Work as a Paralegal
What is a Paralegal?

A paralegal is a catch-all, generic term for anybody who is undertaking substantive legal work - as opposed to purely administrative or secretarial work - but who is not in a trainee solicitor position or a pupillage, or a qualified solicitor or barrister. In reality the term “paralegal” covers a huge range of jobs across the legal services market, from junior level graduate entry roles to well-paid senior roles, which involve working on all aspects of a case from beginning to end and/or supervising or managing teams of staff.

Experienced paralegals earn fees for their law firm and often do pretty much everything that solicitors do.

LPC & BPTC graduates in particular often view paralegal work as a way of gaining valuable legal experience whilst applying for trainee solicitor or pupillage positions; or as a “foot in the door” to a training contract - and it often is.

However, paralegal work should also be viewed as a means and potential career in itself. There are likely to be many more paralegal positions available than there will be trainee solicitor roles or pupillages, particularly in view of the implementation of the Legal Services Act, the development of alternative business structures and the entry into the legal services market of different types of companies & organisations.

Job titles for paralegals vary tremendously- many law firms & organisations will simply name the job “Paralegal” or “Graduate Paralegal” but in reality, many different titles are used.

- Legal Advisor or Assistant Legal Advisor
- Legal Clerk
- Legal Assistant
- Litigation Executive
- Litigation Assistant
- Claims Handler
- File Handler
- Contracts Reviewer
- Police Station Representative
- Crown or Magistrates Court Clerk
- Caseworker
- Costs Paralegal
- Graduate Paralegal
- Paralegal

Paralegals work in firms of solicitors, but they also work in a wide variety of other types of organisations, companies & public bodies; in fact, paralegals can be found anywhere that legal or quasi-legal work is being undertaken.
The work of a Paralegal

Duties vary widely. In some firms, paralegals undertake virtually the full range of trainee solicitor or fee earner tasks; in others, they carry out high volume routine legal tasks, which are a common feature in the fields of insurance, conveyancing and personal injury.

Firms may also recruit paralegals to undertake specific tasks within a single contract. Examples might include proof reading legal documentation being prepared for a multi-million-pound contract closure or the preparation of document bundles for a forthcoming extensive trial.

Tasks may include:

- Legal research
- Drafting letters and documents
- Preparation of briefing notes
- Identifying key documents e.g. Documents which will need to be disclosed to the other side during discovery or for due diligence in a takeover deal.
- Document Management – bundling, scheduling, indexing, pagination, scanning, photocopying. A very high degree of accuracy and attention to detail is required. Hundreds of files may be involved. A typical trial bundle may run to 25 volumes.
- Proof reading
- Instructing counsel
- Taking client statements & notes in court
- Attending completion meetings
- Attending client meetings

Qualifications and qualities sought

Most law firms will look for a minimum of a Law degree or GDL. Increasingly, many firms prefer applicants to have completed the LPC or BPTC. Some look for a 2:1 and stress the importance of a strong academic background.

In some cases, previous paralegal experience, or other office/administrative experience is preferred, and IT skills are considered a valuable asset.

Desirable qualities

- Willingness to do anything required by the partners or solicitors in order to progress the case.
- Willingness to travel to clients
- Ability to work unsupervised
- Ability to prioritise workload, often under pressure
- Highly organised
- Willingness to work flexible hours and the ability to meet deadlines. (Long hours are a frequent feature in Corporate and Commercial departments)
- Accuracy and attention to detail

Training for Paralegals

The National Association of Licensed Paralegals has developed a Level 7 (Postgraduate) Diploma in Paralegal Practice. This is available solely by distance learning
costs £1420. It covers the practical & procedural areas of Civil Litigation, Criminal Practice, Corporate & Business Structures, Matrimonial and Civil Partnership Disputes, Conveyancing and Succession. The practical skills elements are interviewing, drafting, advocacy & negotiation. It is also possible to undertake the drafting and negotiating skills elements without undertaking the full qualification. This costs £85 per skill for NALP members or £99 for non-members. NALP offer licensed status to paralegals.

NB. This course may be of particular value to LLB or GDL graduates who view a career as a paralegal as an interesting alternative to becoming a solicitor, particularly in view of the cost of completing the Legal Practice Course and the fierce competition for trainee solicitor positions.

For further information contact the National Association of Licensed Paralegals nationalparalegals.com.

CILEX (Chartered Institute of Legal Executives) offer the CILEX Level 3 Certificate in Law and Practice. CILEX also offer the Graduate Fast-Track Diploma that gives a short cut to qualification as a Chartered Executive Lawyer for LLB & GDL graduates.) See cilex.org.uk for further details.

Some law firms have developed in-house training modules specifically for their paralegals; others encourage paralegals to attend in-house courses provided for trainees.

Paralegals and becoming a solicitor

Many mid-sized and smaller law firms will consider their paralegals for trainee solicitor positions as they arise. Indeed, many firms of solicitors will now only offer a trainee solicitor position after an LPC graduate has spent some time (typically 6-24 months) “proving” themselves with the firm as a paralegal. In other firms, progression to a trainee solicitor role from paralegal work will be automatic for an LPC graduate so far as they are able to show performance in the role as against the organisation’s criteria. However, in other firms paralegals must apply for training contracts as internal candidates.

The larger corporate/commercial firms tend to keep paralegal work & recruitment quite separate from that of trainee solicitors, though increasingly some trainee solicitors have already worked at the firm as paralegals. Paralegals at large corporate/commercial firms must apply for training contracts as internal candidates and compete against external candidates.

Time spent working as a paralegal may reduce the time spent working in a trainee solicitor role under the Solicitors Regulation Authority’s Training Regulations. Any reduction in the length of a training contract is entirely at the discretion of the firm or organisation the individual is doing his/her Period of Recognised Training (usually known as a “training contract” with). The maximum amount of reduction allowed is 6 months, on a like-for-like basis. In all such instances, application must be made directly to the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

Applying for Vacancies

Vacancies usually arise on an ad hoc basis, and are advertised on an “immediate vacancy” basis i.e. as & when a job vacancy arises.
Many firms do not advertise vacancies, mainly due to the large number of speculative applications received. In addition, some firms require staff at very short notice and so do not have time to advertise – they employ a core of permanent paralegals, and then recruit temporary help as and when workloads demand. As a result, it is advisable to indicate in a speculative application the dates when you are available for work. Some law firms will recruit paralegals via unpaid work experience.

Firms who advertise do so via:

- Manchester Met Careers & Employability jobs database, available at mmu.ac.uk/findajob
- Lawcareers.net/Jobs
- lawgazette.co.uk - Law Society Gazette (search Jobs section)
- cilexrecruitment.org.uk - CILEX’s jobs site
- University law schools
- Recruitment agencies- usually require 6-12 months previous experience
- Firms’ own websites
- Notifying vacancies on Twitter
- Jobs section of LinkedIn

For a list of websites that advertise paralegal job vacancies see the Manchester Met Careers & Employability Service guide for Useful Legal Websites and Blogs, available at mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides

**Legal Recruitment Agencies**

Legal recruitment agencies generally require students to possess 6-12 months paralegal experience.

The Manchester Met Law School Faculty Careers & Employability Manager has a separate guide listing legal recruitment agencies in the Manchester area.
Careers & Employability Support

The Careers & Employability Service offers range of support to Manchester Met students and graduates:

**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 Online:**
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 one of our Careers Consultants by calling 0161 247 3483 to discuss events careers.

**Careers Events:**
Meet employers and enhance your employability by attending our workshops, employer events and careers fairs.
mmu.ac.uk/careers/events

**MMyou**
The online careers centre you can access 24/7 to view lots of career resources, advice and tips, career quizzes and helpful articles wherever you are! Including articles and information tailored to your sector! Login to MMyou Careers Centre to find out more!

For more information visit mmu.ac.uk/careers