

SUMMER 2020

THE UNIVERSITY OF LAW'S STUDENT MAGAZINE

# THE AMICUS BRIEF

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
TRAVEL LAWYER

**GEMMA WILSON**

CHILD SAFEGUARDING ERODED  
IN THE FACE OF COVID-19

## AN INTERVIEW WITH TRAVEL LAWYER

# GEMMA WILSON

ELLA BROWN

*Gemma Wilson is a Commercial Solicitor, specialising in travel law, who works at boutique firm TravLaw in Leeds, West Yorkshire. Despite only having qualified in May 2019, Gemma has worked in a variety of niche sectors, including sports, media and entertainment, and intellectual property law. We asked Gemma to share her journey to becoming qualified, her experience of specialising early in her career and her top tips for aspiring lawyers.*

### Gemma's journey to qualification

Without being able to name a specific reason why, Gemma always wanted to become a solicitor. The opportunity to solve complex problems and the need for 'intellectual rigor', combined with the 'more personal aspects' of working together with clients to achieve outcomes cemented her decision to work in the law. After studying English Literature at the University of Sheffield, Gemma completed the accelerated GDL and LPC with a Master's in Professional Legal Practice at the University of Law, in Leeds. She went on to secure a training contract halfway through her studies.

However, like many lawyers, Gemma's route to qualification was not linear, and, in fact, she completed her training at two different niche firms, specialising in sports, entertainment and media and intellectual property respectively. Some might find this disjointed, but Gemma embraced the experience: it gave her the opportunity to assess the type of work she enjoyed and best fit her skillset. Since qualifying in May 2019, Gemma has specialised in drafting commercial contracts in travel law.

### About TravLaw

TravLaw LLP are one of the UK's top travel law firms, boasting the largest team of specialist travel lawyers in the UK, and with a client list including the likes of Expedia, Jet2.com and lastminute.com, the work is often high-profile, fast-paced, and complex. As a full-service firm, clients can expect advice on a wide range of matters, from employment and litigation to regulatory and intellectual property.

Founded by one of the industry's leading lawyers, Stephen Mason, TravLaw is a formidable player in the travel law market, yet it has maintained its down to earth, personal approach both to its client relationships and working environment.

### Life at a niche firm

For Gemma, working in a niche firm means that no two days are the same.

‘We very much work within the industry that we serve, and the travel sector is constantly changing and adapting to new scenarios’.

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**‘Just in the last twelve months, we have seen the failure of Thomas Cook, storms grounding UK flights, the Australian bush fires, the ever-present question-mark of Brexit, and most recently the coronavirus pandemic. All of these have had serious and severe implications for our clients and, in turn, on our work.’**

Gemma’s work is ever-changing and client queries are consistently complex and unfamiliar. These challenges are part and parcel with working in a niche sector. Moreover, Gemma is surrounded by a team of highly experienced lawyers who are leaders in their field – she continues to seek and learn from their expertise and advice.

An additional benefit Gemma highlights from working in a boutique practice is the collaborative nature of the team: everyone pitches in to lend a hand whenever needed. That being said, she emphasises that no job in the legal profession is without its pressures and lawyers should learn at an early stage how to manage stress.

Finding a supportive team is key, as is having a healthy work life balance and finding a way to switch off after work.

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**It’s important to have interests outside the law and remember that there’s a world outside the office – it helps you keep your perspective.**

For Gemma this means tai chi and yoga after work, and rowing on the weekends!



## Thomas Cook

The collapse of the world’s oldest travel firm on 23rd September 2019 sent shock waves across the travel industry, when over 100,000 customers were left without flights home and thousands of employees without jobs

With no viable alternative available, Marcus Smith J sitting in the High Court ruled for the company to enter compulsory liquidation, a decision which left travel companies worldwide millions of pounds out of pocket and tasked with rescuing those stranded amidst the downfall. The judgement left others reaping immediate rewards, with major competitor TUI reporting an immediate surge in shares.

It is clear that Thomas Cook’s insolvency had far-reaching consequences for the travel industry and firms with travel law specialisms will undoubtedly be feeling its effects among their client base.

## Transitioning from education to practice

Making the move from education to practice feels like an uphill struggle for many students and the process of choosing firms to apply to is daunting at best. Aspiring lawyers are often advised to find an area of law they enjoy and to focus on that. However, as most firms offer an abundance of practice areas and specialisms, finding the one that is right for you is no easy task.

Gemma deems culture fit as equally important to practice area; she explains that an ideal role should

.....  
**‘combine your ambitions and expectations for both the area of law and the firm’**

When making the transition, Gemma advised you should ‘be prepared to be the stupidest person in the room’ and that even as a newly qualified solicitor, you won’t be expected to know everything.

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**‘Becoming a lawyer is a process, and the beginning is for putting down your roots and absorbing as much information as possible.’**

.....  
**‘Be willing to listen to those who have years of experience beyond your own, learn from them, take note of everything, and don’t be too hard on yourself when you struggle with something.’**

Treat the beginning of your career as your foundation blocks and don’t try to conquer the legal world before you’re ready. It’s a marathon, not a sprint.’

## Top tips for aspiring lawyers

Gemma shared a few of her top tips for aspiring lawyers, as well as some things she wished she’d known earlier.

‘Get as much experience in the legal sector as you can before you start making applications and before deciding what area and what type of firm you might want to work in – don’t be afraid to try everything.’

‘Take the opportunities to make connections, rather than waiting for the perfect vacancy or experience to turn up. I secured a two-week mini-pupillage at a top criminal chambers in London by chatting to a barrister I happened to sit next to in a theatre.’

‘Don’t be afraid to foster those relationships and gain those experiences while you’re studying. Yes, it looks good on your CV, but more importantly, it will put you in a better position to know what you like (and vitally) what you don’t.’

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**‘Ultimately the aim is a career in which you can succeed and also that you can enjoy. The more preparation work you do, the higher your chances of success.’**