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THE LAW

APPRENTICESHIPS GUIDE

———— 2026

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Five key things to know about a legal apprenticeship

1

You don't need a university degree: you can progress straight from your GCSEs or A levels to your apprenticeship.



2

You earn while you learn: you receive a salary while working as an apprentice, at the same time as studying.



3

You can find apprenticeship opportunities on LawCareers.Net: there's a comprehensive and searchable apprenticeship vacancies board of current vacancies, accessible via the Apprenticeships hub.



4

You can work in a law firm, private company or local government: many different organisations employ legal apprentices.



5

You can qualify as a solicitor (private practice and in-house), CILEX Lawyer or paralegal: there are a range of apprenticeship options, which allow you to qualify into a legal role that suits you.



Find out more in the rest of the guide.

Welcome



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If you're deciding whether to go to university after leaving school or start your career as a lawyer straight away with an apprenticeship, *The Law Apprenticeships Guide* can help. Don't worry if you don't know much about the legal profession or apprenticeships; this guide is designed to give you the information you need before you choose your next step.

What's a law apprenticeship?

A law apprenticeship combines paid work and training at a law firm with part-time study. It's an alternative path to going to university that offers the same career destinations but avoids the expensive fees. Plus, some law firms have introduced graduate solicitor apprenticeships, which are open to law graduates or non-law graduates who've completed a conversion course.

While apprenticeships aren't yet on the cards for those wishing to become barristers, a collaborative group that consists of some barristers' chambers, the Ministry of Justice and other organisations are in talks about what this might look like. So, watch this space.

How do I decide whether a law apprenticeship is for me?

This guide helps you to:

- compare university and apprenticeship paths so you can understand what each offers;
- learn about the different types of apprenticeship and where they lead;
- find out more about what it's like to work as a legal apprentice;
- check that you have the key skills needed for a law apprenticeship; and
- find out about current vacancies using the LawCareers.Net legal apprenticeships jobs board (located on the Apprenticeships hub).

Where can I find out more?

Head to the Apprenticeships hub on www.lawcareers.net – you'll find a jobs board where new apprenticeship vacancies are frequently posted, plus detailed information on apprenticeships and every other possible career path offered by the UK legal profession.



Legal apprenticeships enable young people to get onto a fulfilling and rewarding career path without the cost of going to university. Our apprentices are valued members of the firm, applying what they learn to real, practical work as they increase in confidence, responsibility and independence on the path to becoming fully qualified lawyers.

**Kieran Bennett, graduate recruitment and development coordinator,
Mayer Brown International LLP**

Apprenticeship v university

University is the right path for some people because it offers the chance to study an interesting subject in detail and gain a valuable degree that opens career options. University can also be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, filled with opportunities for getting involved in new activities and meeting life-long friends. On the other hand, an apprenticeship offers a more direct path to those same career options, without the costs of going to university.

Apprenticeships are also perfect for people who aren't keen on full-time study after finishing their A levels and want to kickstart their careers. It's important to remember that in the legal profession, you can have the same career whether you choose university or an

apprenticeship, which means that your choice isn't so much about where you end up, but how you get there – some apprenticeships even involve gaining a university degree.

Law apprenticeships lead to three possible careers – paralegal, solicitor or CILEX Lawyer. All three are also available if you choose to go to university. Find out more about what being a paralegal, solicitor or CILEX Lawyer involves on pages 4 and 5 in 'Career paths'. Meanwhile, this table explains some of the key differences between an apprenticeship and going to university.

Qualifications



Apprenticeship	University
Professional qualifications to become a paralegal, solicitor or CILEX Lawyer. Completing the solicitor apprenticeship also involves gaining a law degree. Apprentices must complete the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) to qualify as a solicitor.	A university degree in one of hundreds of subjects that's widely recognised. For law, a degree in any subject makes you eligible for the postgraduate professional courses and assessments you must complete to become a paralegal, solicitor, barrister or CILEX Lawyer.

Cost



Apprenticeship	University
None to the apprentice – the costs of apprenticeships are covered by the government and employers, while apprentices themselves are paid at least the apprentices' National Minimum Wage. After announcing funding cuts for level 7 apprenticeships, the government confirmed in May 2025 that funding will continue for level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 16 to 21.	With tuition fees standing at more than £9,000 a year and living costs on top of that, many students leave university in tens of thousands of pounds' worth of debt.



Duration

Apprenticeship	University
Sixteen to 24 months for legal administration/ business administration apprenticeships, 24 months for the paralegal apprenticeship, six years for the solicitor apprenticeship and around 32 months for the graduate solicitor apprenticeship. The duration of the chartered legal executive apprenticeship is dependent on entry point and route (contentious or non-contentious).	Undergraduate degrees usually last three to four years. You then need to pass the SQE assessments and build up two years of qualifying work experience.



Work experience

Apprenticeship	University
Full-time work in a law firm or the legal department of a company or other organisation.	Optional work placements and internships – students interested in law should apply for work experience at law firms.



Social life

Apprenticeship	University
As an apprentice working and studying full time, you may miss out on the social opportunities that come with going to university. However, offices often have great socialising opportunities too, with plenty of activities to get involved in, so you're bound to make good friends.	The opportunities for socialising at university are fantastic. From societies covering everything from political debating to cheerleading, to the thriving music, arts and social scenes at most universities, there's something for everyone to enjoy.

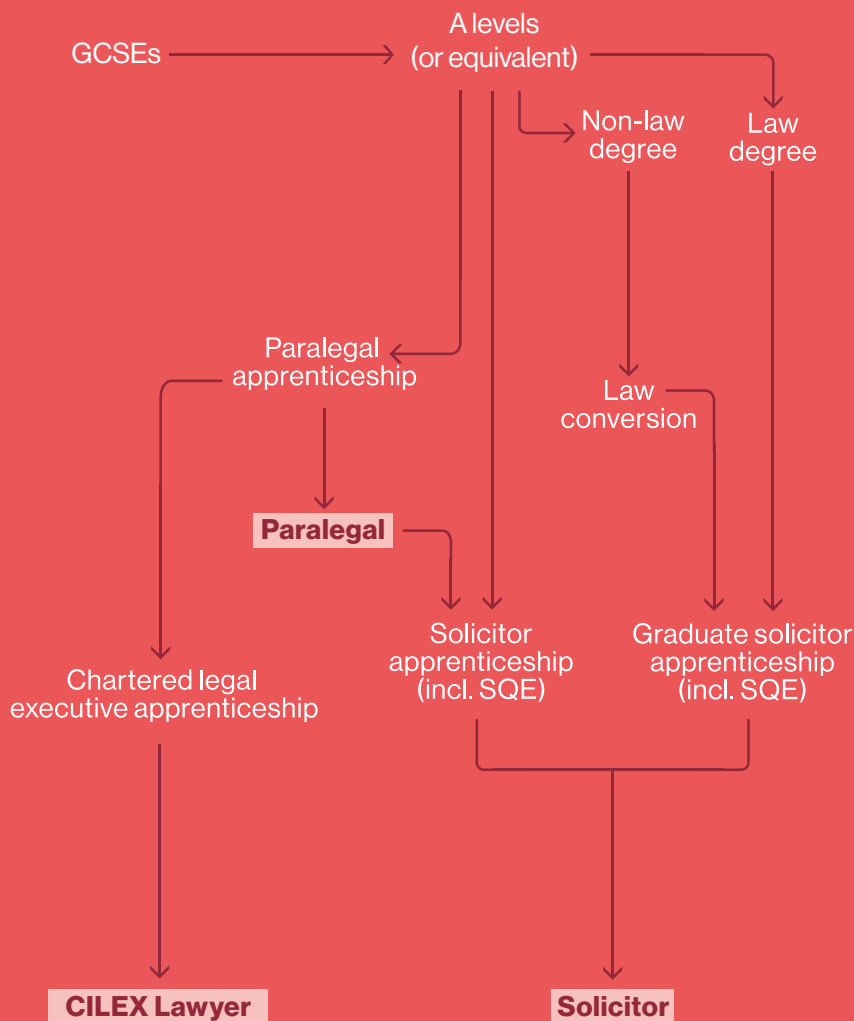


Career prospects

Apprenticeship	University
Both law apprentices and university graduates can pursue a career as a paralegal, solicitor or CILEX Lawyer.	

Apprenticeship career paths

START HERE



GCSEs

The foundation and first step of your legal career.

A levels

The academic stage between GCSE and university or the beginning of a paralegal/solicitor apprenticeship. Universities and employers will likely look at your A-level grades.

Paralegal apprenticeship

The paralegal apprenticeship (sometimes known as the advanced apprenticeship) delivers paralegal training in a particular legal practice area. Entry requirements are five GCSEs graded 9 to 4 (including English and maths) and three A levels graded C or above (or equivalent). It's usually a 24 to 30-month course and can lead to qualification as a solicitor via a solicitor apprenticeship. It's also possible to qualify as a CILEX Lawyer.

Solicitor apprenticeship

The solicitor apprenticeship is a six-year programme of paid, on-the-job training ending in qualification as a solicitor. The entry requirements are five GCSEs graded 9 to 4 (including English and maths) and three A levels (minimum grades vary among employers from CCC to AAB) or equivalent work experience. The apprenticeship integrates a law degree, obtained at the end of the fourth year. Apprentices learn law and legal practice alongside gaining competence in legal and commercial skills, and professional conduct. All solicitor apprentices are required to pass the SQE. The apprenticeship includes preparation and training for the assessments.

Chartered legal executive apprenticeship

You'll complete the CILEX Professional Qualification as part of this apprenticeship, achieving CILEX Lawyer status. As a CILEX Lawyer, you'll have full practice rights in your chosen specialism and complete equivalent work to that of a solicitor. Candidates usually complete previous qualifications, such as the paralegal apprenticeship, before starting the chartered legal executive apprenticeship.

Graduate solicitor apprenticeship

The graduate solicitor apprenticeship is another way to qualify as a solicitor. It's designed for candidates with a qualifying law degree (or equivalent qualification) or non-law graduates who've completed a conversion course, and can take between two to three years to complete. It works in a similar way to the traditional training contract, with on-the-job training and SQE preparation. Graduate solicitor apprentices must pass the SQE assessments to qualify.

Paralegal

Paralegals have traditionally worked alongside solicitors in law firms as support staff, but in practice many paralegals do the same work as trainees or newly qualified solicitors – although almost always for lower pay. Whether you become a paralegal through an apprenticeship or secure a paralegal job after graduating from university, you can qualify as a solicitor, CILEX Lawyer or a more senior paralegal.

CILEX Lawyer

A CILEX Lawyer is another type of lawyer who's trained to specialise as an expert in one area of law. Within that specialism, the job of a CILEX Lawyer is similar to that of a solicitor – they advise clients, draft documents and conduct research to find solutions.

Solicitor

Solicitors provide advice and assistance on legal matters. They're the first point of contact for people and organisations seeking legal advice and representation. Solicitors may work in different areas of law but the fundamentals of the job are largely the same. These include advising clients on legal problems, conducting legal research to find solutions, drafting important documents, such as contracts or wills, and occasionally representing clients at tribunals or in court.

Meet the apprentice



Cyril Lekgetho (he/him)

Mayer Brown

Cyril Lekgetho is a third-year solicitor apprentice at Mayer Brown International LLP. He's currently sitting in the finance practice.

Why did you decide to do an apprenticeship?

Having six years of sector-specific experience before qualifying as a solicitor was a big draw. It presented an opportunity to make industry connections and grow a professional network, while earning a wage from an early age. When looking for an apprenticeship, I knew I wanted to work in the City on high-stakes deals, with market-leading professionals. I was drawn to Mayer Brown as an international firm, with several highly ranked practice areas.

What's a typical day at work like?

We usually rotate seats every six months; however, I've had the opportunity to remain in finance since September 2024, allowing me to build my industry expertise in this area. In my current seat, day-to-day work varies. I undertake a lot of drafting of key documents for our transactions, progress correspondence workstreams with clients and counsel, and manage signing and closing processes. I'm not siloed into specific areas of finance, so I've had the privilege of working across various finance sectors. The fast pace means I've worked on dozens of deals so far. A common misconception is that transactional work can be one-dimensional, but it's a very collaborative process with lots of client interaction.

How have you found juggling work with your study days?

Effective time management is an important skill when you're juggling work with study. However, I've found that the allocated time for studying and the leave that's granted in advance of exams has been sufficient and allowed me to apply myself fully to work and study.

What's the qualification process like?

In two years, I'll finish my degree (which is also preparing me for the SQE) and then undertake the SQE assessments. As you go through each department, you can compare, contrast and consider whether they are areas you'd like to qualify into. I've found that apprentices at Mayer Brown are never a spare member of the team – instead, you're treated like a trainee.

What's the most enjoyable aspect of being an apprentice?

The most rewarding aspect is that nothing feels out of reach. Working at a leading firm like Mayer Brown gives you the confidence and aptitude to make the most of every opportunity. The firm has a reputation in the City for striking a balance between entrepreneurship and meritocracy. I've attended client meetings, had a key role in deals, taken autonomy and immersed myself into the work.

What advice would you give to anyone considering an apprenticeship?

The solicitor apprenticeship is a six-year commitment. As such, applicants must research the legal profession to determine whether it's the right path. When you start, you don't need to know all the technicalities of black letter law, but having a picture of the required core competencies is useful. I recommend attending insight days and seminars, undertaking work experience and reaching out to apprentices to hear about their experiences.

Meet the apprentice



Ava Mathias (she/her)
RPC

Ava Mathias is a solicitor apprentice at RPC. She's currently studying in the matter support department (on placement with the costs team).

Why did you decide to do an apprenticeship?

I applied for apprenticeships alongside university to keep my options open. Throughout the application process, the apprenticeship route felt more secure as I'd have no student debt and wouldn't have to apply for a training contract. I also like to learn practically, so working more days than I'm studying suits me better!

What's a typical day at work like?

Every day is different. Our matter support team supports all the legal teams across the business. I'm on a placement with the costs team, who work with the legal teams to prepare documents outlining the costs incurred for hearings, case management conferences, trials and settlements. Through this, I've been exposed to most of the firm's teams and have experienced a variety of work.

How have you found juggling work with your study days?

Monday is my study day, which means I can work uninterrupted from Tuesday to Friday. I try to avoid work emails on Mondays. Sometimes around exams, or when it's busier, I find myself studying after work or on weekends but, generally, it's a good balance. Good time management is important as there'll always be competing demands – stay focused and commit to work and study.

What's the qualification process like?

I completed a paralegal apprenticeship first, which was a nice introduction to working without the studying being too intense. I'm now in the second year of my degree with The University of Law. After I finish, I'll do a two-year training contract and sit the SQE. The process will take about seven years, which isn't much longer than the 'traditional' university route. Plus, there's no student debt!

What's the most enjoyable aspect of being an apprentice?

I've enjoyed working across multiple areas of law – it's changed my ideas on those I find interesting. Plus, the practical experience I've gained will help me to decide which team I'd like to qualify into. We also have a supportive team of paralegals and apprentices, and the lawyers at RPC are helpful; people make an effort to provide good work for our apprentice portfolios and respect our study days.

How has AI impacted the work you do as a solicitor apprentice?

AI hasn't had a major impact on my day-to-day work yet but I'm becoming more aware of it as I develop. The firm is exploring how AI can support everything from legal research to document review and even insurance claims handling, so I know it'll shape the way we work in future. Even though I haven't used AI tools directly, I've seen the impact – including how the firm is advising clients on regulation, compliance and governance around AI.

What advice would you give to anyone considering an apprenticeship?

Research the firm and programme – it's a big commitment, so you want to make sure it works for you! Make sure you tailor your application to the firm to help you stand out. Soft skills and a willingness to learn are as important as legal experience. As an apprentice, you're not expected to know everything immediately – you'll be given lots of training across the programme. Being open-minded and enthusiastic will help you to make a good impression and build connections.

Key questions

Below are some frequently asked questions about legal apprenticeships.

Q

How do I know whether law is the right career for me?

A

At this early stage, ask yourself some questions as a starting point. Do you find legal issues interesting? Are you intrigued by the ways in which the law is part of everyday life? Is there an area (eg, crime, the environment or human rights) that's caught your attention? Are you the kind of person who'd thrive in a fast-paced environment? The best way to find out whether law is for you is by talking to lawyers and doing some work experience.

Q

Haven't all lawyers been to private schools and Oxbridge?

A

Most law firms understand that the best workforces are representative of the whole community. Most employers have their own diversity policies to ensure that they provide a welcoming and supportive environment for people whatever their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age or socioeconomic background, for example.

In fact, legal apprentice schemes are one of the ways that law firms are trying to attract and recruit a more diverse group of employees.

Q

What skills and strengths do you need to be a good lawyer?

A

Several important skills are needed to be a good lawyer. Many of them are developed during your academic studies, while others become apparent in your working life – the advantage of developing them as an apprentice is that you'll be doing both simultaneously. The attributes that most recruiters look for include: intellectual ability; motivation; accuracy; teamwork; leadership; commercial awareness (ie, an interest in the business world); and communication skills. If you have the majority of these, law could be a good option!

Q

Who can become an apprentice?

A

Many legal apprenticeships are aimed at students who want to move into a vocation after completing their GCSEs or A levels. Most legal apprentices have recently finished secondary education, but apprenticeships are also open to mature candidates (eg, those who've had a previous career) and graduates (ie, graduate solicitor apprenticeships).

Q**Do I have to study A-level law to be an apprentice?****A**

In short, no. A levels are about studying subjects you find interesting and developing key skills – specialist legal training comes later. Also, very few universities list A-level law as a requirement, even for those wanting to start a law degree, so it's not essential. In fact, you can become a lawyer without ever completing a law degree by choosing a non-law degree, completing a law conversion course and then passing the SQE assessments or doing the Bar course. Achieving good grades is important, whichever subjects you choose. Go for subjects that you enjoy and do well in to give yourself the best chance of passing. It's much better to get As and Bs in three subjects than to get Bs and Cs in four, so don't give yourself too much to do.

Q**What do I need to know about my first day at work?****A**

Your first day in any job can be intimidating; however, most firms have comprehensive induction programmes for new joiners. You may also find yourself starting on the same day as other apprentices, so there are likely to be other people in the same boat as you. Some firms will assign you a trainee buddy or mentor to help you adjust to working life. Be yourself, ask questions, show enthusiasm and you'll soon feel right at home. One note on dress code: lawyers are business people and their clients expect them to look the part. While some firms are more relaxed than others, it's best to arrive looking well presented. That doesn't mean spending a fortune on tailor-made outfits, but it does mean arriving on your first day dressed appropriately.

Q**Should I go to my careers service?****A**

Your school careers service is a brilliant resource. They can help you with application and interview techniques, suggest places to look for further information on becoming a lawyer, and even help you to secure informal work experience or shadowing with a law firm.

Key questions

Q

Where can I find details of apprenticeship vacancies and how do I apply?

A

There's more information out there about legal apprenticeships than ever before. Individual firms/ organisations will advertise on their own websites and elsewhere, including on LawCareers.Net (www.lawcareers.net). LCN has a regularly updated apprenticeship jobs board, so it's worth frequently checking for new vacancies, especially at the end of the school year. The site also has more general information about apprenticeships on our Apprenticeships hub, which you can access via 'View hubs' in the menu. Other valuable resources include the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (www.cilex.org.uk/study/apprenticeships) and the government's apprenticeship page (www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship).

Q

What if I might prefer to go to university?

A

If you're undecided between an apprenticeship and other routes into the legal profession such as applying for a university place, read *The Beginner's Guide to a Career in Law* – the companion guide to this one. *The Beginner's Guide* is your first stop for information about the university route to becoming a solicitor, barrister, CILEX Lawyer or paralegal. LawCareers.Net is also a great place for information about this career path.

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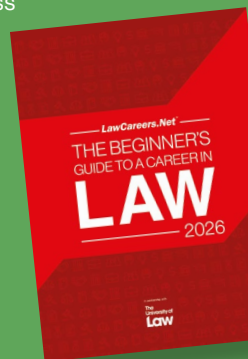
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Your legal apprenticeship skills checklist:

A law apprenticeship combines an interesting job and training at a law firm with part-time study. This means hard work, but the rewards are well worth it. Here's a checklist of the necessary skills to help you get off to a flying start as a legal apprentice.

☐

Good written and verbal communication skills. Lawyers advise people in person, over the phone and in emails and letters, so writing and speaking with confidence is crucial.

☐

Attention to detail. This is one of the cornerstones of the legal profession, so it's essential that you take a careful and thorough approach to all the work you produce as an apprentice, checking and rechecking as you go.

☐

Good interpersonal and customer service skills. As an apprentice you'll meet a range of different people, from colleagues in your organisation to clients that need one of your legal services. You must be friendly, enthusiastic and professional, even with difficult clients.

☐

The ability to work well as part of a team. Solicitors and the other types of lawyers found in law firms rarely work alone. A law firm is one big team divided into smaller teams with different areas of expertise who help each other out, so as an apprentice you'll work closely with others. Being a team player is essential.

☐

Strong organisational skills. Apprentices must stay on top of multiple tasks and be able to prioritise and meet deadlines. They also need to balance their law firm role with studying part time, so it's important to work hard and be organised.

☐

A strong academic track record. Law is an intellectually rigorous and demanding profession. Employers will look for evidence of a strong work ethic, so work hard at getting the best results you possibly can during your GCSEs and A levels (if applicable).

☐

A desire to learn. Although a law apprenticeship offers a great opportunity to get straight onto a fulfilling career path after leaving school, the learning has only just begun once you join a law firm as an apprentice. You'll train and study to become an expert legal professional, so enthusiasm to learn more is a must.

☐

A passion for the firm. Legal apprenticeships vary in length depending on what level they are but most solicitor apprenticeships last six years. Do your research and make sure you only apply to firms you can see yourself growing with.



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