



By Sascha Grimm  
2nd Year Trainee

## Secondment - Sascha Grimm

I was very excited, if a little nervous, when I found out that I was going to be spending six months working in the Legal Department of the world's most famous department store. I was thrilled that I was going to have the chance to work there, as every trainee who had been on secondment had come back speaking of the most amazing experience... and the generous discount!

Going on secondment can be a little daunting at first. As I arrived for my induction, I had a definite *'first day at school'* feeling. There are between 3,000 – 5,000 staff working in the building at any one time, so there is a constant buzz of activity and lots of people who all seem to know where they are going. However, I did not have long to feel nervous, as I was soon met by the EAPD trainee whom I was taking over from, and taken through the maze of corridors.

The department is made up of ten people and is located within the store itself. The Legal team handle matters from all areas of the business, meaning that the work is very varied. During my secondment, the work I did included drafting the contracts for an opera CD, a product recall, writing a letter to a well-known celebrity, employment litigation, copyright issues for a range of dolls, not to mention some bizarre (and often highly entertaining) customer complaints.

Working in-house is extremely valuable in helping to understand your clients. In terms of understanding a business itself, it has shown me how important it is to learn about the commercial culture your clients work in. There may be things that are particular to a business (and my secondment showed me there can be many quirks), which could be crucial to know about when providing advice. I was also lucky enough to

be able to instruct solicitors, as well as Counsel, allowing me to experience obtaining external legal advice first-hand.

What struck me was how quickly I felt at home. The Legal department is a lot of fun, and you feel part of the team right away. In addition, by its very nature, the store is a place which you cannot help but be swept away by. Whether you find yourself behind Paris Hilton on the escalators or watching the dough-maker in the pizzeria sing opera, there is always something entertaining going on. Walking through, you very quickly pick up a sense of the energy and the hard work everyone puts in to keep this big machine in motion. It is also extremely satisfying to see the final product of the *'behind the scenes'* work you've done.

There is no doubt that going on secondment is a fantastic experience. You are given a lot of responsibility and it is great, as a trainee, to have your own matters to deal with (as far as you feel comfortable in doing so). You really do get a sense of how much you are developing and learning to react to problems, legal ones as well as those which require a more common sense or commercial approach.

I could not recommend a secondment highly enough. The department was absolutely fantastic and the work was extremely interesting and very varied – there was certainly never a dull moment!

### Work highlights

“I started my commercial litigation seat in March 2008 and have continuously worked on the *'Buncefield litigation'* (and will do until it finishes). This matter relates to Britain's largest peacetime explosion, which occurred at an oil terminal in Hemel Hempstead. A vast quantity of claims, totalling in the region of £1 billion pounds have been brought against a number of defendants, including our client. Working on such a high-profile, high-value and large piece of litigation has really enabled me to see the whole scope of the court and litigation process. The work I have carried out has been varied and I have also been fortunate enough to attend court on a number of occasions, including Case Management Conferences, the Pre-Trial Review and an application made against our client by a co-defendant for the disclosure of documents which we ultimately won!”

by Vikki Courtney,  
Commercial Litigation

## US Presidential QUIZ

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- Q1 How often is a Congressional election held?
- Q2 How long is one Presidential term?
- Q3 In 1986 who became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?
- Q4 Which president was elected four times during the 1930s and 1940s?
- Q5 The Watergate scandal brought about the downfall of which President?
- Q6 What two animals represent the USA's two largest political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans?
- Q7 In which state was 2008 Democratic Part nominee Barack Obama born?
- Q8 The name of Lee Harvey Oswald is infamous for what event in American political history?
- Q9 Who is the current Governor of California?
- Q10 In which year, on 15 December, did the Bill of Rights come into effect?