



RECRUITING AND BEING RECRUITED: New Lecturers at Bradford University Law School

Introduction

Every person who holds or has held an academic position at Higher Education level has a unique experience of interview and of 'settling in'. This Law in Brief considers the experiences of two new lecturers who took up their posts in August 2007.

Lisa's experience: The Interview, Formalities and Settling in.

When attending for interview it is perhaps normal to be full of expectations, questions and of course nerves. My experience in March 2007 was no different. There was very little scope in the application documents to explain why I wanted the position or why I would fit the position. I had some specific concerns: Did it matter that I was still a student at the time of the interview? Was my lack of experience in teaching at this level going to count against me? The question I now ask myself is: Did Bradford even know what they were getting when they hired me? That is a question I cannot answer.

The interview process was split into two official parts. In the morning we were asked to give a presentation on our teaching, learning, assessment and research strategies as well as what we might bring to the school; in the afternoon we were interviewed formally. This process was complimented by two informal interludes. First we were individually taken on a tour of the grounds by the law school administrator who, of course, reported her impressions back to the Head of School. Secondly there was lunch: This is a terribly position to be in. What if I had spilt water all over the Dean of the School? Would this have ruined my chances? What if I was asked a difficult question which I could not answer without great thought? Would they think I had something to hide? In the end, no water was spilled, no ice cream flung across the room and I proceeded to formal interview.

Interviews are difficult mainly because the candidate does not know what to expect. It is difficult to plan ahead for something which is purposely meant to put

you on the spot; meant to test you. I was nervous and those nerves manifested themselves in my not being able to stop talking. This gave rise to some considerable worry: Did I make promises I could not keep? Was the Head of School going to pull me into his office one year down the line because I had not delivered on promises made at the interview?

Before the presentations and interviews we were all asked to wait in a common staff room with the other candidates. I found this to be a positive experience. I was able to ask questions about the panel, the type of questions and the other candidates' experience. I certainly remember bombarding Jess with questions after her presentation.

The formalities which beleaguered my first semester were the numerous. University inductions (none of which I can remember) and enrolment on the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and Practice. Having already completed a PGCE, I feel as though my effort second time around is merely 'ticking an administrative box', and I would much rather be spending this time planning the new seminars and tutorials which fill my diary. Interestingly, many new lecturers who I speak to about this share a similar view, but there is little I can do about this small annoyance until I complete the course. My first semester saw me metamorphosing from student to lecturer overnight. Particularly with me moving from Newcastle to Bradford, it was a sweeping and total change. My Head of School recognised the need for me to settle, and so my teaching load was 'gentle' in my first semester compared to my new colleagues'. I hope he knows how grateful I am for this!

Jess' experience: Coming 'home'

I saw the Bradford Law School post advertised in early February 2007 and told a colleague 'they are advertising my job, I better apply for it'. The interview process was nerve-racking. It was the first interview I had for an academic post and I really wanted the job. Meeting people on the day only confirmed my belief that Bradford was the place for me and I was the person for Bradford.

Everything about it seemed to fit. My experience of the selection process is almost the same as Lisa's described above. The settling in period for me was however very different.

I felt at home in Bradford from the minute I first set foot in the Law School. I felt like I found my way around the Law School and School of Management very quickly. I had (and still have) some very valuable help and support from our administrator who not only has an open door but also an open ear. If Val does not know the answer to a particular question then the answer has probably not been worked out yet! I also experienced the inductions as very positive and helpful. While I agree that there were too many of them in too short a space of time, I think the information given has proved useful and has helped me find my way around the university administration when I have needed to. It also allowed me to meet people outside of my own discipline which is something that is surprisingly hard to achieve in a university setting.

My experience of the Postgraduate Certificate mentioned above is also less negative. I believe there are two main reasons for this. First, I do not already hold a teaching qualification and therefore the course is not just a tick in a box for me. So far 2 out of 3 modules of the course have proved very interesting and useful. Second, as part of my research work I have been interested in Higher Education policy for some time and I have also developed an interest in legal education specifically. Much of the PGC course allows me to explore that interest.

We both had concerns about being new law lecturers. We worried about balancing teaching and research and we were concerned about how colleagues and students would perceive us given that we are both relatively young. Those concerns were mainly unfounded. We quickly built up good rapport with the students and were immediately accepted as full and equal members of the law school by our colleagues.

Reflections of a Head of School

Jess and Lisa joined us when the Law School was two years old and we had eight members of academic staff – seven will not see their 40th birthdays again! We were looking for people at an earlier point in their careers to provide back up, new ideas and balance the team in terms of experience and skills. We saw a number of good candidates over the days of interview, but these two and the other colleague who joined at the time were head and shoulders more of a 'fit' than any others.

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Had the application been at any other time or had Jess and Lisa been looking for employment at any other time, our various paths may never have crossed and this shows part of the serendipitous nature of the 'employment game'.

We were very aware that the new members of the team may well need support above the formal mentoring roles the university assigns, beyond the September induction rush and beyond the pointing out of where the cafeteria lies. As we had all moved to the university within the previous two years and as a body of eight people has a direct interest into the addition of another three people to its midst, everyone genuinely was interested and prepared to help. It should also be said that the School administrator is of a type whereby colleagues are not only administered by her but counselled and nurtured and this is something about which we must not forget. It would be hard not to feel part of an organisation which had a Val administering it!

As all Law School staff are located on one corridor, it is easy to keep a dialogue going with most colleagues. I had wanted to establish a culture of openness, an ethos of hard work and a camaraderie which belied the hierarchical nature of universities from day one and I believe we have gone a long way towards achieving this. Jess, Lisa and their other new colleague had 'Bradford' written all over them when they were interviewed. Fortunately, they also scored best against the more established criteria for selection between candidates but it certainly seemed they would 'fit'. Now we are in the employment market again hoping that serendipity along with common sense and Employment Law will be on our side again.....

About Law in Brief

Law in Brief is produced by Bradford University Law School. It covers a variety of topics from research summaries to innovative teaching ideas and reports. Law in Brief focuses on issues currently being researched and debated within the Law School and wider community.

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