



Working as a Legal Executive



The stock of legal executives has risen dramatically in recent years. Read all about the work, the chance to 'earn as you learn' and the wide range of law firms, companies and public sector organisations that employ legal executives.

Background

As the third branch of the legal profession, alongside solicitors and barristers, Legal Executives are qualified experienced legal specialists. The Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX) is the professional body representing over 22,000 legal executives and trainees and is a leading provider of legal education. Legal Executives have become increasingly recognised as extremely valuable and useful employees by the law firms, companies and public service organisations that take them on.

Why become a Legal Executive?

There are many reasons why you should think about becoming a Legal Executive. First, there is the rewarding nature of the job itself. As a legal executive, your day-to-day work is similar to that of a solicitor as you will have your own clients and handle your own caseload. You will often be the main point of contact for clients and have significant responsibility. Many people are also attracted to the fact that you can get hands-on, practical experience while at the same time obtaining the sought-after Institute of Legal Executives professional qualifications. A wide range of people from diverse backgrounds have become Legal Executives, from graduates to secretaries.

You may also want to be able to 'earn while you learn'. You might not want or be in a position to take years out of work to study full time for a law degree or to complete a professional course, both of which could leave you in financial difficulty. See below for more information on training and how to qualify.

Opportunities: where can you work?

Legal Executives work in private practice, in-house and in the Public Sector. They undertake work similar to that of solicitors and specialise in a particular area of law. In private practice, Legal Executives undertake fee-earning work which is charged out to clients.

In the private sector, the majority of legal executives were found historically in medium sized and regional firms. This has changed in recent years with City practices taking on an increasing number of Legal Executives to handle work that was previously the domain of paralegals and solicitors.

The Legal Executive's role in the private sector has also widened because employers are looking for their employees to develop a commercial and business awareness. As a result, and circumstances permitting, you can therefore find yourself not only undertaking legal work but also becoming more involved in commercial and business matters.

The last few years have seen a particular demand in the private sector for Legal Executives who are specialists in the property sector, including residential conveyancing, plot sales and commercial property. Market conditions have recently changed and for the time being there is less demand in these areas, however there are opportunities across all practices areas. There are an increasing number of openings in industry with blue chip international and national companies increasingly recognising the advantages of employing Legal Executives.

Public sector organisations, and particularly local authorities, are major employers of legal executives too. Unlike the private sector, which tends to recruit fully or part-qualified Legal Executives, local authorities frequently recruit individuals as trainee Legal Executives. As such, they will sponsor you so that you can complete your qualifications and training.

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Training and Qualifying

The ILEX training route leads to a recognised qualification in law and legal practice. Students need a minimum of 4 GCSE's grades C or above or 2 A-levels and 1 GCSE. Students who decide to go to university to gain a qualifying law degree are exempt from the academic part of the ILEX qualification and will only need to complete the practical side to become a Member of ILEX. Mature students can enrol without any formal qualifications. Most trainees are in full-time employment and study part-time by either day release or evening classes, or by taking a distance learning course with the ILEX Tutorial College (ITC). Training takes approximately four to five years' study part-time, during which time trainees are usually completing their mandatory five years' qualifying employment.

Studying with ILEX allows trainees to combine both study and examination with practical experience. After successful completion of the membership examinations, trainees can use the designatory letters M.Inst.L.Ex. After further completion of the qualifying employment (the final two years of which must be taken after the membership qualifications), you can use the letters F.Inst.L.Ex and be officially called Fellow of ILEX and a Legal Executive. Fellows of ILEX are issued with an annual practising certificate and are required to complete a number of hours continued professional development training each year (CPD training) by attending either approved internal or external training courses.

Once qualified, Fellows have many professional rights. You can act as a Commissioner for Oaths and administer oaths, declarations and affidavits. You also have some rights of audience in the County Court and Magistrates' Court and can become a fully qualified Legal Executive Advocate. This means you can manage a client's case from first briefing through to the end of the court case.

Salaries

So what can you expect to earn? As a Legal Executive you will be a highly valued legal specialist and your salary will reflect this. It is difficult to generalise, however, and your remuneration will be dictated by a number of factors such as your ability, your experience, the responsibilities you will have, your area of specialisation and the location of the job. For full information on salaries for Legal Executives, visit hays.com/legal.

Conclusion

For further information on the Institute of Legal Executives, please visit the website: www.ilex.org.uk. If you are thinking of becoming a Legal Executive, or you are already qualified and are looking for a move, contact our specialist consultants. Our team has several years' experience of advising Legal Executives and we can tell you what your options are.

For more information, please contact hannah.jackson@hays.com.

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