

Let's Talk: Ask us anything - applications and interview edition

Welcome to the Let's Talk podcast. My name is Ayman. I'm a fourth-year business and law student in UCD. I'm one of your campus ambassadors for this year. I'm joined with Finola, who's a graduate recruitment manager here at A&L Goodbody.

We're going to be talking about the application process, how to get through it, and the interviews, and some tips around that. Could you tell us a bit about the application process, Finola?

Thanks, Ayman. Yes. So, the application process for A&L Goodbody is an application form, first of all. And the application form is really to draw out any transferable skills that you may have. So, there'll be questions around the competencies that we look for.

So, questions around motivation and initiative, questions around collaboration, questions around, I suppose, your interest in corporate law and A&L Goodbody as a firm. Overall, we'll be looking at your kind of communication throughout that application form as well.

And I suppose with that, we're looking for those transferable skills. As mentioned, there will be some questions around your academics. So that's the first part of our application process. And the other part of our application process is online assessments.

So, we have two online assessments that we do. One is a behavioral assessment, which will give you two statements that may be conflicting, and you weight them depending on which is your preference. So, for example, it could be, I enjoy working in a team.

I prefer to work by myself. And you would weight depending on which is your preference. The other assessment that we have is a situational judgment assessment. So, it puts you in the role of a trainee and it's kind of like a Teams conversation.

So, you'll get like a Teams message from it could be a partner, could be associate, could be a trainee. And they'll be asking you a query, and there's three responses that you can choose from as to how you'd like to respond to that query.

So, you choose one of those and the conversation then continues. So, you will have various different conversations that will be happening on that. Both our online assessments can be adapted for anyone who has a disability.

There's a support email that you can contact and even just question whether or not you feel they need to be adapted and they'll let you know. But that's our application process.

And is there anything in particular, like how do I make myself stand out in that application? What if I don't have maybe previous law experience? Can I leverage other experience that I have?

Yeah, I think that's a big misconception that people have in regards to applying in the first place that they feel they need to have previous law experience.

You know, we don't, I suppose that's not a prerequisite that we have and that you need to have law experience prior. So, any transferable skills, whether that's, you know, a part-time job, it could be, you know, you mentioned that you were in societies to me earlier.

So, you know, any work that you've done maybe with societies at university, it could be that you've been a campus ambassador or, you know, any other life experience that you may have gained through kind of extracurriculars, could even be sport that you've got experience in.

All of those are really, really relevant because it's that real life experience that we're looking for. So, what I would advise people to do is maybe to stand out is have a look at all of the competencies that we're looking for.

On our website, it gives you a kind of a thorough understanding of what do we mean by that competency. What evidence are we looking for under that competency title? I kind of advise students when I'm out on campus to maybe make a brain tree under each competency and maybe write down different examples that you might have of different areas of your life under each competency.

And that's a good starting process to really kind of pull out all of the different experience that you may have. And you might surprise yourself of the different areas that you might have gained experience in.

Then look at the form and think, okay, which example of that competency has the best evidence. So, whether it was that part-time job, whether it was something you did with a society or something else that you might have maybe volunteered for.

And try and give an example from different areas of your life for each competency so that we can really get more of a three-dimensional view of you as a person. And that's really what we're trying to see on the application form is more about you, who you are, and the experience you've gained to date.

So that would probably be my advice when kind of how to approach the application form is maybe sit down and do that first. And then as mentioned, try and pull experiences from different areas of your life.

Yeah, I remember someone telling me it can be as simple as you work in your local coffee shop and maybe just have to deal with a difficult customer and it can be as simple as that.

Exactly, because I mean, you're dealing with, you know, you're building your client relationships because you're dealing with different people. You might have been really put under pressure, which is really developing your resilience piece. So that's the real life experience that we're talking about. And we really want you to showcase in your application form.

And you mentioned resilience there. What are the other core competencies that A&L Goodbody is looking for? Yeah, so that's, as mentioned, that kind of collaboration piece. So how have you been able to kind of build those relationships?

Have you evidence of maybe demonstrating that you've kind of leadership potential? Maybe it's been a conflicting, you know, client or interaction that you've had that you've had to overcome and use that relationship kind of management to do that.

The other areas, so we mentioned there about motivation and initiative as well. So how have you demonstrated that you've maybe gone above and beyond in areas of your life? Also, areas that we look at is, you know, why are you interested in corporate law and A&L Goodbody?

And I think that's another area of advice that I would give to people is how to make your application unique is really personalising that response. So why is it interesting for you to work at A&L Goodbody?

Because that will be different to other people. A lot of people make the mistake of just maybe regurgitating on our website, you know, what A&L Goodbody is about. But maybe there's something in particular, whether it was at an event that you went to and where you met with us, or it could be something in particular on a website that really draws you to us as a firm.

I'd really focus on that and really personalise your answer to what in particular it is about A&L Goodbody or corporate law that really interests you.

Yeah, I've been told before you just want to convey that you're a person behind that CV because oftentimes people can be quite robotic and you want to avoid stuff like AI because that can make you seem not like a person and you really want to leverage your personal experiences.

Exactly. I mean, AI is brilliant and is a very helpful tool, especially when you're looking at maybe structure to your responses, you know, for grammar, things like that. But more than likely, if we're getting like a thousand applications, a lot of people would have put the same suggestions into AI and therefore getting the same responses out.

So, a lot of the responses start to look the same. So, it's not great for giving you that kind of unique response that we're looking for or that personalised response. So yes, it can be a helpful tool, but just make sure that your personality is coming through, your uniqueness is coming through, which I don't think AI can really give you.

It can be helpful, but don't be reliant on it is what I would say. And you mentioned the why A&L Goodbody piece. Where should people go to look for information or how is best to research the firm?

Well, obviously our website is great to giving you kind of information on, I suppose, the different initiatives that we have as a firm. So whether it's the D&I piece that you're interested in, the pro bono, but also the work that we do with our clients.

And I suppose that will be key to what you'll be doing every day as a trainee. So it's really important to get yourself familiarised with that. We have great podcasts out there with some of information that we share about kind of work that we do.

So the website's always a great opportunity to find out about us on our social media pages as well. So we're really proactive on kind of LinkedIn and then also our other social media platforms. But if you do have the opportunity to attend events when we're out on campus, I definitely advise you to do that because I think when you meet people from a firm, that's a really great kind of indication of, you know, understanding a bit more about the cultural piece because that is hard to find out from just a webpage. But meeting people, finding out, getting into conversations with them, finding out what they love about their role in the firm will give you a bit more of a flavour of, I suppose, why they enjoy A&L Goodbody and it might be something that interests you as well.

Yeah, I think that's definitely meeting people is way more helpful. I went to the full disclosure before and that really helped me get an insight into the firm. And they kind of tell you the little personal anecdotes or stories that kind of help you guide you towards the firm a bit more.

Yeah. And I know I suppose not everybody might have the opportunity to go to some of the events. Maybe some people might be finished university or there may be not an event being held at their particular university as well.

But even just reach out to us. We're always very helpful with our time. So whether it's connecting with us on LinkedIn, sending us an email, asking to have a call, like we want to be there, us as a graduate talent team anyway, to kind of help you with the process. And we're happy to answer any questions that people may have.

And probably the big question for everyone is FE-1s. Do you have to have them done if you're applying for a traineeship? Is it good to have them done in college or can you have them done after you graduate?

Well, I suppose it depends what year you're applying for. I mean, you absolutely don't have to have them for kind of future years. But say, for example, if you're looking for the next incoming intake of traineeship, you probably want to have have started the process and be nearly finished your FE-1s in order to apply for that particular year.

But for future years, for example, if you're a final year student at university and you're looking to start with this maybe kind of 2027 onwards, you absolutely don't need to have any FE-1s started or completed before you apply.

We will give you a contract for your preferred year and then you just have to have your FE-1s completed before you actually start your traineeship contract as it is with kind of all traineeship contracts. I think that's probably a bit more comforting for a lot of people because there's a lot of panic around the FE-1s or maybe a bit of fear around them.

Yeah, and I think like as a student, you're kind of under pressure already with trying to get your kind of final year exams done. You might be involved in a lot of other initiatives at university as well. So I think there's probably that added pressure that students have in regards to trying to get that law experience. And then also the FE-1 piece.

But I would say, you know, don't put yourself under pressure to feel that you need to have them started at university. I think focus maybe on your, you know, your academics

university-wise. And if you feel comfortable to start them, well, absolutely do, but don't feel under pressure to do them because others are doing them.

You know, there's no extra weight given to your application if you've started the FE-1s at university or not. I suppose it might speed up the process of when you can start, but we have openings for each year. So I'd just say don't feel under pressure to start them at university.

And back to the application. How do you advise structuring your answers for those questions? Because people maybe have different writing styles or maybe they need a bit of guidance on how they lay out those answers.

Yeah, that's a great point, actually. So at A&L Goodbody, we have a kind of communication style, which is the ALG way. And I suppose that's just being really clear and succinct in your responses. And when you're looking at maybe up to a thousand applications, you don't want to have responses that are just reams of information and taking a lot of time to go through.

What we're looking at, people who can get to the point quickly, can give us that clear evidence that we're looking for, but in a structured way. So, I always say maybe use the star approach, if you've heard of that, which is situation, task, action, and result.

And I think with the result piece, it should really be your learnings as well as what the result was. I suppose that keeps you on track in regards to making sure there is structure to your response, that you're given the key information that we need in order to provide evidence of that competency, but you're not just giving reams of information because that's not what we're looking for. You know, 200 words, 250 words is a perfect response in regards to the questions that we have on the application form.

Yeah. And having done the internship, like you see the ALG way, people do communicate in that way. So, it's not like a made-up thing. People genuinely do speak in that way. And you do want to keep your responses succinct.

Yeah. And just avoid kind of jargon. It's not going to make you feel or seem more impressive if you have a lot of legal jargon on there because that's not how we

communicate with our clients. So don't feel the need to put that in your application form as well.

So an application can be very long. You're going over it so many times. What are common mistakes that happen in the application process?

Yeah. So, an easy one, it's just, you know, checking your grammar and doing a spell check. And obviously you might have rewritten it a couple of times, and you know what it's meant to say, but it might not come across that way, I suppose, to the reader.

So just make sure you get somebody else to proofread it, that they can pull out any simple grammar mistakes or spelling mistakes. I would also say practice maybe reading it out loud to make sure that it does make sense.

So that's a kind of simple trick I would probably say to people to do. And the other one, as I kind of mentioned in response to one of the other questions, is just making sure it is quite personalised.

And that's what makes your responses unique rather than giving very kind of generic responses is what I would say. And then we'd mentioned about kind of communication and what we look for. It's having your answers that they're not, as you mentioned, too long, that you have that kind of clear, succinct response as well. So that would be, I suppose, the mistakes we probably see most often in regards to the applications that come through.

So moving forward from the application and those assessments, what's the next stage?

So after that, hopefully you've taken on our advice and you've submitted your application form and your assessments and we really want to meet with you. You'll get an invitation to an interview and we do a one-round interview process.

So you're meeting with two partners who will be interviewing you. And similar to your application form, we're really trying to draw out those competencies that we mentioned.

So it was very much competency-based interview where they'll be asking you specific questions on those competencies.

So again, practice or put together some examples that you can draw from from each of those competencies. Similarly, like you did with the application form, I'd say maybe prep to have more than one example just in case they ask you more than one question, you have another one in your back pocket to discuss.

So yes, as mentioned, it's a competency-based interview. There may be another element to it. So whether it's reviewing a short scenario before you go in, just to have a discussion about, or as well, what we do assess probably more so at interview than on the application is around commercial awareness.

So have something or sort of, be aware of kind of what's happening in the marketplace at the moment or in the news and be comfortable having a topic to talk about for the interview. So, you know, maybe just reading the Financial Times that morning and having, you know, the headlines to talk about probably isn't enough.

What they want to do is have a conversation with you about something that you're interested in or something that you think is impacting, you know, potentially our clients, a particular industry that we work with at the moment.

And it's just to see that you are keeping your head up, having an idea of what's happening in the world around you, because that's what our clients look for from us is to see, you know, that we're keeping an eye on what's happening.

So if anything is going to impact them, we're able to advise them on that and keep them ahead of the curve as to how it might impact their business. So, we want to look for people who have that kind of commercial acumen to be kind of keeping their eyes and ears open to what's happening at the moment and then are able to just have a discussion about it.

And that's all our interviewers want to do is have a discussion with you. So if you bring up a topic, of course, they're going to jump on that to have a bit more of a discussion on

it. So, I just say whatever it is that you're going to bring up, just be comfortable having a discussion.

Yeah, I remember my internship interview, I mentioned I was a foodie, and we had about a few minute conversation about food spots in Dublin, which was a funny conversation. But it's very true. If you're going to bring something up, kind of be prepared to talk about it.

Also, it can be a natural conversation as well. And that's exactly what they're trying to do is just have a natural conversation. And I suppose if you only know it from a high-level point of view, it's very hard to kind of continue that conversation if you've given the kind of tidbits of what you know about it early on.

It doesn't allow you to lend yourself into. And I suppose it's just them also gauging, you know, your interests and what you're interested in. So, if you happen to be interested in something that's happening on a, on the political stage, on the economical stage, or, you know, that they can have a conversation about that with you.

And do you have any maybe small tips for your interview? Maybe to put people at ease or how to pace yourself during an interview?

Yeah, so I suppose practice is always a good thing. And, you know, maybe sitting down with a friend or a family member just to say, can I run through this with you? I think, you know, talking about yourself can be, you think it's the easy part, but actually when it comes to it, can be the most difficult is getting comfortable talking about yourself. And generally there is a stage where they ask you to maybe tell you about yourself.

So get comfortable maybe talking about yourself for maybe, you know, two minutes. And I'd say two minutes is probably enough, but maybe just giving an insight into kind of your background to date and the experience that you've gained so far.

So that piece, getting comfortable, that talking piece. So, when it comes to it, you don't kind of, I suppose, freeze up. And that's the other piece, I suppose, when you are nervous. And don't worry, we expect, you know, people to be nervous.

You know, for some people, this could be their first formal interview that they've done. So if you are nervous, that's absolutely okay. But what people tend to do if they're nervous is either freeze or clam up like that, as mentioned, or do what I tend to do when I'm nervous is probably talk too much.

And then I've kind of lost my train of thought when I'm talking because I'm talking too much and hoping and somewhere in that realm of information, I've somehow answered the question. But what I would do is maybe take a pause and just think again of that star approach that we had mentioned for the application form as well.

That's really helpful also for the interview because it keeps you on track in regards to the information that you will need to provide. It also stops you from giving too much information or not enough information for the, I suppose, to provide evidence of that competency.

So I'd say definitely think about the star approach when you're before you answer the question and that will keep you on track. And it is really, really helpful for that piece as well.

Yeah, I think having a glass of water, if you can have it in the interview, can be like quite a natural way to have a break.

Yeah. Because you can just take a sip and then kind of set yourself at ease. Or maybe if you need a bit of time to think about an answer, you can have that sip of water and gives you a bit of time.

Yeah, absolutely. And also don't be afraid to say to the interviewers, you know, let me have a pause and have a think about that one. I want to make sure I give you the right example. Like, don't be afraid. Or either if you were just so nervous, you didn't really hear the question properly or needed a rephrase in a different way. Like, don't be afraid to ask that as well. The interviewers want to make sure that you feel comfortable in the interview so won't have an issue with giving you that time to reflect.

You mentioned earlier for the assessments, you can indicate if you have any accessibility requirements. Is there also anywhere in the application to highlight maybe if something's happened to you throughout your university experience that may have affected your grades or something to highlight that?

Yeah, so we do have obviously some questions around your academics to date. There is, I suppose, a question there. If there is any additional information that you need to provide in regards to your academics, you can do that. So, if there is information you think you feel that we should know, there's the opportunity to enter that there as well.

I guess maybe the last thing on the interview is, is there a post-interview reception? Is there maybe a way to kind of feel out the firm before you go to an interview?

Yeah, so we have what we call a pre-interview event that happens before the interviews where we invite you into the office. And actually, it's a great way to remove that intimidation when you're first coming in for your interview. And also, we have a fantastic new office to show off. So it's an opportunity for us to do that too.

But you'll meet with people. For example, our managing partner usually addresses everyone, congratulates them, obviously, on getting through to the interview stage, but also gives a bit more of an insight into who we are as a firm.

You'll hear generally from a panel discussion of trainees who were in your shoes not too long ago in regards to doing the interviews and then I suppose their experience to date in regards to the trainee program.

So you get a bit more insight into if you were successful in the interview, we're going to join us as a trainee. You know, what does that career look like? What does that experience look like? But then we also have an opportunity for you to meet with other people within the firm from the different kind of departments and work that we do.

So you can kind of familiarise yourself a bit more about the work we do, a bit about our culture, and you get to ask some of those questions that might be really helpful for the interview as well. And we'll give you some more advice on the interview approach too.

Thank you very much, Finola. If there's a few things, because we've talked about a lot here, what are the main things to take away from this?

The main things I would say is, you know, we're trying to get to know you and what makes you tick. And also, I suppose that those transferable skills, as mentioned. So, it's really beneficial to ensure that you pull from different life experiences and they don't need to be law related. I think that's the misconception that we want to make sure that people are aware of.

The other piece then as well is just ensuring that you have that structure, whether it's on the application form or in the interview. And I suppose let your personality shine because again, we're looking for people who we think would, you know, we'd like to work with.

So that's what we're really looking for from the application form and the interview and, you know, that you're interested in commercial law because that's hopefully where your career is going to be in and that you've really thought about it.

Thank you, Finola, for all that advice on the application and interview. I think that was very useful for people out there. If they're looking for more information, they can look on the A&L Goodbody website or follow us on your social media.

And be sure to keep your eyes peeled for the next podcast.