

# *PEACH LEGAL EMPLOYMENT GUIDE for Graduates and Trainees*

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## *Graduate Information*

The rising costs of courses and increased competition for Training Contracts and Pupilages has led to large numbers of educated and skilled people unable to find employment in the legal profession.

At Peach Legal we are able to lend a hand in the search for Paralegal and Legal Secretarial/Administration work which allows you to 'get your foot in the door' and gain valuable experience (temporary or permanent) until you can find yourself a Training Contract (We do not find you a Training Contract or Pupilage).

It is much easier to find suitable positions for you if you have previous legal experience. Ideally 6 months plus is desirable, however, we will consider less in certain circumstances. Work shadowing and mini pupilages do not really count as experience but are still valuable in their own right. Please send us an up to date CV as we will consider all applications from law students and we endeavour to place as many as we can. We have great working relationships with local law schools, colleges and universities so you be assured we understand your circumstances and want to help!

## *Making the Right Choices*

You are a Trainee Solicitor and are trying to decide your discipline. What choice do you make? Most people remain in the same chosen specialty for their entire career so getting the first decision right is key for a successful happy career. Things to take into consideration:

- What do you enjoy?
- What are you good at?
- What long term prospects are there in this sector for you and is this what you are looking for?
- Ask your employer if you can go back to your preferred department to gain some more experience so you can be sure your choice is the right one
- Remember, the chance to change your discipline post qualification is very unlikely as you become more specialised, so get it right now!

## *Is There a Good Time to Look For a New job?*

Market fluctuations show that most people look for a new job from January to April and September to November. The quietest months are over the summer period. This is due to people looking for new opportunities for the New Year and then those returning from summer holiday later in the year. Usually the decision makers in any firm have time off over the summer so little gets done in terms of recruitment drives.

Before you embark on the process of looking for a new job, have you weighed up all the pros and cons?

Consider:

- Does your current firm have any opportunities?
- Ask the relevant personnel what plans the firm has for the future.
- Show your willing and enthusiasm for the firm and its future
- If there are opportunities available, are they what you are looking for?
- What training and prospects are there?
- What is personality of that department?
- Autonomy and responsibility v support, training and supervision?

Take into account all the facts before you make an informed decision

If you have made the decision to leave and take on a fresh challenge then Peach Legal is the agency to help you. Just call us for a chat!

Peach can help you with:

- Market conditions
- Where the best openings are
- Differences between each firm's customs and expectations
- Client knowledge
- Help writing your CV
- Research and interview tips
- Handling difficult questions at interview

## *Preparing your CV - need some help?*

Until your interview, you are only as good as your CV and/or telephone manner. This means your CV and covering letter are crucial. They are essential tools in most job searches. Like any marketing document a CV should help you 'sell yourself'.

### ***What should your CV include?***

#### ***Preparation***

Thinking about your skills, qualifications and experience. What are your unique selling points and strengths?

If you are replying to a specific job advertisement, review what key words and tasks were used in the ad. Which of these words applies to you? Use these words in your CV.

#### ***Helpful Hints***

Remember that you want your CV to be read and responded to. Include just enough information to stimulate interest, but not so much that you bore the reader. Three pages maximum are preferred. Every word must contribute to the overall message – so keep it brief and make sure that the contents are relevant to the job you are now looking for – not your last one.

- Never hand write a CV, always get it typed up.
- Ensure your CV is well structured; this gives the impression that you are thinking logically and makes it easier to review. A CV that is hard to read is often put aside and forgotten. When writing remember that self-opinion is best avoided. Aim to include someone else's opinion (e.g. from last appraisal), facts or even evidence.

- Pay close attention to reply instructions in advertisements (e.g. spelling of the contact's name and address).
- Have someone check your spelling and grammar. Use quality white or cream paper, never coloured, as it does not photocopy well.

### ***Layout of CV***

#### ***Personal Details***

This should contain your personal details (name, address, contact telephone numbers, e-mail etc) and a brief general overview of your skills and experience. If you are seeking locum or contract work do not forget to include availability and preferred locations.

#### ***Education***

State clearly what professional qualifications and education you have. If you have an extensive employment history do not be too detailed about your school education. Simply state how many GCSE's or O Levels you have with grades, you do not need to list each topic separately.

#### ***Employment***

Here you should highlight your employment history in the last five years as the main area. Present this in reverse chronological order (i.e. last job first). Make sure your dates are accurate!

If you have only worked for one company, break it down with an entry for each position or project dealt with. For each position or project held describe the work undertaken, duties and responsibilities. Use bullet points rather than long sentences. Don't waffle! - you can always give more detail at interview.

- If you have extensive experience then your early career can be described in less detail especially if it is not relevant to what you are looking for now.
- Do not include salary details.
- Do include achievements, not just tasks. If you can, quantify them in terms of targets, responsibilities etc.
- Account for gaps – travelling or taking time off is acceptable, you don't need to hide or ignore it.
- Don't use humour on your CV, a prospective employer might have a different sense of humour to you!

#### ***Hobbies***

List your hobbies and interests in no more than three lines if they are relevant. Any voluntary, charity or external posts you have done e.g. school governor are worth including. Avoid listing anything too controversial. Try and make your interests sound well-rounded not just in one area.

#### ***References***

It is recommended that two referees be given – including the referees' official titles, addresses and telephone numbers.

#### ***The Covering Letter***

CV's are seldom used alone; they should always be introduced by a letter or telephone call. The letter should earn readership for the CV.

A good letter should be used to pick up points which modesty or space prevented you putting in the CV (i.e. to highlight your key strengths relevant to that job). An introduction letter can save you from having to rewrite the CV each time you want to target your application to a specific advertisement or sector.

Always keep your CV up to date. Using an out of date CV or hand-writing extra jobs or more information on your CV looks lazy and will be detrimental to your application.

## *Preparing for a successful interview - need some help?*

Congratulations! You have made it past the initial selection process and have been chosen for interview. Your CV has shown that you potentially have the right skills for the job but are you the right person for the company?

People in general will make their mind up about someone in the first few minutes of meeting them so it is vital to create an excellent first impression!

There will be many candidates being interviewed for the job - all of whom will have the skills for the role, so how are you going to stand out?

### ***Preparation Preparation Preparation!***

The only way to distinguish yourself from the rest of the interviewees is to present yourself in a more effective way than others do. Focus on being confident, motivated, energetic and proactive. You will need to be prepared to talk about yourself in order to show a prospective employer that you are the right person for the job.

Checklist the following items:

- Ensure that you have confirmed back to the employer or agency that you can make the interview time and date.
- Familiarise yourself with the journey to the location so that you arrive in plenty of time. If the interview location is different to that of the job then also familiarise yourself with the journey to your potential job so that you are sure that it is commutable.
- Dress for success! Prepare your interview outfit in advance – a suit is usually the best option. Even if you know the firm dresses casually, you still need to present yourself smartly. A first impression is a lasting one. Ask your consultant if you are not sure.
- Practice a good handshake; not too firm and not too weak.
- Research your prospective employer – familiarise yourself with mission statements, past performance, future goals, analyse ratings. Most companies have comprehensive websites with this information.
- Alternatively read business pages of relevant professional journals to gain a better insight into the company. You could also contact the company and request general information.
- If you are going for the interview through an agency, ask your consultant for some background information on the company. Whatever you do – don't go unprepared!
- Make a short list of questions to ask at the end of the interview.
- Other key factors you may wish to consider are: salary, benefits, probationary period, structure of department and progression.
- Know your CV – education, job history and hobbies. Be prepared to answer questions on salaries, why you left a position and any gaps between employment.
- Review everything you have done in the past as evidence of your strong traits and be prepared to answer questions on weak spots in your CV.
- Anticipate likely questions and prepare suitable answers. Why not practice with a friend so that you sound natural, not rehearsed from a script!

### ***The Interview***

- Be ready in plenty of time.
- Take your CV, any relevant information such as presentation material, ID, certificates or references, your list of questions and a notepad and pen. Put these items in a folder.
- If you are running unavoidably late ensure that you contact the interviewer or your agency immediately.
- Arrive with some time to spare but not too early!
- Treat all the support staff you meet with courtesy – they may influence the decision making process.
- Positive body language is essential - create a good first impression: smile, shake hands and greet your interviewer.
- Sit comfortably, do not slouch and try not to fidget!
- Do not gesticulate too much as it will show your nerves to the employer.
- Throughout the interview maintain as much eye contact as possible.

### ***Overcoming Obstacles***

- Be a good listener –try not to over-talk as this can be off-putting.
- Listen very carefully to what is being asked, if you are not sure what the interviewer is asking you then try and summarise the question and feed it back first, before answering, or even ask them to repeat the question. Always answer the question being asked with enthusiasm and interest.
- Keep your answers concise and give examples wherever possible to demonstrate your skills and abilities.
- Don't answer questions with just 'yes' or 'no', try to expand a little on what you are saying.
- Do not criticise previous employers.
- Do not tell lies - you will soon be found out!
- Make sure the employer knows the benefits of employing you.
- Do not be the first one to bring up the subject of salary and benefits.

### ***Handling Difficult Questions***

There may be parts of your employment history that may be considered as 'weak spots' – these will need to be handled in a positive way:

- If you were dismissed or made redundant – be completely neutral when providing answers. What positives have you learned from the situation? Show the employer you are a survivor who can make the best of a bad situation.
- If you're over-qualified for the role – emphasise your relevant skills and qualifications for the job. 'Sell yourself' so that the employer keeps an open mind about you.

- If you don't have enough experience for the job – tell the employer what transferable skills you have and what you can contribute to the job. 'Sell yourself' so that the employer is convinced of your abilities. Show willingness to do any training required.

Questions you might be asked at the interview:

- Tell me about yourself?
- Why would you like to work for our company?
- What do you know about our company?
- Why did you chose a career in law?
- Tell me about your specialism?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your main achievements?
- How do you tackle difficult or sensitive situations?
- Describe your relationship with your colleagues?
- How effectively do you work within a team?
- How do you prioritise your workload?

### ***Exiting the Interview***

- Before you leave the interview - have you asked all the questions you need to make up your mind about the job?
- Have you got all the information from the interviewer that is relevant to the job?
- Establish what the next step is – when are you likely to hear from them?
- Thank your interviewer for their time and shake their hands before leaving.
- Call your consultant at Peach Legal and give them some feedback. Share any concerns and expectations you have with them.
- Your consultant will contact the company to discuss feedback on the interview and you will be informed ASAP
- If you are successful, your consultant will discuss arranging a second interview with you or if a job offer has been made you must consider:
  - Salary + benefits
  - The firm's location
  - The firm's client base
  - The firm's practice areas
- If unsuccessful, your consultant will give you the interview feedback and devise a successful plan of action for future positions

***Good luck from Peach Legal!***

### ***Further Information***

If you would like some specialist confidential advice about legal employment then please call Mary Smith, Head of Peach Legal Division on 01905 22020 or e-mail her at [info@peachlegal.net](mailto:info@peachlegal.net)