

**Employability Skills for Law Students; Emily Finch and Stefan Fafinski;
Oxford; Oxford University Press; 2014; 376pp; ISBN 9780199663231;**

£27.99

Book Review

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Employability Skills for Law Students is an impressive book that is unique in its kind. It is specifically written by two experienced authors, Emily Finch and Stefan Fafinski and provides comprehensive information to develop employability skills that are necessary for law students.

The book is written in a well-structured manner by beginning with the chapter on understanding basic employability skills and slowly leading to focusing and demonstrating those skills. Finch and Fafinski place great emphasis on the importance of skills being as crucial for law students as legal knowledge. This is evidenced in page 3 which begins the first chapter with the quote from Donna Dunning:

“In an uncertain job market, skills are your best security.”

In this short chapter, Finch and Fafinski provided an explanation on the different types of employability skills such as, but not limited to, self-management, team work and problem solving - all of which are what employers in general are looking for. In assisting law students to identify their

skills, the authors provide examples on doing a skills audit.

The next chapter focuses on the planning stage by commencing with a key question which all law students must answer: To practise or not to practise? Thereafter, the authors introduce the routes to both the practise and non-practise pathways. Despite the brief description on the two different professions, Finch and Fafinski provided detailed explanation on the routes to those qualifications. The chapter ends with the guidance on Personal Development Planning (PDP).

Chapter 3 marks the beginning of Part II of this book. In particular, Finch and Fafinski high-light various academic skills which include *inter alia* essay writing, legal research and time management. It would have been perfect if the authors could have provided a more in-depth explanation on dissertation. for example by including a sub-section on research methodology, as well as the structure, both of which are crucial for producing a good dissertation.

The following chapter is probably the most informative chapter of all. The authors look at the three main practical legal skills encountered by all law students: mooting, client interviewing and negotiations. Each is dealt with in detail in separate sections. The effort of the authors is much appreciated as each section demonstrates an outline of opportunities for students to further develop their skills.

Part III which includes Chapter 5, 6 and 7 are closely related and flag up that in a competitive employment market, results do not define who you are. It is the combination of academic

performance and practical legal skills that count. This is precisely the essence of these chapters in which Finch and Fafinski explore various activities for students to develop their skills portfolio. For instance, the authors suggest in Chapter 5 that students could sharpen their writing skills by contributing to a student journal. They also cover different aspects of work experience available to all law students such as mini-pupillages and pro bono work. More specifically, this book contains useful information by providing examples as to what information should be included in a speculative letter.

Part IV of this book is a shift from understanding and building employability skills to focusing on those acquired at law school. Chapter 8, for instance, is extremely helpful for students who wish to practise, either as a solicitor or a barrister. The chapter gives a clear explanation about training contracts for solicitors as well as pupillage for barristers. However, whilst it contains useful information such as the funding opportunities and the amount awarded, it fails to address the actual application procedure which is also important for students, although as this procedure is soon to change it is perhaps understandable.

For students who are uncertain as whether or not to go into practise upon graduating from a law school, Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 might serve as useful guidance in aiding them to make a decision. Chapter 9 specifically addresses law job apart from the traditional work of barristers and solicitors. Finch and Fafinski give a general outline on the working environment of careers such as paralegal, legal assistant, research assistant and licensed conveyancers.

Chapter 10, on the other hand, explores a range of alternative non-law career paths. Despite outlining the possibility of undertaking a postgraduate qualification, it may have been more useful for Finch and Fafinski to move this section into a separate chapter so as to provide a more detailed

discussion on the importance of postgraduate qualifications. In light of a competitive market where universities are producing thousands of graduates every year, this book could highlight that the demand for postgraduate qualifications is growing owing to the unique skills which cannot be obtained at undergraduate level. Moreover, it would also be wise to point out that Employability Skills for Law Students should also draw the attention to the fact that certain international organisations such as the United Nations do not accept anything lower than a master's degree.

The final part of this book explains the practical aspect to assist students in demonstrating those employability skills they have acquired. In summary, it places particular emphasis in submitting accurate, proper and good CVs and covering letters. Finch and Fafinski also emphasise the importance of handling interviews so as to create good first impressions.

The book ends with a list of appendices showing information about vacation schemes. By and large, this is a user-friendly book which is indeed useful for law students. However, several improvements could be made in the next edition based on the suggestions mentioned throughout this review.

**Aberystwyth University Law and Criminology Student Journal (AULCSJ), 1st Edition
published online by the Department of Law and Criminology, Aberystwyth University on
behalf of the AULCSJ. August 2014. Article downloaded from
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criminology/informationforcurrentstudents/studentactivities/auslcj/](http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/law-criminology/informationforcurrentstudents/studentactivities/auslcj/)**