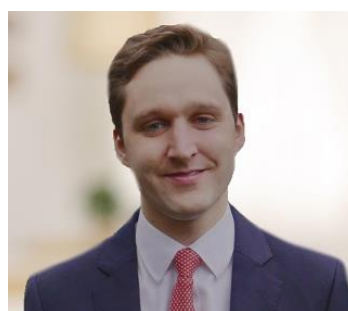


Christianah Babajide, Paralegal, interviews David Whitworth, Trainee Solicitor in the Family Department at Payne Hicks Beach, first published in Future Lawyer online on 15 February 2021 and reproduced with kind permission <https://blog.lawbore.net/2021/02/how-i-did-it-secured-a-training-contract-at-payne-hicks-beach/>



Christianah Babajide
Paralegal, Family



David Whitworth
Trainee, Payne Hicks Beach

How I Did It: Secured A Training Contract At Payne Hicks Beach

Posted on [February 15, 2021](#) by Christianah Babajide.

Categories: [Alumni Interviews](#), [Getting Ahead In Law](#), [How I Did It](#), [News](#).

[David Whitworth](#) completed his GDL and BPTC at the [City Law School](#). Before this, he graduated with a First in History from the University of Warwick before undertaking a postgraduate diploma in Theology at Oxford University. He worked as a Paralegal before securing a training contract at [Payne Hicks Beach](#) (PHB). In this exclusive Alumni interview, he sits down with PHB's Family Law Paralegal, Christianah Babajide, to share his nuggets of wisdom.

You studied History at university, what attracted you to go on to a career in Law?

I was always interested in law because it seemed to require very similar key skills and abilities to my favourite subjects – History and English. Being able to analyse information and come to conclusions based on the evidence, being able to communicate effectively and persuasively as well as an understanding of people, their motives and what makes them tick. From the outside looking in, it looked like most careers in law required these aptitudes and I found that attractive. Now I am on the inside and, I am pleased to say, I think I was right!

Can you start off by telling us about your GDL and BPTC experience at City?

I found it quite a challenging transition from my undergraduate degree. There is a fair amount of learning by rote involved, something that does not feature in the same way in a history degree. What is more, you do these intense courses whilst trying to win mooted competitions, write articles and apply for pupillage or training contracts (as the case may be). So it was challenging. But I got through it and definitely grew in the process! I also met some great people along the way.

You were initially heading towards the Bar, what made you switch to the solicitor route?

In the end I decided being a solicitor was a better fit for me. Both are fantastic careers and there was something about the drama of court and the thrill of advocacy that made me want to be a barrister. That still appeals but when working as a paralegal I got a better understanding of the role solicitors play. Good advice from a solicitor can make a real difference to people, whether they are private individuals or businesses, high-net-worth or legal aid clients. Solicitors need to understand the law and be able to find the best way forward for clients in all kinds of circumstances, as well as be able to communicate with clients and colleagues in all kinds of ways. It is a dynamic role that I ultimately decided plays to my strengths more.



What attracted you to PHB initially?

I wanted to work at a firm that focused on people more than corporations (not that there is anything wrong with the latter). I also wanted to be at a firm that genuinely had clients' best interests at heart in the service it provides. PHB is hard to beat on these fronts!

What did the trainee solicitor application involve?

Application form including a personal statement, followed by an assessment day. The final part of the process is an interview. See the [PHB website](#) for up-to-date information on this.

What was the most difficult and most enjoyable part of the application process?

Both the assessment day and interview had their nerve-racking moments, but also some very enjoyable parts. With both, you tend to relax into it and by the end you may even find you are enjoying yourself.



How did you prepare for training contract interviews?

I think the stock advice out there is good and there are no silver bullets. Make sure you understand the kind of firm it is and why you are applying. Why would you be a good fit? These are probably good questions to know the answers to before actually applying!

Develop a bank of answers for competency questions. These come up at all firms. You will find that answers can be adapted and used for different questions; an example of good time keeping or organisation may also be a good example of working well under pressure! But make sure you have answers for a range of competency questions as these will be useful in most interviews.

In your opinion, what is the secret to writing a successful training contract application?

Try and communicate why you should get the job, with clear examples to back up what you are saying. But do not lose your identity in the process. Work in those things that make you a bit different. It will show there is a real person behind the application as opposed to someone who will say anything it takes to get an interview.

Becoming a trainee solicitor in lockdown must have been strange, what has been the biggest challenge for your personal development in this environment?

If PHB is anything to go by, your colleagues and supervisors will be very aware of how challenging it is to start a new role, let alone a training contract, whilst working from home most of the time. I think it is too soon to say what the biggest challenge has been. But my sense is that, thanks to those I am working with, it is not so bad really.



Quick-fire questions:

Any lockdown hobby?

Reading more and running more. Let's be honest there are limited options available!

Favourite law film?

[Bridge of Spies](#) has some great themes of law and justice. When I was much younger I was definitely quite inspired by [A Miracle on 34th Street](#); a Christmas film with some fantastic legal drama!

What law would you introduce if you could?

From my time in law school I have always thought the area around the rights of cohabitants could do with some further clearing up.

Fun fact about you?

Whilst working as a paralegal during the time in-between law school and my training contract, I volunteered for a charity called Eden. It tries to help people in some of London and the UK's most disadvantaged communities. It was fantastic to do something outside of law that, on a selfish level, helped me keep perspective and give me something else to think about!

Thanks to David for giving these insights into his journey, and to Christianah for her questions! Christianah is a Paralegal in the family department at Payne Hicks Beach.

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