THE ENGLISH JUDICIAL SYSTEM:

PROCESS OF BECOMING LEGAL PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

When you ask a child in his tender age the profession he/she would like to engage in when they grow up, most answers we normal receive are based on professionalism. They tend to always give professional occupations as their wishes such as being a medical doctor, a lawyer, accountant or some sorts of other professional jobs. Ever forth they work their ways towards their dreams, just like all adults do. Some of the times people have the general assumptions that the roles of those in the legal profession is just to go to court and help win cases even though their works require more than that. But a major problems faces us, because most people keep wondering what the legal profession requires of them, what are their roles in the society, what are the benefits one gains from it, what are the remunerations, how could they possibly work their ways to becoming one? And more other questions come into people’s mind.

For all these reasons, we shall discuss all of these in this essay. Who is a professional, are there really an educational process which is required to go through before becoming a solicitor or barrister and even a judge, who is eligible to becoming one, is it only law students in the university that can go into the law profession or even graduates of any course? Moreover, what are the duties of lawyers, their appointments by clients, their discipline for professional misconduct and the differences between a solicitor and a barrister? For the judges, what the roles of the judges are what part they play in the legal system, their appointments, remunerations, retirements and sanctions against them will be further discussed in this essay.

Finally, after we must have known the roles, duties and significance of the legal professional in the UK court system, we shall conclude all by highlighting the basic advantages and disadvantages of these in the English Legal System; are they just there to constitute a nuisance of they are actually there to serve in the interest of justice and the public.

Keywords: Lawyers, UK, Judges, Courts, Prosecution, Inns of court, Pupilage, hierarchy, Queen’s Council, junior barristers, Solicitors, barristers, Client, Bar Professional training course (BPTC), Legal Practice course (LPC), Public Access Rule, CAB rank rule, Courts and Legal Services Act, Access to Justice Act, judiciary, Judicial Appointment Commission, Retirement, Appointment, Dismissal, Superior courts, inferior courts, Public Access rule, Common Professional Examination, Conversion course, Apprentice, Judiciary, Lord Chancellor, Professionals, Law, Client, Legal, Misconduct.
INTRODUCTION

Legal professional is a broad term, and in other not to misinterpret the term we must take a critical examination of it. Starting by the word professional, the question that faces us is who is a professional? A professional is a member of a vocation founded upon specialized educational training. It also means a person who has obtained a degree in a professional field and it’s often used more generally to denote a person with a white collar job[1].

Legal professionals may consist of different areas of work starting from lawyers, barristers, judges in the law courts, clerks of the law courts, solicitors, attorneys, Legal secretaries and legal advisors[2]. But the layman term concerning legal practitioners are the judges, lawyers, barristers and the solicitors.

A lawyer, according to Black’s Law Dictionary, is “a person learned in the law; as an attorney, counsel or solicitor; a person licensed to practice law,”[3] He is an officer in court and an individual who defends a person or entity in various legal proceedings[4]. For a person to be a good lawyer the individual must possess a good intelligence, must be familiar with all the court procedures and methods, must like to read with good study and comprehension skills, with a good personality and the willingness to work.

Lawyers have different names and the word has different meanings and definitions all over the world. For example, in Australia lawyers are referred to as barristers and solicitors, in Canada someone who has been called to bar is referred to as lawyers, in England, lawyers refer to broad varieties of law-trained persons and in United States the term lawyer refers to attorneys who may practice law[5].

Furthermore, a lead person who presides over a court of law either alone or as part of a panel of judges is known as a judge[6].

In this essay, we will be shedding more light into who the legal practitioners are in the UK, knowing more about their roles and functions in the society, their importance to the legal system, how to become one, their professional ettiques and their appointment processes.

Chapter 1: The Barristers

The word lawyer is a general composition of solicitors and barristers in the UK. Being a lawyer could be related to being in medical profession in which all of them will be referred to as doctors but with various areas of specialization, some will be physicians, some will be surgeons and some will be dentists. This is the same in relation to law where all are referred to as lawyer in a generic name but have various areas of specialization.

In the UK, which has the English legal system is one of the three (3) in the world that have divided lawyers into solicitors and barristers[7]. Being a solicitor or barrister in the UK requires different and specific traditions, customs, and training.

Entry into becoming a barrister in the UK requires long, intensive dedication and prolonged academic study in order to get expert knowledge needed for the profession. Most of the time it is the barristers that people refer to as Court Advocate[8] as most of the time the works they do are mainly to go to court and have competent representation of their clients. Majority of barristers concentrate on advocacy although there are some who specialize in other areas such as tax law, company law who rarely appear before the court.[9]

Barristers give legal advice to their clients, they prepare pleadings (summary of cases), and they write legal opinions. Usually barristers work in chambers. A chamber consists of a group of barristers usually 15-20 forming partnership. In addition they will normally have a barrister’s clerk who will act as a business manager, allocating works for the barristers, negotiating their fees and handles or deals their work loads[10]

To become a barrister in the UK, usually the person must possess a degree in law but in the instance where the individual has another degree, the person will write a common professional examination[11]. This is a one year course that teaches the core courses of law. After this, the individual will go ahead into bar vocational training course (formerly known as bar vocational Course). While having this course, the person is required to be a member of one of the four (4) Inns of Court in the UK[12] and have 12 dinners. After the student has passed the vocational course then he/she is called to bar, this does not mean that the individual has become a qualified barrister. The aim of the joining of the Inns of Court is to learn the ettiques of the profession meet other training barristers and meet qualified barrister. Most

[8] Ibid P.539.
importantly, it is the Inns of Court in which the person is a member that will call the person to bar\(^{[13]}\).

The next stage after this is Pupillage. In this, the trainee barrister will attach himself and work under a barrister for one year. This one year apprehentice is divided into two stages. In the first six months, the trainee will shadow the barrister without actually doing any legal work in the sense that; he/she will just be with the barrister with the purpose of just watching and leaning from him. The second six months is when he start practicing and doing some legal works but under the supervision of the barrister. During this time he is eligible to appear before the court and conduct cases but all of these will be under the supervision of the barrister. While in pupillage, the trainee barrister will be paid some salary which is quite low, but after completing this one year, he/she will then be recognized as a full barrister\(^{[14]}\).

There are various types of barristers in the UK; they are junior barristers and Queen's council. The queen’s council is barrister with at least 10 years of experience, expert knowledge and with an advocacy qualification. They command and higher fees for their recognized level of expertise. When a Queen’s council is hearing a case in court, they will usually have a junior barrister assisting with the case. On the other hand, junior barristers are qualified barristers, but any barrister who is not a Queen's council is referred to as junior barristers\(^{[15]}\).

All barristers exercise the right of audience in the UK. This is the right that they can represent their client in any court. Before the client had to go through a solicitor in order to instruct a barrister, then the solicitor, then the solicitor will then appoint a barrister to the client's case. This was highly criticized as it was creating unnecessary expenses for the client who will pay the solicitor’s fee and at the same time pay the barrister’s fee. In order to combat this bar, first introduced a bar direct by which certain professionals such as Accountants surveyors could access a barrister without going through a solicitor. Later, it was extended to other professionals, then in September 2004, Public Access Rule was established which allowed anybody to access a barrister\(^{[16]}\). To allow this, the barrister must have a minimum of 3 years experience, must be registered as a public access barrister and the barrister must access and make sure that it is in the best interest of the client to access him directly.

Finally on a barristers, complains could be filed against a barrister and therefore be taken and sued to court. In the instance where a barrister accepts a case from a client through a solicitor, the barrister is not in contract with the client, therefore cannot be sued based on contract law nor sue the client if his fees are not paid. However, barristers can be sued by the client based on Tort law (negligence) for

\[^{[13]}\] See supra note 7. P.594.


\[^{[15]}\] Ibid, P. 206.

\[^{[16]}\] See supra note 14, P.204.
incorrect or inappropriate advice as was established in the case of Saif Ali v Sydney Mitchell and co (1980). In this case the barrister gave incorrect advice to the client. Also, a client can sue a barrister for negligence in conduct of advocacy in court i.e. inappropriate actions in court as was in Hall v Simons (2000)[17]. Also the bar council could disbar a barrister on the basis of serious professional misconduct.

Most times barristers specialize in a specific area of law e.g. land law, family law, tort etc. It is important to note that barrister’s specialization could be misleading as many barristers may have a quite wide range of work and a variety of common law, thereby with wide knowledge of law.[18]

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CHAPTER 2: THE SOLICITORS

Solicitors likewise to being a barrister, their works also requires intensive and long academic preparations. Currently in the UK, there are over 6000 solicitors practicing under the supervision of the Law Society[19]. A solicitor is a general practitioner, they deal directly with clients and they appoint barristers for client’s case. We can trace the origins of solicitors back to Attornatus, a medieval officer of the court whose main was to assist the client in the initial stage of their case. Later on, a group of people practicing in court of chancery came to be known as solicitors and they perform various miscellaneous tasks for employers such as land owners and attorneys. It was until 1831 that they were given the royal charter, they were not accepted into the Inns of Court, and therefore they formed their own distinct profession[20].

All solicitors only acts on behalf of their client in the lower courts of the UK such as the Magistrates Court and the County Court. In the instance where the case will go on an appeal, they will have to pass the case onto a barrister whom it will take more time before getting familiar with the client’s case, this was criticized a lot. However the alteration of the solicitor’s right of audience was brought by the Court and Legal Services Act 1990 and also the Access to Justice Act 1999 both which provided that all solicitors could be able to represent their clients in any court of the UK[21].

Solicitors work either as a sole practitioner or in partnership. While working in partnership their number is unlimited and the works that they do depends on the firm that they are working in. Mostly they do a lot of administrative works such as dealing with conveyances, interviewing clients, drafting documents and

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[17] Ibid, P.207.
contracts, drawing up will and could also represent their clients in court\textsuperscript{[22]}. Most solicitors have a wide knowledge of law and can give clients various advice based on those needed. However, when a solicitor works in a large law firm, they may specialize in only one area of law\textsuperscript{[23]}. 

The Education process for being a solicitor starts with a degree in law, in instances where that is not present; the individual will go for a common professional Examination, a one year course teaching the main core courses in law. After this, the individual will proceed to a Legal Practice Course (LPC), this course occurs for one year and includes training such as interviewing clients, negotiations, advocacy, legal research and drafting of documents but in general, the skills needed in the profession. After completing this course, the individual is still not yet a solicitor; he/she will have to go for a two (2) year training (apprentice) in a solicitor firm. This will last for two years and the main purpose of this is to get practical experience. The training could also be undertaken in a certain legal organization such as crown Prosecution Service, legal department or local authority. During this training the trainee solicitor will be paid but a little less than the actual solicitor’s fees and he/she will be practicing under the supervision of the solicitor. In addition, the trainee solicitor will complete a 20 days Professional Skill course testing his/her skills learnt at LPC. After all of these steps have been completed, he/she will be admitted as a solicitor by the law society and therefore become a qualified Solicitor\textsuperscript{[24]}.

We must note that solicitors deal directly with clients, therefore, there is a contract between the solicitor and the client. Definitely if the client does not pay the solicitor’s fee, he can sue based on contract law and likewise the client, he/she can sue the solicitor for breach of contract if the solicitor fails to do his duty as expected and necessary.

Furthermore, the client can sue a solicitor based on Tort Law (Negligence) as established in Griffon v Dawson (1993), in this case, the client sued the solicitors for not doing their role properly during the divorce proceeding against her husband and she lost, the court ordered the solicitors to pay her 21,000 pounds for compensation\textsuperscript{[25]}.

Lastly, the Office for Supervision of Solicitors (OSS) which was established after the abolishment of the Legal Services Ombudsman in 1996 by the Law society serves as a watch dog on solicitors. This body can withdraw license from a solicitor and stop the solicitor from practicing based on professional misconduct.

\textsuperscript{[22]} Ibid, P.200. 
\textsuperscript{[23]} See supra note 19, P.200. 
\textsuperscript{[24]} See infra note 26, P. 198. 
\textsuperscript{[25]} See infra note 26, P.202.
Chapter 3: The Judiciary In The UK

The judiciary is a general name given to judges in the English Legal System. Although there are different types of judges and level of judges, their roles are the same which are listening cases in a court and interpreting and applying the law to the facts of the case in an unbiased manner.

The types of judges in the UK include superior and inferior judges. Just like the hierarchy of courts, it is the same with judges. The superior judges starts from the High court Judges (Puisine Judges), the Lord Justices of Appeal who sits in the Court of Appeal (both civil and criminal divisions), and the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary (Law lord) who sits in the House of Lords which is now Supreme court, this will be further discussed as we go on in this chapter. The inferior judges include the Circuit judges, the District judges, Recorders and the Chairmen of Tribunal[26].

The Qualifications for all of these differ as they as well differ in roles, positions and functions. As set out in the Court and Legal Services act 1990 which broke the monopoly of only barristers becoming judges, it enabled solicitors the opportunity to also become judges[27].

Before becoming a judge at any level, one must have been qualified as a barrister or solicitor, qualification is the main criteria not necessarily must have been practicing. Also in 1994, the Lord Chancellor lifted the ban which as prevented lawyers in Civil Services and Crown Prosecution services from becoming judges; this enhanced the opportunity of having more judges and more potential candidates.

The Qualifications for becoming a district judge include 7 years of qualification as a solicitor or barrister. For becoming a district judge, one is to have 10 years qualification as a lawyer or 3 years experience from being a district judge. For Circuit judges, they may possess the holding of a post of a recorder, may also have possession of either a 10 years crown court of county court qualification under the Court and Legal Services Act 1990.furthermore, the individual must have been a district judges, social security commissioner, chairman of an industrial tribunal or stipendiary magistrate for 3 years[28]. Being a High Court Judge requires 10 years as a lawyer or 2 year experience as a Circuit judge. Becoming a Lord Justice of Appeal requires 10 years experience from being a Lord Justices of Appeal and lastly, becoming a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, requires the holding of high judicial office for 2 years and possession of 15 years in a supreme court as provided by the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990[29].

One of the key significant changes to the judiciary in the UK is the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, it made a lot of changes to the judiciary in the UK and

[29] Ibid, P.240.
the main reason behind this is to further enhance separation of powers and also to promote Independence of the Judiciary.

A key significant of this act was to the role and functions of the Lord Chancellor. Over the years, the Lord Chancellor had occupied a unique position in the UK. He was a member of the three arms of government; by this he exercised all the powers of government[30]. In his role then, he was the head of the judiciary, he was the speaker of the House of Lords, he was a judge in the House of Lords, and in regards to appointment of judges; he directly appoints inferior judges and nominates superior judges for appointment by the queen.

However with this constitutional Reform Act 2005, most of his powers were reduced. First, the Lord Chancellor has ceased to be the head of the judiciary as the new head of the judiciary is now the Lord chief justice who is also the president of the courts in England and Whales. Secondly, the Lord Chancellor’s automatic link between his post and the lord speakership of the House of Lords was broken as the post of the Lord Speaker was created. Thirdly, the Lord Chancellor does not sit as a judge in the Supreme Court. Furthermore, he is required to take an oath of office to always respect the rule of law, defend the independence of the judiciary and ensure the provision of resources for efficient and effective running of the judiciary. Lastly, the Lord Chancellor no longer appoints judges; this is now carried out by the Judicial Appointment Commission (JAC) created under the section 6(1) of the act[31].

Before the act, the process of appointing judges by the lord chancellor is as follows; for lords of appeal in ordinary (law lords), the lord chancellor makes a list of those he thinks should be Law Lords and passes the list to the Prime minister who selects somebody from the list and advices the queen on who to appoint to the post. There are 12 law lords who sit in the appellate committee of the House of Lords. In most cases the first choice candidate of the Lord Chancellor is the one who gets the appointment[32]. These law lords hear criminal and civil cases appeal where the case involves a point of law.

The justices of appeal are also appointed just as law lords are. It involves the Lord Chancellor making a list and sending the list to the Prime Minister who makes a selection and advices the queen on appointing. The Lord Justices of appeal sits in both criminal and civil division thereby hearing criminal and civil cases. The works of judges in court of appeal is quite more than those in the House of Lords; therefore high court judges usually form part of a panel that helps with their workloads especially in the criminal division. So when hearing a criminal appeal case, there may be a lord justice of appeal and two high court judges hearing the case[33].

For high court judges, the Lord Chancellor could invite people for it, but the position of the judgeship of the high court has been advertised since 1998. The workloads of high court judges are quite much as they act as deputy to the lord justices of appeal in some criminal cases. Precisely, there have been some discouragements for barristers while thinking of becoming a high court judge is because of enumeration. A Queen Council earns an annual salary of about 500,000 pounds while a high court judge earns an amount far low annually; they earn about 150,000 pounds annually. Also, for security of pension, they are required to have served for at least 20 years while before it was just 15 years\footnote{Ibid, P.215.}. All of these constitutes a bit to why they abstain a bit from being a high court judge. However, their appointment includes that the Lord Chancellor looks at those who applies and he makes his selection, this is passed to the queen who will officially appoint the individual to the position of a high court judge.

Generally, for inferior Judges the Lord Chancellor is directly responsible for their appointment based on the applications of the particular applicants. As at now the position of the district judges and the circuit judges are advertised and it is based on the requirements placed in the advertisement that applications will be made. The first advertisement that was made for the position of the circuit judge was stated that applicants must be 45 and 60. Their appointment includes an interview by a panel made up of a serving judge, a layperson and somebody from the Lord Chancellor’s office. The panel makes their selection and passes it to the Lord Chancellor who officially appoints the person into office\footnote{See supra note 33, P.215.}. “There is only one crown court but this is divided into six distinct circuits which are serviced by circuit judges who sit as county court judges to hear civil cases. As at the moment, there are about 606 circuit judges currently referred to as “Your Honor”\footnote{Ibid, P. 238.}.

All of these appointments process are now a story of the past. The appointment processes of judges is now carried out by the Judicial Appointment Commission, although it has appointment in its name it’s rather a selecting body as the official appointment is made by the Queen. The commission is made up of 15 members consisting of 5 laypersons, 6 judges, 1 magistrates, 1 solicitor, 1 barrister and 1 tribunal member and s.63(2) requires that the selection of the judiciary should be solely based on merit\footnote{Cownie/Bradney/Burton, judges and judges, English Legal system in Context, Oxford university press, New York, 2007, P.171.}.

The Selection process by the JAC differs from the levels of judges. Starting with the inferior judges and the High Court judges, their selection process starts with an advertisement placed by the JAC which states the requirements and qualifications needed for the position. Then following this, people will apply and JAC will check their application, make a list of those best suited for the job and
invite those who meet the requirements to a selection day. On the selection day, the applicants will be given an examination, interviewed and given a role play which tests their ability on becoming a judge. While doing these, JAC checks for intellectual capacity, integrity, ability to communicate, objectivity, independence of mind and intelligence. JAC will then make a list of those who succeed in these and pass it over to the Lord Chancellor who can accept or reject it with a tangible reason for rejection. If the Lord Chancellor accepts it, then the queen will appoint the individual into office.

For Lord Justices of Appeal, their appointment process includes that JAC makes announcement of the vacant position, then people applies. The applications of those who apply is checked by a selection committee consisting of the Lord Chief Justice and a few members of the JAC. They check the applications and select the best person suited for the job of being a Lord Justice of Appeal. After, this selection will be passed directly to the Queen who will appoint the individual into position.

In the case of the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, just like other processes the advertisement will be placed by JAC and people will apply. The JAC will check the applications and make a list of those best qualified for the job. The list is the passes to a selection commission made up of a JAC member, the President and the Deputy President of the Supreme Court. They make their selection and pass it to the Lord Chancellor who again has the power to accept or reject on a tangible reason. If the Lord Chancellor accepts it, he will pass the selection to the Prime Minister who will then advice the Queen on appointing, once the Queen appoints the individual, and then the selection process is finished.

The training of the judiciary is carried out by the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) set up in 1975[^38]. Before the establishment of JSB, the training of the judiciary is minimal. The training of newly elected magistrates chairmen, deputy district judges and district judges is carried out by the magisterial committee of JSB. This committee is also responsible for the training of the lay magistrates, although this is carried out locally by the Magistrate’s court committee. The JSB is also responsible for the instructions and training to all pat time and full time judges. The jurisdiction of judges are different thereby its carried out by 5 different committee; they are criminal, civil, tribunals, family and magisterial, while the equal treatment advisory committee provides advice and supports for all the above committees. The JSB is constituted of judges, a few leading academic and some professionals[^39].

The judicial official retirement age of judges is 70. Formerly, it was 75 but Judicial Pension and Retirement Act 1993 reduced High court judges retirement age from 75 while the other judges’ 72 to 70. When a judge reaches the age of

[^39]: See infra note 41, P. 252.
70, they could still continue service if it were in the interest of public\textsuperscript{[40]} or at the Lord Chancellor’s discretion\textsuperscript{[41]}. Judges generally have security of tenure as provided for by the Settlement act 1700 meaning that they cannot be removed just anyhow. In regards to lord justices of appeal, high court judges and circuit judges they have provisions in the senior court Act 1981. It provides that they remain in office as far as they are in good conduct and they can only be removed by the monarchy on the address of the two houses of parliament. Furthermore, the judges in Supreme Court also enjoy this security of tenure. The judges can only be removed on the bases of criminal convictions, although in such a circumstance the judge will normally resign, the act further provided that in a situation where the judge cannot perform his duty based on the fact that he is incapable or infirmity, he/she should be compulsorily resigned\textsuperscript{[42]}.

Now, a question that faces us is that should there be a career “Judiciary” which is not present in the UK unlike most other continental countries. In these countries, becoming a judge is a career choice made by the individual when they already have their legal qualifications. They will not practice as a lawyer as it is in the UK, rather once they qualify to be judges they will sit in junior posts hoping to be gaining promotions as they proceed in their career line.


CONCLUSION

Over the centuries, the English legal system has been a pace setter for most countries in the world practicing common law. The United Kingdom ruling is strictly based on the following of the constitution and convections therefore; the English legal system is based on the grounds of absolute regards to the justice of individuals. As a result of this all the processes explained above are duly followed without any exceptions. Although we cannot have a perfect system but indeed we can have a system close to perfections.

As we have seen in this essay, becoming a barrister or solicitor requires different area of academic backgrounds, they both have different regulating body, area of specialization and what they do. Most importantly, we have seen how hard it is to become a lawyer and conduct all the ethics without going wrong; the need to duly represent the interests of the client zealously and jealously to avoid professional misconduct. Above all, we now know what being a judge requires of us, how to successfully become one at various hierarchy. We have seen the reason why most of the time we have old people with gray hair becoming judges because the requirement for becoming one is quite demanding.

I believe with this essay, we now understand what we are required of and I am sure we can put anyone who wishes to go into the profession on the right path without any absolute doubt of misleading them.
REFERENCES


