

Practice makes perfect

Linda Ford discusses the benefits of learning on the job & the fast-track routes for aspiring lawyers



The last few years has seen a transformation in legal education, with more options available to aspiring lawyers than ever before.

Firms are taking on apprentices; non-graduates can become lawyers and of course there is the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) which is being phased in to become the new centralised way to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales. It will eventually replace the Legal Practice Course route to practice.

CILEX (Chartered Institute of Legal Executives) also offers a route to becoming a lawyer and last year launched its own new qualification—the CILEX Professional Qualification (CPQ)—with the aim of producing uniquely qualified, specialist lawyers with the skills to meet the changing demands of the modern legal market.

March saw the first ever cohort of CPQ students receive their exam results, with 61% passing the assessments that form part of the first stage of the new qualification (bit.ly/3wu9hpw). Those passing are on track to become specialist lawyers with not only the right legal knowledge but also the practical, commercial and interpersonal skills to make an impact on the profession from day one.

A rewarding legal career

CILEX has been providing an accessible route into a rewarding legal career for over 50 years. Most members qualify by fitting in study around work. CILEX-qualified professionals are currently working at every level of the legal profession with many progressing to become advocates, partners in law firms, business owners and judges.

The CPQ was devised following wide consultation with law firms and other employers. It builds on CILEX's core propositions of accessibility, affordability and flexibility, offering both graduates and those who did not attend university the opportunity to practise law at the highest level.

The CPQ is a three-stage progressive qualification and recognises that a successful career in the law requires more

than just legal knowledge. The course introduces mandatory legal technology, business skills and emotional intelligence study for the first time in legal training. As a result, those qualifying through CILEX are recognised by employers as work ready and well-rounded.

The first step in the Foundation stage of the CPQ, which is aligned to the role of paralegal/case handler. This is the first stage for school leavers, non-law graduates and professionals without legal experience.

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The CPQ is designed for both graduates and non-graduates alike to study flexibly at their own pace and students with a law degree or postgraduate legal qualifications do not have to start at the beginning. Where they start depends on previous academic experience. Law graduates can jump straight to the CPQ Advanced stage and become a fully qualified practising lawyer in three to four years. Those enrolling on the CPQ Advanced stage begin to specialise in their legal education, focusing on the area that most interests them or is of greatest value to their employer.

By completing the final stage, CPQ Professional, students become CILEX Lawyers. This is for those who want to be a specialist in their field and have the practice rights they need to work alongside solicitors, barristers and other legal professionals.

In-depth knowledge

Unlike the SQE, CILEX trainees can specialise earlier, by focusing in more depth on those areas of law that are relevant to them and their employer as well as building professional competence. Many of those already working in law firms will have a clear idea which field they want to practice in and through CILEX they can focus on gaining the knowledge and skills needed for the job rather than

studying areas of the law they will never use. Furthermore, qualifying through CILEX is more closely linked to day-to-day work. What students are studying is applied to work experience from day one, vastly improving their career and employability prospects.

CILEX members will also have access to a large and supportive community of like-minded legal professionals who are proud to be associated with a chartered professional association.

Social mobility

CILEX has long been committed to improving social mobility within the legal profession so, as well as providing a more accessible route into the law, through the CILEX Foundation CILEX runs a scholarship programme.

Targeted at those under-represented in the legal profession and/or from a socially disadvantaged background, students can access scholarships worth up to £12,500 each.

This covers the training costs of becoming a fully qualified CILEX Lawyer, as well as all the benefits CILEX membership brings.

Eligible groups include young carers, those with a protected characteristic, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, previous receipt of free school meals or a history of being in care.

Those looking for a career in the law now have more options than ever before. The choices aspiring lawyers and paralegals make about their future will be about what suits them, their experience, circumstances and future aspirations.

The CPQ offers a flexible approach to study that provides a fast track to becoming a specialist lawyer. For those who want to work alongside their studies and gain the additional skills needed by the legal services employers of tomorrow then CPQ is a perfect choice.

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Linda Ford is CEO the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (www.cilex.org.uk). To find out more about CILEX's fast-track to a legal career, visit the dedicated CPQ page at www.cpq.cilex.org.uk.