

Transcript – Alex

My name is Alex. I'm 30 years old. I'm originally from Vienna in Austria and I now live in London where I train to be a solicitor, which is a type of lawyer. There are two different kinds of lawyer in England; barristers and solicitors. Barristers are the lawyers that always go to court, whereas solicitors are the lawyers that deal with clients immediately.

Um, the reason that I am in the UK is a little bit complicated because my parents are diplomats and when I was 16 we moved to Australia and that was where I learned to speak English. And after that I didn't really want to go back to Vienna immediately and instead I decided I was going to study in England and so I applied to do philosophy at the University of Oxford, which was meant to have one of the best philosophy departments in England, and I was accepted and that's how I ended up there.

The thing that first attracted me to philosophy was that I thought that philosophy was the kind of thing that would help you learn how to think and that it is something that underlies all the other sciences and all the other fields of human thought. But I was also always interested in other more practical things, especially in politics and international relations and I thought that having done philosophy, doing law and practising as a lawyer for a while would eventually allow me to go and work for an international organisation such as the European Union or the UN and that's what I would like to do eventually and that's why I am now in London qualifying as a lawyer.

The legal system in England is different from the legal system in a lot of other countries because it takes much less time to qualify as a lawyer. What you can do, in fact, is a law conversion course, which takes only two years and then you work in a law firm for another two years until you are a qualified lawyer and in this period you are known as a trainee solicitor. In most other countries it takes much longer to be a lawyer. In Austria for example, where I'm from, it can take up to ten years before you're a qualified lawyer.

The law firm I work for is an international firm which means that most of our clients are spread out all over the world and that in turn means that, although officially I

work from 9.30 to 6pm, **informally** I can be called upon to work at any time on any day of the week for, at times, very long periods of time. So normally I come into work at between 9 and 9.30 and I leave, if there's nothing on, at 6pm or if there is something on I can leave at 7, 8, 9, 10pm or a few times even at 4 or 5 in the morning although that's admittedly rather rare.

The work can be very interesting and that depends on who you work for and what is happening at the time. And the thing is that you sometimes work on matters that are in the newspapers, in the press, so it can be quite fascinating to be in the middle of this kind of highly pressured environment. But of course it's the kind of thing that a lot of people only do for a few years when you're still young and you don't really have anything better to do with your life and I don't think I'll be doing it for the rest of my life. But as an experience it's certainly, it's certainly interesting. In the two years that **I'm working** for this law firm **I going to** work for...work in four different legal areas, so every six months I switch and at least one of them has to be what is known as contentious law which basically means the kind of law where there is a conflict between people that has to go to court which is something that people, lawyers, tend to either love or hate. I personally find it very interesting because for some reason the idea of conflict and doing battle is something that appeals to me but that's obviously a matter of personal preference.

In February 2008 I'm actually going to be sent to Hong Kong for six months to work there because my firm has an office there. After that, I'm not entirely sure, it depends on whether or not my firm will want to keep me on and if they do the likeliest outcome is that I'll be working in London, or that I will stay in Hong Kong for a little while but alternatively it's also possible that I will try to find **a work**, find work with a different firm if there's a particular area of law I want to work in that I cannot do at my current firm or that I will try and make a move, **make a switch** to an international organisation which is something I kind of want to do eventually anyway but maybe not straight away.

I'm not sure if I want to come back to London or not. London is a very interesting city but it also has some disadvantages. It's very expensive and I find it's sometimes quite difficult to meet your friends there because it's so big it can take a very long time to get from one part of London to another. As far as working in the UK is concerned, I

think, well, what I like is that in England there seems to be a certain perception of fairness and the need to be fair in the workplace which is something you don't get in all countries and it's something very nice.

I think it's...I know quite a few people who are solicitors who are not native English speakers but I think you do need to have a good grasp of English. I think lawyers need to be good with language, but it's certainly not impossible and the advice I would give is just to...I mean it can be a very rewarding profession but it's also a profession that requires a lot of commitment and you just want to be sure that you want to give it the kind of commitment that it requires. Because it takes years to train, you know, first you need to do a course then another course then you work as a trainee for two years only then are you qualified. It takes a long time so you just need to make sure it's the right thing for you.

Well if I weren't doing this job I think I would like to be a lion tamer. It requires a lot of similar skills – you need to deal with some very unpleasant creatures, and people, individuals and you need to stay calm when there's a lot of pressure.