

TIPS FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANT APPLICANTS

- 1.1 These “top tips” give general tips on how to perform well at each stage of the application process, compiled by team lawyers and research assistants at the Law Commission. This document does **not** serve as a summary or substitute of the recruitment guide.
- 1.2 **Which team?** When deciding which team to apply to, look at the existing and future projects within each team and consider which team best matches your CV and your strengths. Which modules did you excel in at university? Have you gained any experience which is particularly relevant to a team and/or project?
- 1.3 **At all stages:**
 - (1) Read the guide, and re-read it at each stage of the recruitment process! The guide has essential information about the application process.
 - (2) Answer the question you are asked, not what you want or have prepared to be asked.
 - (3) At the application and interview stage, do not make vague assertions about your skills without evidence. For example, if you have excellent research skills, give evidence and examples which demonstrate that you have those skills. If you are describing working in a team, be specific about what your role was: not “*I was involved in X*”, but “*when working on X, my role was Y*”.
 - (4) Don’t be afraid to talk about a time when something went wrong – explain how you attempted to fix the situation and how you would approach the task differently if you were to repeat it.
 - (5) Demonstrate an interest in the Law Commission and the work we do.
- 1.4 **Application stage:**
 - (1) Pay close attention to the guide and make sure you follow it, for example, ensure that you insert your degree result including module breakdown.
 - (2) Take your time! It’s a long application, so give yourself plenty of time to write it – we advise drafting your answers in a word document, and then adding your answers to the online form when you’re finished.
 - (3) Spell check! Incorrect spelling and grammar adversely affects the credibility of an application.
 - (4) Proof read your application.
 - (5) The Law Commission publishes documents which are read by a wide range of people. You should keep the sentences short and in plain English.
 - (6) Avoid repetition – try not to use the same examples for different competencies. Make the most of your CV and your experience, picking the best example for each competency.

- (7) Policy analysis competency – if possible, give evidence of times you have undertaken policy work (as part of employment or otherwise). Otherwise, tell us about a time when you have analysed a policy issue, and explain how you approached it. This could be through a job, volunteering, campaigning, or writing an essay with weighty policy considerations. Sometimes candidates use this competency as a forum to set out both sides of a policy debate. This is not what we are looking for in this competency.
- (8) Team work competency – as stated in the guide, make sure you cover both working well in a team and working successfully independently.
- (9) Length of answers – you should provide sufficient information to explain how you meet the competency, including an example. Don't be too short with your answers (1 to 2 sentences is unlikely to be enough), but don't lengthen your answers unnecessarily.
- (10) Don't recycle your applications – reused parts of applications to different organisations often stand out for the wrong reasons. It is better to start fresh and, in this way, you are more likely to successfully answer the specific question which has been asked.
- (11) If you have applied to the Law Commission before, you can apply again, but don't use exactly the same application form – make sure it is updated and revised!

1.5 **Test stage:**

- (1) Structure your answer and communicate clearly: use headings and bullet points where necessary. Look at Law Commission publications for examples of our writing style.
- (2) Use some common sense when applying authorities or statute. If your legal analysis leads to a ridiculous result, then don't be afraid to acknowledge that.
- (3) You don't always have to come to a definite answer. However, if you are asked for a view, give one.
- (4) Be prepared to engage in policy analysis as well as legal analysis. For example, consider who the stakeholders are and what their interests might be, and the practical aspects of law reform as well as the substantive legal aspects.
- (5) Proof read before sending!

1.6 **Interview stage:**

- (1) Be professional – although our interviewers are friendly, remember you are in a formal office situation and act appropriately. We want you to be yourself, but don't lean, fiddle, or slouch. Your interviewers will be considering how you would come across in a meeting with stakeholders or Commissioners.
- (2) Take your time – when answering questions, it's OK to take a breath and have a think – don't be afraid to have a few seconds of silence whilst you gather your thoughts and give a more considered answer.

- (3) Structure your answers – for example, “I have three points to make about ice cream. First, it is delicious; second, it keeps you cool; and third, it is actually slimming. On my first point, that ice cream tastes delicious...”. Remember that interviewers may well be taking notes during the interview, and a clear structure (especially when paired with a steady speaking pace) will help them note down what you say.
- (4) Avoid rambling – if you speak for more than 3 to 4 minutes in response to a question, your answer is probably too long. Equally important, don't be too brief – develop your answers.
- (5) Prepare – it is particularly obvious if you have not prepared the substantive legal element of the interview.
- (6) Expect to discuss issues and to be probed on your answers – being asked lots of questions is not necessarily a sign that the interview isn't going well – it's just that we want to see what your limits are and how you tackle difficult questions.
- (7) You might not always have a definite answer for everything, and that's OK – if you're not sure or you think you'd need more information to come to a definite conclusion, say so. But if asked for a view, give it – be direct.
- (8) Practise with a friend (or a university careers service) or film yourself to check how you come across and improve your interview technique.
- (9) It's OK to be nervous.
- (10) Try to enjoy the interview, and remember although the interview is testing you, the interviewers want you to succeed!

1.7 After the interview

- (1) After the interview, we will try and make sure a current RA is available to give you a quick tour of the office and answer any outstanding questions you have about the RA role. Although this takes place in a professional setting, it is not part of the interview!
- (2) At the end of the interview, you will be given an approximate timetable for when you will be contacted about the post.