

## **Overview and introduction**

As a penultimate-year law student at the University of Exeter, spending the last eight months as a **Data and Legal Research Analyst at E<sup>3</sup> Consulting** has allowed me to develop beyond the academic environment and gain meaningful exposure to professional working life. From the detailed recruitment stage to the sheer breadth and depth of work I have undertaken, this experience has strengthened my commercial outlook, judgement and practical skills, shaping my professional development. E<sup>3</sup> Consulting's working practices and culture have not only helped me to understand professional conduct, but also given me the confidence to apply the analytical skills developed through my degree in a practical setting.



## **Recruitment and Onboarding**

After completing close to one hundred repetitive job applications (often answering the same questions for different firms), E<sup>3</sup> Consulting's recruitment process stood out to me as different to many processes and became a valuable learning experience for resilience, diligence, and reflection. The long-form application encouraged me to articulate my motivations and reflect on both my academic progress and broader career aspirations. Being given the opportunity to discuss my university modules and explore the role of a quantity surveyor was an interesting aspect of the process (as it not only made me evaluate my first year of university, but it also showed me the different career paths available). It was clear that the business puts an emphasis on reflection, thoughtful decision-making and curiosity, which made the process feel more personal and beneficial for my learning.

Preparing the business marketing analysis and the values report into a formal business report format gave me an opportunity to reflect on and understand my values (an exercise completely new to me, but one that is now a daily practice) and look at the marketing of E<sup>3</sup> Consulting to see how it presents itself in the market - examining the social media, website and case studies allowed me to critically evaluate the business's market position. One of my values I explored was growth, which has been developed through daily emails, messages and informal reflective conversations; this has been a priority throughout, with every decision, phone call or meeting being focused on a key learning point, such as priorities, understanding or communication. Further, this encouraged me to engage in meaningful market research and subsequently view E<sup>3</sup> Consulting's image and competition through a critical lens and then frame my feedback in a constructive manner.

The interviews themselves were collaborative and personal. Discussions with Alun and Nicky encouraged my input and perspective, with a genuine interest in understanding how I approached problems and thought about work. Distinctly, I resonated with the challenge to analyse the purpose of each stage of their recruitment process and to cogitate on reasons as to why it is, how it is; this required me to think in an entirely new way about recruitment and actually question

the process, rather than just experience it. From this process, I gleaned the inherent value that E<sup>3</sup> Consulting places on reflection and collaboration, but also the drive to bring out the curiosity and lateral thinking of candidates.

Further, the structure of the process demonstrated the holistic approach taken to recruitment. Reviewing multiple materials required an ability with language, research, presentation and precision. According to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory (the theory of intelligence being a set of distinct abilities rather than a single general capacity), it brought out the logical (problem-solving) and linguistic (language use) intelligences, ultimately establishing a benchmark for all the candidates. The different aspects of recruitment brought out the curiosity in my nature to want to understand the meaning behind specifics of the process, for example, why there is a research task about the Domesday Book (which was a new and quirky question of which the content was interesting to me). Ultimately, I came to see that the process is designed to identify reflective candidates who are curious and who possess a genuine growth mindset, giving me a new perspective on recruitment and the wider considerations around candidate selection.

Onboarding had the same rigour and pragmatism; a daily email and a timesheet have been used to quantitatively and qualitatively reflect on my progress, capturing my learning points, output, and time spent with continuous constructive feedback. From David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Graham Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, this emphasised the reflective aspects of learning, allowing for breaks from the constant doing of work and an opportunity to understand not only what was done but also how and why. Having experienced how fast-paced and content-heavy some weeks can be, whether at university or work, I have seen the importance of stopping to reflect, which has given me a framework for turning experience into genuine development without letting days pass without examination. At E<sup>3</sup> Consulting, reflection is embedded within everyday practice, with significance being given to each learning point identified throughout the day and week and ultimately drawing out the value in each point to enhance professional development and lead to better outcomes.

Communicating across multiple platforms, such as WhatsApp, Teams, and in-person meetings, has illustrated to me the importance of proactive communication and the emphasis that E<sup>3</sup> Consulting places on collaboration. Each channel's different form of communication helped extract further learning and clarity; a phone call can provide clarity and immediacy that an email cannot, while written communication allows for more structured reasoning that can lose tone and be more easily misread on its own. Learning to use different channels and to be proactive in reaching out rather than waiting for direction has changed how I approach collaboration. It has strengthened the rapport and collaboration, often having impromptu calls to clarify understanding, priorities, perspectives and content. A collegiate



foundation within E<sup>3</sup> Consulting's culture ensures that when decisions are made, they are decisions of the team with multiple perspectives and opinions given, rather than only individual viewpoints.

Spending time in the Dorset office, alongside having meetings in London, has helped to develop a sense of belonging at E<sup>3</sup> Consulting. In an ever-growing digital world, in-person communication and office working have become less prominent; however, I personally see it as the most productive and beneficial form of learning. I have had informal conversations across desks that often provide small but valuable insights and have had the opportunity to learn office etiquette. Nonetheless, remote working is still beneficial, often having Teams meetings and phone calls throughout the day. Also, being able to pick up the phone at any point to clarify anything has really rung true at E<sup>3</sup> Consulting - it is about being proactive to ensure those communication lines always stay open. Balancing both has allowed my communication skills to be further developed, and the combination of both has allowed real learning to occur both collaboratively and independently; it is impossible for one to replace the other.

## **Main areas of work**

### **Legal Research**

My main contribution has been legal research across a genuinely broad range of topics. Each task required a different approach, perspective or analysis, and this variety has significantly impacted how I approach situations both professionally and academically.

Part of my duties has included reading and proofing policies and operating procedures, which required a close reading of the text along with my interpretive ability to understand complex regulations. Also, this required looking into the differences between policies and procedures and bringing several sources together. The work that I was doing was helping with my commercial outlook, and my analysis was being applied in the wider context, rather than being narrowly confined to the theoretical - this helped me have a much more clear understanding between the two.

This work helped me understand the differences between a theoretical service provider and a more pragmatic and commercial one, a key insight from my experience. A commercial business must understand the wider context for the impact of the advice on the client's business and cannot treat their advice in isolation - it is subject to the client's needs and particular position at that point in time. Reviewing firms' opinions and drafting commentary on their proposals reinforced this point. The brief required not only a deep dive into the legal content but also their presentation: social media presence, communication style, and attitudes of the firm. This wider, holistic approach showed me the difference between simply understanding the law, which was common within my degree, and then applying commerciality to its reasoning and understanding what the preferable business choice is for a long-term relationship to be a top priority. This insight has enhanced my commercial awareness, encouraging me to think of the wider picture and needs of the client and the possible ramifications that certain decisions can have on them.

It also gave me my first sustained exposure to legal documents and to contractual clauses. Using the daily email and follow-up questions, I have been able to develop my learning of materials

more deeply and have been encouraged to understand the business impact that each point has. An important point I took from this was that the questions and notes must be completely substantiated and readable (with context and in long form) by someone with no prior knowledge of the documents at hand. This principle has also had an impact on my studies; when making lecture notes, they must be substantiated (with correct reference points and descriptions), as I may only come back to revise that topic several weeks later - I now write as if discussing the topic with someone who is entirely new to the material.

Summarising Valuation Office Agency appeal decisions required extracting nuanced legal principles carefully and concisely, looking through the decision to find key Community Infrastructure Levy principles. Despite being like my university work, there were practical, contentious issues at play here that I had to communicate within a working document rather than in an essay. Not only do I understand more about the transition from academia to professional work, but also the fact that developing a task and documents are usually iterative and working with different perspectives collaborating on a task. This has a subsequent impact on my studies; since I am exposed to a large amount of case law, I have been able to extract principles and summarise decisions quicker, identifying relevant paragraphs and summarising their significance with greater clarity and confidence.

During the recruitment process, I identified a weakness in how I asked questions. However, the collaborative environment here allowed and encouraged me to ask lots of questions with the aim of trying to deepen my learning of topics. Open questions are part of “learning on the job”, and I now see them as a strength to develop my understanding each and every time.

### Microsoft Dynamics

Having never encountered a Customer Relationship Management (“CRM”) system before, working with CRM Dynamics brought me more of a commercial perspective to professional relationships and networking. Creating spreadsheets for contacts and businesses that E<sup>3</sup> Consulting works alongside revealed how important data capture is for future networking and building relationships that could materialise into fee-earning work or referrals. For example, creating a list of contacts that could be targeted for invitation to E<sup>3</sup> Consulting’s seminars allowed me to see that storing this information was key to enhancing connections that are likely to attend. This was also an opportunity to expand my knowledge of different sectors that operate relating to real estate. I became familiar with many new companies, individuals and professionals connected with planning, architecture and property development, further broadening my knowledge to how E<sup>3</sup> Consulting sits within the intersection of all these sectors.



Further, keeping track of who I met and where has become important for my own networking at events. I have deliberately been tracking who I meet and following up after; for example, I have kept in touch with several solicitors that I have met and reached out for 'virtual coffee chats' for advice on the application process and interview. Maintaining this rapport and continuing this ongoing practice has ultimately helped my professional development and become an important transferable part of my experience.

## Reflection and Collaborative Learning

Reflection has now become a habitual part of my daily practice, rather than an imposed task. Being encouraged to reflect on the work that I have produced and the wider company decisions has allowed me to develop a mindset that is eager to understand the commercial reasoning behind decision-making. In turn, this has led me to make better and informed decisions, as I can draw parallels to those that I have reflected upon. I have been able to weigh up a wider range of factors and apply them to the relevant scenario, enhancing my critical thinking and awareness of risk, ultimately giving me wider points of consideration before reaching a conclusion.

Constructive feedback from mentors and peers cultivates a continuous feedback loop which has helped my proactive learning and the refinement of working practices. This has allowed me to focus on both my strengths and weaknesses to closely work to improve most days. For example, I am a perfectionist and aim to submit everything perfectly. However, since working at E<sup>3</sup> Consulting, I have come to realise that documents are iterative, and they won't be perfect the first time, but it is about improving them each time with a fresh view and feedback from a different perspective. To build on overcoming my perfectionist tendencies, submitting a document and then collaboratively refining it has resulted in an overall better quality of document as opposed to retaining it until it feels perfect.

Working with two micro-interns from the University of Plymouth and being tasked with delivering constructive feedback has really illustrated this: detailing small and substantive critiques has made me understand that different perspectives can help to elevate documents and that there is no right and wrong (largely). In particular, collaborating closely with Oti to improve his business report has demonstrated the value in collaborative working in improving the quality of his report document; his document improved with each iteration with feedback, demonstrating that there is never a perfect piece of work, but one that continuously improves. Oti has reflected on that process:



*"As a first-year Computer Science (Artificial Intelligence) student at the University of Plymouth, my micro-internship at E<sup>3</sup>Consulting as an AI and Cyber Risk Research Intern was my first real exposure to professional working life, and Fin played a meaningful part in shaping that experience. Contributing to several key processes, including the firm's AI adoption strategy, I produced a comprehensive business report on AI integration, and it was during this process that I had the pleasure of collaborating closely with Fin throughout the work."*

*Fin's feedback and collaborative discussions were both thorough and genuinely transformative. His actionable suggestions, particularly around referencing, substantiating claims, and structuring conclusions, meaningfully elevated the quality of my report and my understanding of professional business writing. What stood out most, however, was how Fin reframed constructive criticism as something to embrace rather than fear. Through our discussions, I came to appreciate that detailed, honest feedback is one of the most valuable tools for growth, both professionally and personally.*

*What made our working relationship particularly valuable was its reciprocal nature. As I developed my research, Fin and I naturally exchanged perspectives on topics central to both of our work, including E<sup>3</sup>Consulting's recruitment processes, the significance of each stage, onboarding considerations, and where improvements might be made. We also explored the evolving role of AI in academia and recruitment, examining how candidates are increasingly leveraging AI in job applications and how employers navigate this through tools such as Applicant Tracking Systems. These were genuine collaborative exchanges where both of our thinking developed, and that dynamic directly reinforced the open, curiosity-driven culture that E<sup>3</sup> Consulting embodies.*

*Having Fin as a peer made my time at E<sup>3</sup> Consulting all the more enjoyable. His willingness to engage as a true collaborator in shared problem-solving, rather than simply a reviewer, created an environment that was both intellectually stimulating and personally rewarding, and I feel fortunate to have worked alongside him."*

This is only a small example of the collegiate working that occurs at E<sup>3</sup> Consulting; every piece of work that I am privy to is collaborative and will be reviewed by the members of the team for differing perspectives and feedback. This works to draw out my own learning and widen my outlook to different approaches to documents; it also has a commercial dimension to it - it manages risk and ensures that the work completed is as accurate to the task set as possible and that it is of its best quality. This comes at a higher investment price, but that is the compromise for a stronger commercial output and teamworking. This has shown me the nuances, differences and perspectives that contribute to a sound professional judgement, requiring multiple inputs and questions.

## **Commercial Reasoning**

Commerciality isn't merely understanding the market or the structure of a company; it is understanding the wider context, being pragmatic and reflective and seeing the decision in practice for the client. It involves considering the advice and practicalities of any one scenario rather than merely the theoretical. Also, it means having the curiosity and drive to understand the reasoning behind decisions, instructions and tasks, giving a more holistic view and thorough understanding of the needs of the client.

At E<sup>3</sup> Consulting, Nicky, Alun and Todd have spent countless hours working with me to help me realise what commerciality is. Whether it is encouraging me to understand the purposes behind the firm's decisions or wider aims or it is explaining commercial fundamentals, like the calculation of a charge-out rate or why a Letter of Engagement needs to be specific in scope - the team are helping me further my professional development and understand that there is a commercial aspect to all decision-making. Once I understand the reasoning behind it, I then reflect on its wider importance or its importance in a different context. Changing the focus from understanding the work to understanding why the work is important has been a central learning point that has been significant in every aspect of my work, whether it be reading a textbook or writing an article.

This perspective has also helped me understand the difference between the rigidity of academic correctness and the flexibility of professional documents. Building on the previous, documents and work are iterative, looking towards getting the best outcome and accuracy, with multiple perspectives weighing in to increase the value of the document.

## Networking and Events



Attending external events has offered me an opportunity to build new relationships, learn about new industries, and communicate in a more formal setting. The Bournemouth Planning Association Breakfast was my first event, which revealed to me a surprising lapse in confidence! The Royal Town Planning Institute's Continuing Professional Development conference, with Alun Oliver delivering a presentation on Community Infrastructure Levy, helped to contextualise and reinforce my knowledge of the work I have done. From these events, I understood that good preparation, including reading headlines, understanding current affairs and curating thoughtful questions, is paramount for successful networking.

Exposure to E<sup>3</sup> Consulting's Investor and Developer Roundtable on 4 February at the Information Technologists Hall in the City of London and research to support colleagues that attended Le Marché International des Professionnels de l'Immobilier 2026 (MIPIIM - in March with around 30,000 attendees and professional advisers) illustrated how interconnected the business' work really is and the wider sectors that it sits within: architecture, planning, law, banking, hoteliers, healthcare, logistics and investors.

## Concluding Reflections

Whether clarifying priorities, communicating proactively or questioning assumptions, I now approach challenges with a more reflective and commercially aware mindset. This mindset has been incrementally built through daily reflection, curiosity and analysis, with the encouragement to look beyond the immediate matter at hand. Having wider considerations has shown me the importance of growth, as opposed to merely completing the task at hand - I now look holistically and critically at tasks, considering the reasoning



for the business, for me to complete them and potentially for a client. E<sup>3</sup> Consulting has made me look beyond the theoretical approach and look at the wider commercial impact of decisions, news headlines or policy changes, whether it be within my studies or my work.

The practice of continuous reflection built into everyday practices has made me look for learning points in all the work that I conduct, each time extracting the purpose and wider aims - whether that is clarifying priorities, proactively communicating or challenging a decision. I regularly encourage myself to clarify the purpose and aims of each and every task before I start one, giving myself a clear understanding of my objectives. This has increased the quality and accuracy of my work, as the goal and how to achieve it is usually much clearer.

Most importantly, I have understood what professional conduct is; it is more than just technical ability and encapsulates the ability to know how to proactively communicate and the capacity to handle each document with the bigger picture in mind whilst also leaving sufficient space for learning and reflection work.

From these invaluable learning points and experience so far, I hope to leverage this to continue growing as a commercially minded professional, understanding the wider purpose and impacts instead of merely the task at hand. My curiosity has grown considerably since being at E<sup>3</sup> Consulting, looking to understand new methods of working and the broader purpose of work. I aim to continue this curious, reflective and growth mindset forward into every role and challenge that I encounter, both academically and professionally.