

Alumni in the Spotlight

Name: Joanne Frew (nee Pearce)

Job Title: Partner, Global Deputy Head of Employment & Pensions

Company: DWF Law LLP

Year that I left Copley: 1991



What was your dream job when you were 10?

As boring as it sounds, I think I was always interested in becoming a lawyer (although I also harboured ambitions to be a dancer on a cruise ship because a girl at my dance school had done that and it sounded amazing!)

What do you do when you left Copley?

I took my A-levels at Ashton Sixth Form College before going onto Cambridge University to study for a BA in Law. After a year at the College of Law in York obtaining my Legal Practice Course, I was a trainee for 2 years at a firm called Eversheds before qualifying as a solicitor specialising in employment law in 1999. I have been an employment lawyer ever since and have worked at my current firm, DWF Law LLP, since 2002, becoming a partner in 2009. DWF is the largest law firm to be listed on the London Stock Exchange.

I took over as UK Head of the Employment team in 2020 (which was an interesting challenging during the pandemic, being unable to travel!) I became Global Deputy Head of Employment Pensions in May 2021.

What do you do day-to-day in your job?

There are many, many layers to my day job these days as I now have responsibility for a team of approximately 50 lawyers across the UK and Ireland, plus having responsibility with the Global Head of Employment to manage the global employment team across the world. This means a lot of my time is spent on management and strategic planning rather than simply my "day job", however, I am also still a practising solicitor advising on employment law matters.

As an employment solicitor, I advise mainly businesses, including household name companies, on all aspects of employment law. This includes contentious litigation in Employment Tribunals for claims such as unfair dismissal, discrimination and harassment, whistleblowing, worker status etc. and also non-contentious advice on people issues such as redundancies, corporate reorganisations and restructures, investigations, managing disciplinaries and grievances etc.

A large part of my day is spent giving advice either by telephone/in a meeting or via email. I also draft or review employment documents such as contracts of employment, witness statements,

settlement agreements, employment provisions in commercial contracts or communications between employers and their workforce.

If I am appearing as an advocate in the Employment Tribunal, my job is to cross examine the other side's witnesses to try to identify the holes in their evidence and to present my client's case to the Judge by way of oral submissions, to persuade them to find in favour of my client.

In non-contentious matters, my job is to help my clients to address problems in the workplace or to plan the most appropriate (and legally compliant) way to implement their business plans and strategies or to respond to changes in legislation.

What skills and attributes do you need to do your job well?

Good written and oral communication skills

Good organisational and time management skills

The ability to take on board a lot of information and process it, often very quickly

An ability to work under pressure

Determination and resilience

What is your favourite part of your job?

Dealing with people. Although that is also my least favourite part of the job at times!

A person's employment is a very personal and emotive thing and so that creates challenges when an employer has to implement changes that may directly affect an individual. I particularly enjoy the psychology of how people react to different situations and using that in my role to try to achieve the best outcome for my clients.

What is your favourite memory of Copley?

My strongest memory of Copley will always be 'the great fire of 1986'. Having been at the school for only 3 weeks before it burned down, it is not a memory any of us will forget!

However, my favour memory is the school trip to Germany in (I think) 1990, not least because of the teachers' horror and the pupils' amusement in discovering half an hour into the journey back to the hotel that we had accidentally left Mr English, the English teacher in the car park in Cologne – not something that would happen these days now we all have mobile phones.