Imperial College
London

Case Study: Alumni

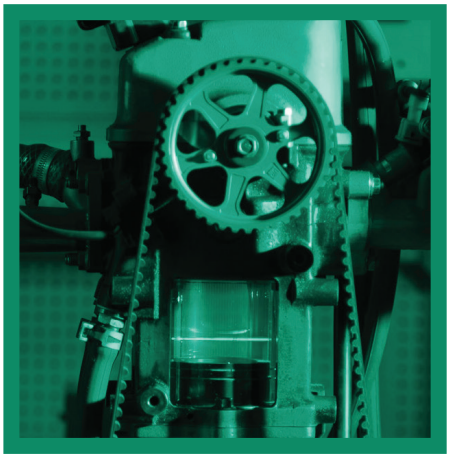
Alex, Physics (MSci)

Graduation Year: 2008

Job Title: Trainee Patent Attorney

Employer: Frank B. Dehn & Co.

Department: Physics and Engineering



What has been your career path up until now?

Previous work experience includes a gap year and three summers at QinetiQ Ltd. I decided that pure research wasn't what I wanted and came across patent work. I now work in Brighton at Frank B. Dehn & Co.

What does your job involve?

As a trainee patent attorney my work mainly involves studying and analysing technical documents, usually a patent specification. Part of my job is to take an invention and see how it is novel and inventive over previous technologies. The job also involves a large amount of liaising with clients, foreign law firms and the Intellectual Property Offices of the UK and EU. One needs a very well rounded skill set. In particular, excellent attention to detail with regard to both scientific analysis and English skills. The ability to formulate a convincing argument is important too.

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>
> - Alex

Do you use skills that you obtained during your Imperial course?

As for skills obtained during my degree, the ability to understand new ideas very quickly is important. As is general knowledge of physics, particularly lasers, optics and laboratory work.

What are your future plans?

The career path is pretty well set in stone, the end of which is a partner in private practice or IP manager in industry.

Can you name three things you like about your job?

Three things I enjoy about my job include:

1. Never get bored. In one day I will usually work on about 6 or 7 cases, all different.
2. Working hours are very good; my firm operates a 'flexitime' scheme.

3. Challenging, rewarding work.

Anything you are less keen on?

1. As a trainee you can have at least 600 cases 'pending'. If you are not very organised it will soon overwhelm you.

2. To qualify you must pass the "purposefully hard" exams. The studying for these is done in your spare time.

3. There's a 'Chaotic' element to the work. Missing a small but vital part of an invention can lead to very large consequences.

Did you choose your course with this particular occupation in mind?

I found out about patent work through various friends. Eventually I looked into it in year 4 and liked the sound of it. After going to two interviews I got a job in Brighton.

What part of your course did you particularly enjoy?

I enjoyed the practical parts of the course, and for some strange reason the mathematics.

Were you involved in any extracurricular activities?

I was involved in the physics Outreach at IC, and gave a few lessons on "Physics in Sport".

Could you give us one or more career tips for Imperial graduates?

Start browsing jobs as soon as you arrive! Luckily though coming from Imperial one finds that employers are after you. Although once it gets to the interview stage obviously this changes. For my job, there was a telephone interview that covered my CV and work experience. Then I visited the office for a longer interview, which included technical questions, describing a piece of stationary in words, working out the safety mechanisms of a kitchen appliance and even a spelling test! Advice: use the careers service early on, especially for CV purposes; get involved in a society, it's well worth it; and try to get work experience (these are what get you through the first round of CV sifting).