



*This document is **only** relevant for first-year undergraduate students as only these students can apply for first-year schemes*

What are first-year schemes?

First-year schemes are short programmes which provide an insight into commercial law at a particular firm. You can expect an introduction to the business, their department areas and their unique selling points. Getting onto a first-year scheme is the best way for a budding lawyer to get their foot in the door. This is because the knowledge and network you are exposed to on the scheme will give you a leg-up when applying, particularly to that firm. First-year schemes are also important for training contracts and vacation schemes, since several firms bypass the normal application process for students on their first-year scheme. This could mean you skip a stage in the selection process (Linklaters) or get fast-tracked to the final interview stage for a training contract (Clifford Chance and Allen & Overy).

Application process

Each firm has its own application process but there are similarities between a number of them. Many students overlook the first stage as preparatory, but at BSC we see this as just as important as the final stage. Graduate Recruitment sift through thousands of applications for these schemes; doing this is bound to get tedious. This means it is imperative that you do not fall within the 'generic' crowd that Graduate Recruitment have seen hundreds of times before. Your application needs to stand out from the crowd and leave Graduate Recruitment unable to forget YOUR unique selling point.

With that being said, don't be afraid to show off in a professional manner in your application. Firms often include questions which prompt you to detail niche experiences or great achievements, so make sure you engage with this in a creative way. Make a list of all the things you could possibly mention and then pick the best ones. Start from secondary school and work your way up; you'll be surprised with what you've accomplished but just forgotten about.

Sixth form/college is usually seen as the cut-off for these sorts of questions as you should have done or achieved these things relatively recently. Bear in mind that this is only preferable, and you must work with what you have. If you competed in a national athletics final and won your competitions in Year 10, then by all means include this. If you won your year group's spelling bee in Year 8, I'd probably leave this out. Use your discretion depending on the gravity of the achievement and how long ago it was.

Tackling the application

Regarding structure, you should use the STAR technique when elaborating on experience such as your most proud achievement or your extracurriculars. This allows you to avoid waffle but cover all the bases when detailing an experience of yours. The structure is as follows:

S - ituation; give some context to the experience you are describing

T - ask; what were you asked to do?

A - ction; how did you go about achieving the task?

R - esult; what was the result?

Make sure to use quantifiers (1/9, 70%) when describing your experiences to add a layer of specificity to your analysis. The rest of the stages involving the application process (Watson Glaser, Interview etc) are covered elsewhere in this BSC package so make sure to have a look at these also.

Top tips when on a scheme

- 1.) Try to ask a question in the majority of sessions you attend. It doesn't give the impression that you weren't listening, or trying to hard, but that you are genuinely interested in the presentations
- 2.) Some of your questions should either draw on what the speaker said, or your knowledge of the firm in this area. This shows that you were listening and bothered to do research on the firm prior
- 3.) Make sure you pay attention to your body language at all times. During sessions, make sure you always look attentive whilst listening. As simple as smiling is, most students do not do this when at firms. So try and smile as much as you can. This gives the impression that you are happy to be there and Graduate Recruitment will pick up on this
- 4.) Do not be late; a mark of lateness is very difficult to shake off. Even if your excuse is valid, it could imply a lack of commitment
- 5.) Do not talk with others during presentations. When the presentation is less interesting, there is a temptation to start conversations with friends. In such situations we encourage students to remember why they're there; making a good impression on the firm first, making friends second.

Conclusion

Despite the leg-up first year schemes can give one when applying for a job in commercial law, they are not the be all and end all. There are other ways of getting your foot in the door without doing a first-year scheme. Thus, do not be disheartened if you are unable to secure one. Look beyond these opportunities and try to gain as much experience as possible.

Whilst bearing that in mind, first-year schemes are amongst the easiest ways of getting a firm to notice you in the earlier stages. By getting your foot in the door early, you can build a rapport with the firm and its representatives beyond the official days of the scheme. This is becoming increasingly important as competition for training contracts increases. BSC has resources and mentors which can help you get onto these schemes, so be sure to make the most out of both!