

CAREER INSIGHTS

Paralegal spotlight: my first step on the legal ladder



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About Me

I am a Paralegal in one of Slaughter and May's corporate departments and am working at the firm for 12 months, ahead of moving firms later this year to start my training contract. I studied History at the University of Bristol before moving to BPP Law School to complete my Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) and Legal Practice Course (LPC). I am a Professional Ambassador for Aspiring Solicitors and am also a Mentor with STRIVE. Both initiatives aim to improve social mobility within the legal profession by supporting candidates with their vacation scheme and training contract applications.

1. Can you give an outline of your responsibilities at Slaughter and May, and what a typical week looks like?

I am a transactional paralegal at the firm, which means that I am client facing and as such, my role is to assist fee earners on their matters. In many ways, the work I am involved in reflects that of a trainee including document review, research and at times, minor drafting. On certain matters I also have direct client contact and am solely responsible for the work from start to completion, experience that will be useful for me to draw upon when I start my training contract. In addition, I have elected to take on some business development work within the Energy & Infrastructure department.

Slaughter and May's biggest practice area is corporate, which means there are always a lot of trainees in my department. As such, I am often called in on an ad hoc basis to support fee earners when additional capacity is required. This means that no two weeks are the same, which is great for me because it means that I get involved in a breadth of work, keeping me on my toes!

In addition to my work, I attend firm-wide training sessions or lunchtime talks to help broaden my skillset and commercial awareness.

2. Is there anything you wish you'd known before starting your professional career?

How beneficial developing a professional network can be.

I am a first generation lawyer and am also the first in my family to secure a place at university, so building my own professional network was quite hard. In addition, doing a non-law degree meant that I had to make a very active effort to connect with individuals within the profession, through the Law Society at university, LinkedIn as well as through social mobility initiatives such as Aspiring Solicitors. Being able to have conversations with peers who were at the same stage as me, as well as conversations with those who were already in the legal profession, was invaluable for me. It helped me understand the route into commercial law whilst also improving my awareness of how to succeed at all stages of the recruitment process.

Also, the legal world is very small so it's nice to bump into a recognisable face in the office or at an event!

3. What advice would you give students to help them stay positive in the current situation?

This is an incredibly daunting time for many people but especially those of you looking to secure a vacation scheme or training contract.

Professionally, the mental plan or timeline that you had for yourself might have changed or been temporarily put on hold, but use this breathing space to your advantage. It is a perfect time for reflection and growth. What gaps do you have in your knowledge or skillset that you could use this time to fill? Are you on track to meet the targets you set yourself this recruitment cycle? How could you meet any outstanding targets?

Use this time to build up a wealth of knowledge about the process, whether that's researching into law firms, asking for feedback from peers on applications or organising phone calls with your professional network. You are being given an invaluable opportunity to ensure that you are the strongest candidate you can be so use this time to your advantage!

Personally, embrace the slightly slower pace of life and use your free time to do things that make you happy and distract you from the uncertain climate we are currently in. Do the things that you've been putting off and be open to learning something new!