Life as a solicitor is a real challenge; you will need to continually keep abreast of changes happening in the law and each new case you work on will be a real test of your skills. In return, however, you get the excitement and satisfaction of working on and completing a stimulating project after months of hard work. It’s true that being a solicitor is tough – on an important case you will have to work long hours, deal with demanding clients and meet tight deadlines, whilst maintaining accuracy and efficiency with lots of paperwork. You will need plenty of dedication and perseverance, but the work is varied so it certainly won’t get boring!

The Legal Landscape

This sector is worth £23bn in the UK and is undergoing significant changes. It is extremely diverse in terms of roles and places of work for solicitors. Whilst many Oxford graduates feel that they should follow a career into a London based, commercial law firm, this is by no means the appropriate choice for everybody – and many more options exist.

Legal issues hit the headlines every day, but here are some of the major changes which may affect you as an Oxford student keen to enter this sector after graduation. It is vital that you do your own extensive research to ensure that you are aware of what is going on and to find out where you might be interested in working. Some of the recent events to alter the legal profession are:

1) The Legal Services Act 2007: The introduction of this act was to allow the emergence of new practices and so improve access to justice. It has allowed the setting up of Alternative Business Structures (ABSs). An ABS is a law firm (or an organisation which offers legal services) where both lawyers and non-lawyers can be in partnership together and share the management of the business. It also allows law firms, for the first time, to offer shares on the stock market and take capital from external investors. The first ABS to be licensed by the SRA (Solicitors Regulation Authority) was not a law firm, but a retailer, the Co-Operative Group who used the ABS License status to offer family law services to the public. There are now 300 licensed ABSs with many more in the pipeline. These have been a mix of existing, traditional law firms (e.g. Irwin Mitchell) and other non legal organisations who may want to begin to offer legal services (e.g. BT Law Ltd) or to improve the effectiveness of the legal service they currently offer (e.g. Harrow & Barnet Councils’ legal departments have formed HB Public Law).

The impact of these new organisations is potentially many more places of employment for solicitors, more variety in types of role for solicitors, as well as new legal roles.

2) The legacy of 2008-2013 Recession: The legal industry did not escape the deep recession. Partnerships restructured to improve profitability, new models were introduced and
existing firms became even more commercially focussed. Qualified staff, including partners were made redundant and some high profile law firms (Halliwells, Dewey & LeBoeuf London) disappeared. On the High Street, smaller law firms and law centres have had to face significant cuts to the legal aid budget as well as increased competition for the Legal Services Act. Many firms reduced the numbers of vacation schemes and trainee positions they offered, other trainees had their entry deferred and some firms even stopped recruiting altogether. The current position has improved; training contract numbers are now at 5302 (2012/3) - 9% up on the recession low of 4,874 in 2009 but still not back to pre-recession times. Retention rates of trainees have also improved significantly to back up over 80%.

3) Continuing trends: In their drive to survive and grow in these tougher market conditions we have seen a great many law firms merge, both within the UK and internationally. Asia, Australasia, Africa and South America have been particular targets for firms chasing business associated with growing financial markets and natural resources. Costs pressures have also led to firms looking for new ways to be efficient so there has been a significant growth in; the employment of paralegals; the outsourcing of non legal functions and of paralegal work to centres outside London; and better, more effective use of technology.

TYPES OF JOB

There are around 150,000 qualified solicitors in England and Wales (Northern Ireland and Scotland have separate systems), with about 118,000 holding practising certificates. At present, the majority (74%) of solicitors work in private practice firms owned and managed by the partners.

Firms vary tremendously in size and specialisation. The working environment, life-style and work/life balance of solicitors will vary considerably between environments. You will need to complete careful research to decide which is the best environment is for you.

Here are some of the factors that you may wish to consider when researching firms for yourself:

Types of firm:

Broadly, the work that law firms do can be split into two categories;

- Work that serves the needs of commerce, such as corporate matters and commercial litigation
- Work that deals with clients with personal legal issues e.g. family, crime, personal injury.

Some firms may do a mix of work whilst others will specialise in either commercial work or private client work.

For those interested in being trained in a non-commercial environment, there are opportunities to complete a training contact within the Government Legal Service (who recruit annually and always attend the Law Fair) or in local government. Occasionally the Crown Prosecution Service also hires trainees.

For some areas of legal practice - for example within the human rights area or those areas which traditionally have been publicly funded - you may need to consider a more flexible approach to qualification as a solicitor. Firms that work in these areas tend not to take on trainees (or possibly just a very small number) and therefore do not attend the Law Fair here. Instead, they may offer
paralegal/legal executive opportunities with the possibility of providing some support to move on to the full solicitor training and qualification at a later point. Even though these firms do not visit Oxford as often as the larger commercial ones, there are plenty of resources available (listed at the end of this Briefing) to find out more about them.

**Size of firm:**

The largest firms have hundreds of partners and solicitors operating from numerous offices across the globe and with significant resources to support their work in serving the needs of international business. Most of these large and medium sized practices have specialist departments or practice areas as most solicitors now tend to specialise either on qualification or very shortly afterwards. The largest firms will probably take on approximately 80–100 trainees each year.

The smallest firm would be a sole practitioner working in the local community. Such a firm is very unlikely to offer trainee positions at all.

**Location – London or elsewhere?**

Although London, as an international financial centre, tends to dominate the commercial sector, the firms in regional centres in the UK - e.g. Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Newcastle and Manchester - are major players attracting high quality work from leading businesses, both locally and internationally. Every city or town has firms that service the local business community. General or “High Street” firms, which provide a mix of personal and business law are found throughout the country.

There are good opportunities in many large and medium-sized practices to work overseas, possibly for six months during a training contract and even more so after qualification and gaining some experience. Clearly the opportunities depend on the type of practice and its specialisations.

Many Oxford students are attracted to the commercial sectors of the Law, particularly in London. These opportunities tend to have a higher profile here, with many of the larger firms targeting Oxford. However, you should consider carefully whether this route is right for you. There are opportunities for excellent training and work in other sectors, e.g. in medium and small ‘niche’ practices which operate both within London and in the UK's thriving regional city centres.

**Private Practice or “In-house”?**

The Law Society describes solicitors working “in-house” as follows:

“Solicitors who practice in-house do so in a variety of different organisations, including working as in-house counsel for commercial organisations, working for a law centre, Citizen’s Advice Bureau or other non-commercial organisation”.

Although the majority of solicitors work in private practice, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of solicitors working outside this environment. Approximately 31,000 solicitors now work in-house. This has doubled over the last 10 years and is predicted to increase further as the impact of the Legal Services Act takes hold.

Many of the solicitors working in-house have often qualified in private practice first, built up some experience and then moved across into an in-house role. There are relatively few opportunities to complete a training contract outside private practice although it is possible and the SRA holds a list of all organisations who have been authorised to provide training contracts. This list is extensive,
but in reality only small numbers of organisations actually offer training contracts on a regular basis. Opportunities are usually listed on lawcareers.net in the “Find a training contract” section.

Many solicitors use their qualification to move away from legal practice into other areas of work in business, administration, training, teaching or consultative roles.

Training, Retention Rates and Salaries:

Each firm will manage its trainee contingent in a slightly different way, but, at present, training contracts typically last 2 years, involve a variety of different rotations (known as “seats”) and will conclude after 2 years with qualification.

At this point firms will try to match the trainees with the needs of the organisation and that of the individual. Inevitably, some trainees decide that they wish to pursue their legal careers elsewhere and leave. Or a firm may decide that they are not able to accommodate every single trainee as a permanent employee. In the last couple of years firms have managed to improve their retention rates (i.e. the number of trainees they retain on qualification) but they can still vary from about 80% upwards.

The range of remuneration varies considerably. The SRA no longer sets a minimum wage level for training contracts but it is likely to be around £16,650, with the London rate at £18,500. City of London firms will often pay much more – up to £41,000 - to their trainees.

On qualification rates will also vary: in the City from £50,000 to the highest to date of £90,000. In other sectors and in the regions firms would pay considerably less. The earnings of qualified solicitors and partners will vary enormously, according to sector and specialisation.

SKILLS NEEDED

Recruiters are pretty unanimous in what they look for. Leading commercial firms will expect applicants to have a consistent academic record, i.e. 2:1, predicted or attained, and AAB/ABB grades at A-Level. As firms have increasingly used vacation placements as a means to hiring trainees, they are paying greater attention to grades achieved in first year exams. Other firms outside of the leading commercial group may have slightly lower academic requirements, but all are agreed on the need for applicants to show:

- Appropriate knowledge and motivation.
- High ethical standards and an understanding of the role of law.
- Evidence of good interpersonal skills.
- A variety of sustained interests which reveal a high level of achievement.
- Evidence of initiative and responsibility.
- Evidence of commercial awareness (all law firms are businesses).
- Knowledge of the firm and justification of your suitability for it.
- Language skills and cultural awareness are a plus.
- Provided other criteria are met, scientific or engineering knowledge/thinking may also be valued.
ENTRY POINTS

The professional body for solicitors is The Law Society, but the regulatory function is undertaken by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). This body lays down the training rules and is responsible for any changes in the regulations.

There are three stages to qualification as a solicitor.

1. The academic stage

This is satisfied by completing either a qualifying law degree or, for graduates of other disciplines, a conversion course, the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), often still referred to as the CPE, available on a one-year, full-time or two-year, part-time basis. Another option at this stage is the two-year Senior Status Law Degree, available at a number of universities. Both of these courses are common to both would-be solicitors and barristers.

2. The vocational stage

For solicitors this is the Legal Practice Course (LPC), also available on a one-year full-time, or two-year part-time basis and as a 7 month course (known as the Accelerated LPC).

3. The practical stage

This consists of a two-year training contract in a solicitor’s practice or other legal department authorised for training by the SRA. Normally this is undertaken after completing the LPC.

Changes to the system

Qualification as a solicitor by “Equivalent Means”

As of July 2014, it is possible for someone who has been working as a paralegal but has not obtained a training contract, to qualify as a solicitor once certain practical experience requirements are met. Details can be found on the SRA website (shortlink goo.gl/xnzqgn). This route is most likely to be deployed in areas of law where training contracts are sparse or where individuals have spent time working as paralegals.

It is likely that the traditional route to qualification (i.e. law degree/GDL + LPC + Training Contract) is likely to be the dominant one for Oxford graduates. However, please make yourselves aware of the Legal Education and Training Review (LETR) (www.letr.org.uk). This major review, published by Professor Julian Webb at Warwick University has reported on whether the current training and regulation for solicitors, barristers and legal executives is still fit for purpose in the changing legal market. Whilst changes are not expected quickly, it is sensible to keep up to date with the key themes of the subsequent debates for the branch of the profession that interests you. In response to the LTR recommendations, the SRA has set up a “Training For Tomorrow” consultation (www.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/training-for-tomorrow.page).

APPLYING FOR ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL LAW COURSES

Details of all institutions offering courses for the academic and vocational stages may be found on the SRA website (www.sra.org.uk) and on the Central Application Board’s (CAB) website.
Note that applications for all these courses are normally assessed, and offers made, without interview.

**Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL, also known as the CPE) Applications (for non-Lawyers)**

- Applications for full-time courses only are made through the Central Application Board ([www.lawcabs.ac.uk](http://www.lawcabs.ac.uk)). This online application system contains details of, and links to, all GDL course providers, a number of whom attend our annual Law Fair ([www.careers.ox.ac.uk/fairs](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/fairs)) in November.
- Applications can now be made for the GDL on a rolling basis across the year prior to entry so there is no longer a closing date. While there is no CAB closing date, some institutions may ask for applications to be made before a certain date in order to have a place guaranteed (subject to meeting their criteria) or to meet a deadline to be considered for funding from that institution.
- Once an application is received by CAB it is then released to the institutions and offers can be made from then on. Different institutions may respond at different rates and some courses/institutions may be more popular than others.
- There remains a statutory cooling off period for acceptances made.
- We advise you to research the institutions carefully and, when ready, to make your application in good time.
- The application form allows applicants to select up to 3 institutions and is only for applications to full time courses. Applications for part time variants should be made directly to the institution concerned.
- There is a requirement to attach undergraduate degree transcripts. Referees will also be needed so please check in advance who that will be and brief them accordingly.

Institutions select on the basis of academic achievement and motivation as shown in the personal statement and references. Most successful applicants will have at least a 2:1 and evidence of suitability for their intended career. Some institutions will give preference to those who can demonstrate good reason for their need to study at that particular institution, e.g. studying near home.

**Where to do your GDL?**

Most employers are not overly concerned where you do the conversion course, but some of the leading City practices do now require their future trainees to study at their preferred institution. They are likely to be more concerned with regard to the LPC - a factor you might like to discuss with them, should you hope to complete a training contract with them.

There are no independent assessments available. However, you may wish to consider some of the following factors in your decision making:

1) Academic rigour – talk to tutors and students, check out destinations, use the Quality Assurance Agency for general institution reviews.
2) Teaching & assessment methods used
3) Geographical location
4) Cost of course and opportunities for funding or financing from the provider.
5) Preference of law firms that you may be seeking to apply to for a training contract
6) Study options – many providers offer part time and study mode options including distance learning.
7) Reputation of their LPC and destination data of its students
8) Access to the profession, careers fairs and events, general careers support and work experience/work

Any self-respecting course will encourage you to visit and be happy to provide more information. Many also hold open days. For comprehensive coverage see the GTI Complete Guide to Conversion and Vocational Law Courses in addition to the CAB and SRA websites.

Be aware that it is not a requirement to have a training contract before commencing the GDL. **Indeed the vast majority of students starting the course do not have training contracts arranged.**

**Senior Status Degrees**

An alternative for non-Lawyers to the GDL is to take a two-year Senior Status Law Degree, which includes the seven ‘Foundations of Legal Knowledge’ but which allows for more in depth study and greater choice of subjects. This course is available at some 28 institutions on a full-time basis, with some on a part-time basis also. These include the Universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, City, Leeds, London (including Birkbeck), Oxford, Sheffield and Cardiff. Contact the relevant Law Faculty for application procedures and prospectuses. For these courses application is normally made via UCAS, but check with each institution. For Oxford and Cambridge the 15th October deadline will apply. Do also check with the institution the fee level charged as this course is second first-degree-level course and thus is not eligible for the same types of government funding as first degrees.

**Legal Practice Courses**

- A central clearing system also operates for full-time courses with applications made via the CAB. All relevant institutions will be detailed on this website and the information kept up-to-date.
- As with the GDL, there is no closing date, but a rolling timetable instead and we advise making applications in good time.
- Completed applications made via the site will be released to the institutions weekly. Institutions can then respond with offers from then on, although some may be able to turn round their offers more quickly than others.
- Applicants are advised to carry out their own research on the institutions that they wish to apply to and read the guidance notes on the CAB website to ensure they include all relevant information on the form. Transcripts and references will be required.
- All part-time applications should go directly to the course provider.
- Institutions apply the same kind of selection criteria as for the GDL.
- The vast majority of employers prefer their trainees to attend a specific course. If you have started your LPC and then secure a training contract during the course, your employer may decide to switch you into their preferred institution or to let you remain, often depending on how far into the course you have progressed. You are perfectly free to apply to any firm for a training contract, even if you have already started your LPC in their non-preferred institution.
- Some employers may insist that their trainees select the optional courses (electives) that are appropriate for their practice. It is always worth checking the views of employers on this issue.
- If you are a non-Lawyer you will find that most institutions which offer both a conversion course (GDL) and the LPC will guarantee a place to those who pass their conversion course.
- From 2014 onwards, you no longer need to be a student member of the SRA before starting the LPC. However, if you think you have any "character & suitability issues" that may affect you ability to qualify as a solicitor then we strongly advise that you contact
the SRA approximately 6 months before starting the LPC to allow the SRA time to follow their procedures.

GETTING EXPERIENCE

How do you decide whether you want to be a solicitor, and, if you do, what kind? Much is written on the subject and a list of useful publications and online resources can be found at the end of this Briefing. Employers will expect you to have fully researched this career option and for you to be sure of your motivations. Perhaps the most important way to find out what a solicitor does and whether it suits your skills, interests and motivations is to arrange some kind of practical activity where you can talk to solicitors and see them at work. Here are some ideas, any of which can be used on your applications:

1. Formal Vacation Schemes (sometimes known as vacation placements or work experience schemes)

Vacation schemes are becoming an increasingly important part of the process to securing a training contract.

Schemes are available during all three term breaks and are often targeted at specific student groups. The Christmas ones tend to be targeted at non-Law students in their final year, but non-Law students are increasingly being considered for placements at the end of their second or penultimate year. Closing dates for Christmas schemes tend to be in October, while official closing dates for Easter/Summer placements are often in mid/late January. Early in the Christmas vacation is a good time to apply to these. They will require similar effort to complete as the official training contract applications. Indeed some firms may allow you to complete one form for both a vacation scheme and a training contract. The catch is that you need to be convincing in your prior research and motivation, e.g. why you are interested in being a solicitor, what type of practice/location you want to work in. It is important to get this right, as these applications are often your first formal contact with a practice.

An increasing number of firms interview and even run assessment days for their schemes, sometimes upon receipt of application before the official closing date. If you gain a vacation scheme, assume that you are being scrutinised for your suitability for a permanent position as a trainee. Some firms will recruit 40–50% of their trainees from their vacation placement cohorts, so securing one does put you in a strong position to be offered a training contract interview (and then hopefully a training contract) at the end of the placement. In some firms, a much higher proportion (over 90%) of trainees may have been recruited from the vacation scheme. It is therefore wise to try and work out, through speaking with the recruiters, how important the vacation scheme is for them as a route to entry as a trainee in their firm. Importantly though, these schemes provide you with a golden opportunity to get to know the practice, its people and work, so that you are well-informed. These schemes are usually between 1 and 3 weeks in duration and are paid.

If you are unsure about the sort of firm you would like to work for, then you might consider applying for a variety of different types for vacation schemes to help you decide. Entry for these schemes is very competitive, so follow the usual guidance for making a top quality application.

Increasingly large London firms are offering mini vacation schemes to first year law students for the Easter Vacation but the vast majority are aimed at 2nd years, finalists and graduates. The Careers Service distributes a full list of vacation schemes (www.careers.ox.ac.uk/vacation-schemes-2014) for approximately 70 firms.
There are also a number of schemes for students with an ethnic minority background and those with a disability, e.g. Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO) London and Employ-Ability.

**If you do not secure a vacation scheme do not despair!** Please do not assume that this means that you cannot get a training contract and become a solicitor. If this happens (which it does, even to Oxford students), focus your energies on finding out about the profession in the ways mentioned below. Come and talk to a Careers Adviser about your tactics and your applications and we will be happy to help.

In the vast majority of firms you can still apply for a training contract with a firm even if you did not do a vacation scheme with them – but you will need to show strong motivation and evidence for wanting to be a solicitor.

2. **Law Firm Open Days**

Many firms provide opportunities to visit them on one of their Open Days. Sometimes these are targeted at certain student groups – for example, first year lawyers are often invited during Trinity term – while others are open to all. Firms also often invite students who narrowly missed out on a vacation scheme place to Open Days. These are also excellent ways to investigate firms, talk to practising lawyers and to get useful tips and hints on applications, commercial awareness and other areas.

3. **Arrange your own informal work shadowing/work experience:**

Why not try and approach your local firm, a law centre, an in house legal team (of a company or local council) or visit your local courts? Any of these are possible alternative means of building your knowledge of the legal sector and life as a solicitor. When approaching contacts, start out by asking for something small; perhaps a visit to the office or an hour to chat to a solicitor about their work. After being able to meet face to face you might find that you hear about other opportunities but even if not, you will have learnt more about the profession.

4. **Meet the firms and their trainees, associates and partners in Oxford**

There is always plenty of opportunity to meet law firms and their employees when they visit Oxford to make their formal presentations or to run skills workshops, competitions and business games. Firms will be here in force during Michaelmas term in particular, and over 60 firms will attend our annual Law Fair on 8th November 2014. Joining the University’s Law Society or your College’s Law Society will provide further opportunities for you to talk with solicitors, to find out how firms differ and to acquire hints and tips for applications.

5. **Utilise the Oxford Network**

We estimate that approximately 10% of Oxford students pursue a career in the law each year. This means that there are plenty of Alumni in relevant jobs to help and guide you too! The Careers Service runs the Oxford Careers Network (www.careers.ox.ac.uk/ocn) with over 120 lawyers that you can contact for help, but many colleges also run their own contact databases from their Alumni offices. If you are considering working abroad you can consider using the Oxford alumni contacts that exist round the world. Use the Oxford University website and the alumni portal https://www.alumni.ox.ac.uk/page.aspx?pid=2961 to find relevant groups or make enquires at the Law Faculty Development Office.
The Law Faculty runs talks and lectures, many of which are open to all students and often led by Alumni. It is well worth exploring these avenues so that you can talk to solicitors who were once in the same situation as you.

6. Get related work experience

For today’s solicitors, it is vital that they know and understand their clients and the environments in which the clients operate. Depending on the type of firm or organisation in which you would like to practice, securing some related work or volunteer experience would also be valuable. For example, if you are considering corporate law, then some experience working in another business (a retailer, bank, or sales and marketing company) would be useful. Equally, if you are thinking of heading towards private client or community based law, then volunteering in an advice centre (e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau, or a local charity helping & advocating for individuals in distress) would be sensible.

This experience doesn't have to be via a formal, paid placement in a large organisation. Employers can be just as impressed by students who have initiated their own work or volunteer work either in and around their community or by taking part in University / College activities.

You might like to sign up to the Law Faculty’s "Oxford Legal Assistance programme" (open to all) or “Pro Bono Publico” (graduate students and faculty members). Any of these can lend themselves very well to building relevant skills.

7. Utilise The Law Society of England and Wales and other Legal Associations to extend your network.

The Law Society has a Junior Lawyers Division that looks after the interests of students, trainees and young lawyers. They run events and conferences which may be open to students and which provide good networking opportunities. The Law Society has a wide range of specialist groups, which provide opportunities for further research/exploration of the work that might interest you and also networking opportunities.

Other very useful groups are the Young Legal Aid Lawyers (www.younglegalaidlawyers.org), the UK Law Student Association (www.uklsa.co.uk), the (www.elsa.org) and the University and College Law Societies that exist within Oxford.

There is often confusion about whether you should be paid to do an internship or work experience. It will depend on your arrangement with the employer and also the status of the employer. To find out if you are entitled to be paid when undertaking work experience or an internship, visit the Government’s webpages on the National Minimum Wage (shortlink: goo.gl/dYksXj).

GETTING A JOB

Training Contracts
Trainees in solicitors’ practices are known as ‘Trainee Solicitors’. There are approximately 5,000 training contracts available each year (5302 were registered in 2011/12).

The SRA requires trainees to have experience of at least three areas of practice, to meet the Practice Skills Standards and to complete the Professional Skills Course. Most trainees will have four six-month ‘seats’ (though the number may vary between practices and a few firms don’t have rotational seats). This period of training (training contract) is compulsory for qualification as a solicitor and is also a critical experience to help you decide on your future specialisation. Many of
the global firms will also offer the opportunity to take a seat in a different jurisdiction or as a client secondment.

94% of training contracts lie in the private practice sector, with the majority being found in commercially orientated firms. These practices recruit early (many two years before the start date), while many smaller and High Street practices will recruit nearer the time of entering work. The remaining 6% of positions are to be found in the Government Legal Service (which follows the two years ahead system), local government, HM Courts Service, legal departments in commerce and industry and quangos.

Applications for Training Contracts
The Voluntary Code to Good Practice in the Recruitment of Trainee Solicitors (shortlink goo.gl/ooGQeq), lays down some rules for the recruitment timetable and the offering, and acceptance, of contracts. Firms are not allowed to make offers before 1 September of a student's final year of undergraduate studies. This rule applies to Law and non-Law students alike, but firms are allowed to interview before that date. This is likely to happen in particular for students on work experience placements. There are rules for students too, in particular with regard to handling job offers. Please make yourself aware of all these conditions as you are expected to abide by them.

Law Students
Most commercial firms, who offer approximately 70% of training contracts in any year, and many others tend to interview Law students in September of their final year, though an increasing number of interviews take place earlier. If an offer is made it will normally be for two years ahead, i.e. offers made in September 2015 will be for training contracts that begin in September 2017. It is vital to apply in good time and make sure your applications are received by the firms of your choice well in advance of the closing date, usually 31st July. Check individual firms' opening and closing dates.

Non-Law Students
Nearly all firms, and in particular the commercial ones, also recruit non-Law students – up to 50% of their trainee cohort in some cases. Although law firms are entitled under the code to interview up to three years ahead, i.e. from September 2014 for training contracts beginning in September 2017, it is unlikely that they will do so as they are usually busy on campus at the start of the academic year. Firms will state the timing for when they would like to receive applications from non-Law students in their careers brochures and/or on their websites and they may open as early as October and may start interviewing as early as November. Some of the larger City of London firms have closing dates in January/February for non-Lawyers only – we produce a list of these dates (www.careers.ox.ac.uk/training-contracts-2014) for your reference, but the end of July in the year of graduation is the most common date. The law careers publications publish such information regularly. However, you must check the websites of the firms (or call the law firm's graduate recruitment team directly) to double check the process that exists for non-Lawyers, so that you can apply at the appropriate time for your circumstances.

Some small commercial practices, and most High Street firms specialising in matrimonial or criminal work or other personal law areas, will recruit trainees only during the year prior to the training period, i.e. while students are doing the LPC, or even for an immediate start. Bear in mind that these places are highly sought after by the large number of LPC students still without a training contract. Competition for these vacancies is at least as tough as for other areas of the law, with firms looking for evidence and suitability as strongly as the commercially orientated practices.

It is probably worth making the point here that gaining a postgraduate qualification in law, e.g. LLM, may be useful for some specialist firms, but such qualifications are not generally sought by recruiting firms at trainee entry level, and should be viewed as providing you with scope for
personal development, not as a means to improve upon a poor first-degree result for recruitment purposes.

**Whether a Law or non-Law candidate**, bear in mind that it is important to apply when you are confident that you are making the right decision, that you are well-prepared, and that you are able to make a ‘good’ application. The competition is very strong and should you make a weak or ill-prepared application it is unlikely that you will succeed. Pay special attention to your grammar and spelling. Should you be unsuccessful, it is possible in many cases to re-apply the following year, but you’ll need to show considerable improvement in your profile. Depending on the stage you reached, reapplication may not always be possible, so you must check with the firms to find out their policies.

Many, if not most, graduate recruitment managers are prepared to respond to reasonable requests for information or queries about the processes involved, beyond what is available via their websites and other sources. They are important contacts in the process of recruitment.

**TIMETABLE FOR ACTION ACADEMIC YEAR 2014/15**

**Second-year Law Students, or Law Finalists Deferring Entry**

- **Michaelmas Term 2014:** Assess motivation/skills to be a solicitor and what the role involves. Attend careers information events, presentations and fairs. Research opportunities for vacation schemes, check closing dates and apply as appropriate, often over the first part of the Christmas holiday (usually online via a standard application form or a CV and cover letter). Don’t leave your application until too late as some firms screen forms as they arrive and interview before the closing date has arrived.

- **Hilary Term 2015:** Continue with applications and attend interviews (many take place in this term in Oxford or at the firm’s premises). If you make your application in good time, you are likely to be able to book your interview at a time that suits during the second half of the Christmas Vacation. Try and avoid term time if you can as you will not be allowed to miss tutorials.

- **Trinity Term 2015:** Research in detail training contract opportunities and check dates and deadlines. Complete application forms (most applications are now online) and revise your CV if required, and submit for training contracts commencing 2017.

- **Summer 2015:** Make full use of the vacation schemes, but note the point about interviews. As a consequence you may need to make yourself available during the late summer months.

- **1 September 2015:** Many interviews for training contracts commence and offers are made. (N.B. Under the recruitment code interviews may well take place before this date, but offers should not be made).

- **Michaelmas Term 2015:** Apply for LPC courses as appropriate from now on, as applications are made on a rolling basis throughout the year. Check with your provider if you need to apply by a certain time to be eligible for their awards or bursaries. Plan your financial arrangements for the course. Continue with research/applications for training contracts as necessary and for smaller, general practice firms.

- **Hilary Term 2016:** Contact the SRA if you think you have character & suitability issues
Four-year ‘Course Two’ law students

Make full use of facilities in their (first and) second years, attending the Law Fair and the presentations so as to be as informed as possible about firms of interest and the most suitable moment for applications for vacation schemes and training contracts. Increasingly there is flexibility about when you can apply for and complete a vacation scheme. Some firms allow you to apply during your second year and then complete the scheme at the end of the second year or defer it to the summer between your third and fourth years. Some still only allow you to apply for and complete your scheme during your third year. Training contract applications would usually be made during your third year with interviews in the September just ahead of the start your fourth and final year. Perhaps also consider the possibility of trying to visit practices’ offices in the country you are studying in during your third year. The Careers Service does offer Skype appointments for students on this course whilst they are abroad.

First year Law Students: If you would like to apply for any of the first year mini vacation schemes at Easter, then the deadlines will usually be early in Hilary 2015. Please do not forget to prioritise your first year exams as law firms do look at the grades you achieve when you apply for formal vacation schemes and training contracts.

Non-Law Students

Final year

- **Michaelmas Term 2014:** Rigorously assess your motivation/skills to become a solicitor. Attend careers events, presentations and fairs. Research and apply early (as soon as they open) for the Christmas vacation work experience/workshop schemes and open days. Applications for the GDL can be made on a rolling basis throughout the year, so visit some of the providers to get a sense of what they offer. Apply online as appropriate. Check for early application dates for training contracts, especially with larger City firms (some are in January) and apply as appropriate.

- **November/December 2014:** Apply in good time for Easter/Summer work experience (closing dates are usually end of January but we don’t advise leaving your application this late) and open days.

- **Hilary Term 2015:** End of January: closing date for some training contract applications. Attend interviews for training contracts/vacation schemes as appropriate.

- **Trinity Term 2015:** Continue to make training contract applications/attend interviews as necessary.

- **Summer Vacation 2015:** Attend interviews as arranged.

Penultimate year

Try to gain some insights into legal work. Some firms will accept applications for formal vacation schemes, but otherwise seek opportunities in local firms and other legal and advisory environments for work shadowing/experience. Make full use of opportunities in Oxford, e.g. events run by the student and college law societies, networking and possible open days. Consider also gaining any other work experience, especially of a commercial nature.
FUNDING

This can be a major issue, especially if you are looking to train in a smaller, less commercial firm. The cost of fees (check with institutions or in reference books) plus living expenses is likely to be in excess of £10,000–£15,000 per annum, i.e. overall £20,000–£30,000 for the non-Lawyer. It is perfectly acceptable to ask a law firm what sort of support they can offer for post-graduate law courses (GDL and LPC).

The Junior Lawyers Division of the Law Society has an excellent page on its website giving information about the various forms of possible support (shortlink goo.gl/ErFBdK).

- **Sponsorship** - most commercial firms that take trainees will offer some form of sponsorship to their future trainees. Many firms, particularly the larger, offer a grant to cover fees for GDL and LPC as well as up to about £7,000 a year living expenses. The legal directories, newspapers/magazines below and firms’ websites give details about their policies. There are now a number of awards given by the law course providers and these are definitely worth investigating as competition and entry requirements are not as onerous as you may think.

- **Local Authority Grants** - LEAs do not normally award discretionary grants for training for the legal profession, but you may wish to check with your education authority.

- **Law Society Bursaries** - The Law Society has a fund to disburse annually for sponsorship and for diversity. Applications usually open in January and there are approximately 50 available. Applicants must usually have a place on the LPC before applying. Details for 2015 will be on the Law Society website by the end of December 2014.

- **Bank Loans** – Some of the High Street banks and specialist banks offer loans for students on specific LPC courses. Contact your local bank branch or LPC institution for details of their student loan schemes.

- **Professional and Career Development Loans** – These are government-backed. Visit the UK Government website (www.gov.uk) and use Freephone 0800 100 900 to call the National Careers Service for advice on these loans. Unfortunately these loans are not available for the GDL course.

- **Trusts/Charities** - There may be a few charitable trusts that are prepared to consider applications for financial help towards vocational training. Details of the relevant ones can be found on the Junior Lawyers Division of Law Society funding web pages.

- **Personal Funds** - It is not unknown for individuals to finance their training through savings and personal borrowing. Do get some feedback on your chances of ultimate success before you commit yourself to high levels of debt. A part-time GDL / LPC, alongside a job, could be an option worth considering.

EQUALITY & POSITIVE ACTION

A number of major graduate recruiters have policies and processes that are proactive in recruiting graduates from diverse backgrounds. To find out the policies and attitudes of employers that you
are interested in, explore their **equality and diversity policies** and see if they offer ‘Guaranteed Interview Schemes’ (for disabled applicants) or are recognised for their policy by such indicators as ‘Mindful Employer’ or as a ‘Stonewall’s Diversity Champion’.

Law firms are particularly active in this area and have well established programmes in place with long standing organisations such as Employ-Ability and Sponsors for Educational Opportunity. Both of these organisations provide support for vac scheme applicants from under representative backgrounds. In addition, new organisations are growing such as Aspiring Solicitors ([www.aspiringsolicitors.co.uk](http://www.aspiringsolicitors.co.uk)), which provides mentoring and CV/application help for any students in its target groups.

The UK law protects you from **discrimination** due to your age, gender, race, religion or beliefs, disability or sexual orientation. For further information on the Equality Act and to find out where and how you are protected, and what to do if you feel you have been discriminated against, visit the Government’s webpages on discrimination (shortlink: [goo.gl/50INcn](http://goo.gl/50INcn)).

### THE CAREERS SERVICE’S RESOURCES

**PDFS**


**BOOKS**

The following books are available to read in our Resource Centre at 56 Banbury Road:

- *Unlocking Company Law*, Susan McLaughlin
- *Understanding the Law*, Geoffrey Rivlin
- *What about law?* Catherine Barnard et al
- *Law Uncovered*, Margaret McAlpine
- *Intellectual Property Law*, David Bainbridge
- *Oxford Dictionary of Law*
- *The law student’s handbook*, Steve Wilson & Phillip Kenny
- *Getting into Law*, Lianne Carter
- *Law of Torts Q&As 2013/14, David Oughton, Barbara Harvey*
- *Employability Skills for Law Students*, Emily Finch & Stefan Fafinski
- *Concentrate:Contract Law*, Jill Poole
- *Land Law*, John Duddington
- *Glanville Williams: Learning the Law*, ATH Smith
- *Human Rights, a very short introduction*, Andrew Chapman
- *International Law, Vaughan Lowe*
- *A guide to International Law Careers*, Anneke Smit, Christopher Waters
- *EU Law, Ewan Kirk*
- *EU Competition law, Ariel Ezrachi*
- *Working in Law 2014, Charlie Phillips*
- *All You Need To Know About The City, Christopher Stoakes*
- *Jursiprudence*, David Brook
- *IFIR 1000 The guide to the World’s Leading Financial law Firms*, Lukas Becker
- *Tomorrow’s Lawyers, Richard Susskind*
- *Rethinking Patent Law, Robin Feldman*
• Careers in International Law, Salli A Swartz, ed.
• Eu Law Q&A 2013/14, Nigel Foster

**JOURNALS**
We subscribe to the following journals in our Resource Centre at 56 Banbury Road:

The Lawyer - weekly  
The Law Society Gazette - weekly  
Lawyer 2B - quarterly  
Counsel - monthly

**TAKE-AWAY MATERIAL**
Collect the following material from our Resource Centre at 56 Banbury Road:

• The Training Contract & Pupillage Handbook  
• Chambers Student Guide  
• The Lex 100  
• TARGETcourses Conversion & Vocational Law  
• TARGETjobs Law  
• TARGETjobs Law Vacation Schemes & Mini Pupillages  
• TARGETjobs Law First: How to get hired.  
• TARGETjobs Pupillages Handbook (from April onwards)  
• Prospects Law  
• The Commercial Law Guide, Gateway

**ONLINE INTERVIEW FEEDBACK**
Our Interview Feedback Database (www.careers.ox.ac.uk/ifd) contains hundreds of accounts of interviews, submitted by Oxford students and graduates. The database can be searched by sector and by organisation.

**OXFORD CAREERS NETWORK (OCN)**
The OCN (www.careers.ox.ac.uk/ocn) on CareerConnect is a database of over 1000 Oxford alumni volunteer mentors who are willing to be contacted about their career. Read their case studies for behind-the-scenes insights into an organisation or occupation, and contact them for more advice and information.

**EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

**USEFUL WEBSITES**

**GENERAL VACANCIES, NEWS AND OCCUPATION INFORMATION**

• www.careers.ox.ac.uk/careerconnect  
• www.prospects.ac.uk/law-sector.htm  
• www.prospects.ac.uk/options_law.htm  
• www.lawsociety.org.uk/careers/becoming-a-solicitor  
• www.targetjobs.co.uk  
• http://www.law.ac.uk/futurelawyers  
• www.jobs.ac.uk  
• jobs.guardian.co.uk
- jobs.telegraph.co.uk
- jobs.thetimes.co.uk
- www.legalalternatives.co.uk
- www.lawcareers.net
- www.chambersstudent.co.uk
- www.legalfutures.co.uk - For useful updates on the legal market
- www.do-it.org - National volunteer database of opportunities including a legal section (Law and legal Support)
- www.insidebuzz.co.uk/law
- www.thelawyer.com
- l2b.thelawyer.com - Student version of The Lawyer
- www.rollonfriday.com - Topical and fun issues
- www.allaboutcareers.com
- www.insidebuzz.co.uk/law
- www.cps.gov.uk
- www.slgov.org.uk - Solicitors in Local Government
- www.lawgazette.co.uk
- www.the-lawyer.co.uk
- www.oadq.org.uk - Oxford Advocacy Development Group: offers advocacy training and work
- www.prolaw.co.uk
- www.totallylegal.com
- www.chambersrecruitment.com
- www.lawcrossing.co.uk
- www.legaljobspot.com
- www.lpc-law.co.uk
- www.leg alweekjobs.com
- www.legaljobsboard.co.uk
- www.simplylawjobs.co.uk
- www.employ-ability.org.uk - A not-for-profit organisation dedicated to assisting people with all disabilities into employment and often advertises work experience opportunities as well as permanent positions
- www.seo-london.org - Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO) London. A not for profit organisation that helps penultimate year undergraduate students from under represented ethnic minority background gain internships
- www.aspiringsolicitors.co.uk

TRAINING
- www.lawcabs.ac.uk – Central Applications Board (applications for full time GDL and LPC)
- www.lawcareers.net - Legal publisher’s site; the most comprehensive list of training contracts and firms offering vacation placements

REGULATORY BODIES AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS
- www.lawsociety.org.uk - Law Society. Here you can also find details of the Law Society’s Diversity Access Scheme
- www.sra.org.uk – Solicitors Regulation Authority
- www.sra.org.uk/students/student-enrolment.page
- www.sra.org.uk/trainees/period-recognised-training/voluntary-code-recruitment.page - for the Voluntary Code to good practice in the recruitment of trainee solicitors
- www.cilex.org.uk
- juniorlawyers.lawsociety.org.uk - Law Society, group for young lawyers and trainees (special page on funding)
• www.younglegalaidlawyers.org – Pressure group representing young Legal Aid lawyers and students, founded by Oxford graduates
• www.lapq.co.uk – the Legal Aid Practitioners Group
• www.lawcentres.org.uk – the Law Centres Federation, providing free legal representation
• www.legalservices.gov.uk – the Legal Services Commission
• www.uksla.org – UK Student Law Association
• www.elsa.org – The European Law Students’ Association
• www.deaflawyers.org.uk – Deaf Lawyers Association
• www.gsdnet.org.uk – Group for Solicitors with Disabilities
• www.onlinebld.com – Black Lawyers Directory
• www.elsa.org – The European Law Students’ Association
• www.gsdnet.org.uk – Group for Solicitors with Disabilities
• www.elsa.org – The European Law Students’ Association

PUBLICATIONS AND DIRECTORIES
• www.the-lawyer.co.uk – weekly newspaper
• www.icclaw.com – international legal directory
• www.hq.org – HierosGamos, provides a directory of international law schools.
• www.lexadin.nl/wlg – Worldwide Law Guide
• www.solicitors-online.com – the Law Society’s comprehensive directory of solicitors
• solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk – Lawtel, A huge on line resource from the Bodleian for news articles, legal journals, case comments and much more. Select OXLIP+Databases, then Lawtel
• www.legal500.com – another useful source on practices’ specialisations; international section. This is a client directory.
• www.chambersandpartners.com – Chambers and Partners, legal publishers – another client directory

OTHER UK JURISDICTIONS
• www.lawscot.org.uk – Scotland
• www.lawsoc-ni.org – Northern Ireland
• www.lawsociety.ie – Ireland
• www.iomlawsoociety.co.im – Isle of Man
• www.jerseylawsoociety.je – Jersey
• guernseybar.com – Guernsey
• www.lawsociety.org.uk – The Law Society: useful pages linking to other EU jurisdictions

RELEVANT EVENTS

For upcoming events in this sector, see the Solicitors page on our website (www.careers.ox.ac.uk/solicitors), log into CareerConnect (www.careers.ox.ac.uk/careerconnect) or see our e-newsletter.

Highlights in 2014-15 include:

- Law firm presentations from Week 1 onwards
- Careers and Internships for 2nd Year Lawyers, 15th October
- Law for Non Lawyers 16th October
- SEO talk 27th October
- How to Impress Legal Recruiters 31st October
- 8th November, Law Fair, including a full talks programme
- Making vacation scheme applications, 12th November
- Tips for Vac Scheme and Training Contract Interviews, 19th Nov.
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES OR HEALTH ISSUES

Your personal circumstances regarding career choices, and whether you should or need to tell a potential employer about your circumstances (e.g. time out from studies owing to depression or health needs) is very personal. Although there is legislation which informs you of your rights and responsibilities, you may find it helpful to see a Careers Adviser. They can help you talk through your particular circumstances, to decide whether you wish to tell someone about your situation and issues, and - if you do decide to inform a recruiter - at what stage in the application process you might do so.

The Law Society also operates its Lawyers with Disabilities Division [www.lawsociety.org.uk/communities/lawyers-with-disabilities](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/communities/lawyers-with-disabilities). They regularly run a series of informative talks throughout the year to which students are usually invited for free.

The two regular events that we advertise on CareerConnect are:

- **GlaxoSmithKline’s Legal Disability Confidence Day**, usually in October and designed to give attendees an overview of working at GSK in the in house legal team and get an understanding of in-house and law firm recruitment practices. This event is aimed at disabled students with legal or scientific backgrounds, trainees, qualified solicitors and patent attorneys

- **The “OPEN” event**, usually run in December in central London. This is an event for students with disabilities or long term health conditions interested in finding out about internships and graduate positions in commercial law.

Careers Advisers can also help you decide how to present your situation and potential needs effectively (often termed as disclosure). We have Careers Advisers who specialise in matters relating to disability and diversity. To arrange a discussion about your personal circumstances with a Careers Adviser, please contact our Reception Team on reception@careers.ox.ac.uk or telephone 01865 274646.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Frequent changes to visa rules affect international students and recent graduates wishing to work in the UK. Now, non-EEA graduates are most likely to gain permission to work by being sponsored by an employer under Tier 2 of the Point Based System. DPhil students nearing completion could apply for the Tier 4 Doctorate Extension Scheme - allowing 12 months to remain in the UK to look for and start work or self-employment.

At Oxford we are fortunate to have a wide variety of law firms wishing to hire both law and non-law undergraduates and postgraduates, either to train as solicitors within the UK (England & Wales), or to return to home jurisdictions to start or complete their training. In the last few years we have seen a rapid rise in law firm merger activity across the world as well as non-UK based firms starting up UK practices in London for the first time. This may change the emphasis in terms of the desired attributes of the individuals who are sought out for hiring: a keen cultural awareness, a desire to take a 2–3 year stint at an international office and even language ability may become more sought after as firms develop.
There are a number of large city firms who already offer an entry point for international LLM students who wish to return to their home jurisdictions on completion of their studies. Whether you are an undergraduate or postgraduate we would suggest that you do your research thoroughly, and early, in your time at Oxford to avoid any confusion or disappointment.

Recruitment of lawyers within England and Wales who are already qualified in other jurisdictions is equally varied and also subject to the rules of the SRA. The Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (QLTS), which is the scheme set up for the assessment of international (and intra UK) lawyers seeking to qualify as solicitors in England and Wales, is constantly being revised. The QLTS replaced the old Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test in September 2010. Now there are a greater number of jurisdictions from which it is possible to requalify but the process for doing so is more complex and the cost is much higher. Visit the SRA’s website for the latest information and advice regarding the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme and the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications under the European Directive and the documentation required for eligibility to sit the exams.

Before embarking on requalification, ensure that you also speak to relevant personnel within law firms for information on how firms view and manage the QLTS process. Recruitment of qualified lawyers happens through a variety of ways; directly by law firms on their websites; regular jobs posting on online legal job sites and through recruitment agencies. Securing a position as a qualified lawyer will likely depend on your area of expertise, the equivalent amount and type of experience that you have, and the business needs of the firms.

For those with entrepreneurial skills and a credible business idea endorsed by Oxford, Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) allows you an initial one-year’s permission to get your business up and running, with the possibility of extending for a further year. There are more limited opportunities in other visa categories.

For the most complete and up-to-date information, check Oxford University’s webpages (www.ox.ac.uk/students/visa) and the UK Council for International Student Affairs’ website (www.ukcisa.org.uk). You can also email student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk for specialist visa help.

MORE FROM THE CAREERS SERVICE

CAREERS ADVISERS
Sometimes you just need a little help – whether it’s feedback on your CV, preparation for interviews, or figuring out what to do next. Our Careers Advisers have direct experience in a wide range of sectors (e.g., in banking, medicine, consulting, teaching, charities, research and many more). Each has a special interest and shares their knowledge, so that any adviser can help you with your initial enquiries.

We offer up to thirty-six 15 minute 1:1 sessions every day between 10:30am and 4:30pm (and later on Thursdays in Michaelmas). You can book these online on CareerConnect. Some extra sessions run in departments, colleges and Exam Schools. In the vacations we also give advice by e-guidance if you’re not in Oxford: email us at guidance@careers.ox.ac.uk.

You can also talk to us at a Career Lounge, where specific topics are discussed in informal groups led by a Careers Adviser. For upcoming topics, see www.careers.ox.ac.uk/lounges.

THE CAREERS WEBSITE
www.careers.ox.ac.uk contains a wealth of advice and information, including all of our career briefings; guidance on deciding what career is right for you; statistics on what recent graduates
have done after leaving Oxford; application advice - including sample CVs and cover letters; and our blog - with daily updates of careers news.

CAREERCONNECT
The password protected area of our site is your portal to browse upcoming events, to book workshops and advice sessions, to download books, and to search for jobs and internships (almost 8,000 opportunities were advertised during the last academic year). To find out more and log-in, see www.careers.ox.ac.uk/careerconnect.

THE RESOURCE CENTRE
At 56 Banbury Road you can browse our collection of careers books; read the latest sector periodicals; take away leaflets, booklets and brochures from national careers publishers - and meet with Careers Advisers. We’re open every weekday, except university and bank holidays, generally 9am–5pm, with a 10am start on Thursdays, and a 7pm finish on Thursdays in Michaelmas. To check opening times, see our website (www.careers.ox.ac.uk).

E-NEWSLETTER
In term–time our weekly newsletter gives a summary of upcoming events, sector news, and opportunities to develop skills and boost your CV. It is mailed automatically to all students; Research Staff and alumni have to opt-in through CareerConnect.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

FACEBOOK
Join us at www.facebook.com/oxfordcareers to get reminders of our major events straight to your newsfeed, as well as last–minute news from employers.

TWITTER
Follow us at www.twitter.com/OxfordCareers to get careers related news and tips, and check out our lists to find a ready–made batch of interesting Twitter feeds for your chosen field.

LINKEDIN
A LinkedIn profile showcases your skills and qualifications, and is a phenomenal research tool to find people to contact, and learn about the background of those in your ideal job. We run a regular talk on how to create a profile on LinkedIn, and how to use the site to network. If you already have a profile, join our group: www.linkd.in/OxfordCareers.