

Field Fisher Waterhouse - Trainee Support Network

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Work and Law Society Requirements

TP It was good from my point of view because it allowed me to work alongside lots of different people and get a really broad experience of different types of work.

RS Although sometimes then the problem is trying to juggle all the work you get from different supervisors.

TP Definitely.

RS And as your sort of assigned supervisor that's one of my roles isn't it to make sure you don't get swamped by particularly too many partners probably trying to ask you to work for them because there has to be some sort of balance struck.

TP Exactly and I think the key thing is to vocalise it and that's why sitting in the same room as your supervisor, lets you know near enough what I have got going on and that's the other useful thing by having the trainee diary it allows me to catalogue exactly what I have got going on and if I want to bring something up with you, which I actually I didn't have to, but it gives you a reference point to know exactly what you have got going on at any one time.

RS So you make sure you are ticking all the boxes on the Law Society requirements. I know that one of our concerns is to make sure that because you were sitting in the Litigation Department you actually got to Court and saw some live advocacy because that it one of the requirements that you have to satisfy the Law Society.



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TP And when we had our mid-seat appraisal, for example, that was kind of what I used as the basis for a discussion and that helps you to kind of keep track of the skills that you have either witnessed or done yourself and then those that haven't, you can try and approach in the second half of your seat.

Work Quality

RS Do you think you were challenged enough in your seat because it is quite a fine line from a supervisor's point of view to challenge a trainee and keep them motivated but not to scare them off by just saying "right I want you to write a letter before action to this company, get on and do it". How did you find that?

TP Yes I think I was and I think that comes with time because you build trust don't you. I think at the beginning of your seat you are inevitably doing more of the mundane tasks and it's a kind of feeling out scenario isn't it. You are trying to find, well you build trust with each other don't you. You will give me a bit of work and see how I get on with it and see how much leeway you can give me in terms of how much support, not hand holding but how much I need you by my side.

Support System

As a first seat trainee you get assigned a buddy which is somebody who is normally in the year above you and that's meant to just be an informal relationship and it is someone who is on a similar peer level to you so you can just ring them up and say "I don't have any idea how to do that, where do I start?" and there is no kind of judgement cast or anything like that. Beyond that you are also assigned a mentor who tends to be in a completely different department to the one you are currently in. Again it is just somebody you can bounce ideas off. Personally I haven't really had a

problem holding my hand up and saying “I don’t understand this” to anyone at any level.

Who assigns Trainee work

TP Do you tend to use just the trainee you are sat with i.e. me in our case or would you tend to go to the wider trainees as well?

RS There is no property as it were in a trainee. In terms of the way that I think all departments work here is that a trainee is not assigned to any one particular person even if you happen to be sitting with your supervisor. So in theory, I could give work to either you or the other trainees in the department. But actually just for practical reasons, as it tends to work out, you get more work from the person you are sitting with because you learn from them, you listen to them on the telephone to the client, you can join into those conversations.

Feedback

TP A trainee’s greatest fear is that you submit a letter or whatever it might be to your supervisor and you just get it back with lots of illegible red scribble all over it. That doesn’t work from either side because the trainee just feels disheartened that their work in the first instance was rubbish, but secondly if they were to try and amend it on that basis, it wouldn’t necessarily work and I think what works well here is that you don’t just get a piece of paper on your chair with the amendments, the supervisors will tend to sit down with you and go through the changes they made and not only that but why they have made the changes.

RS I still think it is very important to have that mid-seat or even may be one month into your seat to have a sit down and a chat so that any problems can be ironed out then. The worst mistake a supervisor can make I think, is not to give that feedback and to give the trainee an opportunity to sort out any



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problems. There is no point waiting until the end of the six months before you raise issues.

TP That hasn't cropped up. The way we worked closely together is we had the ad hoc informal chats about how I was getting on but we also had a proper sit down meeting two months into my seat and identified any potential weaknesses or areas of work that I had not yet covered, so we could address that in the second half of my seat, so that when I had finished I felt happy that actually, I had covered everything I wanted to cover, and I felt that I kind of knew the line my appraisal would take because we had that process going continually through the seat.

RS And it worked out well because you got a job.

TP I got a job.