

Many biotechnology based inventions with great potential for mankind are now being developed.

**Who can help protect these inventions, and enable the research costs to be recovered so that the South African economy can benefit?**

## **The Patent Attorney!**

**Meet Sandra Clelland,**  
Patent Attorney and  
partner at Spoor & Fisher  
in Johannesburg

**BSc (Biochemistry and Chemistry),  
BSc Hons (Biochemistry),  
LLB**

**... the challenge of the job:**  
"You are working with other  
people's intellectual property –  
the responsibility can be daunting!  
Also, it's a job defined by deadlines!"

**... a common misconception:**  
"That the job is glamorous.  
It is a desk job, entailing loads of  
administration and long hours."

### **What does Sandra do?**

Sandra helps clients in the biotechnology industry to protect their inventions by means of patenting. A patent is a government approval to an inventor so that he has the sole right to use and make profit from his invention and can prevent others from making, using or selling it for a specific time period (usually 20 years). Sandra usually has an in-depth discussion with the scientist (inventor), for example on how his HIV/Aids vaccine works, so that she can understand the invention. She then starts to write the patent specifications, and if the inventor has enough money, she may also do a local or international patent search to make sure that the idea has not been used before and is not obvious.

Sandra also manages the patent application procedure worldwide, as a patent needs to be filed in every country where the inventor wants protection for his invention. In some cases, protecting a patent also involves preparing a court case for a patent owner who wants to take legal action against a patent "infringer", in which case a lawyer will be hired to work with Sandra.

### **What do I need to be a patent attorney?**

**Characteristics:** Meticulous, ability to work under pressure, sound communications skills

**Important school subjects:** Biology, Mathematics, Physical Science, English

**Relevant training and qualification:** BSc – Natural Sciences/Biotechnology/ Microbiology/Chemical, Molecular & Cellular Sciences/Biochemistry/ Biological Sciences, or similar combined with a law degree, such as an LLB

### **Where can I get a job as a Patent Attorney?**

Major patent law firms with a biotechnology department, universities, biotechnology investment and funding organisations, biotechnology incubators, large pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies



**science and technology**

Department:  
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**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**