

the trainee

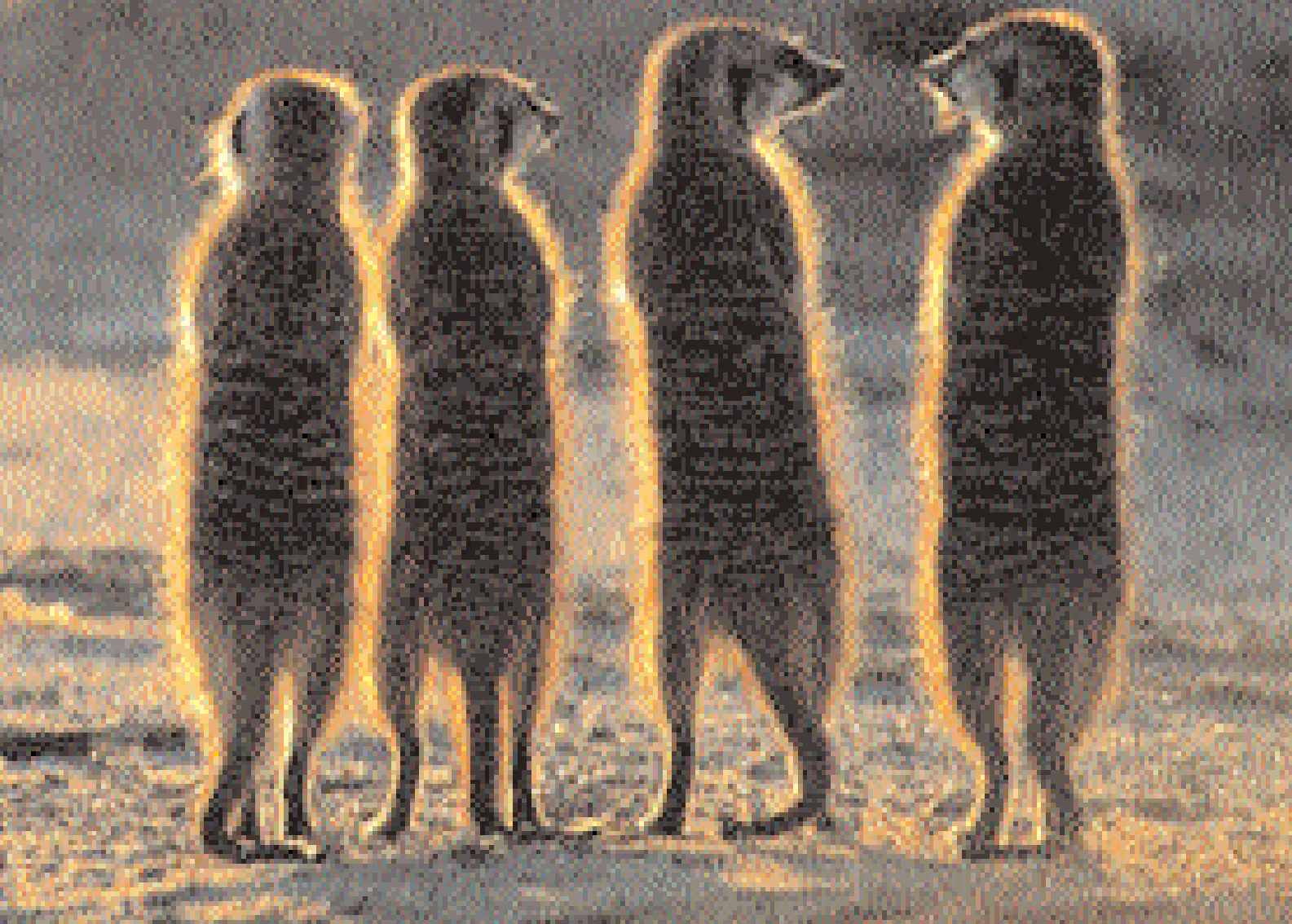
issue 19: march 2004

supporting tomorrow's solicitors today

www.tsg.org

community spirit

what pro bono work can do for
the public - and your career





editor's letter ♦ march 2004

Welcome to all TSG members who are picking up our magazine for the first time. As the new TSG publicity officer, this is my first time at the helm of *the trainee*. I must thank our former publicity officer, Nikki Fitches, for all the guidance she has given me. Nikki is now heading up the TSG as chair.

This bumper issue is overflowing with useful advice and information on pro bono, including how to get involved and what taking part has meant for some of our members.

In *A Postcard from Brussels* Millie Vivian describes her experiences on secondment in the homeland of *Tin Tin*, while in *The Perfect Seating Plan* Sam Mangwana explains how to get the training seats you want. More helpful pointers are on offer in *Make Yourself Presentable*, which aims to guide you in the dark art of presentation skills (minus sweaty palms).

Antony Zacharias takes a look at e-conveyancing in *A New Era for Property Law*, and in *Hot Property* Amanda Timcke suggests how the Property Section can help property lawyers make sense of the changes. *the trainee* furrowed its own brow to come up with our *Guide to the Internet* (p25). Make sure you also check out the *Local Group News* page, where you can find out what your local group has been getting up to.

It would be wonderful to hear from any members who would like to contribute to future issues of *the trainee*. Email publicity@tsg.org with your ideas!

Anoushka Myers

Commissioning editor; Trainee solicitor, Taylor Wessing



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voice from the chair

2004 looks set to be a busy year for the TSG and its members, says Nikki Fitches

Since I wrote my first *Voice from the chair* in January, the Executive Committee has been busy planning events and strategy for 2004, considering policy initiatives and ensuring that we provide our members with as much up-to-date information as possible. Here are a few of the recent projects the group has been involved with.

Money for Shelter

Local TSG and YSG groups have been hosting the annual Shelter quizzes since January 2004. Lots of money was raised for charity and fun was had doing it. Well done to all those involved in organising or attending a quiz.

Helping out in Birmingham

The recent Helpline weekend held in Birmingham was a great success. Fourteen new volunteers were trained in a range of skills. Much time and effort is put into the confidential TSG Freephone Helpline (08000 856 131). Please pass the number on to anyone who may need it. If you are interested in volunteering, contact the TSG's education officers on education@tsg.org.

Calling all law students!

I mentioned in the last issue that the TSG wishes to co-opt student officers on to its National Committee. Details of these positions have been sent to universities across the country. If you are interested in representing the views of students in your region, please contact liaison@tsg.org.

Law Society issues

In January the TSG submitted its response to the *Second Consultation on a New Training Framework for Solicitors*. The Law Society received responses from groups, individuals and firms across the country. The responses are currently being considered. You can track the progress of the Consultation at www.tsg.org.

The Law Society has recently confirmed that it will assist the TSG with the Recognised Groups Agreement (RGA) requirement that membership of the TSG must be on an opt-in basis. (The RGA defines the relationship between the Law Society and its recognised groups.) The details of this are being finalised, and TSG members will be kept posted in future issues of *the trainee*.

“The TSG has teamed up with LawCareers.Net and we are currently planning awards to honour the best recruiters and trainers of trainee solicitors.”

Events calendar 2004

Event planning has taken up a great deal of my time recently, but I am pleased to say we have lined up some excellent events! By the time you read this, the TSG and LawCareers.Net Student Skills Evenings will have taken place. As the numbers attracted to these events have been so great (perhaps because they are free!), I am confident they will have been a huge success. Next year, the Student Skills Evenings will be repeated across the country. Keep your eye out for the next ones and book early!

Dates and locations of the TSG Trainee Skills Evenings will be available shortly on www.tsg.org. There will be several evenings held around the country aimed at those currently in a training contract and those approaching qualification. These events are also free and include the all-important drinks and nibbles!

TSG and LawCareers.Net Annual Awards

The TSG has teamed up with LawCareers.Net and we are currently planning awards to honour the best recruiters and trainers of trainee solicitors. The voting system has been carefully designed to ensure that all firms, regardless of size, have an equal chance of receiving an award. I encourage you all to go to www.LawCareers.Net/Survey2004 and fill in a simple and confidential questionnaire about your own experiences (it will take no more than two minutes!). You will be entered into a draw to win a crate of champagne (or the cash equivalent), so get voting! All questionnaires must be received by Friday 16 April 2004.

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Autumn events

The National Graduate Law Fair is taking place on 21 October 2004 at Excel Centre, London Docklands. On the back of the success of the 2003 event, the TSG are hosting another Law Development Programme in 2004 with seminars on a whole range of issues. For details go to www.tsg.org or www.nationallawfair.co.uk.

Conference

Our events officer is currently collating ideas for a November conference. Please email her at events@tsg.org with suggestions for a location, venue, or theme. This is an opportunity for you to shape this event, so start thinking!

Policy – it's not as dull as you think!

TSG policy initiatives are outlined on *the trainee policy page* (p6). There is a very high chance that at least one of our policy initiatives will directly affect you. I would therefore encourage you to be aware of what is happening in the legal world. You may be aware of the release of the Clementi consultation paper. The TSG is teaming up with the YSG to produce a response. Please contact vicechair@tsg.org with your views. Our 2004 policy strategy is online at www.tsg.org.

The National TSG is planning a research project in conjunction with local groups across the country. The aim of the project is to collate statistics, get a clearer picture of our members and highlight areas of concern. This will allow us to concentrate our time and resources on those areas that most require them. If you have any ideas about the content of, or strategy behind such a project, or would like to assist, please email vicechair@tsg.org.

Leicester TSG

Finally, if you are interested in being a committee member for the Leicester TSG, contact Hannah Pooley at leicester@tsg.org or telephone her on 0116 253 9747.

● **Nikki Fitches is chair of the National TSG and a solicitor at steeles specialising in commercial dispute resolution**



tsg policy page

What issues will the TSG be focusing on this year? Oliver Harman explains

The TSG National Executive has been busy setting out the TSG policy strategy for 2004. The Executive has sought input from the National Committee so that the policy reflects the interests of local TSG groups across England and Wales.

Pastoral care

The TSG currently operates a freephone helpline service, which is available from 9am to 8pm, Monday to Friday. The telephone number is 08000 856 131.

The helpline is manned by TSG members who have received intensive training to provide callers with assistance on a wide range of difficulties. These might range from finding a training contract to minimum trainee solicitor salaries or harassment from work colleagues.

Where members find it difficult or embarrassing to talk about their problems they can send queries via email to educationofficer@tsg.org.

Training Framework Review (TFR)

This is a very important piece of proposed legislation that will change the current training structure for solicitors. It directly affects current and future TSG members.

The Law Society distributed a copy of the *Second Consultation on a New Training Framework for Solicitors* to law firms across the country, encouraging them to respond. The consultation document can be accessed online at www.lawsociety.org.uk.

The National TSG consolidated responses from local TSG groups, individual TSG members and the National Executive Committee in an official TSG response which was submitted to the Law Society at the beginning of January. The TSG response can be viewed at www.tsg.org/policyDownloads.asp.

The TFR looks set to completely change the

path to qualification. The proposals include replacing the current two-year fixed term training contract with an outcomes-based approach. This will have a significant impact on those who cannot secure a training contract, on the existing Legal Practice Course, and it may have an effect on the cost of qualifying as a solicitor.

The TSG will continue to be involved in the development and discussion of the consultation paper. The TSG will also raise any relevant concerns our members have.

Clementi consultation paper

Sir David Clementi is currently reviewing the regulatory framework for legal services in England and Wales. His review is based on five regulatory matters including self-regulation of the profession, complaints handling, regulatory gaps and new business structures. His consultation paper was issued in early March 2004 and responses are invited by 4 June 2004. Further information can be found at www.legal-services-review.org.uk. Please send any comments on the consultation paper to vicechar@tsg.org.

Pro bono

The National TSG has always recommended pro bono work to its membership. Pro bono is an excellent opportunity to obtain practical experience of the law.

The TSG is helping with the organisation of National Pro Bono Week. Between 7-11 June, events will take place across England and Wales showcasing pro bono projects and explaining how to get involved. For more information visit www.probonouk.net or email vicechair@tsg.org. The TSG would be interested in hearing about any pro bono experience you have gained.

Legal aid

The TSG will be promoting the benefits of legal aid work and will look at the many opportunities available in legal aid practices.

The TSG is aware of the uncertainties that surround legal aid. In making this a policy issue for the year, our aim is to ensure legal aid firms provide a range of practice areas, client contact and early responsibility within a training contract.

TSG committee members have learnt from those who undertook work experience at legal

aid firms that the skills gained during these placements helped secure commercial training contracts.

With the intense competition for vacation placements at commercial firms the TSG will stress the potential gains that can be obtained from work experience at legal aid firms.

The group will promote the Legal Services Commission's (LSC) four-year training contract. Under this scheme, a trainee contracts with the LSC and an LSC-franchised firm for the standard two-year training contract, and also for a further two years after qualification. During the four-year period, the LSC assists the franchised firm with the trainee's salary.

More information on the opportunities available within legal aid firms can be found at www.lsc.com and www.lapg.co.uk.

Diversity Access Scheme - (DAS)

The TSG is to help the Law Society promote the DAS among its members. The scheme is run by the Law Society and is entering its second year.

The DAS's objective is to increase diversity within the profession. It will target people who have many of the attributes required to become a solicitor, such as intelligence, determination and creativity, but have specific obstacles to overcome. These obstacles may relate to financial, social or educational issues, or a disability that makes qualifying as a solicitor particularly challenging.

The scheme can assist individuals in overcoming such obstacles by providing them with:

- relevant work experience at any early stage;
- contact with solicitors and mentors who can provide invaluable early advice on shaping a career path; and
- scholarships to enable students to complete the vocational part of their studies.

Email diversityaccessscheme@lawsociety.org.uk for more information.

For further information on any of the above initiatives or to suggest of other policy issues that you would like highlighted on your behalf by the TSG, please email vicechair@tsg.org.uk.

● **Oliver Harman is vice chair of the National TSG and a trainee solicitor with McLellans Solicitors, Hertford**

local group news

London Trainee Solicitors' Group: past successes and future events

THE LONDON Trainee Solicitors' Group (LTSG) is successful and highly active, organising an array of social and academic events and attracting a growing number of members.

A night in Corts!

In September 2003 a new committee was elected and to celebrate we organised welcome drinks at Corts Wine Bar on Chancery Lane. Historically, the drinks evenings have been attended by about 50 members and so we were astonished and delighted that over 250 members supported us and came along on the night. The bar staff did an excellent job of keeping the alcohol flowing. As you can imagine, the LTSG bar tab was rather high!

Messing about on the river

Spurred on by the success of our drinks evening, we organised a pre-Christmas boat party on the London Regalia. Over 200 people keen to get into the Christmas spirit early attended the event.

The night began sedately enough with guests taking advantage of the free drinks and food. Once the DJ began his nights' work things began to liven up. As with most dance floors, it takes one brave soul to encourage the masses to begin dancing and the boat party was no exception. Luckily one guest wowed everyone with his Michael Jackson moves and soon had everyone up and dancing.

The night was a great success and the LTSG would like to thank



Sarah Conroy: chair of the LTSG

the Regalia staff for the great venue and the smooth running of the party, and TotallyLegal.com, the Young Solicitors' Group and Lawyer 2B for their sponsorship of the event.

At a loose end?

The LTSG will be running a number of events in coming months including our annual black tie ball and a careers evening. Details of these and other events will be sent to members as soon as possible and can also be found on our website at www.ltsg.org.uk.

If you would like to become a member of the LTSG, an application form can also be found on the website.

I hope as many people as possible will continue to support the group and make 2004 a highly successful year for the LTSG.

● **Sarah Conroy is chair of the LTSG. She is a solicitor in the Department of Trade and Industry and is working in the consumer credit team**

Merseyside TSG news

THE 2003 Merseyside Trainee Solicitors Group (MTSG) annual charity ball took place at the Crowne Plaza hotel. Over 340 people from local firms, chambers and businesses turned out for an evening in support of Rethink and Helplink, charities working for those with mental health problems and the elderly, **writes Andrea Mulligan.**

At 6.30pm a champagne reception greeted everyone before they moved on to a four-course dinner with music from an excellent local band, Row Z. Magicians amused us all, though I was not sure whether to be amazed or revolted when the magician at our table regurgitated the playing card I had selected earlier!

A raffle and casino kept everyone entertained, and a DJ later took over from the band and kept everyone dancing until 2am.

The MTSG committee would like to thank all those who generously donated prizes and, in particular, the main sponsors of the event – Lipson Lloyd Jones Legal Recruitment, TotallyLegal.com, Weightman Vizards, Brabners Chaffe Street and Hill Dickinson.

Get in touch with Andrea Mulligan at andrea.mulligan@weightman-vizards.com if you would like to know more about the MTSG.



MTSG annual ball organisers Rhiannon Kett (left) and Andrea Mulligan

Mid and South Wales TSG

IF YOU live in mid or south Wales and are a trainee solicitor, LPC student, paralegal or newly qualified solicitor, a local TSG group is very active in your area! **writes Daniel O'Neill.**

We run a variety of social and sports events, recruitment evenings and a district judge shadowing scheme. We had an enjoyable Christmas social in December in Cardiff. We plan to hold a charity quiz evening in the spring which will be a great chance to meet other people in your line of work/study. A summer ball will be held in June/July.

Visit www.tsg.org.uk/localpage.asp?groupId=19 or email midandsouth-wales@tsg.org for more information.

★ Other local group news

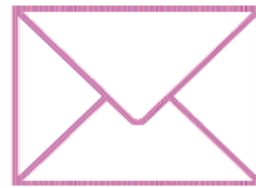
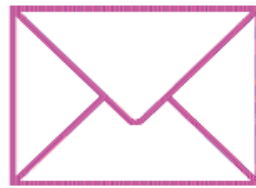
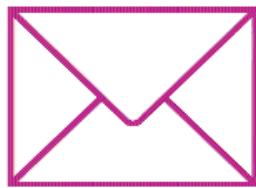
● **Sheffield TSG** held their annual Young Professionals Ball which was attended by over 300 upwardly mobile young men and women. A five-course meal, fire-eaters, casino entertainment and a jazz band kept spirits high. Shelter will be presented with a cheque for £350. For more information on Sheffield TSG email kevin.poulter@lee-priestley.co.uk.

● **Young Surrey Lawyers** tucked into a hearty Christmas curry last December at The Rose Valley in Guildford. If you are interested in finding out more about the Young Surrey Lawyers email surrey@tsg.org

● **Norwich and Norfolk TSG** has a range of events planned for 2004. A day at the Newmarket races could spell trouble for the impecunious, and the summer garden party will be a highly civilised affair! A five-a-side football tournament and the annual autumn ball are also in the offing. Those interested should email norwich@tsg.org.

● **The Birmingham Trainee Solicitors' Society** enjoyed its infamous annual dinner. Attendees got all shook up by soul and blues band 'Shakedown'. The event was first held in 1848, and 2003 was a vintage year! To get involved with this very active group email aanthony@gatelywareing.com.

members' letters



Consider us your sounding board and your friend. Want some advice? Need to get something off your chest? Write to: the trainee, Paulton House, 8 Shepherdess Walk, London N1 7LB Or email: publicity@tsg.org

Mature student seeks training contract

I am a mature student applying to start a CPE in September 2004. I graduated with a 2:1 in English. My career trajectory to date has been diverse, and has taken in promotions, management, sales, script development and script analysis, the latter for The William Morris Agency.

I attended an open day and, following a talk with the CPE programme director, I hope to apply to City University and undertake my CPE there.

I would like to draw on my previous experiences and feel that media law is most attractive to me: I think I would have plenty to offer in this field. I am interested in small City firms or firms of that type.

Bearing in mind all the above, what would *the trainee* recommend as the most secure, time effective and safe route towards achieving a training contract?

John Raman

Dear John,
There is a growing trend towards firms taking on mature students. You should emphasise the transferable skills you have obtained and the fact that your decision to come to the law is based on a proper consideration. Law firms may consider mature student less flighty and more likely to apply themselves. In short, you should not be deterred.

Be prepared to work hard to find the right training contract for you. You must be clear and realistic about what

sort of a training contract you would like, but also be flexible. Not every trainee will get the ideal training contract in the ideal location.

The smaller City firms usually recruit at the same time as larger City firms. Strong competition for training contracts is inevitable. Be warned that media law has become increasingly fashionable and therefore competitive.

Larger commercial firms are recruiting now for training contracts beginning 2006/7. High street firms are likely to recruit later. You should consider approaching high street firms in your CPE year (update your CV held by firms nearer the application deadline).

Work experience is recommended. There are a number of useful links on our website (www.tsg.org.uk) and on the Law Careers Advisory Network website (www.lcan.org.uk). You will find links to vacation placement listings. Many high street firms do not advertise placements – you would have to approach them individually.

People often change their minds about the area of law they wish to practise; so a varied experience will stand you in good stead. It may be that you decide to train with a non-specialist firm and then specialise after qualification.

● Elisabeth Julien and Vidula Patiar, TSG education officers

Training Framework due for an overhaul

Having read the letter in issue 18 of *the trainee* regarding the member's views on the current training system for our country's solicitors, I sought out the Law Society's recent Training Framework Review

consultation document and read it with interest.

Having just completed my training contract, I look back and see the faults with the current system all too clearly. Fortunately, I was a diligent trainee with a clear 'game plan' which came to fruition. However, my training was flabby and too broad-ranging. While I appreciate I need to be aware of key areas of law, I spent a good deal of time learning useless things (probate is of extremely limited value to anyone at a large City firm). Also, I was seemingly 'signed off' at the end of my training contract on the assumption that I was ready for practice, and not on the fact.

Through my own efforts, I have no doubt that I will rise to the task at hand. But it seems to me that the system is well overdue for an overhaul, at both the academic and practical stages. I echo the member's views and look forward to seeing what changes the Review will bring.

Anonymous

Flexible working for women lawyers

My law firm has made a good start to the new year by establishing a working party on women for the purposes of reviewing the firm's existing policy towards its female fee earners.

Both the lay and legal press frequently debate the existence of a glass ceiling for female lawyers and the feasibility of flexible working structures.

It is true that we have moved on from a time when women were perceived as lacking a 'legal mind'. However, the number of female recruits to the legal profession in recent years has outnumbered those of men and yet there is not yet a representative number of female lawyers in positions of seniority in firms across the world. Furthermore, in all the major jurisdictions women must still struggle with the choice between family and a legal career.

The legal profession seems reluctant to bring itself in line with other fields of work, where flexible working hours, childcare arrangements and formal career breaks have been implemented. The problem is obviously not straightforward, in that the culture and necessity of long working hours makes solutions that are workable in other environments difficult to implement in law firms. However, solutions must be created and a delay in addressing this serious problem will ultimately result in the loss of good lawyers from the profession.

I congratulate my law firm for not shying away from a serious problem inherent in the legal services industry. While one working party is unlikely to change the attitude of the entire legal services industry, it is a start. I very much hope that other firms will follow our lead.

2nd year trainee

Taylor Wessing, London

communityspirit



Pro bono work is the ultimate in give and take, allowing you to improve your legal skills while helping more people gain access to justice. This special pro bono issue of the trainee looks at what is involved, and the various ways you can join in...

The term pro bono comes from the Latin phrase '*pro bono publico*', which literally means 'for the public good'. The working definition of pro bono varies, but 'the provision of free or subsidised legal advice and assistance to those who could otherwise not access it' (*Pro Bono Student Guide*, the Solicitors' Pro Bono Group) is a fairly non-contentious description.

The range of pro bono projects is immense: law centres advise on a range of issues; 'street law' programmes teach law in schools, in the community and in prisons; and designated bodies such as the Solicitors' Pro Bono Group (SPBG) offer a variety of structured programmes.

What's in it for me?

Participating in pro bono projects gives you the chance to contribute to your community, local-

ly or globally, and can be a real confidence booster.

Pro bono work also gives you the opportunity to develop your legal skills and knowledge. Client contact, case handling and negotiating are just three of the essential skills that can be enhanced by enrolling in a pro bono initiative.

On a mercenary level, pro bono work is good CV fodder. Potential employers will be greatly impressed with your experiences, and rightly so.

Why is it important?

Mike Napier, the Attorney General's pro bono envoy, believes pro bono work is vital.

"The Attorney General's National Pro Bono Co-ordinating Committee has as one of its current priorities the promotion of opportunities for pro bono work for law students, both at undergraduate and graduate level," he says.

"Such opportunities are important because they enable law students at the beginning of

their career to appreciate the benefits of putting something back into the community, by helping those who cannot afford to pay for legal advice.

"This commitment by young lawyers enhances the appreciation of professional and ethical values to those entering the profession. Increasingly trainees are looking for training contracts in firms that offer and encourage involvement in pro bono work.

"I am pleased to congratulate the Trainee Solicitors' Group in choosing to focus on pro bono in this edition of its magazine, and I encourage all trainees to find out more about the national co-ordination of pro bono work by visiting the website www.probonouk.net."

And now?

There's a project for everyone. Read on for examples of the pro bono projects waiting for you to volunteer, and what can be gained from getting involved.

help required

Rebecca Barnes introduces the Solicitors' Pro Bono Group

You're probably working pretty hard. You've barely got time to read this article, I suspect. It's no secret: being a trainee is hard graft. The work can be fairly routine, much of it carries on into the small hours, and it's just possible that the early stages of your legal career are missing a little *va va voom*. So, do you fancy doing something a bit different? Something, dare I say it, a little more fulfilling?

If you're nodding vigorously at this point, then it may be that pro bono work is for you. Pro bono work is done for free by lawyers, for people who cannot afford to pay for advice and are not eligible for legal aid.

The benefits for trainees who undertake pro bono work can be immense. It offers the opportunity to build up essential legal skills and increase knowledge of an area of law which may not be practised on a daily basis.

Solicitors' Pro Bono Group (SPBG)

Previously, pro bono work was done by lawyers on a piecemeal and unstructured basis. There was no national organisation to support and encourage pro bono activity. The SPBG was formed by members of the solicitors' profession to do just that.

The SPBG is a small independent charity whose aim is to increase the delivery of voluntary legal services to individuals and communities in need, by encouraging, supporting and facilitating lawyers to do pro bono work.

The SPBG achieves this in a variety of ways, but principally through the five 'LawWorks' projects described below, and with the help of hundreds of volunteer lawyers. The projects give volunteers an opportunity to show a commitment to their communities while gaining valuable experience in different skills.

LawWorks Clinics

LawWorks Clinics provide free, face-to-face advice for members of the public, predominantly in the area of social welfare law. For the solicitors involved, and especially trainees, they offer an invaluable opportunity to develop client skills and interviewing techniques.

The SPBG matches firms and lawyers with local advice agencies such as Law Centres and Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) in communities with limited access to legal services. Once the matchmaking is complete, the SPBG helps the firm and agency to establish a Clinic where volunteer lawyers can provide advice.

The SPBG is always looking for new talent. Instead of spending your evenings grumbling

about your newly acquired photocopying skills, why not dedicate the odd evening to advising in Clinics? Your skills are desperately needed, hugely appreciated, and can make a difference.

One woman visited a LawWorks Clinic having been absent from work for over a year due to clinical depression caused by workplace bullying. One of our volunteers, a trainee (under supervision), successfully negotiated a settlement package amounting to nearly 50 per cent of the client's salary, together with an agreed reference. The client was delighted with the outcome and the settlement has made a real difference to her life.

If your firm is not involved in this kind of project, then you could take the lead yourself. Several LawWorks Clinics were started by groups of trainees, and the SPBG will guide you as much as you want.

You may be concerned about your lack of experience in social welfare law *vis-à-vis* advising members of the public. Fear not! The SPBG provides free training sessions, led by specialists, to supply a basic grounding in these areas and to improve advice giving. The sessions are not compulsory and deal with topics including benefits, debt, employment and housing. Whatever pro bono project you choose to get involved in, make sure you feel that you have been adequately trained and you are appropriately supervised.



The Pro Bono Protocol

THE PRO BONO PROTOCOL was drafted by the SPBG and the Bar Pro Bono Unit as a form of quality assurance for pro bono work, which has since been signed by the Attorney General and many law firms.

The Protocol sets out the core values of pro bono work and tries to ensure that pro bono work undertaken by lawyers is of the same standard as their paid work. Quality assurance should be important to both the providers of pro bono services (if the project is worth its salt) and to those receiving the services.

This is something you should bear in mind if you decide to volunteer for a pro bono project. Why not earn some points for initiative and persuade your firm to sign up to the Protocol?

LawWorks for Community Groups

The aim of this project is to provide free legal advice to small, not-for-profit community groups. None of these groups can afford to pay for legal advice and would struggle to gain access to advice without this assistance. All the advice is provided by lawyers working in firms, or as part of in-house teams.

The advantage of this project is that it allows lawyers to give advice in their practice areas. So, if you're currently inundated with title deeds in your property seat, why not take a break and help negotiate a lease for a community group? Alternatively, if your firm tends to represent corporate employers, why not encourage them to help a community group draft employment contracts, for a change? Not only does it broaden

your legal experience, it's an opportunity to help people who really appreciate the work you're doing.

The LawWorks for Community Groups project has helped 316 community groups since it started two years ago, and has saved these groups approximately £1.8m. With the onslaught of technology it doesn't matter where volunteers or the group are based – applications are received from groups across England. If you are keen to assist, find out if your workplace is a member of LawWorks for Community Groups. If they are, offer your services. If not, encourage your firm or in-house legal department to contact the SPBG and register as a contributing member.

LawWorksWeb

The LawWorksWeb project is an example of an initiative that would be great for those of you who are tied to your desks. The project consists of two schemes:

● Initial electronic advice

If your supervisor is reluctant to undertake pro bono work due to time constraints, then this might be the scheme for you both. It involves giving relatively short, finite pieces of advice by delivering an answer to a single legal question and requires no follow up work.

● In-depth advice and assistance

This scheme is only available through advice agencies for individuals who are not eligible for public funding. The agency and the client complete a form detailing the in-depth advice required.

LawWorks Students

The main aim of the LawWorks Students project

is to introduce a pro bono culture throughout law schools and universities in the hope that, upon qualification, students will continue to undertake pro bono work.

If you are a student interested in pro bono work you can:

- ask your university whether it operates any pro bono schemes;
- volunteer with a local charity, such as Law Centres, CABx and Street Law; or
- nominate yourself or a fellow student for the SPBG Student Challenge, which recognises outstanding contributions by students in pro bono work.

Alternatively, students and trainees/lawyers can join the legal literacy scheme and help run citizenship workshops at local secondary schools. Citizenship became compulsory under the National Curriculum in August 2002. The sessions aim to get children thinking about their

“The LawWorks for Community Groups project has helped 316 community groups since it started two years ago, and has saved them approximately £1.8m.”

legal rights and responsibilities and, by exposing them to lawyers and law students, can awaken their interest in a career in law.

LawWorks Mediation

LawWorks Mediation provides the services of mediators free-of-charge in cases where mediation is needed, but at least one of the parties cannot afford the cost and there is no other funding available.

Where possible, the services of lawyers trained in assisting clients in the mediation process will be provided at no cost to those who cannot afford it.

If required, the principles of mediation will be explained to the parties and there will be an independent discussion to determine whether mediation would be appropriate. If the parties agree, arrangements are made for a mediation to take place.

How to get involved

If this has struck a chord, the main thing is to get involved however, wherever and whenever you can. Approach your firm to see if it has any pro bono projects which you can participate in. If not, contact the SPBG, which is always delighted to receive more volunteers and can give presentations on the projects outlined above.

Contact details

For further details on any issues arising from this article, please contact Rebecca Barnes on 0207 929 5601 or email rb@probonogroup.org.uk.

- Rebecca Barnes is a project manager at the Solicitors' Pro Bono Group

Be proactive during National Pro Bono Week

NATIONAL PRO BONO WEEK is an umbrella for a sequence of events held throughout England and Wales that successfully link lawyers with voluntary organisations that need their help, or direct the offer of help where it is needed. The third National Pro Bono Week begins on 7 June 2004, and it promises to be an even bigger success than ever before.

In previous years, the National Pro Bono Week calendar of events has included advice seminars, free legal advice clinics, informative pro bono sessions and receptions, and much more. It has also provided the perfect forum for the launch of many new pro bono initiatives.

2004 will see numerous events held throughout England and Wales, to highlight the work being done freely by the profession. Voluntary organisations will also have a great opportunity to voice their needs for assistance.

The objectives of National Pro Bono Week are:

- to encourage lawyers not yet involved in pro bono work to see and experience what is happening, ask questions and commit to action;
- to ensure that those who need pro bono help know where to find it; and
- to give voluntary organisations an opportunity to voice their needs for help.

Mike Napier, the Attorney General's pro bono envoy, says: "The common fac-

tor of pro bono work is the willingness of an increasing number of lawyers – solicitors, barristers, legal executives, paralegals, trainees and support staff – to share the ethos of putting something back into the community."

This is reflected in the approach to organising National Pro Bono Week. It is jointly organised by the Law Society, the Bar Council, the Bar Pro Bono Unit, the Solicitors' Pro Bono Group and the Institute of Legal Executives.

Last year saw the launch of a new website (www.probonouk.net) which covers a range of issues including pro bono schemes, public access, lawyers and legal professionals, students and law schools, and community advice agencies. It also provides details of all the events taking place across the country.

National Pro Bono Week seeks to emphasise the personal and professional benefit to be derived from pro bono work. As a trainee, National Pro Bono Week provides an excellent opportunity to become involved in pro bono schemes.

More information about this year's National Pro Bono Week will appear on www.probonouk.net.

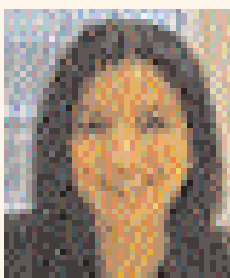
- Lisa Elkin is a first year trainee at Alexander Harris Solicitors



pro bono in practice

Trainees describe their own experiences of volunteer work

“It is the feel-good factor of ‘doing my bit’ that keeps me committed.”



PRO BONO VOLUNTEER:

Osma Rajah, second year trainee solicitor, Clifford Chance, London

PRO BONO EXPERIENCES:

“During my first week at Clifford Chance I attended a talk on the firm’s pro bono and community affairs programme. I remember listening to a very persuasive speaker who reminded the audience of the importance of the community, urging us to give back as much as possible. The speaker rightly pointed out that being in the City should not preclude one from volunteering – so I volunteered to attend the free legal advice clinic in Tooting. I was keen to gain more responsibility and run my own files, but ultimately it is the feel-good factor of ‘doing my bit’ that keeps me committed.

I have been responsible for a wide variety of cases, ranging from consumer claims to tenancy disputes. But my most interesting case to date has been one relating to an unfair dismissal claim. My client was a domestic cleaner and initially sought advice from the Disability Law Service. However, the Disability Act did not apply to her situation. I remember her sense of frustration at not knowing where to turn to obtain legal advice.

Initially I conducted some detailed research to clarify the basis of my client’s claim. Much of this information was then set out in a detailed letter to the employer. Of course, the employer wholly refuted the claim and I had to correspond with the employer (in writing and over the phone) to set out my client’s position. Because of the strict time limits for making an application to the employment tribunal, my client decided to commence proceedings to avoid missing the deadline and to put pressure on the employers. The tactic

was successful and the employer was then keen to settle. However, we received an earlier than expected hearing date, so settlement had to be achieved swiftly.

This case allowed me to gain invaluable negotiation experience. I first had to negotiate the settlement amount. Once this was agreed, the terms of the settlement agreement also had to be negotiated. It required a lot of preparation and I had to think on my feet. At the same time I had to be commercial about the issue.

The level of responsibility may seem daunting, but I have never felt out of my depth during any of my pro bono matters. I am very closely supervised by my group leader. There are also pro bono volunteers throughout my firm willing to assist, should I have a matter relating to their particular area of law. The combination of hands-on practice and the knowledge that I am contributing to the community has made pro bono a very valuable experience.”

“I still use the skills I acquired during my pro bono experience.”



PRO BONO VOLUNTEER:

Shami Duggal, second year trainee, Rawlins Davy Solicitors, Bournemouth and TSG international relations officer, and national representative for Bournemouth TSG.

PRO BONO EXPERIENCES:

“After completing my LPC, I saw an advertisement on the College of Law’s website offering voluntary experience in employment law. Although I had chosen the LPC employment law elective, nothing could have prepared me for the practical, hands-on approach to the law that I gained in those five months.

The competition for the position was fierce and the interview was very strict. It felt more like an oral exam on employment law claims and employee

rights, rather than an interview for a student who had just completed the LPC.

From day one, I was thrown into the ‘battlefield’ of anxious clients who needed advice on their rights in the workplace and those who wanted to sue their employers, having been dismissed. I could not believe the amount of people who had complaints and who were not aware of their basic rights.

Although the pressure in the office was intense due to the number of complaints received and the strict time limits imposed by employment tribunals, it was a rewarding experience and an extremely valuable learning curve.

I dealt with all aspects of employment law. I was involved in the preparation for, and attendance at internal appeals on behalf of clients; issuing proceedings in wrongful dismissal, unfair dismissal, harassment and discrimination claims; preparing defences, witness statements and trial bundles, and following through on the claims.

My first face-to-face interview with a client was nerve-racking. My supervisor had briefed me beforehand and explained how I should approach the client. However, when I met her she was so distressed that she burst into tears and helped herself to my cup of tea!

My supervisor’s words flew from my head and I could barely remember the interviewing techniques I had been taught during the LPC. In fact, I spent the first 15 minutes calming the client down and listening to her problems (even those not relating to her unfair dismissal claim). This was a great lesson in patience and client care.

The most exciting, yet distressing case that I was involved in related to a woman who successfully won a constructive dismissal case against her employer, whose actions constituted sexual discrimination and harassment.

I still use the skills that I acquired during my pro bono experience. I would highly recommend pro bono work to others.”

Will Aid

Sue Davison introduces a successful pro bono campaign that raises millions of pounds for worthwhile causes and offers volunteers valuable work experience

There are many different ways to get involved in pro bono work. Your firm, college or university may already be running projects, or you may have ideas of your own. Failing that, there are plenty of pre-established schemes which are itching for new volunteers, such as Will Aid.

Will Aid gives those who have not yet made a will the motivation to put their affairs in order. Instead of begrudgingly paying the usual fee, participating firms ask the client to make a donation to Will Aid. Simple.

In Autumn 2002 almost 2,000 legal firms raised £500,000 via the Will Aid campaign. Firms also benefited, as the campaign attracted new clients to their businesses.

Who benefits?

The money is used to transform the lives of children, families and communities around the world. The British Red Cross, Christian Aid and Save the Children UK, among many others, have benefited from the Will Aid campaign. This is a good project for those of you who can't

decide who should be the beneficiary of your hard work!

How trainees can help

In many firms, trainees take an active part in Will Aid. In 2002, Sarah Platten was a trainee at Bevan Ashford solicitors in Taunton. Sarah (pictured right) and Vicki Thyer read about the scheme and decided it would be a good way for the practice to support charities and make contact with new clients. Sarah describes Will Aid as a brilliant learning experience.

"We had one secretary between us and had to work hard to cope with the demand. I met some really nice people. Clients seemed to be more open and relaxed than usual. I think that's because we were working for charity."

Will Aid is promoted in a number of ways, but Bevan Ashford decided to market the scheme themselves. Sarah had the opportunity to focus on writing wills for a whole month and



she developed her marketing skills.

"I really enjoyed the marketing side. We contacted our local paper and ran advertisements, and we also designed a poster and sent it to locations in the area. We received a huge number of enquiries about the scheme and were able to attract clients and help them put their affairs in order."

Sarah has since qualified and works for Nalders in Truro. She focuses on wills, probate and IHT and estate planning. Sarah thinks that her Will Aid experience helped her career and she'll be taking part in the November 2004 campaign with her new firm.

Interested?

If you're interested in becoming involved in Will Aid, call Julie on 01460 271178 or email julie@willaid.org.uk for more information.

● Sue Davison, Will Aid press office

Book review

Advocacy in the Magistrates' Court

James Welsh

Cavendish Publishing, October 2003

Price: £22.95

ISBN: 1 85941 784 1

THERE IS very little to fault about this book, except perhaps that it wouldn't make great holiday reading. That aside, it is an invaluable practitioners' guide to the ins and outs of the arcane art of advocacy in a magistrates' court setting.

Wet-behind-the-ears defence solicitors and barristers would do well to thumb the relevant pages of this book before their first pre-trial review or bail application. As well as offering practical advice on procedure and tips on effective advocacy, it covers more esoteric points, such as going equipped with tissues for your client and when it isn't appropriate to address the tribunal with the word 'you'.

The text guides the new advocate through everything, from making sure you get to the right



court, at the right time on the right day (and what to do when you are delayed), to detailed advice on procedure and courtroom basics. Things like checking whether your female opponent wishes to be referred to as a

Miss, Mrs or Ms will help to ensure the advocate's court experience runs smoothly.

James Welsh recognises that getting these things right increases the confidence of a novice no end. Although some points may seem trivial, collectively they will help to ensure good professional relationships are forged and the chances of success are maximised.

Detailed advice on the following areas is provided: getting a representation order, asking for disclosure, bail, warrants for non-attendance,

breach of bail conditions, plea before venue, committal proceedings, reviewing disclosure, summary trial, sentencing, breach proceedings, road traffic hearings, youth courts and video link courts.

At 229 pages the book is mercifully short. This means it cannot be relied upon to cover every aspect of procedure. James Welsh does, however, take in the main points and flag up the major pitfalls. He also throws in a few ideas of how to nudge things along in the right direction.

Each chapter is conveniently broken down into stages. Procedural checklists, bullet points and tables are used frequently and helpfully. The suggested phraseology that peppers the book would be very helpful to a beginner, worrying not only about what to say, but how to say it.

In general, the coherent, logical and clear approach makes the book easy to navigate and a great resource for swotting up on the train on the way to the venue.

● Anoushka Myers is the TSG's publicity officer

service with a smile

Starting a training contract is tough. But if you show enthusiasm from day one, you'll reap the rewards when it comes to qualification, says Paul Smith



March will see a new influx of trainee solicitors into law firms. Although all of you will have spent the requisite one or two years at law school, your academic backgrounds and previous work experience will be quite different. For some, the first week of your training contract will be your first inside a law firm. For others, office life will follow on from six months spent bumming around Australia or Thailand.

In the current climate, trainees are no longer guaranteed a job on qualification, unlike the situation a few years ago when many City trainees could choose the department and the firm they qualified into. So how can the first intake of 2004 impress, and what can you look forward to?

In a spin

The first couple of weeks of a training contract are notoriously busy. You will have to muster up your finest freshers' week enthusiasm, and put a professional spin on it, as you meet trainees, trainers, mentors, mentees, associates and, most importantly, supervisors. When not meeting and greeting, the first week is often spent undergoing intensive inductions and training in everything from using the telephone to where to buy a sandwich.

Then there are the socials. Trainees rightly look forward to their first corporate-card-behind-the-bar night out, and most departments treat these events with great interest. Who are the new rookies? What do they look like? Which one will be the first to disgrace him/herself after too many vodka redbulls? Books are run and bets are taken.

First impressions last

Although it is a cliché, first impressions do last. In this regard, enthusiasm is a quality that not only helps new trainees to become well-known for the

right reasons, but is also the key to the whole training contract.

Associates and partners often appreciate that certain tasks are menial and sometimes mind-numbingly boring. They look favourably on those who are keen to do these tasks well. Muttering under your breath, "Four years of training, for this!" as you skulk out of the room with 10 files of photocopying does not go down very well. The 'happy-to-help' attitude is a key weapon in a trainee's armoury.

Another is the ability to ask 'stupid' questions. As long as the same question is not asked twice, colleagues will not mind, and would prefer to be asked how to use the fax machine straight away, rather than have you spend an hour breaking it. Secretaries are often saviours in this respect.

Minefields

Even if you master the arts of enthusiasm, punctuality and attention to detail, there are still many dangers ahead. Email can be a potential minefield for all. Infamously, a female lawyer wrote an explicit email to her boyfriend back in 2000. It was forwarded and quickly reached the inboxes of employees in some of the worlds' biggest companies. Although those involved kept their jobs, that is not always the case. There have been

A supervisor and his trainee settle into their roles



many cases where staff have been suspended or sacked for misuse of email and this continues to be an area of increasing regulation in most law firms. You should be extremely careful what you send via email, how often you send personal emails and who you send messages to.

Two particularly dangerous tools are the 'reply to all' button and 'whole firm' emails. Stories abound of trainees trying to email 'sensitive' information to one person and informing the whole office of what happened at last night's office party. More innocently, a trainee invited every employee in their global organisation out for lunch at Starbucks.

Forging a path

The training contract is an opportunity for you to succeed. While you will undoubtedly spend dark days in data rooms, perhaps questioning the path you have chosen, there will always be plenty of upsides – responsibility, experience and money to name but three.

Perhaps the most important thing for new trainees to bear in mind is that two years down the track, you might want to be kept on!

● **Paul Smith is a first year trainee at Taylor Wessing**

First day checklist

- Look professional and be punctual.
- Be organised – go equipped with all the forms the firm sent you over the break.
- Smile and be enthusiastic.
- Seek out your supervisor, secretary and immediate neighbours and introduce yourself.
- Ask your supervisor what time s/he would like you to arrive in the morning.
- Be proactive about breaking the ice with your fellow trainees.



hot property

Trainees and newly qualified solicitors may be interested in the Law Society's 'sections' – groups which keep members up-to-date with their area of the law. This issue: the property section

The Law Society currently offers all trainees and solicitors the opportunity to join three 'sections': the law management section, the probate section and the property section. All are self-governing, committee-led, subscription-based membership organisations. Each of the sections works closely with specialist committees who advise the Law Society council on policy in key areas of law. The benefit for section members is the practice-specific advice and guidance offered.

Property section

The property section was launched in November 2002. Its aim is to help residential and commercial property solicitors deal with changes in legislation and policy, such as the Land Registration Act 2002 – the greatest change to the fundamentals of land law and conveyancing practice since 1925 (see Antony Zacharias' article on p23). Members are also kept up-to-date with the latest news and information on aspects of property law and practice.

Property section members are also given a helping hand in relation to the technological changes in the move towards e-conveyancing. This is in conjunction with a general aim of helping members improve IT skills and infrastructure within their firms, in preparation for the 'e-delivery' of legal services.

The Property section also provides a way for members to keep in close touch with the work of the Law Society Conveyancing and Land Law Committee, so they can be part of the important debate on all aspects of property law and practice.

Membership

Membership is via a yearly subscription. There are discounts available for sole practitioners, and if you are able to persuade three of your colleagues to join, a discount is available. Membership brings with it a range of informa-

tion, a quarterly magazine, a soon-to-be-launched, membership-only, interactive website and a monthly e-alert. The discounts on key property legal texts are not to be sniffed at, either.

A focal point for the section are the events which focus on the latest developments in the

sector. The inaugural annual conference was held in October 2003.

Further information

To find out more about the property section please email propertysection@lawsociety.org.uk or telephone 020 7316 5707.

The property section: a member's view

“I qualified as a commercial property solicitor in October 2003. Shortly after joining the department, one of the property partners handed me an application form for the Law Society's property section, which I filled in.

“I am now a member of the section, which provides a sense of belonging between property lawyers. The club-like nature of the section is particularly important for those new to the profession, whether in the residential or commercial property fields.

“From a law firm's perspective, the potential marketing aspects of the property section are one of the main advantages to membership. My details on the section's website have been altered to emphasise my specialist subject, giving strength, in a small way, to my firm's public image.

“Crucially, the property section provides a way for the public to find property lawyers with the expertise they require in their locality. In this way, membership provides something ancillary to distinguish one property firm from another in the Law Society directory. This assists small and niche firms, as additional business can be gained from members of the public who are looking for signposts towards the right firm for them.

“The last year has marked some of the most influential and far-reaching changes to property law since 1925. It has been a particularly harrowing



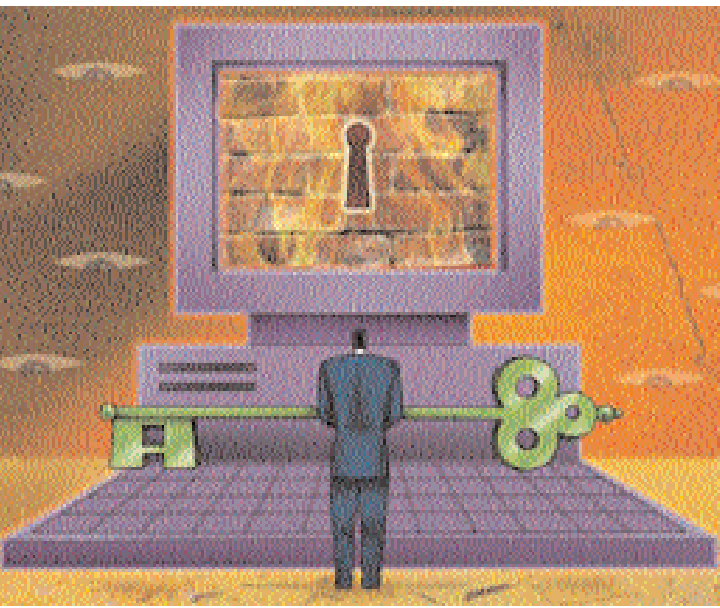
time for property lawyers, made worse by the Government's tight implementation deadlines. The compulsory Stamp Duty Land Tax regime, which replaced the tried, tested and voluntary stamp duty on documents, was a particular problem. With the abundance of information, seminars and courses available from many different angles and on a range of topics, it was very useful to receive distilled, comprehensive information

direct from the section.

“The section's website (www.lawsoc.org.uk – click on the 'property section link in the menu on the left) is a useful resource and contains handy links to the Land Registry and the Inland Revenue, among other things. However, it still requires some development. For example, although the public can use the site to find a lawyer, it has yet to become interactive for its members (something that the law management and probate sections have already achieved).

“The section was created in November 2002 and may not have received sufficient attention or support from the profession to drive such developments. Perhaps now, as practitioners are forced away from 1925 legislation by the recent legislative overhauls, they will draw on the Law Society's property section as a useful resource.”

● **Amanda Timcke is a newly qualified solicitor in the commercial property department of Ashton Graham**



a new era for property law

How will the e-conveyancing revolution effect solicitors and property transactions in the UK? asks Antony Zacharias

The first steps in the most radical overhaul of the English conveyancing system are well under way. The Land Registration Act 2002 (the Act) came into force on 13 October 2003. The aim of this legislation is to improve the speed and reduce the cost of conveyancing by implementing new concepts linked by a common theme: 'e-conveyancing'.

What is e-conveyancing?

The UK conveyancing system has changed little since the Law of Property Act 1925. However, the rise of the internet, and faster, more secure online connections means the system can finally be modernised.

E-conveyancing is the term given to the use of IT in the conveyancing process. The Act provides that complete transactions will eventually be carried out electronically, abolishing the need for the traditional, paper-based transaction. A target date of 2006 has been set for all Government services to be fully online.

Anyone with experience of a conveyancing seat (or those of you who are homeowners) will know how long the conveyancing process can take. Many firms already have initiatives to try to accelerate the process. For example, searches can be carried out via Land Registry Direct, which enables searchers to order documents such as Official Copies online. Email is also relied upon as a speedy means of communication.

These measures are certainly quicker and many firms feel they are already embracing 'e-conveyancing'. However, these are small steps in the context of the framework envisaged by the Land Registry. The Registry says its aim is to ensure that **every** part of the process can be carried out digitally. Anyone working in a property department will agree that this is a giant step in the right direction. The Registry and the

Government have established a number of new inter-linked, user-friendly websites that provide a comprehensive and detailed guide to the new legislation, new procedural developments and online practice leaflets and forms.

The Law Society provides further guidance via membership of its property section, available to both qualified solicitors and trainees. The property section offers support and advice, enabling practitioners to deal with the fundamental changes in both commercial and residential fields. The extensive resources available through the property section enable members to stay updated in a field that is currently undergoing large-scale change. (See p20 for more on the property section.)

Is e-conveyancing the solution?

While there are many benefits associated with a fully developed e-conveyancing system, life in a property seat will not change in all respects. E-conveyancing will not replace any of the present system's legal aspects. The usual transaction steps will have to be followed, and until clients are fully online, documents will still have to be printed out and mailed.

However, opponents of e-conveyancing suggest that paper pushing is not the significant cause of problems in property transactions, and digital documents may create their own problems. They have reservations regarding the reliability of IT, and suspect that a digital system will be open to abuse.

Security issues have been addressed, however. The 'e-lodgement' system enables property departments to access the Registry directly and submit digital versions of all relevant documents, complete with secure 'digital signatures'.

Current situation

More and more searches are being carried out online (the National Land Information Service has recently announced that over a million have

been carried out to date), although the results are often returned in paper form, possibly undermining certain aspects of the electronic system.

The Land Registry and the Law Society are developing a system with mortgage lenders that will automatically reflect the details of mortgage accounts on the Register in real time. This will cut down the time spent waiting for confirmation of mortgage discharges and help relieve stress, waste and uncertainty at completion.

Conclusion

Property departments are currently in the midst of change. The developments will hopefully reduce delays and improve timescales. Firms will want to see that the new systems work effectively, are 'glitch-free' and are well-protected from the possibility of fraud before investing in new technology. However, the implementation of e-conveyancing will be compulsory for all practitioners by 2008.

While the arguments for and against e-conveyancing and the questions of cost and success continue to be debated, it seems that the introduction of a new system has to start somewhere. The flow of criticism will stop only once the system is proved to be reliable, accurate and an effective means of increasing the overall efficiency of most property transactions. Until then, many will continue to wonder whether the amount of time, money and resources invested will produce the results intended by both the Government and the Land Registry.

For more information

- www.landreg.gov.uk/e-conveyancing
- www.lawsoc.org.uk – click on 'property section'.

● Antony Zacharias is a trainee solicitor in the commercial property department of steeles (law) llp

the **trainee** guide to... the internet

the **trainee** reviews
some of the most
useful websites for
TSG members

Whether researching case law or legislation, exploring career options or searching for jobs, websites are more often than not the first port of call for law students and trainees.

It is difficult to imagine life without these specialist sites, but only five to 10 years ago it would have been a different story, with just a few pioneers seeing the advantages of adapting web technology for the legal profession.

Luckily, since then, the recruitment industry,

legal publishers, and the Government have all realised that solicitors who use typewriters are a dying breed (although there are still some lurking out there!) and that the legal professionals of tomorrow rely on IT to help manage their working lives.

But is there a downside to this progress? Perhaps only that there are so many websites out there that scrolling through all of them to find one that meets your needs can waste valuable time. With this in mind, *the trainee* has spent many hours surfing the web to come up with this guide to some of the most useful websites around.

Careers advice

Prospects is the UK's official graduate careers website and has an extremely useful section on the legal services sector (http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Explore_job_sectors/Legal_services/plcXfbma). As well as an overview of the legal profession 'as it is, as it was and as it will be', it also gives tips on 'getting in and getting on', and lists useful contacts and resources (all this information is provided by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services). Students can search a database of firms offering vacation placements. For trainees there is a training contracts search facility where you can sort through firms by type(s) of practice, specialisms, special features (whether the firm offers financial assistance for the CPE/LPC) and location.

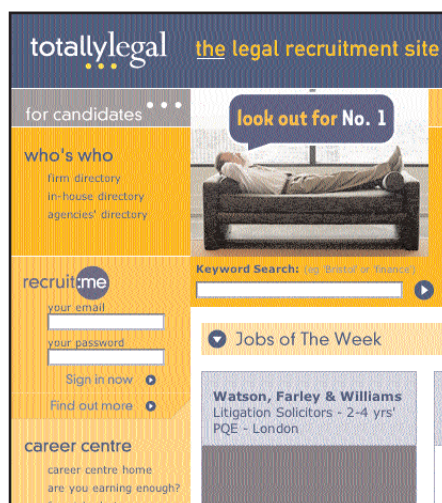
The Law Careers Advisory Network (www.lcan.org.uk) is a partnership of all those involved in providing careers advice to law students and individuals considering a career in law (including the TSG). This site contains valuable information on the routes to qualification and funding, as well as interesting information on alternative careers in the legal sector if you have decided that being a solicitor is not right for you.

Recruitment

In the next five years, 10.3 million adults will be using 'jobsites', and all major companies will be using the internet to advertise their jobs, according to UK online recruitment advertising agency HR Portal and Key Note market research.



Above: www.prospects.ac.uk
Below: www.totallylegal.com



The larger law firms, and any legal recruitment agencies that are worth their salt, already have their own websites. However, to save time looking for them, it is well worth visiting a site which lists them all, such as www.totallylegal.com. www.totallylegal.com also contains links to UK companies with an in-house legal department. Naturally the site allows you to search for vacancies (by sector) and also contains general advice about your career and handling a new job.

www.lawcareers.net is definitely one to add to your favourites list. The site contains a useful overview of courses and allows you to search for CPE/GDL/LPC/BVC and Continuing Professional Development courses by region. It also contains a search facility for vacation placements and training contracts, and features an up-to-date list of application deadlines for both of these. One of the most interesting features of the site is the profile section, where trainees give an insight into their training contract experiences in firms around the country.

<http://doctorjob.com/law/areaofwork.asp> is rather more glamorous than the other jobsites, but is equally useful. Details of vacation placements and a search facility for training contracts feature here too. The site also has some excellent tips from partners about how to get to the top and an 'ask the expert' archive, in which solicitors have given advice on graduate recruitment in the legal profession. If you have a spare moment or two, the site contains some fun quizzes which rate your employability and your personal work ethics (or lack of them).

If you're looking for an alternative to recruitment agencies, however, check out www.legalcv.com, which bans recruitment companies from the website. Here, law firms and companies can post their own legal jobs and check applicants' profiles and CVs online.

Case law and legislation

Databases of UK and EU case law and legislation are big business. The most well known sites (such as www.lexisnexis.com; www.westlaw.co.uk; www.infolaw.co.uk) have well-deserved reputations, but their services don't come cheap! If you are lucky you may be able to access these research tools at your firm, or through your university's law faculty or library.

If not, there are a few websites giving free access to case law and legislation. Working on the basis that everyone should have access to the laws that govern them, the **British and Irish Legal Information Institute** rely on donations to run www.bailli.org. The site is a mine of useful information, including free access to all UK Statutory Instruments since 1998, Court of Appeal and House of Lords judgments since 1996, Employment Appeal Tribunal decisions and Law Commission publications. It also provides a link to the **World Legal Information Institute** (www.worldlii.org) which contains, among other things, details of decisions in the Australian and US courts, and International Court of Justice decisions.

The **Incorporated Council for Law Reporting** publishes weekly case reports but is subscription-based. However, its website has a section for students (www.lawreports.co.uk/newsletter-home.htm) which produces a weekly online newsletter. This includes: daily case notes, useful articles on topics such as conducting better research, dates of forthcoming legal events, news and views, and a letters page. All letters printed receive a free student pack, and the star letter receives a bag containing ICLR goodies.

News and views: online legal journals and magazines

All the legal weeklies and monthlies now have a website. You may have to register to gain access in the first instance, or be a subscriber to access the most valuable parts of the site, but it is well worth taking a look to keep up-to-date with the latest news and judgments, and to see what those in the profession think about burning issues such as legal aid, self-regulation and the Clementi review. The tried and trusted sites are, of course: www.solicitorsjournal.com; www.lawgazette.co.uk; www.thelawyer.com; and www.legalweek.com.

For alternative views of current topics take a look at the purely online legal magazine **Consilio** (www.spr-consilio.com) or the **National Critical Lawyers' Group** (www.nclg.org.uk/index.html).

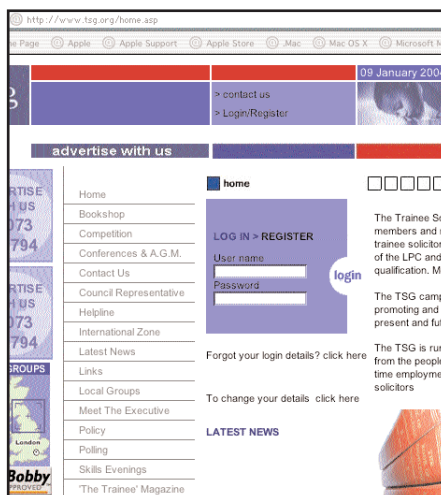
If you are interested in the techie side of the law, the **Legal Technology Insider** (www.legal-technology.com) is the authority on developments in this field, such as case management software and the top 200 IT systems used by law firms.

Spare minutes

For a more irreverent approach to all things legal, visit www.rollonfriday.com. **RollOnFriday**,



Above: www.rollonfriday.com
Below: www.tsg.org



a self-professed 'Anthea Turner-free zone', gives plenty of helpful information on some of the most important things to consider in your working life: how much money law firms offer, where to take clients to lunch and where to drink after work.

If you're feeling serious, however, it does feature a job search, sensible careers advice and a smart 'Make me an offer' tool allowing you to post an anonymous, confidential CV online. This can be accessed by law firms who will leave you a message if they are keen on offering you a job. On the negative side, the site is rather London-centric. But the 'Glamorous solicitor' competition is good for a laugh no matter where you're based.

If you don't bookmark anything else

Special mention should go to the **Legal Resources in the UK and Ireland** website, run by Delia Venables (www.venables.co.uk). Don't be put off by its appearance – the site is crammed full of links to practically every useful

General resources

Rather than having to stop what you're doing on the PC every time you need to check a spelling and look for the firm's dog-eared copy of the dictionary, which has invariably been 'misplaced', it is a lot easier to bookmark online dictionaries and other reference tools on your internet browser. Here are some of the best (you may never have to leave your desk again...)

● Dictionaries and thesauruses

www.dictionary.co.uk (brings up synonyms automatically when you look up a word)
www.dictionary.com
www.thesauras.com
www.yourdictionary.com (This site is in US English, but it does contain a foreign word translator and allows you to translate your name into Egyptian hieroglyphs or Babylonian Cuneiform, should you feel so inclined.)

● Encyclopedias

www.infoplease.com
www.bartleby.com/65

● Currency converters

<http://www.moneyextra.com/rates/currency/converter>
<http://mwprices.ft.com/custom/ft-com/currency.asp>

● General

<http://www.iTools.com/>
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=5703&More=N>
www.royalmail.com (You have to register for a login in order to use the postcode finder.)

● Glossaries

www.uklegal.com/article/latin.htm (Glossary of Latin terms)
www.planningapplications.co.uk/glossary.htm

website there is (including all the Government's sites) and has a useful section for students (www.venables.co.uk/students.htm).

www.tsg.org

Last, but not least, if you haven't already visited the **Trainee Solicitors Group** website (www.tsg.org) then please do so! The site has been Bobby approved, meaning it conforms to UK standards on accessibility and ease of navigation. As well as explaining how the TSG works and what our aims are, the site contains up-to-date information on training and recruitment issues, the TSG's careers and skills evenings and social events. You can enter competitions on the site, and also find out about local trainee solicitors groups and their events, such as the Shelter quizzes. Past issues of the trainee are also available for download.

make yourself presentable

Sharon Glynn shares some practical advice on giving effective presentations, both in and outside your firm

As a trainee, I sometimes find it difficult to create networking and marketing opportunities. However, after attending an Altior course, *Marketing your firm and making effective presentations*, I realised that presentations can be an excellent way for trainees to increase their own profile, as well as that of the firm.

The following tips aim to point you in the right direction, so that your presentation is memorable for all the right reasons.

Choose carefully

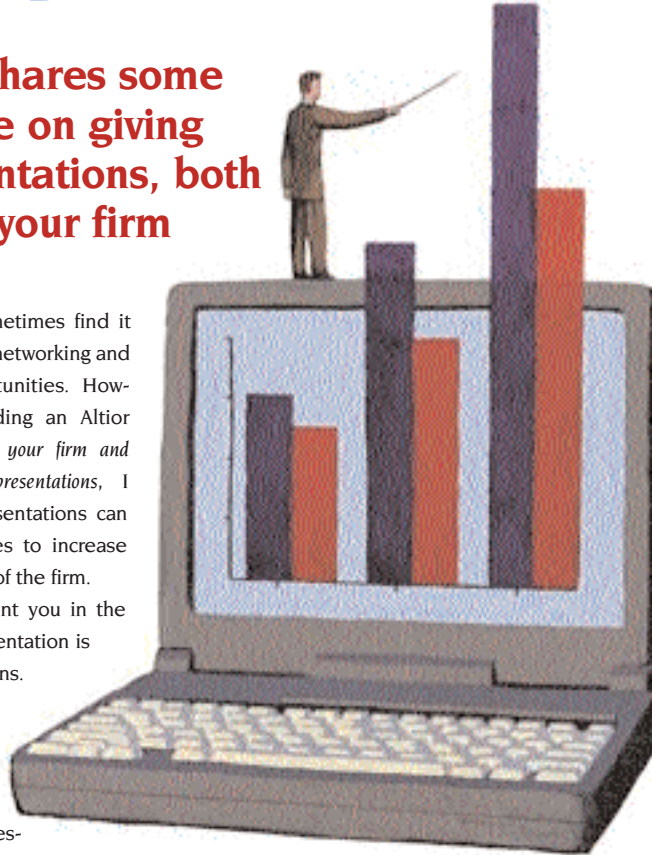
Pick a subject you feel confident with and ensure your preparation is wider than the presentation. People may ask questions outside the scope of the presentation and you want to impress them.

Preparation and content

- Think about what you want to achieve from your presentation and use it as a benchmark for the content.
- Give yourself time for preparation and practice.
- Use your introduction to set the scene. Use a shock statistic or ask a question to grab the audience's attention. Using questions will also help build up a relationship with the audience.
- Choose a maximum of five points for the main body of your presentation, and make sure they can be dealt with in sufficient detail. Audiences have an attention span of around 30 minutes, so ensure your topic is relevant to them.
- Flesh out and illustrate your points with examples and statistics.
- Do not read from your notes. Keep them as a back-up in case your mind goes blank, but use them as a memory refresher rather than a crutch.

Question & answer sessions

- When preparing for Q&A sessions, write down the 10 questions you most expect to be asked and prepare for them. If you have the chance to practise your presentation, encourage your 'audience' to ask you questions.



- Repeat the question and look around at your audience to involve them.
- Do not let one audience member dominate your time.
- If you do not know the answer, confess. Take the person's details so you can find out the answer and give it to him/her later.

Body language

- Ask your mock audience for feedback on any distracting body language habits you have and then lose them!
- Avoid distracting hand gestures by keeping your hands behind your back. Maintain eye contact with the audience and do not block your visual aids.

Visual aids

A study sponsored by 3M and conducted by the University of Minnesota School of Management found that presenters who used visual aids were 43 per cent more effective in persuading audience members to take a desired course of action than presenters who did not. This is very important when looking for new clients!

The study also showed that an audience's comprehension and retention improved dramatically when black and white visuals were replaced with colour.

- Visual aids and slides should not be used as a

visual form of your script. This encourages the audience to pay more attention to your slides than your speech, and you will be unable to build a relationship with them.

- At least half of your slides should contain a graphic illustration to keep the audience engaged.

Avoiding presenter's nerves

If you have prepared your presentation thoroughly, the topic should hold no fear for you. The only fear you may have is in your ability to make the presentation effectively. According to *The Book of Lists (The Ultimate Compendium of All Things American)*, Stephen J Spignesi, ISBN 1 56414 484 4) public speaking is the number one human fear. Here are some tips to alleviate your nerves:

- Practise several times in front of audiences of workmates and friends.
- Biting the tongue gently can ease a dry mouth caused by nerves. Yawning (in private) will relax your throat before you begin.
- Deep breathing is a good way of reducing nerves. Take a deep breath in for a count of five, hold the breath for five and release for a count of five. Continue this and build up the time gradually until you get up to 10.

Aftermath

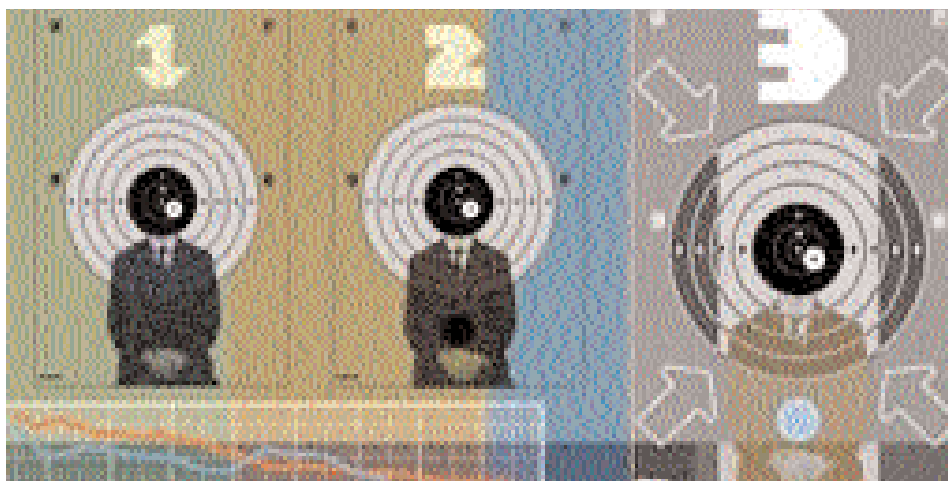
After the presentation, arrange for a drinks and nibbles session if possible. This will maximise the marketing opportunity.

Ask colleagues and friends who attended the presentation for feedback. If they have criticisms, take them on board and learn from them in time for your next presentation. Similarly, if they only have good things to say, work on these to make your next presentation even better!

- Sharon Glynn is currently in her third seat, sitting in Bolt Burdon Claims' professional negligence and personal injury department

Further information

- www.presentations.com
The importance of visual aids and the use of colour.
- www.wessex-speakers.co.uk
Survival guide for nervous speakers by Richard Arundel.
- www.altior.co.uk
Specialists in management, advocacy and skills training for lawyers.



Getting the training seats you've set your sights on can be difficult, but with the right approach you can make the most of whatever you end up with, says **Samantha Mangwana**

the perfect seating plan

A seat is the name given to the four, typically six-month blocks spent in different departments during a training contract. The idea is to ensure trainees are exposed to different practice areas, as well as a mix of contentious and non-contentious work, before qualifying as a solicitor.

What to expect

It is difficult to over-emphasise the importance of the seats you select as a trainee, given it is the principal way of gaining the training required to pursue a career in any given specialism. However, where you do your seats may be entirely out of your hands.

The degree to which you are involved in determining which departments you train in varies enormously from firm to firm. In smaller firms, with a limited number of practice areas and trainees, there is likely to be little or no choice. It may even be necessary for you to perform one seat at another firm to satisfy Law Society training requirements.

In larger firms with more trainees it is more likely that trainees' preferences can be accommodated. However, you should not expect to get your top choice for all four seats. At the end of the day, the number of seats available will, in part, be determined by the business needs of the firm. Training officers have a tough job trying to keep everyone happy.

Choose carefully

Bearing this in mind, you should think carefully about which seats to go for, and when to go for them. There can be a lot to get to grips with at the start of a training contract – a new city, making

new friends, and settling in as a trainee, for example. You should therefore aim for your top choice in the second year of your training contract. You will then be sitting pretty for a newly qualified position on qualification (having ironed out all your creases in seats of less interest to you).

Most of you will have some idea of the areas of law you are interested in pursuing, and this may influence your choice of firm. However, it is important to keep a degree of open-mindedness. The reality is that you could end up hating the department you thought you were destined for, but find you really enjoy working in an area you had not previously considered. The advantage of the seat system is that it allows you to gain practical experience of working in different departments.

Winning the seat

So what seats should you go for? Areas that interested you on the LPC or that you fancy qualifying in would be a good starting point. Be careful not to be swayed by others. Everyone is different and what may have been the bane of someone else's life might turn out to be the dream seat for you.

Once you've worked out where you want to go, the next stage is winning the seat. There's more to this than listing your choices on a sheet of paper. Donna Frazer, responsible for graduate training at magic circle and trade union firms, advises trainees to approach seat selection in much the same way as looking for a training contract – research the role and fit yourself to it. To get the seat of your choice, Frazer says you should:

- Convince the firm of your enthusiasm, and demonstrate it by persistence;
- Point out your prior knowledge of your chosen area, either from the LPC or practical experience,

or persuade the firm that you can adapt to it by drawing on other experiences. Give practical examples of how you pick things up easily;

- Match up different aspects of the work to your relevant experience, and explain how the seat will enable you to develop further;
- Show the firm you have a good understanding of the way it – and the department – works. Highlight particular successes which demonstrate your capability and suitability.

Up seat creek without a paddle?

Give it your best shot, but remember it's not the end of the world if you don't get the seat you have set your heart on. You can transfer your training contract to another firm if you're determined to do a seat in a certain practice area, but this really should be a last resort. A CV showing that you've changed firms mid-training will always beg a few questions.

There is a lot to be learned, even in the seats you are less interested in. Training as a solicitor isn't just about gaining technical legal knowledge. Important skills may be picked up simply from working with different supervisors, since each will have their own way of dealing with clients, communicating, negotiating, and handling difficulties. Developing these 'soft skills' is likely to be the most valuable part of your training, and can be applied to whatever field of law you specialise in.

Try and see the positive aspect of all the seats, since they will all benefit you in different ways. And don't look too much at the downside – you could be discovering a whole new future.

- **Sam Mangwana is a second year trainee at Russell Jones & Walker and the TSG events officer**

a postcard from brussels

As with any overseas secondment, life as a trainee in the capital of Belgium is what you make it, says Millie Vivian

Brussels may be the heart of EU bureaucracy, populated with seemingly high-falutin euro-politicians, but the friendliness of the natives is hard to beat. There is no better way to experience this than on your way to work. Unlike anonymous London, here you receive at least four 'Bonne journées' before you reach your desk. And this continental form of 'Have a nice day!' has all the charm that the transatlantic version arguably lacks.

Language skills

Most people in my office are Flemish, although they happily converse in French or English. Furthermore, the snobbery so *de rigueur* in France is non-existent, making Brussels a good place to practise my Franglais smirk-free! I also keep my French going by reading *Tin Tin* and *Asterix* in the original text. Belgium is, after all, the homeland of both Hergé and Goscinny.

English is the working language at Dechert, as at many overseas offices around the world. However, with any overseas secondment I would recommend lessons in the native language. If nothing else, it is a good way of meeting people. Ex-pat websites and weekly publications have details of language classes, and it is wise to invest in a basic grammar book before you leave the UK as they are much more expensive abroad.

Working life

Trainees in Brussels have a similar workload, which is divided between two areas. The first is EU competition law client work. This involves assisting with investigations and proceedings before the European Commission (EC) and the European courts; advising on the application of EU law to agreements; and dealing with research queries and co-ordinating merger notifications to the EC, or to national competition authorities as far afield as Brazil and South Africa. A seat in

Brussels is good if you are interested in how European business works in practice. You also get the low-down on your clients' product markets pretty quickly.

The second area of a trainee's work is monitoring the latest developments in EU law, compiling reports and operating a EU 'helpdesk'. Monitoring, which in my case focuses mainly on competition, financial services, life sciences and telecommunications, is done on a daily basis by reviewing publications, press releases and websites. Trainees prepare monthly, weekly or even daily briefing notes for clients and interested fee-earners. I have also been preparing a report which deals with new legislation on long-grain brown rice (ours not to reason why!)

La vie Bruxelloise

Despite being busy at work, I have had time to enjoy *la vie Bruxelloise*. With chocolates galore, over 400 types of beer (beware of the Trappist Monk variety), waffles, *moules frites* and more Michelin-starred restaurants per capita than any other city (apart from Luxembourg), it is easy to fritter away your rent-free savings and salary uplift. My flat, like many other trainee flats, is situated in the heart of the shopping area, so even if food is not your thing, the temptations still lurk.

Automatic entry on the Law Society's email distribution list of *stagiaires* and trainees means it is easy to make friends. However, on any secondment it is a good idea to register with the British Consulate/Embassy and get involved with ex-pat clubs and associations, which are great for meeting people. You soon learn that word-of-mouth tips combined with a good handover are invaluable. Nothing can replace the wealth of personal experience your predecessor accumulated.



No time for tears

Although I have met lots of other trainees here, there are times when homesickness gets the better of you. The best way to overcome feelings of isolation is to be proactive. There are museums and galleries to stroll round, neighbouring towns and even countries to explore, bars and restaurants to check out, not forgetting visits from family and friends (Brussels is only two hours and 20 minutes from London by Eurostar). It might help if you like your own company. However, not being of that disposition, I find myself lapping up café culture with fellow incumbents or nipping round the corner to my local 16 screen UGC cinema.

If you can overcome the potential language barriers and feelings of isolation, you are in a win-win situation. However, it takes a certain type of person to fully enjoy longer secondments in cities on the other side of the world, where commuting back to the UK is not an option. Relationships can suffer, and if you applied for the seat for the wrong reasons, you might find that your personal and professional life are put on hold for the next six months.

But the advantages of doing a secondment are plentiful: office-paid accommodation; foreign culture; new contacts; different clients; unfamiliar jurisdictions; and, unless you are in Hong Kong, Singapore or New York, then the cost of living is cheaper too. Definitely one to consider, should the opportunity arise.

● Millie Vivian, a London trainee, was seconded to Dechert's Brussels office for a four-month seat

Impending disaster?

The gap between the number of training contracts available and the number of LPC students chasing them is making it difficult for careers advisers to be optimistic about securing a training contract. Brian Read takes a wry look at the problem

Figures show that every year there is a mismatch between the limited number of training contracts available and the number of students completing the LPC. At present there is a shortfall of about 1,200 training contracts a year.

As a result, training contracts, particularly at small and medium-sized firms, are increasingly going to candidates who have done the LPC some years previously and who have spent time either as paralegals or doing other things. For careers advisers the situation is rather like watching students set sail on a doomed Atlantic ocean liner...

Worst-case scenario

The ship is setting off, as it does each year, for New York (or qualification). The passengers are LPC students and the ship is the only way for them to reach their destination.

The journey is complicated, however. The ship doesn't make it to New York after all. On the way it encounters an iceberg and all the passengers must disembark using the lifeboats (or training contracts). The lifeboats will convey all the passengers to New York. Reassuringly, the ship and the lifeboats have all been inspected by the Board of Admiralty (the Law Society, of course!) which has guaranteed their seaworthiness.

There is plenty of room on the ship. Over 1,600 deluxe cabins (LPC places) are available and they are never all filled. At the last count only 1,300 cabins were occupied and their occupants have all passed the exam allowing them to sail. The journey costs a steep £7,000 and passengers must also pay for their cabins and meals on board.

The owners of the ship (course providers) benefit financially from carrying as many passengers

as possible, so the voyage is well publicised and the attractions of New York are made widely known.

Worryingly, one less well-publicised fact is that there is a limited lifeboat provision of only 1,000. What's more, it is possible to reserve a place in the lifeboat before boarding the ship. 500 passengers will have done so and the majority will also have managed to persuade the lifeboat providers (law firms – keep up!) to pay for their entire voyage.

Once the passengers have boarded the ship they undertake a strict regime of lectures, exercises and other practices to prepare them for rowing the lifeboats on the final stage of their journey. The trip is so demanding that a hundred or so will fall overboard or fail to qualify for a lifejacket (LPC), which is handed out on leaving the ship. There are no places on the lifeboat for passengers without lifejackets.

During the voyage, those without a lifeboat are advised to apply for the remaining vacant places. Lucky passengers may be able to book a place on the lifeboat (or obtain a training contract – in the unlikely event that you weren't following!) before the iceberg is encountered.

Stewards (or careers advisers) on board the ship are available to help those seeking lifeboats. The stewards have many duties, but will usually do what they can to help passengers prepare a strong case for a lifeboat by advising them on the disembarkation points, the best way to get ahead of the lifeboat queues, and how to persuade a lifeboat owner to take them on.

The ship and the iceberg meet. There are now 600 passengers with no lifeboat place and only 400 places remaining. However well the passengers have been advised by the stewards and however good their rowing skills are, 200 passengers will be left in the water, wearing lifejackets



(ie equipped with LPCs) without a lifeboat. Fortunately, they are able to clamber on to the iceberg and wait.

However, once on the iceberg, the passengers realise that there are passengers from previous trips also sitting there. In fact, some of the 400-odd vacant lifeboat spaces are being claimed by these existing passengers, so the actual number of available spaces is less. To occupy their time on the iceberg, those waiting hone their rowing and persuasion skills. As time goes by, the iceberg becomes more densely populated. It doesn't go to New York.

Conclusion

So what can or should be done? Returning to reality briefly, neither the Law Society nor the law firms offering training contracts control the number of training contracts available and, at the current time, the Law Society believes it is wrong to limit the number of LPC places available.

Unless there are some fundamental changes, all careers advisers can do is suggest that well-positioned notices should be prominently displayed in suitable places, warning candidates of the difficulties they may face.

While the present situation exists, many stewards feel they are doing little more than rearranging the deckchairs.

● **Brian Read is careers adviser for the Legal Practice Course at the University of Sheffield. If you are worried about finding a training contract, make an appointment with your college or university careers adviser. They are there to help you.**



TSG helpline

The TSG helpline is a confidential service manned by volunteer trainee solicitors. Whether you're worried about workloads, concerned about colleagues or traumatised by training contracts, advice is at hand. The helpline operates from 9am-8pm Monday-Friday. Call 08000 856 131

Q I have been offered a training contract by a London firm who have apparently been exempted by the Law Society from providing the minimum salary for trainees. I have been offered £11,000. Is this acceptable?

A The Law Society Council annually reviews the minimum salary level for trainees. The Law Society has increased the Law Society minimum salary with effect from August 2003 as follows:

- The minimum salary for Central London increased to £15,300, with a recommended salary of £16,200.
- The minimum salary for the rest of England and Wales increased to £13,600, with a recommended salary of £14,450.
- These new salary levels apply to all training contracts entered into on or after 1 August 2003.

Waivers from the minimum salary can be granted, but only in exceptional circumstances. A successful application for a waiver requires the support of both the firm and the trainee. The firm needs to specify why they wish to pay less than the minimum salary and how much they propose to pay, including any benefits-in-kind, such as assistance towards fees, etc.

You have to agree the salary being offered. The firm cannot impose it on you unilaterally. Details of your personal circumstances will be required and there will be an opportunity for the Law Society to consider your views. Waivers will only be granted exceptionally, for example, if the firm was paying off your debts and offering a lower salary in return. No waivers can be granted which would provide for a salary of less than £11,000.

Q I am a second year trainee at a small, one-partner firm. The partner is generally in the office three days a week from

11am-2pm. There are four trainees at the firm, but there are no other qualified solicitors. I am concerned about the lack of supervision and support available to us. I have also only had one appraisal since I started. What are my options?

A If you are concerned about the quality of your training, make sure you are familiar with the Training Regulations 1990. There are extensive obligations on firms and trainees during the training contract period. A practical guide can be found in *The Trainee Solicitors Guide to Authorisation*. You can access this Guide through the Law Society website (www.training.lawsociety.org).

Trainee solicitors must be adequately supervised within the firm. Supervisors must also have adequate time to devote to the supervision of training. Firms must also have a system for appraising trainees' performance. A minimum of three appropriately timed, compulsory appraisals must take place during the two years.

Initially, it may be useful to approach the partner and raise these issues. Explain that you are concerned about the lack of supervision and refer him to the *Guide to Authorisation*. If handled in a sensitive manner this may well cause the partner to assess the level of supervision provided.

If this fails, you should consider contacting the Legal Education and Training Department at the Law Society on 0870 606 2555. The Law Society can monitor your firm. The Law Society often carries out random monitoring visits on firms, but where prompted by a complaint, the firm has to be informed. In such a case, the Law Society will keep your name and details confidential, but this may be of little use in a small firm.

You should seriously think about taking some action to address this problem. Good supervision is essential to your training as a solicitor and its importance should not be underestimated.

Q I am a trainee in my third seat at a City firm and feel I am progressing well. However, last week I was told that a meeting with my supervisor has been planned to discuss my performance. A colleague informed me that they plan to get rid of me because my 'face doesn't fit'. Can they do this?

A Although difficult, try not to worry until you have actually had the meeting. It is not easy for a firm to terminate a training contract without both parties' mutual consent. If you do not agree to the termination of your training contract, only the Law Society can terminate it. The Law Society can take action in cases where a firm can show poor performance by the trainee. In such a situation, the Law Society would carry out a full investigation. As a trainee, you would have the opportunity to respond to any allegations made. You may decide to have some legal representation.

If you know that performance is not the real issue at stake, and believe you are a victim of discrimination, you can take your complaint to the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors. Any formal decision will be made through the adjudication procedure. For further advice you can speak to the Legal Education and Training Department at the Law Society on 0870 606 2555. You may also find it useful to obtain some specialist employment law advice.

● **Elisabeth Julien and Vidula Patiar are joint education officers for the TSG National Executive**