

Most-asked questions about legal OE

YOUNG New Zealand lawyers looking to gain overseas experience have one thing in common and that is the information they want to know.

This factor emerged during two recent expos on employment opportunities in the UK, hosted by the British High Commission.

Although questions specific to an individual arise, some questions are asked by almost every young lawyer wanting to travel, says Robyn George-Neich, Hughes-Castell's New Zealand manager.

"At these events, we were asked the same types of questions by a number of different people," she says.

"Most of the people we spoke to at the expos were 25 years or under. For people over this age, the questions are different, in so far as they have already established a career and are looking to advance it rather than just travel to see the world."

The following are the most frequently asked questions along with general answers.

When is the best time to go to London?

As to time of year, there is no perfect time. Most people plan it so they get two summers, leaving New Zealand about April to June to arrive in the northern hemisphere summer.

As to when in your career, this depends on your reason for travelling. If you want to advance your career then you should have three to five years' experience in a quality New Zealand firm.

If you want to travel, see the world, and relax a bit after all those years of study before embarking on your career, then any time from graduation on. You do not need to be admitted to the New Zealand bar to work overseas as a paralegal, nor do you need to sit the UK bar exams, although you can if you wish.

Important to note is that when you work in the UK, your experience will be

discounted by two years, so if you have had two years' ppe in New Zealand, then you will be considered as having no post-qualification experience. This is because a UK-qualified lawyer has to work for two years before sitting their bar exams.

Where else can I work?

You can work anywhere, but unless you speak the language, English-speaking countries are easiest. In saying that, there are many opportunities in Dubai, which is growing at a phenomenal rate. Asia is now more open to English-only speakers. Both of these options are more suited for the experienced lawyer who has excellent grades and top firm experience.

If you are recently qualified, then the best option would be a paralegal in London. Use it as a stepping stone and an excellent base for travelling to Europe.

What is a paralegal?

Working as a paralegal is like working as a back office resource. You will be required to do mundane tasks that take up valuable time of higher billing lawyers. It is not glamorous work, but it provides an opportunity to experience the environment of the big UK firms without the extreme pressure of the fee earners.

Another great advantage is that grades and experience are less important. The work is temporary by nature and pays an hourly rate, including any overtime. This is an excellent way to earn a few pounds, then take a few weeks off and travel to the continent.

ProLaw, a division of Hughes-Castell UK, is able to help with all aspects of working as a paralegal, including finding roles.

How much money will I make?

This is very hard to answer generically. For a paralegal, expect £12 to £20 an hour before tax.

How long does it take?

The process from deciding to go and getting on the plane is usually about six months. Obviously, this is only a guide as some people arrange things

much more quickly than that. It usually depends on how committed people are to going, what ties they have to New Zealand and how many friends they have in their chosen destination.

Can I work overseas without any experience?

You can work in London as a paralegal, as long as you have a law degree from a recognised university.

Do I need to use a recruitment agency?

We recommend you use a recruitment agency because they have access to a lot of unadvertised roles that you would have no way of finding out about. They can help you with negotiating your salary package and the best bit is they don't cost you anything. If you register with an international recruitment agency when you are planning to go, you can get job hunting before you leave, so when you get to London the down time is substantially reduced. In some cases we can secure a role before you leave New Zealand. This depends on individual circumstances.

Do I need a visa?

This one is too hard to answer generally, because there are too many variables. We recommend you contact the high commission for the area where you want to work, mostly it is the British High Commission. See their website, www.britain.org.nz.

How long can I work there?

This is also variable as it depends on your entry status and where you choose to go. We emphasise that it is the individual's responsibility to get this information for themselves before leaving New Zealand.

How easy is it to get a job?

This depends on the type of role, whether you want to further your career or work as a paralegal. It also depends on your areas of specialisation. It is very hard for a New Zealand property lawyer or litigator to get a good role, but banking and finance is still experiencing an extreme shortage and people with relevant experience will find more opportunities. **LI**