



**Beacon  
Legal**

**SPECIALIST LEGAL RECRUITMENT**

# **NQ LAWYER GUIDE UK**

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# ABOUT BEACON LEGAL

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Beacon Legal is a recruitment and career consultancy for the legal industry. We combine legal qualifications and experience with recruitment management to provide expert services to candidates and clients. We have offices in London and Australia and provide services in key international markets: UK; Belgium; Ireland; Australia; Asia; New York; Dubai and the offshore jurisdictions in the Caribbean and Channel Islands.

Our team is composed of former lawyers and experienced recruiters, all with long standing and deep connections to the world's leading law firms. As a result, we recruit for the majority of the leading practices in each of the jurisdictions in which we operate. No matter what your career goals may be, Beacon Legal can help you achieve them.



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# YOU'RE ALMOST THERE...

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At Beacon Legal we believe that great careers are built on great foundations. You worked hard through university and law school, and even harder over the last 2 years as a Trainee. It's been a long journey but all that time, effort, and dedication is paying off: in just a few months you will be a qualified lawyer! Deciding which practice area you prefer, what kind of firm you want to be a part of, and what kind of career you want to build are all crucial questions. We're here to help.

In this Guide, we offer our insights into the qualification process, based on our team's experience of advising people in your position for the last 20+ qualification seasons. We hope you find it helpful, but if you would like any further information or assistance, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

# QUALIFICATION SEASON: A TIMELINE



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## **5-6 Months Before Qualification**

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- Begin thinking about your experience over the course of your Training Contract and, if you haven't already, begin deciding on your first and second preferences for the practice area into which you'd like to qualify.
- Consider whether the firm you've trained with is likely to have NQ vacancies in your preferred department(s) and how popular those are likely to be. Speak to your seat supervisors from the relevant teams if you can, since they'll often be able to give you some insight at this early stage.
- Contact a recruiter to get an overview of the market in your preferred practice area, to get an idea of your external options.
- A small number of NQ vacancies will become available at this time. These are typically limited to roles with certain elite US law firms and are generally in areas such as private equity, corporate and finance.





## **4 Months Before Qualification**

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- The majority of firms will publish internal NQ job lists around this time, allowing you to determine how many vacancies your own firm has for Trainees to qualify into their preferred practice area.
- A large number of your peers will begin contacting recruiters in search of external NQ positions as a result of the internal job vacancies being published.
- Beacon Legal consultants will begin to hear from their contacts at a wide range of law firms about which practice areas are most likely to require external candidates in the coming weeks.
- An increasing number of US law firms will begin accepting applications from external candidates, since these firms generally have relatively small trainee programmes and can conclude their internal process quickly. Boutique litigation firms also typically begin considering external applicants around this time.
- Offshore law firms in Jersey and Guernsey will begin considering applications for NQ positions in their corporate, finance and funds teams.



## **3 Months Before Qualification**

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- Most firms will conclude their internal NQ process around this time, so will now begin considering external applicants.
- This is generally the busiest point in the qualification cycle, with the majority of our law firm clients seeking NQs in multiple practice areas and a large number of candidates coming to the market.
- In order to streamline processes, law firms often implement very short application deadlines for certain roles.
- Some candidates will receive multiple offers as law firms compete for the best talent in the market.



## **1-2 Months Before Qualification**

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- Law firms will continue interviewing external applicants to fill any outstanding positions, particularly in more specialised areas.
- Finding a role will become more challenging the closer you get to your qualification date, however we will use our extensive network of contacts to find potential opportunities for you.



Whenever you're faced with a big decision, it always helps to speak to someone who can provide you with relevant information to help you with your decision. We offer a tailored service to each individual, based on our vast experience and track record helping NQs secure qualified roles. We believe the following elements will be most useful at this stage of your career:



We'll arrange an initial consultation, either over the phone or at our offices, to get to know more about you. We'll discuss your experience to date, as well as your short and long term career objectives. We'll also give you an overview of the market and an idea of what is likely to happen with regard to vacancies in various practice areas over the coming months.



We'll advise you on your CV. For a lot of people, this is the first time they've drafted a professional CV, so our team will use their experience and knowledge of the firms to help you highlight the points that will secure that all important interview.



As you move through the qualification season, we will make a plan together for how you would like to conduct your job search. This might include making proactive approaches to your target firms. Alternatively, we can keep you informed of upcoming vacancies as soon as we are aware of them, often before they are advertised publicly.

# THE BEACON APPROACH

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When you're ready to put in an application, you'll authorise us to introduce your CV to your chosen firms. Everyone we represent is introduced individually to ensure their profiles are not buried in a list with other candidates.



We will provide extensive assistance while you prepare for interviews, using our deep understanding of the market and specific knowledge of each firm to ensure you are able to perform at your best when you interview.



If you choose to make applications to several firms, we will manage your interview processes to ensure you have the opportunity to consider all of your options, rather than feeling pressured to accept the first offer you receive.



When you receive an offer we will be with you throughout the entire process, assisting with salary negotiations, managing acceptance deadlines and agreeing a start date (including time for qualification leave if you wish). If you'd like advice on how best to resign to your current firm, we can help with that too.

# LIFE BEYOND LONDON

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While we understand that London is generally the most popular location for newly qualified UK lawyers, our reach extends far beyond the capital. Our team has long standing relationships with the major offshore law firms in Jersey and Guernsey, as well as top tier international firms in other major hubs such as Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia. These locations offer a chance to gain exposure to very high quality work and marquee clients, with the added benefit of living and working overseas from the very beginning of your post-qualified career. If you'd like to learn more about the possibility of relocating on qualification, please contact us.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## ***Should I wait until I know the outcome of my internal NQ process before looking at vacancies elsewhere?***

Despite the fact that most people would ideally like to remain with their original firm after qualification, it's always worth having a plan B. If you wait until later in the season to apply for vacancies then you risk having far fewer external options available if you then discover your own firm is unable to offer you a role. This is particularly true for individuals aiming to qualify into the most oversubscribed practice areas, such as employment, IP, or litigation.

## ***If my original firm can't offer me a role in the department I want, but offers me another department instead, what should I do?***

It depends what other options you have at the time, but in most cases it is worth considering offers from your 2nd, 3rd, or even 4th choice departments. When you speak to other firms, they'll be impressed by the fact that your original firm is trying to retain you, and will understand your passion for a different area has brought you to them.

It will also take some pressure off if you have an NQ role lined-up, even if you continue to monitor the market and may ultimately find a role in your preferred area a month or two down the line.

## ***How quickly does the market move?***

Around 3-4 months before qualification is the time when the largest number of candidates and vacancies will come to market. During this period, it's not uncommon for applications to open and close in under a week for particularly popular roles. As such, it's best to be prepared: have your CV drafted and ready to go; have a specific plan in place with your recruiter; and make sure you're contactable.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## ***How flexible should I be with my criteria?***

There's no 'one-size fits all' answer to this one, but the key here is to remember what's most important and to be flexible in other areas. You have a long career ahead of you, and if you're truly committed to one particular practice area then it's probably wise to consider a wide range of firms provided they have space in the relevant department. Equally, if your main goal is to build up a profile that will help you move in-house in the future, or to a particular overseas jurisdiction, then you may wish to focus more on certain types of firms or groups of practice areas that are most suited to that goal. Whatever your ultimate objective, our team will help you understand the range of options that can get you there.

## ***Should I speak to multiple recruiters?***

We'd recommend speaking to a limited number of recruiters, in order to find the consultant that's the best fit for you. If you ultimately decide to instruct more than one though, it's a good idea to make sure you stay in control of your search. Insist that your CV and details can only be shared with a prospective firm with your written authorisation, and keep an up to date list of which firms you've applied to as you go along.



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# CONTACT OUR NQ TEAM

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