



## **FROM DECIDING TO STUDY LAW, TO MY EXPERIENCE SO FAR AS A LAW STUDENT**

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### **Introduction**

Some people seem to know from an early age which career path they would like to follow and what they hope to be. However, this has always been an area of uncertainty for me, and something which I did not decide upon until quite late into my final year of college. Whilst most people around me had begun their applications to go to university and had made the decision of what they would like to study, I did not know what next step I should take.

Within this article, I am going to discuss my reasons for deciding to study law, my first year at university, from becoming a member of the University of Plymouth Law Society (UPLS), to becoming a committee member, and how I have found the change from virtual learning to being back face to face.

### **A bit about me**

Coming from Cornwall and living on a smallholding, with a variety of different animals including dogs, sheep, lambs, horses and chickens, it may seem a bit hard to believe that I wanted to go on to study law. Although it sounds clichéd, true crime and courtroom dramas were what initially inspired me to look into the variety of legal professions there was to offer. When the opportunity came to study law at A-level, I knew this was something I had to do. During my time at college, I realised that I wanted to continue studying law when I participated as a court clerk in the Bar Mock Trial Competition, as well as visiting my local Crown Court. Whilst it gave me a practical insight into the criminal process, I also discovered there are more roles within the legal profession than the conventional solicitor and barrister routes, so that studying law is more open than I once believed it would be.

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I was also hesitant about continuing my studies for another reason. Having been Type 1 diabetic since the age of 9, this is something that I have learnt to juggle alongside my studies. I found it particularly difficult during my GCSEs and AS level exams because when I feel stressed and or nervous this would often impact my blood sugars. I would often have to wait quite a while until my blood sugars lowered before starting the assessments as having too high sugars affects my ability to concentrate and therefore my ability to complete the exam to the standard that I would expect of myself. Although this has been especially frustrating at times, it has become something that I have simply had to learn to adapt my daily routine to and prepare for each possibility that could arise.

### **My first year at university**

My first year at university was not the typical experience that many students have. Having had to end my time at college with remote learning, due to the beginning of the covid pandemic, and then facing the subsequent rollercoaster ride regarding the results which we received, I was unsure at first if it was the right time for me to start university. Due to the restrictions in place, we were unable to have our first year in person, which meant that socialising and meeting others on my course and elsewhere was difficult. However, I decided that starting my degree would help to keep myself occupied and to try and meet new people, even if it was only virtually. Using Zoom had its challenges, ranging from longer periods spent staring at screens, to sessions ending abruptly due to Wi-fi issues. Despite these challenges though, the lecturers provided recorded sessions and ensured via our seminar sessions that we had understood everything that was going on and answered any questions that we had.

Something that I really liked during my first year was the variety in the modules I studied. As I began each module, I discovered something else that interested me. In my first year I continued to develop my knowledge that I acquired at A-level when I studied human rights as part of Contemporary Legal and Human Rights Issues, to discuss the voting rights of prisoners and the rights of those that have committed criminal offences to remain in the UK. However, I also learned completely new areas of law, such as contract law and judicial review within public law.

I have always found that deadlines, whether for exams or coursework, are quite stressful. This is not because I leave it to the last minute or did not know what I should have been doing, but rather I feel nervous when I hit the submit button, thinking I have missed something basic, or my interpretation of the question is incorrect. Last year my exams were 48-hour open book online assessments, and in a way I found this to be easier than coursework, as

there was not much time to procrastinate. I remember that during my public law exam in the second semester, I had 48 hours to write two short answers of around 500 words each, an essay of 1200 words, and two problem questions of 600 words each. This prospect seemed daunting, as prior to this my essays were done within a period of weeks or even a month, and I was concerned that I would not be able to grasp what the question was asking of me and to organise the relevant information into a coherent essay within the time frame. However, despite these stressful times I managed to get a First for this assessment and for my first year overall, so my university experience was a positive one. Although it was hard, I think this made me more resilient and determined to succeed in my degree.

### **University of Plymouth Law Society**

During my first year I also signed up to be a member of the University of Plymouth Law Society (UPLS). Although we were unable to socialise in the normal sense due to Covid restrictions, this gave me the chance to meet other law students from different stages of the degree, through the online events which they hosted. It gave me an opportunity to discuss with other people how they felt about studying from home and the different areas of law that they were studying, as well as listening to a variety of legal professionals talk about their life working in the profession. Even though the competitions were also held online, I decided to participate in the Client Interviewing Competition as a way of improving my problem-solving skills in a more practical sense. I was very proud to have won this competition alongside my partner, and I think this provided me with more confidence in my abilities.

From the time that I spent with UPLS through a variety of socials and talks, I was encouraged to run for a role on the committee in my second year. Although I did not get the role that I initially ran for, I believe these things happen for a reason, and with the benefit of hindsight I am pleased that instead I was elected one of the Events and Activities Officers. This role has meant that so far since the summer of last year, I have had the experience of helping to organise our Cheese and Wine Networking Event, which we were fortunate to be able to hold in person at The Box museum at the beginning of December. This enabled me to talk to a variety of professionals, for example within family law, youth justice and the Magistrates Court, to ask about the routes which they took into the profession. After being a competitor in the client interviewing competition last year, this year I was part of organising the competition, helping to write the scenarios for the first few rounds and participating as a client in the semi-final.

I have also enjoyed my role in the committee, connecting with other people through the

different events. So far, I have been able to get to know my fellow committee members and our members through the UPLS Christmas event and dodgeball, which was a lot of fun! I am really looking forward to the events that I will help to organise in the next few months.

### **This year, adapting to face to face learning**

Adapting to face-to-face learning did seem a daunting prospect at first, as I had only visited campus once before teaching started at the end of September. But this first semester has flown by, and thanks to the campus maps I managed not to get lost too much! Although it may seem strange for some, I have enjoyed experiencing the everyday things associated with university life, the chance to sit in a lecture hall, talk to those around me, go to the library and explore the different law books.

This year I also signed up for the UPLS negotiation competition, as I thought it would give me additional experience and is something I was not able to do last year. I also felt this competition would help prepare me for the advocacy assessment coming up in January as part of the Dispute Resolution Skills module.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, whilst it seemed those around me knew what career paths they wanted to take, and knew that they wanted to go to university, I found the decision to go to university and to study law were ones that I was unsure to make straightaway. However, I think that by taking extra time to consider alternative options, like other degrees and alternative routes such as apprenticeships, I knew that when I finally decided to submit my UCAS form to study law, it was the right decision for me. Even though my first year of university life was unconventional, due to it being online, I have not regretted my decision to study law. It is manic at times, and involves a lot of commitment, but I have enjoyed the variety of experiences that I have had so far within my university life, and although times are still uncertain, I hope that I will have many more opportunities to come.