

# Careers in the Legal Profession



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## LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand the changing trends in the legal profession.
- Recognize the most common types of legal careers across Canada.
- Describe the educational requirements for various legal careers.
- Identify the job prospects as a legal professional.
- Find an adviser or mentor to help you.

## Introduction

You have decided to enter the legal profession. Your initial question may be where to start after graduation. This book will guide you through the process of job searching, resumé writing, and numerous other skill-building exercises to help you succeed in your search for a job and, ultimately, a career in the legal profession. To begin with, though, it will help to explore different legal careers and understand the requirements and responsibilities of each position. Job opportunities are plentiful, provided that you have acquired the appropriate education and skills and can position yourself accordingly.

## Changing Legal Profession

From the three independent functions of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Parliament to provincial and federal courts, along with the multitude of tribunals and municipal governments, the public has many ways to access justice. Each province and territory has a judicial council to manage the conduct of courts and judges. However, the need for affordable legal services for Canadians has become an issue and needs to be addressed. What then is the role of legal professionals within the legal system to aid in the public's access to justice?<sup>1</sup>

In Ontario, paralegals can provide a more affordable and accessible option to the public in need of legal services in certain areas of law. Can we see the modernization and licensing of paralegals progress throughout Canada as we move toward access to justice?

In other provinces in Canada, the paralegal role is evolving under the supervision of a lawyer, but there appears to be a resistance to regulating paralegals. In British Columbia, a lawyer may now have a designated paralegal who can perform additional duties under a lawyer's supervision, including providing legal advice and appearing before tribunals, as permitted, or

attending to family law mediations. It is hopeful that this will eventually lead to paralegals being regulated and providing lower fees, as well as greater access to justice for the British Columbia population.<sup>2</sup>

In Alberta, both legal assistants and paralegals are being recognized for the independent work they perform within the profession. While still not regulated, paralegals are able to take on more substantive roles under the supervision of a lawyer. The Alberta Association of Professional Paralegals is actively pursuing the regulation of the paralegal profession in order to create consistent standards of competence and education and to have paralegals recognized for their work.

The legal profession is slowly changing, and as it is adapting to this change, it is opening doors for individuals who are non-lawyers to work and take on more responsibility.

## Common Careers in the Legal Profession

You have made the decision to have a career in the legal profession. The first step is to understand the differences between the most common types of legal professional careers: legal administrative assistant or legal assistant, law clerk, paralegal, and immigration consultant. The specific duties and requirements for each role differ depending on the province, with the exception of an immigration consultant, which is federally regulated.

### BOX 1.1

#### DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A JOB AND A CAREER?

- A **job** is intended to be short-term employment.
- A **career** is a long-term progression in one particular field with opportunities for growth and advancement. A career generally requires a specific form of education.

Amongst laypeople, it is not uncommon for confusion to take place when attempting to understand the differences between a legal administrative assistant or a legal assistant, a law clerk, a paralegal, and an immigration consultant. There can be more ambiguity when you start to look at the roles from province to province (see Table 1.1). Not all positions are available in all **jurisdictions**. For example, law clerk positions are not used in British Columbia or Alberta, while the role in Ontario is a blend of paralegal and legal assistant duties. In some provinces, the title of law clerk can refer to a law school graduate who

is completing part of the articling process. Therefore, this title is not usually used within a law office.

The duties and responsibilities can also vary greatly. For example, in some provinces, a paralegal is an individual who works only under the supervision of a lawyer and does not provide legal services to the public for a fee. However, the law office may bill the client for the paralegal's services. They can also be known as legal assistants. Legal assistants in British Columbia tend to have more general clerical duties.

**TABLE 1.1 Overview of Roles Across Jurisdictions**

| Alberta  | British Columbia  | Nova Scotia   | Ontario  | Federal  |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal Assistant</li> <li>• Paralegal</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal Administrative Assistant</li> <li>• Paralegal</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal Administrative Assistant</li> <li>• Paralegal</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal Administrative Assistant</li> <li>• Law Clerk</li> <li>• Paralegal</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration Consultant</li> </ul> |

**BOX  
1.2**

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Looking for a job after graduation can be intimidating and all-consuming, but your work should not dominate or consume your daily life. It is imperative to find the balance between a rewarding career and life outside of the work environment. Your career will undoubtedly have numerous challenges and difficulties. Focusing solely on your career may come at the cost of your mental health, your relationships and family responsibilities, or your personal interests and hobbies.

Find other ways to define yourself. Do activities that you enjoy or try learning something new. Find different hobbies and new interests, join a club, learn a new skill, take a course, and find relationships outside of work. Do things that express who you are as an individual and not just your employment.

It is extremely vital to allocate time for you to decompress and recharge on a regular basis. In doing so, you will establish a solid foundation to achieve the balance between your work obligations and having a fulsome personal life that will safeguard both your mental and physical health.

# Alberta

## Legal Assistants and Paralegals

In Alberta, legal assistants do most of the administrative type of work. Daily duties include setting up meetings, photocopying, answering phone calls, scheduling appointments, and updating calendars. Whereas the role of a paralegal is expanding, and they are being recognized for the work they can do, paralegals are still not a self-regulating profession in Alberta. However, recognition of their training is giving more paralegals the ability to take on more of a substantive role and work independently in law firms. Their tasks would include conducting research, drafting pleadings, interviewing clients and witnesses, assisting a lawyer in court, and rarely, where allowed, representing clients in court matters. Any task would be under the supervision of a lawyer, and any resolution of a matter must be approved by the supervising lawyer. Although still prohibited under the Alberta *Legal Profession Act*,<sup>3</sup> the Law Society of Alberta does not pursue prosecution of independent paralegals attending Traffic Court for traffic infractions.

Paralegals can work in most areas of law, including criminal law, family law, human rights, civil litigation, real estate, corporate, and wills and estates. Since all resolution decisions must be reviewed with the supervising lawyer, paralegals are not required to have their own insurance.

Paralegals and legal assistants can both act as commissioners for oaths, and paralegals can have a billable rate for client files.

At the time of writing, licensing and regulating paralegals is being reviewed in the province. According to the Law Society of Alberta, “[p]aralegals are not accountable for their services, as there is no regulatory body to set or maintain standards of service. Paralegals are not required to follow a code of conduct. It is important to note that, unlike licensed lawyers, paralegals do not have professional liability insurance to cover the cost of any mistakes they may make.”<sup>4</sup> When describing who regulates the practice of paralegals in Alberta, the Law Society of Alberta states, “[t]here is no regulatory body for paralegals in Alberta. If there is a problem with the services provided by a paralegal, there is no recourse for review, complaint or discipline of the paralegal.”<sup>5</sup>

The Alberta Association of Professional Paralegals, formed in 1981, provides voluntary membership for both legal assistants and paralegals. The Association’s members include students, legal assistants, paralegals, and those who support the industry. They provide continuing education, mentorship, and networking opportunities and work toward advancing paralegals in Alberta to clarify and expand their roles.<sup>6</sup> They are actively pursuing the regulation of the paralegal profession to create consistent standards of competence and education and to have paralegals recognized for their work. An Innovation Sandbox was recently announced in Alberta, allowing

non-lawyers to apply for permission to provide limited scope legal services, which the Association hopes is the first step to the regulation of paralegals in Alberta.<sup>7</sup>

**BOX  
1.3**

### INNOVATION SANDBOX

Innovation sandboxes have been introduced by both the Law Society of Alberta and the Law Society of British Columbia.<sup>8</sup> They encourage the development of “innovative models for the delivery of legal services that cannot be currently offered due to existing regulatory requirements.”<sup>9</sup> This is an opportunity for paralegals to propose a concept or idea to provide access to justice to the public. It is a way for an unlicensed person to provide legal advice and assistance to meet the needs of the community. It is an interesting “grassroots” approach to the legal profession.

An individual may propose and apply through the Innovation Sandbox to address the legal needs of the community. Proposals are to be submitted to the Committee of the Law Society of Alberta or British Columbia. If accepted, they will receive an agreement from the Law Society setting out the conditions under which the applicant is able to provide services to the public.

Proposals must:

1. outline legal services proposed to provide;
2. describe how the services will focus on the legal needs;
3. set out who would have access to the legal services;
4. outline how to manage the risk to the public;
5. provide the relevant credentials, education, training, and/or experience;
6. specify if the applicant has been accredited to provide legal services in other jurisdictions and to provide details; and
7. set out if the applicant carries any insurance for the legal services proposed.

It should be noted that law clerks, which is a profession in Ontario, are not common in Alberta with respect to a legal support position. The title is usually used informally in Alberta to describe a judicial clerk position for law school graduates completing part of their articling year with the courts.

## Schooling and Career Path

Typically, to qualify for a legal assistant position, an individual should attend college and be successful in either a diploma or certificate program for legal assistant or legal office administration. Legal assistants can find work in any legal area doing administrative type of duties. Legal assistants with seniority and knowledge can become paralegals and perform services under the supervision of a lawyer.

Individuals who want to pursue a career as a paralegal can attend a recognized school. Substantive law courses in either a diploma or a legal studies major degree program are available. The courses are designed to help increase the knowledge of substantive law and procedural law. Although still not common, it is becoming possible that law firms will hire individuals with a paralegal diploma or degree.

However, generally, law offices will not employ recent graduates of any of the programs with little legal experience to work as paralegals. Graduates often start working as legal assistants and then move on to paralegal duties after several years' experience.

Career paths for legal assistants and paralegals are not only in law firms but can be found at the courthouse as clerks or judicial assistants, justice ministries with the provincial or federal governments, in-house legal departments with companies or municipalities, banks, health authorities, insurance firms, and with immigration consultants.

## British Columbia

### Legal Administrative Assistants and Paralegals

As in most provinces, in British Columbia, the legal administrative assistant works on the more administrative type of duties. This typically includes tasks such as scheduling meetings, client appointments, preparing basic correspondence, and drafting legal documentation from handwritten notes or dictation, as well as completing precedent forms. As experience is gained, more technical responsibilities will be given.

Paralegals can work on client files. They can be assigned to work on drafting legal briefs and memorandums of law, researching, meeting with clients, supporting lawyers in court, creating witness statements, and other tasks that can be billed directly to the client. Paralegals cannot work independently and are still required to be supervised by a lawyer; however, the scope of work that they are given is much more involved with the client's file. Paralegals often supervise legal administrative assistants in the different divisions within the law firm.

Paralegals and legal administrative assistants working in a firm can apply to the province and become a commissioner for taking affidavits. This allows them to swear affidavits and statutory declarations for clients of the firm.

Paralegals are not licensed or regulated by the Law Society of British Columbia (LSBC). This subject has been debated for over three decades.

In 2012, **benchers** approved changes to permit paralegals to be “designated paralegals”—an individual permitted to give legal advice and represent clients before a court or tribunal.<sup>10</sup> The changes allowed for paralegals who met the criteria to take on an expanded role and was another step toward a changing role. At that time, lawyers were guided by the *Professional Conduct Handbook*. On January 1, 2013, the *Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia* replaced the *Handbook*.

The LSBC has established best practices for the supervision of paralegals by lawyers.<sup>11</sup> Lawyers can permit a paralegal to have carriage of a file, but the lawyer is responsible for the oversight of the file and obligation to the client. This seems to work well as the paralegal has the satisfaction of demonstrating their competence in the relevant area of law. Since they are being supervised, they fall under the lawyer’s insurance and do not need to carry any insurance on their own.

In mid-2015, the LSBC Legal Services Regulatory Framework Task Force report recommended an amendment to the *Legal Profession Act*<sup>12</sup> to permit the LSBC to establish new classes of legal service providers. One solution identified was a certified paralegal who would be able to deal with family law matters, residential tenancy disputes, small claims, and administrative tribunals. These were areas underserved by lawyers, and the public required assistance. In 2019, the Task Force was looking at potential amendments to the *Legal Profession Act* to address the need for access to affordable legal services.

In 2020, the Task Force recommended the creation of a process that allows alternate service models to develop under the general oversight of the LSBC known as the Innovation Sandbox (see Box 1.3). The Task Force also reported that “[a] system can eventually be developed by which paralegals who enter the sandbox, and meet identified objectives/criteria for a defined period of time, could eventually apply to the Law Society to become licensed paralegals.”<sup>13</sup>

At the time of writing, legislation has not yet come into force that would create a “licensed” paralegal to provide legal services and be regulated as a member of the LSBC.

The British Columbia Paralegal Association (BCPA) was formed in 1979 with a view to promoting and supporting the paralegal profession. It has reviewed the paralegal licensing and regulations in Ontario but feels that the current supervision model and Innovation Sandbox in the province is working, and there is no movement to have the LSBC license paralegals.



The role of a law clerk does not exist in British Columbia. However, when you take a closer look at the role of a paralegal, it can be compared to the duties and tasks that a law clerk would perform in Ontario.

## Schooling and Career Path

Neither legal administrative assistants nor paralegals require certification in the province. However, law firms do prefer either a diploma or certificate in the chosen field for both positions.

Individuals that want to pursue a career as a paralegal can attend a university or college program. There are several universities and colleges in the province that provide substantive law courses in either a diploma or certificate program, as well as a four-year bachelor of legal studies degree. The courses are designed to help increase the knowledge of substantive law and procedural law. A student can choose a full-time or part-time program and take the classes in person or online. According to Michèle Ross, president of the BCPA, it is becoming the trend that law firms will hire individuals with a paralegal education in the role of a paralegal.<sup>14</sup> With a diploma or certificate, graduates from the paralegal program can work on more substantive law matters in a firm and can be assigned work on a client file which is billed to the client, thereby bringing in money to the firm. Presently, the market for paralegals is growing in private, public, and government offices.

The job market for legal administrative assistants is currently on the rise, and there are many opportunities to find employment in a legal office. Office automation and technological changes have increased the demand for qualified, trained, and educated legal administrative assistants. Individuals who want to take on more responsibilities are encouraged to obtain either a diploma or certificate in a paralegal program.

## Nova Scotia

### Legal Administrative Assistants and Paralegals

The legal administrative assistant position in Nova Scotia helps in the delivery of legal and other administrative services in a legal office. Legal administrative assistants would draft correspondence and perform general office and clerical duties.

The Government of Canada provides the following description of a paralegal in Nova Scotia as someone who “prepare[s] legal documents and conduct[s] research to assist lawyers or other professionals.”<sup>15</sup> Paralegals are not regulated or licensed in this province. Paralegals cannot operate on their own as they do in Ontario.

Paralegals in Nova Scotia are employed in law firms and government offices. They may conduct legal research, interview witnesses, draft correspondence, and assist in court under the supervision of a lawyer.

Acting Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society Jacqueline Mullenger advised that if paralegals engage in work that is in the practice of law on their own, the Society will seek an injunction to stop them from engaging in the unauthorized practice.<sup>16</sup> The Nova Scotia Barristers' Society had a strategic plan to study the development of regulating paralegals but has not moved forward on that issue to date.<sup>17</sup>

Law clerk is not a position found in the legal profession in Nova Scotia.

## Schooling and Career Path

In Nova Scotia, individuals who seek to be employed as paralegals and provide support to lawyers are going to university and obtaining a paralegal degree or certificate. In the last few years, more responsibilities have been put on paralegals, and law offices are looking for paralegals who have formal education and can show their capability to work independently.

## Ontario

### Legal Administrative Assistant

In Ontario, a legal administrative assistant has obtained specialized procedural and administrative clerical skills to work as part of a legal team. This position would have less responsibility than a law clerk or paralegal.

Examples of a legal administrative assistant's tasks may be to schedule meetings, file documents, photocopy materials, maintain lawyer's dockets, draft correspondence, and book telephone conferences. They take on more administrative tasks to support lawyers and paralegals on day-to-day operations.

### SCHOOLING AND CAREER PATH

Most law firms require that an administrative assistant have a college diploma and knowledge in the legal profession as they form an essential part of the office. Their assigned tasks can cross over to law clerk tasks.

### Law Clerk

Law clerks in Ontario have become an integral part of the legal office and are able to conduct a wide range of duties under the direction and supervision of a lawyer. The need for law clerks is found in the areas of real estate, civil litigation, family, and wills and estates.

The Institute of Law Clerks of Ontario (ILCO) is a professional association that provides continuing education and networking for its membership. The ILCO defines a law clerk as a

trained professional doing independent legal work ... under the direction and guidance of a lawyer and whose function is to relieve a lawyer of routine legal and administrative matters and assist [them] in more complex ones.<sup>18</sup>

The name “law clerk” was established by the Law Society of Upper Canada (now the Law Society of Ontario) to permit the use of this title to members of the ILCO. The Law Society of Ontario does not regulate law clerks, and accordingly, there is no exam to be written once they have graduated from a law clerk program.

The ILCO provides law clerks with further education to support their roles in a legal office. There is an annual membership that must be paid to become part of the organization. It also provides for a Code of Ethics<sup>19</sup> that law clerks are required to follow.

## SCHOOLING AND CAREER PATH

Several colleges in Ontario offer a two-year diploma program. As part of the program, students will be taught in the following areas of law: corporate, wills and estates, civil litigation, and real estate.

## Paralegal

The role of paralegals in Ontario has evolved over the past decades as the need for alternative legal services providers has increased.

Paralegals were known as agents at court prior to licensing by the Law Society of Ontario (LSO). Agents would represent clients charged with traffic offences, matters in Small Claims Court, and various tribunals. These agents would have their own business and would not be working for a lawyer.

In 1987, an Ontario Court of Appeal decision *Regina v Lawrie and Pointts Ltd*<sup>20</sup> examined the issue: Could an agent provide legal services for a fee? The Court of Appeal looked at the *Law Society Act*<sup>21</sup> and the *Solicitors Act*<sup>22</sup> and referred to other statutes governing the legal profession in Ontario. The Court held that section 51(1) of the *Provincial Offences Act*<sup>23</sup> allowed a defendant to appear by agent and that section 1 of the *Solicitors Act* only dealt with penalizing unauthorized persons; it did not prohibit the unauthorized practice. Accordingly, the Court held that a paid agent acting under section 51(1) of the *Provincial Offences Act* fell within the exception.

Following this landmark decision, agents at court continued to practise in Highway Traffic Court, Small Claims Court, Family Court, and tribunals. There were no regulations for these agents at this time, and it proved to be

a problem for the LSO due to complaints by the public for unprofessional representation by some court agents. This resulted in paralegals being investigated and charged.

In 1990, an attorney general-appointed task force on paralegals published a report recommending regulating paralegals to provide greater access to legal services for the public. After the report, no further action was taken by any regulatory body.

In 2000, a new task force published a report bringing a renewed interest in paralegal licensing. It outlined that the rights of the low- to middle-income Canadians to access the justice system were not being met and laid the foundation for the framework for regulating the practice of paralegals.

In 2004, the attorney general together with the LSO established a task force to develop a proposal to regulate paralegals. The task force proceeded to work on a regulatory model and recommendations. The LSO took on the role of regulator, and the paralegal scope of practice was confined to the practice areas authorized by law. Effective May 1, 2007, paralegals in Ontario became the first to be licensed and regulated, enabling them to start their own businesses, obtain insurance, and provide legal advice and services within the permitted scope of practice, namely small claims, provincial offences, *Criminal Code*<sup>24</sup> summary convictions, matters before provincial and federal tribunals, and limited matters pertaining to no-fault motor vehicle insurance.<sup>25</sup>

Paralegals have since requested that this scope be increased. Since regulation, the scope of practice has expanded to include a small area in immigration and refugee matters. Paralegals who are licensed by the LSO can appear before the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) to represent a client or clients in an IRB hearing and can provide legal services to clients for matters relating to an IRB hearing (By-Law 4, s 6(2)2(iv)).<sup>26</sup> Drafting of documents or other legal services that are not related to an IRB hearing remains outside of a paralegal's scope of practice.

In addition, the LSO has been reviewing family law for the last decade with the intention of adding this area of law to the scope of practice for paralegals to improve access to justice for the public. In December 2022, the LSO approved a proposal for a family legal services provider (FLSP) licence that would allow paralegals to perform a narrow scope of family law-related duties such as providing clients with information about court procedures. To obtain the FLSP licence, paralegals need to take 260 hours (about three months) of additional training and pass an exam.

**BOX  
1.4****PARALEGALS AS COMMISSIONERS OF OATHS  
AND NOTARY PUBLICS**

Licensed paralegals are Commissioners of Oaths and may commission documents, affidavits, and declarations or administer legal oaths.

On August 1, 2020, the *Notaries Act*<sup>27</sup> was amended to also allow for paralegals to be appointed as notaries upon becoming licensed by the Law Society.

There is a distinction between the two titles. Commissioners or notaries can swear documents within the province; however, if the document is to be used outside of Ontario, the document must be notarized by a notary public.

**SCHOOLING AND CAREER PATH**

Paralegals must obtain their education through an accredited institution approved by the LSO.

They must complete 590 instructional hours of compulsory legal courses, minimum of 120 hours of field placement, and 120 instructional hours in additional courses. It usually takes two years to complete the program.

Some colleges offer two streams: a regular diploma and an accelerated diploma; both must contain the specified instructional hours and field placement. As with the diploma program, there are a few colleges that offer a graduate certificate. At the time of writing, one college in Ontario provides an opportunity to obtain a bachelor's degree in paralegal studies.<sup>28</sup>

Upon completing the appropriate steps, individuals must write and pass the P1 exam to apply to be licensed.

**BOX  
1.5****PARALEGAL LICENSING PROCESS**

Steps to become licensed by the Law Society of Ontario include the following:

- graduate from an accredited paralegal program,
- apply to the licensing process,
- pass the P1 exam,
- be deemed to be of good character by the Law Society,
- pay all required fees and submit all required forms/documentation, and
- apply for a P1 licence.

Like law clerks, paralegals can be employed by law firms and in legal departments throughout public and private sectors and are hired to assist lawyers and/or other paralegals in conducting a wide range of duties, including conducting research, attending court, and preparing documents.

## Federal

### Immigration Consultants

Immigration consultants are licensed individuals who provide services to help clients immigrate from one country to another country. There could be several reasons why an individual may want to come from another country. It could be related to travel, work, business, study permits, or visas. A Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant (RCIC) can explain immigration and citizenship options and programs, fill out and submit applications, communicate with the government, and attend immigration or citizenship applications or hearings.<sup>29</sup>

RCICs are regulated by the College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants (CICC). The CICC was created through the *College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants Act*,<sup>30</sup> which passed in June 2019. The CICC launched in November 2021, replacing the former Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council (ICCRC).

### SCHOOLING AND CAREER PATH

Individuals wishing to qualify as RCICs will have to complete a graduate diploma. At the time of writing, there are only two accredited diploma programs: Queen's University is the only school to offer the program in English, and Université de Montréal is the only one offering it in French.<sup>31</sup> However, entry will require an undergraduate degree or equivalent.

The accredited programs prepare students to write the Entry-to-Practice Exam administered by the CICC to obtain a designation.

RCICs are employed by government agencies, consulting firms, and professional organizations or are self-employed.

**Go to Appendix A and complete Exercise 1.1: Comparing Legal Careers.**

## Job Prospects

Finding a job in your chosen profession can be stressful; however, once you have narrowed down the area of law that you are interested in, you now have a direction. You want to find out how to get that job and where to look. Give yourself time to find the right job and stay positive.

Some individuals consider volunteering for a firm that may lead to a paid job. Some offices offer internships that provide hands-on work experience. This can help you to build your resumé.

Some people gain employment with an organization in which they work for multiple years. These individuals may never attempt to find alternative employment; however, they are able to move up the career ladder by continuing their educational pursuits and expanding their knowledge.

## Law Firms and Other Legal Offices

Working in a legal office requires you to know how it is structured. Although every office can have a different hierarchy, you should be familiar with the basic structure (Figure 1.1).

**FIGURE 1.1** Structure of a Law Office



This visual provides a general overview of the basic structure of a law office. The specific roles and hierarchy can vary between provinces and firm size.

## Agencies and Businesses

Did you know that legal positions are in other organizations? They can be found in:

1. federal, provincial, and government courts, agencies, and municipalities;
2. banks and credit unions;
3. private corporations, such as grocery stores, Tim Hortons, Canadian Tire, and Lululemon;
4. legal aid offices;
5. children's aid societies;
6. universities and colleges;
7. immigration agencies or consultants;
8. community legal clinics;
9. insurance companies;
10. mediation firms;
11. real estate firms;
12. unions and labour relations firms;
13. pension companies;
14. collection agencies;
15. hotel chains;
16. temp agencies;
17. publishers;
18. tribunals;
19. property management companies;
20. paralegal firms (if authorized by the province); and
21. hospitals and health institutions.

### BOX 1.6

#### JOB PROFILES

*Property management companies* hire legal assistants or paralegals for the legal work acting for a landlord. This could include drafting leases, calling tenants in arrears, issuing notices to end a tenancy, drafting applications to the Landlord and Tenant Board or Small Claims Court, and attending to represent the landlord.

*Collection agencies* hire legal assistants, law clerks, and paralegals to help clients get money owed to them from individuals, including small business companies that have outstanding customer invoices and need help to have them paid or take court action on their behalf.

*Banks* have in-house legal departments and hire staff, including legal assistants, law clerks, and paralegals. There would be positions working in the mortgage departments as well as collections for unpaid credit card balances.



## Other Legal Professions

If you are looking for a change in your career direction as a legal administrative assistant, law clerk, or paralegal, there are jobs in other legal professions. You can educate yourself on the different careers that are out there and some that are overlooked when thinking of a career change.

### BOX 1.7

#### JOB PROFILES

*Court reporters/court clerks* work in the court system either in the courtroom or in various departments, including working for a justice of the peace or judge. If you are working in the court, you may require education as a court reporter. However, in any of the other various positions, educational requirements could vary.

*Tribunal adjudicators* are appointed to the position by the attorney general. There are various tribunals where adjudicators can sit and oversee hearings. Individuals appointed to the position may have varied educational backgrounds and may require some education in mediation or adjudication.

*Justices of the peace*, also known as JPs, are appointed by the attorney general. They preside in various courts, including provincial regulatory offence matters and municipal prosecutions. They will also issue informations, summons, and warrants. Individuals who are appointed to this position have diverse educational backgrounds. A legal background is not a requirement.

*Instructors/professors* who are teaching in an accredited program must be licensed by the law society. However, instructors who teach legal assistants do not need to be licensed and only require work experience.

*Legal researchers/legal writers* are individuals who perform legal research. They should be well versed in researching and have the ability to accurately find case law and prepare a well-organized and informed research memorandum.

*Law librarians* are information resource experts who work in law schools, corporate law departments, law firms, and government libraries. They have extensive knowledge of print and electronic media and help individuals with research resources.<sup>32</sup>

Most important is to look at the various positions in the legal profession in your province. As we have seen earlier in the chapter, they can vary from province to province.

## Consider Finding a Mentor

If you start to think that everything is becoming a bit too confusing and overwhelming, perhaps it is time to seek out someone to help you chart a plan. Sometimes, the best way to understand a position is to speak to an individual who is currently doing the job that you are interested in. You can have an **informational interview**. This is a great way to talk to someone about what the job is really like. Many individuals would invite you to speak with them about what they do at their job and how they came to work in that position.

You may want to start by reaching out to your program coordinator or student success adviser at your academic institution. You can also look to your own network of friends or members of your community. Ask if anyone knows of someone that works in the field you are interested in. If you have no connections, try looking on LinkedIn and checking out profiles of members and contact them.

Another route you can take is to become a member of an organization, such as the following:

- Ontario Paralegal Association
- Women's Paralegal Association of Ontario
- Institute of Law Clerks of Ontario
- British Columbia Paralegal Association
- Alberta Association of Professional Paralegals (reduced membership fees for student memberships)

If you are in another province, you can do an Internet search and find out if there are organizations that you can connect with.

Finding a good adviser or mentor who is willing to help and guide you to make career decisions is a good option to investigate. You will want to choose someone who will give you honest feedback and real criticism of both the good and bad elements of the job. It could be someone that you met through networking or someone that you have heard has a good reputation. You will want to look for someone who has been working in the legal profession for a few years and has the experience to answer your questions.

What should you expect from an adviser or mentor? It may be difficult to find a good adviser or mentor because they may often be preoccupied with work, and you will likely need to carefully schedule meetings. Make contact, and if you do not hear back, that is all right; just do not give up. Before meeting with them, prepare a list of questions that you would like to ask, and in addition, send the questions ahead of the meeting so that they can be prepared to discuss the answers.

**BOX  
1.8****INFORMATIONAL MENTOR QUESTIONS**

Example of types of questions to ask:

1. How did you get interested in this field of work?
2. What does a typical day look like?
3. What do you like the most about your work?
4. What do you like the least about your work?
5. What is the job market for the position?
6. Is there anyone else you would suggest that I reach out to?

Do not make them guess what you want to discuss with them. This will show that you are sincere about getting to know more about the position. Above all, always take notes so that you can review them later. Another suggestion would be to see if you could shadow them at work to get an even better idea of their work activities. After meeting with individuals, make sure you thank them for their time in person and send them a note.

Above all, remember that the person or persons you meet with may not have all the answers. It is okay to talk to more than one person to get a complete picture and comprehensive answer to your questions. It is your potential livelihood, and you want to make the right decision for yourself. It is the opportune time for you to take control of your future.

Hopefully, after you have connected and talked with a few people, you will have a clearer idea of which career in the legal profession you want to pursue.

**Go to Appendix A and complete Exercise 1.2: Preparing for an Informational Interview.**

## KEY TERMS

### benchers

lawyers and paralegals who are elected to serve on committees, task forces, or regulatory proceedings by members of the Law Society; the solicitor general appoints the public representatives; benchers are elected to serve four-year terms

### informational interview

an informal interview that involves talking to someone in a particular position to find out more about a job or career; provides feedback on

required skills and abilities to help guide next steps

### jurisdictions

the authority of a court or tribunal; can be applied to the scope of work covered in an organization; there are three legal jurisdictions: monetary jurisdiction is the maximum limit for a claim within a specific court; territorial jurisdiction is the court's authority to hear matters within a certain physical location; and legal jurisdiction sets the types of matters a court or tribunal may hear

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  - 12 SBC 1998, c 9.
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