Swapping Guernsey for London - Laura Smith reflects on her secondment

August 2023

In April, Trainee Solicitor Laura Smith swapped the beaches of Guernsey for the city of London when she went on a three month secondment at Howard Kennedy. Upon returning to Collas Crill, we caught up with her to see how she found living 'onshore', what she learned from the experience, and what she got up to when she wasn't working...

How did you find the experience?

'It was great to take on a new challenge, and really interesting to see the inner workings of another law firm compared to Collas Crill. It's amazing how many of the systems and procedures are the same across firms: definitely more similarities than differences!

It was also a great opportunity to see how the work differs between jurisdictions. Although they were the Trusts and Estates Disputes team, it definitely skewed much more towards the contentious probate side of things, which we see so much less of compared with all of the work that we do with trusts.'

What was the key learning take away?

'I think it really taught me how to work with people in a different way. There is much more of a focus on WFH in London still in my experience, and I was working with people based in Bath, or even Ireland. I think it led to more planned team meetings on core office days, which helped set the foundation for people to be able to work well from a distance. You definitely miss something when you're not regularly running into your teammates for a chat in the kitchens though!'

How has the experience shaped your career goals?

'I was able to see what working in London is like, but for now at least I prefer the broader range of work that you get to do over here. Lawyers tend to be much more specialised into particular niches, in London at least. There's definitely something to be said for getting a bit of variety in your work day.'

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Laura's home while in London

How have you expanded your network of contacts?

'Both through actually working with different people (at Howard Kennedy, and with the various Counsel I've been lucky enough to collaborate with on some of the HK matters) and through attending as many of the BD events going on that I was able to, I've met solicitors, barristers, financial advisers… all sorts!

They were a brilliant team for letting me know about (and getting me invited to) all sorts of BD events going on. From book launches, to breakfasts or drinks, to shuffleboard, to tours of the Supreme Court, there were so many opportunities to get to know other professionals working in trusts and estates disputes.'

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Laura attended a number of Howard Kennedy BD events

Did you have a mentor at Howard Kennedy and if so, what did you learn from them (or others in the team)?

'My 'buddy' for the three months was Tom Deely, a senior associate in the team. He was excellent at making even the most junior members of the team (me, mostly!) feel like their contributions and opinions were valid and helpful.

From the team more broadly, I learnt a lot about people-management. Part of the work that I did while I was there involved listening to a lot of recordings of witness proofings (and attending a few in person), and it was a real masterclass in dealing with people who aren't particularly cooperative, as well as those who are a bit too keen to cooperate but forget that the truth is more important than the 'helpful' answer.'

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The commute to the London office

What do you think the Howard Kennedy team learned from you? (Perhaps, for instance, there were some views on Guernsey/offshore that you could change?)

'The team that I joined had a trainee from Jersey who was working with them occasionally, so the Guernsey/Jersey rivalry had already been made very clear to them before I'd even made it into the office!

I think they probably realised how close we are, both physically and in terms of the work done. 'Offshore' can be seen as this 'other' thing, but actually we're only a 45 minute plane ride away, and doing all the same sort of things, just maybe with some slightly different laws or processes behind it.'

What was your favourite thing about working in London? Did you miss anything about Guernsey?

'There was just so much going on at all times. I definitely made the most of the opportunity to fit in a few shows after work and at the weekends, which is something that I have always loved to do on visits to London in the past, and it was lovely to be able to pop out to Borough Market, or sit and eat lunch by the river.

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I think I did manage to miss most of the good weather for Guernsey summer this year though!'

Some of the theatre programmes Laura collected

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