

EIP

Careers in Ideas week 2020: Tuesday

To support CIPA's Careers in Ideas week initiative we are interviewing people at EIP about how they found a career in intellectual property. Today we asked Darren Smyth and Caroline Foucher to share their stories.

Darren Smyth, Partner, Patent & Design Attorney

1) With a background in chemistry what made you choose to become a patent attorney?

Although I studied chemistry at University, I remember being interested in law even while I was still at school, and considered reading law and becoming a barrister. (I am glad I didn't; although I enjoy advocacy I would not enjoy it being the predominant part of my job). When I had had enough of doing chemistry, after a DPhil and a post-doc, patent law was the obvious career choice. I have not regretted it for one moment.

2) You are closely involved with IP Inclusive – how do you feel the IP community has evolved in terms of D&I during your time in the sector?

The IP professions are unrecognisable in terms of diversity compared with when I joined two decades ago. At the time, in the largest patent firm in the UK, there was not a single other out LGBT person, and it was about five years before I met another in the profession at all. Now we have a thriving IP Out community, but it is very noticeable that it is almost entirely people from a younger generation than me. In all other areas of diversity as well, there have been huge improvements, but we are still a very long way short of an equitable diversity outcome that the profession is truly accessible and inclusive for all people.

Caroline Foucher, Associate & Patent Scientist

1) What are the benefits/challenges of being a native French speaker working in a UK-based business?

When applying for the job at EIP I did question whether being a non-native English speaker would affect my chances. I am conscious that as soon as I speak everyone will know I am French and I do worry that English not being my first language will affect how people see my ability to do my job. Having previously worked in highly international businesses where everyone else is in the same situation as me, coming to work at EIP where most people are UK/native English speakers at times has been hard. That said I do believe that having a French speaker is an asset, and look forward to using my language skills to benefit the firm especially in terms of translations. Also, having learnt English as a second language I bring a different point of view when it comes to checking language on drafts/translations.

2) You have worked in several countries/continents – what differences did you notice between them?

In my studies and career I have lived in Canada (Montreal), Scotland, the UK, and Singapore so am well versed at moving! With each move it gets easier but moving to Singapore – a new continent with only one suitcase and knowing no one was a real challenge but it taught me resilience. I thought moving to Montreal would be easy as everyone speaks the same language as me but learning the local use of French was something I had not expected. The biggest challenge when living in a different country, particularly when it comes to work is getting to know the local culture – working hours, language used (formal/informal), conversational topics, etc.