



WHEN I GROW UP, I WANT TO BE TALLER!

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Introduction

Children are often asked, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” My answer every time was that I wanted to be taller, just like my mum. So, have I fulfilled my childhood wish? Currently I’m in my first year of study for my LLB Law degree at the age of 40. Most people think I’m mad and are always asking, how on earth am I doing it all? I am a mum of three amazing children: Luke, Ella, and Oliver, who all keep me on my toes. My children are my inspiration and my drive. Prior to starting University, I was an Area Sales and Lettings Manager for a local Estate and Letting Agents. Being an Estate Agent was never my childhood dream; it was simply where my career had taken me over the years.

So, why the decision to make a huge U-turn after my already successful career? During lockdown, so many of us had the time to stop and think about what we were doing and where we wanted to be in our lives. This was very much the same for me. Having had my son Oliver during lockdown, when it came to thinking about going back to work after my maternity leave, did I really want to spend the next 28 years being an Area Sales Manager? My next logical career progression was to become a legal executive. Having done quite a lot of research around the subject, I decided this was the route that I was going to take. I was lucky enough to be accepted by a local firm to undergo my training, or so I thought!

Whilst at the local garage waiting for my car to be serviced, I noticed the university advertisement on the side of a bus that drove past and in a fleeting moment wondered if I would ever be considered? Was I too old to go down the traditional route and were there any places left? Although it was probably mad, I thought it was worth a call anyway. Having spoken with

¹ Emma Jackson is currently in the first year of her law degree

admissions, I sent them all my certificates, as well as my CV for consideration. The following day I was informed they would be delighted to have me on their Law Foundation year, which would then lead on to the main Law degree, so in that moment I jumped straight on to it and had to start the very next day.

When I told my family that I was starting university the next day, the look of shock followed by pride on their faces was priceless and gave me the most amazing feeling. When questions from others came up, like: “Are you mad? Are you sure you’ll be able to do it all, especially with the children?” – my answer was, “Why not? Nothing can stop you achieving what you want, when you really put your mind to it.” My children are what keep me going during the tough times, as it isn’t easy. If it was, I suppose everyone would do it.

University

So here I am now, in my second year at university but the first year of my Law degree. Undergoing the foundation year was the best decision I made. It gave me time to realise my own strengths and weaknesses within this environment, and to develop my skills further. The support and encouragement I received was fantastic; without the tutors from the foundation year, I really believe that I would have just run a mile. My career aspirations at the time of enrolling on the foundation year was to specialise in property law due to my background. However, having enjoyed every module and had my eyes opened to all the possibilities available to me, I have decided to keep my options for the future open.

This year I have seen so many looks of sheer panic and ‘rabbit in the headlights’ moments for younger students. I’m not saying this hasn’t happened to me, but at this stage in my life I’m much more prepared. As a mature student, many people think it’s just the logistical hurdles you must overcome, managing home and family alongside your degree, but actually it’s so much more.

Wurtele and Maruyama state that many younger university students hold negative attitudes towards the mature students.² This was far from the truth during the foundation year, as many of us were there as mature students. However, starting the first year of my degree has been one of the biggest hurdles I’ve had to face. On my first day, as I walked into the lecture hall, it was

² Wurtele S and Maruyama L, ‘Changing Students’ Stereotypes of Older Adults’ (2013) 40(1) Teaching Psychology 59

assumed that I was the lecturer. When I took my seat, there was an incredulous look on many of the younger students' faces. It was apparent that trying to encourage them to engage with me was going to be a challenge in itself. This made me wonder if it was due to my age and that I'm old enough to be their parent, or was it perhaps that after COVID and two years of relative isolation, they didn't know how to engage with someone my age who is not a teacher?

Seminars were also tricky, as there were times in the beginning when I tried to engage with younger students, but was ignored. However, I'm never one to shy away from a challenge and made every opportunity to talk to as many of the younger students as possible. Through cognitive bias a person is unaware of the bias they place upon a person or a situation. This is a mental process which, due to important stimuli within a person's life and upbringing, influences their judgements and decisions.³

There was one instance in a seminar when another student remarked that it was ok for me, as I didn't need to work! This lit a fuse, but I challenged it more gently than perhaps I would have done previously. They didn't know that I was constantly juggling family chores and errands with university work, whilst also co-running a business, and that in fact I was jealous other students could do university work whenever they wanted to. When I pointed all this out, I could see these things had never occurred to them. Even so, I do have one advantage as a mature student, which is that I've learned from necessity to master time management and to multi-task. At the end of the first semester, having faced these hurdles, I'm glad to say I've met some fantastic individuals and formed strong friendships, not only with other mature students but also with many younger students.

Statistics

That said, what hurdles am I likely to face in the world of employment and how will I be perceived by the legal sector as an older student?

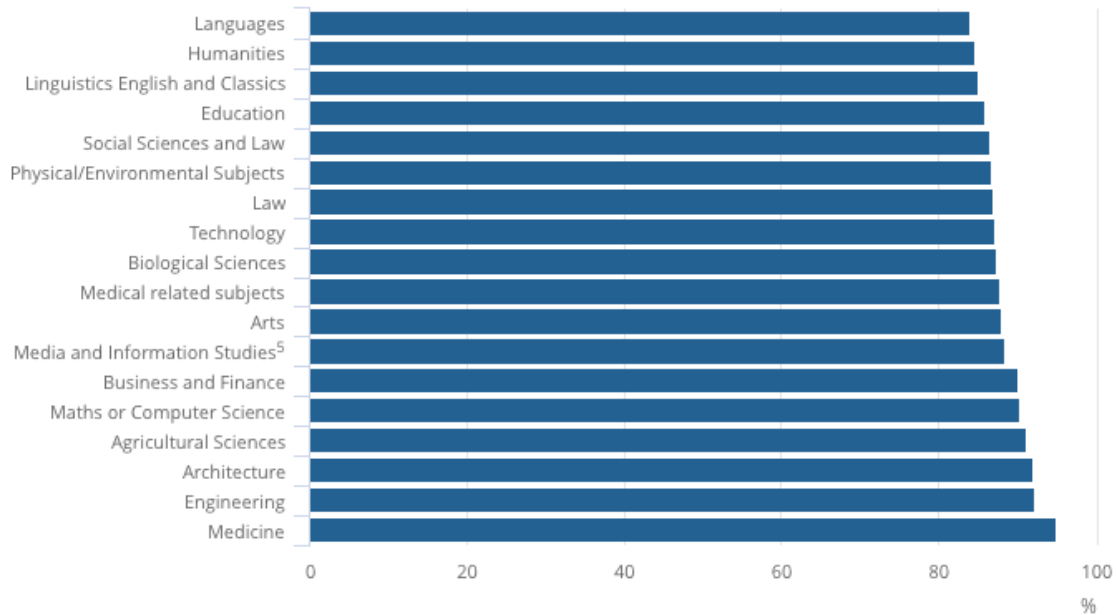
According to the Office of National Statistics around 87% of Graduates with an undergraduate

³ Nisbett RE and Wilson TD, 'Telling More than We Know; Verbal Reports on Mental Processes' (1977) 84 *Psychological Review* 231

degree in Law are employed within the UK:⁴

Figure 10: Employment rates¹ for graduates² with undergraduate degree³ by the subject of their degree⁴

July to September 2017, UK



The Higher Education Statistics Agency⁵ reported that in 2017 there were 21,000 new law graduates within the UK, with only around 800 job vacancies in that year, according to High Flyers Research Limited (2018).⁶

According to the Law Society, in 2019 20,905 students were accepted to study law at undergraduate level, of which 14,520 were female.⁷ In 2020 the number of solicitors on the roll

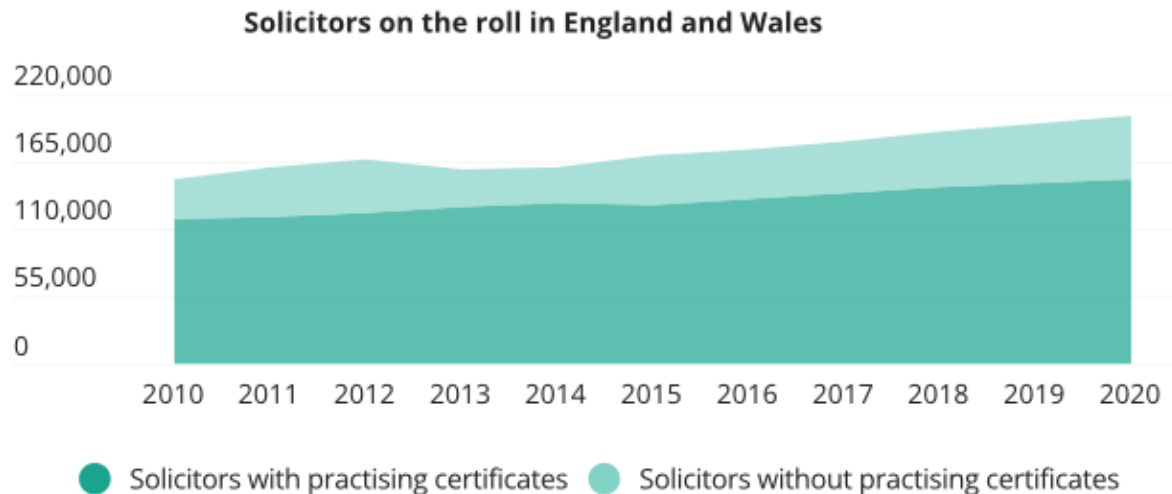
⁴ Office of National Statistics 'Graduates in the UK Labour Market 2017' <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/graduatesintheuklabourmarket/2017>> accessed 4 December 2022.

⁵ Higher Education Statistics Agency, 'Higher Education Leavers Statistics 2016/2017' <<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/12-07-2018/sfr251-higher-education-leaver-statistics-ap-subjects>> accessed 4 December 2022

⁶ High Fliers Research Limited, 'The Graduate Market in 2018: Annual review of graduate vacancies and starting salaries at the UK's leading employers' <https://www.highfliers.co.uk/download/2018/graduate_market/GMReport18.pdf> accessed 4 December 2022

⁷ The Law Society, 'Entry Trends: Undergraduates and Graduates in Law'

of England and Wales increased from 149,891 to 202,374^{18, 8}



The Solicitors Regulation Authority reports there has been an increase of women into the law profession, of which 52% are female. It states the gap between a female solicitor and partner of a firm is still high, but is slowly decreasing.⁹ This is due to the fact there are now more female undergraduate students studying Law, as highlighted by The Law Society.

According to the Solicitors Regulation Authority, 59% of lawyers are aged 25-44 and 33% of lawyers are parents, with this increasing to 38% in partner positions within a firm.¹⁰

- 30% are aged 25-34 – down from 31% in 2019
- 29% are aged 35-44 – no change since 2019

<<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/en/career-advice/becoming-a-solicitor/entry-trends>> accessed 5 December 2022

⁸ The Law Society, 'Annual Statistics Report 2020'

<<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/Topics/Research/Annual-statistics-report-2020>> accessed 6 December 2022

⁹ Solicitors Regulation Authority, 'How Diverse is the Solicitors Profession'

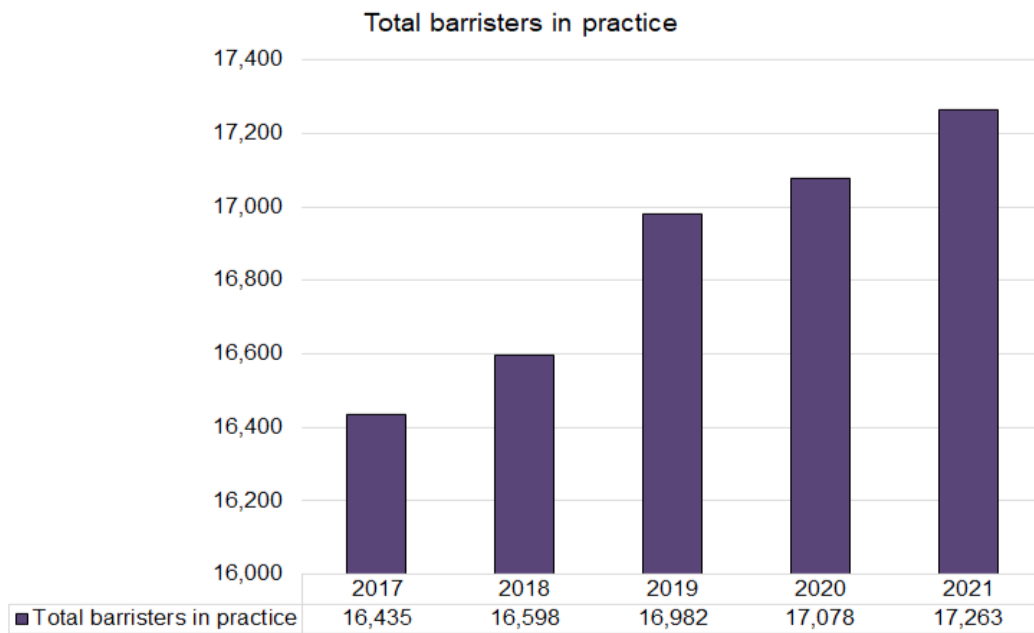
<<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/diverse-legal-profession/>> accessed 6 December 2022

¹⁰ Solicitors Regulation Authority, 'How Diverse is the Solicitors Profession'

<<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/diverse-legal-profession/>> accessed 6 December 2022

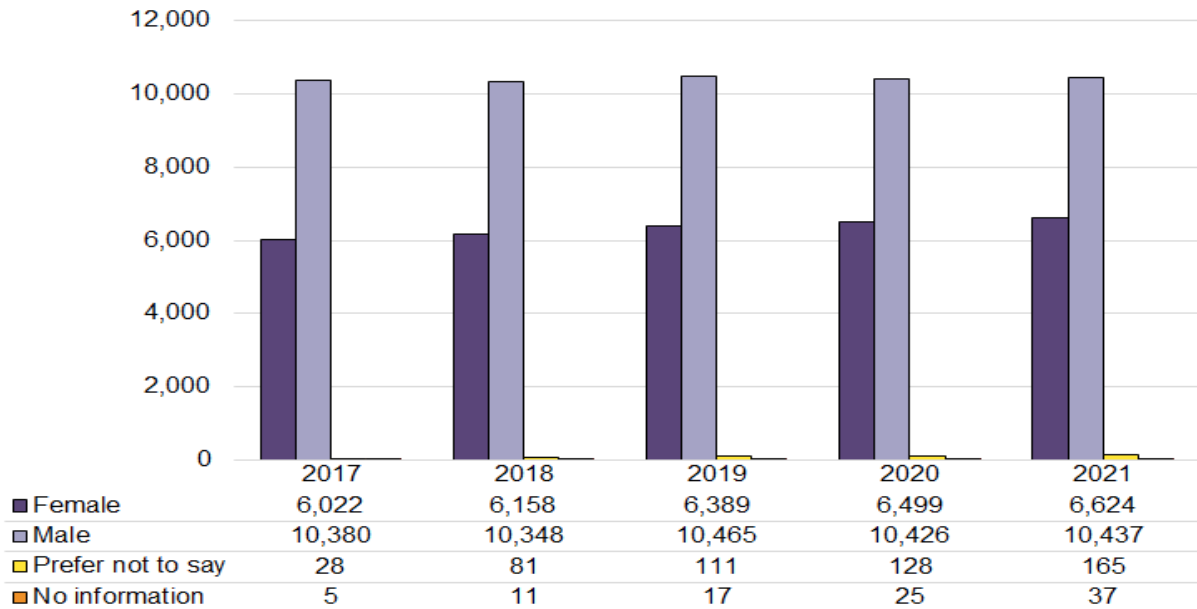
- 22% are aged 45-54 – no change since 2019
- 13% are aged 55-64 – up from 12% in 2019
- 4% are 65+ – no change since 2019

According to the Bar Standards Board, the number of practising barristers since 2017 has increased from 16,435 to 17,263 as of 2022. It also reports there is an increase in female barristers. However, the total number of practising barristers on average has stayed the same.¹¹

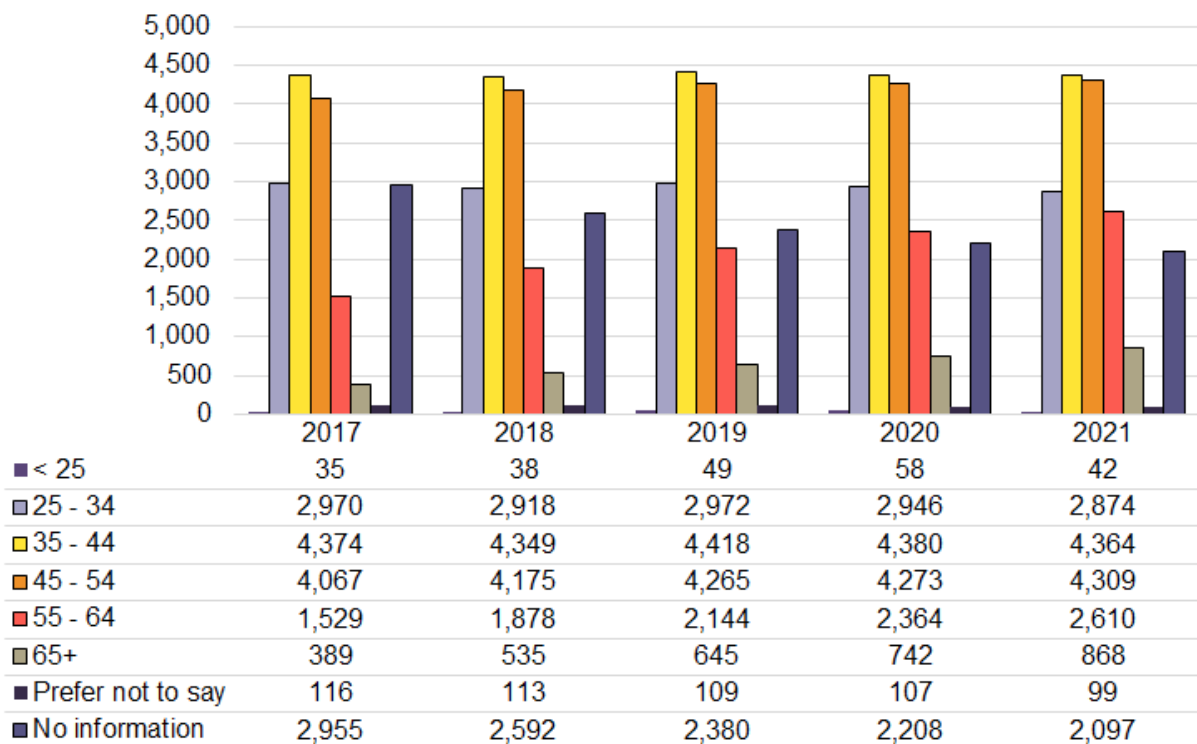


¹¹ Bar Standards Board, 'Statistics on practising barristers' <<https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/news-publications/research-and-statistics/statistics-about-the-bar/practising-barristers.html>> accessed 6 December 2022

Total practising Bar - Gender



Total practising Bar - Age



Legal networking

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend the University of Plymouth Law Society (UPLS) Cheese and Wine event, with legal professionals from the area. I was quite apprehensive that I would get the same reaction concerning my age and abilities as I did at the beginning of the year. Indeed, when I first walked in, some students from other year groups approached me, assuming that I must be one of the professionals and not realising that I was a student myself. This caused some embarrassment, but it broke the ice with the younger students and we had a laugh about it. Then when I spoke to some legal professionals, their response was not what I expected. The advice, encouragement and support that they offered was invaluable, and has made me even more determined to see this through to the very end.

So, to answer my original question: am I taller? Well yes, I believe I am. I've taken a huge leap back into education and maybe even set an example for my children. It has made me think about all the other mature individuals out there who don't realise that going back into education is a feasible option, since I'm forever being asked, how do I do it? My answer to this is simple: there's nothing you can't achieve if you really put your mind to it.