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Things to **think about** on **qualification**

For trainee solicitors this year qualification is potentially much more challenging than in previous years. With Covid-19, lockdown and many firms largely home working some trainees have been furloughed, others have found that their firms have put back decisions about where roles are going to be and some have quite simply found that the area of work that they wanted to qualify into is no longer busy and perhaps not an option for them.

Decisions made at this stage can be critical to your future career, so even if you have to be more flexible than you would have liked, make sure you are taking the right factors into account. The decisions you make now can affect many things, including:

- Your job mobility;
- Your earning potential;
- Your career potential;
- The types of practices you can work for;
- Whether you can work in-house at a later stage, and crucially
- How much you enjoy your career.

Important considerations include:

Which seats you have enjoyed. Why you enjoyed the seat – it is important to remove any issues relating to personality of individuals, good or bad, as you are hoping to make the right long term career decisions, not selecting who you might work with for the next few months or years.

Think about, and take advice on, where this route might take you longer term. Will it allow your career to evolve? Could it give you the earning potential you desire? Could you get bored with it?

If you have a clear preference for one area of law, ask if you can return to that department for your last seat. This not only gives you a better base of experience from which to apply for new roles if you want to look at external roles, but it can also confirm that you are making the right decision.

If you are genuinely interested in more than one area of law it is perfectly possible to look for roles in both.

Take advice as to the potential availability of roles, if you are selecting a particularly competitive area you may need to be more flexible, geographically or in terms of the nature of roles you're interested in.

✂ When do I start looking for a new job?

National / large regional practices:

Ordinarily these firms would have completed their internal selection process for September by May/June, however this year some have pushed it back to ensure that they recruit into the right roles. In reaction to the pandemic many firms have had to keep things under review as work levels have fluctuated and they are keen to understand if the impact is a short or long term one.

Smaller / mid-tier firms

They are less structured in their approach, many leaving it until later in the Summer.

If your firm is releasing roles later than usual it may well be worth speaking to people within the departments that you are interested in remaining within to get a sense of how busy they are and how the pandemic has impacted upon them.

Moving on or staying on?

At this stage in your career the key is finding the best opportunity for you, whether that be within your existing firm or a new one. At a time when some people may need to compromise it is important to assess where the compromises could be and what kind of impact these would have on your mid to longer term personal and career aspirations.

In considering what the best opportunity is, it is important for you consider:

- The quality of work
- Clients (type, size, sector)
- Training – consider both classroom and less formal support
- Personal matters – location, salary, future career opportunities, working hours/ conditions
- Reputation of the practice for that work type

If you don't manage to get your ideal role now ensure that you are positioning yourself for it in the mid-term, or at least not closing any doors. Whilst in an ideal world you would be setting your qualified career off on the track you want to practice in, with a firm you want to work for, it is possible to rectify this later when the market has improved within your favoured area. The better you can align your skills with this, the easier this will be.

Not sure?

If you are not sure on any of these issues, it's worth speaking to a consultant who should be able to give you an objective view of the market right now.

It could be that external roles can't offer you anything better than staying put, but at least you will have the satisfaction of knowing that and hopefully some peace of mind that you've made an informed decision that is the best for you and your career in the current market!

✘ What does a Consultancy do?

How should it work?

The role of a recruitment consultant is easy to define, but how well it is done can vary enormously. They should:

- Advise on career choice and direction
- Advise on the market and opportunities within it
- Assist with CV preparation
- Make applications on your behalf
- Brief / Coach you for any interviews
- Negotiate offers
- Advise you on the process between accepting an offer and starting your new job

Choosing the right Consultancy

It is critical that you find a recruitment company that can represent you well. Making the right choice can not only make the whole process easier but also significantly affect how successful it is.

✘ When choosing who to work with consider the following:

- Do they have someone specialising in the geographical region in which you're looking to work?
- Have they got an established reputation within the type of organisations you'd like to work for?
- Are they interested in finding out what you're looking for and why you're looking for it? Only if they are prepared to do this can they really advise on your career and what's best for you personally. Ideally, they will ask to meet you, probably via a video link at the moment.
- Are they recommended?

One consultancy?

If you have a very specific geographical remit you may well only need to register with one recruitment company. If you select the right one they should have the breadth and depth of contacts that will remove the need to register with others. This means that you keep full control of the process, there being no opportunity for duplication of CV's. It also ensures that you receive clear and unbiased career advice throughout.

Or more?

If you decide to register with more than one company ensure that under no circumstances do they send your CV anywhere without your consent. Ensure that approaches are for specific roles and with your express consent. This is critical as duplication can be detrimental to your prospects of securing an interview.

✕ Other Information

Salaries:

For NQ roles salaries are generally non negotiable and your consultant will be able to advise in relation to current levels.

Mid tier/niche commercial firms tend to lag behind National practices by between £3,000 and £8,000 although, on the whole, they do have lower chargeable hours targets.

General practices can pay considerably less but do vary. Again your consultant will be able to advise on specific firms.

Salary will depend on the type of work you do: work for commercial clients (eg Corporate/Commercial Property) will usually pay considerably better than work typically done for individuals (eg Family / Private Client).

Benefits:

National practices – have fully comprehensive packages and there are few differences between them, the major benefits being:

- Pension
- Health Care
- Death in Service
- Critical Illness Cover
- Flexible Benefits (where you can buy / sell additional benefits such as holidays, pension contributions etc)
- Not many offer parking but most now have a bonus scheme

Mid tier / niche commercial firms – offer Pensions, some offer Health Care, not many offer Critical Illness Cover or Flexible Benefits schemes.

General Practices – there is a high variance in what benefits are on offer.

Transfer of training contract:

Although not common, it is possible to transfer training contracts. The ability to do this really depends upon the nature of the practice, their requirements and your experience, as well as the availability of other candidates who may be able to qualify earlier. Your recruitment consultant will be able to advise as to the realistic prospects of achieving a transfer and what to look out for in doing so.