



LIFE AS A SUMMER CLERK AND INTERNATIONAL CLERK WITH BAKER MCKENZIE



Julian McMahon

Associate, Sydney

Joining the truly global firm

It is difficult for law students, with minimal-to-no first-hand experience of working in a big corporate law firm, to appreciate what working in a law firm is really like. During the lead up to the Clerkship application period, certain buzzwords are common with firms – the word 'global' being chief among them. With so many firms, it is often unclear if or how Clerks and Graduates can have international experiences. Baker McKenzie stood out as a firm with genuine, immediate global connectedness for juniors: offering cross-border and global work and International Clerkships.

Real work, real clients and real support

During my Summer Clerkship with the Sydney office, I completed two rotations: the first in the Tax group and the second in the Dispute Resolution group. Both rotations were interesting and enjoyable, and provided me with great insight into the type of issues and work that lawyers undertake. From the outset, I was asked to assist with client matters and engage in real, substantive legal work alongside my colleagues. The matters I was involved with were varied and challenging, and a considerable portion of work was done in conjunction with lawyers from other Baker McKenzie offices around the world. It was impressive to see how seamlessly the offices collaborated to provide legal solutions for our global clients. Some of the more notable matters included drafting updates to the Australian chapter of a global product liability handbook, advising multinational technology clients on significant changes to Australian tax laws, and conducting witness interviews for a large scale litigation matter and drafting the corresponding affidavits. Along with most of the other Summer Clerks, I also undertook a client secondment, and spent a week assisting the World Wildlife Fund in their Sydney office which provided a unique insight into the way clients operate. I also got involved with the Firm's Pro Bono practice, and participated in some meaningful programs that had immediate and positive impact for our clients.

I was given a fair degree of independence at an early level but was also provided with support and guidance from my buddy and supervising Partners. This atmosphere of abundant support, together with the opportunities for genuine international experiences, were the main factors in my decision to ultimately accept a Graduate position with the Firm.

The Summer Clerkship was the perfect entrance point to the working life of a junior lawyer at Baker McKenzie. It provided me with an authentic experience of what the work and culture was like, but more importantly, developed my abilities to work and thrive at a leading commercial law firm.

From Sydney to Tokyo

My plane touched down at Haneda Airport on a frosty February morning. I was met at the arrival gate by a fastidiously uniformed driver who could have passed for an airline pilot: epaulettes, cap, white gloves. He chauffeured me to a comfortable, conveniently-located, Tokyo-sized apartment close to the office. Baker McKenzie's Tokyo office is located in Roppongi, a bustling central business district, home to the Japanese headquarters of many major international companies and to numerous embassies and luxury hotels. The office is situated next to world-class cultural institutions, renowned bars and restaurants, and places of significant historical importance. This proximity made it easy to explore some of the city's major highlights and points of attraction.

Parallels between Sydney and Tokyo

The similarity in culture between the Sydney and Tokyo office was striking. I was welcomed as warmly by the Japanese office as I had been by the Sydney office. The working environment was far removed from the stereotype of Japanese law firms: warrens of overworked drones. My supervising Partner in Tokyo was very generous with his time from the beginning and ensured that I met everyone in the practice group and many others within the office. On my first day, I spent time with the Managing Partner – also an Australian - who shared some wisdom gleaned from his time living and working in Japan.

I spent my International Clerkship with the Taxation team, which I had nominated as my preferred practice group. It was fascinating to see Japanese-based lawyers dealing with complex, international legal issues within the context of a different jurisdiction. The team actively involved me in their matters and were responsive in providing guidance and feedback, which was helpful when engaging with new and sometimes unfamiliar concepts. I assisted colleagues in providing advice about recent amendments to Japanese consumption tax laws which closely resembled the then-incoming changes to Australian GST laws, and provided me with an insight into how Australians would soon be complying to similar changes. I also accompanied a senior tax advisor to a matter being heard before the Tokyo High Court; assisted a team member with a presentation for an upcoming conference; and conducted research into ongoing changes to international taxation arrangements.

An outstanding start to my career

It is thanks to Baker McKenzie that I was able to have such extraordinary experiences at such an early stage of my legal career. I will always be grateful to have had the chance to undertake an International Clerkship - and experience meaningful work in another jurisdiction and develop professional connections globally. My experiences leave me with no doubt that I will have an exciting career with Baker McKenzie in the years to come.



LIFE AS A SEASONAL CLERK AND INTERNATIONAL CLERK WITH BAKER MCKENZIE



Rowena Baer

Associate, Melbourne

Tangible international opportunities and a collaborative culture

Baker McKenzie was one of my top preferences for a Clerkship due to the genuine global opportunities the Firm provides and the collaborative, friendly culture created by the Firm's people.

My journey with the Firm started with a four week Seasonal Clerkship. During our first few days, we undertook induction and training where we were provided with information about the Firm - locally and globally, and given technology and library training to support us during the Clerkship. We were involved in some fantastic professional development sessions as well - designed to help us succeed during the Clerkship. These sessions were on effective communication, goal-setting and time management. We also had presentations on career progression at Baker McKenzie and how to get the most out of a Clerkship. The induction training gave us great insight into the Firm and really helped us adapt to the professional working environment.

During my Clerkship, I was placed in the Construction team! From day one, I was engaged in meaningful work including drafting letters of advice, undertaking legal research, attending negotiations and helping craft a litigious appeal strategy. The mentoring and support that I received from my supervising Partner, other lawyers and Clerkship peers was unlike anything I had experienced in any other workplace. No matter how busy people were, they consistently made the time to provide feedback on work, insights on firm life as well as introductions to lawyers across different practice groups and other Baker McKenzie offices.

The depth of this mentoring was evident to me when a few months post my Seasonal Clerkship, and during a visit to the UK, I had the chance to meet with a Melbourne-based Baker McKenzie lawyer seconded to the London office. Generous with his time and insights into working life in the UK and the opportunities across Baker McKenzie's global network, this meeting cemented my desire to join Baker McKenzie and ultimately paved the way for an International Clerkship opportunity in London.

Of course, the Clerkship was not just all about work! There were plenty of social events for us to get to know one another in our Clerkship group and everyone in the Firm. The highlight, of course, was the Firm Christmas party where I gained a fantastic insight into the Firm's warm, friendly and social culture.

Welcome to the global family – IT/Com in London

Shortly after receiving a Graduate offer for Baker McKenzie's Melbourne office, I applied for and was thrilled to be selected to undertake an International Clerkship in the Firm's London office during February 2017.

After 3 months of backpacking through Central and South America, I smartened myself up and headed off to London to experience work in the IT/Communications group. Although the London office was much bigger than any of the Australian offices, with lawyers from all over the world, I was immediately struck by how the Firm's culture transcends borders. It seemed that friendly, talented and passionate people were a common theme within Baker McKenzie globally.

Joining the IT/Com team at a particularly busy time in the year, I was instantly pulled into a number of exciting matters and multi-jurisdictional projects. During my first week, I helped prepare a client presentation on global cyber security and privacy issues including comparisons of regulatory frameworks for crypto currencies as part of a training day for the Firm's European banking clients. I also assisted the team with coordinating an advice for a multinational client requiring privacy and tax inputs from various Baker McKenzie offices, in order to roll out a new online gaming product worldwide. Treated just like the other London trainees, I was given the opportunity to present at the group's monthly practice group meeting. Feeling very out of my depth, I educated a room full of European lawyers on the inner workings of the then new Right to Data Portability as part of sweeping new changes to European law effected by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). These kinds of work opportunities, though challenging and quite daunting, really helped me to learn and develop and to cement working relationships with my London colleagues. They also enabled me to form close friendships with the other trainees.

Like the Melbourne office, our London counterparts also love a good social event! During my International Clerkship, I was invited along to the IT/Com's belated Christmas party, corporate ping-pong at Bounce Holborn, Aussie and Kiwi networking drinks, and was shown the best view of London over a classic duck and waffle breakfast!

What a way to start!

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have been given this opportunity at such an early stage of my legal career. Exposure to work on this global scale and the chance to forge close working relationships with foreign lawyers and international clients are experiences that most Australian lawyers don't have until well into their careers. To be given this opportunity with Baker McKenzie within months of leaving law school is definitely a unique experience for junior lawyers. Having had a taste of Baker McKenzie's global nature, I can't wait to continue my global career journey and see what's in store for me in the years ahead!

