



Profiles	Patents
Name	Elizabeth King
Age	30
Job	European patent attorney

Working in patents gives me the opportunity to use my scientific knowledge and be aware of new developments in chemistry and other subjects.

Career path and qualifications so far

After studying Chemistry, Biology and Physics at A Level and Maths at AS Level, I completed my first degree, a BSc double honours degree in Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Southampton, then went on to do a PhD in Bio-organic Chemistry. After completing my PhD I studied for a Postgraduate Certificate in Intellectual Property Law at Queen Mary & Westfield College in London while working for my current company. I subsequently passed the UK examination Patent Agents' Practice, Advanced Level (one of four UK Final Exams). After working for three and a half years, I passed the European Qualifying Exams and qualified as a European Patent Attorney.

What is a patent?

A patent is a right, granted by the Patent Office, to inventors or companies in return for disclosure of an invention. This then gives the patent owner the right to stop other people using that invention for a certain period of time (maximum 20 years). Inventions vary from simple gadgets to complex mechanical, chemical, electronic or microbiological processes and apparatus.

What is a patent attorney?

To stop other people profiting from your invention, the description and definition of that invention needs to be drawn up in a legal document. Patent attorneys develop these descriptions and definitions. They are skilled in patent and other intellectual property matters and have passed appropriate examinations. A patent attorney is not a type of lawyer although part of the training to become a patent attorney does involve developing a thorough understanding and knowledge of those areas of the law that are relevant to the job.

Day to day activities

My work involves drafting patent applications for clients and prosecuting them through the various patent offices such as the UK Patent Office and the European Patent Office. Most companies require patent protection across the world. Since patents are national rights, it is necessary to file and prosecute patents in other jurisdictions. I therefore liaise with foreign attorneys and direct patent prosecution to obtain patent protection at various international patent offices such as the United States Patent and Trademark Office and the Japanese Patent Office. As well as this I advise clients on their patent strategy, for example, advising on how to file patent applications and defend patents from attack. Being in private practice means that I work with a number of different clients in different technological areas ranging from new pharmaceutical products to developments in food technology.

Further qualifications

In addition to my science background, I needed to learn the legal aspects of my job and undergo further training to qualify fully as a patent attorney. The training is mostly on the job and usually involves working for one or more fully qualified patent attorney/s in a firm, in conjunction with taking exams. To obtain the Postgraduate Certificate in Intellectual Property Law, I attended Queen Mary and Westfield College in London full-time for three months. Studying for the European Qualifying Exams (to become a European Patent Attorney) and the UK final exams (to become a Chartered Patent Attorney) involved studying during evenings and weekends, in addition to in-house tutorials and tutorials organised by The Chartered Institute of Patent Agents.

Why patents?

Having graduated with a science degree, I was keen to follow a career in the sciences. However, I didn't want to pursue a career as a research scientist. I was attracted to the patents profession because I believed I had good communication skills, both oral and written. Being a patent attorney has enabled me to develop these (and other) skills.

What do you most enjoy about your job?

My job involves working closely with inventors to define their inventions. I enjoy the interaction with research scientists in industry and in university research departments. It gives me the opportunity to use my scientific knowledge and be aware of new developments in chemistry and other subjects. The work is varied and interesting and can be intellectually demanding.

What other skills do you need?

The first and most fundamental requirement if you are going to write down a description and some definitions of someone else's invention is to be able to understand it. Most inventions are more or less technically based and therefore, the fundamental requirement for a patent attorney is technical ability. You must be able to get to the heart of a new invention and all entrants now have a science or engineering degree.

As well as the skills and qualifications mentioned above, it is also necessary to have good communication skills, both oral and written. As a patent attorney it is necessary to be able to communicate effectively with people at all levels within an organisation, as well as with people having varying levels of understanding about patents in general. Good organisation and interpersonal skills are also very important.

Why is it useful to study a science subject at university?

It is necessary to have this scientific/engineering background to be able to think logically about and gain an understanding of a client's invention, even if it relates to subject matter that is initially unfamiliar to you. The patent profession can therefore be viewed as a hybrid profession lying somewhere between science/engineering and law. This is one of the aspects that makes it such an interesting career.

Further information/contacts

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