



Application Forms

Listed below are some of the most common reasons why applications for either a Vacation Placement or Training Contract may be unsuccessful at the application form sifting stage.

- Weak module marks that contribute to a borderline 2:1
- Widely inconsistent module marks or retakes
- A trend in electives or options that demonstrate a strong focus on non corporate/commercial areas i.e. family, criminal, constitutional law
- A strongly articulated interest in niche areas of law that only reflect a small volume of the work most firms undertake e.g. defamation, European competition and sports law.
- No extra-curricular roles of any substance or responsibility
- Poor research into the role of commercial solicitor
- No evidence of commercial awareness
- No quantitative information or data to substantiate claims made elsewhere
- Lack of awareness of key practice areas of the firm
- Lack of awareness of past or current clients or projects the firm has worked on
- No references which indicate a broader perspective or evidence of research other than the basic information gathered from the firm's website
- A concentration on early sections of the application that are about the individual but poorer engagement made with later questions about the firm and legal sector
- Applications which are sparsely populated with information e.g. lack of information relating to what skills were gained during work experience
- Applications where the candidate does not answer the question
- Poor spelling, punctuation and grammar
- Cut and paste errors which still show another law firm's name



Interviews & Assessment Centres

Here are our top tips for how to approach an interview or assessment centre.

Understand the firm

While there are many similarities between different law firms, each will have its own 'language' and selection criteria. By familiarising yourself with the terminology used by each firm you can make sure that you understand what the assessors will be looking for during the selection process. The firm's graduate website can normally provide this information.

'A 2:1 who is fun'

We expect our candidates to be on track for a good 2.1 degree result but we also want people who have skills and experience other than raw academic ability. Opportunities to develop relevant skills can be found through volunteering, holiday jobs or by joining a society or team. This is especially true if you take responsibility for tasks such as managing a budget or organising an event.

Don't undersell your achievements

If you have undertaken work experience (legal or non-legal), then make sure you leave time to think about what you have learned from the experience. Try not to simply describe what you did, but instead focus on the skills you developed and what you learned. Where there is qualitative or quantitative evidence to validate your achievements make sure you provide this.

Practice makes perfect

Many candidates ask a friend to read through their application form before they send it in, but far fewer practice their interviewing. The more practice the more comfortable you will feel during the interview. Getting feedback on how you come across in an interview situation from someone you don't know can be very helpful.

Have an opinion

Many candidates prepare for an interview by reading up on recent news stories in the hope that this will demonstrate their commercial awareness. While it is important that you know what is going on, it is even more important that you are able to put forward your own thoughts about the stories and help us understand how you reached your conclusions.

Final preparation

If you have submitted an application form prior to the interview make sure you re-familiarise yourself with what you have written prior to the interview. It is highly likely that your interviewer will have read this and may even bring a copy to the interview. Ensure you leave yourself plenty of time to complete your journey, know the dress code and who you will meet. If you have any questions or concerns, always contact the Graduate Recruitment team.

First impressions count

Be confident. Most applicants are not invited to attend an interview, a firm will only invite candidates to interview who they think have the potential to be successful.

When you meet your interviewer make sure you introduce yourself, smile, make eye contact and give a firm handshake.

Don't try to second guess the firm

Pinsent Masons has a strong commitment to diversity; we aim to recruit the very best people whatever their background. You are far more likely to perform well at interview if you adopt your natural persona rather than an artificial one you think will impress your interviewer.

Don't forget to interview the firm

Most firms will give you the opportunity to ask questions. Remember what you are looking for in a prospective employer and make sure your expectations can be met. Try not to ask obvious questions, especially if the answer can be easily found elsewhere.



Commercial Awareness

What is commercial awareness?

Is the ability to view situations from a business perspective, and in particular be able to understand things from the point of view of a third party. It's requires an awareness of the business world and its terminology as well as wider trends that may be having an impact on a single organisation, sector or the economy as a whole.

Why is it important?

Businesses seek the advice of commercial law firms because they recognise that legal expertise can help improve their performance. Our clients vary in size, operate in different Industries and across different geographical regions; to give the best service to our clients, it's therefore important that we understand their unique requirements. As a trainee solicitor this is the types of challenge you will face as soon as you join the firm, so it is imperative that you can demonstrate commercial awareness throughout the selection process.

How can I develop my commercial awareness?

- Research your target firm's website; identify their corporate values, mission statement & strategy. Know what large deals they have been involved with
- Ask if the firm offers client secondments as these offer the opportunity to develop your commercial awareness once you are at the firm
- Think about what commercial experience you may already have gained from other experiences. For example, if you have worked for a retailer you might consider: the organisation's structure, how they market themselves, their approach to customer service, their competitors and how government legislation impacts on them
- Take part in employer-led business games and workshops held online or on your university campus
- Join a society or team and take responsibility for promoting events or raising finance to fund activities
- Read and take a genuine interest in the business news and legal press. What legal angles could there be to the stories you are reading even if they are not mentioned.

If you are not interested in doing the above you need to seriously question whether you want to be a commercial lawyer!

How do I demonstrate my commercial awareness?

In addition to getting the above experience you must be able to convey this through your application form or at interview. Some questions will explicitly ask you about commercial awareness but even questions that do not can offer the opportunity to demonstrate it. Make sure you have quantitative and qualitative evidence to back up any claims you make.

How can I find out more?

Why not download this and subscribe to a couple of business-related podcasts that you can listen to when you are stuck on public transport or are waiting for a lecture to begin.