

Time out with Head of Jersey Dispute Resolution Nick Williams

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If arguments are an art, then disputes are a discipline; the former something to avoid, the latter an interesting area to work in.

For Nick Williams, the law was a career choice from an early stage. His father was a lawyer at international firm Mayer Brown, and growing up in Ealing, London, attending school at St Paul's School in Barnes, law appeared to be the connector between his academic interests and his desire to work in City business.

After studying History at York, Nick did a law conversion, and secured a training contract at Clifford Chance in London where he qualified as an English solicitor in 2003. He gravitated towards the Dispute Resolution team, where he found himself working on many highly complex commercial cases including some that involved Jersey trusts, and in 2007 he joined Ogier and moved to Jersey.

Thirteen years later, Ogier has one of Jersey's largest Dispute Resolution teams and since becoming partner in 2013 and team head in 2018, Nick has led the practice, growing the business case after case.

"It has been a hugely exciting time," Nick said. "Ogier has been growing rapidly as a firm across our jurisdictions, and the Dispute Resolution team has been an integral part of that growth. Dispute Resolution covers so many aspects of law. We work on everything contentious that might arise in the offshore sphere, including trust advisory work, corporate shareholder disputes, insolvency and bankruptcy matters, and contentious regulatory issues - as well as local civil disputes relating for example to land or employment rights."

"As a Jersey advocate you often need to be able to apply your mind quickly and interchangeably across all these sorts of practice areas, many of which may also have a cross-jurisdictional element. The work covers everything from advice to drafting to appearing on your feet in Court,

which is the most challenging but ultimately most rewarding part. It is a very diverse mixture of work."

Trust Advisory work is a key area of interest for Nick.

"Jersey has a sophisticated Financial Services industry and as a result there are a number of leading trust companies we are privileged to act for in an advisory capacity. These clients may find themselves in complicated contentious situations, not necessarily of their own making, but as a result of sensitive situations that have evolved that can be difficult to deal with: for example, family disputes following a divorce, or the death of a family patriarch or matriarch. Often the trustee may find itself central to resolution of these issues, holding and administering assets at the heart of things, and may need assistance deciding on the right strategy to put their best foot forward."

When Nick began his career in the early 2000s, UK law firms were just starting to move away from their typically formal approach, following a number of transatlantic law firm mergers.

Now in places like Ogier, your average lawyer might stroll around the glass walled office in jeans and a jumper, and even though Nick is wearing a suit following a client meeting, he is clear that neither he nor his team are expected to be suited and booted every day if they don't want to be.

"Ogier brought in 'Dress for your day' in 2015," Nick said. "It's about being comfortable in how you work. I'll wear a suit for most client meetings, and of course have to dress formally for Court, but otherwise people are not constrained by a prescriptive approach over what to wear. There has been a change of mentality in the legal profession since the start of my career. We want to be able to welcome everyone with the necessary skills and accommodate different working styles and preferences."

Ogier follows this through with an extensive employee wellbeing programme covering physical, mental, and financial wellbeing.

"The partnership is committed to the wellbeing of our employees as a core part of the culture of our organisation. Fundamental to the success of Ogier are the immensely talented group of people who have chosen to work here. We ask a lot from them, so it's important that we give everyone the support they need to be motivated and purposeful and hopefully to enjoy what they do. We therefore encourage people to work in a way that is best for them - whether that is a formal part-time, or ad-hoc flexibility, with people working from home if they need to or taking time out in the day for important appointments.

"The commitment to wellbeing extends to other areas as well, be it opportunities to engage in sports and social activities or our corporate social responsibility initiatives. Employees have the opportunity to buy extra holiday and we also offer other services like income protection in the event of long-term illness, a generous pension and an Employee Assistance Programme which

provides employees experiencing any kind of difficulty with a 24/7 confidential, external helpline through which they can access qualified support."

Nick tries to maintain a good work life balance himself. As a father to two young daughters, a lot of his spare time involves family activities. However, he is also a keen runner, lapping up miles along eastern coastal roads, and he is an 'Almoner', an Assistant Church Warden, at Grouville Parish Church.

"Whilst I may be a Londoner at heart, I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to live in this fantastic Island. When I first moved to Jersey - not knowing a single person - I was just about still young and able enough to play rugby. I played with Jersey United Banks, a great club which helped me integrate into the Island and meet friends across all walks of life. In fact, the welcome I received everywhere as a newcomer in Jersey made me realise what an inclusive community it is, and somewhere where I knew I could be happy. In turn, that led me to meet my wife, who was born and grew up in the Island. Professionally, I have also had the good fortune to work for, and learn from, some inspirational lawyers. The Jersey Bar is strong and collegiate and as an Island we are fortunate to have a robust and high quality judicial system that helps stand us in very good stead."

"A lot of law is about attention to detail. When drafting documents or understanding a client's case you need a granular approach. But then you also need to be able to step back, and see the bigger picture. You need that sense of objectivity in order to help a client when they are emotionally involved in an issue, or to ensure that you understand what they want to achieve commercially. And the emphasis always has to be on 'resolution' rather than 'dispute'".

Focus and detachment. Being full on, then being able to switch off - a winning strategy for resolving disputes, and perhaps a good approach for long-term career satisfaction as a lawyer too.

About Ogier

Ogier is a professional services firm with the knowledge and expertise to handle the most demanding and complex transactions and provide expert, efficient and cost-effective services to all our clients. We regularly win awards for the quality of our client service, our work and our people.

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