

# Career development at Clarion

## Susan Hemingway – Legal Secretary to Head of Risk and Regulatory



I vividly remember my interview for my first “proper” job nearly 30 years ago. The Senior Partner commented that my GCSE and A Level Grades were “decent” and everyone deserved a break in life. I walked out with the job title office junior. Over the next few years, I worked my way up to being a receptionist and a secretary in the family team before finally becoming a PA to the head of the team. Each role that I had made me want to achieve the “next level” and prove to myself I could develop.

Eventually, I was lured away by the bright lights and fancy Leeds offices and I struck gold landing a job in 2003 at what has become Clarion as a senior secretary. I was back in my familiar territory of the family department and loved it from the start!

The desire to achieve that next level never went away and although I didn’t have the opportunity to follow the traditional academic route, I always knew that I wanted to study further and get a degree. Not long before I joined Clarion, I had started an undergraduate degree with the Open University. It was the perfect time to be studying for a BA (Honours) in Business Studies and Systems Practice because the partner I supported as a PA was becoming more involved in the management of Clarion and I could put my new found knowledge into practice. As his role developed, so did I taking on the role of office manager along the way and increasingly supporting him in his compliance officer roles. And after a brief dabble in HR, I decided that risk and regulatory was what I really loved.

It was a tough but enjoyable 6 years, working full time and studying at the weekends, but eventually the hard work paid off and I achieved First Class Honours in Business Studies and Systems practice in December 2007 – something I don’t think I could have done without the real life exposure I got at Clarion.

But then the old feeling of “okay, what next?” kicked in again and being a glutton for punishment I thought studying for an MBA would be a great idea! And I was delighted when Clarion agreed to financially support me in achieving that qualification – what they probably didn’t realise at the time was the benefit of the great exposure that I got with those real life examples again which really brought my academic study to life.

Any aspiration to develop has been supported all the way by Clarion, most recently supporting me through the Practitioner Certificate in Data Protection. And so, here I am, 17 years into my Clarion career and what a journey it’s been – Senior Secretary to Head of Risk and Regulatory managing a team of 7 people! As well as supporting Ryan in his compliance officer roles, I am part of the operations team and enjoy the challenge of improving systems and processes to make us as compliant as possible in the least onerous way. I manage the very capable facilities team, a team that too has grown as the business has grown. I also manage the professional support team and am proud that we have been able to centralise and streamline some of the administrative processes. I am looking forward to being able to develop this further with the Hive team and add some value to that part of the project. Knowing how crucial development opportunities are, I’m delighted that I am able to support 3 apprentices within the team – because everyone deserves that break in life, right?

## Harrie Riley – Administrative Assistant to Account Manager



I joined Clarion in 2012 to assist with updating our marketing database to earn some extra money between my second and third year of studying psychology at university. I found quite quickly that I really enjoyed the work I was doing and the people I was with. The encouragement to own my role and do everything with passion (yes, even data inputting) made me reconsider my plans to return to university, as I had already decided psychology was not something I wanted to pursue a career in. After a lot of help and guidance from my then manager, I transferred my course to The Open University and completed my final year in business, finance and marketing over two years, whilst working at Clarion where I was offered a permanent administrative assistant position, split between HR and Risk & Regulatory.

Once I was ready for the next step, I applied for a split PA/admin role to support five of our legal teams. I had no experience and the role could have easily been filled by an external candidate, but Clarion took a chance on me and with a lot of patience, training and mentoring from my supervisor and various Partners I found myself in a fast

paced, rewarding and varied role. The skills, knowledge and experience I gained during this time both about Clarion and in general was invaluable. After a couple of years, I was promoted to a Business Support Manager where I was again fully supported in my next challenge as a first time line manager.

Throughout my time at Clarion I have been involved in various firm projects, so I have had the bonus of project work experience outside of my day to day roles. The one thing we are very good at is getting people from all levels involved in projects and initiatives, which really helps you feel involved and as though your opinion is heard.

After 7 years at Clarion and a lot of experience working with the majority of the legal and support teams, I found my real strength and drive was on the billing and finance side of things. Without realising, I had developed a billing client facing role and become very knowledgeable in the area, thanks to the Partners I worked with trusting me with their clients and our Finance Controller taking the time explain things in detail to me, despite me not being in his team. In June 2019 I was given the opportunity to recruit and head a brand-new account management team, who now do billing and financial administration for the whole firm. Whilst I sometimes miss spinning lots of plates, it is great to have focus and feel fulfilled in the position I am in now, plus life is never boring at Clarion as there is always something else to get involved in, whether it be an IT project or planning our next Christmas party!

I would never have found myself in the job I am in today if it wasn't for Clarion giving me the exposure to different roles and allowing me to make them my own. I will always be thankful to the many busy Partners and Department Heads who have taken the time to train and guide me since 2012, as it has all contributed to getting me to where and who I am today.

I think it's important to say, whilst I am very lucky to love my job, it's the culture, leadership and people that are the main reasons I have never left. Everybody goes through difficult patches, whether it be work related or personal, and having the Clarion team around you makes showing up to work that little bit easier.

## Sarah Collins – Legal Secretary to Paralegal



I started at Clarion in May 2016 as a Legal Secretary for Private Client and Family having only been a Legal Secretary for 3 years, and previously in Personal Injury so this was a completely different area of work.

An opportunity came up in the Family team for a Paralegal and Justine Osmotherley, the Head of Family team approached me and asked if I would consider applying. I was flattered, but straight away dismissed the idea. How could I be a Paralegal!?! I don't have a law degree, I scraped through school with C's in GCSE's and I didn't want to be a Solicitor. I loved my role as a Legal Secretary. I knew what I was doing, and had a good support network around me, and the thought of change and coming out of my comfort zone was scary. However, with a bit of persuasion and the belief of some important people in my life, I made the move and although naturally to begin with, I felt out of my depth, I have never looked back. I am part of a very supportive team of outstanding Lawyers who inspire me on a daily basis to be the best I can be.

To help me settle into my new role as a career Paralegal, Clarion arranged for me to go on courses to develop my knowledge.

I am part of the Clarion Paralegal support network, which provides vital support to Paralegals and their development whether their end goal is to be a Career Paralegal, a Legal Executive or a Solicitor. I also have an allocated mentor who is on hand to discuss my development, any concerns I have in a confidential setting and offer guidance and support.

Clarion really do believe in putting the time and effort into developing people's careers and they have given me an amazing opportunity to progress and develop a career I thought would only be available to someone who had a law degree and wanted to become a Solicitor.

“Change can be scary, but you know what is scarier? Allowing fear to stop you from growing, evolving and progressing” – Mandy Hale