

A day in the life of a Commercial Disputes Resolution (CDR) trainee

Ruby O'Hara gives us an insight of her role in the Commercial Disputes Resolution team.

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Monday mornings in Commercial Dispute Resolution ("CDR") kick off with a team meeting. With lawyers across Browne Jacobson's Nottingham and Manchester offices, we're able to catch-up as a team and figure out what the week ahead holds. This is a really good opportunity for everyone to share with each other what sort of work they are dealing with, or if they have the capacity to take on new work and who will need assistance with their matters.

This weekly meeting is the only predictable part of my routine, as the work in CDR is so varied! Despite being a Manchester-based trainee, the Nottingham team often delegate work to me, giving me exposure to lots of different types of litigation (and clients!). In Manchester, one associate supervises me on a 1-to-1 basis, as our team is fairly small. But when picking up work from the Nottingham team, supervision can be from several senior lawyers. I've also been asked to assist with projects that are based in the Nottingham office.

I've been heavily involved in many commercial disputes that initially started as 'Quick Call' queries, in which schools ask the firm quick questions that can be about anything and everything! This is a brilliant opportunity for client contact because the client will email and phone us directly. However, as these enquiries are often about substantial, complicated matters, they frequently turn into stand-alone instructions. This has allowed me to run several of my own cases for client schools. These have involved conducting short interviews with the clients to find out exactly what the issue is, discussing the issue with my supervisor, creating a plan of action and then advising the client directly. These matters have ranged from simple contractual enquiries to complex – and sometimes bizarre – disputes.

CDR works in collaboration with lots of other departments, particularly the Education team. This is great for me as a trainee as I often end up dabbling in matters that I wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to work on. For example, recently I've been working with the Financial & Public Risk team on an insurance project for one of the firm's biggest clients!

As you'd expect, working in CDR involves appearing at court. But these appearances are fairly rare because most disputes are resolved before trial. Having said that, I did attend court for an uncontested bankruptcy hearing. It was great to sit in the meeting room with the client before we went into the hearing. Listening to them tell stories that could have been taken straight out of a soap opera script was incredibly entertaining!

With this exposure, CDR gives trainees a brilliant grounding for both commercial projects and other forms of litigation.

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