

Sophie-Beth Aylett

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Tell us about your current role and organisation.

I am a European Patent Attorney, currently working at Sagittarius IP in Marlow. Sagittarius IP is an intellectual property services company which specialises in advising clients in the life sciences area. Specifically, we are specialists in biotechnology, chemistry and pharmaceutical patents. I have been in the profession since 2013 working in London, Oxford and Cambridge. My practice includes drafting, filing and prosecuting patent applications at the UK and European Patent Offices and coordinating prosecution of large patent families spanning many countries. I also handle post-grant matters including oppositions, and providing patentability and freedom to operate opinions. My clients range from established pharmaceutical companies, through to start-ups and spin-outs looking to expand their patent portfolios, to first-time inventors.

How did you move from academia to your current role?

Whilst doing my PhD at the UCL Institute of Child Health, I attended a number of workshops and seminars organised by the Careers Service. At one of these events, I spoke to a partner in a patent attorney firm and asked if I could spend a week at their firm doing work experience. I was fortunate enough for that partner to agree to my work experience request. Following this, I prepared my CV and began applying to various patent attorney firms.

What does a normal working day look like for you?

My normal day begins with checking my emails and deadlines. The profession is very deadline centric as a missed deadline can potentially result in loss of the patent application which may have serious consequences. I then begin looking and working on cases in my docket that have deadlines coming up and for which work is outstanding. Some of my day is taken up with various meetings both internal and external, the latter of which may require travel to the client site. For granted patents, there is a possibility that they may be opposed by a third party and such oppositions may require travel to the European Patent Office in The Hague or in Munich to attend Oral Proceedings.

What are the best things about working in your role?

One of the best things about my role is meeting new inventors that have devised a new invention which they would like to obtain patent protection for. Being a scientist, it is exciting to get involved with new science straight from the lab bench without having to carry out any experiments. Working for a variety of clients in private practice means that you are exposed to a variety of different scientific inventions rather than working on one niche project.

What are the biggest challenges you face in your work?

One of the biggest challenges we face is to provide the best protection in a patent application for the client's invention. Patent claims can be very verbose and are generally presented in a single sentence that is several lines long. It is important to thoroughly understand and research the client's invention so that when drafting the patent application, the invention is fully defined and described.

What's the progression like/where do you see yourself going from here?

Progression within firms is varied but generally job titles start at the trainee level and progress through to attorney and partner. As you become more experienced, you begin to qualify for promotion. Promotion is of course not a guarantee. Generally speaking, trainees are required to pass their qualifying exams before being promoted to attorney level. For attorneys, they are required to not only be deeply involved with their client portfolios but to also be involved at a business level. Attorneys usually require 10+ years of experience before they are considered for promotion to partner.

What top tips would you pass on to researchers interested in this type of work?

Speak to as many people as possible if you would like to enter into the profession. It is difficult to get work experience in the profession as not many firms offer it, but if you are able to get a day or two it looks very good on your CV. The competition for trainee positions is fierce, so apply to as many firms as possible and be prepared to consider moving to a different city if you are offered a position.