

CAREER CHANGERS:

A Practical Guide to Changing to a Law Career

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Introduction

Career changers now represent a substantial proportion of new entrants to the solicitor profession. People move into law from areas such as teaching, consulting, journalism, healthcare, banking and business ownership every year, drawn by the opportunity to apply their experience in a new context.

The profession values judgement, communication and resilience far more than having a perfectly linear career path. Your background can be a strength, not a disadvantage, and many career changers thrive because they bring skills that junior lawyers usually take years to develop.

Law is a competitive – and sometimes demanding – career, but it can also be deeply rewarding. A good starting point is to reflect on why you want to move into the profession at this stage of your life. Understanding your motivations, what inspires you and what you value will help you present yourself with confidence. Law firms and organisations will expect you to explain your reasons clearly, so take the time to develop a strong and authentic narrative that shows who you are and why you are committed to this career change.

Here are some articles you may also find useful:

- [🔗 Top 10 Tips For Career Changers Breaking Into Law](#)
- [🔗 Finding Purpose In Your Legal Career](#)

Best,



Steph Day, Careers & Employability Manager,
BARBRI

The Solicitor Route Today (In Brief)

To qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales you need:

1. A degree (in any subject, from any country)
2. To pass the Solicitors Qualifying Exams: SQE1 & SQE2
3. [Two years of Qualifying Work Experience \(QWE\)](#)
4. To meet character and suitability requirements

It's important to note that you DO NOT NEED a law degree or a conversion degree. [Visit the Solicitors Regulation Authority \(SRA\)](#) website for more information.

The flexibility this new path (introduced in 2021) allows career changers to thrive in the legal industry today. You can work while studying, build experience gradually, and qualify without a traditional training contract.

BARBRI specialises in preparing candidates for the [SQE](#), particularly those balancing study with full-time jobs or family life.



Am I Too Old?

No, you are not! There is no upper age limit for entering the legal profession, especially since the introduction of the SQE, which has made the qualification route more flexible and accessible for people at all stages of their careers.

Firms and organisations focus on the things that predict success in the legal profession, including:

- Whether you can pass the SQE
- The transferable skills you bring from previous roles
- How you can add value to clients through your judgement and experience
- Your level of commercial awareness and understanding of the wider business context

They care far less about:

- Your age
- Whether you followed a traditional graduate route into law
- How long ago you were at university

Many trainees qualify in their thirties, forties and well beyond, and maturity is often an advantage in client-facing work. The only real limitations tend to be personal ones, such as financial commitment and the ability to balance study with work.

Not everyone has the capacity to take this on, and it is being realistic about this. However, for those who can, a career in law can be extremely rewarding, offering both an intellectual challenge and long-term professional fulfilment.



How to Identify and Articulate Your Transferable Skills

Most career changers underestimate how relevant their existing experience is. Law is not about memorising rules; it is about applying judgement under pressure.

See how transferable skills in these areas can be applied to law:

- **Business, finance or consulting:**
Client management, commercial awareness and risk analysis transfer well into corporate and commercial practice.
- **Teaching or academia:**
Clear explanation, structured thinking and strong time management suit litigation, regulatory work and advisory roles.
- **Healthcare, social work or public sector:**
Confidentiality, client care under stress and decision making translate well to clinical negligence, family, public law and regulatory practice.
- **Media, communications or writing:**
Persuasive writing, research and audience awareness are valuable in litigation, IP, defamation and advisory work.



How to Apply Your Skills to Job Applications

Get familiar with the [SRA's solicitor competences](#), which is a list of skills you'll need to have and develop – now and throughout your career.

Then, follow this simple method:



List your core tasks from your current or past roles



Identify the underlying competencies, not the job title



Match those competencies to legal work

For example:

- Managing difficult stakeholders becomes handling complex client relationships
- Writing reports becomes drafting clear, structured advice
- Meeting deadlines becomes managing cases and workflow efficiently

When speaking to firms, frame your experience in terms of outcomes, judgement and responsibility.



Choose a Practice Area

Choosing a practice area is a balance between what you enjoy, your strengths, lifestyle preferences and market realities. The more you expose yourself to different fields, the clearer your decision will become. And remember, your career is a journey, there is room to adapt and grow along the way.

The following practice areas frequently align well with the strengths of career changers:

- Employment law
- Commercial and contract law
- Regulatory and compliance
- Property
- In-house advisory roles

To get started, follow these steps:

1. Understand the main practice areas
2. Reflect on your interests and strengths
3. Gain practical experience
4. Consider lifestyle and work patterns
5. Research market demand and opportunities
6. Be open to change

You do not need to decide everything straight away. Lots of research and exposure through Qualifying Work Experience will help you to decide.

Pro bono work is an excellent way for career changers to build practical legal experience while contributing to the community. It exposes you to real clients, real issues and the day-to-day realities of legal work, all of which help you to develop your skills and learn new ones in a legal context.

It also allows you to demonstrate commitment to the profession and to gain evidence of the [SRA's solicitor competencies](#) in action, even short periods of volunteering or shadowing can deepen your understanding of different practice areas and help refine your career direction.



Lifestyle: The Reality

Law can be demanding, but the experience varies hugely by practice area and firm type. The pace, expectations and working patterns differ widely, which means there is room to find an environment that aligns with your strengths, preferences and long-term goals.



Working Hours

Here is a comparison of the working hours you can expect from different types of legal employers:

- City/commercial firms: long hours, high pressure.
- Regional and high-street firms: more predictable hours.
- In-house roles: generally better work-life balance.
- Legal aid and public law: emotionally demanding, but can feel meaningful.



Salary Expectations

It's important to be realistic.

- Trainee or paralegal roles will normally pay modestly initially.
- Newly qualified (NQ) solicitors: salary varies widely by location and practice area.
- Mid-career progression can be strong, especially with commercial experience.
- The top salaries are found in US and City firms, whereas public sector and legal aid positions will be on the lower end.
- See the [SRA's summary of average salaries per sector](#).
- Career changers often catch up quickly because they bring skills that junior lawyers usually take years to develop.



The SQE Exams

Studying for the SQE exams is demanding, particularly the SQE1, which requires sustained focus and a high level of commitment to understand and memorise legal knowledge. Most candidates find that they need to dedicate regular evenings and weekends to revision because the assessments test both depth of understanding and the ability to apply knowledge under time pressure.

At [BARBRI](#) we design our courses specifically for people who are working alongside their studies, offering structured materials and support that help you maintain momentum, but personal discipline remains essential. Consistency, strong organisation and realistic planning make a significant difference.

It is also important to approach SQE preparation with an honest assessment of your existing strengths and any knowledge gaps. For career changers, we highly recommend our online, on-demand [Foundations In Law](#) course to start with – it will give you an introduction to the common law in England and Wales and common legal terminology, and how to conduct legal research.

Things To Do Next

1

Research different legal roles to understand which fits your skills and interests.

2

Speak with lawyers who have also changed careers to gather real insights – join [Later On Lawyers - LinkedIn](#)

3

Highlight your transferable skills and match these to the employers' requirements effectively.

4

Gain experience through volunteering, shadowing or pro bono opportunities.

5

Tailor your CV to emphasise relevant achievements from your previous career.

6

Build your professional network through events, LinkedIn and alumni groups – be visible.

7

Stay informed about key legal developments to demonstrate commercial awareness and commitment.

8

Prepare a clear narrative about why you are changing career and what you bring.

9

Focus on firms or areas of law that value your previous industry expertise.

Changing career into law is a significant step, but with clarity, preparation and confidence, it can lead to a rewarding and sustainable future. Taking time to understand your motivations, strengthening your skills and engaging actively with the profession, you place yourself in a strong position to progress.

Success Stories

Amit

In this episode of QWE & Me, our Head of Employability & Engagement, Robert Dudley, chats with Amit Kapoor about switching to a career in law after a career in IT:

[*Is it Too Late to Switch Careers and Become a Solicitor? | QWE & Me with BARBRI | Ep 1*](#)
[*Amit Kapoor*](#)

Tim

In this episode, Rob chats with Tim MacFarlan, a journalist turned humanitarian lawyer:

[*Do Transferable Skills Count? | QWE & Me with BARBRI | Ep 2*](#)
[*Tim MacFarlan*](#)

Georgia

Also read our student story with Georgia Fowler, who worked in the music industry and then upskilled as a solicitor in the same industry:

[*Student Success: Georgia Fowler | BARBRI Resources*](#)



Thinking of Changing Careers and Becoming a Lawyer?



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