

Myths to bust

If you're looking to start a career in law, you've no doubt heard a number of "myths" along the way about the legal profession. Some might be positive, but most are likely to have made you wonder if this is the right career for you... Here are 13 myths about the legal profession that we think need busting!

1. Having a poor early years education track record will be a barrier to a legal career – MYTH

No it will not... if your education track record from your early years isn't as good as it perhaps should have been, you'll need to be prepared to explain and be honest. However, prospective employers will assess a candidate on their current academic ability, commercial awareness, understanding of the organisation they are seeking to work for and the sector the organisation works in, as well as skills such as teamwork, communication and resilience. So, if your early years don't reflect the real you, don't let it hold you back!

2. A career in law is for the elite/rich/privately educated – MYTH

Historically, a career in law may have been seen as elitist and for those who could afford private education. However, times have very much changed and this is not the case. There are many routes into law, including apprenticeships, so a person's background and wealth do not come into it. WBD is a diverse and inclusive firm looking to recruit individuals from many different backgrounds.

3. You need legal work experience in order to obtain a training contract and experience outside of the legal services sector is not important or relevant – MYTH

All experience is valuable, especially where it can be applied to work/working situations undertaken in the legal sector. For example, you might have worked in a customer facing role before, such as retail or hospitality – many of the skills you will have gained from this role can be transferred into the legal profession where you will be dealing with clients, such as time-management skills, delegation skills, prioritisation skills and a solid grasp of commercial awareness. Or, you might not have any "work experience" at all, but you might have cared for a family member for a period of time – this will have provided you with some many transferable skills that will be relevant for your applications. It's also worth noting that not everyone comes from a legal background; we have many employees at WBD who have changed careers and previously worked in something completely different to law.

4. You will not have a work life balance when you become a lawyer, nor will you be able to have family commitments – MYTH

Of course, being a lawyer will require hard work and you will sometimes need to work longer hours than normal when there is work to be done and important deadlines. However, if you choose a firm and sector that promotes work life balance and has a positive working culture, then you will not be expected to work long hours every day.

5. Junior lawyers do not get the opportunity to get involved in business development or client engagement – MYTH

Junior lawyers are an important part of developing the team they work in and also play an important part in maintaining and growing client relationships in a number of different ways. For example, clients are placing increasing importance on having visibility of, and a relationship with, all lawyers in a client service team rather than focusing solely on the client relationship partner as it's the client service team lawyers who will be providing most of the day to day legal advice to clients. For this reason, all members of the team participate in client engagement and business development activities.

6. Trainees and apprentices are often stuck doing photocopying and other mundane tasks – MYTH

Commercial firms like WBD, recruit trainees and apprentices to support teams and the business with commercially important work. Of course in every role there is an element of admin work; however, as a trainee or apprentice, you will gain invaluable commercial experience and learn from colleagues around you.

7. Most firms are strictly hierarchical and partners will be unapproachable – MYTH

Although most firms have a hierarchy in place, this is rarely felt by the team members. At WBD teams are co-operative and every member of the team is important and treated the same. Our supervisors and partners are friendly and approachable and will make you feel part of the team. In fact, we were even recognised for this when we won the Legal Cheek award for Most Approachable Partners.

8. The legal industry is white, male dominated – MYTH

This may have been your perception, especially historically, however the legal industry has come on leaps and bounds by investing time, resource and money into opening the industry up to all backgrounds. We've seen a significant shift in diversity in the profession – with wider routes to qualification, we've been able to unlock access and reach out to a diverse pool of candidates. Firms, including ours, are investing in supporting underrepresented groups with the use of mentoring schemes, apprenticeships and other initiatives. We recognise there's still a lot of work to be done but diversity and inclusion forms a part of our business and recruitment strategy.

9. All lawyers stand up in court and argue cases, meaning you need to be a good public speaker and if you have a regional accent you won't be taken seriously – MYTH

Aspiring solicitors often think that all lawyers are required to stand up in Court and argue cases, no matter what type of law you specialise in. However, unless you are looking to become a Barrister, it's unlikely that you'll be required to do this. If you end up working in a disputes team as a solicitor, then you will attend court; however, it will still be the barristers that will do most of the arguing and public speaking and, as a solicitor your role would be more client facing. So, if public speaking isn't something you're keen on, then there's no need to worry as this won't be a barrier to the profession. On the regional accent point, this is also a myth! You will be taken seriously no matter what your accent.

10. You need to go to University to join the legal profession and the University you go to and your marks matter – MYTH

This isn't true. As mentioned earlier in this article, there are apprenticeships to become a solicitor which do not require a degree. If you do choose the degree route, many firms, including ours, do not look at which university you went to and whether it was a Russell-Group university and we also won't look at your grade. There is so much more to an application than your degree and the university you went to. You need to make sure you are 'more' than your degree, such as having work experience, interests, hobbies etc.

11. There is an expectation to wear full 'business attire' every day – MYTH

Whilst this may be true in some firms, at WBD we have a 'dress for the day' policy, meaning that you don't have to wear full business attire unless you need to (for example, if you have a client meeting). This means that no one is expected to wear full suits, or high heels, but instead it's about wearing what's appropriate for the day ahead.

12. You have to be of a certain age to apply for a training contract or apprenticeship – MYTH

There is no right or wrong age to train to be a solicitor. If you're looking to go down the apprenticeship route, you don't have to apply during or soon after your A-levels, you can apply at any stage in your career (as long as you don't already hold a LLB degree). For the training contract route, there is no requirement to start a training contract straight after university; there can be value in gaining work experience after university, before you commence a training contract. And, as mentioned earlier, there is no right or wrong age to apply, you may have worked for 10+ years in a completely different industry and that's not a problem!

13. Lawyers don't have personalities and aren't real people – MYTH!

This is our last myth of the article and we are keen to bust it! The rise in social media for law firms and lawyers highlights that lawyers and other legal professionals truly are just normal people, with plenty of personality and emotions.

As you can see, most of the "myths" you might have heard about the legal industry are not true; really there is nothing stopping you from starting a career in law if you would like to. It's important to be yourself during application processes and assessments, to give you the best opportunity to demonstrate your strengths and show what you can offer as an individual. Everyone can bring something different to the industry, making you unique and valued!