

Working the world

Neil Oxford set out to take a couple of years working in New York, but was soon hooked

What has been your career to date and how did you come to be working where you are?

After my LLB and diploma at Aberdeen, and an LLM at Cambridge, I trained with Maclay Murray & Spens in Edinburgh and Glasgow. I stayed at Maclays after qualifying in 1998 and practised in the litigation department for three years. I loved the people and the variety of the work – I was in court all the time and working on every type of case imaginable – but got itchy feet and, on a whim, decided to see if I could work in the US for a couple of years before settling down in Scotland.

Maclays were very supportive and helped line up interviews, including one with Hughes Hubbard & Reed in New York. The Hughes Hubbard offices look over the harbor and the Statue of Liberty, so they pretty much had me at hello, but it turned out to be a great fit all round. I sat the New York bar exam (anyone with a full-time Scots law degree is eligible to sit it, which is not the case for most states), took some time off to travel and arrived in New York in October 2001.

Moving from litigation in Scotland to litigation in the US involved a steep learning curve. While the general principles are very similar, the practice is very different, particularly because of the liberal discovery rules. I had to learn how to spell subpoena, and quickly!

In my first few years here I spent a lot of time working on large product liability cases, which was great experience. I got to see some of the best trial lawyers in the country in action. They are not any better than the best in Scotland, but the style is certainly more flamboyant. Working on these cases also took me all over the States, from Pacific North West to Miami and everything in between. This was a fantastic opportunity to explore



the country, including many places I would never have known existed until I was sent to do a deposition there.

My two year jolly turned into eight years before I knew it, and I am now a partner at Hughes Hubbard. My practice today focuses on general commercial litigation and business disputes, and is not that far from the type of work I did at Maclays although, this being the US, the amounts in dispute tend to have a few more zeros on the end.

Do you see yourself staying there long term?

Definitely. I was fortunate enough to get my green card last year, so I'm staying put.

What do you like most about living and working where you are?

New York is an incredibly vibrant city, where it's impossible to run out of things to do. Even after eight years, that sheen has not worn off. Professionally, New York is in many ways the centre of the legal world in the US, so the quality and variety of the work is unparalleled.

Are there any downsides?

None!

What is the value of retaining your Law Society of Scotland membership?

It's a great way to keep in touch with developments in Scotland. A few years ago, some ex-pat friends and I realised that while there was a successful local Irish Bar Association

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in New York, there was nothing for us Scots. We fixed that by founding the Scottish Bar Association of New York, and the Society has been very supportive of our efforts to foster links between Scots lawyers in the New York area and those back home.

Do you miss Scotland?

I do, but it's an easy enough flight home that I aim to get back regularly. The other big advantage of New York is that it is fairly high on most people's list of places to visit, so friends and family make it over all the time. If I was offering them free accommodation in North Dakota, I'm not sure I'd see them so often!

What would be your advice to others considering a similar move?

Do it, even if you think it's only for a couple of years. You never know where it will lead. 

● The Journal would like to hear from more Scottish solicitors working abroad. Contact peter@connectcommunications.co.uk if you would like to feature in this column.