

Working for the Parliamentary Counsel: Andrew Wright

I joined the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) in 2019 after relatively short stints as a Judicial Assistant at a US law firm and as a government lawyer. I came across the OPC in that last role, while instructing on a bill. I was impressed by the skill of the drafters I was working with and enjoyed the complexity and conceptual nature of bill work.

Drafters at the OPC specialise in drafting, rather than in any one area of law. The subject matter of your work as a drafter is ever-changing. So far, I have worked on bills in relation to withdrawal from and the future relationship with the European Union, investigatory powers, telecommunications, and corporate governance and insolvency. The topics of the next bills I help draft will most likely be entirely different.

The skill of a drafter is quickly getting to grips with an area of law and working out what needs to be done to give effect to the policy. That may involve making changes to the existing structure, or perhaps building a new one within, on top, or beside it. Connecting the legislative plumbing and wiring of what has been newly built into what is already there is all part of the challenge.

All of this needs to be done in a clear and coherent way. Attempting to do so can throw up inconsistencies within a policy and in how it fits with the wider policy landscape. Producing a draft also has the potential to reveal legal problems and policy questions a bill needs to say something about in order to give effect to its broader aim. Drafts develop iteratively and more of these issues are teased out with each iteration. This involvement in policy development is an important and rewarding part of a drafter's work.

The OPC places great emphasis on the training and development of junior drafters. As a junior drafter, I work closely with a senior drafter on a bill. I learn by the senior drafter carefully reviewing my drafts and discussing them with me. By the same token, I am expected to pull apart their drafts and to suggest improvements. This was slightly daunting to begin with, but each senior drafter I have worked with has been encouraging. Engaging with their work in this way is great for a junior drafter's development and I think discussing drafts is now one of my favourite parts of the job.

I have heard drafting being described as Marmite-y and I would agree. There is no getting away from the fact that drafting is hard and requires deep concentration. It is easily the most difficult thing I have done in my legal career. The job is immense amounts of fun, unique and by definition at the cutting edge of the law. If you enjoy thinking conceptually, have an eye for detail, and want a legal job that is creative, a career as a drafter might be for you.