



## **NATIONAL LAW LIVE MANCHESTER: CONFERENCE REPORT**

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It was a privilege to be accepted to attend and represent Plymouth Law School at the National Law LIVE Manchester on the 4th December 2015. On arrival at the venue, The Museum of Science and Industry, I was taken aback by the industrious red brick exterior of the building, a symbol of English heritage containing generations of forward thinking and revolutionary ideas yet encompassed by modern city life. Symbolic of the work required for change. A fitting venue in my eyes to host the next generation of enthusiastic and passionate lawyers of the future. This conference was designed to target a select number of candidates to give sound and informative advice from expert national lawyers, trainees and recruiters, but it was much more than this. I saw it as an opportunity to experience what makes the successful lawyers' and firms' heart beat. I was hoping to gain real insight into what makes the perfect candidate from those who have been in my shoes, and therefore be able to grow and learn from this experience. The application process which was similar to that of a training contract application, set the bar high for delegates to meet the expectations of the programme for the day. Preparing me for the day's focus: advice on crafting an excellent application form, gain an insightful 'behind the scenes tour' of national firms and how to look at the economics of a national firm. I was filled with anticipation and could not wait to begin the day.

Following initial networking with fellow delegates, complemented by a selection of danish pastries and fresh orange juice, it was time for the welcoming speech to outline the objectives for the day. Mr Andrew Davis, a partner from DLA Piper, was greeted on stage to present the keynote speech regarding general advice in applying for a training contract. His speech really helped to develop my understanding as to what working life at a national law firm entails. The key point that resonated with me was in relation to obtaining a training con-

tract, to bear in mind how each law firm is unique, it is impossible to ever find one firm that is exactly the same as another and because of this it is imperative to research thoroughly into firms to find one which chimes with your personal objectives. This advice will prove invaluable in future applications and endeavours with law firms I may encounter. With regards to the 'perfect candidate', Mr Davis told us how there is no specific criteria for a trainee, however in order to become a successful candidate they must fit well with the organisation by sharing the same hunger and passion for the firm, be able to provide advice from a commercial awareness perspective and shown to have made an informed choice of the job role, for example national law firms are notorious for long working hours and it must be clear you recognise this and still share the same passion for the role. As highlighted and reiterated throughout the day whilst networking, Mr Davis touched on the fact vacation schemes are a fantastic recruitment tool for both employers and candidates, especially the latter who will be able to establish whether the characteristics of the firm suits them. Reflecting on the speech, I have gained valuable insight from Mr Davis and am now able to arm myself with a fresh set of tools to deploy in my future legal career.

From previous experience I have never fully understood what being commercially aware truly means. A prominent and recurring trend of law events I have previously attended emphasised the need for aspiring lawyers to be commercially aware in order to gain with success, without fully explaining or exploring what this means in practice. However, the panel discussion focusing on law firms as business entities during the day really helped shed light on what commercial awareness really is, what recruiters want to discover when asking a commercial awareness question in an interview and how I can evidence my own commercial awareness to become a successful applicant and more importantly a successful lawyer.

For me, the most intriguing and thought provoking session of the day was the real estate workshop hosted by Nabarro LLP. Here, a full service firm employing over 1,000 lawyers in 27 cities worldwide, took us on a journey of a hypothetical real estate transaction. Given the role of a trainee we had to assist the case, flagging up main issues to the client and understanding how to effectively close the transaction. I found this extremely useful as it enabled me to use prior academic knowledge and apply it to real life scenarios, using interpersonal skills to tailor the information to a level the client would understand. I found this very effective practice as I never before have considered real estate as an avenue for my future career however,



on reflection, it seems like a viable option. One point I have taken away from this workshop is my hunger to learn more about real estate in practice as well as really strengthening my skills of applying legal knowledge to everyday situations.

Prior to networking during lunch I found myself becoming a little nervous because I was surrounded by highly qualified professionals and people currently working successfully within the legal industry. I ensured I was fully prepared before the event and formulated informed questions to really target firms that hold similar perspectives as myself and firms I am keen to know more about. As I began interacting with the professionals around the room I seemed to relax and gain confidence as I discovered how these successful, professional people were once in my exact position and I know I have the potential to succeed, I just need to realise that potential. The skills and advice I gain from networking events like National Law LIVE can only be a positive experience, standing me in good stead for the future.

As well as providing valuable information, National Law LIVE sparked me to reflect on my own personal beliefs in a legal environment. This became apparent through the final panel discussion aimed at giving key advice for applicants. One issue I was unsure about was the increasingly popular recruitment mechanism of video interviewing. I personally believe that an interview is an opportunity to convey your personal attributes and character whereas a timed video interview does not allow for this personal aspect of an interview during the application process. Although some of the panel possessed persuasive points supporting video interviewing, for example when working in a national law firm you may have to video call clients and therefore need to be comfortable communicating within a video setting, I am still not convinced whether this is an appropriate method for interviewing. However, I feel the information given within the panel discussion will prove invaluable personally as it has given me insight into several different techniques legal firms utilise in their recruitment, thus preparing me more for applications I may pursue in the future.

My experience from representing Plymouth Law School at National Law LIVE has been extremely positive. Visiting Manchester, a huge, vibrant and exciting city has really helped strengthen my desire to learn, grow and progress as an individual in the legal world through the experiences and expertise I have acquired from this unique conference. In my personal opinion working for a national law firm is desirable however it is not a decision to be taken lightly. National Law LIVE has really strengthened my passion to become a lawyer but overall I have gained the knowledge to suggest that working for a national law firm may not suit my personal attributes and character, which is a learning experience I could not have gained without firsthand experience at National Law LIVE.