

What is a training contract?



To be a successful solicitor, you will need more than legal knowledge to ace your exams and plunge to the challenging world of law. You will also need to have a substantial training period. As aspiring solicitors, you need to start preparing to apply to training contracts.

Currently, it is normal for students to start applying for training contracts in the second year of their LLB (their Law Degree program) or the final year of their non-law degree. However, the recent change to the Graduate Recruitment Code means law students may soon start applying in their first year of the university.

The training contract, or period of recognised training, is the final stage on the path to qualifying as a solicitor. This period enables you to understand the practical implications of the law as well as developing your skills required in law practice.

It is the stage where you put into practice what you learnt so far, and develop these still further within a working environment. You will have an opportunity to harness your commercial and financial awareness, negotiation skills, drafting, advocacy and client care skills.

The training contract is usually a two-year period spent working at a law firm. Trainees in larger firms spend for blocks of six months each in different departments (they are usually called as seats). While in smaller firms, the training will not be so structured although the trainees will need to cover at least three areas of work.

Your contract of employment

Your relationship to your employer is that of apprenticeship, regulated by the SRA, to make you apply the skills you learn at the earlier stages into practice in a real, supervised environment. Hence your contract cannot be easily terminated by your employer unless there is a serious misconduct, you are so incapacitated that allow you not to be trained properly by the firm, or the business has been changed or closed.

Training contracts often have a cancellation clause (like the inability to complete GDL or LPC). However, cases wherein trainees being fired by their employers are quite rare.

Trainees must complete the Professional Skill Course, which the firm has to pay the course fees. The PSC will enable them to be fully qualified solicitors. This course is split into three modules: advocacy and communication skills, client care and professional standards, and financial and business skills.

Aspiring solicitors must also be aware that SRA is considering a single central exam – the Solicitors Qualifying Examination – to be taken at the end of the training contract.

What you need to learn

During the training period, the SRA requires your firm to provide practical experience in at least three areas of English and Welsh law and practice.

This apprenticeship provides the trainee solicitors avenues to develop and apply practical skills, which they will need as qualified solicitors.

The trainees should develop the skills through the mixture of the following activities:

1. Completing work and tasks by themselves;
2. Assisting others;
3. Observing experienced practitioners.

Advocacy and oral presentation

On completing the training period, trainee solicitors should be competent to exercise the rights of audience available to solicitors in admission. The trainees must be able to fully grasp the skills required to prepare, conduct, and present a case.

Case and transaction management

The trainee solicitors must acquire the skills in managing and running a case or transaction. To develop these skills, trainees should work on large cases or transactions as members of a team, or they should be given smaller transactions that they run by themselves.

Client care and practice support

To be able to deal with the strenuous demand of solicitors life, trainees should develop skills necessary to manage time, resources, and effort. They need to develop good working habits.

Communication skills

Through the apprenticeship, trainee solicitors should understand the importance of refined communication skills so that they can present oral and written presentation in a way that achieves its purpose.

Dispute resolution

Trainees should gain a full understanding of the skills and practice necessary in resolving disputes, including settling, mediation, and adjudication. in a fair, cost-effective, and timely manner that meets the client's needs.

Trainees can develop these skills by attending tribunal hearings or alternative dispute resolution, meetings, and assisting with the preparation of cases.

Drafting

The trainees should develop the skills that enable them to produce clear, concise, and precise documents that achieve their purpose.

Interviewing and advising

This training experience will also help the trainee solicitors understand the importance of identifying their client's goal along with taking accurate instructions. They should experience observing and conducting interviews with clients, experts, witnesses, and others.

Legal research

Trainees should learn to find solutions by investigating the factual and legal issues, analysing problems, and communicating the results of their research.

Negotiation

By being given a chance to observe negotiations conducted by experienced practitioners and/or conducting negotiations under close supervision, trainees will be able to understand the processes involved in contentious and non-contentious negotiations. They will also value the importance to the client or reach an agreement or solve the dispute.

Other than the above-given skills needed, it is also important to note that the apprenticeship program can help develop the trainees' character, which will make them suitable to practice law.

Successful completion of training contracts does not necessarily guarantee a job offer, although the majority of the trainee solicitors work in the firms where they conduct their period of recognised training.

Payment to Trainees

All trainee solicitors receive a salary, but this varies depending on the firm and location.

From August 2014, SRA announced that companies are required to pay the trainees the national minimum wage; however, many trainee solicitors receive more than the national minimum wage.

Law firms particularly the larger ones offer to cover the cost of the LPC and/or GDL tuition fees, with some even providing support for living costs.

In conclusion, the apprenticeship must be seen as a period to learn about several areas of practice and at the same time to find your spot in this competitive profession.