

# International Work Placements

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Are you dreaming of skiing the Alps? Holidays in the Greek isles? Experiencing the sights and sounds of Singapore? If you answered "yes" to any of the above, you may be a prime candidate for an international work placement. But where to start? I spoke to two leading recruitment consultants about what to expect when heading off to work overseas. Shaaron Dalton of Hamilton Jones & Koller and Angela Clelland of Mahlab Recruitment throw some light on working in the big smoke.

*Currently, what are the most popular destinations for international legal work?*

London continues to be the number one destination for young Australian lawyers who work overseas. Asia, in particular Hong Kong and Singapore, is also popular. Both Hamiltons and Mahlab are currently making in-roads in relation to having discussions regarding placement of lawyers in the US, and expect that the market there will open up in the future. One alternative for those keen to work in the States is to seek employment in an American firm based either in Asia or London and thereafter seek an internal firm transfer to the US.

*What are the areas of law in which it is possible to find international legal work placements?*

Areas of legal expertise which are most in demand are commercial/corporate law, banking and finance, mergers and acquisitions, utilities, telecommunications, IT and IP. In Hong Kong, there is currently a demand for commercial litigators and insolvency lawyers (in addition to the above) due to the current economic downturn. Commercial litigation continues, in general, to be less in demand than general commercial skills.

*At what stage of career is it easiest/most beneficial for lawyers to obtain work overseas?*

Hamiltons have found it easiest to place lawyers who have between 2-6 years post-admission experience, although Shaaron Dalton states that more junior and senior practitioners have also been placed successfully. Mahlab have placed lawyers who have recently been admitted, as well as those with up to 5 or more years post-admission experience. Angela Clelland stated that Mahlab used to only place lawyers with 2-5 years experience. However, increased demand has led to the market opening up for newly qualified practitioners. There are also more senior applicants who have had success through Mahlab.

*What qualities in a candidate do overseas firms seek?*

Lawyers from larger firms are most easily placed, due to the fact that these firms are familiar in the overseas market, both in terms of name and quality of work. Candidates from other firms also have success, but may find it takes a little longer to find the right placement.

Patriality and sponsorship are also important when

considering working overseas. Employers find young lawyers with patriality much more attractive than other candidates. Of course, if there is a demand for a particular area of law, patriality is not so important. Practitioners can be sponsored by the international law firm, as they are filling a need that cannot be met by the local market.

Shaaron Dalton stated that candidates who have made a firm decision to go overseas (e.g have booked a ticket) are generally easier to place than candidates who are merely exploring their options. In general, most firms look for candidates who have a genuine

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Above all, candidates need to be confident and enthusiastic, with good people skills. Candidates who are personable and outgoing, who can quickly build a rapport with others are more successful in general.

*Describe general working conditions and working environment overseas?*

In London, the major difference is the size of firms - they are much larger than here. The working environment in London is similar to that found in a major Australian firm. Hours are consistently very long. However, the normal starting time in London is 9:30 am.

Hong Kong and Singapore also tend to have long hours (generally between 12-16 hours) and practitioners can expect to work a 6 day week.

Hong Kong in particular exhibits a "work hard, play hard" type of lifestyle.

In general, the working environment overseas can be described as demanding, with longer hours and a faster pace than generally found in Australia. However, both Mahlab and Hamiltons stated that most candidates expect this and want to work hard in exchange for the international experience and the extremely high calibre of work/transactions in which most practitioners are involved. Matters are generally much larger as compared to Australia, but lawyers may be given greater responsibility and autonomy.

Contract work is another option which should also be considered.

*What are the general ranges of remuneration of international work?*

Hamilton Jones & Koller stated that London placements of between 2-5 years would earn between £40,000 - £68,000, while practitioners employed by US firms in Asia earned between US \$100,000 - \$180,000. Both recruitment consultants stated that regular salary increases can be expected once a practitioner has "proved themselves". Angela Clelland stated that many firms allow for generous relocation costs as part of the remuneration package offered.

Both Shaaron Dalton and Angela Clelland stated that it is usual to be well remunerated when working overseas, but warned against going overseas solely as a money-making venture.

*How does an international placement affect the career path of an Australian practitioner upon return to Australia?*

The major drive towards overseas recruitment of Australian lawyers began circa 1994, so it is a relatively new development. Both Hamiltons and Mahlab stated that they were now experiencing the "cyclical" effect, whereby lawyers with 3-4 years experience working overseas were now returning to Australia.

In general, international work experience is viewed very favourably when candidates seek to re-enter the Australian workplace. However, practitioners should be wary of returning to Australia "too late".

Practitioners who are at Senior Associate/Partnership level may experience difficulties re-integrating into the firm structure.

*Are there any support groups or points of contact for Australian practitioners who choose to work overseas?*

Both Hamiltons and Mahlab put candidates in touch with other ex-pat lawyers, so that candidates can find out more about their prospective employer and have a point of reference if they find themselves overseas.

*Are there any tips/traps of which young lawyers should be aware when working overseas?*

- (a) Don't oversell your skills - you'll be found out very quickly!
- (b) Make sure you ascertain whether there are any requirements for admission to practise in the particular jurisdiction.
- (c) Enjoy the experience - make time for that all important trip to the south of France!

So there you have it - the lowdown on working overseas. If you're looking to work hard, see the world and get some fantastic experience, a jaunt overseas could be just the ticket to spice up your life.

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