The Legal Profession—
Information for Intending GDL Students
SECTION 1: Entry To The Solicitors’ Branch Of The Legal Profession

A Period Of Recognised Training To Become A Solicitor-Trainee Solicitor/Graduate Trainee Positions

The Solicitors Regulation Authority rules governing how to become a solicitor changed on 1 July 2014. The new term for a “training contract” is a Period of Recognised Training (PRT). This is a trainee solicitor position, which lasts for a period of not less than 2 years and during which a trainee solicitor must be trained in three different areas of law, and must acquire the prescribed SRA Practice Skills Standards. However, it is likely that many law firms and other employers of trainee solicitors will continue using the term “training contract” as this has been a recognised term.

Further information on the rules regarding training to become a solicitor can be found in the Manchester Met Careers & Employability Service guide Becoming a Solicitor- a Period of Recognised Training, available here: mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides

Corporate/Commercial Law Firms- Recruitment 2 Years In Advance

As you prepare to start your GDL course at Manchester Metropolitan University, you need to be aware of several important factors regarding entry into the solicitors’ branch of the legal profession. Probably the most significant of these is that you should be considering applying for a trainee solicitor position before you commence your GDL. Most of the large City, international & national corporate/commercial law firms recruit 2 years in advance.

In other words, you will need to apply to these by 31 July 2018 (and sometimes even earlier) for a trainee solicitor position to commence in September 2020. These firms also offer paid vacation schemes in the Easter and/or summer holidays and often run the first stage or final assessment for a trainee solicitor position on these schemes. If you wish to apply for a place on the vacation scheme, then the closing dates are earlier i.e. between December 2017 & April 2018. Second stage interviews tend to take place in August or September 2018 and offers of training contracts will be made in September or October in order to commence in September 2020.

Other Ways to Become a Trainee Solicitor & Paralegal Roles

The large corporate/commercial law firms also recruit for paralegal positions. Although paralegal roles & trainee solicitor roles are very different & separate in these firms, paralegal work can sometimes be a useful inside “foot in the door” to a trainee solicitor role. At these large firms, paralegals must apply for training contracts as internal applicants, competing with external applicants.
This forward recruitment has **advantages:**

- If successful, you are free to concentrate on your studies, which are going to be intensive and demanding;
- The firms concerned usually offer good conditions of service, including a systematic and carefully monitored training scheme;
- Many of the firms pay course fees for the GDL and Legal Practice Course. They may also give a maintenance grant for these courses in order to help with living costs.

However, there are **disadvantages:**

- You must undertake in-depth research into the training and the range of legal work offered by these firms over the coming months;
- You will have to choose specific areas of law in which you will practise for at least the first two years of your career, before you have acquired sufficient legal knowledge to appreciate what these specialisms will entail;
- Settling into a new academic field, a new institution and a new geographical location brings its own pressures without adding those of preparing for interviews.

Some medium-sized law firms advertise training contracts 12-24 months in advance. However, outside of the large corporate/commercial law firms, which recruit trainee solicitors 2 years in advance, increasingly less law firms advertise training contracts for direct external competition, with entry to these law firms coming via a paralegal job. Paralegals then either apply & compete for a trainee solicitor role internally or are simply given a trainee solicitor role having proved themselves by working in the paralegal job, typically after 6-24 months. Paralegal roles are usually advertised on an ad hoc basis, as and when vacancies arise, not advertised far in advance. Many firms/organisations require or prefer completion of the LPC (or BPTC) for paralegal roles.

**Further information on different types of law firms/organisations and trainee solicitor recruitment can be found in the Manchester Met Careers & Employability Service guide Applying for a Legal Practice Position, available here: mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides**

Paralegal work can be also be a career in itself. Whilst the number of trainee solicitor vacancies is unlikely to grow hugely, there is a growing need for paralegals and senior paralegals are often well-paid fee earners who often manage or supervise staff.

**Further information on paralegal work can be found in the Manchester Met Careers & Employability Service guide Work as a Paralegal, available here: mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides**

**Current Employment Situation**

Although the number of practising solicitors has grown rapidly in recent years to 136,176 there is intense competition for training places. Over 12,000 places are available on the Legal Practice Course (LPC) each year whereas the number of training contracts registered with the Law Society in 2015-16 was 5,728.
As a result, those applying for trainee solicitor vacancies face stiff competition, with many large corporate/commercial firms setting their entry requirement at a minimum of an upper second degree plus A-level grades typically of AAA-BBB. In addition, firms want evidence of your commitment and usually expect you to have undertaken at least one vacation placement or have done some legal work experience and/or pro bono volunteering work.

It is also important to be aware that starting salaries can be quite low. The Solicitors Regulation Authority previously set a minimum training contract salary but this ended on 1 August 2014.

### Deciding To Apply in 2017-2018

If you would like to apply to the larger practices this year, in order to commence a training contract in 2020, careful preparation is essential. You may have already seen your University Careers Consultant before graduating and some background reading may have been recommended to you. If not, the following booklets/websites will provide much of the essential information:

- **Target Law**: [targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/law-solicitors](http://targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/law-solicitors)
- **Applying for a Legal Practice Position**: [mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides](http://mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides)
- **Training Contract & Pupillage Handbook**: [lawcareers.net](http://lawcareers.net)

These are available on reference in the Manchester Met Careers & Employability Service, in the Employability Hub on the Manchester campus on Oxford Road. In addition, detailed information is given at [sra.org.uk/home/home.page](http://sra.org.uk/home/home.page). The Solicitor’s Regulation Authority help line - tel. 0370 606 2555 is provided to answer specific queries from students about the process of becoming a solicitor.

### Work Experience and Vacation Placements

To aid your decision-making and to enhance the content of your CV, you should undertake some relevant work experience or shadowing before commencing the GDL. Indeed, a significant proportion of solicitors use vacation placements or work experience as part of their selection process.

Work experience is normally gained through a vacation or work experience placement in a solicitor’s office but experience gained in local authority or company legal departments, the magistrates’ courts, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or similar are all acceptable. It may also be useful to do a mini-pupillage in barristers’ chambers to confirm that the solicitors’ branch of the legal profession is the right one for you.

As stated in the first section, many larger firms have established Easter/summer vacation schemes. They will normally offer a weekly wage or assist with travelling expenses. However, placements in smaller firms will usually have to be undertaken on a voluntary basis.
Many of the formal vacation schemes are listed in the websites and reference books, above. However, you can make your own speculative approaches to firms of solicitors and organisations with legal departments in which you are interested. The “Find A Solicitor” search function on the home page of the Law Society’s web site is particularly helpful when making such applications—solici tors.lawsociety.org.uk.

In addition, attending Open Days which are organised by some firms, work-shadowing a solicitor for one or two days, visiting the courts, or undertaking voluntary work in an advice centre can all be acceptable to recruiting firms seeking evidence of your commitment to a career in law.

*IMPORTANT: The Solicitors Regulation Authority have announced the introduction of a new Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) which will be introduced in 2020. It is anticipated that this will lead to new vocational courses for training as a solicitor. However, the current route of Graduate Diploma in Law followed by the Legal Practice Course will still be available to all non-Law graduates who commence legal study before September 2020.

For further information on the SQE: http://sra.org.uk/students/students.page

Sources of Vacancy Information

PROSPECTS Law: prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/law-sector

Training Contract & Pupillage Handbook: lawcareers.net

Chambers Student Guide to the Legal Profession: chambersstudent.co.uk

Many of the larger firms produce their own brochures in hard copy and on-line outlining the work of the practice and describing the application, recruitment and training procedures.

Important Dates in 2018-2019

April 2019 – Exact Dates to be Confirmed

Closing date for applications for the Law Society Diversity Access Scheme to cover the costs of the Legal Practice Course. Students should keep an eye on the Diversity Access Scheme section of the Law Society’s website at lawsociety.org.uk/law-careers/diversity-access-scheme/, where this competition will be announced.
SECTION 2: Entry to the Barristers’ Branch of the Legal Profession

Entry to the Bar is extremely competitive. It is a small profession with approximately 12,750 barristers practising at the self-employed Bar and just under 3,000 in employed practice.

There are approximately 1800 places on the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC). In 2014-15, 437 first six pupillages were registered with the Bar Standards Board. The Northern Circuit, based in Manchester, offers a reasonable no. of pupillages each year and there are reasonable prospects of securing tenancy on completion.

The Bar Standards Board authorizes organizations other than chambers to offer both first and second six pupillages. Examples include solicitors, local government, and commercial organizations with legal departments, charities, citizens’ advice bureaux and law centres. In all cases, the pupillage must be undertaken with a practising barrister who is entitled to act as a pupil supervisor. Evidence so far, however, indicates that this has had minimal impact upon the number of pupillages on offer each year.

All pupillages are now funded to a minimum level of £12,000 per annum. In the second six, this can take the form of a minimum earnings guarantee. However, the earnings of a new tenant are unlikely to be as good as those received by a newly qualified assistant solicitor.

Before embarking on the Academic Stage of Training, do consider whether you have the necessary qualifications, skills and abilities to succeed.

*IMPORTANT: The Bar Standards Board have announced likely changes to the vocational stage of training for the Bar which it is anticipated will be introduced from 2018-19. At the time of updating this careers guide the Bar Professional Training Course remains in place. However, it may be replaced by a new or modified course and admissions system for the 2018-19 academic session. The BSB have announced that Bar students will still need to join an Inn of Court and successfully pass the Bar Course Aptitude Test before proceeding to this course. More information can be found at Future Bar Training: http://barstandardsboard.org.uk/qualifying-as-a-barrister/future-requirements/

Mini-Pupillages

Before you start the GDL, you should complete at least one mini-pupillage. Details of chambers offering mini-pupillages appear can be viewed at lawcareers.net/barristers/minipupillages.
Important Dates in 2018-19

Friday 2nd November 2018
Likely closing date for applications for Inns of Court BPTC Scholarships.

*Early-Mid January 2019
Likely closing date for first round applications for the Bar Professional Training Course (or whichever vocational course is then running) starting in September 2019, which are made through the Bar Student Application Service- bars.com/. Applications for BOTH the full-time & part-time BPTC are currently made through this system.

November 2018
A National Pupillage Fair normally takes place in London in November. This is designed to assist you in selecting which sets of chambers to apply to. Full details, including a registration form, will be available at targetjobs.co.uk/targetjobs-national-pupillage-fair once details are finalised.

Early February 2019
Likely closing date for pupillages being processed through Pupillage Gateway.

It is important to note that some chambers now recruit up to two years ahead. Many chambers do not use Pupillage Gateway and recruit by direct application, either on their own application form or via submission of a CV and covering letter. These chambers use their own individual closing dates.

However, all pupillages, whether Pupillage Gateway or not, have to be advertised in accordance with Bar Standards Board regulations and appear on the dedicated web site – pupillagegateway.com

31st May 2019
Closing date for application for admission to one of the Inns of Court. Admission is required in order to register for the Bar Professional Training Course. It may take a few weeks for the Inn to process your papers, so early application is advisable.

September 2019
Likely closing date for taking the Bar Course Aptitude Test (BCAT.) In addition to making an application to the course, students wishing to progress to the BPTC must register for and pass the BCAT. The test is administered by Pearson Vue and is available to take at a variety of their test centres around both the UK and the world. It is a multiple-choice test that tests critical thinking & reasoning. You are advised to take the test early in case you need to retake it, there is no maximum no. of attempts but you must allow 30 days to elapse between attempts. (The test costs £150 per attempt if taken in the UK, £170 abroad.)
Sources of Helpful Information

Bar Council’s Careers Section  barcouncil.org.uk/careers
Target Law  targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/law-barristers
PROSPECTS Law  prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/law-sector

The Inns of Court

The Student Officers of the Inns of Court are particularly helpful and should be approached in writing or by telephone whenever you have a specific enquiry. They can advise on applying for mini-pupillages, awards and scholarships available to help finance your professional studies and obtaining pupillage. Contact details are as follows:

Inner Temple, London EC4Y 7HL. Tel: 0207 797 8210
Student Officer: Mr Eamonn Reilly
inner temple.org.uk

Middle Temple, London EC4Y 9BT. Tel: 0207 427 4800
Student Officer: Miss Sally York
middletemple.org.uk

Lincoln’s Inn, London WC2A 3TL. Tel: 0207 405 1393
Student Officer: Mrs June Gascoigne
lincolns inn.org.uk

Gray’s Inn, London WC1R 5ET. Tel: 0207 458 7900
Student Officer: Miss Rachel James
graysinn.org.uk
Manchester Metropolitan University Careers & Employability Service - mmu.ac.uk/careers

The Careers & Employability Service also houses some of the reference books referred to in this leaflet. Free PC access to professional and company web sites is available.

If you wish to discuss your options before commencing the GDL, contact the Careers and Employability Service by telephoning 0161 247 3483. Nick Touati is the specialist Law Careers & Employability Consultant and he can see prospective GDL students by individual arrangement.

An introductory careers talk is given to all GDL students at the beginning of the autumn term. The talk covers applications to both the Legal Practice Course and Bar Professional Training Course, enrolment with the Inns of Court, sources of financial assistance and applications for trainee solicitor positions, paralegal jobs and pupillages. This will be followed by events during the year to allow you to meet practitioners and learn more about the main areas of legal practice. mmu.ac.uk/careers/events

Detailed careers guides

Our full range of careers guides, including information on finding and applying for opportunities are available on our website: mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides

Ask a Careers Question

Get online advice through My Career Hub, ask your question at any time and receive support via email. mmu.ac.uk/careersquestion

Careers Consultant Appointments

Book a 30 minute appointment with a Careers & Employability Consultant. All you need to do to book in is call us on 0161 247 3483.

Careers Events

Meet employers and enhance your employability by attending our workshops, employer events and careers fairs. Keep up to date with the latest events here: mmu.ac.uk/careers/events