



BECOMING A BARRISTER



A barrister is a type of lawyer who specialises in court assistance and giving legal opinions.

This is often done through court cases that focus on improving a situation for a particular group or person.

Functions of Barristers

Barristers draft legal opinions. For example, a barrister might give you a legal opinion on whether or not you have a good legal case against someone with whom you have had a dispute.

The barrister may then write the legal documents that must be filed in the case.



If the case comes to trial, the barrister may represent you in court, speak on your behalf and argue your case before the judge.

Your barrister may also be the person who negotiates a settlement of your case instead of it going to trial.

How to Become a Barrister in Ireland

Academic Stage

Graduates (with approved law degrees) who would like to practice as a barrister must complete **the Barrister-at-Law degree course** in the Society of the King's Inns. Applicants for this degree must first have passed certain 'core subjects' in their law degrees and must pass an entrance examination.

(Note: search 'TABLE 21 SCHEDULE OF LAW DEGREES' online to see list of approved law degrees.)

To be eligible to apply for Kings Inns, students must have passed the following subjects during their degree:

- Land Law (including Law of Succession)
- Equity
- Administration Law
- Company Law
- Law of the European Union
- Jurisprudence



King's Inns will also require entrants to sit and pass an entrance examination involving the following five subjects:

- Law of Contract
- Criminal Law
- Irish Constitutional Law
- Law of Torts
- Law of Evidence

FUN FACT

The King's Inn is the oldest institution of legal education in Ireland!



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Vocational Stage

Students must undertake the one-year full-time, or the two year (part-time), Degree of Barrister-at-Law at King's Inns. You can only be admitted to this professional course after you have completed an approved law qualification and satisfied the entry requirements for King's Inns.

Entering Practise

The first year of your practise must be spent as a pupil (also known as a one-year 'pupillage') with a qualified Dublin-based barrister. This is similar to an apprenticeship where a junior barrister learns by shadowing a more senior member of the profession. It is the responsibility of the newly qualified barrister to secure a master. During this year, the pupil is not paid.

The Aims of Pupillage are:

- to prepare pupils (who have been called to the Bar) for practice at The Bar of Ireland.

- to prepare pupils to take responsibility for their own professional development and practice.

- to develop further the knowledge, skills, and experience gained at the vocational stage of training.

- to develop the pupil's professional and ethical approach to practice as a barrister.

Junior and Senior Counsel

If you are involved in a court case, you may come across junior and senior counsel.



When barristers are first "*called to the Bar*", they act as junior counsel. A junior counsel may have the letters **BL** after their name, which stand for "**Barrister at Law**".

Junior counsel tends to do most of the paperwork in cases (drafting legal documents) and they represent clients mainly in the lower courts (the District Court and the Circuit Court).

After about 10 to 15 years of practising as a junior counsel, a barrister may apply to become a **senior counsel**. This is sometimes called "*taking silk*" because the senior counsel's gown was traditionally made of silk. A senior counsel may have the letters **SC** after his/her name.

Senior counsel are very experienced advocates who represent clients in the High Court, the Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court.

Why do barristers wear wigs?

The wearing of horsehair wigs in court is a tradition inherited from British predecessors.

The trend was started by Louis XIV of France. A balding scalp was considered as a sign that someone had contracted syphilis.

Therefore, the king disguised his scalp using a wig. This trend quickly spread throughout the upper and middle-classes in Europe including to Britain where Charles II followed suit.

Wigs became part of proper court dress because barristers were also considered as part of middle-class society.





Do you remember your first time in court?

Vividly – I was a bag of nerves until I got to my feet, then things flowed well enough. We didn't get bail, but just getting that first hearing under my belt was a huge milestone – it suddenly felt real that I was a barrister, and no longer just training to be one.

What was your most memorable win?

Probably defending in a trial in which my client was charged with causing grievous bodily harm with intent and several other offences. The defence was self-defence. My client was acquitted (cleared) on all charges and walked free from court.



What advice would you give to young aspiring barristers?

Go for it. There is so much goodwill and support out there, especially through the Inns, and you should not be afraid to ask for it. The bar has a wonderful ethos of integrity and excellence, and although these values unite most barristers, they are otherwise a hugely diverse bunch with a wide array of different backgrounds, personalities, and styles of advocacy.

Other areas of employment

In the public sector, barristers can find work in the **Office of the Attorney General**, the **Office of the Director of Public Prosecution**, the **Law Reform Commission**, the **Courts Service**, and the **Legal Aid Board**. They may also take on prosecution work on behalf of the state. The Civil Service has been a traditional career path for many qualified barristers.