Nigeria

Legal System Summary

Nigeria is a federation of states and follows a common law system. The country is governed by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which has been through three alteration acts since 2009. Besides the constitution, Nigeria also permits the exercise of Sharia Law for its Muslim population. The constitution provides for separation of powers among the three branches of government — a strong executive, an elected legislature, and an independent judiciary; it is modeled after the U.S. Constitution. The president of Nigeria is elected by the people of the country and is both the chief of state and head of government. The president is in charge of the Federal Executive Council (cabinet). The executive branch is divided into Federal Ministries. The president appoints a minister who leads each Federal Ministry.

Nigeria’s court system is made up of a Supreme Court, which is the final court of appeals; a Federal Court of Appeals; a Federal High Court; and high courts in each of the country’s 36 states. States are also entitled to have a Sharia court of appeals system. Nigeria’s Supreme Court has jurisdiction over disputes among the states and between the federal government and any state, particularly with respect to monetary issues and any issues that arise out of the election process.

Education Prior to College or University study

The educational system prior to university level study in Nigeria consists of 12 academic years at the primary and secondary levels of education. The first six years are spent at the primary school, which is referred to as “Universal Basic Education,” and the later six are spent at the secondary school. In each case, a student graduates with a Primary School Certificate and a Secondary School Certificate in Education, respectively.

College or University Education Prior to Law School

Students study law as undergraduates.

Admission to the Study of Law

To study law at university, a student must have credits in the following Senior Secondary School Certificate subjects: English Language, Mathematics, Literature-in-English, Economics, Government, and Commerce. Though not mandatory, students may also earn a credit in any of the languages of the three largest tribes in Nigeria — Yoruba, Hausa, or Igbo.

In addition to the above, one is required to take a Joint Admissions Matriculation Examination, which is composed of English Language, Literature-in-English, Economics, and Government. It is specifically tailored for those who intend to study law. Usually, each university sets its cut-off mark for admissions and once a student crosses this threshold, he or she is qualified to further compete with other students for the admission spaces available. This cut-off mark is based on the marks from the previous year’s class (on the Joint Admissions Matriculation Exam) as well as on how many students reached that mark in that
Previous year. For example, in one particular year, few students met that year’s cut-off, so the schools had to lower the cut-off score on the exam.

Generally, there is a National University Commission at the federal level that provides the accreditation and rating of university education in Nigeria. Therefore, the law schools that have the highest rating are generally more difficult to get into with many candidates competing each year for the available spaces.

**The Study of Law**

A law degree takes four and a half to five years to complete. Additionally, the professional qualification that enables a person to be called to the Nigeria bar is undertaken at the Nigerian Law School for one year. While law school involves acquiring knowledge in substantive law areas, the one-year program at the Nigerian Law School involves acquiring knowledge in procedural law areas. Completing the program at the Nigerian Law School is a mandatory pre-requisite before one can be called to the Nigerian bar to practice as a Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria. The mandatory subjects at law school are: Introduction to Legal Method, Law of Contract, Law of Tort, Criminal Law, Land Law, Commercial Transactions, Law of Equity, Law of Trusts, Law of Evidence, Jurisprudence and Legal Theory, and Company Law. At the Nigerian Law School, mandatory subjects are Civil Procedure, Criminal Procedure, Law of Evidence, Company Law and Commercial Practice, Professional Ethics, Legal Drafting, and Conveyancing. Law school exams are written and closed book.


**Admission to the Practice of Law**

In Nigeria, a lawyer’s education starts at the university level. One can find law school, called Faculties of Law, in the universities all over Nigeria. The conditions or qualification for admission to study law are usually published by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board Act. A prospective lawyer may also choose to study at a foreign university.

The content of the course of study leading to the award of a law degree, whether from a Nigerian or foreign university, must be approved by the Council of Legal Education. The Council only approves foreign universities in common law countries or those teaching common law courses. The Council usually insists that the subjects taken include Constitutional Law, Criminal Law, Contracts, Torts, Land Law, Equity & Trust, Commercial Law, and Evidence.

The Council of Legal Education runs the Nigeria Law School. Those who have obtained a university degree in law and want to practice as lawyers in Nigeria must attend the Nigerian Law School. Admission is also open to those who have passed the final bar examinations of the English, Scottish, or Irish bars or the Solicitor's Final Examinations of England, Scotland, or Ireland.

After a course of study at the Nigerian Law School, the student who passes the final bar part II examinations receives a certificate from the Council of Legal Education and is then called to the bar by the Body of Benchers as provided by the Legal Practitioners Act. This is followed by enrollment as a Legal Practitioner at the Supreme Court of Nigeria. The bar examinations are generally considered to be difficult.

Another major part of the requirement for qualification to the Nigerian bar is the Court and Chamber attachments. Students spend three months during the one-year law school program at each of the chamber and court attachments.
**Significant Honors**

Individual law schools and the Nigerian Law School give honors to academically deserving students who have made immense contributions to the law school and, in some cases, the society at large. Students may receive honors by distinguishing themselves as the best student in particular subjects and as the best in the program overall at graduation. Also, awards are given for contributions to the legal society. At the Nigerian Law School, such awards are also given on the basis of best performance in individual subjects and overall best performance.

**Advanced Law Degrees**

Both advanced law degrees (master’s and PhD degrees) are available at certain universities in Nigeria. It is more common to undertake a Master of Laws (LL.M) degree than a PhD. In order to become a professor at a law school, one must have a minimum of a master’s degree. A doctorate is equally important in academia, as some law schools will only hire people with PhD degrees. Although it has not been traditionally common to pursue an advanced law degree, there is an emerging trend of lawyers in Nigeria who look to specialize in a particular area of law by pursuing LL.M and PhD degrees.

**Authority of Admitted Lawyers**

Once admitted, a lawyer becomes a Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

**Admission of Law Students or Lawyers from Other Countries**

As mentioned above, the Council of Legal Education runs the Nigerian Law School. Those who have obtained a University degree in law and want to practice as lawyers in Nigeria must attend the Nigerian Law School. Admission into the Nigerian Law School is also open to those who have passed the final bar examinations of the English, Scottish, or Irish bar or the Solicitor's Final Examinations of England, Scotland, or Ireland.

The process for admission to practice law in Nigeria for foreign lawyers is similar to the process for those who are originally from Nigeria. After a course of study at the Nigerian Law School, students from other countries who pass the final bar part II examinations receive a certificate from the Council of Legal Education and are then called to the bar by the Body of Benchers as provided by the Legal Practitioners Act. This is followed by enrollment as a Legal Practitioner at the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

Foreign students who are not from England, Scotland, or Ireland who studied or are qualified to practice law in other jurisdictions are required to spend two years studying at the Nigerian Law School and afterwards be called to the Nigerian bar to practice as a Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria. They are required to pass the bar part I and bar part II exams. Part I of the bar exam is essentially a test of knowledge of constitutional law, criminal law, the Nigerian legal system, and Nigerian land law. Part II is based on courses such as Civil Procedure, Company Law and Commercial Practice, Criminal Procedure, Law of Evidence, Legal Drafting and Conveyancing, Professional Ethics, Legal Practitioners Accounts, Law Office Management, and General Paper.

**Law Firms**

A list of Nigerian law firms is available at [https://www.hg.org/firms-nigeria.html](https://www.hg.org/firms-nigeria.html).
Association with Law Firms or Lawyers from Other Countries

There are restrictions on lawyers who are only admitted to practice in other countries being partners in Nigerian law firms. Rule 5 of the Rules of Professional Conduct for Legal Practitioners (made pursuant to the Nigerian Legal Practitioners Act) expressly states that a lawyer shall not form a partnership with a non-lawyer or with a lawyer who is not admitted to practice law in Nigeria, if any of the activities of the partnership consist of the practice of law. In terms of representing clients, Section 2 of the Nigerian Legal Practitioner Act provides that a person shall be entitled to practice as a barrister and solicitor if, and only if, his or her name is on the roll. One whose name is on the roll has completed all of the necessary requirements for the practice of law in Nigeria and has been successfully called to the Nigerian bar. The implication of this provision is that a foreigner is not entitled to practice Nigerian law unless he or she has been called to the Nigerian bar.

However, there are cases where lawyers who are not admitted to practice law in Nigeria work as foreign law consultants in local Nigerian law firms providing advice to individuals and corporate entities based on the laws of the jurisdiction(s) in which they are qualified. For example, an English or New York trained lawyer may work as an English law or New York law/International law consultant on a transaction or matter that is governed or impacted by the law of these jurisdictions.

Customary Titles for Lawyers

In Nigeria, lawyers are referred to as Barristers or Solicitors.

Further Information

Nigerian Bar Association
NBA House
Plot 1101 Cadastral Zone A00,
Central Business District,
Abuja F.C.T. Nigeria
+234 709 821 1663
info@nigerianbar.org.ng
**Grade Conversion Guide**

The Nigerian grading system in law school is the source of much controversy and unhappiness among law students because they feel it is too strict. The Nigerian law school grading system is outlined below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nigerian Grade</th>
<th>United States Grade</th>
<th>Nigerian Mark Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>70-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>60-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>50-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>40-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>30-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20-29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below is another way Nigerian grades convert to grades in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nigerian Grade</th>
<th>United States Grade</th>
<th>Nigerian Mark Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 4, 5, 6</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 7 and 8</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample CV/Resume

No specific format is required for a CV/resume in Nigeria. Applicants are expected to keep their CV/resume formal/professional and provide information on their contact details, work experience, education, other interests, and accomplishments and publications (if any). Below is an example of what an employer could expect to find.

NAME OF APPLICANT
ADDRESS
TELEPHONE NUMBER & E-MAIL ADDRESS

EDUCATION

NAME OF INSTITUTION:
Degree or Certificate Obtained:
Honors/Awards:
Activities:

(To be replicated for each institution attended)

EXPERIENCE

NAME OF ORGANIZATION, CITY, STATE
Position; Duration of Employment
Details of work done

(To be replicated for each organization the Applicant has worked for)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Languages:

Hobbies:

REPRESENTATIVE PUBLICATIONS & PAPERS (IF ANY)