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# Step 3: Planning your legal career

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## Education

If you want to be a barrister or solicitor, after your GCSE level studies you would normally study A-levels (or equivalents), then a degree followed by a year or two on a postgraduate law course. Finally, you would spend a year or two undertaking work based training (period of recognised training/training contract or pupillage). We will look at each of these stages in turn, highlighting some factors you might want to consider on the way. There are alternative routes, but this is the path taken by the vast majority of lawyers.

### Alternative Routes

If you want to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales, the entry route outlined here is the most common, most well established and, for most people, the most straightforward. However, there are alternatives:

the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx) has been providing a route into the profession, based heavily on study while work, for decades  
transfer options may exist for those who are qualified lawyers in other jurisdictions  
Equivalent means – since 2014, it has been possible for those with significant legal experience to be able to apply for this experience to be taken into consideration as equivalent to that secured as part of the training contract.  
Apprenticeships – similar to the CILEx route – allowing a combination of work and study. This is a new and developing area.

These alternative routes are outside the scope of this Resource Book.

There are currently limited alternative routes to the Bar: primarily, these apply to those qualified as lawyers overseas or as solicitors in England and Wales.

Training reviews: as discussed in Step 1, at the current time, the training for both barristers and solicitors is undergoing a significant revision.

### A-levels or equivalent

There are a range of pre-university courses available. When choosing your options, you need to consider:

**What type of qualifications to study?** Despite the equivalence of all post-16 qualifications, many universities prefer standard A-levels (or the main equivalents such as the International Baccalaureate, Scottish Highers and so on) and many legal recruiters tend to prefer these too.

**Which subjects to study?** Generally speaking, if you are thinking of a career in law, as long as the subject has a solid academic content, then what you study matters less than how well you do: choose subjects in which you think you can perform well and those you will enjoy. Many universities will not mind what you have studied, as long as it fits with the degree you wish to pursue (a relevant language for a language degree, sciences for a science degree, etc.). If you already have an idea of the



universities you are interested in, you should check their criteria. You should also be aware that some universities have expressed a clear preference for what can be described as



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bankruptcy or other financial difficulties  
addictions or other conditions will call into question your fitness to practise  
If any of these issues affect you, you are encouraged to contact the Inn for advice and make any application to join early to allow time for a decision to be made.

For aspiring solicitors, the SRA no longer requires membership prior to the LPC

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- Student Loans Company loans – in addition to covering the costs of

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mini-pupillage with a set of chambers you intend to apply to for pupillage, it can be useful to get an insight into that organisation and therefore give you a head-start in the recruitment process. However, some chambers will require candidates to undertake an assessed mini-pupillage, and this forms part of the recruitment process. Therefore, you need to be researching different chambers as early as possible to see if assessed mini-pupillages are an integral part of the selection process, and ensure you apply in plenty of time.

## **Recruitment: training contract and pupillage applications**

### **Training contract deadlines**

As mentioned above, training contract applications can become ‘tied up’ with the vacation scheme application timetable, which means that for the larger City firms you need to be in the process of getting your applications together as early as the autumn term in the penultimate year of your LL.B – that is almost three years before you begin your training contract. Even without vacation schemes, the deadline for training contracts at these large firms can be as early as the second term of the final year, for example January 2018 for a 2020 training contract. While it is primarily the large corporate firms which have such early deadlines, some firms outside this sector may also ask for applications 2 years or more before you would expect to commence a training contract with them. If you are not interested in the larger recruiters, however, other firms will recruit according to a much shorter timetable for example recruiting LPC graduates a few months before they are due to start training.

### **Pupillage deadlines**

Most deadlines for most pupillage application deadlines are in the winter just under 2 years before your pupillage would commence. For example, those recruiting via the Pupillage Gateway in January 2017 will usually be recruiting for October 2018 pupillages.



