

Kluwer Arbitration Blog

Swiss VYAP and YAWP Interview Series: Insights into Career Paths in International Arbitration

Patrick Pithon (Bonnard Lawson International Law Firm) and Yasmine Fulena · Wednesday, March 8th, 2023

The [Swiss Very Young Arbitration Practitioners](#) (“Swiss VYAP”), in collaboration with the [Young Arbitral Women Practitioners](#) (“YAWP”), held an interview series on career paths in international arbitration during the second half of 2022. Five interviewees, whose professional experience spanned the arbitration spectrum, shared their insight and knowledge in their respective arbitration environments. This blog post summarises their brilliant insights into the different career paths for those who did not get a chance to attend. The speakers focused their remarks on 5 key themes, related to working with arbitral institutions, working for a third-party funder, becoming an arbitrator, launching one’s own arbitration firm, and going in-house.

Insights into Working with Arbitral Institutions

Korinna von Trotha, Executive Director of the [Swiss Arbitration Centre](#) and the [Swiss Arbitration Association](#) (ASA), spoke about what a career with **arbitral institutions** looks like against the background of her experience working at several arbitral institutions. Before assuming her current role, she served as Deputy Counsel of the Secretariat of the [International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce](#) (ICC) in Paris, Manager of the Case Management Unit at the [Dubai International Arbitration Centre](#) (DIAC), and Head of the Berlin office of the [German Arbitration Institute](#) (DIS). She shared that working at an arbitral institution offers the advantage of a neutral position insofar as you do not represent one side of the dispute. By definition, at an arbitral institution you are exposed to a lot of different players involved in arbitration and thus have the opportunity to build a diverse network of contacts. To pursue a career with arbitral institutions, Korinna suggested prioritizing multilingualism and participating in moot competitions to gain experience and develop relevant skills. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of being flexible, fearless, and open to moving to new countries: according to Korinna, “you may sometimes wonder where life leads you, but if you are open-minded and flexible you will find your way eventually.”

Insights into Working with Third-Party Funders

Olivia Furter, Co-head of Switzerland, France, and Benelux at [Nivalion](#), shared her experience of

joining a **third-party funder**. Olivia's interest in numbers made for a natural transition from a law firm to working for a third-party funder, but a special fondness for numbers is not a prerequisite for this particular line of work.

Working for a third-party funder is fascinating because of the different perspective third-party funders have when assessing an arbitration matter. For example, risk, and balancing of risk in the third-party funder's portfolio, is a constant consideration when making decisions on funding cases. Olivia shared that while no day is like the other at Nivalion, when a request for funding comes in, the case management team member's responsibilities will include the preparation of a commercial offer, the in-depth due diligence of the case during the exclusivity period, and the drafting of the investment proposal. If the case is funded, the responsible case manager monitors the case's developments with a focus on cost control and major milestones. Olivia shared that in addition to these responsibilities, as Co-head at Nivalion she is involved in business development as well as discussions on strategy and allocation of risk, and that she is a member of Nivalion's advisory panel which reviews the draft investment proposals to ensure quality standards and adherence to the internal investment guidelines and policies. Overall, working at a third-party funder is versatile, and one can draw on both soft and hard skills in this environment.

Establishing a Practice as an Arbitrator

Angelina M. Petti, Partner at [von Segesser Law Offices](#) in Zurich, provided valuable insights on how to establish oneself as an **arbitrator**. She emphasized that counsel work is an excellent preparation for practicing as an arbitrator, and that insight and close contact with the business operations of clients can prove beneficial when called upon to render decisions later. Additionally, Angelina suggested that gaining experience as a tribunal secretary is extremely valuable for those looking to prepare for work as an arbitrator. Angelina obtained her first appointment as an arbitrator through an arbitral institution before which she had already handled several complex arbitration cases as counsel. She noted the importance of engaging with arbitral institutions and networking with peers to increase one's visibility, making it more likely to be considered for arbitrator appointments in future cases.

Angelina also highlighted that a strong legal background, as well as industry-specific knowledge, can set one apart from other colleagues and that strong communication skills, both oral and written, are also important. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of being open-minded culturally and legally as well as being willing to work in different jurisdictions.

Lastly, Angelina noted that building an arbitrator practice takes time and patience, and recommended compiling a detailed list of one's cases and arbitration experience early. As for foreign lawyers looking to move to Switzerland, while this may be a challenge, that which makes you "different" from others in the legal market can also be something which you use to distinguish yourself. She recommends gaining experience – whether it be first in one's own home jurisdiction or abroad – and using that experience to demonstrate practical knowledge in Switzerland.

Gaining Experience at Multinational and Boutique Law Firms

Simon Gabriel, arbitrator and counsel at [Gabriel Arbitration AG](#), shared his pivot from a large

multiple-practice firm to launching his own **boutique law firm** in Zurich. Simon's firm, Gabriel Arbitration AG, is entering its tenth year and Simon shed light on the individual strength necessary to launch one's own firm to versatile skills beneficial to all practitioners. While the boutique arbitration firm landscape worldwide has evolved, it was a novel step when Simon made his move a decade ago, and was an opportunity to make an impression.

Beginning one's own firm may be of particular interest to a lawyer interested in specialising in a specific area, or areas, of the law. However, one should be cognizant that the working environment and support will be different to that when working in a large law firm: the support structure at a large law firm will not be available when embarking alone, and you will need to conduct and oversee every task, from administration matters to writing submissions and discussing strategy with clients. Therefore, while launching your own firm is a rewarding experience, it should not be taken lightly as you will be your own boss and managing every single task. Simon also stressed that there is no single marker in one's career to determine the right moment to found one's own firm. Instead, it is a combination of both inner conviction, personal circumstances, and professional experience.

Working as In-House Counsel

In the final installment of this interview series, **Annabelle Möckesch**, Global Business Partner for Legal Civil Engineering at [Implenia](#), shared her perspective on working as an **in-house counsel**. She emphasized the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the role, noting that as an in-house counsel one is expected to wear many hats and that no two days are alike. She highlighted the wide range of responsibilities that come with this position, such as providing legal advice to the project teams or management, conducting contract reviews and providing legal training for operatives.

Additionally, Annabelle emphasized that working in-house allows for a unique level of exposure to the company's operations and the opportunity to work on various projects, thereby making business acumen and awareness essential for lawyers considering making the move to in-house counsel. Furthermore, as in-house counsel, Annabelle also plays the role of a gatekeeper, ensuring that the company's business activities and decisions align with legal standards.

Key Takeaways: The Ingredients for Success in Careers Connected to International Arbitration

The career opportunities presented during this interview series were vast, but the following common key elements were highlighted in all five discussions:

- **Your network is your asset and must be cultivated:** do not underestimate the value in sharing your potential career moves with trusted members in your network. They may help you pivot or help bring you clients. Continue to nurture and develop your network after your move.
- **You will know when it is time to pivot:** the time to switch into a new career is determined by a culmination of experience, feedback, and personal circumstances, not by a specific career milestone.
- **You will benefit from being open-minded:** learning about different cultures and practices in jurisdictions outside your own is a helpful quality when considering career options. Being

mentally flexible and nimble is necessary when pursuing new opportunities.

These interviews provided a wealth of information for practitioners looking to gain a deeper understanding of, and insight into, different career paths in the arbitration industry. They highlighted multiple professional avenues available in arbitration and demonstrated that one may eventually be naturally guided to the career best suited to their interests.

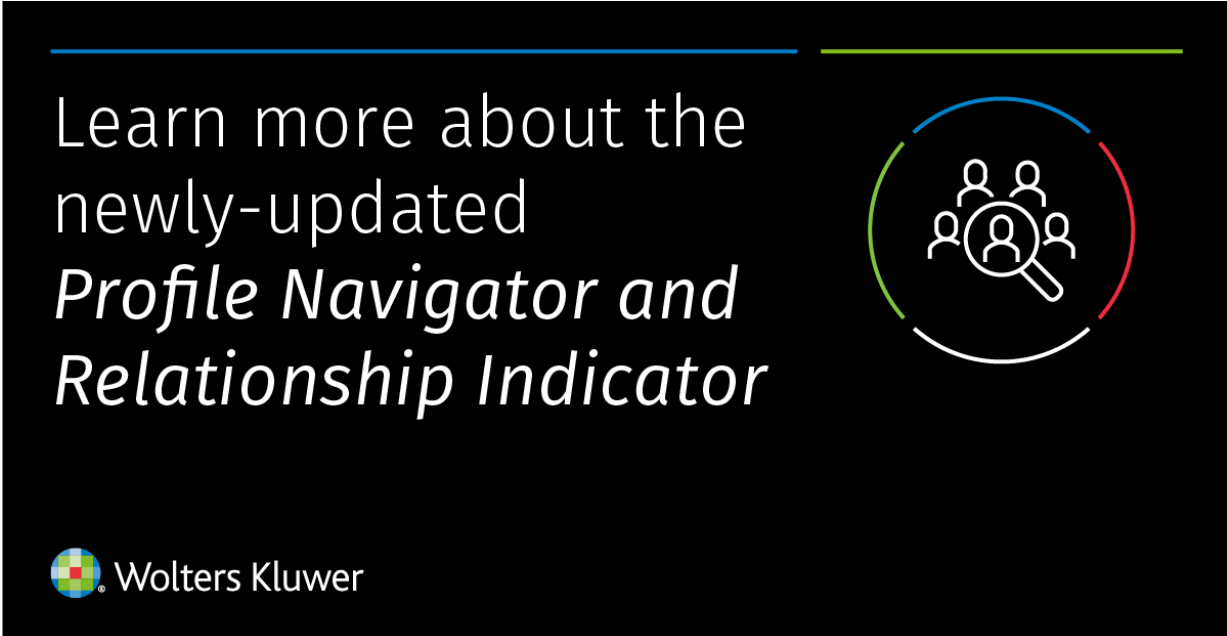
The moderators were (in chronological order): Andrea Roth (Senior Associate, Wartmann Merker Ltd, Zurich, Switzerland), Francesca Borio (Associate, Walder Wyss, Zurich, Switzerland), Nadja Al Kanawati (Counsel, WilmerHale, London, England), Dilber Devitre (Associate, Homburger, Zurich, Switzerland) and Alec Ray (Associate, Lalive, Geneva, Switzerland).

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