

The Legal Profession - Information for Intending GDL Students

Careers & Employability Service

www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/guides



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

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ENTRY TO THE SOLICITORS' BRANCH OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION

As you prepare to start your GDL course at Manchester Metropolitan University, you need to be aware of several important factors regarding entry into the solicitors' branch of the legal profession. Probably the most significant of these is that you should be considering applying for a training contract before you commence your GDL. Most of the larger firms of solicitors in the City of London and in the regional centres recruit two years ahead. In other words, you will need to apply to these by 31 July 2012 (and sometimes even earlier) for inclusion in the round of first interviews. These firms also offer paid vacation schemes in the Easter and/or Summer holidays and often run the first stage of assessment for a training contract on these schemes. If you wish to apply for a place on the vacation scheme, then the closing dates are earlier i.e. between January-April 2012. Second stage interviews tend to take place in August or September 2012 and offers of training contracts will be made in August-October in order to commence in September 2014.

This forward recruitment has advantages:

- i. If successful, you are free to concentrate on your studies, which are going to be intensive and demanding;
- ii. The firms concerned usually offer good conditions of service, including a systematic and carefully monitored training scheme;
- iii. Many of the firms pay course and examination fees for the GDL and Legal Practice Course. They may also give a maintenance grant for these courses in order to help with living costs. This has obvious benefits as you are most unlikely to receive financial assistance from your local authority.

However, there are disadvantages:

- i. You must undertake in-depth research into the training and the range of legal work offered by these firms in the next two or three months;
- ii. You will have to choose specific areas of law in which you will practise for at least the first two years of your career, before you have acquired sufficient legal knowledge to appreciate what these specialisms will entail;
- iii. Settling into a new academic field, a new institution and a new geographical location brings its own pressures without adding those of preparing for interviews.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

Although the number of practising solicitors has grown rapidly in recent years to 117,862, there is intense competition for training places. Over 12, 000 places are available on the Legal Practice Course (LPC) each year whereas the number of training contracts registered with the Law Society in 2009-10 was only 4, 874.

As a result, those applying for trainee solicitor vacancies face stiff competition, with many firms setting their entry requirement at a minimum of an upper second degree plus good A-level grades. In addition, firms want evidence of your commitment and usually expect you to have undertaken at least one vacation placement or have done some legal work experience.

It is also important to be aware that starting salaries can be quite low. The Solicitors Regulation Authority currently sets a minimum salary for first year trainees of £18, 590 in London and £16, 650 in the rest of England and Wales. Whilst the commercial firms may pay in excess of this figure, many smaller firms will pay only the minimum.

It is extremely difficult to predict the situation that will face students who delay applying for training contracts until closer to the end of their studies. Vacancies in medium-sized firms, general/high street practice, Legal Aid work and local authorities are available. In recent years, some large corporate/commercial firms have offered a small number of late vacancies.

DECIDING TO APPLY IN 2012

If you would like to apply to the larger practices this year, in order to commence a training contract in 2014, careful preparation is essential during the late spring and summer. You may have already seen your University Careers Advisor before graduating and some background reading may have been recommended to you. If not, the following booklets/websites will provide much of the essential information:

Target Law	www.targetjobs.co.uk/law
Prospects Law	www.prospects.ac.uk/p/sectors/law_sector.jsp
Applying for a Training Contract	Manchester Metropolitan University Careers & Employability Service (Contains information about completing a CV and covering letter.)
Training Contract & Pupillage Handbook	www.lawcareers.net

These are available on reference in the Careers Information Room at All Saints. In addition, detailed information is given at www.sra.org.uk. The Solicitor's Regulation Authority help line - tel. 0870 606 2555 is provided to answer specific queries from students about the process of becoming a solicitor.

VACATION PLACEMENTS

To aid your decision-making and to enhance the content of your CV, you should undertake some relevant work experience or shadowing before commencing the GDL. Indeed, a significant proportion of solicitors use vacation placements as part of their selection process.

Work experience is normally gained through a vacation or work experience placement in a solicitor's office but experience gained in local authority or company legal departments, the

magistrates' courts, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or similar are all acceptable. It may also be useful to do a mini-pupillage in barristers' chambers to confirm that the solicitors' branch of the legal profession is the right one for you.

As stated in the first section, many larger firms have established Easter/Summer vacation schemes. They will normally offer a weekly wage or assist with travelling expenses. However, placements in smaller firms may have to be undertaken on a voluntary basis.

Many of the formal schemes are listed in the Vacation Placements section of the PROSPECTS web site at www.prospects.ac.uk. However, you can make your own speculative approaches to firms of solicitors and organisations with legal departments in which you are interested. The "Find A Solicitor" search function on the home page of the Law Society's web site www.lawsociety.org.uk is particularly helpful when making such applications- www.lawsociety.org.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law.

In addition, attending Open Days which are organised by some firms, work-shadowing a solicitor for one or two days, visiting the courts, or undertaking voluntary work in an advice centre can all be acceptable to recruiting firms seeking evidence of your commitment to a career in law.

SOURCES OF VACANCY INFORMATION

PROSPECTS Law

www.prospects.ac.uk

**Training Contract &
Pupillage Handbook**

www.lawcareers.net

Chambers Student Guide to the Legal Profession

- Chambers & Partners (www.chambersstudent.co.uk)
- Many of the larger firms produce their own brochures in hard copy and on-line outlining the work of the practice and describing the application, recruitment and training procedures.

Company Brochures

Most University Careers Information Rooms hold reference copies of these texts. Careers Information Rooms remain open on weekdays throughout most of the summer vacation, so do take every opportunity to complete the basic but vital research now.

IMPORTANT DATES IN 2012-13

DECEMBER 2012

Applications for the **full-time** Legal Practice Course are now accepted on a rolling basis right up until the start date of courses, subject to places being available. However, applying by December 2012 is advisable. Applications are made via the Central Applications Board- www.lawcabs.ac.uk.

Tel: 01483 301282.

Applications for the part-time course at MMU School of Law are made direct to the School of Law.

AUGUST 2013

The Solicitors Regulation Authority advises that applications for student membership be made by this date. **Bear in mind that if registration is not completed in good time, you will not be permitted to enrol on the Legal Practice Course in September. You MUST have enrolled for student membership at least 1 MONTH before the start of the LPC. Students who need to declare issues concerning their character or suitability to become a solicitor are advised to meet the earlier closing date of March 1 2013 and MUST have enrolled at least 6 months before commencing the course.** All student enrolment is now done online at www.sra.org.uk/enrol/.

MARCH 2013- EXACT DATES TO BE CONFIRMED

Closing date for applications for Law Society Diversity Access & Bursary schemes to cover the costs of the Legal Practice Course. Students should keep an eye on the Junior Lawyers' Division section of the Law Society's website at www.juniorlawyers.lawsociety.org.uk, where these competitions will be announced.

ENTRY TO THE BARRISTERS' BRANCH OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION

Entry to the Bar is extremely competitive. It is a small profession with approximately 12,000 barristers practising at the self-employed Bar and 3,000 in employed practice.

There are approximately 1800 places on the Bar Professional Training Course Course (BPTC). In 2009-10 only 460 pupillages were registered with the Bar Standards Board. The Northern Circuit, based in Manchester, offers a reasonable no. of pupillages each year and there are reasonable prospects of securing tenancy on completion.

The Bar Council now authorizes organizations other than chambers to offer both first and second six pupillages. Examples include solicitors, local government, and commercial organizations with legal departments, charities, citizens' advice bureaux and law centres. In all cases, the pupillage must be undertaken with a practising barrister who is entitled to act as a pupil master. Evidence so far, however, indicates that this has had minimal impact upon the number of pupillages on offer each year.

In addition to the very tight employment market, the financial problems facing would-be barristers remain considerable. All pupillages are now funded to a minimum level of £12,000 per annum. In the second six, this can take the form of a minimum earnings guarantee. However, the earnings of a new tenant are unlikely to be as good as those received by a newly-qualified assistant solicitor.

Before embarking on the Academic Stage of Training, do consider whether you have the necessary qualifications, skills and abilities to succeed.

MINI-PUPILLAGES

Before you start the GDL, you should complete at least one mini-pupillage. Details of chambers offering mini-pupillages appear in the “Pupillages and Awards Handbook” and can be viewed at www.pupillages.com. Personal copies can be obtained from the Bar Council.

IMPORTANT DATES IN 2012-13

FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2012

Likely closing date for applications for Inns of Court BPTC Scholarships.

MID- JANUARY 2013

Likely closing date for first round applications for the Bar Professional Training Course starting in September 2013 through the BPTC online applications system. (www.barprofessionaltraining.org.uk). Applications for BOTH the full-time & part-time BPTC are made through this system.

Applicants for the BPTC commencing in September 2013 will also need to successfully complete the BPTC Aptitude Test. It is anticipated that the test will be available at a variety of test centres around the country. However, the test is still being piloted and exact information about dates & test centres is not yet available.

Further information will be made available to GDL students nearer the time.

MARCH 2013

A National Pupillage Fair normally takes place in London in March. This is designed to assist you in selecting which sets of chambers to apply to. Full details, including a registration form, will be available on the www.targetjobs.co.uk/law web site once details are finalised.

LATE APRIL/EARLY MAY 2013

Likely closing date for pupillages being processed through Pupillage Portal.

It is important to note that a few chambers now recruit up to two years ahead. Many chambers do not use Pupillage Portal and recruit by direct application, either on their own application form or via submission of a CV and covering letter. These chambers use their own individual closing dates.

However, **all pupillages**, whether Pupillage Portal or not, have to be advertised in accordance with Bar Standards Board regulations and appear on a dedicated web site – www.pupillages.com.

31 MAY 2013

Closing date for application for admission to one of the Inns of Court. Admission is required in order to register for the 2013-14 Bar Professional Training Course. It may take a few weeks for the Inn to process your papers, so early application is advisable.

SOURCES OF HELPFUL INFORMATION

Bar Council's specialist careers website www.become-a-barrister.com

It's Your Call: A Career at the Bar General Council of the Bar

The Bar Directory General Council of the Bar/Thomson Sweet & Maxwell

Target Law www.targetjobs.co.uk/law

PROSPECTS Law www.prospects.ac.uk/p/sectors/law_sector.jsp

THE INNS OF COURT

The Student Officers of the Inns of Court are particularly helpful and should be approached in writing or by telephone whenever you have a specific enquiry. They can advise on applying for mini-pupillages, awards and scholarships available to help finance your professional studies and obtaining pupillage. Contact details are as follows:

Inner Temple, London EC4Y 7HL. Tel: 0207 797 8210

Student Officer: Mr Eamonn Reilly

www.innertemple.org.uk

Middle Temple, London EC4Y 9AT. Tel: 0207 427 4800

Student Officer: Mr Richard Chapman

www.middletemple.org.uk

Lincoln's Inn, London WC2A 3TL. Tel: 0207 405 0138
Student Officer: Miss Judith Fox

www.lincolnsinn.org.uk

Gray's Inn, London WC1R 5EU. Tel: 0207 458 7951
Student Officer: Mr Kyri Sawa

www.graysinn.org.uk

USEFUL LEGAL WEB SITES

Sites listing vacation placements, mini-pupillages, pupillages and training contracts:

www.prospects.ac.uk

www.lawcareers.net

www.lawgazette.co.uk

www.targetjobs.co.uk/law

www.chambersstudent.co.uk

www.pupillages.com

www.slgov.org.uk/careers/vacancies

www.lapq.co.uk

www.lawcentres.org.uk

Sites providing information on firms and the latest legal developments:

www.lawsociety.org.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law

www.legal500.com

www.venables.co.uk

www.lawgazette.co.uk

www.thelawyer.com

www.thelawyer.com/l2b/

www.rollonfriday.co.uk

Professional bodies:

www.lawsociety.org.uk

www.sra.org.uk

www.barcouncil.org.uk

www.barstandardsboard.org.uk

www.juniorlawyers.lawsociety.org.uk

www.ilex.org.uk

www.nationalparalegals.co.uk

www.theiop.org

Publishers' sites (for immediate vacancies and useful articles on legal trends and developments):

www.guardian.co.uk

www.the-times.co.uk

www.independent.co.uk

www.lawgazette.co.uk

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY CAREERS & EMPLOYABILITY SERVICE

www.mmu.ac.uk/careers

The Careers and Employability Service is located on the ground floor of the All Saints Building on Oxford Road and is open Monday to Friday between 8.45am and 4.20pm throughout the year. (Opening hours may vary during the vacation however so please ring to check before visiting.) The Careers Information Room houses all of the reference books referred to in this leaflet. Free PC access to professional and company web sites is also available.

If you wish to discuss your options before commencing the GDL, contact the Careers and Employability Service at All Saints during the Easter or summer vacations by telephoning 0161 247 3500. The School of Law has a dedicated Careers & Employability Advisor who offers “career clinic appointments” specifically for MMU law students.

An introductory careers talk is given to all GDL students at the beginning of the autumn term. The talk covers applications to both the Legal Practice and Bar Professional Training Course, student enrolment with the Solicitors Regulation Authority and Inns of Court, sources of financial assistance and applications for training contracts and pupillage. This will be followed by events during the year to allow you to meet practitioners and learn more about the main areas of legal practice.

I do hope that you will find the information in this handout helpful in planning your next career steps. I look forward to meeting you either at the Open Event in December or early in your GDL studies and wish you every success whilst you are studying at the Manchester Metropolitan University.

Nick Touati
MMU School of Law Careers & Employability Adviser
August 2011