

Q&A



SO, YOU WANT TO BE...

A COMMERCIAL LAWYER?

Brendan Hatch is a trainee solicitor at Pinsent Masons LLP. He recommends commercial law to problem solvers with analytical minds.

What's great about working as a trainee solicitor at your organisation?

Every day you learn something new. As a trainee at a commercial law firm, you generally spend two years completing a training contract. That time is divided into a number of 'seats' (usually four) where you work within different legal departments. This rotational process maximises your exposure to as many areas of law as possible. This lends itself to an exciting and challenging day-to-day working life where you are constantly learning.

What sort of person would it suit, as a career?

A career in commercial law is well-suited to problem solvers with a curious and analytical mind, those who have good communication skills (both oral and written), and those with a keen attention to detail. Studying and practising law involves absorbing a lot of information and being able to distil it into bite-sized chunks so that you can find solutions to a particular issue or problem.

Although a legal career is considered to be quite an 'academic' profession, it is important to remember that 'people' skills, such as being personable and persuasive, are as important as a strong grasp of complex legal concepts.

What subjects would it be useful to study at school and what practical experience is beneficial?

I found studying languages at GCSE and A level useful as it not only encourages you to consider a variety of topics from different points of view, but also teaches you to support and develop arguments. Additionally, working in a multinational law firm means that you can be involved in cross-jurisdictional work where a knowledge of other cultures and languages can be invaluable.

At law school, you will be required to carry out a lot of reading and essay writing, so any subject that prepares you for this is beneficial. Getting involved with a legal advice clinic, even if just to provide some administrative support, looks great on a CV and helps develop those all-important people skills at an early stage.

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Could you outline the routes into entry-level roles in your field at your organisation?

There are many different routes to becoming a solicitor at Pinsent Masons. In my cohort of trainees, some of us, including me, completed a vacation scheme (a two-week period of work experience) over the summer after which we were offered a training contract.

Others worked as paralegals at the firm before securing a training contract through the internal application process and others obtained a contract through a direct application. The firm also offers paralegal and solicitor apprenticeships which combine academic studies with work-based learning in order to gain the requisite professional qualifications.

What personal skills and qualities would you need?

In addition to the above, an interest in business is also imperative if you aspire to a career in commercial law. Keeping up to date with and understanding the types of problems that commercial clients face is a key part of being a commercial solicitor as legal advice must always be tailored to clients and their particular business objectives.

How could your career develop as a solicitor at your organisation or beyond?

The traditional career path is to begin as an NQ (newly qualified solicitor) after completing your training contract and work your way up through associate and senior associate to partner. However, there are alternatives to partnership such as becoming a practice development lawyer, a senior lawyer responsible for keeping teams updated on changes in law and market practice and organising and delivering training.

Outside of private practice, one can also become an in-house lawyer who has only one client – the company that they work for. Unlike in private practice, in-house lawyers tend to be generalists, doing a bit of everything.

What has been the highlight of your job so far?

One of the most enjoyable pieces of work I have been involved in was a cross-jurisdictional project which allowed me to combine both my legal and French language skills. As I was the only one who spoke French in that team, it meant that I became the go-to person throughout the transaction, which was fantastic experience for a trainee. Another highlight was the firm's trainee induction process, where the entire intake (some 70 of us) spent a week in Scotland attending training sessions and getting to know one another at dinners and other social events.

