

# My Experience as a Library Graduate Trainee in Law

**Abstract:** Graduate traineeships are an excellent way for people to enter into a career in libraries, providing a vast range of relevant experience. In the following article, last year's Graduate Trainee at Lincoln's Inn Library Natalie Kent, describes her experience as a trainee in law, outlining her background, role, training and visits, and reflects on the profession more widely.

**Keywords:** training; law librarianship

## INTRODUCTION

In September, I completed my year as graduate trainee in Lincoln's Inn library. It was a challenging year, but one that in many ways exceeded all my expectations. Since then I have been studying full time on the MA in Library and Information Studies at UCL. This article is a reflection on my experience as a trainee in a law library from the perspective of someone who is still very new to the profession.



Natalie Kent

## LIBRARY GRADUATE TRAINEESHIPS

Like most new graduates hoping to pursue a career in libraries, I was directed to the CILIP Graduate Training Opportunities scheme as a way to gain experience and training when entering into the profession.<sup>1</sup> Supplementary information for candidates with some useful questions answered can be found on the designated Facebook and Twitter pages.<sup>2</sup>

A range of graduate trainee positions in law have been advertised in recent years, including law firms like Slaughter and May, Field Fisher Waterhouse and Hogan Lovells, or, in the academic sector, the Bodleian law library and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. Lincoln's Inn is the only one of the four Inns of Court to recruit a graduate trainee every year. I was trainee number 21, dubbed the 'coming of age trainee', which meant I was entering into a very well-established and well thought-out programme. The trainee is an integral part of the Lincoln's Inn library staff, making this a particularly interesting trainee role.

It is common for employers to recruit graduate trainees a number of months before the person is due to start. I was appointed in March in 2011, ready to start in September (this was around two months later than the earliest traineeships advertised).

## MY BACKGROUND

I decided to pursue a career in libraries during my fourth year at Durham University. I had been considering this career for some time previously, but my decision became cemented while I was studying for my MA in Classics; in undertaking research myself, and seeing from a user's perspective the extent of the resources and services the library provided, I realised I had a drive to support the research, study or work of others through an information service.

I met with a number of librarians who helped me find out about the variety of opportunities available and the different

paths people might take to get there. The more I found out about the profession the more I wanted to enter into it; I still consider it an ideal career, one which allows involvement in work of others in a supporting role.

When I was fully confident in my decision to pursue a career in libraries I began to consider which sector might suit me. I think many graduates would not immediately consider law libraries; academic libraries are a more obvious and safe path for recent or soon-to-be graduates who know and enjoy the environment of an academic library. My own work experience was in the library in Durham University. I enjoyed it a lot, and could see myself fitting into that environment. On the other hand, it was partly because I could see myself fitting into that environment that I thought there would be value in using my year as a trainee to branch out of my comfort zone and enter into a new subject and a new sector.

I was drawn to the job at Lincoln's Inn, where I would be helping to support practising barristers and students studying for the Bar exams, because it would be a challenge. I had an interest in law, but the subject was new to me, and I had no experience of working in a professional environment. There was something in this unknown world

that I found exciting. I welcomed this chance to learn in-depth about an information service in this new subject.

Something else I thought made the job at Lincoln's Inn stand out was the size of the library team, comprising of only eight staff. I hoped that by working in a small team I would be exposed to a variety of enquiries and tasks, and hold a high level of responsibility; I was not disappointed.

There was also the chance to be part of Lincoln's Inn itself, a historic institution with a wealth of traditions. I knew the role would be focussed on the modern, working legal function of the library, but I was also drawn to the historic collections and the occasional chance to help visiting academics working with the library's rare books and manuscripts.

## **MY ROLE**

My role was as varied and challenging as I hoped it would be. The desk where the trainee is based forms part of the enquiry desk, providing high levels of contact with those using the library.

### **Enquiry desk duties**

From my first day I was encouraged to answer enquiries, and by the time I had worked in the library for around six months I was able to answer the majority of enquiries directed to me. The level of the enquiries is something I consider particularly interesting about working in law. They varied from straightforward questions about the library's services (and I quickly became an expert at photocopying!) to more complex enquiries relating to finding and using legal resources. I was pleasantly surprised by the speed with which my knowledge developed so that I was able to provide people with meaningful answers. Coming from a background in classics I enjoyed the challenges posed by the more difficult enquiries and working through problems with the knowledge I had. It is very rewarding to help someone in their work so directly, particularly when those you are helping are often working under pressure.

### **Other duties**

My other duties in the Library helped me gain close familiarity with the library's resources. I assisted in the acquisitions process, checking in parts of serials, through which I also developed understanding of why the Library subscribes to certain publications (or does not subscribe to others), and how relationships with suppliers function. I also updated contents pages of legislation, and each month I held responsibility for sending batches of items for binding, and processing batches on their return. Even my more routine tasks, like stock checking, contributed to my knowledge of the collection. I found that, in working in a law library, all my experience was helpful in developing my wider knowledge, and it helped to consolidate my understanding of providing an effective legal

information service. The different elements of my role complemented each other, and provided me with close insight into why these resources are necessary for the users of Lincoln's Inn library, and how the library can best provide these resources to meet their needs. I welcomed the chance to develop such specific knowledge which would not be possible in a different sector.

My role also involved working in collaboration with the other Inn libraries, or law libraries more widely, from scheduling items to send for binding to determining whether serial parts were missing. I received the impression that law libraries are used to helping each other and working collaboratively to improve services.

### **The library's users**

Another unique element to being a trainee in a law library, and in a sense unique to the Inns of Court, was the demographic of users whom I was helping. The library's users typically consisted of barristers, students studying for the Bar exams, judges and clerks with occasional visiting researchers (not to mention the odd lost tourist wandering through the doors!). Meeting the different needs of these users made for interesting and varied days.

## **TRAINING**

One of the best aspects I have so far found about working in a law library is the high level of very specific knowledge that information professionals develop. My own traineeship included individual, regular in-depth training sessions with the Librarian. I initially found this learning curve quite steep, but receiving such thorough training on a one-to-one level with one so experienced could not be bettered.

My training started from the basics of using the catalogue, law reports and legislation, and went on to cover locating more obscure materials, conducting advanced searches, and details of EU and human rights law. I developed thorough knowledge of all legal resources, reference tools and the main databases, knowledge which I applied regularly in answering enquiries.

I also spent some time with the Inn's Archivist, learning about the Inn's archives, the important internal function they serve, and historical enquiries received.

Because Lincoln's Inn has extensive special collections of manuscripts and early printed books, I was able to follow my personal interest and spend sessions learning about these. The staff at Lincoln's Inn were excellent at listening to what I was interested in learning more about, and I felt encouraged to go far beyond what would have been a minimum knowledge base to complete the year.

I also attended external training sessions with the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, providing further in-depth knowledge, and giving me the opportunity to learn from other experts in their subjects.

The time dedicated to my training at Lincoln's Inn was exceptional. The staff all showed huge dedication to

building my knowledge to make me well equipped for whatever might arise in this post, or any post I might take on in the future.

## MY INVOLVEMENT IN OTHER PROJECTS

Another benefit to my traineeship at Lincoln's Inn library was the library's willingness to allow my involvement in a new endeavour, social media pages for the library. While studying at Durham University I found the library's updates on social media pages informative and helpful. Two of the Inns were already using social media to provide their users with information, as were a high proportion of libraries of all kinds, and I was able to have involvement in the project of launching Facebook and Twitter pages for the library.

This project provided me with an opportunity to work collaboratively both with those in the library and members of staff from other departments within Lincoln's Inn. I was given the opportunity to present my ideas and research to managers, to work on policy documents and implement and manage the pages. I felt that my input was valued and I gained worthwhile experience far beyond what other traineeships might entail.

I was also very pleased to be given the opportunity to put together a small exhibition on a subject of my own interest, Charles Dickens and his relationship to Lincoln's Inn, using prints and books from the Inn's collection. I received support and guidance from my colleagues at every stage, from conducting my initial research to the practicalities of installing the display. This project was something I enjoyed hugely.

## VISITS

An important aspect of graduate traineeships is visiting other libraries, and I made the most of all visits on offer. Several of the visits I made were to other law libraries, beginning with the libraries of the other three Inns of Court. I followed this with the libraries of the Supreme Court and the Law Society. I found it helpful to see libraries that were in some ways very close to Lincoln's Inn, but worked in very different ways and faced some quite different challenges. Visiting law libraries in the academic sector, the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library and the Squire Law Library, revealed another side to the profession, considering a different balance of users, and working under very different structures. I was given a contrasting impression again when I visited the library of Hogan Lovells, seeing how an information team functions to support work within a law firm.

These visits were instrumental in building my own understanding of the profession and seeing firsthand how different libraries are working to meet the needs of their users. I was very grateful for the time given by all those I visited; the professionals who hosted me were all highly generous with their time and open in answering all my

questions. My experience from making these visits made a large contribution to my overall positive impression of the profession as a whole.

I was very lucky to have full support from the staff in Lincoln's Inn library who encouraged me to go on visits, and kindly put me in touch with some very helpful contacts.

## PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

From the outset I was keen to engage widely in the profession and when I started at Lincoln's Inn library, I joined both CILIP and BIALL. I received the impression that a high proportion of information professionals in law are actively involved in these organisations, and are driven to positively shape where the profession will go in the future, and I enjoyed taking part in a number of events throughout the year.

In particular, I attended two days for new professionals; one was organised jointly by BIALL and CLSIG, and the other, on a larger scale, was organised by CILIP. The former open day took place before the earliest deadlines for library school applications, and featured speakers from a range of backgrounds, including practising librarians, a library school lecturer and a representative from a recruitment agency. At that early stage I found it very helpful to see the range of possibilities that can follow a graduate traineeship while conversely, helping me to focus on where I wanted to go with my next step. The subject specific focus was also helpful; often graduate trainees in law libraries are the only trainee in the organisation, which was the case at Lincoln's Inn. It was helpful to meet others at the same stage in their careers to share our experiences.

The CILIP New Professionals Day took place towards the end of my traineeship, with presentations and workshops on a range of subjects and sectors, with advice on how to develop and apply skills and encouragement for new professionals to take active involvement in their profession. At this later point in the year it was interesting to hear ways in which library and information professionals can shape their future careers and the profession as a whole, and ways in which they can successfully engage with a wider community. Many of these ideas were useful for new professionals in all sectors, including law.

I was lucky to have support from my colleagues to attend these days, and other events run by CILIP and BIALL throughout the year; through their encouragement I was able to engage with the wider profession, meeting some very interesting people along the way.

## THE FUTURE

My year as a trainee showed me that there are many interesting and varied paths that can be followed in law libraries, and through working with my colleagues in Lincoln's Inn, and meeting other professionals through events and visits, I feel that I gained excellent

understanding of all the opportunities available, and how I can make the most of them.

Trying to find just a few words to sum up this year is difficult because it gave me numerous different things; experience in a new and challenging environment, in-depth training in an interesting subject, a chance to work closely with experienced and interesting professionals,

and a degree of independence in my working so I felt that I was making my own contribution to the library.

Perhaps most importantly of all, it was the support and encouragement of my colleagues at every stage, and other professionals who gave up their time to help me, that made me feel that I want to continue in this career.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cilip.org.uk/jobs-careers/qualifications/graduate-opportunities/pages/introduction.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/13484212748/>; <https://twitter.com/CILIPcpd>.

## Biography

Natalie Kent studied Classics and Ancient History at Durham University before becoming a graduate trainee at Lincoln's Inn library for one year. She is currently studying for a Masters in Library and Information Studies at UCL and works part time as an Evening Assistant in Inner Temple library.

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# Tears, Drama and Meeting Minutes: an Indexing Experience

**Abstract:** In this article Kate Faulkner describes her experience of creating an index for 36 volumes of committee minutes for the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, and explains the processes involved. She explores the unique issues associated with the indexing of minutes and relates some of the aspects of human interest found within the material and discusses the role of the indexer.

**Keywords:** minutes; indexing; Inner Temple

## INTRODUCTION: THE FREELANCE INDEXER

Being the freelancer that I am, the prospect of an ongoing project that would provide some guaranteed income for a year and a half was irresistible. Indexing is the kind of work that you either love or hate. You need to have the right mind for it. Most librarians do have the right temperament for this sort of work and we all appreciate how useful an index is. However, not everyone would want to take on 36 volumes of the minutes of the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple's Executive Committee (1956–2006)!

The Executive Committee for Inner Temple is comparable to the board of directors of a company, and their minutes cover all the day-to-day business of the Inn. But of course the Inns of Court are quite unique institutions, steeped in history and tradition, but still very active in the modern age. Chambers, for example, have always been used as offices as well as residences, and this remains true today. I had already indexed a volume for Inner Temple covering 1836–1845; so I hoped that this project would use some of the information I had learnt previously.

As a freelancer, quoting for such a big job is also difficult. You can roughly calculate how long it will take to