



Interview with a Trainee Solicitor at Lester Aldridge – Nicole Critchley

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Nicole Critchley is a first-year trainee solicitor at Lester Aldridge who initially joined as a paralegal in our Southampton office. Nicole shares what attracted her to the firm and her experiences with her training contract so far as she comes to the end of her first seat (placement).

Please share with us your journey into law.

I first started thinking about a career in law quite early. I especially remember taking a career aptitude test ahead of a work experience week and being really excited by the prospect of law due to the day-to-day analysis and problem-solving required.

My journey into law hit a bump in the road quite early on as prior to starting college, I was diagnosed with a severe brain injury and was told that I would not be able to go to university and to start making other plans. Thankfully I didn't lose my slight stubborn streak and battled through my A-Levels in 2016 whilst re-learning how to walk and talk.

I went on to study law at the University of Hertfordshire and graduated with a first in 2019 before taking on the LPC with the [University of Law](#) online during the first COVID lockdown. I secured my training contract with LA in August 2021 and started as a paralegal with the firm a couple of months later.

Tell us about your career/seats so far at LA.

I joined LA as a paralegal in the Insolvency team in Southampton in November 2021. A few months into joining LA, I was asked to go on a six-week 'mini secondment' to the Real Estate Southampton team to help out in March 2022 as the team was busy. I definitely surprised myself with how much I loved commercial property work, so I stayed in the team for a bit longer than planned!

I was fortunate enough that my training contract was pulled forward to start in September 2022, so I am coming to the end of my first seat, which has been in the Lender Services team in Bournemouth, and my next seat will be in Real Estate Southampton.

How does the seat system work at LA?

Approximately eight-ten weeks before the end of your current seat, an email is circulated to all of the existing and incoming trainees listing what seats are available for the next rotation. We then rank the seats in preference order, along with an explanation as to our rankings. Once all of the trainees have submitted their preferences and the allocations have been made, we are then all informed of where our next seat will be.

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

I have a bit of a way to go before qualification and making the big decision, but I have really surprised myself with how much I have loved property work as this was not a practice area that I envisaged myself in before I joined LA.

What attracted you to the Lester Aldridge trainee scheme?

The diversity of the practice areas within the firm was definitely what attracted me to the LA trainee scheme. When compared to other firms in the local area, it became really clear that LA stood out as having a wide range of practice areas, and that really appealed to me when I was applying for training contracts.

How did you prepare for your trainee solicitor interview?

Lots of research, particularly on the LA website, reading up on the firm's values and delving into the firm's specialities. I read through some of the articles recently published on the website and watched a video with two of the firm's trainees at the time to get a feel for whether I would be a good fit for LA and vice versa. I also practiced some psychometric tests and read up on some top tips for Zoom interviews as my interview process was impacted by COVID.

What's the best thing about training at LA?

The best thing about training at LA has been the support and guidance I have received, whether that has been through fellow trainees helping me with filling out the seat preferences form for the first time, senior members of a team helping with complex files, or members of a completely different team lending their expert guidance for a particular query that has popped up during the course of a transaction. The amount of client contact and exposure to transactions I have had has been fantastic for my development, but this would not have been the same if I did not have the guidance that has been provided to me alongside it.

How would you describe the culture at LA?

I am fortunate enough to have been in three different teams at LA, and each one has been incredibly welcoming and supportive. Beyond this though, there is a great culture of sharing knowledge and expertise between teams, whether that is through internal training or articles on the hub, the diversity of the teams within the firm and the expert training they can provide really stands out in this regard.

What are the development opportunities like at LA?

There are a lot of development opportunities at LA. I know that some of my fellow trainees joined as paralegals and have developed within LA, but likewise, we have incredible solicitor apprentices and trainee legal executives who have taken a different qualification route but have all been supported and developed within LA.

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

My number one tip would be to be solution focused. It may be hard to get to the bottom of an issue that has been referred to you to look at, but even if it's as simple as setting out a draft email to go to the client at the bottom of what you have found, it will help the person who has assigned you the work a lot more.

A close second top tip is to make sure you don't have any plans the weekend of the Financial and Business Skills PSC exam!

Find out more about training contracts at Lester Aldridge

We are currently accepting applications for training contracts starting in 2025. [Find out more, or apply here](#) by 28th May 2023.