



Becoming a barrister: your path to the Bar



The Bar Council

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So you're thinking about becoming a barrister?

If you're thinking about becoming a barrister – this guide is for you. Whether you're driven by a passion for justice, intrigued by the art of persuasion, or simply curious about life in the courtroom, this guide is here to help you take your first steps towards a career at the Bar, the phrase commonly used to refer to the barrister profession.

We'll explain what this career has to offer. More than that, we'll show you that the Bar isn't just for a select few - it's open to everyone, regardless of background.

So, whether you're just starting to think about your future or already considering a legal career, this guide will help you see how dynamic, fulfilling, and empowering life as a barrister can be.

About the Bar Council

The Bar Council is the voice of the barrister profession – representing and supporting the nearly 18,000 barristers in England and Wales, and championing the rule of law and access to justice.

Part of our work involves supporting the next generation of barristers. We have a range of resources, guidance and events for you, no matter what stage you're at.



The Bar Council



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What is a barrister?



Barristers are specialist legal advisers and advocates who help individuals and organisations understand, pursue, and defend their legal rights. They can often be seen wearing wigs and gowns and presenting legal arguments in court but there is much more than that to the profession.



Deliver expert legal advice: guide clients through complex issues with clarity and confidence, helping them understand their rights and make smart, informed decisions



Advocate in court: take centre stage in the courtroom, presenting compelling arguments and representing your client with authority and precision

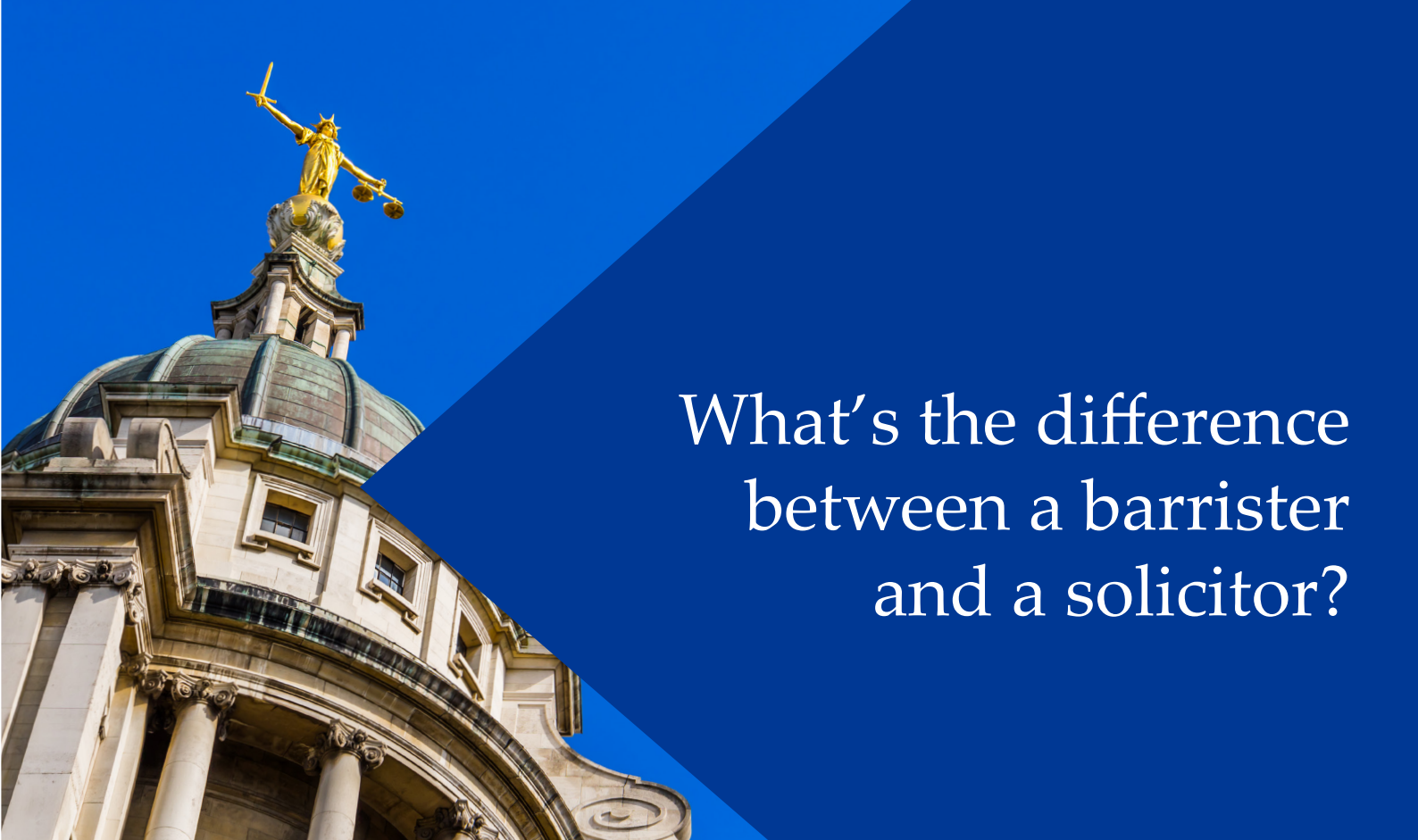


Challenge and uncover: question witnesses and experts to reveal crucial facts, test the strength of evidence, and shape the narrative of your case



Build arguments: dive into legal research to craft sharp, well-founded cases that stand up to scrutiny and have an impact

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What's the difference between a barrister and a solicitor?

In England and Wales, the legal profession is split into two key roles: barristers and solicitors. Both are vital to our justice system. If you're drawn to the drama of the courtroom, the thrill of advocacy, and the intellectual challenge of specialist legal argument, the Bar might be your calling. A barrister's work is often high-stakes, fast-paced, and intellectually demanding – perfect for those who thrive under pressure and enjoy public speaking.

	Barristers	Solicitors
Number in England and Wales	Around 18,000	Around 136,000
Where they work	Chambers or organisations	Law firms or within organisations
What they do	Advocate before judges, juries and magistrates on behalf of clients, instructed by a solicitor	Provide expert legal advice and assistance in a range of situations

You can learn more about becoming a solicitor via [the Law Society's website](#)- they represent all solicitors in England and Wales.



What does a career as a barrister involve?

No two days are the same for a barrister. One day might be spent meticulously preparing legal arguments and providing specialist legal advice, the next could involve heading to court to represent your client. The role is fast-paced and varied with some barristers travelling around the country and the world for their work. Life as a barrister offers intellectual challenge and real-world impact.

Key term – practice areas

Different types of law that barristers and solicitors can specialise in—like criminal law, family law, immigration, or commercial law. Exploring practice areas can help you find what interests you and where your skills fit best.

Day in the life of a barrister

Pippa Pudney, Spire Barristers

I start my day at 5am (5.15am by the time my alarm stops going off) and head straight for coffee and the gym. I really value spending time moving my body and find weight-lifting helpful as a focus outside of work. Getting this done first thing accommodates for the unpredictable schedule at the Bar, so my 'me' hours are done in the morning before the emails begin.

I can be at my desk by 8am, although I try and set myself a boundary of not starting work until 9am if workload allows. I start the day by going through emails that need actioning and making sure I've responded to everything that requires an urgent response.

When working from home, I section my day into work chunks, with a couple of hours set aside for each case to either read through papers or draft documents. My remote-working days tend to include a hearing or two, conferences and meetings. On average, I will have two different cases in my diary per day, either hearings or meetings in advance of a hearing. I then divide up my remaining working hours between other cases, to read papers and draft position statements.

For days when I am at court 'in person', I often have to be on the road by 8am. I still carve my hours in the day up between cases to make sure I know what I'm working on when I return home and have allocated time throughout the week to get everything done.

I set aside about one hour everyday to walk the dog! It's helpful to have something which requires me to leave my desk and get some fresh air.

I try to finish work by 6-7pm – although recently it has been closer to 9pm. My brain usually switches off at 10pm so that is my cut off point.



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Where do
barristers work?



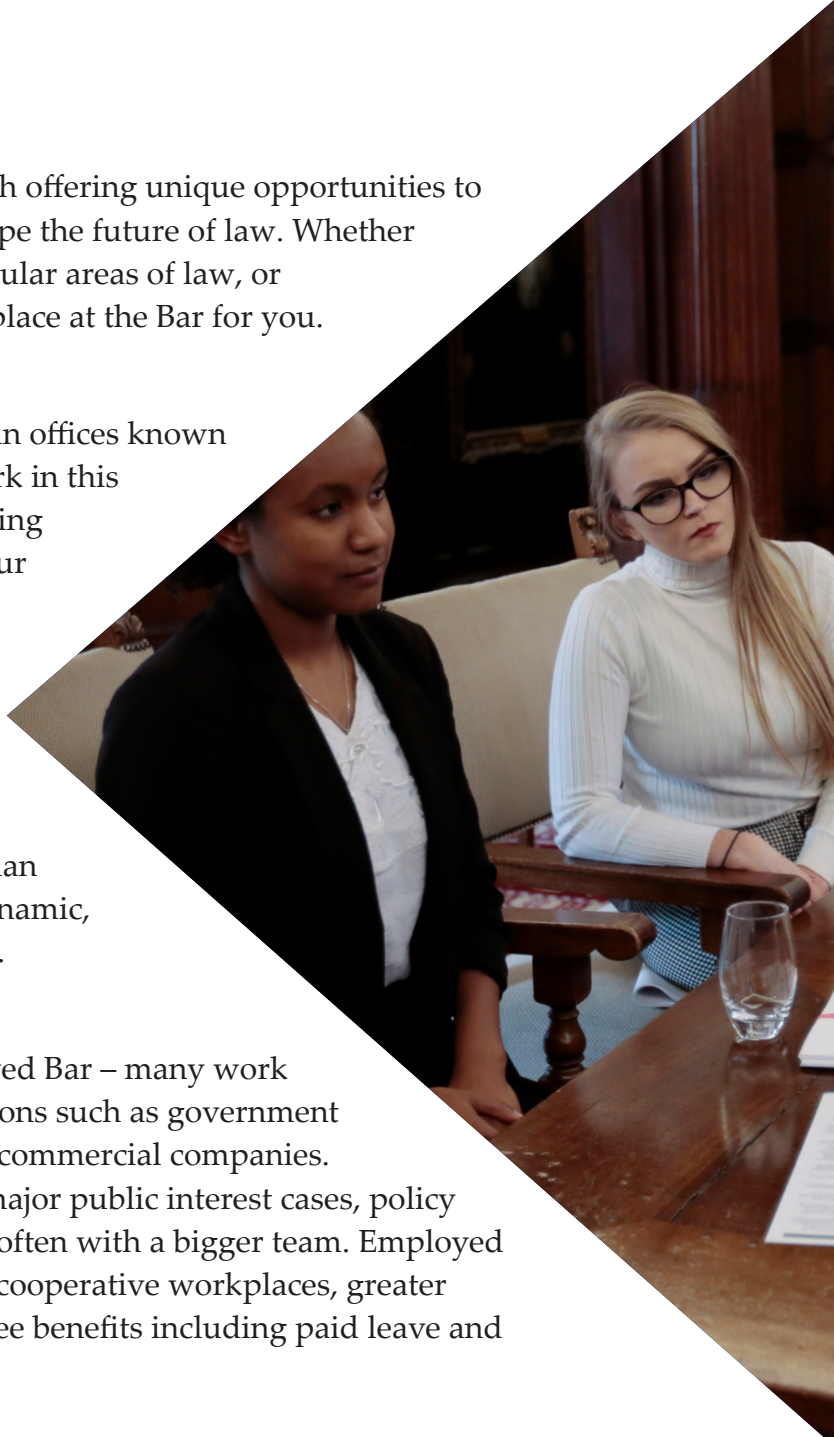
Barristers work in a range of settings, each offering unique opportunities to build expertise, make an impact, and shape the future of law. Whether you're drawn to high-profile cases, particular areas of law, or community-focused advocacy, there's a place at the Bar for you.

Chambers

Self-employed barristers group together in offices known as 'chambers' or 'sets'. If you were to work in this collaborative environment, you'd be sharing resources, support and expertise with your chambers colleagues. Just like barristers, chambers often specialise in a certain practice area – this can be broad such as in criminal or family law or more niche like agricultural property law. From sets handling complex commercial disputes to chambers specialising in human rights law, you'll be working within a dynamic, collaborative and supportive community.

Organisations

Not all barristers work at the self-employed Bar – many work in-house and are employed by organisations such as government departments, regulatory bodies, or large commercial companies. These roles offer the chance to work on major public interest cases, policy development, or in-house legal strategy, often with a bigger team. Employed barristers benefit from collaborative and cooperative workplaces, greater financial security, and a range of employee benefits including paid leave and protections.



Self-employed barristers

Work independently in a chambers - they don't have an employer and are their own boss representing a range of different people and organisations. The majority of barristers in England and Wales are self-employed.

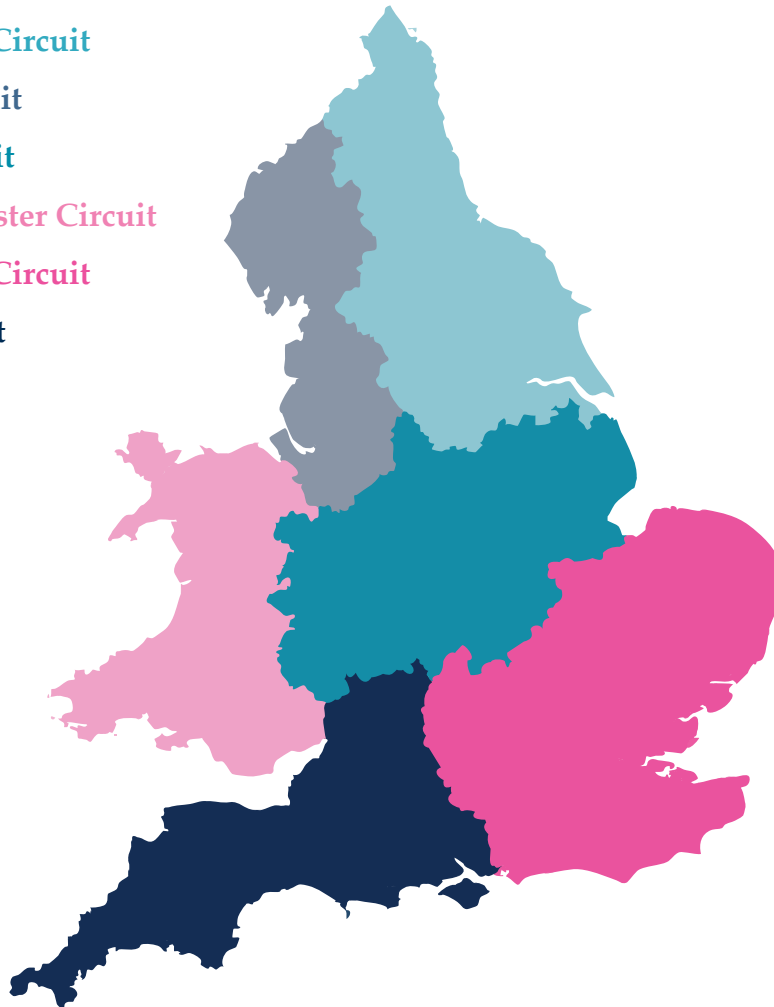
Employed barristers

Work in organisations such as banks and corporations, law firms, local authorities, and the military. They remain independent but unlike self-employed barristers, they only act on behalf of their employer.

Circuits

England and Wales is divided into 6 regional circuits, each with its own legal community, training opportunities, and court networks. The circuits, particularly outside London, are often close-knit networks providing support, advice and representation for barristers working in those areas. Find your local circuit:

- The North Eastern Circuit
- The Northern Circuit
- The Midland Circuit
- The Wales and Chester Circuit
- The South Eastern Circuit
- The Western Circuit



Specialist Bar associations

Barristers can specialise in different practice areas. To support these specialisms, there are 24 **specialist Bar associations** (SBAs), each focused on a specific practice area or region. SBAs offer tailored training, mentoring, networking events, and represent members' interests in legal reform and regulation. For example, the **Chancery Bar Association** offers **student membership**, giving you the chance to meet practising barristers, attend exclusive networking events, and deepen your understanding of Chancery law.

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What can the
Bar offer you?



For many, life as a barrister is a vocation rather than a job. It's a profession which requires motivation and resilience and success will depend on your dedication and hard work. Being a barrister comes with the bonus of a competitive salary which will grow as you gain more expertise and experience. While it's a challenging job, it's rewarding and full of opportunities.



Career progression

A career at the Bar can lead to exciting opportunities beyond practice. Many barristers become King's Counsel (KC) – referred to as taking silk – and are recognised for their excellence in advocacy. Others go on to become judges, politicians, legal academics, or senior advisers in government and business. The skills you develop at the Bar open doors to high-impact roles across law and public life.



Social value

A career at the Bar offers the opportunity to create real social impact through the law. Whether you're advocating for individuals facing injustice, supporting families in crisis, defending human rights or guiding corporations to act responsibly and ethically, the Bar equips you to be a force for good. It's a profession where your expertise can help shape lives, influence policy, and drive positive change. If you're looking for a career that combines intellectual challenge with purpose, the Bar is the place for you.



Intellectually stimulating

Whether you're in court advocating before a judge, preparing complex legal arguments, or advising clients on your area of expertise, the work will challenge you meaning you will have to work hard – which is really rewarding as you can make a real difference to someone's life.



Can be lucrative

Barristers are typically well-compensated for their expertise and hard work. **Barristers' salaries** depend on their areas of practice and expertise. In 2023, the median earnings for a self-employed barrister within their first three years of practice was approximately £87,000. At the very top, barristers who have been in practice for over 23 years can earn £500k annually. It's a career that not only offers intellectual challenge and social impact, but also financial compensation.



Inclusivity

The Bar offers you the chance to be part of a profession that values and actively promotes diversity. It's open to talent from every background, because a justice system can only be trusted when it reflects the society it serves. We're making encouraging progress in understanding and addressing who gets pupillage, how work is distributed, and who advances in their career at the Bar. As part of this, we're implementing targeted equality, diversity and inclusion, and race training, and actively monitoring work allocation and income distribution by ethnicity, sex, and age. We're also supporting barristers to build inclusive cultures within chambers, ensuring fairer access to opportunities and long-term career development across the profession.

Meet Lucy



Lucy was born and raised in Peckham, London and studied commercial music at undergraduate level. After working in hospitality, Lucy became a union rep where she gained experience in employment law. From this introduction to the legal world, Lucy went on to study to become a barrister and then became the first lawyer in her family.

I am half English, half Pakistani Russian. Growing up, my family worked in public services – teachers, nurses, a fireman. I think that contributed to my having a strong moral compass: a calling to help others and stand up for what is right. For the past decade I have lived in council housing and campaigned for tenants' rights, including running my pro-bono project, CommUnify.

I feel like my background has prepared me for life at the Bar – intellect is necessary but also interpersonal skills and a strong work ethic, which cannot be taught easily. I absolutely love my job. It is rewarding, challenging, yet often hard work and long hours. I cannot imagine doing anything else. In terms of pupillage, I would advise others with eclectic backgrounds to highlight those transferable skills, which many candidates may not have. Do your research and be discerning when considering chambers, whether you would be a good fit for them, and vice versa, instead of applying to as many as you can. Although there is a long way to go regarding access to the profession, there are some amazing schemes out there that gave me opportunities I would not have had otherwise, such as the **Inner Temple PASS scheme**.

Read more about **Lucy's journey** and how her past experiences have shaped her career.

Meet Andrew



Andrew grew up in Australia, first living with his mother and later his grandparents. He started his career as a solicitor working for HMRC before transferring to the self-employed Bar.

I have a very diverse practice across family, property, personal injury, and employment law. I find each area gives me something different. Getting parents to a point where they're able to resolve their disputes together is particularly rewarding, as is securing important improvements in the lives of the children in front of a judge. Black-letter law is rewarding for a whole different set of reasons, and I find it equally exhilarating – the complexity and fear of error is everything that I wanted the Bar to be. I think my experience gives me an ability to empathise. I remember how it feels to walk in those shoes. I know what this client needs to know and what support they need to make empowered decisions about their futures.

Read more about **Andrew's journey** and how he has used his lived experiences to help people.

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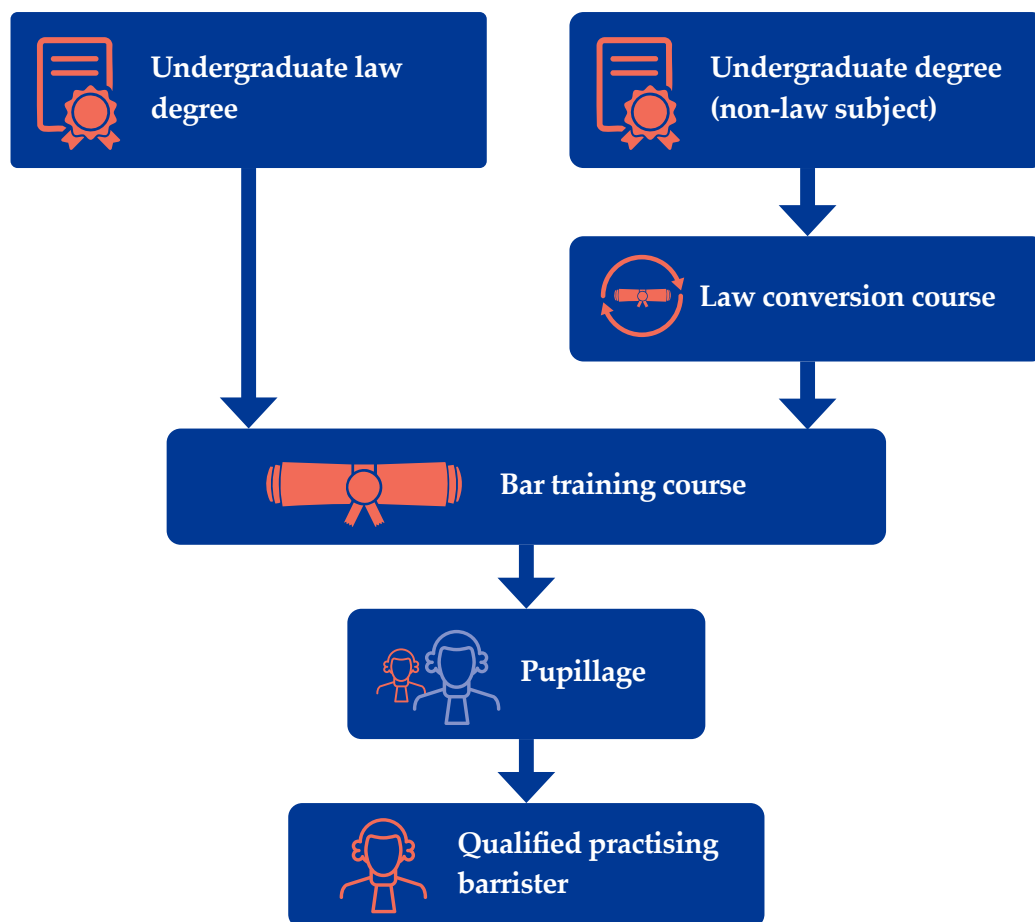
How to become a barrister



Now that you've seen what a career at the Bar can offer, here's how to start making it happen.

There's no single path to becoming a barrister, people join from all sorts of academic backgrounds. Some study law at university, whilst others take a different subject first and then complete a law conversion course. Many barristers also do other jobs before becoming a barrister which are not necessarily in the law such as working in the civil service.

Whichever route you choose, you'll need to complete some form of legal education (either a qualifying law degree or a conversion course) before moving on to Bar training.



Did you know?

More than half (52%) of people who secure pupillage are between 25 and 34 years old. Read more in our [Pupillage Gateway Report 2024](#).

Key term –First six and second six

Pupillage is split two, your 'first six' and 'second six', the non-practising and practising periods. During your first six, you'll focus on observing and learning. During your second six, you'll take on your own cases under supervision.

Three key steps to qualifying as a barrister

1. Academic stage

- The first step to becoming a barrister is to get a degree – this must be a minimum of a 2:2 (although some chambers and employers require a minimum of a 2:1)

Did you know?

Applications to the Bar are very competitive. Candidates with a first-class honours degree were more than twice as likely to secure an offer than those with a 2:1. Read more in our [Pupillage Gateway Report 2024](#).

- You don't need to have an undergraduate law degree to become a barrister. If you study a subject other than law, you'll need to complete a conversion course (this can be the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) or a combined GDL or Master of Law (LLM))
- There is a cost to studying to become a barrister and that can feel daunting. But there is financial support available, including **scholarships offered annually by the Inns of Court**

Key term – Inns of Court

The 4 Inns - Lincoln's, Inner Temple, Middle Temple, and Gray's – are historic legal societies in London that support aspiring and practising barristers. Membership in one is required to become a barrister. They provide training, mentoring, scholarships, and community, helping to uphold professional standards and promote access to the profession.

2. Vocational stage

- To be called to the Bar you need to complete and pass the Bar training course
- There are several Bar training course providers and we recommend you research each one and consider what's best for you
- Before you start your course, you'll need to join one of the Inns. These are professional associations who will "call" you to the Bar after you have passed your course and completed an additional 10 "qualifying sessions" at your Inn

3. Work based stage – pupillage

- Pupillage is the final stage of barrister training - a one-year placement in chambers or with an employer. The first 6 months focus on observing and learning
- The second 6 involve taking on your own cases and being 'on your feet' under supervision

Key term - on your feet

A common phrase in the legal profession referring to the act of speaking in court - whether making submissions, questioning witnesses, or responding to the judge. It's about live, oral advocacy and is a core skill for any practising barrister.

- Pupillages are completed in a set of chambers or with an organisation such as the Government Legal Department

Did you know?

Around 10% of pupillages are offered at the employed Bar. These are primarily offered at the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Government Legal Department (GLD), but also at law firms and regulators. Read more in our [Pupillage Gateway Report 2024](#).

- You can apply for pupillage via our Pupillage Gateway, the central online platform where pupillages are advertised. It's ran by us and used by Authorised Education and Training Organisations (AETOs) to recruit aspiring barristers. Through the Gateway, you can browse pupillage vacancies, submit applications, and track deadlines - all in one place. It's a key resource for anyone applying for pupillage
- Securing pupillage is very competitive so we recommend undertaking mini-pupillage's first

Key term - Authorised Education and Training Organisation (AETO)

An AETO is an organisation approved by the Bar Standards Board to deliver training for barristers, including offering pupillage. Most chambers and some other organisations such as the Crown Prosecution Service are AETOs.

Did you know?

Undertaking a mini-pupillage can give you better chances of success: our research has found that very few candidates who have not done a mini-pupillage obtain a pupillage offer. Read more in our [Pupillage Gateway Report 2024](#).

For more detailed information on these stages visit our [Becoming a barrister hub](#).

A woman with dark, wavy hair is sitting at a wooden desk in a library, focused on her laptop. She is wearing a grey t-shirt and a light grey zip-up jacket. The background shows blurred bookshelves filled with books. A large blue diagonal graphic with a red number '5' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

5 What else can
I do to increase
my chance of
becoming a
barrister?

Like any professional qualification, training to become a barrister requires dedication and time. Alongside your academic studies, it's essential to build a broad set of skills that will support your future practice.

We recommend finding opportunities to build your skills wherever you can. As a barrister, strong communication, analytical thinking, and advocacy are essential. There are many ways to develop these skills by taking part in:

- **Public speaking**
- **Debating**
- **Volunteering**
- **Taking part in mock court hearings**

Many universities offer great starting points through student law societies, legal clinics, and outreach programmes.

Getting involved in these activities can be a valuable way to gain experience, build your network and confidence, and enhance your understanding of the profession. We run two programmes to help aspiring barristers get a taster of life at the Bar:

Bar Placement Scheme

Our **Bar Placement Scheme**, offers undergraduate students a unique opportunity to gain real-life insight into barristers' work.

You'll shadow a barrister in chambers and in court and take part in advocacy training delivered by the Inns of Court College of Advocacy. The scheme is designed to help students from underrepresented backgrounds explore whether a career at the Bar is right for them, whilst developing valuable skills and experience to enhance future applications.

Lilly Bennett, who took part in the 2025 scheme, said:

I had doubts on my first day. But by the end of the week, I had forgotten them. I left with more confidence and huge respect for barristers. The scheme did more than introduce me to the profession—it introduced me to a future. This experience affirmed what I half-hoped in anticipation: I will have a career at the Bar.

Read more about **Lilly's experience**



Meerab Basit, who also took part in the 2025 scheme, said:

This placement has changed the way I view the Bar - not just as a career, but as a calling. I've come to realise that being a barrister isn't about who speaks the loudest, but about the one who speaks with reason, conviction, and an understanding of the people they represent.

Read more about [Meerab's experience](#)

10KBI

The **10,000 Black Interns (10KBI) Programme** is a paid internship initiative aimed at increasing access and representation for Black students and graduates within the legal profession. Delivered by a steering group of chambers and Bar-based organisations and supported by us, it gives you a 6-week placement across multiple chambers.

You'll gain exposure to a range of practice areas, attend court hearings, receive advocacy training, and build professional networks. You'll be able to explore life at the Bar and develop the skills and confidence needed to pursue a legal career. For more details, [visit our 10KBI page](#).

Corey Boothe, a 10KBI intern, said:

Whether you are considering the Bar course, currently studying on it, or (like I was) in the hunt for pupillage post-qualification and in purgatory, if you're eligible for the 10,000 Black Interns ('10KBI') scheme, applying is simply a must.

Read more about [Corey's experience](#)

Want to hear more?

Some of our other interns have shared their experiences of the 10KBI programme, reflecting on the skills they gained, the people they met, and how the scheme shaped their ambitions.

[Read more intern reflections](#)

What are the Inns?

The Inns of Court are 4 historic legal societies in London: **Lincoln's**, **Inner Temple**, **Middle Temple** and **Gray's**. Every barrister in England and Wales belongs to one of them. The Inns offer training, support, scholarships, and networking opportunities that can help you on your becoming a barrister journey.

Why join as a student?

Even if you're still an undergraduate, joining an Inn (or at least engaging with one) can give you many opportunities, including:

- **Scholarships:** each Inn offers generous funding for the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and Bar course. These are competitive but accessible and being proactive early could make all the difference
- **Mentoring and networking:** meet practising barristers, attend moots (a mock legal hearing) and debates, and gain insights into the profession

What makes each Inn unique?

Each Inn has its own character, history, and facilities:



Lincoln's

The largest, with 25,000 members. Known for its regency architecture, Great Hall, and education suite. Offers residential scholarships and a strong academic programme. Lincoln's offers over £2 million each year through various scholarships, awards and prizes



Inner Temple

Rich in history, Inner's legal reference library dates back to 1506. The Inn offers £1.7 million in scholarships and has a strong mentoring culture



Middle Temple

Home to Elizabethan Middle Temple Hall and the peaceful Fountain Court. Offers up to £1.25 million in scholarships.



Gray's

The smallest but known for its serene gardens, close-knit community and association with Francis Bacon. Gray's offers up to £1.5 million in scholarships



Opportunities at the Inns of Court



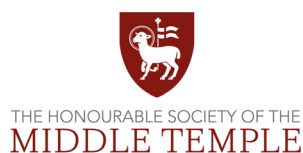
The **Pegasus Access and Support Scheme (PASS)** is run by Inner Temple to support aspiring barristers from underrepresented backgrounds. Designed for those not yet on the Bar course, PASS is a mini-pupillage placement, as well as professional and advocacy skills development delivered through a mix of in-person and online sessions.



Lincoln's Inn careers events offer a range of opportunities for you to explore a career at the Bar. These include university presentations, InnSight Days, and information afternoons followed by networking dinners with barristers and benchers. The events cover key topics such as training routes, funding options, and life at both the self-employed and employed Bar.



The **University Advocacy Day** at Gray's Inn is a hands-on opportunity for university students considering a career at the Bar to engage directly with the profession. Held twice a year the event includes advocacy workshops led by barristers, an ethics discussion, and the chance to perform advocacy exercises to gain feedback.



The **Access to the Bar Award** is a funded work experience programme offered by Middle Temple to support undergraduate and postgraduate students from underrepresented backgrounds who are considering a career at the Bar. Each summer, up to 30 students are selected to complete two weeks of legal experience: one week marshalling a judge in court, and one week shadowing a barrister in chambers.

Key term - benchers

Senior members of the Inns of Court, who help lead and support the legal community. They guide professional standards, offer mentorship, and contribute to the running of the Inns.

Further career resources

We often share **blogs** about pursuing a career at the Bar, pupillage and making **pupillage applications**. This is regularly updated with advice and insight, there for you to regularly reflect on.

Wellbeing at the Bar hub has a collection of resources for those who have completed their Bar course.

Many chambers and circuits have their own podcasts which you can list to learn about the work of a barrister and the most recent developments in law. Red Lion Chambers have developed a specific **Pupillage pathways podcast** which is a great resource if you're considering pupillage.

The Bar in numbers blog examines the changes we've seen in the profession over the last few decades. For example, the average age of pupil barristers has slightly increased over the past 35 years. In 1990/1, the average age of pupils was 27.2 – now most (52.5%) candidates who secure pupillage are between the age of 25 and 34.

Our **Employed barristers webpage** is a great space to understand more about the role of an employed barrister.

On our **Becoming a barrister hub** – I am a student page is a great space to learn more about what your journey to the Bar looks like.

Our **Pupillage Gateway report** offers valuable insights into the application process and what recent trends mean for future applicants.

Our **Pupil Survey** shares real experiences from current pupils, helping you understand what pupillage is really like and how to prepare.

