

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR VACATION SCHEME



Before attending university, I had no idea what a Vacation Scheme was. This meant that when I secured my first ever Vacation Scheme with Clarke Willmott, I did not know what to expect from the opportunity, especially as I had never done any work experience like it before. Before the scheme began, I was incredibly nervous and worried about the impression I would make at the firm.



It is perfectly normal for a new situation to feel daunting but, whilst no amount of research will ever be able to tell you exactly what to expect from a Vacation Scheme, there are certainly some pieces of advice that will apply across the board and may help alleviate some of the concerns you have. **Here are a few tips to help you feel confident approaching the experience.**

1. No luck involved

First and foremost, try to avoid using terms like “I am lucky to be here.” As someone who suffers from imposter syndrome, I recognise how easy it is to fall into cycles of self-doubt and anxiety surrounding your own abilities. However, be assured that **you landed your place on the scheme because of the time, effort, and commitment you put into your application.** Put simply, you earned it, so take this well-deserved opportunity to shine!



2. Don't be afraid to ask questions

Asking questions is one of the best ways to learn, develop your understanding and expand your legal skillset. Though it is completely normal to feel nervous about asking questions, try to remember that your team is there to help guide you through the scheme and make sure you are learning; **questions are expected and encouraged!**

They will also demonstrate that you are eager to make the most of the opportunity and keen to maximise your potential throughout.

The phrase ‘there is no such thing as a silly question’ is also true. Some things you think should be ‘obvious’ may not always be as clear cut as you assume so **if you are unsure, then just ask!**

That said, **when you are faced with a problem, I recommend attempting to solve it independently first.** This does not mean you should struggle in silence, but first reconsider what the task brief was, what resources or research tools you have been directed to, and what prior knowledge or skills you can apply to the situation. This will not only develop your problem-solving and task management skills but will also show your team that you possess important qualities for a career in law, such as proactivity and resourcefulness.



3. Network, Network, Network



One substantial benefit of a Vacation Scheme is the opportunity to form meaningful connections in the legal sphere.

These connections will not stem from simply asking questions like “how do I get a training contract” but will develop through **taking a genuine interest in the people you work with** and building on those professional relationships.

Make a conscious effort to engage with colleagues: introduce yourself, strike up conversations, and ask thoughtful questions, for example, about their work, career journey, and hobbies.



★Top Tip - Once you have formed that professional relationship, it would be appropriate to ask if they would like to connect on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a great tool for maintaining professional relationships and sharing updates about your own development.

4. Make the most of it your OWN way



There is no ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to a vacation scheme and it is important that you are **comfortable whilst participating** so that you can make the most out of the experience. If you do not feel comfortable attending large social events, there will certainly be other opportunities for you to shine, whether that be completing individual tasks set or group work with your wider cohort.

However, if you are keen to participate in firm events, there will likely be opportunity for you to do so. Either way, **do what will make the experience best for you** – do not feel as though there is any pressure to do something you are uncomfortable with.

5. Be patient with yourself



When working at the firm, you will certainly encounter a wide range of tasks, so it is important to recognise that **some things will take time to fully grasp**, and you will not necessarily ace everything on your first attempt.

A crucial part of professional growth is **learning from mistakes, misunderstandings, and misconceptions without harsh self-criticism**, instead viewing them as opportunities to learn and improve.



Feedback during the scheme will always be constructive so try to **take it on board, apply it, and keep moving forward**.

6. Keeping a Log



Throughout the scheme, I found it incredibly useful to keep a detailed log of my time at Clarke Willmott. An easy way to do this is to keep a notepad and pen on your person throughout the day. You can **record anything you feel is valuable**, such as new terminology, questions to ask, and tasks worked on.



Logging your activity will also serve as a useful ready-made resource for future applications! However, remember that you will be working at a law firm and will always need to **have the importance of confidentiality and data protection at the forefront of your mind**, so make sure to only jot down development notes.

7. No need for a new wardrobe

Quite simply, you do not need to buy an entirely new wardrobe for your Vacation Scheme. **Look at the firm's specific dress code carefully**, which can often be found on the firm's website, before spending money on a complete suit and boot. For example, Clarke Willmott's dress code is 'dress for your day', meaning business attire is not needed everyday; **your outfit can match your schedule!**



Repeating outfits throughout the scheme is also perfectly fine but, if you feel as though you are short on options, there are many budget-friendly alternatives to purchasing outfits at retail price, such as charity shopping or outfit swapping.

Above all else, **make sure you enjoy the experience**. You worked incredibly hard to secure your place on the scheme, so take the time to soak in every moment of being at the firm. Remember that beyond any nerves or self-doubt you may experience is a team that is genuinely excited to have you there. So, take a deep breath, be present, and show them what you can do.

Good luck - **you've got this in the bag!**