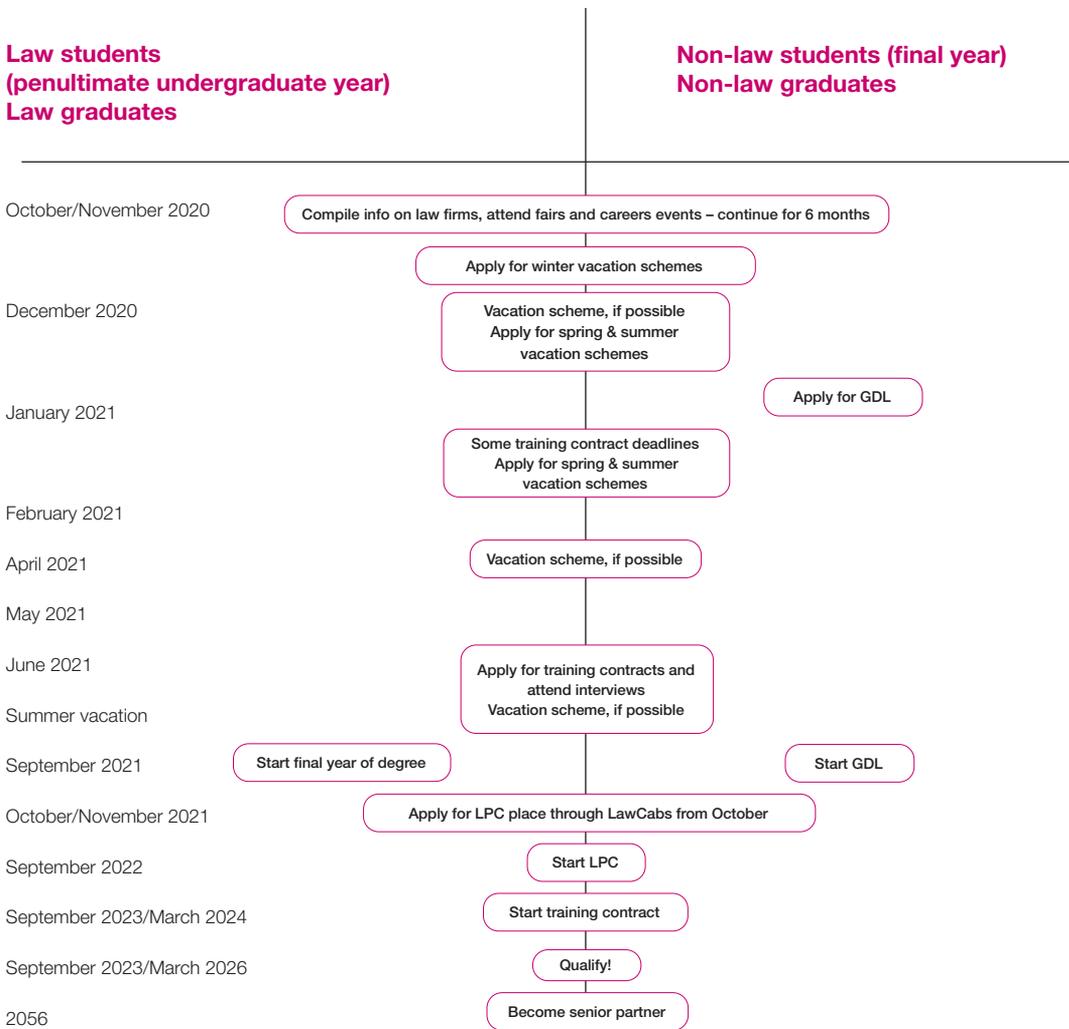
*“All our SQE programmes will be available in both face-to-face and online modes, and all our highly experienced tutors are qualified solicitors or barristers,”* Crisp tells us. *“ULaw uses learning analytics to personalise students’ education and guarantee exam success, as well as an innovative and unique intelligent revision tool to help them practise multiple choice questions and consolidate knowledge.”* The University of Law will also offer pre-study diagnostic testing for both SQE 1 and 2, and additional learning analytics to support student performance and engagement – allowing tutors to spot ‘red flags’ and trends early on in the learning process.

***“Choose a training provider with a track record in preparing students to qualify as a solicitor.”***

Crisp points out that *“in the undergraduate National Student Survey, ULaw was the top university in England for overall student satisfaction.”* He confirms that the new courses will also allow for *“a personalised and adaptive learning journey to create motivated and active learners.”*

Any final advice for students preparing for the SQE? *“Choose a training provider with a track record in preparing students to qualify as a solicitor – you will need significant training, coaching and support to pass the SQE,”* Crisp says. *“ULaw has trained more qualified solicitors in England and Wales than any other provider and we are confident that our SQE programmes will set you on the road to success and realise your ambitions.”*

# Solicitors' timetable

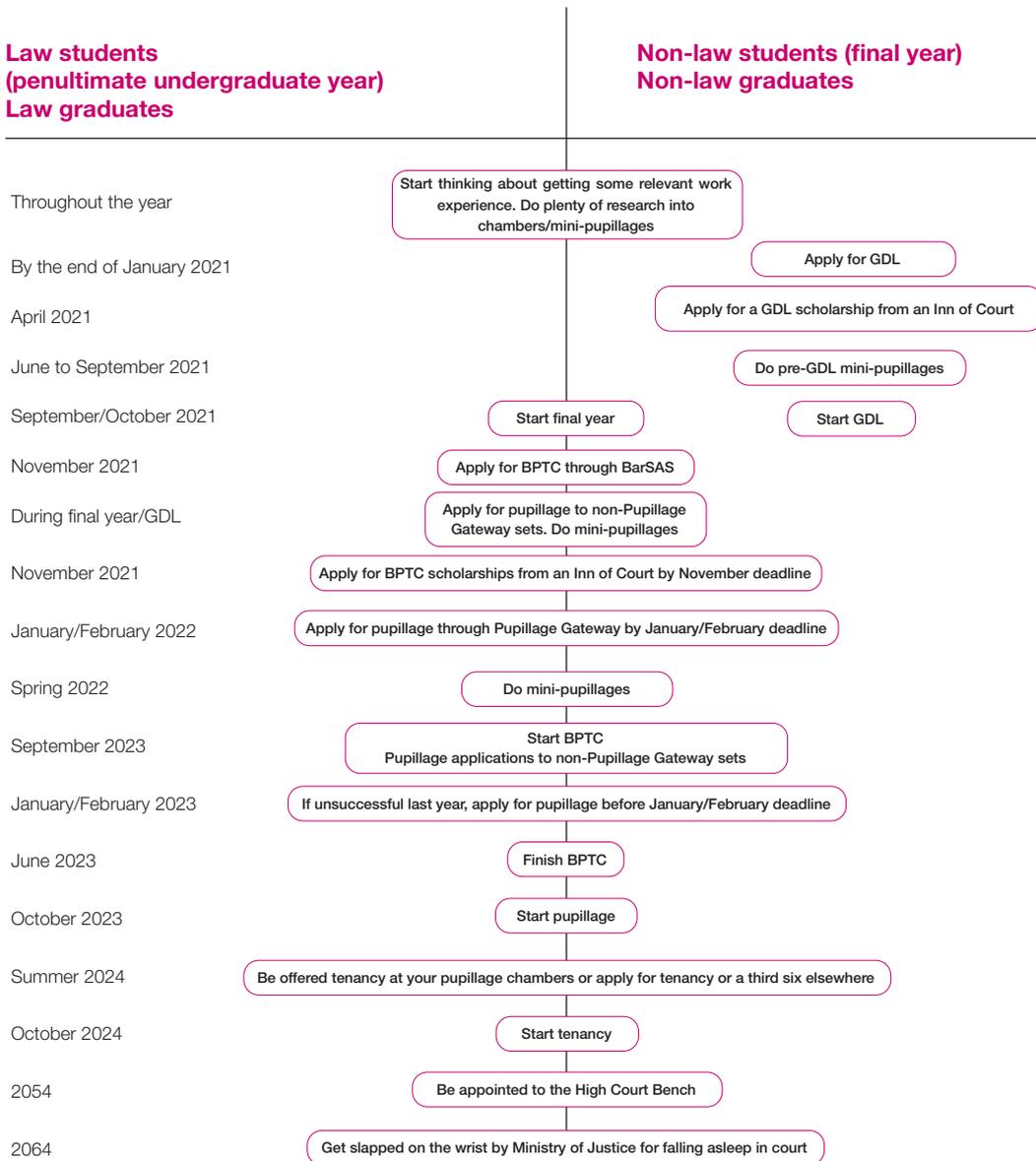


Law School

Notes

- It is important to check application closing dates for each firm as these will vary.
- Some firms will only accept applications for vacation schemes from penultimate-year students, whether law or non-law. See A-Z pages for further information.
- Some firms require very early applications from non-law graduates. See A-Z pages for further information.
- The timetable refers primarily to those firms that recruit two years in advance. Smaller firms often recruit just one year in advance or for immediate vacancies.
- This timetable assumes students will progress straight through from university to law school and a training contract. This is not necessarily the most appropriate or achievable course of action for all students.

# Barristers' timetable



Law School

Notes

This timetable assumes students will progress straight through from university to law school and a pupillage. This is not necessarily the most appropriate or achievable course of action for students.

## The Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)

Whether you chose to spend your undergrad years exploring the ritual ceremonies of Amazonians, immersing yourself in Chaucer and Langland, or grappling with some insoluble questions existentielles, you can still come to the law via a one-year conversion course known as the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL).

If you're the type of person who doesn't like change, then look away now. Back in the winter of 2016/17 the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) announced major plans to scrap the GDL and LPC for those wishing to become solicitors and completely reshape the route to qualification. The plans involve the introduction of the Solicitors Qualification Examination (SQE), a two-part 'superexam' to be taken at the start and end of a two-year period of practical training respectively. The first students are set to sit the SQE in 2021, from which point the GDL will effectively become defunct for aspiring solicitors. But if you have already done the GDL, are doing it now or are starting it before autumn 2021 then you can still follow the old route into the profession. The old system will be completely phased out by 2032, the SRA tells us. Click here to read more about the SQE.

The first stage of the SQE will cover much (though not all) of the current GDL, so the information below may still be of use to you in that respect. It certainly does provide a clear outline of what the course entails if you're considering starting the GDL in January 2021 or September 2021. For the time being, the GDL will continue to be a requirement for non-law students pursuing a career at the Bar as a vital step before doing the Bar Course (though you must start it within five years of completing the GDL). Previously known as the BPTC, this has also recently undergone extensive change, with different providers offering courses with alternative names.

### The basics as they are now

The GDL is a one-year course which non-law graduates aiming for a career as a solicitor must take before doing the obligatory Legal Practice Course (LPC). In effect it 'converts' your non-law degree into a qualifying law degree – for that reason it is sometimes also known as the 'conversion course'. It was previously called the CPE (Common Professional Exam), and some employers and law schools may still use that term along with PgDL (Postgraduate Diploma in Law).

Because techniques like textual analysis, research, logical argument, and written and oral presentation can be acquired in a whole range of disciplines, from English lit to zoology, legal employers tend not to make a distinction between applicants with an LLB and those who take the GDL route. Around half of current solicitors – and half of trainees – come from a non-law background and did the GDL.

The GDL is essentially a crash law degree designed to bring you up to the required standard in the core legal subjects that are typically taught in the first two years of an LLB – that's two years condensed into one. Taken full-time it lasts a minimum of 36 weeks and can demand up to 45 hours of lectures, tutorials and personal study each week. It's possible to take the course part-time over two years, and you'll find course providers offer a surprisingly wide range of flexible study options, from distance learning to weekends and evening-only classes.

*The GDL is essentially a crash law degree designed to bring you up to the required standard in the seven core legal subjects that are typically taught in the first two years of an LLB.*

The standard requirement for admission is a degree from a university in the UK or Republic of Ireland. It is possible for non-graduates to get onto a course if they've shown the requisite drive and determination, and have exceptional ability in some other field. Previously, candidates from overseas needed to apply for a Certificate of Academic Standing from the Bar Standards Board or Solicitors Regulation Authority before enrolling on the GDL. Now individual providers decide whether to admit overseas applicants.

Assessments tend to be written exams taken at the end of the academic year. These make up the bulk of your final grade, so make sure you're prepared. Most GDL providers offer their students the opportunity to take mock exams throughout the year, and while these are generally

optional, it's a good idea to get as many as you can under your belt. If nothing else, they give you an indication of your progress and the chance to receive feedback from tutors. Other assessments and essays completed during the year can count for up to 30% of your final grade, so don't underestimate their importance. Coursework allows for a degree of flexibility, meaning students can write about areas that aren't necessarily explored in depth on the course, such as copyright or competition law. Depending on the institution, there is more or less emphasis on academic essays, written problem questions and practical preparation for classroom debates.

Because the institutions that offer the GDL vary in perceived quality, approach and composition of their student bodies, it's well worth doing your research before you apply. City Law School and Nottingham Law School are renowned for offering more academic courses, thought to be ideally suited to students headed to the Bar. By contrast BPP and the University of Law are packed with plenty of City types and place special emphasis on helping you gain practical legal skills.

### *Be aware that an increasing number of City firms are appointing a particular law school as their preferred provider.*

Be aware that an increasing number of City firms are appointing a particular law school as their preferred GDL provider. What this means is that individuals who've won a training contract with that firm are asked to undertake the course with a certain provider. It does not mean that doing the GDL with a certain provider will get you into the firm's good books. (However, going to that provider might give you the chance to attend certain events or mingle with peers who have a training contract with your chosen firm, which could give you a leg up.) If you have your heart set on doing your training contract with a certain law firm, do your research and find out whether they have a preferred provider before you apply to the schools.

There's a huge amount to take in, so you need to be disciplined. Try to work out a study timetable early on, and stick to it. Don't count on being able to catch up, as time will fly by. You're there to learn a set curriculum, not to think outside the box. That said, it's important that you gain an overall understanding of how the law works, so avoid studying each subject in isolation. Perhaps the best use of your creativity is to come up with amusing ways of remembering case names. Above all else, attend classes! Especially if you've already secured a training contract before starting the GDL, as some law schools will report on attendance (if asked by your future employer).

## The seven foundation areas of law

**Contract** As a practising civil lawyer, you'll apply your knowledge of contract law on a daily basis as it underpins nearly every single legal relationship. Students start by studying the rules that determine when an agreement becomes legally binding and enforceable, and which formalities are required to create a contract. You'll then move on to study what terms are permissible and find out what happens when you omit to read the small print. You'll hear about the doctrine of misrepresentation, mistake and duress, and you'll find out what your remedy is when an art dealer has neglected to tell you the Jackson Pollock masterpiece you've just bought is actually the product of his son's finger painting. Armed with your knowledge of the Sale of Goods Act, you may be tempted to bring any number of small claims against the high-street retailers whose products fall apart the minute you get them home.

### **Tort**

Broadly defined, the law of tort is concerned with remedying wrongs committed by one individual against another via the civil, rather than the criminal, courts. Beyond this very sensible definition hides one of the most intellectually challenging and stimulating courses on the GDL. The law of negligence is the big area of tort, so expect to spend most of the year grappling with it, but the course also covers wrongs ranging from defamation to private nuisance. While studying tort you'll hear stories both comic and tragic, with cases ranging from gruesome botched operations to rogue snails in bottles of ginger beer.

### **Crime**

Reading the papers, you could be forgiven for thinking the law begins and ends at crime. Studying criminal law will allow you to discover the reality behind the storylines. The syllabus takes you through assault, battery, sexual offences, criminal damage, theft, fraud and homicide. Also covered are the liability of accomplices, attempted offences and the defences available to those accused of committing criminal acts.

### *Whether your interest is in policy or the gruesome things that people do to one another, the crime course should provide plenty to engage and surprise.*

Whether your interest is in policy or the gruesome things that people do to one another, the crime course should provide plenty to engage and surprise. Overall, the subject follows a logical pattern and doesn't hide many difficult philosophical concepts. You will find out early on that you always need to prove both *actus reus* (the guilty act) and the *mens rea* (the guilty mind) in order to establish an offence. Follow this structure religiously and you can't go wrong. By the end of the course you'll also be in a better

position to explain why killing someone is not necessarily unlawful, or why you could be guilty of theft without actually making off with somebody else's property.

### Public law

Public law is a course that includes the study of constitutional law, human rights and administrative law. If you have no interest in politics, you may find the whole subject a little obscure, but with Brexit at the top of everyone's agenda and the Human Rights Act often in the press there's no better time to study this fascinating subject. The course normally kicks off with an analysis of the UK's constitutional arrangements, covering such abstract notions as parliamentary sovereignty, the rule of law, the royal prerogative and responsible government. Those of a political, philosophical or historical bent will feel right at home. If you don't fit the description, Google 'Dicey' and see where that takes you.

*You'll also be taught about the Human Rights Act, learning about things like freedom of speech, the right to a fair trial.*

You'll also be taught about the Human Rights Act, learning about things like freedom of speech, the right to a fair trial and how much force the police can use when they throw you in the back of their van. There's also judicial review, the process by which individuals with sufficient standing can challenge the decisions of public authorities. Those who don't enjoy the theoretical feel of constitutional law should appreciate the more practical nature of judicial review.

### Equity and trusts

The equity and trusts course provides an introduction to the fundamental principles of equity, an intriguing area of law that calls upon the idea of conscience to remedy injustices brought about by the application of black letter law. Generally thought of as the preserve of those with their hearts set on the Chancery Bar or private client firms, equity actually pervades all areas of law.

You'll learn snappy equitable maxims, be taught about the creation of gifts and trusts in the family context, and see how injunctions can help recover misappropriated funds. You'll hear about adulterous husbands trying to set up secret trusts for their mistresses and illegitimate children, or wealthy eccentrics attempting to set up a pension for a beloved pet. Past students report that there's a mathematical side to this module and that the complex nature of some of the concepts promotes a creative way of thinking.

### Land law

The land law module will teach you everything you need to know about the ownership of land, starting with the startling realisation that all of it ultimately belongs to the

Queen. Many students may find the subject off-putting to begin with because it uses archaic, mind-numbing jargon and calls on concepts such as overreaching, flying freeholds or overriding interests. Give it time and you'll find the topic has practical implications for your everyday life, including tips on how to handle a dispute with your landlord or how to arrange your first mortgage. The course will also take you through the basics of conveyancing and how to acquire interests in land such as easements or covenants, before going through the detail of how those interests operate.

*It uses archaic, mind-numbing jargon and calls on concepts such as overreaching, flying freeholds or overriding interests.*

In addition to remembering loads of cases, you will be required to memorise countless statutory provisions on creation and registration of interests in land. Don't wait to familiarise yourself with the most important sections of the Law of Property Act: start creating flowcharts and checklists early on and you will laugh your way through the exam. As with most topics on the GDL, you will need to gain a good overall understanding of land law to be able to deal with specific matters, so don't bet on revising selected subjects for the exam. There can be important overlap between them, particularly with equity and trusts.

### EU law

Though the result of the 2016 referendum has led to the assertion that 'Brexit means Brexit', EU law is fundamentally intertwined with that of the UK and has historically been one of the core subjects of the GDL. Traditionally students would become familiar with the institutional framework, foundations and underlying principles of the EU before going on to explore certain areas of substantive EU law. Big subjects include the free movement of goods and workers, competition law and the freedom of establishment. The whole thing represents a fascinating mix of politics, history, economics and comparative law, featuring some of the most tongue-twisting case names you're likely to come across. How all this will change once the UK's future relationship with the EU is determined is anybody's guess, but in any case, the integration of EU and UK law will surely have a profound effect on this part of the syllabus going forward.

### Extras

In addition to the core subjects certain GDL providers, particularly those with a City slant, offer optional classes designed to ease your passage into the corporate world. These may include additional lectures or seminars on company law, intellectual property and international law. Most also organise mooted competitions and pro bono work. These should give you an early opportunity to try your counselling and advocacy skills and find out if a le-

gal career is really for you, particularly if you're headed for the Bar. A number of providers have degree-awarding powers allowing you to upgrade your qualification to an LLB, either upon successful completion of your GDL and LPC or after a summer or online course following the GDL. Unlike the GDL, the LLB gives you an internationally recognised accreditation.

### How to apply

All GDL applications are made online through the Central Applications Board. Remember, there's an application fee and it's worth getting your application in as early as possible if you have your heart set on a particular institution, particularly as LawCabs needs your referee to respond before your application is passed on to the schools you're interested in. Many law schools now offer January fast-

track courses (lasting seven months), as well as traditional September starts for their GDL programmes (lasting nine months), and so the application timetable has been reformed to accommodate this. Replacing the old process involving first and second round offers, law schools now recruit GDL students on a rolling basis.

The application forms for courses beginning in 2021 will be available from October 2020, and commencing early November applications will be sent to law schools who may then make offers to students. The later you apply, the more flexible you may have to be about where you study. Applications for part-time courses should be made directly to the providers. If you intend to do an LPC or BPTC at a popular institution you might stand a better chance if you choose it for your GDL, as many providers guarantee places to their GDL graduates.

**On our website you can find a GDL providers table, detailing course fees and other useful information.**

## The Legal Practice Course (LPC)

Before starting your glorious career as a solicitor, you'll need to jump through the unavoidable hoop that is the LPC. Just don't let all of those flexible and alluring study options distract from the truth that the LPC is intense, costly, and not a guaranteed pass to a training contract.

### Hasta la vista, LPC

Though the LPC has long been a crucial step on the epic journey to becoming a solicitor, it hasn't been immune from criticism, particularly due to the variation between institutions that offer it. With that in mind, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) announced the replacement of the LPC with a one-size-fits-all, centrally managed Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). This all-important 'superexam' comes in two parts, the first of which is in theory open to anyone with a degree. The SRA has stated that the SQE will be rolled out from autumn 2021 and that anyone starting a law course before then (including the LPC) won't necessarily have to do the SQE.

So if you're considering starting the LPC in 2021, have a gander at the information below. But do remember that very soon the LPC may no longer be offered or may not be offered as widely as it is now. Flick back a through pages to read our full overview of the SQE, keep your eyes peeled for news about it and the future of the LPC.

### The nuts and bolts

It's important to remember that the LPC is not an academic course – it's vocational. Treat it like the first year of your professional life. The LPC requires good time management, organisation and preparation, and even though some providers have open-book exams, it's far from advisable to be sitting at your desk with an exam paper in front of you searching furiously through the textbooks at your side. Keep on top of things as the course progresses, and perhaps even think about sharing the revision workload with classmates.

It's not as stimulating as an undergraduate degree, but then again, it's not supposed to be; it's meant to get you ready to start a training contract. With classes on semicolons and split infinitives, it can feel like you're back at school, but you'll pick up plenty of tricks and tips along the way, including:

- How to conduct an interview (usually a strong handshake accompanied by the offer of a beverage);
- How to minimise tax exposure – it's about avoidance, not evasion (apparently);

- How many directors it takes to make a board meeting (this isn't a bad joke);
- When litigation documents must be served on the other side – you'll curse the day bank holidays were invented;
- Why it's never a good idea to dabble with clients' money; and
- How to make sure your client isn't a money launderer.

Virtually all the law schools that run the LPC have a raft of interesting extracurricular opportunities on offer. For example, pro bono work is easy enough to come by and can range from getting involved in the school's legal clinic to undertaking projects with external organisations.

### The numbers game

First of all, the good news: at the last count, the number of training contracts available was higher than it was any point in the last decade. A total of 5,811 were registered in 2017-18, a rise of 1.6% on the year before and the highest number since the 2008 financial crisis. The bad news? Covid-19 has already prompted an even more dramatic recession, which will almost definitely have an effect over the next few years.

In recent years there have been 5,000 to 6,000 people doing the LPC each year, so you might think there will now be training contracts for all. But you'd be wrong: what you have to remember is that you're also competing for traineeships with past law school grads and people who are yet to start or complete the LPC – that means traineeships remain very oversubscribed. If you go back and add up and subtract the number of traineeships from the number of LPC grads, you'll discover there are potentially over 10,000 people still searching for training contracts.

The new 'superexam', the SQE, is in part being introduced to help remedy this oversupply of law school grads vying for traineeships. Its focus on gaining work experience and the splitting of exams so that half are done after your traineeship are welcome developments in this regard. But the popularity of law as a profession is not going to change and the number of available traineeships will always be limited. So competition of traineeships will remain fierce. Just take a look at the application numbers:

some firms get over 100 applications for each trainee position.

## Money on my mind

It's a competitive market and not just for LPC students. Law schools are competing with each other for students, and some providers are doing better than others. In the past few years, Oxford Brookes, Aberystwyth, the University of Hertfordshire and Plymouth have all shuttered their LPC programmes, citing a decline in the number of applications. On the other hand, BPP and the University of Law have opened several new centres up and down the country to expand their empires: between them ULaw and BPP were responsible for a whopping 80% of LPC enrolments in 2017/18. More schools outside the major city centres are to be welcomed, as they allow students the less expensive option of studying from home and they generally cost less than their City counterparts.

Wherever you choose to do it, the LPC is an expensive affair. Unless you've been hooked up by a commercial law firm that's sponsoring you, it's time to dig deep. Around £11,500 is par for the course at most providers but BPP and ULaw ask you to cough up over £16,000 for their London courses. One reason the SRA has given for the introduction of the SQE is the prohibitive cost for some of undertaking the LPC without sponsorship. The pricing for the SQE will indeed be significantly lower than that of the LPC, but it's not yet clear how much the necessary preparatory courses will cost. We reckon it may be quite a bit, so the consideration of whether to take the punt on expensive courses will remain. For a comprehensive comparison of course fees look at the LPC providers table. For advice on how to fund your trip to law school, see our feature on How to fund law school.

Law schools are businesses, and many sell the LPC to prospective solicitors and welcome as many people as they can without compromising on quality. With the introduction of the SQE, we think the same will remain true of the provision of the relevant preparatory courses. At present, a 2:2 degree will pretty much guarantee you a place on the LPC, but finding a firm that will want to train you afterwards is an entirely different proposition. When faced with a 2:2 candidate, firms usually expect a pretty good reason for the grade (i.e. valid extenuating circumstances), some outstanding features on your CV or, if you're a more 'mature' candidate, a strong first career under your belt.

## Make the right choice

### When and how

Timetables can vary wildly between providers, and while some have taken advantage of the fact they're allowed to condense teaching into three or even two days, ei-

ther mornings or afternoons, others still require attendance four days a week alongside a sizeable chunk of self-study. Term dates and even the length of the whole course can vary substantially. Students can opt to spend anywhere between seven months and five years studying for the qualification. Think realistically about what timetable structure will fit most easily into your life. Also think about whether or not you will need a job during the course because, while all providers are reluctant to acknowledge that students will be able to fit in a part-time job, they are increasingly aware that this may be unavoidable, so the majority offer the choice of studying part-time.

### Assessments

The vast majority of providers examine their students using open-book exams and written assessments. A notable minority have stuck with the closed-book approach. Although it's easy to feel drawn to the open-book approach, the timeframes are such that you have very little time to trawl through books in the exams.

### Facilities

For every provider at which students must search plaintively for a quiet study corner, there is another where they can spread out in blessed peace in their own office. Take the LPC at one university and you'll belong to a proper law faculty surrounded by chilled-out undergrads and deep-thinking postgrads; elsewhere, leather sofas and acres of plate glass might make you think you've strayed into the offices of a City firm. IT is massively important on the LPC, so consider whether the institution offers endless vistas of the latest flat screens or a few dusty computers in a basement.

### Atmosphere

A large institution may appeal to students keen to chug anonymously through the system. Conversely, the intimacy of fewer students and easily accessible tutors may tip the scales in favour of a smaller provider. Some places are known to attract corporate types destined to be City high-flyers; others cultivate the talents of those headed for regional practice. Still, others purport to attract a broad a mix of students, so the commercially minded can mingle with future high-street practitioners.

### Money and location

Fees vary and so do the providers' policies on the inclusion of the cost of textbooks and Law Society membership, etc. Even if you have sponsorship, living expenses still need to be taken into account. The cost of living in London can be an especially nasty shock – according to one students website, the typical yearly living costs for students in the capital is a whopping £15,180. Plenty of students find that tight finances restrict their choice of provider. Although it might seem reprehensible to some, living with the parents will obviously save you a packet. If

you're desperate to strike out on your own (or you haven't lived with your parents for some time), then it's worth considering what you like or don't like about your university or GDL provider and whether you want to prolong your undergraduate experience or escape it. When weighing up providers in large cities, find out whether the campus is in the city centre or out on a ring road.

### Extra qualification

A current trend among providers is the offer of a top-up LLM, with students using their LPC credits to count towards a Master's of Law. Students at ULaw can top up their LPC with an LLM in Legal Practice or an MSc in Law, Governance, Risk and Compliance. We should add that we're not aware of law firms placing any particular extra value on such qualifications per se, though the extra writing and research skills you gain may be valuable and some firms have made their firm-specific LPC and Master's-level programme. Some providers also allow you to turn your GDL and LPC into an LLB, though again we're not aware of this increasingly employability in any way.

### Social mix and social life

Hip, student-infested cities such as Nottingham and Bristol are always a lot of fun, but the bright lights of the capital may be irresistible. Experience tells us that compared to those in other cities, many students in London tend to slink off the moment classes end rather than socialise into the evening.

### Social distancing

The effects of Covid-19 will have an effect on all aspects of studying: technology and the possibility of remote learning will become more important than ever. Take the time to research what precautions providers are taking to ensure safe, effective delivery of courses.

### Making applications

The Central Applications Board administers all applications for full-time LPCs. The application timetable has been overhauled in response to the fact that several course providers have introduced January and February start dates. LPC admissions will now be processed on a rolling basis with the application form available from early October. Beginning early November, applications are sent to law schools week by week and the course providers may make offers to students immediately.

Obviously the later the application, the less secure a place, but it should be remembered that almost every school will have more validated places than enrolled students on both its full-time and part-time courses. Some of the most popular institutions must be placed first on the LawCabs application form – see our LPC providers table – but students can apply for up to three. Check also whether your university, GDL provider or future law firm has any agreement or relationship with a provider. Applications for part-time courses should be made directly to the individual provider

## The Bar Course

The Bar Course (different providers now use different names) is the necessary link between either an LLB or GDL and pupillage for would-be barristers. At present, six law schools are authorised by the Bar Standards Board (BSB) to teach their course at locations all over the country. Those with the gift of the gab, step up please.

### What's in a name?

If you've got an older copy of *Chambers Student*, you may be wondering where the section on the BPTC has gone from this edition. We've refreshed things because as of 2020, the BPTC will be replaced by a series of new Bar Courses. Each provider will now be offering its own programme, and each comes with its own fun name. As of September 2020, anyone who has not already completed the BPTC must go through one of these new courses. The BSB has made this change to allow for more flexibility and (hopefully) encourage more diversity in what has traditionally been a very exclusive profession.

The content of the new courses is unlikely to differ substantially from the old BPTC, and we'd offer largely similar advice on how to approach it. Do take the time to research what each provider is offering, to make sure you find the Bar Course that's right for you.

### A career at the Bar? You may need your health checked

Being a barrister may be *"the best job in the world,"* according to one source we spoke to, but every year many more students enrol on the Bar Course than there are pupillages available with sets and other employers. The disparity between the legions of Bar Course graduates and the miserly amount of available pupillages has led the BSB to put out a 'health warning' to prospective barristers. Lady Deech, then chair of the BSB, stated in 2011: *"There are too many people on the [Bar Course] who shouldn't be there. We need to give a signal to those who aren't up to it that they're wasting their money."* Strong words, but a quick glance at recent employment rates show that Lady Deech is absolutely right. Would-be barristers need to make a cold, hard assessment of whether they can cut it in the profession.

According to BSB statistics, in 2017/18 there were 1,753 students enrolled on the Bar Course and around 70% of them successfully completed and passed the course. Consider also that the Bar Course has a lifespan of five years, so those applying for pupillage will include indi-

viduals who've passed the course in previous years and who were unsuccessful in their first, second, third or even fourth attempt! Around 3,000 individuals may be applying for pupillage in any given year, and some chambers receive over 150 applications for a single position.

The quest for a pupillage can look almost as daunting as the Hunger Games when you consider the qualifications of those who do make the cut; the academic records of successful pupillage applicants are quite simply terrifying. According to the BSB, 35.6% of pupils who completed the Bar Course between 2014 and 2017 were Oxbridge undergrads, while 38.9% went to another Russell Group university. In addition, those with a First are around twice as likely to gain pupillage as those with a 2:1. Throw into the mix a bountiful array of MAs, PhDs, academic prizes, scholarships and languages and you can see that the competition is fierce. If you want a closer look at that competition go to the websites of chambers you're thinking of applying to and look at the CVs of their most junior members. Remember this is the calibre of candidate you will have to match if not beat. As Lady Deech says: *"If you're tone deaf, don't go to music school; if you have two left feet don't go to ballet school"* – with reference to Bar Course students who lack the required command of the English language. The point is, winning arguments over the dinner table and thinking you look dashing in a wig and gown isn't going to cut it. You really need to make a cold, hard assessment of whether you can make it in the profession.

So consider all this before you sign up for the Bar Course, cool as it may sound to be able to tell your family and friends that you're now 'going to Bar School'. Cost is another big thing that should stop and make you think. The fees at BPP and the University of Law in London now sit at around £20,000, an eye-watering sum for a course that in and of itself gives no guarantee of a job at the end of it.

### 2:2 boohoo

At present, the first hurdle on your journey to the Bar is the Bar Course Aptitude Test, or BCAT, a critical thinking

and reasoning test that costs £150 to sit and will remain in place for the new Bar Courses. The test aims to protect certain misguided students from the burden of a heavy debt unnecessarily incurred by preventing no-hopers from wasting their money on Bar School. To that effect, the pass mark was raised in 2017 in an effort to ensure high standards are maintained.

The BSB's minimum requirement for admission onto the course is a 2:2 at degree level, and a pass on the GDL (where taken). Several providers have chosen to up the ante. Most require all applicants to possess a 2:1, and even those subsequently shortlisted often have to attend an assessment day where they undertake a written advocacy exercise, an oral advocacy exercise and an interview. One course leader told us: *"In line with BSB requirements we never outright say no to someone with a 2:2, but increasingly we have looked to recruit people with at least a 2:1 and mini-pupillage or practical experience. They have to have a fighting chance."* Of course, sets and providers want more than just impeccable academics. You'll also need to show a commitment to the profession, so public speaking, like mootings, debating and mock trials, and relevant work experience are a must.

An additional requirement to undertaking the Bar Course is registration with an Inn of Court. These are the Bar's professional organisations which provide support and advice to Bar students and (if you're lucky) scholarships. 31 May (of the year you start your Bar Course) is the deadline for getting yourself in with an Inn. We suggest a look at each one in order to find which one best suits you. See page XXX for more about the **Inns of Court**.

The mismatch between Bar Course graduates and the number of pupillages is tempered to a certain extent by those individuals who have decided that the Bar is simply not for them, and by the significant number of international students (around half of all Bar Course students) most of whom return home rather than seeking pupillage in England and Wales.

## Mad skillz

The Bar Course has been designed to ensure that wannabe barristers acquire the skills, knowledge, attitudes and competencies needed for practice. Cue: developing students' advocacy, drafting, opinion writing, conferencing, case analysis and legal research skills. As for knowledge, students are schooled in civil litigation and remedies, criminal litigation and sentencing, evidence and professional ethics. These core areas, especially ethics, are essential because *"barristers are individuals, and they get thrown to the wolves more often. When you're a solicitor you have the protection of the firm around you – barristers have to be equipped with all the knowledge they can get."*

In the final term, students select two option subjects in areas they're targeting for practice.

Almost wherever you study the emphasis is very much on face-to-face teaching – usually to groups of about 12, but for all-important skills there's often six students or fewer. Oral skills classes make use of video recording equipment in role-plays so students can improve by assessing their own performance as well as that of their peers. The skills acquired are then examined using a variety of assessments in the second and third terms. Written skills are tested through a mix of unseen tests and 'homework'. Professional actors are commonly drafted in to take part in oral assessments. Written skills are tested through a mix of unseen tests and 'homework'. Professional actors are commonly drafted in to take part in oral assessments.

Skills assessments are set locally by each provider, but since 2012 the BSB has set standardised and centralised exams for civil litigation, criminal litigation and ethics to ensure confidence in the parity between course providers. The exams consist of a blend of multiple choice and short answer questions. The latter are still marked locally by the providers, while the former are centrally marked. The BSB then samples and moderates the written exam papers.

Course directors tell us that the Bar Course is *"a very demanding, intensive and rigorous course,"* and the new Bar Courses won't be a walk in the park either. The timetable is described as *"undulating"* – *"intense in parts and boring in others"* – and often the course is *"front-loaded."* But don't use the quieter times to relax. This is your chance to improve your pupillage prospects, as one student advised: *"Organise dining with the Inns, mootings, debating, pro bono, mini-pupillages, marshalling and the like to give your CV a fighting chance of reaching interview stage."*

## How to pick a provider

The fight for pupillage is a truly testing one, so choose your course provider carefully. Read through prospectuses and websites, attend open days, try to speak to current or former students. Read the **Law school Reviews** on our website and consider the following criteria:

### Cost

London is clearly going to be pricier than Northumbria, but even in the capital there's variation. Working out what you'll be forking out is especially important given rising costs in recent times. The good news is that in 2017/18 average course prices have remained static and ULaw even cut its fees. If you're an international student, make sure

## On chambersstudent.co.uk...

- Bar Course providers compared

you look at the non-UK/EU fees. Part-timers should note whether fees increase in the second year.

### Location

Regional providers may be the best option for those looking for pupillage on the regional circuits, not least because of their stronger links and networking opportunities with the local Bar. London students benefit from proximity to the Inns of Court and easier access to London sets for pupillage interviews. However, compulsory dining and advocacy training courses in the Inns enable regional students to maintain their links with the capital's beating legal heart.

### Size

Smaller providers pride themselves on offering a more intimate and collegial environment, and student feedback indicates that this does make a positive difference to the experience. You can also expect a noticeably different feel at the providers that are within universities from those that aren't.

### Facilities

Students can tap into a far wider range of support services, sports and social activities by taking the Bar Course at a university. Library and IT resources vary from one provider to the next, as does the level of technology used in teaching. Some providers make technology a key feature of the course.

### Option subjects

These do vary. For example, although judicial review and immigration are popular, they're not offered everywhere. Check out our online table of **Bar Course providers compared** to see what's on offer at each one. This table also compares fees and offers provider-specific application tips.

### Pro bono

Opportunities range from minimal to superb across the nine providers. Again our online table of **Bar Course providers compared** has the details.

**It's essential to look carefully at the extracurricular opportunities offered at each provider and throw yourself into everything you can. Most providers will deliberately keep days free of classes to allow students this opportunity.**

## How to fund law school

It's not impossible that you'll be saddled with upwards of £40,000 of debt by the time you finish your undergraduate degree. LPCs, Bar Courses and GDLs aren't cheap either, so how can you ease the increasingly intimidating financial burden of law school?

### Secure sponsorship before starting your training contract

If you're interested in commercial law or want to work at one of the larger firms in the UK then you are in some luck. Securing a training contract with them will often result in sponsorship through law school. These firms tend to recruit two years in advance of the start of the training contract, so you'll need to get your act together well ahead of time. Not only will such firms cover the cost of course fees (LPC and usually GDL too), they may well give you a few thousand pounds towards the cost of living. Details of what solicitors' firms are offering their future trainees are given in our overview of **Salaries and benefits compared**.

A hard-working (and extremely lucky) minority of Bar Course students will already have a pupillage lined up. At the more affluent sets, the size of the pupillage award is now comparable with City trainee/NQ salaries. Usually a decent chunk of the pupillage award can be drawn down to cover course expenses. At the more modest sets there may be no money available for the Bar Course at all. Further information about funding is given in the **Bar section** of this guide.

### The Inns of Court

If you're training to be a barrister you can apply for a range of GDL and BPTC scholarships from the **Inns of Court**. Around a quarter of Bar Course students get some funding, and there's just under £5 million up for grabs. Check out our **Inns of Court comparison table** for more information.

### Where to study

Studying in London could set you back as much as double what it would elsewhere, say in Sheffield, Cardiff or Nottingham, and the quality of training isn't necessarily going to be any better. Our tables on the **GDL providers**, **LPC providers** and **Bar Course providers** will allow you to compare the prices of all the relevant law school courses. In future, law schools will likely offer preparatory courses for the new SQE 'superexam', which may cost between £3,000 and £4,500 according to the SRA.

### Combined Master's

Recently, a number of course providers have reformed the LPC that they offer, so that it doubles up as both a practice qualification and Master's degree – which provides the potential option of a government loan. A total of £11,222 is now available if your course starts on or after 1 August 2020 – for more information visit the government's postgraduate student loans pages. Check out our overview of **LPC providers** to find out which law schools offer an LLM top-up or LLM-only LPC.

### Bank loans

There's a good chance that you've already emptied the last pennies out of your student overdraft, but never fear – you may still be eligible for more debt. Compare and contrast the interest rates of various banks.

Since 2010 most banks have withdrawn the special packages for customers entering the legal profession. However, check out graduate accounts, because they sometimes offer slightly better overdraft terms. Whatever you do, don't make any decisions lightly; loans involve a big commitment that only continues to grow once the debt starts to accrue.

### Get a job!

Law firms are increasingly interested in applicants' commercial awareness and ability to cope in a professional office environment, so what used to be an undesirable option can now be deployed in an interview as proof of your suitability for a career in law. Course providers tell us that part-time enrolments are on the rise as students increasingly look to ease the financial burden of law school by working jobs alongside their studies.

While this option does stall your legal career by another year or so, it does also help you avoid the heavy debts accrued by the average law student. Even students on full-time courses will look to boost their cash flow with evening shifts or weekend work. Be sure to set yourself a manageable schedule, though. You don't want to end up flunking your course for the sake of saving a few extra quid.

## Benefits, benefactors, begging

Living at home with ma and pa during your course isn't a dream come true, but sometimes needs must. Forget ideas of declaring bankruptcy to evade student debt; consider other creative ways to ease the burden.

- A student card will get you low-cost travel, discount haircuts, cinema tickets, a cheaper Spotify subscription and all manner of other exciting things. If nothing else, it'll make you feel young.
- Websites such as Unidays and Save the Student have discounts and deals for meals, entertainment and more.
- Law books are pricey, so don't get overzealous before term starts. College libraries will have the core texts and you're sure to find former students hawking books. Check out notice boards and online for second-hand tomes. You may not need to buy some of the denser works.
- A number of law schools, chambers and solicitors' firms run competitions. The Times 2TG Moot run by The Times and barristers' chambers 2 Temple Gardens is a good example. Do a Google search to find others. Winning will bring kudos as well as cash.
- Market research focus groups will pay decent money for an hour or two of your time.

## Some scholarships

- Many law schools offer funding. For instance, national provider the University of Law offers various scholarships to those studying the GDL, LPC or BPTC. It offers 50 Law First Scholarships worth £3,000 for students about to start a GDL and another 50 for those about to start the LPC. Applicants must fit certain criteria, such as being in receipt of free school meals or living with a guardian on Universal Credit.
- Universities also offer a miscellany of scholarships: Oxford, for example, has many for students wanting to take its BCL or MJur courses.
- The Law Society's Diversity Access Scheme offers ten scholarships each year, supporting talented people who face obstacles to qualification.
- The Inderpal Rahal Memorial Trust supports women from an immigrant or refugee background. Contact [irmt@gclaw.co.uk](mailto:irmt@gclaw.co.uk) for more details.
- The Leonard Sainer Foundation offers scholarships to final year law students at UCL of £15,000 for the LPC and £18,500 for the Bar Course to students in financial need who intend to practise in social welfare law.
- The HM Hubbard Law Scholarship is for trainees and solicitors who want to study the law and legal procedures in France, Spain or Canada. Past scholarships have ranged from £14,000 to £28,000.
- The Human Rights Lawyers Association provides at least one grant of £3,500 and several small awards of up to £1,500 from an annual bursary fund, to those who wish to undertake unpaid or poorly paid human rights work, either during their training or soon after.
- The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Chevening Scholarships are available for overseas students wishing to study in the UK. The fund offers more than 1,500 scholarships worth a total of several million pounds.
- Postgrad Solutions offers two £500 bursaries for LLM students.
- Universities and publicly funded colleges have discretionary access to learning funds available to especially hard-up students.

## Law school course providers

Provider	GDL	Replaced GDL with LLM	LPC	BPTC
Anglia Ruskin University			•	
Birmingham City University	•		•	
Bournemouth University	•		•	
BPP Law School	•		•	•
University of Brighton	•			
Bristol Law School at UWE	•		•	•
Brunel		•		
Cardiff Law School	•		•	•
University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)	•		•	
City Law School, London	•		•	•
De Montfort University	•		•	
University of East Anglia	•		•	
Leeds Beckett University	•		•	
Liverpool John Moores University		•	•	
London Metropolitan University	•		•	
London South Bank University		•		
Manchester Metropolitan University	•		•	•
Northumbria University Law School	•		•	•
Nottingham Law School	•		•	•
Oxford Brookes University	•			
University of Sheffield	•		•	
University of South Wales			•	
Staffordshire University		•	•	
University of Sunderland			•	
University of Sussex	•			
Swansea University	•		•	
University of Law	•		•	•
University of West London			•	
University of Westminster	•		•	
University of Wolverhampton		•	•	

# Bristol Law School

**The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol)**

**Coldharbour Lane, Frenchay, Bristol, BS16 1QY**

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Website: [www.uwe.ac.uk/bls](http://www.uwe.ac.uk/bls)

Twitter: @UWEBristol

Facebook: UWEBristol

Linkedin: Bristol Law School

## University profile

Bristol Law School at UWE Bristol is widely recognised as one of the leading providers of professional legal education in the UK. We have a reputation for excellence and for delivering courses of the very highest quality. We offer the full range of professional law programmes. Our courses are taught by the tutors who design and write them; experienced solicitors or barristers teaching within their own subject areas. From our dedicated law facilities to our events and pro bono activities, we have everything you need to enhance your career prospects and a very strong track record of assisting students that have not secured training contracts or pupillage.

Both the Legal Practice Course (LPC) and Bar Training Course (BTC) are offered as Masters programmes, allowing eligible students to apply for a postgraduate loan to fund their studies. There are different options to complete the Masters programme, these focus on continuing your professional development as a reflective practitioner with responsibility for your own development and learning.

**Our Benefits:** Regional law fair and meet the employers fair; networking and careers events (including our distinguished executive address series); dedicated professional law teaching and common rooms; mock courtrooms (used by legal practitioners and students); comprehensive online resources, including recorded lectures; extensive law library; pro bono unit, with a range of award winning activities.

## Graduate Diploma in Law

Our GDL enables you as a non-law graduate to progress with confidence to the LPC/BTC, and is supported by a dedicated team of tutors who understand the demands of the GDL route. Teaching is not shared with undergraduates. The curriculum is divided into two teaching blocks with assessments after each block, which greatly assists our students in managing workload. Tuition will develop you for the demands of the legal profession, equipping you with the necessary legal skills to thoroughly apply the law to a set of facts and the ability to solve legal problems.

## LLM Advanced Legal Practice (LPC)

Whether you are intending to practise in a commercial or high street firm, the practical, wide-ranging Legal Practice Course will provide the broad and rigorous foundation you need to be 'practice ready' for a career in Law. Our LPC is the longest established in Bristol and the region with a reputation of the highest quality.

Workshop teaching happens in small, interactive groups with an emphasis on intensive, personal tuition. Here, you will learn by doing within a supportive, friendly environment, developing the skills and knowledge to excel in your role as a solicitor. You will benefit from flexible modes of study and a choice of timetabling options. There are strong links to local and regional practice, including a new mentoring scheme for LPC and GDL students.

## LLM Bar Training Course (BTC)

With its reputation for teaching excellence, high levels of student satisfaction and outstanding pastoral care, our BTC will equip you with key skills to excel in practice. There are exceptional links with the local Bar including participation in mock pupillage interviews, chambers sponsored advocacy and mooting competitions annually and an additional Western Circuit sponsored advocacy prize. You will also have the opportunity to become an accredited civil commercial mediator.

**Contact**  
[admissions@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@uwe.ac.uk)

**GDL**  
Lucy Rees  
[lucy.rees@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:lucy.rees@uwe.ac.uk)

**LPC**  
Full time: Suzaan Rowley  
[suzaan.rowley@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:suzaan.rowley@uwe.ac.uk)  
Part time: Fiona Davis  
[fiona.davis@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:fiona.davis@uwe.ac.uk)

**BTC**  
Full time: Karen Thorpe-Williams  
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Part time: Joanne Stringer  
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**PSC/CPD**  
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# The City Law School

City, University of London, Northampton Square Campus, London EC1V 0HB

Tel: 020 7040 0322

Website: [www.city.ac.uk/law](http://www.city.ac.uk/law)

Facebook: @thecitylawschool

Twitter: @CityLawSchool

## School profile

The City Law School is one of London's major law schools providing legal training to both law and non-law graduates. Located close to legal London, students will benefit from a new building exclusively for law students, with dedicated study spaces, advocacy rooms and a law library. Students can also benefit from access to online legal resources, careers support and opportunities to take part in Pro Bono schemes and mooted competitions.

## Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) (full-time)

The GDL at City is one of the most respected law conversion courses in the UK. Our rigorous programme enables students to fast track their studies, by studying the core legal modules in just one year and then progress on to either bar training with the Bar Vocational Studies programme, or the Legal Practice Course.

## Graduate Entry LLB (two years full-time)

This well-established conversion course for non-law graduates provides students with the opportunity to gain the required legal knowledge, whilst identifying and developing special interest subjects.

## Bar Vocational Studies (BVS) (full-time, part-time or two-part)

The Bar Vocational Studies (BVS) programme qualifies you to be Called to the Bar of England and Wales. Our full-time, part-time and two-part programmes offer you a choice of learning methods and routes depending on your requirements and learning style. Students can also choose elective modules and LLM routes which are both practice-focused and academically rigorous. Our dedicated Pupillage Advisory Service is also available to support students when applying for pupillage opportunities.

## Legal Practice Course (LPC) (full-time)

The School's Legal Practice Course (LPC) has been designed to ensure that you are fully prepared to meet the demands of the modern legal profession by teaching you to master the vital skills and knowledge you need to be a successful solicitor. There are two City LPC routes. If you successfully complete the compulsory taught element of the course you will be awarded the Postgraduate Diploma and be certified as having completed Stages 1 and 2 of the Legal Practice Course. Alternatively, you may choose to complete both the LPC and an additional practice-focussed dissertation in order to achieve a master's degree.

## Master of Laws (LLM) (full-time or part-time)

The Master of Laws (LLM) is a flexible programme which enables students to develop a critical understanding of specialist or linked areas of the law. Students embarking on the LLM are able to select from a range of different module electives to gain a general Master of Laws, or choose electives from specific modules, to specialise in a particular area of law. There are 13 specialisms that include public international law, international banking and finance law, international energy law and regulation, international commercial law, and international human rights law.

<b>Contact</b>
<b>GDL</b> 020 7040 3309 <a href="mailto:law@city.ac.uk">law@city.ac.uk</a>
<b>LLB (Graduate Entry)</b> 020 7040 3309 <a href="mailto:law@city.ac.uk">law@city.ac.uk</a>
<b>Bar Vocational Studies</b> 020 7040 5787 <a href="mailto:bvs@city.ac.uk">bvs@city.ac.uk</a>
<b>LPC</b> 020 7040 5787 <a href="mailto:lpc@city.ac.uk">lpc@city.ac.uk</a>
<b>Master of Laws LLM</b> 020 7040 5787 <a href="mailto:law@city.ac.uk">law@city.ac.uk</a>



# The University of Law

2 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8HQ

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Website: [www.law.ac.uk/postgraduate](http://www.law.ac.uk/postgraduate)

Facebook: [universityoflaw](https://www.facebook.com/universityoflaw)

Twitter: @universityoflaw

Instagram: @u\_law

LinkedIn: [the-university-of-law](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-university-of-law)

## University profile

The University of Law is the UK's longest-established specialist provider of legal education and training in the UK. Our expert employability service gives students access to work experience, pro bono opportunities and legal vacancies as soon as they accept their place. The result is excellent employability statistics: 97% of our full-time 2016/17 and accelerated 2017 LPC students graduating in summer 2017 secured employment, a training contract, or further study within nine months of successfully completing their course according to our latest available data.

## Graduate Diploma in Law (full-time / part-time / online)

Our modular GDL spreads the workload for a better paced approach. Unlike linear GDL courses, our modular course structure is spread over two semesters, so you can 'bank' some exams in the first semester, therefore reducing any excessive end of course assessment burden. With a range of study options to suit you, including full-time, part-time and online.

## MA Law (full time / part-time / online)

Our MA Law course is designed for non-law graduates to gain a legal qualification at Master's level. An internationally recognised qualification, it is ideal if you're considering a career path in or outside of the legal sector. We now offer full-time, part-time and online options. MA Law students may also be eligible for a postgraduate loan.

## Legal Practice Course (full-time / part-time / online)

Our career-focused LPC will prepare you for life as a solicitor. Improve your career prospects by learning the essential professional skills that legal employers are looking for. At no extra cost, you can gain an MSc in Law, Business and Management or an LLM in Professional Legal Practice. LPC Master's Degree students may also be eligible for a postgraduate student loan. We offer a range of study options to suit you, including full-time, part-time and online.

With a clear focus on employability, we offer our LPC Employment Promise. Get a job in nine months or receive 50% of your fees as cashback plus 50% of your fees as credit towards any further courses.\*

## Bar Practice Course (full-time / part-time)

Our BPC is designed to help you secure pupillage and prepare you for life as a barrister. You'll get to study in small groups, with plenty of opportunities to test your advocacy skills. With our BPC LLM, you can choose from three pathways to success: complete real-life legal work experience, write a dissertation or study additional modules and sit the exams after you finish your BPC. Master's Degree students may also be eligible for postgraduate funding.

## Master of Laws (full-time / part-time / online)

Our Master of Laws (LLMs) for law and non-law graduates are designed for those who want to explore the practical application of a particular, specialist area of law. LLM student may also be eligible for postgraduate funding.

## MSc/PGDip Legal Technology (full-time / part-time / online)

Designed for law and non-law graduates who would like to gain essential in-depth knowledge of legal technology.

## MSc Programmes

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\*Terms and conditions apply. Visit [law.ac.uk/promise](http://law.ac.uk/promise) for more information.

### Contact

Tel: 020 3435 4608

Email: [study@law.ac.uk](mailto:study@law.ac.uk)

[www.law.ac.uk/postgraduate](http://www.law.ac.uk/postgraduate)

### GDL, MA Law & LPC full-time

Apply via the  
Central Applications Board  
[www.lawcabs.ac.uk](http://www.lawcabs.ac.uk)

### GDL, MA Law & LPC part-time & online

Apply directly to  
The University of Law  
[www.law.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/](http://www.law.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/)

### BPC full-time & part-time

Apply directly to  
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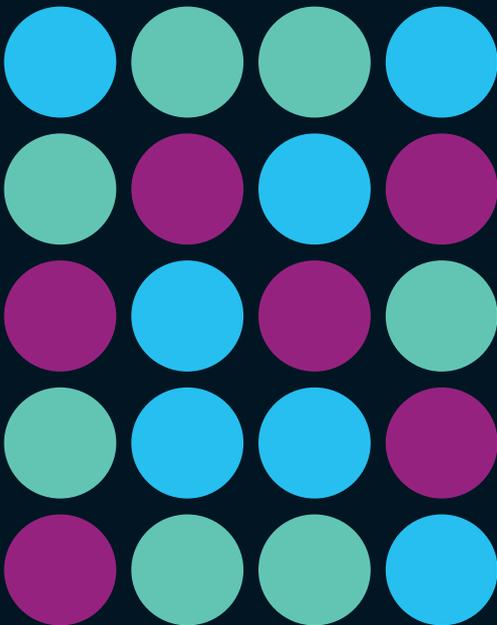
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Apply directly to  
The University of Law  
[www.law.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/](http://www.law.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/apply/)

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