


Five misconceptions about the solicitor apprenticeship

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Browne Jacobson's solicitor apprenticeship provides junior lawyers with valuable legal experience and the opportunity to develop their professional skills from early on in their legal careers. However, leaving school and entering a law firm as a young and inexperienced junior led me to question what I actually knew about the profession, and from that grew several assumptions about my new role.

Hopefully, speaking about these five misconceptions will help to ease any concerns you may have about applying for an apprenticeship and the incredible journey you will go on as a solicitor apprentice.

1. I won't be trusted or given any responsibility

One of my biggest concerns was that, as a junior without a law degree, I wouldn't be given the same level of responsibility as a trainee solicitor. In reality, this couldn't be further from the truth. By the end of my first week, I was already handling my first matter. Depending on the department you're in, you may even run your own caseload, always under supervision.

As an apprentice, the firm cares very deeply about your training journey and ensuring that you are exposed to the right level of work. Your supervisors want to challenge you, but also ensure you are comfortable and have access to opportunities to best demonstrate your skills.

2. I'm going to miss out on the social aspect of university

I had originally applied to both university and apprenticeship programmes, but I was always apprehensive about the debt I would incur at university and the risk of not securing a training contract after I'd finish my course. I also really enjoyed the work experience I had been involved in during my A-Levels and knew that the 9-5 structure of the apprenticeship and working on the job appealed to me.

But then I had some reservations about the apprenticeship route, would I make friends? Am I going to miss out on the university social life? Will there be societies or groups I can join?

However, when I started my apprenticeship at Browne Jacobson, I quickly realised the firm offered plenty of ways to get involved whether through societies, organising events, or even suggesting new initiatives.

Individual departments often organise socials and the firm runs events throughout the year that you can both get involved with organising and attending. These are great places to meet people from across the firm and network with your colleagues.

3. There's no work-life balance in the legal profession

Although it is a given that there may be evenings where you are required to work past 5 o'clock, there is no expectation that you should be working late into the night unless, of course, the nature of your work requires you to.

Teams are supportive in ensuring that juniors are not overworked or overloaded, and that their workload is manageable. If you have concerns surrounding your workload or working hours, raise this with your line manager – there is no one in the firm that will make you feel less for doing so.

4. I need to know everything about the seat or area of law I'm going into

The firm do not expect you to know everything (or anything at all when you first start). Your supervisors and line manager know that you have most likely come from a non-legal background, whether that is with a degree in another subject, with little to no legal work experience, or straight from A-Levels.

I've come to realise that no one on your team expects you to know everything. You can ask as many questions as you need—even the same one more than once—and there will always be someone happy to help.

5. You are guaranteed a job after your apprenticeship

One of the best pieces of advice I received from the head of my current team was to treat your apprenticeship like a six-and-a-half-year long interview. Every day, show up to work with a positive mindset and take each piece of work as it comes, but also share your struggles with your supervisors and ask for help where you need to.

An assumption I have heard (and have also been asked) is that solicitor apprentices are guaranteed a job with their firm after their apprenticeship concludes. In reality, securing a role after your apprenticeship isn't automatic. Like any other trainee solicitor or external applicant, you'll need to decide where you want to qualify and go through an interview process for your desired role. My advice would be to build your network, work hard, ask questions, and seize as many opportunities as possible.

Good luck on your apprenticeship journey!

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