

Costs law: Understanding career pathways

June 2026

**Published by
The Careers
Research and
Advisory Centre
(CRAC) Ltd**

CRAC

Costs law: Understanding career pathways

An independent study and report by the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC), commissioned by the Cost Lawyers Standards Board.

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Published by the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC)
22 Signet Court
Cambridge CB5 8LA
www.crac.org.uk

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About CRAC

The Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC), registered as a charity in 1964, provides research, expertise and innovation services for all those who support career development, at all ages and across all sectors. CRAC's research and consultancy work focuses on career-related learning, employability development and career transitions, including graduate, postgraduate and professional careers. CRAC also owns and manages the Vitae programme, which enhances support for the professional and career development of researchers and, increasingly, development of the research environment and improvement in research culture.

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1 Key findings

This study, commissioned by the Costs Lawyer Standards Board (CLSB) and conducted by the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC), provides new insights into how individuals enter, develop and progress within the field of legal costs. Building on the CLSB's 2025 workforce survey, through interviews with 17 Costs Lawyers it explores career pathways, motivations, challenges and support experiences. These findings are presented with the aim of deepening understanding of this small but strategically important profession within the legal sector.

Entry into costs law is rarely pre-planned. Most interviewees had not heard of costs law during education, even if they studied a law degree. Rather they (in their words) “fell into” costs law, either coming across it during searching for their first job or whilst working in a proximal role (such as a paralegal, finance or administrative position) in law or a related profession. Some entered from more distal work trajectories, but these cases tended to be several decades ago. What was common to all, however, was that they learnt of a specific costs law job opportunity, and/or costs law as a profession, through a colleague, manager or other third party. Costs law was consistently described as a “hidden profession.”

Motivations for entering the profession centre on aptitude, challenge and legal interest. Interviewees were drawn to a role in costs law because it matched their analytical and numerical aptitude, could provide some technical challenge (where sought), and enabled them to maintain a connection to law without having to pursue solicitor or barrister training pathways, which were thought to be expensive and arduous. Job security, professional status and encouragement from managers or qualified Costs Lawyers were other strong influences.

Early career experiences involve steep learning curves. First jobs in costs law are unregulated roles and interviewees described early steps in that work as highly challenging, with the complexity of work now increasing due to changes in the costs law regime. Many interviewees felt they had been “thrown in at the deep end” once they started work, with much of their development in the form of “learning by doing” – although neither of these was uniformly unwelcome, and they felt retrospective satisfaction in overcoming these challenges.

Qualification as a Costs Lawyer is widely encouraged, culturally and organisationally. Although other views might be held by unqualified practitioners, these interviewees felt that progression to qualification as a Costs Lawyer is often expected or encouraged by employers, especially in larger firms. Personal motivations to undertake the training necessary and become qualified included opportunities for a wider range of work activities, higher chargeable rates and improved career prospects, but also professional pride. Overall, interviewees had mainly responded to employers' encouragement, and/or the sector's cultural expectations, as much, or more than, being driven strongly by their individually-held motivations.

Once qualified, onward career pathways are diverse but cluster into two main routes: management or leadership (i.e. team leader, head of department, ultimately partner) and technical specialism (including advocacy). In addition to pathways within law firms (including specialist costs firms), options included in-house roles within certain client organisations, self-employment or setting up their own costs business. A few interviewees were considering a longer-term switch to become a solicitor or moving towards a judiciary-related role. However, not everyone sought upward progression, with some preferring to continue as a qualified practitioner without leadership responsibility. For those, especially, workplaces offering flexibility and/or family-friendly employment practices were particularly valued.

Key challenges to progression. Interviewees cited a range of issues or hurdles they had overcome during their progression to date and/or might impact their further progression. These included regulatory changes, increasing workload complexity, the burden of becoming qualified, and could be intertwined with personal circumstances. Specific challenges included:

- The impact of the Jackson reforms and regime change which now required more complex work to be undertaken earlier in a costs law career;
- Handling the burden of training for qualification while also balancing (in most cases) full-time work and family or social responsibilities, especially for young parents;
- The fast-moving nature of costs law, and case law within it, requiring continuous learning;
- Varied levels of employer support, especially in smaller firms, although overall the level of support from employers was felt to be improving;
- While costs law was recognised as an improving professional landscape, experiences of gender and social-class related prejudice.

Support from employers, managers and peers are major enablers for progression.

Supportive line managers and teams (colleagues) were viewed as essential for new entrants to costs law to thrive, and these and the funding of training became even more crucial to pursue qualification successfully. Peer learning and informal mentorship played significant roles. Recent experiences of the delivery of the ACL Training Professional Qualification course were largely positive, with reports of accessible tutors, support and flexible course structures, but the role of personal support from family was widely acknowledged as necessary.

There remains scope for better structured, profession-wide support. Specific areas where interviewees suggested improvements to the professional environment in costs law included greater support for returners from maternity/paternity leave, including 'refresher' development activities or information on changes in costs law and working practices. Some kind of professional helpline or safe discussion space, for technical questions and practical issues like software support, would be helpful to many, given that many teams are very small and reliance upon team and managerial support at many career stages. Wider availability of more structured mentoring opportunities across the profession would also be welcome.

Overall, the findings indicate that costs law offers satisfying and meaningful professional careers but remains poorly understood outside the profession. Greater visibility, clearer career pathways and more structured support could enhance recruitment, development and long-term progression within this specialist legal field.

Recommendations

- First, as we believe this research has uncovered some valuable and authentic evidence, we hope that the CLSB uses the findings to inform its strategies including in relation to communications and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI);
- Given widespread views that costs law is a 'hidden profession', we believe the CLSB should review current provision of careers information about the profession and potentially undertake a programme of work to augment it (including use of case studies);
- While the CLSB provides information to the profession about developments in costs law, we recommend it considers specifically how to make this more accessible to returners to the profession (e.g. after maternity leave or a career gap);
- Further, we believe the CLSB should consider the accessibility of the other professional development support and information that it provides to practising Costs Lawyers.

2 Background and project aims

2.1 Introduction and context

Costs law is a specialist area within legal practice concerned with assessment, management and recovery of legal costs. Costs Lawyers are qualified and authorised costs law professionals with the right to conduct litigation, represent their clients in court and administer oaths, relating to the preparation and filing of costs documents and the negotiation and settlement of costs disputes. Typically this can involve detailed case analysis, interpretation of complex rules and procedures, consideration of proportionality principles and application of case law in determining costs. These tasks demand strong analytical capabilities, precision and the ability to collaborate effectively with solicitors, clients and courts. Costs law constitutes a distinct but essential component of the legal eco-system, and the expertise of Cost Lawyers helps ensure that the determination of legal costs is conducted fairly and transparently, supporting the integrity and efficiency of the wider justice system.

Costs law intersects with all areas of legal practice, so practitioners engage with a broad range of cases. Although these practitioners represent only a small fraction of the overall legal workforce, their role is structurally important because costs issues arise in almost all litigation contexts. They work in specialist costs firms (or as independent consultants) or within broader legal practices, while others work “in-house” in a public sector or other organisations.

Understanding more about careers within costs law, including who enters and how they progress, is potentially valuable when considering this workforce as a profession and to ensure a sustainable pipeline into this specialist and strategically important area of legal practice.

The Association of Costs Lawyers (ACL) is the professional body representing Costs Lawyers in England and Wales, promoting, supporting and protecting their interests as a profession. As a representative membership body, it lobbies on their behalf and provides networking, training and community support. Its training arm (ACL Training) provides the Costs Lawyer Professional Qualification, a Level 6 qualification studied as a two-year programme which historically has been the approved route to becoming a Costs Lawyer, although a Level 6 apprenticeship pathway is being developed. Under the Legal Services Act 2007, ACL is the approved regulator for the profession, but as it is not permitted to regulate directly it has delegated regulatory functions to an independent body – leading to the creation of the CLSB.

The Costs Lawyer Standards Board (CLSB) is the independent regulator of Costs Lawyers in England and Wales, existing explicitly to protect the public interest, not the interests of the profession. It serves the public interest by setting and maintaining the standards of professional conduct by which Costs Lawyers must abide, to ensure they deliver services safely, ethically and competently for consumers. It oversees complaints relating to conduct issues and can also take regulatory action when a Costs Lawyer’s conduct falls below required standards. As a regulator, it also has a statutory objective to “encourage an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession.”

One of the CLSB’s activities towards that objective has been to monitor the diversity of the profession, in order to identify areas of under-representation and consider actions it or others could take to develop a more diverse and inclusive workforce. The CLSB regularly undertakes surveys of Costs Lawyers to ascertain the evolving workforce profile. Its December 2024 workforce survey focused on career pathways into and within the profession, aiming to discover more about different paths that led individuals to working in costs law, how

respondents found out about careers in costs law (and/or their first job within it) and factors influencing their career decisions. This was part of a wider programme of work by CLSB which sought to understand more about career experiences and what could be done to strengthen the current profession and ensure and support the next generation of Costs Lawyers.

This report documents the findings of further research commissioned by the CLSB, undertaken by the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC), to build upon the survey results and provide deeper insights into Cost Lawyers' career pathways and decisions. Such findings could be useful in developing new career information to enhance recruitment into the profession and progress within it.

2.2 Project aims and research topics

The broad purpose of this research study was to develop and provide greater understanding of individuals' career pathways into and within costs law, including the factors and decisions that led them to becoming a costs law practitioner and shaped their subsequent trajectory within the profession. That deeper and contemporary understanding should help the CLSB identify and develop new career information that could enhance recruitment into the profession, to assure or augment the future pipeline into costs law. It could also underpin any development of new support for Costs Lawyers so that they, and the next generations, can progress and succeed in their career ambitions, at the same time sustaining a thriving profession.

Under these broad objectives, we identified a series of key areas for investigation (i.e. research questions):

- What were individuals' career trajectories to their current positions?
- How did they find out about costs law, opportunities within it and the job with which they entered the profession?
- What factors influenced their choices and prompted them to pursue this direction?
- What support or enablers have helped in their career or progression and what barriers and challenges have they faced to date?
- Why did they progress to a regulated position and what was that transition like, where appropriate?
- Where might their career now lead them, and what might help them achieve such progression?
- To what extent do these issues vary for different sub-groups within the workforce, if sufficient engagement and insights are available?

2.3 Methodology and sample

Narrative interviews were carried out online with 17 participants between December 2025 and February 2026, selected from a pool of volunteers recruited via a range of promotions by the CLSB. All were Costs Lawyers as these were easier to reach than others. The sample was purposively selected so as to reflect a range of characteristics across the interviewees, including gender, broad career stage, duration in costs law, prior career trajectory and geographical region. While the CLSB is interested in wider aspects of diversity, it was not possible to cover every protected characteristic within a modest research sample. A fuller description of the methodology and sampling process appears in Appendix 1.

3 Finding and entering costs law

In this chapter the focus is on entry to costs law as a profession or occupational sector. It should be remembered that qualification as a Costs Lawyer involves passing both the professional qualification and a period of supervised Qualifying Experience. In practice, what this meant in our research was that all the interviewees had entered costs law in an unregulated position (Costs Advisor, although they tended to refer to this as Costs Draftsman), and had subsequently qualified, which allowed them to become regulated as a Costs Lawyer. A selection of quotations from interviewees is included to illustrate research findings; a more comprehensive collection can be found in Appendix 2.

3.1 Discovering costs law and opportunities within it

3.1.1 Prior trajectories

A starting point in our interviews focused on participants' entry to costs law, i.e. the first job they had within costs law as an area of legal practice. However, this was most meaningfully explored with understanding of their prior circumstances and career trajectories, including educational qualifications. Overall, just over half of the interviewees had studied law at university (including a few at postgraduate level such as the Legal Practice Course or a legal conversion course). The remainder had a variety of qualifications, not all in higher education.

In line with the results of the CLSB's survey, around one third of the interviewees had entered costs law as their first job after education (mostly higher education, in which most had studied a law degree). Most entered at a later career stage with at least some prior employment trajectory, which was in most cases was substantial (i.e. at least a few years in employment) and for some was at a mid-career stage. Knowledge of those prior working circumstances is valuable in understanding how and why they came across a costs law job opening and/or costs law as an appropriate future career direction.

Amongst those who had previously worked, there was some range of previous occupations and sectors, although not a wide range. Most commonly they had either worked in a junior accounting, administrative or paralegal function in a legal practice, or in an accounting or finance role in an enterprise that could be described as adjacent to law (such as an insurance business). Meanwhile, there were also a few individuals with an entirely unrelated education and/or career background, who had entered costs law at a later career stage – although these were all several decades ago and may reflect an era where costs law was less formally structured and/or recognised as a profession.

3.1.2 Learning about specific opportunities

Most of those entering a costs law job without substantive prior working experience had studied a law degree and had come across the opening during routine searching of job opportunities that were related to law. In most cases they did not, at that point, want to pursue a pathway to becoming a solicitor or barrister. In two cases, recruitment agencies had alerted them to specific opportunities in costs law, based on the broad interests they had registered, while personal contacts were important for others. While these interviewees entered a costs law job as their first main job post-graduation, none had appeared proactively to target a costs law career beforehand because, they reported, they had been unaware these specific roles or the profession existed.

"I was just looking for any sort of legal job at the time, applying for all sorts of paralegal jobs and training jobs, and a position came up for a cost draftsman working in a law firm. I was like 'I don't know what it is, but I'll apply for it'. I got offered the job and went in at the very bottom of the scale."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"I went to university and did a law degree. And then when I had finished that, I didn't want to go on and be a solicitor or a barrister. I came out of university and I thought, I'm just going to look for any job that's legal because I love the law and I'd enjoyed my law degree and I knew that was definitely what I wanted to do as a career. So I just applied for anything that was within the legal profession and I applied for a cost draftsman's job."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Amongst the majority who had previously been working, many had been in jobs that could be stated as proximal to costs law. It was through those working experiences, and most commonly through colleagues or contacts at work, that they learned about specific job openings or potential opportunities within costs law. Although in some cases this was encouragement of a manager (for example, if they were already in a law firm), more commonly it was more serendipitous (for example, an accounting executive recognising the level of business relating to costs that occurred in legal work).

"I was working for a solicitors firm but doing insurance claims work and an opening came up to work in in the very small costs team dealing with cost negotiations. So I applied and that's where it started."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

"I was head of the cash office for [a legal] firm, and then one day a solicitor came into me and talked about legal aid files that hadn't been billed. From there I got moved into that department and took on costs full time. I'd never heard of a costs lawyer in my life."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (late-stage qualifier, male)

Some of those who had started their career in entirely unrelated work – such as a skilled trade or working for their family business – had migrated into a related function such as accounting, while for some others their relatively abrupt/unexpected move into a costs law role was purely through a pivotal personal contact (as opposed to a work colleague), such as via their partner or a close relative who worked in the profession.

These experiences strongly echo the findings of the CLSB survey, which reported many respondents to have worked in a legal-related career before entering costs law, with about half of respondents finding out about costs law openings while in the workplace and a further quarter encouraged by their manager to pursue one within their existing legal firm.

3.1.3 Awareness of the profession

As reported above, none of the interviewees said they were aware of the costs law profession, or specific costs law positions within it, when they were in education, irrespective of whether that included higher education or even studying law at university. Several specifically highlighted that their undergraduate law course had not included learning about costs law as a specialty or separate profession, although one remembered a single session on costs within their Legal Practice Course (LPC):

"I got a degree in law and I hadn't even heard of the costs sector at that time. It's not mentioned in the law degree - it's not a requirement [to be mentioned] in the degree",
Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

"I feel like it's the hidden profession of law, because a lot of people fall into it, nobody gets to it from university"
Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

This reflected the results of CLSB 2025 survey respondents, of whom just 3% had identified costs law as a profession they might like to work in while studying. Evidence from this and the interviews strongly suggests that costs law is very rarely a predetermined career option and much more commonly is only learned about or explored once in a proximal job and/or a recommendation by a work colleague, manager or other contact.

3.2 Motivations for entry

It is clear from the above that most Costs Lawyers we engaged were not motivated to enter the profession because they had identified it as an attractive or apt career direction while in education. Rather, most had learned about it (as a profession), or more commonly spotted a specific job opening, while working in a related or proximal job role. However, either way, it is valuable to know what it was that they found attractive. The most popular themes expressed by interviewees when asked this were their potential aptitude, the perceived challenge, professional status job security of the potential job and it being related to the legal field.

Many interviewees reported that costs law work was a good fit with their aptitude for numbers, and that they found such work enjoyable, which may have been what had motivated many of them to have entered an accounting or finance-related role in the first place.

"Actually it's my A-levels that are perhaps more relevant to being a cost lawyer than my degree. I did maths, chemistry and English and they lend themselves very well to the career of a cost lawyer. Maths for obvious reasons. Chemistry because we often have to be forensic in our analysis and English because you have to construct legal arguments, paraphrase documents, etc."
Mid-career Costs Lawyer (in house, female)

"I fell into it rather and found that it actually suited my style quite well, because I've got a degree [and] was used to being analytical which is a key skill when it comes to cost drafting".
Late-career Costs Lawyer (own firm, male)

Several interviewees remembered their perceptions that a costs law role could offer more challenging work than their existing finance or accounting position. As many interviewees had considered a specific costs law position (i.e. a job move) rather than necessarily a career shift, practical issues such as potential job security, flexibility in working conditions and pay were also important. However, it was clear that they had perceived such a role as one that was technical and/or professional which also made it attractive – while some had viewed it within the context of a different kind of professional career.

"It was really varied. It felt like a proper professional role."
Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"Being regulated [by the CLSB] has really given me a lot of sense of pride and joy to have a profession. When I was studying all those years ago I wanted to be a criminal

defence lawyer, so it's a bit of a change but it's something that I have a natural aptitude for and I love what I do."

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

A number liked the fact that it could allow them to retain their interest in law and proximity to the legal profession, but without some of the requirements or difficulties that pursuing many legal careers might entail. For example, some with a first degree in law and/or those working in a finance role in a law firm, or as a paralegal, could see a progression path that they perceived was less competitive and perhaps more flexible than the path they would need to take if seeking to become a solicitor. Others felt that being a solicitor could itself be too restrictive, being constrained to a single area of practice (particularly in the modern context of specialised firms).

"At that time, I'd had enough of studying and I didn't really want to just jump straight into another set of studying. And so I came out of university and I thought, I'm just going to look for any job that's legal because I love the law and I'd enjoyed my law degree. I wanted to have a professional role that would be recognised, respected and well paid and would give me opportunities to work in the law."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

In many cases interviewees had been encouraged or influenced by others. In some cases those others were Cost Lawyers, who presumably were in a position to describe some of issues above, while others were existing senior or other work colleagues who at least had some awareness of costs law. The role of these third parties was acknowledged in the previous sections in relation to helping individuals become aware of costs law job openings, and/or the profession, but it is clear from the 2025 survey responses and several interviews that the encouragement they gave was also itself a significant motivating factor. In the absence of plentiful career information about costs law – a situation many reported – such personal encouragement could be more important than for other potential career directions (which individuals might have been more readily able to explore personally).

While understanding of the issues that had motivated people is clearly important, the evidence should be viewed in the context that these were largely the perceived benefits of moving into a costs law job, mostly from other existing employment, rather than more generally held perceptions held during education about a potential career. There was a pervading impression that many had "fallen into" costs law due to various circumstances, rather than costs law being an overt positive career choice. This does seem to support the view that more substantive promotion of costs law as a career or profession would be beneficial.

"Everybody knows what a solicitor is, everybody knows what a barrister is, everybody knows what a judge is, but nobody knows what a Costs Lawyer is."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"I think a lot of people do fall into costs. I think very few people wake up and think, oh well, I'm going to be a cost lawyer or, I want to go into that practice area. It's usually a second thought or a diversion along the way that people fall into."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

4 Progression within costs law

The previous chapter considered how Costs Lawyers came across the profession and elected to enter it. This chapter focuses on how their careers have subsequently developed, including becoming regulated. Again, a more comprehensive collection of quotations from interviews can be found in Appendix 2.

4.1 Early progression

The interviewees entered costs law in either a costs advisor or trainee position (albeit often referred to as a costs draftsman role). As all were now Costs Lawyers, a key aspect of their trajectory was progression to becoming a Costs Lawyer, which they referred to as “qualification”.¹ The information they provided prior to, and during, interviews revealed that almost all had qualified between three and 10 years after entry in a costs advisor or trainee role. Most commonly the period was around five years, and those who remained in a single large firm tended to qualify the earliest. There were isolated cases of a much longer period, but this was due to varying personal trajectories – such as a period abroad outside the UK profession – and/or because they had started at an earlier time when regulation did not exist in the current form.

Their working trajectories from entry as a costs advisor or trainee to qualification were varied, with the majority remaining with the same firm (in most cases a large firm, but not exclusively), but a substantial minority displaying some mobility between employers prior to qualification. Such mobility was driven by personal circumstances (such as family relocation, or divorce) for several individuals rather than for progression or other professional reasons. However, some had moved between companies seeking better remuneration, more opportunities for progression (including the potential for training/support for qualification), enhanced working conditions (such as greater flexibility) or different line management, or to work in a different practice area. Overall, interviewees had changed employer (since entering costs law) relatively infrequently in comparison with the early-career stages of many Generation Y or Z people in the UK, although this may be in line with the extent of moves in other parts of the legal profession or other regulated professions.

4.2 Motivations for qualification

The 2025 CLSB survey indicated a wide range of factors contributing to individuals’ decisions to become a regulated professional, including extrinsic factors (potential career progression and improved job opportunities, authorisation to undertake particular types of work, marketability, higher hourly rates commanded and salary) and intrinsic (personal pride in regulatory status, interest in professional development, respect from other legal professionals and from the judiciary). Evidence from the interviews gave a somewhat more nuanced picture, emphasising the additional insight that qualitative approaches can bring to research about these decisions, particularly the role of context. Of course, it should be remembered that interviewees had all taken the decision to become regulated professionals, and a fuller picture of decision-making around qualification might emerge had individuals choosing not to do so been included in this research.

¹ Strictly, “qualification” is the process of passing the course and undertaking two years of Qualifying Experience, while “regulation” is being authorised by CLSB after applying for a practicing certificate

For many interviewees, becoming qualified appeared to have been something expected and/or encouraged by their employer, particularly in larger firms. Some individuals had started such training immediately or soon after entering the firm, whereas for others there had been a more substantive period as a costs advisor before a decision was made to pursue training and qualification as part of their progression.

“To be honest, I don’t know. It kind of just happened. I was working, they trained me in costs, and I was getting better at what I was doing. I got the offer to do my ACL qualification. I thought why not, and then here I am as a qualified Costs Lawyer.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I knew that the qualification existed and it was something put on the radar, suggested to me once I’d been offered the job and was speaking to my manager. It was a few years before I started the course, but I knew [earlier] the path you could take.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

That ‘encouragement’ or expectation on the part of the employer was presumably because it saw additional value to its business that could arise through having qualified staff, either to secure and deliver more or higher-value income-raising activity or save costs by providing this aspect of service in-house. It was felt that as costs have risen and become more and more important for clients, employers may find it difficult to entrust responsibility to somebody unqualified. There was also evidence that the post-Mazur requirement¹ – essentially that unauthorised staff cannot conduct litigation – had had the effect that more employers were encouraging their staff to become qualified, for example, so that they had rights of audience.

“Clients prefer to have a qualified regulated person as opposed to non-qualified. It is beneficial for the firm, hence there is a push for qualifying.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“We can also increase our rates – we can justify charging a higher hourly rate for our work than being unqualified. I think that was a positive thing; employers understand that it’s worthwhile investment for their staff because they will get the positives and the benefits from that following qualification.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

It was clear that there is some cultural expectation within costs law as a profession, as well as overt encouragement by employers, for staff to become qualified. These are potentially powerful influences especially where they align with individuals’ aspirations, both extrinsic and intrinsic. Interviewees did identify several of the more individual motivations for qualification suggested in the CLSB survey, including to enable personal progression within their existing firm or to have more options if seeking a move, some of which bordered upon more intrinsic rationales (such as professional respect):

“It opens up so some can specialise in different areas of work. We’ve got some that go down the route of being an advocate, others progress into senior or supervisory roles like myself, or the more technical side. So I think once you’ve qualified, it can open up more opportunities”.

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

¹ Mazur v Charles Russell Speechlys LLP (2025) ruled that ‘non-authorised’ staff cannot conduct litigation, even if supervised by an authorised solicitor; this means costs for work conducted by unauthorised staff on litigation matters may be irrecoverable.

<https://www.judiciary.uk/judgments/julia-mazur-and-another-v-charles-russell-speechlys-llp-and-others/>

“You don't really have to be qualified to be successful in the sector, but getting qualified certainly was like getting the Prefect badge; that's the best way I could explain it really, it gives you an extra prestige, and gives you the extra responsibility.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

There was also some evidence of somewhat more intrinsic rationales for becoming qualified:

“The motivation is essentially wanting to be a qualified lawyer and bring justice to clients, whether that's in costs or in any area of law. That's what I always wanted to do as a practitioner.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

“Being regulated by the CLSB has really given me a lot of sense of pride and joy, to have a profession”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

However, the pattern of evidence suggested that most commonly interviewees had responded positively to employers' encouragement, or the sector's cultural expectations, in terms of pursuing training to become qualified, rather than being driven strongly by their individually held motivations.

4.3 Pathways and current roles

4.3.1 Career paths in costs law

As the interviewees were deliberately selected on the basis of different career stages and working situations, they had a range of current roles. These included:

- Costs Lawyer working within a team in a legal firm (some who had relatively recently qualified, but some with longer service) or as a sole in-house specialist in a small law firm;
- Team leader (of Costs Lawyer teams) in a legal firm;
- Senior Associate or Head of [Costs] Department, who also led teams;
- Partner in specialist costs law firm;
- Self-employed Costs Lawyer;
- In-house Costs Lawyer within an organisation that was not a law or costs firm.

Between them they demonstrated that a variety of career paths exist. Broadly, the two most common career paths – at least within larger companies, i.e. within a department in a large law firm or within a more specialist costs firm – were to move into management or to pursue a technical track:

“From experience and knowing different people along the way, you tend to find that you've got Costs Lawyers who make good managers because they're a people person and good at forming and bonding a team, a team leader or a manager who's in charge of the staff and workload. And then alongside that a technical manager who might not manage a team, but they're there for the technical side of things as support alongside the team manager. So this seems to be two alternative directions.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

In addition, some had moved in different directions, such as setting themselves up as a self-employed specialist Costs Lawyer, or becoming an in-house Costs Lawyer in a public sector organisation (to reduce its reliance on external specialists). On the other hand, it is also important to note that not all individuals wished to progress in terms of promotion and greater

responsibility, and a few interviewees said they were content to remain as a qualified member of a costs team: *“not everybody wants to be a superstar”*.

Their trajectories suggested a number of rationales and factors that influenced progression, including ambition (to progress, recognising that more options open up after qualification), greater alignment with personal interests in terms of area of practice, desire for more autonomy, as well as organisational factors (growth, or a shift in emphasis or strategy). However, the influence of personal circumstances was crucial for many interviewees, in particular women who became parents and others with caring responsibilities, but also those requiring relocation to accommodate changes in a spouse or partner's career.

4.3.2 Reflections upon current roles

Interviewees were all at least reasonably content with their current role, although it is possible that the interview volunteering and selection process had inadvertently screened out individuals who were not content. Their observations on their current roles attested to satisfaction with the purpose of the role and what it achieved, but also more intrinsic issues such as interest in the work undertaken or its variety. On the other hand, a few individuals accepted that it was some of the benefits brought by the role, rather than the work or role itself, that they saw as its greatest value.

“The main stream of my work is personal injury, life-changing, serious stuff. It's big money, a lot at stake. Quite often [I am] dealing with litigation because the client is a patient or a child. So yeah, it's good, it's different, it's interesting. There's always something new. So yeah, we enjoy it.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“Every saving that [I and team] achieve is [government] genuinely pound in pocket. To be able to train those conducting litigation to bear in mind the need to save taxpayers' expense, for me is really important. The money saved from the budget could then be spent elsewhere where it is needed.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (in house, female)

“I think the main difference [from other areas of legal practice] could be that even though you do need good social skills and costs, I think it's a different level of social skills required. Within costs, you obviously need to negotiate, you need to have persuasion, you need to have good negotiation skills with people, but the vast majority of the work is dealing with numbers.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

4.4 Further progression

Further illumination of how career pathways could manifest was available from interviewees' thoughts about how or where their career might lead them in future. Aside from the late-career interviewees who talked about potential retirement, a range of future directions emerged. For example, several spoke about progressing to positions of leadership, although these did relate to their current career stage (as the question had suggested where they might be in five or so years from now):

“I would like to grow this team so that we can bring all of our costs work in-house and we wouldn't have anything needing to go external. I would obviously have a team below me; I would love to become a partner.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I'd love to be in like a managerial role, happy to stay at the firm I'm at now, if things permit. I would be staying in costs – no idea in my head that I would ever want to

change. I've always avoided advocacy; there's a certain type of person that would do really well in a role like that, but I don't think I'd be one of them. Some of the training that I've been doing for younger people in my team has opened up [...] I love the idea of passing things on that you've learned, I think I'd do well in a managerial position."

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

On the other hand some wanted to continue with their learning to develop in other directions within costs law or, in rare cases, potentially within law more widely:

"Ideally, for me, in three to five years' time, I would like to have complete experience in being an advocate. I think that would be the final thing for me that will make me a fully rounded Costs Lawyer who could pick up a case in costs at any point. I might even then be looking at setting up my own firm."

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

"The idea is that I'd be moving to [being] a solicitor and then hopefully, I don't know, in 10 years' time then going to the judiciary. That's the ultimate route, but I'm just looking for ways to keep moving, keep progressing rather than staying still."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (in house, female)

By contrast, several had more limited ambitions, as they were content with their current role or what they saw to be relatively achievable progression that did not require further study:

"If Associate happens [from current application], I think probably I'll try and just stay at that level for a couple of years, because it's a bit busy with two young kids. I've played my strengths and found areas that have worked for me and developed them and got recognition for it. So I suppose it will be seeing what opportunities come forward. I am quite settled here. Some people jump about quite a lot, but I like the flexibility and the support. While I'm still happy here, this is where I will stay."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

A few others, again, wanted to remain in costs law but set up their own business, in this case continuing the autonomy they had as a self-employed practitioner:

"I just want to be the best at it. So that's my goal for my second part of life – making my own practice. I've been really good at family legal aid, that's why I'm still working as self-employed with other companies, to gain as much experience as I can and so I know all eventualities before I set out on my own."

Costs Lawyer (Late-stage qualifier, self-employed, female)

4.5 Challenges to progression

Several interviewees considered there was something of an existential threat to costs law, following the 2013 Jackson reforms² which had introduced a fixed recoverable cost regime for certain areas of work, reducing the need for, and scope of, human input to calculating costs. Introduction of that regime resulted in the starting point for 'human' costs law work becoming progressively higher in terms of the costs and complexity involved. In addition, there were

² Lord Justice Jackson's 2013 report following his review of civil litigation costs system to promote access to justice at proportionate cost. This shifted the focus from 'reasonable' costs to proportionate (to value, complexity and importance of the case), leading to stricter costs budgeting that had to be submitted in advance.

some fears more generally about the potential future use of AI tools. However, the interviewees saw this as mainly a threat to work at the unregulated level and reasoned that Costs Lawyers would continue to be needed for the more complex work and varied roles that they undertook.

By contrast, overall, there was agreement that the introduction of regulation into costs law was felt to have helped make it more visible generally and more 'acceptable' (respectable, or respected) as a profession within the legal domain. Some interviewees who had started in costs law the longest ago – in the 1980s and 1990s – spoke of how they had been looked down upon then professionally, when they were unqualified, being seen “merely” as ‘clerks’ and not to be professionals like solicitors or barristers (views held by many other legal professionals, and the judiciary). However, despite this shift to recognition of professionalism, costs law continued to be seen as a “hidden profession” and one in which clear career progression pathways were not yet established.

A further consequence of the 2013 reforms was that with the reduction in the basic work that was typically undertaken by an unregulated costs advisor, new recruits at that level now also faced more complex work at an earlier stage. Many interviewees talked about their own early days in costs law as being “*thrown in [at] the deep end*” and so they felt that new starters at this level could face increasingly complex work immediately. This, they believed, could present a challenge, as the new staff had a higher extent of complexity to navigate. As much of their training was “*learning by doing*”, supervised by in-house colleagues, this could present greater challenge both to the new recruit and to those supervising them. It is also interesting to speculate on whether this shift could have any impact on recruitment to unregulated jobs, which many felt they had “*fallen into*”; i.e. would it continue to be feasible to fall into a role in which there was inherently more complicated and difficult work?

“It's a scary environment and a lot to learn to start with, information you just have to get to grips with straightaway. Whenever we have new starters now, I say it's a very uphill battle, but it will start like that and ease off as you start to find your feet. I would definitely say it's always a bit daunting to start with, especially if you've not been in the legal world. You've got to learn lots of things, that's [even] before software or how certain businesses conduct [business] and all the things that surround that.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“Challenges [included] taking ownership of work, dealing with complex things, and every conceivable pitfall for the unwary you could fall into on the job. It was a baptism of fire, I won't lie. You're up against people who have a lot more experience than you, a lot more savvy, and can litigate better than you. It was overwhelming at times; there were times in the past where I [wasn't] sure I was capable enough to be in this position, but thankfully things turned out well – I overcame those challenges and I've since forged a really good career.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

More broadly, there was felt to be a challenge in the continuous learning that was required to remain active in the profession. While this is a feature of all professions – a requirement for professionals actively to continue updating their skills and practice – some interviewees felt that costs law was particularly prone to constant change in both the law and practice. While the learning required to keep on top of this could be an attraction for some, it was not welcome to all.

However, one of the most prominent areas of challenge reported by interviewees was around qualification. It was recognised that not all employers were prepared to fund the Costs Lawyer Qualification and/or support an unqualified employee to undertake it, whereas both funding and support were more readily available in larger firms. More fundamentally, not all recent entrants were keen or able to take on the commitment of studying and training, for what was seen as a considerable duration, although it was acknowledged that this was becoming more flexible with time. As in wider legal and other professions, there was the more generic challenge of finding the drive, time and resilience to combine studying, keeping on top of work (in which you might still be quite new and learning) and family or other life commitments. Clearly this was most difficult for those with children or family caring responsibilities, and there was some evidence to suggest most who were parents had become qualified either before having children or once they were of at least school age.

“I started [ACL Training] in 2022, the old three-year course, but I was exempt from the first year. I know it's worth it in the end, but people might struggle with balancing it with the day-to-day life and obviously the full-time job as well. It's a lot of content, and the exams alongside a full-time job, it's very strenuous. I know they've streamlined it now, I think you can do it in one year if you've got enough exemptions, which is great but I imagine it's very full on.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

To some extent, those challenges were seen to continue beyond qualification, as there was a need to keep up with changes in costs law and practice, in addition to achieving day-to-day work requirements, especially for those with responsibility for children or family. This was most commonly but not exclusively related by women, and particularly when they returned to work after parental leave. It is not clear without a comparative study whether this challenge is greater or any different in costs law than other professions. However, what is presumably common is that the support and flexibility offered by employers varies strongly, although overall was seen to be improving. Several interviewees had left previous employers because of inflexibility or lack of support during those challenging times, while others felt they would stay with a current employer which had supported them and continued to offer flexibility and compassion. Arguably, such support is more easily provided within large firms, so it is possible that overall it could be less widely available within costs law if the profession comprises a larger proportion of small enterprises.

“The difficulties I've encountered [were] going off and having a family and then coming back into work. I think with costs law, it's so fast moving and things change so quickly and there's always new case law. I came back to work and I sat there and I was like I don't know how to do my job anymore. I don't know what I'm doing – I think that was a massive knock to my confidence.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

The other aspect of employer support that could be challenging which arose during the interviews was that of the line manager. It was clear that these relationships were crucial to both wellbeing and progression, and not all line managers had been supportive. This could be in relation to encouraging (or not) and supporting training for qualification, or more generally in relation to progression or flexible working. However, there was an overall view that organisational cultures had improved and that a supportive environment and/or line manager was far more commonplace now than in the past. The issue of line management is presumably generic to most professions and occupations, so we do not provide quotations highlighting particular personal experiences here.

Finally, and this is something that has arisen in other workforce studies within law, several interviewees commented on challenges they had faced personally in relation to gender and social class. Almost all the women at later career stages whom we interviewed said they had had to suffer gender prejudice during their careers, much as we have reported in our previous research with barristers, for example. Admittedly the circumstances reported tended to be several decades ago, so there was recognition that this had improved overall, and we have chosen not to illustrate those experiences specifically with quotations in this report due to their vintage. However, two of the men we interviewed (who had entered from prior work in other sectors) reported experiences of prejudice in relation to their social class background. They perceived persistent elitism amongst established Costs Lawyers, and they and others felt that an “old boys network” had existed and progression was still to some extent based on “who you know not what you know.” More extensive research on a stratified basis would be required to understand how widespread this continues to be and the extent that it has changed as the profession has evolved and matured, but the following quotations refer to situations within the last 10-15 years:

“I was brought up in an underprivileged area and went to a state school. I’ve had a sense of imposter syndrome. [...] I don’t fit the costs draftsman or costs law profile. I was scared of failing, of not passing the exam, of not being as good as the people in my team who’ve already qualified, scared that I’d be looked at as not as intelligent or bright as people thought. It was just pure fear. [Yet I] achieved the highest score of anyone who sat the exam that year. The association was [previously] very snooty, elitist, very look down your nose, but it has changed a lot.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

4.6 Enablers and support

In the same way that some of the challenges reported above are generic and some specific to costs law careers and training, the support and enabling factors that helped interviewees with their progression and success could be seen in the same way. The key enabling or support sources identified were their employer, as well as their line manager or team leader, and their team colleagues or peers.

The benefit and impact of support from these parties was particularly acutely felt when the interviewees were considering and undertaking their qualification training:

“[Large firm] have always been encouraging and paid for it. They’ve always said, yes, you can do it, so there’s never been any kind of [questioning of] why or that they’re not going to pay for it. I never felt any barriers within the training and development, or held back in any way.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I was very lucky with the team I had around me because almost every single person had done [ACL Training] already. It was good to have people to speak to in my little close team and obviously the wider costs management team as well, who could give me some tips, tell me how they managed to get through exams, tips and tricks on the essays. Obviously, when you’re learning anything new, there are going to be some barriers, but if you’re struggling to learn something, just ask someone about it, everyone around me just wanted to help me so I could do the best that I could.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

The influence of within-company support during those study periods seemed to be especially critical. Most interviewees revealed that they had experienced supportive working environments in at least some (and in some cases all) of their jobs. Although significant

numbers reported instances of toxic or unsupportive environments at some period in their career – none of these was recent.

“I joined a team and everybody was really supportive. The partner and head of the cost team was involved in training, because we were a lot smaller then. So there was always somebody to ask and we got a lot of support. I think that's why stayed here so long – there's always support, somebody to ask. You're not on your own.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Predictably, line managers or team leaders had played particularly valuable roles in supporting the interviewees when they were at an earlier stage of their costs law career and/or to the current day. Several of them were modelling such supportive behaviour now that they, in turn, were a team leader or in a managerial role. Only one interviewee reported having (informal) mentorship, however, but this had been very influential for them.

“My first ever boss at [...] gave me a tremendous opportunity because he made me his right- hand person. So I went with him to see clients and that was a real opportunity for me to be sat with clients, I watched him deliver seminars, I went with him to court, I went with him in-house to different law firms to do jobs that were urgent and things like that. That was an amazing learning curve for me.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (own firm, female)

“I think mentorship is massively important to anyone who works in costs. I think it's important even if you are experienced, just having someone to bounce ideas off. And in the context of the costs qualification, whether it's via the apprenticeship route or via the more traditional academic route, I would say it's hugely important to have that mentorship and that peer review to help you along the way.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Colleagues within teams and/or other peers were also reported to be vital during their training but also as a source of further professional development. Relatively few interviewees spoke about formalised networking or developmental activity within the sector that was outside their firm, although these were particularly important for those who worked solo, in small firms or small in-house teams. Events hosted by the ACL and the CLSB were mentioned, and also specifically ‘Women in Costs’ activities.

“I think it's got to be your fellow Costs Lawyers. Someone to always bounce off and have the conversation with if you're thinking about an issue or anything.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“When you work in-house like I do, it is important to make sure you still engage with costs-specific events and training. We do our own training in-house, but I think ACL events are really important, making sure you meet people and know who they are. You want people to think of you in a positive way in case at some point you're opposite them on a case.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Returning specifically to when the interviewed Costs Lawyers were studying for their professional qualification, a number of observations on the experiences of those who had studied in the last five or so years are most worthy of note. While some who had studied the ACL Training course longer ago had not found the course delivery had been supportive, it was much more positively viewed by those who had undertaken it recently:

“Three or four of us did it at the same time, so there was a little group, we could feed off each other and help each other – that was actually quite good. I think if you were doing it alone or worked in a much smaller firm where you didn't have that kind of team around you, it might be quite difficult.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“[I qualified last year:] the ACL Training course was delivered with the mindset that most people doing it also work at least part time and most likely full time. So having tutorials at certain hours of the day, and the course curriculum – where you can do your essays first and then have a good chunk of time to focus on the examinations – is a good way of structuring it. The ACL [Training provider] itself will give you a massive amount of support if you're willing to ask for it, mainly from the tutors and the course [leaders]. It can be quite overwhelming because it's distance learning, with a massive amount of digital documents to go through, so it's nice to have a tutor and the operations manager where you have a specific question. Even if it's a very simple, what may be considered a silly, question, they were always happy to help, very quick to respond. I was able to make a request for an extension and they were very understanding; something like that would have been the difference of me qualifying or not.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Candidates also relied on support aside from their employer and the course provider, from family or friends, which presumably is a common situation for those who study other professional qualifications while in the workplace:

“I also got other support from my partner who was able to share the burden with me, whether it was with childcare or if I needed spare time to do an hour's tutorial or spend a couple of hours preparing an essay or revising, I could have a quiet space to do that. You do need to put the time in. It's not easy, there's a lot of information to understand and to learn, and you do have to set aside a few hours a week and consistently put those hours in, and you'll see the benefits at the end.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Support from their partner, family or friends was also raised as important by some interviewees during other phases of their costs law career, at times of stress or when support within the workplace was not forthcoming. This was cited particularly for those returning to costs law work from parental leave, especially those outside the large firms in which there tended to be more support.

4.7 Ideas for additional support

There was general consensus from interviews that the working environment in costs law was generally now far more supportive (and somewhat more inclusive) than it had been in the past, and that the introduction of regulation into the profession had made it more respected as an area of legal practice. Many positive experiences of support were cited by interviewees, as summarised above, which were tending to offset some of the challenges that had been experienced, but some of those challenges persist. A small number of interviewees volunteered specific ideas for additional support that they hoped come be put in place for the profession, to counter specific challenges noted in the earlier section. These are included here as separate from the recommendations we make on the basis of our research findings.

“Either the CLSB or the ACL could put some sort of support in place for parents returning from either maternity or paternity leave, even if it's just a couple of hours, a seminar, where they can maybe run through updates. I think reassurance that the CLSB or ACL are there to support you [would be good] so it's not just a case of you do your qualification and that's the end of your interaction with them. Knowing they're there and that you can approach them, even prior to going off on maternity [would be valuable]. Maybe just webinars or videos about what to expect when you come back to work, how you might feel? I think sometimes, especially when you're a first-time mother, it can feel really daunting when you've got a career, especially if you're in a management role and you go off and have children. At the back of your mind you are thinking, will I still be able to do that role? How's my career going to look alongside caring for a young child or family?”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I think some sort of help, like a helpline, whether it be telephone or online chat or something like that, that would be really helpful just to talk through some of the problems, not just how to interpret cases and things like that but also support for the software we use for drafting the bills? A kind of online mentoring facility. I think there's a lot of support out there for [the personal] side of things now, a lot more than there was. But there now needs to be some, maybe even anonymous, some sort of opportunity to ask questions in a forum, a safe space without being made to feel stupid.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (own firm, female)

Appendix 1. Methodology, scope and sample

A1.1 Methodology

In 2025 the CLSB published results of a survey which had obtained 159 responses from 701 regulated costs law practitioners it contacted (a 23% response rate), providing what were considered reasonably robust results for this segment of the workforce but recognising that it might not reflect the entire regulated profession. With a sample of that size it was not possible to develop results for segments to enable comparison of results for different sub-groups (for example, by gender, age, career stage, work setting or other characteristics).

To obtain the depth of information from individuals we sought in this new study, a qualitative method was selected. A survey-based method was dismissed as such approaches tend not to be effective in isolating the very aspects of personal context, factors and influences that this study sought to understand. A narrative-based online interview approach was adopted, as this was expected to be effective in producing the depth of information sought from individuals. However, the resourcing required to implement an in-depth approach within the project budget meant only a modest number of interviews could be undertaken (i.e. a small sample within the workforce). This raises the challenge of whether the individuals engaged reflected the diversity of characteristics and experiences across the workforce, because a statistically representative sample could not be achieved practically. The approach taken was to select potential interviewees on a purposive basis, i.e. trying to recruit and select individuals iteratively so that as a group they displayed a reasonable range of the personal and professional characteristics of interest. In the next section, a summary is presented demonstrating the balance of the sample of interviewees achieved, in these respects.

In practice, the CLSB invited practitioners to participate through a series of promotional activities (emails to individuals, articles in newsletters and social media etc.). These invited practitioners who were willing to participate to respond to CRAC through a short online questionnaire in which they provided key personal information (personal characteristics, career stage and work setting), enabling CRAC to select from this volunteer pool and engage a variety of individuals for interview. This fieldwork process was undertaken between December 2025 and February 2026. All interviews were conducted online, on a semi-structured basis so that a consistent set of topics was covered but allowing for some flexibility so that appropriate questions were asked in relation to factors such as career stage and/or other known contextual issues.

A1.2 Scope and sample

The scope of the research was limited to Costs Lawyers as these were expected to be the most readily reached and engaged by CLSB. Within this, it was agreed with CLSB that the characteristics where some diversity in the sample would be sought were:

- Gender;
- Age;
- Disability;
- Ethnicity;
- Broad career stage;
- Duration in costs law;
- Prior career trajectory.

While CLSB is interested in other aspects of diversity, it was not realistic to attempt to cover every protected characteristic in a small research sample. The aim of the selection process was to achieve – for the interview sample collectively – some diversity in the respects above, although it was not possible to represent diversity in all these characteristics separately (without a much larger sample size). At the same time, it was agreed the sample should include diversity in relation to practice areas, geographical regions and employment settings.

Inevitably, such an approach to sample shaping is highly contingent upon the range of volunteers who come forward. Within the fieldwork period available, 17 interviews were conducted, partly constrained by the total number (27) and range of volunteers obtained. The ‘shape’ of the sample achieved, in relation to the characteristics above, can be seen in Table A1.1. Based on the profile of the regulated workforce according to recent CLSB surveys, the achieved sample somewhat over-represented female and white Costs Lawyers (there were no volunteers with an ethnic minority background), but broadly reflected its age profile. There was some over-representation in terms of a shorter duration of experience as a Costs Lawyer but this was deliberate given the research focus on pathways into the profession.

The sample also achieved desired diversity in relation to prior trajectories and work settings, with a reasonable geographical spread across the UK. 12 of the interviewees worked for legal firms (ranging from large to local), while four worked in an independent cost law business (including some who owned the business or were self-employed); one was an in-house Cost Lawyer in the public sector.

Table A1.1 Characteristics of the interview sample (shown as number of interviewees)

Gender	Female	Male	Not stated
	11	5	1
Age (by band)	Under 35 years	35-49 years	50 years or over
	3	8	6
Disability	Declared	No disability	Not stated
	2	13	2
Prior trajectory	Only costs law	Other legal	Other sector
	5	6	6
Duration in costs law	Up to 5 years	6-14 years	15+ years
	5	7	5
Work setting	Legal firm	Independent	In-house
	12	4	1

The reporting of research findings from an interview sample of such modest size has some challenges, not least how to express how widespread or common are particular issues or experiences within the sample. Given the size and stratified nature of the sample (which is not representative quantitatively of the costs law workforce), the approach taken here in most cases was not to express findings in terms of specific numbers of instances (such as 3/17, or a proportion). Instead, the aim is simply to give some indication of whether observations were based on a sole individual’s experiences, arose from several individuals or were common across the whole interview sample. A number of interviewees had experiences of costs law before it was regulated; some evidence has been used from those individuals but somewhat more weight was given to those with career trajectories that are more likely to be relevant to individuals considering the profession now.

Appendix 2. Interviewee quotations

A selection of quotations from interviewees has been included in Chapters 3 and 4, to illustrate research findings. This Appendix contains a greater number of quotations – including those mentioned above – for purposes of greater illustration and/or depth. These are segmented thematically, but without the full narrative in those chapters.

Chapter 3. Discovering costs law and opportunities within it

Learning about opportunities

Entry after studying law:

“I was just looking for any sort of legal job at the time, applying for all sorts of paralegal jobs and training jobs, and a position came up for a cost draftsman working in a law firm. I was like ‘I don’t know what it is, but I’ll apply for it’. I got offered the job and went in at the very bottom of the scale.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I went to university and did a law degree. And then when I had finished that, I didn’t want to go on and be a solicitor or a barrister. I came out of university and I thought, I’m just going to look for any job that’s legal because I love the law and I’d enjoyed my law degree and I knew that was definitely what I wanted to do as a career. So I just applied for anything that was within the legal profession and I applied for a cost draftsman’s job.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“It was an accountancy and finance degree and law was part of that degree. Immediately [afterwards] I was looking for jobs in the legal profession”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (own firm, female)

Entry from other occupations:

“I was working for a solicitors firm but doing insurance claims work and an opening came up to work in in the very small costs team dealing with cost negotiations. So I applied and that’s where it started.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

“I was head of the cash office for [a legal] firm, and then one day a solicitor came into me and talked about legal aid files that hadn’t been billed. From there I got moved into that department and took on costs full time. I’d never heard of a Costs Lawyer in my life.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (late-stage qualifier, male)

“As a school-leaver I became a legal executive. I then did banking and finance litigation [for several firms]. After we merged with [large legal firm], I entered the costs law team.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Awareness of the profession:

“I got a degree in law and I hadn’t even heard of the costs sector at that time. It’s not mentioned in the law degree - it’s not a requirement [to be mentioned] in the degree.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

“It’s one thing in universities, when you’re doing your degree or your LPC or any sort of legal qualification, costs law isn’t mentioned.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I feel like it’s the hidden profession of law, because a lot of people fall into it, nobody gets to it from university.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Motivations for entry

Aptitude:

“Actually it’s my A-levels that are perhaps more relevant to being a cost lawyer than my degree. I did maths, chemistry and English and they lend themselves very well to the career of a cost lawyer. Maths for obvious reasons. Chemistry because we often have to be forensic in our analysis and English because you have to construct legal arguments, paraphrase documents, etc.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (in house, female)

“I fell into it rather and found that it actually suited my style quite well, because I’ve got a degree [and] was used to being analytical which is a key skill when it comes to cost drafting.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (own firm, male)

Attraction of a professional role:

“It was really varied. It felt like a proper professional role.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“Being regulated [by the CLSB] has really given me a lot of sense of pride and joy to have a profession. When I was studying all those years ago I wanted to be a criminal defence lawyer, so it’s a bit of a change but it’s something that I have a natural aptitude for and I love what I do.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Remaining within the legal sector:

“At that time, I’d had enough of studying and I didn’t really want to just jump straight into another set of studying. And so I came out of university and I thought, I’m just going to look for any job that’s legal because I love the law and I’d enjoyed my law degree. I wanted to have a professional role that would be recognised, respected and well paid and would give me opportunities to work in the law.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I did a law degree and I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do, but I didn’t want to be a solicitor. I got a job as a HR assistant where a big chunk of my week was calculating the wages. When I wanted to do something else I decided I wanted to do something based in law and had a few interviews for paralegals and applied to [legal firm] to be a cost draftsman.”

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

The hidden profession

“Everybody knows what a solicitor is, everybody knows what a barrister is, everybody knows what a judge is, but nobody knows what a Costs Lawyer is.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I think a lot of people do fall into costs. I think very few people wake up and think, oh well, I’m going to be a cost lawyer or, I want to go into that practice area. It’s usually a second thought or a diversion along the way that people fall into.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Chapter 4. Progression within costs law

Motivations for qualification

Expectations and employer encouragement:

“When I passed my six-month probation it was just before the next intake of ACL. So I signed up and started on that straight away.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“To be honest, I don’t know. It kind of just happened. I was working, they trained me in costs, and I was getting better at what I was doing. I got the offer to do my ACL qualification. I thought why not, and then here I am as a qualified Costs Lawyer.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“When joining [...] there was the support, the structure and clear targets for progress.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I knew that the qualification existed and it was something put on the radar, suggested to me once I’d been offered the job and was speaking to my manager. It was a few years before I started the course, but I knew [earlier] the path you could take.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Professional rationales:

“Clients prefer to have a qualified regulated person as opposed to non-qualified. It is beneficial for the firm, hence there is a push for qualifying.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“We can also increase our rates – we can justify charging a higher hourly rate for our work than being unqualified. I think that was a positive thing; employers understand that it’s worthwhile investment for their staff because they will get the positives and the benefits from that following qualification.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Opportunity for progression:

“As a qualified lawyer I stand out compared to draftsmen.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“It opens up so some can specialise in different areas of work. We’ve got some that go down the route of being an advocate, others progress into senior or supervisory roles like myself, or the more technical side. So I think once you’ve qualified, it can open up more opportunities.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“One of the MDs that I worked for said you need to do the qualification because you’ve got people in your team who are qualified and we want you as their manager to be qualified.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

“You don’t really have to be qualified to be successful in the sector, but getting qualified certainly was like getting the Prefect badge; that’s the best way I could explain it really, it gives you an extra prestige, and gives you the extra responsibility.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Intrinsic rationales:

"The motivation is essentially wanting to be a qualified lawyer and bring justice to clients, whether that's in costs or in any area of law. That's what I always wanted to do as a practitioner."

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

"Being regulated by the CLSB has really given me a lot of sense of pride and joy, to have a profession"

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Pathways and current roles

Main career paths:

"If you start as a cost draftsman, your career path would be to do this for a couple of years, then qualify as a Costs Lawyer. But then after that, it's down to you forging a career path in the business that you work in. Some businesses, most businesses these days, will have the same career options open to Costs Lawyers that they would offer solicitors or CILEX [-qualified staff]. So you can become an associate in a firm, a senior associate, a director or a partner."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"From experience and knowing different people along the way, you tend to find that you've got Costs Lawyers who make good managers because they're a people person and good at forming and bonding a team, a team leader or a manager who's in charge of the staff and workload. And then alongside that a technical manager who might not manage a team, but they're there for the technical side of things as support alongside the team manager. So this seems to be two alternative directions."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Reflections upon current roles:

"The main stream of my work is personal injury, life-changing, serious stuff. It's big money, a lot at stake. Quite often [I am] dealing with litigation because the client is a patient or a child. So yeah, it's good, it's different, it's interesting. There's always something new. So yeah, we enjoy it."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"Every saving that [I and team] achieve is [government] genuinely pound in pocket. To be able to train those conducting litigation to bear in mind the need to save taxpayers' expense, for me is really important. The money saved from the budget could then be spent elsewhere where it is needed."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (in house, female)

"I want to do what I really love and I love doing family law, and I love doing costs, so doing it together is the best thing for me."

Costs Lawyer (Late-stage qualifier, self-employed, female)

"I do actually enjoy it. Believe it or not, it's so varied. It's so different. The average lay person goes to a solicitor with a personal injury claim or whatever, and they just think 'I've got my damages, I'm off' and nobody thinks about the solicitor who has done all that work. Who's paying them? How are they getting paid? I think because it's so niche, that's why I like it. It's different."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"I think the main difference [from other areas of legal practice] could be that even though you do need good social skills and costs, I think it's a different level of social skills required. Within costs, you obviously need to negotiate, you need to have persuasion,

you need to have good negotiation skills with people, but the vast majority of the work is dealing with numbers.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

“I don't love it. It's fine. I really, really like the firm where I work now. They have a very good work-life balance thing going on, and since I've had a child they're very family-friendly and [know] that you need to work flexible hours. I've been doing it for nearly 13 years now. Being in a decent firm where the work is interesting, it's interesting enough that I'm happy to stay in it.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Future progression

Management and leadership:

“I would like to grow this team so that we can bring all of our costs work in-house and we wouldn't have anything needing to go external. I would obviously have a team below me; I would love to become a partner.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“[In future] I would still like to be working for the firm that I work for now. I would like to have been promoted to director, the equivalent of partner, and to have expanded our team further and brought in more of the work we have within the firm. My ultimate aim is to stop [use of external providers] and to have built our team to the degree that they can come up with all of the work internally for the whole firm.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“I'd love to be in like a managerial role, happy to stay at the firm I'm at now, if things permit. I would be staying in costs – no idea in my head that I would ever want to change. I've always avoided advocacy; there's a certain type of person that would do really well in a role like that, but I don't think I'd be one of them. Some of the training that I've been doing for younger people in my team has opened up that side of me, which I've really liked doing. I love the idea of passing things on that you've learned, I think I'd do well in a managerial position.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Specialisation:

“I'd like to get my civil litigation practice rights with CILEX just to just to complement the qualifications I've got. I think I'll stay in costs; I don't see me doing anything different.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

“I'd like to get to be an associate. I used to want to step into the advocacy side, but since being a team leader, I've not got the time to spend learning that side. Maybe five years down the line, I could look into that again, because I do think I'd like to go into court and represent in court.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

“Ideally, for me, in three to five years' time, I would like to have complete experience in being an advocate. I think that would be the final thing for me that will make me a fully rounded Costs Lawyer who could pick up a case in costs at any point. I might even then be looking at setting up my own firm.”

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

“If you're a qualified solicitor with enough experience, it's conceivable that you could look at Costs Judge roles in the future, whereas with only the costs qualification you're not eligible.”

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

"The idea is that I'd be moving to [being] a solicitor and then hopefully, I don't know, in 10 years' time then going to the judiciary. That's the ultimate route, but I'm just looking for ways to keep moving, keep progressing rather than staying still."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (in house, female)

"I have been considering taking the SQE solicitors' exams. Probably not anytime soon, but if I got to a point where I don't want to be in costs anymore, I'd try and transfer, stay in law, but become a solicitor as that opens up different areas I could work in."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Consolidation:

"I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing now. So I think I'd like to carry on doing what I'm doing and then maybe, at some point, step down from team leader and just prepare bills. I don't want to do that now; I quite like the variety of things, so I'm happy where I am, really."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"If Associate happens [from current application], I think probably I'll try and just stay at that level for a couple of years, because it's a bit busy with two young kids. I've played my strengths and found areas that have worked for me and developed them and got recognition for it. So I suppose it will be seeing what opportunities come forward. I am quite settled here. Some people jump about quite a lot, but I like the flexibility and the support. While I'm still happy here, this is where I will stay."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Self-employment:

"I just want to be the best at it. So that's my goal for my second part of life – making my own practice. I've been really good at family legal aid, that's why I'm still working as self-employed with other companies, to gain as much experience as I can and so I know all eventualities before I set out on my own."

Costs Lawyer (Late-stage qualifier, self-employed, female)

Challenges to progression

The changing type of work:

"It's a scary environment and a lot to learn to start with, information you just have to get to grips with straightaway. Whenever we have new starters now, I say it's a very uphill battle, but it will start like that and ease off as you start to find your feet. I would definitely say it's always a bit daunting to start with, especially if you've not been in the legal world. You've got to learn lots of things, that's [even] before software or how certain businesses conduct [business] and all the things that surround that."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"Challenges [included] taking ownership of work, dealing with complex things, and every conceivable pitfall for the unwary you could fall into on the job. It was a baptism of fire, I won't lie. You're up against people who have a lot more experience than you, a lot more savvy, and can litigate better than you. It was overwhelming at times; there were times in the past where I [wasn't] sure I was capable enough to be in this position, but thankfully things turned out well – I overcame those challenges and I've since forged a really good career."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

"When I first started it was like a rabbit in the headlights. [I'd] never done this before, 'Oh my God, what have I come to?' But then once I got a bit more knowledge, obviously that gives you confidence. I started enjoying it then."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Qualification:

"I started [ACL Training] in 2022, the old three-year course, but I was exempt from the first year. I know it's worth it in the end, but people might struggle with balancing it with the day-to-day life and obviously the full-time job as well. It's a lot of content, and the exams alongside a full-time job, it's very strenuous. I know they've streamlined it now, I think you can do it in one year if you've got enough exemptions, which is great but I imagine it's very full on."

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"I qualified in 2017. So when I did the ACL, it was a new course. Before I started it was three years and all your exams at the end. Whereas when I joined, you did coursework and an exam every year. [But] during that time I also went for promotion and became a deputy team leader."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Flexibility:

"The difficulties I've encountered [were] going off and having a family and then coming back into work. I think with costs law, it's so fast moving and things change so quickly and there's always new case law. I came back to work and I sat there and I was like I don't know how to do my job anymore. I don't know what I'm doing – I think that was a massive knock to my confidence."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"I took maternity leave for a year and then came back and had to reduce my hours and juggle work and all the responsibilities. And actually while I was off, there were big changes as well with the last provisions I had to get used to, as well as getting back into the role, new ways of working and new things."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Inclusion:

"The negatives were certain people where I worked [who said] 'You're not a lawyer, you're not a solicitor, it's not a proper career path, we can't support you'. You can't do this [studying] in work time or do any training."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (late-stage qualifier, male)

"I was brought up in an underprivileged area and went to a state school. I've had a sense of imposter syndrome, especially in the exam periods and the study periods when you speak to a lot of people who are working in London and who've done it. When they meet you, they ask what I do and I say, oh, I'm a lawyer, they go 'really? I thought you were a bricklayer, or a builder'. I don't fit the costs draftsman or costs law profile. I was scared of failing, of not passing the exam, of not being as good as the people in my team who've already qualified, scared that I'd be looked at as not as intelligent or bright as people thought. It was just pure fear. [Yet I] achieved the highest score of anyone who sat the exam that year. The association was [previously] very snooty, elitist, very look down your nose, but it has changed a lot."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Enablers and support

Employers and line managers:

"[Large firm] have always been encouraging and paid for it. They've always said, yes, you can do it, so there's never been any kind of [questioning of] why or that they're not going to pay for it. I never felt any barriers within the training and development, or held back in any way."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"At most places I've worked, they are happy to fund [ACL Training]. It doesn't cost them too much and the benefit they get out of it is really good. It's not very competitive to get into, you can just do the qualification as long as your employer is supportive and you've got the time."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"I was very lucky with the team I had around me because almost every single person had done [ACL Training] already. It was good to have people to speak to in my little close team and obviously the wider costs management team as well, who could give me some tips, tell me how they managed to get through exams, tips and tricks on the essays. Obviously, when you're learning anything new, there are going to be some barriers, but if you're struggling to learn something, just ask someone about it, everyone around me just wanted to help me so I could do the best that I could."

Early-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Supportive environments:

"I think I was lucky in that I started my cost law [career] in a very small family-run firm, so they had a lot of time for us and to train us. I think I had very strong support and guidance in the early years. So I think that really helped."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"I joined a team and everybody was really supportive. The partner and head of the cost team was involved in training, because we were a lot smaller then. So there was always somebody to ask and we got a lot of support. I think that's why stayed here so long – there's always support, somebody to ask. You're not on your own."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Mentorship:

"My manager at the time was sharing his experiences, that helped me being able to do the course but also he was giving you day-to-day training on how things worked. He was taking you to court hearings and allowing you to see the bigger picture as to what you were working towards. So that kind of incentivised you to think, this can be me, I can go on and do this."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"My first ever boss at [...] gave me a tremendous opportunity because he made me his right-hand person. So I went with him to see clients and that was a real opportunity for me to be sat with clients, I watched him deliver seminars, I went with him to court, I went with him in-house to different law firms to do jobs that were urgent and things like that. That was an amazing learning curve for me."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (own firm, female)

"I think mentorship is massively important to anyone who works in costs. I think it's important even if you are experienced, just having someone to bounce ideas off. And

in the context of the costs qualification, whether it's via the apprenticeship route or via the more traditional academic route, I would say it's hugely important to have that mentorship and that peer review to help you along the way."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Peer support:

"I think it's got to be your fellow Costs Lawyers. Someone to always bounce off and have the conversation with if you're thinking about an issue or anything."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"As a team, we are close-knit, I'd say; we've always been there for each other to support everyone. It's the same with the trainees - every week we talk about the issues, what's happening on the case. So they're getting that knowledge as well, and if they want you to explain anything to them, as qualified people, we will spend time with them to assist them like that. I think we do go that extra mile, if you like, to help and support people."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"When you work in-house like I do, it is important to make sure you still engage with costs-specific events and training. We do our own training in-house, but I think ACL events are really important, making sure you meet people and know who they are. You want people to think of you in a positive way in case at some point you're opposite them on a case."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Support during qualification:

"Three or four of us did it at the same time, so there was a little group, we could feed off each other and help each other – that was actually quite good. I think if you were doing it alone or worked in a much smaller firm where you didn't have that kind of team around you, it might be quite difficult."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"[I qualified last year:] the ACL Training course was delivered with the mindset that most people doing it also work at least part time and most likely full time. So having tutorials at certain hours of the day, and the course curriculum – where you can do your essays first and then have a good chunk of time to focus on the examinations – is a good way of structuring it. The ACL [Training provider] itself will give you a massive amount of support if you're willing to ask for it, mainly from the tutors and the course [leaders]. It can be quite overwhelming because it's distance learning, with a massive amount of digital documents to go through, so it's nice to have a tutor and the operations manager where you have a specific question. Even if it's a very simple, what may be considered a silly, question, they were always happy to help, very quick to respond. I was able to make a request for an extension and they were very understanding; something like that would have been the difference of me qualifying or not."

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

Friends and family support:

"I also got other support from my partner who was able to share the burden with me, whether it was with childcare or if I needed spare time to do an hour's tutorial or spend a couple of hours preparing an essay or revising, I could have a quiet space to do that. You do need to put the time in. It's not easy, there's a lot of information to understand

and to learn, and you do have to set aside a few hours a week and consistently put those hours in, and you'll see the benefits at the end."

Early-career Costs Lawyer (male)

"I live with my best mate; she's supported me when I was studying and just let me crack on in an evening if I had an assignment or something."

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

Ideas for additional support

"Either the CLSB or the ACL could put some sort of support in place for parents returning from either maternity or paternity leave, even if it's just a couple of hours, a seminar, where they can maybe run through updates. I think reassurance that the CLSB or ACL are there to support you [would be good] so it's not just a case of you do your qualification and that's the end of your interaction with them. Knowing they're there and that you can approach them, even prior to going off on maternity [would be valuable]. Maybe just webinars or videos about what to expect when you come back to work, how you might feel? I think sometimes, especially when you're a first-time mother, it can feel really daunting when you've got a career, especially if you're in a management role and you go off and have children. At the back of your mind you are thinking, will I still be able to do that role? How's my career going to look alongside caring for a young child or family?"

Mid-career Costs Lawyer (female)

"I think some sort of help, like a helpline, whether it be telephone or online chat or something like that, that would be really helpful just to talk through some of the problems, not just how to interpret cases and things like that but also support for the software we use for drafting the bills? A kind of online mentoring facility. I think there's a lot of support out there for [the personal] side of things now, a lot more than there was. But there now needs to be some, maybe even anonymous, some sort of opportunity to ask questions in a forum, a safe space without being made to feel stupid."

Late-career Costs Lawyer (own firm, female)

Appendix 3. Case studies

Case Study 1: Entrant after a law degree

Samantha's career as a Costs Lawyer began almost by accident. After completing a law degree and the Legal Practice Course (LPC), she was looking initially at paralegal and trainee solicitor roles. However, when a vacancy for a costs advisor appeared, she applied – without knowing fully what the role involved. That single application opened the door to a career that has become her professional passion.

Starting at a small, family-run firm, Samantha benefited from hands-on training and strong early support: *"They had a lot of time for us and to train us"*. That nurturing environment allowed her to develop foundational skills in drafting, costs assessment, legal aid billing, and dispute negotiation. Offered the chance to do the ACL Training qualification, she then qualified as a Costs Lawyer: *"I was working, they trained me in costs, and I was getting better at what I was doing. I got the offer to do my ACL qualification. I thought why not, and then here I am as a Costs Lawyer"*. Her sister, who initially joined the same firm in an administrative role, also went on to become a Costs Lawyer, illustrating how accessible and engaging the field can be for newcomers.

Samantha's subsequent career trajectory has involved several job moves, but also breaks for maternity and relocation for better career opportunities. Because costs law evolves rapidly, she found returning after leave was challenging; shifting case law, reforms and procedural rule changes made her temporarily feel out of her depth and required learning but this was possible with peer and company support. Overcoming those challenges has reinforced her commitment to costs work.

She recently moved to a newly created in-house Costs Lawyer role for a legal aid firm and this has reinvigorated her confidence. As the sole costs specialist there, she handles a wide range of work: legal aid costs, inter partes costs, client billing, points of dispute and replies, and providing advice on demand for fee earners. That diversity is one of the aspects she enjoys most, with no two days looking the same and each case bringing fresh analytical and technical challenges. Her ambition is now to expand the in-house team, to bring all outsourced work under her supervision, and eventually to progress to partnership – goals that demonstrate the significant career progression opportunities available.

Samantha's story illustrates the strengths of the costs law profession: varied work, intellectual challenge, meaningful impact within legal services, and the opportunity to build a team and take on leadership. Rarely mentioned during law degree courses, costs law can offer a rewarding career for those who discover it, by design or accident.

Case Study 2: School-leaver entry

Nicola left school with little idea of a career direction but an interest in the law and took an opportunity to work as a junior in a solicitors' office. Without a degree she started a CILEX course but soon felt she was not destined for mainstream legal practice. She joined another firm and for 11 years built experience across banking, finance and general litigation, developing a reputation for reliability and a strong affinity for working with numbers.

Following maternity leave she joined a different firm, still working on the same themes, which then merged with a large legal practice which had substantive costs law activity and teams. A turning point came when the department she worked in was reorganised and her role at risk of redundancy. A chance conversation in the office kitchen with a costs team manager introduced the idea of joining the costs team, in a role she had only vaguely known to exist from when she had previously instructed external Costs Lawyers. Motivated by a desire to stay with an employer whose ethos and work environment she valued, she took the chance and has been with them for over 10 years since.

Her transition into costs law was challenging, entering from a near standing start, and Nicola describes that early period as being *"like a rabbit in the headlights."* Costs law is a complex and constantly evolving field, requiring strong analytical thinking, comfort with numbers, attention to detail, and continual learning. What sustained Nicola was a combination of personal resilience and supportive colleagues. She quickly commenced the professional qualification through ACL Training and this helped enhance her competence. An enthusiastic course tutor helped Nicola develop confidence and pride in her developing expertise. As her skills grew – drafting bills, managing budgets, conducting negotiations, advising clients, and handling serious injury and protected party matters – Nicola found both satisfaction and purpose in the work. Interacting with clients who had experienced life-changing events reinforced the value and humanity of the work, deepening her commitment to doing it well: *"The main stream of my work is personal injury, life-changing, serious stuff. It's big money, a lot at stake. Quite often [I am] dealing with litigation because the client is a patient or a child. So yeah, it's good, it's different, it's interesting. There's always something new."*

Nicola has been a Costs Lawyer for seven years and aspires to progress to an associate and a future lead role, where visibility, business development and contributing to the wider profession will all be necessary as additions to her developing skillset. Her journey demonstrates that a successful career in costs law is built on perseverance, analytical skill and continuous learning, but the speed of that trajectory varies according to individuals' circumstances and supportive leadership that recognises and nurtures potential.

Case study 3: Entrant from proximal work

Anthony graduated from university with a degree in an arts-related subject and thereafter worked in the insurance industry for several years, for an insurer, and later in a dedicated insurance claims handling unit at a firm of solicitors. During his time in that role, he had gained some exposure to legal costs, albeit on a superficial level. He wanted to pursue something more technical and challenging than afforded by his role and learned of an opportunity arising in the firm's small in-house costs team. Having sought advice from a senior colleague, and confident that his skills could match the role – and that the work could be more interesting – he applied and joined the team. Anthony's work as a costs paralegal comprised both paying and receiving party work. At that point he had heard the term "Costs Lawyer" but was unaware it was a regulated legal professional role.

Anthony describes his early experience of costs litigation as a baptism of fire, dealing with a much wider range of challenges than in his previous role, but learning all the time. After a few years he undertook the ACL Training course, qualifying in 2019. He then moved to a full-service law firm where he was promoted to Associate Director with supervisory responsibilities. After a further move, he is now a Senior Associate and Costs Manager with his current firm where he manages a small team. He is responsible for the day-to-day leadership and development of his direct reports, providing strategic advice to legal teams and running his own caseload.

He notes that successful Costs Lawyers must draw upon multiple skills in addition to their analytical and numerical base, ranging from client care to litigation and strategy. Costs Lawyers must be able to work autonomously and have good case management skills, but also the ability to apply the law to represent their clients' best interests. They also adapt to a constantly evolving practice area, with new arguments and issues being put before the judiciary, which then influences the advice given to clients in relation to the potential risk of various courses of action.

As to further professional development, Anthony is a dual-qualified CILEX Fellow and may seek to obtain civil litigation practice rights to complement his existing qualifications. However, he anticipates remaining in the costs practice area. He currently tutors the civil litigation module of the ACL Training course and acts as a Qualified Person for a trainee currently going through the course.

Case Study 4: Sector change in mid-career

Clint left school and worked as a painter and decorator for four years. He then opened a furniture shop, but that had to close and he needed a job again. He was taken on by a solicitor needing some IT support, which introduced him to the administrative side of legal practice. He moved into the cash office and started doing the accounts for them. Gradually he built both financial and organisational expertise, and later was promoted to head that office with a team, reporting to the Finance Director.

A decisive turning point occurred when a solicitor approached him with a backlog of 600 unbilled legal aid files. Taking on this challenge led him deeper into costs work and ultimately prompted him to explore the possibility of joining the costs profession – at this point he had never heard of a Costs Lawyer, but discovering the qualification during a conversation with a Manchester practitioner was pivotal: *“This lit a fire for me”*. Aged 45, he decided to undertake the Costs Lawyer Qualification.

Clint faced a number of barriers, including some scepticism within his firm about this potential career path. He had to self-fund the training and the firm did not support him with study time or development. But with his strong personal motivation and the encouragement of a supportive solicitor colleague, he was able to progress. He reflects that her mentoring, willingness to discuss case law and confidence in him were essential scaffolding during his development. Once undertaking the qualification, he found value in connecting with fellow trainees who shared knowledge and perspectives, reducing his feelings of isolation within the firm. His peers helped build his confidence and broaden his understanding, as well as reinforced his commitment to pursue this path.

Qualifying as a Costs Lawyer in 2021 was the major milestone he had hoped for, bringing increased recognition, responsibility recognition and career advance. Clint became the firm’s Director of Costs and its internal expert on legal aid billing, but he also started to manage apprentices and expanded the team with other training roles. He especially looks forward to when his first apprentice also qualifies as a Costs Lawyer. He feels he now has the perfect role, which is both fulfilling and aligned with his strengths.

Reflecting on his unconventional route into costs law, Clint emphasises that as so few people – especially young people – know about costs law as a career, non-linear pathways may remain important towards these highly specialised professional roles, provided that individuals get the necessary encouragement and support when learning.

Case Study 5: Recently qualified/regulated

When Andrew graduated with his law degree, he first imagined a future in criminal defence, but finding the funds to undertake the LPC was hard and he struggled to find job openings without prior experience. He took a role in a solicitors' firm which dealt with personal injury claims through the Ministry of Justice portal, but did not enjoy the extensive dialogues with prospective claimants. However, a colleague had joined a costs specialist firm and was undertaking the Costs Lawyer Qualification, who highlighted that was an alternative direction if you wanted a long-term career in costs, less expensive than training to become a solicitor or enter the bar.

Andrew therefore entered the costs law field as an unqualified costs advisor and soon realised he had an aptitude for the work. The numerical precision, analytical demands and structured, evidence-based decision-making required during drafting suited him. Costs law allowed him to focus on detail, accuracy and applying rules of recoverability – skills he found both natural and fulfilling. Over the next 12 years, in a number of firms, he gained experience in bill drafting, cost budgeting, negotiating with defendant insurers and was able to shadow advocacy in court. Yet despite this steadily developing expertise, Andrew recognised that remaining unqualified limited his autonomy and scope of work. In 2017 he began the ACL Training qualification, but then had to put it on hold, due to both life (having children) and job changes which interrupted its funding.

By 2023, supported by a new employer and ACL Training's development of a more flexible distance learning structure, he recommitted to the qualification. The new structure, responsive tutors and some ability to flex the required coursework meant he could balance work, study and family life, albeit with his partner's support in sharing childcare. He qualified in 2025 and reports that the impact was both immediate and transformative.

"Being regulated [by the CLSB] has really given me a lot of sense of pride and joy to have a profession. When I was studying all those years ago I wanted to be a criminal defence lawyer, so it's a bit of a change but it's something that I have a natural aptitude for and I love what I do. The motivation was essentially wanting to be a qualified lawyer and bring justice to clients, whether that's in costs or in any area of law. That's what I always wanted to do as a practitioner."

Becoming a Costs Lawyer unlocked the conduct of litigation and rights of audience, but also brought him increased professional accountability, and increased trust from both employers and clients. Within months he was being approached by more prestigious firms. It also reshaped his long-term vision, due to the broader opportunities and strengthening professional identity. In a few years, he would like to deepen his expertise in advocacy, perhaps through the Bar training route, to make him a fully rounded, experienced Costs Lawyer able to manage cases from first instruction to final assessment. Beyond that, he might eventually pursue self-employment or establishing his own firm.

Case Study 6: An in-house costs lawyer

Following completion of a law degree and LPC, Fiona explored different areas of legal practice; including criminal law, family law and conveyancing. After a chance recruitment call she moved into costs litigation with a large insurance firm. During the LPC only a portion of a single class on civil costs had been taught and so she entered the field with almost no prior knowledge. Her experience in the field encouraged her to undertake training with ACLT whereby she became qualified as a Costs Lawyer. This afforded her rights of audience to go to court, the specialism matching her strengths of technical precision, methodical thinking and complex problem- solving.

Over 18 years in practice Fiona developed significant depth and breadth in cost litigation, having worked in solicitors' firms, costs law firms and latterly within central government. These roles required representing claimants, defendants, insurance companies and the taxpayer. The nature of the work expanded to include undertaking group litigation, managing mini-teams, training junior practitioners, solicitors, barristers and clients, advocacy, representing clients at joint settlement meetings and working on matters of substantial financial and public interest. One of her highlights has been government practice, where the work is diverse and the sense of public value – saving money for taxpayers and helping government departments manage litigation responsibly – is a key motivator:

“Every saving that [I and team] achieve is [government] genuinely pound in pocket. To be able to train those conducting litigation to bear in mind the need to save taxpayers' expense, for me is really important. The money saved from the budget could then be spent elsewhere where it is needed.”

She has been working in government for over seven years with work spanning costs budgeting, drafting, negotiating, case management, advocacy, advisory work and overseeing complex and high value group litigation. She has assisted in recruitment and developing the team, enjoying training new entrants to the profession and observing their progress flourish. She enjoys mentoring, taking part in one of her old university's and the civil service mentoring schemes as a mentor. Fiona values the Costs Lawyer profession, observing how it has gone from strength to strength since she first joined and the value of training for new entrants to the profession.

Fiona's career has not been without challenges, from navigating rigid managerial structures in some firms to balancing professional responsibilities with childcare. She reflects that support at critical moments has been essential – at times from strong family networks that provided stability during difficult periods, and in the workplace where supportive managers and colleagues have enabled her to thrive. At points she feels she has had to overcome imposter syndrome, when conducting group litigation and achieving very good results that she and others feared only a barrister could do, while she was “only” a Costs Lawyer. The mutual professional respect and encouragement that she has received within government and the wider costs community continue to reinforce her confidence.

Fiona has qualified as a solicitor and moved into a new field of law but will always be a Costs Lawyer at the core and will maintain her expertise in costs, while a long-term ambition could be to join the judiciary.