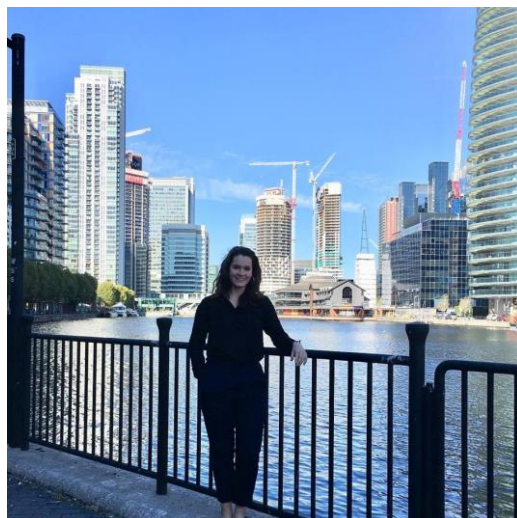


1. What does your current role involve (with KPMG)?

I completed 10 weeks of training at the KPMG 'VAT Academy' in London before joining the Reading Office as an Indirect Tax Advisor. My role focusses primarily on providing VAT advice to businesses which can include VAT compliance, enhancing cash flow, and making recommendations on business modelling in line with VAT efficient supply chains to mitigate unnecessary VAT loss.



The great thing about my current role is that the team is extremely busy which meant that I only had 10 days in the Reading Office before being sent on-site with a client. As someone who does not have a background in tax, business, or accounting I really enjoy working in a client facing role because it allows me to practice technical tax expertise without getting lost in jargon.



2. What skills/abilities are essential for that role?

**Be Agile and Able to Learn;** I hadn't finished my LLM in International Commercial Law with Arbitration when I got a message from Simon Shaw, Head of Indirect Tax, asking if I would be interested in applying for the role. After four rounds of applications, I was offered the job which meant moving to London and finishing the LLM in two weeks instead of two months to be ready to complete full-time training with KPMG. VAT will continue to evolve over our lifetime and we will always have to learn; being able to learn is a skill that you need to be able to demonstrate. I was able to do this because I earned a Distinction in my LLM with no background in law; my first degree was in Development and Peace Studies from the University of Bradford.



**Know People;** Tax advice is relevant to the accounts team, the managing directors, and small start-ups. Being able to have a conversation and understand what the problem is means that if you know people, you know where to add value, and provide relevant advice. I have engaged with various stakeholders over my career; for example, last year I was in a room with Richard Branson and Kofi Annan as one of the delegates for the Future Leaders Connect Program run by the British Council. The same weekend, I was at the checkout in Lidl (where I worked during my LLM) trying to give customers swift and friendly service. All these skills are relevant and it's important to communicate effectively with people.



**Be Competitively Curious:** I am not competitive in a traditional sporting setting. However, I am strategic and like to find the most effective way to complete tasks. To me, this means working smart, not hard (although they tend to go hand in hand). KPMG is always looking to innovate and with 'MTD' (Making Tax Digital) arriving in the UK next year, it's important to be able to look up from the tasks you are doing today and see how they might be done tomorrow. I was able to demonstrate this to the KPMG team by talking about my previous role as a Programme Assistant for a think-tank in Uganda. The research team was trained in qualitative data software and I applied it to our fieldnotes to streamline the research process and create a database of hundreds of fieldwork findings. This created an additional role for me within the organisation where I trained our immediate team, four interns, and other research teams who were interested in applying the software to their projects.



3. In what kind of activities did you participate at university to develop those skills and abilities?

**Part-time Work;** At a practical level, this meant I could afford to attend interviews and it also showed that I could go from the law library to stacking shelves. During the professional skills section of the LLM, we were working with practicing arbitrators and I think a couple of

the arbitrators thought that I was just late to their sessions and didn't fully believe that I had to be on the shop floor in the evening. At the end of the two weeks, we had a drinks reception in the law school and I had to work that evening; turning up to the drinks in my Lidl uniform was entertaining. Balancing all the areas required planning, organisation, flexibility, honesty with capability, and effective communication.

**Future Leaders Connect;** Being chosen as a 'Future Leader' by the British Council coincided serendipitously with the LLM in International Commercial Law with Professional Skills I began in 2017. 'Future Leaders Connect' ran for the first time as a nine-day residential program during October 2017 designed by the British Council to promote policy leadership amongst 'Future Leaders' in various policy fields. 50 members met in the UK for nine days of activities, travelling from Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tunisia, USA, and across the UK to be part of the global network of emerging policy leaders. Thanks must go to the School of Law which was supportive in facilitating the trip halfway through a semester, allowing extensions on assignments and the subsequent support in creating media including [videos](#) and [blog](#) posts.



**Chartered Institute of Arbitration:** One thing that really stood out for me with this LLM was the incorporation of external qualifying bodies within the course. Part of a module included the Chartered Institute of Arbitration Award Writing Exam – I passed with high enough marks to permit me to apply as a Fellow to CiARB. There were also options to do modules online and long distance which really served my work/life balance, the process of

searching for a job, and partaking in Future Leaders Connect events like a Policy Incubator in Mexico City.

4. What advice would you give to current students considering this kind of role (or more broadly unsure about their future direction)?

**Keep an Open Mind:** Never would I have considered a role in tax! Each stage of the application, I took a relaxed approach and just did my best – I never thought I would have been able to work for a Big Four firm in a specialisation that is completely new. As I went through each stage of the application, I was able to understand that there were correlations between my previous career and a future in tax and I could draw on these to demonstrate why I was a good fit. For example, my first degree was a BA in Development and Peace Studies from the University of Bradford; there is never a ‘correct’ answer in Peace Studies but you do have to demonstrate why yours is the ‘most correct’ answer which is similar to law and to tax.



**Understand KPMG:** Understand that an organisation like KPMG wants to retain staff – especially those that can represent the organisation effectively. You may start in tax and spend the next twenty years moving from department to department around the global offices. Or you may not. The beauty of KPMG is that there are options that don’t involve a job application every two years because the firm is big enough and competitive enough to be able to offer employees what they may have interest in.

**You Never Really Know:** It’s a blessing to find what you want to do and then pursue it, if you don’t know – try tax and see where it takes you. At the very least, you’ll be able to earn enough to be able to make more strategic decisions and you’ll never, ever be bored.