

LAW

Sector Background

There are four main courts in Ireland: the District Court, the Circuit Court, the High Court and the Supreme Court. Other courts in operation are the Special Criminal Court and the Court of Appeal.

- **The District Court** has jurisdiction over minor civil and criminal matters. It also has specified geographical limits. In the District Court each judge sits alone. You can appeal the outcome of a case heard in the District Court to the Circuit Court.
- **The Circuit Court** has jurisdiction in more serious civil and criminal matters. In the Circuit Court each judge sits alone. You can appeal the outcome of a case heard in the Circuit Court to the High Court.
- **The High Court** is presided over by a President of the High Court. It also has jurisdiction over civil and criminal matters. For example, the most serious criminal offences, such as murder, are dealt with by the High Court. In the High Court each judge normally sits alone, but for important cases it may sit as a bench of three judges.
- **The Supreme Court** was created as the final court of appeal and is presided over by the Chief Justice. The Supreme Court can sit as a bench of seven judges but normally sits as a bench of five, or alternatively of three, judges.

Barristers

The main role of barristers lies in pleading cases in the Supreme, High, Circuit and District Courts. However, barristers also perform a number of other important functions. They represent individuals and organisations that appear before public enquiries and tribunals. They give advice on legal matters, draft legal documents and give expert legal opinions on particular issues. Some barristers specialise in specific areas of law - Criminal, Commercial or Family Law, for example. Others attach themselves to particular circuits outside Dublin (a circuit is the area of one or more counties in which a particular judge presides). In addition to practising at the Bar many barristers have developed very successful careers outside the courtroom setting, in the worlds of commerce, public administration, finance and insurance.

Solicitors

Solicitors could accurately be described as general practitioners of the law, as they provide clients with legal advice and representation on all legal matters. The work of solicitors varies as widely as the community they serve and will normally depend on their employers. Their role is to provide a broad service to individuals, families, businesses, large companies, corporations and organisations and establishments of every nature. As consultants to their clients, they dispense legal advice and information; as executors and administrators, they process and implement legal procedures and transactions. Solicitors' firms can range hugely in size, from one sole practitioner (rare) to very large international firms employing hundreds of legal practitioners. Larger firms are more likely to specialise, either in legal areas such as corporate mergers, acquisitions or tax, or in certain

industry sectors such as IT, construction or banking. Smaller firms often work very much as general practitioners, dealing with family members, small business owners, farmers, property owners and so on.

Typical Roles

Some roles in this sector include;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrister • Solicitor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judge • Legal Executive
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Entry Routes

Barrister

A summary of the stages to becoming a Barrister is:

1. Entrance Examination at King's Inns
2. Barrister at Law Degree at King's Inns
3. Called to the Bar
4. Training contract – one year minimum ('Devilling')

Qualification as a Barrister takes place in three stages: the Academic Stage, the Vocational Stage and the Training Contract Stage.

The Academic Stage

This refers to [the primary degree](#) that the Barrister holds.

The Vocational Stage

The [Honorable Society of King's Inns](#) is Ireland's oldest School of Law and is responsible for the [professional training of barristers](#) through the Barrister-at-Law degree, the only professional practice course for barristers in the Republic of Ireland. The course is full time and lasts one year. Only holders of the Barrister-at-Law degree may be called to the Bar by the Chief Justice and admitted to practise in the Courts of Ireland as a member of the Bar of Ireland.

To be admitted to the Barrister-at-Law degree course, a potential trainee must hold an [approved Law degree](#) from a third level education institution and pass the [Entrance Examination](#). Past exam papers are [here](#).

Non-law degree graduates can study for a two year [Diploma in Legal Studies](#) at King's Inns instead of a third-level law degree before sitting the King's Inns [Entrance Examination](#) for a place on the degree course. The University of Limerick two year [Law Graduate Entry programme](#) enables

candidates to sit the Entrance Examination at King's Inns. Students over 25 with no degree can also take the Diploma course.

The Training Contract Stage

Newly qualified Barristers have to train with an experienced Dublin-based Barrister (Master) for a minimum of one year following their call to the Bar. This is commonly known as 'devilling'. The work is unpaid and forms the essential learning period where they have an opportunity to apply their knowledge in a practical setting. The barrister accompanies their Master to court and observes the skills applied in the courtroom.

Many newly qualified Barristers train with a different Master for a second year. If they plan to attach themselves to a circuit outside Dublin, a second year of devilling in their chosen circuit is essential.

Solicitor

In the Republic of Ireland it takes almost three years, from start to finish, to become a solicitor. Entry into this profession is competitive.

There are five stages to qualifying as a solicitor:

1. [The Preliminary Examination](#)
Holders of Irish and UK accredited degrees, regardless of discipline, are exempt from the Preliminary Examination.
2. [The Final Examination – First Part \(FE-1\) Entrance Examination](#)
This is the entrance examination to the Law Society of Ireland.
3. [The Training Contract \(24 months in duration\)](#)
Applicants must secure a two-year in-office training contract with a qualified solicitor before they can apply for a place on the PPC I. The Training Contract is 24 months in duration and commences 14 days after the final examination on the Professional Practice Course I (PPC I).
4. [The Professional Practice Courses](#)
After completing the training contract with a qualified solicitor, the trainee solicitor may then take the 8 month [Professional Practice Course I](#) (PPC I) in the Law Society's school in Blackhall Place in Dublin, before commencing 11 months of in-office training. The apprentice solicitor then returns to Blackhall Place for the 3 month [Professional Practice Course II](#) (PPC II), after which there is a further 10 months of in-office training.

5. [Admission to Roll](#)

At the end of this process, which takes 32 months in total, the trainee is qualified to be [admitted to the roll](#) and enrolled as a solicitor. Finally, all Solicitors must have a Practising Certificate. In order to receive a Practising Certificate, the Solicitor must pay an annual registration fee to the Law Society.

Judge

In Ireland, Judges are appointed by the President acting on the advice of the Government. Judges must have at least 10 years' experience as a Barrister or Solicitor to be eligible for the post. They typically have many more years of legal service and experience before they are appointed.

Relevant Bodies & Professional Associations

Association of Judges of Ireland	Legal Aid Board
Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform	Office of the Attorney General
European Law Student's Association	The Bar Council of Ireland
IILEX - Irish Institute of Legal Executives	The Courts Service of Ireland
Law Society of Ireland	The Honourable Society of Kings Inns