

Career Insight: Jack, Legal Trainee, Government Legal Department

“Douglas Trumbull died recently. A filmmaker and mastermind of visual effects, his pioneering work supervising the dazzling sequences in Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey earned him critical acclaim. In some ways, the mysterious world of pupillage is like 2001. Initially, you wonder, what on earth is going on? Then, the journey begins in earnest. So much stuff is thrown at you. At the end, you look back and wonder what you just experienced in the knowledge that, as arduous as it could be, it was worth it.

My own journey to the Bar was a frustrating one; lots of HAL-like responses from recruiters along the lines of, “I’m sorry Jack, I’m afraid you can’t do that.” Hailing from modest means in Northern Ireland, the first in my family to go to university, and subsequently moving from the wee island to the big island to forge my career, it took 6 years of around 100 applications and perhaps a score of interviews before I was offered pupillage.

I commenced my training with the [Government Legal Department \(GLD\)](#) in September 2020. Government trains all its prospective lawyers – solicitors and barristers – over 2 years. Pupillage constitutes the first 12 months – which also make up the litigation year of GLD’s training scheme – in which barristers tend to work in immigration litigation before being seconded to a private set of chambers. I completed my second 6 months at [Selborne Chambers](#), a commercial/chancery set, and qualified as a barrister in September 2021. I then commenced the first of 2 advisory seats at the Cabinet Office Europe Legal Advisers, where I worked on issues concerning the post-Brexit landscape. At the time of writing, I have recently begun my final training seat in GLD’s Commercial Law Group, sitting in the [Home Office](#).

Looking back on my training to date, I do truly believe that GLD’s offer provides superlative opportunities to work at the forefront of incredibly interesting and varied practice areas. Although barristers in government cannot expect regular courtroom-based advocacy, we are exposed to headline-making, complex work at the dawn of our legal careers. In the litigation sphere, prospective applicants might expect to provide written advice, draft pleadings, instruct Counsel, conduct settlement negotiations, manage appeals and observe hearings. In Chambers, I was afforded a great degree of independence to provide comprehensive legal opinions, draft statements of case, carry out discreet research tasks and (on a limited basis) appear in the Upper Tribunal as an advocate in my own right upon receiving GLD instructions. In the advisory world, prospective applicants might anticipate providing concise advice on legal issues related to policy proposals, coordinating with other government departments, and potentially getting involved with bills and statutory instruments.

More generally, GLD offers an encouraging and inclusive environment, with plenty of opportunities to become involved with worthwhile corporate initiatives. I have also appreciated GLD’s support of the outside work I do

as a Bar Council "I Am the Bar" Social Mobility Advocate for 2021/2022, a Lincoln's Inn mentor, and occasional blogger (this profile piece being a case in point).

In closing, I say simply this: you can be rewarded in this profession, regardless of background, if you have the ability, know where to look, and do not give up. If you opt for GLD, you will be rewarded with excellent training and fascinating work.

Finally, apropos of Doug Trumball, if you can, honour his memory by checking out his feature film debut as director, Silent Running, especially if you fancy an outing at [DEFRA](#)."