



SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS TO LAW FIRMS

Abstract

Top tips, techniques and research to make your application and assessment process effective

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Introduction and purpose of document

Applying to law firms is notoriously competitive and so students are right to consider how best to improve their chances. Its also time consuming so making the most effective use of effort devoted to making applications is most important. With more than one or two firms on your list that you will be applying to its very easy to find yourself leaving applications to the last minute, rushing them, and having poorly prepared the groundwork to be undertaken before applying. This document aims to highlight the essential activities and preparation to undertake during the research and application process.

It also addresses the questions about “How many firms to apply to?” and “What can I do to improve my chances?” The answer to the latter will include several suggestions most of which cannot be done at short notice or may require effort ahead of time to be ready at a later date to make applications. So thinking in advance and planning are important. More often than not applying to law firms successfully is a marathon and not a sprint and you may find yourself either managing the process from the beginning of your first year as a student to line up

something for when you graduate or, if you come to the process later, using a gap year after you graduate to complete some of the steps you didn't have chance to do earlier.

It doesn't go into details about the differences between firms in the way that they qualify their intending solicitors which may be an important consideration for you in your research. For some law students other than first years there may remain an option to do the Legal Practice Course if the firm supports that route. Overwhelming the route will be the [Solicitors Qualifying Exam](#) plus Qualified Work Experience although even here there may be differences in the scope of QWE that are important to you and which you can confirm during your research. Some law firms may be offering the Graduate Apprenticeship Route which with its emphasis on work experience and practice may make it more appealing and will be worth researching for some.

Lastly, there are a number of differences to bear in mind if you are looking to apply to commercial and corporate law firms or their alternatives, typically, firms involved in public interest law, civil liberties and human rights. These differences are highlighted in Appendix 1.

Researching the firm(s)

Before embarking on your research decide whether you will be interested in firms according to a single set of criteria such as type, geographical location or size or whether you are going to adopt more than one, perhaps in order to make a broader range of comparisons as you develop your interest. It is perfectly fine to follow either approach so long as you can explain clearly the rationale you adopted when asked the questions at interview such as "Why did you choose this firm?" and "What other/competitor law firms have you applied to"? .It is not unusual to be asked these questions and law firm recruiters expect you to be applying to more than one firm as it would be quite risky to place "all your eggs in one basket". What they are looking for by way of a good answer is a clear reasoning why you can place their firm top of your list.

There are three main sources of information you can use to build a target list of firms of interest.

- a) Focus on the principal practice areas of the firm, highlight an affinity and interest in the work they do and connect positively with the reputation they have developed. Here there are two sources to consult that describe the work involved in different legal practice areas as there are many and then a listing of the leading firms in each. To find out about the work involved in different practice areas you can read some helpful surveys especially [Target Law](#) which describes over 25 in detail and [Chambers Student](#) which also includes some profiles of practitioners and the work they do. Remember that a particular type of work is just one criteria, there will be plenty of opportunity to explore more during your training when you encounter one that, much to your surprise, appeals. However its good to start with one area whilst keeping an open mind. Once you've identified the practice

area(s) that interest you the second step is to research the group of firms that practice in that area AND the leading practitioners. For this you can use the main [Chambers&Partners UK Directory](#) and simply select the area of law which you've identified as an interest for you from the drop down practice list. Its then a question of cross referencing the firms you identify with details of their vac schemes and training contract deadlines.

- b) Having got a broad idea of what the firm does a second source of information is feedback from the trainees themselves and here there are two key sources to use in your research. The first is [Lex100](#) which is based on an extensive annual survey it undertakes with trainees in the leading firms and also [Chambers Student](#) which also collects detailed and insightful comments. What you read quoted in the articles and reviews can be material to draw on in your applications as actual evidence of any assertion you might make in support of either your own motivation or in comparing firms.
- c) Study news, briefings and commentaries on law news websites. There are two sorts of website to check out for this information. The first of these is from the law firm itself. A recruiter will expect you to have read the new releases and any special report or client briefing material hosted on the firm's website. The second is from sources external to the firm ranging from articles in the [FT.com](#) to which you have free access with your Raven account to specialised law publications such as [Lawyer2b.com](#) and those with a slightly more light hearted approach such as [Legal Cheek](#). All are worth consulting once your target list of firms is established.

It is not unusual at interview to be asked for the names of other firms to which you've applied. This is not a trick question. Law firms expect you'll be making more than one application and there are two elements to a successful answer which are derived from your research. Firstly, does your list have a coherent rationale that makes the recruiter feel reassured that you know what you are doing. Be prepared to explain the rationale. Secondly when making a comparison it provides you with the opportunity to highlight why the firm you are currently meeting with is top of your list.

By now you'll be beginning to accrue a wealth of information worth storing in an organised way in spreadsheets and folders. Once interviewing gets underway much of the information can "blur" because of time pressure so make it easy to review quickly in due course.

Ten key research criteria

In summary the following are 10 key criteria which you can use to differentiate the firms when populating your research with specific information and expressing your motivations within your application.

- i. Quality of work you'll be doing. (Which practice areas will you be offered experience in, what's the reputation of the firm for the work it does in those areas and what is the role of the trainee in working collaboratively?).
- ii. Levels of responsibility and client contact. (This can easily be overplayed as until qualified a trainee's interactions with a client will inevitably be closely

- supervised. Nevertheless, don't overlook the fact that in smaller firms with smaller teams a trainee can be more exposed to seniors and clients)
- iii. Work/Life balance (Evidence usually garnered from current trainees speaking frankly. Different departments and different firms have their defined cultures and expectations of "screen time" or presence at work. It's an aspect of work in flux, especially for lawyers, emerging from "Lockdown" during Covid.)
 - iv. Social life within the firm (Solicit evidence from the trainees but look in particular for ways in which the firm supports activities important to you, eg.. free tickets to major cultural events or encouraging competitive sporting activities).
 - v. Level of conversion from vac scheme to training contract. (In other words, if law firms aim to convert 75% of vac schemers into trainee offers what are your chances when applying for a contract if you haven't had prior experience with them. Attending Open Days is a good thing to do if you haven't been accepted onto a vac scheme.). Similarly, retention rates for trainees into newly qualified roles might be important to you. These figures for the leading firms are regularly reported in the legal press such as [Lawyer2B.](#))
 - vi. International or client secondments (Worth factoring in for the experience in its own right but also insights into future career options of working abroad more long term or going "in house" as a lawyer in due course once qualified.
 - vii. Remuneration. There can be a wide variation between the major corporate City firms and say a regional mid-size firm or even one doing public funded work but don't forget to evaluate the likely "hourly rate" for the work you put in. Usually, high pay means long hours.
 - viii. Diversity & Inclusivity (Becoming increasingly important and especially relevant for law firms all of whom will have a policy and programmes in place. Research how closely what they do for specific groups matches your own values and aspirations of what is important.)
 - ix. Support from seniors and mentoring and buddy schemes. (A real help in your early years and beyond for both professional and personal development. Make sure to include it on your list of key criteria).
 - x. Internal professional networks. (Again, very important for the long term if staying within the firm or moving outside it to other areas. Trainees who qualify at the same time tend to stay in contact throughout their professional careers.)

For more sources of material and links to key sites when researching law firms see Appendix 3.

Planning the approach

Next it's time to plan your approach. Much will depend on which year you are in and which subject you are studying when you begin in earnest but remember you apply successfully when you are at your strongest and when it is the soonest and if you do find others around you have done more than you by the time you do make your efforts, don't worry. You will be able to get where you want to be in

due course. Everyone's timings are different and there is always the possibility of applying to a firm quite straightforwardly anything up to three years after you complete your course. The following are typical activities for you to consider and organise once you have compiled the list of firms in which you have an intention to apply.

- a) Check for deadlines and depending on your year it may be deadlines for applying to Open Days, Insight Weeks or Spring Weeks, summer or winter vac schemes or training contracts. Make a note of them wherever you are organising your application activities. Be clear whether the schemes accept applications on a "rolling basis" or against a fixed deadline and if the former make sure yours is in early. The main commercial law publications of LawCareers.Net and Student Chambers publish handy lists of the deadlines of the main firms.
- b) Make a note of the application tasks you will need to undertake and use the Careers Service Resources on Handshake to get some practice. Most of these you can be sure you'll be encountering in due course anyway and so you can practice as early as you want...even before you have collated a target list. Namely:

- CV that's been checked for effectiveness. Use the [CV and Applications Guide](#) to put one together if this is your first and then use [CareerSet](#) the AI driven CV analytical tool to improve it. What's crucial at this stage is that you've checked the specific competencies and strengths identified by the law firm in its graduate trainee specification and you've highlighted those when describing your experiences. Be careful to check. You might think they are all the same but despite there being much overlap you'll be surprised at the differences. And in describing your experiences which match these expectations use the vocabulary that's appropriate...compile some wordlists for yourself which allow you to describe analytical, organisational and team working skills in different words..
- Ability tests are now often the first filter applied because of high volumes of applicants and a threshold mark is used as a pass rate to progress to the next stage. Practice helps improve your scores. Use [GraduatesFirst](#) to get better and especially focus on the support material for Watson Glazer tests which are the main ones used...although others occasionally do feature with law firms. Again research the firms outline of their assessment practice to identify which will be using tests and which you should practice in advance.
- Asynchronous video interviews. Some law firms have used these for a while now. You are required to record your answers to pre recorded questions, speaking into your device against a clock counting down the time you have left available. You can practice these very effectively with [ShortList.Me](#) provided by the Careers Service as a resource.
- Connecting with Cambridge alumni in the firms that you wish to apply to is easy but pays rich dividends. You can contact them at a College level (ask the College Development Director or Alumni Relations Manager for a list to help you with insights), the Careers Service [Alumni Careers Connect](#)

platform and finally by using [LinkedIn](#) to search for alumni and either contact them for advice or simply review the career history highlighted in their profile for you to think of emulating or at least learn from.

- Make sure you have reviewed and noted when a firm will be “present” for a Cambridge audience either within your own college (usually organised by the college law society) or at a careers or social event organised in the [Cambridge University Law Society](#) term-card or at an event, fair or presentation on the Handshake diary from the Careers Service.

c) Meeting recruiters online and in physical settings. Its possible to meet with graduate recruiters online, at events, presentations and fairs. There is a great deal of advice available on how to make a good impression on such occasions. Watch the Carers Service video on “[Making the most of Careers Fairs](#)” and “[Questions to ask employers at Careers Fairs](#)”. However, its highly unlikely that the impression you make in a busy recruitment season will be such to stand out in the memory of most recruiters or indeed lead them to solicit or look out for your application. Rather you should use such occasions to find out something that will be useful for you. If there is a question you need answered don’t be afraid to ask it. If its important enough to help you, give the context before asking it and the recruiter will treat it seriously. It’s their job to present the firm as “good listeners”. In particular and despite any current situation being unusual ask for tangible examples. “How many visa applications has the firm made for international trainees in the last three years?”” What percentage of trainees were converted from previous vac scheme students?”

Pipeline Management

A question all students face answering at some point is “How many firms should I apply to? It’s an answer that’s made more complicated because:

Making good applications is time consuming given the research and individual attention required for each and this at a time when academic priorities often need to take precedence

At the early stages when nevertheless deadlines are pressing the level of knowledge about firms and identification of career preferences is still forming and taking shape.

Much remains unpredictable and therefore it’s easy to make too few applications. What’s the actual number of trainees a firm will take above those lucky enough to have been converted from a vacation scheme into a hire? How well will you do at the assessment centre stages when if all doesn’t go well it can be too late to add more firms to your pipeline of applications...especially if by then there is little recruitment activity in which to engage them.

These questions make it difficult to suggest an actual number as a guideline but students fall into three categories when making applications. Those who apply to a

handful of firms or less. This approach means more risk but less effort and usually a great deal more thoroughness. Then there are those that apply to about a dozen. For most this is the maximum amount of effort that can be spared from academic work and allows for a certain amount of “false steps” along the way. Finally, there are those that apply to more than a dozen and in some cases much more. This can be very demanding of time and as an approach should be discussed with a Careers Consultant if at all possible. It could be that mistakes are being made that are leading to rejections and are then being replicated in additional applications to more wasteful effort. And the subsequent impact on motivation can also be leading to an underperformance in making applications.

The next question to answer when managing your approach is “What is my Plan B (or even Plan C) if this round of applications fails?” You will usually need to wait a year and significantly add to your application material by building your profile before you can apply again. Possible Plan B options are:

- Try again next year. This means reflecting on what didn't work well enough in your applications and assessments and taking conscious steps to rectify it before next time. Typical areas where improvements might be needed are in being able to demonstrate commercial awareness adequately, interview performance especially in front of associates, inadequate amount of work experience especially in a relevant environment or one where your transferable skills have been enhanced, or in your motivational answers to firm's application form questions where the depth of research is needed to make your application stand out. All the above can be rectified over time before reapplying.
- Self fund the next stage of the qualification process and apply with more knowledge/qualifications on your CV
- Switch direction of your applications and work on a non trainee role within a firm whilst positioning yourself to make an “application from the inside.”
- Change the type of firms to which you are making applications to a genuine alternative. City law firms are extremely difficult to get into if you've not engaged with them from an early stage on one of their first year, ambassador or diversity programmes. Explore other options with firms you may not have known until you started looking again.
- Spend a year or two working in a legalistic environment to build up your career profile and apply to a firm as a mature candidate. Consult the “Guide to Alternative Legal Roles” for a wealth of ideas and suggestions some of which can be pursued as career outcomes in their own right and others which may act as a stepping stone to your career goal within a law firm.

Profile Building

Throughout your time as a student, and once you've graduated and are in the process of continuing to make applications, a strong relevant profile for the roles you

are applying for is key. Law firms hope to see elements within the profile of a successful applicant that match both what all law firms look for in general and also what each law firm looks for specifically in applicants they wish to progress. Having an appropriate profile validates and reassures a recruiter that you are a worthwhile candidate to interview. These elements include:

Academic performance

It's generally accepted that a strong academic transcript is a prerequisite for applying to commercial law firms. For Law students this tends to mean a 2:1 in all of your papers, for a non-law student it's a 2:1 overall performance. Students can get very concerned if there are occasional deviations from this consistency. If that's the case with you, you can do one of several things:

Explain the context that led to their marks being lower than expected. All application forms have a final box that allows for "Additional Information" and this is most often used by students to explain their academic marks. (It isn't necessary however to explain why you didn't get a First.) If there were mitigating circumstances then be open about them so the recruiter will make an informed decision. You can also provide additional evidence as part of your application that attests more appropriately to your academic ability and therefore, in the eyes of the recruiter, intellectual ability. Offering to provide a reference from your DoS or highlighting your supervision reports and expected exam marks are both tangible pieces of evidence. You could also highlight anything you've done especially well, for example, in student legal essay competitions,

Student Societies

Anyone interested in the Law as a career will probably have taken up some of the many opportunities to engage with societies. Those interested would naturally look to joining societies which deliver vocational content, opportunities for networking and skills insights in the form of career workshops. As well as the main [Cambridge University Law Society](#) each college will have its own Law Society which will get involved with the alumni of the college who make a point of maintaining contact and support for those interested in law as a career.

Online presence

There is a positive side to providing recruiters with an attractive online presence by highlighting a link in your personal details to your LinkedIn profile. Not only can a recruiter see whether your activities and interest endorse what you say in your other application material but for those who are especially active online you can post material that demonstrates your interests and provides further evidence of analytical and writing ability. Recruiters will also take a quick look at what individuals or organisations you are following. But there is also a potentially negative side to your online presence that most students are aware of when they leave a digital footprint they would prefer future employers not to see. For the most part recruiters won't spend time

trying to find damaging material but as you will be joining a regulated profession once you qualify it's not unusual for most large firms to check all the verifiable details that you have provided as part of your application which occasionally may highlight something. The advice is to use your own best judgement if you feel an employer will spot something and talk with a Careers Consultant if you are concerned about information about you that reached a higher than usual profile.

For those looking to get started with LinkedIn there is a handy Careers Essential video on "[Using LinkedIn](#)" Additionally recruiters will engage directly with students from which they would like to solicit interest in their vacancies and events and to do that they will refer to your Handshake profile. Again there is a short Careers Service video that helps you when [Getting Started](#) with setting up an effective profile.

Extracurricular activities

A final aspect of a student profile that can appeal to a recruiter is the demonstration of "advocacy" or "representation" either as an individual, part of a society or in your time away from Cambridge volunteering or helping others. Although a more or less essential pre requisite for a career at the Bar (and there are formal opportunities to engage with this) for solicitors also there is always the sense that either in representing a client's position or making your own case for a course of action to be taken by a team you will be advised to be able to advocate effectively. Indeed, often the group task you will encounter as part of a legal assessment centre will require an element of argument or consensus building where you need to be able to demonstrate assertiveness in presenting your ideas without resorting to defensiveness or aggression. Beyond that most large law firms will offer you a seat in "litigation" as part of your qualified work experience or even a role within a Litigation department upon qualifying if that suits your skills and interests. So, it's entirely relevant and desirable in widening your options to take on any opportunity to represent and argue on behalf of another individual, a group or a "cause".

Relevant experience (including work experience)

Most firms would like to see that you have experience of the type of work that occurs in their type of law firm and that you are aware of the distinctive work cultures within which they operate. In both these ways the recruiter knows that you understand what's important. Ideally you experience their office environment at some point (which is why the summer and winter vac schemes they advertise are ideal).but this is not always possible. And at the very least recruiters like to see evidence of the generic type of work they undertake. So if you can't find a vac scheme then making successful unsolicited applications to law firms local to you or volunteering for a front facing role in a legal charity are all respected forms of work experience on your CV. Summer vacation schemes in law firms are for two weeks duration but if you find relevant work experience for yourself try to make it a little more immersive for say four weeks at least if not longer.

During “lockdown” many firms opted to provide “virtual” vacation schemes or internships. These were quite substantive featuring a focussed set of tasks with outputs which simulated the experience of working online as you would even when in an office. However total time required to complete was usually no more than 8 hours. And students did multiple instances of these all of which showed a commitment to gain insights and practice skills. Law firms have since said that they prefer these virtual activities to be listed in the “extracurricular” section on your CV or in a “Legal activities and interests” section rather than under “Work experience”.

Completing work experience of whatever sort provides you with tangible evidence on which to base the motivational statements you will make in applications. What you assert to be the case is no longer simply an assertion. Rather it’s backed up by evidence of experience. Secondly it makes your application stand out and be engaging. The recruiter is unlikely to have seen another application like yours when it includes such details and so is reading it afresh. Thirdly it gives you the self confidence to speak fluently in an interview. It’s your story, you know the detail and you know the recruiter wants to hear how you tell it.

Volunteering

As noted already volunteering with a legal charity does impress recruiters. It shows commitment and a recognition of what they look for in candidate. In other words once again, they have confidence that you know what you are doing. There are many appropriate legal charities, but they don’t necessarily inform the Careers Service about their vacancies. In fact they may have an open recruitment process where any individual can apply all year round as they have a constant need for volunteers and not just during university vacation periods. Quite a few of the most popular and most relevant schemes have been collated into a Handshake Resource entitled “**Volunteering for a Legal Charity**”. It’s located as part of “[Graduate Digital Publications](#)” under the Law section.

Positions of responsibility

Some of the most desirable traits in the profiles of successful applications to law firms list experience demonstrating “taking initiative, assuming responsibility, and affecting positive change”. All of these are required when working together with other students on improving something or developing something new whereby they all rely on each other to complete an interdependent set of tasks. For legal careers in particular the types of specific duties, actions or roles involve attention to detail about a regulatory or formal process. This equates to either a Treasurer or Secretary role on a committee because such roles require dealing with formal documents, managing paperwork, understanding and applying the rules in any given situation, negotiating, advocating or representing the group in person or in written submission with senior or other regulatory bodies and so on. The vocabulary of responsibility is an excellent one to appear in applications. There is a well-

known saying about lawyers working in teams. "Everyone is playing the same game but the lawyer has to have read all the rules".

Legal activities especially skills workshops

Don't overlook these on a CV or within an application. There are many ways to join in with workshops that are either run independently or in conjunction with law firm staff, recruiters as well as trainees and associates. You'll find skills workshops advertised in the Careers Service Handshake diary online, in student society term cards, in events listings by law course providers or third-party support agencies such as those enhancing diversity and inclusivity. All recognise the value of workshops and all are there for you to participate in. Having done so they can appear within your "Legal activities and interests" section on your CV or application, quoting the names of law firms with which you were able to interact.

Transferable skills

All the above should have convinced you by now that transferable skills (and personal strengths) are there to be developed from a wealth of activities outside of those that are very specifically legally orientated. Check out the skills and strengths listed in law firm trainee recruitment material and you'll find that many will be familiar to you from your University activities. They normally will include, team working, organising, attention to detail, creativity, resilience, analytical ability in a word based environment, exercising responsibility and so on. Ideally talk with recruiters whenever you can to confirm what attributes they look for in candidates and especially ask what for them makes a candidate "stand out". They may well come up with something personal, specific, surprising and useful for you to match in the way you present your experiences

Commercial awareness – your hidden asset.

Commercial awareness is a topic that deserves a guideline all to itself. Firstly, there is no uniform consistency about what any two law firms mean by it and how they compare. They may mean an understanding and appreciation of the factors influencing the law firm itself as it operates as a business, or they may mean an appreciation of what is affecting their clients and the economic arena as a whole. Secondly commercial awareness isn't a topic that is taught. It's for students very much to work on their own with the resources they find available (and this includes attending workshops mentioned above. Simply because of its opacity it's a topic often offered up by those wishing to generate an attentive audience. Thirdly it's an area of knowledge that necessitates constant updating, refreshing, and current awareness. By itself this generates too much information to absorb within a busy student schedule so finally there has to be an element of selectivity in where to apply your attention. For now the best way to prepare along the lines of connecting with what your law firm of choice needs is to identify the following resources as valuable:

Press releases and client briefings on law firm websites together with following anyone within the firm who is “blogging” or “tweeting” will identify what’s of commercial relevance.

Using your free access to the major national newspapers especially the FT or following the commercial topics on Lawyer2B will keep you up to date with some more independent content

Following specific commercial awareness series hosted by information suppliers such as [Law Careers.Net](#) or [Bright Network](#) will be a way of someone else selecting the topics for you.

Combining all this source material will let you answer the oft asked question on applications or assessments centres of “What do you think will most affect our firm/our clients in the near future and with what outcomes?” Remember above all there may be no right or wrong answer to such questions and its unlikely that your information will be better than those asking you but what is hoped for is that you have some interesting insights that you base on interpreting tangible information which you deliver in an obviously engaging way. Can you hold an interesting conversation about a commercial issue which you might be expected to do with a client or other team member. Can you spot all the stakeholders involved in commercial stories (more than you think), do you quickly form views on risks and opportunities and strengths and weaknesses of those involved, and can you structure an argument or interpretation which stands up but which can also be modified as additional information and detail becomes known.

Positioning yourself in advance with a firm.

There are a number of ways in which law firms begin early to connect with students which subsequently can enhance either the chances of a successful application by a student or which accelerate them through the process. These include:

College Law Society officer. Some law firms engage proactively with colleges in developing their profile and is so doing encouraging applications. Whilst targeting of Cambridge as a whole has fallen away somewhat amongst the magic circle firms activities at a college level especially when delivered via Cambridge alumni have continued. If you are the individual in the college liaising with the recruiters within a law firm you are in a unique position to impress and to access advice and get to understand the firm well. This inevitably aids with an application.

Law firm Ambassador. For the most part colleges prohibit students taking on term time roles as Ambassadors for law firms. Such roles often require promoting or publicising opportunities at the firm, providing students with an opportunity to ask questions and to feed back to the firm what successful initiatives are being undertaken by their competitors. Cambridge students do seem to manage to take on these roles and to follow their college guidelines.

The benefits of being in a liaison role with recruiters are the same as outlined above.

Diversity scheme participant. Law firms are in the forefront of those in the City that actively reach out to groups of students under-represented in their applicant pool and therefore trainees. They will either support their own firmwide specific scheme or more likely they will work with one or more of the following organisations. If you meet the criteria to participate with one of these organisations you will receive opportunities to engage with the firm and thereby enhance your research and be looked upon favourably as an applicant. They include:

[Bright Network](#) who in particular host an annual virtual internship programme for firms

[Aspiring Solicitors](#)

[SEO London](#)

[Rare Recruitment](#)

Research each diversity support organisation to see which schemes and events they have on offer and which law firms they work with as their sponsors. Groups of students they offer programmes to include those based on ethnicity, disability, LGBT, neurodiversity, and social disadvantage. Recognising the value of a firm's Corporate Social Responsibility programme (CSR) or sponsored pro bono activities. Nearly all law firms will provide their staff with time and funding to pursue individual or firm centred support for charities and other causes. They will be very likely to identify these on their website. Whilst it shouldn't come top of your list of reasons for applying to the firm it nevertheless is worth acknowledging in your application by saying how much such general and particular endeavours resonate with your own personal values.

Appendices

Appendix:1 Applying successfully to public interest led law firms

Whilst it is often easy to list the main and many commercial and corporate law firms in which to be interested it can be much more difficult to locate those involved in civil liberties and human rights. Here is a starting list sourced from the [Chambers & Partners](#) UK Directory.

Bhatt Murphy, Bindmans, Birnberg Pierce, Deighton Pierce Glynn, Hickman & Rose, Hodge Jones & Allen, Howard Kennedy, Irvine Mitchell, Irvine Thanvi, Leigh Day, Simpson Millar, Simons Muirhead Burton, and Wilson Solicitors.

These firms tend to be much smaller than the larger ones encountered in the corporate sector and because they often are publicly funded for much of the work they do they can be subject to more financial constraints than those servicing large organisations. Fortunately for them there is a considerably large number of would be applicants to work with them who are students keen to bring together their skills as a

lawyer with their motivational interests and values in using the law to enhance access to justice for those less advantaged in society and in other ways develop public good.

When making effective applications however there will be differences you encounter, namely:

- i. There will be a more obvious need to demonstrate your motivational values around supporting the sort of groups or individuals you'll encounter as potential future clients. This could be by involving yourself in relevant societies (especially the Pro Bono Project) or in volunteering over a longer period for a legal charity or a cause close to your heart.
- ii. These firms typically don't sponsor the conversion or vocational stages of a graduates qualifying process. This means two things. Firstly students will have to access other sorts of funding or finance their continuing studies in other ways (perhaps studying part time for example) and secondly it may take longer to progress given the need to manage funding.
- iii. Significant periods as a paralegal for such firms is the norm for building a profile and making successful applications. These firms need you to be experienced and proficient at a much earlier stage when being exposed to clients. There won't be large teams around you conducting transactional work according to a clearly established framework. You will have more responsibility from the start with your own caseload. So this means developing your level of experience in roles before you fully qualify, enhancing your skills and deepening your knowledge. The first step after you have completed a vocational qualification such as the LPC or SQE I will be to paralegal.
- iv. In building your knowledge it is much more likely you'll consider completing a relevant LLM at some point which has the additional benefits of giving you more time to deliver support to pro bono or volunteering activities whilst being a student. You can easily locate appropriate course using the [Prospects](#) website where you can also specify "location" as a search field. There are many on offer so compare and contrast according to your individual circumstances but the one offered by [University College London](#) would be a good benchmark. Either consult LinkedIn using the course name to search for Cambridge alumni to speak to or ask the admission team of the University you are thinking of applying to find out more about the course.
- v. The challenging nature of the work and the pressures involved can be more than in a corporate environment. Recruiters need to know you've understood this. So whilst you paralegal or in talking with practitioners who are alumni you can assure yourself and the firm that you are clear and well motivated to rise to the demands.
- vi. It is especially important to keep up to date and well informed about issues surrounding access to justice and government policies on immigration, asylum, housing, mental health, prison reform and much, much more.

Signing up to the most relevant law blogs, following lawyers on Twitter and reading the news in the broadsheet press are all especially important to do, to demonstrate and to quote from in the application process.

Appendix 2. The Top Five Tips Checklist

1. Make sure you have a coherent target list of firms on your list. What criteria did you use?
2. Contact alumni in the firms wherever possible for insights to quote during interviews
3. Make sure your online profile is attractive to law firm values and aspirations for its trainees
4. Interact with recruiters from the firm at skills events, fairs, online chats, webinars, college and law society networking. Use an approach engaging with a diversity programme or a diversity third party with which they collaborate.
5. Understand what current commercial issues will affect the firm and its clients and in what way. Be able to articulate why this context has led you to chose the firm as one to apply to.

Appendix 3 Links to other key research resources

Much information exists online produced by the publishers of commercial graduate law material on this topic. Below are a few more sources to consult which all have useful additional ideas to consider.

[How to research a law firm properly](#) – Student Chambers (This is a useful link for explaining the usefulness of the main Chambers and Partners UK Directory as well as the benefits of the student version. It also provides a handy link to more reviews based on trainee feedback, a picture of salaries and retention rates for newly qualified, and which firms offer overseas opportunities.

[How to research law firms](#) – The Student Lawyer. This link has a focus on using Google alerts to follow a firm and using social media.

[How to research law firms](#) – The Lawyer. This list of ips focusses on current events and differentiating firms.

[17 websites you can use to research law firms.](#) – Shearman & Sterling. This site is different being developed by a law firm itself giving you their view on which other sites are best to use. A great round up.