

# Harding Evans LLP

Thinking about a career in Law?  
Some handy hints to get you started.

# Introduction

Are you interested in starting a legal career?

Maybe you fancy a career change and want to know more about getting a job as a lawyer, paralegal or legal secretary?

Hopefully this brief 'Introduction to a career in law' will answer some of your questions.



# About us

Harding Evans is one of the leading law firms in Wales.

From our offices in Newport and Cardiff, we represent a wide range of individual and commercial clients, and are committed to getting the best outcome for them, whatever their legal needs.

We have friendly, experienced lawyers who are specialists in many different areas of the law, from family, wills & probate and residential and commercial property to clinical negligence, dispute resolution and employment law.



# About me



I'm Ben Jenkins, I'm a Partner at Harding Evans and head up the Dispute Resolution team. I studied my LPC at Cardiff University in 2005 and joined Harding Evans in 2007, working my way up to Partner in 2017.

I specialise in civil and commercial litigation, commercial contracts, advocacy at court and mediation. I've acted for a wide variety of clients including foreign companies, professional sports clubs and professional athletes.

I was always more interested in English and History at school and when it came to career choices, it was between journalism and law for me. My teachers suggested I do a History degree at university and specialise after that if I still wanted a career in journalism or law, but I was impatient and keen to start my career. I opted for law and have not looked back since.

My tip for anyone considering a career as a dispute resolution lawyer? Have a thick skin, don't lose your sense of perspective, make sure you know your case inside out, be prepared to be thrown into the deep end and enjoy it!

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“ *The power of the lawyer is in the uncertainty of the law.*”

*Jeremy Bentham*

# What do lawyers do?

Being a lawyer is a very valuable role as law is involved in every aspect of society – from buying a house to writing a Will. The law is there to protect your rights, whether as a consumer, patient, employee or employer.

Traditionally, the legal profession is divided into two main branches – solicitors and barristers – but there are lots of other jobs in the sector too. Their jobs vary considerably depending on what area of law they work in and whether their job is advisory or involves legal disputes. However, all lawyers' jobs involve some or all of the following:

- Meeting clients, finding out their needs and establishing how to help
- Researching different areas of law and advising clients of their options
- Drafting letters, contracts and other legal documents
- Acting on behalf of clients in negotiations and representing them at tribunals or in court

Working in the law can be a tough but rewarding job. Many of those who enter the profession work their way up through the ranks from trainee to associate to partner.

# Jobs available in the legal sector

Although careers as a solicitor or barrister are the most popular options, there is also a variety of other law jobs you can do. To help you choose the right one for you, here's a breakdown of some of the most common jobs in the sector.

- **Solicitor**

A confidential adviser who has direct contact with clients, combining expertise and people skills to provide legal guidance and assistance, both in and out of court. Once qualified, you can work in private practice, in-house, in local or central government or in the court service.

- **Barrister**

You'll advise clients on the law and the strength of their case, represent clients in court by presenting the case, examining witnesses and giving reasons why the court should support the case, and negotiate settlements with the other side.

- **Chartered legal executive**

Only those who have completed the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives training programme can become chartered. As a qualified lawyer you'll have your own client files and, unlike other legal support staff who are not fee earners, your work can be charged directly to the client.



# Jobs available in the legal sector

- **Paralegal**

You'll need an understanding of the client and sector, good people and networking skills, to be a methodical problem solver and able to analyse information and the possible implications.

- **Legal secretary**

It's your job to ensure the office runs smoothly by providing administrative support to solicitors and legal executives. You may provide wills and contracts, accompany solicitors to court or police stations and deal with clients. You'll need to be able to type accurately and quickly and have a good eye for detail.

- **Judge**

You'll control trials and hearings in the courtroom. You need to look at the evidence, interpret the law and make an impartial decision in favour of one of the parties. In criminal cases you'll also decide what sentence to give a defendant if they're convicted. You need significant experience as a solicitor or barrister before becoming a judge.

- **Support services**

Law firms also need the full range of support services, from IT and HR to finance and marketing, so if you are interested in pursuing any of these career paths, working for a law firm could be an interesting place to start and build up specialist experience.

**Try to arrange work experience and attend insight days to help decide which path might suit you.**

# Skills you'll need for a career in law

There are a number of key skills that law firms like ours look for when selecting candidates:

- **Commercial awareness**

Lawyers must appreciate the commercial importance of meeting deadlines, keeping costs reasonable and working quickly and effectively, as well as having an understanding of how businesses are run.

- **Teamwork**

You'll need to collaborate with colleagues and partners in your firm as well as fostering a close working relationship with your clients.

- **Attention to detail**

Accuracy is essential to the success of your legal career. A single word out of place can change the meaning of a clause or contract while bad spelling or grammar gives clients a negative impression of your firm.

- **Communication**

Strong communication skills are essential. You'll need to be able to listen effectively and speak confidently, to build relationships and gain your clients' confidence, and write well to draft letters and legal documents.

# Skills you'll need for a career in law

- **Creative problem solving**

You'll often need to think outside the box to get the job done so will need to apply creative thinking and problem-solving on a daily basis.

- **Information analysis and research**

You'll need to be good at reading large amounts of information, absorbing facts and figures, analysing often complicated material and distilling into something understandable.

- **Organisation**

The life of a solicitor can be one big juggling act so the ability to prioritise and stay focused is essential.

- **Resilience and self-confidence**

This can be a challenging career so you need to be strong enough to take knock backs but have confidence to believe in your abilities.

- **Able to work under pressure**

You'll have a heavy workload to manage, difficult decisions to make and tight deadlines to meet so you'll need to be good at dealing with stress.

# How to become a lawyer

## What qualifications do I need?

- The traditional route is to complete a qualifying law degree (LLB) at university or study another subject at undergraduate level and then take the one-year Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) conversion course.
- To be a solicitor, you must complete the vocational Legal Practice Course (LPC) before undertaking a training contract with a law firm. You can then apply for admission to the roll of solicitors.
- An alternative is to complete a Solicitor Apprenticeship, a six-year, Level 7 programme aimed at post A Level students, paralegals and chartered legal executives.
- In September 2021, the way that solicitors qualify in England and Wales is set to change with the introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE).

# How to become a lawyer

## How long does it take?

- If you study full time it generally takes at least six years to qualify as a solicitor. You can go down an alternative route, such as a legal apprenticeship, but this tends to take longer.

## Which A level subjects should I choose?

- There are no essential subjects you must study at A level to become a lawyer but try to choose ones that involve research, analysis and communication, such as history, geography, modern languages or maths, to demonstrate you have the necessary skills for the job.

## Do I need good grades?

- Universities usually expect excellent A Level grades as evidence that you'll be able to cope with the demands of studying law.

## Why should I choose law over other professions?

- Don't just pursue a career in law because you've heard that it pays well. You need to have a strong desire to be a lawyer in order to succeed. Do you find law interesting? Is there a particular area of law that has caught your attention? Do you think you'd thrive in a legal environment?

# Which area of law should you specialise in?

There are hundreds of different types of law, but most will fall into one of two categories, commercial work or work for individuals.

Each area of law will interest different types of person and will require a slightly different set of skills.

We've explained some of the most popular areas of law here to help you decide.

- Employment Law
- Dispute Resolution
- Family Law
- Criminal Law
- Wills & Probate
- Property

# Areas of the law

## **Commercial Law**

- Advising companies and individuals on business-related issues is what this area of law is all about. You'll handle a range of corporate deals and stand-alone transactions and will be responsible for negotiating and drafting contracts.

## **Criminal Law**

- This covers any form of criminal behaviour, regardless of scale or severity. Private lawyers represent the defence while public practitioners work for either the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or the Public Defender Service (PDS).

## **Employment Law**

- This regulates the relationship between employers and their employees, including what employers can ask of and expect from their workforce and what rights individuals have in the workplace.

# Areas of the law

## **Dispute Resolution**

- Also known as litigation, this involves assisting with any civil disputes and claims that arise following a commercial deal or transaction, either between different companies or between a company and an individual. Issues can include fraud, regulation, unpaid bills, defective products, contractual matters and mergers and acquisitions.

## **Family Law**

- This area of law covers areas such as divorce, domestic abuse, parental responsibilities and childcare issues. You'll need good communication skills and empathy to succeed in family law.

## **Wills & Probate**

- In this area of law, you'll work with clients to ensure all the necessary documentation is in place to agree how an individual's finances, property and other assets should be distributed after their death, as well as any arrangements for caring for their children.

## **Property**

- Working on either commercial or residential property cases, you'll work with individuals, companies or developers to support them in the buying and selling of property.



# Thanks for reading!

For more information about a career in law, contact Harding Evans on 01633 244233 or 02922 676618.

Good luck!