



Alumna Sophia Maxwell-Yates **LATHAM•WATKINS**
Subject BSc Management
Graduated 2011
Place of Work Latham & Watkins
Position Law Student, training contract starting 2013

Latham & Watkins is a global law firm with 2,000 lawyers working in 31 countries. They specialise in transactional, litigation, corporate and regulatory areas.

Sophia successfully applied to SEO London, undertaking two placements at City law firms after graduating. She is now sponsored by Latham & Watkins to study law at BPP, after which she will start a training contract.

What was the most important factor in your decision to study at Royal Holloway?

It was a combination of reasons. It is close to where I lived, which was convenient. Its links with the University of London meant I could gain access to all the facilities, like choosing to study in Founders or spending the day in LSE's library. It felt like a great place to be when I visited it and people spoke of the community feel, which also attracted me. I had the freedom to be in London, close to all the amenities, as well as on a campus, in a place where I recognise people.

Why did you choose Management?

I was very much focused on what I wanted to do after university. Initially, I wanted to study International Relations, but this was at the start of the recession. I spoke to friends who had done humanities degrees, and the general feeling was that you should be employable as soon as you leave university so you need to have vocational skills on top of your academic qualification. I chose Management because of the opportunities to specialise and tailor your degree to be more employable. As nice as it is to do something you like, you really have to be sensible about your decisions, particularly given the higher fees and current economic climate.

What were the best parts of your course?

You are encouraged to make the most of all the opportunities on campus; it's all about building up your network, meeting and hearing from industry experts. One talk I attended was by Nigel Kershaw, the CEO of the Big Issue. Following some email contact, I ended up volunteering at the Big Issue's investment branch a couple of days a week for three months in my 2nd year. Above all, the main draw was the freedom to choose modules and build a programme around my interests. It's all been so useful when it came to applying for jobs.

What is your outstanding memory of you time spent at university?

The Summer Ball absolutely blew me away. We had Nero DJ'ing, Tinchy Stryder, a video DJ mixing videos on a big screen. Everyone was there at 6 am for the Survivor's Breakfast in Founders Dining Hall. It was one of the best nights I had at Royal Holloway.

How did you come to apply to the SEO?

At the start of my 3rd year, I went to the Careers Centre, picked up as many legal brochures and catalogues as I could find, and signed up to their email alerts. Two days later, I received a message informing me that SEO London's director was coming to campus. The talk lasted for two hours

and he gave us so much advice, all about how to get a job, what City firms are looking for. He told us to make our applications as quickly as possible because it is a really popular scheme, and from the minute I applied it was just a whirlwind of activities. SEO makes recommendations to the firms, and, if they are interested, you are invited to apply through their application process or to skip the initial interview and go straight through to the second round. I had four interviews, completed two placements, and received two offers.

Tell us about the SEO application process.

First there was the online application form, followed by a round of psychometric tests and a telephone interview. Then we had a day in a law firm, testing our commercial awareness through written exams. Then you have this networking event. It lasts for six hours – half an hour with each law firm and some time in between to network with the partners. The law firms have a catalogue of candidates in front of them and pretty much mark you with a tick or cross while you are sat talking to them. Once the firms have shown interest and you have been invited onto a placement or have applied through their application process, that's when you are officially part of the SEO Corporate Law class

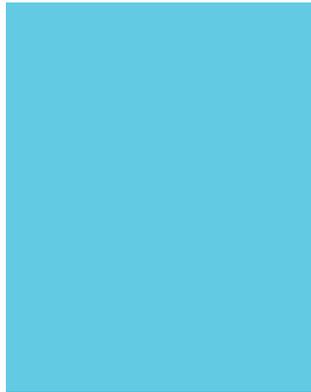
Great minds *go on to* great places



Royal Holloway
University of London

people with passion

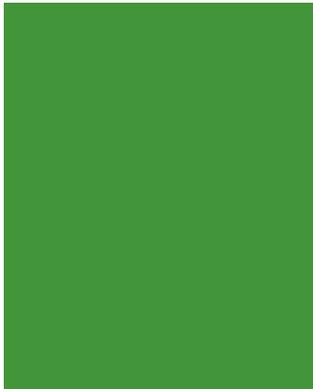
“The skills that I developed during my degree were a huge help, and I think that they put me at a real advantage.”



All of this was happening right in the middle of my second term in 3rd year. It got to the point where I was doing assessment days and handing in final essays. When I look back on it I think 'I can't believe how much I did, how was I sane after all that?' Now I'm at BPP, and I'll be here for two years before starting my training contract at Latham & Watkins.

Why did you choose the corporate law stream?

Before I started university I'd gained some legal experience, but it was a profession that I hadn't ever properly considered. I started reading up about it and found myself getting really excited about the idea. At the end of my 2nd year summer vacation I got an informal placement through a friend at a high street law firm; just before Christmas in my 3rd year, I got talking to a barrister and managed to secure a mini pupillage. Sometimes things just happen! But ultimately the work placements reassured me that this was what I wanted to do. So hearing about SEO's links with corporate law firms, getting onto the programme... every step of the way I was reassured I was doing the right thing.



Tell us about your placements.

I sat in two departments: competition and banking. My choice of practice areas had a lot to do with the modules I was studying on my degree, for instance, I was particularly interested in the Accounting and Finance modules. The placement works in two ways, as recruitment for the firm and as your continuous assessment, so you sit with a supervisor, work with them on their cases, learn about the firm, as well as handing in formal written assessments during the placement. Trainees often ask you to help on their cases, and on top of that, there is a strong emphasis on networking. On the first day of my placement, we had a drinks reception with the firm's partners and senior associates, so you have to be quite confident.

After the placements, I received two offers and chose Latham & Watkins. Both firms I was placed at were great, but I preferred Latham as it tied in with my ambitions to work for an international law firm where I would have the opportunity to be placed abroad.

Have your studies in Management been useful to you so far?

In today's competitive climate firms want business minded people: it's all about commercial awareness. For me, studying Management proved to be a huge advantage. Not only did I have an understanding of the issues at stake because of having studied the business modules in my degree, I also had an interest in it. It all slotted together.

In addition, we were required to do a lot of presentations, report writing and essays, and that is how I was being assessed in the application process. When it came to handing in work, mine was very different to say an English or Law graduates' work, because I channelled these skills of clear and concise presentation of information.

What is the most important piece of advice that you could give to an undergraduate?

You need to start thinking about what you want to do from the word go. Attend the talks, reach out to people after networking events, get involved with volunteering and clubs or societies, and build up your CV. The more you can do the better, because it shows that you are an interesting and well rounded person.

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