



# Interview with a Trainee Solicitor at Lester Aldridge – Maddy Cornmell

In this interview, discover how first-year trainee solicitor Maddy Cornmell pursued a career in law and gained a training contract at Lester Aldridge after studying at the University of Surrey, the LPC at the University of Law, and work experience in criminal defence & family law firms.

## Please share with us your journey into law.

I studied Law with Criminology at the University of Surrey and then the LPC at the University of Law in Guildford. Whilst at university, I undertook work experience in boutique criminal defence and high-net-worth Family firms. I took part in pro-bono training with the charity Amicus ALJ, appealing the death sentence in the US. I was also on the Law Society committee as Wellbeing Officer, running the mentoring scheme and acting as a point of contact for students struggling with their mental health.

Between my degree and the LPC, I worked full-time at the National Centre for Domestic Violence as a Legal Aid caseworker, interviewing and drafting witness statements for survivors of abuse and applying for protective injunctions. It was this role that confirmed I wanted a career in law, working with clients through the extremities of their lives.

Currently in my first seat, Real Estate Finance (formerly known as Lender Services), my journey at LA began on the first day of my training contract, given that I was an external candidate. Within this role, I am part of a sub-team dedicated to representing one major lender. In terms of tasks, I draft various documents, including security documents, lease reviews, and certificates of title. You are encouraged to build up your pool of tasks, and the end goal for this seat is to manage my own caseload!

## How does the seat system work at LA?

A few weeks before we rotate, the trainees are sent a list of all the departments which have room for a trainee. There's always a great variety and usually the opportunity to go to the other offices. We put the seats in a list of personal preference. We justify our choices with a few sentences, and then it is sent to the training principal, Susan Cowan, for review. Throughout your training contract, you have to do a mix of contentious and non-

contentious work, so you will get a variety!

## **What area of law do you enjoy the most / hope to qualify into? Has this changed?**

As I am only in my first seat, I am not quite in a position to say where I want to qualify just yet, but so far, I have really enjoyed Real Estate Finance and the variety of work it presents. I am also looking forward to more contentious areas of law and would like to experience areas such as Personal Injury, Care, and Family.

## **What attracted you to the Lester Aldridge trainee scheme?**

I had three main criteria when I was looking at various firms – location, seats, and outreach. Experiencing the commute to London firms first-hand, I knew that lifestyle was not for me. A southern-based firm was my preference, and LA, with offices in both Bournemouth and Southampton, met this requirement. The firm's offer of a variety of exciting and different areas caught my interest. Particularly appealing were the niche areas that LA provided (Marine, Care, International Private Client, to name but a few), in addition to the more traditional areas of practice. Finally, I wanted a training contract that would allow me to get involved with the wider community, and LA has great links with various societies and charities.

## **How did you prepare for your trainee solicitor interview?**

I practised competency-based questions (i.e. tell us about a time you have worked in a team / dealt with a difficult customer / used initiative etc.) and ensured I had good answers using the STAR technique. It is easy to go off on a tangent in an interview, but the STAR technique ensures you stay concise and actually answer the question – Situation, Task, Action, Result.

It is also important to recognise your non-legal work experience and to bring in anything that is relevant or where you gained transferable skills. I had various roles where I gained invaluable experience and soft skills, for example, my summer jobs when I was at university working at a theme park as a ride operator or bartending at a student nightclub.

It sounds impossible, but it is also important to be relaxed. When you're relaxed, you can be your most genuine self! The interview is a two-way conversation; it is also for you to see if LA and what you've learnt about it so far from the application process is for you.

## **What's the best thing about training at LA?**

The people. I have never been made to feel out of place or as though one of my (many!) questions are too silly. My colleagues are friendly and really took the time to show me how to do various tasks when I was new. I had

never had an office-based job prior to my training contract, but I felt as though my transition into my training contract with LA was smooth and supported. The Bournemouth office is also only 10 minutes from the beach, which is a plus!

## **How would you describe the culture at LA?**

The culture is supportive and team-focused. There is a real sense of progression, and your colleagues want you to do well. Most colleagues trained at LA or have stayed at LA for a long time, so you can tell it's a positive and progressive place to work. As a trainee, you are encouraged to get involved as much as possible. For example, I am on the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion committee and enjoy working with colleagues I otherwise wouldn't on important topical issues.

## **What are the development opportunities like at LA?**

There are lots of opportunities to further your understanding of the seat you are in. For example, in Real Estate Finance, I have been given opportunities to attend monthly fee-earner catch-ups and seminars on planning to learn more about our clients. There is also an annual Real Estate Knowledge Sharing Day, where all RE fee-earners gather to listen to seminars from industry experts, including barristers, valuers, and internal speakers.

Regarding personal development for trainees, you have regular catch-ups with the partner of the seat you are in to assess your targets for the seat and to catch up with how it is going. You are also assigned a Training Principal for the duration of your training contract, someone with experience who can advise you on negotiating the two years and moving to new seats.

## **Do you have tips for trainees just starting their training contracts?**

Invest time in organisation – make your email folders clear and comprehensive and ensure your document management makes sense to you and your colleagues. Nothing is worse than an inbox of thousands of emails that should've been deleted! It makes the workload of a trainee feel much more manageable when you know exactly what needs doing and what can be filed away!

Get involved – at LA, there are regular social events. I have taken part in firm-wide quizzes and department-specific mini golf and drinks. There are also trainee meet-ups – most recently, the trainees went axe throwing! Getting to know your colleagues outside of the office and having some fun is important.

Be open-minded about the seat you are in and the work you are given. Previously, I hadn't enjoyed Land Law or Real Estate much at university, but I can confirm it is much more interesting in practice when you are tangibly getting involved in real-life matters!

(Also – stay on top of your training diary!)

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## Find out more about training contracts at Lester Aldridge

We are currently accepting applications for training contracts starting in 2026. [Find out more, or apply here](#) by 17th May 2024.