

A day in the life of a patent litigator: Nicola Dagg

Dagg tells [Managing IP](#) about being starstruck when dealing with Nobel Prize-winning inventors, and how she deals with self-doubt. *By Rory O'Neill*

For Nicola Dagg, partner at Kirkland & Ellis in London, the best part of her job is still the science.

Dagg graduated from the University of Cambridge with a postgraduate degree in natural sciences in 1991 and had funding for a PhD secured.

But after chatting with friends who had done vacation placements at patent departments, she decided to give intellectual property law a try.

That was a good decision. Dagg rose to become a partner at Hogan Lovells and then Allen & Overy, specialising in patent litigation, before joining Kirkland & Ellis in 2018.

Dagg heads up one of the most sought-after patent litigation teams in the world. One of the biggest perks of the job, she says, is getting the chance to work with cutting-edge scientists.

“Sometimes you pinch yourself when you think someone’s paying you to sit in a conference room and listen to a Nobel Prize winner explain how they came up with a new invention.

“This is my job, but I’d pay to go to the cinema just to experience it,” she says.



Nicola Dagg
Partner
Kirkland & Ellis

KIRKLAND & ELLIS

A day in the life

Dagg initially struggles to think of what a typical day looks like, and that's partly what she finds so enjoyable.

Her schedule looks different every day, depending on what clients she's working with and what time zone they're in.

Dagg speaks to Managing IP from her farm in Hampshire, in the south of the UK, where she ordinarily works on Mondays and Fridays.

Normally, she is in Kirkland's London office from Tuesday to Thursday as part of the firm's hybrid working scheme adopted during the pandemic.

"I can bound out of bed in the morning no matter how early it is though because I love it," she says.

She'll often attend 7am conference calls with clients in Asia or work late to stay in touch with clients and colleagues in the US.

When those mornings are free, she likes to use that time for legal analysis and to prepare evidence.

"You sometimes get very busy on both ends of the day, and that's where our team has to have each other's backs," she says.

"The kind of service we provide is creme de la creme, 24-seven, 365 days a year."

The one fixture in her working week is picking up her daughter from school on Thursdays.

When she's in court, there are other rituals she follows. Her coffee of choice is a flat white from the Watch-House cafe near Kirkland's office at the Gherkin building in London.

It's a revelation she has introduced to all of the barristers she works with, and she assures Managing IP they are now similarly hooked.

"I only drink one coffee in the morning and it has to be a really nice one," she says.

That's a principle she lives by at home as well. On the day Kirkland's office shut down during the first UK lockdown in March 2020, she made two investments – an industrial printer and Nespresso coffee machine.

When she's not working, her favourite thing to do is ride her horse – a love born out of growing up in rural Tipperary, Ireland.

Q&A

What one case meant the most to you?

One that really meant a lot to me was Regeneron v Kymab at the UK Supreme Court in June 2020. We represented Regeneron, whose chief scientific officer George Yancopoulos had made this really amazing breakthrough with transgenic mice.

These mice are used as discovery vehicles for antibodies for treating cancer and all sorts of other medicines, and it was the opposite of what everyone in the field was thinking at the time.

I felt really strongly about it, because it's just such a fabulous invention story. Unfortunately, in the end it didn't go our way and Regeneron's patent was invalidated at the Supreme Court.

The life sciences cases have that extra buzz about them. I've dealt with cases involving medicines that have been life-changing for members of my own family.

Do you ever get nervous?

I get very nervous before every day in court.

I expend a lot of nervous energy seeing how our case theory goes down in court, and how the witnesses I've worked with for two or three years deal with cross-examination in the box. There's so much of me in every single one of those cases, and a trial can pivot at any moment.

I doubt myself every day. I'm always pressure testing with our team and with clients, making sure this is the right way to go. Part of doing a good job is to feel that self-doubt and vocalise it.

Why do you like working with trainees?

Sometimes with our trainees, it feels like I'm looking at myself in the mirror because I remember being at that stage. Some of them come from very diverse backgrounds, and I can see the same fear and hunger as I felt.

It was scary for me starting out, as a young woman who had no family background in law at all. Entering the London legal scene was really daunting. I always felt like I needed to work 100 times harder.

I talk to the trainees every day. There's a massive competition for talent right now and we've been able to recruit at the top of the market.

They're invaluable to us, and I try to get them involved in as much court work as possible. The more of that they can see, the quicker they'll learn the emotional intelligence that's required to be a litigator.