

The advantages of articling in a small town

By AdvocateDaily.com Staff

The Law Society of Ontario (LSO) recently endorsed two pathways to licensing for law graduates — articling with a firm or completing a Law Practice Program at university — but graduates would do well to consider choosing a small town practice over a big-city experience, says [William Woodward](#), vice-chair of [The Federation of Ontario Law Associations \(FOLA\)](#).

In the “smalls and soles” that make up law practices outside of the GTA, articling is seen as a way to bring young lawyers on, says Woodward, managing partner with the London, Ont. law firm [Dyer Brown LLP](#).

Smaller practitioners are often looking to grow, free themselves to take vacations, or to retire and have someone take over their practice, he tells AdvocateDaily.com.

“This is an advantage for those who look outside the GTA for articling,” Woodward says. “And another benefit is that you may be provided with opportunities to take on higher levels of responsibility.”

While some people get very good exposure to different aspects of law during their articles, there has always been “urban myths about articling candidates who did nothing but pick up their principals’ dry-cleaning or wash their cars,” he says.

“I believe it’s more myth than reality, but those stories were out there. The idea now is to try to ensure that there’s some basic level of uniformity in the articling experience across the province,” Woodward says.

Part of the LSO’s decision was to implement some mandatory education and training for both the principals who guide articling candidates and the supervisors of LPP work placements.

Woodward hopes these will not be too onerous for smaller practices.

“These aren’t being implemented until May 2021,” he says. “The devil will be in the details.”

Like many law graduates who feel the only way they can pay off their huge student debt, Woodward chose to seek an articling position in Toronto. But since he had law-clinic experience at the University of Western Ontario, he was able to land a position in London instead — and has stayed with the same firm ever since and serves as an articling principal to new lawyers.

“By being part of a smaller firm, you will have an opportunity to do work that wouldn’t come your way in a larger firm that’s far more structured,” Woodward says. “And while you might not earn as much in a small community, the cost of living is a lot lower.”

He says it’s not helpful for law grads to get a one-year gig at a big firm that lets them go at the end of their articling.

“The opportunity to get hired is a graduate's priority. In a bigger firm, you could end up back on the street after a year, competing for a position with others who have graduated two or three years before,” Woodward says.

In smaller firms, there’s a real commitment of time and resources to train new lawyers, he says.

“And if they’re good there’s a great opportunity to parlay that one-year articling placement into a full-time position,” Woodward says.

In addition to a higher level of tasks and responsibility, those articling at smaller firms have more direct contact with senior lawyers who will decide on their future employment, he says.

“It also gives them the opportunity to get involved in the community, beyond the practice of law, on boards and in volunteer organizations,” Woodward says.

To help law grads source and secure articling positions in small firms throughout Ontario, FOLA has created a [new resource section](#) that includes key contact information and helpful tips.