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MANAGING EXPECTATIONS- STUDENTS

What can I expect from training for a career in Law?

Here are answers to some questions you may have thought of recently if you are considering pursuing a career in the Law.

How do I become a solicitor? Do I have to do a law degree?

To become a solicitor, it doesn't matter if you have not read Law at University. If you did read Law, then you will need to graduate, complete the one-year Legal Practice Course (LPC) and then complete a two-year training contract (like an apprenticeship, what used to be called "Articles"). If you did not read Law, then you will need to complete a conversion course (the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) for example) before commencing the LPC. The training contract is always undertaken, and is compulsory to qualify as a solicitor.

There is another route to qualification, which does not include the GDL, LPC or the training contract. This is known as the ILEX (Institute of Legal Executives) route. This takes longer, but involves training and working to qualify. To find out more, please visit www.ilex.org.uk for information on Legal Execs.

Do my grades really matter?

Quite simply yes! It is a fiercely competitive profession and employers look to grades in making initial selections. This includes your first year grades, as you will have to apply to law firms to obtain training contracts two years before starting (this could mean applications in your second year of University). So, make it count because it does!

How much will cost?

Top up fees will be introduced in September 2006. These will make a huge difference to the amount it costs to train as a solicitor.

- The average cost of a 3-year degree pre top-up is £3,750 and post top-up is £9,000 in total.
- Those doing a conversion course (GDL) should expect to pay in the region of £5,700 to do this.
- The LPC costs around £8,500.
- Maintenance for the 6-years maximum to start training is estimated at £30,000 (minimum!).

How much will I earn as a trainee?

- The Law Society minimum salary is currently £14,720 for trainees outside London, and £16,450 for those in London.
- Some trainees do earn more than this figure, but your firm can also opt out of the minimum salary, and so some are paid less.
- Saying this, if you train at one of the top law firms in the City your salary may reach £30,000.

Still interested? Some tips that might help...

- Get some legal experience if you can – paid work is great but volunteer is you can. Pro bono work is great way of getting legal experience.
- Don't forget to develop commercial awareness and people skills! See the TSG website for info (www.tsg.org)
- Think ahead – start researching firms and keep an eye on deadlines
- Plan your finances
- Get those grades!