

# Browne Jacobson first law firm to join Ladder for Greater Birmingham campaign

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Browne Jacobson has become the first law firm to become an official partner of the Ladder for Greater Birmingham apprentice campaign.

The Ladder for Greater Birmingham campaign was launched in summer 2018 with the aim of creating thousands of new apprenticeships across Birmingham and Solihull. On 10 February, as part of National Apprenticeship Week 2023, the Apprenticeship Manager for The Ladder for Greater Birmingham, Justine Johnson, met with leading legal figures based in Birmingham to discuss raising awareness about the solicitor apprenticeship opportunities that exist in Birmingham, and to celebrate Browne Jacobson and Joanna Hughes, Director at Joanna Hughes Solicitor Apprenticeships, both becoming new partners with the Ladder for Birmingham.

Browne Jacobson, the first law firm to become a partner with the Ladder for Birmingham, has for two years been the UK's leading employer in the cross-sector Social Mobility Foundation Employer Index. The meeting took place at Browne Jacobson's offices, a brand new flagship commercial development at 103 Colmore Row.

Solicitor apprenticeships offer an alternative route to full qualification as a solicitor and are becoming increasingly popular. Joanna Hughes explains: "Like all apprenticeships, solicitor apprenticeships involve on-the-job training and at least 20% off-the-job based learning. Solicitor apprentices complete their apprenticeships with a degree and the professional exams SQE 1 and SQE 2 – just like more traditional trainee solicitors.

Solicitor apprenticeships are actually only one of a number of different types of legal apprenticeships, but degree-level apprenticeships such as solicitor apprenticeships are becoming more common in the professions. Indeed, UCAS has launched a set of 18 'Industry Guides' on apprenticeships, including a useful Guide on the legal profession, and some excellent new podcasts about apprenticeships. On 6 February UCAS issued a press release to say that from this autumn they will expand their service so that students can see more personalised options, including apprenticeships. From 2024, students will then be able to apply for apprenticeships through UCAS alongside an undergraduate degree application."

UCAS data shows that of the 53,000 students interested in studying Law at University or college, 38% of those are also interested in apprenticeships, that's over 20,000 potential solicitor apprentices ready for this September.

Claire Stripp, Head of Talent and Knowledge at Browne Jacobson and the lead for apprenticeships at Browne Jacobson, said: "Solicitor apprentices bring an energy and ethos to the profession which I think has been missing for a while, and they embed the legal academic learning in their practical experience, which enables them to be so valuable to colleagues and to clients."

Bridget Tatham, Partner and Executive Sponsor for Race at Browne Jacobson and Chair of ACCI (African Caribbean Community Initiative), a mental health charity based in the Midlands, added: "It is about choice; aspiring solicitors can decide which career path best suits them. And employers can take advantage of a diverse, enthused and bright pool of talent who want to be in control of their careers from an early start, and value the mix of work and learning. It is a brilliant start for those who will also gain from mentoring and sponsorship early on in their careers."

Justine Johnson, Ladder Manager, Ladder for Greater Birmingham, said: "The Ladder recognises the need for young people to be given access to a wide range of opportunities. I'm so pleased our collaboration will help to raise awareness not only to young people, but also

their parents and employers. There's much to like about doing a solicitor degree apprenticeship...no tuition fees, earning money, have work experience and come out ahead of those who have left university doing a traditional degree."

Solicitor apprentices can be employed not only by private practice law firms, but in-house legal teams too. Shazadi Stinton is General Counsel and Company Secretary at Moneysupermarket Group and has been employing and working with solicitor apprentices since 2018. Shazadi summarises her experience with working with these talented lawyers: "Having had the privilege of recruiting two solicitor apprentices, I cannot recommend it highly enough. My apprentices were keen and hard-working, contributing to the wider business and bringing an energy into the team that everyone benefited from. Apprenticeships are a great way of getting a more diverse and talented workforce, whilst for Apprentices themselves they get on the job training together with earning a salary as soon as they start. Solicitor Apprenticeships are great because they give another avenue for potential future lawyers who may be put off from going to university due to the high fees."

While solicitor apprenticeships are not inextricably linked to increasing opportunities for young people from low-income backgrounds, they can be a powerful social mobility tool. Alice Kinder, an Employment Lawyer at Bexley Beaumont, Vice President of the Birmingham Law Society, and Social Mobility Ambassador at The Law Society commented: "Apprenticeships can provide opportunities to talented individuals who would not otherwise be able to access them. High tuition fees and rising costs of living mean that some school leavers are looking for alternatives to university. Apprenticeships can allow someone to gain qualifications and progress their career whilst working. In turn, this means businesses can diversify their workforce and access new ideas and perspectives which can help them remain competitive."

The last word should go to current solicitor apprentices working in Birmingham: "I was always keen to work in law, so the solicitor apprenticeship was the ideal route for me as it allows you to study, and become a solicitor in six years, whilst earning a wage. The ability to apply the theory of law to my work in practice has been invaluable in building my confidence in my legal career. The opportunities to network and build relationships over a six-year period is also a fantastic element of the solicitor apprenticeship", says Sahnia Shouan, Solicitor Apprentice at Browne Jacobson.

It's a message echoed by Sahnia's colleague and Solicitor Apprentice Hollie Ingram, who commented: "Being a Solicitor Apprentice has awarded me with so many amazing opportunities and I am grateful to be working at a firm that is passionate about alternative routes into law. Not only have I gained invaluable and transferable skills whilst working at Browne Jacobson, I can confidently say I would not have had the same experience had I taken the traditional route into Law. Really getting your foot in the door early on in your career and having the opportunities to build on those networking and practical skills is crucial and one the Solicitor Apprenticeship offers. I love that Solicitor Apprentices are finally breaking the stigma around alternative routes into law."

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