

## **Trainee Account 1**

### **How I obtained my Training Contract**

The process of obtaining your training contract requires plenty of patience and perseverance. Your applications will be rejected or ignored more often than you receive a positive response. By way of academic background I received 395 points in the Leaving Certificate and two 2:1 degrees in college. Therefore I was not a candidate with 500 points and a 1:1 in the bag. My situation was that I wanted to remain in Galway throughout my training contract and so in applying for a traineeship I limited my applications to firms in Galway or within a commutable distance. This limited my options significantly as of the current PPC 1 intake roughly 85% are with Dublin based firms.

Upon my completion of the FE-1s in 2017 I began handing out CVs around Galway City. This was in addition to keeping an eye on the Jobs Section of the Law Society website and applying to any Traineeships advertised which fitted my criteria. I was offered work experience with a sole practitioner around this time which I did for much of the summer while I was applying for my traineeship. This was useful not just for learning the trade but also as while this Solicitor did not take on any trainees herself she was able to put me in contact with some of her colleagues who did.

Towards the end of the summer of 2017 I received my first offer of a training contract. This was from a small firm regional firm with two offices in Connacht. I had dropped in my CV by hand and the position was not advertised. I was interviewed for the position in August which was in fact after the deadline for applications to PPC1 but I was advised that a place was there for me should I accept.

My reason for declining this opportunity was two-fold. Firstly, I felt it was too rushed. Due to the deadline having passed for applications to PPC1, I had little or no thinking time once the offer was put on the table. I knew this was a huge decision and I didn't feel comfortable having such a short window to mull things over. Secondly, not only would the firm not be paying me while I was in Blackhall (which they were not obliged to as I would not commence working in the office until after PPC1), but I would only be receiving €200 per week while in the office which is well below the minimum trainee wage as required by the Law Society. It just wasn't financially viable for me to accept this offer and so even though it meant waiting another year to attend Blackhall I decided to reject the offer.

The same week I rejected this offer the Solicitor I had been working with put me in contact with a close colleague of hers who I had applied to earlier in the summer. Even though it was a small office, at the time I applied they had two Legal Assistants in place who would be attending Blackhall the following September in 2018. Since I had applied, one of these Legal Assistants had left the office and as a result a position had become available. I interviewed for the position and was offered a contract for a probationary period of three months with a view to training with the firm and attending Blackhall a year later. I was required to start immediately and so I accepted the offer.

Therefore, in the space of a few days I was offered two training contracts. This same week I was also invited to interview with a medium sized firm in Galway which had been the firm I hoped to train with all along having heard positive things about the office. Again that week I was also contacted by a top 10 firm who invited me to interview. I spent the weekend deciding whether to attend or not as I was to commence my new job the following Monday and therefore would need time off work for either interview. Before I had a chance to respond to this large firm I was contacted by a member of their HR department looking to expedite my response as their partners were very impressed with my application. This shocked me as I didn't think any top 10 would be interested in a candidate like me, let alone be impressed by my application. While I know they would have invited dozens to interview I was still surprised to know that a firm that size was interested in me. I ultimately didn't attend either of these interviews as I didn't want to inconvenience my new employer. In hindsight I believe this was a mistake as I should have put my interests first.

Due to financial difficulties at the office I had joined I was let go at the end of my three month probation period as the office could not afford to send two trainees to Blackhall simultaneously. In the New Year I secured a Training Contract with a small General Practice in Athlone. This is the firm I am now training with and I thoroughly enjoyed my time there prior to Blackhall. They cover a very broad range of areas of law which is important for a Trainee as you want to broaden your horizons where possible. Also with a practice this size you are given a great deal of responsibility in comparison to a larger firm where you are further down the food chain.

I hope that the above is useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows that you need to be patient. I had been applying for months throughout the summer of 2017 and rarely even received a response. Then all of a sudden in the space of little over a week I received two offers and was invited to interview with a further two firms.

Secondly, you should sell yourself and not downplay your achievements. I had received a response from one particular Solicitor who said I should be playing up my academic results rather than coming up with excuses as to why I didn't achieve higher. Similarly don't rule out a larger firm if that's what you want just because you think they would have no interest in you. On one occasion I interviewed with a top 15 firm who again I was surprised were even interested. I subsequently found out that when selecting candidates to interview they will purposely select some who are not high academic achievers. The reason for this being that one of the partners who interviewed me did not have a particularly impressive Leaving Cert and so they were well aware that the points you receive when sitting the Leaving Cert is not necessarily indicative of your quality or otherwise as a Trainee.

Thirdly, deciding what firm is for you is very subjective and therefore you shouldn't necessarily base your decision on the experience of others. There are pros and cons to every firm. Training with a large firm carries with it greater prestige and financial remuneration although your work life balance will suffer. On the other hand you are more likely to receive broader training with a smaller firm where there are no departments and you will be given more responsibility at an early stage. Needless to say the remuneration will not be as good as with a large firm. These are all considerations that have to be deliberated over by all potential trainees as they go about deciding what sort of firm they would like to train with.

Securing a training contract is a difficult and stressful journey which we all have to go but is ultimately worth it in the end.

Best of luck!

## **Trainee Account 2**

### **How I found my contract**

I thought the process of obtaining a traineeship was universal and applied to everyone the same way however in hindsight, I realised a traineeship can be much more elusive.

I attended a secondary school in Dublin then studied Law (LLB) at Trinity College Dublin. This was a relatively large course and was 4 years long. I chose not to complete my third year abroad on Erasmus and upon completion of the degree I achieved a 2.1 grade. I worked part-time throughout college although not in the legal sector.

My plan throughout college was to obtain a traineeship however I have no family or close friends within the legal sector so wasn't sure on the process of starting down this career path.

At the beginning of third year, I heard of a few of my peers that had obtained internships that summer at some of the large Dublin firms and a smaller number that had been offered training contracts at the end of their time there. This gave me a motivational kick to apply for internships, both at legal firms and accounting/consulting firms (such as KPMG and Deloitte) for the summer after third year. I applied to probably 10 firms (all of them well-known and based in Dublin) as I was under the impression that everyone who studied law/business would secure an internship fairly easily.

I was called for several interviews and I thought they went well and I assumed at that time that relatively good grades and an ability to speak well in an interview would suffice, however I wasn't offered any positions as a result of the interviews.

These interviews were held around April so I applied to some smaller legal firms and investment firms to try and gain some experience that summer as I was aware of the looming 'milk rounds' that happen every October.

Again I was called for a few more interviews with no luck. At this point I had finished my third year college exams and was starting to panic.

I decided to contact a family friend who worked in a law related semi-state agency, wondering if he could facilitate me working in his department for free for a few weeks in order to gain some experience within a commercial environment.

Fortunately, he had contacted a former colleague of his who was a partner in a large legal firm in Dublin who had a very busy litigation team that needed an extra pair of hands during the months before the courts closed.

I was delighted with this and of course agreed. I ended up working on the team for July and August however I was not part of the summer internship programme at all

and had to apply for a training contract in the same manner as a person who had never worked there before.

During my fourth year of college, I applied to as many legal firms in Dublin as I could and centred my applications around my experience gained that summer. I revised my whole CV and got advice from peers who had already obtained traineeships as to what their CVs looked like. I also took a lot of time including practical examples in my applications and tailoring cover letters to suit the firm I was applying to.

I got called for several interviews and found that my experience within a law firm seemed to really help, particularly, as I could now draw on practical examples of my skills and traits. I was offered a traineeship in a firm I really like which I of course accepted.

On review of the whole traineeship search process, my main piece of advice is to try and gain any sort of practical business/legal/office experience that you can as this is a strong factor in an interviewer's decision as to whether or not you will be competent during your traineeship.

This can be easier said than done but I would recommend contacting smaller local firms and offering to work for free for a few weeks (I know this may not be possible for some). Registering with temping agencies can also be helpful on this front as they can provide work in business/legal firms on a short term basis very quickly which can add to your experience when applying for traineeships.

Other tips I would suggest include the following:

- when applying to firms, carry out as much research as you can on that specific firm, particularly recent awards they have received or if they have been in the media recently for obtaining a new client/representing a well-known client and be aware of the areas of law the firm specialises in.

- This applies to cover letters to firms as well; I got my cover letters to a stage where I could use the same template for each but I always included a paragraph specific to the firm I was applying to; a deeper level of knowledge about the firm will stand out to whoever first reviews the applications as it implies that not only you're looking for a traineeship but that you want one specifically with that firm (I've discovered that law firms really value loyalty).

- If you are called for interview, try and find out who your interviewers will be and again research what you can on them, for example, if you know one is a Litigation Partner and you're interested in that area then you can steer the conversation this way to allow you to express this interest during the interview.

- Regarding the awful question 'what have you done since you first applied, it's crucial that you have a valid answer for this, whether it be passing some FE1 exams, doing an online course that relates to law or even furthering your interest in a specific

area of law and attending a few events/talks on that topic through your former university/college. I find this question isn't to try and catch candidates out but it's an opportunity to show interviewers that you're still committed (and hopefully even more so) to obtaining a traineeship.

- Continue to apply for internships as well as traineeships as these internship programs have become the basis from which law firms hire their trainees for many firms.
- Job recruitment websites can be really useful in finding a paralegal or short term intern position (outside the formal recruitment times of summer internships and milk rounds) and these will add to your CV as well as getting your foot in the door with the law firm offering this position to secure a more long term contract.

Best of luck to everyone.

## **Trainee Account 3**

### **How I found my training contract**

I decided to study law for various vague reasons, as many eighteen year olds do, namely because I liked reading and writing, it's a broad subject, I wanted to help people and I thought I would automatically get a good job at the end of my degree. It wasn't until my final year that I actually thought about what I was going to do after graduating. I returned to Trinity after my third year abroad to find that half my year already had training contracts and the panic began.

After missing the deadline for traineeship applications in autumn, I decided to apply for a few summer internships in the big firms. Surrounded by over-achievers, I felt like I wouldn't even get to the interview stage, particularly as my grades were average, but I successfully got an interview with two of the big firms and succeeded in getting a 4 week summer internship in one of them. At this stage I had no legal experience, but I had worked various part-time jobs throughout college in restaurants *etc.*, so I discussed this in my application, as well as my year abroad and some extra-curricular activities. Really at this early stage, if you have a well written application, and can illustrate that you have a strong work ethic (part-time jobs) and interests outside the law (sport, volunteering and societies *etc.*), then you stand as good a chance as anyone. The hardest part is getting the interview. As a starting point, I read over applications of friends who had already successfully gotten traineeships for inspiration. I then printed out the application forms of each firm and wrote out draft answers, then further condensed and amended them until I was happy. Don't underestimate small details such as spelling and grammar and sticking to the word limit. It's quite tedious but worth the effort.

I was delighted I had obtained a paid internship in a corporate firm but I was also interested in human rights and social justice and wanted to gain experience in these areas too, which are harder to come by. I attended a talk in college on "alternative careers in law" and got chatting to two women, one from a community legal centre and another from FLAC. I expressed my interest in these organisations and we exchanged email addresses. I subsequently followed up by emailing them both my CV and on foot of this, I got a 6 week internship in the legal centre and I began volunteering with FLAC on a monthly basis, which I still do today over 3 years later. To get the foot in the door of smaller and charitable organisations, you need to make contacts as they don't usually have formal applications, so I would encourage people to attend talks and events where there's potential to mingle.

I didn't receive a traineeship after the internship and I turned down a longer position in the legal centre as it was unpaid so I felt like I was back to square one at the end of the summer. I didn't even know if I wanted to pursue law anymore. In a desperate attempt for a job I got in contact with a very distant relative of mine (who I had never met!), a solicitor in a medium-sized firm in town. She was lovely and gave me some helpful advice over the phone, and also set up an interview for me in her firm. I was successful and worked there for a year as a legal executive.

I contemplated doing the fe1s but was still unsure about a career as a solicitor so instead I decided to do an LLM in a niche area that I had always had an interest in.

The master's opened up further voluntary and interning opportunities. I applied for more internships and got one in another big firm and was offered a traineeship at the end. It was only after getting the traineeship that I felt motivated enough to do the fe1s. I spent the following year studying and working part-time in a local solicitor's office. It was hard work but it was definitely worth it - In my opinion PPC1 is much more fulfilling and interesting than studying law at undergraduate level because it's more practical and you really appreciate the college lifestyle after being in the office.

My tips for applying for traineeships:

1. Use every avenue to find some legal experience - apply through company websites and the law society job section, ask relatives and friends, send your CV to local offices, volunteer in legal centres/NGOs, use recruitment agencies.
2. Try to get experience in a wide variety of places, e.g. big firms, medium-sized firms, sole practitioners, in-house, NGOs, abroad *etc.* What you like the most might surprise you.
3. Have interests outside the law - volunteering, sport and traveling *etc.* Employers want to see that you are a well-rounded person.
4. Attention to detail - read over your application again and again until it's perfect. Ask another person to read over it too. Make sure you address the correct firm and take key words from their website to show them that you've done research into their particular values.
5. Give your CV an edge/personality - for me, my master's and voluntary experience related to a particular area of interest of mine, that I decided not to pursue in the end. It really doesn't matter if it is unrelated to the work of the firm that you are applying for. As long as you are passionate about *something*, this will help you (1) to get an interview (it will make your CV stand out among the thousands and (2) in the interview (it gives you something interesting to talk about).
6. Don't give up if it takes some time, it's not a race and every bit of experience you gain along the way will be useful in the future.

Good luck!

## **Trainee Account 4**

I have come from a mature student perspective and I inadvertently sought my traineeship by looking for summer work to gain some office experience before completing my studies in Business Studies in Waterford Institute of Technology. This was back in 2002 and I was 22 years old at the time. I submitted my CV (having worked part-time in the local supermarket in Thurles, Co. Tipperary) to an ad in the Irish Examiner for a part-time receptionist position / legal secretary. I received a phone call asking had I completed my degree and how competent was I with Microsoft Office. I explained I was seeking work experience for the summer months and I was asked to attend for interview a week later which I did.

On the way to this office, I met with the office building porter who explained that the firm's trainee was leaving and that the 'word around the building' was that they were looking for new trainees. I did not envisage that I would be a lawyer but I headed up to the third floor of the office building and met my prospective employers for interview. We had a fairly informal discussion and I was asked to attend for work the following Monday. Upon starting, I worked on every file and every task they gave me to the point that by the end of the summer, I was asked to stay on and consider studying law by night. I did not take too long to consider this and immediately accepted their proposal. It meant that I would work as a trainee whilst studying law by night. I learned not only secretarial skills but during my time, I had gained a considerable amount of responsibility to interview clients, assist with company law matters and run litigation files by myself.

In 2007, I successfully completed my law degree by night (after completing a legal diploma in 2002 while waiting for the evening BCL to start in 2003). I attempted the FE-1's but did not take them too seriously and left this firm for a start-up firm outside of the city where I would gain experience in conveyancing. I also worked in this firm as a trainee and had my own office and ran my own litigation and conveyancing files. However by 2008, the recession had started and I found myself like a lot of legal staff unemployed. My old firm insisted that I rejoin them which I did for 3 years but by 2011, I decided that I needed to make a decent salary and decided upon a different career route. I entered into Supply Chain Management and commenced studying for this career in UL through a job bridge scheme. At the time, I was working in Dell through work placement provided by UL and shadowing Supply Chain Managers.

At the same time, I was also working on a part-time basis (and at weekends) for a number of law firms in Cork to make ends meet. Even though I was changing my career due to the recession, I knew that I was much happier in law and wanted to stay in this career so I kept my options open. During this time (2011 - 2015) I worked in a number of firms, some as a secretary but others as a quasi-trainee solicitor / paralegal role where I managed the firm's litigation department and worked on medical negligence and personal injury cases.

By 2015, I decided it was time to make a move towards actually qualifying as a solicitor as at this stage, there was a small pickup in Cork in legal work. I printed out as many copies of my CV as possible and walked the length and breadth of Cork city handing in my CV, meeting with Solicitors and seeing if I could actually get some

legal work. I started in one firm as a legal secretary to cover a secretary who was getting married and effectively had secured 2 weeks' work. After the two weeks had passed I was asked to stay on and work in the firm and I sat the FE-1s in 2016. I worked right up to the date of the exams and passed my first four exams in October 2016. At this stage I was offered a traineeship upon completion of the other four exams, which I did by October 2017. By this stage I was 37, married and by December of 2017, my wife announced that she was pregnant.

So here I am today in PPC1, commuting from Thurles mid-week and to Cork at the weekends to see my wife and little boy, whilst juggling professional and personal life on my road to qualifying as a solicitor. It has been a long route for me but I have learned so much and have had such a vast amount of experience and I have thoroughly enjoyed the process.

## Trainee Account 5

At the outset I would like to say that securing a training contract is not an exact science. Every firm is looking for different traits, different backgrounds and different qualifications. That's why it's important not to compare yourself too much to others and to focus on your own strengths and what sets you apart.

Although I studied law I never considered myself capable of a career as a solicitor and it wasn't until third year I realised my classmates were applying for internships in the various firms and I decided as this seemed to be the norm, I would apply as well. The application and interview process can be gruelling and you'll want to do anything else, but it is necessary and worth it in the long run. I completed two internships in summer of third year in two commercial firms in Dublin and the experience was invaluable. I would urge anyone looking for a training contract to seek experience of any sort in a law firm to see the day to day work of a solicitor and to see if the culture and people in the firm suit you. I also found that interviews for contracts will focus largely on what you learned and did during any in-office experience. During the internships I made sure to ask for plenty of work, made sure I was always enthusiastic about new tasks and of course, was always professional.

During my final year of college I made sure to put all my effort into my studies and I really focused on getting good grades and before Christmas I spent a lot of time researching law firms and deciding where I would like to apply to. I realised there was no point trying to half-heartedly apply to places I didn't see myself working in as this would eat into study time. Make sure you want to work where you're applying to as you will be able to write a more genuine application. It's also really important to do your best in the written application as firms receive sometimes hundreds and they have to be brutal in cutting the weaker ones out, so make sure spelling is correct and that you write coherently and with purpose. If you can, get advice on how to write your CV and ask people to read your application to see if it is logical and clear. I also learned to be myself in applications and interviews. The firm will be looking for certain types of people and there's no point trying to be what you think they want because the interviewers will be able to see through that. In general I think firms look for down to earth, intelligent and hardworking people. They appreciate people who have worked in college, are team players and have a genuine interest in working in the firm. It's important to research the firm's culture and what's important to them. No two interviews will be the same because no two firms are the same, so make sure you focus on each one separately. I think it's important not to set your heart on one firm as you may not be successful in getting in there but that doesn't mean you can't work there in the future. It's important to be open to as many offices as you can as chances are, if they pick you it means they think you are a good match for them and you will be happy there. The main thing is not to lose hope and not to give up. If getting a contract the first time doesn't happen for you, think about doing the FE-1s or taking the year to work in a firm and apply in the next round. This shows the firms that you are constantly working towards your goals. If you don't secure a contract, consider doing some internships and getting into the firms that way. I genuinely believe there is a contract out there for everyone who works hard and wants it enough.

## **Trainee Account 6**

I had studied the last few years of my undergraduate law degree abroad, and apart from knowing that I had to do the FE-1s at some point, I didn't have a clue in the summer of 2017 of what exactly I had to do to get as far as Blackhall Place. I did my first set of FE-1s without any training contract at all and only found out about the milk rounds from friends who had already secured training contracts.

However, I mostly did research into the kind of firm I wanted to work for and made up a list of them that summer. From about June, I made a note of all the deadlines for applications. In the end, I had about thirty firms on my list! This was a good move, as a lot of firm's deadlines for training applications close either immediately after the end of the FE-1s or during the exams.

Filling in applications was a long task. Most of them are online forms, but a few involved sending in CVs and cover letters. I knew that because of my undergraduate degree in international law I would be aiming for larger firms in Dublin, so I started with sending my applications into smaller firms and ended with the firms I'd identified as ones I'd really like to work in. I narrowed this down by talking to friends who worked in them and identifying which places sounded not only like they generated interesting work but whom also sounded good to work for. Additionally, some firms only take in trainees from their summer internships so it was important at that stage to identify and note these ones for later.

By approaching the applications by my least preferred options first, I was able to practice answering so many of the questions that eventually they repeated themselves, such as: "why would you like to work in our firm?", "why are you interested in this area of law?" and others along the lines of "what do you think are going to be the most important aspects of law in the future?". If I'm honest, the hardest ones I found to answer were questions such as "what are your hobbies and achievements?"

It took several weeks for the applications to start coming back. Despite the amount of firms I'd applied to, I only got around ten replies, and at that, only two initial interviews. I wouldn't get too disheartened by this, as they were firms I had been hoping to hear from but also some firms never replied to me at all. I was definitely glad that I hadn't only applied to a few firms especially since I received a negative reply from an office I had already worked in and had thought I would be guaranteed at least an interview in.

Then by the end of October 2017, I had two interviews. I'll admit I found them hard to prepare for, especially since I was pretty worn out from the FE-1s. I had no idea what to expect either, since I'd never taken part in a milk round before.

My first interview was not an ideal experience. It was a group interview. I'd had to travel up to Dublin to take part in it, and on the morning of it my cat had died so I really wasn't in the space to do my first traineeship interview. It just proves that you can never be fully prepared! I decided to give the interview my best shot anyway but I didn't enjoy the group interview atmosphere and left it without any good feelings.

Later the same day, they phoned to let me know I hadn't succeeded in my applications but I wasn't too disappointed.

My second interview took place a few days after the firm held welcoming drinks for its trainees. I thought the welcoming drinks were a great idea and I would encourage attendance if it's offered. For me, it was good to be able to get through the doors of the firm without the pressure of an imminent interview. I also really enjoyed talking to different partners and trainees about their experience both in working in the firm but also to get some tips about the interviews. I was quite lucky that I was a bit older as several friends from college worked in the firm already and it was reassuring to see some familiar faces. I then came in two days later to do the interview. While I thought it had gone well, I was disappointed to learn the next day that it hadn't been successful either. Additionally, when I contacted them for feedback on my interview performance I was very disappointed with the comments I received – I felt as though I hadn't been listened to at all!

Two interviews later and no training contract was not a position I wanted to be in coming up to Christmas. I was pretty upset! However, I had noted which firms took in trainees for internships in the summer and I had been told by several friends that if I didn't get a place in a firm in November it didn't mean I wouldn't be also successful in the summer.

It was at this point I got an email from my current firm, inviting me to a drinks evening and also for interview. I was relieved but also delighted as they are a firm with a lot of prestige in Dublin. And, despite my previous interview experiences being very disappointing, I think they prepared me for my interview here. I had become more relaxed and natural in my answers, and I liked their interview style more than previous firms. It was very open and more about me and my personality. It was more a case of going through my CV rather than them asking hard questions to catch me out, and I was pretty happy when I left the interview. In fact, I was a little worried that I was too happy about it because I had felt so at ease! I was then delighted when I was offered a training contract there last November.

There are definitely lessons I'd take from this whole experience. Probably the most important one for me was that a lot of larger firms are looking as to whether you're a fit for their firm culture rather than how you answer the questions they put to you. I've definitely found that my personality fits in really well with my current intake rather than those of the other two firms I'd applied to. Basically – it's not personal, so don't get disheartened.

The second thing I'd take from it was that it was really reassuring to be able to talk to people who already work in the firm about their experiences there, if possible, before your interview. The pre-interview drinks evenings were definitely worth attending. I found it helped me get a feel for the atmosphere in the firm and I even picked up some tips about how to approach the interview. It was also nice that after a couple of such interviews I was coming across the same faces in the waiting rooms before interviews.

Finally, you can never apply to too many law firms! And I think if I hadn't been successful this time, I would have continued to apply for internships in the summer.

It's important not to get disheartened. I also think it's important not to aim for a particular level of firm and to keep your options open. Just because you've applied definitely doesn't guarantee an interview (or even a reply to your application) and each interview I did was excellent preparation for the ones that followed.

Basically, you can never do too many interviews or talk to too many people about their experiences! Especially if like me, you've never studied in the legal sphere or have done the majority of your degree outside Ireland. It's easy to see now, but it's also important to not take feedback or an unsuccessful application personally. Perseverance is a skill in itself!

I wish you the best of luck with your applications!

## **Trainee Account 7**

### **How I found my Training Contract**

I initially attempted the FE-1s after completing my university degree but was unsuccessful in my attempt.

I took up a role with a public sector employer, mostly within the Human Resources department and worked there for about eight years. I felt that in order to progress my career, I needed to obtain a professional qualification. I re-sat the FE-1 exams in the last couple of years as a mature student. I had to leave my employer in order to qualify as a solicitor so I set about applying for traineeships.

I found it difficult to get interviews with the bigger firms in Dublin. I spoke to a partner in one of the firms who gave me an idea of the types of questions that were asked at interview. In short, it sounded like the interviews were intended to challenge interviewees, trip them up and test their resolve to work in a pressurised environment. I wondered if this was the type of work environment I wanted.

Nevertheless, I was interviewed for one of the big firms and it was actually a very fair interview although I didn't sell myself sufficiently at interview. I know that there is interview training which some people avail of and find very helpful. I'd recommend this to applicants who are nervous about interviews or who feel that their performance at interview is holding them back.

I find it difficult to put my best foot forward at interview, to describe all of my achievements and project myself in my best light. Interviews, like anything else, get easier with practice. I found that talking to colleagues who I had worked with and getting specific feedback from them regarding my interviewing style helped me to develop my skills.

I had a group interview with another firm which I felt was not well conducted. It wasn't a group interview as I understood it; in reality, it was asking the same questions of six candidates in the same interview, in other words, an attempt to save time by having six interviews at the same time.

I had lots of applications turned down, receiving no reason for my rejection and no feedback. As a mature student, you can feel insecure that firms are looking for younger applicants who can be moulded; much as younger applicants can feel frustrated that they will never have the required work experience if no-one gives them a chance!

You have to persevere and learn to accept rejected applications but also improve your CV and applications generally. Talking to existing solicitors and establishing networks through whatever clubs or associations you are involved can also be very helpful.

Persistence paid off for me in the end and I got a traineeship in a small firm with a great environment and which is full of very engaged and effective solicitors.

## **Trainee Account 8**

The following is an account of how I attained a training contract with a Big-5 commercial firm and I hope it proves useful for any person seeking to train in a similar environment.

### **Introduction**

I realised that I wanted to be a solicitor in a commercial firm when I was in 3rd year of college as I had an interest in that area of law and wished to work in that kind of working environment. In the summer between 3rd and 4th year I took part in an internship programme with a large firm, and this gave me both an insight into the work of a trainee solicitor in a commercial firm, and the application process for that firm's traineeship.

### **Application Forms**

In the first semester of 4th year, I completed a number of applications for various training programmes in commercial firms around the city. It was a long and gruelling process, with hours being put into each form filled out. However it was an essential part of getting my foot in the door and having the chance to meet partners from the firms to show that I was a fit for their firm.

When filling out the application forms it is important to remember who you are applying to, as there is no way to "copy & paste" your answers into every form. A good starting point would be looking at the firm's website which will show you how they describe themselves and what kind of work they do. It is up to you whether you feel you would fit into working in any given firm based on this. Another helpful tip is to see whether the firm offers an "insight day" to prospective applicants. These days are usually around September, before the applications open, and give applicants a chance to meet solicitors from the firm and ask questions. Personally, having attended a number of these events, I found it extremely useful in making my decision as to whether a particular firm was a fit for me.

It is important to remember that the application process is as much about you assessing whether a firm is right for you, as it is for a firm deciding whether you are right for them.

When filling in application forms it is important to use clear, concise and professional language. It is also critical to read over your application forms a number of times to check for spelling or grammar mistakes. Try to include all relative information that shows you are competent to take on the role of trainee solicitor, are aware of the work that the firm does and can fit into the particular culture of the firm.

### **Interviews**

Having submitted your applications, it is important to remember that applying for traineeships involves dealing with a lot of rejection. If you are lucky enough to get a response from a firm it is time to start preparing for interview.

Depending on the firm there are a number of different types of interviews. The interviews I did ranged from one-on-one interviews with a partner or two, to group interviews with my peers, to researching and giving a presentation on a random legal topic. Many firms have a number of rounds to their process too, and for one firm I had to interview on three separate occasions before a decision was made.

I found it was most important to try show off my personality in the interview, and I found that the partners' questions were testing my ability to handle pressure and also seeing whether I would be a good person to share an office with too. It is important to maintain a balance between sounding professional and letting your personality come across. Also the obvious rules apply of dressing professionally and looking well.

I found it helpful to try and prepare any possible question they could ask me, so that I wouldn't be stressed at every turn in the interview. A good place to start doing this was by combing through the application form I submitted to that firm and thinking of what possible questions they could ask me for every piece of information I had in it.

In terms of group interviews, it is important to strike a balance between being assertive and volunteering yourself for questions, and being willing to let others speak and be heard too. Reflective listening is a good trait, where you build on the answers of your peers, showing that you are listening and not just waiting for your opportunity to speak.

In the weeks leading up to your interview it is a good idea to keep an eye on the newspapers and headlines, and know what is going on as it will be likely you'll be asked an opinion on something topical in the interview. This is the interviewer's way of testing whether you are able to make natural conversation and be confident in what you say. Don't try and bluff, or pretend you know about something you don't have an idea about.

## **Trainee Account 9**

### **The trial and tribulations of the milk rounds**

By way of a brief introduction, I am currently a trainee solicitor with a Big 5 firm in Dublin. I studied Law and French in Trinity for my undergraduate degree and then went on to do a Master's degree in Intellectual Property Law (also in Trinity).

I (finally) signed my contract in 2015, took approximately 2 years to do the FE-1s and started in 2018. The road to getting the training contract was not easy and I often just wanted to give up. But, if I can make it through the process, so can anyone!

I am going to set out the trials and tribulations that I went through in three stages – before, during and after.

#### **Before:**

I started to apply for internships in my third year in university. I applied to Irish firms and UK firms, thinking that the more applications I sent out the higher the chances of me getting an offer. Needless to say that I was wrong and the only emails that I received in reply were ones telling me that I was unsuccessful and to try again next year.

In the final year of college, I decided to give the applications another go and applied straight for the training contracts, but only to the Irish firms this time. I drafted and re-drafted my applications until I could recite them in my sleep and I read the news as if my life depended on it. Needless to say that none of these applications were successful. Being honest, I was devastated. I didn't know if I was just not a good candidate (which is a soul destroying thought) or if I just didn't know the best way to describe myself to the HR department in a firm.

In the end I decided to take a break; I applied for my Master's degree and an internship in a small software start-up. I was accepted to both, which was the confidence boost that I needed.

While I was working in the start-up, I decided to give the milk rounds one more shot. This was partially because I can be very stubborn and because I thought that I had more to offer a law firm after working in a different industry. Having the experience of managing a team, managing HR files, carrying out due diligence exercises and security audits just gave me the confidence to know that I would be a good addition to a law firm, that I can bring something to a team and that I can actually tackle anything that is put in front of me.

#### **During**

In the last milk round that I put myself through I only applied for traineeships in three of the big 5 firms in Dublin. Thankfully, I managed to get called for interviews for all three.

The process of preparing for the interviews was a little strenuous. Trying to guess what questions might get asked, what the interviewers would be like, what they won't

like about my CV on paper and what I would have to explain. In the end, I decided to know my CV inside out and be able to link my skills to specific pieces of work I had done. Having something concrete to talk about gave me a little bit of a safety blanket. I am not the best at “selling myself” but I can show someone what I can do and let them judge me on that. After all, actions do speak louder than words.

Being honest the preparation was exhausting, but it was necessary.

The interviews themselves were a mix. For one firm I had three interviews which were just with partners; for another I just had one. For the third, there was a group interview which was a harrowing experience that I never want to repeat. My preparation came in handy, especially if I was asked a question that was a little trickier. I did get a few curve ball questions, but all I could do was show my logic even if I couldn't give an answer.

In the end, it was three for three and then I had a tough decision to make.

### After

Choosing an offer is a first world problem, but one that I was happy to have after a couple of years of rejections (because the three firms I had offers from had each rejected me at least twice).

Being honest each firm is not hugely different. The main difference is mainly the size which dictates the size of the deals and the size of the clients. Reading about the deals that each firm has worked on, or reading the posts that each firm post in LinkedIn was not very helpful. After reading every little piece of information on each firm that I could find online, I ended up speaking to people that I knew that worked in the firms. Talking to people and finding out the things that the graduate team in each firm does not publicise is the best thing you can do. People are always the best resource for information and the people themselves are a really good indicator about what the firm is like! The people you will talk to will have personalities and characteristics that will tell you something about the firm too.

### Do

- Research the firms well!
- Know what you want and what you don't want.
- Let your experience speak for itself.
- Talk to people about the firm.
- Chose where you want to work not where you think you should work.

### Don't

- Lie.
- Pretend to be something you are not.
- Underestimate what the interviews are like. They are stressful and preparing well makes them so much easier!
- Chose where to work because your friends are going to be working there.
- Be blasé. You are deciding where you will be working for at least three years of your life – that's a long time.

## **Trainee Account 10**

### **Finding my training contract**

I moved into law having worked as a trade union official since 2013. I graduated University in 2011 and completed my FE-1 exams in 2016.

I had initially thought I would have to sit repeats so my search for training contracts was somewhat delayed because I had just started a new job as an Industrial Relations Officer with the Irish Medical Organisation in November 2016. As such I held off applying for training contracts until late 2017 as I wanted to gain experience from the new post.

I was little concerned that I would have a bit of a gap between my FE-1s and traineeship so I decided to take the Kings Inns Employment Law Diploma, which was one morning a week from late 2017 to early 2018. My plan was to become practically qualified enough in Employment Law that I would be able to gain a traineeship in a firm on the back of this.

When I began applying for contracts in late 2017, like almost everyone else I primarily applied online for every traineeship that came up on the Law Society legal vacancies website over a number of months.

As my initial degree was not in law and I had a very average leaving cert result, I did find getting a contract quite difficult. I, of course, applied to the large firms and dug out my transcripts from each year in college but I found that I wasn't even getting the opportunity to interview with these firms.

My initial plan to be so qualified in one area that I'd be attractive to a large number of firms didn't really pan out unfortunately. It quickly became clear that although most firms did at least some employment law, few relied on it as a major source of fees.

I interviewed with four smaller firms in late 2017/early 2018. Some of these firms were quite unclear on what they wanted from a trainee. Though each time I felt I interviewed quite well and got my experience across, I was unsuccessful in getting any of these four. I found it very hard to prepare for these interviews as unlike larger organisations they had no scoring systems or training in interview techniques. In fact three of the interviews mainly involved the principal in the firm talking at me about their practice while I tried not to interrupt. Quite annoyingly a number of these firms simply failed to follow up and notify the candidates who weren't selected.

With these smaller firms I was clearly at a bit of a disadvantage also for not having in-office experience in a firm which was something they were definitely looking for as they knew they'd have to rely on trainees for a wide variety of tasks.

I, however, was unwilling to leave my better salaried position for an entry level legal executive post to remedy this. Instead I held out for a training contract. In hindsight this was probably a risky strategy and it was definitely a possibility that I might not have made to Blackhall this year.

In April I was interviewed by a well-established mid-sized firm in Ennis. Though I'm a Dubliner It made sense to me to apply across the country as I had no particular advantage in Dublin regarding legal contacts *etc.* and if I'm to be honest, the much cheaper cost of living outside of Dublin was attractive to someone preparing to go on a trainee salary.

Training with the firm was also clearly a good opportunity as the firm has a national profile in a number of areas of practice and they have a significant longstanding involvement with the Law Society. When I was invited to interview I made the decision to commit to it as an option and really try and get the traineeship.

While they weren't an employment law based firm they were impressed with my experience in workplace disputes and clearly liked that I had researched their practice and had specific reasons that I wanted to train with them. The interview was quite short but thankfully that turned out to be a positive and I was called about a week later and offered the contract.

Unusually, compared to the majority of firms now, they did not take on their trainees ahead of PPC1 in Blackhall, instead starting them afterwards. Though this meant I am not being paid while at Blackhall, it did have the advantage of me being able to stay in my previous job right up until I started here in September.

If I was to give any advice it would be that in-office experience seems to be a big advantage, especially with smaller firms. If, like me, you are unwilling to give up your salary from your existing career until you have a training contract then understand that it might take a bit longer to get one and you might consider taking a part-time diploma while you apply to keep the legal part of your CV current.

Finally I would advise anyone changing careers that it isn't as straightforward as some people suggest. You might have to be persistent about applying and flexible about where you apply to. I had many people say to me my additional experience would be a huge advantage and that firms love diversity in professional background. I have to say I personally didn't find that to be the case until I interviewed with my current firm.

However it was definitely worth keeping at it and I really feel my persistence has paid off with a great training firm which will give me a really good start in the profession.

## **Trainee Account 11**

I applied to most of the big 10 commercial firms for internships and training contracts in my final year of college however was not invited for interviews. I had good grades, two years' experience with FLAC and had gained work experience in general practices during the summer holidays. Looking back on it, my applications were weak and I used the same content for each firm's application form which is a big mistake.

When I graduated from my undergraduate degree in 2014, the economy was just only starting to pick up and entry level legal jobs were mostly unpaid or through Jobsbridge. I worked for several months in a hotel in Dublin while applying for numerous roles. I took advantage of the admin skills that I picked up while working in the hotel which included phone bookings, using a computer booking system and filing and bulked up my CV. Through a recruitment consultant, I was finally invited for interview with a medium sized practice for an office junior role. The role included menial work such as photocopying and putting together briefs however it was in fact invaluable experience for familiarising myself with legal documents. After a short time in that position, I was offered a legal secretary position in the probate and conveyancing department of the firm. I started studying for my FE-1s and passed my first set of three in March 2015 followed by a further three in October 2015.

In autumn 2015, I again took the time to start applying for the milk rounds. This time I took the time to really research the firm I was applying to and although time consuming made sure to take a fresh approach to each application. I was delighted to receive an interview to two big 10 firms that year. Although I felt the first round interviews went well, I knew the reasons for my PFOs were that I hadn't come across particularly commercially astute despite having gained practical experience in a well-known firm. I was a bit deflated but gathered myself and finally acknowledged that I wasn't interested in corporate law and there was no point in putting myself through it for the sake of an excellent trainee package. So with six FE-1s under my belt I began applying for traineeship positions in smaller firms. It is worth noting at this point that the firm I was working in at the time did not generally take on trainee solicitors and hadn't done so for some years.

The next few months applying to smaller firms were fairly soul destroying. Although I was successful for interview for most of the roles I applied for and was for 75% of them offered the position, I simply could not accept the offers for financial reasons. All of the smaller firms I interviewed for would not contribute towards PPC1 fees. Most were only paying minimum wage while in the office and some were not willing to pay me while in Blackhall. I am from the country and did not have the financial means myself or through family to fund the entire thing while trying to live in Dublin at the same time. I was completely deflated by the realisation of it all. I put a lot of that stress down to the reason for failing my last two FE-1s in March 2016. I was really unsure of where to go to next, however shortly after, I spotted an advertisement for a legal executive in my home county on the Law Society website. I applied for the position and was subsequently offered it. It was a big move but I was working in a monotonous position where I wasn't gaining much more experience while on fairly poor money and knew that I had at least a year before I would be in a position to start PPC1 so took the risk and went for it!

It honestly was the best decision I ever made in terms of growing professionally. I moved to a sole practitioner practice and the environment was very much 'sink or swim'. There was nobody there checking every full stop on every letter like it had been in my previous job and I was very much running my own files within a few weeks whether I liked it or not! Although at the time it was very daunting I soon came to terms with not having anyone to hold my hand on everything and had no choice but to ask all the right questions quickly and find a lot of stuff out for myself. As a sole practitioner my boss was incredibly busy and spent a lot of time out of the office at courts or at meetings so I became the sole point of contact for all district court, conveyancing, probate, family law and some smaller litigation matters in the office. No money could ever purchase the wealth of experience I gained in that position over the next two years. In meeting and dealing with my own clients and by representing the office in court I developed a lot of key skills necessary to be a good lawyer. In addition my commercial awareness expanded particularly by dealing with rural commercial clients.

I developed a fantastic working relationship with my boss and my colleagues in that office however with the final FE-1 passed in October 2017, I had to start looking towards PPC1. My boss had already told me that he would absolutely sign my indentures however I was faced with another financial dilemma. As a sole practitioner just about getting by it was impossible for him to contribute towards PPC1 and paying me while out of the office. I had gathered a few savings by living at home but not enough to pay fees and live in Dublin for 7 months. So yet again I started to apply to firms in Dublin. I was surprised at how much the economy had changed in the two years I had been home. So many more medium firms were offering training contracts. I applied to a medium sized firm specialising in insurance defence litigation. In my current role I had gained an interest in litigation while working on some smaller files but was eager to get more experience in that area. I was invited for interview with said firm. The interviews were friendly but professional and I found myself to be much more headstrong in my interview approach as I was bringing a lot more practical experience to the table combined with a stronger commercial awareness. I was offered the training contract which comes with an exciting secondment opportunity and I am due to start with my new firm after PPC1.

My journey to securing the right training contract was slightly longer than planned but I cannot emphasise the importance of taking the time to properly consider what route is best for you. Financial reasons were the main reasons that delayed me but the old 'everything happens for a reason' cliché clicked in as by actually failing a few FE-1s and missing out on PPC1 last year everything worked in my favour as I probably would have rushed into it and got myself into a lot of debt for the sake of getting qualified. Instead I was afforded more time to figure out what areas of law I am interested in and have since been offered a stable training contract with a reputable firm that I know I am going to be offered fantastic training in.

## **Trainee Account 12**

### **How I found my training contract**

I completed my BCL in UCD with a year abroad in Toulouse, France. I hadn't applied to any internships whilst on my year abroad in Toulouse and so the panic set in when I started fourth year as I realised that many of my fellow students had completed internships that summer and had acquired training contracts. I submitted every application possible when the milk-rounds came around in October and managed to secure one interview with a Dublin firm. I knew it wasn't good news when the partner's eyes glazed over when I said no, I didn't play any sports but I was a member of a number of orchestras. During the Christmas and Easter holidays I managed to get a few weeks work experience here and there in various Belfast firms.

I graduated college without a training contract or an internship with a Dublin firm. After moving home to Belfast, I secured a position as a paralegal in a small general practice firm. I was later told that I was hired based on the unpaid experience I had in several Belfast firms. The experience I gained while working in a small firm was invaluable. After working there for three months, I was managing my own conveyancing and wills & probate files as well as attending court with clients and Counsel.

Five months into my new paralegal role, I applied for a training contract with a large firm in Dublin and ultimately was offered a contract for September 2018. I completed my first seat in their corporate department before starting PPC1.

What I wish I had realised earlier is that it's quite rare for someone to complete all the FE-1s in one year and step straight into a training contract. The vast majority of my colleagues and friends enrolled in PPC1 either completed a master's degree, travelled or gained practical experience for a number of years before beginning a training contract. A number of individuals even had completely different careers outside of the legal industry for many years before deciding to complete the FE-1s and find a training contract. Law firms are looking for individuals who are interesting and who they'll get along with; academic results aren't the be all and end all!

The main piece of advice that I can give to prospective trainee solicitors is don't give up! Research each firm thoroughly when completing applications and attend firm networking events and career fairs where possible. Rejection is likely but while you may not be a good fit for one firm, you'll be an excellent fit for another.

## **Trainee Account 13**

### **How I got my training contract**

I was very lucky to have gotten my training contract in one of the biggest law firm in Dublin in autumn 2016 and to be in Blackhall now in autumn 2018.

I did my undergraduate degree in University College Cork where I graduated with a first class honours degree in 2016. I went on to do a specialised law master's degree also in University College Cork after my undergraduate degree and graduated in 2017 with a first class honours.

I knew from the start of my first year in college that my goal was to get a traineeship in a big law firm in Dublin. From the very first day, I always worked really hard and was very studious throughout my college years. I was also involved in debating and went on to do a lot of debating competitions both in Ireland and abroad. I was involved in various other societies in college that I enjoyed being part of. Whenever there was any job fair on campus, all the employers wanted for the students to be all rounded and to have taken part in extra activities during the college years.

I did my first training contract applications and interviews in autumn 2015 when I just started my final year of my undergraduate degree. I knew that I had good grades and I was involved in a lot of extracurricular activities so I believed I would get a training contract without many difficulties. I applied to many law firms, both small and big in Dublin at the time. I applied for over ten law firms, however, I only got a few interviews. I went up to Dublin for the interviews but at that time in 2015 I had no luck. It was easy to just give up then and there and think of another career path as I wasn't sure what the employers were looking for as I had thought my CV was not bad.

I continued to study hard and be involved in societies that I enjoyed being part of. I graduated with a first class honors BCL degree and went on to do a law master's degree straight after. I believe that the master's degree was definitely the turning point in how I got my training contract. I did a specialised master's degree in an area I was specifically interested in. I applied for many law firms again in autumn 2016. I got many more interviews this time around. I really enjoyed the interviewing process as it was much easier to talk about my interest in law as I was studying a specialised area of law. I think it was evident and clear that I was very passionate about this type of law. I got my training contract then.

I believe my grades in college played a key important role in getting a training contract. I also believe that my determination and motivation played an important role too. I did not give up and kept working hard to achieve my goal and this probably came across in the interviews as well. Doing a master's degree was definitely a turning point in my life as it helped me to get a traineeship and most importantly to realise that a career in law is all I ever wanted.

## **Trainee Account 14**

### **How I found my training contract**

I studied in NUIG, graduating in 2011 with a degree in Corporate Law and in 2012 with an LLB. I had wanted to be a solicitor since I was about 15 but on graduating I wasn't sure if I was the 'right fit' for a career in the legal profession. Also, Ireland was still in recession at the time and there didn't seem to be any traineeships on offer outside of Dublin.

I secured a job with AIB in Dublin but I had never wanted to stay in Dublin and so a year later I left AIB for a job with an asset servicing company back West. I was surprised that they had an in-house legal department and thought I might get some experience there. I applied for two internal positions, one for a paralegal (more so just to get my name out there, I knew I wasn't qualified enough) and the other for a legal assistant and was unsuccessful. One of my colleagues announced she had secured a training contract and would be finishing up to start work in a firm and I started to think maybe a career as a solicitor was what I wanted after all!

At this stage I was commuting from Galway to Clare daily and I knew if I was to undertake the FE-1 exams I wouldn't be able to sustain this, so in February 2015 I took a twelve month maternity leave contract with a debt and asset management company in Galway and registered to sit the FE-1s in October of that year. I was a bit overwhelmed by the whole process and I can't deny I lost faith a couple of times which resulted in them taking a bit longer than they should have!

I was lucky enough to be kept on in my job after my twelve month contract was up and in April 2017 I was offered a managerial position in credit control. I had made it clear from my first day there that I was intending to train as a solicitor and that once I had completed the FE-1s and secured a training contract I would be leaving and they seemed happy to offer me the position in spite of this. With all my cards laid on the table, I decided that the position would be a good opportunity for me and with just two FE-1 exams left to sit I set myself a date of September 2018 for Blackhall.

Now that I was earning a decent enough wage, the thoughts of having to seek out a training contract was a daunting one. I knew that many firms in Galway would not pay my fees. I couldn't afford to pay them myself and I did not want to go back to working in Dublin. I also really loved the office I was working in and it was hard to think about starting out again somewhere new. I came across an article in the Law Society Gazette about training in-house – I hadn't even known this was possible. Our parent company in the UK has its own law firm however our company was a much smaller scale and had one solicitor so I didn't think it was something that would be an option for me. I broached the subject with the in-house solicitor and was surprised that he seemed open to the idea.

At this stage the company was growing and getting a lot busier. I used every opportunity in my role to show my knowledge and experience and I was always eager to learn. My hard work and determination didn't go unnoticed when I passed my final FE-1 exams my manager asked me if it was possible to train in-house would I stay. I didn't need to be asked twice! He told me he would speak with the in-house

solicitor and managing director to see if it was a possibility and from there I was offered my training contract.

My advice to anyone trying to find a training contract is to consider all the options. Applying for the big firms and going through the 'milk rounds' is the traditional approach but if that isn't something you are interested in there are other options. If you are working in a company that has an in-house legal department, suss them out to see if they are open to the possibility. In-house solicitors now account for approximately 20% of the profession and it is definitely an area which is growing. I have met colleagues in Blackhall who are training in-house in tech companies and pharmaceutical companies so the options are varied. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there and make your intentions known – it worked for me! Also from what I hear speaking to colleagues in the big Dublin firms, the work-life balance is far better working in-house. While my situation did involve a lot of luck and a being in the right place at the right time, I proved myself through my other roles in the company and certainly believe that this was a huge factor in securing my training contract.

## **Trainee Account 15**

### **Write an account of how you found your training contract**

I think that it is important to start by saying that there is no clear way to get a training contract. Everyone I know took a different route, but we are all in the same position now enjoying our time on the Law Society's PPC1 course.

I studied Law with History in UCD, spending a year of that time on exchange in Australia, and got a 2:1 in my degree. I came back from my year abroad into an extremely intense final year, which would count towards 100% of my GPA. I didn't know what I wanted to do and I hadn't applied for traineeships or internships previously.

I put in one application to a large commercial firm which offers internships during the October milk rounds rather than training contracts. I thought that this would suit me better than committing to a full traineeship. I also got a particularly good feeling from the people I spoke to in the firm. In hindsight, applying to a few more firms definitely wouldn't have hurt, as I could've decided further down the line what I wanted (if I got any offers that is).

Only applying to one firm meant that I gave myself the time to put a lot of effort into my application. I spent a good bit of time trying to get a feel for the company ethos (*i.e.* reading their website and attending their college talk). I tried to make my cover letter a good mix between information about myself and what interested me particularly about their firm.

I was delighted when I was called for an interview with the firm. When it came to it I did an interview with two partners. I was nervous beforehand but when it came to it they put me at ease and luckily it was fine. If you have anything unusual on your CV such as an exchange, or my history minor, be prepared to be asked about it. Even if you don't know the answer to a question they ask, I think they just want to see that you can field it confidently and calmly. Following the interview, I was offered a place in their internship programme.

The internship would take place in the summer following final year. It wasn't until the final days of the application window for other large firms' internships that I panicked and sent in some haphazard applications. Unsurprisingly, I was not offered any interviews. I have heard that sending in applications early rather than last minute makes a difference. Also, I just didn't put as much effort in. But I have to note how random the selection process can feel. I and my friends in college had similar GPAs and experience; why were some getting four interviews while other people got none? If it's not working out for you just now, I wouldn't give up hope at all.

Following the internship in July, I was offered a training contract. I think the main thing is to be friendly to everyone and enthusiastic about all the work you are given. Once you are in the door, they mostly want to see how you react to the work environment and if you are a right fit for the firm.

Best of luck to everyone applying!

## **Trainee Account 16**

### **Finding my training contract.**

My route to my training contract is most likely more convoluted than others. After finishing secondary school in 2011 I went in completely the wrong direction and started a degree in energy engineering in UCC. Although innately I knew this was the wrong path I continued for two years before dropping out.

It was at this point that I took my medicine and worked for one year in a fish factory in west Cork to pay for my undergrad in law. After this perspective altering experience I completed my undergrad in UCC.

During my time in UCC I knew I wanted to become a solicitor, so what became clear to me was that I needed to build my experience so that I couldn't be passed over by the bigger firms. The first building block was acquiring a part time job with Apple. I could point at this in my interviews and say, I've worked with a multinational and had the discipline to do so during college.

The second thing I did was to try and get an internship wherever I could. I knew this would help as I could oversell it on my CV. I completed a three week internship with Allianz's legal team during Christmas of my second year of my three year degree. This was an unpaid internship, but sometimes this is necessary when there is a bigger goal. I didn't do a whole pile of work here but I shadowed some of their legal team and got a feel for what it would be like to work in an in-house legal team. But most importantly I was able to list it on my CV as an internship and build up the tasks and responsibilities I was given. In hindsight I should have taken part in more projects in my time in Allianz as these projects stand out more than simple legal buzz words.

Shortly after this I also completed an internship in New York. This came about mainly through luck and nepotism. My mother's cousin is a New York cop and had a friend who was a partner in a law firm. Through some initial conversations, I was told that I could spend a week in the office in New York. This office turned out to be of a mid-size insurance firm based on Wall Street. This was a fantastic experience as the people in the office couldn't have been more accommodating. I spent time in court in Brooklyn and Queens and sat in on a few depositions. This was invaluable as it is something different which will cause someone to pause when looking at a CV. Again this was unpaid but it didn't matter as I knew it would be something that would stand to me in the long run. However knowing what I know now, I would recommend trying to get as long a time as possible working in a firm as a week simply looks like work experience to prospective employers.

It was after this that I began applying to the firms for internships. But what this experience gave me was that instead of waffling when filling out the application form, I was able to justify points by pointing to my experience. I was able to show that I completed these different tasks and was able to work well with different teams. By building my experience it helped me not to just find my training contract, but was key in actually being offered one.

I applied to the top six law firms in Dublin and few mid-size firms in Cork. Looking back, I would recommend applying to basically any firm that is willing to take your CV. I know this sounds excessive but the application process is very unstable and you don't know what you might or might not get. This can be an arduous process. It can feel like your answering the same questions repeatedly and I believe this is the same for the traineeship applications. I was probably guilty of a few copy and paste efforts but I would recommend that one takes their time with the applications and tries to tailor the application to the firm. I would also recommend applying to as many firms as possible. For me it was an internship but nowadays, internships are basically a month long interview for a traineeship. It is advisable to visit the universities career service's department, I went with my CV and my application forms and the advice I received was top notch and helped me immensely when applying. I went repeatedly, after making the changes to the application forms, as this allowed me to continually polish my applications.

I got interviews with two of the top 6 law firms. Both on the same day which was ideal but not so ideal was the fact that they were only one hour apart. What was even less fantastic was that one was located on Stephen's Green and the other down in Grand Canal.

Regardless I prepared extensively for both interviews. I emailed back and asked who was interviewing me. I then researched these people, found out what department they were in, looked into what they liked on LinkedIn, basically any information which I could use to make the conversation flow as naturally and as easily as possible.

My interview with the 1<sup>st</sup> firm went well, it was about 20 minutes and they went through my CV. My opinion on interviews is the less they feel like interviews, generally the better they go. This felt like an interview but I was still optimistic. I then had just 25 minutes to make it to the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview which I believed was closer than it was. I was wearing new shoes and unfortunately skinned my heels quite badly on the way down. In addition, I arrived just about in time which isn't ideal. I would not recommend this approach. Get taxis if you must but try to arrive in plenty time for the interviews. Don't be afraid to ask to change the time of the interview also. The firms understand people are traveling.

I was taken to a conference room and I had just sat down with a cup of coffee when I was summoned to the interview. I was interviewed by a partner and a senior associate, but it couldn't have felt less like an interview. They mainly just asked me about things like my opinion on the Healy Rae's, corporation tax as well as something to do with sport. But for the rest of the interview it was just about where I'm from in west cork, my hobbies and was generally just a conversation. I was lucky that I was up to date with current affairs, however looking back I would have been studying the broadsheets and online news apps. This is their way of checking if a candidate is clued in and can think of their feet during an interview.

So I didn't get the first internship but I got the second one for July of that summer. I was disappointed I didn't get the first but I would recommend moving on quickly and just accepting that maybe that firm wasn't for you. There can be a lot of rejection in the process and this can be difficult so it helps to develop a short memory and don't

take the rejection personally. The important thing to remember about the internship is that it is simply a month long interview and it can be ultra-competitive. I was sat with a partner who gave me tasks but was otherwise abrasive and not very helpful. However I was assigned a trainee who made my month very enjoyable. The firm assigned us a few tasks during the month, a drafting task and a presentation. It is important to perform well in these. It also helps to get as involved as you can in any activities, for example I played soccer for my firm. As mentioned it can be very competitive between interns as everyone is competing for a training contract, however it can also be great fun and you have to embrace this as the firm also looks at how you get on with your fellow interns. Something I tried to do is even if your partner is stand offish, try and ask them a few questions about themselves. I found a good time to catch my partner was when he was coming back after lunch before he was engrossed in his work.

My month was super enjoyable. I had a great time and the internship was very well organised. The firm is also trying to impress interns as many interns will have a few traineeship offers so enjoy living the high life for the month. From what I understand at the end of the internship the intern's partner is given an evaluation form which has a simple yes no box as to whether to offer a training contract or not. Luckily my partner gave this form to my trainee buddy and she filled it out.

The most important thing about the traineeship is that everything is geared towards getting a training contract. The firms openly state this but it is only a month so it is very important to perform during this month. What I consider more important is to show that you can interact with other interns and with your team well, because the one question they will ask themselves, is whether they would like to work with you or not.

After an anxious six weeks I was called to say that I got the training contract. But in conclusion, to find a training contract I simply built my experience and prepared as best I could for the application process and interviews. I was a decent 2:1 student, but my experience made my CV stand out.

## **Trainee Account 17**

### **Finding a Training Contract**

When I first started off in the hunt for a training contract, I was quite naïve as to how competitive and how much time and effort is required to be successful. I know it is very easy to get caught up in the “game” when everyone around you in college is sending in applications. So firstly, I would advise that you take a step back and ensure that this is what you want to do at this exact moment and consider whether you will be able to submit a strong application. Alternatively, you may decide you do not want to get involved in the “milk rounds”. If this is the case, I would recommend you keep an eye on the Law Society’s vacancies website for any training contract positions which may suit you better. You must think about what type of firm you want to spend the next two and a half years working for.

When it comes to applications, think outside the box. The firms do not want to see the same thing written on every application. Think about what makes you different. While in college, I volunteered with a number of charities, held a part time job and undertook short legal work experience periods in small firms. As a result, I had a variety of aspects of life that I could draw from when completing the applications. Think about a small task that you have been involved in, you may consider it meaningless or easy, but it could be this small task that makes you stand out from others.

For the paper application, you must remember you are selling yourself. Present yourself on paper as you would in person. Be clear. Be concise. Put your best self forward. One of the most valuable things that stood to me was having a parent/friend read over the application. I know you may not want other people to read the application, but it is priceless. As you have written the application, it can sometimes be hard to pick up on your own grammar mistakes or syntax.

When it comes to interviews, be prepared. Google “key competency questions” and think of potential answers to same. The majority of firms are moving towards competency style interviews. You will need to be able to be aware of what the key skills each firm is looking for and hit those points in your interview. Make sure you know your application inside out. The interviewers will have it front of them and will be aware if you say something which conflicts with your application. Additionally, I would try and have two or three other selling points which you have not mentioned in your application. Remember to relax into the interview. Do not try and learn off replies to questions as this will come across to the interviewers. Be personable and be yourself in a professional manner.

You may get rejected multiple times from firms. Remember, this is not the be all and end all. You will get a training contract. You must remember to persevere. I had a number of interviews while in my penultimate year of my degree, none of which resulted in me obtaining a training contract. In final year, I took a step back, reevaluated my applications, picked out my stronger and weaker points. In doing this, I was able to put more emphasis on my stronger points and add in more examples of skills I had developed in the year break. Also, ensure that you ask for feedback from any interviews to which you are invited. This can be invaluable. Often

it is hard to know where you may have fallen in the interview and therefore constructive feedback can push you in the right direction.

If there is one piece of advice I can offer, it is to persevere! There are plenty of options out there and now is a great time to be entering the workforce. Best of luck with finding a training contract and it will happen. Be open minded and consider all firm sizes.

## **Trainee Account 18**

### **Finding my Traineeship**

On leaving secondary school I did not know what career I wanted. I started an Arts degree in NUI Maynooth and decided after a year that it was not for me. I left that course and applied for Business and Law in UCD. However I still was not sure what I wanted and so I deferred my place in UCD and travelled for a year. This year travelling gave me the opportunity to stop, take a breath and really think about what kind of career I wanted. I did not come up with all the answers but I knew I wanted to get a decent degree and that perhaps a career in law would suit me. I came home and started my course in UCD. It wasn't until third year that it really clicked with me that I definitely wanted to follow a career in law. That's when I googled the difference between a barrister and a solicitor and tried to figure out which one I would prefer. I decided I liked the thought of a regular pay cheque better than self-employment and set out on the long arduous road of becoming a solicitor.

As it took me until third year to make this decision I was already a little bit behind my eager colleagues. While I was enjoying my third year college placement in Sydney, many of my colleagues were doing internships in the big five. First tip, if you know you want to work in a big commercial law firm, apply for internships in as many commercial firms as possible, as early as possible, and keep applying until you get something (internship, paralegal, legal assistant). Once you have your foot in the door with one commercial firm, you are instantly more attractive to them all!

I left college with no legal internships under my belt. However, I did have an international college placement and I also won a college drafting competition in final year. Another tip, use college opportunities to help your CV stand out – competitions, mooting, debating, societies, additional diplomas/certificates.

I made endless applications for internships and traineeships throughout my final year, from the big five firms to criminal firms to human rights internships. Yet again I had no idea what I wanted! Most of my applications were ignored, many rejected but I did get some opportunities to display my dismal interviewing skills. Needless to say I did not secure a traineeship that year. I finally got an internship with FLAC, the Free Legal Advice Centres, just after my final college exams. I worked in FLAC for the following year while doing my FE-1 exams. I worked on the phone line and learnt an awful lot about many different areas of law. I threw myself into the work and made sure I stood out as a competent employee. FLAC was perfect for me, I learnt a lot, made many important contacts, and the work was flexible enough for me to be able to study and pass my FE-1s in two sittings.

After my second round of FE-1s I applied, again, for endless internships and traineeships. Most were ignored and many rejected. I did a few interviews and I accepted an internship in the immigration department of a solicitor's firm. Although this area of law was not for me, I enjoyed the challenge and had good exposure to the workings of a legal practice and court attendance. I continued to look for traineeships. I finally got two interviews, one in a very small employment firm, and the other in a small general practice/criminal law firm. I was offered both and

accepted the general practice/criminal law firm as I thought it would be more of a challenge and would offer me a broader range of areas of law to train in.

I worked in this firm in the criminal department as a trainee for a year with a view to going to Blackhall the following September. I enjoyed the criminal law work more than I thought I would but ultimately decided that this was not the right firm for me to train with. I felt that if I trained in this firm I would be training as a criminal solicitor with some general practice experience. I did not want that. I took a big risk and left with no alternative job to go to. Not exactly advisable but I didn't make the decision on a whim, I thought very hard and long about it. This was not the firm for me, I knew it wasn't the right fit, but I couldn't find the right firm while I continued to work there. I left, collected myself, worked part time on a European project through FLAC, and applied for the milk rounds, again.

This was a bit of a low point. I was not sure if I had made the right decision, and going through the endless applications was really tough. Many of my friends were in Blackhall. I got countless rejections again but I did also get called for a few interviews. I felt I was in a much better position for interviews. I had real experience and had more of an idea of what employers were looking for. But most importantly, I viewed the interviews less as an interrogation and more of a way for me to suss out the firm and whether I could see myself happily working there. I needed to be sure I liked the firm and that it was a good fit for me as I did not want to have to move again.

It was tough but I did finally find the right traineeship for me and am happy knowing that I made the right decision in moving firm. Last tip, be picky in the firm you ultimately train with. That is not to say you absolutely have to train in the exact firm you want or the exact area of law you want, but if there is some kind of link or you can see the pathway to where you want to eventually end up, that will help you to get through the harder times of your traineeship. Don't be miserable in your firm just because you don't want to lose your traineeship. Think about all of your options and take control of your career.

## **Trainee Account 19**

### **How I got my Training Contract.**

I started with my Training firm for a pre-seat in April 2018 prior to attending PPC1 in September 2018. However, I had been out of college since 2014 and was starting to think it would not happen for me. I like to tell myself that I took a “scenic route” into my training contract.

I studied Law Plus in the University of Limerick, graduating in 2014. I was fortunate enough to do an eight month placement with a mid-sized family firm in Limerick city as it meant I had legal experience on my CV and gave me an idea as to whether or not I really liked legal work. Unfortunately, my placement was unpaid and as it was a family firm, it was quite closed off – there didn't really seem to be an opportunity for me to return post-graduation to train with them. I did the usual panic applications to the summer internships in fourth year and interviewed with a Top 5 firm but did not progress, so I decided to go on a J1.

Coming home after the J1 saw me in a tight spot financially. I do not have any contacts/family in law which I came to learn further on in the process, was a drawback. I was offered some legal experience on an unpaid basis but unfortunately I was not in a position to work for free (student loans and a summer spent living off an overdraft!). I was advised by a friend's parent to apply for a banking graduate programme and surprisingly got through all the stages and was successful.

I worked with that bank for two years but constantly compared the work I did there back to my time with the law firm during my co-op and I knew deep down that I missed law and wanted to qualify so I made the decision to start doing my FE-1s while working full time on the graduate programme. My next goal was to gain legal experience so I began exploring my options within the bank and challenged for a role within the bank's mortgage arrears unit. I spent nine months working on the judgments team, gaining exposure to High Court proceedings and dealing with a panel of five external law firms.

At the same time, I was sitting FE-1s and applying furiously to every and any trainee solicitor job posting that I saw on the legal vacancies website. I made a list of all the milk round deadlines after my last sitting of the FE-1s and these became my new obsession. I also searched “Trainee solicitor” on LinkedIn and noted every firm that someone was training with. I then made sure I had applied to each of these in some way. If they had no milk round deadline or trainee information on their website, I emailed my CV to their generic “info@lawfirm” email and asked if they were recruiting trainees for PPC1 2018. I estimate that I interviewed with twenty or so firms including many of the top 10 firms. Interviews varied from group/panel but were mostly me versus two partners. I was often challenged on my commitment to qualifying given the fact that I had spent two years in banking rather than seeking out a legal position. Unfortunately for me, some interviewers completely disregarded my experience as a legal exec in mortgage arrears as it wasn't “firm experience”.

It was extremely disheartening to know that I was good “on paper” as nearly every application I sent in was met with an invitation to interview, however I really struggled

to convert these into offers. In hindsight, my confidence and belief in myself was probably an issue as I wasn't happy to be stuck in banking and I also found it hard to spin my banking experience in a positive light because of this. I made a promise to myself to leave the bank in 2018, one way or another and in early 2018, took a paralegal position with a Top 5 firm.

Around the same time that I transitioned into my new role, one of the panel firms which worked with my team in the mortgage arrears unit was advertising for their trainee programme, and at that point I felt I had nothing to lose by applying. I was invited to interview and I don't know if it was the confidence of having experience with a Top 5 behind me and finally having moved on from the bank or the knowledge and familiarity I had of the firm, but I felt I delivered a pretty good interview.

Again, at the time of this interview I had another with a smaller firm and ultimately received an offer with them but my gut feeling told me not to take it and to hold out for the first firm. Thankfully, it all paid off and I got an offer from my current firm and I truly believe it all worked out how it was meant to in the end.

My main takeaways from my own journey would be:

1. Get the FE-1s passed as soon as possible.
2. Get office experience – preferably legal, however I wouldn't be in my position without having the banking experience behind me.
3. Use all your available contacts. It is a tough industry and even nowadays a lot of people have family connections at their disposal.
4. If you are receiving interviews but not offers, consider an interview coach, you could be doing something so minimal that you aren't aware of. Even the language/construction of your answers may need to be fine-tuned.
5. Always ask for feedback after an interview. You might not get it, but if you do, it could be the difference between getting the next one or not
6. If you don't have an extracurricular or a hobby on your CV, get one. This was a huge downfall for me (again hindsight is wonderful). It puts you at ease and gives you some control of what you can talk about. I had basically obsessed over FE-1s and doing TC applications so that when it came to the "Any hobbies?" question in interviews, I seriously struggled.
7. I was asked "Why Law?" in every single interview and again I struggled because saying you did it for the paychecks is not going to cut it. It was often put to me that if I had no family in law, why did I want to be a solicitor which I found extremely frustrating. Have a good answer for this question. Bring it back to your skills, characteristics, motivations and how that makes you suitable to be a solicitor.
8. Trust the process (timing is everything) but more importantly trust your instinct. If it doesn't feel like the right fit, it probably isn't. You might think you nailed an interview and be so disappointed to be rejected, but understand that there may be someone with just that little bit more experience or there may even be an internal candidate.

Best of luck, what's for you won't pass you!!

## **Trainee Account 20**

### **My journey to a training contract.**

I started working in a law office at the age of nineteen years, with the intent of only covering reception duties during the course of the summer holidays. However, thirteen years later I was still working in the same office, having been promoted to legal executive, running my own files and attending the Circuit and High Court.

Before my promotion, I decided that I would attend college as a mature student, undertaking a bachelor degree in business studies. Strangely enough, I never considered undertaking a degree in law. At that stage my interest was still around the functions of a business and the role that I would potentially play in it with a business degree.

It was only when my responsibilities in the office as a legal executive increased, that I began to take more of an interest in the study of law. While I was working in law on a daily basis, I was only applying the law as per the rules of the superior court, but I did not understand the reasons as to what, how and why I was applying such procedures.

At this stage, I was attending counsel on my own, for various applications at different circuits (different counties) and I was beginning to understand the different dynamics between solicitors, counsel and the meaning of collegiality. I was also attending consultations with clients on my own, corresponding with defence solicitors and progressing files to trial. I was working in litigation only, mainly medical negligence and I thoroughly enjoyed it and gained confidence in my role.

This was when I decided that I would undertake what seemed at the time, the insurmountable challenge of the FE-1 exams. I was extremely nervous about this challenge as my primary degree is in business, not law. Thankfully, I successfully completed the FE-1s and it was my intention to undertake my training contract in the office that I had been working in for the last thirteen years, when suddenly I was let go from my employment.

At this stage my prospects of obtaining a training contract seemed bleak as due to my family circumstances I did not want to move from the West of Ireland. I was also aware that the larger firms may be less likely to take my experience into account and would more than likely reject my application due to the fact that my primary degree is not in law.

I was unemployed for over six months when I was approached by a law firm to cover holiday leave, undertaking general office skills *i.e.* typing and photocopying. While this was far below the level that I was used of when working in an office, I had a mortgage to pay and decided that anything was better than nothing.

Again, being conscious that my CV was not truly reflecting my capabilities and experience and I also knew that I would be competing against much younger candidates with impressive CVs, I decided to undertake a master's in law (LLM) which I undertook while working full time. For me, this was far more laborious than

the FE-1 exams, as the assignment deadlines were very strict. Fortunately, as the office I am working in have made many applications for guardianship for intending parents and children born through surrogacy, I decided to focus my dissertation on the lack of legislation in Ireland in this area. I was extremely lucky to gain extensive first-hand knowledge in such a specialised area, including cross border surrogacies.

When I commenced my masters, the firm that I was covering in, offered me continued employment as a secretary. While I gladly took the position, I made it clear that I was actively seeking a training contract, which they understood.

However, when I started to attend interviews for training contracts the firm that I was working in offered me a training contract instead, even though they had not had a trainee for over ten years. They said that they did not want to lose me to another firm. This offer was not on merit of me undertaking my masters but instead merely on my diligence as an employee.

So what have I learned from my experience that I could offer to someone else?

1. Cliché - but never give up. There will be many days when you will consider if it is all really worth it.
2. Be aware that sometimes your personal attributes will play more of a role in obtaining a training contract than your CV.
3. Always be professional in the work place and always be open minded in all learning opportunities as you never know where these opportunities may lead to.
4. Rejections and criticism most definitely serve to build character.
5. While sheer determination will get you a training contract, never forget those who helped you on your journey.
6. Once you qualify, you do not necessarily need to practice. The qualification alone will open many new and exciting doors for you.

I wish you all the very best in your journey to becoming a solicitor.

## **Trainee Account 21**

I first began looking for traineeships in January 2017 before I had done any of my FE-1s. I went for a few interviews with the bigger Dublin firms but they were reluctant to take me on as I had little to no experience and I had not even started the process of applying for my FE-1s. It was quite a shock to me that college subjects, results, club and society participation counted for very little in terms of obtaining a job/traineeship with a firm.

I decided I needed to get experience if I was going to get anywhere and also promptly applied to take my first round of FE-1s in October 2017. Then I started applying to firms around Cork City where I lived and worked at the time. I didn't apply for a job/traineeship outright. Instead, I simply asked firms to take me on as an unpaid intern for a month over the summer. I emphasized that I was keen to gain experience in an office and to see what everyday life in a law firm was like, in the hope that it would give me an edge in future interviews.

I also overhauled my C.V. and cover letter, cutting the information within to the bare minimum of relevant details to the role I was asking for.

A small firm agreed to take me on a short term unpaid basis. The whole process was fairly informal and only consisted of me sending in an email with C.V. and cover letter followed by a quick chat over the phone.

In July 2017 I commenced my month of work experience. My tasks varied from the very interesting to the very mundane. It involved a lot of doing the jobs no one else wanted to do such as copying, shredding, setting up meeting rooms for clients, hand delivering letters to other firms and running files up to Barristers in court. I also got to do quite interesting tasks such as doing research, assisting in advising clients on the law, interfacing with clients such as receivers and private equity funds and attending solicitors in district court, circuit court and even high court matters as a note taker. I found this experience to be invaluable and it was a really good indicator of what life as a trainee would be like.

At the end of the month the managing partner of the firm called me into her office and told me that the partners had been impressed by what they had seen the month previous and that they were happy to offer me a training contract. Needless to say I accepted gladly. I began working for the firm in November 2017 after my first round of FE-1s and continued to work with them on a full time basis (bar a few weeks to study for my second round of FE-1s in March 2018) up until I came to Blackhall this September.

I think the most important aspects in me getting my training contract were the fact that I was willing to work for free to gain experience which demonstrated a genuine interest in the profession as well as the work I did then while on the internship. Eagerness as well as the way I conducted myself throughout the unpaid internship were probably the key factors in me being offered the training contract.

## Trainee Account 22

The first step to remember when applying to secure a training contract is to do just that: apply. I remember thinking to myself in 2nd year of college “oh I can’t apply just yet because my grades from first year are poor and I don’t want them to look at my application until I get a 2.1.” Applying to firms for summer internships is a great way of getting used to building your CV, getting used to the interview process and, let’s face it, the rejection process.

Internships are a great way to show the firm that you are a capable employee with a strong work ethic and many firms will offer traineeships through their internship programme. This is so handy to have if you are in final year college and you can relax a bit more knowing your job is secure at the end.

You are unlikely to get a job/internship in the big commercial firms coming straight out of first year (if that’s what you’re looking for), however smaller firms can be more than happy to recruit some help for the summer. Apply anywhere and everywhere. Getting a bit of experience early on in law areas will show firms that you truly show an interest in the law and that you are interested in pursuing it as a career path. Maybe even get some weekend experience here and there if you don’t want to sacrifice a summer.

Volunteering is always a great boost to any CV for obvious reasons but particularly for law firms as they usually will do pro-bono work and have designated charities that they fundraise for and donate to.

Getting involved in societies in college is also great as it shows a willingness to lend time to group work and a willingness to engage with your peers on a deeper level than just drinking and socialising. Societies that involve public speaking are even better in my opinion.

Being involved in a sport to any degree again displays teamwork skills, community involvement *etc.*

Having something interesting on your CV is always a good thing. Something that stands out really works in your favour. I controlled a social media page in college which, at the time, had more followers than Unilad. I subsequently used that page for advertisements and sold it eventually. This has NOTHING to do with law but gave me something to chat about in my interview.

You don’t need to have all of these things but this is just a guide to what the firms look for outside of academic abilities. Just remember, it’s natural to think everyone else applying has better grades, a better CV than you - but it’s just not true! You have just as good a chance and you’ll never know unless you give it your best shot.

## **Trainee Account 23**

My background in law is probably not the average...

When I left school I had no intention of going to university or indeed studying law at all. I was heavily involved in the music industry at the time, so much so that I broke my parents' hearts when I turned down a place on the history and Irish degree course at Trinity College in order to study a Music Management plc in Ballyfermot College of Further Education.

This led to me completing a 'top up year' in Buckinghamshire in England in order to gain a degree from Buckinghamshire Chiltern's University College in Music Industry Management and live Event Production. During the degree year, I undertook several law modules, and it was from there that I really started to develop an interest in law.

I remained in England and the following year I completed a legal secretary diploma in London in order to build on my legal skills and see if a career in law could be for me.

I had a particular interest in media law at the time and took a job in the broadcasting industry. I began to study part-time in the evenings for a Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), which is essentially a law conversion course, whilst working full time.

Having completed the GDL I then undertook the Legal Practice Course (LPC), part-time for two years with BPP University which is the English equivalent of the PPC1 and PPC2 courses. In doing so, I took a gamble, I wasn't signed up as a trainee with a law firm and the broadcasting company that I was working for hadn't officially offered me a traineeship.

Throughout my studies I applied for numerous jobs in the law sector in London but the recession was in full swing in both England and Ireland which made it very difficult to find legal work so I mostly gained legal experience through volunteering with legal clinics and organisations.

I became a paralegal in the broadcasting company that I was working for, gaining valuable experience in contracts, corporate agreements and negotiations *etc.* which I hoped would lead to a training contract within that organisation.

When I completed the LPC however, my employers were unfortunately unable to offer me a training contract and I hadn't managed to gain one with a legal firm, so I returned to Ireland. Within a month of arriving home, I started working as a legal secretary with a small law firm, in a 'job bridge' position in order to gain some legal experience.

When the contract came to an end, the principal decided to retain me as a legal secretary and over the next two years I went on to complete the FE-1s whilst working with the firm. The firm's Principal thereafter, in recognition of my dedication and hard work, offered me a training contract and here I am....

My main advice for future trainees would be to try and gain as much experience as

possible within a law firm or an in house legal department, even if that means working in an area of law, or in a particular roll that you may not necessarily wish to practice in. Persevere, your hard work and determination will always pay off in the end.

Best of luck.

## Trainee Account 24

Everyone's journey in getting their training contract is different; no two stories will be the same. While it may sound simple in theory (finish your degree, apply for and attend numerous interviews, get a contract with the 'perfect' firm), in reality it can be a stressful, exasperating and sometimes disheartening experience. There's a lot to consider as a young lawyer beginning their legal career: will I apply for a training contract? Am I good enough to apply? Who should I apply to? And what size firm is best for me?

The best piece of advice I can give is to stick to your gut. While this is true about most things, it is almost imperative in the context of obtaining a training contract. In my own experience, when I first began to consider applying for a training contract, I was very apprehensive and I wasn't entirely sure what route I should be taking.

I entered into my final year of the BCL in UCC without a care in the world. That is until the people around me started talking about the imminent future and possible careers after college. The words 'training contract' were all we ever spoke about. I had to really consider whether or not it was for me, or whether there was another career I would find just as fulfilling and challenging. Was my future meant to be in Law at all? I debated this question with my friends, my family, even one of my lecturers, but in the end I knew the question would have to turn on whether it felt right to me. It turns out it did, and with that I began the exhausting process of applying for a training contract.

Of course this process began by quickly Googling law firms in Dublin (having lived in Cork all of my life, I decided I needed a change of scenery), jotting down the names, and carefully tweaking my Cover Letter to match the name of the relevant firm to its application. I threaded through my CV on a daily basis looking for grammar errors and typos, and whipped out my best formal wear for interview.

I applied to an array of firms, some of whom I knew I would never hear from, and others whom I hoped I never did. Looking back, I probably should have only applied for the firms whose ethos I liked and that would most likely suit me, and not just every single firm in the hope that one of them would reply. For example, I'm not an extremely competitive person so applying for a firm with a reputation for being dog-eat-dog does not make sense.

When the calls came in for interviews, I was unsure I would be able to handle the pressure. All I could think was that I was an undergraduate, going up against older and much wiser applicants who had more experience than me, and who were more educated. I had never even done a formal interview. To say the least, I felt disheartened before I had even begun.

The first interview I did with one firm was atrocious. I was really nervous, I had under-prepared, and I had no confidence in myself. The next interview was worse again, and I came out laughing (hysterically) because it had gone that terribly. The interviewer asked me to name my favourite company, to which I replied Microsoft, and mumbled something about Bill Gates (not knowing he had stepped down as the CEO). But, the third interview with another firm didn't go so badly. In fact, it went really well. Something about the interview clicked. I was confident, I believed in what I was saying, I answered to the best of my ability, and I was comfortable with the culture of the firm.

Something became apparent to me after the interviews were over. This was that the interviews in which I had done the best were the interviews where I was genuine in my answers, and I remained true to what I believed in. I took the mentality of: this is

who I am – take it or leave it. I thought, ‘if you don’t like my honest answer, maybe you’re not the firm for me’. I stuck with my gut and my gut didn’t fail me. As for the firm I’m currently contracted with, I took that same approach and I believe this was why I had been successful in getting a training contract. I didn’t tweak my answers to fit in with the firm, or to impress the interviewers. I answered sincerely, and this allowed me to feel confident and relaxed, and I came out knowing I had done the very best I could do.

If I could advise someone as to their CV I would insist that all work experience is relevant – it does not have to be legal work experience. Law firms love to see some real-life work experience on a page that can set you apart from the endless other applications they receive. While of course legal experience is also a bonus, don’t worry if you haven’t done an internship in a legal office. If you’ve worked in a pub, you’ve dealt with the most difficult and disorderly people and firms want to know if you can handle challenging situations. If you’ve volunteered abroad for a summer, that shows you’re not afraid of hard work and you’re willing to give back to other people. If you’ve given Math’s grinds to your neighbour’s son, that shows initiative and entrepreneurship (and also a mathematical brain, which is rare in the legal realm). For me, the thing that seemed to work best was to bullet point the work experience and to give an explanation next to it what skills or expertise I had gained from it. For example, when I worked as a waitress this developed my communication skills because I had to deal with customers every day, and handle their queries and grievances. In an interview you can expand on this by tying it into communicating with clients, and be able to properly handle their queries. Also, with regards to your CV, don’t be afraid of showing off - have confidence in yourself and your accomplishments. You have to show the firm why they want to take you on and what you can bring to their table.

As for your cover letter, this is the firm’s first impression of you, so make sure it’s near perfect. Briefly explain why you want to pursue a career in law and why it is you want to work for them. Make sure you have the correct name of the firm on the letter (NB!!).

In all, while getting a training contract is no mean feat, it is possible. It takes time and effort, and it might not happen the first time around. But keep trying and you’ll find the right firm for you, as cheesy as it sounds. Be honest with yourself, and apply for firms if you really want to apply to them. Best of luck!

## **Trainee Account 25**

I never expected to end up in law. My undergraduate degree was in English Literature and I followed that up with a master's degree in Medieval Studies. Afterwards I spent a long time looking for work in a variety of different areas. I ended up doing an internship with a family friend who ran his own corporate services business. He had worked as a solicitor previously and recommended that I look into law. I had thought that going into law would require going back to university, but on looking into it I realised that it was a matter of gaining work experience in the area and starting to take the FE-1 exams.

This friend helped me to find a few weeks' work experience with a partner in a smaller firm of solicitors in Dublin city centre. There were about eight solicitors in this practice and I ended up doing a bit of work in a variety of areas, including litigation, conveyancing and probate as well as helping with the administrative side of running the office. I was able to go down to the Four Courts during this time with one of the legal executives and ended up sitting in on hearings in both the High Court and the Court of Appeal.

After those few weeks I had a bit of a feel for what working in a law firm was like and I decided to try and pursue it as a career. It was now April of 2016 and the so-called "milk rounds" for the larger firms were over, and so online applications seemed to be closed. The friend who had taken me on for an internship recommended that I try and bypass the online applications and get in touch directly with the HR departments of various firms to see if I could find any work.

I got a list of the then twenty largest firms in Ireland from the Law Society Gazette. I also looked on the Law Society's website to see which smaller firms in Dublin had been hiring recently to see which firms were growing in size and might be willing to take an intern or paralegal on. I looked through the list of twenty and decided to cross off a few I knew I wouldn't apply for; these were either firms that didn't have Dublin offices or firms which specialised in very niche areas which I knew I would not find interesting. Having narrowed it down to about fifteen, I started to cold call them and tried to get through to the HR manager, or whoever was responsible for hiring.

At first it was very disheartening. Most of the larger firms had already chosen their summer interns and offered pre-training contracts. One HR manager told me that they had a waiting list of about a thousand in case any of their new interns dropped out before starting. I finally made my way down the list to number twenty, the last on the list I had found. I called up and was pleasantly surprised to find that there were just two places left on their summer internship program.

After a brief interview I started the summer internship along with almost ten others in May of 2016 and was assigned as an intern to the corporate department. After two months I was initially offered a year-long contract. A very busy two years followed. As well as working and trying to complete the FE-1s, I got married and had a daughter, which made studying in the evenings and weekends difficult. In addition to this, only a limited number of people would get training contracts each year and so there was pressure to perform well and get through the FE-1s so as not to have to

wait until the following year to get a training contract. I worked eight months in all in the corporate department followed by a year in litigation.

Eventually, having finished six out of the eight FE-1s, I was offered a training contract, subject to getting my last two FE-1s in the March 2018 sitting. Needless to say this was a lot of pressure but eventually I got through them. I did a last rotation of five months in the public procurement and construction department before going to Blackhall in September 2018.

If I were to give any advice to somebody looking for a training contract based on my own experience, it would be the following:

- Getting a bit of work experience in law, even just a few weeks, is very helpful for standing out from the crowd when first looking for a contract.
- Where possible, getting in touch with a person in charge of recruiting and speaking to them can be much more helpful and informative than just sending an email.
- Different firms have different approaches to interns and trainees; some only take on people who have finished their FE-1s whereas others (like mine) take on interns or paralegals who can work as they finish the FE-1s.
- Don't underestimate the FE-1s, especially when trying to get your first three. I was able to take study leave and I took annual leave as well in order to have enough time to revise for them. I usually took about four weeks altogether each sitting and I just about got through them in three sittings.
- Be flexible. If your firm isn't offering a training contract in the particular year that you want it, and you have all or most of your FE-1s finished, other firms will take you on and it's much easier to get a training contract if you have experience in another law firm.
- If you're looking for a contract in one of the larger firms, the "milk rounds" are usually between December and February; you put in your CV then with a view to starting in the following summer. Not all firms work like this however so be sure to research the firms you're hoping to get into. Most medium and large firms will usually have a lot of information on careers on their website.

## **Trainee Account 26**

I studied Law and Business at undergraduate level and in my final year, I set about trying to secure a training contract with a commercial law firm in Dublin.

### **Before Applying**

I did an internship in London during the summer before my final year and even after a couple of weeks in the firm, I knew that this was the career I wanted to pursue. I loved the diverse range of work and the constant buzz around the office.

Before commencing the search for a training contract, I would highly recommend getting some experience in a law firm. Firstly, to help you to figure out whether this is actually something you want to pursue as a career and secondly, it will give you lots to talk about during any subsequent interviews. This experience does not necessarily have to be an internship - even a week or two unpaid in a law firm of any size will give you an insight into the work of a solicitor.

### **Application Process**

Preparing your CV and completing the various application forms is a time consuming process and should not be underestimated. If you are applying while still in college, the application deadlines tend to conflict with the deadlines for submitting coursework or essays. I would highly recommend getting a head start on the applications. While many of the firms ask similar questions in their application forms, watch out for subtle differences - using copy and paste across the application forms is a dangerous game!

While you may have researched the various firms extensively and have a specific company in mind that you believe would be a good fit for you, I don't think there is any harm in applying to several firms. When completing my applications and preparing for interviews, I firstly researched each firm online. I also attended the networking events in college organised by the firms. I found these gave me a real insight into the working environment and atmosphere in the various offices and also their practice areas.

In the weeks leading up to the interviews, I read the newspapers every day to keep up to date with legal developments and current affairs. I personally found that knowing I had a general idea of what was going on boosted my confidence walking into interviews - and reduced the fear that I could be completely caught off guard by a difficult question!

While your hobbies and interests might not be the main focus of your CV or application, I was asked and spoke a lot about these in my interviews - you might be surprised by the little things you may have in common with the interviewers. Interviewers are looking to hire someone they can see themselves working with and who will work well as part of a team. So I would suggest including a short summary of your interests, volunteering, travel and part-time jobs in your application form or CV.

## **The Interview**

I would highly recommend knowing your CV and application form inside out. (Also make sure to save a copy of your answers if you are submitting an application online - if you forget to do this, as I did, don't hesitate to contact someone in the HR department!) I found that most interviewers had a copy of my application form in front of them and used the questions as a roadmap to guide the interview. I would recommend becoming very familiar with your answers and I would advise against any exaggeration or embellishment, as you could easily be caught out by these in an interview setting.

Nerves on the day of the interview are inevitable. Someone once suggested that if you are faced with a question that throws you off, rather than panicking and launching straight in with a rambling answer, take a sip of water and think about your answer, even for a few seconds. This brief pause will almost certainly go unnoticed by the interviewer, but it will give you a chance to gather your thoughts and to give a more considered response.

My interviews tended to be about 45 minutes long and varied hugely in terms of content. During one particular interview, I felt as though the interviewers were constantly trying to challenge me with difficult questions and I was often abruptly cut off when speaking on topics I was comfortable with. I left feeling like I had not been given the chance to speak about any area I was even remotely confident on. Another interview, with the firm I am now training with, could be described as more of an informal conversation, so much so that when I left I was convinced that the firm had no intention of hiring me and were letting me down gently by going easy on me during the interview. I felt as though I was completely in control of the interview and I was given the chance to speak as much as I liked about the topics I wanted to discuss. It was clear that the interviewers had read my CV and application form in detail and they seemed genuinely interested in my answers. My positive experience during the interview made that firm the obvious choice for me.

## **Before You Start**

After securing my training contract, I worked as a paralegal in the office for 6 months before I started my traineeship. I found this time in the office to be invaluable, particularly as I returned to the same team for my first seat. It was a great opportunity to get to grips with the basics - even using the photocopier and finding my way around the office - which boosted my confidence when I later started as a trainee. I would recommend going into the office, even for a couple of weeks if possible, before you start.

*Best of luck!*

## **Trainee Account 27**

I started looking for a training contract in December 2017 with the hope to start attending the PPCI in September 2018. I had passed four subjects of the FE-1s at the time but I had no law degree and no prior experience of working in any law firms. It proved to be a challenge to look for a training contract without a degree and any experience.

I mostly used the law society's website to search for opening positions. I applied to about 20-25 law firms between December 2017 and January 2018. Unfortunately, my profile did not attract much interest from law firms because all I had on my CV that is relevant to law was the four FE-1 results. I finally got interviews with three relevant small firms at the end of January.

I interviewed with all three firms. To my surprise, the initial interviews were all very short – lasting for about 20 minutes. I prepared a lot before the interviews. For example, I studied different legal terms, legal areas in law firms, and current legal topics. But I didn't get asked any of that.

All the firms asked me why I wanted to become a solicitor. None of them asked me about my previous work experience as those roles were not relevant to law. The interviews focused more on the skills that would be required in a law firm. One of the firms seemed very concerned that given I had no prior experience, they would have to spend a lot of time training me and they were not sure if they would have the resources to do so considering their small size.

I was given time in all interviews to ask questions. I had prepared several questions to ask each firm so it showed them that I did my own research and I was genuinely interested.

I eventually received an offer (after only one interview) from one of the firms which is the one I'm training in. They were open to train people and didn't seem concerned about me not having prior experience. In the meantime, I received another offer for a legal secretary position, but they could not promise to provide me with a training contract in a few months' time. So I eventually accepted the offer with my current firm.

While most people looking for training contracts might have had a law degree and/or experience working in law firms, I think it is important to keep an open mind and to not get frustrated over silence or rejections.

## **Trainee Account 28**

I was fortunate to be in a position during senior cycle that achieving the points required for pretty much every course was within my capabilities. I explored a multitude of options, particularly because I was scientifically and mathematically minded. However, law just felt like a natural choice for me. I had spent a week with both a barrister and a solicitor, respectively, during transition year. Law had always appealed to me. I was slightly atypical - I excelled in Honours Maths, Chemistry and Physics, and I didn't study any humanities. I have always spun these skills to my advantage - I prove the 'lawyers can't do maths' perpetuation wrong!

BCL International at University College Cork felt like the perfect fit. I wanted a rounded law degree, within which I could take a lot of electives, and I wanted to study abroad. I also knew that it was an attractive degree in the eyes of prospective employers. I spent a semester in the US and another in the Netherlands in third year.

That spring, I applied for and was offered internships with a number of large Dublin firms. I interviewed over Skype as I was in the Netherlands at the time. There were a few difficulties - the Wi-Fi was so poor that one became a telephone interview, and we had a mix up as regards the time of the interview due to the time difference with another! However, I was successful in each, and I accepted two internship offers. On my applications, I emphasised my somewhat unusual leaving certificate subjects, and the fact that I had done so was fed back to me positively by a number of firms. I could illustrate how the skills I had developed through each subject, such as problem-solving and logical thinking, would be of benefit in the legal sphere. I also had a range of extra-curricular activities, and was widely involved in university life, both academically and socially. Again, I showed how my experiences with each would be beneficial to a legal career. I could demonstrate willingness to work by the fact that I had worked part-time (on and off) since my late teens, in a variety of fields - retail, hospitality and business.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first internship. I felt welcomed by the firm and every employee I encountered was kind and helpful. Nobody felt beyond approach, and the managing partner went out of his way to speak with us frequently. I greatly enjoyed working with the team I was assigned to and got on well with the other interns. We were interviewed in a formal manner on the second to last day but it felt more like a conversation. Neither of the two partners interviewing me was trying to catch me out or made me feel on edge. The opposite was true. My 'interview' transcended into a conversation about American politics and democracy, given that I had just returned from studying there and in light of the political climate there at the time (Trump was the presumptive Republican nominee at this point). I was comfortable talking about same because politics and current affairs interested me. I was offered a training contract the next day. I started another internship the following week and within the first few hours of the first day, I knew I definitely wanted to accept the first firm's offer. Although the firms were technically very similar - similar fields of work, similar sizes, similar people the overall feel was starkly different. It confirmed what I had already felt: that I wanted to train with the first firm.

I accepted the training contract offer, and asked to be listed to commence in April 2019. Therefore, I went in to final year without the stress of finding future employment looming overhead! I graduated from BCL International with a First Class Honours in 2017. I contemplated doing a master's degree abroad, but decided not to because I was lucky enough to have secured a training contract without it. I spoke with my firm and with various professors and came to the conclusion that I didn't really need a fancy master's anyway. I sat my FE-1s in two sittings in October 2017 and March 2018, and started my training contract this September, going straight into PPC1. I had initially listed my start date with my firm as April 2019 but decided in the spring of 2018 to request to begin earlier. My start date was moved without hassle.

I would advise prospective trainees to develop well-rounded CVs. Get involved in academic and social activities, whether during third level or afterwards. Know yourself inside out and do not embellish your CV because you think it will make you more appealing to prospective employers. It's an easy way to get caught in a lie. Believe in yourself and make sure you show this belief. Confidence is key. I am also, however, a proponent of humility. Answer any questions posed, whether in an application or in an interview, thoughtfully and comprehensively. It is far better to take a few seconds to think than to jump straight into an answer. It is also an admirable trait to be able to say 'I am actually not sure about that but...' or 'I don't have a lot of experience in that but..'.

Good grades and relevant work experience will always work in your favour, and do try and sit your FE1s in as little sittings as possible if you do not have a contract beforehand. Ensure you know as much as you can find out about the particular firm you are applying for or interviewing with - reach out to people you know who work there already, or who have had offers from them before. Do be aware of current affairs, and of any major developments with clients of the firm. It may not need to be said but I would advise dressing in an understated manner: a black or navy suit and dark shoes. Less is more as regards make - up and hair. A shiny blue suit and light brown shoes are not appreciated by every firm! Speak articulately and be mannerly.

I wish every prospective trainee the best of luck. Perseverance will pay off in the end!

## **Trainee Account 29**

I think it is fair to say that for someone embarking on a legal career with no family connections to the legal profession at all, finding one's training contract is a significant hurdle. This is certainly one of the obstacles that I encountered. My quest to join the legal profession began all the way back in Galway in the depths of the recession as a teenager when I decided that the role of a solicitor neatly fitted my interests in current affairs and history.

The first hurdle was the leaving certificate which I completed in 2011 and I was happy to gain my number one CAO preference of Arts at NUI, Galway. I chose this particular course as it gave me the opportunity to combine my study of law with other subjects such as economics. My reasoning was that I wanted a back-up should the path to the legal profession not work out.

Having received my undergraduate BA in Legal Studies and Economics in 2014, I managed to obtain a summer internship in Citi, one of the world's leading financial institutions in the IFSC in Dublin. I then returned to NUI, Galway to complete a post-graduate LLB which I completed in 2015. The day I completed my final exam, Citi came calling to offer me a place on their graduate programme and there I spent two happy years.

At Citi, I worked in the areas of fund administration, risk management and global custody contending with a broad spectrum of matters from the downright mundanity of daily trades to the sheer exhilaration of reacting, in real time, to the chaos of global markets caused by the unexpected election of President Trump or the calamitous Brexit referendum in the UK all the while studying for the eight dreaded FE-1 exams. So several nights a week and every weekend I would open up my college notes, textbooks and FE-1 manuals and while away the hours learning and re-learning the syllabus set by the Law Society, in between pints and hangovers from the active Citi Grad-Programme social scene! Whilst many of my peers spent significant sums of money on preparatory courses for the FE-1 exams, I opted to study independently as I found that method suited me quite well from my time in university. Of course, other people work better in the structure of a class room and that's okay too.

The hours working at Citi varied from the usual 9 hour working day to 12 hour, 16 hour days or even overnight as the workload required. So I learned to be quite disciplined with my study, work and social life. There is no reason why anyone should deny themselves a social life or time with friends and family whilst studying for the FE-1s and/or working. I lived a full social life going on the mid - week pint and baby Guinness circuit with my friends or going to whatever sporting event was on a given weekend, returning home to Galway to help out on the family farm or cut the cake at a 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party. If one is disciplined with time, one can fit in study time. I was lucky in that I was allowed to avail of study leave during the two weeks of the FE-1s (and only those two weeks) without my annual leave allocation being affected but it wasn't always easy, I failed them on the first attempt. However, I got on with it and passed four exams on the second attempt, and whittled away at the remaining FE-1 exams over the coming years.

During my time at Citi, I would take a random half day here or there throughout the year to attend interviews for jobs with law firms in Dublin and particularly during the milk-rounds at autumn-time which inevitably raised eyebrows at work from friends and colleagues alike. I attended countless training contract interviews over 3 years starting in 2014 when I was still a student. From the top 10 law firms to the small time practitioners, I could never seem to get a training contract. But I always learned something from each interview, whether it was how to conduct oneself sitting across from partners, what to put into a CV or topics of conversation for the interview itself (and those topics to steer clear from!). No experience is useless and there is always room for improvement.

Then finally my time had come in November 2016 when I interviewed with one of the big firms in Dublin and happily received a telephone call from them the following week offering me a training contract commencing in 2017. So at last, I was on the road to Blackhall. It didn't even matter that I was still waiting to pass three FE-1 exams. All I knew was that I was going to Blackhall in September 2017 and my hard work was paying off. I hand-delivered my signed training contract to my training firm knowing that I would be starting a four month pre-seat with them in the summer of 2017, but not before I got some world travel out of the way. And with that knowledge, I handed in my notice to Citi, packed my bags and moved back west to Galway for three months to study in quiet bliss for my final batch of FE-1 exams in March 2017

By St. Patrick's day 2017, the FE-1 exams were a distant memory, the pint glass was overflowing, the travel brochures had pages turned down and torn out with explicit instructions given to the travel agent for my tour of South-East Asia. Then in the final week of March, I got a call from my training firm that all pre-seats were requested to commence work in the first week of April. Travelling around Vietnam and Cambodia on a motor-bike (as seen on Top Gear) with Instagram friendly photos taken along the way would simply have to wait until later in the summer before commencing Blackhall that September. At least, that's what I thought.

So the following week I was in induction with all the other trainees in the board room of my training firm. Within hours and days I found myself grappling with how to prepare a brief for a barrister, drafting letters and researching obscure aspects of law. It was quite a steep learning curve for one who had never set foot in a legal office prior to that. Then on 21<sup>st</sup> April, the earth beneath me shattered, my Dad rang me to say that the FE-1 results had arrived. But it wasn't meant to be, I had failed two of the last remaining FE-1s. There would be no Blackhall that September after all.

But I just got on with it and sat Contract law and Equity that October 2017 (and had a great weekend at EP in Stradbally, Co. Laois and an even better week back in Galway celebrating the All-Ireland Hurling Final win along the way). I continued working on the Construction and Projects team making wonderful friends and learning from fantastic mentors along the way. I learned from the extra time spent with that department that construction and procurement was an area that I could see myself practising in long-term. I rang my parents on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2017, but this time it was good news: I had passed all of the FE-1s and could look forward to commencing

Blackhall in 2018. Yes it was a year later than anticipated, but life throws up many surprises and you need to roll with the punches.

Looking back on it all now, I think that I performed best in interviews where I was just myself with that thick Galway accent with which I grew up with, talking about the experience of eking out a living on the land breeding Connemara Ponies in order to pay for university and working every hour in the week in the world of finance whilst studying for FE-1s. In short, just be yourself in an interview. After all, law partners know that you understand the law why else would you have a law degree. What they are looking for in an interview is whether you the person and your personality and attitude will fit well with their law firm and the necessity of working as part of a team. If you can demonstrate an enthusiastic readiness to learn, an ethic for hard work and the ability to work with others, then FE-1s notwithstanding, you will get that elusive training contract.

So fast forward to July 2018, my pre-seat was over and I travelled the world for two months before Blackhall (stopping off in an Irish bar in Lima, Peru to watch Galway get hammered in the All-Ireland Hurling Final). On 4<sup>th</sup> September 2018 I walked through the black wrought-iron gates into the Law Society at Blackhall Place and looked up at its copper dome (which incidentally channelled Hogwarts vibes from the Harry Potter books) and I thought to myself: "*at last, I have arrived*". So yes, seven years after I commenced first year legal studies at NUI, Galway here I was living my dream and on my way to becoming a solicitor at the age of 25 with my training contract in hand. It wasn't without its obstacles, it wasn't without hard work, but I wouldn't change my path here for the world because even though there were disappointments along the way, there was great craic too and no experience is useless. From our failures, we learn how not to repeat those same mistakes. Every day is a learning day.

## **Trainee Account 30**

I studied Business and Law in UCD and came out with a 2:1 degree (as did many people).

The Business and Law course in UCD is a four year degree course and I started to apply to the large commercial firms in my third year of college (as did many people) but to no avail. I wasn't called for one interview at that stage and it was really disheartening as I believed that my grades were good and I had participated in extra-curricular activities during college. I believed that that would be enough.

The summer before going into final year, I went away on a J-1 so applying for internships at that stage wasn't an option. Again, once in final year, I applied to the milk-rounds to all the large commercial law firms in Dublin but wasn't successful. If I thought I was disheartened in my third year of college, it didn't compare to what I was feeling in my final year. I was feeling anxious at that stage, as many people in my year had been successful in obtaining a training contract after college and I started to compare myself to them.

Another set of applications came after the milk-rounds closed and the large firms started opening their applications for internships. I was slightly more successful in this, but to be honest I wasn't flooded with interviews either.

I did however interview for a niche financial services law firm in Dublin and once offered the internship, I immediately accepted. The internship lasted for the entire summer and I was offered a training contract at the end of the internship.

However, I didn't want to bank on being offered the training contract after the internship so I applied for the LLM in International Commercial Law in UCD and applied to sit the first three FE-1s in October after graduating before I was offered the training contract. I didn't really know what to expect when sitting the FE-1s so I only applied to sit the first three exams to act as a practice run to see how I got on.

When the firm that I did the internship with heard of my plans to sit the FE-1s straight away, they offered me a position as a paralegal in the firm while I sat my exams. I was delighted at that stage – knowing that I could now forgo the LLM. I believed that gaining experience in the office as a paralegal and getting my FE-1 exams would be more benefit to me instead of doing the LLM. After all, I was only really doing the LLM to enhance my applications for further rounds of interviews!

I worked in that firm in a very niche practice area for nearly 2 years, and surprisingly passed the FE-1s within a year while working full time. The experience I gained was incredible, but I started to have doubts about the area of law that I was working in. The reason why I wanted to pursue a career as a solicitor was because I was interested in the practice areas of litigation and property, and while the firm I was working with at the time offered those departments, the teams in those departments were very small. I started to realise that I didn't know what area I wanted to practice in after I qualified, and I wanted to get the broadest training I could get while a trainee, so that I might have wider job options after qualifying. That was when I realised I would have to start applying to firms once again...!

I checked the Law Society's website daily for openings for trainees under the "Vacancies" section to see if there were firms that were looking for a trainee that was available to do PPC-1 this year. I knew that it was quite last minute so I didn't get my hopes up too high. I also started the process of applying to the larger firms again for a training contract during the milk-rounds for a third time! But this time, instead of applying to each and every one, I did extensive research into each firm, deciding which one I liked more, and which one I actually wanted to work for. I ended up deciding to apply for two firms and worked hard on my applications – tailoring each answer appropriately depending on the firm I was applying for. This is one of the main reasons I think I was successful this time – I put a lot more effort into the applications and showed I had researched the firms extensively.

I was called for interviews and attended the drinks receptions that the large firms usually have before the interviews and it was only then did I realise how much experience the other potential trainees had in the room with me. Many people had a masters, studied abroad, had all of their FE-1s and had been working for years before they applied to the milk-rounds. I think it is because it is such a competitive environment it is becoming less and less likely to get offered a training contract while in college. Grades and extra-curricular activities are not enough, and if you get offered a contract just on that, that is an outstanding achievement, but the more people I spoke to at the drinks receptions, I realised how intelligent and educated people were, and how much legal experience people actually had.

The first round interviews were fine mainly just a conversation with only simple current affairs questions and they are generally nothing to worry about. I think the first round interviews are really just showing that you are able to have a conversation with partners / associates and you get to show your personality more. The second round interviews can be a little harder and are generally longer.

Definitely keep an eye on current affairs coming up to the second round interviews. You could be asked a very general affairs question on something that is obviously topical at the time but you can also be asked something harder or more obscure. My advice is, if you don't know the answer just say! They will appreciate your honesty rather than just trying to fluff your way through an answer that doesn't make sense.

Easier said than done, but try and not be nervous. Show that you are confident in your abilities as a trainee. After all – you have worked extremely hard to get to where you are. I was lucky at this stage, that I could show that I had lots of legal experience having already worked in an office and the fact that I had already passed the FE-1's, and this is what stood to me in the second round interviews. I was able to relate the trickier questions to an experience that I already had in the office, rather than trying to relate it to something that wasn't truly related to the question. I was asked if I had a training contract in the firm I was currently working in and I was truthful and told the partners that I had. Be careful not to bad-mouth any firm regardless of the reason you are leaving! I also used the firm that I was currently working in as a comparison when I said why I wanted to leave. I explained that I didn't want to be too restricted in certain practice areas after I qualified and the partners seemed to appreciate that. I know that some of the questions during those types of interviews can call for a little bluffing but just realise the people sitting opposite you that are interviewing you, are

people too and are just looking for a realistic and truthful answer. The interviewers were impressed with my legal experience and how I passed the FE-1s while working full time and I was offered a training contract which I accepted.

As a conclusion, one thing to take from this is that you should not be disheartened if you aren't offered a contract while you are in college. There are other people out there that are applying for the job too – you are not just up against people with degrees. It is a competitive process. If you are unsuccessful during college, try and get as much legal experience as possible. Try and enhance your applications by completing your FE-1s and research extensively into the firm you are applying to. If you stick to these three things, I'm sure you'll be successful.

One final note – if you are not happy with the area of law you are working in and you're not really happy with the firm you are working in, don't be afraid to change! A training contract is only a job at the end of the day. Make sure you are happy wherever you work – after all, it is a big commitment!

Best of luck with everything!