

Trainee Solicitor's Handbook 2020

Your career starts here



The BCL Legal Trainee Solicitor's Handbook is completed in association with Trainee Solicitors' Groups across the regions to provide you with a comprehensive guide in the lead up to qualification.

Working with BCL Legal gives you access to a full range of opportunities that enable you to make informed decisions now and in the future.

Congratulations on getting this far and good luck in your career!

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If you'd benefit from a one-to-one chat or you'd like to meet us in person, please contact BCL Legal at info@bcllegal.com.

Introduction to BCL Legal

Who we are

BCL Legal is the UK's leading legal recruitment agency. We're the most established and trusted legal recruiter in the UK.

We have over 15 years of experience and a leading reputation for quality: placing the right person into the right role, every time.

How we operate

We're a specialist legal consultancy and pride ourselves in thoroughly understanding the markets you may want to work in.

BCL Legal services at all levels: from paralegal to partner. We offer advice and support, and more importantly, we present opportunities to you so that you can make informed decisions at every crossroad of your career.

Across the UK, we work in partnership with private practice firms, large blue chip organisations and the public sector to help you find your first post-qualification opportunity.

We have offices in Manchester and Birmingham and we're committed to providing the highest possible service to you and our clients.

"A successful career involves a lot of thinking, planning and organisation. It's worth starting now."

Planning your career

As a newly qualified solicitor, it's important you qualify into an area of law that interests you. As much as possible, disregard personalities within the department and concentrate on 'the letter of the law' as this will be the only constant throughout your career. The area of law you qualify into will have a huge impact on your career. As much as possible, try to think further ahead: Do you think you'd like to work in-house or overseas later in your career? Do you want to be a partner? Do you think you might want flexible working hours in the future? Would you like to have a non-fee earning role, for example as a PSL or in business development? A successful career involves a lot of thinking, planning and organisation. It's worth starting now.

Managing your career - get on the right track

At the moment, as the career process begins, you're likely to fall into one of the following categories:

- 1 You've been offered the ideal role with your current employer
- 2 You're competing with your colleagues for one or more vacancies with your current employer or you simply haven't been told if you'll have a job on qualification
- 3 You know that the job you want is not available with your current employer and/or you want to leave your current firm
- 4 You're hoping to go abroad, work in-house or as a locum
- 5 You want to leave the legal profession

Read on for advice depending on the category you fall into...

1. Staying at your firm

Fantastic news. If this is the perfect role for you and it satisfies your long-term career aspirations, accept the job! Try to return to this department for your final seat. Keep in touch with BCL Legal for up-to-date salary comparisons and general career information. Even if there's an opportunity to stay at your current firm and qualify into a discipline that was your second choice, you should consider any offer carefully. Read Section 2 below as you may want to consider other options at the same time.

2. Keeping your options open

Often, this can be a period of great frustration and is well known as 'the waiting game'. It's essential you're aware of all the opportunities available to you at this point of time in your career. If you rely on your firm to retain you when you qualify you're at risk of 'missing the boat' as many firms won't decide until as late as July. Ensure you're choosing disciplines based on the work you've done and the skills you have. If you've had a lot of fun with the people within your department, this can taint your view. Remember, it's unlikely you'll be working with these people in five years' time. It's often quite difficult to change discipline several years after qualification because of the necessary re-training involved and associated cut to your salary, so it's important you qualify into a discipline you enjoy working in. Ideally, you'll have more than one choice of discipline so you can take advantage of more opportunities. You also need to consider what type of work you want to do within your chosen field and the location, including how far you'd commute for the perfect job, and whether the firm has a good reputation for your chosen specialism.

3. Get job hunting

Form a good relationship with a legal recruitment consultant. The consultants at BCL Legal have been finding jobs for newly qualified solicitors since 2003 and have considerable experience dealing with law firms at this crucial time. We understand it's time critical, it's scary and everything is 'up in the air'. We're here to take the panic and the unknown out of the process. We'll advise you of jobs as soon as they arise. As many firms will want to offer jobs to their current trainees first, jobs don't usually come to the surface until late summer; sometimes past September into October and up until Christmas. If you want as much certainty as possible, have two or even three choices of discipline, be clear in what you want to achieve and register with BCL Legal early. We recommend registration at least six months prior to qualification. In some cases, it may be possible to transfer the last seat or remainder of your training contract. This is a process we can help you with and it means that when you do qualify, you're already part of the furniture.

4. Something different

Practising in-house

Moving in-house offers a distinctly different career to private practice. Solicitors looking to move in-house seek a more commercial role: one that tests both business acumen and technical ability. You'll learn all about the business and the sector it operates in and become an expert in avoiding and managing risk on a daily basis. Most in-house lawyers have a more general practice than private practice solicitors, but the main focus typically, is non-contentious commercial work. You'll often be involved in an array of commercial disciplines from advising on contracts to organising projects, to dispute resolution or mergers and acquisitions. Most jobs are for lawyers with at least one year's PQE within commercial disciplines, including commercial contracts, corporate, PFI, commercial property and construction.

Locum opportunities

Many lawyers are seeing the benefit of working as a locum and law firms and in-house departments are more locum-friendly than they've ever been. There may be an opportunity to work in a temporary position if you don't find the right opportunity on qualification. However, this isn't something to rely on. Organisations use locums to cover maternity or long-term sick leave, or when they're experiencing a busy period. Temporary contracts can offer flexible working, the opportunity to gain exposure to different areas of law, and the potential of a permanent position.

5. Something completely different

Perhaps the legal profession isn't what you thought (especially if you're a fan of Suits, Silks or The Good Wife!); with seven chargeable hours a day, clients who complain if the job isn't done today, lots of administration and filing cabinets in a sometimes archaic and hierarchical structure. There are always other options. Remaining in the law without the fee-earning pressure, there are opportunities for professional support lawyers in many commercial disciplines.

You'll normally need at least three years' PQE before you can make the switch. Outside of legal practice, many lawyers have opted to teach, either in schools or for legal education providers, including universities, The University of Law and the BPP law schools.

We hope this isn't you, but the reality is, the law isn't for everyone. If you find yourself in this position we'll do our best to offer guidance because a majority of BCL Legal consultants come from a legal background; many are qualified solicitors who opted for change.

Manchester and the North West

The Manchester team is dedicated to recruiting in private practice and in-house for both permanent and temporary job seekers. The North West region includes the beautiful Lake District of Cumbria in the north, down to Cheshire in the south.

Ever since Manchester's regeneration effort began in earnest during the mid-1990s, the city has developed into a fantastic place to live, boasting all the benefits of the Capital while maintaining a community feel. Manchester has always had a diverse range of law firms, from top tier firms including **Pinsent Masons, DLA Piper, Eversheds Sutherland** and **Addleshaw Goddard**, to national mid-tier heavyweights including **CMS, Squire Patton Boggs, DWF, Shoosmiths, Gateley** and **TLT** who all provide healthy competition to the top tier. Regional firms continue to prosper, with the likes of **JMW, Brabners** and **Pannone Corporate** offering excellent quality work and a fantastic alternative to the national firms, often having smaller teams and a greater ability for lawyers to make their mark and progress.

With recent entrants **Latham & Watkins** and **Freshfields** increasing their headcount and market profile in Manchester – the variety of options available is greater than ever. **Deloitte** also launched their legal team in Manchester in 2019, joining **KPMG** and **EY** in offering a real alternative to the traditional law firm model; a unique offering for transactional lawyers looking for a breadth of corporate and commercial work.

With the quality of work being as good as the City, but without the same demands that come with working in the Capital, the North West is very much open for business. With a thriving legal community, cosmopolitan music scene and home to four Premiership Football Clubs across Manchester and Liverpool, it really can offer everything the City can and more. Speak to a BCL Legal consultant who can advise on where to live, what life is really like, and which of the many firms best match your ambitions.

The North West of England is experiencing a renaissance, which has resulted in a significant and continuing uplift in the volume, range and quality of in-house opportunities available. Out in front by some distance is Greater Manchester, home to a significant number of PLC and household names. BCL Legal's portfolio in this region includes **BAE Systems, JD Sports, Kellogg's, Pets at Home, The Hut Group, BooHoo, Manchester United, Siemens, Gazprom, Lookers, The Co-operative, University of Manchester, United Utilities, Sellafield** and many more.

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Liverpool and Chester

Since Liverpool was named European Capital of Culture in 2008, the City has seen its economy and legal market continue to grow at a rapid pace. In 2020, the Liverpool legal landscape rivals that of neighbouring Manchester.

The landscape and the famous skyline have been transformed, while the city centre has been modernised radically – as has the legal marketplace.

In addition, Liverpool's legal market is incredibly diverse with a range of firms from the high street all the way up to top-tier international practice – making it an exciting time to be a lawyer here.

The city houses the traditional Top 5 firms, many of which were founded in Liverpool:

- **DLA:** a global law firm with longstanding Liverpool office;
- **Hill Dickinson:** a leading commercial law firm founded in Liverpool in 1810 based in the heart of the commercial district;
- **Weightmans:** a top 45 national law firm which houses 700 people in Liverpool;
- **DWF:** an International law firm founded in Liverpool and was the first law firm to float on the London Stock Exchange's main market in March; and,
- **Brabners:** a large regional firm. Although there are offices in Manchester and Preston, Liverpool remains a stronghold.

In the last year, there have been some exciting new entrants to the market: innovative law firm **Freeths**, top-rated tech practice **Taylor Wessing**, global giant **CMS**, strong regional firm **Napthens** and Top 100 law firm **JMW**, which has led to increasing demand in commercial disciplines.

The addition of new firms has led Liverpool to become a really good place for junior lawyers to start their career. There is a thriving social scene for junior lawyers with The Merseyside Junior Lawyers Division being one of the biggest junior lawyer associations in the country.

The increasing financial investment in the city, bigger legal market and increased workflow means Liverpool is a worthy option for lawyers at any stage in their career. Despite the rumours, there is no longer a disparity in pay to neighbouring Manchester.

If you're a lawyer looking to do excellent work in a vibrant city, Liverpool is certainly worth considering.

Chester in itself has also recently emerged as quite the hub for legal activity. With easy access to Manchester, Liverpool, Cheshire, and the relatively untapped region of North Wales, Chester firms have managed to attract a range of clients across all different areas of law. There is now a range of strong regional firms with offices in the area, including the Legal 500 ranked, Knights, Hillyer Mckeown, DTM Legal and SAS Daniels. Cheshire based lawyers now have an alternative option to commuting into the big cities.

BCL Legal has long-established relationships with in-house legal departments in the Merseyside and Cheshire region. This includes **Liverpool Football Club**, **Iceland**, **Peel Ports**, **Yodel**, **Stobart Group**, **GB Group**, **Innospec**, **Lloyds Banking Group/ MBNA**, **Liverpool John Lennon Airport**, **Halewood**, **Redrow**, **Stobart Group**, **wejo**, **Princes** and **Speedy Hire**.

Leeds and Sheffield

BCL Legal has one of the largest teams in Yorkshire – servicing candidates across private practice and in-house.

Until recent years, the Leeds legal community was dominated by the ‘Big Six’ firms; together with some established regional players like **Gordons** and **Shulmans**. This landscape has evolved quite quickly over the last five to 10 years with a good number of nationals opening Leeds offices, as well as boutique firms and other new entrants joining the market; established mid-tiers have also grown and developed a greater profile.

As things stand, Leeds is the fastest-growing legal market in the UK.

Bevan Brittan arrived in Leeds in 2015 and has grown steadily and consistently since its arrival. Most notably, **Shoosmiths** hit the city in late 2016 attracting a number of new partners to spearhead future growth, which has continued apace over the last three years to create a full-service office made up of high-profile lawyers from the local market. Recent arrivals include **Devonshires**, **Reed Smith** and **Hill Dickinson**. This means that in addition to the ‘Big Six’, aspiring lawyers in Leeds have an array of other high-quality options to consider, including **Mills and Reeve**, **Capsticks**, **Gateley**, **Womble Bond Dickinson**, **Stewarts**, **Clarion**, **Schofield Sweeney**, **Shulmans**, and growing corporate boutique **Progeny Corporate**. In addition, **Knights plc** has just opened its doors in York, which we expect will bring some real energy to the North Yorkshire market.

The steel industry that put Sheffield on the map may be long gone, but like many northern cities, it’s undergoing a transformation in a bid to reinvent itself.

Sheffield has an established Law Society that actively supports the local legal community and will provide you with a social calendar to be envious of. Events include chocolate making, treasure hunts, escape rooms and gin-making amongst others. If you’re a junior lawyer, we guarantee you’ll make friends quickly.

In addition, the local area has seen an influx of new businesses that are attracting more and more people to the city; making it a must-consider destination for anyone who wants to experience both vibrant city living and nature walks in the beautiful Peak District National Park.

There’s a wide variety of law firms to choose from, ranging from high street to international, many with top tier rankings in the Legal 500 and Chambers and Partners Guide. This includes international firms like **DLA Piper** and **CMS**; nationals like **Irwin Mitchell** and **Freeths**; heavyweight regional firms like **Keebles**, **Taylor and Emmet** and **Lupton Fawcett**; boutique firms like **Tapestry Compliance** – many of its lawyers originating from London Magic Circle firms. Sheffield will equip you with the tools you need for a successful legal career.

BCL Legal has a strong foothold within in-house legal departments and works with clients across the full spectrum of industry sectors. We work with major institutions which employ significant sized legal teams such as **Arriva**, **Asda**, **Bupa**, **Royal Mail**, **BAE Systems**, **Drax Power** and **Siemens**, as well as businesses such as **Bettys & Taylors**, **Sky B&G**, **Tomme Tippee**, **Hermes Parcelnet** and **Bannatyne Group**, who deploy a smaller scale in-house capability.

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“Sheffield will equip you with the tools you need for a successful legal career.”

Newcastle and the North East

The financial strength and confidence of the Newcastle market are evident by continued growth within the legal sector. International firms **Womble Bond Dickinson**, **DWF**, **DAC Beachcroft** and **Eversheds Sutherland** all have offices in the city with home grown firms like **Muckle**, **Ward Hadaway** and **Sintons** maintaining impressive positions in the Legal 500 and Chambers Rankings, not to mention numerous awards across most disciplines. We have seen a number of smaller and medium-sized firms undergo complete rebranding exercises in recent months, as well as some firms relocating to newer, more modern offices both in the city centre and on the outskirts. Boutique practices continue to establish and grow themselves in this buzzing legal market, with the likes of **Square One** maintaining a strong position, and newcomers **St James' Square** taking on top talent across a full range of disciplines.

Northshoring continues to make its way up to the North East with the likes of **Norton Rose Fulbright** and **Clifford Chance**; both establishing new fee earning teams in their new Newcastle offices in 2018/2019, as well as other established firms offering similar setups in their existing Newcastle offices. The recent arrival of national heavyweight **Weightmans** onto the Newcastle scene has stirred up some excitement and it will be interesting to follow their growth plans into 2020 and beyond.

Further afield in the North East, we continue to see a lot of movement across the full-service commercials, as well as the smaller regional and more high street practices. The likes of **Jacksons**, **Tilly Bailey and Irvine**, **Archers** and **Hewitts** remain leaders of the pack in Teesside, and **Swinburne Maddison** and **EMG Solicitors** maintain fantastic reputations in Durham.

It's safe to say the North East Legal market, while compact, shows no sign of slowing down. A strong legal hub, offering an amazing place to live and socialise, means more and more people are relocating to the region, be that from the hustle and bustle of London, or perhaps returning home after a number of years spent further south.

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Birmingham and the West Midlands

BCL Legal has the largest team of specialist legal recruiters in Birmingham and the wider Midlands area. We work with all of the major national, international and regional firms in the city and are on the preferred supplier list (PSL) for all firms. BCL Legal also works with Birmingham's leading defendant insurance litigation and claimant litigation heavyweights.

In addition, BCL Legal has strong working relationships with all of the regional practices in the West Midlands, which means we're uniquely placed to advise you on market conditions and how to position yourself in the NQ market. The Birmingham legal market has been extremely buoyant in the last few years, which mirrors the continued investment and development within the city centre.

Given Birmingham's close proximity to London and the ever-improving transport links, including HS2, Birmingham firms are able to offer both lawyers and clients a viable alternative to the Capital.

As preferred supplier, BCL Legal works closely with professional services firms **PwC**, **KPMG** and **Deloitte**. We're responsible for the majority of hires into their legal teams. This option is an interesting alternative to the traditional law firm model.

Birmingham is in the midst of a huge regeneration programme including the Eastside development and Paradise Birmingham. Such large scale projects and infrastructure are going to result in more investment in the city, so there's been no better time to build your long-term career in Birmingham. The wider Midlands area is also benefitting from this influx of work and you'll find that the majority of firms in the Midlands are recruiting, which is great news for the NQ market.

BCL Legal also has a leading in-house Midlands team that works with high profile brand names such as **LEVC**, **Halfords PLC**, **MolsonCoors**, **Wolseley**, **Booker Plc**, **Triumph Motorcycles** and **XPO Logistics**. We are seeing an increase in clients who consider newly qualified lawyers who have undertaken in-house secondments or have worked as a paralegal in a commercial contracts or construction capacity.

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East Midlands

The East Midlands legal market is diverse. Whether you're looking for a large international practice, something with a national focus, or a regional heavyweight/boutique offering, the East Midlands has it all!

The Nottinghamshire market is dominated by large established players such as **Eversheds Sutherland**, **Browne Jacobson**, **Shoosmiths** and **Freeths** – servicing national and international clients from their Nottingham base.

In terms of recognition and calibre, the Shoosmiths Nottingham corporate team won deal of the year in 2018; **Gateley PLC** has a track record of advising on multimillion point transactions; **Shakespeare Martineau** is highly regarded in specialist areas; **Howes Percival** is mentioned in the Legal 500 as a “firm to note”; and, **Hewitsons** is regularly acknowledged for its “accurate” and “trustworthy” team that easily attracts talent from London with a number of the partners being City-qualified.

Recent shake-up has occurred by the new kids on the block **Knights PLC** and their acquisitions in Leicester. Knights offer something fantastically different to the traditional law firm model, including no chargeable hours targets for all lawyers at the firm!

Worried about lower salaries and less quality work? Worry not! The level of deals, clients and transactions in the regional offices of these stand-out practices rivals that of their larger city counterparts (including London).

NQ starting salaries are just as competitive as other major legal centres, yet the cost of living is lower. There are solid transport links too – meaning a move to the East Midlands is a win on all accounts!

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East Anglia

Comprising Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, as a legal and commercial centre, East Anglia is often overlooked. However, all of the region's cities enjoy a thriving legal scene, which reflects the region's key role in the agricultural, transport and shipping, technology, biotech and telecommunications sectors.

Cambridge has the largest legal market in the region helped by the worldwide reputation of The University of Cambridge and a myriad of spin-off businesses in the area. The city's success in the technology arena has made Cambridge the number one destination for venture capital investment anywhere in the world (outside the United States). Major Top 200 law firms include **Mills & Reeve**, **Eversheds Sutherland**, **Birketts** and **Taylor Vinters**, together with smaller offices of London and international heavyweights such as **Taylor Wessing** and very recently Top US firm **Goodwin Procter**. There are also a significant number of smaller, long-established commercial firms such as **Greenwoods GRM** and **Hewitsons** holding enviable client bases, which include education and charity sector clients.

Penningtons Manches Cooper, formed through a few mergers, is now another solid international practice.

Norwich is the traditional capital of East Anglia and has the most diverse legal market. **Mills & Reeve**, **Howes Percival** and **Birketts** dominate the corporate and commercial scene. **Birketts**, nominated for Corporate Law Firm of the Year in 2018, undertakes corporate work with a significant proportion involving an international element.

East Anglia is one of the leading markets in the UK for private client and agricultural law. **Mills & Reeve**, **Hewitsons** and **Ashtons** are dominant in these fields, with other larger firms retaining substantial private client teams and specialist firms such as **Roythorne & Co** – adding weight to the region's reputation. Suffolk is also a major centre for bloodstock and horse-racing related work.

“Cambridge has the largest legal market in the region helped by the worldwide reputation of The University of Cambridge and a myriad of spin-off businesses in the area.”

The Thames Valley

A lesser-known location for lawyers and arguably the profession's best-kept secret, the Thames Valley and Oxfordshire region has much more to offer newly qualified lawyers than you might first think. A plethora of leading law firms and multinational businesses have offices and/or their headquarters in the region; taking advantage of the close proximity to London and access to graduates from top universities.

The strength of the legal community in the region is demonstrated by international law firms such as **Clyde & Co**, **Charles Russell Speechlys**, **Osborne Clarke** and **Penningtons Manches Cooper** maintaining a presence in the region. Established national firms such as **Shoosmiths**, **Gateley** and **Freeths** have been bolstering their offerings, while ambitious firms such as **Knights**, **Harrison Clark Rickerbys** and **IBB** have also entered the market in recent years. Several more local firms also boast impressive national reputations, including **Stevens & Bolton**, **Field Seymour Parkes** and **BoyesTurner**.

On the in-house side, FTSE 10 Vodafone is headquartered in Newbury, while one of the largest consumer electronics businesses, **Samsung**, is in Chertsey. In Reading, you'll find the likes of **Microsoft**, **John Lewis** and many more. When one considers that **KPMG** and **Deloitte** have also developed teams in the region, it's not hard to see why commentators consider the Thames Valley to be "under-lawyered".

It's not all about business law! The region is a fantastic place for private client-facing areas of law. A booming property market and the popularity of the area with high net worth individuals has enabled **Blake Morgan**, **Blandy & Blandy**, **Royds Withy King**, **Gardner Leader**, **Clifton Ingram** and others to develop fantastic personal tax and family law practices.

Geographically, the area provides easy access to outstanding natural beauty and popular attractions such as Legoland and Windsor. It's hard to think of a better location to practise law!

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Beds, Bucks and Herts

Comprising of Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, the Northern Home Counties has a thriving Legal market ranging from international practices to regional heavyweights. A host of Top 200 Law firms are taking advantage of this legal hub and its easy access to City-trained lawyers; offering high-calibre work, competitive remuneration and the work-life balance to go with it.

Milton Keynes is the central hub for the offering. International practice **Dentons** is a key name in the city, noted as the largest law firm in the world and highly regarded for its cross-border transactional capabilities. Other prominent firms include **EMW Law LLP**, which is noted for its work with owner-managed business clients; **Shoosmiths LLP**, which benefits from its nationwide network of offices and advises primarily on corporate and commercial matters; and **B P Collins LLP**, which remains a key name in dispute resolution, most notably in the waste management sector. If you're interested in technology, **Moorcrofts LLP** offers expertise in open hardware, cloud computing, open-source, as well as IT and data protection law.

St Albans is the main city in Hertfordshire and enjoys close links to the City of London. Prominent firms in St Albans include many Legal 500 ranked practices like **SA Law LLP**, **Debenhams Ottaway** and **Sherrards Solicitors LLP**. There's no micro-management here! These top regional and independent practices are where you can have complete client contact at an early stage in your career, run your own cases and start winning your own work from the get-go. You can also enjoy London quality work but afford to buy a house in the countryside! What more could you want?

Essex

Colchester and Chelmsford are where most of the top practices are in Essex. These are main commuter cities into London, so when the 'big city' gets too much these are seen as viable alternatives with practices like Top 100 UK practice **Birketts** being somewhere a lot of City-trained lawyers see as a happy medium, enjoying high quality work and clients as well as a well balanced home life.

Other well-known firms such as **Birkett Long LLP** are particularly proud of their commercial property, corporate and private client departments. Up-and-comer, **Thompson Smith and Puxon** is one of the leading firms in agricultural law. **Fisher Jones Greenwood LLP** continues to grow with the expansion of its real estate team. **Tees Law** has made efforts to grow its work in the family and employment departments and has moved from strength to strength with its recent merger with **Wortley Byers LLP** in Brentwood (that has a particularly strong real estate team).

Other strong regional practices include **Palmers**, **Pinney Talfourd LLP** (especially recommended for employment and family matters) and **Mullis & Peake LLP** - another up-and-coming firm in Romford.

Bristol

Bristol is a well established legal centre and an increasingly popular destination for lawyers at all stages of their career. Not least because of the high standard of living, exciting culture, ever-developing and revolutionary music scene and fantastic access to the countryside, the gateway to the South West has become a hub for lawyers from all backgrounds and firms of all shapes and sizes.

Established bigger players like **Burges Salmon and Osborne Clarke** jostle for supremacy with more London-centric practices such as **Simmons & Simmons, CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro Olswang** and **RPC**. All can boast superb reputations and regular instructions from a stellar client list!

Hot on their heels is an impressive chasing peloton of firms such as **TLT, Womble Bond Dickinson, Thrings, Royds Withy King, Veale Wasbrough Vizards, Clarke Willmott, DAC Beachcroft** and **Bevan Brittan** that have all established national reputations. Another large national practice, **Freeths**, has also opened an office in the city in 2019. You can also throw South West aficionados **Foot Anstey, Michelmores** and **Ashfords** (all of whom are making their presence known in Bristol).

Bristol is also home to a wide range of firms offering more boutique offerings as demonstrated by the success of the likes of **Co-op Legal Services, Stowe Family Law, Loney Stewart Holland**, and of course, **Steer & Co.**

In most instances, salaries in Bristol are higher than their equivalents in other large regional legal centres throughout the UK, even on par with one or two Top 100 law firms in London. In addition, you're likely to find a culture where work-life balance is expected. It's no wonder the Sunday Times has voted Bristol as one of the best cities to live in the UK; year on year.

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London

London is one of the world's leading legal centres and its reputation has coined it 'the lawyer of the world.' It's one of the most prominent centres in international law and has also merited its reputation as a leading world city for professional services.

London employs 45% of all solicitors in private practice and is home to 25% of all private practice firms in the UK. Regarded as the top law firms in the UK are the Magic Circle, consisting of **Clifford Chance, Linklaters, Freshfield Bruckhaus Deringer, Slaughter and May** and **Allen & Overy**.

As a world-leading financial and insurance centre, London is home to some of the best law firms servicing these sectors and almost all sectors of law are represented within the City. Law firms in the insurance sector have a long-standing reputation spanning many years, including **Clyde & Co, Kennedys, DAC Beachcroft** and **RPC**. In recent years, there's been growth in the number of US law firms using London as their European base. Prominent US firms include **Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, Shearman & Sterling LLP, Baker & McKenzie, Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP, White & Case** (to name just a few).

Divided into City, West End and High Street, London has the most diverse range of legal practice to be found anywhere and this continues to make it the most popular choice for legal careers.

CV and interview advice

It's essential to present yourself in the best light possible, and we can help. Most of the time you'll be in a competitive process so you need to ensure you've done all your preparation so you can sell yourself, your skills, and your knowledge.

Preparing your CV

Your CV forms the basis of any interview. You'll need to set out your CV in a concise structure and ensure it's relevant to the position you're applying for. Some top tips to remember:

- ▶ In bullet points, detail the experience you've acquired throughout your seats
- ▶ Always spend more time describing the work you did in the seat and discipline you'd like to qualify into
- ▶ Ensure you're familiar with the cases and transactions that you list in your CV as an interviewer is likely to focus on these points
- ▶ Don't over exaggerate as you may be caught out
- ▶ If you've assisted on a multi-million pound completion while in the corporate seat for a blue-chip company, tell them
- ▶ Don't worry if your CV runs over more than two pages, but be punchy and factual
- ▶ Highlight any involvement in business development and/or marketing and always add a paragraph about your interests outside of work

For further guidance, check-out our CV templates at www.bcllegal.com

The interview

Most interviews last around one hour. There may be a panel of interviewers but more often, especially in first interviews, there'll only be one or two interviewers present. Most of all, be yourself and enjoy the meeting. An interview is an exercise in establishing common ground. Treat the interview as a two way process and have relevant questions prepared. Not only will this reassure the firm you've thought about the process, but it also allows you to gain in-depth information to assist your decision about whether the firm is the right fit for you!

Want to practise? All BCL Legal consultants can advise you on best presentation at interview. Don't hesitate to contact us for some guidance.

Where and when

- ▶ Always note the telephone number of your recruiter, as well as the firm you're interviewing at (just in case you get lost). In addition, allow a 15 minute margin
- ▶ Always befriend the reception staff!

You

It sounds obvious but aim to make a great first impression. Take extra care to look your best, wear your smartest suit and polish your shoes (even if you're attending an interview on a dress down Friday). Carry any bags or files in your left hand so that your right hand is free to give a firm handshake. Ensure you maintain eye contact with all the interviewers and show your enthusiasm for the role and what you know about the business.

Discussing your CV

Remember, your CV forms the basis of any interview. Include and emphasise areas you feel comfortable talking about. This way you're in a better position to predict the questions you'll be asked. Read your CV before the meeting and feel free to take a copy with you. If you can, use the interests and hobbies section to develop a rapport with your interviewer.

Do your homework

Websites

Read the firm's website; familiarise yourself with the type of work they do and the clients they deal with. Many firms have archived documents and articles that you can read, which will give you lots of background information. Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners will tell you about specialist areas of law, recommended individuals at the firm and the percentage split of work across the practice.

Trade press

The Lawyer, Legal Week, the Law Society Gazette and their websites publish current information about firms, so they're all worth checking at least the week before and especially the week of the interview.

Ask your recruiter

Your consultant should be able to tell you more about the firm's culture, their interview style, and if there are likely to be any written or verbal tests as part of the interview process etc.

Due diligence

Ask your friends and colleagues if they know anyone who works at the firm so you can ask them some questions beforehand.

Social media

The way people search for new opportunities is rapidly changing. Online presence can be a huge factor when trying to secure a new role. Remember the age-old interview question: "what do you know about our firm?" It's not a case of looking at a brochure or website anymore. Social media allows for the most in-depth research possible. It enables a firm to create much more of a feel for their brand and gives voice to their employees. The firm's LinkedIn profile, Twitter or Instagram accounts can tell you not only about the work they do but also a little about the culture, the working hours, the social scene and much more. Take heed that the same applies to you as a jobseeker so think before you post!

Interview questions

Prepare your answers to the questions below. Ensure you don't waffle your answers, try to give real examples whilst being brief and to the point. The questions will often be (deliberately) open-ended to make sure your answer isn't a simple yes or no. Below is a non-exhaustive list of some of the questions you may be asked.

- ▶ Why are you not being retained on qualification? Why do you want to leave the firm you've trained with?
- ▶ What do you enjoy about your current role? What do you not enjoy?
- ▶ Why have you applied for this job? What do you know about the vacancy?
- ▶ Why are you looking to join us? How much do you know about us?
- ▶ What have been the key achievements in your professional and non-professional life?
- ▶ Where does your initial interest in law stem from?
- ▶ What successes have you enjoyed in your current role? How did you achieve these?
- ▶ How would your boss/team describe you?
- ▶ What do you want to achieve over the next 2/3/5 years?
- ▶ What are your strengths and areas for development?
- ▶ How good are you at: time recording, dealing with targets; organising your day; prioritising?
- ▶ When have you ever worked under pressure?
- ▶ What is your ideal job?
- ▶ What do you like to do outside of work?
- ▶ What motivates you?
- ▶ Give an example of how you've worked as part of a team?
- ▶ What difficulties have you encountered in your current job and how have you overcome them?

Questions to ask at interview

In addition, you'll need to prepare some questions to ask the interviewer(s). A good interviewer may have already answered most of your questions. Ideally, you will've developed a good rapport with them and asked questions throughout the interview rather than save them all to the end. Here are some suggestions.

- ▶ How has this position become available? (i.e. growth or replacement?)
- ▶ How would you describe the culture of the organisation? Team spirited? Open door policy?
- ▶ What are the future plans of the business/department?
- ▶ How would you describe the individuals in the department currently?
- ▶ How do you appraise the performance of your staff?
- ▶ What type of work would I handle in this role?
- ▶ Which clients would I act for?
- ▶ How many files on average does each fee earner handle?
- ▶ Does the organisation encourage marketing by younger members of staff?
- ▶ How many chargeable hours are staff expected to bill per month?
- ▶ How much does the firm invest in technology?
- ▶ How would you describe the values of the firm?
- ▶ How has the firm/team changed over the last few years?
- ▶ How much training, support and development opportunity will there be?
- ▶ What are the long term prospects for the person who gets this job?
- ▶ When am I likely to hear if I have been successful at this stage of the process?
- ▶ What is the next stage of the recruitment process?
- ▶ Do you have any reservations about me?

BCL Legal owns one of the largest legal jobs boards in the UK and we update it with new opportunities on a daily basis. At any one time, we have hundreds of legal jobs in each region within private practice, public sector organisations and commerce and industry.

You can sign up to legal job alerts via our 'job streamer' where you'll receive job information that matches your selected criteria. This way, you're regularly informed of jobs in real-time – as and when we receive instructions from our law firm and company clients.

You'll also find CV templates, the latest Salary Survey results, and general and useful information to assist you in securing the perfect job.

For more information visit www.bcllegal.com.

"I registered with a couple of agents before I was recommended to speak to BCL Legal. I met with three consultants at BCL Legal as I was keen to keep my options open and within a week they had arranged interviews for me at four firms and a week later I received a job offer. The consultants have been very approachable and are always willing to help. I have found the preparation they provide before an interview to be excellent. They have given me the information I need to pitch myself at the right level at each interview. I feel confident and trust that the consultants at BCL Legal are going the extra mile to secure what will be the best position for me on qualification" - **BCL-placed NQ**

"BCL Legal is made up of an extremely proactive team. They proved they genuinely cared about my journey, which I valued a great deal. Their market coverage is excellent and the consultants I dealt with offered comprehensive advice before every interview. Thanks a million!" - **BCL-placed NQ**

"BCL Legal found me my current NQ position and was excellent in preparing me for what my firm was looking for at interview. I was conscious of finding a role well before I qualified in September and an offer was agreed by early April. Generally, BCL was ahead of the curve in sourcing vacancies for me compared with other recruiters I contacted; BCL Legal seems to take things further by getting a good sense of who you are and what drives you, and matching these with a prospective employer."
- **BCL-placed NQ**

Contact us

For more information about legal opportunities in your area, please contact a consultant at one of our offices.

Manchester

Lancaster Buildings, 77 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2BW
T: 0161 819 7475 E: info@bcllegal.com

Birmingham

Colmore Place, 6th Floor, 39 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B25SN
T: 0121 236 2623 E: info@bcllegal.com