

Summary of “How I Found My Training Contract” submissions from trainees

Introduction

Every year I ask for students to submit an account on how they found their Training Contract. The aim of this is to show potential trainees how actual recent trainees went about this rather than someone from the Law Society compile a list of recommendations.

We also hold Finding Your Training Contract Seminars, where trainees also speak at these about their own experiences, which is invaluable. And as it's not possible for everyone to attend these seminars, we also include written submissions on the Law Society website.

Real life stories have so many scenarios, from being in the right place at the right time, struggles, failures and frustrations, and at times, comical (although not at the time for the trainee!) From experience, this is far more valuable to potential trainees as they are personal and easier to relate to.

Their advice is based on personal and recent experience, their accounts of interviews, and of course their own recommendations for potential trainees.

So below, I have put together a summary of what former trainees experienced during their search for the elusive training contract.

I hope you find the summary of help and I invite you to read the accounts from trainees in full for a more in depth feeling of their experiences.

Fionna Fox

Solicitor

Trainee Executive

SUMMARY

First off, be prepared for everything and anything -rejection letters, being ignored, good and bad interviews and the unexpected. For many it's a matter of being in the right place at the right time. But successful candidates have one thing in common - they are tenacious and that can create its luck.

The most prominent recommendation from current trainees is to try to get some work experience in a law firm, voluntary agency etc through internship, paid work or job bridge schemes. Not only will you gain experience, but a firm who may not have considered taking on a trainee, may well be persuaded by your brilliance! Experience combined with any qualifications you may have, is the icing on the cake for the selection process. Working in any capacity in the legal profession exposes you to contacts and provides you with a means to network. Realistically firms are going to be very reluctant to offer a training contract to a candidate without legal work experience.

A training contract is a huge commitment for a firm. They are committing to a two year contract with pay and training which is monitored by the Law Society. Many firms will have decided not to recruit at all at the moment because they are under some much pressure.

What are some of the challenges solicitors face today?

- Solicitors are extraordinarily busy people. The demands of the office and clients can be almost overwhelming. Solicitors fear that you might take up more of their precious time. Time is money, literally. Solicitors charge for their time.
- Many practices have seen the work of the practice shrink in the last few years. They may be stretched financially.
- Most solicitors work in small practices trying to juggle many different roles
- Practices may fear they are too specialised to offer a traineeship
- Due to the recession they may not have a budget for advertising or marketing. They may have had to make cuts on other things eg secretarial. Their IT knowledge is possibly very poor. They may have old systems. They need time management and case management. They know that to compete effectively this has to change but it is a task they don't have the time or the money to do.

Your challenge is to demonstrate, through your work experience, that you can reduce the solicitor workload, not add to them. How do you do this?

First of all understand their challenges. How do you do this? Work experience will give you an insight into this. Read the Law Society Gazette, papers for what is going on in the profession. Ask solicitors that you may come into contact with.

Demonstrate as a result of your legal work experience that you are proficient in the running of an office, you are adaptable, you have taken on lots of roles in the office and that your experience is such that you were engaged in undertaking more senior roles and tasks. That you were trusted in your previous role(s) because you can take instruction, work efficiently, good with clients, familiar with a procedures of an office.

They may not know the correct trainee salary rates, or whether or not they are obliged to pay the fees. Be ready to explain this. If the firm is specialised you can still train with them though you would be required to undertake a secondment. Understand the technology that apply to firms and indeed be aware of some of the legal phrases. Again the Gazette is very helpful on this.

Don't be afraid to ring firms you have a preference for, and find out who the person is responsible for training solicitors (if any). It's also a good idea to have a list of bullet points prepared to ensure you cover the vital areas, including if they have an application period. Alternatively approach a firm indirectly – ask for advice they could offer a candidate looking for a training contract. The worst that can happen is that the firm say they are not taking on any trainees.

Checking and re-checking your CV. There is no excuse for any spelling mistakes and this could result in your application being put to the bottom of the pile, or the bin.

Do not lie on your CV – it's pointless and leaves you open to being caught out and of course feeling embarrassed.

If you have no gaps in your CV, which is likely due to being in education - make sure you have an explanation if asked.

Tailor make each application to the firm you are applying to and also research the firm. Pick up the phone and enquire who best to send you CV to.

Some large firms have an application period with strict closing dates, so it's worth while researching firms and noting dates in your diary, but most commonly this is from September to October. This decision is of course up to the firm, so keep checking their websites for updates.

When given an application form to fill out, print/photo copy 2 copies so you can practice filling them in. Ensure that your spellings, details, etc are correct and up to date. Go online and research sample CV's and applications as certain terms and phrases are either a no-no or the new 'buzz words'. Don't over complicate things or go out of your way to use flowery language-keep it simple and professional.

Do keep yourself up to date with current affairs and high profile cases. Before attending for interview, try to find out if the firm is involved in any high profile cases, and what their main practice areas are. Read the Law Society Gazette, register for mailing lists with firms, voluntary agencies, NGO's etc

It's a good idea to do a mock interview with a friend and record it. If you are nervous in a mock interview, would you be worse in the real thing? You will be able to see your posture, reactions to questions, overuse of the words "um, ah, em" etc.

When attending for interview, pay attention to what you are wearing. Be professional in your appearance. Don't go overboard with the aftershave/perfume or the make up- less is more. Interviewers are of course aware that you could be very nervous and make allowances. Being over pushy can also be a turn off for potential training solicitors with sincerity being the preference. Yes, be confident rather than over enthusiastic but not to the point that you are perceived as 'cocky' which we know is difficult since you have to essentially 'sell' yourself to the firm.

Considering the volume of people applying in or around the same time, don't get disheartened. You have to persevere and not lose faith in yourself. So many of our students have a box of rejection letters and it's not because they were not good enough. With several hundred applications going into big firms every year and bearing in mind that a

firm can only have a certain amount of trainees at a given time, it's more often than not a matter of timing, which is totally out of your control.

If you receive a rejection letter, don't be afraid to contact them and ask their reasons why (without getting upset) and also their advice. This will help you for your next interview and you have to use it as a learning opportunity.

Don't give up is a sentiment echoed in every single account sent to us, year after year.

CONCLUSION

Essentially, it's about persistence and utilising your determination to secure your training contact. You may have to deviate from your original plan eg go on a job bridge scheme before getting your contract, but if you know that becoming a solicitor is what you want, then stick with it.

This is why the Finding Your Training Contract Seminar is important. Not only do you learn from the speakers but you meet others in the same boat, but they can help you out and provide a shoulder to cry on if you get a rejection letter.

And as always, please don't lose faith in yourself or doubt your abilities.

TRAINEE ACCOUNTS

1.

My hunt for a training contract was very much a gradual process. During the work placement element of my undergraduate degree I worked in a small solicitors in Dundalk however due to my financial situation I wanted to secure a training contract with a commercial firm in Dublin.

I completed my LLB in Law and European Studies in the University of Limerick and in 3rd year (4 year degree) began applying to the big commercial firms in Dublin as it seemed to be what everybody else was doing. Looking back I realise that at the time I had absolutely no idea what was involved in the application process for these firms. I applied in third and fourth year of my undergraduate degree and wasn't called for any interviews. At this point I began getting a little bit worried. I knew plenty of other people who were called for interview and quite a few who were offered training contracts and I knew my CV could stand up to theirs, yet I wasn't getting any interviews.

Having finished my undergraduate degree and with no training contract I spent the next year sitting the FE1's and working part time. I applied again when the 'milkrounds' came around in September/October and again no joy. At this point I realised that I had to get something extra onto my CV. I decided to complete an LLM in Law and International Commerce in Queens University Belfast. I felt that this would significantly enhance my CV/Application Form as I was seeking a traineeship in a commercial law firm. Feeling extremely downhearted after three years of rejections I decided I was going to work as hard as possible to get a good grade in my Masters and take part in any extra-curricular activities that would bulk up my CV/Application Form. I felt as though this was last-chance-saloon.

I started my LLM in September 2010 and applied for training contracts with all the top commercial law firms, again I received no interviews. A really good friend of mine in the class had also applied to all the top Dublin firms and received three or four calls for interview and he was really surprised I hadn't as I told him my academics/extra-curricular etc. We sat down and compared our applications and he reviewed mine. This was the first time I realised the amount of effort that should go in to the CV/ Application. He had done extensive research on each firm he was applying for, tailoring his Application accordingly,

whether it be the skills they were looking for or the areas he was interested in. I had been using essentially the same application for every firm.

I felt a lot more confident now that I had seen how the applications should be completed and the amount of work that should be put in. I applied for all the internship programmes in the Spring of 2011 and secured my first ever interview, for the Eversheds internship programme. Having finally manoeuvred the application process hurdle another was in my way, the interview. I took some tips from my friend who had helped me with the applications however one thing I can say about interviews is that experience is essential. It was my first interview with a big firm and I was extremely nervous. I knew my application form inside out however I was too nervous and this is what ultimately let me down (I also wore a pink tie, which I have since been advised is a bad idea for interviews, conservative colours are the best option, you want your personality to stand out not your attire).

I was finishing up my LLM in September 2011 and with the 'milk rounds' in September/October 2011 I felt it was make or break time. I felt quite confident however. After years of rejections I finally had overcome the application stage and I now knew what was required in the applications and I had experienced an interview with a commercial firm. I also had strong results from my LLM which I could use to answer the dreaded "What have you done since you last applied?" question.

I applied for all the top firms once again and received calls for four interviews. I made it through to the final round with MOP and William Fry however I was unsuccessful in both. I was absolutely devastated. I was now finished college and had no job. After seriously considering changing career paths I said I would wait until the following Spring and apply for internships, volunteering in a local solicitors for experience in the meantime. I applied again for internships with the top Dublin firms and also for a traineeship with Eugene F Collins who were recruiting trainees at the same time. I was selected for interview with Eugene F Collins and for three internship programmes. The interview process with Eugene F Collins had two rounds and after the second round I was offered a training contract. It was a long road and I came very close to losing heart on a number of occasions. My main piece of advice in obtaining a training contract is that persistence is key. Also speak to as many friends as possible who have a training contract to gain an insight into how they went about obtaining it.

In terms of tips for completing applications I would say ensure there are no time gaps in your application and demonstrate practical examples of how you possess the relevant skills. My tip for interviews would be to be confident. Not overly confident but confident enough to appear assertive to the interviewer. No client wants to be represented by a pushover so that is a key trait prospective training solicitors are looking for.

2.

My undergraduate degree was in Corporate Law in NUIG followed by an LLB also in NUIG. I then worked in a co-op placement in the tax department in Ovens in EMC in Cork for work experience and went into Ernst and Young training as a tax consultant. I left this job to finish my FE1 exams and it took me approx 7 months from when I had received them to find a work placement.

I began by compiling a list of firms from various sources. I then looked up their online profiles. I had a generic CV but adopted the cover letter to each application. Ideally, being from Kerry I looked for employees or preferably partners that had a connection with Galway, the same undergraduate degree, Kerry or had similar interests or experience that matched my own profile.

I then emailed them directly. I would estimate that one in twelve or so responded. Mostly to offer encouragement or to say they would pass it along. One was a partner in a firm in Dublin that stated they did not have an opening but would get back to me when once was so available. This partner got back four months later and I interviewed for a low paid 6 month internship. At the end of this period I was offered a training contract and had to work in the office for approx 15 months before I came here to Blackhall.

As encouragement I would say that it is very difficult but to set aside one day a week as your day to send CVs. I did this on a Wednesday as people were less likely to be absent or under pressure. I then spent the week following up where appropriate. This spread out the disappointments and gave a solid platform. Searching every day can get very disheartening so I would advise rationing it. I did not find HR approaches particularly useful.

Best of luck to all.

3.

For my undergraduate degree, I studied Corporate Law and thereafter completed a postgraduate LLB degree at NUIG graduating in 2009. Thereafter, I applied to the top commercial law firms in Ireland to no avail.

Recession had just hit and I knew a lot of graduates that had not secured a training contract or even legal experience, I did not see myself pursuing a career in law in this country. After attending a lecture on the New York Bar Examination course, I decided to enrol in a weekend preparatory course in Galway. I travelled to New York to do the exams in February 2010. It was a challenging process but the preparatory course was very comprehensive and structured and ultimately I was successful.

On returning to Ireland post exams, I learned that a new rule had been introduced with the effect that a student having successfully passed the NYB examinations was required to complete a year's work experience in New York state before being allowed to sit the QLTT (Solicitor conversion) examinations in Ireland.

I was quite disheartened given that I had intended to sit the exams, in the hope that a dual civil and common law qualification would make my CV stand out and create opportunities for me.

I decided my only option was to seek legal experience in Ireland. I wanted to work in a legal office environment to see what areas of law would most interest me. I searched the internet for names of law firms in Ireland and started to send CVs and cover letters. I got the occasional reply thanking me for my CV and advising that they would be in contact if their situation changed.

After five months of rejection emails, I decided to go to Brussels and look for a staigire position with an MEP or an NGO. The week before I was due to leave, I was contacted by a partner in a medium sized law firm in Dublin and asked to interview for a four month internship. I was offered the position and decided against travelling to Brussels.

In 2010, I again unsuccessfully applied to the biggest law firms in Dublin. After my four month internship, I was offered a further internship.

I decided to sit my FE 1 examinations and successfully completed five examinations in March 2011. Whilst studying for these examinations I remained in contact with my firm and was offered another internship.

I completed my remaining three FE 1 examinations in October 2011 and was again asked to return to the firm to work as an intern. This firm allocated two trainee positions commencing in January 2011 and I was promised a training contract to commence in January 2012.

In 2011, I applied to the top commercial law firms, I sent speculative CV's and cover letters to law firms all over the country and I also applied for advertised trainee positions on the Law Society website.

On this occasion, I interviewed for a large commercial firm, a medium sized firm and a smaller niche firm with its head office based in the UK. In March 2012, I was delighted to accept a training contract with a medium sized law firm based outside of Dublin.

I would advise prospective trainees:

- To seek legal experience with a law firm. It is preferable to seek an internship position as this clearly indicates your intention to progress to the position of trainee.
- To complete the FE 1 examinations in as few sittings as possible. From personal experience, I feel that once you have completed the FE 1s you can focus your mind solely on obtaining a training contract.
- To tailor your CV and cover letter to the firm's specific practice areas when applying for trainee positions.
- To keep up-to-date with current affairs and legal developments.
- To be persistent. Obtaining a training contract is a long and hard process for the majority of graduates.

Good luck.

4.

Don't underestimate the value of the degree you have earned. I got a degree in Law after leaving a degree in Science. Despite not completing Science, each interviewer I spoke with had an interest in and placed a value in the various classes and skills I had experienced. However there is a wide array of undergraduate qualifications among them and if you haven't heard it before, a Law degree is definitely not a prerequisite.

Before and during my FE1s I spent periods working in a small office. From talking to the trainees I have started in PPC1 with, it seems a small minority have not worked in an office at some stage so it is an essential part of the process. When interviewing for a traineeship it shows a practical approach to researching the career of a solicitor. Secondly it will endow you with skills which you can offer to the firm at interview.

Set yourself apart and be natural when completing applications or doing interviews. The firm I am training with interviewed 60 candidates in the first round and 20 in the second. Prepare to be asked about your interests and be able to convey why you are passionate about them.

Before my first interview, I asked a previous employer if they knew anyone who had worked for the firm I was applying to. Luckily he did and the former employee was very obliging in answering my questions about the firm. In the interview the partners seemed impressed that I had gone outside of the information provided on their website to get a personal insight. When you get to the interview stage (and you will), use a professional or college careers service. I asked the advisor where I had studied and she was more than happy to perform a mock interview and give me valuable feedback.

Finally, when I read these accounts during my applications I took this as an idle truism but it is so important:

Persevere

Persevere

Persevere

It all looked fairly glum after many rejections and shortly before I was (thankfully) offered a contract. I'm delighted that I stuck with the process as the firm seem a good bunch of people and PPC1 is fantastic.

5.

I started working in a solicitor office as a secretary when I was 18 doing my undergraduate degree. I was in my final year of my degree and I started looking for an apprenticeship. I sent out three cv, got two interviews and two offers. This was early 2008 and it was very easy to find a traineeship with my experience. I had made the decision not to do a traineeship in the office I was working in as I thought I would not get the respect of a solicitor.

The traineeship I was offered was to start PPC1 in September 2010. I decided to leave the full time job I was in as a legal executive to do a Masters! Within a week of leaving the office and starting the masters, the banks crashed and recession began. I thought it wouldn't affect me. I had my traineeship secured. I wasn't! I did my FE1s during my masters ready to start the job in September 2009.

As soon as I started in the office I realised I wasn't secure! The office made 80% of their staff redundant and I lost my traineeship. I didn't know what to do. I canvassed the country with cvs. I didn't have the intention of ever leaving Waterford but at this stage I didn't have a choice. I got a few interviews but no job! I started working with the rape crisis centre in Waterford and doing temp work in solicitor's offices.

I started working with the Irish Human Rights Commission in July 2010. I was planning to do a PHD when I finished with the commission but that week I received a call from a solicitor office in Dublin who found my cv on the law society website. After 3 interviews I was offered the job! I worked there for 18 months before starting here.

6.

My primary degree was Business and I majored in law in my final year. I completed a six month internship in a large law firm as part of my degree course. Unfortunately I was naive enough to think this experience would be more than enough to secure a Training Contract and I applied for a number of positions in my final year of college. While I did get to the final round of interviews with one top tier firm I wasn't offered a Traineeship.

After my degree I completed my LLM as I felt I needed to expand on my primary degree. During the FE1's I consistently checked firm's websites and along with most other potential Trainees I sent my CV and cover letter to a large number of solicitors. I interviewed with two firms but I was not successful. I also received a number of typical "due to the downturn in the economy we are unable to take on any Trainees" and "best of luck in the future" replies. After my Masters I worked in the Property Market for two years, but I felt the best chance I had to get a Training contract would be to gain some further legal experience. I yet again sent my CV to a number of local solicitors and I was offered unpaid work experience by one firm. I was working full time at this stage so I had to take the risk of leaving paid work for the chance of gaining enough experience to secure a Traineeship. I also had to move back in with my parents in order to afford to work unpaid!

During my work experience I tried to network and meet as many people working in law firms as possible. The solicitor I was interning with was aware that I was trying to get a Traineeship and always mentioned this to other solicitors she introduced me to. At the time I interviewed with a corporate firm that I had applied for months previously and whilst I got to the final round I was yet again unsuccessful.

The firm I was interning with was a General Practice firm, and even though I had always imaged that I would work in Commercial Law because of my Business Degree, I loved the variety of the work I was doing. I had been interning with the firm for three months and was beginning to feel like I would never secure a Traineeship when they offered me a Training Contract. They were impressed with the fact I was willing to work for free to improve my CV and my legal knowledge.

The best advice I can give to potential Trainees is to try to gain as much legal experience as you can – general office work in college, internships or volunteering with legal advice centres all look great on your CV and are an excellent opportunity to network. And while it's great to know what area of law you are interested in try not to only apply for those firms as like me you might not realise how much you enjoy other legal areas until you actually get hands on experience. Don't forget to use any contacts that you may have, I asked all my college friends to let me know if they heard of any positions or work experience and one friend who worked in a bank contacted me about a job just after I had accepted my Traineeship!

For the majority of us it is extremely hard to get a Training Contract but the struggle is worth it and I haven't met anyone yet who has had to give up and work in a different field so keep at it and best of luck!

7.

In my third year of university, I realised that I wanted to become a solicitor. During the summer after my final exams, I spent a few weeks working with a local solicitor. The following year, I worked full-time, studied at night for a LLB and began to apply for traineeships.

I didn't find the careers advisory service in college helpful. They weren't very knowledgeable on the differences between firms and were always more concerned about my list of hobbies on my CV! I discovered that the UK universities provided a lot more helpful information on their websites, including sample interview questions that were anything but the usual 'tell me about your hobbies' kind of questions!

I set about re-doing my CV and cover letter. I tried to focus on 'me' in my CV. I wanted the firms to know who I was from reading my CV and cover letter. I didn't want a cookie-cutter CV.

I knew that I wanted to train in a commercial firm because that is the area of law that I am interested in. Secondly, most commercial firms pay a wage and pay for the Blackhall fees. I would not be in a position to fund myself through Blackhall. I applied to the usual suspects in Dublin and a few smaller commercial practices. I was lucky enough to get interviews with five firms.

When preparing for the interviews, I researched each firm's website, looked at legal500 and talked to as many former trainees that I knew. I had attended every visit by the law firms to college and found that it was useful to reference those conversations with trainees or partners in the interview. It's very important to know your CV inside out. When preparing, try to think of five potential questions for every piece of information on your CV.

I was very lucky to obtain a traineeship during college, which meant that I wasn't under so much pressure for my exams. I spent the following year studying for the FE-1 exams and started my traineeship in 2012.

My advice to those looking for a traineeship

1. Get some legal experience, even if it is only for a week or two. Ask your extended family to ring their solicitor and see if you can do a bit of work with them.
2. Know your CV inside out and don't make anything up.
3. Attend open evenings and firms and get chatting to as many people as possible – partners, HR, current trainees. You'll gain an insight into what the work atmosphere is like there and you might be lucky enough to meet your interviewer.
4. Be prepared for the most random questions in your interviews. Take a deep breath before you answer!

8.

I decided that I wanted to become a solicitor after I did work experience in a small practice in Dublin 7 during transition year. After this I returned to this office for a number of subsequent summers when I really began to learn about the workings of a law firm.

I went on then to do a BCL law degree in UCD which I really enjoyed. I graduated from UCD in 2009 and at this time it seemed almost impossible to secure a traineeship. I therefore decided to go on and do a masters in law (LLM) in Trinity College. During this time I began working in a large office within an independent statutory body.

I come from a family with no legal connections at all, and there were many times that I did not think that I would ever find a training contract. At this stage I had a significant amount of office experience but not a whole lot of experience in a legal office. I therefore decided to volunteer with the organisation FLAC which provides free legal assistance to members of the public. This was an invaluable experience and I have no doubt that it helped me to get a training contract. It involved attending one of FLAC's centres once or twice a month with a qualified solicitor or barrister and together advising people on any legal issues they may have. I found it an excellent way to expose myself to the area of law/ legal issues while also using this opportunity to network.

When I finished the LLM in Trinity College I began to send out CV's, submit application forms etc. for the position of trainee solicitor. I would say that I must have sent out at least 150-200 CV's to firms all over the country and while I received some lovely replies from some firms it seemed that the majority of firms were finding things extremely difficult financially and were simply not in a position to take any trainees on. I was advised by a number of these solicitors to put my CV up on the trainee register on the law society website, which I had already done, but nevertheless I was surprised how helpful some of the solicitors were. I received a number of calls from one or two other solicitors, who again explained that they were not in a position to take on any trainees but told me to call in to their office, or spoke with me on the phone and provided some words of advice on how to possibly find a training contract and some further words of advice on working within the legal sector.

While I continued to receive the rejection letters I contemplated trying the New York Bar exams. I did a lot of research on these exams and while they appeared to be extremely difficult I was prepared to attempt them if it meant securing a training contract. Then one day out of the blue I received a phone call from a medium sized firm in County Dublin who said that they had seen my CV on the Law Society website and would like to call me for an interview. I could not believe it. I attended the interview, which went well and was subsequently offered a training contract for the following year. While I was disappointed that I would not be attending PPC1 that year, in hindsight I believe it was for the best as I gained invaluable experience working in the office which will no doubt stand to me during PPC1. I must admit that when I put my CV up on the Law Society website, I did not believe for a second that I would secure a training contract this way, however my employer later told me that he preferred to use the Trainee register to find trainees rather than advertise and be inundated with hundreds of CV's.

Therefore I suppose the moral of the story is to stick with it, if a career in law is something that you really want to pursue. I would advise someone with little or no legal experience to consider doing some volunteer work with FLAC or any other organisation for some valuable experience and if nothing else make sure you have your CV up on the Law Society website!!!!

9.

As I came to the end of LLB in NUIG in 2008, I wanted to gain some practical experience in an office that would stand me in good stead for my future career. I also wanted to be sure that the office, and therefore the practical aspect of this career was really for me.

As I came to the end of my LLB, I was fortunate enough to get two weeks work experience as a legal secretary / receptionist covering study leave in a small firm in Galway city centre. During those two weeks, I enthusiastically did all that was asked of me such as answering phones, attending the stamping office, copying, dictaphone typing etc. At the end of the two weeks I was offered a permanent position as legal secretary / receptionist. I honestly believe that my positive attitude and willingness to assist worked in my favour.

I worked in this role for two and a half years and gained invaluable experience in Personal Injuries Litigation and Criminal Law. During this time I became very familiar with litigation proceedings, the practical workings of a file and the necessary steps in a personal injuries claim. I also learned how to liaise with Counsel and other professionals such as engineers and medical professionals. I also dealt with clients who were sometimes upset that matters were not progressing as they would have liked and I found that I was calmly able to deal with their concerns. I learned a great deal about managing clients during this time. I also became very familiar with the workings of the District and Circuit Criminal courts. It was during this time that I sat the FE1 examinations. It was difficult to work full time and prepare for the examinations but I felt that I needed to have an income and gain experience in a legal practice.

This experience was invaluable when I decided to leave Galway and move to Dublin where I secured the role of legal executive having full responsibility for District and Circuit Court debt collection matters as well as assisting a solicitor in the commercial litigation department. I had no previous experience in either commercial litigation or debt collection but my general knowledge of litigation was taken into account and I quickly adapted to the role.

Only nine months into my position, there was an announcement that there would be redundancies in the firm. I was the last person in and I assumed I would lose my job. There were some positions remaining in the firm and I asked to be considered for one and to be

considered for any position of trainee that would come available. I was kept on and given a training contract for when I completed my FE1s.

10.

My story as to how I got my training contract is a lot to do with being in the right place at the right time but I also believe that my experience swayed my employers. I had not even passed all my FE1s when I was offered a training contract. I proved myself to be diligent and hard working. I was organised and punctual. I showed that while I had some knowledge, I was eager and quick to learn.

My advice to anyone searching for a training contract would be to try to gain some experience in a legal role, just a foot in a door and something for the CV. I would also advise people to be humble and polite, helpful and eager to learn, even when it is not what you would like to end up doing.

My attitude was always to learn as much as I could so that I could go wherever I wanted to go and I never saw any task or any area to which I was directed as futile or a waste of my time.

11.

I have a 2.1 Arts degree (legal science and history) and a 2.1 LLB from NUI Galway. I started the FE-1 exams in September 2006 and attained a pass in all by March 2008. I then went to Australia for a few months, and returned home to do a LLM in Public Law in 2009. After finishing my Masters I secured a job as a research assistant at the Centre for Disability Law and Policy in NUI Galway. After a number of months in this position I felt that I strongly wanted to qualify as a solicitor, and I started re-applying for traineeships in early 2012. I secured my traineeship in May 2012 having sat a 3-stage interview process for the firm.

My first steps were to update and tailor my cv, for which I got advice from the college careers office. This was essential, as they helped me to produce a cv which was concise and contained only the information which firms would be interested in. Then I selected only firms who were advertising vacancies or who had areas in which I was very interested in

working for to contact. Although some would argue against this, I felt that focusing my efforts cut down on the time, effort and stress involved, leading to a more productive process.

I believe that your approach to an interview is essential. I felt that my delay in applying for traineeships would work against me - it was 6 years since I'd finished my LLB - however, I was advised to stress the positive aspects of the delay during my interview. I told my interviewers that the 6 year gap had been positive for me, that I had gained a lot of experience in related areas and had travelled, and was now sure that becoming a solicitor was what I wanted to do. I feel that they were very receptive to this approach, and that this worked in my favour in the interview.

I believe that extra work I carried out in my Masters degree was of great benefit in securing my traineeship. I referenced this during my interview. I also feel that the position I held at the time I applied was of benefit, and during my interview I referenced the positive aspects of the position (although not directly related to the work of the firm) to good effect. If you can refer to experience you have -working in an office, volunteering with a senior counsel, working on a project - it reflects very well on you in an interview.

12.

I am currently a trainee at a large Dublin commercial law firm. As I know the task of securing a training contract can be daunting at first instance and varies greatly from person to person, I'm going to discuss three general advices that worked for me, and more importantly, which I hope will increase your chances of success.

1. Make an informed not an ill-formed decision

The road to securing (and completing) a training contract can be a long and often arduous time for even the best of us, so before deciding to go this route, attempt to answer the following questions. First, do you actually *want* to be a solicitor? Second, and more importantly, *why* do you want to be a solicitor? If you can answer these then you're already far ahead of others on the path to securing a training contract for the following reasons: Perhaps being a solicitor is an obvious choice for some, but there is no way such a career should be the default choice for law graduates. If you have made the conscious decision to

apply yourself to the task of training and qualifying as a solicitor, you will be more than resolute in the face of the various challenges to obtaining a training contract (e.g. the FE-1s, getting legal experience and the applications and interview processes of different firms, etc).

Second, if it is clear in your mind as to why you want to become a solicitor, then the applications you submit to firms, be it on a Cover Letter or standard application form, will be more convincing – you'll give yourself the best chance of securing a training contract by demonstrating that you have made a careful and considered career choice.

2. Effort is essential, but the result is definitive (either way!)

In the majority of professions, success is defined not by amount of the hours spent pouring over a particular piece of work but more so in terms of the quality of the output or product. For example, no one cares how long it takes a surgeon to fix a broken leg, just that they do a good job and have us back running from A to B in no time!

In terms of relating this to securing a training contract, when one applies for a position as a trainee solicitor, the various trainee interviewers will want to see the magical formula of X effort resulting in Y product. They will want to see this reproduced across anything from academics, extra-curriculars or just life experience. This doesn't mean that everything you have done has got to have resulted in a success, remember we can all show any number of glittering examples of success. If you can show a situation where the eventual output did not meet the initial expectations – all the better – as long as you can show what you learned from the experience. Remember, as a lawyer, you can't win every case!

3. There is no yellow-brick road to a training contract

Unfortunately, there isn't one single path to a trainee contract. What we do all have in common is that we all worked extremely hard to secure a traineeship, received numerous knock-backs, sat through tough interviews and generally were single-minded in our determination to become solicitors.

With that in mind, don't overly concern yourself with what other people are doing. Don't be afraid to be yourself, get as much legal experience as is possible, and then after that, do what feels right for you at that particular time. At the end of the day, while it's somewhat

debatable (!), I don't think you can be a good solicitor without first being a well-rounded human being.

In conclusion, I wish you the very best in the search for a training contract.

13.

I studied Law in UCC from 2007 to 2010 and then went on to do a masters in Trinity. I had a studied a wide variety of subjects and chose to do a Masters in mental health law.

I had four fe1s and had just finished my masters when I went on a hunt for a training contract I did the applications with the bigger Dublin firms two years in a row (while in 3rd year and my masters) and interviewed with a few firms but never got an offer.

I decided I probably needed some relevant work experience before I'd really be in the running for a training contract. I then sent around a my cv to a handful of smaller firms in Dublin and was offered a place on the Jobbridge internship scheme.

Six weeks after starting I was offered a training contract to attend Blackhall in 2013 with the firm. I was also offered another internship with a view to an apprenticeship in another Dublin firm.

I decided I still wanted to go to Blackhall in 2012 so took a few weeks off to do the fe1s and continued applying to other firms.

I was offered a training contract by a firm in August of this year to start in Blackhall in September.

I feel that it was the work experience I gained from my internship which ultimately got me the job. I was confident going into the interview that I could chat away to the interviewer about my role in the firm, what I had learned etc. This was a major improvement from when I interviewed in college, I was clueless and a nervous wreck going into the interviews!

14.

I completed the BCL in UCC in 2006. I stayed on for a further year and completed the LLB course. I had worked part time all through college in retail positions and when I finished the LLB in 2007 I continued working part time in retail at weekends while also working full time as a medical secretary.

I sat and passed my first four FE1s in Spring 2008 and completed the remaining 4 in Autumn 2008. In the months coming up to October 2009 (start of big firm applications time), I had done nothing law related with my CV since passing the FE1s the year before in Autumn 2008. I had moved to a full time, secure, permanent administrative job and I thought that, in the midst of the recession which had set in within the previous 12 months, I had better do something to show that I was still interested in law as I was not working in a law related area. I had to do this while still working full time as giving up work was simply not an option financially in particular giving up a permanent full time job in a recession was a non-runner.

I enrolled on two part time evening courses that would fit around work. One of these was a Diploma in Employment Law accredited by the Institute of Commercial Management which was run by Griffith College in Limerick. This was an evening course which ran from October 2009 to March 2010. The lecturer was a young female Barrister in Limerick and advised that the course was not pitched at an academic level, more so a practical level but that was fine by me. At the time, the Law Society had a school in Cork City. I enrolled on the Certificate in Litigation course in Cork which ran on Wednesday evenings in Cork for the same duration as the Diploma in Employment Law, i.e. October 2009-March 2010. I made arrangements with work to make up the time to leave a little early on Wednesdays and travelled to and from Cork each Wednesday evening for the course. The two courses probably cost about €1,700 altogether and was, without a doubt, something that definitely stood to me in getting my training contract eventually.

I did the big firm applications again in Autumn 2009, this time with my two part time courses on my CV and I was called for 3 interviews. Nothing came of these and I did not get past the 2nd interview with them but it was still an improvement on the year before.

The two courses I did finished up in March 2010. I once again did the arduous applications for the big firms in Dublin in late 2010. I was called for a few interviews again but to no avail.

At that stage, late 2010, I felt quite dejected after it all and somewhat trapped in an administration job.

There was still something lacking on my CV and that was experience in a law office. I had worked in a healthcare administrative position since I left college in 2007 and had never worked in a law office. I contacted a solicitor, gave her my CV and asked her if she would take me in for one week of work experience that I wanted to do while on annual leave. I completed one week of work experience which gave me a brief but helpful insight into the day to day life of a firm. I was subsequently offered an apprenticeship in the same firm shortly after but I was not to start in the office until about 6 months later, in April 2011. This was on the basis that I would not go to Blackhall until September 2012. I was simply grateful to get an apprenticeship at long last and this was fine with me and here I am now. My tips for improving chances of getting an apprenticeship in a small-medium general practice;-

1. Do some part time law related study or courses after your FE1s particularly if you do not fall into a training contract straight away after passing them. This is particularly so if your college grades would be considered just average. Show an interest each year post FE1s in doing something, anything, law related. It will show an employer that you still have an interest in continued learning even if there are only a few apprenticeships going around and will show some determination not to give up as well! Do not be snobby about courses either, courses not specifically aimed at law graduates or not pitched at that sort of academic level can actually be very practical. Also, these are often the only option if you have full time employment that you cannot give up but at the same time, don't want to sit back and do nothing. Whatever you do, do something or start doing something! You will make contacts in these types of courses. For example the young Barrister who taught the part time evening Employment Diploma course I did 3 years ago who I had not seen since, approached me in Limerick Circuit Court about 5 months ago, knew my name, asked me how I was doing, where I was training, what areas was I doing work in etc. She is a contact I now have in the region in which I am training.

2. If you cannot type, learn how to. I cannot emphasise this enough from my point of view as a trainee in a general practice firm. It was the first question I was asked when I looked for one week of work experience. This applies to guys and girls. Do a typing course if you are not too confident about your skills. I had 4 years administrative work under me by the time I did my work experience in the firm which then offered me an apprenticeship. I thought that nothing I was doing in that job would help me get an apprenticeship but never underestimate the practical skills you have from the job you might be in even if it is completely unrelated to law. In the 4 years I worked as a medical secretary, I built up excellent typing skills including (and very importantly I later learned) dictaphone typing. I also built up a base of contacts in the medical sector which has proved invaluable in my job in a litigation firm for medical appointments etc. I did not realise that this would stand to me. Do not write off the experience you have or people you know or the business you can bring in from the various jobs you have been in until now. This will very much stand to you in getting a training contract with a small general firm and plug this when you are sending in CVs or being interviewed. There is a recession. If you can type, if you can bring in business (any business; accidents, wills, house purchases etc.) you are more attractive to a small – medium firm. That's not to say that a trainee should be typing all the time but, think about it, if you can type not only your own work but solicitors' work when required, you are more useful than somebody who cannot. It is all well and good putting in your cover letter how much you admire a firm, the work they do, the ethos etc. but personally, if you are applying to a small-medium firm, I would advise that you highlight your skills from whatever jobs you have had and how they can save that firm money or better yet pay the bills of a firm you are looking for a training contract in.
3. Get into an office even for one week's work experience. I used my annual leave to do this in the office in which I am now a trainee. It will impress any possible employer than you are prepared to go into an office for a week of unpaid labour rather than go to Lanzarote for a week instead!

4. Related to number 3 above, if you do get work experience in an office, treat it as a trial run, you never know when that firm might be hiring a trainee and may remember you. Make an effort;- be in early, ask if there is anything else to be done before leaving, pull out the Hoover...be busy and look eager to be useful in any way that you can. Be polite to everyone in the firm from the cleaner upwards. People talk and if you are rude to someone or lazy or a complainer, the boss will find out and you will have ruined your chances! When you finish your work experience, everyone will be asked how they thought you got on. Everyone. Remember this.

5. Do not let training contract dates put you off. I started in my firm in April 2011 on the basis I was not being allowed to go to Blackhall until September 2012. I have my FE1s since 2008 and as far as I know 2013 was the last year that I could go. Blackhall is regarded as the Holy Grail when you do not have a training contract but while I was disappointed not going last year, I had a training contract at last and that was good enough for me. This, in hindsight, was most definitely for the best. You will meet people in Blackhall who have never set foot in an office or been to a Courthouse before they start PPC1. If you have done even a few months in an office, it will stand to you. I had 18 months in office experience before PPC1 (one of my PPC1 friends has 13 years behind her in an office having only done the FE1s recently) and part of me thinks that in office experience of at least one year should be compulsory before PPC1. I would not change the fact that I was not allowed to go last year seeing what practical experience I now have. So, do not be afraid to apply for training contracts which say that they will not let you go to PPC1 until a year later or even two after starting. As long as your FE1s will not expire of course. Do not be afraid of doing a stint in the office before Blackhall. It will also make you appreciate Blackhall much more as a break from the office!

6. I do believe that it is possible to do all of the above while holding down a full time job if you have one. It is a personal decision whether you give up a paying job to go back to full time study such as a Masters to try to improve your chances of getting a training contract. I personally think that you can add improvements to your CV and

work full time. At the end of the day, if you have a job, albeit unrelated, it pays the bills, pays the rent and can pay for a part time course.

15.

I attained a training position with a Dublin firm in February of this year after a great deal of searching. I graduated from Waterford Institute of Technology with a First Class Honours Degree in Legal and Business Studies in 2006. I was then offered a place in University College Cork to pursue a Masters in Law but I declined on the basis that I preferred to pursue the FE1s immediately.

Over the next year and a half I sat and passed both the First Irish Examination and the FE1s. Unfortunately the downturn started to hit just as I finished the examinations and I spent the next two years unsuccessfully papering the country with my CV. Most firms simply were not hiring at that time and to get an interview became almost unheard of amongst my fellow graduates, though I did attend a number in a variety of corners of the country.

After two years of banging my head off this particular wall I decided to shelve the idea. I was well out of college. My school friends were accountants, teachers, bank officials- it was beyond frustrating to keep doing the same thing over and over again and getting no result. Throughout college and beyond I had worked at a large supermarket. I had started packing bags and, due to my work ethic and willingness to learn, I had worked my way up through a variety of roles and eventually headed one of the departments part time. I had an aptitude for dealing with people (something I had hoped to benefit me in the legal profession) and a head for numbers so I began to aggressively pursue a career in retail. The results were quick and I soon took over management of the largest revenue generating department of the store. When the role of overall store manager became available I obtained the job despite competition from a great deal of applicants, both internal and external. I carried on this role for over a year.

I admit that I did not give the law a great deal of thought during this period, at least not outside of competition and at times criminal law, as necessitated by my role as a store manager. Thankfully though I had built relationships with a large number of my regular customers, which included an examiner from the Land Registry and a number of legal practitioners. As I discovered, they apparently talked amongst themselves about me (which, had I known, would probably have alarmed me!). The upshot of this was that a week before my birthday in February a customer rang the store and told me about a trainee

position she had heard about in Dublin. Apparently I had gone to college with her son and another customer had told her that I was looking for a traineeship. She had been scouring for a job for me ever since because I used to share my notes with her son.

To this day I still am not sure what I put in my cover letter to the law firm. It was drafted at 2am on a wing and a prayer because the deadline for applications was to close the next morning. To my utter astonishment I received a call about ten hours later asking me to come in for an interview the following day. Needless to say I dropped everything and high tailed it to Dublin. The interview itself was brief but rigorous and passed in something of a blur. I was told I would hear in a couple of weeks but received a call the next day asking me to come back for a second interview immediately. I did so and was again told that I would hear in due course. A day later I received a call from the managing partner telling me that I had secured one of the trainee positions. It was my birthday. Best present yet!

In conclusion I'm afraid I did not use any innovative strategy to gain my traineeship. Instead I decided to pursue another career entirely but through sheer chance and an (definitely unknown to me) ability to ingratiate myself with all kinds of people, the opportunity simply tripped, fell and landed face first in my lap.

I hope this was in some way helpful.

16.

I completed my LLM (Criminal Justice) Clinical in UCC in October 2007 and it was at this point I started the FE1's. I waited until the following year when I had all eight exams passed to start the task of sending out my CV to firms. Unfortunately this was a time when the effects of the recession were hitting many legal firms in Ireland. I also had no contacts in the area.

I first started with the firms I would like to work for and the location I liked, having no success there, I started sending my CV to hundreds upon hundreds of firms with no success. I did however avoid applying to the big commercial firms, crazy as it might seem to many I did this because I knew I wanted to work in general practice and secure experience across a broad range of areas of law rather than work in a commercial firm. I knew it might

be financially difficult but job satisfaction was important to me. I put my CV on the Trainee Register but unfortunately did not get any response.

While looking for my traineeship I started working in Human Resources in a large medical device company where I gained vast experience in different aspects of employment law. I thoroughly enjoyed working in this area and the benefits of working for an American company are very attractive indeed. Despite this I still continued my search for a traineeship. After numerous rejection letters I have to say I questioned whether this career was for me after all. When my contract ended I decided to go travelling in the hope that the recession would have eased somewhat when I returned. So I went to Australia and New Zealand like many other Irish and a blast. But ultimately I decided to return home and search yet again for a traineeship.

I returned to a role in Human Resources in another medical device company after my travels. It was here I encountered a colleague who had also studied law but had decided to pursue a career in HR. Although he was highly successful in his career he had regrets for not pursuing the legal career some thirty years later. I did not want to have the same regrets later in my life. After numerous months of debating whether I should continue with my career in HR and remain in a company where the rewards were very tempting or continue with my search to secure a traineeship, I made the decision.

I contacted a solicitor who owns a general practice in my local town seeking three months unpaid work experience. Shortly after I started in this firm I discovered that the firm had not taken on a trainee in 10 years due to a bad experience. Although I was gutted when I heard this I continued to work hard and soak up as much information as I could. At the end of my three month period I was asked to stay on for a further period. After a number of months and encouragement from numerous Counsel who I had attended I built up the courage to ask my Principal would he sign my indentures. To my delight he agreed. It was such a relief and the ultimate satisfaction of finally securing a traineeship was immense. The hard work and sacrifices I made were worth it. I am also happy that I had spent a number of months in the office before starting PPC1.

17.

I had just begun my final year in Business and Legal Studies in UCD when I was confronted with the inevitable decision: business or law. Once I had decided on law, I actually had to do some research on how to become a solicitor! It may seem naive, but until that point I had been so focussed on my studies that I hadn't thought to familiarise myself with the steps to qualifying as a solicitor. The Law Society's website, particularly the section '*Becoming a Solicitor*', was a valuable source of information.

Application Process

I set about downloading application forms from firms of all sizes. While I wasn't dead set on becoming a lawyer for one of the big corporate firms, I realised that in these tightened times they might be in a better position to offer contracts and ultimately, keep most of the trainees they take on.

Completing the forms was a time-consuming exercise. However, many of the forms ask the same questions so once I was happy with one set of answers I simply recycled them. In answering questions I was quite tempted to embellish interests, achievements etc. I would advise anyone who is similarly tempted not to do it! If you stray too far from the truth you will be exposed in interviews! Instead, think about using any free time in Blackhall to volunteer or to join one of the teams or societies.

Interviews

I was unsuccessful in 12 interviews! People advised me not to take it personally but I couldn't help it. I had good grades, had a bunch of hobbies, and volunteered... what was I missing? The answer: Confidence!

I began practicing answering questions in front of my family. My brother recorded me on one occasion. Let's just say I wouldn't have hired me either! I stuttered and stumbled when asked unexpected questions and shied away from speaking about my achievements. I soon learned that when confronted with 'curved balls' to take a deep breath and think before answering, and most importantly to take any opportunity on offer to promote myself.

Internships

With my new-found confidence I braced a couple more interviews. I soon learned that many of the larger firms were giving precedence to people who had done their internships the previous year. Having only decided to pursue a career in law in my final year I had effectively missed that boat! At this stage, even though it was a training contract I was really after, I realised that my best shot may be to apply for an internship and with any luck, the following year I might be in a better position to secure a training contract with that particular firm.

I did an internship with one of the larger firms that summer. It was an extremely worthwhile exercise for two reasons. Firstly, it reaffirmed my gut feeling that a career in law was for me. Secondly, it allowed me to 'get my foot in the door' or to make the necessary impression over a 4-week period that I couldn't do in a 10 minute interview.

During my review on the final day I expressed an interest in training with the firm. The following week I got a call to say I could start training with them the following year. What are the chances?!

Conclusion

I learned several lessons during the 'milk rounds'.

1. Confidence is critical.
 - If you don't have it, at least fake it!
2. Sometimes you have to go backwards to go forwards
 - Think about applying for an internship if you are having difficulty securing a training contract. Most of the larger firms give precedence to former interns. For some firms it is their sole means of recruiting trainees.
3. Persevere
 - If you have tried to secure a contract in the past and have been unsuccessful, do not give up! Reflect on past interviews, identify any weak points and if possible ask for feedback so that you can improve. It is important that you do not lose heart. As my mother always says, "what is for you won't pass you".

18.

I graduated from my BCL Honours Degree from UCC in June 2006.

I then sat my first four FE-1's in October 2006 and the next four in March 2007. Thankfully I passed all eight exams first time around so I didn't have to repeat.

I then went looking for a trainee contract towards the end of 2007 and I was only half-heartedly trying to get a trainee contract as I was working with AIB at the time and really enjoyed it. I stayed with AIB until I went travelling to Australia in May 2009. I returned to Ireland in January 2011 and properly began my search for a trainee contract.

I used to sit at my computer every day for hours emailing my CV to numerous law firms. I sent my CV and covering letter to law firms all over Ireland. I then found out that I was entitled to take part in the Fas Jobbridge Scheme and so I re-sent all my CVs again but included in my covering letter that I qualified for the Fas Jobbridge Scheme.

Within two weeks I had two interviews. One interview was with a sole practitioner and she only had part time work for me as she already had a trainee in the office. Then I got an interview with a large law firm in Cork. There were 8 candidates being interviewed for the Job Bridge position and thankfully I was successful.

I began my 9 months Fas Jobbridge Internship in August 2011 and finished it in May 2012. During those 9 months I was getting paid €235.00 from the social welfare and the law firm didn't have to pay me. In May 2012 when the Fas Jobbridge Internship finished I was told by the firm that they would keep me on initially for a 3 month period as a legal assistant. Then in June 2012 they informed me that they would give me a traineeship and I started the PPC1 in September 2012. The firm did not pay my fees and they are not paying me while I attend the PPC course.

I am of the opinion that I would not have found a trainee contract unless I participated on the Fas Jobbridge Scheme and although it is very tough financially being on so little money it will definitely pay off in the long run and my advice to people looking for trainee contracts is to try and do what they can just to get work in a legal office and then show them what you are capable of and hopefully it will work out like my situation did.

19.

From my experience, I believe that the key to finding the elusive training contract in the current economic legal market is determination, determination and more determination or of course being lucky enough to have a family member in the legal profession.

I commenced my legal journey by undertaking a BA (Hons) in Law with Taxation in which I completed in 2009 and I continued on my path to the dreaded FE1 examinations. While I was undergoing my exams and holding down a full time job in the food industry I began plaguing law firms with my Curriculum Vitae's. I would send out my cover letter and C.V nicely bound (which I found to be very costly and ineffective) in the post to the local law firms in the Cavan/Monaghan area and I received one of two outcomes:

1. I received replies that there were no training contract positions within the office and that my C.V would be retained by the firm in the event that a position arose.
2. I received no reply.

In May 2010 I successfully had completed all eight FE1 exams and this give me more ammunition to seek a training contract or at a minimum to seek legal experience in a law firm. I extended my geographical search to the Ulster and Leinster areas. There was one particular firm which I approached in Cavan and I got a five minute slot to speak with the principal of the firm setting out my position and advising on how determined and enthusiastic I was to gain legal experience. I was later interviewed and advised that I could work voluntarily in the firm to gain experience and in time a training contract may be available. I was advised that the reason I was preferred over the hundreds of applications the principal received for the position, was due to my drive and determination. Although this was an unpaid position it was the position which lead to my training contract which I have now obtained.

Climbing the ladder to success

From this position I was offered a Job with a large Banking Institution in the Conveyance department where I gained invaluable experience. I later was called for an interview with a mid-tier Law Firm in Dublin who were impressed with my experience and offered me a

training contract. I am now attending PPC1 and am in an excellent law firm who are focused on my training and furthering of my career.

Previous to this position I was offered two traineeships which were unremunerated and my role was classified more as that of a secretarial role than a training contract. Although, I give grave considerations to taking up these unremunerated training contracts at my time of desperation, I thankfully turned down these offers and found my feet with a good law firm who have an active role in my training. It is vital to know your worth when seeking a training contract.

I would give the following as key points to bear in mind when seeking out a training contract:

1. **Applying for a Training contract:** The most effective (both realistically and cost effectively) way of getting yourselves at the forefront of a law firm's mind is to email your cover letter and C.V to the managing partner of the firm, as he/she is the person who will be giving you the position.
2. **Legal work Experience:** Strive to gain some form of work experience (even if it is voluntary as this will open doors for you), be it one day a week at the photocopier or five days a week answering phones in a law firm, you are gaining exposure to the legal office and therefore will be helpful when seeking a training contract and most importantly your foot is in the door.
3. **Know your worth:** Never underestimate your abilities and know your worth when you obtain a training contract.
4. **Be determined:** Stay positive and be determined and persistent in your search for a training contract. The elusive search for a training contract is made a lot easier when you are determined and enthusiastic that it is what you want. Also, a partner will always be impressed by an enthusiastic trainee.

Best of Luck on your search for a training contract!!!

20.

I finally obtained a training contract in November 2011, after nearly 6 months of searching. Initially I went the traditional route of applying to vacancies posted on the Law Society Website. As these were few and far between I then started 'Blanket Bombing' my CVs on as many firms as I could using the Law Directory as my guide.

After sending a CV to a firm I would then call to follow up, whilst everyone was gracious and encouraging I was continually informed there were simply no positions available.

In October 2011, I contacted a volunteer group to offer to do some volunteering work with them. I had read a lot of articles about their work, and felt what they were doing was very admirable. I started with them in mid October. I was immediately thrown into a vibrant legal environment, working very closely with numerous solicitors, barristers and business people. As my particular interest was in the legal end of the organisation, I aligned myself closely to the solicitors and offered to do any work they needed me to do.

This approach paid off a month later when a solicitor there offered to take me on as a trainee. I was delighted, after all that time!

I would encourage anyone seeking a training contact to do some volunteer work. Especially with an organisation that has a legal element.

I hope this will be of some benefit to those seeking the illusive training contract!

21.

On completing my FE1s in 2009, I sent my CV to law firms with practices in the areas I was interested in. I am a non-traditional candidate – older, immigrant with no Irish family connections, attracted to smaller firms and more niche areas of law – so I knew from the start that my options were limited, but I hoped that my strong academic record and years of legal experience would carry me through.

Unfortunately, my optimism turned out to be misplaced. After sending my CV to dozens of firms that I considered a possible match, I received a few “we will keep your CV on file” replies, a few “no thanks but good luck” letters, one “I’m not taking on any trainees but perhaps we could meet for coffee sometime”, and from most of them, nothing.

When it became clear that I was not going to be starting the PPC-1 in 2010, I decided to put the next year to good use. I enrolled in a year-long LLM course, to study an area of law I’m particularly interested in. I intended to renew my search for a training contract afterwards – but when 2011 came around, I simply couldn’t face putting myself through that again, and reluctantly began considering alternate career possibilities.

I still checked the Law Society website for traineeship openings, however, and out of the blue one day an advertisement appeared from one of the firms I had been most interested in. My LLM area was mentioned in the ad, so I thought I may as well try again, now that I had an additional qualification I didn’t have previously. I knew the competition would be fierce and so it was – but I was asked to come in for a first interview, and then a second interview, and was finally offered the position.

Many people say that these days, finding a contract is the hardest part of becoming a solicitor – harder even than the FE1s. But I think it may just be a question of being the right person at the right time. The first year I sent out dozens of CVs and didn’t even get an interview; the second year I was hired by the only firm that I applied to. Most people will probably find their experience falls somewhere in between these two extremes. The important thing is to tell yourself that there *is* a contract for you out there and if you don’t find it right away, keep looking! There are things you can do to make yourself a better candidate, and you never know when an opportunity might appear.

22.

Below is my account of how I attained my traineeship.

I was in my final year of university in Galway and unsure if I wanted to become a solicitor straight away, or even at all. I had a keen interest in intellectual property law and decided that I would do a Masters in IP law in the University of Edinburgh and I had started the application process.

Meanwhile most of the students in my year were applying to the larger law firms in Dublin for traineeships. I decided to apply to three firms just to have gone through the application process and maybe get some interview experience. Out of the three firms I applied to, one offered me an interview. I went to Dublin with a friend of mine who was also interviewing and we attended the drinks reception the night before the interviews where we met a lot of other candidates and I was introduced to one of the solicitors who would be interviewing me the next day. I wasn't sure how much time to spend talking with her in case she formed any premature perceptions of me!

The next day the interview was a very pleasant one, it took the form of a 15-20 minute informal discussion about some of the things on my CV. It was hard to tell what they were looking for so I just stuck to being myself and I was happy when I heard that I had a second round interview a week or so later.

The second interview was tougher and I had quite a grilling on a lot of current affairs issues and they probed a lot into my opinions and values and how I could justify these. It was a 40-45 minute interview.

A couple of weeks later I received an email saying that I was not being offered a place in their traineeship but that they were offering me an internship for two months that summer. I was delighted to get the paid summer work and the experience that would come with it. It turned out that there were 9 interns that summer and it was one of the best experiences I had had to date. We were given great training and hands-on experience and it turned out that I really enjoyed the work, my colleagues in the office and the work environment.

I was contacted by the firm shortly after finishing the internship and offered a traineeship with them for the following year pending my passing the FE1s.

I declined my place in the Masters and concentrated on studying for my FE1s to secure my place and the way it worked out I had 5 months free time for a bit of travelling before I started in the office pre-Blackhall.

23.

I was unemployed for two years prior to obtaining my training contract.

I was working for free in various law firms just trying to gain experience. If a Solicitor would not see me to review my CV I would pretend I was a client and make an appointment to see them. It pays to be determined and persistent and it paid off in the end because I got a training contract in a brilliant middle sized firm. Any experience that can be gained is invaluable as it shows you are committed to learning and passionate about what you do as you are willing to do it for free.

Also people know that they will have to train you a little less regarding the basics and they know that belong too long you will be a valuable asset in the office. So that's my one big tip - get experience, however you do it. Listing this experience on your C.V. will hopefully get you an interview for a training contract.

Once you get an interview for a training contract study for it as if you are about to sit an exam. Research the firm in detail and find out the areas of practice which each Partner specialises in. You should be able to find pictures of the Partners on the internet and become familiar with each Partner. Then when you go into the interview you will be able to recognise them and you could either bring up a case you know that they were involved in. I had read an article in the Law Society Gazette written by one of the Partners that interviewed me and we discussed its contents in my interview.

I would also keep up to date with any new legislation to demonstrate your on-going interest in the law. Topical legal issues will always be raised in interview so be sure to have considered any legal issue that is being discussed in the papers and be able to give your opinion on it. I made a folder of newspaper articles dealing with topics I thought may be discussed in the interview.

It is important to see yourself and to believe in yourself. If you get turned down, which most people do, it is important that you call and ask why (in a polite and professional way). You would have gone to a lot of effort preparing for the interview and it is beneficial to get constructive feedback as to why you were not right for a firm that did not offer you a training contract. If you do this getting refused is not a disaster, it is a learning process and you will eventually succeed.

24.

I passed all of my FE-1s in 2008, right at the start of the recession.

I sent out hundreds and hundreds of CVs to firms all over Ireland for a trainee position. Most companies had stopped hiring trainees as they were uncertain as to what the future held in store for them and their firm.

Solicitor practices were closing down all over Ireland and securing a traineeship did not look likely for me.

I paid to get my CV drafted professionally in the hope to at least get an interview somewhere!

While I continued to receive rejection letter after rejection letter from firms (or no acknowledgement at all), I decided to use this downturn in the economy to my advantage by educating myself further.

I completed a Masters in Law and also did some Continuing Professional Development courses in Law. I felt it was important not to give up on my dream of becoming a Solicitor as I had worked so hard to get this far and it was something I really wanted to do.

I checked the Law Society's job vacancy page on a daily basis and applied for all trainee jobs that were advertised. Eventually, I got a call for an interview and after 4 years of searching, I was offered a trainee job.

I would advise any person out there who is struggling to find a traineeship to keep positive and not to give up!

Don't turn down any unpaid work opportunities a firm may offer you - it is a method of getting your foot in the door.

All the rejection I received before securing my traineeship has made me a stronger person. There is a position out there for you- you just have to keep trying.

Best of luck with it.