

Becoming a barrister is one of the toughest and most competitive career paths on offer. To give you a hand, we have broken the process down into 4 simple steps:

Stage 1 - The degree

- Any aspiring barrister must attain a 2:2 or above in either:
 1. A qualifying law degree (QLD); or,
 2. A non-qualifying law degree plus the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)
- A QLD can be an LLB (Bachelor of Laws), a BA or BSc - students simply need to check that it is a qualifying law degree. The key difference with an LLB is that modules will concentrate on the 7 foundations of legal knowledge - public, tort, contract, criminal, EU, equity and trusts, and land.
- The GDL is the year-long conversion course taken after studying a non-law degree. It allows students to specialise in a completely different subject before studying law. However, student loans are not offered to GDL students so most should expect to pay their tuition fees up-front (unless their personal circumstances qualify them for a bursary fund).

Stage 2 - the Inns of Court

- In the UK aspiring barristers must join one of the four Inns of Court. These are the only associations which have the right to call students to the bar. The four Inns of Court are Lincoln's Inn, Inner Temple, Middle Temple and Gray's Inn.
- The Inns offer support to aspiring barristers by providing mentors, teaching and access to libraries, as well as bestowing generous scholarships upon their highest performing members. They also act as a social network for members with moots and seminars running throughout the year. Whilst all the Inns provide similar services, it is a good idea to conduct thorough research into each before applying as each have their own histories and customs (and membership is for life.)
- Scholarships at the Inns are available for BPTC and GDL students, with the most prestigious awards worth around £15,000 each (and some even including free residence in one of the Inns' London flats during the BPTC year.) These are not only very desirable to fund training, but also because they demonstrate to chambers that an Inn has recognised your ability when you later apply for pupillage. The deadline for Inns scholarships usually falls a year before the start of the BPTC so it's important to get a head start on your membership.
- Qualifying sessions are put on by the Inn to prepare members for their careers as barristers. These can be educational or social in nature, ranging from lectures on courtroom technique to networking parties. Once you have completed the BPTC and attended 12 qualifying sessions at an Inn, you may be called to the bar.

Receiving a call to the bar means you are now qualified to argue in court on behalf of another party.

Stage 3 - Vocational training (BPTC)

- The BPTC (Bar Professional Training Course) is a year long vocational course. It equips aspiring barristers with the skills to undertake a pupillage.
- To study the BPTC (Bar Professional Training Course), students must:
 - Have sat the Bar Course Aptitude Test (BCAT), and
 - Belong to an Inn of Court as a student barrister, which allows them to be 'called to the Bar' at the end of the BPTC and fulfil the statutory definition of a 'barrister'.
- There are currently only 8 institutions which offer the BPTC: BPP Law School (Manchester, Leeds and London); Cardiff Law School; The City Law School, London; Manchester Metropolitan University; Northumbria University; Nottingham Law School, Nottingham Trent University; The University of Law; University of the West of England.
- Whilst the BPTC remains in place in the short-term, students should expect changes to the BPTC structure from 2018/19 onwards as the licences for course providers expire. These include a combined vocational training and Master's course, a Bar apprenticeship, and a two-part vocational training model. Here is an explanation of each of the 3 proposed reforms:

1. Combined vocational training and Master's course

Currently, only one course provider offers the BPTC with a Master's degree (Northumbria University). However, the BSB is keen to see more Master's courses offered alongside the BPTC. This will allow students to qualify for funding under the student loan system as well as awarding them a widely recognised qualification. ‘

2. Bar apprenticeship

The BSB are aware that training similar to higher apprenticeships should be accepted within their framework. However, there is little support for this proposal amongst course providers and employers. This means that precise details on what form this training would take are currently unavailable.

3. Two-part vocational training model

Under part 1 students would:

- Study elements of legal knowledge - for instance, criminal/civil procedure and evidence.
- Not be expected to attend a course provider, which means there would be no compulsory attendance at law school.

Under part 2 students would:

- Focus on legal skills such as advocacy, drafting and ethics.
- Be required to attend law school.

Students must pass part 1 to progress to part 2. This proposal has been well-received by employers.

Stage 4 - Pupillage

The pupillage is the final stage of barrister training. It is a year of paid, work-based learning. During this time pupil barristers are supervised by qualified barristers. Pupils are assessed throughout the year and at the end of their pupillage it's decided if they will be offered tenancy at the chamber. Upon completion of the pupillage, pupil barristers are fully qualified.

Most barristers' chambers start recruiting for pupillages a year in advance. Roughly half use the Pupillage Gateway (an online application system - like UCAS for pupillages) whilst others require direct applications. Applying for pupillages is notoriously competitive; often candidates must apply several times before gaining pupillage.

Source: <https://www.unifrog.org/know-how/becoming-a-uk-barrister>