

For three months in summer 2015 I worked as a casework intern at the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants in Old Street, London. I am currently studying the BPTC and intend to practice in immigration and asylum law. As such, I hoped that my time at JCWI would give me a crash course in immigration law, and an insight into the way it works in practice. I was not disappointed!

Over the 12 weeks I was there, I did a wide variety of tasks.

One of my main jobs was to answer the free Advice Line run by JCWI for irregular migrants. When a solicitor was unavailable to give advice immediately, I spoke to the callers, took an immigration history and identified the issues to assist the solicitor in their return call. Through this task, I gained invaluable insight into the many and varied issues facing irregular migrants in the UK. People from innumerable different countries, a wide variety of backgrounds whom all, for some reason or another, had found themselves residing in the UK without documentation. What struck me most was the palpable fear of these individuals, many of whom gave details of a harrowing past or incredibly unfortunate circumstance, which had led to their current situation. By the end of the summer I had begun to recognise similar fact patterns, and was able to unpick the history and recognise the advice the solicitor would give them upon the return call.

A second substantial task was the assistance in creating bundles for client's court appearances- a surprisingly complicated task! However when compiling the documents I had a great opportunity to read witness statements and look at different types of evidence, including Home Office documents. It was invaluable for getting my head around the vast quantities of paperwork involved in immigration applications and appeals.

The final main part of my internship was research for various cases being worked on by JCWI. One such case was a Somali deportation case. Part of the client's argument against deportation was his need for adequate mental health services to support him in his long term mental health condition. As such, I had to research into the mental health provision in Somalia, to assist in presenting the case that his needs would not be met if he was deported.

In all of the hearings I attended, I found that part of the skill of immigration law advocacy was striking a balance between navigating the incredibly technical and complicated law, and presenting the client's personal circumstances. In immigration law particularly, the individual circumstances of each appellant is of highest importance in advocating. Where persons may have a less than perfect behavioural record, or a history of social problems, the circumstances which have caused them to flee their homeland in the first place, more often than not, are key to explaining behaviour or issues. Added to this, the incredible mental stain of going through an immigration appeal, the considerable delays, detention or threat of detention, familial separation and the persecution, war, terror or family that people have escaped, and the true impact of these proceedings becomes clear.

Overall, I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to intern at JCWI. I learnt an enormous amount about the practice of immigration and asylum law that I could never have gained from textbooks. Working over a longer period meant I could be involved in cases from research through to observing the hearing, and the context of being there during the summer of the start of the refugee crisis in Calais and the rest of Europe was fascinating.

I am so grateful to the HRLA for enabling me to take up this opportunity which has given me the tools to go into my study of immigration and asylum law confident and with an in-depth understanding of the law in practice.