

AN INTRODUCTION TO CLERKSHIPS

2020 SULLS CAREERS GUIDE LIFT-OUT



**SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY
LAW SOCIETY**

Why Apply?

Read about all the benefits of a clerkship and what you “need” to get one.

The Application Process

Find out the about the process of getting a clerkship and all the elements of an application.

The Clerkship Experience

Learn about the clerkship program and all the fun activities on offer.



Acknowledgments

Many thanks to everyone who made the production and publication of the 2020 Sydney University Law Society Introduction to Clerkships Guide possible. In particular, we would like to thank the Sydney Law School and the University of Sydney Union for their continued support of SULS and its publications.

We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land that the University of Sydney is built upon, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We acknowledge that this was and always will be Aboriginal Land and are proud to be on the lands of one of the oldest surviving cultures in existence. We respect the knowledge that traditional elders and Aboriginal people hold and pass on from generation to generation, and acknowledge the continuous fight for constitutional reform and treaty recognition to this day. We regret that white supremacy has been used to justify Indigenous dispossession, colonial rule and violence in the past, in particular, a legal and political system that still to this date doesn't provide Aboriginal people with justice.

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Note: Due to campus closures as a result of COVID-19, the SULS office is closed until further notice. Stay updated via our digital channels.

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What is a clerkship?

If you're a penultimate year law student, you might consider participating in a summer clerkship in the summer of 2020-21. SALS hosts a number of clerkship presentations to inform students about various firms, and to help students find the right fit for them. Before those presentations begin, this early guide addresses the nature of clerkships and how you can prepare for them.

The Basics

Summer clerkships are paid employment experiences in major commercial law firms over the summer break. For law students in NSW they are primarily based in Sydney, with other states and some overseas firms offering variations of the program.

The Summer Clerkship Program is generally open to penultimate year law students only (LLB IV and JD II), however final year students with an extra semester left in their degree are also encouraged to apply.

Common Terms and Distinctions

"Big Six" = Allens, Ashurst, Clayton Utz, Herbert Smith Freehills, King & Wood Mallesons, MinterEllison. Otherwise known as the "top tier".
"Magic Circle" and "Silver Circle" = UK headquartered law firms regarded as the first and second-ranked groups of law firms respectively.

Participating Firms

<i>Firm</i>	<i>Graduate Program</i>	<i>Summer Clerkship</i>
Allen & Overy	Yes	Yes
Allens	Yes	Yes
Clayton Utz	Yes	Yes
Herbert Smith Freehills	Yes	Yes
Ashurst	Yes	Yes
Baker McKenzie	Yes	Yes
Gilbert + Tobin	Yes	Yes
King & Wood Mallesons	Yes	Yes
Arnold Bloch Leibler	Yes	Yes, clerkship program is year-round with different application dates
Clifford Chance	Yes	Yes
Maddocks	Yes	Yes
Norton Rose Fulbright	Yes	Yes
Streeton Lawyers	No	No
Bird & Bird	Yes	Yes
K & L Gates	Yes	Yes
Sparke Helmore	Yes	No
Thomson Geer	Yes	Yes
White & Case	Yes	Yes
Australian Government Solicitor	Yes	No
Barraket Stanton	Yes	Yes
Brown Wright Stein	Yes	No
Corrs Chambers Westgrath	Yes	Yes
DLA Piper	Yes	Yes

<i>Firm</i>	<i>Graduate Program</i>	<i>Summer Clerkship</i>
<u>Gadens</u>	Yes	No
<u>Hall & Wilcox</u>	Yes	Yes (Melbourne only)
<u>HWL Ebsworth</u>	Yes	Yes
<u>Johnson Winter & Slattery</u>	Yes	Yes, clerkship program is year-round with different application dates
<u>Jones Day</u>	Yes	Yes
<u>Mills Oakley</u>	Yes	Yes
<u>MinterEllison</u>	Yes	Yes
<u>Piper Alderman</u>	Yes	Yes, clerkship program is year-round with different application dates
<u>PwC</u>	Yes	Yes
<u>Squire Patton Boggs</u>	Yes	No

*Please note that most firms recruit graduates directly from their clerkship program, however many firms hire additional graduates on an 'as needs basis'.



Why Apply?

- A clerkship is a good way to try out a law firm and find out if commercial law is right for you. Law firms don't expect you to know everything - you just need to be keen and eager to learn.
- Clerkships give you great training and experience. The firms want to show you that they are invested in your future and are interested in your learning and development. At most firms, you will be given introductions to every practice group in the firm as well as their leading partners, and can get a feel for which practice group is right for you.
- Clerkships often lead to a graduate job. Most firms recruit their grads through the clerkship process, although an offer is not guaranteed. The amount of clerks taken in any one year is often dependent on graduate business needs.
- In offering graduate positions, firms may be open to deferring placement for a year for a range of reasons, such as travel and undertaking tipstaff positions.

Don't feel pressured

- Don't feel pressured to do a clerkship just because everyone else is doing one.
- Don't make your decision based on everyone else's opinions about law firms - each firm is unique. Find a firm that fits what you're looking for by doing your own independent research at our clerkship presentations or through firms' websites. Look into how firm cultures differ, or expertise in a certain area of the law.
- Ultimately, a clerkship is definitely a great opportunity if you are interested in pursuing a career in commercial law.

Areas of law you will be exposed to:

Firms provide legal services across a number of industries, including banking and finance, energy and resources, technology, media and communications. You will probably have the opportunity to preference which rotations you want to undertake in different practice groups, such as corporate, real estate, tax, dispute resolution, insolvency and M&A. Most firms offer two or three rotations over the summer.

Practice groups will vary in size according to each firm. Teams can range anywhere from 15 to 60 lawyers. Groups can be either transactional, litigious, advisory, or a mix of the three.

- Transactional groups deal with 'front-end' work - negotiating with clients, developing and drawing up contracts, and other document

packages. For example, a front-end group may work on a negotiation over which party would bear the risk in the contract in the event of minor breaches.

- Litigious groups deal with 'back-end' work and basically everything after the contract is signed. Examples of back-end groups include dispute resolution, litigation and insolvency.
- Advisory groups provide legal opinions on certain areas of the law. For example, the tax group provides clients with advice on how changes to tax laws will affect their business.

What you "need" to get a clerkship

Firms are interested in hiring well-rounded individuals. In your application, and throughout the interview process, be sure to highlight the following:

(i) Academic achievements, including your marks, awards, and scholarships.

Where your mark(s) are not strong, take advantage of any opportunities to explain any extenuating circumstances which may have contributed to your mark(s). Consider, Have your marks improved throughout university? Have you been consistent? What are your strongest subjects? What does that say about you? The answers to these questions can be selling points, and can help to make a rogue bad mark unimportant.

(ii) Extracurricular activities, such as volunteer roles and other involvements.

Firms want to know what kind of person you are beyond your WAM. Examples of relevant activities may be involvement in university societies and programs, publications, clubs, hobbies, sports, and other interests.

(iii) Work experience, including both paid and unpaid internships.

Firms are not just looking for legal experience, any and all work experience is relevant and highly regarded. You don't need to have worked in a law firm or barristers' chambers - don't let anyone tell you otherwise. General work experience is important because it shows you can study and hold a job down at the same time - time management is a crucial skill in a commercial environment. Think about what skills your job requires and how you can apply those to a commercial firm.

Remember, whatever you have done or whatever you do, make it a selling point. Tailor your experience to each individual firm. Firms want people who want to work in their particular commercial law firm.



FINDING THE RIGHT FIRM

Get started by

- (i) talking to people you know in the industry and contacts who have already gone through the clerkship process;
- (ii) Look into firms' websites and social media channels;
- (iii) Make the most of cocktail nights, interviews and 'buddy' systems.

Consider:



QUALITIES

What qualities are important to you in a workplace?



CULTURE

What kind of culture would you feel best in?



HAPPINESS

What will make you happy at work?

Stepping Into Paid Internships

What is Stepping Into?

Stepping Into is a paid internship program designed specifically for students with disability. Students benefit significantly through gaining experience with the job application and interview process, developing a network of contacts within a professional organisation, gaining valuable paid work experience which they can include on their resumes, and having the opportunity to showcase their skills and knowledge.

Previous placements have been with organisations such as Commonwealth Bank Australia, BHP Billiton, PwC, Department of Agriculture and Department of Education. Students from all disciplines are encouraged to apply.

Website

<https://www.and.org.au/pages/stepping-into...-programs.html>

Research

Firms have great websites and LinkedIn pages that feature interesting articles and videos that are a good snapshot into the firm's work, culture and values.

Attend:

A great way to get information about a firm is to hear from the firm directly.

- Attend the lunchtime Clerkship Presentations to hear personally from grads, partners and HR.
- Attend Skills Seminars to improve your application.



The Application Process

**Please note that Semester 1 results for USYD are published 8 July 2020.*

The application process is time-sensitive, so make sure you are organised throughout.

Source: <https://www.lawsociety.com.au/legal-communities/law-students/internship-program/clerkship-program>

Note: Dates and application processes are due to change - please check the relevant firm's website for any updates.

Key Dates for 2020

Tuesday 9 June - Applications for summer clerkships open.

Sunday 5 July and Sunday 12 July - Applications for summer clerkships close.

Wednesday 16 September - Offers for summer clerkships can be made.

Friday 18 September - Offers for summer clerkships must be accepted or declined by 5.00pm.

CVs

Tailor your CV for the law firm you are applying to. The Careers Centre and the SULLS Careers Guide offer great examples of what form this should take.

- Be very aware of length - try and keep it brief and concise. Two pages is a good length.
- Consider narrowing your margins to allow more content to fit in.
- Have a professional formatting finish - including a suitable font.
- Save in PDF before sending - this is the professional standard.

Cover Letter

- Ensure your cover letter is addressed to the correct person. Use the correct title - this information can often be found on firms' websites.
- Your cover letter should be no longer than a page. Again, extend the margins if you need to fit in more content.
- Demonstrate that you have an interest in commercial law. Try to show an appreciation for how the firm works and its role in a transaction. Consider mentioning a particular transaction or dispute which the firm has worked on.
- Always do a final check. Attention to detail is crucial.

Transcripts

You will be required to submit your academic transcript and input your grades. After your first semester marks come out, you may need to send them in as well.

Transcripts may be downloaded from Sydney Student. Official transcripts can be purchased at the Student Centre for a fee. Certified copies must be notarised by a recognised certifier, such as a Justice of the Peace or a legal practitioner.

Pay attention as to what requirements attach to the submission of your transcript. Each firm has distinct requirements.

If you have an interview you will need to bring an official transcript with you to the interview.

CVMail

CVMail is the database that many firms use to manage the clerkship process. This is a very useful site that helps to streamline the application process.

It has a host of information available to students on writing a CV and sitting an interview. Once the application process is done, however, the firms usually email the address that you provided to them.

Familiarise yourself with CVMail now and find out which firms do and do not use CVMail.

In-Person Interviews

Round 1 will be a more structured interview. A mix of behavioural questions and getting to know you. It will usually be with one partner or with an HR representative.

Round 2 will be a more informal interview. It focuses on getting to know you, and can take the form of an unstructured chat between you and one or more partners.

Who is interviewing you is important information. You will generally be emailed ahead of time detailing who will be interviewing you. This gives you an opportunity to research their background and areas of interest, but don't feel the need to be an expert on your interviewer's CV.

Questions that are asked during interviews are highly varied, and often difficult. A useful way to structure more complex answers is to use the STAR method.

Situation - describe a situation or problem you have encountered

Task - describe the task that the situation required or your ideas for resolving the problem

Action - describe the action you took and the obstacles you had to overcome

Results - highlight the outcomes achieved

Prepare your own questions. Doing so shows that you're interested in the firm and want to be there. Some examples are:

- What is the most interesting matter you've worked on this year?
- What aspect of the firm do you most appreciate?
- How would you describe the culture of the firm?

Online Interviews

Depending on public health considerations and firm procedures, there is a chance that interviews will be conducted online or remotely this year. Here are some tips to ensure you're prepared and ready to give it your best shot!

Ask some preliminary questions.

No matter how comfortable you are with the technology you are using, it is a good idea to be prepared for communication difficulties or mishaps. You might want to ask the interviewer: what should I do in the event of technical difficulties? Or maybe: is there a number I should call in the event of technical difficulties over Skype or Zoom?

Take care with selecting your environment.

Lighting

Overhead lights and too much darkness in your environment will probably make you look a bit spooky. Glares can also be distracting for your interviewers. To avoid these faux pas, you should aim to have soft natural lighting. Try sitting near a window that will

receive enough sunlight at your scheduled interview time.

Background

Try to have a plain wall as your background. A bookshelf in the background is also appropriate. Make sure there are no potentially embarrassing items; soft toys, alcohol, laundry or toiletries are not a great look. It is also a good idea to not have a door in the frame – just in case you have any interruptions from a forgetful family member or pet!

Time Management

Make sure that you have chosen your space the day before your interview, so that you have the time to prepare your environment. This would also be a good opportunity to let your family members know what time your interview is and where it will be conducted so that they do not accidentally interrupt. Send the details to the family group chat or over text so that if anyone forgets they can check the messages.

The Interview

Try to simulate an in person interview

It may be hard to adjust to a professional tone while you are sitting in your own home. To help yourself get in the zone, dress professionally from head to toe and make sure you sit up straight. Also, make sure you have a glass of water on your desk in case your throat starts to catch.

Make eye contact

Even in the online environment, eye contact is important. While it feels more natural to look at the face on the screen, try to look into the webcam while you are talking to create the impression of eye contact and, thus, engage your interviewer.

Cocktail and Networking Evenings

Cocktail evenings are designed to see how you are in a social setting. It is a good opportunity for the firm to get to know you in a more relaxed environment outside of the interview setting, and for you to talk to as many different people as is necessary to give you an idea of the firm culture.

- Wear a suit/corporate dress (cocktail dresses are not suitable).
- Be professional and courteous in your conversations and interactions.
- If you attend two cocktail evenings in one night, email the firm that you are going to second and inform them that you will be late.
- Remember to be yourself. They chose you to be a part of this late stage of the recruitment process for a reason.



OFFERS

Making decisions between different firms

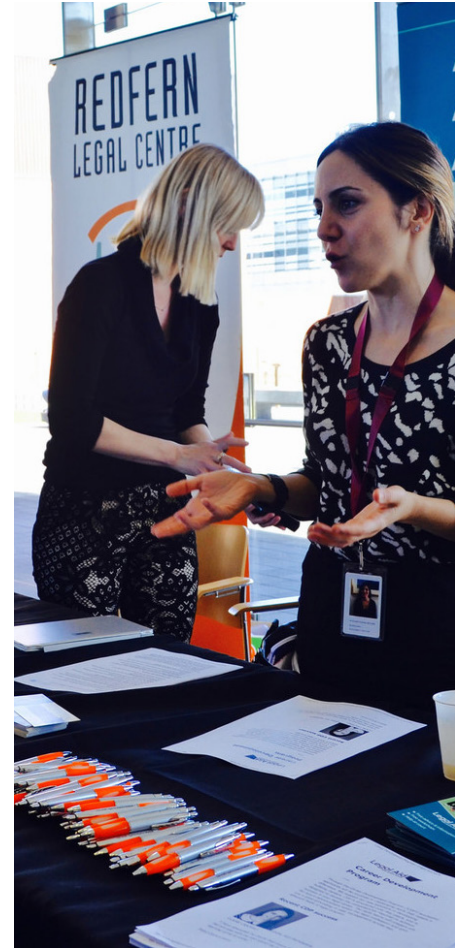
Firms often make offers on the same day to give people the best choice, and to ensure that you can decide between multiple offers fairly.

A number of considerations may inform your choice:

- Talk to partners, friends and HR to seek advice
- Consider whether this is a firm you can ultimately see yourself working at
- Consider the specialisations of the firms and whether they align with your interests
- Consider the structural benefits to working at a certain firm
- How much pro bono work a firm does

Paralegal opportunities in your final year of study

If you do not get a clerkship offer and are determined to work in commercial law, there are alternative pathways you can pursue. Try to secure a paralegal position so you can best qualify yourself for a graduate role. Or consider delaying your degree by taking three subjects a semester, and having a second attempt at a clerkship in the following year. This sounds like an extreme choice, but is not uncommon in the law school community.



The Clerkship Experience

Rotations

Be open-minded about which practice areas and industries you would like to work in. You could be surprised at what you end up liking. The people in your team can sometimes be more important to the enjoyment of your work than what specific area of law you are practicing. Consider preferencing at least one transactional and one litigious rotation. Litigation-based rotations in January can often be quiet as the courts are closed.

The work required of a clerk is usually a mixture of interesting and mundane tasks. A clerkship is an opportunity to get training and experience so the work should not be excessively challenging. Depending on the business of your group or the culture of the firm, clerks are usually able to work reasonable hours - not too many late nights are required.

Good luck with your applications! For any further enquiries about SULLS' programs or the clerkship process, please feel free to contact Felicity Macourt (Interim Vice President Careers) at careers@suls.org.au. Otherwise, be sure to look out for the 2020 SULLS Careers Guide in Week 13!

For any inquiries as to SULLS' publications, and becoming involved as a contributor, please contact Alison Chen (Publications Director) at publications@suls.org.au.

Fun Activities

Sporting opportunities to take advantage of for summer clerks:

- Monday night sport at Rushcutters Bay
- Firm lunchtime sports
- Clerk-solicitor cricket matches
- Beach volleyball competitions

Some of these are internal competitions and others are against other firms.

The Inter-Firm Cruise and Inter-Firm Trivia Night are annual traditions and a fun way to meet clerks at other firms. Firm-wide and practice group Christmas parties are a great way to mingle with your future colleagues.

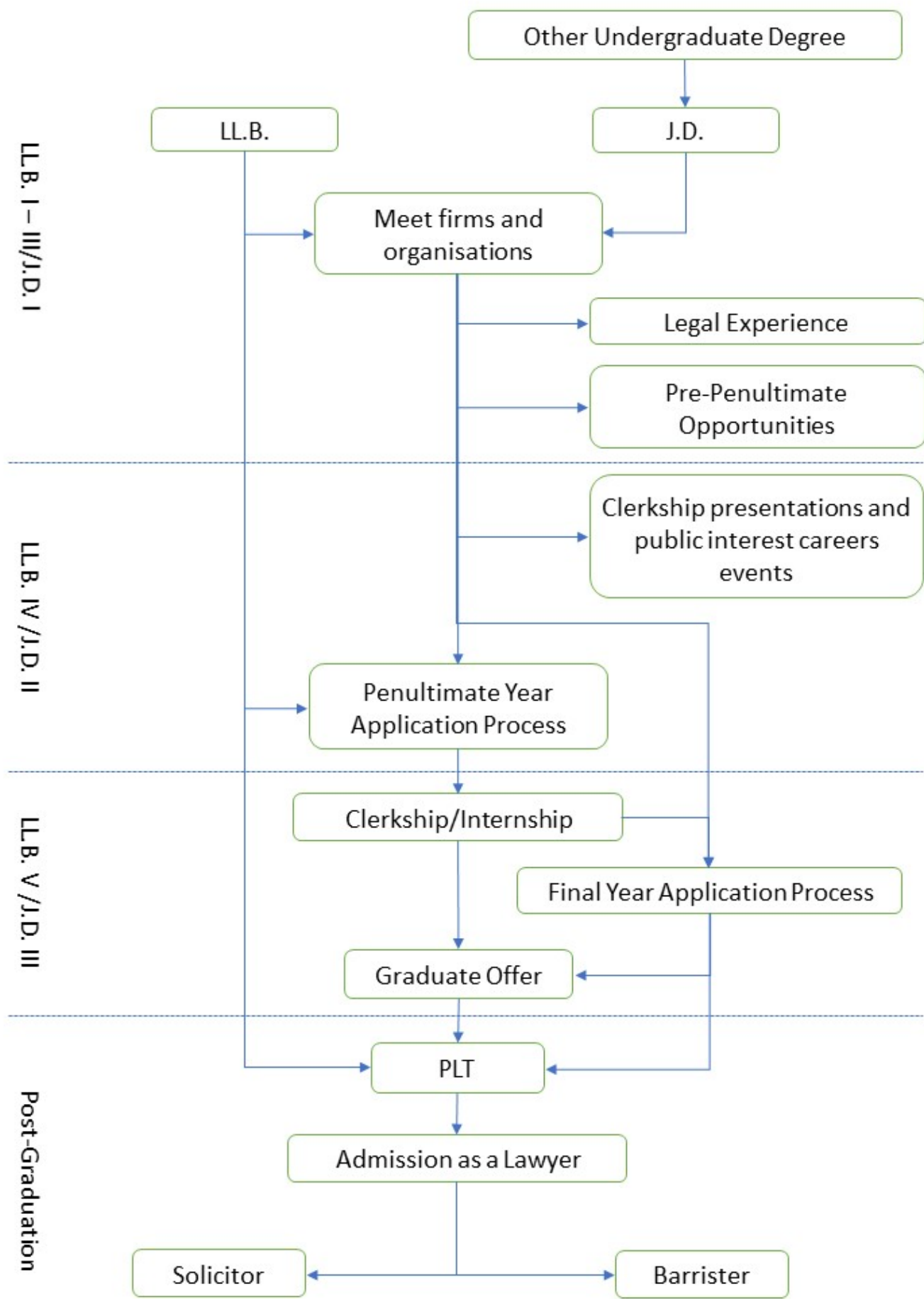


PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

This year, all presentations will be conducted online. Dates are subject to last minute changes, so please keep an eye out for more details in the SALS Weekly and on our [Facebook page](#). Sign up for the Weekly [here](#).

All presentations will take place from 1-2pm and are usually held via Zoom video conferencing.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Presentation</i>
Monday 27 April	Herbert Smith Freehills
Tuesday 28 April	Clayton Utz
Wednesday 29 April	Allens
Thursday 30 April	Ashurst
Monday 4 May	MinterEllison
Tuesday 5 May	Allen & Overy
Monday 11 May	Clifford Chance
Tuesday 12 May	Gilbert + Tobin
Wednesday 13 May	Baker McKenzie



SULS



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