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## So you want to be a lawyer

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# SO YOU WANT TO BE A LAWYER

## SOLICITORS IN PRIVATE PRACTICE

A solicitor is a lawyer who deals directly with the public and is the person to whom an individual turns when he or she has a legal problem. The solicitor may be required to help plan and organise the client's affairs, enforce a legal right or defend an action, or negotiate complex commercial dealings.

Solicitors are able to represent clients in any court in New South Wales, though there are a few special tribunals where they are not permitted to do so. In many cases a solicitor may decide to brief a barrister to appear in court instead, but will still be responsible to the client and prepare evidence. Some solicitors work by themselves and are known as sole

very complex, a solicitor may seek the advice of a barrister who has specialised knowledge. Barristers, unlike solicitors, do not deal with the many transactions and legal problems of clients which do not need a court decision. All barristers are self-employed.

Barristers must have excellent research skills as well as oral and written communication skills. Debating or public speaking skills are also useful and an ability to remember details quickly and accurately is important.

## CORPORATE LAWYERS

Corporate lawyers are solicitors employed by a business rather than a law firm. They work in banks, manufacturing businesses and even tourism companies. In this arrangement the business is

Federal and State Departments, or within the legal sections of larger departments. The largest government bodies employing solicitors are the Commonwealth and State Crown Solicitors' Offices.

Solicitors in government may be responsible for administering the law or involved in providing policy and legal advice to the government. In the Australian and New South Wales Law Reform Commissions some solicitors investigate areas of the law which require reform. Other large government bodies employing lawyers are the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Legal Aid Commission.

## OTHER LAWYERS

Lawyers also work in community legal centres, providing advice



*Solicitors give their clients independent advice on legal issues and represent them without fear or favour.*

practitioners. Most solicitors work in firms where there are two or more solicitors and some larger firms employ more than 100 lawyers.

## BARRISTERS

A barrister is a lawyer who specialises in advocacy (making appearances in court), advising clients and preparing court documents. Where a legal problem is

the solicitor's client.

A corporate solicitor can arrange the company's legal affairs, such as the negotiation of leases or the purchase of property, and ensure the company complies with the law in meeting its tax obligations and employees' working conditions.

## GOVERNMENT LAWYERS

Government lawyers work in

and assistance to disadvantaged members of the community and in the universities as researchers and lecturers.

## STUDYING LAW

In New South Wales there are many institutions offering law courses. Students wishing to practise law must complete a recognised law degree or diploma.

There is a wide variety of

degrees available to full time, part time and correspondence students. Students starting law straight after completing the Higher School Certificate (or its equivalent interstate) will usually be required to enrol in a combined degree, such as commerce/law, science/law or arts/law, or enrol in another degree and then start law as a graduate student.

All law degrees contain common subjects, such as criminal law, contract, constitutional law and torts.

Law schools and universities publish faculty handbooks containing information about subjects, lecturers, timetables etc, which are available from the universities, school libraries, local community libraries or a Career Reference Centre.

### WHAT IS LAW SCHOOL LIKE?

What happens after law school? A law graduate who wants to

practise law in New South Wales as a solicitor or as a barrister is required to obtain full qualifications, join the Roll of Solicitors or Roll of Barristers and hold a practising certificate.

Graduates wishing to become solicitors must have completed practical legal training such as that run by the Law Society of New South Wales and the College of Law.

After graduating from the College of Law, students are admitted to the Supreme Court of New South Wales and entered on the Roll of Solicitors. This enables the new solicitor to apply to the Law Society for a practising certificate. A person cannot claim to be a solicitor or practise as a solicitor without a practising certificate.

Initially a new solicitor is allowed to practise only as an employee. It is not until several years later when the solicitor has had more experience that he or

she is able to practise as a partner of a firm or work alone as a sole practitioner.

People who want to become barristers usually practise as solicitors first to learn the basics and build up a network of professional contacts. Once admitted to the Role of Barristers, a new barrister must work as a pupil of a more senior barrister (called a master) for 12 months.

### WHAT ARE THE JOB PROSPECTS?

A law degree and a practising certificate is not a guarantee that employment will be found in private practise, or if it is found, that it is in the new solicitor's first choice of practice area. The employment prospects for people with law degrees are usually very good, although law graduates should be imaginative and flexible when choosing positions

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