

Placement Years: How to Make the Most of your LLB

Gaining experience within the legal sector can feel like a challenge and it is hard to know where to begin. However, just as pathways into a legal career are beginning to broaden, so are opportunities for students to dip their toes in the profession. As one of the first placement students at Michelmores, here's some information about what a placement year at the firm consists of and why it is so beneficial.

What is a placement year?

At Michelmores, placement years are now being offered to LLB students at the University of Exeter and the University of West England. This forms part of a 'sandwich' degree with the placement taking place between a student's second and third years of study. The placement therefore becomes an accredited part of a student's degree.

This is a paid opportunity which is provisionally nine months in length. Students are placed with a team of their choosing and given the opportunity to work alongside top lawyers on a daily basis. I am currently sat within the Family team which means I have been heavily exposed to the financial side of matrimonial law as well as child arrangement orders.

The tasks that students are asked to complete range from administrative to paralegal level. This allows students to gain in-depth knowledge about their chosen area of law. As a few examples of these tasks, I regularly put together papers for counsel, draft correspondence to clients and complete research for lawyers.

Why complete a legal placement year?

A placement year can be beneficial for many reasons.

It could be that a student wishes to confirm their interest in the law before committing to post-graduate study or applying to training contracts. With law in practice being quite different from what students experience during their degree, a long-term placement provides students with additional (and practical) knowledge to make more informed decisions about their careers.

Alternatively, it might be that a student is sure about their career path and sees the opportunity as the 'foot in the door' that they need to unlock future prospects. With a career in law being so competitive, having something like a placement year under your belt is bound to make you stand out!

Personally, I chose to complete my placement as a part of my journey to obtaining a training contract. As a result of my placement, I have been able to experience Michelmores' culture and values for myself as well as gain a deeper understanding of the firm's strategy. The knowledge I have gained has allowed me to develop my soft/analytical skills and hopefully will enable me to establish a long-term relationship with the firm.

Are you able to network outside of your team?

A crucial part of a placement year is the ability to network broadly amongst a firm. At Michelmores, placement students are encouraged to embed themselves into the firm as much as possible and the firm holds many events which supports this.

For example, in my first few months I have marshalled at Michelmores' yearly Charity Run, attended 'Thirsty Thursdays' and been to wider events, such as the YRES Autumn quiz, with my colleagues.

What have I enjoyed so far?

In terms of my day to day, I enjoy the range of matters which I am exposed to. Family law is a great combination of being able to directly help people whilst navigating an intellectually stimulating area of the law. It has been a really interesting experience to be able to hear lawyers discuss their cases and understand the workings of the law in different contexts.

When looking at the placement experience more broadly, I have also appreciated the variety of knowledge-based sessions I have been able to attend. For example, I have been to lectures focusing on diversifying the workplace, SRA training and talks addressing the sustainability of the firm. Each of these sessions have allowed me to develop my commercial awareness as well as my understanding of how law firms function as a business.

Is this an alternative route to a training contract?

The traditional route to securing a training contract is known to consist of a direct application to a firm or the completion of a vacation scheme.

As part of applying to Michelmores for a placement year, students are invited to complete the traditional first three stages of the training contract process. This includes a written stage and two interviews.

As a result, at the end of the scheme, students are offered a place in one of Michelmores' assessment centres. Therefore, in some respects, a placement year can be seen as an extended vacation scheme.

How to apply?

HR intend to send out communications to both the University of Exeter and the University of West England at the beginning of the new year. If you're interested in the meantime, please email gradrecruitment@michelmores.com

If you have any questions following this post, please do not hesitate to also get in touch with me.