

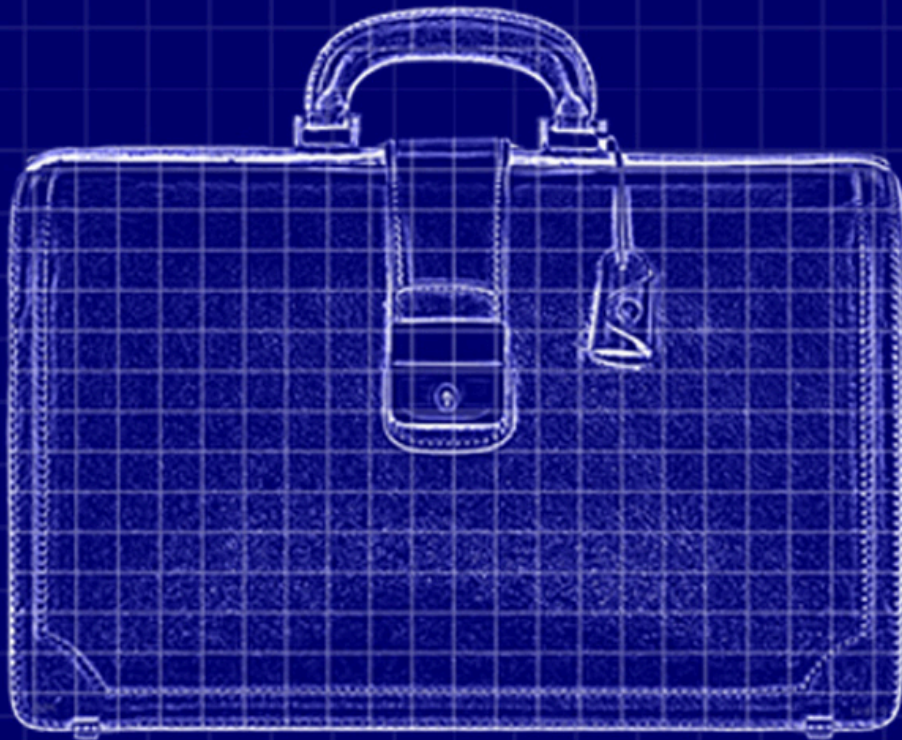
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The Blueprint

Thinking About a Law Degree?

A realistic guide for sixth formers



In this issue:

- What law really involves (not just what people say!)
- The routes into law and how they actually work
- What matters in sixth form (and what doesn't)

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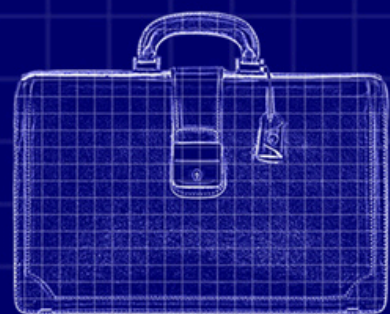
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Thinking About Law? Let's Be Honest First

Abdifatah Mahamed

I've known for a while that law was probably for me but not for the reasons most people assume.

I've always been interested in business: how companies make money, how they raise money, and how they actually operate behind the scenes. I've also always been a bit of a tech geek, and over time I realised that a lot of what makes big companies valuable isn't just the product but rather the legal protections behind it. For example, trademarks, designs and processes underpin what can keep businesses unique.

For a long time, I thought I'd end up in investment banking. But the more I reflected, the more I realised that what I actually enjoy is solving problems, especially the kind that don't have one clear answer. And when businesses face their biggest, messiest problems, lawyers are usually involved.

What I wish more sixth formers understood is that choosing law isn't just about liking debate or being good at essays. It's about choosing a competitive process.

Law has become more competitive over time. COVID disrupted exam cycles, qualification routes have changed, and solicitor apprenticeships have grown in popularity. Timing matters, and not everyone starts from the same place.

I realised law isn't a straight line at the end of my second year at university, when a group of us sat down and asked what we actually wanted to do after the degree. The answers were all over the place. That's when it clicked that there isn't one route into law, and there isn't one way to use a law degree.



Is law worth it?

There's no neat yes-or-no answer.

If you enjoy:

- reading and breaking things down
- thinking through problems with no clear answer
- understanding how businesses actually operate

Then law might be for you.

This guide isn't here to sell you law. It's here to help you understand the process before you commit.



The Law Journey (Without the Panic)

If you're in sixth form and feel like you should already have everything figured out, you're not alone—and you're probably being too hard on yourself. At this stage, certainty matters far less than direction.

If you already know you're interested in a degree apprenticeship, that's great. Start by looking up the firms that offer them. Check the entry requirements. Try to understand the type of work they actually do. You don't need to apply tomorrow just understanding your options early already puts you ahead.

If you're not sure yet, that's completely fine too.

One of the simplest habits you can build is keeping up with what's going on in the world. Nothing intense. Five minutes a day browsing business news—the BBC Business section or the FT's free articles are good places to start.

Read one story that interests you and move on. Over time, you start recognising companies, industries, and recurring issues. You'll notice when the same firm appears in a merger story one week and a regulatory dispute the next.

Commercial awareness—understanding how businesses operate, what drives them commercially, and how legal issues affect them—is one of the things law firms ask about most. It develops slowly, not overnight.

And if none of this clicks yet, the most useful thing you can do right now is still very simple: get the highest grades you reasonably can. Strong grades don't lock you into one path, but they keep doors open while you work things out. You don't need all the answers in sixth form. You just need options.

At this stage, focus on three things:

- Keep your grades as strong as possible
- Start paying attention to business news
- Explore options (university vs apprenticeships)



Grades, Competition & Different Paths in Law

Grades matter. There's no point pretending otherwise.

If you can leave sixth form with something like AAB, you put yourself in range for many City firms and competitive opportunities. That doesn't guarantee anything—but missing those grades often means more explaining, more applications, and more time.

Strong grades help because:

- They open more opportunities early
- They reduce the need to explain results later
- They keep more routes available

That doesn't mean you can't succeed without them. It just means the route may be less direct.

If your grades were affected by circumstances outside your control—illness, family, or something else. It's worth knowing that many firms won't hold that against you. They understand that life happens. What matters is that you're upfront about it in your application rather than leaving results unexplained.

One reason grades matter more now is simply that law has become more crowded. Through clearing, law has consistently been one of the most popular subjects picked up. More applicants don't mean better lawyers – but it does mean universities and firms need quick ways to filter. Grades are one of the easiest tools they have.

It's also important to say this clearly: not everyone wants the same end goal. When people talk about “law”, they often default to City firms. Law is a much broader profession than that.

Some people want to be:

- City lawyers working on commercial deals
- Barristers focused on advocacy and the courtroom
- Lawyers in criminal, family, or immigration law
- Lawyers working in-house, in policy, or alongside businesses



Different paths value different things. City firms tend to be more grades-focused early on. Other areas care more about commitment to the area, experience, and whether you actually understand the work.

You don't need to decide your final destination in sixth form — but understanding that there are multiple definitions of success can take a lot of pressure off.

Law Degree or a Non-Law Degree?

You do not need a law degree to become a solicitor or barrister.

A non-law degree can make sense if:

- You're not fully sure about law yet
- You'll perform better in another subject
- You're interested in a particular sector such as business, tech, or politics

A law degree can make sense if:

- You enjoy legal thinking
- You want an early structure
- You're confident you'll engage deeply with the subject

You can study almost any subject—from music to marketing to computer science—and still pivot into law later through a conversion route (traditionally known as the GDL) or newer SQE-based pathways where firms build legal training into their graduate programmes.

Neither route guarantees anything. Firms care far more about strong academics, motivation for law, and whether you understand what you're applying for.

At this stage, your job isn't to pick the perfect degree. It's to pick one you'll do well in and can explain confidently.



Don't Box Yourself In Too Early

This is something I didn't realise until later and it's probably my biggest regret.

I boxed myself in too early.

I'm the first person in my family to study law and to go through the UK university system. My mum studied in Italy, so she wasn't familiar with how things work here. I know a lot of sixth formers reading this will be in a similar position the first to go to university, or the first to navigate this system properly.

When you're in that position, there's pressure to get every decision right the first time. Changing course can feel like failure.

I want to be clear about something: I'm happy I studied law. I enjoyed it, I learnt a lot, and it's given me a strong foundation. This isn't regret in the sense of wishing I'd chosen wrong.

It's more of a grass-is-greener reflection. At times, I've wondered whether I could have studied something like computer science and still ended up in law later on. The honest answer is yes.

Being first-generation often means you don't know what options exist yet—not because you're less capable, but because no one's shown you the map. Once you understand the system, you get to make it work for you.

Flexibility isn't failure. It's part of the process.

If this sounds like you, you're not behind. You're just learning something new.

Outcomes Aren't Always Linear

I've been clear that grades matter and I stand by that.

But it's also important to say this.

I didn't leave sixth form with top grades. I got average grades and went to a non-Russell Group university. One of my close friends left with A*AA and we still ended up at the same university.

That doesn't mean grades are meaningless. It means the system isn't as predictable as people make it sound. Universities consider many factors: course demand, personal statements, timing, and context. Two people can take very different routes and still arrive at the same place.

What grades really affect is:

- How many options you have
- How early you get them
- How much explaining you'll need to do later

Stronger grades usually make things smoother. Weaker grades don't end the journey they just tend to make it longer and less straightforward.

The advice isn't "panic" or "be perfect". Do the best you reasonably can, knowing that the path isn't always linear and that where you start doesn't permanently define where you end up.



Final Thoughts: What Actually Matters in Sixth Form

If you take one thing away from this guide, let it be this:

You don't need to have everything figured out in sixth form. What you do need is to take this stage seriously.

Getting the highest grades you reasonably can is one of the few things fully within your control right now and it still makes almost every path easier later on. Grades won't decide your future on their own, but they give you flexibility while you're still working things out.

Alongside that:

- Stay curious
- Don't box yourself in too early
- Remember that there's more than one way to build a career in law

The goal isn't perfection. It's progress, patience, and keeping your options open.

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END OF GUIDE

