10. The Legal Professions

This chapter explains what the legal professions are, what they do, and how to qualify as a member of the professions. It examines the rules governing practice as a member of the professions and, in particular, the issue of ethical behaviour. There are three principal branches to the legal profession in England and Wales. The first consists of barristers, the second of solicitors, and the third of chartered legal executives. The routes to qualification vary for each of the branches, but broadly speaking all involve an academic stage and work-based training. When considering the current routes to qualification for each of the branches of the profession, the chapter also explores potential qualification reforms, in particular those proposed by the Solicitors’ Regulation Authority with the introduction of the Solicitors’ Qualifying Exam (SQE). Diversity within each branch of the profession is also explored in relation to gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic backgrounds.