

“Maybe it is that they are less active in those type of things or maybe there aren’t many of us in the suburbs – in particular, younger women.”

Deren and Juli also both agree that many suburban practitioners face difficulties when it comes to accessing resources.

For this reason, Juli says that it can sometimes be hard to keep up with changes in the law.

“The internet has helped this but there are still issues for suburban firms as not all can afford to constantly upgrade their research systems”.

Another problem encountered by suburban practitioners that is unlikely to be encountered by their city counterparts is, according to Deren, the fact that “resources for career development are limited as there are few CLEs and it is difficult to specialise in a suburban general practice.”

practising in London an impression

By Peter Larsen (an Australian and former corporate lawyer practising in a London law firm, Ashurst Morris Crisp)

Earlier this year, shortly after joining a large law firm in London, I found myself in the back of a cavernous London taxi, rumbling around the pre-dawn streets of the City, past the Bank of England in Threadneedle Street and under the dome and great portico of St. Paul’s Cathedral at the end of an all-night negotiation on a deal which was to close in the next 48 hours.

The contrast between the ancient city of London, steeped in tradition and history and the vast scale and relentless pace of this deal, its size and its complexity struck me forcibly that morning. It is a contrast which, I think, characterises much of legal practice in London.

I might add, that finding myself in the same situation the following morning after a second all night negotiation I was slightly less enthusiastic about the marvels and contrasts of London and far more focused on the prospect of a shower and some well-earned rest!

The above, albeit not characteristic of every day experience, certainly characterises to a large degree the very busy side of corporate legal practice in a large firm in London.

The size and magnitude of the deals both in terms of their financial value

and their complexity is astounding.

The same is true of the volume of work which seems to come through the city.

This invariably influences the way in which law is practised in London.

Of necessity, work is turned around quickly and efficiently and a great deal of responsibility is given to assistant solicitors from quite a junior level.

This is, of course, both daunting as a newcomer to London and also very stimulating as the opportunity to become involved in projects and transactions at a very high level from an early stage in one’s career is there.

Before moving to London and back to private practice earlier this year, I had held the position of General Counsel and Company Secretary of one of Victoria’s privatised electricity utility companies.

While working in that environment required a great deal of self-direction and independence, and conferred a high level of responsibility in the management of the company’s legal affairs, the contrast between “in-house” practice and the move back to private practice in London is very striking.

In my in-house role I was consistently busy on a range of matters of endless variety, and worked solidly within regular hours.

My experience of project based work in London is, that one works principally on one very large scale project at a time, working extremely long hours (including the odd “all nighter” or two!) with very tight deadlines and timeframes, leading to signing or completion of a deal, followed by a lull before the next deal in which one becomes involved.

One of the great advantages of working and being in London (once one gets used to the extraordinary cost of living over here – and becomes all too familiar with the discrepancy between the value of the Australian \$ and the English £ sterling) is the accessibility of the rest of Europe.

It would be fair to say that very few Australians who come here do not take the opportunity to travel extensively on long weekends and holidays to all sorts of obscure and interesting places all over Europe in a context where ducking over to Paris for the day becomes a bit like going up to Sydney, and the possibilities of going further afield are endless.