



Podcast Transcript

Topic: Careers

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Collette

Thanks for downloading the law Society of Scotland's first ever podcast on careers. My name is Collette Paterson and I am the Society's new lawyers co-ordinator. The Society is the body which prescribes what a person needs to do to qualify as a solicitor in Scotland. Universities are accredited by the Society to run a course in law, which is why we are interested in someone who is thinking about embarking on the law degree.

The vast majority of first year students on the LLB, which is the official name of the law degree, will be school leavers. This podcast is tailored to pupils about to leave school and start university. We want to ensure you get the information you need to make your university choice, probably one of the most important choices you will ever make.

I've asked a couple of people who know all about making these choices to share their views with the Society today. Maryam Labaki is the President of the Scottish Young Lawyers Association and in September 2007 she qualified as a solicitor.

Richard Pugh is immediate past-president of the Scottish Young Lawyers Association. He is a solicitor and will soon be leaving the legal profession to become an advocate, which is different from a solicitor. More about advocates later, if you're confused about what an advocate is.

We've also enlisted the assistance of some pupils and budding law students from Craigmount High School in Edinburgh. They're at Craigmount right now but through some technical wizardry we'll be focusing today's podcast around questions that the pupils at Craigmount want answers to.

Students

Hi my name is Alexander I am interested in the law degree because I think it would be very interesting thing to study at University.

Hey - My name is David and latter this year I am applying to several uni's to study law. My reasons for this are two fold. The first is that simply I just think that the course would be good and challenging, because it seems quite intellectually rigorous and I think I would enjoy it. And the second is that I would enjoy a career as a lawyer where I think practicing in court would be great fun.

Hi I'm Brian and I am looking to study law because from a young age I have always been half interested in law though TV programs with lawyers striding up and down courtrooms, and then recently in the last couple of years I've looked into law and found it to be extremely interesting.

Collette

If you're listening I'm sure you'll agree that's much better than the three of us sitting in a room telling you what we *think* you want to know about the law degree!

So, Maryam, if I can turn to you first, Alexander at Craigmount High School is ready and waiting with our first question on careers and it would be great if you would pick that one up. Over to you Alexander.

Alexander

What subjects do I need to study at higher level to get on the law degree and what marks will I need to achieve in the exams?

Maryam

Really the only subject a law school wants its students to have studied is Higher English, or the equivalent. Being able to communicate effectively in writing is really important when you are a law student - you need to be able to use the English language to state your case, and argue convincingly, so it's no surprise that Higher English is a pre-requisite. **But** over and above that there are no hard and fast rules, your peers will have studied a real broad range of subjects at school, from sciences to languages to everything else, although the subjects *do* need to be academic subjects. But the Higher English requirement should be a good indicator to you. If your heart sunk when I said that, then you might want to think again about your choice of university course because there's lots of reading and writing involved in the study of law!!

Richard

Can I just add to that, I have heard students say that Modern Studies is a useful course, even though it is not a pre-requisite.

Collette

And what about the marks Alexander might need to get to get into University in the first place, Richard?

Richard

Well, it's difficult. Neither the Scottish Young Lawyers' Association nor the Society could ever give anyone completely accurate advice on entry requirements. There are ten universities offering the LLB, and each of them set their requirements each year. They might vary greatly across the board. It's really up to the individual law student to get a hold of the most recent prospectus, which will state clearly what entry requirements that university is looking for, and liaise with their university of choice if they don't have those marks, about their options.

Collette

Thanks Richard, that has probably cleared quite a few things up for a few pupils who have heard about different entry requirements for different LLB courses. Now let's go back over to David back at Craigmount High School, who has a related question.

David

Other than getting good marks in my school exams what else will I need to do to secure a place on the LLB? Will I need to go for an interview?

Richard

David is already aware that securing a place on the LLB at your university of choice is not necessarily *only* about the marks you receive. It's fair to say that universities will look at the personal statement you include on your UCAS form, in which you state your reasons for applying for certain courses. Universities are *very* likely to look at that, but law schools are less likely to hold interviews. Maybe in a limited number of cases, but it's certainly not common.

If you are applying to the University of Glasgow you should remember that the National Admissions Test for Law must be taken. That tests candidates' suitability for the study of law. Listeners should contact the University of Glasgow directly for more information about that.

Collette

Thanks, Richard. I think David has another question for us.

David

There are ten Universities that offer the law degree. How do I choose one, are some better than others?

Maryam

I'd like to answer this one Collette, if I can?

Collette

Of course, Maryam - but before you do on behalf of the Law Society of Scotland could I add that no, some universities are *not* better than others. There are ten accredited LLB providers in Scotland, which means that ten universities meet the standards required by the Society in terms of the law degree.

But that doesn't mean applicants won't have their own views on the different universities generally. You might want to be part of a year group of 30 rather than 250 students. Or you might want to escape city life and study on a more rural campus. You might be a keen sports person, or musician, and want to find a university that offers you the chance to join a club or society that you're interested in. These aren't considerations only of law students, but would it be fair to say that the university experience is also an important consideration when picking a law course Maryam?

Maryam

I would agree, yes, but it's also important to remember that although ten universities offer the LLB, it's likely that these ten universities will each teach their courses differently, and ten students could experience ten very different four years at university. So, the first thing pupils should do is keep a close eye on the websites of universities. Most of the LLB providing universities will hold open days, which prospective students can attend. These might be general campus days for the entire university, or a specific "law" open day.

Collette

How would someone benefit from a law open day specifically?

Maryam

Well, students might be given talks from existing law students, or from lecturers, and take a tour of the law department to get a feel for the law school they are visiting. They might even get a chance to take part in a mock trial, or a moot, as those are called.

Collette

Thanks Maryam, I think attending an open day would be top of my list for someone who is thinking about going on to study law. Moving on from entry requirements and the choice of University, lets have a listen to a query from Brian at Craigmount High School about gaining some exposure to legal life before he starts university.

Brian

Will getting some work experience before I start my law course help me, or are there any other extra-curricular activities which would help me do well on the LLB?

Maryam

OK, I'm going to be honest. On the one hand, it's never going to harm you to get some experience in an office, and do more with your life than simply excel in exams. Becoming a well-rounded person who has some "life experience" is going to help you immensely as you progress through your law degree. But on the other hand, how can you really tailor work experience that is going to assist you until you have done at least one year of your course under your belt and you have started to realise where your interests lie? For example, something you study might spark your interest in volunteering, for example, with the Citizen's Advice Bureau during your course. Or you might decide from a very early stage that you want to be a commercial lawyer, and try to take advantage of a variety of **paid** summer placements on offer. At Brian's stage he should take advantage of opportunities to broaden his horizons, of course, but I don't think those necessarily need to be work experience at his stage.

Collette

So, once students have thought about everything they need to do to get on to the law course, there are then lots of questions about the actual study of law. I think Alexander has a question on that very topic.

Alexander

What do you study on the LLB? What are the distinctive features of Scottish law and training, and then in what ways is a law degree different to any other degree?

Richard

Like any prospective law student, Alexander hasn't sat a "Higher" or "A-Level" in Scots Law. So the study of law does need some getting used to. University learning techniques always require some getting used to, but with law in addition the subject can be quite alien at first.

Like most university courses, subjects are taught through a mixture of lectures and tutorials. Lectures will probably be to your entire class, and depending on what university you attend might be up to 200 people. Tutorials are less frequent and see smaller groups look at issues more in-depth than in lectures, looking at problems more closely and actually discussing the issues in groups. When it comes to being assessed, depending on the university you attend you're likely to be assessed through a mixture of exams, and individual or group coursework.

Now I can't speak for every degree out there, but I can give my personal opinion, and the opinion of many others who have been law students, to say that the study of law can be very interesting! It's interesting to learn about the country we live in, the law and politics of our country and the legal system. It might require a strong stomach at times to learn about the criminal law of our country, but it's fascinating. Family law makes sense to us because most of us have our own family units and can relate to the family dynamics described in the case law. Learning about consumer rights is useful, crucially you'll know your rights the next time you buy an expensive product and it breaks down, and will confidently state your case with the shop or manufacturer! I could go on, really, but what I'm trying to show is that law pervades every aspect of our lives, and interestingly for the law student the LLB is structured deliberately to give students a broad base in law.

Collette

Don't law students or lawyers specialise somewhere down the line?

Richard

I don't want to talk too much in depth about what a person who wants to become a solicitor must do after the LLB, because there are points in that that merit an entire podcast of their own and I know the Society will probably do one at some point, but after the LLB a graduate must currently go on to study what is called the Diploma in Legal Practice for one year, which is a year of preparing LLB graduates for life in the office as a "real lawyer". After that year the Diploma graduate must work for two years under the supervision of a Scottish solicitor. That is called the traineeship. It is later on down the line that real choices need to be made -for example what kind of law you want to specialise in, or what type of organisation you would feel comfortable working for.

People often ask what they need to do to be a criminal lawyer, or an advocate or a judge, or to become a lawyer in Australia, when they are still in school! Pupils shouldn't worry about the specifics just yet, there's plenty of time to make decisions down the line. I'm an example of that myself, I've recently decided to qualify as an Advocate after 4 years working as a solicitor and 2 years before that as a trainee solicitor. Not everything needs to be decided on right away.

Collette

Thanks Richard.

The Law Society of Scotland is actually reviewing what a person needs to do to qualify as a solicitor in the future. It's likely that for someone leaving school the LLB at one of the ten universities will always be their first choice to start the route to qualification, but if someone is listening today then what they should do is make sure they keep in good contact with the Society during the LLB to make sure they are being given the most up-to-date information on their options, so they can make the right choices during the route to qualification.

Richard

Absolutely, the same is true of the SYLA - we're here to answer all manner of tricky questions a law student might have, and students should always feel free to contact us about that side of things during their LLB and the years after that.

Collette

If we can go back to the original point about specialisation, the law student has choices during the degree itself, is that right? Maryam, would you like to answer that question?

Maryam

Yes Collette. The broad base is necessary for all solicitors. It wouldn't be right for a criminal solicitor to know all there is to know about criminal law, but nothing about family law, would it? Solicitors need to be trained in a "core" number of subjects, and in fact because there aren't enough traineeships – the two year job that Richard just mentioned – it's actually the students who achieve the best marks in these "core subjects" during the LLB who are able to progress on to the stage that follow.

That said, later on in the degree most LLB students opt to go on and study what is known as "Honours". That is because there are two types of degree – an "Ordinary degree" and an "Honours degree". When graduates are going for jobs, recruiters are looking for an "Honours" degree, and it is the Honours degree which gives people the classification first class, or Upper Second Class, or Lower Second Class, or Third class. Students often have the chance to study subjects that they are really interested in, in great levels of depth during "Honours", as well as write a dissertation on a subject that the student is interested in. Students often find there are lots of choices open to them at this stage of the degree.

Collette

Thanks Maryam.

What about the way in which law is taught, what can prospective law students expect their daily lives to be like?

Richard

Well, you might be at a university with up to 200 other students, or you might be at a university with only 30 other students, so experiences will vary. However, I think it's fair to say that the teaching of law will be a mixture of lectures and tutorials. The assessments will be a mixture of essays, group essays, and exams. As a law student, you will have a heavy workload, and you simply cannot compare your law course with someone else's first year course, that's one thing that I learnt when I was at university and is something I always tell prospective law students. You will have a heavy workload, and probably spend lots of hours over and above teaching hours reading to aid your understanding of complex cases and legislation. Generally at university you are expected to do pre-reading before lectures and tutorials, to make the most out of the lectures and absorb as much as of them as you can, so it's a very proactive approach to learning that students have to adopt, and very different from school as no-one, bar yourself, is going to check up on you. Your performance in your first and second year will dictate whether you progress to the later stages of training as a solicitor though, which does mean it's all worth while.

Collette

Richard, you do make it sound like a lot of hard work, but I suppose what our listeners should remember is that perhaps unlike other courses, on the LLB course students are, for want of a better phrase, all "in it together". Would that be fair to say? Because you study all of the same subjects as your fellow students, would you say you form close groups with other people on your course, and your able to share views on what you are learning, and aid each other's understanding the complex cases and legislation you mentioned?

Maryam

Yes, I definitely think that's what it's like Collette, but I'm conscious we've been very honest about the workload and the importance of doing well from year one. I think we should point out to listeners that studying law can be fascinating! The core subjects

are really diverse, and there's *always* going to be at least one subject in there that *really* captures your interest.

What I would like to say is that we have definitely been making a point about talking about academic subjects **but** at the same time being a university student is probably the most fun parts of your life and that university and being a law student is incredibly good fun. There's lots of social sides to being a law student. There will be a student law society at whatever university you are at and lots of extra-curricular activities, which allow you to mix with students from all courses.

Definitely would impose that there is first and second year exams that you will have to have good exam marks, but at the same time it's definitely a work hard and play hard ethos being a law student. Wouldn't you say Richard?

Richard

Yeah – I would just like to add that when you get to the end of the day you are looking for employment and most employers will look for people that have a wide range of interests and who have participated in extra-curricular things as well as studied hard for their exams.

Collette

So law firms and recruiters are generally looking for well-rounded individuals who have more on their CV than simply studying hard for four years?

Richard

Oh absolutely - it at least as important.

Maryam

It will definitely go in your favour if you have been a part of, for example the sailing club at university. I had one employer at my summer placement who was absolutely delighted to see that I had been apart of the sailing club as he was a keen sailor. So you will find that you will have common interests with people not only on your course but also perhaps your future employers and people you are hoping impress in the future.

Collette

Thanks Maryam, and I think that's a great note to end our podcast on. Studying law is not easy, you will not be able to graduate with a good degree and become solicitor without lots of hard work, from the very first year of your course. BUT learning about Scots law can be fascinating and as you have pointed out there is also a very important social side to being a law student and also being at university.

One final question that I would like to answer is one asked by Brian at Craigmount High School.

Brian

If you study law in Scotland does that mean that you can't move to England and practice law there or visa versa?

Collette

Well this podcast is about the route to qualification for solicitors in Scotland and the route to qualification for solicitors in England and Wales is **different**. It's not uncommon for qualified Scottish solicitors to re-qualify in lots of different countries. However, if you want to qualify as a solicitor in England or Wales straight away do

contact the Law Society of England and Wales or Universities in England and Wales about the English LLB.

Unfortunately that's all we've got time for in this podcast, so thank you to Maryam and Richard of the Scottish Young Lawyers Association for sharing your views with us, and special thanks to Alexander, David and Brian of Craigmount High School for providing us with the questions *they* wanted to know the answers to about the LLB.

We might have reached the end of this podcast, but remember that this is only the first in a planned suite of careers podcasts which tackle the critical stages of the route to qualification as a solicitor, and the decisions law students are required to make along the way.

To find out about other projects that might be useful for you if you do become a law student, log on to www.lawscot.org.uk/training and log on to www.syla.co.uk to find out more about what Maryam and Richard and the Scottish Young Lawyers Association can do for you.

And remember, if today's discussion *hasn't* answered a particular question you had, why not contact the Society's Education & Training Department on 0131 226 7411. Lots of luck in making your University choices, and goodbye for now!