

Niamh Hills relates her experience as a Barlow Robbins LLP trainee

The ominous training contract search is an experience that is difficult to explain to anyone outside of the Legal world – trying to find a firm that offers you opportunities to train in areas of law in which you have an interest, that gives you responsibility from an early stage and that ensures that you have exposure to high quality work is quite a difficult list of elements to realise all in one firm. Barlow Robbins does just that – satisfying all of these elements, and I can say without a doubt that in my experience, the firm offers all of this and more. When I accepted my offer of a training contract with the firm, I knew that I would be provided with excellent legal training and I have certainly not been disappointed.

My first seat was in the Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence department, based in the firm's Guildford office. This was an area of law in which I had very little experience prior to starting my training contract, so I was slightly apprehensive. However, from the start I was afforded the opportunity to get really 'stuck in' and build upon skills which I had acquired throughout my undergraduate degree and legal studies. From attending conferences with counsel to conducting client meetings, I had high levels of client contact, in addition to undertaking intricate drafting tasks and assisting with the procedural necessities for hearings and trial and my supervisors ensured that I was exposed to a wide range of work from differing stages of the litigation process. It was especially rewarding to work with clients who had been through incredibly traumatic experiences and to be assisting with achieving the best possible settlements to help them rebuild their lives.



My second seat was with the Residential Property team, split between the firm's Godalming and Woking offices. After getting over the initial change of pace and volume of work, in addition to drafting and learning the sometimes complex conveyancing procedures, I had constant client contact, liaising with agents and other firms to ensure that transactions reached completion whilst offering high levels of service to clients. Learning to balance a large workload and client expectations were important skills I quickly acquired and will carry with me throughout my career.

Having now reached my third seat, in the Corporate and Commercial Department, I am now undertaking my first seat within the Business and Organisations Group of the firm. I am looking forward to experiencing this work type which will contrast with the experience I have already gained in two private client seats. The department also incorporates the firm's IT/IP team and the Charities team, and work is given from all angles, again providing a fantastic opportunity to gain a vast amount of experience with a wide range of work.

It is apparent from an early stage that the firm is keen to invest in its Trainees, from generously providing financial assistance with the Legal Practice Course, (which was very welcomed as I had taken the non-conventional route to law and so also having to complete the GDL did put my studying costs somewhat through the roof!) to the incredibly useful and supportive Mentor Scheme. The firm ensures that trainees are fully supported throughout their training contract 'journey'. In addition to the 'usual' training, the firm also offers opportunities to volunteer with local charities and take part in charity events, attend marketing and networking events, in addition to being able to get involved with the various committees. All of these 'extras' are extremely enjoyable and provide a great opportunity to meet others both within and outside of the firm who are all willing to impart their knowledge and experience. There is certainly not an expectation to stay late or 'stay to be seen' which a lot of firms have a culture of, and the firm really emphasises the value they place in being individual and in spending your time enjoying your interests outside of work.

So, one year in and having completed two seats in the Individuals and Families Group of the firm, I am looking forward to gaining experience now within the Business and Organisations Group. Looking back, it is hard to comprehend how much progress I have made in my training to become a solicitor, from my first day of grappling with time recording (your life will forever be timed in 6 minute units – even when you are watching TV...) to the beginnings of my third seat where I am already being afforded independence and responsibility, I have developed and grown in confidence and in my abilities as a young professional.

A lot of time, dedication, patience and perseverance is spent in preparing to be in a position to apply for training contracts, and I would not be in that position now if it were not for the time and support given to me by Barlow Robbins towards my training to qualify as a solicitor.