

Comparative qualification and alternative entry routes in common law jurisdictions

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Purpose

This report sets out an overview of diverse routes to qualification as a lawyer in a range of common Law jurisdictions; as well as a look at the routes into other regulated professions, such as medicine, dentistry, and accounting (in the UK). The aim is to provide a comparative benchmark which can be used to consider and stimulate thinking in terms of the future model for admission and training in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

There are different routes to qualify as a lawyer in common law jurisdictions. In this report, we will discuss the qualifications and requirements for becoming a lawyer in some of these jurisdictions, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Scotland, Canada, and Australia. We will also discuss transfer and requalification routes for overseas lawyers who wish to practice in a different jurisdiction and alternative routes, such as legal apprenticeships. The qualification to become a lawyer vary across different countries and jurisdictions, with some requiring an undergraduate degree in law, while others require a postgraduate qualification; however, all standard routes involve academic qualification, vocational training, and practical work experience. Like the legal profession, there are a range of routes for individuals in England and Wales who wish to practice medicine, dentistry, or accounting, including requalification for those coming from other jurisdictions and work placements to gain exposure and experience.

Key Findings

The key findings from the research conducted show some flexible and innovative alternative ways to qualify as a lawyer in other common law jurisdictions and within other regulated professions:

- There are a diverse range of entry routes, providing access for those with non-law degrees or no degree. For instance, Legal apprenticeship routes are becoming increasingly popular in some jurisdictions as an alternative pathway to becoming a lawyer. This pathway provides individuals with practical work experience while pursuing their legal qualification and can also offer a more affordable option for those who do not wish to attend law school full-time. Another example is the Scottish 'pre-PEAT training contract.'
- There are also transfer and requalification routes for Lawyers with overseas qualifications. This route typically requires additional education and training to ensure that lawyers can meet the requirements of their new jurisdiction. There are opportunities to make inter-jurisdictional transfers as well.

- Qualifications to become a lawyer vary across common law jurisdictions, but generally require a combination of formal education, practical legal training, passing character and fitness tests, and passing a bar exam or qualifying exam; as well as qualifying work experience, such as pupillages to become a Barrister or 'articling' in Canada.
- Other regulated professions such as medicine, accounting and dentistry have their own unique qualification routes, some have opportunities to transfer from other jurisdictions, as well as work experience, such as internships, training programs and apprenticeships, such as with the AAT (to become an accountant).

Comparative qualification and alternative entry routes in common law jurisdictions

United States

Standard route

In the United States, becoming a lawyer generally requires a four-year undergraduate degree, followed by three years of law school. The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is a core component of the law school admissions process. Admissions officers use scores from the LSAT as an objective measure to assess the knowledge and quality of applicants. In 2016, Arizona State University began accepting the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) standardized exam as an alternative to the LSAT. Harvard Law School followed suit the next year. Graduate students typically take the GRE before pursuing graduate work in various fields. Currently, many law schools—including Columbia, Cornell, Yale, and others accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA)—have started accepting the GRE rather than only LSAT scores. This change means many prospective law students who have already taken the GRE are no longer required to take additional examinations to gain admission to law school. This broadens the applicant pool by encouraging more students to apply.

After completing law school earning a juris doctor (JD) graduates must pass the bar exam in the state where they wish to practice and meet character and fitness requirements as well. The bar exam is a rigorous test that evaluates a candidate's knowledge of the law and ability to apply it to real-world scenarios. Each state has its own bar exam, and passing it is a requirement for practicing law in that state. The final step to becoming an attorney is taking the state's oath of attorney (States may differ on the exact elements of their oaths).

Requalification Route

In the United States, lawyers with a law degree from a foreign jurisdiction may be eligible to take the bar exam in certain states. However, the requirements for eligibility vary by state. Completion of the LL.M. degree does not guarantee eligibility to take the bar exam. Most states do require a J.D. degree from a US law school to sit for the bar exam. Some states require a certain number of years of legal practice in the foreign jurisdiction, while others may require additional education or training. There are some states which do allow foreign law graduates to sit for the bar exam, including New York, California, New Hampshire, Alabama, and Virginia. In this case, however, foreign-trained lawyers must begin the process by getting their law degree reviewed and analysed by the American Bar Association, and it can take up to a year before the foreign law credentials are assessed.

Lawyers who are licensed to practice in one state may be eligible to transfer their license to another state. This process, known as 'reciprocity', allows lawyers to practice law in a new state without having to take the bar exam again. However, not all states offer reciprocity, and the requirements for transferring a license vary from state to state.

In addition to transferring their license, lawyers who wish to practice in a new state may also choose to requalify by taking the bar exam in the new state. This process involves studying for and taking the bar exam, just as if the lawyer was a recent law school graduate. While requalification can be time-consuming and expensive, it allows lawyers to gain experience in a new jurisdiction and expand their practice.

Alternative route

Legal apprenticeships and graduate programs including work experience are also important pathways to becoming a lawyer in some jurisdictions. In the United States, for example, some states allow individuals to become lawyers through an apprenticeship program, which typically involves working for a qualified lawyer and completing a certain number of hours of supervised work experience. After completing the apprenticeship program, individuals may be eligible to take the bar exam and become licensed to practice law. For instance, In California, Virginia, Washington and Vermont, individuals can become a law reader—or an apprentice—

instead of earning a law degree. Each of these states has different requirements, which may include several years of study under the guidance of an experienced judge or attorney, studying for a set number of hours or passing a mini bar exam. Also, Wyoming, New York and Maine do not require lawyers to hold a JD degree, but they do require a certain number of hours in law school.

It is possible to enter law school without having completed an undergraduate degree. Some law schools offer what is known as a "3+3" program, where students can complete their undergraduate degree and law degree in six years instead of the traditional seven. Also, some states offer other options as alternate routes to starting a law career. For instance, In Wisconsin, if individuals have a JD, they do not have to pass the bar exam to become an attorney.

Canada

Standard route

In Canada, becoming a lawyer requires a bachelor's degree in any field, followed by three years of law school. After completing law school (Obtaining an LLM or JD), graduates must pass the bar exam in the province where they wish to practice (This differs a bit from one province to the next). The bar exam is like the one in the United States and evaluates a candidate's knowledge of the law and ability to apply it to real-world scenarios. Each province has its own bar exam, and passing it is a requirement for practicing law in that province. Depending on the province in which students completed the Bar Admission Course, there will be different requirements. For instance The [CPLED program](#) is shared by Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. It is based on a Competency Profile, or skills and competencies needed by new lawyers. Students are evaluated on these competencies before passing the course.

In British Columbia for example, lawyers wishing to become certified must complete a 12-month program. To begin, this will include 9 months of articling in a legal workplace such as a law firm. This work must be completed on a full-time basis and consists of working under the supervision of a qualified, licensed lawyer. Following this comes the completion of a 10-week Professional Legal Training Course (PLTC) detailing content such as legal skills, ethics, and practice management. After the course, comes two examinations covering materials learned in the PLTC course. Once this has been completed successfully, individuals will receive a package detailing call and admission to the bar, along with membership options and fees. Individuals with a non-law degree can take a one-year conversion course known as the National Committee on Accreditation (NCA) program before taking the bar exam.

Requalification Route

Lawyers with a law degree from a foreign jurisdiction may be eligible to take the bar exam in certain provinces. However, the requirements for eligibility vary by province. Some provinces may require additional education or training, while others may require a certain number of years of legal practice in the foreign jurisdiction.

In some provinces such as British Columbia (BC) a lawyer who has obtained a law degree in a country other than Canada or a law degree in the Civil Code may be called to the Bar in BC, but must first obtain a Canadian LLB degree or a Certificate of Qualification issued by the National Committee on Accreditation(NCA) A person qualified to practise law in a country other than Canada who wishes to give legal advice in BC respecting the laws of that country may apply for a Practitioner of Foreign Law Permit. The NCA assesses the legal education and professional experience of lawyers from outside of Canada and provides accreditation to practice law in the jurisdiction.

There are also provisions for non-practising or retired lawyers who wish to return to practice, as well as for lawyers who were formerly licensed to practise in BC and want to be reinstated.

Lawyers from other jurisdictions in Canada may be eligible to practise temporarily in BC. In some instances, they may be permitted to practise temporarily in BC without a permit; in others they may need to apply for an Inter-Jurisdictional Practice Permit. The National Mobility Agreement 2013 facilitates temporary and permanent mobility of lawyers between Canadian jurisdictions. Transfers between Quebec and those Canadian common law provinces that have not yet implemented the National Mobility Agreement 2013 are governed by the Quebec Mobility Agreement and an Addendum to the agreement. These agreements permit lawyers in common law jurisdictions wishing to practise in Quebec, and lawyers and notaries from Quebec wishing to practise in common law jurisdictions, to acquire restricted practise rights. Canadian Legal Advisors are permitted to practise federal law, the law of their home jurisdiction and public international law.

Alternative route

Although aspiring lawyers must go to law school to practice in Canada the Department of Justice provides articling students with the opportunity to develop the essential knowledge, skills and experience for practicing law. The Legal Excellence Program benefits Civil Law and Common Law students, and those in the combined Civil/Common Law National Program. In addition to unique learning and professional development opportunities, the Department of Justice also provides a competitive salary.

The Department of Justice also participates in the Public Service's Post-secondary Co-op/Internship Program, which provides post-secondary students with relevant and practical work experience to fulfil the requirements of their academic program. Through the Program, the Department looks to recruit the best students and benefit from current theories and the fresh ideas and energy that students bring to the workplace. The Quebec Regional office offers CO-OP Internship Program for Paralegal Technology. The purpose of the co-op program is to recruit interns who are completing their college diploma in paralegal studies.

Australia

Standard route

In Australia, becoming a lawyer generally requires a bachelor's degree in law- recognised by the Law Society of state or territory one wishes to practise in. Students need to complete either a Bachelor of Laws ("LLB") or a Juris Doctor ("JD") to graduate with an "eligible law degree". This is followed by practical legal training and then either a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (GDLP) or a practical legal training course (PLT), depending on the state where the candidate wishes to practice. The articles of clerkship were previously the primary method of completing PLT. Over time the GDLP program has overtaken the articles of clerkship. In Queensland, a two and five-year articulated clerk scheme was replaced in 2005 by a minimum one-year supervised traineeship scheme. After completing a period of supervised legal practice, called a traineeship or supervised practice, respectively, graduates must pass the bar exam or the solicitor's qualifying exam, depending on the path they chose before practicing law in Australia. Before graduates can practise law in Australia they must first be admitted as a lawyer of the Supreme Court of an Australian State or Territory and then you must hold a practising certificate issued in an Australian jurisdiction. Further, to be admitted as a lawyer, the courts ensure that prospective lawyers are "fit and proper" people to practice law.

There are some exemptions to be admitted as a lawyer-Individuals employed as lawyers in a government department in Queensland for example are exempt from requiring a practising certificate. However, most jurisdictions do not allow this exemption; government lawyers in New South Wales and Victoria must join their respective law society or bar association.

An individual who has been admitted as a lawyer and obtained their practising certificate must still be supervised by another lawyer in employment. In Queensland, junior lawyers require supervision for a minimum of two years of full-time equivalent legal practice for those who have completed PLT, or 18 months for those who have completed the one-year supervised traineeship scheme.

Requalification Route

In Australia, lawyers with a law degree from a foreign jurisdiction may be eligible to take the bar exam in certain states. However, the requirements for eligibility vary by state. Some states may require additional education or training, while others may require a certain number of years of legal practice in the foreign jurisdiction.

Individuals can either complete an undergraduate degree in law or a non-law degree followed by a two-year Juris Doctor (JD) program. For those not yet practising law, they will need to have their law qualifications assessed by the admitting authority in the state or territory they wish to practise in before completing the Practical Legal Training program. For those already practising law, they will need to have their law qualifications assessed by the admitting authority in the state or territory in which they wish to practise. They may also be required to complete all or part of the Practical Legal Training program.

If one has an overseas law degree from a country where English is not the primary spoken language, they will need to supply a certificate that demonstrates English proficiency in accordance with the IELTS standard at:

- Level 8.0 - Writing
- Level 7.5 - Speaking
- Level 7.0 – Reading

For law graduates from New Zealand, they can undertake the Australian Practical Legal Training program and pay the domestic student fee rather than the international student fee. For Practitioners from New Zealand Admission is covered under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Scheme.

Alternative route

In Australia (like Canada) aspiring lawyers must go to law school to practice -some law firms and legal organizations offer graduate programs that provide practical work experience and training for recent law graduates. These programs typically run for 12-24 months and involve rotations through different practice areas within the firm or organization. Participants in these programs receive a salary and may also receive funding to complete additional legal qualifications.

Scotland

Standard route

- In Scotland to qualify as a lawyer you must complete the 4-year LLB degree- Study Scots Law at one of 10 accredited providers in Scotland. There are honours, ordinary, part-time, and online options available as well as the accelerated LLB for postgraduates. After completing a law degree, individuals are required to do a 1-year diploma in professional legal practice- a mandatory one-year course that makes them day-one ready to start their traineeship. The Diploma is currently offered at six universities in Scotland-followed by 2 years of traineeship- which provides an opportunity to learn 'on the job', by working as a trainee under the supervision of a qualified Scottish solicitor. When individuals have successfully completed their traineeship and have been deemed to be a 'fit and proper person to be a solicitor they are ready to apply to take out a solicitor's practising certificate.

Requalification Route

- Solicitors qualified outside of Scotland must obtain a Certificate of Eligibility before requalifying as a Scottish solicitor. This certifies that they are a fit and proper person to enter the profession. once the application process is complete and they have been granted a Certificate of Eligibility from the Society,

they can apply to undertake the Qualified Lawyers Assessment. This is a universal set of exams, which will attract various exemptions for solicitors already qualified in certain countries. For instance, English and Welsh solicitors and barristers, Northern Irish solicitors and barristers, Irish solicitors and barristers and solicitors and advocates from the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are exempt from sitting examinations in public law, obligations, European law and institutions and professional conduct.

- Lawyers qualified in non-UK European economic area jurisdictions or Switzerland are exempt from sitting an examination in European law and institutions. Other exemptions for lawyers qualified in common law jurisdictions include the option to answer any three questions in the examination in legal system and legal method. Non-common law candidates also must answer three questions, in which one question will be compulsory.

Alternative route

- The alternative route is used particularly by individuals who already have jobs working in a Scottish solicitor's office and want to begin the process of qualifying as a solicitor. Rather than studying the LLB, individuals will undertake a 'pre-PEAT training contract'. This route consists of working in a solicitor's office while studying for exams and completing a Work Based Learning Module set by the Law Society of Scotland. Individuals taking this route should be prepared to balance working life with independently studying for examinations.

England & Wales

Standard route

To qualify as a lawyer in England & Wales, students must complete a combination of academic, vocational, and practical training. In 2021, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) introduced a new route to becoming a qualified solicitor known as the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). The new SQE route is for people who have a degree level qualification (it doesn't have to be a law degree), who then complete SQE1 and SQE2 exams, followed by two years of Qualifying work experience (QWE)-by working in a law firm and satisfy the SRA's character and suitability requirements on assessment, before applying for admission. Individuals can also apply for equivalence to a degree using other qualifications and/or relevant work. Once admitted as a solicitor they will need to apply for a practising certificate.

To become a Barrister following successful completion of a Bar course, individuals are required to undertake a pupillage with an Authorised Education and Training Organisation (AETO) such as a chamber. This involves practical training under the supervision of a barrister or barristers. Usually lasting 12 months, the pupillage is split into two six-month periods of on-the-job training, known as 'sixes'. Individuals need to successfully complete the year to be able to practice as a barrister. Meanwhile, a mini pupillage is a short period of work experience in a set of chambers, Bar standards board (BSB) authorised body or another type of AETO

Requalification Route

For overseas students to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales, they'll need to:

- hold a degree in any subject or an equivalent qualification (such as an apprenticeship) or relevant work experience.
- complete two stages of assessment, SQE1 and SQE2
- complete two years of qualifying work experience (QWE)
- satisfy the Solicitor Regulation Authority's (SRA) character and suitability requirements.

Chartered Legal Executives (CILEx) and Justice Clerks Assistants may also be exempt from part or parts of the academic and vocational stages.

Alternative route

In England & Wales aspiring solicitors can qualify through a solicitor apprenticeship. This provides an alternative to the traditional qualification route through university and may suit candidates who want to 'earn as they learn', working for a law firm. Training and assessments are paid for through the apprenticeship levy fund. Solicitor apprentices must pass the SQE assessment to qualify as a solicitor. The apprenticeship includes SQE training, as well as the assessments, and typically takes 5 to 6 years to complete (for school leavers or those with no degrees or non-law degrees). At the end, providing an apprentice passes the assessment and meets the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) suitability requirements, they can qualify as a solicitor.

Some employers also offer solicitor apprenticeships to individuals who have already completed some legal training. This could be a law degree, the Legal Practice Course or the Trailblazer level 3 paralegal apprenticeship. These candidates also need to complete all the elements of the SQE. However, depending on their experience and skills they may not take the full 5 to 6 years.

Other regulated Professions (UK)

Medicine

Standard Route

Medical Students must obtain a bachelor's degree, complete the UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) or the BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT), and then attend medical school, which typically takes five to six years. After completing medical school, graduates must complete a two-year foundation program and then enter a specialty training program in a specific area of medicine.

Medical schools set their own entry requirements. Generally, the minimum entry requirements to standard entry medicine are three As at A-level or equivalent qualifications. One subject, sometimes two, must be in a lab-based science (this means chemistry or biology) and some medical schools also require maths or physics at A level. Grades at GCSE or equivalent are usually considered as part of the application, but medical schools place varying emphasis on them.

All doctors intending to practise medicine in the UK are required to be registered with the General Medical Council (GMC), follow the [GMC's good medical practice guidance](#) and be subject to the GMC Fitness to Practise actions. Doctors who hold registration but not a licence may be working as an academic or outside the UK. They cannot undertake any of the activities - clinical work - for which UK law requires them to hold a licence to practise.

Requalification Route

Individuals who have obtained a medical degree in another country may be eligible to practice medicine in the UK by completing a process known as the General Medical Council (GMC) registration, with a licence to practice. This process involves demonstrating that the individual has the necessary knowledge and skills to practice medicine in the UK and may include passing a licensing exam and completing additional training or education.

The requirements for registration in the UK will depend on several factors:

- Nationality
- the country in which primary medical qualification was gained.

- the type of work an individual wants to do.
- whether or not individuals have completed a period of post-graduate training or an internship

In addition, international medical graduates (IMGs) will be required to demonstrate their medical knowledge and skills, and all applicants may have to demonstrate they are competent in using the English language before they are registered.

Doctors must, however, also hold specialist registration to take up a consultant post (other than a locum consultant post); and those wishing to work as GPs must be on the GP register. Doctors qualifying from outside the UK may be eligible to apply directly for full registration if they hold an acceptable primary medical qualification and have completed a period of postgraduate clinical experience (internship).

Alternative Routes

Graduate entry programmes (usually four-year medical courses) are offered by some UK medical schools. The graduate entry courses offered by recognised UK medical schools are approved by the General medical council. The degree awarded at the end of the course is the same as all other medical degrees leading to GMC registration and a licence to practise in the UK. Students must demonstrate they meet the same curricular outcomes to the same standards as students completing more traditional medical degrees. As the holders of a UK medical degree, these doctors have the same career prospects as other UK medical graduates. Students can also gain practical experience and find out more about a career in medicine through work observation.

Accounting

Standard Route

Students must obtain an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in accounting, finance, or a related subject and then complete a training program with an accounting firm, such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) or the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) or the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA). During the training program, students gain practical experience in accounting and finance and must pass a series of exams to become fully qualified. The ACCA and CIMA qualifications are open to individuals with or without a university degree, while the ICAEW requires a university degree in a relevant subject.

Requalification Route

Similarly, individuals who have obtained accounting qualifications in another country may be eligible to practice as a chartered accountant in the UK by completing a process known as the International Qualifications Assessment (IQA). This process involves demonstrating that the individual's qualifications are equivalent to those required to become a chartered accountant in the UK and may include passing a series of exams or completing additional training or education. International students from outside the UK must confirm the comparability of their degree and the employer's requirements before applying for an ICAS CA training position.

Alternative Routes

In addition to the professional accounting qualifications, individuals can also become licensed by the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), which offers qualifications at various levels in accounting and bookkeeping. The AAT qualifications do not require a university degree but may require completion of certain A-levels or equivalent qualifications. Accounting apprenticeships, such as those run by the AAT, are a viable alternative to university and they provide a fast-track to achieving chartered status with the main professional bodies such as

the ICAEW and ACCA. They also provide individuals a chance to gain practical skills while earning a wage and receiving the same benefits (including a holiday allowance) as other employees at the company.

Finance graduate schemes are often structured with the opportunity to attain an accounting qualification such as the ACA or CGMA as one of the programme's objectives.

Another way to enter the industry is through a work placement or voluntary or part-time role. Even work shadowing for a day can give a feel for the kinds of accounting activities involved in the profession. As an alternative to working in an office, some accountancy firms now offer virtual work experience opportunities. Formal summer accounting internships with larger financial institutions, such as PwC or Deloitte are also available.

Dentistry

Standard Route

To become a licensed dentist, individuals must typically complete a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) degree from a dental school recognized by the General Dental Council (GDC), which is the regulatory body for dentistry in the UK. After completing dental school, dentists must also complete a period of supervised clinical training, known as a residency (dental foundation training), before being eligible for licensure. This typically lasts for one year and is a requirement for registration with the GDC. Following dental foundation training, dentists can pursue further training in a dental specialty or enter general dental practice.

The requirements for entry into a BDS degree program in the UK vary by institution, but generally include completion of A-levels, International Baccalaureate (IB) or equivalent qualifications in science subjects such as biology, chemistry, and physics. Many dental schools also require applicants to take the UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) or the Biomedical Admissions Test (BMAT).

Requalification Route

Most dental schools will list what the requirements are for other qualifications from outside of the UK. Most do not usually accept transfers of students from a dental school outside of the UK. This is because each dental school follows a different course structure and there are no realistic means of verifying the quality and grades received at a university outside of the UK dental education system.

The ORE is an exam that overseas qualified dentists must pass to register with the General Dental Council (GDC). Registration allows dentists to practise unsupervised in the UK. The ORE tests the clinical skills and knowledge of dentists whose qualifications are not recognised in the UK. Candidates are expected to meet or exceed the standard of a 'just passed' UK BDS graduate. The exam has two parts- The written Exam- Part 1 is designed to test application of knowledge to clinical practice and Part 2 Clinical Exam: is designed for candidates to demonstrate practical clinical skills.

Alternative Routes

There are roles that allow individuals to go into the dental industry straight away after school or as a career change. Though there currently aren't any dental degree apprenticeships available there are many apprenticeship opportunities in roles such as, Dental Laboratory Assistants, Dental Nurse and Dental Technicians. Individuals can move from one role to the other with additional training and go to dental school to qualify to become a dentist.

Conclusion

The path to becoming a lawyer varies by jurisdiction, and there are various entry routes available to individuals with different backgrounds and experiences. For those with overseas qualifications, there are transfer and requalification routes available to become qualified in a new jurisdiction or inter-jurisdictional opportunities. For those with no academic degrees or non-law degrees the apprenticeship route, graduate programs or related work experience are available in some jurisdictions as an option. In addition to the legal profession, there are other regulated professions that require specific qualifications and training, but also offer a range of routes to qualification- such as internships and work placement opportunities; as well as offer routes for foreign professionals and students to transfer and requalify into the professions from other jurisdictions.

Sources:

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SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE

Comparative Qualifications and Alternative Entry Routes in Common Law Jurisdictions

Purpose

This note adds to the previous report on ‘Comparative Qualification and Alternative Entry Routes in Common Law Jurisdictions’. It sets out a brief overview of the routes to qualification as a solicitor in the Republic of Ireland; as well as a breakdown of the legal executive and licensed conveyancer professions in England and Wales, including how individuals holding such qualifications could cross-qualify as a solicitor of England and Wales.

The Republic of Ireland

a) Standard route

- **Entry requirements:** Law graduates from recognised universities must pass the Final Examination Part 1 (FE-1) exam before they can be admitted to study in the Law Society’s School of Law at Blackhall Place. To be accepted on the course, students need first to enter a training contract with a solicitor, for a period of 24 months.
- **Structure of course:** The solicitor training course has recently been restructured (from 2022) as a single Professional Practice Course (PPC) replacing the previous two-part ‘sandwich course’ known as PPC I and PPC II. This followed feedback from employers and students about the issues arising from a course split into two parts with an in-office sandwich element between parts.
- **In-Office training:** candidates must secure a traineeship with a law firm or an approved legal organization. Trainees are required to keep a training diary and attend a range of legal practice skills courses before gaining admission to Roll of Solicitors. See [here](#) for detailed infographic.
- **Different modes of study:** The LSI is now offering a hybrid Professional Practice Course (PPC Hybrid), which combines online lectures with face-to-face tuition. The PPC Hybrid is a more flexible route into practice that does not include the requirement to be on-site in the law school for a significant period. The course is also structured so that trainees will potentially be able to continue working during the PPC Hybrid. The new offering is of particular interest to some trainees located outside Dublin and increases the course’s accessibility to a wider, more diverse intake of students.¹

¹ [Becoming a solicitor in Ireland: entry and training \(gradireland.com\)](https://gradireland.com/becoming-a-solicitor-in-ireland-entry-and-training)

b) Alternative routes

In addition to the standard route, there are alternative routes and more flexible paths into the Irish solicitor qualification process. These alternative routes provide flexibility for individuals with diverse educational backgrounds. The main alternative routes are:

- **Non-law degree and non-degree entry:** non-graduates and holders of non-law degrees can undertake a preliminary examination before sitting the FE-1 Entrance Examination. The Preliminary Examination consists of eight subjects covering various areas of Irish law.
- **Trainee Solicitor Apprenticeship:** The Law Society of Ireland introduced a Trainee Solicitor Apprenticeship Program in 2017. This program allows individuals to work in a law firm while studying for a law degree with a recognized higher education provider. Upon completion of the apprenticeship, candidates can progress to the PPC and the traineeship to qualify as a solicitor.
- **Mature Applicants:** The Law Society of Ireland also considers applications from mature candidates who do not hold a law degree but have relevant work experience in the legal sector. These applicants may be eligible for exemptions from certain requirements and may need to demonstrate their competence through alternative means.²
- **Law Clerks/Legal Executives:** those with at least five years' experience who hold a Diploma in Legal Studies (or equivalent qualification) or a Law Clerk within more than ten years' experience, even if individuals do not hold a Diploma in Legal Studies, may apply to the Education Committee for an exemption from the Preliminary Examination.³

c) Requalification Route

- For individuals who have qualified as solicitors in another jurisdiction, requalification in Ireland may be possible. Qualified lawyers from outside of Ireland, can convert their qualification to practice as a solicitor in Ireland. The Law Society of Ireland offers a requalification process, which involves an assessment of the applicant's qualifications and experience. Requalification candidates are required to demonstrate competence in Irish law and undergo a period of adaptation training.
- Holders of degrees from other jurisdictions may apply to the Education Committee for exemption from the Preliminary Examination. Their degree certificate should be certified by a practising lawyer in the applicant's original jurisdiction, or a practising lawyer admitted in the Republic of Ireland. The certificate must state that the copy is a true copy of the original and that the original has been produced to the person certifying.
- English and Welsh solicitors are now able to automatically requalify by applying for a certificate of admission with the LSI, as was the case before the end of the Brexit transition period. They will not be assessed under the local Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test.⁴
- Please note - although the LSI is responsible for the education and training of solicitors there are changes underway in the education and training system in Ireland. The Law Society's control over the qualification system was weakened following the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 and the LSI may soon lose its training monopoly under proposals being advanced by the Legal Services Regulatory Authority.

² www.lawsociety.ie

³ [how-to-become-a-solicitor-2016.pdf \(lawsociety.ie\)](http://www.lawsociety.ie/how-to-become-a-solicitor-2016.pdf)

⁴ [Ireland re-opens door to England and Wales solicitors | News | Law Gazette](#)

England and Wales – Other Regulated Lawyers

In addition to solicitors and barristers, there are various other professions recognised in the England and Wales Legal Services Act 2007. These include legal executives and licensed conveyancers, which are professions that share some of the rights of solicitors. Both professions have their own regulators, who operate under the same framework and principles with a shared oversight regulator in the Legal Services Board.

Legal executives and licensed conveyancers can work independently, set up their own firms, work in partnership with solicitors or others, and be employed by solicitors or in alternative business structures (ABSs). Both qualifications also grant their holders some recognition for cross qualification into the solicitor profession.

a) Chartered Legal Executives

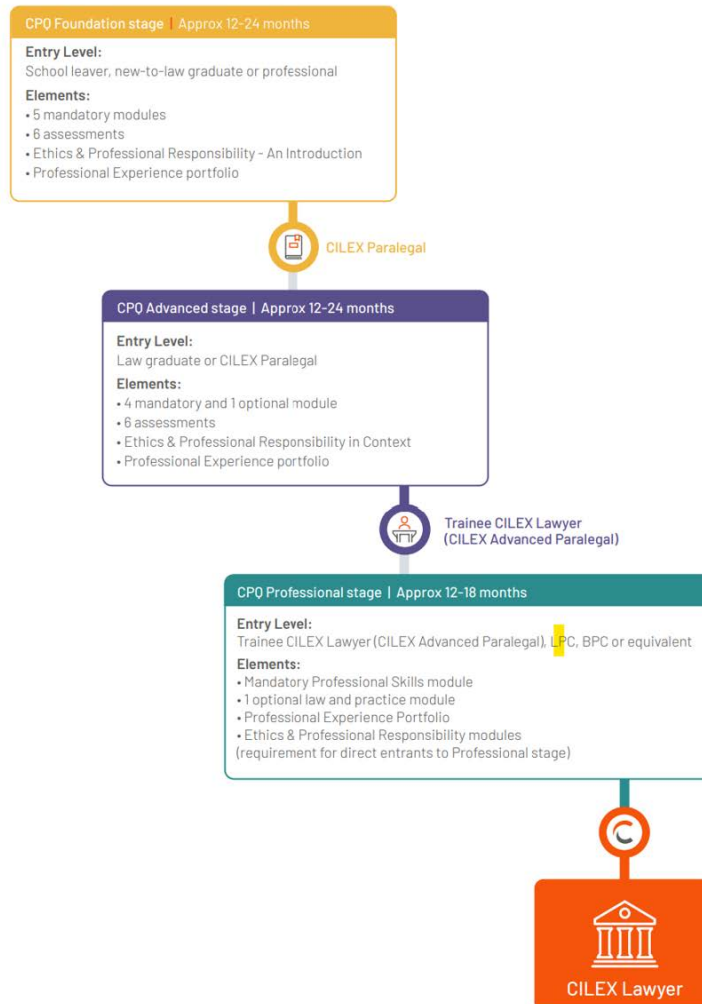
What they are and what they do:

- A Chartered Legal Executive is a qualified lawyer who is trained to specialise in one or two specific areas of law in England and Wales. Chartered legal executives can gain the same practice rights as solicitors in specific areas. They are then able to undertake much of the work that solicitors do in those areas, although they cannot appear in the High Court, Court of Appeal or Supreme Court. However, they can become judges, coroners, advocates, act as a commissioner for oaths and become partners in law firms.
- Until recently, chartered legal executives needed to take additional assessments beyond their core qualification to gain the practice rights for which they were eligible. CILEX (the professional and qualifying body for chartered legal executives) has now relaunched its qualification process and rebranded it as CILEX Lawyer Professional Qualification. This enables candidates to obtain practice rights in specific areas as part of their qualification.

How they qualify:

- **The CILEX Professional Qualification (CPQ)** is a three stage training programme which enables candidates to gain qualifications as a CILEX Paralegal, a CILEX Advanced Paralegal or a CILEX Lawyer. The full CILEX Lawyer (CPQ) qualification grants its holder practice rights in the area of qualification equivalent to those held by solicitors. The different levels and their entry requirements are illustrated in the figure below.
- **The specialist qualification and accompanying practice rights conferred (if relevant) may be gained in up to two of the following areas:**
 - Family law and litigation
 - Dispute resolution
 - Criminal law and litigation
 - Residential conveyancing
 - Commercial conveyancing
 - Employment law and practice
 - Probate and private client
 - Business and commercial law and practice

Figure: The three stage CILEX Lawyer CPQ Qualification



- **Flexible training:** Since its inception CILEX has positioned itself as a route into the profession for school leavers or career changers. It is designed as a flexible route that allows for academic study to be undertaken alongside work.
- **Alternative routes:** Individuals with law degrees or the LPC can gain exemptions for direct entry at the Advanced and Professional stages.
- Employers may choose to offer an apprenticeship route for the different stages of the qualification. The main difference between this and the standard CILEX route lies in the formality of study arrangements and funding. All apprentices are required to pass an end-point assessment at the end of their Chartered Legal Executive Apprenticeship, which is equivalent to those taking the standard route.

Who regulates them:

- The Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEX) is the professional association and governing body for over 21,000 Chartered Legal Executive Lawyers, other legal practitioners, and paralegals.⁵ Under the terms of the Legal Services Act 2007, CILEX is the designated regulator, but as in the case of the other legal profession regulators, it must delegate its regulatory functions to an independent body.
- CILEX Regulation (CRL) has performed this role to date, but CILEX has recently proposed to its members that the SRA should regulate legal executives. Most legal executives work in solicitors firms and those that don't need the reputation of a bigger, more established regulator to get recognised on banking/mortgage panels etc.

How they can become solicitors:

- CILEX Lawyers (Chartered Legal Executives) can apply for admission to the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) roll via the SQE route- To qualify as a solicitor, candidates need to provide evidence of their status as a qualified Chartered Legal Executive to the SRA. After validation of degree, level 6 qualification, or equivalent, candidates must pass both SQE1 and SQE2. Then, they must record and confirm two years qualifying work experience in up to four organisations (CILEX experience typically counts towards this). They can also apply for individual exemptions.
- Once candidates have applied and received their results, they can apply to be admitted to the roll of solicitors. This process involves: having degree checked by the SRA, registering work experience and a character and suitability check.⁶ Entry on the roll will allow these professionals to work as a solicitor in England and Wales.
- See admissions infographic here.

b) Licensed Conveyancers

What they are and what they do:

- Licensed Conveyancers are qualified, professional property lawyers specialising in the legal aspects of buying and selling property in England and Wales. Licensed Conveyancers were first introduced in England and Wales by the Administration of Justice Act 1985. They are one of the nine legal professions recognised in the Legal Services Act 2007, with practice rights in conveyancing and witnessing of oaths. Licensed Conveyancers have the same legal authority to act as solicitors in conveyancing transactions and may separately become authorised to deliver probate services.
- The Council for Licensed Conveyancers (CLC) has the power to regulate licensed conveyancers, as well as regulated entities, to deliver conveyancing and probate services. The CLC oversees the qualification standard for licensed conveyancers and authorises third party training providers to deliver courses leading to the qualification.⁷

⁵ [About CILEX: Who we are and what we do?](#)

⁶ [How does a chartered legal executive become a solicitor? | AllAboutLaw](#)

⁷ [CLC – The Specialist Property Law Regulator \(clc-uk.org\)](#)

- Licensed Conveyancers can work in a legal department headed by a qualified person in any organisation that deals with the transfer of a title to property or land. Their scope of employment is not limited to law firms, but may include housing associations and local authorities, banks and building societies as well as firms owned and run by licensed conveyancers or third parties (the Council of Licensed Conveyancers is one of the recognised regulators of alternative business structures in England and Wales).

How they qualify:

- **Standard Route:** To qualify as a Licensed Conveyancer, individuals must complete the Level 6 Diploma in Conveyancing Law and Practice and obtain 1200 hours of supervised practical experience. Eligibility to enrol in the Level 6 Diploma can be met with one of the following prior qualifications:
 - Level 4 Diploma in Conveyancing Law and Practice
 - Bachelor of Laws degree (LLB)
 - Postgraduate qualification, eg Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)
 - CILEx qualification level 6
 - Relevant legal practice course (Diploma level)
- **Broad routes to entry:** Individuals who do not hold any of the above qualifications can start a career in law straight from school or college with a Level 4 Diploma in Conveyancing Law and Practice. This entitles them to become a regulated conveyancing technician.
- **Additional authorisations:** Licensed conveyancers (and others) may separately become authorised to deliver probate services by obtaining the Level 6 Probate Practice Diploma or by following the route to full practice rights through the Level 4 Probate Technician Diploma and the Level 6 Diploma.
- **Flexible learning options:** The diplomas can be studied with an approved training provider by classroom-based learning, distance learning or on an apprenticeship scheme. Approved training providers offer qualifications certified by the SQA (the awarding body).⁸

How they can become solicitors:

- Licensed conveyancers can become solicitors through the SQE route. However, they do not need to complete a further period of qualifying work experience, only sit the two SQE assessments. Individual licensed conveyancers may apply for exemptions from these assessments if they have additional relevant experience or qualifications.

⁸ [CLC – The Specialist Property Law Regulator \(clc-uk.org\)](http://clc-uk.org)

Standard qualification and alternative entry routes in common law jurisdictions

The Challenge



- The solicitor profession in NI is currently losing over half of every cohort of new entrants within 5 years
- What does the sector need? More associates? More diversity? Other types of talent?



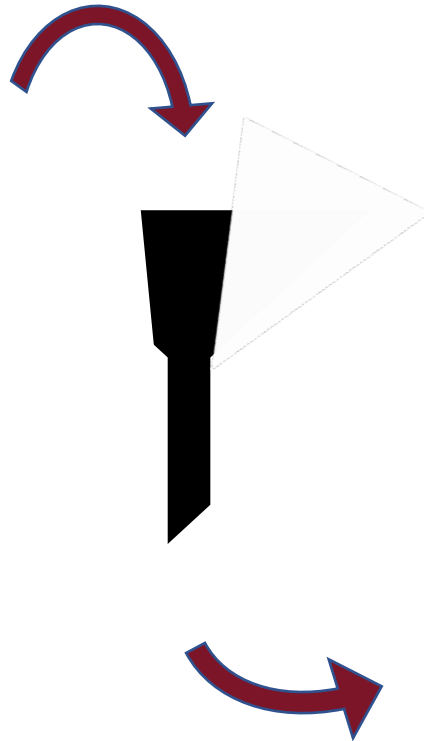
Aim of this presentation- Provide comparison with other common law jurisdictions to aid reflection on future options.

A common approach

- All common law jurisdictions base solicitor qualification on demonstrated competence in: Knowledge of the law (gained through **academic training**) and ability to apply knowledge and skills in practice (gained through **vocational training** and **practical training**).
- The duration, content and extent to which these areas of training are covered separately or concurrently varies across jurisdictions.
- **No longer about process:** Nearly all other major common law jurisdictions now have a **statement of initial solicitor competence** which allows qualification to focus on ensuring that individuals seeking entry to the profession meet the standards required, rather than focusing on a particular process.

The Issues with NI Qualification Routes

Narrow pipeline into the profession –
single entry point (law degree + ILPS
entry test + obtain Master + IPLS study
+ traineeship)



Is the talent that emerges from the qualification process:

- a) **Sufficient for initial needs?** - given that law firms are asked to predict their employment needs far in advance – so supply driven by looking backwards
- b) **Robust enough** given attrition?
- c) **Diverse enough** to reflect changing NI society?
- d) **Diverse enough** to reflect changing practice needs?

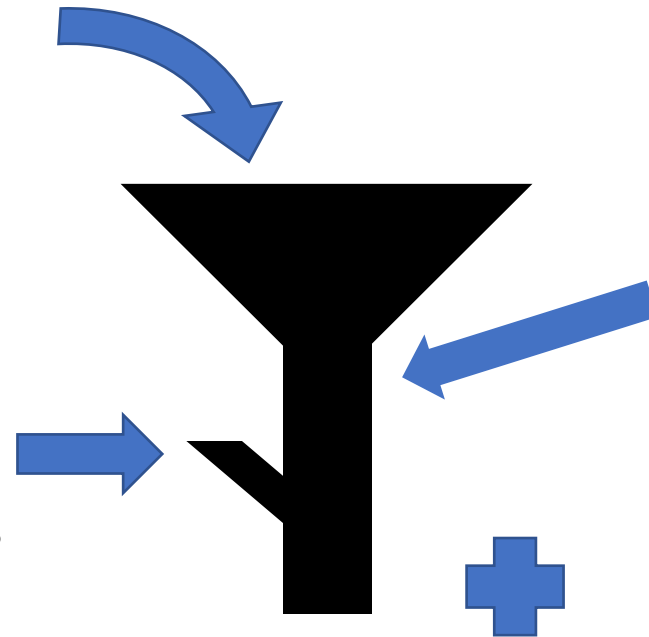
What do others do?

How do others compare?

Wider Intake

Many jurisdictions take more than just law students and most don't control numbers qualifying through employer demand

More flexible paths into the qualification process – A growing number of jurisdictions offer routes other than a traditional degree route into the profession and give recognition for prior, non-law experience or qualifications



Later selection pinch-point

Jurisdictions vary as to when final selection for eligibility to join the profession takes place and who grants it (i.e. a delegated training provider administering an exam or a Bar/Law Society exam).

A wider pool of para and other legal professionals available

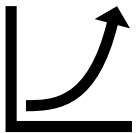
Many jurisdictions have a pool of part-qualified solicitors/barristers who have the ability to gain training needed to qualify in other ways. Some jurisdictions have qualification schemes for registered paralegals or other para-professionals (e.g. Legal executives, licensed conveyancers).

Standard qualification routes in common law jurisdictions – the pipeline into the profession

Wider initial intake



Broader access to standard routes: No limits in numbers at entry point and opportunities for those with non-law degrees. Also, multiple different education and training providers. For instance, in Australia and in Canada.



Conversion routes for non-law degree holders: In E&W, non-law grads can choose preparation they feel they need prior to sitting the SQE assessments. Those following LPC route must take a 1-year conversion course. The Scottish Accelerated LLB route awards a law degree to non-law grads in 2 years instead of 4.



Different modes of study: Most common law jurisdictions (including Ireland now) offer part-time or distance learning options for the vocational stage of training (i.e. equivalent of IPLS) – important for diversity

Flexible ways to gain necessary work experience



SQE - New Qualification system for solicitors in England and Wales no longer requires a single employer training contract, instead demanding 2 years' work experience to be gained from no more than 4 different employers. Skills tested by SRA in Part 2 of the Solicitors Qualification Exam.



Flexible options – Australia offers variety of options to meet mandatory 75 days of practical legal training for qualification – can be satisfied by online course or in-office experience or a mixture. Firms tend to supplement with their own training to suit their needs.



Alternative routes into the profession



Work based learning –

- In England & Wales aspiring solicitors can qualify through a 7-year school leaver solicitor apprenticeship or a 3 year graduate solicitor apprenticeship (the latter based on weekly day-release for study instead of 1 year in full time study followed by a 2 training contract).
- In certain US states, e.g. California and Virginia, law clerks working in law offices and courts can gain eligibility to take the bar exam through WBL schemes under supervision of an experienced judge or attorney.
- Scottish 'pre-PEAT training contract' for staff in solicitor firms – alternative to an LLB. Followed by Graduate diploma and traditional training contract.



Stepping stone qualifications and exemptions - Legal Executives (CILEX) can gain exemption from part of the academic, vocational or work experience stages in England and Wales.

Alternative end points

Wider workforce regulation - Alternative end points



Regulation of Paralegals – In Ontario, Scotland and some US states, paralegals are licensed and can practise independently of a lawyer. In British Columbia, paralegals can represent litigants before courts of limited jurisdiction, such as administrative boards and tribunals.

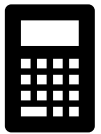


Other legal professions – In E&W, in addition to solicitors, barristers and notaries – trademark and patent attorneys, licensed conveyancers, legal executives and costs lawyers all have recognised practice rights and formal regulation. Ireland is considering licensed conveyancers.



Legal tech certification - New accreditations likely to emerge in legal tech. The Law Society of Scotland has created the professional status of Accredited Legal Technologist- open to solicitors and non-solicitors working in legal technology either directly or indirectly for law firms or working in an in-house legal team

Lessons from other professions



Accounting - Across the UK and elsewhere – Accountants can progress through to full qualification without a university degree (e.g. by feeder qualifications such as Accounting Technician qualifications). Apprenticeships and work based learning also open up routes to achieving chartered status with professional bodies such as the ICAEW and ACCA.



Dentistry - There are roles that allow individuals to go into the industry straight away after school or as a career changer. There are apprenticeship opportunities for Dental Laboratory Assistants, Dental Nurse and Dental Technicians. Individuals can move from one role to the other with additional training and go to dental school to qualify to become a dentist.



Medicine - Accelerated graduate entry programmes (usually four-year medical courses) are offered by some UK medical schools for those with a non-medical first degree

Summary

Jurisdiction	Route open to all eligible	Flexible ways to gain WE	Non-law degree options	Apprentice/ work based learning option	Paralegal and other roles
N.I	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Eng & Wales	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Scotland	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Ireland	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red
Australia	Green	Green	Green	Red	Orange
Canada	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green
US	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

Summary



Rigidity of current offering - Compared to other common law jurisdictions LSNI's standard route is narrower and less flexible – elsewhere ensuring competence has become more important than following a specific qualification route.



Others are opening up the profession to a more diverse range of people with varied experiences, professional and academic backgrounds, providing different educational pathways and ways to gain work experience towards qualification



Need for other allied professionals – Others are recognising that its not just about qualifying more solicitors. There is a need for other related skills e.g. career legal technologists or legal executives