What Can a Paralegal Do in the UK?

Written by Louise Donnery

Paralegals are essential to the UK legal system, providing critical support to solicitors, barristers, and organisations across various sectors. Whether you're exploring a career as a paralegal or seeking their services, understanding their responsibilities and limitations is key. This guide explains what paralegals can legally do, their restrictions, and how they contribute to the legal profession.

Are you thinking about becoming a paralegal or hiring one? Discover training opportunities and professional memberships to advance your career, or learn about paralegal services today.

The scope of a paralegal's role

Paralegals play a vital role in supporting legal professionals and ensuring the smooth operation of legal services. Their work spans multiple areas of law, including family law, corporate law, criminal law, real estate law, and employment law.

Here's what a paralegal can do:

- **Conduct legal research:** Paralegals investigate case law, statutes, and precedents to provide solicitors and barristers with crucial information for cases
- **Draft legal documents:** They prepare contracts, Wills, pleadings and correspondence, ensuring accuracy and compliance with legal standards
- **Manage case files:** Organising evidence, compiling litigation bundles, and ensuring all relevant documents are accessible.
- **Client communication:** Conducting interviews, gathering witness statements and maintaining contact throughout the case lifestyle
- **Administrative support**: Organising case files, compiling litigation bundles, and preparing court documents. They also manage correspondence, schedule meetings, and assist with billing and timekeeping, ensuring smooth communication and efficient legal operations.

For example, in family law, paralegals may help draft divorce petitions or organise child custody agreements. Although their responsibilities overlap with those of solicitors, their work is typically supervised to ensure compliance with legal regulations.

What can a paralegal not do? (Legal limitations)

While paralegals have a broad skill set and contribute significantly to the legal sector, there are strict boundaries on what they can do independently. UK law restricts certain activities to regulated professionals like solicitors and barristers.

Here's what a paralegal cannot do:

- **Represent clients in court (except in limited circumstances):** Paralegals generally lack rights of audience, meaning they cannot formally represent clients in court. Exceptions include small claims or employment tribunals, where judges may grant permission on a case-by-case basis.
- **Provide legal advice unless supervised by a qualified solicitor:** Paralegals can share general legal information but must avoid giving personalised legal advice independently, as this is reserved for regulated professionals like solicitors.
- **Conduct litigation independently:** Paralegals cannot initiate court proceedings, file official documents on behalf of clients, or act as an agent to receive service of legal documents. They may assist clients by drafting forms or letters, but clients must sign and submit these themselves.
- **Hold client funds or undertake reserved legal activities:** Under the Legal Services Act 2007, activities such as managing client funds, probate work, conveyancing, notarial services, and administering oaths are strictly reserved. Paralegals are prohibited from performing these tasks unless authorised.

These restrictions are outlined under the Legal Services Act 2007 to protect clients and maintain professional standards within the industry.

It's essential to ensure that individuals seeking affordable legal assistance from paralegals operate within these boundaries.

Can a paralegal work independently?

Yes, paralegals in the UK can work independently, but they must operate within strict legal boundaries. Independent paralegals are becoming more common in the UK as they offer cost-effective services within non-reserved areas of law. While their scope is limited compared to solicitors or barristers, independent paralegals can:

- Assist with drafting wills (excluding probate)
- Advising on landlord-tenant disputes
- Represent clients in employment tribunals
- Prepare documents for uncontested divorces

These professionals often fill gaps in the market by offering specialised support directly to clients. Many independent paralegals join professional organisations like the National Association of Licensed Paralegals (NALP) to ensure credibility and compliance with industry standards. Membership demonstrates professionalism while providing access to resources that help practitioners stay informed about legal developments.

For those considering freelance work as paralegals, obtaining professional indemnity insurance and adhering to industry guidelines is essential to protecting both clients and practitioners from potential risks.

Career prospects and how to become a paralegal in the UK

Becoming a paralegal offers diverse career opportunities within the legal sector. While formal education isn't mandatory for all roles, obtaining recognised credentials such as a Level 3 Diploma in Paralegal Practice or completing a legal apprenticeship significantly enhances job prospects.

Practical experience is equally valuable—internships or volunteer positions within law firms provide hands-on exposure that employers look for when hiring entry-level professionals. Salaries for UK paralegals vary depending on experience and specialisation; entry-level positions typically start at £18,000 per year but can exceed £40,000 for those working in high-demand areas like compliance or intellectual property law.

Many paralegals use this role as a stepping stone toward becoming solicitors or chartered legal executives by pursuing qualifications such as the SQE route. This pathway allows them to gain practical experience while advancing their careers within the legal profession.

Next steps for aspiring paralegals

Paralegals play an indispensable role in the UK's legal industry. They provide support across various sectors while operating within defined boundaries. Whether considering this career path or seeking their services, understanding what they can legally do is crucial.

Ready to take the next step? Explore accredited training programmes and professional memberships to boost your career prospects, or find reliable paralegal support today.

Frequently asked questions

What is the difference between a paralegal and a solicitor

While both roles involve legal work, solicitors are licensed professionals who can perform reserved legal activities like representing clients in court or conducting litigation. Paralegals support solicitors but operate within defined boundaries.

Read more: What's the Difference Between a Paralegal and a Solicitor?

What qualifications do you need to become a paralegal?

There is no single route to becoming a paralegal, but employers often prefer candidates with formal qualifications such as a law degree, a Level 3 Diploma in Paralegal Practice, or certifications from organisations like the National Association of Licensed Paralegals (NALP). Apprenticeships and legal secretary diplomas are also viable pathways.

Is becoming a paralegal a good career choice?

A career as a paralegal offers an opportunity to work in law without the extensive training required to qualify as a solicitor or barrister. It's ideal for those interested in legal research, case preparation, and supporting clients within defined limits.

What are the career growth opportunities for a paralegal?

Paralegals can specialise in specific legal areas, progress to senior roles, or qualify as solicitors or legal executives through the SQE or CILEx. They may also move into leadership, compliance, or consultancy roles or establish independent practices offering non-reserved legal services.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context

together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.