

Legal

The in-house Legal department supports the entire business by providing legal advice and support on all the issues that affect that company. It is the role of the legal team to ensure that the business is operating within the law at all times.

Large businesses are likely to have their own Legal department, known as an in-house team, but might also 'outsource' some of this work, i.e. hire a private law firm to handle some of their legal work. Therefore the roles in an in-house department are similar to those in a law firm and both may work together on some larger projects.

The areas of law that would be covered by an in-house legal team are business focused and might include:

- Employment
- Banking and debt finance
- Consumer (legal issues that affect customers)
- Commercial
- Tax
- Corporate
- Insurance
- Property
- Litigation (resolving a legal dispute via the courts).

Under each area of law come many different sub-areas. For example, Employment law includes many different topics such as contract issues (working terms, etc.), dispute resolution as well as redundancy and restructuring law. Each area is very broad so a lot is covered under each of the headings.

The type of business that the company does will dictate what areas of law the in-house team advise on. For example, a large pharmaceutical company might have a number of lawyers who advise on their intellectual property rights (the rights they own in their products), whereas a financial services company, like a building society, would be more focused on consumer law and issues related to their customers (e.g. mortgage terms and conditions). The key areas the legal team focus on will be those that relate to the company's business, lawyers therefore tend to specialise on particular areas so they might employ one lawyer who is an expert in Banking and Tax law and another that specialises in Employment law.

There are a number of roles within a Legal department many of which can also be found in a law firm. These include:

- General Counsel
- Qualified Solicitors
- Paralegals and researchers

The **General Counsel** is the head of the in-house department. They oversee all others in the department and will report directly to the board of directors. This person will be legally qualified (see below for qualifications) and will have a great deal of experience in the areas of law relevant to the business, and with managing large departments and workloads.

Salaries can reach up to £100,000 a year or more in large corporations.

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Qualified Solicitors will be responsible for specific legal areas and will work in teams, e.g. employment, commercial contracts, tax, etc. under the watchful eye of the team manager (also a qualified solicitor) and the General Counsel.

Work will include drafting and proofing legal documents, researching areas of the law and advising the business appropriately, attending meetings and negotiations and possibly even attending court.

To become a qualified solicitor a recognised professional qualification called the Legal Practice Course Law is needed. To be eligible for this qualification candidates need to have good GCSE's and A-levels as well as a qualifying law degree or a non-law degree and a conversion course. Finally candidates must complete a two year training contract in a law firm or in a corporate.

Once qualified a solicitor can earn from £28,500 or more a year. This will increase greatly with experience.

The legal team will be supported by Paralegals and Researchers who may or may not be legally qualified.

The main role of a paralegal is to support the solicitors to which they report, researching the law, cases and other relevant information. They will also draft and proofread legal documents and larger in-house departments may employ a number of people in these roles.

Salaries vary depending on the company but normally start at around £16,000 depending on location and experience.

Employability SKILLS

There are a number of skills needed to work in a legal department, including:

- **Responsibility and dependability**
- **Good organisation**
- **Ability to analyse information quickly**
- **Effective communication and discretion**
- **Ability to prioritise, work under pressure and to meet deadlines**
- **Problem solving abilities**
- **Team work and independent thinking**
- **A good understanding of the law and the needs of the business.**

A key employability skill is responsibility and dependability. It is very important that lawyers are able to handle demanding and complex work. In the commercial world multi-million pound deals can hinge on small details so everyone working on a transaction needs to pull their weight.