

The Right Choice For Me

I joined the Department of Justice as a Legal Trainee (Solicitor) in 2000 and have now been with the Civil Litigation Unit of the Civil Division for almost 11 years since my admission in October 2002.

I can say without doubt that the 2-year comprehensive training under the scheme has laid a solid foundation for my legal career. It enabled me to appreciate how to become, and, more importantly, equipped me with the basics of becoming, a responsible and effective legal practitioner – the skills in identifying relevant issues, research, legal analysis, drafting, advising clients and advocacy.

Throughout the training, I was given ample opportunities to hone those skills, with the guidance from my supervisors and other experienced counsel. For any given case, I had to study the facts carefully, identify the issues, research on relevant points and present my advice in a clear and structured manner, taking into account legal as well as practical considerations. I always find the task of advising client departments meaningful. That is because the advice that I give may often affect, not only a particular individual (as in the case of serving a private client), but the general public at large. For example, in one particular advice, I had identified a loophole in certain piece of legislation, and legislative amendments were eventually introduced to address the problem.

Advocacy work was also not lacking for a trainee solicitor under the scheme. The Criminal Advocacy Course and the Civil Mock Trials are two unique parts of the training from which I built up my confidence in advocating a case. The experience of being a prosecutor in live cases for seven weeks at the Magistrates' Courts was invaluable. One of the memorable trials that I had handled was an indecent assault case where I felt I had done justice to the victim by putting the culprit behind bars. Equally interesting were the civil mock hearings of statutory appeal or court cases where I had to master a large number of documents and make out my case for the client department in a fair and convincing manner. An important thing that I learned from all this experience, which has proven to be very useful in my years of practice, is preparation is the key to advocacy, so much so that you might not be able to present your arguments clearly and forcefully without it.

Another special feature of the scheme is that it offered me the chance to gain insights into the nature of the legal work in the public sector and also that in the private sector. With the benefit of being rotated to different Divisions of the Department and other government department as well as seconded to a city law firm for 6 months, I was able to see how the practice works in both sectors and the differences between the two, and that has assured me that the Department is the right place for me to pursue my legal career. I enjoyed working in the Department very much. At times, I encountered difficulties in my work and when

I felt that I needed help, the resourceful Main Library of the Department often came to my rescue, and I could of course turn to my colleagues who were always willing to assist, discuss and exchange views. My superiors were also positive and encouraging and provided close guidance on my work. The Department is one big family where members are all friendly and prepared to support each other.

If you are interested in the public service and if you are looking for wide exposure that can prepare you well for the challenges that lie ahead of you in your future legal career, I believe joining the Legal Trainee Scheme would also be the right choice for you.

Clifford Joseph Tavares

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