

Life as a law student and an offshore paralegal: Q&A with Matthew Davies

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Matthew joined Ogier in June 2016 as a paralegal in our Dispute Resolution team. In this interview, a version of which first appeared on the University of Kent's website, he discusses his day-to-day work at Ogier, the benefits of being a paralegal in an offshore law firm and his career and study path so far.

You're currently working as a Paralegal for Ogier in Jersey - can you tell us about the work you are doing?

I work in the Dispute Resolution team at Ogier. The great thing about working in an offshore law firm is that each department works on the full breadth of matters within the practice area - for example my department works on anything and everything that falls under the umbrella of a "dispute". This means I get to be involved in a huge variety of cases ranging from international trust disputes, through to employment and immigration law. Another upside of working in an offshore firm is that you tend to be given much greater responsibility and opportunity to get involved than you might elsewhere. This means that I am not the stereotypical Paralegal who does a lot of photocopying!

What does a typical working day/week look like for you?

Because the work which my department does is so varied, I don't have a "typical" working day or week. There is so much going on within my department that I can be pulled into helping out on something completely alien to me at any point. I get to work alongside senior fee-earners on things such as drafting affidavits and skeleton arguments which is great experience and lets me develop my drafting skills.

How did your legal education help prepare you for the role?

The legal system in Jersey is very different to the UK which can make my job extremely challenging, particularly where research tasks are involved. The skill of critical thinking is

extremely useful in my job. Sometimes a situation can arise which has not been addressed in Jersey before, so you need to be able to think outside the box and find a way to justify a particular course of action.

As a former President of Kent Law Temple Society (KLTS), can you also tell us how this experience helped prepare you for the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC)?

One of the most beneficial things about being involved in any Society is learning how to manage your time. Sometimes balancing the demands of your degree with the pressure of delivering great events for the Society members can be stressful, and it is really important not to let one thing get done at the expense of the other. The BPTC is all about time management because it is a very intense course which moves quickly. By the time I started the BPTC I was used to juggling several things at once, and this proved invaluable! In addition to this, KLTS ran a lot of workshops and events during the year that I was President. This gave me lots of good opportunities to practice my public speaking skills, which is another very valuable skill for the BPTC.

KLTS, and the other student law societies, give students so many great opportunities and you do not need to be a member of the society committee to benefit. Getting involved in the networking events and various workshops which the societies run helps a lot when you move on to your first job or a post-graduate course.

Do you have fond memories of mooting at law school? How important were those mooting experiences in developing practical legal skills?

I have very fond memories of mooting at Kent. I mooted several times both in the internal mooting scheme, and also in a couple of external competitions. It is always quite a nervous experience at first, but it is very good fun!

I think that mooting is a very useful experience, even for those who are not interested in a legal career which involves oral advocacy. Mooting is about more than just standing up and making a legal argument. It is all about analysing a fact pattern, identifying issues, and understanding how the law applies. A moot problem is almost always going to throw up an issue where the law is against you. You can't just give up, or hope that the Moot Judge doesn't notice. Instead, you have to tackle the issue head on, critique the law and try and find a basis on which you can distinguish your case. If you can't do that, or if the Judge isn't with you, then it also teaches you when to concede. All of this is very useful for working as a lawyer.

What were the highlights of student life for you?

One of the best things for me was meeting people from all over the world. For example, during my final year each of my housemates was from a different country! You get to learn so much about different cultures when you are a student, which is fantastic. I am lucky to say that I have made a

lot of friends from my time at Kent, some of whom live far away. For example I made friends with people who live in Abu Dhabi and Canada. If nothing else, this makes for a great excuse to go on a holiday.

I also learned a lot about myself while I was a student. I moved a relatively long way from home to go to Kent which forced me into a whole new level of independence. It might sound terribly cliché, but life as a student is a great opportunity to discover yourself.

What advice would you like to share with aspiring barristers/lawyers?

Don't be afraid to acknowledge your weaknesses or limits. None of us are perfect, and it would be a mistake to suggest that we are!

And finally, where do you see yourself in ten years time?

I honestly don't know! If you had asked me that 2 years ago, the answer I would have given would bear no resemblance to where I am now. I am sure I will still be working in the law, but in what role and in what jurisdiction, remains to be seen.

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