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www.lawyer-recruitment.co.uk

Advice for LPC & LLB Students Finding work, training contracts and career advice.

This guide is produced without cost to assist LPC and LLB students look in the right places for work. It deals with the most common telephone queries we handle on a daily basis. The guide is written by Jonathan Fagan LL.M Solicitor, (non-practising) and Managing Director of Ten-Percent. We make no apology for plugging our products throughout this article!

1. I need a training contract.
2. I have finished the LPC and don't have a training contract.
3. Have you got any work for an LLB/LPC graduate/student?
4. Can I register with you?
5. I have a training contract, and I thought I would show off by calling you as it is impressive. I want paralegal work until it starts.

I need a training contract

This is a common call from July to September, and December to January. "Hello my name is Jane Smith and I am looking for a training contract. I wonder if you can help."

If you are reading this simply to find out if we can help, I will cut straight to the point. We cannot assist. The reason for this is that firms do not pay recruitment consultants to find trainee solicitors. There are 1000's of you out there, and the competition is intense. Recruitment consultants exist because there are never enough solicitors or executives to fill vacancies, and the cost of advertising is prohibitive for firms.

We do however give free careers advice and as nearly every call is exactly the same, we thought we might save you hearing it from us and instead see it written down! The advice below applies to private practice firms, and probably excludes the large London city firms.

1. You need to think about what area of law you are looking to practice in. It is very hard to change fields of law once qualified. Do you want to do non-contentious work (conveyancing, corporate finance, wills & probate, tax, energy, commercial property) or do you want to do contentious work (crime, family, commercial litigation, insolvency, employment). Once you have made this decision, do you want to work in a high street practice (ie on the high street), or do you want to work in a commercial practice (ie a practice that specialises in assisting companies, institutions and extremely wealthy individuals).
2. If you do not know the answer to the above question, don't bother going any further at this stage. You need work experience. See section 3 below.
3. If you do know the answer to the above question, have you identified the firms that will be of interest to you?
4. If the answer is yes, why have you contacted us and why are you reading this?

5. If the answer is no, the first thing to do is visit www.solicitors-online.com which is the Law Society online director (the Scottish Law Society has a similar one – www.lawscot.org.uk - follow the links to Solicitors Details on the left hand side).
6. Next, identify the firms in the area you are looking (normally near your home) that deal with the types of law you want to practice in. If there is more than one area repeat steps below.
7. Identify the names of the senior partners, visit the firm's website, check on their recruitment policy.
8. Write to these firms. Change your covering letter for each firm, ensuring it deals with the types of law and size of practice every time you write it. Check that your CV is of sufficient quality. We provide a Covering Letter and CV writing service. Visit www.ten-percent.co.uk/cv.html for details.
9. In most cases, unless you have a very good background with lots of quality experience, a well-written CV and something to make you stand out of the crowd, you will be lucky if you receive more than 1 response to each 50 you send out. Don't bother with SAE's – if firms want to write back they will do. They can afford stamps.
10. Do not be despondent.
11. Make a list of the firms you have contacted, and call each one.
12. This is an art form in itself. Courses are run in London each year training recruitment consultants and sales staff to get past secretaries and speak to fee earners (ie partners). The definition of fee earner is someone who earns fees for a firm – ie they produce revenue.
13. Ask to speak to the partner you wrote to, explain to the secretary if necessary that you are calling about recent correspondence you have had with the partner.
14. Keep trying.
15. If you manage to get through to a partner you have done extremely well. Again the response rate will be low, but probably higher than if you had written and not called.
16. Tell the partner that you wrote to him or her a short time ago, and that you are calling to check that he/she received the letter and wondered if they would be interested in meeting you. Inform the partner before they can speak that you are available for any work they may have and can start immediately.
17. Be prepared for instant rejection.
18. Try again.
19. If you get through your list of firms, and do not get anywhere with the above, move onto plan C. Make a list of the firms in each area you have written to, but had no response from writing or calling. Dress smartly, but not over the top (a suit is probably not necessary but will create a good impression). Attend at the offices, and ask to speak to the partner you wrote to.
20. Take a copy of your CV and covering letter, together with any work examples that might be of interest. If you manage to get to speak to the partner give him/her the same sales pitch as above.
21. This technique works, although you may have to keep going for some time. If you are thinking – "but I cannot call law firms – I'm scared" – do not worry. Most people are, and very few ever do the above. You must remember that being a solicitor requires the ability to conduct advocacy, public speaking and be outgoing where necessary. If you really feel unable to do any of the above, are you going into the right profession? We offer careers consultations for the uncertain, or if you need particular advice. Visit www.ten-percent.co.uk/careers.htm for details.

Firms do not necessarily have a recruitment policy for trainees. They recruit when a person turns up who they like the look of, and think will fit in well and make them money. More importantly they want someone who is enthusiastic, willing to learn, receive instructions and get on with all members of staff (from office cleaners through to senior partner's wives/husbands).

Please note that the above advice does not apply necessarily to the large London City firms. I do know of a candidate who got to stage 2 before being offered 1 month work experience with a very large practice, but this is exceptional.

The above information is also used during our "Life before the Training Contract course". Visit www.ten-percent.co.uk/courses.htm for details.

I have finished the LPC/LLB and do not have a training contract.

I think people sometimes say this as if there is something wrong with them. They almost sound surprised that they do not have one. I am only ever surprised if someone has a 2.1 degree and a pass or above at LPC level, has 3-6 months of varying legal experience, and has written to more than 100 firms and attended at least 5 interviews.

You must have been aware when starting the LPC or LLB that the market for training contracts is very competitive. There are more students than ever now competing for them, as Universities (and the Law Society to a certain extent) realise how much money can be made running and administering the LPC courses.

It is not the end of the world if you cannot get a training contract. There are plenty of other ways into the profession.

Firstly, have you made full efforts to get one? Read the advice above to find out. If not, go through the above steps until you have thoroughly exhausted all avenues. There are over 10,000 law firms out there, most of whom can take a trainee if they want to. Getting authorised as a trainer is not too difficult so even firms who are not already may change their mind once you join them.

Secondly, have you checked that your CV and covering letter are adequate? Visit www.ten-percent.co.uk/cv.html for assistance.

Finally, are you sure that being a solicitor is the be all and end all for you? If it is, you may need to consider alternative options. Our careers consultation may again be of use to you – visit www.ten-percent.co.uk/careers.htm

Paralegal work. This can be the same as solicitor work. It depends on the firm and the work type. It can also be photocopying for years on end in a basement with no question of career advancement. The Law Society does grant exemptions from training contract periods if the work in question is relevant and similar to that dealt with by a trainee solicitor.

Legal Executive work. This is almost the same as solicitor work, except legal executives have less status with advocacy rights in some courts. This may change. You can qualify as a solicitor after passing exams and gaining a certain level of experience.

Court Clerk work. Working in the Magistrates Court as a Court Clerk can lead to qualification as a solicitor. It is well paid compared with some private practice firms.

Have you got any work for an LLB/LPC graduate/student?

No. Not usually. We do assist paralegals with extensive conveyancing and personal injury experience from time to time, but these tend to be career paralegals who have been in the profession for some time and have good quality experience (usually more than 12 months in a paid role). A sandwich year at University tends not to count.

You need to contact firms to get work, and if you do not have any work experience try getting some rapidly. After all without work experience why have you started the LPC – you may not even want to be a solicitor having seen what they do in practice! We used to run a Job Creation Scheme for students, but after securing a training contract for one, and arranging work for another, both of whom left within a week, we gave up. This emphasises that the majority of the competition against you is quite flimsy. Most people give up within a few months of looking and do not push hard enough to get work.

Some of the larger London agents do get work for LPC and LLB students on a temporary basis. Best time to register is outside the busy periods (June-July and December-January). The work tends to be tedious and monotonous, mostly in the larger London city firms chasing paper and photocopying. It is not experience that most firms will consider as useful, although if you have none any legal experience is good experience!

Can I register with you?

Of course you can. All applications from LPC and LLB students without good practical experience go into a virtual box on our system that contains 1000's of similar applications. We hardly ever contact any of them. We cannot assist if there is no market. As there is no market, we cannot assist!

I have a training contract, and I thought I would show off by calling you as it is impressive. I want paralegal work until it starts.

What annoys me more is when these people call and speak to me as if they are already lawyers and I am a mere recruitment consultant. Often they have a forceful and aggressive tone "Hi I'm Ed Winchester" – "you are going to help me". We are not.