

SPOTLIGHT ON MIKE MCCLURE, PARTNER, DISPUTE RESOLUTION, SEOUL

25 May 2017 | Seoul
Legal Briefings

Mike McClure heads the dispute resolution department in our Seoul office and has a focus on construction and infrastructure cases. In his journey to becoming a partner in South Korea, Mike has also worked in the firm's offices in London, Dubai, Hong Kong and Moscow. He talks us through his experience across the global practice, his interest in advocacy and the current growth in the Asia market.

DURING YOUR TIME WITH THE FIRM, YOU HAVE WORKED WITH THE LONDON, HONG KONG, MOSCOW AND DUBAI OFFICES, AND YOU HAVE NOW MOVED TO SEOUL. HOW HAS WORKING ACROSS THESE OFFICES SHAPED YOUR GROWTH AS A LAWYER?

I have always enjoyed living and working in new countries and engaging with new cultures. To be given the opportunity to do this as part of my job has been fantastic. It is one of the things that attracted me to working in an international firm in the first place. My family has had a life that's very different from some of our friends, but it's something that we enjoy.

Working in different jurisdictions has its own challenges and rewards. Something that always varies across cultures is what the clients expect of their lawyers and how they expect lawyers to interact with them. It has been challenging to work with all varieties of clients, and yet to find a way to gain their trust, to get the right kind of information from them and to learn to produce advice that they can understand and that is useful for them. It has been a challenge I have enjoyed!

"Something that always varies across cultures is what the clients expect of their lawyers and how they expect lawyers to interact with them" [Mike McClure](#)

I think my time in different cities has made me more adaptable, having quickly learned that disputes are not run in other parts of the world as they are in London. From my time in Russia and parts of Asia, I have seen that one does not always find the level of documentation that you might usually expect when running a dispute in the UK. In these jurisdictions, far more is done orally, sometimes over a handshake. You might not see a well-negotiated, beautifully drafted contract or extensive minutes of meetings. Yet, similar legal principles apply, so how you establish your case can ultimately prove to be not so very different. This has its own pros and cons, but as a mid-level lawyer in Russia, I never found myself stuck on a tedious disclosure exercise!

YOU ARE KEENLY INTERESTED IN ADVOCACY. AS A JUNIOR LAWYER, HOW DID YOU SEEK TO GET AS MUCH ADVOCACY EXPERIENCE AS POSSIBLE?

My interest in advocacy goes back to my time in university. I very much enjoyed debating and mooting, and the thrill of making compelling arguments has carried on from there. At HSF, I have been fortunate that the firm has a great culture of training its lawyers to be advocates. When I was a trainee in the Hong Kong office, we were encouraged to make applications before masters in courts. As a junior associate in the London office, I was encouraged to take up higher rights of audience to be allowed to argue in the courts in England and Wales.

In the HSF international arbitration team, on most matters it is the HSF team that does the advocacy. This is led by a partner but there are always opportunities for a junior member of the team to get hands on experience, by doing some of the advocacy at a procedural hearing, examining or re-examining witnesses, doing small parts of opening and closing submissions and eventually doing some cross examination.

***"No matter how good you are and how well you can think on your feet, if you don't know the facts of the case, you can come unstuck very quickly"* [Mike McClure](#)**

I have attended hearings since the time I was a junior lawyer. Even though I didn't have a chance to argue, I helped the partners prepare their briefs, and I was always entrenched in the preparation of the case. I had the opportunity to work with partners who went on to become QCs, such as Paula Hodges QC. When you brief QCs outside of the firm, you miss out on the great experience you have when you are working side by side with them, in the same firm and in the same team. You are so much more involved.

My time doing advocacy in HSF has made me acutely conscious of the importance of certain things. One, preparation is key. I have sometimes seen barristers instructed on matters who are not into the detail of the case, and at least initially, they struggle. No matter how good you are and how well you can think on your feet, if you don't know the facts of the case, you can come unstuck very quickly. Two, you must always play your hand. If you have bad points, you must deal with them. You can't hope that they will go away. They usually sit and fester and more often than not, they infect your good points. If you don't address them, it is unlikely that you will win.

AS AN OUTSIDER JUST STARTING HIS PRACTICE IN SEOUL, WHAT ARE YOUR INITIAL THOUGHTS AND IMPRESSIONS ON THE LEGAL MARKET?

Asia is such an exciting part of the world to be in. The growth in Asia now exceeds what we see in Europe and the USA. It is great to be a part of that dynamic and growing market. With the merger, Asia has become central to our business. I can see the depth and strength of our Asia and international practice first hand in Seoul. The matters we work on almost always involve our other offices, be it on transactions or on arbitrations. In the nine months I have spent in Seoul so far, the matters I have worked on have required me to work with colleagues in the Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo, Brisbane, Perth, Frankfurt, London, Dubai, Saudi Arabia and New York offices!

In Seoul, our mandate is to try and win outbound work for Korean clients. We have a great team on the ground with fluent Korean language skills. We have also started a programme of putting Korean nationals through the London training program, to give them good international exposure and training before they come back to join us. We've just had our first trainee become an associate in the London office.

"I can see the depth and strength of our Asia and international practice first hand in Seoul" [**Mike McClure**](#)

My aspiration for my time in Seoul is to build on the excellent disputes practice we have here, and work on further interesting mandates. The idea is to build a team of lawyers with international disputes experience, in particular arbitration, and Korean language capabilities. Seoul is a very competitive market with lots of established international firms, with more looking to enter, and a very good level of domestic firms. We compete for the same kind of work, and to get instructions we need to show value. For me, the idea is to help Korean clients in Seoul and across the world grow and improve their businesses

A key part of my focus is on construction and infrastructure disputes work. This has a natural synergy with the very many Korean EPC contractors in Seoul. I hope to build on the already strong relationships we have with a number of them. Our plan for growth is organic and we hope that as we become more established in the market, and continue to bring value to our clients through the firm's broader international network, that the Seoul office will grow naturally.

KEY CONTACTS

If you have any questions, or would like to know how this might affect your business, phone, or email these key contacts.



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