

Career Doctor



By Nalini Moore, Mahlab Recruitment

Q *I am a young lawyer who is interested in working overseas, ideally in the UK or Asia. Unfortunately, I do not know where to start. How should I go about positioning myself to get a good job? I do not speak a language other than English fluently, so is the UK my only option? Do I need any additional qualifications to practise overseas?*

Aspiring but Equivocal.

A move overseas can be very exciting, yet daunting at the same time. Fortunately, Australian lawyers enjoy an excellent reputation internationally. This can be attributed to the high calibre of training both at our law schools and at our top law firms as a graduate lawyer, our very good work ethic and the fact that Australians are considered to be friendly and adaptable – so your work has been made easier for you.

Further good news for you is that the sluggish international market of the previous two years has now picked up and signs are that it will remain steady.

You have identified a very important issue when contemplating such a move – how to best position yourself to secure a good quality job in the overseas market. I have set out below a few factors that are important to consider throughout the planning stage.

Level of experience

In the current market, most lawyers who secure roles overseas in, for example, the UK and Asia, have at least three years post admission experience.

Your level of experience is important in terms of when you time your overseas move. Once you have gained at least two years post admission experience, your drafting, file management, analytical and technical skills should have developed to a stage where you can transition more easily into a new role. In addition to this, the overseas market is likely to already have a good pool of local candidates with one to three years post admission experience to choose

from. Accordingly, it is much harder to break into the overseas market at that junior level.

Type of experience

The majority of Australian lawyers who gain quality overseas roles are usually sourced from top tier law firms in Australia. Predominantly, this is because these firms are very well recognised overseas. If you are not already working in a top tier firm, it might be worth working towards stepping up to such a firm and consolidating your experience prior to making your move overseas.

Further to this, it is generally the top tier Australian law firms that have offices overseas. These firms may have growth plans for their overseas offices. By working for one of these firms in Australia, you increase your chances of working internationally in either the firm's overseas offices or being successful in working for a similar firm in the UK or Asia.

Area of law

If you consider your career path in advance, you will be in a better position to engineer a move overseas.

Recently, the areas of law that have been in most demand in Asia and the UK are banking and finance, corporate/mergers and acquisitions, capital markets, major projects, construction, and to a lesser degree, commercial litigation. If you practise in an area of law that is jurisdiction specific, for example tax, employment relations/industrial relations and superannuation, it is understandably more difficult to transfer your skills to the overseas market.

In general, if you have a solid corporate/commercial or banking and finance background, you will be in the best position to secure a good role overseas.

Sponsorship

Unless you are a citizen of the specific country that you wish to work in, you will require sponsorship. It follows that if you do not require sponsorship, you

will certainly be ahead of your competitors. That being said, the large global law firms will be in a position to sponsor you in most circumstances.

Academic results

Although academic results are not the only factor underpinning a successful application, they still hold a high level of importance in the recruitment process. Law firms in Asia and the UK consistently request a copy of a solicitor's academic transcript to be forwarded together with a resume. Again, by planning in the early stages of your career, in this case working hard to achieve high results at university, you increase your chances of securing a quality role both in Australia and overseas.

To boost your application, you may also consider furthering your degree to a masters level or undertaking the graduate diploma in applied finance and investment (Securities Institute of Australia).

Language skills

Language skills are obviously more significant in countries where English is a second language. In Asian countries, language skills are highly sought after, particularly in Hong Kong and China where the ability to write and speak Cantonese and Mandarin will significantly increase your chance of gaining employment in these markets. If you are interested in relocating to an Asian country, it would be a good idea to study the relevant language in preparation for your move in the future.

You have an exciting time ahead of you, good luck.

If you need further information as to how to set yourself up for the move, it would be worth seeking advice from a recruitment consultant that specialises in international recruitment. ■

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Quick Quiz Answers (from page 2)

1. The full title of the Act is *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT ACT) Act of 2001*.
2. Sodomy.
3. *Reversal of Fortune*. Claus von Bulow.
4. The International Criminal Court (the Rome Statute entered into force on 1 July 2002).
5. "Magic circle" (Allen & Overy, Clifford Chance, Linklaters, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer and Slaughter and May).
6. The place where the wrong occurred.
7. Both were Italian magistrates who were murdered for investigating and prosecuting the mafia in Sicily.
8. Convention on the Rights of the Child.
9. Section 51(xxix).
10. Sian Elias is Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New Zealand. Beverley McLachlin is Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.