Dear Sir / Madam,

I write this letter in the hopes of being selected for the Byrne Wallace trainee solicitor programme. Hopefully this letter will provide some insight into who I am and why I would make an excellent trainee and employee at the firm.

I was born into a family of modest means and temperament from Greencastle, Inishowen, County Donegal in September of 1999. My parents provided me with a fantastic childhood, instilling family values quite typical of a modern rural Irish home. I was always urged to make the most of my education, an opportunity which they, having grown up in the 1960s and 70s in a heavily underdeveloped peninsula, had never had in their youth. My father left school just after failing his Junior Certificate to fish on the North Atlantic, the proceeds of which would go almost exclusively to his parents. My mother was among the first nurses and midwives from the Republic to work in Altnagelvin hospital in Derry – she tells some fascinating stories of the discrimination she faced from British soldiers in the 1970s.

With their moral and financial support, I opted to study law at Trinity College Dublin. My grades were good enough and I was thoroughly interested in History and English in particular. I think an appreciation of these subjects led me to take to the concept of the common law like a duck to water. The common law system, to me, is the perfect blend of respect and deference to the past, and capability to adapt to an ever-changing social and economic landscape through democratic and judicial law-making. From my very first weeks in law school, I know I had made the right choice. The study of tort, equity and land in particular appealed to me throughout my Freshman years.

In the summer between first and second year (2019), I was accepted into the EBS’s summer internship programme after two interviews. They placed me in the Price Review 5 team based on my individual skills and interests. The PR5 team was established by ESB Networks with the aim of presenting an agreeable service plan to the energy regulator for the period of 2021-2025. The task facing the team was not one to be taken lightly. Communication with every department in the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity needed to be constant. Coordination of hundreds of moving parts had to culminate into one final plan.

I learned much about the compliance law that a semi-state body must go through before their product or service can go to market. I drafted reports on previous Price Regulatory periods and gave them to my manager for historical context. Beyond this, however, I was able to spend a limited amount of time in the in-house legal department, which is comprised of around 50 solicitors. Although my time there was brief, it reinforced my wish to work in a solicitor’s office upon graduation.

One of my proudest achievements is my time spent on exchange in Hong Kong for the third year of my degree (2020-2021). The application process was arduous and competitive, not to mention the fact that it was all undertaken while classes were ongoing in Michaelmas term of second year. I had to submit several motivational letters and undergo an interview. I have always had a fascination with the Far-East however, and I worked hard throughout my freshman years with the objective of securing an exchange year in third year, which is quite competitive in Trinity College (i.e. most people who apply for nomination by the college must be turned down due to lack of places in partner institutions).

I learned an awful lot about Hong Kong’s legal system and society during my time there but as cliched as it sounds, I think I learned even more about myself. The culture shock I felt for the first month there was immense: the language; weather; sheer density of people; and the food were among the most pronounced. After my quarantine period and introducing myself to the other exchange students and some of the local students, I felt ready to immerse myself in Hong Kong’s way of life. The hikes, parks, gardens, architecture, places of worship and monuments were mesmerizing, further cementing my already heavily romanticized view of the Far-East.

After completing my assessment at City University of Hong Kong (see CV for more info), I set about looking for some work experience in the legal sector as I was loving the city and also due to the fact it’s a common law system, any experience attained would be beneficial. I was interviewed by several barristers and was accepted by two of them for a ‘mini-pupillage’ of a couple of weeks each – Arbitration Barrister Phillip Rompotis (Prince’s Chambers) and a separate barrister at Plowman Chambers. It was not to be however, as I was unable to get my hands on a visa that allowed me to work in Hong Kong rather than study. After the hours I spent in the immigration building and effort spent impressing these barristers, it was a real kick in the teeth to be denied due to the excessively stringent and bureaucratic Immigration department of Hong Kong.

I kept my head up, and upon returning to Ireland I contacted a cousin of my father’s who is a barrister in North Dublin who goes by the name of Donal McGuinness. He was more than happy to take me on but as it turned out the restrictions in place in Ireland still precluded much of the proceedings that Mr. McGuinness would ordinarily be involved in. Most of his work over the summer was done virtually and I would have learned little from observing him in such an environment in comparison to the knowledge and experience he could offer me in pre-pandemic times.

So alas, I was unable to secure legal work experience in the summer of 2021 but I can, with a clear conscience say, that it was not for a want of trying. Instead I worked for a couple of months in a window workshop in Moville, County Donegal – quite the fall from grace from a skyscraper office in Hong Kong, but you work with the hands you’re dealt. I channelled my effort into revising administrative law in preparation for my final year thesis and picking up on the bit of French that I learned in secondary school and since neglected.

If my experiences have taught me one thing, it’s that things rarely, if ever, work out according to plan. I’m sure such a lesson is equally applicable to the legal profession as it is to life generally. My future employer can expect an honourable, dependable, diligent, and bright trainee. I always strive to be in a state of learning and self-improvement, academically or otherwise. My respect and interest in the law only grows with time as I begin to find more and more niche areas that spark my curiosity. My favourite areas of law at the moment are land, planning, administrative, litigation, and consumer law, with an underlying and perpetual interest in legal philosophy.

Please feel free to contact me any time with the details on my CV if there’s any supplementary information I can provide. I look forward to hearing from you and you have my gratitude for taking the time to consider my application.

Yours sincerely,

Fergal D. McGuinness