

Qualifying as a Costs Lawyer

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What is a Costs Lawyer?

A Costs Lawyer is a regulated specialist lawyer who deals with all areas of costs in legal work. They can be appointed by courts, solicitors, members of the public and businesses to undertake specific work including:

- drafting Bills and Schedules of Costs;
- drafting Points of Dispute and Replies to claims for costs;
- assisting in the preparation of costs budgets and advise on costs budgets presented by an opposing party;
- advising on retainers and fee arrangements between clients and their legal advisors;
- advising on and preparing claims for costs from public funds (Legal Aid);
- advising on disputes between solicitors and their clients;
- acting as costs mediators or arbitrators in costs disputes;

As regulated legal professionals, Costs Lawyers are authorised to undertake specific reserved legal activities:

- The conduct of litigation
- The administration of oaths
- The exercise of a right of audience, which means that you could appear in court on behalf of your clients on matters relating to costs.

As a Costs Lawyer you would have a career in law, with a focus on financial analysis. You would have to adhere to a code of conduct, undertake continuing professional development and carry professional indemnity insurance.

What does a Costs Lawyer do?

The work historically derives from the following three key areas:

- Costs between the parties;
- Solicitor and client costs;
- Legal aid/public funding.

Until recently, most of the work you would undertake as a Costs Lawyer would be carried out after the settlement of a matter. More recently, however, the introduction of costs budgeting has meant that Costs Lawyers are an integral part of a case (whichever party is giving the instructions) and, as a Costs Lawyer, you may be heavily involved in the management of the claim from a very early stage right through settlement of the claim and to the conclusion of matters relating to costs.

As a Costs Lawyer, your work is likely to be considerably varied and what work you would undertake would depend upon where you work – this may be in-house in a solicitor’s firm, within a firm dealing solely with legal costs or you could work independently. Some Costs Lawyers deal with a particular specialism (i.e. work solely on behalf of claimants or defendants or only take on legal aid work) whilst others may deal with a broad spectrum of work.

What will I be doing?

As a Costs Lawyer, your work could include:

- Advising on retainers and fee arrangements between clients and their legal advisors;
- Assisting in the preparation of costs budgets and advise on costs budgets presented by an opposing party
- Attending Costs and Case Management Conferences
- Advising on costs orders
- Drafting bills of costs and schedules;
- Drafting points of dispute and replies to points of dispute;
- Advising on costs offers and negotiate
- Attending detailed assessment hearings (advocacy)
- Instructing costs counsel to attend detailed assessment hearings
- Attending mediation (ADR)
- Dealing with the outcome of provisional assessment
- Preparing applications relevant to costs including appeals.
- Advising on and preparing claims for costs from public funds (legal aid)
- Advising on disputes between solicitors and their clients

- Acting as costs mediators or arbitrators in costs disputes

How to qualify as a Costs Lawyer

Entry requirements

You don't have to be a qualified lawyer, or to have previously studied law, to qualify as a costs lawyer. The basic entry requirements are as follows:

1. Four GCSEs at grade C or above, English and Maths being compulsory; or
2. Two A level passes and 1 GCSE level to include English; or
3. Three AS level passes to include either English or Maths; or
4. GNVQ at intermediate or advance level, provided a communications skills element is included; or
5. Passed a written aptitude test set by the Association of Costs Lawyers (ACL).

If your first language is not English, or you have not studied your secondary education in English, you may need to demonstrate you have achieved a recognised English language qualification.

The minimum International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score required for entry to the programme is 6.0 overall with a minimum 5.5 in each component.

Just like everyone else who applies, mature students need to demonstrate academic ability and commitment to study.

All applicants must be ordinarily domiciled in England and Wales or working permanently in England and Wales.

Find out more about the entry requirements

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Requirements of Suitability

You must declare any information that might affect your suitability to be a trainee costs lawyer/costs

lawyer in accordance with the Trainee Costs Lawyer Training Rules 2020, Rule 5. In the event of any declarations ACL Training will consider your suitability and whether any conditions should be imposed. ACL Training may make any required checks including criminal records checks to ensure the suitability of an applicant. Failure to disclose, or the provision of misleading information on an application, can be taken into account by ACL Training when considering you to be a trainee costs lawyer.

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Qualifying course

You would need to complete the Costs Lawyers Training Course, run by ACL Training, which is taught at a level six academic qualification standard and includes assignments, compulsory practical seminars and end of unit examinations.

What you study and how long this part of the qualification takes depends on the qualifications you already hold. If you have no previous legal qualifications, you would need to complete all three parts of the course, which is currently three years, but if you have legal qualifications such as a qualifying law degree or Graduate Diploma in Law, you could apply for exemptions.

Find out more about the Costs Lawyers Training Course

Supervised practice

In addition to completing the course, you would also need to undertake three years of work experience in costs law and practice (Qualifying Experience) to qualify as a costs lawyer. This is work that is of costs nature, or work involving activities that require the application of costs law or procedure. A qualified costs lawyer must have undertaken this work for a period of 3 years or more. This could be as an employee, self-employed or working for a registered charity. The experience can be gained before, during or after study for the costs lawyer qualification, and does not need to be continuous.

Find out more about the supervised practice requirements

Apply for a Costs Lawyer practising certificate

When you have successfully completed both the course and your supervised practice, you can then apply to the CLSB for a Costs Lawyer practising certificate under which you will be afforded the rights to conduct the following Reserved Legal Activities under the Legal Services Act 2007:

- The exercise of a right of audience
- The conduct of litigation
- The administration of oaths

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