

**27. Learning to be a Professional:
The story of my placement experience.
Faculty of Law
Parliamentary lobbyist intern at global warming campaign**

When my work placement began, I simply never anticipated the events I would be organising, participating in and receive national press mention for. I never thought I'd be meandering through the arteries of the Houses of Parliament, congested with MPs, civil servants, lobbyists and even the so-called 'Law Lords'. I never considered the possibility that I would have private meetings with influential politicians, and attempt to persuade them to support a Parliamentary Bill.

Let me start from the very beginning: As a Law with International Studies student, the majority of placements available were in solicitors' offices in and around London and Guildford. Valuable experience surely, but this was not a prospect that excited me, or made me feel grateful for having a placement year. I wanted something a little more profound, original and challenging.

Though the demands of a law degree were pressing, I, with help from my placement tutor (to whom I am eternally grateful), found a potential work placement which ticked all the right boxes. I had never seriously considered a career as a parliamentary lobbyist before, but as soon as I saw the opportunity I jumped at the chance to explore it. A C.V. and a couple of informal interviews later, I was given a start date and some information to read. Though the issue I was to be working on is one of the greatest global threats to the modern world, I was grateful for the time to read and digest the information – I had a great deal to learn, if I was going to be trying to persuade MPs!

The organisation I was working for was a prominent environmental charity. I was thrown straight into the deep-end; into the parliamentary team, who were campaigning to amend the Climate Change Bill. The team was relatively small, with a head campaigner who worked part time, a senior campaigner, a consultant and two interns (myself, who worked full time, and another who worked 2 days a week). Despite the limitations on the team's capacity, we worked hard and spearheaded the 'Big Ask' campaign.

My duties varied from day to day. Though there were less exciting tasks such as mail-outs or filing letters from MPs, these were easily outweighed by the meetings in parliament, the grass roots campaigning and the interesting research projects. My team leader was certainly an inspiration, having worked on many successful bill campaigns for a number of years.

I quickly became part of a smaller team of employees from different teams within the organisation, working on lobbying carefully selected MPs (selected by virtue of their ministerial capacity or constituency). In the first few meetings I sat back and observed, but once I gained confidence I learnt that being assertive in meetings certainly pays off. My keenness solidified my place in the group, ensured I got to undertake some of the more desirable tasks, and could offer new ideas.

While my administration work and target lobbying was ticking along, I was invited onto another meeting group – concerned with organising a massive public meeting in central London on the Climate Change Bill. Speakers at the event included the minister for the environment, his Liberal Democrat and Conservative counterparts, and the charity's director. The evening was a great

success, with a turnout of over 1000 people. I acted as a co-ordinating usher for the evening, and even got to share a few drinks with an MP at the pub afterwards!

The success of the meeting inspired me to take action locally. Outside of work, I joined my local branch group in my town. I gave the group an informative speech about the Climate Change Bill campaign. After some research, I found that the MP for the north of our town was also the then Energy Minister. With a little persuasion, I encouraged the group to assist me in organising a (albeit smaller) public meeting for local constituents.

Within 2 weeks, I had worked solidly, arranging, advertising and inviting. The hard work paid off—despite being very nervous on the days before – the room was full. The MP was questioned by many people, including local councillors and GLA candidates. He even made statements supporting the demands of our charity, which was very encouraging to hear from a cabinet minister! The icing on the cake was the press attention the meeting encouraged. Not only did we receive pages of local press coverage, but also BBC.

As the placement began to draw to a close, I was given a task of encouraging lobbying efforts in the constituencies of 3 very high profile MPs. Though I was never able to finish, I set up large databases of information, which was hopefully of some use to the person picking up the work. I also completed two research projects for other related campaigns, promoting food sustainability and 'green' job creation.

My transformation between being a student with some retail experience to becoming a professional was almost unbelievable. For me, becoming a professional meant stepping out of my comfort zone, and learning to deal with situations which I didn't expect or predict to happen. It meant keeping calm and cool, even when talking to influential politicians. It meant an exponential growth in confidence, when speaking privately in meetings or publicly to an audience.

On returning to University, my approach to learning has completely changed. I am now more organised with my work, having learnt how best to deal with multiple deadlines. I am more confident in seminars, and more likely to speak up and offer ideas. I am more streamlined in my research and coherent when writing. Though the experience was an emotional journey of sorts (stress, joy, disappointment (with uncooperative MPs!) to name but a few), the highs by far outweighed the lows and I would not have changed anything.

I advise students looking to a placement to not take the easy or standard option. Look for something that you want to do, that you can really get your teeth into, even if it is different to your peers.

For interest - The Climate Change Bill is about to become an Act. An advisory committee has just recommended all the amendments campaigned for by myself and my charity. The Bill is the first of its kind in the world, and advocates an 80% reduction in Carbon Emissions. If applied properly, it will prevent dangerous climate change. I feel honoured and proud to have been part of such a campaign effort.