

My career story: "I moved offshore"

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Alex Curry, a senior associate at Ogier, explains why he moved to the Channel Islands and provides advice on how to move to an offshore firm.

Was moving offshore always a career objective for you, or did it happen by chance, or a long process of realisation?

A very good friend of mine from university moved from a London firm to the British Virgin Islands back in 2009. I was approached by his recruitment agent at the time who enquired as to whether I would be interested in moving to the Caribbean. I met with the agent but dismissed a move because I was happy in London at the time.

In early 2014 I received a call from the same agent who told me he had been retained by a firm to recruit into Jersey. I was fast becoming tired of the three-hour daily commute from Surrey and was looking for another challenge in different surroundings.

I had briefly contemplated moving to other regions in the UK to get away from London but when I scratched the surface no prospective city really appealed. I think I could have settled in one of them easily enough but didn't want to lose out on the deal experience I was receiving in London which was the main concern for me.

I have to say, having dismissed the UK, moving offshore was a very easy decision. Jersey is a truly wonderful place to work, the deal experience is extremely good and the commute has been reduced to 20 minutes per day. All things considered, I wondered why I hadn't made the move years earlier.

At what stage of your career were you when you made the move?

I was a senior associate in the corporate team of my previous firm. I think the time was right to move. I felt that I had gained significant experience in the City over the years and I had also been

seconded to work in house for an AIM-listed oil exploration company. I felt that I had a lot to offer and was able to move with the confidence that I would be able to bring plenty of experience to my new role.

What was the process like?

Very easy. I received a call out of the blue from the agent I had met with five years prior. We met again for a coffee and chatted through my experience and credentials. We spoke a lot about Jersey, life as an offshore lawyer and what it was like to live on a small island.

I think the whole process from that initial coffee to receiving the offer took about three months. I first had a telephone interview with a couple of the partners at the firm which mainly covered transactional experience and was relaxed. My second interview was in Jersey and I was flown out with my girlfriend for the weekend and had my interview on the Monday. I think it took a week or so for the offer to finally come through.

What are the key differences between your old and new job, in terms of working life?

The main positive is that I genuinely feel that I have the best of both worlds. I am working with blue chip clients on high-profile transactions on a daily basis while being able to meet my family after work to walk along the beach. I have more time in my life now to do other things away from the office and I am not spending hours commuting. London is also only a short flight away, so it is easy to visit clients, contacts and friends as and when required. Some people may feel that small island life is not for them but honestly I don't feel that way about it.

It is obviously difficult moving to a new firm. In my previous firm I had built up lots of personal goodwill over many years and people knew me and could depend on me. All of that is reset when you join a new firm and you have to work hard at rebuilding your brand but that is all part of the fun and the challenge.

From a purely professional perspective, the fact that you leave the relative comfort of familiar legislation and convention to deal with a new set of statutes can be a challenge. Helpfully, the Jersey companies law is largely based on the English Companies Act 1985 - which was the legislation I studied at law school. This makes things easier when interpreting the local law but it does take you a little while to get used to it.

What's your top tip for someone in the same position?

It may sound obvious but the best piece of advice I can give is to speak to an agent who specialises in offshore recruitment, ideally someone who has worked offshore in one or more jurisdictions so they can give you an honest overview of what life is like.

Take your time and don't make any rash decisions. If you are concerned about distance from friends and family in the UK, then don't consider the Caribbean - Jersey and Guernsey are both

approximately 30 minutes flying time from the UK.

Do your research into the firms too - again this is something that the agent will be able to help you with. It is not just about understanding the firms and the work on offer but gaining an understanding of what life is like away from the office too. If you are not going to be comfortable and happy in the local environment then the move will not work in the long term.

What were some of the chief non-work-related challenges of moving? Any tips for how to get through them?

Moving overseas can be a huge undertaking. The local government website was invaluable. It has a section on moving to Jersey and contains lots of information which is relevant to people relocating to the Island.

We were given accommodation by the firm for a couple of weeks to allow us to find a place to live. We ended up renting a property in the east of the Island but local rules meant that we were not able to move in to the property until I had actually started work for the firm.

It also takes time to find a suitable removals company to bring all of your belongings over from the UK. We looked at lots of different companies and eventually selected a local firm in Jersey who coordinated the move from the UK for us. This proved invaluable because they had first-hand knowledge of the island so knew where we were headed. They also worked regularly with the port authority so knew the procedures at the port and how to deal with the various regulations at customs. We were able to leave everything to them and our belongings arrived safely on time and in one piece.

Given that Jersey is not too far from the UK we decided to make a number of day trips to the Island in advance of the move to get a feel for the place and learn our way around. Book plenty of flights well in advance and this will save you money. You will find that during the transition period you will be travelling back and forth more than you might imagine.

I also brought my car to Jersey. It is important to be aware of the local laws when it comes to driving overseas. It's not just the obvious things like speed limits and local driving customs. I had to re-register my car in Jersey within six months of arriving and had to exchange my UK driving licence for a Jersey driving licence. All of these little things take time and there is plenty of paperwork!

Health insurance is another important factor to bear in mind. There is no NHS in Jersey so you pay for your medical care in a system that is more similar to the US than the UK. It is not a problem because everyone has insurance. Just be aware though, if you are coming to the island with your partner or girlfriend and you are not married you may need to take out a separate health insurance policy to make sure you are both protected because most firm's policies only insure their employees and their spouses.

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