Alumnus profile: James Richards

Programmes: **BA (Hons) Medieval and Modern History, (2006) and Graduate Diploma in Law, (2007)**

James graduated in 2006 with a BA (Hons) in Medieval and Modern History before going on to complete a Graduate Diploma in Law in 2007. He is currently working as a Solicitor for Gateley.

"I work for Gateley as a solicitor. I specialise in real estate development and investment. My role involves helping property developers acquire land, secure funding and develop sites with the long term aim of either selling those sites or operating them as an income stream.

As I didn't complete a law degree I first took the Graduate Diploma in Law at the University before moving into the city centre to finish my training by doing the Legal Practice Course. Following University I trained with another national law firm in Birmingham and stayed there on qualification for almost two years. I joined Gateley in April 2012. Outside work I am heavily involved with an organisation called Birmingham Future which promotes and develops opportunities for young professionals working within the City.

I think having a degree from a University like Birmingham was in itself a major benefit [in securing my first job]. The University is well respected with employers and also provides a range of activities outside the lecture theatres and libraries that can make you more rounded. It goes without saying that a degree helps you get to grips with some of the key fundamentals that a working environment necessitates. You need to be able to time manage your workload, hit deadlines, carry out research, present your thoughts orally and in a written form. I'd say that my degree gave me a solid foundation to secure my first job and more importantly gave me a starter in some of the skills that I need to use on a daily basis.

I enjoyed the depth of learning that you get at University. At school you touch on some areas but never really get into the subject whereas at University, and indeed on a History degree, you can really dig a bit deeper.

My advice [to students today] would be to make the most of all the opportunities available to you. Focus on your degree of course but make sure you take advantage of all the other opportunities the University provides. Whether you play sport, raise money for charity or get involved with a society make sure you get involved. These experiences and the people you meet are fundamental when you start working as many of the people can end up forming part of your social and professional network as you grow up but more importantly they raise your awareness of different people and expose you to different situations."

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