

ALEX SLADE

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Alex Slade was a trainee at the firm from 1999 to 2001. He is now General Counsel of Arena Racing Company (ARC) which owns and operates 16 racecourses and four greyhound tracks in the UK as well as several hotels and golf courses. ARC became the leading greyhound racing operator in the UK following its purchase of Nottingham Greyhound Stadium in 2020.

Challenge and excitement are what motivates Alex; be it in work, homelife or sport he firmly believes one follows the other. Alex joined Arena Racing last May, in the early days of lockdown, which “was a challenge in itself,” but well worth the effort. “They were looking for their first in-house counsel and I was looking for a GC role in sports with a wide range of rights to manage, so it was a perfect match.”

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Alex has found that being a General Counsel is certainly general. Day to day he’s involved in litigation, property disputes, infrastructure tenders, myriad service agreements, drones, medical services as well as sponsorships and media rights licensing. “I seem to spend a huge amount of time outside my comfort zone which is usually enjoyable, but not so much fun when reviewing 60-year old racecourse leases (property law and I were never close friends).”

ARC wears several hats. As well as a racing business which hosts fixtures and runs the racecourse, it’s also a media rights and data business, creating the rights and exploiting them through partnerships such as its joint ownership of *At the Races* and Sky Sports Racing. The company also runs events and owns hotels and golf courses, some of which have been adapted for Covid-19 vaccination hubs.

Even though racing has been able to continue behind closed doors, the effects of the pandemic have been tough on ARC. “It has forced us to take some horrible decisions about our workforce,” says Alex. When professional sport started up again last year, racing was the first to be permitted and has continued since, but ARC is looking forward to welcoming the public back.

Alex has enjoyed many aspects of home working, glad to avoid the commute into London and appreciating more time with his wife and children. "It has been lovely from a family perspective but far from ideal starting a new job." Getting to know how ARC ticks and the nuances of the business, remotely, has been trickier and taken longer. "I hadn't appreciated quite how much you absorb simply by overhearing conversations around the office," he says. "Remote working also turns the quick two-minute chats to get a sense check on a point into a much bigger, more formal, call with the relevant exec."

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Now that Alex has found his dream job, what advice would he give to those embarking on their own careers? "Get good training, keep your eyes open for all opportunities and don't limit yourself too soon," he says. Alex knew he wanted to be an in-house commercial/IP lawyer but had no clear plan beyond that. "I've been alert to new opportunities throughout my career, actively keeping in touch with recruiters, watching the market and even cold-calling companies I wanted to join. There's been a bit of good fortune in the moves I've made (BUPA, ITV, Nickelodeon and BT to name a few) but to a degree you must make your luck; it rarely comes to those who sit waiting on the side-lines." He admits, however, to envying people who know what they want to do from the start as it saves "an awful lot of hassle and pain!"

One thing he was certain about was that an in-house role suited him better, though that's not a negative reflection on WFW. "WFW's strong alumni network reflects well on the firm and is consistent with the friendly, supportive environment I experienced as a trainee," says Alex. He's occasionally in touch with Helen van Acker (Palmer) and Lindsey Keeble and, when time allows, would like to re-establish connections with other former colleagues.