James S. Robertson

PhD in Microbiology and Immunology, 2004.

Who is your current employer and what do they do?

LEO Pharma
I work for LEO Pharma which is a Danish biopharmaceutical company, based in greater Copenhagen, that specialises in the development of dermatology medicines.

What is your job title and what does the job entail?

Executive Director, Global Head of Patents. I lead the patent department, comprised of experienced European Patent Attorneys. The primary role of the department is to obtain and defend patents, across the globe, that protect inventions made by LEO Pharma employees, or in-licensed from other companies. As head of the department, I have overall responsibility for all patent related matters. I advise and update the senior management, the CEO and the Board of Directors on patent matters, as well as support the patent attorneys with their day to day work.

How did you achieve your current position?

After I completed a PhD at Edinburgh University, I accepted a position as Postdoctoral Research Associate at Imperial College, London. After a year or so, I became aware that I did not want to remain in academia, and looked for other careers in which I could apply scientific knowledge and skills. Whilst at Edinburgh, I had attended numerous career presentations, one of which by a UK patent attorney firm. With this in mind, I applied for a job at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), based in Brentford just outside of London, for a position as a trainee patent attorney. Entrance into the patent profession is profoundly competitive, and those attempting to enter the world of patents, generally apply for numerous trainee positions. I was tremendously fortunate in that I was accepted for the one position to which I applied. One's scientific and academic credentials (and a well-crafted CV) may get one into the interview room, but to succeed at interview, one must clearly demonstrate a sound scientific mind, the ability to critically analyse language, and skill in accurately and clearly expressing one's self. It most certainly helps to enjoy a good argument as the job ostensibly demands persuading others that you are right.

I started as a Patent Advisor at GSK in 2006, commencing training to become a Chartered (UK) Patent Attorney (CPA) and European Patent Attorney (EPA).

Aside from a few courses, becoming a CPA and EPA is learned whilst working in a company or law firm under the guidance of qualified patent attorney for a minimum of 3 years; there's no need to spend time and money on a Graduate Diploma in Law, and subsequent Legal Practice Course or Bar Professional Training Course. I took the final qualifying exams and qualified as both a CPA and EPA in 2010. Staying with GSK, I relocated to Brussels, Belgium where I gained further experience, and my role grew in responsibility and seniority. In 2015, I was approached by a head-hunter regarding a position to lead a team of patent attorneys and head up a patent department in Copenhagen, Denmark. I was eventually offered the job, which I accepted. In my experience, geographical flexibility can very much help advance one's career, for the simple reason that it opens up many more opportunities.

How do you feel you have used the skills and/or knowledge developed during your research degree in your career to date?

I depend enormously on the knowledge and skills I learned during my undergraduate degree and PhD. It is a prerequisite for a patent attorney to have a scientific or technical degree. Whilst at Edinburgh University I studied DNA and subunit vaccination against *Salmonella enterica*. At Imperial College, I worked and published a paper in the journal *Vaccine* on a model for testing transmission blocking vaccines against malaria (*Plasmodium vivax* and *Plasmodium falciparum*). My scientific background in vaccination provided much of the basis for my selection by GSK, as my role was to support GSK's vaccines business. It is critical for a patent attorney to understand the science/technology that they attempt to protect, and this is reflected in the fact that a growing number of patent attorneys today have a PhD in a particular scientific or technology field. It is considered by many that it is easier to teach a scientist patent law, than *vice versa*. One's scientific skills are key to the role, as patent attorneys work at the cutting edge of any given technology, working close with, and building relationships with scientists, to protect their new and non-obvious technological advances.

The role of a patent attorney is extremely interesting, particularly as an in-house attorney as it involves a combination of science, law and business. Working in private-practice can be equally interesting, but can sometimes lack some of the business and commercial aspects of the in-house job. That said, patent attorneys in private practice are generally better paid.

As a patent attorney, my scientific knowledge and analytical skills are constantly put to the test, as technologies develop and the subject matter that one must understand inevitably broadens. The role of a patent attorney also involves drafting patent applications, corresponding with scientists/clients, and drafting (sometimes lengthy) submissions to the patent office. Accordingly, the skills learned from writing one's thesis and scientific papers, such as writing clearly, concisely and convincingly, are also a huge asset; my PhD provided an excellent basis for my current job.

Other qualifications

BSc (Hons) Medical Microbiology, University of Edinburgh
Certificate in Intellectual Property, Queen Mary, University of London
Chartered Patent Attorney

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Careers Service

European Patent Attorney
Diploma in Patent Litigation in Europe, University of Strasbourg

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