

GLOBAL GAVEL

全球法律視野



Kelly's Hong Kong admission, with Caroline McNally, partner at Hugill & Ip
 Kelly 獲取香港律師資格，與高葉律師行合夥人 Caroline McNally 合照

Kelly Merris, Senior Associate, Hugill & Ip



In an increasingly interconnected world, the legal profession has become truly global. Hong Kong serves as a prime example of a vibrant legal hub where talents from across the world converge, bringing with them unique experiences and perspectives.

In this issue of "Global Gavel", we spotlight Kelly Merris, a seasoned family lawyer who began her career in Western Australia and has since practiced in London before making Hong Kong her home. Kelly's journey offers a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by legal professionals transitioning to a new jurisdiction. Her experience navigating the intricacies of family law across different legal systems, combined with her insights into adapting to Hong Kong's vibrant legal landscape, provides a compelling narrative of professional growth and cultural adaptation. Through our discussion, Kelly shares her motivations for relocating to Hong Kong, the skills she brought from her time in London, and her advice for those considering a legal career in this dynamic city.

Can you tell me more about yourself and how you ended up pursuing a legal career?

Kelly: I studied law at university in Western Australia. I was interested to learn about the law, its history, practice and procedure, and the different areas of law. I thought it would provide me with a good foundation and opportunities in my career. It was common for students to also work a day a week in a law firm in their final year at university. By chance I worked in a family law team. I then was a member of my university's team in the Australian National Family Law Moot Competition in 2010, and our team won in the final in Canberra. The final was judged by a full court of Chief Justice Bryant, Deputy Chief Justice Faulks and the Honourable Justice Kay. The next year I coached my university's team, and they also won in the final in Sydney. I went on to work at the Family Court of Western Australia as the Associate to Justice Moncrieff and later as the Appeals Associate to Chief Judge Thackray. Since then, I have worked in private practice in family law in London and now Hong Kong.

What made you relocate to Hong Kong for work?

Kelly: My husband, who is also a lawyer, and I were ready for a new challenge. We had been living in London and an opportunity came up to relocate to Hong Kong at the beginning of 2023. Hong Kong is a vibrant and exciting city. Relocating here offered us the opportunity to be closer to our families in Australia, live in an amazing city, and have access to excellent care and schools for our young son. We both were excited to qualify in Hong Kong and work as lawyers here. We felt that there are a lot of opportunities for young professionals and young families in Hong Kong, and that it was an exciting time to be living in Hong Kong.

What challenges, if any, did you encounter when you first began working here and how did you overcome them?

Kelly: Family law in Hong Kong is very similar to family law in England, but there are some differences which can be tricky. The practice and procedure are different from Australia and London in many ways. It is also my first time working in an environment where English is not the only language spoken in the workplace.

It's been interesting to learn about cultural norms and ways of doing things in Hong Kong. The biggest challenge I would say was passing the Overseas Lawyers Qualification Examination (OLQE). Although I studied to qualify in Australia, and sat the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme exams to qualify in England, I completed the OLQE in Hong Kong while working and with a young child.

What do you find attractive about working as a lawyer in Hong Kong?

Kelly: It's a dynamic international city. My clients are all interesting people, with diverse backgrounds, jobs, and outlooks.

What skills or experience from your time working in London were useful in helping you adapt to working and living in Hong Kong?

Kelly: There are a lot of similarities between living and working in London and Hong Kong. The skills I learned in London were helpful in settling into working life in Hong Kong. For example, living in a big city means that clients want to sort their legal disputes quickly and cost effectively, they appreciate it when you streamline work and cut through all of the noise and distraction that legal disputes often come with.

What advice would you give to anyone looking to establish a legal career in Hong Kong?

Kelly: Seek out opportunities, network, and get to know people. While Hong Kong is a big city, it is a welcoming place and it's easy to get to know people here. It is also

a small world. Just yesterday I was speaking to counsel on the phone and we worked out we had gone to the same university.

What upcoming opportunities in the legal industry/space in Hong Kong do you find exciting?

Kelly: I'm interested to see the development of technology in the legal space in coming years. For example, I'm interested to see what technology the Court might bring in for filing documents online and whether it will make litigation more efficient. I think Hong Kong has the advantage of having the opportunity to observe what other jurisdictions have done, and what worked and what did not. Hong Kong has not been locked into clunky technology contracts early which means it can take advantage of more efficient technology that has developed in this space.

What are some unique skills or experiences you have gained as a result of working as a lawyer in Hong Kong?

Kelly: Learning more about the intersection between Hong Kong and other jurisdictions. Hong Kong has given me the opportunity to work on cases which intersect with China, the US, Europe, and Australia. In particular, I have found it interesting to learn more about China and Southeast Asia. Australia, England and Hong Kong have common law systems and so it is always a learning curve when working with clients who have connections and interests in jurisdictions which are not common law countries and do things differently. This makes you a better lawyer as you have to adapt your way of thinking.



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高葉律師行高級助理律師 **Kelly Merris**



在 日益互聯的世界中，法律專業已經真正全球化。香港是個充滿活力的樞紐，來自世界各地的法律人才匯聚於此，帶來多元化的經驗和獨特的視角。

在本期的「全球法律視野」中，我們訪問了經驗豐富的家事律師 Kelly Merris。她在西澳洲展開事業，之後在倫敦執業，後來以香港為家。Kelly 的經歷提供獨特的角度，讓我們了解法律專業人士在轉移到新的地方後面對的挑戰和機遇。她在不同法律體系中駕馭複雜的家事法，以及適應香港充滿活力的法律環境的經驗，構成了引人注目的專業成長和文化適應的故事。Kelly 與我們分享了她的移居香港的動機、她在倫敦時期所學到的技能，以及她對考慮在香港從事法律工作的人的建議。