



Interview: Starting a Training Contract at Lester Aldridge

On 1st March, [LA welcomed five new trainee solicitors](#), Emily Curtis-Bennett, Aneta Zaitlikova, Beth McCarthy, Luke Foot, and Jessica Slater, who began their two-year training contract with the firm.

We caught up with three of the new trainees, Emily, Aneta and Jessica, to find out more about their journey into law, what attracted them to LA and what their first day as a trainee solicitor (during lockdown!) was like.

Please share with us your journey into law.

Emily: I have always been interested in law and started by doing some initial work experience when I was in the sixth form. I went on to complete my law degree at the University of Surrey. In the third year of my degree, I was able to do a placement year in which I spent a year working in a Surrey-based law firm. I continued to work there part-time for the final year of my degree. I then did the LPC at the University of Law in Guildford, whilst working part-time for another law firm in Guildford. After finishing the LPC I went travelling for 3 months and on my return, I secured a paralegal position in London where I worked for three years before starting my training contract with Lester Aldridge in March 2021.

Aneta: I moved to the UK when I was 18 and completed a BA in Diplomacy and Law at London Metropolitan University. After graduating, since I did a BA course instead of an LLB, I had to complete a GDL (Graduate Diploma in Law - conversion course). Since I completed over half of all required modules in my law degree, I was exempt from completing the full GDL and only completed the missing modules. I then moved on to study my LPC part-time in London. In my first year of the LPC, I secured a paralegal/compliance assistant position at an offshore law firm's London office. I received a training contract offer from LA in 2019 and began this March.

Jess: After studying for my LLB in England I moved out to Australia and started working as a paralegal in a boutique shipping and aviation law firm in Sydney. After gaining valuable experience, the firm sponsored me to obtain a residential working visa. I enrolled at Sydney University to study part of a diploma in law to convert my degree to Australian law. Following my time abroad, I moved back to London where I worked as a paralegal full time in various specialist shipping and commodity teams for around 3 years whilst studying for my LPC and Masters with BPP Law School in London.

What is your first seat? What are your expectations/what are you most looking forward to in this seat?

Aneta: My first seat is in [LA Marine](#). Funnily enough, we discussed the marine sector at my training contract interview at LA and how I found it fascinating coming from a landlocked country. The team are really lovely and very helpful – I am looking forward to working with them. The team gets involved in various litigation, arbitration and mediation work for a range of clients and I am looking forward to having the exposure. I also know very little about LA Marine and marine sector in general so I am looking forward to learning more about this industry.

Emily: My first seat is in [Personal Injury and Medical Negligence](#). I studied PI on the LPC and I really enjoyed it. I am looking forward to developing this knowledge further and seeing how everything works in practice and also getting to know the team and the firm.

Jess: My first seat is in the Lender Services ([commercial property](#)) team in Bournemouth. I have never worked in a property team so I am looking forward to learning and experience a new area of the law. I hope to gain insight across a diverse range of property matters/issues, which I feel will help develop many transferable skills.

Describe your first day at LA (in lockdown 3.0!)

Aneta: It has been a very different experience – mostly because all our induction was online hence it gave us a very different feel to the induction we would have in the office. Needless to say, however, that everyone was very friendly and helpful. We were welcomed in by the [head of HR](#) and [Mark Benham](#), Partner in Real Estate Team who also [trained at LA](#) – impressive! We then had a few other meetings over Zoom and assigned e-learning. It's been great to see that almost all of the equity partners started as trainees with LA and how LA takes the development of their trainees, their commitment to equality, diversity and mental health seriously.

Emily: My first day at LA was very well organised and involved a lot of Zoom induction talks. All the talks were very informative and everyone was very welcoming.

Jess: My first week at LA involved a remote induction. On day 1, we met our cohort of trainees and attended a series of presentations and welcome sessions. It was an inspiring day and we all felt welcomed into the firm!

What's it like starting a training contract during a lockdown?

Aneta: Strange! It is a completely different experience to be logging on from my living room to Zoom meetings instead of meeting everyone in the office. I must say however that everyone was very approachable and appreciative of the fact that this is very unusual to LA.

Emily: It is definitely more challenging to start a training contract whilst working from home compared to being in an office environment where you can interact with everyone, especially when you are new to the firm completely. However, everyone involved in our induction week at Lester Aldridge has been very welcoming, very understanding of the circumstances, and have been more than willing to help with any queries.

Jess: Brilliant thus far. The induction week was well organised, each trainee was provided with a tight schedule to stay engaged – and it was personalised to ensure we all had the necessary training relevant to the seat we were joining. The induction week was well organised, each trainee was provided with a tight schedule to stay engaged – and it was personalised to ensure we all had the necessary training relevant to the seat we were joining. Ample coffee breaks were provided. Since the induction week, I have been working in the office for essential training and the team have regular zoom calls twice a week to share knowledge and provide training to the team as a whole.

What area of law do you enjoy the most / do you hope to qualify into?

Aneta: My interests lie in corporate/commercial or international private client work. However, I am keeping an open mind and will see what the training contract will bring. I might find out I actually enjoy something completely different!

Emily: The current experience I have is in debt recovery, residential property, private client (i.e. will, trust, probate) and now a small amount of PI. It is hard to say definitively what area I enjoy most or what area I want to qualify into as there are still areas that I wish to explore, but currently, private client would be top for me.

Jess: Ah – the big question! I have a background in maritime law so I can see myself in the marine or shipping sphere but I have a budding desire to combine this with some environmental law along the way! I am not sure how yet but I have some ideas.

What attracted you to the Lester Aldridge trainee scheme?

Aneta: The ability to experience hands-on training in a collaborative, friendly and appreciative environment in a leading firm in the South West. The number of partners who trained in the firm is also a testament to the firm's extensive training and development focus and a strong, friendly culture. Coming from London, I also wanted to live by the beach, not spend hours commuting and enjoy work-life balance. Since starting, I can appreciate even more LA's commitment to a balanced life, mental health and equality and diversity.

Emily: I wanted to train at a firm that had a robust and long-standing training programme in place. It was also very appealing to me that a lot of partners and senior staff at LA initially trained with the firm, so it clearly showed the investment that LA put into their trainees.

Jess: LA's training contract is well-established – they invest in their trainees! The firm is medium-sized and has

many different seats on offer in different locations. I believe the rotations are invaluable to any junior lawyer not only to help narrow down a speciality but also to make us all well-rounded lawyers with the right balance of legal awareness and transferable skills.

How did you prepare for your trainee solicitor interview?

Emily: I spent a lot of time researching the firm and its values and also researched the interviewers once I knew who they would be. I also went over all of my experience, including legal and non-legal, and made sure that I had thought about key competency questions and examples of where I had shown key skills that would be attributable for a solicitor. Finally, I made sure that I thought of and noted down the questions that I wanted to ask at the end of the interview.

Aneta: I made sure I researched the firm well and had a clear idea of what I want from my training contract and future career (not necessarily where I will qualify but rather that the firm's culture should resonate with my own beliefs and the quality of work and breadth of clients). I then prepared answers to various questions usually asked at the TC interviews I found online or through the careers department at my university. To be honest my interview was not as I expected – It was more of a friendly chat!

Jess: Read, research, practice!

How to apply for a training contract at Lester Aldridge

The window for applying for training contracts starting in 2023 is open from 1st April – 30th June 2021. Find out more about [graduate training contracts at Lester Aldridge](#).