

## **Pegasus Scholarship Trust Placement – Dubai**

*Hazel Hobbs 2019 Pegasus Scholar*

I can't lie, when I initially got the placement in Dubai I was a little apprehensive. I had never been to the Middle East before and as a feminist I wasn't too sure what to expect given some of the stories reported in the news. On my way to the airport I dressed in leggings and a long top, my mum told me I would have to change into something looser fitting, like many daughters, I ignored her. But thinking back to this comment now makes me erupt with laughter given what I know now about Dubai.

My placement didn't come with accommodation but I was extremely lucky to find a room advertised on Facebook only walking distance from DIFC. The apartment was stunning and covered in arabic artwork. My landlady was a Persian Kiwi who lived with a Persian artist and her two daughters, one an indie film producer and the other an educational consultant, and a Persian artist. Within a few days I settled right into the apartment. They took me all around Dubai and introduced me to the surprisingly active nightlife in Dubai. They also taught me Farsi and to cook the most delicious Persian food. Dubai went far beyond my expectations, everything was shiny and new, there were people from all cultures working and living harmoniously together. In terms of clothing, my mum had nothing to fear, shorts and t-shirts were far from shocking. I embraced Emirati culture, having Arabic coffee everyday and even went with my Emirati friends to the market to buy an abaya, which I occasional wore to work.

On my first day at the DIFC Courts I was introduced to everyone and set to work on some very interesting cases. The projects I was involved in were mind blowing, I drafted practice directions, judgments, assisted in redrafting the code of conduct and looked at ways to improve the Court for users. Looking at procedural rules from this perspective allowed me to develop a more agile and developmental approach in my work. One of my last tasks was to assist in drafting the new Judicial Authority Law; working with the Deputy Chief Justice in comparing the Arabic and the English translation, whilst considering the intentions of the Court and looking at the wider implications of the legislation. Never in a million years did I think I would be involved in such projects.

When I moved to Al Tamimi I jumped feet first into high value international litigation cases. The largest of which related to a freezing order for tens of millions of pounds and related to facts not too dissimilar from that of a bond movie plot. Everyday there a new legal problem, which usually involved a number of jurisdictions, which I relished working on. It was interesting to work on a case as a solicitor, where you get to know the case so well and develop your own case theory, which you try to get across to your barrister and the Judge.

I got to work with some of the most inspirational women and talented lawyers I had ever met. Amna Al Owais, Registrar of the DIFC Courts, who undertook everything she did with such passion and veracity. Nour Hineidi, Deputy Registrar of the DIFC Courts, who was a literal machine in the way she dealt with the sheer volume and complexity of her caseload. And Rita Jabbalah, Partner of Al Tamimi and head of the International Litigation Group, whom I would describe as a litigation swan; appearing to glide on top of the water while her amazing brain was resolving a hundred and one complex legal issues at a time. It was such a pleasure to work with and learn from these amazing women, along with a number of others.

It's safe to say that I took advantage of my position as Pegasus Scholar, I managed to get onto the CIARB Introduction to International Arbitration Course as part of my scholarship, with the help of Philip Punwar from Baker Botts. I also got free entry to a number of events, including the Global Arbitration Review Dubai as a member of the DIFC Courts.

Working in international litigation allowed me to experience what it was like to truly love your job. Although there were some late nights and stressful situations it was all worth it. I enjoyed my job before but working with legal issues which covered a number of areas of law and involved different jurisdictions was so interesting and fulfilling. I would also say that working as a female lawyer in Dubai was very different from the UK and in many ways was better. I felt that in all situations both myself and my legal opinions were treated with respect. It was a very teamwork orientated environment, where everyone was valued.

Without hesitation, I would say that my placement was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life and I hope, inshallah, to continue my work in Dubai and develop an international commercial practice.