

---

# NQ Solicitors Guide 2019

---

## Career decision-making as an NQ

# 3

Brooke Thornham  
Consulting

# What factors should I consider when deciding my future career direction?

For some, the range of considerations you have as you approach qualification can be all consuming.

Key questions to consider will include:

- **What type of law do you want to specialise in?** (How much does your experience gained to date lend itself to that choice? Do you have a second choice option? What do you enjoy the most?)
- **What type of environment do you think you might like to work in?** (International firm? Regional firm? 'Boutique'? In-house?)
- **Where do you want to live, both now and longer term?** (You need to consider whether your longer term geographical requirements will be preserved or dramatically limited by your choices on qualification. For example, if you pick something which is centred on a particular location (e.g. shipping or derivatives) or you go offshore for a significant period, then you may have more limited options when returning in a few years' time than if you had chosen a more ubiquitous field of law.)
- **Do you think you want to remain in private practice, or might you be tempted to move into industry one day, or perhaps start your own law firm?** (Not all legal fields will 'port' into industry easily later on, no matter how technically capable you may have become. Similarly, certain fields of law lend themselves to entrepreneurial ventures more so than others.)
- **Have you considered the future direction of the legal market?** (Where might your current choices position you in perhaps 5-10 years' time in terms of job security based on what is happening now?)

These issues are all examples of the kinds of questions a reputable recruitment consultancy should be asking you. Our role isn't to judge you, nor is it to tell you what you should do, rather we are here to listen and to advise. We think it is important to challenge your thinking, to help you to analyse what is important to you and to help you to understand the market and how to make the best choices you can.

## TOP TIP

Carry out as much research as possible to find out which law firms have the best reputation in your chosen field. Take advantage of your recruiter's knowledge of the market.



# Your most important choice to make - what practice area should I specialise in?

The choice of practice area is the singularly most important decision you will make in your legal career. The choices you make now will have a direct impact on your options in the years to come. Given that, for many, it will be a career lasting over 25 years it is clearly worth giving time and consideration to this choice. It's a key decision to make.

Your first consideration will probably be: is there a field of law which you've been exposed to that you think you would like to specialise in? If the answer is no then you really need to speak to us.

Sometimes trainees come to us and it is clear they feel they either picked the 'wrong' firm to train with or have perhaps been deployed unfairly, or not given enough variety. It happens, but thankfully not too often. No experience is wasted, since it might be able to be channelled in a slightly different direction. Your recruiter should be able to help you come up with a plan.

If you've had a good spread of work, the next consideration is arguably the most important: what do you enjoy doing the most? Very often the distinction starts with a decision on whether you want to be a contentious lawyer, a non-contentious one, or both.

You're likely to be doing this work every day for the majority of your working life, so clearly it needs to be something that sustains your interest and which you will enjoy for the long term.

Bespoke career advice is something that is second nature to us. So, if you are unclear on the best way forward we can help you get things straight in your mind.

## TOP TIP

As an overall approach, focus on the work – everything else is less important at this stage. Legal skills are what prospective employers will focus on first and foremost.

## Some Do's and Don'ts

- Don't pick a department because of the people. People move on.
- Don't pick a discipline because the money is better. It's better to be happy and to steer your career towards better earnings gradually than to take an inflated NQ rate. You may regret it later.
- Don't take an offer because it's the easy option, or to avoid looking at the market. It's better to take the active step of finding the right role for you in the long term than to be passive. Most people only get this opportunity once. If you make a mistake, it can sometimes be difficult to rectify.
- Do be objective in your thinking, and remember that if you do make a mistake, things can be corrected later, but there is usually a trade-off to be had to alleviate the effects of unfortunate career choices.
- Don't be overly influenced by the working environment and a firm's premises - firms move offices and certainly with regional firms you should be wary of judging their expertise by their postcode.
- Do consider the future realistically. Where will you want to live in a few years' time? What lifestyle changes and shifts in priorities do you anticipate?
  - A City of London salary won't be maintained in a regional city, if you want to relocate.
  - If you want to relocate closer to family in a rural part of the North later in your career, but you loved your debt capital markets and structured finance seats above all others, you may need some advice on the choices to make and when to make them.
  - If you have longer term aspirations of working offshore, you'll need to research what skills and experience are the most marketable in those places and steer towards those fields of law.
  - If you want to work in-house, there are practice areas you can qualify into which will render it more likely to happen.
  - What are the potential changes to the legal profession or the economy which might affect your choices? The commoditisation of certain areas of legal practice and cuts in public funding are both market trends you should consider and assume will continue at least for the medium term, then factor that into your thinking so your choice is as fully informed as possible.

**Be aware of the latest opportunities by signing up for our regular Jobscast emails and monthly 'NQ Bulletin' newsletter containing market insights, advice, and details of specific NQ opportunities - visit our**

## Get in touch

If you'd like to speak with us about your own circumstances and how we can assist you then please feel free to check out our profiles, and don't hesitate to make contact with any of our team on **0113 487 3080**. (We are happy to schedule conversations out of hours to suit you.)



**Anthony Brooke**  
DDI 0113 487 3081  
Mobile 07879 446552



**Gemma Crossley**  
DDI 0113 487 3083  
Mobile 07458 081458



**Harriet Ulyott**  
DDI 0113 487 3082  
Mobile 07458 081457



**Helena Ireland**  
DDI 0113 487 3086  
Mobile 07458 081454

**Brooke Thornham  
Consulting**

[www.brookethornham.com](http://www.brookethornham.com)  
0113 487 3080

**Leeds**  
No 1 Aire Street  
Leeds  
West Yorkshire  
LS1 4PR

**Manchester**  
Chancery Place  
50 Brown Street  
Manchester  
M2 2JG