

Becoming a PEI Lawyer

Information for High School Students – A Career as a Lawyer

This document was developed by the P.E.I. Branch of the Canadian Bar Association and the Law Society of Prince Edward Island to give high school students information about law as a career.

Television is great entertainment, but it can be misleading. Take the stereotype created of lawyers. They are usually flamboyant, coming from big city firms, spending all their time in court, and usually prosecuting or defending a criminal case. You probably could find lawyers like that, but they would not be representative of today's legal profession.

Here are some interesting facts about lawyers in P.E.I.:

- many lawyers never go to court; most of those who do are more likely to be acting for a client in a civil dispute than in a criminal case;
- 16% of lawyers practise alone;
- 24% are in small firms of two to four lawyers; 60% are in larger firms;
- 70% of lawyers are under 45 years of age;
- almost half of law school graduates are women.

So, what do lawyers do? To begin, let's distinguish between barristers and solicitors.

A *barrister* is a trial lawyer who argues cases in court. The case may involve a family dispute, personal injuries from a car accident, a criminal charge, or a hearing before a government board. A barrister develops specialized skills in drafting court documents, arguing points of law, and questioning witnesses.

A *solicitor's* work is extremely varied. Solicitors may draft contracts, handle real estate transactions, give advice to corporations, draft wills, administer estates, or advise on income tax problems, to name just a few areas. It is primarily an office job, and a solicitor does not go to court.

In England, you become *either* a barrister or a solicitor. In Prince Edward Island a lawyer is *both*. He or she is qualified to act in court as a barrister, or work in the office as a solicitor. It is a matter of personal preference, experience and temperament whether the lawyer will do one, the other, or both.

So you can see that the role of a lawyer portrayed on TV is not always representative of real life.

What Training Do I Need?

It takes a lot of hard work and commitment, to become a lawyer.

These are the main steps:

- High School - You need to graduate from high school, with university entrance requirements.
- University - You need a minimum of three years' university toward a degree; most applicants have a bachelor's degree which means four years' study. No special

courses are required, but English comprehension and writing skills will help you later on. The better your marks, the better your chance of being accepted into law school.

- Law School - Admission into law school is based on your undergraduate marks and your score on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), although some admissions are allowed on a discretionary basis. If you are accepted, the law school program is three years; you may study at any Canadian common law faculty of law. There are three law schools in the Maritimes: Dalhousie University in Halifax, the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, and the Université de Moncton, where the language of instruction is French.
- Articles - After completing a law degree, you must apply to the Law Society for enrollment as an articled student. To do that you must find a qualified lawyer who will take you into his or her office, where you will work full time for a year. As part of your training you will attend the Society's Bar Admission Course, where you will learn the skills required for the practice of law, and the laws particular to our province. Law School will have given you *legal principles* (e.g. real estate law, criminal law) and articling will teach you *procedures and skills* (e.g. how to do a conveyance or conduct a trial). To be accepted as an articled student you must satisfy the Law Society that you are a person of good character - a lawyer's background must be one of honesty and respect for the law.
- Call and Admission - If you successfully complete your articling year, the Law Society will give permission for you to be "called to the Bar" at a ceremony in the Supreme Court. At that point you become a barrister and solicitor, and are authorized to practise law.

Will I Make a Good Living?

Six or seven years of university and one year of articles require a big commitment of time and energy. Some of your high school friends may be earning good money during those years, and you may feel left behind. So it's fair to ask whether all this training will be worth it. Here are some points to ponder:

- Becoming a lawyer does not guarantee you a job, or a good income. When the economy is depressed, law firms hurt too. When the economy is growing, law firms grow with it.
- If jobs are scarce, you may need to relocate, set up your own law firm, or consider an alternative law-related position.
- Law has historically been one of the more highly-paid professions. But how much you will make will depend on how hard you work, how competent you are, where you locate, whom you work for, and what type of law you practise. Lawyers' incomes vary widely.
- Law is certainly not a "get rich quick" profession. It requires hard work, long hours, and lots of discipline. *Becoming* a lawyer is just the beginning. But any lawyer will tell you that it can be a very stimulating and satisfying career.
- A lawyer's training opens doors to other professions, too; you are not limited to practising law. Many law graduates go into business, public administration, government, and politics.

- A lawyer may be part of the nation-wide Canadian Bar Association, which represents the interests of lawyers, provides legal services to the public and encourages law reform.
- A lawyer is part of the Law Society, which governs the legal profession, and is responsible for the admission, conduct and education of lawyers.

Where Can I Get More Information?

For more information about entering a Maritime law school, contact:

Admissions Office, Dalhousie University

The Weldon Building

6061 University Avenue

Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 4H9

Website: <http://law.dal.ca>; e-mail - law.admissions@dal.ca

or

U. of New Brunswick, Admissions Office

Ludlow Hall, Box 4400

Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 5A3

(506) 453-4693 FAX (506) 458-7722

website: <http://law.unb.ca>; e-mail - lawadmit@unb.ca

or

Admissions Office, Faculty de droit

Université de Moncton, Edifice A.J. Cormier

Moncton, New Brunswick E1A 3E9

website: www.umoncton.ca/droit; e-mail - edr@umoncton.ca