

# Preparation for vacation placement interviews or Training contract interviews with law firms

## **Self - knowledge**

Know your CV/ Application Form back-to-front, and try to anticipate possible questions that could lead on from it

Draw up a 'Skills Audit' to prove to yourself that you understand the skills and personal qualities needed to become a solicitor, and that you have evidence for these. The evidence can come from your work experience, whether legal work experience or not, your extra-curricular activities or from your degree. The skills needed are as follows:-

- the ability to take in and analyse large amounts of information
- the ability to pay great attention to detail
- the ability to write clearly and succinctly
- excellent presentation skills, and the ability to argue a case successfully when in court
- the ability to explain the legal position clearly and simply to people who may find the concepts difficult to understand
- tact and sympathy when dealing with clients who are distressed
- numeracy, for some branches of the work
- the ability to work as a member of a team/ alone, depending on the practice
- the ability to work under pressure, to deadlines

## **Occupational knowledge**

To find out more about what it's actually like being a solicitor, use:-

- [targetjobs.co.uk/law](http://targetjobs.co.uk/law)
- [www.lexonthenet.com](http://www.lexonthenet.com)
- [www.lawyer2B.com](http://www.lawyer2B.com)
- [www.lawgazette.co.uk](http://www.lawgazette.co.uk)
- [www.thelawyer.com](http://www.thelawyer.com)
- [www.venables.co.uk](http://www.venables.co.uk)
- [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)
- [www.the-times.co.uk](http://www.the-times.co.uk)
- [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)

### **Find out about the following topics:-**

- The size of the firm
- Its areas of practice
- Its clients
- Its competition and the way the firm is responding
- The deals it has been involved in recently
- The 'issues' which are affecting the firm (for example, is the market changing? Is it in a state of growth or decline?)
- The way in which the firm hopes to develop in the future

To find out about these topics, use the recruitment brochure, the web-site, the annual report (if there is one), and objective information on firms - via web-sites such as [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com) [www.marketlineinfo.com](http://www.marketlineinfo.com) and [www.wetfeet.com](http://www.wetfeet.com)

### **Current affairs / commercial awareness / legal issues**

Find out about the following topics:-

- Current affairs and commercial awareness- read a quality newspaper everyday in the lead up to your interview/ or listen to the 'Today Programme'
- Current legal issues- look at legal sections in 'The Times' (Tuesdays), 'The Independent' (Wednesdays), 'The Lawyer' and 'The Law Gazette'
- Check out [www.lawcareers.net](http://www.lawcareers.net) for their weekly bulletin containing the Hot topic of the week
- [www.lawyer2B.com](http://www.lawyer2B.com) is excellent for summarising current issues again in a weekly newsletter.

### **Possible questions**

NB These are all 'live' questions that actual applicants have had! Obviously some overlap to some degree.

- What do/ did you like most about your degree course?
- Where have you chosen to do your LPC and why?
- Which A levels did you choose and why?
- Why did you choose to do a law degree?
- Why did you choose module x/ y/ z at university?
- What interests do you have?
- Compare your past jobs: which did you enjoy the most, and why?
- What have you gained from your academic/ employment/ extra-curricular activities?
- Expect to get a number of similar questions to the above, based around your CV
- So you didn't do very well at x/ y/ z- why not? (Discuss the mitigating circumstances, such as illness, where appropriate, and then talk about what you've learned from the situation, or what you're willing to do to improve)
- You may get asked 'scenario' questions. The interviewer is not looking for a detailed answer, but just 1 or 2 reasonable suggestions that show you can think a situation

through logically and use common sense. e.g. 'If you were the manager of a department, and there was a problem to which you thought the solution was X- how would you convince the others to come round to your way of thinking, or to make a compromise?'

- 'Explain how you confronted problems faced during your previous employment and whether you felt these problems were satisfactorily resolved?'
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What problems have you encountered during university (you could talk about how you resolved arguments or conflict with your housemates)
- What would you change about yourself?
- What makes you laugh/ makes you angry/ motivates you?
- If you had a spare weekend, and money was no object- what would you do?
- What are you thinking of doing this weekend?
- What do you want to do before you die?
- If you died now, what would be written on your gravestone?
- Which 3 people, dead or alive, from the past or present would you most want to invite to a dinner party and why?
- If there were one law you could change, what would it be?
- If you were made Lord Chancellor tomorrow, what would you change?
- How would you describe the city of London/ a game of football/ the Stock Exchange to a Martian who's just landed? (your logic is being checked out here!)
- What do you know about this company?
- How many hours do you think we work per week in this firm?
- Tell us about a deal that you're interested in that our firm has become involved in recently?
- What criteria have you used to distinguish between one firm and another- to help you choose who to apply for?
- Taking for granted that this is your first choice firm, which is your second choice and why?
- Have you applied to other firms like us?
- Why did you not apply to any of the Magic Circle firms?
- What is wrong with this firm/ puts you off working for this firm?
- Where do you see this firm going over the short-term future?
- Where do you see yourself in 5/ 10 years' time?
- What do you see as the main challenges facing the legal profession in the next few years?
- What current affairs interest you?
- Which 3 events in the world at the moment make you most angry and why?
- What is the biggest legal issue in the City at the moment?
- What story or issue from the business world has interested you the most recently, and why?

- Describe the differences found in working in:-
  - a) A commercial department
  - b) A family department, with regard to client type and work pressures

Try to anticipate other possible questions by thinking of others you may be asked which are similar, or cover the same themes.

### **Questions that are almost guaranteed**

- Why do you want to be a lawyer?

(Here are some questions to ask yourself to help you answer that question- how does being a lawyer fit in with your values? For example, you might like the fact that it enables you to help people. What specific tasks about the job are you looking forward to, what skills or personal qualities do you already have which benefit you to become a lawyer? What have you enjoyed about the legal work experience which you have had so far?)

- Why do you want to work for this firm? (Because of its geographical location, its areas of practice, its clients, its support for trainees etc.)
- Why should we employ you rather than another candidate? (What is it about you that makes you different from the person sitting next to you that this particular firm would appreciate)
- Can you think of an example of when you have worked in a team/ worked alone/ had to meet deadlines/ (or any other personal quality needed in the job). For evidence, think of situations you have been involved in during your academic life, within your work experience or in extra-curricular activities.

### **Questions to ask them**

Anything that will genuinely help you to decide whether you will take the job if it's offered, that has not already been dealt with in the course of the interview. For example:

- What is the balance between working in a team, and working alone?
- What kind of support is there for trainees?

(Based on an article by Jennifer Connell, Careers Adviser, University of Liverpool)