

Everything you need to know about a career in law

Pursuing a career in law is extremely popular – it's varied, challenging, interesting and rewarding. There are several ways you can do this and you don't necessarily need a degree. Here, we talk you through the different options.

Train as a Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEX) lawyer

- You don't need a degree.
- There are three routes depending on your experience – foundation, advanced or experienced – all known as the CILEX Professional Qualification (CPQ). At foundation level, there are no specific academic entry requirements.
- CILEX Lawyers qualify through a mix of study and practical experience, often while working.
- You'll need qualifying work experience (QWE).
- Once you've completed your CPQ and QWE you can apply for your full CILEX practice rights.
- You'll need to choose to specialise in a specific practice area, for instance family law or Court of Protection work. (Read **Laura's** account below)

Click [here](#) for more detailed information

Train as a solicitor

- You need a degree or a level six qualification (for example a degree apprenticeship or a CILEX level six higher diploma).
- You'll then need to pass the two parts of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). This replaces the Legal Practice Course, although it is still possible to qualify this way if you finished your degree before 2021.
- You must complete two years of qualifying work experience.
- Once qualified, you can choose any area of specialism.

Read **Caitlin** and **Rebecca's** stories below.

Click [here](#) for more detailed information.



Become a lawyer through an apprenticeship

- You can train to become a solicitor, a paralegal, a legal technician or a CILEX.
- You don't need a degree if you pursue a Level 7 apprenticeship.
- You'll usually work in a law firm for four days a week and study at university or with a training provider on the remaining day.
- A graduate apprenticeship may be for you if you already have a degree and are interested in the law.

Click [here](#) for more detailed information on solicitor apprenticeships.

Train to become a lawyer with specialist property law regulator, the CLC

- You can apply straight from school or college and you don't need a degree.
- You can pursue a qualification as a Licensed Conveyancer, specialising in the legal aspects around buying and selling property or as a Probate Practitioner, specialising in Wills, Inheritance and the administration of estates when someone dies.
- You must pass the CLC Level 4 and Level 6 Diplomas and complete 1,200 hours of supervised practical experience.

Click [here](#) for more detailed information

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What's the difference between a solicitor and a CILEX lawyer?

A: Both are qualified lawyers but solicitors have a broad-based legal education whilst CILEX practitioners are trained to specialise in a particular area of the law.

Q: How long does it take to train as a solicitor, a CILEX and an apprentice?

A: It takes about six years to train as a **solicitor** on the traditional route (degree, SQE and qualifying work experience).

As a **CILEX**, you qualify as you go and often combine this with working. Typically, it takes between four to six years but there are fast track options for those with legal experience.

As an **apprentice**, how long it takes to qualify will depend on your apprenticeship route. For solicitor apprentices straight from school, it's usually five to six years, for graduate solicitor apprentices it's often between two and three years. For paralegal and some CILEX roles, it can be two to three years.

Q: Which route should I choose?

A: It's up to do, depending on your qualifications – for example, if you have A levels or not – and how you like to learn. The benefit of the CILEX and apprenticeship routes is that you won't incur the student debt that comes with university education but you will still have to pay for your training.

Where can solicitors work?

There are more than 174,000 solicitors currently working in England and Wales in various roles including:

Private practice

Around 95,000 solicitors work in private practice, at firms like Wards Solicitors, providing legal services to individuals, businesses and corporate clients.



As 'in-house' lawyers

Working within the legal department of corporate, public and not for profit organisations to deal with any legal business internally, known as 'in-house'. British Telecom, for instance, employs hundreds of solicitors in this capacity, smaller organisations just one or two. A rapidly expanding sector, there are more than 34,000 solicitors employed as 'in-house' lawyers.

Local and central government

Just over 5,500 work solicitors work in local government and roughly half that number in central government advising on new legislation as well as prosecutions.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

Representing clients at police stations, deciding whether to bring criminal cases to court and dealing with prosecutions, the CPS employs just under 2500 'in-house' solicitors, around 1200 paralegals and 72 solicitors with a 'higher right of audience' which means they can act as an advocate in the Crown Court, Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court. The CPS has also offered 187 legal traineeships in the last three years (up to March 2025).

How We Did It



Caitlin Lang, 28, is from Wiltshire and qualified as a solicitor in June 2026 after joining Wards on a training contract in 2024. She is now part of our Family Team in Yate. She has three A Levels in English Language, English Literature and Philosophy and Ethics. She did a law degree followed by the LPC and worked as a paralegal before joining Wards.

Why did you want to be a lawyer?

"I wanted to become a lawyer because the work is interesting, varied and impactful. Helping clients navigate complex situations and standing up for their rights has always made the work meaningful for me and I take pride in what I do."

Why did you choose the route to qualification that you did? Could you talk about your time as a paralegal?

"I chose to work as a paralegal before applying for my training contract because I wanted to gain practical, hands-on experience within the legal field."

"It gave me the opportunity to develop a strong understanding of legal procedures, client interaction and the day-to-day realities of working in law. It also makes you an attractive candidate when applying for training contracts as it demonstrates both experience and a clear dedication to the profession."

What were the benefits for you of the route you chose?

"I completed my LPC alongside peers from my degree which made the process significantly more manageable. We were able to draw on each other's knowledge and experiences, creating a supportive environment where we could learn collaboratively and build confidence together."

What makes your job worthwhile? Why have you chosen Family law as your area?

"Family law is a very human area of practice which balances legal expertise with empathy and understanding. For me, it is not just about resolving legal issues but about ensuring clients feel heard, understood and supported throughout the process. This makes the work so rewarding."

Caitlin's top tips for aspiring lawyers:

- Develop communication skills early: It's not just about knowing the law but how you explain it to others.
- Get some real-world exposure: Seek out work experience, shadowing or volunteering. It will help you understand what the job is really like.
- Work on your resilience: law is demanding and it takes time to qualify. You will face setbacks but be persistent and you'll succeed.



Rebecca Royal is 26 and from Gloucester. She has three A levels in Law, Biology and Psychology and 10 GCSEs.

After graduating with a law degree in 2021, she worked as a court intermediary supporting people participating in court or tribunal hearings. She then joined Wards as a 'float' secretary, moving around different departments and completing her Legal Practice Course part-time as she did so. In 2024, she started a training contract at Wards and has now joined our Wills, Probate and Mental Capacity Team in Bradley Stoke.

Why did you want to be a lawyer?

"I wanted to become a solicitor to support people through legal processes that often feel daunting and unfamiliar. Being able to make a positive difference during important moments is what particularly drew me to the profession."

Why did you choose the route to qualification that you did? Could you tell us about your time as float secretary?

"I decided to gain experience in the legal industry before starting the LPC so that I could develop a clearer understanding of how a law firm works in practice."

"As a float secretary at Wards, I had the opportunity to move between different departments and offices. This gave me valuable exposure to a wide range of legal work including conveyancing, Wills and Probate, Family law and Disputes. This helped me understand which areas suited my skills and interests. It was also a great way to learn how different teams operate and to build relationships across the firm."

What makes your job worthwhile? Why have you chosen Wills, Probate and Mental Capacity as your area?

"I enjoy the balance between technical legal work and client care that comes with Wills and Probate. I find it extremely rewarding to build relationships with clients, particularly the vulnerable or elderly. Supporting clients to plan for the future and help them feel confident their affairs are in order makes the work especially satisfying."

Rebecca's top tips for aspiring lawyers:

- Don't feel pressure to qualify at the same time as others. Everyone's route into law is different, and gaining experience along the way can be incredibly valuable.
- Try to explore different areas of law early on, ask questions, and take opportunities to build relationships within the profession.



Laura McDougall is 33 and from South Gloucestershire. She joined Wards in 2017 initially working as a receptionist. She is now a senior legal caseworker in the Court of Protection team supporting and advocating for vulnerable clients and studying to be a CILEX lawyer at the same time. She chose not to go to university after leaving school as it was not an option financially for her or her family.

Why did you want to be a lawyer?

"I started on reception in the Yate branch and loved the Court of Protection team and the office – great people to work with who really showed me the ropes and introduced me to the legal world.

"My background was probation (vulnerable client care) so when I was offered the opportunity to work in the Court of Protection team five years ago, it seemed a good fit. I really enjoy the role and was made senior about two years ago."

Why have you chosen the CILEX route to qualification?

"The flexibility of being able to work alongside studying was the main reason for picking the CILEX route to become a lawyer and I knew by then that Court of Protection was the area of law I wanted to work in.

"The time and commitment needed is a lot! I started at the bottom with no legal experience and currently the course is requiring around 15 hours a week study time alongside my full-time job. It is a lot to juggle but I am managing and enjoying it.

"I am set to qualify in around two years, so hopefully June 2028, depending on being able to squeeze it all in!"

What makes your job worthwhile?

"Being able to help vulnerable clients and their families is rewarding and fulfilling. In addition, I form lasting professional relationships with clients spanning years and am able to see what a difference our advice and support makes to them."

Laura's tips for aspiring lawyers interested in the CILEX route

"It is very intensive but if you are prepared to work hard it's a good way to learn as you go, gaining real world experience alongside the books, especially as you can work in the area you are hoping to qualify into."



Wards Solicitors – about us

Wards Solicitors was established more than 120 years ago. Today, we have a High Street branch network of 13 offices spanning the Bristol, North Somerset, South Glos and BANES region including a new city centre hub.

We employ more than 75 legal specialists – solicitors, CILEX lawyers, chartered legal executives – working across the full spectrum of private and commercial sectors.

This includes family law, personal injury, residential conveyancing, disputes, criminal defence and Court of Protection as well as one of the largest, most respected Personal Tax, Trusts and Probate teams in the South West.

How we're supporting training opportunities

Every year, we encourage support staff already working with us, and who want a career in law, to develop this interest.

We currently have two aspiring lawyers on the CILEX route and two training for a qualification with the Council for Licenced Conveyancers (CLC).

Three of the four trainees who began solicitor training contracts with us two years ago, have accepted jobs to stay on at Wards once qualified.

We have also just offered four new solicitor trainees a contract to start with us in 2026/27.

In addition, for the first time, we will be taking on an apprentice later this year.

More news to come on this soon.