

WHY CONSIDER A CAREER AS A PARALEGAL?



I. COST

The substantial cost of both the Legal Practice Course (LPC) and Bar Profession Training Course (BPTC) costing upwards of £12,000 - £16,000 for the year (in addition to the University fees already paid), means that entering the legal profession via conventional routes is a very costly and time consuming process, with no guarantee of a training contract or job at the end. Paralegals can do virtually the same work as Solicitors except for some 'reserved activities' which still remain the monopoly of Solicitors.

2. CHANGES IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

The Legal Services Act 2007 is a statute seeking to liberalise and regulate the market for legal services in England and Wales, to encourage more competition and to provide a new route for consumer complaints.

The SRA (Solicitors Regulation Authority) is responsible for granting licences for alternative business structures (ABSs) to operate with non-lawyers in professional, management or ownership roles being able to join in partnership with solicitors to offer legal services. This means that not only will paralegals be able to become partners with solicitors, but also that legal services are now being offered in the High Street by companies other than solicitors and these companies, such as Co-operative Legal Services, are employing Paralegals.

The Legal Services Board created by the Act, has a duty to promote the Act's objectives, amongst other things, to ensure that there is improved access to justice and to promote competition in the provision of legal services. With the reduction in legal funding (legal Aid) and with solicitor's fees being relatively substantial and out of reach for most consumers, this means that the role of qualified paralegals will take on greater significance.



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3. VIRTUAL ERADICATION OF LEGAL AID

With Legal Aid being abolished for all but a few cases, the consumer will need, now more than ever, access to cost effective legal services.

4. DIRECT ACCESS TO BARRISTERS

Most barristers are now registering to become 'Public Access Barristers' and as such can now be approached by the public directly. Given that the Legal Services Act directive provides for improved access to justice and to promote competition in the provision of legal services, barristers may offer an alternative access to justice and will use the services of paralegals to do so in the future.

In addition to this, since January 2014, barristers are now able to 'conduct litigation' and several barristers have opened high street firms offering fixed fees to the public, operating in direct competition to solicitors.

5. SELF-EMPLOYED PARALEGALS

NALP encourages members to work for themselves initially as freelance paralegals and then to aspire to be a NALP Licensed Paralegal by gaining a Licence to Practice from the NALP. Eligibility depends on qualification and experience.

6. MEMBERSHIP OF NALP)

Registering for this scheme will give membership to NALP, the leading professional body for Paralegals in England & Wales, which will entitle specialist career advice on how to attain Paralegal Work and also provide information about events and changes going on in the Profession. This information and other benefits is via the bespoke members' portal on the website. There is also the benefit of being able to have your details on the Licensed Paralegal Register which is a free benefit for all current NALP Members to enable them to market themselves to prospective employers and possibly consumers of paralegal services (You require a Licence to Practice for this). There is also an National Association of Licensed Paralegals (NALP) Facebook group and a NALP forum on both Google+ and LinkedIn called Paralegal Professionals UK so that ideas and information can be exchanged between members.