

BRIEF

Encounters

Calum Lamont considers the attributes and work of the modern barrister and the advice that has influenced his career.



You were recently awarded International Arbitration Junior of the Year at the Chambers UK Bar Awards, what do you think clients are looking for in a modern barrister?

I was obviously really proud to win the award. I was extremely lucky to have been introduced to international work at a relatively early stage of my career by more senior members of chambers and I took to it. Sometimes it has been difficult being away for long periods of time – there was a stage when I was abroad for the best part of 3 years, and I very nearly didn't come back! The experience, however, was invaluable, as were the connections that I was able to make during those travels. I firmly believe that if one is willing to travel, show willing, and of course do good work, then there is an international practice for everyone.

As to what clients are looking for, I think 90% of the job is about hard work and if you are prepared to be diligent, but at the same time produce high quality output, clients will, generally speaking, be happy.

I think to make a name for yourself in the international work that we are exposed to here in chambers, you have to be prepared to work flexibly. The cases can be enormous, have often taken a life of their own, and frequently none of them make sense at first. There is no substitute for sitting down with the client and the experts and asking questions until you think you have understood it, and then ask further questions. I have found that solicitors are looking for a safe pair of hands and will happily hand over parts of the case to you if they can see that you are making progress, particularly with clients who are often wholly perplexed by the process.

What sort of disputes are you currently working on?

I always seem to be doing disputes about cracked concrete structures. Floor slabs are a particular favourite, not least because all parties involved point the finger of blame at each other. I am also dealing with a couple of car parks, precast concrete bridges, and tunnels. The technical aspects of our work are always the most interesting, not least when there are multiple technical experts who never seem to be able to reach consensus. My practice tends to be about 50% domestic work, and 50% international (predominantly the Gulf).

What else have you been doing recently?

I have co-authored a book, together with two other members of chambers (Adam Constable and Lucy Garrett), which was launched in early December 2018. It's called *Litigation in the TCC*, and we were really pleased that Coulson LJ and Fraser J were able to both read it and provide some kind words in their forewords. I get teased in chambers for saying so, but it is not a law book; rather, it is intended to be a book of ideas. The genesis of the book was from various late-night discussions whilst working on cases where we all thought that there must have been a better way to run particular aspects of the litigation or arbitration in question. We put our heads together and (several years later), hey presto! Happily, it has generated interest, and even some debate, which was why we wanted to put pen to paper in the first place. We don't pretend to have all of the answers, but you should definitely go and buy a copy.

Aside from that, Demolition (the Keating band) has been on tour and we are now proud winners of Law Rocks! for two years in a row.

In your role as a pupil supervisor you support aspiring barristers in the early stages of their career. What is the best professional advice that you have been given?

There are two pieces of advice which have stuck with me. The first was from my history tutor, Jonathan Scott, back in Cambridge, who taught me about relevance. His theory was that any properly formulated question should only ever seek to elicit an answer covering some 10% of a particular subject area. The skill in answering it, he said, was to apply 100% of your answer to the 10% of the subject area requested, rather than responding generally. His theory was that the recipient would then assume that the candidate was familiar with the remaining 90% of the subject area, by virtue of the comprehensive and fully relevant response to a focussed question. That would then be rewarded with good marks. To me, that advice has proved invaluable, and it has been fully transferable into practice. For example, when pleading, one should be as concise as possible and only plead out what is truly required. When responding to a tribunal's question, generalised assertions which seek to divert attention to perhaps more meritorious areas of the case are not helpful; tribunals want to get to the right answer, and as advocates we should be able to help them reach that by providing direct, relevant, answers.

The second was from an unnamed member of chambers. He said, "don't overtrade". It is always important to be busy, but I like to think that what sets us apart at Keating is the quality of the work which we produce and that, of course, takes time.

Calum Lamont is a pre-eminent junior in global construction and engineering litigation and in international arbitrations involving construction and infrastructure disputes, particularly in Korea, Hong Kong and the Gulf. Calum won International Arbitration Junior of the Year at the Chambers UK Bar Awards 2018.