

The Law Society
of British Columbia



lawsociety.bc.ca

Considering
a career in law?



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COVER PHOTO: New lawyers attending a Call to the Bar ceremony at the Vancouver courthouse.



Nav Parhar While many of his classmates at Dalhousie law school in Halifax set their sights on articling at a downtown Toronto law firm, Nav Parhar couldn't imagine anything better than returning to the west coast. "Many people talk about the grinding hours and menial work that you do as an articling student and associate, but I haven't found that to be the case," says Nav, who articulated at a small Victoria firm, then joined Cook Roberts LLP, a mid-sized law firm in Victoria. "I have had the good fortune of getting a lot of great work early on." Working at a mid-size firm offers a perfect balance of hands-on experience and access to resources, Nav says. "I can walk out my door now and get advice from five or six different lawyers." The Nanaimo native manages a busy litigation practice, including regular courtroom appearances, and still finds time for year-round golf and weekly hockey games. "I like the lifestyle and the pace here in Victoria, and maintaining family ties is important to me."

Considering a career in law?

The Law Society of BC governs the practice of law in the province. Under the authority of the *Legal Profession Act*, the Law Society is responsible for ensuring lawyers are qualified to provide legal services to the public. The Law Society is responsible for setting and enforcing standards for the licensing, competence, professional conduct and discipline of lawyers in BC. To call yourself a lawyer and to practise law, you must be a member of the Law Society of BC or another provincial or territorial law society.

If you are considering a career in law, this booklet will provide you with valuable information to help you make your decision.

In the pages that follow, you will learn about the different kinds of work lawyers do, the legal profession in BC, the requirements you must meet to become a lawyer and the role of the Law Society.

For more information visit the Law Society's website at lawsociety.bc.ca.



Mary MacGregor Ranching is a big part of Mary MacGregor's thriving corporate commercial practice in Kamloops, but she wants young lawyers to know that the interior community is no cow town. "This is a great place to live. I love the climate here, the people and the spectacular scenery. And the legal community is very collegial." Mary, a sole practitioner, thoroughly enjoys the benefits of being her own boss. But she's quick to note that small firm practice is hard work. She advises lawyers to carve out a specialty and build a network of contacts in the legal community before setting up their own practices. In addition to her network of contacts in Kamloops, Mary keeps herself tapped in by referring to Continuing Legal Education Society course materials and regularly evaluating how she is using technology. "I love the independence and flexibility that comes with working as a sole practitioner."

What do lawyers do?

Lawyers are recognized around the world as leaders in business, public service and dispute resolution. They are trusted advisors, skilled negotiators, effective advocates, and creative problem solvers.

The range of work lawyers do is extremely varied and there is no single type of legal practice. Some lawyers work in private practice — either on their own or with other lawyers. As private practitioners, lawyers advise a wide range of clients such as large corporations, small businesses or individuals. Other lawyers work “in house” as employees of companies, financial institutions or governments.

As a lawyer, you might draft real estate transfers, help businesses with financial contracts, negotiate divorce settlements, represent insurance companies in court, prosecute or defend criminal cases, or provide advice on tax law to investors. You might work for a bank preparing loan agreements, a software company negotiating licensing contracts, a public interest organization representing environmentalists or the provincial government prosecuting criminal cases. Or you might choose to use your legal education in a career outside of law, such as teaching, journalism or business.

Some lawyers limit their practices to specific areas of law or specific types of clients. Others may have a general practice that deals with different issues every day. And some have specialized backgrounds that they bring to their legal work. For example, a lawyer with an engineering background might represent construction companies while a lawyer with experience as a journalist might focus on media law.

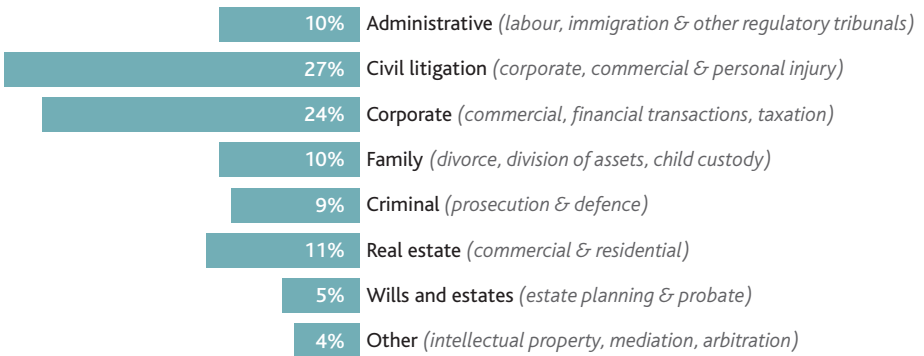


Gavin Jones During his first year of practice, Gavin Jones had the opportunity to appear in court almost every day. "I never wanted a desk job. Working in a small firm, I get the opportunity to be really hands on, and the Kelowna criminal Bar is very close knit so there's a real sense of collegiality." As an associate with Heritage Law Group, a two-person law firm in downtown Kelowna, Gavin handles criminal defence work almost exclusively. But the benefits of small firm life are just part of the reason Gavin returned to his hometown. "The lifestyle here is unbeatable." For Gavin that means skiing, wake boarding, fishing, hockey and curling.

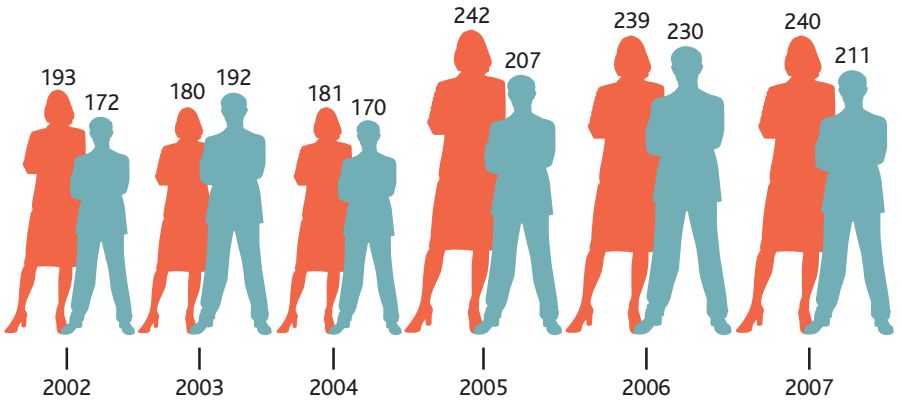
Barristers and solicitors

Barristers are lawyers who advise clients on matters intended for a hearing in court or at an administrative tribunal such as the Labour Relations Board or the Human Rights Tribunal. Solicitors prepare contracts and other legal documents such as real estate transfers, wills, share transfers or corporate agreements. In Canada, lawyers are qualified to act as both barristers and solicitors, although many lawyers choose to limit their practices to one of these professional roles. Contrary to television stereotypes, barristers do not spend all of their time in the courtroom. Most legal disputes are settled — usually through negotiations by the lawyers representing the parties — without ever going to court.

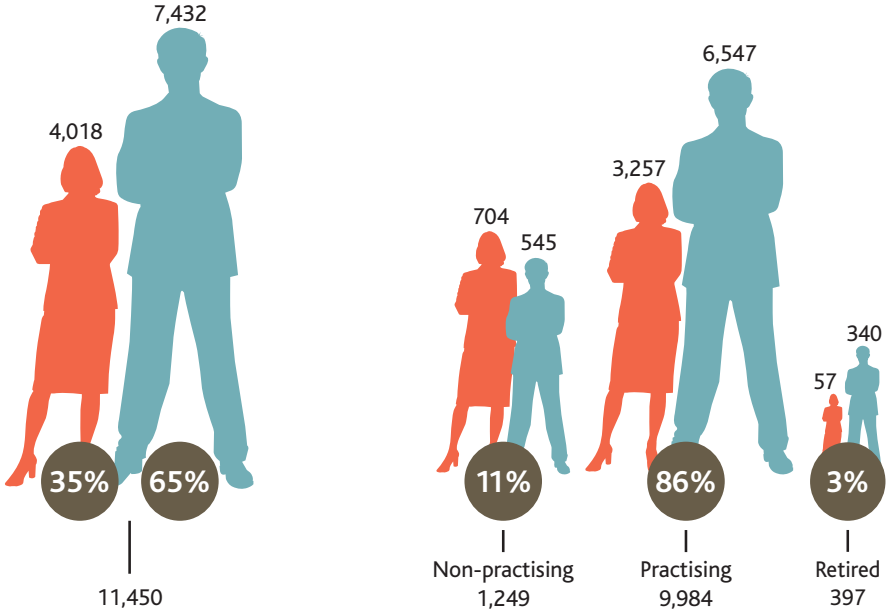
Once you become a lawyer, your opportunities are limitless



These categories provide a general picture of the types of legal work performed by BC lawyers. The demand for legal services is affected by the economy, societal trends and changes to legislation and can fluctuate dramatically. A growing economy, for example, might lead to an increase in business deals not seen during a recession. Although there is a significant overlap in the work of barristers and solicitors, approximately 40 per cent of the legal work in BC is solicitor's work while 60 per cent involves barristers. Much of the work barristers perform, however, is similar to that of solicitors, such as preparing court pleadings and settlement agreements or reviewing documents.



NEW BC LAWYERS



TOTAL BC LAWYERS

PRACTISING STATUS OF BC LAWYERS

The legal profession at a glance

Where will I practise? What size firm will I work in? And Who will I practise with? are important questions for anyone considering a legal career.

Changing demographics

Like all professions, the face of the legal profession is changing. More women are becoming lawyers than ever before and the profession is rapidly getting younger and more diverse as the baby-boom generation retires. While men still make up 65 per cent of the lawyers in the province, since 2002 more than half of the new lawyers entering the profession in BC are women.

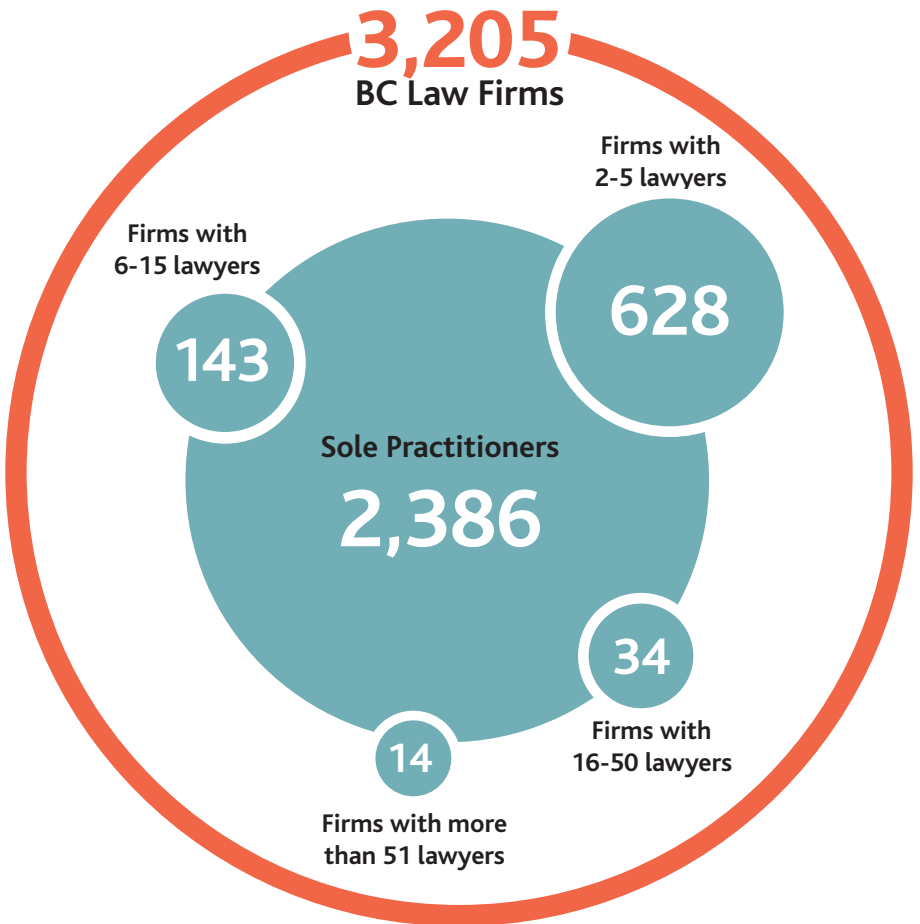
Although there was rapid growth during the 1980s, the profession are relatively stable in recent years with the number of lawyers in BC increasing by about 1.3 per cent annually. This trend is expected to continue for several more years.

Eighty-six per cent of the profession are practising lawyers working on their own, in a law firm or as in-house counsel for a business or government. Non-practising lawyers are usually people whose work requires them to remain part of the legal profession but who do not provide legal services, for example law school professors, business persons or journalists. Senior lawyers who no longer practise law are entitled to retired membership which enables them to stay in touch with the profession after leaving legal practice.

The Law Society is committed to making the legal profession a welcoming one for all lawyers. By promoting equity and diversity, the society helps ensure that BC lawyers are a reflection of the communities they serve.

BC law firms

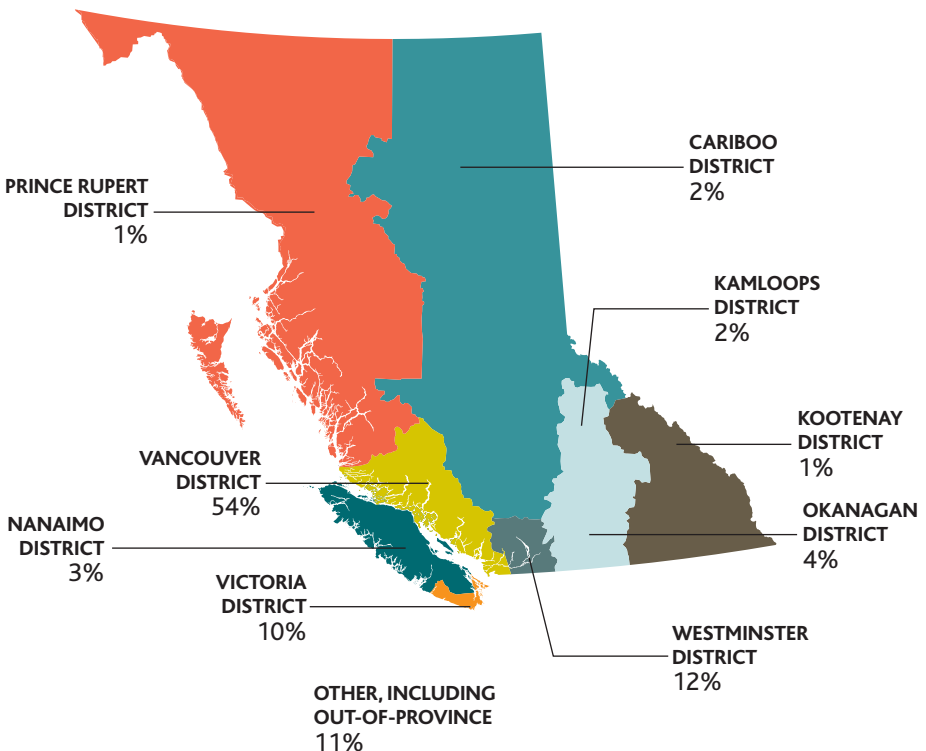
Small-firm lawyers are, and always have been, the backbone of the legal community. For most people, they are the face of the legal profession. About three-quarters of BC lawyers are in private practice with the remainder working as employees of governments and businesses. Thirty-two per cent of those in private practice are sole practitioners and another 40 per cent are in small firms of two to 15 lawyers. Mid-size firms with 15 to 50 lawyers account for 12 per cent of the lawyers in private practice in BC while 16 per cent of the profession work in firms with more than 50 lawyers. Most of the mid-sized firms and all of the large firms are based in Metro Vancouver.



Lawyers around the province

Two-thirds of BC's lawyers work in the Metro Vancouver area. Another 14 per cent are on Vancouver Island (concentrated primarily in Victoria). The remainder practise in communities across the province.

Rapid economic development throughout BC, along with a growing population, has increased the demand for legal services outside Metro Vancouver. Opportunities exist in every part of the province for articling students and lawyers seeking a broad range of legal experience along with the lifestyle smaller communities have to offer.





Louise Kim Within the short span of a few months, Louise Kim led and won a case in the BC Court of Appeal, got married and made the transition from private practice to policy analyst with WorkSafeBC. "My schedule at WorkSafeBC is more predictable, which means I can more easily plan my life outside of the office," says Louise, who fits in lunch-hour pilates during her work day. "As a policy analyst, I get to focus on finding the best solutions to promote safe and healthy workplaces for everyone." While she finds in-house work very rewarding, Louise thoroughly enjoyed the excitement that comes from leading a case in court — an experience she had as an associate at a mid-sized, Vancouver firm. During her first two years of practice, Louise's firm supported her in providing free legal services to dozens of tenants facing eviction from an apartment complex. "As a new lawyer, pro bono work allows you to gain experience in areas you may not otherwise be exposed to."

How do I become a lawyer?

Being a lawyer is both a privilege and a responsibility. Clients place great trust in their lawyers and the Law Society requires prospective lawyers to meet high educational and ethical standards before they are permitted to practise law.

Graduates of a Canadian law school

To qualify for admission to the legal profession in BC, you must first earn a law degree from a Canadian law school offering a common law degree. This typically involves three years of graduate study.

Courses vary from university to university and a wide range of programs is available. Consider what each law school has to offer, how the available courses match your interests and career plans, and where you want to live while attending school.

Before choosing your courses, you should also consider the law society admission program in the province where you intend to practise. This will ensure you are properly prepared for the program and can meet its requirements.

Law Societies do not govern admission to law school or the law school curriculum. Most law schools require applicants to complete at least three years of an undergraduate program and write an admission test. More information is available from university websites.

International law school graduates

If you have a law degree from outside Canada, you must first apply to the National Committee on Accreditation. The committee, administered by the Federation of Law Societies of Canada, will evaluate your credentials and work experience and determine whether you must complete further academic requirements before applying to a law society admission program in Canada. For more information on the National Committee on Accreditation, visit the website of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada at flsc.ca.

The Law Society of BC admission program

After successfully completing law school, all prospective lawyers must complete the Law Society's admission program. This consists of nine months as an articled student working under the supervision of a lawyer and successful completion of the 10-week Professional Legal Training Course.

Character and fitness

To protect the public and to maintain the profession's high standards, each applicant for enrolment as an articled student must be of good character and repute. Law Society staff screen all prospective lawyers to ensure they meet this requirement. You must provide the Law Society with your complete employment history, as well as details of any other factors that might affect your character or fitness to practise law such as financial difficulties, drug or alcohol abuse or criminal charges. Past problems do not necessarily prevent anyone from becoming a lawyer. If you have questions or concerns, contact the Law Society's credentials officer for confidential advice. See the resource list at the back of this guide.

Articling

Before enrolling in the admission program, you must obtain an articling position with a law firm or a government or corporate in-house legal department. Most law schools have placement programs to assist students with finding articling jobs, but it is your responsibility to find a position. Articling positions are available throughout the province and students are encouraged to look outside Vancouver and Victoria.

The law firm will assign a lawyer to act as your principal. Your principal will supervise you during the nine-month articling period and ensure you receive practice experience and training. You and your principal must prepare an education plan, and provide the Law Society with a mid-term and final report outlining your progress during the articling term. Toward the end of your articles, you will be asked to meet with a Law Society Benchers (a lawyer elected to the Law Society's board of directors) to discuss your articles, and to learn more about the Law Society and your professional obligations as a lawyer. This is also an opportunity for you to establish a relationship with a Benchers to whom you can turn for advice as you pursue your career as a lawyer.

Professional Legal Training Course

In addition to successfully completing your articles, you must also attend the Professional Legal Training Course (PLTC), a classroom-based program taught by Law Society staff and practising lawyers. The full-time, 10-week program is offered three times a year in Vancouver (spring, summer, fall) and once a year in Victoria (summer only). You can usually select the session or location that is most convenient. The highest demand, however, is for the summer session because it starts shortly after the conclusion of law school.

PLTC teaches practical skills, including writing, drafting, advocacy and interviewing. The program gives students an opportunity to practise these skills under the supervision of experienced lawyers. You will also learn about practice management and professional ethics.

At the conclusion of the course, you must complete two, three-hour qualification examinations covering substantive and procedural law. One examination is devoted to solicitor's practice and the other to barrister's practice. These topics are not taught during PLTC and it is your responsibility to learn the law in these areas either during law school or through self-study.

SOLICITOR'S EXAMINATION	BARRISTER'S EXAMINATION
Real estate practice	Creditors remedies
Wills	Civil procedure
Corporate practice	Criminal procedure
Commercial law	Family practice

Call ceremony

Students who successfully complete the admission program will be issued a practising certificate entitling them to practise law. New lawyers must also be presented to the court in a call and admission ceremony. Call ceremonies are held in Vancouver and Victoria several times a year, and can be arranged throughout the province to accommodate students in other locations.



Roy Millen Roy Millen, a partner at the Vancouver office of national firm Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP, enjoys the interesting and varied work that big firm life has to offer. "We have a national platform that allows us to do work that just can't be serviced on a small scale," says Roy, who handles litigation, aboriginal law, and international trade files. "There's a collegiality at our firm, a common sense of motivation, and purpose." He is also one of the many lawyers who volunteers at a legal clinic providing free legal advice to low-income people. Roy works hard to strike a balance between work and spending time with his family. A competitive runner, he fits exercise into his daily life by cycling or running to work. "Finding time to fit in things you enjoy outside of work is crucial."

The role of the Law Society

The Law Society of BC is responsible for setting and enforcing standards for the licensing, competence, professional conduct and discipline of lawyers in BC.

The lawyers of the Colony of Vancouver Island first established a law society in 1869, two years before confederation with Canada. The Law Society was formally recognized by provincial law in 1874 and constituted in its present form by a law passed in 1884.

Since its beginning, the Law Society's primary role has been to protect the public interest through regulation of the practice of law. The society is not an advocate for the legal profession.

Self-regulation and independence

Legal services, like other professional services, are regulated for public protection. All Canadian lawyers must be members of a provincial law society. Regulation helps lessen the risk that a member of the public will suffer serious harm at the hands of someone who purports to be a professional service provider, but lacks the expertise, skill or character to deliver a service properly. Professional governing bodies — including those of doctors, nurses and accountants — are ideally positioned to set and evaluate professional standards, and so are given this responsibility.

Self-regulation also helps ensure professional independence. A lawyer must act in a client's best interests. If lawyers were regulated by government or another regulatory body, that relationship could influence the handling of a client's legal matters. It is for this reason that our legal system has always guaranteed the independence of the legal profession. This is not for the benefit of lawyers, but for their clients who need independent legal advisors and advocates.



Governance and administration

The Law Society is governed by 31 directors who are known as Benchers. Twenty-five Benchers are elected by lawyers from among the profession. The provincial government also appoints six non-lawyer Benchers to represent the public interest. The Law Society is funded by dues paid by all lawyers and does not receive funding from other sources. This is important for maintaining the profession's independence. The society's senior elected official is the President.

The Benchers are responsible for setting the Law Society's policies and direction. Implementation of those policies is the responsibility of the society's Chief Executive Officer, management team and staff, who oversee the operation of the Law Society's programs and services.

Law Society programs and services

The Law Society regulates the legal profession through a number of programs, including:

- *Credentials* — deciding the standards for admission to the profession and overseeing the education of articled students;
- *Ethics* — setting ethical standards for all lawyers;
- *Practice Standards* — setting standards of competency;
- *Professional Conduct and Discipline* — investigating allegations of misconduct, resolving complaints and taking disciplinary action when appropriate; and
- *Financial Protections* — providing liability insurance for lawyers and trust protection coverage for the public.

The Law Society also provides lawyers with a number of services, including ethics, risk management and practice advice, educational programs, trust accounting and practice management assistance, personal counselling services and partial funding for courthouse libraries.

PHOTO: Law Society 2007 President, Anna Fung, QC (right) greets new lawyers at a Call to the Bar ceremony.

Additional resources

LAW SOCIETY OF BC

845 Cambie Street, Vancouver,
British Columbia, Canada V6B 4Z9
Telephone 604-669-2533
Toll-free within BC 1-800-903-5300
TTY 604-443-5700
lawsociety.bc.ca

Credentials and member services

memberinfo@lsbc.org
Telephone 604-605-5311

PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL LAW SOCIETIES

Law Society of Alberta
lawsocietyalberta.com

Law Society of Saskatchewan
lawsociety.sk.ca

Law Society of Manitoba
lawsociety.mb.ca

Law Society of Upper Canada (Ontario)
lsuc.on.ca

Law Society of New Brunswick
lawsociety-barreau.nb.ca

Nova Scotia Barristers' Society
nsbs.ns.ca

Law Society of Prince Edward Island
lspei.pe.ca

Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador
lawsociety.nf.ca

Law Society of Yukon
lawsocietyyukon.com

Law Society of the Northwest Territories
lawsociety.nt.ca

Law Society of Nunavut
lawsociety.nu.ca

The province of Québec follows the civil law tradition from France and has two law societies. The *Chambre des notaires du Québec* (cdnq.org) governs the notarial profession within Québec, while the *Barreau du Québec* (barreau.qc.ca) governs the lawyers.

INTERNATIONAL LAW SCHOOL GRADUATES

International Federation of
Law Societies of Canada
flsc.ca

CANADIAN LAW SCHOOLS — COMMON LAW DEGREE

University of BC
ubc.ca

University of Victoria
uvic.ca

Osgoode Hall Law School (York University)
osgoode.yorku.ca

University of Toronto
utoronto.ca

University of Ottawa
uottawa.ca

University of Western Ontario
uwo.ca

University of Windsor
uwindsor.ca

Queen's University
queensu.ca

McGill University
mcgill.ca

University of New Brunswick
unb.ca

Dalhousie University
dal.ca

University of Alberta
ualberta.ca

University of Manitoba
umanitoba.ca

University of Saskatchewan
usask.ca

University of Calgary
ucalgary.ca

University of Moncton
umoncton.ca

The Law Society
of British Columbia



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Do you have any questions or comments on this booklet?

Email communications@lsbc.org

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