Planning for success
When Michele Vas was studying, she hadn’t considered going into planning law – it was only after securing a training contract with a local authority that her career path became clear. ‘I had never come across planning law before and quickly became aware that it offered the scope to use contentious, non-contentious and political skills. I particularly enjoyed the regenerative aspects of planning law, that it could really make a difference to local communities, and began to appreciate how prevalent planning is to everyday life in shaping the environment around us.’

Michele now works as the Managing Associate in Denton’s Planning and Public Law team, acting for both public and private sector clients. ‘Planning has a very wide scope and my workload ranges from negotiating complex infrastructure agreements, advising on compulsory purchase orders, planning policy to more contentious matters such as judicial review and public inquiries. As a consequence no day is the same! My senior role within the team means I also supervise junior solicitors and act as a sounding board when needed.’

Getting onto the career ladder
For Michele, work experience proved vital in helping to decide what route to take. ‘Whilst still at University I secured a part-time role as an outdoor clerk/paralegal at a local high street firm. I would go along to court with barristers dealing with criminal law cases and do any other paralegal work for the family and civil litigation departments. I knew that law was the right career path for me but was not sure that this was the sort of work I wanted to do or that a high street firm was right for me.’

From her interest in public law, Michele applied for training contracts at local authorities, securing one with Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council. ‘Perhaps because it was a local authority I was given responsibility for all my cases from day one; I was fortunate enough to be given some really decent work, which I thrived on. When I qualified I was fortunate to have three options: stay in local government, move to the civil service or go into private practice. I took the latter and have been at Dentons ever since; that I am still here over a decade later is testament to the team I work with and quality of work I have exposure to.’

Advice and the future
Whilst keeping up to date with legal news is important, Michele stresses the value of industry gossip, as a way of learning how others in the industry are handling particular issues. ‘I would also advise building relationships with your peers early on in your career, not just fellow lawyers, but surveyors, planning consultants and developers. They essentially “grow up” with you during your career and those relationships can be incredibly useful later on – you may even make some life-long friends!’

Michele’s personal goal focused on being a highly regarded lawyer in her field. ‘I am noted in Legal 500 and the Chambers directory but would like to be recognised in the Planning Magazine annual legal survey and obtain greater industry recognition generally.’

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