7 TIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Will law firms accept applications from international students?

Advice from the Junior Lawyers Division of the Law Society is that:

“It is difficult for non-EEA graduates to gain training contracts, simply because firms are legally obliged to consider candidates who do not require permission to work. This means that they must apply a labour market test to justify their preference for an international student to somebody who doesn’t need a work permit.”

Historically, some international graduates have managed to secure traineeships, though the vast majority of those who do the Bar Professional Training Course intend to practise in their home country. It is fair to say that most successful international students are able to highlight something special in their application which makes them stand out from UK and EEA applicants.

For information on work permit schemes applying to international students, go to the UK Border Agency [http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/working/](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/working/)

What can I do to increase my chances?

Consider the ‘extras’ that you have to offer a firm to make you stand out from UK or EEA nationals. These might include:

- Excellent academic qualifications. Firms compete for the best talent from within the UK and beyond so having a really strong academic record gives you the best possible start. Some international students achieve good grades despite interruptions to their education and moving to a new country without speaking the languages; if this applies to you, make it clear in your applications

- Language skills. Firms are occasionally desperate for particular languages, for example when they are opening offices or entering partnerships in a country for the first time so watch out for this kind of news in the legal press. Others may require lawyers with community languages for work on immigration or other issues which particularly affect new entrants to the UK. You can find out about lawyers offering particular languages from the ‘Find a solicitor’ section of the Law Society website ([www.lawsociety.org.uk](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk)) although it does not necessarily mean that the solicitor uses those languages at work and can certainly not guarantee future language requirements

- Knowledge of particular markets in which the firm operates or intends to operate. This can include cultural awareness and more specific commercial and legal knowledge

- Knowledge of a particular business sector relevant to a firm’s practice

- Vacation or paralegal experience in the firm’s office in your home country

- Legal qualification in another jurisdiction relevant to the firm’s business

- International experience. Many international students may have travelled more widely than their UK counterparts and may have studied and lived in several countries
• Do detailed research to find firms that are most likely to value your background rather than making ‘scattergun’ applications. For example, one Brunel student found a firm specialising in Anglo-Swedish law which perfectly matched her background. Legal news will tell you of firms' overseas expansion and partnership plans. Brunel also subscribes to the Going Global database with worldwide opportunities which you can access from [http://www.brunel.ac.uk/services/pcc/secure-resources](http://www.brunel.ac.uk/services/pcc/secure-resources).

• Use Law Careers Fairs and other opportunities to meet employers and ask about their interest in international students. If you can’t actually meet recruiters, contact the firm before you apply to check their policy.

• **Consider joining ELSA** - the London branch of an international Law Students’ Association offering networking opportunities in 37 countries, seminars and conferences in the UK and overseas. Details at [http://www.elsa.org](http://www.elsa.org). Work hard at getting vacation scheme places or other work experience with the firms that interest you; it is an excellent way of proving your worth. Some firms offer a large percentage of their traineeships (up to about 80%) to students who have done their own vacation scheme so you will put yourself at a major disadvantage if your first contact is with a traineeship application.

• Show the equivalence of your international qualifications to the UK exam system. Many firms look for high academic achievement from A levels through university and you need to prove that your qualifications match up. Make it clear what your qualification actually means; for example a score of 18 means nothing in isolation, 18/20 tells you more, but saying that only 5% of students score 18 or more shows clearly that you are in the top ability range.

• Spend time on your applications and ask for help to ensure that they are of the highest possible quality. Placement and Careers Centre staff will advise on content and you can get help from the Language Centre to ensure correct use of English. UK organisations can have very specific application processes and so it is a good idea to get to know what UK firms are looking for and how your application needs to be tailored.

### International students and the Bar

Most international students who take the BPTC do so with the intention of returning to practise in their home jurisdiction but the Bar Council website describes the support available for non-EEA nationals who are seeking mini pupillage or pupillage [http://www.barcouncil.org.uk/aboutthebarcouncil/international/ImmigrationSupportForNonEEANationals/](http://www.barcouncil.org.uk/aboutthebarcouncil/international/ImmigrationSupportForNonEEANationals/).

### If you are a qualified lawyer in your home country

You may be eligible to apply for the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme to practise as a solicitor in the UK [http://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/glts/apply.page](http://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/glts/apply.page) but the process is demanding.