

IAML Studentship Report

For the fourth year running, the IAML has run a competition for family law students at Cambridge University, with the prize being a fully-funded studentship in a family law firm anywhere in the world where an IAML fellow was happy to host you. I chose to write my essay about the position of the unmarried father in English law with regards to the attainment of parental responsibility, something I found so interesting that I am now exploring it in further depth for my final-year dissertation. After submitting and attending a short interview, I could not believe I had been selected as a recipient of such an amazing prize!

Everything was put organised very quickly and in August I found myself flying out to Melbourne, Australia where I was lucky enough to be spending two weeks living with Ian Kennedy and his wife, and working at Ian's firm Kennedy Partners Lawyers.

From the very first day, everyone at the firm was extremely welcoming and went above and beyond to find me interesting work to do. I was even given my own room in the office which had a spectacular view over the city. I was given lots of case files to read through so I knew the background of cases I would be able to see some work on later in my stay, and was able to attend meeting with barristers, client meetings and witness court proceedings. I was particularly interested in the Hague Convention cases relating to child abduction, seeing how the different jurisdictions worked together, and it was fascinating to see family law being applied on a global scale. This is not something we get to study in the undergraduate module on family law, and so it was exciting to be able to learn more about it and see how it worked in practice, and is definitely something I now want to learn more about and possibly even work in this area in the future!



In the family law courts I got to witness a variety of proceedings, from the more simple divorces, to discussions about whether to place children on an airport watch list, to the division of assets after divorce and childcare arrangements. It was interesting to compare how much involvement the judge had in proceedings compared to court proceedings I had witnessed in the UK, and having read about the cases earlier in the week, I enjoyed seeing all of the bigger picture come together in court.



However, it was not all work for the two weeks, as I was incredibly lucky to be completely spoiled by Ian and his wife, Dr Sandra Hacker, who ensured I had lots of time to experience Melbourne and make the most of my time there! I could not have asked for two nicer hosts as I was made to feel at home straight away. Everyone at the firm was great at advising me where to go and visit in my lunch breaks, and Josephine and Angela in particular must be mentioned for taking me out to great restaurants and bars for post-work drinks! I was even spoilt with things to do at the weekends: Angela invited me over to the lovely seaside town of St Kilda (where I got to see penguins come in in the evening), Sandra took me to a wonderful Tchaikovsky Concert, and Amanda and her children took me to a wildlife sanctuary where

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I got to see koalas, wallabies and kangaroos! (I was particularly taken with the koalas and now have my very own souvenir koala to remind me of my trip!). I also got to do a day trip to the Great Ocean Road, which was absolutely spectacular and an absolute must for anyone visiting Melbourne!

I even got to fit in a few days sight-seeing in Sydney before flying back to the UK.

The experience in such a prestigious family law firm was truly life-changing, particularly as the careers opportunities you hear about at university tend to mostly relate to commercial law rather than family law. I learnt that dealing with clients involves a lot more than just 'hand-holding' and that you really have to know a lot about different areas of law to be able to practice family law – I was surprised how useful my commercial awareness was when trying to identify the assets in a marriage where both parties were involved in a series of businesses. I know now for sure that my interests really do lie in family law, something I could not have been sure of if I had not been given such a fantastic opportunity to experience it for myself.



Special thanks must go to IAML and David Salter, Jens Scherpe and Nick McBride for organising the scheme, Angela, Amanda and Josephine and everyone else at Kennedy Partners Lawyers for making me feel so welcome, and above all to Ian and Sandra for ensuring that I had a wonderful time and learnt so much too; I'm not sure I've ever met more inspirational people.