The student’s guide to the leading law firms and sets in the UK

e-Edition
CAREER FOCUSED LAW COURSES

Our range of law courses focus on building practical legal skills so you have the best opportunity to achieve your career ambitions.

From the GDL, MA Law, LPC and BPTC for aspiring lawyers, to our specialist Master’s Programmes in Law, we offer courses whatever your aspirations.

Find out more law.ac.uk/postgraduate

*97% of our full-time 2016/17 and accelerated 2017/17 LPC students graduating in summer 2017 secured employment, a training contract, or further study within nine months of successfully completing their course.

**71% of our full-time UK/EEA BPTC students graduating in 2017 secured a pupillage within one year of successfully completing their course.
Travers Smith is defined by its unique culture, deep commercial insight and outstanding client service.

Above all else, we are a collaborative and inclusive firm where the most talented people – from all backgrounds – can thrive and enjoy working.
Above all else, we are a collaborative and inclusive firm where the most talented people – from all backgrounds – can thrive and enjoy working. Travers Smith is defined by its unique culture, deep commercial insight and outstanding client service.
The True Picture

Think all law firms are the same? They’re not. Even superficially similar firms can be worlds apart in how they operate internally. Fortunately, one tool exists to help you tell the difference: the True Picture.

Between them, the firms covered in the True Picture have thousands of training contract vacancies to fill. With luck, one of them could be yours. If none of these firms wants you, reading the reports will teach you a great deal about the nature of legal training and the experience of working within a law firm.

How we do our research

Every year we spend many months compiling the True Picture reports on law firms in England and Wales, ranging from the international giants to small regional practices. Our purpose is to get to the heart of what you need to know about a prospective employer – what it can offer you in terms of work and working environment. You’ll want to know how many hours a day you’ll be chained to your desk, the tasks that will keep you occupied and who you’ll be working with. Importantly, you’ll want to know about a firm’s culture and whether colleagues will turn into party animals or party poopers come Friday night.

Most of our chosen firms handle commercial law, although many also offer private client experience. There are also a few firms which handle publicly funded or public interest work. To take part in the True Picture a firm must provide a complete list of its trainees. After checking the list is complete, we randomly select a sample of individuals for telephone interviews. Our sources are guaranteed anonymity to give them the confidence to speak frankly. The True Picture is not shown to the law firms prior to publication; they see it for the first time when this book is published.

If you’ll allow us to blow our own trumpet for a minute, we’re the only publication that conducts our research in this way. By chatting to trainees rather than sending them formulaic questionnaires, we can follow up on leads and delve deeper into what makes firms tick and what challenges they face. We think that leads to better, more detailed information for our readers.

Trainees tell us why they chose their firm and why others might want to. We put on our serious faces and talk about seat allocation, the character and work of different departments, the level of supervision and what happens to people on qualification. And we flirt shamelessly to get the gossip on firm politics, office oddities and after-hours fun. We look for the things trainees agree upon, and if they don’t agree we present both sides of the argument.

We also speak to senior sources at every firm – managing partners, training partners, recruiters. You’ll notice their comments scattered throughout the True Picture features and published in more detail online. We conduct these management interviews to get their insights on what their firm’s strategy is for the coming years. We know that by the time you, our readers, hopefully begin your training contracts in 2020 and beyond, market conditions might be very different, so we’ve tried to make this a forward-looking guide. Additionally, the True Picture feature isn’t supposed to simply be a review of a training contract, but rather a broader picture of a firm as a whole. After all, it’s not much use knowing that ‘trainees at Firm X are happy/sad and work reasonable/terrible hours’ but not having a clue about the commercial environment in which Firm X operates. Again, we’re the only publication to go into this much detail.

What kind of firm do I choose?

Your choice of firm should be based on location, size and the practice areas available. Once you’re settled on those, it’s all about chemistry: some firms are stuffier, some are more industrious and some are very brand-aware, involving trainees heavily in marketing activities. Most work in modern open-plan offices; a few occupy buildings with a more traditional set-up. Some focus on international business; others are at the heart of their local business communities. Some concentrate on contentious work; others transactional. The combinations of these variables are endless.

What we hear every year

• Some seats are more popular than others and there are no guarantees of getting a specific seat. Employment and intellectual property are perennial favourites.

• Levels of responsibility vary between departments. In property you might have your own small files. In corporate you will generally work in a very junior capacity as part of a team.
The experience in litigation depends entirely on the type of cases your firm handles; usually a trainee's responsibility is inversely proportionate to the value and complexity of a case.

Working in corporate and finance seats means putting in long hours, commonly climaxing in all-nighters. The size and complexity of a deal will determine your role, but corporate and finance usually also require the most teamwork.

Most firms offer four six-month seats; some offer six four-month seats and others operate their own unique systems. Trainees switch departments and supervisors for each seat. Some share a room and work with a partner or senior associate; others sit in an open-plan office, either with the rest of the team or with other trainees.

All firms conduct appraisals: a minimum of one at the conclusion of each seat, and usually halfway through as well.

Client secondments help you learn to understand clients' needs. They can be the highlight of a training contract.

Trainees love doing overseas seats. They're not just a fun jaunt abroad but a good way of getting an insight into a firm's international activities; as overseas offices are usually smaller than domestic ones, responsibility levels are usually higher abroad.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority requires all trainees to experience both litigation and transactional matters. Additionally, some firms have certain seats they require or prefer trainees to try.

And finally...

Use the True Picture to help you decide which firms to target. No matter how easy or hard securing a training contract is for you, you'll want to end up with the right one.
Jargonbuster

We're not massive fans of lawyers’ jargon, but some of the phrases do actually mean something. If you want to brush up on your legalese for an interview, here's a handy guide to sounding like a pro.

- ABS – alternative business structures: newly permitted arrangements for law firms, which allow non-lawyers to have a financial stake in the business.
- Adjudication – the legal process by which an arbiter or judge reviews evidence to come to a decision.
- Agency work – making a court appearance for another firm that can't get to court.
- AIM – a ‘junior’ stock market run by the London Stock Exchange, which allows smaller companies to float stock within a more flexible system.
- Ambulance chasing – a derogatory term for personal injury and other lawyers who chase potential claimants; SRA rules prohibit this kind of activity.
- Antitrust – the US term for competition law.
- Arbitration – a type of dispute resolution where the parties agree to abide by the decision of one or more arbitrators.
- Associate – solicitors not at partner level; sometimes called assistant solicitors.
- Bench – the judge or judges in a courtroom.
- Best friends relationship – a situation where two firms have no organisational or financial ties, but use each other as the first port of call when referring work.
- Billing – putting together sets of all the relevant documents for a transaction.
- Billing target/chargeable hours target – the number of hours lawyers are required to record working for a client; time is usually recorded in six-minute chunks.
- Boutique – a firm (usually a small firm but there can be exceptions) which works only on one area of law.
- Brief – the instructing documents given to a barrister when they are instructed by a solicitor.
- Bundling – compiling bundles of documents for a court case.
- The City – the commercial and financial centre of London; also known as the Square Mile.
- CMC – case management conference.
- Coco – company-commercial department/work.
- Conditional fee arrangements – also called ‘no win no fee’; an arrangement whereby a solicitor acting in a claim agrees only to be paid a fee if they win the case; such payment is usually made by the losing party.
- Contentious matters – legal disputes between parties.
- Conveyancing – the transfer of the ownership of property from one person to another.
- Counsel – a barrister.
- CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility: the practice of companies taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on society; in reality ‘CSR committees’ at firms will run projects where lawyers paint schools, plant trees and clean playgrounds.
- Damages – a sum of money which one person or organisation has to pay to another for not performing a certain duty.
- Data room duty – used to involve supervising visitors to rooms full of important documents, helping them find things and making sure they don’t steal them; with electronic data rooms the job has become more of a desktop exercise.
- Disclosure – making relevant documentation available to the other parties in a dispute.
- Dispute resolution – an umbrella term for litigation, mediation and arbitration.
- Document management – dealing with the more administrative side of deal documentation.
- Due diligence – the thorough investigation of a target company in a deal.
- Equity partner – a partner who receives a contractually agreed share of the firm’s annual profits. A part owner of the firm. The other type of partner is a salaried partner.
- Fee earner – a lawyer or a paralegal who bills time to a firm’s clients. The term doesn’t include lawyers who act in a more supportive role.
- FTSE 100 (pronounced ‘footsie’) – an index of the 100 most valuable companies listed on the London Stock Exchange; the value of these companies is used to give an indication of the health of the UK’s business world.
- Grunt work – administrative (and boring) yet essential tasks including photocopying, bundling, bibling, paginating, scheduling documents, data room duties and proof reading or checking that documents are intact.
- High net worth individuals – rich people; commonly used when referring to private client work.
- Highly leveraged – the practice of having a ratio of few partners to lots of solicitors; leverage is also a term used in finance – the two are not connected.
- Infant approval – court authorisation for a settlement involving a minor.
- In-house lawyer – a solicitor or barrister who is employed by a company or public body rather than a law firm or barristers’ chambers.
• Injunction – a court order requiring a party to do, or to refrain from doing, certain acts.
• IPO – the Initial Public Offering of shares in a company to the public on a stock market; also known as flotation.
• Judicial review – the legal process by which the actions of the government or public bodies can be challenged.
• Junior Lawyers’ Division – a sub-group within the Law Society set up in 2008 to represent student members of the Law Society, trainees and lawyers up to five years’ PQE.
• Law Society – the official representative body of solicitors in England and Wales.
• Legal aid – a government-funded system which pays for legal representation in criminal and some civil cases for individuals who would otherwise be unable to afford it.
• Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act – the 2012 Act of Parliament which brought in the most recent round of (ongoing) reforms and cuts to legal aid. Known as LASPO for short.
• Legal Services Act – this 2007 Act of Parliament deregulates the legal market by allowing non-lawyers to invest in law firms and non-legal businesses to provide legal services.
• Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) – a way of structuring a professional partnership such that no partner is liable to any of the firm’s creditors above and beyond a certain sum.
• Litigation – a method of settling disputes through legal proceedings in court.
• Lockstep – the practice of increasing solicitors’ salaries based purely on seniority.
• M&A – mergers and acquisitions; the buying, selling and combining of companies; often the main focus of firms’ corporate teams.
• Magic circle – the name given to five of the leading London-based law firms; it is generally held to consist of Allen & Overy, Clifford Chance, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, Linklaters, and Slaughter and May.
• Managing partner – the main boss of a law firm, who leads the partnership and/or management committee in running the business and devising its strategy.
• Master (in the High Court) – a judge in the High Court ranking lower than a High Court judge, chiefly responsible for case management. They are called ‘Master’ regardless of whether they are male or female.
• Mediation – a type of dispute resolution where a dispute is resolved with the help of a neutral third party.
• Moot – a mock trial used to train or test advocacy skills.
• Nearshoring – the outsourcing of work to another organisation, usually in a part of the UK where overheads and salary costs are lower.
• Niche practice area – a practice that is specialised and not in a mainstream area.
• Northshoring – nearshoring to the North of England.
• Notary public – a qualified lawyer appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is authorised to authenticate and certify estates, deeds, powers of attorney and other documents, especially for use abroad; the majorities of notaries are also solicitors.
• NQ – a newly qualified solicitor.
• (Offshore) outsourcing – hiring in an external organisation (overseas) to perform a part of a company’s activities.
• Overseas seat – same concept as a seat (see further down the list), except that it’s undertaken in an overseas office.
• Panel – a group of law firms or lawyers chosen for regular consultation by a certain business.
• Paralegal – a non-lawyer, often with some legal training, who assists qualified lawyers on legal matters.
• PFI – Private Finance Initiative; a way of creating ‘public-private partnerships’ (PPPs) by funding public infrastructure projects with private capital.
• PLC – public limited company; a company listed on a stock exchange. Big firms’ clients may be public companies, and one law firm in this guide (Gateley) has now listed publicly too.
• Power of attorney – the legal authority to act on someone else’s behalf.
• PQE – post-qualification experience.
• Pro bono – from the Latin ‘pro bono publico’, meaning ‘for the public good; legal work done without payment as a public service.
• Profits per equity partner (PEP) – the annual profits of a law firm divided by the total number of equity partners in the firm; this statistic is often used to indicate the financial health of a firm, but it can easily be manipulated by altering the number of equity partners.
• PSC – Professional Skills Course; a compulsory course taken during the training contract.
• Public procurement law – regulates the purchasing by public sector bodies of contracts for products, works or services.
• Restructuring exercise (in the context of a law firm) – the reorganisation of a business, usually to make it more efficient or more attractive to clients; often a euphemistic way of talking about staff/lawyer redundancies.
• Rights of audience – the right of a lawyer (either a solicitor or barrister) to appear and conduct proceedings in court.
• Rotation (when referring to seats) – when a trainee moves from one seat onto the next.
• Salaried partner – a partner who receives a salary but has no contractual claim on the firm’s profits; the other type of partner is an equity partner.
• Seat – time spent by a trainee working in a department, usually four or six months.
• Secondment – the practice of ‘lending’ trainees and qualified solicitors to a firm’s client to work in their in-house legal department for a certain period.
• Silo-ing – encouraging people to work in a specific field rather than being generalists; teams working very independently of others within a firm.
• Silver circle – a group of elite English law firms, generally considered to fall just outside the magic circle. This tends to include Ashurst, Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, Herbert Smith Freehills, Macfarlanes and Travers Smith. Some of these firms have expressed their reservations to us about being labelled as members of the ‘silver circle’, so be careful how you use the term.
• SQE – the Solicitors Qualifying Examination; a new two-part ‘superexam’ being introduced in 2020 for all those qualifying as solicitors.
• SRA – Solicitors Regulation Authority; the body that regulates the professional conduct of solicitors in England and Wales.
• Superinjunction – the informal term for an injunction whose existence and details may not be publicly disclosed.
• Swiss Verein – a business structure consisting of a number of independent offices, each of which is independently liable for its own obligations.
• Tesco law – a nickname for the effects of the Legal Services Act.
• TMT – technology, media and telecommunications; an increasingly common area of practice.
• Tort – a breach of duty owed to someone else (a ‘civil wrong’) which leads to injury to a person or their property.
• Training contract – a two-year period of working in legal practice in which someone who has completed their Legal Practice Course is trained by an accredited organisation to become a qualified solicitor.
• Training partner – the partner who oversees the training scheme.
• Tribunal – a specialist judicial body that decides disputes in a particular area of law.
• Vacation scheme – a placement with a law firm designed to familiarise a prospective trainee with a firm and vice versa; sometimes called ‘vac schemes’ or ‘summer placements’, they are usually held during the summer (or more rarely in winter or spring) and can last anywhere between one and three weeks. The vast majority of commercial firms offer vac schemes.
• Verification – the aspect of a deal in which lawyers ensure stated information is accurate.

Learn to distinguish between legal jargon which actually means something and meaningless business guff.
Addleshaw Goddard LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Manchester, Leeds, Scotland
Overseas offices: 6
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 236/624/112
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £40,000 London; £27,000 North; £23,500 Scotland
Qualification salary: £75,000 London; £45,000 North; £42 Scotland

Commercial powerhouse Addleshaw Goddard gives trainees “scope to do complex, high-value work” in a mish-mash of seats.

The Firm
Location, location, location. Kirstie and Phil tell us it’s everything. And Addleshaw Goddard sure knows it, with a national spread of six offices in London, Leeds, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen (it acquired the Scottish offices in 2017 through a merger with HBJ Gateley). Sticking with the theme of British property shows, Addleshaw Goddard has a place in the sun too – or several places rather, with six overseas offices in the Middle East, East Asia, and most recently in Hamburg, which opened in 2019. There are plenty of options if you have grand designs want to escape to another country (enough – Ed.).

“You are pushed to take on challenging work.”

This was the firm of choice for trainees who “wanted somewhere with impressive commercial experience” that could offer them “scope to do complex, high-value work.” The firm acts for a lot of financial institutions, funds, investors, and real estate clients, as well as businesses in the retail, energy, transport and healthcare sectors. All told, the firm holds around 90 Chambers UK rankings to its name. Outside London, AG is a national leader in banking and finance, corporate/M&A, employment, IT, intellectual property, litigation and restructuring. It shines particularly brightly with top regional rankings in the North West and Yorkshire. Nationally, it’s ranked in as many as 26 practices. Go to chambers.com for a full breakdown.

In its English offices, the firm recruits around 45 trainees a year, which are split pretty evenly between London, Manchester and Leeds, with London recruiting a handful more. AG also hires trainees in all of its Scottish offices. “The quality of work is really excellent,” one trainee emphasised, “but it’s not the kind of place where it’s frowned upon if you have to leave the office at 6pm.” That said, “you are pushed to take on challenging work, which sometimes involves long hours.”

The Seats
Trainees do four six-month seats, with no compulsory seats beyond SRA requirements. Seat options vary year to year, but “there are always a few in banking and financial litigation,” as well as litigation, corporate, and real estate. The firm uses a fancy computer algorithm to allocate seats, with trainees ranking their preferences ten to zero. They weren’t quite sure how the algorithm makes its decisions, with one bemused source telling us: “I got my top preference in my first seat, but my next seat was a zero preference.” Sources thought it was mostly fair, but “a lot of people feel it might be better if we chat about what we want” – with a human, we should add.

AG offers secondments to its international offices, and trainees pointed out those who want to do one are likely to get to go, “but you won’t get control on where.” Unlike some firms where trainees have their bags packed and passports at the ready, sources felt that at AG “not everyone wants to do an international secondment.” Clients secondments were much more popular, and more likely – “around half of the trainees have done one.” In addition to local placements for Leeds and Manchester trainees, there were also options to relocate to London for six months.

Seat options: litigation; finance & projects; real estate; corporate & commercial
The firm’s enticingly named **global investigations** seat offers trainees litigious experience. The team deals with alleged money laundering, fraud, bribery and market abuse. Cases are often high-profile in nature and featured in headlines. Adding a sense of drama, AG keeps its clients strictly confidential. To give you a flavour of the work, trainees told us the team had been working on matters connected to the Manchester Arena bombing as well as the Grenfell disaster. While “the context behind the work was fascinating,” the day-to-day work was “heavily administrative” and not quite as thrilling. “There’s a lot of doc review,” trainees said. On the plus side, a dedicated team is on hand to “do the admin heavy-lifting with things like bundling. I don’t think I’ve ever had to photocopy or print a thing.” Trainees said they “also drafted a lot of advice notes” in this seat.

Trainees might sit in **financial litigation**, which acts for big banks like Nationwide and Lloyds. The team recently defended RBS in a £100 million claim brought by a property developer regarding the activities of the bank’s global restructuring group. Trainees got experience with “huge litigations” that were running for as long as a decade. Trainees also reported working on asset finance cases, which might entail “people who’re getting their cars taken off of them.” Trainees felt they were given the “right level of responsibility,” with the team “pushing you to be independent.”

“You’re working on housing developments and large-scale infrastructure.”

AG’s **real estate** department accounts for a big chunk of the firm’s global turnover. It represents real estate investment trusts like British Land, alongside well-known names like Network Rail, Siemens, Asda, and WeWork. AG was recently one of three firms that worked on the £1.6 billion acquisition of commercial assets in the Battersea Power Station redevelopment. In Leeds, the team acted for Channel 4 in connection with its HQ relocation to the Majestic building in Leeds City Centre. The firm also has local authorities clients such as Kirklees Council, which sought the firm’s expertise for the £250 million regeneration of Huddersfield town centre. Like many real estate departments, there are “often a lot of smaller matters like leases, easements, and wayleaves,” which trainees typically run by themselves. They warned “you can be dealing with an awful number of matters all the time—it’s like spinning plates!” On these smaller matters, trainees said they “take complete control of the matter from inception,” and were “drafting documents, negotiating with the other side, and speaking with the client.” Trainees added that there are “opportunities to get involved in larger-scale cases with bigger retailer or landlord clients.” On these matters, “you’re playing more of an ancillary role: document tracking and keeping enquiries up to date.” However, there’s “still scope for getting involved on drafting ancillary docs.”

“The context behind the work was fascinating.”
ened their experience to “a baptism of fire.” Fortunately, the team is “really friendly,” with “very hands-on training.” Trainees added that it’s “a very transactional, contractual seat, where there are small tasks that feed into a bigger picture.”

**Trainee Life**

All of our interviewees were required to work long hours when they encountered tough workloads, “like having to prepare a bundle at 10pm on a Friday night, or being asked to review over 75 contracts in two days for a due diligence report.” Corporate, financial regulation and banking were singled out as being particularly demanding, but sources underlined that “the extra hours and stress definitely get recognised and are genuinely appreciated by the wider teams.” As one said, “there is always plenty of support, whether from your supervisor, a paralegal or a partner in the team – even if they’re just volunteering for tea rounds while waiting for others to finish work for final sign-off.”

“The teams vary quite drastically.”

That said, trainee feedback on supervision and training was mixed. “The teams vary quite drastically and this can hit you hard when moving seats,” a Manchester trainee cautioned. “Trainees quickly learn to be very adaptable to new teams and how to work with different people.” Others found that “no question is ever a stupid question, and you are made to feel like you never have to apologise for getting something wrong.” Sources described “unparalleled supervision” in the banking and finance team, while over in the corporate department, “the partners are really hands-on and give weekly training.” Trainees in London added that the corporate department holds “a weekly meeting where associates can air any issues on their mind with the partners. This creates a nice team culture and the partners are really responsive to any feedback.”

More generally in London, trainees found “partners and senior lawyers are approachable, and you learn a lot via osmosis in an open-plan office.” London trainees are also encouraged to attend the firm’s pro bono clinic in Lambeth one evening a month. One trainee highlighted that a client “sent a really lovely email!” at the end of a matter, but there were some grumbles that the firm doesn’t pay for taxis home before 9pm. “People finish [at the clinic] at different times, so I’ve been walking at night on my own,” one voiced.

When it came to diversity and inclusion at the firm, some thought AG was “proactive” in all facets of D&I, pointing to the number of women partners particularly, which sits above the national average at 28%. Others thought “the firm could do more to hire and retain a diverse workforce” and wanted to see more action from “non-diverse” attorneys. “Most trainees are white and middle class,” observed sources, who found the disparity more noticeable within the senior ranks. Some wanted to see the firm do more to address the numbers of BAME partners specifically. The firm does have an AG BAME Sponsorship Programme which was established with a view to attracting and retaining ethnic minority talent. It is also worth noting that AG makes efforts to support social mobility, taking “extenuating circumstances” into consideration when it reviews applications, and several of the trainees we spoke to came from less privileged backgrounds. AG also funds the LPC for its trainee hires.

“They’re the type you’d want to go to the pub with after work.”

Trainees thought that Addleshaw Goddard “tends to hire friendly, open, supportive people” at all levels. “Even the cleaners are chatting along with everyone.” One source described their colleagues as “normal people.” Meaning? “They’re the type you’d want to go to the pub with after work.” Another agreed “it’s not a stuffy, old-fashioned place. You can crack a joke with the partners and chat to them.” Teams are often spread across offices, but trainees reported partners from other offices visiting every now and then, “so you get to meet people who you work with on a daily basis.” There were regular lunches and drinks on the social side, and occasional away days “for a whole day of networking” with the office. Overall, every one of our survey respondents felt they had joined the right firm, and (almost) everyone was happy with their lot. This year’s qualification process deviated slightly from the normal procedure due to Covid-19 upheaval, but ultimately the firm retained 44 of 50 trainees in 2020.

**AG OGs:**

Several sources had worked at the firm as paralegals before deciding to commit to the training contract route.
Addleshaw Goddard

Milton Gate, 60 Chiswell St, London EC1Y 4AG
Tel: 020 7606 8855  Fax: 020 7606 4390  Email: grad@addleshawgoddard.com
Website: graduates.addleshawgoddard.com

Firm profile
We are a premium international law firm with an exceptional breadth of services. Our reputation for outstanding quality is built upon long-term relationship investment and a deep understanding of client markets. This, together with our high-calibre expertise, straight-talking advice and collaborative team culture, means we are here for our clients, whenever and however they need us; from everyday queries to high-value strategic advice, we are proud of the consistently excellent, relevant and focussed service our people provide.

Main areas of work
We have a broad client portfolio, which is testament to the strength and expertise of our people. It includes financial institutions, public sector bodies, successful businesses and private individuals. We are a leading advisor to FTSE 100 companies and a market leader across: corporate, commercial, finance and project, real estate and litigation business divisions; specialist fields such as private capital; energy, financial services, health and life sciences, real estate, retail and consumer, and transport sectors.

Training opportunities
We are more than just exceptional lawyers here. We attract sparkling people from all backgrounds, who bring their own unique qualities, along with a collaborative approach, professional drive and a commitment to every client’s success. This is just one of the reasons we’re sure you will enjoy working with us.

We require a 2.1 honours degree (or equivalent). But what will really open doors to an outstanding career here is the real you. At Addleshaw Goddard, we’re looking for original minds and collaborative spirits alongside motivation, drive and commercial awareness. We’re constantly delighted by the diverse backgrounds of our best lawyers, and we’re open to law and non-law graduates alike, as well as those looking to change career.

As a trainee, important cases will come your way from the get-go. You will work on everything from multi-million-pound deals to high-profile fraud cases, employment disputes to complex technology contracts. Our success is intrinsically linked to yours, so we’ll always have your back and help you realise your potential.

Training contracts are four seats long, with opportunities to spend time in another of our offices as well as on secondment with clients. During each six-month seat, you will have regular two-way performance reviews with your supervising partner or solicitor. He or she will help you develop the skills you need to deal with the demanding work you will come across every day. As well as learning on the job, you will also have access to high-quality in-house and external training, a buddy scheme in your first seat, and a mentor throughout your training contract and beyond.

Work placements
We offer week-long Easter work placements in Edinburgh and London, and two-week summer work placements in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, London and Manchester. And because everyone is an individual, we make sure each placement is a valuable experience for each individual student.

While you are here, you will get to know the everyday life of an Addleshaw Goddard trainee. You will be allocated a department to sit in and, if you are part of the summer scheme, will swap into a new department in your second week. You will be supervised by an experienced solicitor, who will welcome you to the department and allocate work. A trainee buddy will be on hand to help throughout your placement.

This is a scheme as unique as you are. As well as informative sessions, group exercises, assessed work and plenty of time at your desk, you will attend social events with a range of people across the office. It’s a real chance to get to know our people and our culture. We offer training contracts to successful placement scheme students, so we’d encourage you to apply.
Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld

The facts
- Location: London
- Overseas offices: 19
- UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 48/74/12
- Seats: 4x6 months
- First-year salary: £50,000
- Qualification salary: $190,000

Looking for an entrepreneurial environment, small trainee intake and a mouth-watering NQ salary? If so, the London base of this US outfit is likely to comfort even the most Akin of hearts.

The Firm
Seventy-five years ago in Dallas, two down-on-their-luck lawyers pooled what was left of their cash in a post WWII economy and founded a law firm. That firm today has a weighty 900 lawyers across 21 locations worldwide and generates a global revenue of $1.14 billion. How's this for a decent return on investment? It may be no surprise that Akin Gump is considered a world leader in investment funds – alongside international trade and restructuring/insolvency, according to Chambers Global.

Chambers UK recognises Akin Gump’s London office in nine practice areas, and is a market leader in restructuring and insolvency. Other areas of strength in the UK include financial litigation, tax, hedge funds and private equity, construction arbitration, and true to its Texan roots, the London team sits high in the rankings for oil and gas work. Corporate partner Vance Chapman has it on the DL: “The London office had its best ever year in 2019. The PE group expanded significantly. The transactional capabilities of the office, it’s a different beast to what it was five years ago.” The office has grown recently by hiring from US firms O’Melveny, White & Case, Vinson & Elkins and Orrick.

The Seats
In financial restructuring the work is “very international, coordinating with different offices and teams.” The firm generally represents creditors, so trainees can expect to be dealing with big funds, banks and household names on transnational deals across jurisdictions. The department recently advised Oceanwood and other investors on a restructuring of aggregate debt amounting to around $1 billion for Norwegian paper and pulp company Norse Skog. On tasks and responsibilities, trainees told us, “when I showed I could handle it, I was given more. It’s a ‘the more you put in, the more you get out’ situation.” Tasks can range from liaising with local counsel teams, recording and collating responses, documents and research tasks. Interviewees were impressed with the department’s structure, commenting: “The two partners are women. It’s very encouraging to see such strong female leadership.”

“It’s very encouraging to see such strong female leadership.”

Over in litigation, there really isn’t any room for error and there is a great deal of responsibility,” said Spiderman. “I had to analyse the argument, go through and read a lot of documents and try to understand what was going on. There will be a bit of bundling, but I didn’t have to do that much, mostly research tasks.” Another source informed us: “I got to attend an arbitration which was pretty cool. You get to be around some pretty superior people. It’s quite glamorous.” Due to the nature of the work, you could be working on a civil case relating to oil and gas, a fraud dispute in construction, you name it. “You are expected to take the lead without your supervisor necessarily telling you.” A recent chunky matter saw the firm representing Renova Industries in a $1 billion litigation relating to the ownership of

Seat options: corporate/M&A; financial restructuring; disputes; international trade; finance; investment management; energy; EU/UK competition; financial services regulatory; tax
a private energy company in Russia that included fraud claims and interlocutory applications.

The corporate department has "literally everything going on, especially having recently expanded," and offers a general corporate seat and a seat in oil and gas. The work could be run-of-the-mill M&A transactions or auction processes, joint ventures or strategic alliances, often with cross-border elements. One recent matter saw Akin Gump representing Vitol in its acquisition of an ownership interest in Petrobras Oil and Gas, with the work involving Nigeria and Brazil. One source told us: "You interact a lot with teams outside of corporate," citing interactions with the firm’s US securities arm and its Russian-qualified desk based in Moscow. One source reported: "I did some crossover work in corporate with the restructuring team. The corporate team is so big, so they help on a lot of other deals.”

"You get to be around some pretty superior people. It’s quite glamorous.”

A seat in tax will see you getting right down to the nitty gritty including "lots of research tasks on technical issues. All the work was international, advising on the UK tax aspects of a huge deal involving a huge range of jurisdictions." The department works closely with finance departments representing financial institutions and standalone clients. Acting as independent international legal counsel for Agrokor, a corporate group based in the Balkans, Akin Gump recently worked on a $6 billion restructuring of the group's debt. Sources told us they really enjoyed their time in tax, with one commenting: "They made a conscious effort to get me involved and I got to work with everyone individually.”

Seats are allocated in a relatively informal process: "If they can accommodate, they will, provided there’s need in that department, and there isn’t someone in the year above who wants to try before qualifying.” The qualification process is transparent: "Once the trainees have expressed a preference there will be a discussion. You’ll be told by the partners and graduate recruitment but it’s a mutual process," unless there’s competition for a seat, where there may be an interview: "You’re not competing with 60 or 70 trainees, so you know what everyone wants and if there’s popular demand. It allows you to be strategic.” The appraisal system includes mid and end-of-seat reviews, as well as a monthly catch-up. Commentators agreed the process was fair and thorough, and one said: “I think it’s very nurturing.”

Trainee Life

Hours vary from team to team, but a good day could be 9.15am to 7/7.30pm (rumour has it you could even get out at 6 if it’s really quiet). But as with most top firms dealing with overseas transactions, adapting to other time zones is common, and on closings you might find yourself staying till 1 or 2am. Sources are realistic, though, and tell us: “Any trainee would be naive to go into a City law firm to expect to do 9 to 5, but it’s definitely not as bad as I was anticipating.” Most teams are flexible on late starts after late nights and often provide dinner and taxi home. The collegiate vibes are there, as noted by an interviewee: “Because the teams are smaller, the people you’re working with know when you’ve got a lot on, so people will be supportive.” It’s fair to say that trainees don’t stress too much about the pay, with NQs starting on $190,000 a year – the top market rate in the US. Vance Chapman offered some useful insight into what makes a successful trainee: “Partners stay heavily involved with cases, which is the US model. As a result of that, you need to be more self-starting and entrepreneurial, and have the robustness to take the knocks as you go up the learning curve.”

“A very intellectual firm.”

Akin provides regular training sessions, with “one or two associates or counsel giving a talk on executing deeds or whatever, drafting, skill sessions, legal sessions.” Trainees have had trainings from “an associate from corporate on how to run a closing” and “one senior finance partner who gave an introduction to debt.” Something that shouldn’t be overlooked is the plentiful pro bono work, which mirrors Akin Gump’s considerable pro bono achievements in the US. “Pro bono hours count towards billable hours. It is really heavily encouraged and offers great opportunities to work with other people in the firm.”

Sources describe Akin Gump as “a very intellectual firm,” with one adding that partners are “pretty chill, some are surprisingly chill and get involved and go for drinks. They’re not stiff, if you know what I mean.” There is an effort to encourage more socialising, with a new open-plan cafeteria, pool table and foosball. Let’s not forget the “two sleeping pods with kitchens and couches and shower facilities. The reception has marble floors and a beautiful view.” The firm lays on Christmas and summer parties, with reports of partners even having a bash at karaoke. “The Christmas party this year was really swish, held in the church in Spitalfields. I wouldn’t say people are raging drunk or going wild, but it is informal.”
On the firm’s culture, Vance Chapman noted: “We’re a successful and profitable firm but we try not to lose touch with that human spirit that has been a part of our history from the beginning.” There are plenty of diversity initiatives in place, with an LGBTQI group, a wellness programme, a women’s initiative and talks on topics ranging from unconscious bias to neurodiversity. A source told us: “I feel like they’re acknowledging these issues are out there and are making an effort to tackle them in the workplace.”

Trainees are also offered scheduled sessions with a psychologist, in which they can talk about work or any other issues.

And finally...

A trainee tip: “They don’t expect you to bring every bit of legal knowledge with you, it’s soft skills and personal skills that will serve you best.”
Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld

Ten Bishops Square, Eighth Floor, London, E1 6EG
Tel: 020 7012 9600 Fax: 020 7012 9601
Email: graduaterecruitment@akingump.com
Website: www.akingump.com/uk-students

Firm profile
Akin Gump’s London office is the main hub for the firm’s international offices, practising at the top of its markets. The firm’s clients range from corporations and financial institutions to foreign governments and individuals.

Main areas of work
Market leading practices including: financial restructuring, corporate/M&A and equity capital markets, debt finance (including debt capital markets and securitisation), energy, project finance, financial services regulatory, disputes (including international arbitration and civil fraud), investment funds (hedge, private equity, real estate and infrastructure), EU competition, international trade and tax.

An important part of Akin Gump’s culture is its commitment to pro bono. Trainees are encouraged to take part and are represented on local and firm-wide pro bono committees, including a unique scholarship programme. The firm has an inclusive working culture and actively supports a broad diversity strategy for its continued success.

Training opportunities
By focusing on a smaller intake we maintain flexibility and seek to grow through our junior lawyer retention. You will have the choice of sitting within the financial restructuring, corporate/M&A, energy, finance, financial regulatory, funds/investment management, litigation/arbitration, international trade/EU competition or tax practice areas. Seats can be tailored to three or six month durations across the two year training programme to provide a breadth of experience.

Vacation scheme
Akin Gump’s two week summer vacation scheme provides an excellent opportunity to gain a first-hand understanding of the day-to-day work of trainees in an international law firm. Through training sessions, mentoring and social activities, you will get to know our firm. Through working side by side with partners and associates on live deals, you will get to know our practices and clients.

We welcome applications from law students in their penultimate year of study, non-law students in their final year and graduates looking to commence a training path in two years’ time. Participants are offered a training contract interview at the end of the programme.

Participants are paid at the London Living Wage.

Other benefits
Health insurance, income protection insurance, life insurance, travel insurance, dental insurance, pension, season ticket loan, annual eye exam, moneygym, employee assistance programme, onsite wellbeing adviser, fitness reimbursement programme.
Allen & Overy LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Belfast
Overseas offices: 27
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 190/545/162
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats
First-year salary: £46,500
Qualification salary: £90,000 (including bonuses)

A&O attracts intellectually curious candidates with its bigwig banking practice and prestigious global brand.

The Firm
“I wanted to work for the best possible firm and on the biggest deals, which narrowed down my choice. Of course, the magic circle branding was important as it can open many doors.” Indeed, who needs ‘alohomora’ when you have a firm like Allen & Overy on your CV? However, getting in in the first instance isn’t as easy as waving a wand: A&O’s ranks are filled to the brim with overachievers, albeit approachable ones. To distinguish it from its magic circle peers, interviewees said: “We’re known as the friendly magic circle firm! People here are very ambitious and like to work hard but it’s a fun environment to work hard in – it pushes you further.”

“A&O felt like home from the first interaction and I haven’t regretted my choice at all.”

A&O bags more top-tier Chambers UK rankings than we can list here, and the firm’s achievements are even less concise in Chambers Global, in which the firm is identified as a worldwide leader in banking and finance, projects and energy, capital markets and dispute resolution. Additional draws for trainees included the large trainee intake “ensuring an all-rounder training contract,” the salary (what a surprise) and its international network with a whopping 44 offices. “A&O felt like home from the first interaction and I haven’t regretted my choice at all,” confirmed one junior. In 2020, the firm reported a 5% increase in revenue with figures rising to £1.62 billion, weathering the initial storm of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Seats
The firm’s standout banking department is separated into seven different areas: corporate lending and real estate finance (B1), structured and asset finance (B2), leveraged finance (B3), restructuring (B4), projects, energy and infrastructure (B5), regulatory (B6), and funds and asset management (B7). Cross-border work is commonplace in all these seats, as are matters with enormous value attached: the team recently advised the mandated lead arrangers on LVMH’s €15 billion loan financing of the public bid for Tiffany & Co. We heard “banking departments are a great first seat if you can get one. They’re great for building core – if not strictly legal – skills like managing a conditions precedent checklist, signing and dating hundreds of documents, bibles, originals and even occasional drafting of ancillary docs.” At the time of our calls, a majority of those we spoke with had done a stint in one of the banking departments in their first seat.

Seat options: banking; corporate; international capital markets; litigation; real estate; employee & benefits; tax
Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative &amp; Public Law</th>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asset Finance</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking &amp; Finance</td>
<td>Intellectual Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking Litigation</td>
<td>International Arbitration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Markets</td>
<td>Investment Funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodities</td>
<td>Life Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition/European Law</td>
<td>Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Outsourcing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/M&amp;A</td>
<td>Pensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Protection</td>
<td>Private Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Share Schemes &amp; Incentives</td>
<td>Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Public International Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy &amp; Natural Resources</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Real Estate Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Crime</td>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>Restructuring/Insolvency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>Social Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Banking departments are a great first seat if you can get one.”

Project finance (B5) was a particularly popular banking choice. It splits between “those working on the project finance side, then around a quarter of the team deals strictly with the project development. Trainees can work on a mix of matters.” The team advised the Office of the Quartet, UN, on the structuring of the Gas for Gaza project – a gas pipeline constructed from Israel to Gaza to serve as a solution to the ongoing energy and humanitarian crisis in Gaza. “The project contract and development side is a lot more technical and so as a trainee you’re there to support the team with day-to-day research and drafting documents they need help with.” Trainees on the finance side of the team would carry out “a lot of deal management. We’d manage the conditions precedent checklist, communicate with agents and borrowers, liaise with the local counsel and handle the drafting and re-drafting of various security docs.” Over in structured and asset finance (B2), “around 70% of work is surrounding aeroplanes and the other 30% is shipping.” The team advised the Vroon Group, an international shipping company, on its €1.5 billion restructuring of its 22 bilateral financing agreements. “It’s very similar to corporate lending and real estate finance when it comes to the tasks. There’s a lot of conditions precedent checklists and drafting documents,” one trainee reflected.

Corporate follows a similar subgroup structure to the banking team – we spoke with trainees who sat in commercial corporate (C2), private and public M&A (C4) and energy & infrastructure corporate (C8). There’s a greater “variation of deals” than in banking, and sources reckoned “you have to think more rather than always whipping out a precedent.” The department handles complex M&A deals with a heavy finance component. The team continues to advise Greensill Capital, a provider of capital finance, on its $800 million investment from the SoftBank Vision Fund, valuing Greensill at $3.5 billion. The team also advised Marks & Spencer on its 50/50 joint venture with Ocado Group; and advised Asahi on its $11 billion acquisition of Carlton & United Breweries. Sources in private and public M&A stated they “cannot sing the praises of this group enough. We’re led by A&O’s most senior female partner and we can see a lot of interesting deals.” In these kinds of matters, trainee responsibilities weren’t quite as interesting, with due diligence and managing CP checklists regularly on the cards. Corporate commercial (C2) is split into “half advisory and half transactional elements.” The team advises on commercial issues such as outsourcing contracts, software licensing, IP, marketing, online Ts&Cs, and joint venture agreements. “We handle bespoke contracts relating to a bunch of sectors such as aerospace or agriculture,” said one trainee. The group also advises on non-contractual issues like data protection, freedom of information, and document retention policies.

A&O’s ICM practice houses securitisation, debt and equity capital markets, general securities, and derivatives and structured finance. Some trainees had also sat with the “smallest team in ICM” – the corporate trustee and agency team. The securitisation team recently advised NatWest Bank and NatWest Markets on a synthetic securitisation of £1.1 billion in loans to the sustainable energy market in the UK. Another matter saw the team advise J.P. Morgan, Banca IMI and others on a €1.7 billion issue of four series of project bonds. “There’s definitely a better deal flow in ICM,” a source said. “I’ve worked on around 15 to 20 deals compared to when I was in projects (B5) where I only worked on three big deals.” Another trainee praised the “good level of responsibility in the seat. Trainees can get a first stab at drafting, work on prospectuses, agency agreements, and the signing and closing agenda. It’s a great seat to build up your confidence in drafting as each transaction consists of around five to six documents.”

“We get in on the juicy and fun details.”

Over in litigation, options include banking and finance investigations, corporate and commercial litigation, employment, IP and international arbitration. On the arbitration side, one trainee pointed out how the team “handles the advocacy itself since the partners are QCs, so we get in on the juicy and fun details.” In a recent investor-state arbitration, the team represented the Kingdom of Morocco in a settlement of investment dispute (ICSID) claim brought by an Italian construction company, Impresa Pizzarotti & CSpA, regarding the construction of a motorway tunnel under the old town of Rabat. A general litigation matter saw the team acting for Rangers Football Club in mer-
chandise manufacturing and sale disputes surfacing out of its commercial relationship with SDI Retail Services (a part of Sports Direct). “There’s a lot of legal research to do, which is pretty much the main role. There is some drafting but it’s more restricted in contentious seats,” one trainee explained. IP litigation is “split into hard IP patent work and soft IP” consisting of brand designing, copyright and trade marks. Some work was more repetitive in nature like “drafting another report on a type of screw,” but source also flagged “nuggets of interesting work to get involved in. Since we’re part of the litigation team, we get to sit with the barristers and help build strategy.” The firm encourages trainees to write articles on current issues and present case law updates to the rest of the department. “We also get involved in the business development side since A&O’s IP team, although ranked, is less well known.”

Trainee Life
Trainees don’t necessarily have to do a full seat in litigation – they can also gain their contentious experience through 40 hours of pro bono. Sources homed in on the pro bono efforts taking place in light of the current affairs at the time of our calls: “We’ve been handling a lot of Covid-related matters with NGOs and some criminal justice work. We’ve also been working with Allen & Overy’s US offices in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, to provide legal advice to protestors.” Another regular pro bono haunt saw trainees give advice at legal clinics such as Battersea. Most sources picked up pro bono work regardless because the 40 hours are a requirement before going on secondment in the fourth seat. Common secondment destinations include Tokyo, Singapore, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Milan and New York.

We heard “there’s no generic line when it comes to the hours – you’re there for as long as the work needs to be done.” For kinder seats, trainees would be looking at regular 9am starts and 7–7.30pm finishes. Other seats weren’t quite as consistent; the transactional teams “have the reputation for the worst hours.” Others noticed that “banking is more sustained busyness, whereas corporate seems to have highs and lows. You can leave at 6pm for a couple of weeks and then be leaving at 6am the week after.” One source admitted “the sacrifices that you need to make in your personal life in order to maximise your opportunities can be obscene,” but this may be a reflection of the high expectations trainees have of themselves as much as external pressures.

Another area where experiences differed was supervisors. Most juniors were full of praises – “all of the associates and seniors that you work for are incredibly switched on, so you are expected to be at the top of your game and you are always pushed intellectually.” On the other hand, some sources suggested the firm could do more to standardise the level of supervision across seats: “Supervisors whose trainees leave [their seat] after an unsatisfactory experience are just given trainees again in the next round, which I cannot understand.” The firm assures us that high-quality training and supervision is of paramount importance: supervisors all attend various training programmes (which incorporate trainee feedback), and new supervisors in particular are given training at the start of a seat rotation. Our interviewees found that during the 2020 lockdown period they were able to build strong connections with their supervisors, most of whom would “schedule a quick call every morning to make sure everything is okay and go through the agenda for the day.”

“Even in the two years I’ve worked here, I’ve seen marked improvements on all fronts.” On the diversity front, trainees felt “the firm could be better in terms of ethnic minorities, but it is addressing that – it’s not going to happen overnight.” As if the firm read this trainee’s mind, A&O recently announced a new set of ethnicity targets for 2025. The firm is aiming for 35% ethnic minority representation for its trainees, 25% for its lawyers and staff, and 15% for partnership. “Even in the two years I’ve worked here, I’ve seen marked improvements on all fronts,” an insider concluded. “It is clear to me these are all strategic priorities for the firm in the months and years ahead.”

Come qualification, trainees bid for the department of their choice around “two months into the final seat. You can rank as many seats as you like.” Sources suggested keeping an open dialogue with the partners and associates of your preferred team – “have chats with them, go out for coffee and just make them aware of your intentions. It’s pretty transparent so the end result doesn’t come as a shock.” Although initial retention rates tend to be steady, one interviewee reckoned that further down the line “the hours aren’t sustainable. Not everyone sticks it out for more than a couple of years post-qualification.” In 2020, 68 of 78 qualifiers were kept on.

Look after the pennies...
In an attempt to curb the impact of Covid-19, A&O has cut its NQ salary to £90,000, pressing pause on the pay war of the past few years along with most of its magic circle counterparts.
The True Picture

Arnold & Porter

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 14
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 17/21/5
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £46,000
Qualification salary: £90,000

Hailing from Washington DC’s regulatory sphere, A&P offers its select group of London trainees a highly regarded hub for life sciences and much more.

The Firm
Size, international prestige and a strong reputation for life sciences expertise were the three big draws for Arnold & Porter trainees in this year’s crop of interviews. Our inside sources sought smaller dimensions in London and agreed that “being one of a hundred trainees in a year group wasn’t an attractive option.” One explained: “I wanted somewhere where I could form personal connections with people in the firm - people who would be personally interested in my training and career progression.” With just two or three trainees recruited each year, sources felt this was more of a possibility. Trainees also singled out A&P’s “stellar reputation in the US and on the international stage.” In London, sources highlighted that “we are one of the smaller outfits in the City,” but made it clear that a more petite size did not translate into tiddly matters: “We are tackling the same quality of work as our larger competitors and we’re often sitting opposite magic circle firms.”

“The chance to work in a specialist sector, rather than being a generalist, was an exciting prospect to me.”

An inspection of the firm’s Chambers UK rankings supports these assertions. Top rankings in the life sciences sector confirm A&P’s premier standing in the regulatory, product liability and defendant fields of law. “The chance to work in a specialist sector, rather than being a generalist, was an exciting prospect to me,” one source enthused, adding that “working with leaders in the industry gives you great exposure as a trainee.” Another told us: “I was interested in knowing about the laws and mechanisms behind things like clinical trials and how drugs reach the market – the laws are all very interesting and complex!”

Sources also highlighted that the academic makeup of the firm is “very diverse,” and includes associates with technical backgrounds and “specialist pharma partners for whom law is a second career.” However, interviewees were keen to stress that a background in life sciences “is absolutely not a prerequisite for trainees.” Indeed, none of the firm’s trainees at the time of writing had such a background. Moreover, Chambers UK also bestows A&P with rankings in areas such as IP; financial crime; competition law; and commercial and corporate litigation which, between them, also attract cases in sectors beyond the firm’s life sciences specialism.

With such a small trainee cohort, the assignment process for seats is very informal, though it requires some effort from trainees. Depending on business needs, trainees have a choice of seats they can express an interest in. They’re encouraged to be proactive and approach the departments they’d like to join and secure the seat that they want for upcoming rotations. “It’s not a difficult conversation to have,” one source remarked. “It’s usually just a case of sending an email requesting to move there and then popping down to the department for an informal chat. There’s no real competition for seats, so nobody is ever turned down.” The training principal is also on hand to assist with seat selection and overall, sources were pleased “to have the autonomy to pursue what you’re interested in.”

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get hired at Arnold & Porter

Seat options: corporate & securities; intellectual property; life sciences; competition; white collar crime; complex litigation; antitrust
The Seats

A&P’s life sciences know-how covers all regulatory and litigious elements tied to medicinal products and medical devices. The firm’s lawyers have handled many of the major product liability actions that have been brought in the UK. Recently, the firm advised one of the world’s largest cannabis companies on the regulatory, commercial and advertising elements surrounding the proposed launch of a new CBD product in the UK; advised Bayer during an appeal at the judicial review stage, which challenged a decision by several Clinical Commissioning Groups in Northern England to preferentially offer an ‘off label’ eye condition medicine as opposed to a costlier licensed product; and also advised the same client on a product liability matter concerning a public inquiry into the supply of blood products between the 1970s and 1990s.

Qualified associates are more likely to go on client secondments, but these opportunities do occasionally come up for trainees. Recently, two trainees spent about four months with a pharmaceutical company client. “It’s great to see how the in-house team takes advice from private practice,” one trainee explained, adding that they’d done “a lot of reviewing internal agreements, conducting research into drug funding and conducting website reviews to ensure they comply with life sciences and data protection regulations.”

“Working on both the transactional and litigation side can be challenging but fun.”

As a trainee put it, “competition is one of the firm’s more prominent practice areas and it covers contentious and non-contentious matters. I was worried that I would be exclusively churning out merger review cases but that hasn’t been my experience at all.” The team recently obtained clearance from the European Commission on behalf of Monsanto (a global agrochemical company) to allow its merger with life sciences giant Bayer. Other clients include Novartis, Philip Morris International and Bloomberg. “Working on both the transactional and litigation side can be challenging but fun,” one source told us, who was kept busy on everything from “gathering merger control analysis” and research to conducting doc review and drafting client reports.

Mid-market M&A, private equity and corporate governance work is all on offer in A&P’s corporate seat. The department also houses a single employment partner who offers work to trainees too. “We work with a mix of industries and clients, including tech companies and private equity houses. We’ve also increased our activity in the cannabis sector too,” one source pointed out. Of late, the team has advised US client Omega Healthcare Investors on its acquisition of a significant interest in a real estate joint venture consisting of 67 care homes in the UK; they also acted for VPN business Buffered during its sale to Mudhook Marketing. “Updating company filings often falls on trainees’ shoulders,” sources explained. However, we also heard of more substantive responsibilities that included drafting letters and articles of association, as well as “conducting research into areas such as directors’ obligations and the liabilities they may face.”

Like corporate, the IP and commercial team’s scope extends beyond life sciences. “I was doing some copyright and trade mark infringement cases that weren’t in the life sciences sector,” one source reported. On the commercial side of things, trainees cut their teeth by conducting research, plus reviewing and drafting agreements. The work can be highly technical, “but once you’ve read around the topic and got to grips with the terminology, it tends to be fine,” this seasoned trainee assured us.

Trainee Life

Trainees were keen to highlight “a real sense of community” at the firm. One elaborated: “Most people (if not everyone) have been very approachable. And when I say approachable, I don’t just mean they will speak with you; they are willing to go the extra mile to hear you out and consider your opinion.” The interviewee concluded that this atmosphere made “life easier, as you don’t feel like you have to walk on eggshells or worry about your junior status.” Some of our sources did feel that the office’s layout (A&P is spread over four floors) may have inhibited some cross-department socialising. However, they also pointed to the office-wide Christmas and summer parties, networking events and pro bono work as good opportunities to interact with lawyers across departments. “All fee earners are encouraged to get involved in pro bono,” one trainee told us. “It has allowed me to develop my skill set as a lawyer. For example, representing children on immigration cases has required me to be much more personable, giving my training contract a different dynamic.”

“You might have to work a weekend here and there, but it doesn’t feel like anyone’s forcing you to work long hours.”

Pro bono tends to be more of a fixture of US law firms, so we wondered what other US qualities came to the fore with A&P’s training contract. Long hours are a US firm stereotype, but our interviewees agreed that there wasn’t an “aggressive approach” to clocking all hours under the sun (and moon). “In a busy season I would be expected to work longer, and you might have to work a weekend here...
and there, but it doesn’t feel like anyone’s forcing you to work long hours.” Indeed, most felt the average day ran from 9.30am to 7pm, with busier periods cropping up in any given month. On the more severe side, one source explained that “there was a busy week before Christmas where I was finishing between midnight and 2am before getting in again for 9am. But that only lasted for four days over a six-month period.”

Come qualification time, departments make an announcement if they’re looking to take on NQ associates and interested trainees make their applications. From here, the process is led by departments. Candidates might be asked to sit down for an interview or assessment, but they might be able to go without this final formality if they’ve done a seat in the department they’re applying to. In 2020, the firm kept on all four of its qualifying trainees.

And finally...

The office may have “amazing views” but trainees were pained to point out that “we don’t have a Nespresso machine and the biscuits aren’t great either.” But if that’s the worst that can be said about a firm, you know you’re going to get a pretty good deal overall.
Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer (UK) LLP

Tower 42, 25 Old Broad Street, London, EC2N 1HQ
Tel: 020 7786 6100
Email: london.graduate.recruitment@arnoldporter.com
Website: www.arnoldporter.com

Firm profile
Arnold & Porter is a US headquartered firm with a deserved reputation for its quality of service and expertise in handling the most complex legal and business problems, which require innovative and practical solutions.

Main areas of work
Arnold & Porter’s London lawyers advise on a full range of regulatory, transactional and litigation matters, with a particular focus on pharmaceuticals and medical device regulation and litigation, intellectual property and technology transactions and litigation, telecommunications, internet and media and technology, employment, competition and trade regulation, international arbitration, white collar crime UK enforcement and dispute resolution, corporate and securities, bankruptcy, finance, investment management and product liability advice and commercial litigation. Providing clients with an excellent service is Arnold & Porter’s number one priority, and the firm’s lawyers need to be commercially minded, approachable and able to work with clients as part of a team on complex and often high-profile legal issues.

Training opportunities
The firm looks for talented law and non-law graduates from all backgrounds who share the firm’s commitment to excellence, and want to be part of the continued growth of its London office. Candidates need to demonstrate a consistently high academic background; the firm looks for well-rounded individuals who can demonstrate their participation in a range of extra-curricular activities and achievements. Four six-month seats: life sciences and healthcare regulatory, IP, corporate and securities, finance, competition, international arbitration or white collar crime. The firm encourages individuals to work across specialisms and emphasises teamwork, so trainees may find that whilst they are working in one group, they undertake work in a variety of different areas throughout the firm. Trainees will be expected to work on several matters at once, and assume responsibility at an early stage.

For more information please go to the Careers section on the website and select London Trainees.

Vacation schemes
The firm takes around ten summer vacation students each recruiting year. Whether you are a law or non-law student, the firm will introduce you to life in a busy City law firm. You will spend two weeks working on a variety of projects and workshops with partners and associates throughout the London office. Apply via the firm’s website by 8th March 2021.

Other benefits
Healthy incentive bonus, Christmas bonus, private health insurance, private dental insurance, life assurance, season ticket loan.

University law careers fairs 2020
Oxford, Cambridge, UCL, City, University of London, Manchester.
Ashfords LLP

The facts
Locations: Bristol, Exeter, London, Plymouth, Taunton, Tiverton
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 71/129/13
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: Exeter £28,000; Bristol £29,000
Qualification salary: Exeter £42,000; Bristol £47,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired by Ashfords
More on the firm’s social housing work
The Exeter Young Business Club

Ashfords has built a regional empire in the South West and now has its sights set on a more rounded national profile—an enticing prospect for trainees who want high-quality work and more balance in their lives.

The Firm
“I was looking for a firm that was focused on the South West but not a firm where I would have to compromise on quality of work. In that respect, Ashfords was the perfect choice,” one satisfied source told us when recalling their reasons for picking this firm. While most of Ashfords’ six offices are indeed in the South West, it does have a small London base and markets itself as a national outfit. Training principal Kerry Morgan-Gould tells us that pre-Covid-19, Ashfords was looking to launch a new office somewhere along the M4 corridor to boost this national image: “We do a lot of national work and would like to branch out to join up our South West bases and our London office. It’d significantly alter the perception of the firm, so it’s a key part of our overall strategy.” (These plans, understandably, have been paused in light of Covid-19.) On that topic of expansion, one insider observed that “it’s common for firms that are on the cusp of being national to emphasise how corporate they are while maintaining a good work/life balance. But Ashfords genuinely does have a good balance. It’s not just a marketing ploy.”

Work-wise, Ashfords splits its services into business and personal areas, making it an ideal destination for those who want to work for corporates and/or individuals. The firm picks up Chambers UK rankings for its local government, venture capital investment, personal insolvency and (if you’re looking for something niche) equestrian work. Homing in on the South West, Ashfords’ know-how is mostly rewarded with high-level rankings in several areas: real estate is a real strength, with nods going to various related strands like planning, social housing and property litigation, while other highlights include banking & finance, corporate/M&A, employment and IP.

Trainees choose between a South West contract or a Bristol contract. Bristolians tend to stay put for all four seats, while South West trainees primarily reside in the Exeter HQ but can also spend time in Plymouth, Taunton and Tiverton. The firm doesn’t recruit trainees into the London office directly but might offer up a seat there if there is a business need for it. When it comes to seat allocation, the process starts off quite informally: “We find our own opportunities by talking to department heads – it’s down to you to make that happen.” Department heads then feed these preferences back to HR, who put together an available seat list for trainees to confirm their choice. The final result was a mixed bag for our sources with some getting their first choice and some ending up a tad disappointed: “HR doesn’t always align with the conversations that you’ve had with partners.” The firm told us that it listens to all parties in the allocation process and assigns seats with both business need and the career development of trainees in mind.

The Seats
Real estate is the firm’s biggest department and many trainees end up sitting here. The department covers dev-

Seat options: real estate; property litigation; planning; construction & infrastructure; restructuring & insolvency; corporate; commercial; commercial litigation; employment; trusts & estates; family
development, social housing, residential, landlord and tenant, and commercial property work. The Exeter office has a niche in energy sector work, which covers projects such as solar and wind farms, as well as recycling plants. Bristol has a penchant for franchise work – one of their main clients, Subway, can “keep trainees occupied for their whole seat!” Commercial work can involve helping property developers “on the whole process from land acquisition to the sale of individual plots.” The team recently helped construction company Unitbuild as it purchased a site in Plymouth to build a new business park. Read about the firm’s social housing work online.

The size of the real estate team “gives property litigation the scope to generate work off of those clients if they run into disputes.” This team works with local authorities on landlord and tenant matters such as evictions; it also works with property investors, portfolios and chains, as well as “the regular ‘Joe Bloggs’ who’s had a residential bust-up with their neighbour.” Of late, the group represented CDS (Superstores International) during a dispute with its landlord over asbestos found on its commercial premises in the North West. Trainees here liked that they’re “not just dealing with the same thing again and again. It’s constantly fresh and different.” Typical tasks included drafting break notices and writing letters prompting a response from the other side or different parties. “Most of the time, it never escalates to court,” said sources, but when it does, trainees can find themselves taking notes, preparing bundles and keeping in contact with the barrister on the case.

“It’s constantly fresh and different.”

The corporate department works on M&A deals but also handles corporate advisory matters across the country. In Bristol, there’s a growing expertise in the fintech space. Showcasing some of the firm’s cross-border capabilities (boosted by its membership of the ADVOC network of international firms), Ashfords’ corporate lawyers recently advised beauty product maker Swallowfield on the sale of its manufacturing business to a Canadian development group for £35 million. “In terms of the work that I was doing at first, it was baby steps,” noted one source, but we were told that responsibility soon comes knocking once trainees find their feet: “I had an important call from a client with ten minutes’ notice. From that point, I ended up managing my own files.”

Restructuring and insolvency is a small department that’s spread across the London, Bristol and Exeter offices. Matters here span debt recoveries, appointments of administrators and liquidators, and “investigations into letters of claim against previous company directors.” As there “aren’t masses of firms covering this work in the South West, we get high-value and interesting matters,” an insider reported gladly. On its list of recent assignments, lawyers here represented CVR Global, which acted as the liquidators of Implement Consulting in a matter worth £3.3 million. On the personal legal services side, high net worth individuals also call upon the group for its bankruptcy expertise. This is a “niche area for us and there’s lots to learn,” enthused one source. Among the common tasks for trainees are writing letters, drafting agreements and running timelines.

Trainee Life

“I am basically my supervisor’s shadow,” joked one source. Trainees were huge fans of their supervisors, who have reportedly mastered that “perfect balance of being hands-on while giving you independence. They’ll give you something and say, ‘Have ten minutes, then we’ll come back and talk about it.’” Partners were also described as being good at placating trainees’ worries: “They say that there’s no such thing as a stupid question and they’re always willing to talk to you about any ideas you’ve had.”

This approach was felt to foster a culture of kindness, with this trainee flagging that “we’re told to help people any way and at any time we can! It really makes us feel like a big team.” The Exeter HQ was highlighted as having “a great family environment” aided by its open-plan layout. The office also has a canteen and a gym, where the firm hosted a rowing challenge for Sports Relief (“it was fun to go and watch people get sweaty!” chortled one amused trainee). Bristolians, meanwhile, wanted to make it clear that “we’re known as the cool office. We’re quite laid back and pretty open. We do lots of socials and stuff – it’s chill.” Firmwide, we heard of departmental days out and weekends away. For example, “the real estate team took everyone to a hotel in Cornwall where we enjoyed free drinks, beach yoga and a spa – it was so fun!”

“We enjoyed free drinks, beach yoga and a spa – it was so fun!”

Trainees were also fans of Ashfords’ “really healthy and up-to-date attitude” towards diversity and inclusion, with this source detailing how the firm “puts on regular training and sends out little tests to make sure you’re up to date
The True Picture

throughout the year.” At the same time, insiders acknowledged that the firm has some way to go to diversify its ranks and commented that “it’d be nice to see more female partners.” At the time of publication, we were told that Ashfords has recently appointed a new female CEO, which has strengthened the representation of women at the senior level of the firm. Returning to the subject of work/life balance, trainees told us that the average day lasts between 9am and 6pm, with a late finish considered to be 7pm. These consistent hours were put down to team mentality: “Rather than one person staying until 11pm, we all stay until 7pm. It makes it more fun to be in late and we get it done better as a group.”

The qualification process is a bit like the one for seat allocation, where trainees make their preference known to partners and heads of department. A formal NQ jobs list is released after HR liaises with heads of departments to confirm space for roles. Qualifiers do apply, but only face an interview in the event that two people go for the same job. In 2020, seven of nine qualifiers stayed with the firm.

cAshfords...

Ashfords’ revenue has risen 69% in the last five years. Nice work!
Ashfords LLP

Grenadier Road, Exeter EX1 3LH
Tel: 01392 337 000
Email: trainee.recruitment@ashfords.co.uk
Website: www.ashfords.co.uk

Firm profile
Ashfords is a national provider of legal, professional and regulatory services. We combine legal expertise, commercial experience and our wider network to help our clients achieve their goals, providing value for time and value for money. Our commitment to excellence is reflected by the quality of our employees and partners, our client testimonials and industry awards. We are also delighted to have been voted a Guardian UK 300 employer by students and graduates in the UK for the seventh year running. We’re proud that our priorities go beyond business; our employee-led corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme is committed to making a positive social and environmental impact.

Main areas of work
We have a clear understanding of our markets with an absolute focus on our clients. As a full service firm we cover a wide range of practice areas, including corporate, real estate, dispute resolution, construction and infrastructure, employment, intellectual property, trusts and estates, residential property, family and equity release. We advise clients across a number of industries with a focus on technology, energy and waste, retail and the public sector. We service clients internationally through our ADVOC network of independent law firms, and work on a number of cross border transactions.

Training opportunities
You will experience different areas of law during your 24 month training contract, spending six months in four different departments. You have a choice of either a Bristol or South West based training contract; our South West trainees have the opportunity to work across our Exeter, Taunton, Tiverton and Plymouth offices. Your career with us is very important, we have a clear career model with structured development to support you at each stage. We are transparent about promotion criteria and you will have access to development on an individual, firm-wide and departmental level to help you to achieve your career ambitions. We are proud to work with talented people who are happy to share their experience — you will be encouraged to do likewise. Our trainees have the opportunity of hands-on experience, early responsibility and client involvement throughout their training contract. Our trainees also play an integral role in CSR and business development initiatives which provide exposure to our diverse client base.

Vacation scheme
We hold three summer schemes over the summer months (June/July) in both our Exeter and Bristol offices. To take part in a vacation scheme, students will need to have reached their penultimate year of their undergraduate law degree (or final year for non-law students) and be ready to start a training contract in two years’ time. There is no specific route to take to secure a training contract, we are just as likely to recruit you from a summer scheme as we would from an assessment centre!

Other benefits
Annual benefits include: 23 days’ paid leave, birthday day off, additional Ashfords Christmas day off, holiday purchase scheme, free in-house gym (Exeter office) and national gym discounts, pension, health cash plan, membership of The Junior Lawyers Division, cycle scheme, annual discretionary bonus scheme.

University law careers fairs 2020
Exeter, Bristol, UoL Bristol, Cardiff.

Partners: 73
UK fee-earners: 222
Total trainees: 19
UK offices: Exeter, Bristol, London, Plymouth, Taunton, Tiverton

Contacts
Graduate recruiter:
Graduate Recruitment Team,
trainee.recruitment@ashfords.co.uk
01392 337 000
Training partner:
Kerry Morgan-Gould,
k.morgan-gould@ashfords.co.uk

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 10
Applications pa: 500
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1 or other
Vacation scheme places pa: 24

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: 1st November 2020
Training contract deadline, 2023 start: 30th April 2021
Vacation scheme applications open: 1st November 2020
Vacation scheme 2021 deadline: 30th April 2021

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: South West - £28,000, Bristol - £29,000
Second-year salary: South West - £29,000, Bristol - £30,000
Post-qualification salary:
South West - £42,000, Bristol - £47,000
Holiday entitlement: 23 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: No
Maintenance grant pa: No

International and regional
Offices with training contracts:
South West (Exeter, Taunton, Tiverton, Plymouth) and Bristol

University law careers fairs 2020
Exeter, Bristol, UoL Bristol, Cardiff.
Ashurst

The facts
Location: London, Glasgow
Overseas offices: 26
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 120/350/80
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; client secondments
First-year salary: £46,000
Qualification salary: £84,000

For its commercial offering, international reach and “open culture,” trainees give Ashurst an A*—but even the firm says grades aren’t everything.

The Firm
During the Great Grades Debacle of 2020, Ashurst was one of the first firms to announce it was dropping A-level requirements in its training contract applications. The news probably didn’t come as a surprise to the firm’s current trainees, who praised its efforts in promoting social mobility. In the last few years they launched Ahead with Ashurst, a week-long programme for first-year or second-year law students. “I like the fact that my colleagues come from a variety of backgrounds,” one of our trainee interviewees told us, “be it from other countries, places within the UK, or a range of universities.” At the time of our calls, Ashurst’s trainees had come from up and down the country, including graduates of Exeter, Newcastle, Cardiff, Manchester, Bournemouth, Edinburgh, Bristol, Oxford and Cambridge.

“High-calibre work and clients coupled with an open culture.”

For these trainees, “Ashurst’s offer of high-calibre work and clients coupled with an open culture and inclusiveness” was a winning combination. Ashurst is a prestigious, full-service commercial outfit renowned for its energy and projects work in particular. It nabs top national rankings in Chambers UK for oil and gas, infrastructure, projects, and transport. It also gets high praise for its AIM capital markets and renewables practices. In London specifically, the firm excels in mid-market banking and finance, and gets high rankings for competition law, real estate finance and big-ticket real estate.

Another big pull for our interviewees was the firm’s international reach of a 27-office network spanning the UK, Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East and North America. They also liked their chances of getting an international secondment. Pre-pandemic, trainees were jet-setting to destinations like Luxembourg, Brussels, Madrid, Frankfurt, Singapore, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong and Tokyo. To make the deal extra sweet, a fair few secondments also come with a living bonus, paid accommodation and free flights. To apply for a spot, trainees send off their CV and an application form with a snippet of writing explaining why they’d be a good fit. Client secondments are also sprinkled into the training contract. “It gave me a lot of exposure on how to do business with a variety of clients,” said one former secondee. “I got more independence and confidence.”

The Seats
Ahead of each seat rotation, trainees may submit as many preferences as they please. There are just two rules: everyone has to do a finance seat in either banking, global markets or restructuring, as well as a transactional seat in either real estate, corporate transactions or projects. But trainees suggested there’s wiggle room within those rules—split seats and repeat seats are not unheard of, for example.

“I worked on a lot of social infrastructure, defence deals, and transport deals.”

In the projects seat, lawyers work on projects (duh) across the energy, natural resources and infrastructure sectors. The team handles both project development and project finance deals for sponsors, lenders and government bodies. Ashurst is especially well known for its expertise in public-private partnerships (whereby the government contracts a private company to manage a
As part of the ‘seat initiation’ in real estate, newbies can enjoy a complimentary tour around London courtesy of a couple of partners, where “they show you all the buildings Ashurst has worked on.” Much of the work in this department concerns acquisitions and divestments, development schemes, construction and urban regeneration projects... the list goes on. To any shopaholic’s delight, the group recently advised Westfield on a multibillion-pound project to redevelop two of Croydon’s shopping centres. There are sub-groups to be found here too, like construction, but from a trainee’s point of view, work is pretty fluid throughout the seat. With such variety, they said, “you’re always kept on your toes.” One told us: “I did a lot of drafting,” and others said: “There is plenty of due diligence to go around!” Other jobs include running licences, drafting wayleaves (annual agreements that can be renewed or terminated by either party), organising payment, and setting up conference calls and meetings.

Ashurst’s tax lawyers advise on both direct and indirect tax, ranging from corporation tax to VAT and stamp duty land tax. “Often as a trainee, you are pulled into matters from all over the firm,” including supporting on deals in the corporate, real estate and projects departments. Trainees said there’s also some tax litigation in this seat, which involves more standalone cases. Trainees in this seat were responsible for drafting applications, tax structuring papers and tax feeds, and doing “lots of research into different pieces of tax legislation.” The clientele includes private equity house Inflexion as well as property companies Oxford Properties and Lendlease. Alongside the real estate and finance teams, the tax group recently advised on the €400 million acquisition of three Amazon logistics warehouses in the UK, Barcelona and Paris by investment bank Korean Investment & Securities.

Over in Ashurst’s funds practice, the team works with private equity funds, real estate funds, infrastructure funds, debt and credit funds and more. Clients include Credit Suisse, fund manager Equitix, and investment firm Sprints Capital. Interviewees told us that a lot of their work revolved around carrier schemes. The team recently advised private equity house Inflexion on the simultaneous closings of two private equity funds valued at £1 billion. An interviewee was pleased with the responsibility they got in the seat, telling us: “I was able to manage a junior trainee on the transaction.” Trainees were also kept

seat options: banking & finance; capital markets; commercial property/real estate; company and commercial; competition and EU law; construction and engineering; corporate finance/mergers and acquisitions; corporate tax; dispute resolution; employment, pensions and incentives; energy and natural resources; property; Islamic finance; projects/project finance; shipping and trade; and technology, media and communications.
busy “drafting transfer agreements and focusing on document management skills.”

Trainee Life
When pondering the firm’s culture, one millennial enthused: “We have an open convo culture.” Trainees thought this open ‘convo’ could be down to the firm’s open-door policy, or perhaps the level of supervision and support they got from senior colleagues. Interviewees noted weekly chit-chats to discuss workload and career development. “People are receptive to progression,” they told us, with one pointing out that “some teams shine due to the invested and compassionate leadership of the partners – other teams can be a lot harder.”

“The whole European practice travels to one city for a weekend of networking.”

It’s safe to say the firm’s recent office relocation to Spitalfields has only had positive cultural repercussions for its inhabitants, with a new canteen, fitness facilities and a rooftop terrace to enjoy. Each department has its own social committee and there are social events at every seat rotation to keep trainees merry, such as a trainee ball, a summer party, quizzes, dinners, mini-golf and drinks (we heard the firm often hires out a whole bar!) And trainees were quick to mention much anticipated annual away days, when “the whole European practice travels to one city for a weekend of networking and activities.”

Interviewees said pro bono work is a big focus at Ashurst – it’s even a seat option for trainees. Trainees reported providing legal assistance in matters related to the climate crisis, death row and the criminal justice system, LGBTQ+ issues, and modern slavery. “The firm has a genuine desire to give back through pro bono,” one said. “I feel supported whenever I take it on.” One trainee told us about their experience helping on an LGBTQ+ matter: “I researched the London Boroughs to see what policies they have in place for LGBTQ+ rights and wrote up on how they can improve.”

The firm received a lot of praise from interviewees when it came to diversity and inclusion. “You get the sense that Ashurst is genuinely interested in your individuality,” one felt. “It’s important that people feel that they can bring their full self to work.” The firm has ‘diversity strands’ focused on disability, gender, multiculturalism and LGBTQ+. The firm’s D&I events were a big talking point, from a drag show organised under the LGBTQ+ strand, to a celebration marking 100 years of women being able to practise law. The firm also recently held a ‘hijab day’ to share the experiences of women who wear the hijab. “The first hijab-wearing model came in to talk about her experiences in the fashion industry,” trainees said.

A couple of trainees did suggest “there’s not always the necessary understanding from some senior staff” on D&I topics, but we heard “mental health is taken seriously firmwide.” The firm supports the Mindful Business Charter (a collaboration to promote well-being at work). What’s more, “puppies sometimes come into the office” for a bit of cuddle therapy. “It’s so cute!”

“Jekyll and Hyde.”

And some days may well call for a bit of mental TLC. When asked for the downside of the training contract, trainees brought up some long hours. One described their workload as “Jekyll and Hyde” depending on which seat they were in: “I would not trade my experience with some teams for the world, but other teams have taken a lot out of me.” Seats on the Hyde side included projects, global loans and global markets, with 12-hour days a familiar story. “I worked really long hours, mostly without any junior associates,” one grumbled. “My practical skills vastly improved but it was not enjoyable.” Real estate and tax fell into the Jekyll category, with good days running from 9am to 7pm. Fortunately, these trainees didn’t go into the training blind. “I knew before I started how busy working in a commercial law firm can be,” said one. Consider yourself warned.

Interviewees were satisfied with their salary at trainee level, which rises to £84,000 or NQ associates. When qualification time rolls around, trainees submit their preferences to HR along with their CV. In our survey, the firm didn’t score particularly highly for its transparency in the qualification process, but most were still hopeful they’d be kept on, and retention rates tend to be strong. In 2020, the firm retained 18 of its 20 qualifiers.
Ashurst LLP

London Fruit & Wool Exchange, 1 Duval Square, E1 6PW
Tel: 020 7638 1111 Fax: 020 7638 1112
Email: gradrec@ashurst.com Website: www.ashurst.com/en/careers

Firm profile
Clients are at the heart of our thinking, our ambition is to be our clients’ most incisive partner. We are able to reach this aim by remaining at the forefront of legal technology innovation with initiatives such as Ashurst Advance and Ashurst Digital Ventures. You will see we have a prestigious client base, with whom we build strong partnerships working closely together on large and complex multi-jurisdictional transactions to deliver insightful commercial solutions. Our global reach provides opportunities for our people to work in numerous jurisdictions with leading international organisations across the world. At Ashurst you will work as part of a team of high calibre individuals operating in a high performance environment. We are creative, innovative and agile thinkers always looking for new and better ways of doing things. Working this way we will achieve our goals to be the best advisor and an exceptional place to work.

Main areas of work
Ashurst advance; banking and finance; capital markets; competition and antitrust; corporate and M&A; digital economy; dispute resolution; employment; financial regulation; insurance and re-insurance; intellectual property; investigations; investment funds; pro bono; projects; real estate; restructuring, insolvency and special situations; tax.

Training opportunities
Ultimately, we want to help you become a thought leader with a reputation for clear, perceptive and influential advice – a professional in whom governments and leading businesses the world over can place their trust. This isn’t an easy route to take. You’ll need to become a shrewd negotiator, have an ability to read both balance sheets and behaviours, and become a commercial strategist with a deep understanding of specific industries. Our training contract will start you on that road. We will plan closely with you for four seats of six months each, that will broaden your world view and hone your talents. At least one seat will be in a finance practice and another within a transactional department. You will also have the opportunity to apply for an overseas or client secondment.

We will be accepting training contract applications to start in September 2023/March 2024 from 1st September 2020. The deadline for this is 5th January 2021. We may then re-open applications in Summer 2021.

Vacation scheme
Winter Vacation Scheme: A one-week scheme designed for final-year students and graduates from any degree discipline. Applications open on 1st September 2020 and close on 3rd November 2020. Summer Vacation Scheme: A three-week scheme designed for final years and graduates of all degree disciplines as well as penultimate-year law students. Applications open on 1st September 2020 and close on 5th January 2021.

First year opportunities: Ahead with Ashurst
We also offer a first year law work experience programme called ‘Ahead with Ashurst’ which will be held April 2021. Apply online between 1st September 2020 and 5th January 2021.

Other benefits
Future trainee loan, £500 language bursary, £500 first class degree prize, private medical insurance, life assurance and income protection are provided by Ashurst. Pension (including contribution from Ashurst), season ticket loan (interest free), dental insurance, ISA savings account, technology purchase plan, holiday purchase, travel insurance, reduced rate gym membership, childcare vouchers, cycle to work scheme, give as you earn, onsite services including doctor, physiotherapist and masseuse. 25 days holiday (plus bank holidays), staff restaurant, daily fruit breakfast.

University law careers fairs 2020
Baker McKenzie

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 77
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 133/397/71
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; client secondments
First-year salary: £48,000
Qualification salary: £87,500

London is a key part of this US-founded firm’s global enterprise, which offers trainees a mighty array of corporate and banking options alongside much more.

The Firm
There’s international, and then there’s international. There’s having a scattering of overseas bases, and then there’s having 78 offices in over 46 countries. Put simply, Chicago-founded Baker McKenzie is a truly global outfit. “There are few firms out there that from their inception sought to bring in clients that were international and cross-border,” declared one source. “The whole point of Bakers is to assist household names across multiple countries and jurisdictions.” Our sources unanimously circled back to this: to be drawn to Bakers is to be drawn to practising law on a global level. “Few firms can offer the advice we can on the scale we can,” another interviewee enthused. “The whole point of Bakers is to assist household names across multiple countries and jurisdictions.”

Let’s look at that scale in more depth: Baker McKenzie is ranked in a not-so-shabby 56 regions across the globe in various Chambers & Partners guides. On the global stage, Bakers rules when it comes commercial contracts, data protection, employment, employee benefits, IP, tax and TMT (technology, media and telecoms) work, among many other highly regarded areas. For the work conducted from Bakers’ London base, Chambers UK bestows top-notch praise on many of the practices listed above, as well as areas such as construction-related international arbitration, IT, product liability, banking & finance, and administrative & public law.

Rankings aside, London is in fact home to Bakers’ largest office and “frequently comes up as a lead office on anything multi-jurisdictional.” While considered “a hub office” due to its coordinating capabilities (aided by London’s geographic placement and time zone), “we’re not the be all and end all,” Baker’s US origins are influential, but we would emphasise that this doesn’t feel like a stereotypical US firm. Baker has continued to invest in the capital with 11 high-profile lateral partner hires made in 2019, alongside its appointment of three new global practice heads in the London office.

The Seats
There’s been a “real shift to become and position ourselves as a transactional heavyweight for applicants,” one clued-up interviewee shared. As such, trainees are now encouraged to complete at least two transactional seats as opposed to just one previously (due to the firm’s current work streams). Before each seat rotation trainees are required to submit their preferences. Allaying any fears over transparency, Bakers now “explains how many places there are in each department and how many first preferences there are each time.” Each rookie also selects a “priority seat” for their training contract, which “you’re pretty much guaranteed to get.”

That emphasis on being a ‘transactional heavyweight’ is reflected in the size and structure of Bakers’ corporate department: it’s split into seven different seats! These consist of corporate reorganisations; M&A; private equity and funds; tax; corporate finance; energy, mining, and infrastructure; and environmental markets. “You tend to
work with one team at a time, but we do move resources around when there's capacity,” one source noted.

Both public and private M&A deals are handled by Bakers, which does indeed represent various household-name clients including Unilever, McDonald’s, Hitachi, and more. Of note, the firm recently advised Saudi Arabia’s Alawwal Bank on its merger with the Saudi British Bank, which created the Kingdom’s third largest bank (with assets under management valued at around $70 billion). Bakers also acted on Japanese conglomerate Hitachi’s $11 billion carve-out and acquisition of automated tech company ABB, as well as pharma outfit GSK’s joint venture with Pfizer, which created the world’s largest over-the-counter healthcare business (valued at $50 billion). Interviewees enthused about their work on these “industry-changing deals.” One trainee told us about their experience working on a large carve-out, which involved “trying to manage the opening of multiple corporate entities around the world” and pulling off seamless coordination with local counsel in various jurisdictions.

“I was given the local counsel details of clients in Africa looking to acquire businesses and was just told to run with it!”

Trainees in private equity and funds see premier investor clients – such as Bain Capital, Macquarie, KKR, CVC, and more – flock through the doors. There’s an emphasis here on the tech, construction and infrastructure fields. Trainees had worked on deals that they described as “small market, with sellers usually pitched at £100 million.”

Bakers’ banking and finance group covers structured capital markets (SCM), financial regulatory services, and restructuring and insolvency work. The department’s grown in recent years due to lateral hiring from a range of fellow US firms with offices in London. A range of derivative products – such as rate swaps, FX products, and equity derivatives – are handled within SCM, and the team recently assisted luxury products group LVMH on its $3.2 billion acquisition of 45 luxury hotels (and other assets) by conducting a due diligence review of the seller’s existing financing arrangements. The SCM team similarly acts for well-known banks and financial institutions such as AIG, Bank of China, Citibank, and UBS; the work for names like these is further split between structured debt securities, securitisations and derivatives. A mix of contentious and non- contentious work colours life in financial regulatory services. Of note, the firm acted for several senior managers under investigation by the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority) and PRA (Prudential Regulation Authority) at Metro Bank. The restructuring team, meanwhile, recently acted for Global Loan Agency Capital on its $1.9 billion bid for the European distribution platform of building materials company CRH. Crossover support with other corporate groups is reportedly common. “There’s lots of responsibility,” said one source. “You see the vast majority of documents and do all the trainee tasks on those deals, like proofreading, drafting, and note-taking on calls.” Beyond those usual “trainee tasks,” one interviewee raved about their role on a matter: “I was given the local counsel details of clients in Africa looking to acquire businesses and was just told to run with it!”

There’s plenty of crossover with the energy, mining, and infrastructure (EMI) team. “Broadly speaking, the biggest stream of work here is a mix of M&A and projects,” a trainee revealed. The group also offers a “fair chunk of advisory work, with lots of regulatory specialists present on the team.” Internationalism again comes to the fore when working with mining majors like Rio Tinto and oil and gas maestros like Shell. The firm has recently been called upon by Saudi mining company Ma’aden to advise on the development of the Mansourah-Massarah Gold Project in the Kingdom. “On bigger matters, I did both buy and seller side M&A,” noted one source, citing business development, ancillary document prep and proofreading as typical tasks for trainees. “But on discrete matters, the smaller teams shine” for giving trainees more responsibility. “For example, if you’re working to purchase a couple of fields or handling the advisory components on commission liability, you get more substantial legal work.”

“While I don’t draft the meatier documents, I’m keeping the project going. And on something of this scale, that’s recognised to be incredibly key.”

Bakers' banking and finance group covers structured capital markets (SCM), financial regulatory services, and restructuring and insolvency work. The department’s grown in recent years due to lateral hiring from a range of fellow US firms with offices in London. A range of derivative products – such as rate swaps, FX products, and equity derivatives – are handled within SCM, and the team recently assisted luxury products group LVMH on its $3.2 billion acquisition of 45 luxury hotels (and other assets) by conducting a due diligence review of the seller’s existing financing arrangements. The SCM team similarly acts for well-known banks and financial institutions such as AIG, Bank of China, Citibank, and UBS; the work for names like these is further split between structured debt securities, securitisations and derivatives. A mix of contentious and non-contentious work colours life in financial regulatory services. Of note, the firm acted for several senior managers under investigation by the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority) and PRA (Prudential Regulation Authority) at Metro Bank. The restructuring team, meanwhile, recently acted for Global Loan Agency Capital on its $1.9 billion bid for the European distribution platform of building materials company CRH. Crossover support with other corporate groups is reportedly common. “There’s lots of responsibility,” said one source. “You see the vast majority of documents and do all the trainee tasks on those deals, like proofreading, drafting, and note-taking on calls.” Beyond those usual “trainee tasks,” one interviewee raved about their role on a matter: “I was given the local counsel details of clients in Africa looking to acquire businesses and was just told to run with it!”

There’s plenty of crossover with the energy, mining, and infrastructure (EMI) team. “Broadly speaking, the biggest stream of work here is a mix of M&A and projects,” a trainee revealed. The group also offers a “fair chunk of advisory work, with lots of regulatory specialists present on the team.” Internationalism again comes to the fore when working with mining majors like Rio Tinto and oil and gas maestros like Shell. The firm has recently been called upon by Saudi mining company Ma’aden to advise on the development of the Mansourah-Massarah Gold Project in the Kingdom. “On bigger matters, I did both buy and seller side M&A,” noted one source, citing business development, ancillary document prep and proofreading as typical tasks for trainees. “But on discrete matters, the smaller teams shine” for giving trainees more responsibility. “For example, if you’re working to purchase a couple of fields or handling the advisory components on commission liability, you get more substantial legal work.”

“While I don’t draft the meatier documents, I’m keeping the project going. And on something of this scale, that’s recognised to be incredibly key.”
Services in connection with the contentious restructuring of a Belgo-Dutch biotech company, Galapagos. Our interviewees had sat in all the above practices. Across the groups, a “high-pressured” air prevails, with late nights and tight deadlines part of the mix. Acclimatising quickly is part of the deal here, as “it’s a technical area of law, which can be quite difficult to get to grips with.” Yet with their feet found, responsibility ensues for trainees in the form of drafting legal opinions, offering memorandums and fee letters; amending documents; handling company filings; and notetaking on client calls. We heard of many a complex matter here, which saw trainees putting together large sets of loans for railway infrastructure abroad; completing discrete anti-money laundering research assignments; contributing to insurance regulatory work for art houses and auctions; and assisting international banks that were seeking to set up in the UK. These are just some of the highlights documented from across the seats.

“I actually didn’t do any bundling in this seat!”

Dispute resolution (and contentious financial services matters more generally) has been marked as an area of growth for the firm. The recent addition of a banking and finance litigation partner from Allen & Overy has helped to enhance an offering already stacked with globally familiar names, like FedEx, Barclays, L’Oréal, and more. The firm successfully acted for Prandicle (a company owned by Ukraine’s former deputy prime minister) during $1 billion commercial court proceedings following the alleged wrongful sale of a large steel plant in Ukraine. Bakers has also continued to advise natural gas exporter Gazprom in High Court litigation concerning a dispute with various Bulgarian companies over the dilution of shares in a joint venture. Trainees celebrated the “really broad remit” of cases available and had worked on large-scale investigations, product liability matters, arbitration hearings, and large commercial litigation matters. “I actually didn’t do any bundling in this seat!” one source enthused. Instead, interviewees had made submissions to court and drafted a mix of witness statements, claim forms and paragraphs of client advice.

Trainee Life

Client and overseas secondments are also a Bakers mainstay. Presentations are given before each rotation on secondment availability, with trainees’ experience often dictating assigned destinations. Client secondment options are confidential, but we can tell you that trainees can potentially go to any Bakers office in the global network if there is a business need. Popular destinations for overseas seats included Brussels, Hong Kong, Dubai and Sydney. “I’ll be pushing to do the secondment again,” joked one source. “It’s been really good for my personal brand.”

“It’s just so positive here,” one interviewee concluded on the topic of culture. “It’s not competitive between trainees either. The quickest way to lose an offer is to climb all over other people.” This humble approach also extends to the senior ranks. “It’s one of the least hierarchical places I’ve been in,” another trainee commented. When asked about stress – a common accompaniment to legal work in the City – sources found that while levels were team-dependent, it was important to keep everything in perspective. “It’s important to learn that you’ll get things wrong,” one sage source reflected. “There are very high expectations for trainees, but I’ve generally felt well supported.”

Much of the social life at Bakers is also team-dependent. “Some departments are known for socialising, while others are smaller and the social vibe is less prevalent.” Overall, sources had few complaints about the activities on offer, with cocktail-making classes, karaoke nights, darts excursions, and firm-wide seasonal parties all celebrated. The ‘Baker Mingle’ committee also organises events with a budget from the firm. Organic frivolity is also key, and “every Friday, trainees will go for a drink in the pub. It’s kind of a given we’ll be there.” Pro bono opportunities can take on a social slant as well. There’s reportedly a “huge amount of stuff” trainees have access to, alongside a dedicated pro bono associate who sends out regular emails to advertise opportunities. “We do a lot of work with charities to help improve the chance of BAME individuals entering the City, and not just within the legal profession, but the City in general,” one source informed us. Sources also championed the firm for not capping the number of pro bono hours that they could do. As we went to press, the firm told us that it has just launched a dedicated pro bono seat for two trainees per rotation.

On this corporate social responsibility (CSR) note, Bakers has links with several local schools where it offers talks and workshops for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Wider discussions around diversity at the firm arose in our interviews, with this source saying: “When it comes to action, they’re working on bolstering non-male partnership ranks and BAME outreach.” In 2019, the firm committed to a global partner and leadership target of 40% women, 40% men, and 20% flexible representation (women, men, or non-binary persons). But what about the lived experience of diversity at Bakers? “Diversity is not seen as a tick box exercise here,” one trainee assured us. “It’s engrained in the people at Bakers.” Interviewees listed a whole host of diversity groups and initiatives for people to get involved in. “There’s so much going on, you can’t get involved with everything!” one regretful source declared.

And the hours? “It depends on the team,” one trainee responded, unsurprisingly. “There’s a general expectation...
that for at least half of a corporate or banking seat, you should expect to be in until at least 7pm.” Another source highlighted the “red zones” for long hours – corporate is “notoriously bad on that front, as is SCM. Banking and disputes are notable for their long hours too.” Trainees generally considered 11pm and beyond a late night, with finishing times between 6pm and 7.30pm regarded as “normal.” The firm also provides dinners and taxis home for late finishers. We heard that evenings and weekends are mostly respected, as is the emphasis on the lack of strict face time requirements. “People are really good at making sure that when you’re off, you’re off,” one relieved trainee found.

Informal mid-seat chats with supervisors are followed by detailed end of seat reviews. The latter come complete with development points and formalised scoring for factors such as quality of work, business development efforts and pro bono endeavours. “Because the trainee evaluation process is strictly followed,” one trainee revealed, “you’re given indications throughout the process on how to improve.” This led to good reviews of the qualification process, which involves submitting first and second preferences to graduate recruitment after receiving a list of available NQ positions. “You submit around 250 words to a page explaining why you want to join those teams and that’s it. There are no interviews and it’s very much based on feedback from the departments.”

Baked to perfection...

Retention rates have been historically strong at Bakers. In 2020, the firm continued that trend and retained 28 of 34 qualifiers.
Baker McKenzie LLP

100 New Bridge Street, London EC4V 6JA
Tel: 020 7919 1000  Fax: 020 7919 1999
Email: london.graduaterecruit@bakermckenzie.com
Website: www.bakermckenzie.com/londongraduates

Firm profile
With 77 offices in 47 countries, and a presence in all leading financial centres, Baker McKenzie is the world’s premier global law firm. Our strategy is to provide the best combination of local legal and commercial knowledge, international expertise and resources. Trainee solicitors are a vital part of that strategy, exposed to the international scope of the firm from the moment they start. There is also the possibility of an overseas secondment, recent secondees have spent time in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Tokyo.

Main areas of work
London is home to the firm’s largest office where Baker McKenzie has been well established since its opening in 1961. With more than 400 lawyers, we have a substantial presence in the legal and business community. Providing a full service offering, we deliver high-quality local solutions across a broad range of practices and offer global advice in conjunction with our international offices. Our client base consists primarily of venture capital funds, investment banks, technology powerhouses and household name brands. As a firm with a very strong international client base, we have considerable expertise in acting on, and coordinating, complex cross-border transactions and disputes.

Training opportunities
The two-year training contract comprises four six-month seats which include a corporate and a contentious seat, usually within our highly regarded dispute resolution department. We also offer the possibility of a secondment abroad or with a client. During each seat you will have formal and informal reviews to discuss your progress and regular meetings to explore subsequent seat preferences. Your training contract commences with a highly interactive and practical induction programme which focuses on key skills including practical problem solving, presenting and the application of information technology. The firm’s training programmes include important components of management and other business skills, as well as seminars and workshops on key legal topics for each practice area. There is a Trainee Solicitor Liaison Committee which acts as a forum for any new ideas or concerns which may occur during the training contract.

Vacation scheme
Our vacation schemes offer the ideal opportunity to experience what it’s like to work for a city-based, global law firm. Each vacation scheme gives you the chance to experience two of our key practice areas. Training is provided throughout to familiarise you with some of our typical transactions and to help you develop key skills. We place great emphasis on involving you in ‘live’ work.

• Spring Vacation Scheme: 12th April - 23rd April 2021
• Summer Vacation Schemes: 21st June - 9th July 2021

Other benefits
Bonus scheme, gym membership/subsidy, life assurance, pension scheme with company contributions, private healthcare/dental, season ticket loan, subsidised restaurant, cycle to work scheme, childcare vouchers.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Open Days: We have tailored our Open Days to you by focusing on the different things that matter to you. We are holding four Open Days where you can hear about Baker McKenzie more generally. But we also have Open Days for black future lawyers and allies, Open Days for LGBT+ and allies, Open Days focusing on women in law, plus many others that will give you a taste of our culture as well as our diverse community.

First Year Insight Schemes: We offer ten places to spend two days in the firm on 7th and 8th April 2021. There will be a number of skills sessions and each student will spend a day in a department of their choice. Applications open in October.
Bates Wells

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 38/79/12
Seats: 2x6 months + 3x4 months
First-year salary: £36,000
Qualification salary: £62,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Bates Wells
BW’s employment and disputes seats

Looking for a City firm whose “primary objective is to enhance social responsibility”? You’d do well to check out Bates Wells.

The Firm
Bates Wells has had a bit of a rebrand lately, ditching ‘Braithwaite’ from its name and changing its slogan from ‘City firm with a conscience’ to ‘positive people, positive impact.’ These slight tweaks refine BW’s messaging about its ethos: this is a modern firm that wants to do good things for communities and the environment. Its client-base is heavily skewed towards organisations in the charities sector and it was the first UK law firm to achieve B-Corp status. B-Corps, like sustainable-clothing company Patagonia and high street beauty staple The Body Shop, are for-profit business that (as the B-Corp website states) “meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose.”

These principles very much attracted the current crop of trainees, with one telling us: “BW’s primary objective is to enhance social responsibility, which made it by far my number-one firm to join.” Our interviewees were looking for something quite different from the usual string of corporate and finance legal work on offer in the City and were drawn by the fact that a large proportion of BW’s clients are charities or social enterprises. “There are just so many clients that I’m impressed to work with,” one insider relayed. The kind of names you will find on the books include some of the most well-known charities such as Barnardo’s, Children in Need and the Samaritans.

All of this good work has not gone unnoticed by Chambers UK. BW has rocketed in those rankings from its one office in the City: unsurprisingly, its charities work is top-rated on a UK-wide basis, while its immigration and real estate know-how also comes out on top. Other high-performing practices include education, electoral law, professional discipline, administrative & public law, and media & entertainment.

The Seats
The seat system is quite different at BW: trainees complete two six-month seats in their first year and three four-month seats in second year. Rookies submit preferences for seats one and two in the run-up to doing each one; come second-year however, they set out their preferences for their remaining three seats all at once by ranking up to five choices. “It helps the firm to plan better,” said one source, “otherwise we’d be doing the same process every couple of months.” Interviewees thought the system had improved on BW’s previous ‘flight path’ process, where newbies had to choose all their seats shortly after joining. We heard it’s common to repeat a seat, usually in the firm’s biggest group, charity and social enterprise, which is fondly known as ChaSE.

Given it’s the biggest department, trainees in ChaSE “work with a lot of a people across a wide range of matters.” However, drafting clients’ applications to achieve charity status is the “bread and butter” work for trainees: “We get to take the lead on those. They’re over 80 pages long, so it’s a lengthy process, but it means we get high levels of client contact.” The transactional side involves advising charities and social enterprises on mergers, spin-outs and the setting up of subsidiaries “so it’s like the corporate seat. I helped draft due diligence reports and assisted with the lead-up to completions.” It’s a heavily regulated sector, so there’s a fair amount of liaising with the Charity Commission, too. BW recently advised a consortium of charities, including the RSPB, on its application for judgment on a new charity law concerning responsible investment, which

Seat options: charity and social enterprise (ChaSE); dispute resolution (DR); corporate & commercial (CoCo); employment; real estate; public and regulatory; and immigration
“Trainees often work with one fee-earner, so we get to build relationships with clients.”

BW’s immigration department handles a mix of business and personal matters. On the business side, the team recently helped a London-based examination board with visa requirements for sending employees overseas to examine international students – this matter involved the jurisdictions of Malaysia, China, Hong Kong, Botswana and Namibia. This commercial arm sees trainees filling out online applications and drafting letters to clients: “Trainees often work with one fee-earner, so we get to build relationships with clients.” On the personal side, acting on declaration of citizenship matters proved to be a real highlight for trainees, with one describing how they “drafted the witness statements, which was really enjoyable. The team is lovely!”

Corporate/commercial, aka CoCo, is loosely split into four groups: corporate, commercial, banking and competition. The corporate side deals with typical transactional work, like M&A deals. Commercial “isn’t very transactional, it’s more about chunky drafting work,” like amending and negotiating commercial contracts and drafting loan agreements (which we were told could be 70 pages long!). The team recently advised a Christian TV channel, TBN UK, on its broadcasting contracts with the BBC. The other two arms of the department are slightly smaller groups: banking covers (among other things) social finance and lending transactions within the charity sector, while competition deals with – you guessed it – competition in the marketplace. On the banking and finance side, BW advised construction materials business SigmaRoc on its placing of 79.9 million new shares, which raised £32.8 million. Other clients under the corporate umbrella include Trinity College London, the National Landlords Association and software developer Elecosoft. Sources pointed out that “we’re exposed to a wide range of work from each area, which helps with assessing what we want to do in the future: the more you see, the more beneficial it is.”

Trainee Life

“The big thing here is personality,” noted one source. “It’s a firm that really values individuality and cares about what you can bring as a whole person. They don’t want you to be just another fish in the bowl.” That’s a relief. Alongside individuality, it sounds as if BW also prides itself on having a social environment too. “The people here are very genuine and down to earth at all levels,” commented one source. “The partners aren’t detached from the more junior employees, and the open-plan office probably helps with that.” Others explained that each department has its own area, with a hot-desk system in place, so sources felt comfortable “walking up to a partner with a question or chatting with them at the tea station.”

Qualification was “a sticking point” for some, who told us how BW has been trying to formalise a process as its trainee cohort has grown. “It’s still in its early teething stages and it’s even more difficult this year because of Covid-19.” Others did feel that BW “is trying to be as fair and transparent as possible.” Trainees praised the firm for eschewing pay cuts and reduced hours measures: “They’ve protected us as much as possible.” In the end, five of seven qualifiers were retained in 2020, with two on fixed-term contracts.

All’s wells that’s recycled wells...

“Everything the firm does is driven by its B-Corp status. One of the first things I was told about the firm was that nothing is sent to a landfill. There’s a big drive on sustainability and we officially recognise the climate crisis.”
Bates Wells

10 Queen Street Place, London, EC4R 1BE
Tel: 020 7551 7777
Email: training@bateswells.co.uk
Website: www.bateswells.co.uk/careers/trainees

Firm profile
We’re Bates Wells, a City firm with a difference.
We believe in making a positive impact, whether that’s achieving legislative and regulatory change around sustainability, or working on a landmark case with wide-ranging implications. We’re not afraid to challenge the status quo.
Our clients are diverse — from global household names, to public bodies, to start-ups. We’re also the firm of choice for thousands of charities and social enterprises.
As a values-driven firm we show commitment to our clients, our people, the environment and society. We’re the first UK law firm with a B Corp certification.

Main areas of work
Bates Wells is best-known for our expertise in advising charities, we have the largest dedicated charity and social enterprise team in the UK. However, we also have a focus on corporate and employment law, as well as real estate, arts and media, immigration, litigation and public and regulatory law.

Training opportunities
When you join us, you’ll be ready and willing to bring your ideas and the best of yourself, but in the cockpit rather than as a passenger.
Over the two years of the training, you’ll do two six-month seats in the first year, followed by three four-month seats in the second year.
All trainees do seats in charity and social enterprise, and we’ll help you to choose the seats that will best prepare you for your preferred career path.
You’ll have a dedicated supervisor in each seat, who’ll make sure your work is relevant and varied, with training where necessary.

Vacation scheme
Our summer placements are a great way to make your mark — and could lead to a training contract. By applying for a vacation scheme, you’re guaranteed to be considered for a training contract. You don’t need to apply for both the vacation scheme and the training contract — you only need to choose one.
We accept applications for Law and Non-Law university students, but please make sure you are eligible to begin a training contract in 2023 when applying. Applications close January 2021 so be sure to apply before the deadline.
Summer vacation scheme 1: Tuesday 1 — Friday 11 June 2021
Summer vacation scheme 2: Monday 14 — Friday 25 June 2021

Other benefits
Life insurance, private healthcare, cycle to work scheme, gym, employee assistant programme, pension, profit sharing scheme, recognition scheme, season ticket loan, wellbeing weeks, access to complementary therapies, volunteering days, agile working, extra day of annual leave (usually in December) as well as many more.

University law careers fairs 2020
- Bright Networks
- TBD
BDB Pitmans LLP

The facts
Locations: Cambridge, London, Reading, Southampton
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 72/230/22
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments
First-year salary: £36,500 (London); £30,000 (Reading)
Qualification salary: £57,000 (London); £45,000 (Reading)

With more than 300 years of heritage to draw from, the newly merged BDB Pitmans now looks to a bright future.

The Firm
2018 really wasn’t that long ago, but you’d be forgiven for thinking it was ancient history. Theresa May was still prime minister; almost nobody knew the name ‘Joe Exotic’; and some of us were still hopeful about the ending of *Game of Thrones*. December 2018 saw the formation of BDB Pitmans from a merger between Bircham Dyson Bell (centred in Cambridge and London) and Pitmans Law (based in Thames Valley with an HQ in Reading) and much like the rest of the world, BDB’s already come a long way. The firm moved to shiny new Cambridge premises in 2019 and grew that office with lateral hires into the family and matrimonial department.

Trainees found themselves “attracted to the firm’s combined specialist practice area offering.” BDB Pitmans’ practice balances private client, corporate and commercial expertise. *Chambers UK* ranks the firm highly nationwide for charities, Parliamentary law, rail planning and authorisation; and top in Thames Valley for litigation, pensions, planning and restructuring. As for private clients, *Chambers High Net Worth* ranks the firm highest for private wealth law in Reading, but also for high-value real estate nationwide and both non-contentious private wealth and disputes in London.

“…attracted to the firm’s combined specialist practice area offering.”

BDP Pitmans recruits up to eight trainees a year into its City office, and a further seven a year in Reading; the Cambridge base will also be recruiting as of 2021. Our sources described the appealing “smaller intake” and “personable atmosphere” as key factors in deciding to join the firm. “The culture seemed very friendly and supportive,” one said. “Their departments are well ranked for a firm of this size and I thought the smaller intake would give me greater experience and responsibility.” Alongside wanting to boost firm revenue, BDB’s original motivation for the merger was expanding geographical and practice area diversity. In terms of lawyer diversity, trainees were impressed with the firm’s hiring practices but wanted to see more diverse staffing of teams, according to our survey.

Following the merger, incoming trainees receive their first seat at random. “We can express future preferences at our mid-seat reviews for the remaining three seats,” trainees from each location told us. “There’s also some flexibility to move between offices. If I’m sat in Reading I can go to the London office for knowledge-sharing evenings or spend a day there working;” one revealed. A handful of trainees had done seats in both offices.

The Seats
The planning, infrastructure and public law (PIP) department centres on a sizeable ten-partner team and handles major infrastructure projects as well as advising on planning systems, Parliamentary matters, implementation of orders and public affairs. “Projects are big and last for months up to a year, if not longer. As a trainee you’ll probably see around one or two big deals and be handling the small research tasks on the side,” sources explained. BDB recently helped Transport for London secure a Transport and Works Act Order to authorise a £3 billion extension. Other clients include National Rail, Highways England and London Luton Airport, whom the firm advised on a proposed expansion of the airport to double passenger...
handling capacity. Daily trainee tasks include “writing up development consent order hearings, taking notes on action points, creating bundles, court runs and just generally managing the planning process,” trainees explained. Our sources found their work interesting and left their PIP seat with good practice area knowledge, but suggested client contact was hard to come by.

“Projects are big and last for months up to a year, if not longer.”

Legacy firm Pitmans Law brought much of the firm’s real estate offering to the merger equation. Expertise varies by office: Reading excels for residential developments and Southampton shines in agricultural and coastal real estate, while the London team earns praise for investment transactions, development schemes and corporate support. On the development side, trainees manage the land registry documentation, write reports on title and “sit in on a load of phone calls and client meetings.” Those who got stuck into commercial real estate helped with refinancings, sales and acquisitions, drafting new leases and managing construction agreements. National Grid and the Landmark Trust are clients here, and BDB Pitmans acts on deals beyond its own footprint, recently advising the Healthcare Management Trust on purchase, development and finance for a £25 million hospital in Swansea. Residential developers make up the primary client base in Reading: Vanderbilt Homes called on the firm’s advice during its acquisition of South Coast housebuilder Crayfern. The Covid-19 pandemic only increased the workflow into this department, and trainees assisted on “frequent rent break cases on behalf of both tenants and landlords.” There’s been “more of a pause in sales and acquisition work,” which should pick up as the property market gets back on track.

Over in litigation, the BDB merger strengthened Pitmans’ existing dispute resolution team with growth into areas such as charities, public law and judicial review. Typical cases here include shareholder disputes and contract termination cases, especially for clients in the IT and technology industries. “You’ll come in as a general litigation trainee and have the opportunity to stretch your professional muscles across multiple areas of interest,” interviewees told us. The firm’s Thames Valley clients in-
Trainee Life

There were some concerns about supervision across the training contract – trainees suggested that “not enough of the staff put in the time to invest in us as trainees.” One of our more critical sources felt “some departments don’t have an enjoyable atmosphere, with partners creating a poor working environment and some practices simply seeing you as an extension of the admin team.” Others noted a “disparity between the type of work, volume, client contact and responsibility depending on which legacy firm the seat originates from.” Pitmans veterans were more likely to be disappointed with their lot overall. Trainees proposed a push for “standardised supervision and feedback training for the firm’s partners.” We should point out that trainees who joined BDB Pitmans’ legacy firms are likely to have different views to those joining post-merger, after the dust has settled.

Although there’s no formalised mentor system, many appreciated the presence of an NQ or junior associate buddy during their first seat. “I can ask them silly questions and not look like a moron,” one trainee chuckled. Department-specific training also scored rave reviews: litigation has an “in-house trainer who provides weekly sessions on topics like ‘how to serve tenancy’ and new legal developments.” Team corporate doesn’t miss out, with training given on company accounts and the intricacies of sales and acquisitions.

“Can ask them silly questions and not look like a moron.”

Salary was another point of post-merger contention. “There’s a significant difference in salary for trainees depending on legacy firm,” one grumbled; another argued that “a pay gap between trainees in London and Reading is inevitable.” Trainees speculated salaries ‘will be standardised once all trainees are recruited through the merged firm.” After reviewing salaries, the firm tells us it is competitive in both markets.

Reading trainees who completed a seat in London had “all the train fares and expenses refunded. We definitely feel well cared for by the firm, especially considering the hours they expect us to do.” Good news on that front, as hours may vary by seat (litigation and charities call for the longest stints) but longer hours means leaving at 6.30pm, rather than early in the morning as at some firms. There’s also no need to skip breakfast as “there’s no culture of getting into the office early. I aim to get in for 9 to 9.30am but I’ve been late plenty of times and that wouldn’t fly so well at other firms.” Peak periods can require later nights that are “easy enough to predict” in advance.

Some noticed a culture shift as the firm’s departments “became accustomed to the different working styles and got used to the additional practice areas in our offering.” It’s no surprise that BDB’s planning, charities and private client operations would function differently to legacy Pitmans’ pensions, corporate and commercial teams. Insiders revealed that aside from “a lot of IT overhaul and lawyers moving into different office spaces,” there was very little upheaval or personality differences. “They all seem like lovely people,” one declared. “The London office is definitely more fun... Reading is much quieter since there aren’t as many people rushing around to go to court or client meetings.” They were happy to go into more detail: “London’s the type of place where there will be 100 people in the lobby grabbing croissants and coffee with handbag and coat still in hand; there’s always something cool and fun going on. The demographic in Reading is just more focused on picking up their kids from school.” It’s up to you which of those environments sounds more appealing.

“The London office is definitely more fun... Reading is much quieter.”

Each BDB Pitmans office has its own social calendar, and trainees praised the “good work/life balance despite the ‘City firm feel’” in London. “I’ve also been impressed by the numbers of partners who were once trainees here, showing clear progression routes.” When we asked about their future plans, most of our sources hoped to continue up the BDB Pitmans ladder for some time to come. The first step is qualification, for which trainees must submit a CV and cover letter. “Like at other firms, the major delays this year were due to Covid-19, but there was a particular lack of communication with mixed-up timeframes and we didn’t hear about the jobs list till late June,” sources said (this was about ten days later than usual according to the firm).

“Following on from this, it was a pretty quick turnaround to submit everything and prepare for an informal interview via Zoom. It’s fair to sum it up as a pretty stressful NQ process.” Sources did however appreciate that everyone is told on the same day via phone whether they’ve scored a job or not. BDB Pitmans retained seven of ten qualifiers in 2020.

**SHINE bright like a diamond**

We heard “trainees take a forefront role in diversity initiatives throughout the firm,” including “assisting with the various affinity groups such as SHINE [for minority ethnic lawyers] and the LGBTQ+ group.”
**Firm profile**

BDB Pitmans was established in 2018 following a merger between legacy firms Bircham Dyson Bell (BDB) and Pitmans Law, bringing together over 300 years of legal expertise across 4 locations – Cambridge, London Westminster, Reading and Southampton. Working at BDB Pitmans brings all the benefits of a top 60 firm including interesting work, varied clients and support for professional development. While our clients are at the heart of everything we do, we recognise that life outside of work is important too and our approach to flexible working and target hours for fee earners reflect this. What really sets us apart is our friendly, open and inclusive culture. People join and stay at BDB Pitmans as they get the benefits of challenging work in a supportive and professional atmosphere.

**Main areas of work**

We have one of the largest private wealth teams in the UK offering a full service to longstanding and new clients which includes wills, estates and trusts to international tax planning. Our government and infrastructure team work on some of the largest and most significant infrastructure and regeneration projects in the UK, specialising in planning, regulatory and public law. The corporate and commercial team advises businesses large and small, start-ups to household names, on all aspects including structural changes, mergers and acquisitions, IP and data protection. Our real estate team manage the property life cycle from planning and construction to land disputes, drafting commercial leases and sale and purchase of property. The employment team provides expert advice on high profile and high value employment matters and immigration. Our award winning charities and social enterprise team acts for both global and UK charities, working with colleagues across the firm to offer advice from initial charity formation, set up and registration to tax planning and governance issues. Our litigation department deals with a range of contentious matters including commercial disputes, property litigation, family disputes, judicial review, trusts and estates, insolvency and IP.

**Training opportunities**

You will receive excellent legal training over four six month seats. We encourage you to express a preference for your seats and our training principal is in contact with trainees before and during their training to understand each persons preferred seats. Opportunities for client secondments includes ExxonMobil for six months with other trainees seconded to clients when opportunities arise for part or all of a seat. After a comprehensive induction programme our trainees receive extensive legal and interpersonal skills training to ensure their expertise and career skills are constantly developing, including specific technical training in each seat. Great emphasis is also placed on interpersonal skills such as networking and client management so when you qualify you have the breadth of skills required to be an excellent solicitor. Training with BDB will bring you real responsibility right from the start, combined with the right level of support to ensure you never feel overwhelmed.

**Vacation scheme**

We offer a two week paid summer vacation scheme in June/July each year. This is open to those who are eligible to start a training contract in two years’ time. During the placement you will gain valuable experience with two of our legal departments and we aim to give you as much practical experience as possible, plus the opportunity to experience first-hand how our solicitors and partners work. Additionally, a range of organised activities including a networking event, trainee social and legal research exercises will make your time with us enjoyable as well as insightful.

**Other benefits**

25 days holiday per year, private medical insurance, medical screenings, cycle to work scheme, payroll giving, on-site gym, sports teams, yoga and pilates classes, interest free season ticket loans, matching pension contributions up to 7%, life assurance, employee assistance programme, income protection insurance, enhanced maternity and paternity pay.
As the NHS rises to meet unprecedented challenges, this public sector and healthcare-powered firm plays an important role too.

The Firm

“I wanted to work in Bristol but didn’t want to be in a regional office that missed out on high-value clients,” a trainee told us. Enter Bevan Brittan, a UK top 100 law firm that recruits ten trainees a year between its offices in London, Leeds, Birmingham and HQ in Bristol. BB’s best known for advising public sector clients and “works closely with many NHS trusts, having built an excellent reputation for healthcare work. The firm is an industry leader in public sector law.” Bevan Brittan is growing its private sector practice too, but if you’ve got no taste for public sector work – especially healthcare, which makes up 50% of the firm’s docket – then look elsewhere in Chambers Student.

If health and public law do tickle your pickle, then you’ll struggle to find a better firm to train at: Chambers UK rates the firm top nationwide in clinical negligence, healthcare and local government, as well as in the North East, Yorkshire and South West for social housing. “Trainees work across offices on projects, which runs fairly smoothly,” insiders shared. For those situated outside of the HQ, “it’s very clear that Bristol is the head office. HR are all based there, and if you’re not you’ll only deal with them over the phone” (although HR does visit each office at key times like qualification). Some sources felt left out of Bristol-centric internal communications, but Londoners gave two thumbs up to a recent office renovation there: “We went from two floors, where we were at our own desks in separate departments, to one floor all hot-desking. It’s been a big change with much more mixing of teams.” Renovations to the Bristol office were underway at the time of writing.

HR centrally coordinates seat allocation for the whole firm, which caused some headaches in other offices as “they can be pretty slow to let us know what our next seat will be.” According to the firm, this happened most recently because there were more seats available than trainees to do them. Second-years rank three preferences for each rotation, before first-years make their picks. That didn’t limit them too heavily: about half of surveyed trainees got what they wanted in their first two seats. Many departments are larger in Bristol and London than Birmingham or Leeds, and trainees can move offices to do a particular seat if they’d like. “The firm is good for that,” one regional trainee confirmed, “but they don’t want people applying to one office, hoping to do multiple seats in another.”

The Seats

Bevan Brittan is built on four main departments. Clinical risk breaks down into clinical negligence and healthcare and regulatory subgroups. Commercial and infrastructure (C&I) includes commercial, corporate, construction, commercial health and energy teams. In litigation and regulatory (LAR), trainees will find litigation, employment and procurement. Then there’s the property department, including transactional property and property litigation teams. Though there are no compulsory seats, over 70% of our trainee sources had sat in clinical negligence.

Seat options: commercial; corporate; construction; commercial health; energy; local government; litigation; employment; procurement; clinical negligence; healthcare & regulatory; property; property litigation; housing management
Much of the firm’s clinical negligence practice is defence-side for NHS trusts and foundations, as well as insurance providers. Examples of recent cases include a patient who suffered a double amputation due to a rare vascular condition, bringing a claim against their local NHS trust for not considering a vascular case; and a claimant suing for damages and surrogacy costs after doctors failed to detect signs of cervical cancer from multiple smear tests and biopsies over several years. Trainees said their experiences in the seat ranged “from attending case management conferences at the Royal Courts of Justice” to “organising high-value claims involving multiple experts and witnesses.” Clinical negligence got mixed reviews overall – while all found their work on cases interesting, some trainees were left wanting for client and partner contact and felt they got “a lot less responsibility than in other seats. Everything is very closely checked – possibly too much.” That perhaps shouldn’t come as a surprise given how high-stakes this practice area is, and others had an “amazing experience,” with opportunities to draft based on expert advice.

“The firm's insurance team is in HCR, you're working directly with the NHS.”

The firm's healthcare and regulatory (HCR) team has a non-contentious practice, working with NHS and private providers. “We do a lot of inquest investigations,” trainees explained. Lawyers here also “protect vulnerable people” in Court of Protection cases; and provide regulatory and consultancy advice to 59% of NHS providers and 33% of UK clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). Sources explained that “in clinical negligence, your client is actually the insurer. In HCR, you're working directly with the NHS.” Bevan Brittan has helped NHS foundations and trusts up and down the country, recently advising the West London NHS Trust on a ten-year contract with a CCG to act as the single provider of various community health and care services. Trainees told us they enjoyed “day-to-day contact with NHS clients,” taking instructions and drafting orders. They were unanimously pleased with the training and partner contact available, in meetings or telephone conferences.

While some departments work with almost entirely public sector clients, there’s more of a balance between public and private in employment, including some independent healthcare providers. Bevan Brittan advises the Professional Cricketers Association (PCA), Northern Devon Healthcare, and local councils and NHS trusts on employment issues; the firm’s Bristol office outshines London in the Chambers UK rankings, but their practices are fairly similar. Trainees found they had “quite a lot to manage” in their employment seat. “I wasn’t just sitting around and bundling – there was some of that, but I also got to prepare advice notes and attend tribunals,” one shared. “I had to figure out how to complete certain responsibilities by myself, which was quite exciting; there’s a nice variety of tasks.” Recent cases include defending three NHS trusts against race, religious and disability discrimination allegations brought by a former work placement student; and the PCA on proposed limits to involvement of ‘Kolpak’ cricket players in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

The property team in Bristol is best known for health-related work and comes to the aid of local government and housing associations with property queries; borough councils and NHS trusts make up most of the firm’s London clients. “I was trusted with more substantial tasks here than in other seats,” an insider remarked, which makes sense as matters aren’t as life-or-death as other areas of the firm’s practice. “It’s been a particularly helpful seat in terms of training and development.” BB has repeatedly advised the Canal & River Trust, including on the sale of its wholly owned subsidiary British Waterways Marinas Limited to private equity investor LDC for an eight-figure sum.

Trainee Life

Sources revealed that while “everyone is really lovely” at Bevan Brittan, “trainees don’t socialise much.” We didn’t need to do much detective work to learn why – for one, the firm encourages having a life outside its walls. “If I was in the office beyond 7 or 7.30pm, my supervisor would come in and ask if I was overloaded,” an insider suggested. The lack of a social scene is also down to geography – the firm recruits ten or fewer trainees a year across four offices. “People come to this firm for the clients it works for,” sources concluded, happy to sacrifice regular nights out for quality work and the chance to eat dinner at home.

“Senior solicitors, as well as dedicated support staff, have shown that they are there to support us.”

Female sources declared they “don’t feel hindered by the firm’s structures or culture,” and a relatively relaxed approach to flexible working was popular with all. There was less of a consensus on ethnic diversity – some argued that “visibility-wise it’s quite diverse and the firm clearly has good intentions,” though others felt that (like many other law firms) Bevan Brittan is “largely white mid-

### Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative &amp; Public Law</th>
<th>Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Negligence</td>
<td>Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Public Procurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>Social Housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The True Picture
“The unspoken message is that the firm wants to retain everyone,” interviewees agreed. “Qualification comes up in everyday conversation.” At the time of our calls, some were nervous about the upcoming qualification process: “We’d like some more information. Speaking to trainees in the year above, it sounded pretty stressful, not knowing where jobs were or if there would be interviews.” Bevan Brittan treats the process like a job application: trainees submit a CV and cover letter, before two interviews with partners. The firm retained eight of ten qualifiers in 2020, with one fixed-term contract.

**Gonna take my trainees to the old town court**
Trainees told us they got permission from the firm to attend trials they weren’t staffed on, purely for the experience. “They disregarded my targets for two weeks, so I could go,” one said.
Bevan Brittan

Kings Orchard, 1 Queen St, Bristol BS2 0HQ
Tel: 0370 194 1000
Website: www.bevanbrittan.com

Firm profile
Bevan Brittan is a UK-Top 100 national law firm providing a comprehensive range of legal and advisory services to over 300 private sector businesses as well as being a market-leading firm within health and social care, housing and local and central government.

Bevan Brittan is a UK-Top 100 national law firm providing a comprehensive range of legal and advisory services to over 800 businesses as well as being a market-leading firm within health and social care, housing and local and central government.

Main areas of work
Based in Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and London, our award-winning teams provide commercial, corporate, property, regulatory, employment and litigation (commercial and clinical negligence) legal advice.

Training opportunities
The training contract is made up of four, six-month seats. During each seat, the core of your training will be practical work experience in conjunction with an educational programme. The training is aimed at developing attitudes, skills, legal and commercial knowledge which is essential for your career success. You are encouraged to take on as much work and responsibility as you are able to handle, which will be reviewed on a regular basis with your supervisor. The firm is friendly and supportive with an open-door policy along with a range of social, sporting and cultural activities.

Vacation scheme
Our award winning summer vacation scheme takes place in June each year with places available across the offices. The scheme is open to second-year law students, final-year non-law students and graduates. During the placement you will spend a week in two different departments enabling you to gain first-hand experience of two different practice areas, getting a real taste of what life at Bevan Brittan is like. You’ll be given real work to do and formal feedback on how you’ve done by each member of staff you work for. In addition to this there will be the opportunity to meet current trainees and network with people across the firm to find out more about the work and culture at Bevan Brittan.

Other benefits
You will receive 25 days annual paid holiday, the option to purchase up to one week additional holiday, a pension with a 5% employee contribution, private medical insurance, permanent health insurance/income protection, a range of voluntary benefits including season ticket loans, childcare vouchers, cycle to work scheme, and an on-site gym.

University law careers fairs 2020
- University of Law, London, Bristol and Birmingham BBP
- University of Bristol
- University of the West of England
- University of Exeter
- University of Birmingham
Bird & Bird

The facts
Locations: London
Overseas offices: 29
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 88/175/37
Seats: 4x6 months; client and overseas secondments
First-year salary: £40,000
Qualification salary: £71,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Interview with training principal Ian Edwards

Birds of a techy feather flock to Bird & Bird.

The Firm
“When I got to Bird & Bird, I thought, ‘It’s like the Facebook of law!’” one enthusiastic trainee told us. “It’s so well known for the quality of its IP work and its expertise is second to none.” Bird & Bird is a leader in tech and IP law, acting for companies as they adjust to technologies developing at meteoric speed. In 2020, that’s everyone, right? Bird & Bird’s client wingspan touches on the automotive, aviation, defence, energy, financial services, healthcare, media, entertainment, sport and retail sectors. To understand how it flew to such heights, a little history might be useful. Bird & Bird was one of the first firms to focus on the emerging computer industry – former senior partner Alan Woods co-founded the Society for Computers and Law in 1973. From the mid-80s the firm built up its telecoms practice, acquiring mega clients in the space like BT. At the end of the 90s, Bird & Bird had just three offices in London, Brussels and Hong Kong. From 2000 onwards (i.e. the age of the internet) it expanded rapidly across Europe, China and Australia. Today the firm has 29 offices in 20 countries.

“It’s like the Facebook of law!”

Bird & Bird rules the roost in Chambers UK for IP, patent litigation, IT, data protection, franchising, life sciences, outsourcing, sport, and telecommunications law. For most of our sources, the firm’s IP expertise was “an important reason” for joining the firm, as was its culture. Even with its impressive technological chops, trainees say it’s one of those firms where “they’re smart, but not snobbish. It’s cool!”

Firms that have such a strong tech focus often recruit trainees with science degrees. There were certainly a few scientists in the nest here (around 50% of trainees surveyed), but there were also enough humanities grads to feel confident that B&B is open-minded about who it hires. Training principal Ian Edwards tells us: “There’s not a cookie-cutter approach to what defines someone who works at Bird & Bird.” Many trainees did have work experience prior to joining the firm. Out of a trainee intake of around 18 a year, one fresh-faced interviewee told us, “I’m one of just three who came straight from university.” Work experience certainly isn’t a requirement for applicants though, and Edwards continues: “I’m always surprised and fascinated at the end of the day by the variety of people we see in interviews.” Read our full interview with Edwards online.

The Seats
The fledgling birds do four six-month seats. In the month leading up to starting the training contract, “every department does a short pitch” to show trainees what they’re all about. Trainees then submit their preferred seats ranked one to seven to HR. We heard everyone gets their first choice at least once. While none of the seats are compulsory, “intellectual property is massive” – making it a likely destination.

Secondments “with cool clients” are on offer in every rotation, including an IP secondment with a well-known bank. Trainees can let the firm know if they’re interested in spending time in an overseas office, but a secondment isn’t guaranteed: “With the exception of Brussels and some of the Asian offices, you have to speak the language beyond basic fluency to go” to a country where English is not the main language. Trainees have also previously been seconded to Milan and Sydney.

Seat options: aviation; banking; commercial; corporate; dispute resolution; employment; intellectual property; real estate; tax
B&B’s commercial team is massive, occupying several floors of the office. It’s broken down into sector-based sub-groups which include energy, media/entertainment/sport (MES), retail and consumer, defence, technology transactions, IT and infrastructure. Trainees technically sit in one sector but are encouraged to pick up work in other areas. “If you’re doing a sports seat, for example, the work isn’t necessarily confined to that stream.”

“A UK client, a US lender and an Indonesian local counsel.”

The aviation team advises clients like airports, airlines, aviation authorities and aerospace companies. It recently advised Keflavik Airport in Reykjavik on its expansion programme of over $1 billion, and Air Arabia on its $14 billion purchase of 120 Airbus A320s. There’s also contentious work, as the firm recently represented Fiji Airways in a dispute with Abbotswood Shipping Corporation over alleged breach of aircraft leases. As you can tell from these examples, the work often has an international element to it. On one matter, a trainee described dealing with “a UK client, a US lender and an Indonesian local counsel.” Trainees typically worked on several “small-scale deals,” rather than getting stuck into one big transaction. Because of the team’s relatively smaller size, trainees said you “get a lot of responsibility,” which included “liaising with local counsel, taking calls directly with clients, and drafting progress reports.”

Like commercial, the IP department is “huge” at B&B, with over 90 lawyers. Among the team you’ll find lawyers working on patents, trade marks (both contentious and brand management), design and copyright issues, and transactional IP matters for clients in sectors like communications, life sciences and media and entertainment. The team advises jewellery company Fabergé and the Daily Mail on their global trade mark portfolios. In a recent matter, the IP team acted for Rockstar Games and Take-Two against the developers of cheats for Grand Theft Auto V. Trainees found “one of the advantages of a big department” was that “you’re able to pick your own work to a certain extent.” The majority of trainees’ work comes from their supervisors, “but you’re not boxed in – I’ve been able to say I want to do other work and do that.” Trainees got involved in everything from patent litigation and life sciences matters to copyright and trade mark issues. “If you’re working on a large matter,” like advising Vista Equity Partners on its $1.5 billion acquisition of tech company Accelya, for example, “then you’ll do classic trainee work: bundling, filing, and admin tasks basically.”

Some trainees in the IP seat split it with a three-month IP secondment to a client of the firm (a well-known bank). One key strand of work on the secondment involves “a large brand protection programme that Bird & Bird does for the client.” Once secondees are “back at the nest, about half of your work is dealing with the client from the firm’s side.” Sources enjoyed seeing both sides, but felt like they “didn’t have a full crack at IP” and wanted more time to get to know the team. “In terms of the short-term goal of qualifying into IP, it isn’t the best,” one felt. After trainees had “pushed for a second chance,” the firm tells us that in exceptional circumstances they can sit in IP twice in the training contract.

“As soon as you find something interesting you can ask the partner to give you more – and they do!”

Unlike IP, the dispute resolution team “is relatively small” (about 16 lawyers) which meant “there’s a lot of opportunity to get stuck in” as a trainee. “When you hear that you’re going into litigation, you think you’re just going to be bundling for six months,” one reflected, “and I did do a bit of that, but you get a lot of responsibility too.” Alongside the necessary but unglamorous tasks like filing, sources highlighted the chance to see trials and mediations, drafting correspondence, “maybe speaking to the client and definitely speaking with counsel.” Some were also tasked with communicating with the court, “which takes up a lot of time.” Trainees also mentioned “interesting research tasks,” as well as “drafting memos, which would sometimes be sent directly to the client.” Trainees liked the “cool clients” in this seat and got to see some “highly technical” matters. KFC’s very public chicken shortage because of a supply chain problem dominated the headlines for a short while in 2018, but Bird & Bird is still advising the company on the repercussions of the crisis, which amounted to financial losses of more than £20 million. The team also recently acted for Citibank in a £7 million dispute with a Dutch software company over a software licence agreement.

Trainees experienced “a lot of peaks and troughs” in the corporate seat. “There would be times when I was in the office until the late hours and then other times I was sitting around twiddling my thumbs,” one told us. As is the case in corporate departments, “it got pretty busy in the run-up
to Christmas with deal closings and completions.” Trainees were kept busy doing mark-ups of articles of investment documents, share purchase agreements, board minutes and post-completion filings. One highlighted getting “a good go at the first cut of the first documents” on a venture capital deal. The trainees who thrived in the “exciting” up periods liked that “as soon as you find something interesting you can ask the partner to give you more – and they do!” Insiders added that “it’s a really great seat if you’re interested in equity capital markets.” The team does a lot of mid-market M&A, and has advised Just Eat on several transactions as part of its international expansion, including the acquisition of software service Practi.

Trainee Life
Interviewees described Bird & Bird’s culture as “one of the best things about the firm,” highlighting working with “highly intelligent people but without the ego.” And while “there are a couple of partners who’re harder to work with, overall everyone is friendly and approachable.” Another pro is the firm “has a visibly good work/life balance for staff.” Our research indicated that spending eight to ten hours in the office each day was the norm at B&B. Trainees said: “There’s an expectation to be in the office if you need to work late, but there’s no point in sitting around looking pretty” during quieter stretches. Contractual hours are 9.30am to 5.30pm, which was close to what trainees described as “a quiet week.” When it’s busy, “I’m up at 6am.”

“Highly intelligent people but without the ego.”

Trainees often start their day at the firm at the office’s popular complimentary coffee bar, complete with a barista. “First thing in the morning, people bump into each other there and have a quick chat.” The firm also has “a great lunchtime culture,” thanks partly to the firm’s popular cafeteria with free food and “panoramic views.” And after a hard week’s work, “everyone goes to the pub on Friday.”

Reviews of the firm’s diversity initiatives were a bit more mixed. For some, B&B “is doing a great job!” Others weren’t as convinced, with one telling us they found some attitudes “superficial.” A more balanced source said “the firm is getting better, but I think they could do more.” The firm has a global women’s development programme that aims to improve retention of female associates, but trainees wanted to see more at the junior end. Despite “not seeing the diversity that I want in senior leadership” for now, trainees scored the firm highly for inclusivity training and its efforts to recruit diverse talent.

Last year, we heard there were some angry birds when it came to qualification time. “It was a bit of a car crash,” one trainee confided. “There was very little clarity in terms of numbers and managing expectations. This year there’s much more clarity.” Phew! Trainees explained that grad recruitment sets out the timetable around Christmas time. Trainees have a couple of meeting with the head of grad recruitment and the training principal to express their interests and eventually confirm what they’re interested in qualifying into. After this, trainees undergo an interview which includes a short presentation – “only five to ten minutes.” In 2020, the firm retained 16 of 18 qualifiers.

Spread your wings:
“At Bird & Bird, scientists come in thinking they want to do IP but end up doing something else!”
Bird & Bird

12 New Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1JP
Tel: 020 7415 6000 Email: london.graduates@twobirds.com Website: www.londongraduates.twobirds.com Linkedin: Bird & Bird LLP

Firm profile
Bird & Bird is an international law firm with a rare and invaluable grasp of strategic commercial issues. We combine exceptional legal expertise with deep industry knowledge and refreshingly creative thinking to help clients achieve their commercial goals. We have over 1300 lawyers globally in 29 offices across Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia, as well as close ties with firms in other parts of the world. We understand the trends that are shaping the markets, and the technological and regulatory issues that are transforming industries.

Main areas of work
We’re involved in a range of sectors, from Aviation and Defence through to Communications and Technology, Energy and Utilities, Retail & Consumer, Financial Services, as well as IT, Life Sciences, Media and Sport.

Training opportunities
Trainees complete 4x6 month seats from the following, and there are opportunities to go on an international or client secondment:
- Aviation
- Banking
- Commercial
- Corporate
- Dispute Resolution

- Employment
- Intellectual Property
- Real Estate
- Tax

Vacation scheme
We recruit the majority of our trainees from vacation schemes.
- Spring 2021: 12 April – 23 April 2021
- Summer 2021: 21 June – 2 July 2021
Law students should apply from their penultimate year onwards; non-law students should apply from their final year. Graduates can apply at any time. Each vacation scheme runs for two weeks and we pay the London Living Wage.

Other benefits
Private healthcare, life assurance, pension scheme, computer loans, season ticket loan, cycle to work scheme, gym membership, employee assistance programme, corporate discount, 2 days paid volunteering opportunities.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Students not yet eligible to apply for a Training Contract or Vacation Scheme with us can apply to attend our Early Bird Virtual Workshop which takes place on 13-14 January 2021. It is a virtual experience for students to gain an insight into Bird & Bird and develop their interest in law. Applications close 15 November 2020. We also run open days, with a separate day for STEM students. Applications close 30 October 2020.

University law careers fairs 2020
We aren’t attending any university career fairs in 2020 but we will be attending a number of Legal Cheek, AllAboutLaw and Aspiring Solicitors virtual law fairs. Please see our website and social media for more details of our events programme.

Partners: 88
Associates: 150
Total trainees: 37
UK offices: London
Overseas offices: 29

Contacts
Graduate recruiter: Lara Machnicki, london.graduates@twobirds.com 0207 415 6000
Training partner: Ian Edwards 0207 415 6000

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: up to 18
Applications pa: 2,000
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1
Vacation scheme places pa: up to 40

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: 3rd September 2020 Training contract deadline 2023 start: 31st December 2020
Vacation scheme applications open: 3rd September 2020 Vacation scheme 2021 deadline: Spring: 13th December 2020, Summer: 31st December 2020 Open day deadline: 30th October 2020

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: £40,000
Post-qualification salary: £71,000
Holiday entitlement: 25 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant pa: Yes

International and regional
Offices with training contracts: Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Hong Kong, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK.
Please apply directly to international offices.
Birketts LLP

The facts
Locations: Cambridge, Chelmsford, Ipswich, London, Norwich
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 70/294/34
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £25,500-£28,000
Qualification salary: £40,000-£58,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Birketts

Like Delia Smith’s favourite football team, Birketts is a leader on the East Anglia circuit.

The Firm
“Everyone knows Birketts,” declared one confident insider. For the unfamiliar, here’s the lowdown: the firm set up shop in East Anglia 150 years ago and now has offices in Cambridge, Ipswich, Chelmsford, Norwich and London. Despite its regional roots, the firm still does work for clients elsewhere in the UK and overseas.

Several trainees were sold by its “really good reputation across East Anglia: I was attracted by the mix of London-quality work but a better work/life balance.” The firm picks up the majority of its Chambers UK rankings in the East Anglia category, and its skill set is broad – Norfolk broad, you might say (not at interview though). The firm is top-ranked for (deep breath) construction, corporate, employment, environment, litigation, planning, real estate litigation, restructuring/insolvency, and social housing. It’s also top-ranked for its crime and agriculture prowess in Essex, Ipswich and Norwich, plus its family group in Ipswich. Wowza!

“You’re not just a cog in a rather large wheel.”

All these rankings are generated by a relatively small firm, with just over 350 lawyers spread across five offices: “It’s big enough to have all the key practice areas but small enough that it’s a really tight-knit, relaxed group. You’re not just a cog in a rather large wheel.” When applying for training contracts, some sources “thought London’s bright lights were calling, but after speaking to my friends in London I realised I didn’t want to be doing the double D [due diligence] for months.” Trainees who came into law without any legal background “liked that fact Birketts has so many practice areas, so you have as varied a choice as possible when choosing seats.” At the time of research, the Ipswich HQ was home to just under 40% of trainees, with Norwich, Chelmsford and Cambridge drawing in six or seven newbies each.

The Seats
Rookies are assigned their first seat according to business need, but get to put down preferences for the rest following an “informal” discussion with HR. It’s worth noting that former paralegals can shorten the training contract by six months, so long as they’ve satisfied SRA requirements. Given they’re closer to qualification, second years get priority, but “they try to give everyone the seats they want, and more often than not people get their first or second choice.” If there’s no room at the inn, you’ll likely be able to do the seat you want in another office: “It’s a really good way to get to know more people across the firm, so I can see why they encourage us to do at least one seat elsewhere.” This makes up for the fact there usually aren’t any secondment opportunities, though they may arise from time to time. Those who hadn’t sat in another office lamented: “There’s a sense of disparity, especially as the offices are far apart. I guess it’s geography, what are you going to do?” HR do organise quarterly firm-wide training sessions “which are always followed by dinner and drinks, so they’re good at bringing us together in that respect.”

“I pretty much ran a £10 million transaction from start to finish!”

Seat options: agriculture; banking and finance; commercial litigation; commercial property; commercial property SIPPs; commercial property utilities; construction; corporate; employment; family; new build, planning; private client advisory; property litigation; public sector; regulatory and corporate defence; residential development; shipping
Folks spending time in another location get a £200 monthly allowance to cover travel costs “but it’s taxed so it doesn’t come anywhere near to covering a season ticket, so you’re out of pocket.” This was brought up by every trainee we spoke with who had sat in a different office, with one pointing out: “They’ve paid the same allowance for ages, but of course ticket prices inflate every year.”

Interviewees pointed out: “What’s unique to regional firms is that it’s common to run smaller matters on your own from start to finish,” like handling land registrations in the commercial property seat. There is “inevitably” a lot of post-completion work, which is “bread and butter” for the team, “but there are also really good opportunities for drafting contracts and leases, plus transaction management,” like running data rooms “which I quite enjoyed once I got to know the system!” Other trainees had focused on the residential development side “which was completely different to what I imagined – most commercial property seats deal with a lot of leases, but our clients are mainly housing associations so they come with an additional set of regulations which is niche.” Such regulatory issues include government quotas for social housing, “so I spent a lot of time on the Land Registry website looking at various plans and deeds.” This team recently negotiated the development and land agreements in a national housebuilder’s acquisition of 68 affordable housing units in Essex. This seat isn’t known for having much face-to-face client contact “because we have quite big clients, but we do get to send emails to them.”

By default, the private client group is “one of the most client-facing seats,” so although trainees “started on the less complicated stuff” like taking attendance notes in client meetings, sources pointed out that the opportunity to “go to client meetings is fab, so it’s a really good seat if that’s something trainees are suited to.” “I ran a lot of drafting matters independently and that’s something trainees are suited to.” This was brought up by every interviewee’s highlight was “pretty much running a £10 million transaction from start to finish!” The fee earners would probably have preferred to go home but the other side wanted to play beggars.”

Newbies also got involved in more traditional professional negligence, insolvency and shareholder dispute matters, “but loads of different types of law pop up – you can be handed a case where the nature of the matter is completely new, which is really exciting.” Birketts recently provided UK legal advice to McCormick Global Ingredients in a $16 million breach of contract dispute between its Mauritius office and a French supplier of vanilla pods. Day-to-day trainee tasks vary from drafting settlement agreements and liaising with counsel on the other side to visiting clients’ offices to gather evidence: “You’re exposed to a really broad spectrum of matters, so you definitely learn fast.” Some sources were so keen on this seat they want to qualify into it: “It’s so analytical; you learn the ins and outs of the subject matter, plus there’s the strategic element of how to play the litigation.”

Somewhat disappointed that “there’s not much opportunity for advocacy or court attendance,” but one interviewee did attend a mediation, “which was very good experience.” We’d hope so, as this mediation lasted a whopping 21 hours: “We had a break for dinner but otherwise we just blasted through. The fee earners would probably have preferred to go home but the other side wanted to play beggars.”

Corporate newbies also got to explore more nuanced areas of practices by working with the corporate tax subgroup: “Those two teams work side by side” (both literally and metaphorically). Tax work is “mainly research-based” and largely involves “helping out colleagues in other groups with internal clients’ queries,” like stamp duty and land tax matters. Trainees are thrown straight into the action: “On my first day a partner grabbed me and said: ‘I want you to be involved, here are loads of ancillary documents for you to draft.’” Trainees had also been involved in the bank finance subgroup: “I ran a lot of matters independently and helped in the background with bigger transactions.” These folks “act for a lot of sellers so I generally did straightforward M&A, plus a little bit of private equity.” The bank finance team recently advised the Little Norwich Shoe Company on its acquisition of Northampton-based shoe manufacturer and retailer T. Groocock & Co.
Birketts LLP

The True Picture

The firm has grown in recent years, so trainees can now do pure banking seats if they fancy. This seat’s known for offering “a lot of client exposure, especially if the transaction is local or lower in value. I got to meet clients one to one.” Sources did note that “things got a bit sparse when Covid-19 started to close down deals.” Although corporate seats typically have shocking hours, “even in our HQ, late finishes are 8pm, unlike the City.” A highlight of this seat is going to big completion dinners in London, so “there’s a really good sense of fun in the team – I didn’t have a single bad day.” Interviewees were keen to point out: “The partners are really approachable – they’re not the scary people you’d think they’d be. There’s just a great atmosphere.” A special shout out went to a tax partner who “always pointed me in the right direction if I was ever confused.”

“The partners aren’t the scary people you’d think they’d be.”

Trainee Life

Trainees can check in with HR as often as they like and have a dedicated HR contact, while there are also informal mid-seat and end-of-seat reviews to see how trainees are getting on. That said, “getting feedback varies hugely within teams,” which is “especially prevalent in large teams like commercial property because you get work from various fee earners.” For example, “some people look over everything you do and always make a small change, but others trust that you’ve done the work correctly.” Others had a more positive experience: “My supervisors have taken a lot of time out of their day explaining deals in a wider context.” Even in the wake of Covid-19, mentors had done video calls with their mentees: “The firm’s been really good in carrying on with business as usual.” Some felt the open-plan office layout means “it’s never terrifying to go up to a partner.”

Across the firm, trainees participated in twice-weekly Webex meetings “where we all talk about how we’re doing. We’ve had some teething issues with tech but I’ve been pretty impressed.” The firm put on video training during lockdown: “Each session someone will talk about their team and introduce trainees to practice areas they might not have thought about. We even had training on the firm’s professional indemnity insurance.” Others were pleased to receive resilience and wellbeing training over video. Birketts has been “big on mental health over the past year and making sure resources are available, like the anonymous helpline so it feels like there’s a good support network,” though others felt these initiatives are being rolled out “just as a box-ticking exercise.”

“I don’t feel like I’m alone in this.”

While some departments, like corporate, have anonymous suggestion boxes, the commercial litigation team have also taken the initiative and now assign each fee earner a buddy: “It’s an excuse to go out for lunch and catch up in a more informal setting.” Speaking of lunch, we heard there’s a canteen on the top floor of the Chelmsford office: “The partners sit with the trainees and we chat and get to know each other; regardless of what level you are, so there’s a nice community atmosphere.” In the Norwich and Cambridge offices too, “everyone, including partners and secretaries, will chat in the kitchen. There aren’t any cliques.” One particularly enamoured trainee declared: “Everyone is so approachable that it feels like we’re a family. I don’t feel like I’m alone in this.”

The firm recently launched its Good to Great initiative, “which is designed to help us improve our client care, efficiency and cohesiveness between offices. Everyone, including back-office staff, had training on it, which really helps with the one-office mindset.” There were concerns that this collegial culture may be threatened by Birketts’ current expansion “from an East Anglia-based firm to something else entirely,” while others explained: “We’re already a large regional firm which is growing rapidly and what happens next is up in the air.” The firm told us its goal is to maintain the OneBirketts shared culture even throughout change. In May 2020, Birketts merged with London-based insurance boutique EC3 Legal, adding a further seven lawyers to its insurance practice. Some were excited by the expansion: “It feels like we’ve got a lot of momentum as a business and that we’re going places.”

The NQ process is a pretty informal affair: “It gets mentioned during conversations but if partners ask where you want to go you can be as non-committal as you like.” Once the job lists come out, trainees submit a couple of paragraphs about why they want to join a certain group, followed by an interview. If only one trainee wants to join a certain group, they don’t have to go through an interview process. Birketts retained 12 of 14 qualifiers in 2020, with two on fixed-term contracts.

Werk-ett's

Insiders explained Birketts “keeps on more or less every trainee – there’d have to be a very good reason for them not to” and “this is definitely a place with a meritocratic element, so if you throw your oar in you’ll get very good work.”
Birketts LLP

141-145 Princes Street, Ipswich, IP1 1QJ
Tel: 01473 232300
Email: graduate-recruitment@birketts.co.uk
Website: www.birketts.co.uk/graduates

Firm profile
Birketts is a full service, top 100 UK law firm, with offices in Cambridge, Chelmsford, Ipswich and Norwich. With a rich heritage, we have built an enviable track record advising businesses, institutions and individuals in the UK and internationally.

We are large enough to provide specialist expertise at a standard that is frequently compared with major city firms, but not at the expense of maintaining a personal and tailored service. We are flexible about everything except our reputation for maintaining the highest professional and ethical standards.

Main areas of work
Each office provides legal advice to both corporate, commercial and private clients, we also have niche practices in corporate criminal defence and shipping.

Training opportunities
Our training contract comprises four ‘seats’, each lasting six months. While trainees are allocated to a particular office there is the opportunity and expectation that you will spend at least one seat in another office.

You are likely to spend time in corporate, commercial property and private client teams as well as the firm’s specialist practice areas such as employment, litigation, shipping and agriculture. From the beginning of your training programme, you will have direct contact with our clients. You’ll feel valued and involved, and will see first-hand the importance of going the extra mile.

Our trainees have regular meetings and a more formal mid and end of seat review ensuring that they receive regular, constructive feedback on their progress.

Vacation scheme
This is a chance to get a taste of life at a ‘Top 100’ law firm. We offer the scheme once per year (two weeks in June) across all four offices. The majority of our training contracts are offered following participation in the scheme.

We welcome anyone to the scheme who fits our academic criteria and is available to start a training contract in two years’ time, i.e. penultimate and final year law students, final year non-law students and graduates.

All applications for training contracts should be made using our online application system.

What will the interview be like?
We interview between 35-40 potential summer placement students. You will be interviewed at the office to which you have applied by two partners and the interview will last 45 minutes. You will be asked to present for ten minutes on a topic of your choice.

Other benefits
- Staff profit share
- Life assurance
- Contributory pension scheme
- Private medical insurance
- Permanent health insurance
- Interest free season ticket loan
- Discounted legal services
- Subsidised gym membership
- Cycle to work scheme
- Childcare vouchers
- Social events
- Agile Working Policy

University law careers fairs 2020
UEA, University of Essex and Anglia Ruskin.
Blaser Mills Law

The facts
Locations: High Wycombe, Amersham, London, Silverstone
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 23/33/9
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: undisclosed
Qualification salary: undisclosed

This firm has been blazing a commercial trail over the past few years, but it’s still a great destination for those interested in personal legal services too.

The Firm
Blaser Mills is very clear about what it would like to do in the near future: to continue growing its commercial capabilities. This isn’t a new move for this South East outfit, which has transformed itself over the past decade from, as this trainee put it, “a traditional high street firm to a more corporate offering. It’s an exciting thing to be a part of and we are definitely winning bigger clients.” New laterals are adding something to this corporate makeover too: a regulator for the London Stock Exchange with expertise in the Alternative Investment Market (AIM) hopped on board, as did the former head of corporate and commercial at regional firm Tollers and a senior trade mark attorney (who will support commercial clients’ brands). All this commercial activity hasn’t gone unnoticed by trainees, with one noting that the “corporate and commercial team is taking up most of the work in the office!”

“It’s an exciting thing to be a part of and we are definitely winning bigger clients.”

Acting for businesses is just one half of the Blaser Mills mission: it also has a robust personal services offering from its more ‘high street’ days, which has been bolstered by the firm’s corporate drive of late. “There’s a lot more focus on protecting business assets,” explained one junior. A tactical move to create (as reported in the legal press) a ‘regional hub’ for its private clients saw Blaser Mills merge its lawyers and specialist services previously based in Rickmansworth with those in Amersham. In Chambers High Net Worth, Blaser Mills is ranked for its private wealth expertise, especially with regards to its estate and tax planning know-how, as well as for its Court of Protection work. In Chambers UK, meanwhile, Blaser Mills picks up more nods for its personal services work, in areas such as family/matrimonial, personal injury and crime, while on the more commercial side its real estate and litigation practices are gaining traction.

Alongside its High Wycombe HQ, Blaser Mills also has offices in Amersham, London and Silverstone. Trainees tend to be based in High Wycombe and Amersham, but are also likely to spend their time in Silverstone and London, with a fair amount of flexibility. Trainees were drawn to the more “tailored” approach to the training contract and told us that Blaser Mills is all about flexibility when it comes to mapping out individual training programmes. “Your first seat will be allocated at random, based on business needs,” explained one source, “but moving forward, a lot of people do more specific, focused contracts.” This means, for example, that if you’d like to qualify as a family lawyer, you can specify this with the training principal and potentially steer away from spending time in unrelated seats.

The Seats
“We’ve been targeting more City clients by expanding the London office,” a trainee said of the corporate and commercial department. According to one, “around 50% of the work now stems from London-based clients.” The department has four main focuses covering the technology sector, owner-managed businesses (especially SMEs), the private equity sector (Blaser Mills has been busy advising target companies on their options for attracting

Seat options: corporate and commercial; real estate and development; commercial litigation and dispute resolution; family law; residential property; wills; trust and probate; commercial property

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired by Blaser Mills
investment), and the motorsport industry (an area mostly serviced from the firm’s Silverstone office). To get the mood right, one trainee revealed that the head of the department had added “office chairs in the shape of racing car seats!” Two trainees can sit here per rotation and sample both corporate and commercial matters. The result? Daily responsibilities range from “drafting share purchase agreements for M&A transactions; drafting commercial contracts; reviewing terms and conditions; and reviewing racing driver contracts.”

“...office chairs in the shape of racing car seats!”

Blaser’s dispute resolution department handles work for commercial clients and individuals on both the claimant and defendant sides. Sector specialisms include construction and ‘consumables’, which cover the likes of alcoholic beverages, pet foods and sterile products. A recent case saw the team act for animal feed supplier AB Agri as it looked to recover payment from a customer, while another involved pursuing the enforcement of an adjudicator’s decision in the Technology and Construction Court on behalf of the liquidated company, Meadowside Building Developments. Trainees felt that they were able to get in on “all the procedural steps, like going to the court with barristers,” as well as “drafting everything from letters to clients, claim forms, instructions to counsel and witness statements.”

Amersham and High Wycombe are the places to be for the private client department, which covers wills, trusts and probate matters. One source gave an overwhelming thumbs up to the seat and felt that it had helped to build up their “confidence and knowledge with impeccable supervision and autonomy.” This rave review partly came from being able to deal with clients early on: “We’d always attend the client meetings from day one and then act as a point of contact via phone and email to answer client queries and provide updates.”

Trainee Life

Insiders described the culture of the firm as “relaxed, friendly and without drama.” One went on to explain that “people are hearing the firm’s name more and more now – we have more of an entrepreneurial side to us now.” Supporting this savvier angle was the trend to “work more flexibly, which has changed people’s attitudes towards the firm; when you give people that freedom, they’re more invested in growing their departments. No one dreads going in to work.” Despite the shift from a high street perspective to a more corporate/commercial mentality, Blaser Mills lawyers still get “together in the kitchen in the morning to have a coffee.”

The firm’s tight-knit culture shines through the training and support that’s available for trainees. “We have really good working relationships with our supervisors and the training principal,” said one source. “They sit down and take the time to explain particular details if we’re struggling with a piece of work; they are seriously patient.” Alongside these support avenues, trainees are also allocated a lunch budget to meet up with their mentor as frequently as they would like during the training contract: “Our mentor is usually an NQ who we would feel comfortable with discussing any issues that we encounter - the kind of things that we wouldn’t necessarily talk to a senior member about. For example, the other day I felt unmotivated while working remotely and I gave my mentor a call and it was nice to hear they felt the same way and we supported each other.”

“...when you give people that freedom, they’re more invested in growing their departments.”

On the subject of time spent working, trainees told us that “it’s never going to be a nine till five job, but Blaser has no ‘sit at your desk’ culture, so when you’re done, you won’t be encouraged to stay late for the sake of it.” Good hours, a tight-knit culture and a sense of entrepreneurial growth were all understandable reasons for wanting to stay at Blaser Mills. The qualification process occurs at two different points during the year due to the firm’s March and September trainee start dates (it’s September for the majority). Sources told us that the process has become more standardised recently, but flagged that trainees do have conversations with departments to flag their preferences before the qualification period occurs. In 2020, Blaser Mills retained three of four qualifiers.

And finally...

Sources liked the different feel of the offices: “High Wycombe has a bit more of a City vibe to it, while Amersham is more relaxed. The London office is in a great location with fun people – and there are always doughnuts!”
Blaser Mills Law

40 Oxford Road, High Wycombe, Bucks HP11 2EE
Tel: 020 3814 2020
Email: graduaterecruitment@blasermills.co.uk
Website: www.blasermills.co.uk

Firm profile
Blaser Mills Law is a leading law firm based in the South East with over 50 lawyers. We are a full-service firm, offering a comprehensive range of legal services to businesses and private individuals.

Our highly regarded firm has a strong business services offering, including corporate and commercial, employment, commercial property and dispute resolution. We also have experienced private client and family lawyers, as well as specialist lawyers in personal injury, child care, residential property and criminal defence.

We offer a fresh approach to law, with a focus on not only building relationships with clients, but also building employee relationships. The success of our business, and the high-quality service we provide for our clients comes from nurturing the skills and promoting the talent and diversity of our staff.

Types of Work
- Corporate, Commercial Property, Employment & Dispute Resolution: 37%
- Residential Property & Development: 22%
- Wills, Trusts & Probate: 16%
- Personal & Serious Injury: 10%
- Family & Divorce (including child care): 11%
- Criminal Defence: 4%

Training opportunities
From the moment that our future trainees receive their official offer, they become a valued member of the team. The firm organises a number of events throughout the two year gap to give them an opportunity to get to know the firm before they officially start their training contract.

Training starts in September with a full induction day. Trainees will have varied (four six-month) seats in both non-contentious and contentious practice areas, giving them the opportunity to gain experience across a broad range of legal disciplines in a variety of locations. From day one, trainees are given plenty of responsibility and hands-on experience, with the ongoing support from experienced training supervisors. In addition, we operate a mentor scheme that gives trainees confidential access to recently qualified lawyers who can offer first-hand experience and advice. Part of the mentor scheme includes getting the trainees together three times a year for social events.

Throughout the training contract, trainees will develop their technical skills, department knowledge and client care. Business Development is a further skill that we look to develop in our trainees, so when it comes to qualifying, they are confident to approach prospective clients and build their own client list. Trainees will have access to multiple business development opportunities, whether that be through article writing, presenting at seminars or attending networking events.

Other benefits
Trainees are enrolled into our pension scheme and are given life cover from day one.

University law careers fairs 2020
Royal Holloway Mini Law Fair and Networking Evening
When there’s a dispute about a claim, there’s a BLM.

The Firm
If you want to get a snapshot of what BLM does (after reading our True Picture, naturally), kick your feet up, switch your box on and tune into BBC One’s Claimed and Shamed. The documentary investigates insurance fraud and busts bogus claims, and the lawyers at BLM often make cameo appearances as experts on the subject. But fraud is just one piece of the puzzle at this bumper insurance firm. Our trainee interviewees praised BLM’s “strong contentious offering,” representing major insurers like Allianz, Aviva, and Zurich as well as companies that get embroiled in insurance disputes, such as Coca-Cola, Specsavers and Sainsbury’s. While most of the work is litigious, trainees said “there is much more scope for non-contentious work” as the firm continues to build on its commercial advisory practice (which started in 2017 with the addition of a team of 30 from Slater & Gordon). Another major focus of the firm over the last few years has been global growth—it recently helped found a global network of insurance-focused firms.

Chambers UK awards BLM top marks on the national stage for personal injury and professional discipline, plus high commendations for insurance volume claims, police law, travel, and health and safety.

It wouldn’t be hard to scout out a BLM lawyer off the small screen, with about 800 of them spread between 13 offices across the UK and Ireland. Manchester is the firm’s largest base and housed about 14 trainees at the time of our calls, as did the London office. Birmingham had six, Liverpool and Southampton each had three and Bristol housed a solo trainee. Many of our interviewees had paralegal experience at BLM or other firms before they started as trainees.

The Seats
“When applying to an office, check its specific seat options,” trainees advised. “If you don’t have ties to a particular area, consider which office would best fit your career.” The London and Manchester offices offer a colourful array of seat options, while Birmingham, Southampton and Liverpool don’t have quite so many options. Second-year trainees come first in line in the seat allocation process, but business need is “the driving force behind decisions.” Some interviewees got all of their preferences while others received none at all. “It is what it is,” one sighed. We heard healthcare and professional indemnity are unofficially reserved for second-years as they tend to be a bit more popular. Trainees will most likely complete at least one “injury” seat, such as abuse, motor, catastrophic injury, occupational disease, public liability, and clinical negligence.

“You read tons of reports by consultants.”

The occupational disease team defends clients against employee disease claims. Cases of noise-induced hearing loss and asbestos-related disease are areas of particular expertise. The team recently represented outsourcing company Capita and construction company

Seat options: casualty; occupational disease; fraud; motor; professional indemnity; public sector; housing litigation; property damage and recovery; abuse and neglect; catastrophic injury; clinical negligence; construction and engineering; commercial real estate; professional discipline regulatory; product liability and recall; insurance; reinsurance and coverage; commercial litigation and dispute resolution; family law; prison law; inquests and regulatory; white collar crime; healthcare (go online for breakdown by office)
Balfour Beatty in proceedings brought by the widow of a former employee who died of mesothelioma. “The work is very much medical,” trainees explained, and as such they learned a lot about the world of medicine. “You read tons of reports by consultants.” The claims are often historical, given that the causes of some diseases can go back decades – for example, exposure to asbestos may result in mesothelioma 20 years later. This meant trainees had to play an investigative role, “gathering documents from employers that don’t exist anymore.” One source got to work on an ‘aerotoxicity’ case involving “an individual that had inhaled airliner cabin air over a long period of time.” Although this is a fab seat for the curious, it probably isn’t the best choice for the squeamish. “At first it’s quite disturbing,” one admitted. “You have to read detailed medical statements about people who’re bedridden.” If trainees don’t want to work on a particular case, they can opt out with no ill feelings (pardon the pun).

The clinical negligence department handles claims that involve medical malpractice, acting on the defendant side for insurers, clinics, care homes and medical professionals. Clients include the Royal College of Nursing, Axis Capital and the Harley Medical Group. “Doctors may receive a notice from the General Medical Council saying that they are under investigation in relation to a specific incident,” trainees explained. “They then may have to go to tribunal.” BLM recently defended a GP in a £500,000 claim relating to a delayed diagnosis of lung toxicity caused by antibiotic treatment. Trainees gushed over some of the experience they got: “I was working on a high-profile case involving a doctor while it was in the public eye.” Day-to-day tasks included conducting research into companies, doctors or press coverage of cases; meeting doctors and dentists; and attending hearings before the Medical Practitioners Tribunals Service.

Trainees in the motor seat may encounter a plethora of matters, including hire car claims, motor trade claims, liability disputes, and cases of catastrophic injury. The injuries in these claims can range from mild whiplash all the way to cause of death by dangerous driving. This area is often referred to as ‘volume litigation’ and the moniker is appropriate: BLM handles tens of thousands of motor claims every year. With cases coming thick and fast, it’s a good place for trainees “to learn the litigation process” as they’ll often see files all the way from the pre-litigation stage to the outcome. BLM recently defended Allianz in a £12,000 loss of earnings claim and a £100,000 road traffic accident claim. Trainees got their teeth stuck into fast-track claims ranging from £10,000 to £25,000 in value, as well as more complex multi-track casualty claims of over £25,000. On these cases the team deals with “assigning the responsibility for compensation,” or in other words, figuring out what caused an accident and whether anyone is liable to cough up. This process entails “going through disclosures and drawing up the relevant documents a client has to build the case and interviewing witnesses.” Complex multi-track claims often have multi-jurisdictional elements, where the subject of the claim “might have been injured abroad.”

Property damage is one of the more common non-injury seats trainees may do. The department represents clients in property damage disputes and advises on policy responses when properties are damaged by “fires, floods, soil movement or unusual runaway animals.” Goodness. The team recently represented Integro Insurance Brokers in a $7 million fire damage claim brought by a large Brazilian retailer. Trainees were entrusted with their own caseload of low-value claims. Recovery claims were super common: “This is usually where the insurance has had to pay out to the insured for damages caused to their property, but we believe someone else is at fault.” a trainee explained.

Every three months BLM sends a trainee on client secondment to the Association of British Insurers. “Most of the work is in-house legal work related to the policy aspect in the insurance world,” said one former secondee. The nature of the work might be heavy. One trainee for example got to grips with matters stemming from systemic child abuse: “I assisted with preparing the witness statements and summarised transcripts from children who had been abused in places like care homes or hospitals.” To go on secondment, trainees said “all you need to do is ask” – but of coursesplacements are still subject to the firm’s business needs.
Trainee Life

The working day generally runs from 9am to 6pm for BLM trainees, with some getting out just in time for Pointless at 5pm. Departmental differences occur, with the corporate seat warranting slightly longer hours: “If you have pressing tasks you’re expected to stay and finish them, but it’s an expectation rather than the rule.” But typical ‘late’ nights for trainees meant a 7.30pm finish, and the Manchester office even locks its doors at 8pm.

With such an appealing picture of work/life balance, what’s the catch? “I don’t think the salary is justified,” one trainee told us, echoing many of their peers. BLM does not have a fixed NQ salary but the starting point outside of London is £31k. While some interviewees were disgruntled about salaries, others pointed out that the firm has reasonable client rates as an insurance risk and commercial law firm and “the work the firm does determines salaries.”

“Associates, partners and paralegals are like a big family.”

Again and again, sources decorated the firm’s culture with adjectives such as “approachable” and “friendly,” citing interactions between different levels of seniority. “When chatting with a partner you don’t feel a wall between the two of you,” said one. This kind of atmosphere could be down to the open plan offices or the business casual dress code, but whatever it is, trainees felt “relaxed” at work. And, although the firm is large in scale, it’s done a pretty good job at creating a cosy feel: “Associates, partners and paralegals are like a big family.”

Even so, we heard the firm “isn’t crazy social,” although each department gets a budget to plan the occasional outing. Trainees highlighted activities like ping pong, bowling, pizza and crazy golf. The London office had a bit more going on: “We work close to Liverpool Street and sometimes have dinner at PizzaExpress.”

Trainees described the Leeds office as much more quaint and “modest space,” but in 2020 the firm announced it would close its Leeds and Bristol offices, with staff moving to work remotely.

“Associates, partners and paralegals are like a big family.”

Trainees are contacted as they approach qualification time to run through their options and go over how the process works. NQ positions are published six months before qualification and trainees can apply to as many departments as they wish with a CV application. If there is more than one applicant for a particular vacancy, trainees then go through an interview process. Retention has historically been shaky, and in 2020 BLM held on to 11 of 23 qualifiers.

Want cutting-edge tech?

Rest insured: the firm has a digital conferencing platform called BLM Innovations Forum that offers video links for anyone involved in a case and enables the sharing and editing of online documents.
BLM

King’s House, 42 King Street West, Manchester, M3 2NU
Tel: 0161 236 2002
Email: graduaterecruitment@blmlaw.com
Website: www.blmlaw.com/join-us/graduates
LinkedIn: BLM
Instagram: @BLM_Grads
Twitter: @BLM_Grads

Firm profile
BLM is an insurance risk and commercial law firm with both a domestic and international focus. We now work with an increasing number of clients, across more lines of business, in more locations throughout the UK and Ireland as well as across the world, than ever before. Our philosophy is to deliver positive outcomes for our clients and help them make their businesses more successful. Fundamentally we are helping them to reduce the time and money spent on managing risk and resolving disputes, whilst offering a practical, commercial and solutions driven approach to non-contentious business law.

Main areas of work
We operate in 12 key markets: brokers; care; construction & property; general insurance; healthcare; leisure & hospitality; Lloyds & London market; manufacturing; public sector; retail; TMT; transportation & logistics.
We have established a deep-rooted presence in the general insurance sector, the London Market and amongst brokers. We also have a significant presence among corporate businesses many of whom are multi-national, the public sector and the health and care industry.

Training opportunities
Our two-year trainee solicitor programme has been designed to maximise your potential. You’ll complete four six-month seats, giving you exposure to a variety of teams across the business. You’ll also gain the experience and develop the skills required of a qualified solicitor within insurance law.
You may also have the opportunity to spend time on secondment. Throughout your programme you will work with our partners and associates on a variety of cases from low to complex, high-value claims, from initial investigation through to trial. You will have all of the support that you need from your assigned supervisor and our in-house talent development team.
Partners encourage early responsibility and expect trainees to manage workloads autonomously and as part of a team. We will provide a supportive and friendly working environment and you can expect clear opportunities for career progression and a broad scope of challenging and interesting work.

Vacation placements
BLM’s vacation scheme gives you the opportunity to spend two weeks in one of our offices. You’ll be paired up with one of our current trainees and will have the opportunity to really get to grips with what we do ‘day to day’. You’ll work with our partners and associates too, contributing to live cases and be given real responsibility.

Other benefits
Pension, private medical insurance, discounted gym, childcare vouchers, life assurance, season ticket loans, employee assistance programme.

University law careers fairs 2020
TBD
Boodle Hatfield LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Oxford
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 40/40/8
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £40,000
Qualification salary: £64,000

Trainees wear many hats at this increasingly international outfit: private client advisers and property pros are just two examples.

The Firm
If you think you’ve seen enough change for one year, imagine what you’d see in 300 years. Witness to (nearly) all 300 of them is London’s Boodle Hatfield, a firm balancing tradition and modernity. “It’s a firm with a lot of history but lots of new, modern and entrepreneurial clients,” noted one trainee-come-historian. “Boodle is focusing internationally on the Middle East and America, and we’re really growing in that sense.” The firm’s core strengths are in private client and property law, but its scope is growing to help fulfil its global ambitions.

Looking back at Britain and the firm’s Chambers UK rankings, you’ll find accolades for real estate, family, and agricultural and rural affairs in London, plus art and cultural property nationwide and a top spot for agricultural law in Oxford, where the firm also has a base. You’ll need Chambers High Net Worth for Boodle’s best bits: top rankings in private wealth disputes, private wealth law and high-value residential real estate. Alluring indeed, but trainees reckoned that “as with any place, it’s all about the people” when it comes to nailing down Boodle’s appeal – an intake of just 12 or so trainees a year means “everyone’s close and willing to support one another and maintain a strong community base.”

“Keep saying it, but everyone is so damn friendly!”

Each trainee shares an office with their supervisor, “so it’s easy to turn around and ask a question.” A slimmed-down headcount also means “you’re never doing admin jobs, you’re doing proper legal work,” interviewees suggested. “The responsibility levels come from the size of the intake.” Seat allocation comes down to informal chats with HR and “everyone gets mostly what they want. That’s another benefit of having fewer trainees.” Once they got settled into seats, trainees reassured us “you never feel lost. I keep saying it, but everyone is so damn friendly!”

The Seats
Speaking of nice buildings, Boodle’s property team offers “a wide scope” and “big variety” for trainees. The department covers commercial and residential property, as well as real estate financing; construction is a standalone team. Our sources relished “doing title reports and analyses of Land Registry titles,” enfranchisement work, “negotiating leases all the way through to completion,” drafting development release agreements, providing legal support for clients “raising capital to develop property, looking at conditions precedents, and facility agreements.” The firm’s clients include Marriott International, Bedford Estates and IBM UK’s pensions trust; Boodle recently advised financier ASK Partners on its debt facilities to property developer Groveworld, targeted for a 300,000-foot residential and commercial development. “Menial jobs tend to be in the minority and I’ve been surprised by how meaty the tasks are,” interviewees in this seat concluded.

In 2019 the firm released a report which found that more than 200 new luxury hotels are currently being developed in London, including the £1 billion-valued former US Embassy and a five-star Nobu hotel in Marylebone.

Seat options: property; private client & tax London; private client & tax Oxford; litigation; corporate; family
Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture &amp; Rural Affairs</th>
<th>Family/Matrimonial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art and Cultural Property Law</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We’ve got a sub-department doing lots of work in the hotel space,” according to trainees keen to ride that wave. “It’s really interesting seeing how the asset classes operate.” In another sign of growth even in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the firm welcomed Navpreet Atwal (formerly at Morgan Blake) as a property partner in March 2020.

“I’ve been surprised by how meaty the tasks are.”

The firm’s private client department is also faring well, recording a 28% increase in turnover between 2018 and 2019. Bucking convention helps: “I had an image of what private client lawyers were, and the seat really did open my eyes, as in truth everyone’s very in touch with modernity and forward-thinking,” a source said. “It’s not as stale as I thought it might be.” Boodle’s team specialises in international wealth structures, supporting large family-owned businesses and landed estates; if you’re a creative type, the firm’s growing art practice might be picture perfect. Trainees in the department are generally charged with drafting wills, powers of attorney, declarations of trust and more. “I thought it would just be wills and trusts but I’ve done a lot more including very varied work for Middle Eastern clients,” a source shared. “I’ve recently been looking at facilitating different trust structures; there’s a lot more thought and creativity required to find innovative options for clients.” When you’re working for people that rich, expectations can be high.

Boodle Hatfield’s corporate practice focuses on lower mid-market M&A transactions for companies, high net worth individuals and entrepreneurs. Trainees reckon the smallish department “punches above its weight with high-value deals which we can get involved with. Each partner has a different expertise.” Pooled together, their practices span fashion clients, small companies fund-raising and startups. The firm has acted for property developers ASK and Falco Capital, mattress maker Sleepeezee and trampoline park operators GoJumpin. “You’re involved all the way through deals,” according to our interviewees. Their roles included drafting board minutes and ancillary documents; “you’re involved with the main documents of the deal to a lesser extent.” Trainees found restructuring and financing elements of the seat “fascinating,” and were happy to go beyond bread and butter corporate/M&A; regular cooperation with the private client and property teams (providing financial assistance “for a property development owned by a large company,” for example) also put smiles on faces.

Other practices also feed into the litigation department, which is comprised of commercial, art and property litigation teams. The last of those advises “a real mix of big estates as well as a lot of Middle Eastern property owners in London.” Boodle recently advised Grosvenor Group on a multimillion-pound enfranchisement claim for the Aldford House block of flats on Park Lane. While the commercial litigation team is generalist, there’s also “a quite big art team” dealing with fraudulent purchasing, copyright infringement cases, and title and ownership disputes. “It’s nice to get responsibility for small matters,” interviewees said. “Debt recovery, taking care of pre-action steps, issuing proceedings and seeing it all the way through to hearings… you get a full overview of the process over six months in this seat.” Trainees in litigation also grappled with “lots of Section 21 notices,” research tasks, drafting settlement agreements and viewing mediations: “They’re really interesting to watch. It’s always great going to a court hearing, especially watching the barristers in action!”

Trainee Life

Much like the Bar, Boodle Hatfield has a rich and very long history. Trainees assured us that the firm has kept up with the times: “I’m not necessarily aware of it being around since 1722. It’s just a very pleasant place to work.” Many were also keen to be part of the firm’s story for years to come. “There are quite a few lifers here,” one said, “which shows how the cultural dynamics help foster longevity.” We got another trainee to explain what they meant: “I was surprised by how common it was to ask a partner a question,” they recalled. “You might think you’re bothering them, but they really want to help.”

“I’m not necessarily aware of Boodle being around since 1722. It’s just a very good and nice place to work.”

Our sources were also happy to spend some quality time with the rest of their cohort, through playing in weekly netball and football teams (“who’ve been doing dangerously well”), a local schools reading group, wine clubs, gin clubs, summer cricket teams or even Boodle’s Got Talent. “It was good fun to see semi-decent to actual talent on display,” one said. “We definitely get a collaboration boost through social events.” All this implies that trainees have ample time outside billing hours, and those we spoke to agreed “there’s a pretty good work/life balance, and the hours are very civilised for the work we’re doing. It’s one of the key advantages at Boodle that I can legitimately make plans on a weeknight.” Most put in shifts running from 9am to 6.30 or 7pm on average. “The latest I stayed was helping a colleague until 8.30pm,” one happy chap declared.

Field of dreams

Qualification is “a very simple process” of voicing preferences to HR: “They then let you know if there’s space and if you’ve got a job. Their aim is to keep everyone on.” Boodle retained three of four qualifiers in 2020.
Boodle Hatfield LLP

240 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NW

Tel: 020 7629 7411
Email: traineesolicitors@boodlehatfield.com
Website: www.boodlehatfield.com
Twitter: @BoodleHatfield @art_law_and_more
Facebook: Boodle-Hatfield

Firm profile

Boodle Hatfield is a highly successful law firm which has been providing bespoke legal services to leading families, businesses and entrepreneurs for nearly 300 years. They still act for some of their very first clients and are proud to do so. The firm has grown into a substantial practice, serving the full spectrum of commercial and private clients, both domestically and internationally from their offices in London and Oxford.

Main areas of work

The ethos of facilitating private capital activity and private businesses underpins the work of the whole firm. The interplay of skills between five major areas — private wealth, property, corporate, litigation and family — makes Boodle Hatfield particularly well placed to serve these individuals and businesses.

Training opportunities

Trainees spend six months in up to four of the firm’s main areas: Private Client and Tax, Property, Corporate, Litigation and Family. Boodle Hatfield is well known for the high quality of its training. All trainees are involved in client work from the start and are encouraged to handle their own files personally as soon as they are able to do so, (with the appropriate supervision). The firm’s trainees therefore have a greater degree of client contact than in many firms with the result that they should be able to take on more responsibility at an early stage with the appropriate level of supervision. Trainees are assigned a supervisor in each seat and are given formal appraisals every three months which are designed as a two-way process and give trainees the chance to discuss their progress and to indicate where more can be done to help in their ongoing training and development.

Vacation scheme

Two week placement in July, for which six students are accepted each year.

Applicants should apply via the application form on the website at www.boodlehatfield.com. The form will be available from 1st November 2020.

Sponsorship

GDL and LPC course fees are paid and trainees will also receive a maintenance grant whilst studying for the GDL/LPC.

Other benefits

In addition the benefits we offer include private healthcare, life assurance, income protection, season ticket loan, pension scheme, enhanced maternity pay, permanent health insurance, employee assistance scheme, childcare vouchers, cycle to work scheme, give as you earn scheme, conveyancing grant.
Brabners LLP

The facts
Locations: Manchester, Liverpool, Preston
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 75/246/19
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £25,000
Qualification salary: £40,000

There’s nothing drab about Brabners, a people-pleasing powerhouse in the North West.

The Firm
Was it focus of investment in the local economy? The reputation for a more laid-back law firm culture? Or perhaps they were just inspired by Kim and Kanye’s daughter? In any case, the North West was calling for Brabners’ future trainees: “I wanted a Northern firm,” one confirmed. “Brabners seeks to be the leading independent law firm in the UK and we don’t wish to expand to London.”

With three bases in the region and 200 years of local history, this is a firm that knows what it wants.

We should make it clear that Brabners welcomes folks from all over and is by no means a ‘Northerners only’ club, even if a large chunk of the trainees we spoke to had local links. One of them who didn’t confirmed: “There’s never been an occasion where I’ve felt like I don’t fit in.”

Brabners’ status as a full-service outfit is reflected in its impressive collection of Chambers UK rankings. The firm gets top marks in Liverpool for agriculture, crime and family; Manchester also leads the local pack in family law. Across the North West, Brabners earns strong rankings for corporate, social housing, IP, IT and litigation. The cherry on top is a nationwide ranking for sports law: the Brabners team represents top-flight clients including British Swimming, Liverpool FC and the Rugby Players Association.

The Liverpool, Manchester and now Preston offices recruit trainees. To get additional experience beyond the firm, Brabners offers a secondment to Nicholls.” It was a completely different and really interesting experience,” a former secondee said. “The work there is very hands-on and it made me reassess which department I eventually wanted to qualify into.”

The Seats
All new trainees have their first seat allocated upon joining the firm. Those we spoke to had no problems with the system – “my first seat wasn’t my cup of tea” was the closest thing we heard to a complaint. Others found the lack of choice at the start a big plus: “The seat you’re allotted might not be something you would pick yourself, it keeps you open-minded. I now want to qualify into the first department I sat in.”

Heading into each seat change, trainees email the training principal three preferred departments; the principal and HR do their best to accommodate them.

There’s been growth in the employment department following the acquisition of recruitment specialists HRC Law in July 2019, bringing 15 more lawyers into the fold. The team as a whole advises on contract issues, policies and procedures, unfair dismissal and whistleblowing cases. Trainees spent their days “redrafting staff handbooks, updating sickness and shared parental leave policies, reviewing correspondence and drafting early case assessments.”

Much of the work here is contentious, offering chances to work on grievance appeal letters and witness statements as well as attending employment tribunals and getting involved in negotiations. Household names including Travelodge, Nando’s and Leicester City FC call on Brabners’ advice; the firm recently assisted pub giant JD Wetherspoon in curating its policy for transgender and non-binary employees.

Seat options: corporate; commercial; real estate; employment; charity; private client; litigation
The firm’s litigation team has two core focuses – general commercial, and property disputes. Trainees in the seat were able to either zero in on one side or split their time across the whole department. One who’d focused on commercial litigation “got stuck into a lot of shareholder disputes, general company disputes and debt claims. Trainees are given an awful lot of responsibility which works well for me.”

Brabners’ small trainee intake means there will rarely be more than a handful in any department. Sports disputes are a popular option here: “I was working on a criminal investigation for a footballer involved in an assault accusation,” a trainee told us. “I met up with the client, took notes, drafted witness statements and dealt with evidence disclosed by the police.”

“We represent high net worth individuals including celebrities, footballers and CEOs.”

Sports clients play a role in the family department too, as do other high-profile figures. “We represent high net worth individuals including celebrities, footballers and CEOs,” a trainee explained. These clients tend to prefer to keep their affairs private, and some of the work can get juicy. Trainees were involved with financial settlements, some-times arising from divorce proceedings: “I’m working for a client with children who is going through a divorce,” one revealed. “We are looking at the agreements, drafting letters on housing and assessing arrangements for the child.” Such cases require a human touch as much as they do legal know-how.

The real estate team works with clients in the food and drink, retail and student accommodation sectors among others. “I do a lot of landlord/tenant disputes,” a trainee revealed, dedicating their time to “renewing leases, research, working on purchase and sales agreements and due diligence.” Brabners’ flowering client list includes industry giants like Home Bargains, Primark and NatWest; the firm advised Peel Land and Property on a road link into the £5.5 billion Liverpool Waters development.

Trainee Life

If you’re not yet sold on lawyering outside London, this might do the trick – trainee hours at Brabners typically run from 9am to 6pm, with late nights an extreme rarity. “I don’t think I have ever stayed in the office past 9pm,” an interviewee said. Predictable hours do wonders for the mental health of lawyers: “No late nights, no stress.” The work will of course be demanding in its own right, but letting trainees go home at a reasonable time is one of the easiest ways to keep them happy. “It’s part of the culture, we are just not encouraged to stay late,” we heard.

“On nights out, the partners do let their hair down…”

Trainees were happy to brag about Brabners: “The culture here is second to none,” they suggested. Many were complimentary of senior partners, and not just in a work sense... “We made a Christmas video dancing along to Mariah Carey’s ‘All I Want for Christmas’ and yes, the people in management all got involved.” We couldn’t find it on YouTube, but maybe you’ll have more luck. On nights out, the partners do let their hair down. I can’t say any more,” a trainee teased.

Reach out and Brab it

Brabners sponsors trainees’ memberships with the SOLICITORS group, which offers Continuing Professional Development training and hosts exhibition events. “I went to a panel which discussed life after training,” one source said. “It helps make you a well-rounded individual.”
Brabners LLP

Horton House, Exchange Flags, Liverpool L2 3YL
Tel: 0151 600 3000
55 King Street, Manchester M2 4LQ
Tel: 0161 836 8800
7-8 Chapel Street, Preston PR1 8AN
Tel: 01772 823921

Email: trainees@brabners.com
Website: www.brabners.com
Twitter: @BrabnersLLP
Linkedin: brabners

Firm profile
Brabners is one of the top North West commercial firms. Based in Liverpool, Manchester and Preston, it has the experience, talent and prestige fitting a firm with a 200-year-plus history. Brabners is a dynamic, partner-led specialist in the provision of bespoke legal services to clients ranging from large plcs to private individuals.

Main areas of work
We have more than 400 employees with nationally recognised experts in key practice areas such as corporate, commercial, property, employment and pensions, litigation, sports, social housing, charity, family and private client law. We have a broad client base that includes plcs, public sector bodies, banks, other commercial, corporate and professional businesses and high-net-worth individuals.

We carry out a wide range of specialist legal services in a number of core sectors including real estate, business services, healthcare, media, technology, retail, sport and charity.

Training opportunities
At Brabners we recognise our reputation rests on the excellence of our people, and we recruit with that in mind. We look for talented trainees who can demonstrate intelligence, intuition, humour, approachability and commitment.

Trainees are given a high degree of responsibility and are an integral part of our culture. Each has partner-level supervision, and the training programme is overseen by the Training Principal Dr Tony Harvey. Our culture is supportive and friendly, plus we have an excellent social programme. We do not believe in presenteeism — there is no long-hour culture here, rather a focus on you finding a work-life balance from the outset. Many of our partners undertook their training with us, and a high proportion of our staff are long-standing.

Other benefits
25 days holiday, travel loan, fresh fruit delivered to the office, charity and social events, payroll giving, colleague recognition, smart working practices, buy and sell holidays, pension scheme, subsidised discounts in retail stores, cycle to work.

University law careers fairs 2020
Brabners attends law career fairs at the University of Manchester and the University of Liverpool.
Bristows LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas office: Brussels
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 43/100/20
Seats: mix of 3-month and 6-month seats, typically 5-6 seats in total; client secondments
First-year salary: £39,500
Qualification salary: £66,000

Tech, life sciences and brands are the focal points of Bristows, the firm that’s been solving IP problems long before geek-chic was the in thing.

The Firm
One of the earliest pieces of work Bristows did was to draw up patent agreements for the first ever electrical telegraph in the 1830s. This set the tone quite nicely for the work it’s been doing ever since, from the agreements behind the first transatlantic phone cable to the image rights for the TARDIS (yes, Doctor Who’s ship), and from the UK’s first ever biotechnology case to litigation over the invention of the Y-front (yes, the underwear). Upon this strong foundation, Bristows mixes with clients in the tech, life sciences, pharma, science and media spaces, including Google, Sony and the Financial Times.

“I looked for firms that were good in the IP sphere,” one interviewee shared, “and Bristows is basically number one.” Chambers UK nods in agreement: Bristows is one of just two firms to score an uppermost IP ranking in London, where the firm also bags top marks in IT and patent litigation. Nationally, the firm is top-ranked in data protection and life sciences. Trainees came from “all kinds of degree backgrounds.” Several held STEM degrees like chemistry, biology and biochemistry, but there were also trainees who'd studied history, business and law. Sources figured this mix made for a diverse culture. “Bristows tries hard to find quirkier people with a bit of personality,” one reckoned. “They aren’t looking for someone who'll fit a lawyer-shaped box.”

The Seats
Owing to the intake size (up to ten a year) sources felt “there’s more opportunity to get the seats you really want.” Trainees send graduate recruitment a list of their preferences and get placed from there. First seats are typically six months long; trainees then do either six- or three-month seats with a mandatory stint in patent litigation, and either real estate or corporate. The majority of trainees have the opportunity to go on a client secondment to clients including Google and Capgemini.

Commercial IP and IT was a popular seat. The department handles three strands of work: IP transactions, IT transactions, and data protection. “There’s a vast range of work across the department,” trainees told us. “It almost feels like three mini teams.” Clients include tech giants like Google, Amazon and Sony, and well-known names from other sectors such as McDonald’s and Louis Vuitton. Trainees reported liaising with “a mix of IP, life sciences and pharmaceutical companies.” On the IT side, the firm advises on technology outsourcing projects, contracting, and a host of areas like FinTech, AdTech and HealthTech. Data protection work involved matters like GDPR compliance and cybersecurity issues. The firm recently advised Spotify on the collection of data in one of its employee surveys. A trainee gave us a snippet of their work: “I helped draft a non-disclosure agreement for an inventor who’d created a medical device that improves sleep by inducing a meditative state.”

“I was running laboratory tests and sourcing lab equipment.”

Patent disputes are the name of the game in patent litigation. The firm recently represented Heineken in a case involving counter-top beer kegs. It also acted for Philips…

Seat options: patent litigation; brands, designs and copyright; competition; regulatory; corporate, tax and employment; real estate; commercial IP/IT; commercial technology and copyright disputes
Hey Bristows!

If trainees qualify into patent litigation or brands, the firm automatically signs them up for an IP diploma at Oxford University.
Firm profile
We are Bristows, the world’s leading specialist law firm for clients that innovate. We are a European headquartered hub for litigation, transactions and advice throughout the world. We help clients grow in life sciences, technology and other dynamic sectors. We provide advice on all their legal matters and are proud to be different.

Main areas of work
We focus on dynamic, IP-rich sectors and have the expertise to solve a broad range of litigation, transactional, and advisory challenges. We have a true cross-disciplinary practice encompassing our renowned IP, competition, regulatory, corporate and commercial, dispute resolution, IT and data protection teams. The strength of each individual practice complements the others to provide a fully integrated and comprehensive service.

Training opportunities
During the two-year period of training you will spend time in each of the firm’s core practice groups, including a guaranteed seat in Patent Litigation. You will also have the opportunity to explore other areas of Intellectual Property law including Commercial IP and Brands, Designs and Copyright. Trainees typically undertake five or six seats during the training contract with a mix of three- and six-month seats. One of these seats may be a UK secondment to the in-house legal department of one of the firm’s leading multinational clients.

Bristows trainees work alongside partners dealing directly with clients from the start of their training. There is plenty of responsibility and this is matched by an extremely supportive and friendly culture. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved in life at the firm through charity fundraising events, sports teams, social events, community initiatives and a number of staff committees and networks.

Vacation scheme
We offer intensive one-day IP workshops (instead of longer vacation schemes) to give students and graduates the opportunity to learn more about Intellectual Property law and the career opportunities available at Bristows. The workshop offers learning opportunities, interactive case studies and networking sessions. They are a great opportunity to assess whether law as a career, and Bristows as a firm, are for you.

Undergraduates in their second-, penultimate- and final-year of study and graduates of all degree disciplines are eligible for the winter workshops on 18 and 26 November. All STEM students and graduates are eligible for the 2 December workshop that is tailored to scientists and engineers.

Other benefits
We offer a flexible benefits package including: life assurance; matched pension contributions; private medical insurance; holiday ‘buy and sell’; cycle to work scheme; gym membership; travel insurance; dental insurance; an employee assistance programme; and season ticket loan.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We will hold a workshop for first-year students on 31 March 2021. Please apply online via our website.
Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Manchester
Overseas offices: 29
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 150/348/74
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments; overseas seats
First-year salary: £44,000 (London), £27,000 (Manchester)
Qualification salary: £78,000 (London), £43,000 (Manchester)

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get a BCLP training contract

When two become one—a Transatlantic love story that forged a legal behemoth, soaring to new heights whilst caring for its domestic real estate “golden child.”

The Firm
BCLP is technically one of the youngest firms in our guide, born from a 2018 merger between UK-based Berwin Leighton Paisner and Missourian Bryan Cave—the two high-performing firms in their own right coming together to create an international superhit. “I was attracted to BCLP because they had a modern, fresh take on a law firm,” a trainee told us. “They’re more open-minded about things and seemed less hierarchical.” The glamorous modus vivendi of working at an internationally recognised law firm with over 1,400 lawyers across 31 locations still “doesn’t go to people’s heads—we’re all very down to earth. The firm feels unpretentious despite its prestige.”

“The firm feels unpretentious despite its prestige.”

In its former Berwin Leighton Paisner incarnation, the firm’s UK practice was a titan in the real estate sector. “It used to be the case that it was just real estate all over the place, but since the merger there’s been a huge diversification,” we heard. Chambers UK continues to recognise BCLP as a leader in construction, planning and real estate, though the firm’s less prestigious rankings also span banking and finance, energy, commercial contracts, capital markets, contentious regulatory and hotels work among others. American legacy firm Bryan Cave added 17 US offices to the network—one on the junior end, it seems “so far away” that it was very rarely even brought up by our interviewees; but the merger’s brought cross-Atlantic fare into the firm’s workstream. BCLP picks up worldwide Chambers Global rankings in agribusiness, construction, international private client and outsourcing.

Moving to diversify further, the London office has recently brought in lateral hires to bolster its M&A, corporate finance and aviation teams. Trainees no longer have to complete a real estate seat, but those we spoke to described it as “the golden child” of the firm: “If you’re applying here you have to, at the very least, not hate real estate.” Trainees list five seat preferences before each rotation. “Allocation can be hit and miss” according to one. “I got my first choice in two seats, but I’ve also had one that wasn’t on my list at all.” The vast majority of trainees are in London; Manchester recruits two or three a year.

The Seats
Five sub-teams make up the real estate department, “an enormous enterprise within the firm.” These each break down into further divisions; some teams are “distinguished by their focus on transactional matters, asset management or otherwise, but others are rather broad.” As a whole BCLP’s real estate practice handles site acquisitions, lease renewals and purchases and sales of property, investment management; M&A and corporate finance; technology and commercial; data privacy; tax advice and controversy; private client; commercial construction and engineering; planning & zoning; core real estate; banking; structured finance; energy, environment and infrastructure; transport and asset finance; real estate finance; restructuring & insolvency; real estate disputes; investigations, financial regulation & white collar crime; commercial disputes; CDR/anticompete; antitrust and competition; international arbitration and construction disputes; commercial construction/ construction disputes; and labour and employment.
**Chambers UK rankings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset Finance</th>
<th>Insurance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banking &amp; Finance</td>
<td>International Arbitration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking Litigation</td>
<td>Investment Funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Markets</td>
<td>Licensing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Contracts</td>
<td>Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition/European Law</td>
<td>Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Outsourcing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/M&amp;A</td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Protection</td>
<td>Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Public Procurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy &amp; Natural Resources</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Real Estate Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Crime</td>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>Restructuring/Insolvency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>Retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels &amp; Leisure</td>
<td>Sports Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ties for businesses and investment groups. Trainees can have as many as 30 different matters on the go at once, which some found gives a “surface knowledge of lots of things – but I’d rather have got to know a few things well.” The firm recently advised real estate giant URW (owner of Westfield and its shopping centres) on the formation of a partnership with the Canadian public pension fund property group to fund a £670 million build-to-rent scheme near its Stratford site. Other clients here include Transport for London and Heathrow Airport. Asset management work took a dive during the Covid-19 crisis and “trainee workload dropped significantly in lockdown, so the team drafted a fictional case study for us to work on, which kept training going.”

“An enormous enterprise within the firm.”

A seat in real estate was marmite for trainees – some said your opinion could come down to “the team you’re in. Some trainee tasks seem like they could be automated – there’s a lot of chasing emails all day for 100 different things, with no real application of the law.” Others reported “getting lots of responsibility, independence and trust” to draft licences, leases and deeds. The culture of sub-teams varies too, with some reporting they “had no time to ever take a break or chat due to the stress and competition.” Overall, interviewees agreed that a spell in real estate “gets you a bird’s-eye view of the work the firm does.”

Though it’s “complementary to the RE team,” real estate finance is “completely its own machine” at BCLP. Welcoming six trainees at a time, the department deal with “higher value” real estate deals – we’re talking hundreds of millions. This team steps up “whenever there’s a finance or loan element to a real estate deal.” Trainees get to see both borrower and lender side deals: “it’s great to not get tied to one side of the market.” The firm recently advised hotel group Globalgrange on its restructuring of the £1.5 billion Grange Hotels portfolio; Barclays, Homes England and Allianz are also on the books. Trainees told us that around half of their work is managing conditions precedent checklists of “50 or so items, chasing people to get documents in on time, keeping track of their status and sending them to the right place.” Higher-responsibility tasks include working through comments in negotiations and drafting security packages and board minutes. Interviewees found it “exciting to be able to get stuck into documents, understand how they work and negotiate what you can and can’t accept.”

International arbitration and construction disputes used to be two separate seats, but now live under one IACD roof. “It does still feel there’s a distinction between them in many respects,” insiders felt. “They’re trying to make it as cohesive as possible.” Trainees do indeed get staffed on one side but can work in the other if they’d like – “the firm is keen on enabling you to get involved with different types of work if you want to.” International arbitration is fitfully enough “an international practice in ways that a lot of other departments at BCLP aren’t.” The firm handles large disputes for Russian and Eastern European clients; has a presence in Singapore; and there’s been “a push for more Abu Dhabi and Dubai work recently too.” Commercial clients from the tech, energy, infrastructure and transport worlds (as well as the odd sovereign entity) call on BCLP’s expertise. Trainees can get their hands on “meaty tasks, including substantial drafting exercises and technical research.” They also do plenty of disclosure, but typically dodge the dreaded bundling thanks to the growing trend of “e-bundles” in arbitrations. Long live the internet.

“... remarkably clever, you can just absorb wisdom off them.”

Over in construction disputes, “a lot of the work feeds off real estate clients as you’d expect.” Examples include litigation avoidance and “disputes against contractors when a building goes wrong or when, a few years down the line, they find faults with it.” Much like in arbitration, cases are kept confidential – think projects that reach the billions, resulting in arbitrations all over the world. BCLP’s practice also involves adjudications, “a shorter process of resolving a dispute – perhaps over how much a contractor is owed.” The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a landslide of construction suspensions, leading to questions of whether contractors are entitled to stop work. Construction is “quite a technical area of the law. Trainees do lots of research into specific niches – I now know lots about the chemical composition of concrete!” Our sources also attended witness interviews, drafted documents like witness statements and letters, and helped partners form arguments. Some said their role is “spreadsheet-heavy,
using a lot of numbers, which can be frustrating!” They were happier to say that senior colleagues are “remarkably clever, you can just absorb wisdom off them.”

With 30 offices, international secondments are practically a given – BCLP comes through here, with potential destinations including New York, Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, Brussels and Abu Dhabi. The firm also runs client secondments to the likes of Goldman Sachs and Heathrow Airport. Some spots are competitive (shout out NYC) “but if you want to go on a secondment, you can. Just be a bit proactive and let HR know early on.” Trainees apply during the standard seat allocation process, ranking up to five secondment preferences with a pitch of why they’d suit the spot. In-demand seats require video interviews, though they’re “pretty informal and laidback.”

Trainee Life

BCLP’s London office was due to relocate when the 2020 lockdown hit. “We’re really looking forward to going in,” trainees said. “It’ll be fully open plan and we have new desks, though they do look a bit crammed in from the artist impression... like an IT suite at school!” Some were disheartened to lose their “old view of the river, the heart of the City is such a soulless area.” It’s hard to beat for socials, though – trainees can get involved in sports, pub outings and various “shindigs.” The trainee social committee organises nights out for the whole cohort, “they go for simple things like loads of food and money behind a bar.”

“There’s a general acknowledgement of your existence outside the job.” Interviewees were very passionate about “genuine recognition of diversity and inclusion.” The firm runs webinars, research projects and events, which have a large trainee turnout as “it’s considered part of the trainee role to play an active part in diversity at BCLP.” That doesn’t mean things are perfect, but we heard the firm is “trying very hard to bring in more black lawyers, for example, and concede it’s not historically gone as well as they'd like.” Trainees also dived into pro bono projects with the Financial Services Lawyers Association and Amicus, which represents people on death row in the US. Other options are a weekly legal advice clinic in Tower Hamlets, cases with LawWorks and a new project that examines how prisons are dealing with the Covid-19 crisis.

Some felt that BCLP “didn’t do as well as some other firms” in reaction to the worldwide lockdown. Initially “we weren’t given laptops, screens, desktops or chairs and have to use our own equipment. It makes us less productive.” That said, trainees credited the firm as “really good at keeping everyone updated and in good spirits,” reflecting a more general “emphasis on mental health” and good-natured firm culture. “Everyone’s so friendly – people couldn’t be nicer. There’s a general acknowledgement of your existence outside the job.” Sources implied that while partners in some seats are “old-fashioned and less approachable,” most are “happy to help you and take an interest in your development.” At the start of each seat, trainees complete “very comprehensive training. I always look back at my notes for common issues and tips!”

“A very early push to get you out talking to juniors in clients’ departments.” We reported last year that BCLP trainees were disgruntled about their salaries and lack of bonuses. Spirits rose after increases at trainee and NQ level. The firm did ask anyone earning over £30,000 to consider taking a pay cut during the Covid-19 pandemic (at first it was pitched at 15% and then subsequently lowered to 7.5%). While not everyone was pleased with the firm’s request, others argued that it was “proactive. It’s better to do it early rather than wait until it’s too late and people get fired. Those moaning about the money are missing the point.” Though some declared they “could be doing the same hours for more at a US firm,” most told us they are “invested in BCLP. I’ve seen the quality of associates they can produce and it’s a very good place to continue to develop and learn.” The firm went on to confirm a new (lower) London NQ pay rate of £78,000 in summer 2020.

Trainees meet with HR to discuss qualification preferences, then get a list of available jobs before submitting applications. “Each team has a different approach to interviews, depending on how many people apply.” BCLP failed to disclose its 2019 retention figure, but it’s sometimes been low by City standards. This put off trainees who felt they were “there to serve as a cheap resource for two years before needing to move on.” Covid-19 and a lateral hiring freeze added further uncertainty to the mix, but recent changes in the graduate recruitment team left many “hopeful - they’re being interactive with trainees and trying to listen more.” In 2020, BCLP did not disclose its retention rate.

Cave dwellers

Though we heard of “odd late nights” or “regular 10.30pm finishes,” trainees wrapped up work by 7pm on average. Private client and IACD are known for friendlier hours, whereas finance departments can call for “ridiculous hours, squeezing every minute of the day for working.”
Firm profile
Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner is a market leader formed by one of the biggest transatlantic mergers in recent times, we now have over 1,400 lawyers in 30 offices around the globe. Join us as a trainee and you’ll be at the heart of it all, working with industry leading teams and award winning technology allowing you to focus on more exciting work.

Main areas of work
The firm is structured into four large departments: real estate, corporate, finance, and litigation and corporate risk. Trainees work on challenging projects from the outset and are given a high level of responsibility. A handful of our internationally renowned clients are names such as Deliveroo, Nike, Goldman Sachs, Heathrow, EDF, BT, Deutsche Bank, Tesco and eBay to name a few.

Training opportunities
The firm is structured into three large departments: Real Estate, Corporate and Financial Transactions and Litigation and Investigations. We deliver legal solutions to a wide range of major companies, financial institutions, prominent public sector bodies and private clients. As part of our team, you will be exposed to how they work, the problems they face and the opportunities they have to grow. As their adviser, they will rely on your guidance, skill and thought leadership to help them achieve their commercial objectives. The level of client contact is high for our trainees and trainees are exposed to a high caliber of clients including, Deliveroo, Nike, eBay and Tesco. Working in partner-led teams, you’ll be exposed to a client base that includes over 50 Global Fortune 500 & FTSE 100 companies, and over half of the world’s top 20 banks.

Training opportunities
At BCLP we are fully committed to providing continual, high-quality training and support to our trainees. We offer four seat rotations of 6 months, with flexible seat choices across all core departments and a wide range of practice areas in the business. Each trainee receives regular 1:1 support from the Graduate Recruitment team and the Training Principal, a Partner mentor to provide wider career guidance and a designated supervisor within each department. Trainees have access to individual coaching and training from the Learning and Development team, as well as quarterly ‘Lunch and Learn’ updates. We aim to continuously improve our trainee experience and accordingly run a Trainee Discussion Forum with representatives from each trainee intake to facilitate active information sharing between management and trainees. We also have an active Trainee Social Committee to ensure trainees get together outside of the office.

Vacation scheme
We run our vacation schemes in the summer for up to 15 candidates per scheme across June and July. We aim to keep our schemes very interactive. We want to make you feel like you are a trainee through out your time at the firm and the work you do will often make a real impact and be presented to our clients. During our summer vacation schemes you can also expect to attend case study workshops, complete a pro bono project and take part in a mock pitch with a real client. It is not all hard work and no play, we want you to experience our culture first hand through our speed networking lunches and social events.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We are hosting an Open Day in December 2020 and February 2021. These opportunities are open to candidates at any stage of their career (university level and above) that are interested in applying to BCLP. We also host a week long Insight Scheme in April which is for first year law students and second year non law students. If you perform well whilst on the scheme, you can apply for a direct training contract in September. If your application is successful, we will consider you early on in the process to ensure you have a space at one of our first assessment centres of the year.
Burges Salmon LLP

The facts
Locations: Bristol, London, Scotland
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 96/323/38
Seats: 6x4 months
First-year salary: £35,000
Qualification salary: £50,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Burges Salmon

Big fish Burges Salmon reels trainees in with quality work, but CSR initiatives, mental health awareness and ice cream keep ‘em hooked.

The Firm
Where in the world can you see world-famous street art, take in views of the River Avon from over 200 feet high, and finish up in acosy pub for a delicious pint of cider? Why, Bristol of course. Home of Banksy, the Clifton Suspension Bridge, cracking cider – and law firm Burges Salmon. The firm also has small bases in London and Edinburgh, but every single trainee joins HQ in good old Brizzle. Naturally, Burges Salmon appeals to those who already know how awesome the city is. But it was also an appealing package for those who weren’t familiar. “I moved here not knowing anyone,” one such trainee shared, “but you end up making very good friends” – incoming trainees all do the LPC together in Bristol. “Burges Salmon was always on my radar,” said another, “but I was initially focused on London. When I looked into it more, I realised the firm has quality work and really good clients.”

Burges Salmon is swimming in Chambers UK rankings, with no fewer than 43 accolades spanning 28 practice areas. In Bristol and the South West, it gets no less than top marks for every single ranking it has (17 in total), and nationally its public procurement and rail work is among the best. Outside London the firm is a national leader in construction, corporate/M&A, employment, IP, real estate and, according to Chambers High Net Worth, private wealth law. The firm’s energy work is also highly ranked by Chambers Global. All considered, this makes it one of the best firms working outside of London, competing with prestigious City firms and big national firms alike.

Burges Salmon has eight core practices: banking, commercial, corporate, dispute resolution, employment, private client, projects and real estate. This breadth could be one reason why the firm operates with the less conventional six-seat system, each seat lasting four months. This structure put Burges Salmon at “the top of the list” for rookies. Aside from the fact that trainees get experience in more areas, “you know what you like after four months, so staying in a seat for another two months could be painful!” Trainees rank their preferred seats from one to three before each rotation. To boost the chances of getting what you want, “have a clear plan,” one advised. “I said why I wanted a particular seat every step of the way and I got every single seat I wanted.” Not all of our interviewees were so lucky.

The Seats
Trainees are likely to do a seat in real estate, which is one of the firm’s biggest groups. Six trainees sit here per rotation, and sources felt “it’s a really good place to kick off the training contract because there are a lot of juniors to support you.” For trainees, there’s a “lot of form filling” to be done, like completing Stamp Duty Land Tax forms: “They’re nice to do because once you’ve done one you’ve got your head around them.” Rookies often run smaller bits of “chunky” deals as well, which entailed “collating the documents needed for transactions, plus some heavy drafting of ancillary documents.” Trainees described plenty of “intellectually challenging” work like writing letters to HMRC, “which involved some exceptionally complicated maths!” The client base is “a real mixed bag” of companies in the energy, transport, hotels and leisure sectors, as well as banks like HSBC and retailers like John Lewis and Waterstones. The firm recently advised Malaysian property developer YTL on its development of the Filton airfield site in Bristol, which will include 2,600 homes. Trainees also

Seat options: real estate; dispute resolution; projects; tax, trusts and family; employment; pensions; corporate; planning; construction; banking; innovation and client solutions
got in on some “smaller residential transactions” for high net worth individuals.

“I was up and down to London filing claims with the High Court.”

If a real estate dispute arises, it’ll be handled by the disputes team. Other subgroups include IP, energy, pensions, financial services, transport and agriculture. As the firm’s largest department, it takes ten trainees at a time and everyone is guaranteed to do a stint here at some point in the training contract. “It’s incredibly fast-paced and pressurised,” sources told us, with trainees “thrown in the deep end straight away.” For one trainee, “I was up and down to London filing claims with the High Court and getting witnesses’ evidence.” For another, “a super urgent injunction” kept them occupied over a few busy days: “I travelled on three hours’ sleep to turn around the work, but I never felt like an expendable source.” Less scintillating “research tasks and bundling sadly come with the territory” too, but interviewees noted they “got the most exposure to big clients” in this seat. None come much bigger than Coca-Cola, Virgin, the BBC and The Crown Estate, all firm clients. The team recently defended Benefit Cosmetics in the deep end straight away.”

The corporate finance team handles mid-market M&A and private equity work for public and private companies, many of which are AIM-listed. Trainees liked the fact that “we don’t just work for big clients, we help the little guy too,” pointing out that Bristol is “well known for its incubator hubs and start-up companies.” One told us: “I helped lots of cool tech start-ups with their fund-raising rounds.” The team recently advised ITM Power, which manufactures hydrogen energy equipment, on a £58.8 million fund-raising round. Corporate finance is a highly regulated area of law, so trainees felt the pressure to “make sure we crossed all the t’s and dotted all the i’s.” As one told us, “I went to lots of client board meetings to facilitate signatures.” Getting this kind of client contact was a highlight for trainees in this seat.

Banking is a great seat because trainees take on lots of responsibility,” one insider praised. “Granted, we don’t draft agreements from day one, but we’re still a crucial part of the deal process.” To keep deals ticking along, trainees were responsible for updating documents and running conditions precedent lists. Trainees might also get called on to assist on matters with the insolvency team. Banks on the client list include Lloyds, HSBC and Dutch bank NIBC. This group recently negotiated with the government to secure public funding for the Eden Geothermal Project in Cornwall on behalf of the project sponsors, and advised private equity company Capital Dynamics on £64 million of debt finance for a wind farm in southern Scotland.

“I really felt part of the team and really got to know the clients.”

As the examples above demonstrate, energy is a key sector for Burges Salmon, and environmentally-conscious trainees were drawn to “a real focus on renewables rather than fossil fuels” – although the firm does work in both arenas. The projects team does transactional and advisory work on a “wide array” of nuclear power, transport, waste and water management, renewables and defence projects. In that last category, the team recently advised the Ministry of Defence on its £30 billion procurement of Dreadnought submarines, which will replace Trident. Trainees spent a lot of time negotiating contracts with the other side, and sources “really loved” the seat for the high amount of client contact. “I really felt part of the team and really got to know the clients,” said one. Some even got involved in pitches for new clients. Trainees were also given research tasks, like brushing up on niche areas of procurement law to advise clients.

We heard a lot of secondment opportunities come up in the energy sphere, including a client secondment with EDF Energy. Trainees might second to the Edinburgh offices, and the firm also does an “internal secondment” with the innovation and client solutions team. “It was great to see that side of Burges Salmon,” one insider told us. “I did a lot of research into AI solutions.”

Trainee Life

“The culture is one of the strongest things about this firm,” interviewees praised. “What strikes me most is how lovely everyone is,” said one. “Every partner I’ve met is so willing to impart their wisdom and give you the time of day.” Trainees felt the firm’s “real focus on teaching breeds mutual respect throughout all the ranks.” Several highlighted a “non-hierarchical” atmosphere, with one telling us: “I feel...”
fine walking into a partner’s office for a chat.” Plus, with a trainee intake of between 25 and 30 a year, “there’s a strong support system amongst us, so I’ve never felt isolated.”

Our interviewees were all conscious of “the stigma around the impact of the legal industry on mental health,” which made them especially appreciative of the firm’s efforts. Trainees highlighted talks made by senior lawyers at the firm, “where they stand up in front of their peers saying, ‘Look at me, I’m fine now but I’ve had to ask for help.’” We also heard the firm was particularly attentive to mental health during lockdown, with “weekly wellbeing updates and communication from people at the top of the firm.”

“People practise for ages and the costumes are brilliant.”

Everyone at the firm is “strongly encouraged” to get involved in the firm’s corporate social responsibility initiatives through two dedicated volunteering days, like helping out at a food share organisation or gardening at a local farm “which was really cool, though it did rain the whole day.” Others got involved with mentoring schemes such as giving careers advice to high school students. This year, Burges Salmon chose the theme of ‘no child goes hungry’ to focus on through its charity work, so it sponsors charities that work to address food poverty. The firm also hosts an annual charity dance competition called Strictly Legal, complete with a raffle and auction. It’s a bit of a social highlight as well. “People practise for ages and the costumes are brilliant,” one trainee told us. “The lawyers get into groups then dance in our atrium - they play the Strictly theme tune too!” Interviewees were delighted to report that the trainee group won the most recent one.

Diversity at BSalmon:
The firm has LGBTQ+ and BAME networks called BProud and BCultured.
Firm profile
Burges Salmon is the independent UK law firm which delivers the best mix of advice, service and value. The firm prides itself on delivering an excellent standard of legal and business advice to its clients, which has led to many of the firm’s practice areas and sectors winning awards and recognition as best in class. Burges Salmon’s national and international client base ranges from private individuals to government departments and FTSE 100 companies including The Crown Estate, Nationwide, Lloyds Banking Group, John Lewis, The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, First-Group and the Crown Commercial Service.

Main areas of work
The quality of the firm’s expertise is widely recognised across its main practice areas including banking and finance, commercial, corporate, dispute resolution, employment, private client, projects and real estate. The firm operates within seven key sectors; energy, power and utilities, infrastructure, public sector, transport, financial services, private wealth and real estate.

Training opportunities
Burges Salmon’s six seat training contract is designed to provide you with the greatest breadth of experience possible as a trainee. While traditional training contracts normally include four six month seats, ours include six four-month placements. This affords you the maximum exposure to our varied practice areas and experience of a wide range of contentious (you can expect to sit in dispute resolution) and non-contentious work from across the firm’s departments.

Vacation schemes
Burges Salmon runs winter (one week), spring and summer (two weeks) schemes across the year. During the scheme you will have the opportunity to visit two departments of your choice. The emphasis is on ‘real work’ and, under the guidance of your supervisor, you will have the chance to attend court or client meetings as well as skills sessions run by trainees and solicitors. In addition to this, there are many social and sports events throughout the placement that offer a real insight into life as a trainee solicitor. Allowance: £300 per week.

Other benefits
Annually reviewed competitive salary, 25 days paid annual leave, bonus scheme, pension scheme, private health care membership, life assurance, mobile phone, Christmas gift, corporate gym membership, sports and social club.

Open days and first-year opportunities
This year the firm will run three virtual open evenings in November and December. Presentations are given by current trainees, a recruitment partner and the graduate recruitment team about life at the firm and the application process. There are also various other insight events throughout the year including open days and Food for thought’ skills sessions.
A hard-earned private client reputation married to a full-service corporate/commercial offering... a mix to leave you Speechlys.

The Firm
Since the firm was formed via a 2014 merger, trainees have been drawn to CRS’ London, Guildford and Cheltenham offices by the “good breadth of seats” on offer, as well as the promise of a “better culture that comes with working at a slightly smaller firm than the giants.” Upon arrival, trainees noted “how personable Charles Russell Speechlys is; the people are genuine and honest.” In 2019 the people got a new leader in the form of freshly installed managing partner Simon Ridpath, successor to pre-merger skipper James Carter.

“I liked the fact that as well as having a good reputation in the private client sphere, they also have a full-service offering,” one trainee offered up as their reason for choosing Charles Russell Speechlys to train at. Alongside stellar rankings in Chambers High Net Worth for an array of private client areas (including private wealth law, private wealth disputes and high-value residential real estate), the firm also scores spots in commercial rankings in London and UK-wide: corporate M&A, real estate, charities, sports, telecommunications and retail. Guildford’s team particularly excels in construction, family and real estate litigation; Cheltenham’s expertise includes agriculture and rural affairs, employment, banking and finance.

“...better culture that comes with working at a slightly smaller firm.”

Though CRS is slightly ‘smaller’ than some competitors, that doesn’t by any means make it ‘small’ in the big picture: three UK bases are complemented by international hubs in Paris, Hong Kong, Manama, Luxembourg, Dubai, Doha, Zürich and Geneva. London trainees have the option of international secondments: “One of the seats is private client in Geneva, and occasionally people have gone to Zürich – someone once did three months in each.” Client secondments were more common: trainees had spent six months with various clients including “big-name banking and media organisations.” International seats in particular are in high demand, so be prepared to fight your corner if you want to score a golden ticket overseas.

Each office has a structured process for seat allocation: around two months before each rotation, the firm releases a list of available seats. Trainees fill out a form stating three preferences, “as well as reasons for wanting to go there,” then HR will try and sort trainees into their preferred departments. The process used to be more informal in the smaller offices – “in Cheltenham there have only been two trainees in each intake, so it was easier to work out among ourselves” – but these offices have now adopted the same process as elsewhere.

Seat options: LONDON: commercial; corporate; banking; employment, pensions & immigration; financial services; charities; family; private property; tax, trusts and succession; tax; construction, engineering & projects; real estate; real estate disputes; commercial dispute resolution; private wealth disputes; corporate restructuring & insolvency; IP litigation. GUILDFORD: corporate; employment, pensions & immigration; family; private property; tax, trusts and succession; construction, engineering & projects; real estate; real estate disputes; commercial dispute resolution; private wealth disputes; corporate restructuring & insolvency. CHELTENHAM: corporate; employment, pensions & immigration; private property; tax, trusts and succession; real estate; real estate disputes; commercial dispute resolution; corporate restructuring & insolvency.

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into CRS

254
The Seats

Real estate has a “reputation for being one of the busier seats.” Interviewees didn’t see this as a bad thing – with lots of work to do comes “lots of responsibility from the word go.” CRS advises commercial and residential clients, and trainees worked for a spectrum from individuals to large corporations. Eton College, the City of London Corporation and Caring Homes are on the books; the firm recently acted for the acquisition-hungry Stonegate Pub Company on its £3 billion purchase of the Ei Group and 4,500 pub sites. On the residential side, CRS advised Bellway Homes on a £109 million tenant-backed estate regeneration in south London. Trainees spent their time on a mix of “lease renewals, transfers of property, and sale and purchase agreements.” Several we spoke to appreciated the “freedom and trust to communicate with clients,” finding this commonplace in a real estate seat. Deals gave trainees the chance to get “involved with Land Registry applications,” then move on to “drafting leases, transfers and contracts” alongside “juicy research tasks.” One source also recalled being given “some smaller files to run, such as licences to alter.”

The real estate disputes seat ties in well with real estate, dealing with any contentious elements that may arise from properties (they often do). These could be disputes between landlords and tenants, clashes over property boundaries or more complex issues like “party wall disputes, compulsory purchases, enfranchisement disputes or even some property finance and insolvency cases.” Cheltenham folks noticed an uptick in work from landed estates. Day to day, trainees got stuck into “drafting letters before action, letters of claims and letters of response” as well as “drafting instructions to counsel, attending conferences with counsel and the usual bundling and admin tasks.” Some sources had even got the chance to “do a bit of advocacy, acting on some eviction matters regarding squatters.” Wagamama and the National Crime Agency are CRS clients and the firm recently acted for the liquidator of nightclub operators Strobe 2 on a £14 million claim against the former directors.

“The helping clients comply with child arrangement orders while in lockdown.”

Charles Russell Speechlys has historically been best known for its work advising private clients. A seat in tax, trusts and succession gives trainees a good view of this: high net worth clients rely on the firm’s advice for wills, trusts and general administration of their affairs. For our sources this meant physically “drafting wills, letters of wishes, and lasting powers of attorney” as well as “trust deeds, appointments of trustees, retirements of trustees, and appointments of capital.” The seat also includes tax planning, so trainees also do a fair bit of research and “prepare tax advice – obviously under heavy supervision!”

As well as wealthy individuals and families, clients here include executors of estates and so sensitivity is needed in this seat. Interviewees had also attended “stacks of client meetings” and appreciated the chances for “really good client exposure” available in this department. “We also have to deal with HMRC here, which is painful but has to be done,” one chuckled.

Private clients are also the focus of the family practice, but here they’re dealing with “mainly divorces, some children’s matters (usually custody clashes along with divorces) and family finance issues.” High net worth individuals both domestic and international call on CRS for advice: daughters of Ukrainian businessmen, Russian oligarchs and members of one of the Middle East’s richest families are some exciting examples. During our research period, the coronavirus outbreak was creating unique problems for the team and trainees to solve, including “helping clients comply with child arrangement orders while in lockdown” and conducting divorce and custody hearings remotely. “It’s been interesting to see as the courts are catching up as well – we’ve had to sort getting everything online and work out how to best service our clients from home,” a source told us. In more normal circumstances, trainees are likely to get stuck into a hefty amount of research as well as drafting “financial disclosure, briefs to counsel and applications to court.”

“I did quite a lot of high-value cross-jurisdictional M&A – one of our partners does a lot of African M&A work.”

A construction seat offers experience in litigious and non-contentious matters and our sources got stuck into both. If it’s disputes that you’re looking for, the CRS team handles “a real variety, with any number of parties involved in a project.” Adjudications are all the rage in this sector, so trainees were able to see everything from first
responses to the eventual decision - “adjudications are great because they’re designed to be rapid and you actually get to see a conclusion.” As for the non-contentious side, trainees were charged with “drafting appointments for professionals like architects, designers, or engineers needed for large-scale projects” as well as dealing with collateral warranties and amending standard form contracts. Sources enjoyed the exposure to a variety of “different kinds of contracts with very different clients,” whether they be housing developers, contractors or the private clients which can be found once more here. The team recently advised Harrods on the construction aspects of the office extension to its Hammersmith HQ; and acted for Greenwich Millennium Village on a £1.5 billion regeneration scheme aiming to construct 3,200 homes.

There’s also a “a full-on corporate seat” available – full-on in what way? “The whole department does everything,” sources explained. “I worked on all forms of corporate transactions.” At CRS that means private equity, mid-market M&A and capital markets – our sources had seen them all, often in an international context. One explained: “I did quite a lot of high-value cross-jurisdictional M&A – one of our partners does a lot of African M&A work.” As for the UK, the team advised the Eddie Davies Trust on the out-of-administration sale of Bolton Wanderers FC to new owner Sharon Brittan’s Football Ventures; as well as the accounting network Grant Thornton UK on the sale of their wealth advisory business to 1825 (a Standard Life financial planning and advice arm).

Trainee Life

Though working hours varied by seat, trainees were “pretty happy” for the most part. Corporate, real estate and transactional departments in general were the most demanding, with trainees usually clocking off around 7pm – later finishes could run later than 9pm, but that was a rarity for many and our sources found their hours “relatively reasonable.” In other seats, many were able to leave by 6 or 6.30pm. “They want you to work hard and do your best, but they don’t want you to work yourself to death,” a grateful CRS insider noted.

“Even partners take pro bono seriously; if you say you’re at capacity because of pro bono, that’s generally fine.”

Across the firm our interviewees agreed that “there’s a really good rapport between colleagues. There isn’t an obvious hierarchy and senior associates and partners are really accessible; there’s never any apprehension about going over and talking to them.” Although this open atmosphere was common across each office, Guildford and Cheltenham come with added advantages. “Because they’re smaller, you quickly get to know everyone,” we heard. “You don’t feel like just a name.” Some felt the CRS culture was changing slightly over time – “becoming one of a bigger firm with more of a growth-oriented atmosphere” – but caveat that by saying “the firm hasn’t lost its focus on its people.” One source summarised that “fee earners are conscious that we are a family away from home” – and as with many families, social activities are key to keeping people happy. Trainees highlighted “excellent firmwide summer and Christmas parties” for everyone to come together, as well as office-specific shindigs. CRS also host regular events for charity, including an “auction of promises.”

The firm’s charitable nature extends to its work too, through a healthy pro bono practice: “CRS takes pro bono really seriously. We have a dedicated pro bono legal director and there’s a real range of matters to get involved in.” London folks spent time helping at the Bethnal Green Legal Advice Centre, while others did “property work for various charities” and family cases for clients with less wealth than the CRS norm. “Even partners take pro bono seriously; if you say you’re at capacity because of pro bono, that’s generally fine,” they concluded. Diversity is also promoted through various initiatives; acknowledging that the firm’s stats “could be better,” trainees suggested there’s been a “real push to raise awareness.” Much of that has come from the diversity and inclusion committee, “which is doing more and more work and making a tangible difference.” Recent events include an International Women’s Day celebration where “everyone in the firm was invited to make a pledge to do something that would promote equality,” as well as a “Black History Month panel event where prominent women of colour and some of our own lawyers spoke.”

Second-year trainees were about to begin the qualification process at the time of our research (though the coronavirus outbreak had caused some dismay). “The jobs list is usually released towards the end of April,” we heard. “Trainees then put in an application to the departments they’re interested in, with a CV and cover letter.” Departments hold interviews before making decisions. Charles Russell Speechlys customarily fares well on retention, but by the time we went to press the firm had not disclosed its retention numbers.

CSR at CRS

The firm has recently joined The Valuable 500, a network of international businesses adding disability inclusion to their leadership agendas.
Charles Russell Speechlys

5 Fleet Place, London EC4M 7RD
Tel: 020 7203 5000
Website: www.charlesrussellspeechlys.com
Twitter: @CRS_Trainees

Partners: 168
Associates: 300
Total trainees: 43
UK offices: London, Guildford, Cheltenham
Overseas offices: Doha, Dubai, Geneva, Hong Kong, Luxembourg, Manama, Paris, Zurich

Contacts
Graduate recruiter:
Emma Hawken, emma.hawken@crsblaw.com
Training partner:
Hamish Perry

Application criteria
Training contract pa: 25
Applications pa: 1000
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1 or other
Minimum UCAS points or A levels: AAB
Vacation scheme places pa: 56

Dates and deadlines
Training contract and vacation scheme applications:
October each year
Training contract and Vacation scheme deadline: 31st January 2021

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant: Yes

International and regional
Offices with training contracts: London, Guildford, Cheltenham

Firm profile
Charles Russell Speechlys is a law firm headquartered in London with offices in the UK, Europe, the Middle East and Hong Kong.

We have an unusually broad range of skills and experience across the full spectrum of business and personal needs. This gives us a wider perspective, clear insight and a strongly commercial long-term view. We use this approach to secure the growth of our clients as they move confidently into the future.

It has made us a leader in the world of dynamic growth and family businesses, and among the world’s leading creators and owners of private wealth and their families. Major corporates and institutions find our more considered and personal approach a refreshing alternative to conventional business law firms.

Main areas of work
Banking and finance, commercial, commercial dispute resolution, construction, engineering and projects, corporate, corporate tax, corporate restructuring and insolvency, employment, pensions and immigration, family, financial services, IP litigation, private property, private wealth disputes, real estate disputes, real estate and tax, trusts and succession.

These practice areas are focused on the following sector areas: charities and not for profit, construction and infrastructure, energy and natural resources, financial services, healthcare, private wealth, real estate, retail and leisure, sport and technology, media and telecommunications.

Training opportunities
At Charles Russell Speechlys we provide a practical learning environment for trainees where emphasis is given to early responsibility and supervised client contact. The two-year training contract is divided into four seats, giving trainees the opportunity to experience a range of different practice areas before qualification, including a contentious seat. Throughout the training contract there are regular meetings and reviews between the trainees and their supervisors to ensure they are continuing to receive a broad range of quality work. This, together with our in-house training programme, the Charles Russell Speechlys Skills Academy, ensures that our trainees develop the required skills and knowledge to become successful lawyers.

Vacation scheme
Our vacation scheme takes place in our London, Cheltenham and Guildford offices and offers a detailed introduction to the legal world. Each week is spent in a different practice area where you will carry out real fee earning work that could include attending client meetings and going to court. You will have support from trainees and solicitors in each of the teams and have the opportunity to meet a number of different people, either at organised social events or as part of your day to day interactions.

Other benefits
Benefits include private medical care, PHI and life assurance, pension, season ticket loan, cycle to work, 25 days’ holiday, dress down Fridays and a subsidised restaurant in the London offices.
Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 15
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 19/61/21
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats
First-year salary: £50,000
Qualification salary: £133,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Cleary

If you wish to be a “global citizen” in a friendly and “stratospherically intelligent” environment, look no further than cheery Cleary.

The Firm
When you think of New York’s international white shoe elite— and Cleary are very much one of them—it’s unlikely that ‘friendly’ will be the first word in your mind. A network of 16 international offices doing billion-dollar work all over the globe, employing the skills of attorneys from over 50 countries... it sounds vast, perhaps intimidating. Yet trainees in Cleary’s London base described it as “the best of all worlds, you don’t have to sacrifice personality to work here.” Once upon a time, in fact, Friendly was legitimately this firm’s middle name – Henry Friendly was one of the founders of Cleary, Gottlieb, Friendly, & Cox.

“It’s common for people here to have an international background or at least an interest,” we heard. “At least half the most recent intake has had a lot of foreign exposure, lived abroad, or have come from overseas.” Trainees loved their internationally diverse cohort: “You’re exposed to different cultures and perspectives, which has really opened my eyes to how the world operates. It makes me feel like a global citizen.” Cleary is ranked in Chambers Global as top worldwide in capital markets and competition/antitrust, and it’s highly commended for dispute resolution, corporate/M&A and tax among other fields. As for fair Blighty, the team in London earns Chambers UK rankings for high-end private equity buyers, capital markets, banking litigation, competition and big-ticket corporate – all of which often have a strong international dimension.

“...impressed by the people here. They’re stratospherically intelligent!”

Looking around their cohort, trainees were “unbelievably impressed by the people here. They’re stratospherically intelligent!” Cleary clearly looks in certain places to find boffins: “Almost exclusively from private schools. Oxbridge alumni are about 70% of each intake.” At the time of our calls, the split was 60% Oxbridge and from September 2020 it will be 52%. High-achieving Russell Group universities tend to supply the rest; some felt this “seems unfair” but rationalised the situation by pointing out that “this salary package attracts a lot of applicants from top unis, so the applications are skewed.” The pay package certainly is impressive – Cleary once boasted the highest NQ salary at £120,000, though a handful of firms have since outdone them. “It’s quite competitive... it’s comparable to the salary of first-year juniors in the US, so it makes sense for us,” trainees said.

The buzzword at Cleary was “flex” – trainees used it as a summary for “freedom, flexibility and independent thought” at the firm. Trainees in one seat may be “flexed” to help out on a matter in another department, “getting insights into a practice area without even sitting there.” It’s also common for trainees to “continue matters from your first seat through your entire training contract, from various angles. It’s a more organic way of learning.” A vast international network combined with a “flexible” training contract gives trainees “a bird’s eye view of the entire market,” while the ability to move around the firm gave sources the impression of “making a rich and unique contribution to Cleary from day one. It might sound kitsch, but it’s true!” The seat allocation process is “very informal. You chat with HR at the halfway point of your seat and give them a list of where you’d want to go next and why.” There are no compulsory seats, though almost all trainees do one of capital markets, finance or M&A.

Chambers UK rankings

- Banking & Finance
- Corporate/M&A
- Banking Litigation
- Litigation
- Capital Markets
- Private Equity
- Competition/European Law

The Seats

“Here in Clearyland, capital markets isn’t a siloed team,” trainees said. “You can see the whole range from shelf takedowns and debt matters to annual reports for multinational banks and corporations.” This theme park of a practice includes emerging markets, US and European debt and equity offerings – to give you an idea of the money being thrown around, Cleary recently advised Credit Suisse on issuing $6.25 billion in notes over multiple transactions; HSBC on the issuance of $7.25 billion of note offerings; and acted on the $6 billion IPO of Scandinavian media group Schibsted’s Adevinta. Massive deals mean trainees typically get stuck into “un glamorous” due diligence. Insiders revealed that Cleary recently trialled AI software to streamline the process, “which can work really well, but you’ve still got to read everything yourself!” The seat can also involve legal research, taking call notes, drafting disclosure and some types of agreements, and work on annual reports. One additional key trainee task is “going over selling restrictions and keeping on top of what’s going on with Brexit. It can all change very quickly!”

The M&A team represents a mix of private equity and sovereign clients – trainees were keen to let us know that “aside from them being really bloody big, we don’t have a typical client type.” Wells Fargo, BNP Paribas, Goldman Sachs... the common theme is big money. Cleary recently advised the Qatar Investment Authority on its acquisition of Tiffany. Interviewees here got to grips with mega deals like Disney, Coca-Cola and Sony call on Cleary, and the firm advised Louis Vuitton on the global competition aspects of its luxury industry record $16.2 billion acquisition of Tiffany. Interviewees here got to grips with “academic policy advocacy. Because competition is evolving all the time, lots of associates contribute to various journals.” Trainees got their fill of drafting court submissions, bundling and research: “I’ll be looking at other regulators’ decisions, working out what it was that pushed them one way or the other and seeing how it relates to our case. It feels like a lot of work, but it’s fine because we’re all bookworms anyway!”

Scoring an overseas seat isn’t a game of musical chairs – trainees give HR a business case of why they want to go to that location, “usually it’s because you will have been in touch with a partner over there and want to continue that work.” Jetsetting trainees in past intakes have spent time in DC, New York, Abu Dhabi, Paris, Milan, Brussels, Buenos Aires, Moscow and Hong Kong (any destination is up for grabs if there is a business case, however). As with general seat allocation, trainees felt the secondment process was “organic” and allows you to “chase the opportunities and lifestyle that are most exciting for you. The small intake means that everyone has a good chance of going somewhere.”

As with M&A, Cleary’s finance practice sees a lot of sovereign clients – recently helping the Government of Bar-
a new swimsuit just yet: “It’s not a holiday. You get there, have a weekend to get your bearings, then you’re straight in on Monday morning and should expect to be busy.”

Trainee Life

Though Cleary does run formal training opportunities and lunchtime practice area presentations, interviewees felt “the biggest part of our training is the incredible work we get to see as trainees. It’s invaluable.” They also keenly described a “huge degree of pastoral support” including regular check-in calls and meetings with HR every six weeks. Seat supervisors earned praise for “getting really involved in trainees’ professional development and making sure everyone feels part of the Cleary family. Some partners are more relaxed, some are more hands-on, and the younger ones are more approachable, but everyone’s friendly.”

From “intellectual” and “academically curious” to “wicked smart,” interviewees had a clear idea of who fits in at Cleary. Arriving at an “intellectually rigorous place” can be “a bit intimidating at first,” but our sources clarified that “the culture is relaxed. Trainees aren’t in competition with each other and no one’s trying to prove themselves.” Many felt right at home in the thoroughbred environment: “We all play at a higher level because we’re surrounded by other great players, but that doesn’t mean there are any egos or abrasive personalities. We’re all down to earth.” Cleary prefers trainees to study the GDL and LPC together at University of Law, to break the ice before the training contract kicks off.

The firm hosts diversity talks and outreach programmes to keep the subject “at the forefront of everyone’s minds. Cleary takes diversity and inclusion totally seriously.” However, some diverse trainees felt that “though the firm isn’t putting barriers up, they’re also not leading the way. There’s a respectable atmosphere, but Cleary needs to do more, especially on the social mobility front.” We only heard good things about the firm’s pro bono efforts: a coordinator connects trainees with “small ad-hoc matters in the UK, or bigger ones in the US and worldwide.” Local projects include volunteering at a women’s legal clinic and helping refugees apply for resettlement; longer-term matters, such as a project surveying the persecution of the LG-BTQ+ community in the Caribbean, look to make “massive changes.” Cleary is “enthusiastic” for trainees to bring their own pro bono causes to the table too. “My cases have come with experiences that are harder to get on client matters and they’ve developed me hugely, personally and professionally,” one said.

“We’re academics, so we want to take the extra time.”

If it sounds like there’s a lot going on at Cleary, news that trainees have “completely unpredictable hours” won’t come as a surprise. Supervisors are tasked with supplying trainees with a minimum of seven billable hours a day, but the longest we heard was 70 hours in one week; this source confirmed “that’s definitely not a regular deal,” and trainees often head home between 7 and 8.30pm, but many felt “a need to be responsive 24/7. I don’t turn my work phone off when I sleep.” Some argued this drive to grind is “self-led. It’s not that the firm is necessarily asking you to stay that late – we’re academics, so we want to take the extra time to do the work and learn properly.” Trainees can get refreshed at Burger & Lobster Friday lunches and let their hair down with fortnightly pizza and beer at informal get-togethers.

An “open channel” between trainees and HR from the start of the training contract about qualification and “what’s expected of you” means that the process is “informal and organic.” At the end of April, each trainee has a discussion with HR about where they’d like to qualify, which is taken into consideration along with business need. It’s common to qualify into more than one department: “There’s a lot of freedom. Someone once qualified into litigation and M&A, which is as varied as it can get!” All our interviewees looked to “stick with Cleary for several years,” but noted that many tend to head for pastures new at senior associate level “as the firm doesn’t make many homegrown partners.” In 2020, Cleary kept on ten of its 13 spring qualifiers.

Nothing’s gonna stop us now

Cleary earned praise from interviewees for training contract management during the coronavirus crisis: “The firm’s infrastructure is robust and there’s been no shortage of ongoing training.”
Firm profile
Pioneers in the globalisation of the legal profession, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP is a leading international law firm with 16 integrated offices located in major financial and political centres around the world. The firm operates as a single global partnership. Consistent with the vision of its founders, Cleary remains committed to openness, diversity, individuality and collaboration.

Main areas of work
Core areas of practice in London are mergers and acquisitions, financing and restructuring, capital markets, international litigation and arbitration, and competition. In addition, Cleary has established successful self-standing practices in tax, financial regulation, and intellectual property and information technology.

Training opportunities
We do not believe in a ‘one size fits all’ training solution. By recruiting 10–15 trainees each year, we are able to offer training that is tailored to each trainee’s interests, experience and aptitudes. Nor do we believe that the transition from trainee solicitor to associate occurs overnight on qualification. So, we encourage our trainees to take responsibility as soon as they are ready to do so. Given appropriate levels of supervision and support, trainees operate as lawyers from the day they join us.

Work experience
The firm’s London office offers around 40 vacation places each year across four schemes: one in winter, one in spring, and two in summer. Cleary actively encourages all candidates who are considering applying for a trainee solicitor position to undertake a vacation placement with the firm. The deadline for spring and summer vacation scheme applications is 31st January.

Other benefits
25 days’ holiday, fitness subsidy, health screening, private health insurance, life insurance of twice annual salary, long-term disability insurance, critical illness insurance, dental insurance, employee assistance programme, emergency backup care, cycle to work scheme and subsidised staff restaurant.

Open days and first year opportunities
Insight day in spring 2021.

University law careers fairs 2019
- University of Bristol
- Trinity College Dublin
- LSE
- Kings College London
- Cambridge University
- UCL
- Durham University
- Exeter University
- Oxford University
The facts
Locations: London, Newcastle
Overseas offices: 32
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 184/616/197
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; secondments
First-year salary: £48,000
Qualification salary: £94,500

Trainees who wanted it all for their careers weren’t taking any chances when they applied to corporate colossus Clifford Chance.

The Firm
What did Clifford Chance’s trainees want from a firm? Not much, just “a prestigious name, great international opportunities, and a top-notch reputation across multiple practice areas.” Only a handful of firms could fulfil such a wish list. As a member of the revered magic circle, its status as one of the world’s top corporate and financial law firms is airtight. Alongside its London HQ and a small Newcastle office, Clifford Chance has 36 more offices around the globe, including bases in New York, Singapore and Beijing. For trainees, this means overseas seats are up for grabs.

As for expertise across multiple practice areas, Clifford Chance pulls in over 270 rankings from Chambers Global. Domestically, Chambers UK bestows the firm with nearly 60 rankings, many of which are top-tier. The majority of these fall under transactional areas such as banking and finance, capital markets, M&A and private equity, but the firm’s litigation and banking litigation teams are considered top-notch too.

“It’s something I can use as a springboard for the rest of my career.”

But Clifford Chance’s sterling reputation wasn’t all our sources felt the firm had to offer. Many were also attracted to “a forward-thinking culture” and a firm they believed “genuinely values diversity.” This sentiment was shared by a clear majority of our survey respondents: 97% strongly approved of the firm’s efforts to recruit diverse candidates, and more than 30% identified as black, Asian or an ethnic minority.

For some interviewees, “the training was the key driver” behind their decision to apply to Clifford Chance. “The quality of the work you’re involved in and the level of supervision is excellent,” said one. “No matter the stresses, I’m working with some of the best people in the country.” Interviewees had a strong sense of the opportunities Clifford Chance opened up to them – “it’s something I can use as a springboard for the rest of my career.”

The Seats
The firm has an innovative approach to seat allocation by using a computer algorithm. In short, trainees are given 200 points which they can ‘spend’ on seat preferences. The more they want to do a seat, the more points they spend. One source likened the process to a “blind auction,” explaining that “hypothetically you could guarantee a seat by spending your full 200 points in one go. However, it means that the remainder of your seats will be assigned based on the business needs of the firm.” Trainees liked that “the numerical approach takes out a lot of the politics” that often accompanies seat allocation.

There’s still some human input, but more so when it comes to allocating international and client secondments. “HR has to consider language skills and an individual’s general performance,” trainees explained. “They’re not going to send an underperforming trainee to a client!” Most trainees undertake an overseas seat. Available locations vary each year. “Often the seats in Asia are most popular, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, as well as those in the Mid-
Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Areas</th>
<th>Practice Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asset Finance</td>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking &amp; Finance</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking Litigation</td>
<td>International Arbitration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Markets</td>
<td>Investment Funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodities</td>
<td>Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition/European Law</td>
<td>Parliamentary &amp; Public Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Pensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/M&amp;A</td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Protection</td>
<td>Private Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Share Schemes &amp; Incentives</td>
<td>Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Public International Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy &amp; Natural Resources</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Real Estate Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Crime</td>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>Restructuring/Insolvency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>Retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels &amp; Leisure</td>
<td>Tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

die East,” one insider told us. “There’s a perception that because they are English-speaking, it’s much easier to assimilate and pick up more responsibility.” The firm’s overseas offices are often smaller than headquarters in London, so trainees agreed that these opportunities usually offered up greater responsibility all round.

“I’ve had the chance to work with some of the most intelligent people I have ever come across.”

Trainees have their pick of seven sub-teams within corporate including private funds, TMT, competition, financial institutions, private M&A, and public M&A. Of the two M&A groups, private is the biggest and provides plenty of opportunities for trainees to cut their teeth drafting board minutes, managing checklists and “helping supervisors analyse client queries.” The clients are huge – recently, the team advised Coca-Cola on its £3.9 billion acquisition of Costa. It also acted for Pfizer, one of the world’s largest pharmaceutical companies, on a joint venture with GlaxoSmithKline to create a global consumer healthcare company.

Those with a passion for finance will salivate at the prospect of choosing between five distinct finance seats at Clifford Chance: SABRE (structured and asset-backed real estate); regulatory/derivatives; asset/project finance; restructuring; and general banking. The banking team recently advised the lead arrangers on the financing for the £1.9 billion take-private of BCA Marketplace, a car auction operator, by TDR Capital (a take-private is when private equity firms purchase the stock of a public company). One source explained that “compared to M&A, you tend to have more set trainee tasks that you are expected to do on repeat for each deal, such as drafting legal opinions and managing conditions precedent checklists. It can be less exciting, but it means you get good at something quickly and can add value.”

Trainees who’d sat in asset finance expressed similar sentiments. “Although it’s technically difficult in a couple of areas, the work is also quite straightforward in that you’re typically dealing with the same three or four types of deals,” one clued us in. “Once you familiarise yourself with them, they become easy to understand and repeat.” The majority of the work is in the aviation sector, “so if you don’t like planes, you probably won’t enjoy it,” one source put it bluntly. The team recently advised GE Capital on the sale of PK AirFinance, an aviation lending business, to Apollo Global Management and Athene Holding for $3.6 billion.

In regulatory/derivatives (which is also known within the firm as 50H) much of the work is advisory and focuses on black-letter law. One insider told us: “I’ve had the chance to work with some of the most intelligent people I have ever come across.” Sources suggested the regulatory seat offered more responsibility than other transactional departments. As evidenced by one trainee: “I was writing memos that went straight to clients with minimal oversight and conducting detailed research into what the implications of a certain EU regulation would mean for a transaction.”

Within capital markets trainees can do seats in equity and structured debt. The team recently advised Nordic residential property managers Samhällsbyggnadsbolaget i Norden (also known as SBB, mercifully) on the structuring, drafting and negotiating of a €300 million hybrid capital issuance. “Debt capital market deals follow very strict and rigid timelines,” insiders explained. “In terms of sheer volume, it’s quite high-octane but the workloads are fairly predictable.” Translation: you’ll consistently be working late nights, but you’ll know they’re coming. Plenty of drafting was available, as were opportunities “for trainees to run some deals independently with a supervising associate.” The department also scored among the highest of the transactional seats for the level of client and partner contact it offers trainees.

“The department also scored among the highest of the transactional seats for the level of client and partner contact it offers trainees.”

Trainees can sample a wide variety of work within the firm’s dispute resolution seat, including commercial litigation, arbitration, regulatory investigations work, and more. Some of the clients here include General Electric, Airbus and BT, the last of which the firm defended against claims brought by the administrators of Phones 4u, alleging that several telecoms companies colluded
against it. In a recent arbitration, the firm also represented Invenergy Renewables against Poland concerning contracts made with state-owned companies. Our interviewees explained that “once you’ve gained your team’s trust, you’re rewarded with meaningful responsibility, particularly in the form of research.” We also heard of trainees getting more mundane tasks, such as “inputting analysis from transcripts into a table – for a month!” But on the plus side, “doing some glorified admin can actually be a relief when you’ve been working long hours.” Our survey results showed that there wasn’t much client contact or interaction with partners in this seat, but respondents agreed overwhelmingly that the work was interesting, their legal skills progressed, and that they would be happy qualifying into the department.

Sources also pointed out that “the litigation department heads up most of the firm’s pro bono initiatives.” Trainees can participate in one of several clinics that the firm attends each week, which include assisting local residents with issues such as Court of Appeal litigation, domestic violence, employment, welfare benefits, debt and housing. The firm also advises and represents the parents of autistic children in litigation before the Special Educational Needs Tribunal to secure better educational provision for their children.

Trainee Life
At this point, you’re probably dying to know how much of your social life you’d have to trade in for Clifford Chance’s name adorning your CV. Let us ease you in. Trainees reported far less gruelling hours in seats like litigation, where they often went home before the 8pm mark. In pensions, “I logged on at 9.30am, took a full hour for lunch and was off at 7pm every evening without fail.” Over in the transactional seats, “there are going to be days where you’re leaving at 6pm and days where you’re leaving at 6am,” one insider summarised. Asset finance was highlighted as particularly tough (“some of my friends looked grey in that one!”). Our survey participants ranked SABRE as the most demanding seat – “I was happy if I got out between 10pm and 11pm!” One particularly expressive trainee described it as “the murderous baby produced when real estate finance and structured finance decided to merge last year.” Fortunately, we heard the firm “recently had a review to help address the problem” of trainees working long hours.

And in this vein, our interviewees were impressed by the firm’s approach to mental wellbeing. “They want to support you if you’re feeling bad,” one trainee told us, adding: “They make efforts to make sure your hours are more manageable. A response of ‘this is what you signed up for, deal with it,’ would never be acceptable.” Resources on hand include an occupational health professional who lawyers can access through the firm’s healthcare programme. Another insider felt that “on a firm-wide level they are great mental health advocates, but in reality your experience is dependent on your supervisor and the team you’re in.”

“A junior associate from an ethnic minority background can mentor a partner.”

Interestingly, one of our interviewees drew a correlation between the departments with the most demanding hours and their gender composition. “Groups such as capital markets are very male-heavy,” they stated, adding: “I think if you’re a young black woman looking for representation at the higher levels then it becomes problematic.” The firm has set itself targets of 15% of new partners and 30% senior associates to be made up of ethnic minorities by 2025, and is aiming for 40% female global partners by 2030. Clifford Chance performed well in our diversity survey, with trainees ranking it favourably in categories such as inclusivity training. The firm has a female empowerment programme called Accelerate, as well as a reverse mentoring scheme, whereby “a junior associate from an ethnic minority background can mentor a partner.”

While trainees undoubtedly work hard, being part of a firm that generated revenues of £1.8 billion in 2019 means trainees can expect some considerable perks too. For example, last year, litigators were rewarded with an all-expenses paid skiing trip to the Alps. The firm also puts on summer and Christmas parties. As for the salary, trainees start on £48,000 and progress to £54,000 in the second year. Along with most of its magic circle peers, Clifford Chance cut NQ pay in the wake of the pandemic, so this year’s successful qualifiers will begin on £94,500.

On the approach to qualification, all trainees are given a presentation during their final seat outlining a “very clear timetable” of the process. Competitive departments such as litigation “have a four-stage approach,” which involves interviews, supervisor meetings and appraisal analysis. Last year, the firm boasted a respectable 90% retention rate. This year, 70 of 95 qualifiers were kept on.

Tech a Chance on me
Clifford Chance launched its IGNITE training contract last year, offering a tech-focused experience for a small number of trainees a year.
Clifford Chance LLP

10 Upper Bank Street, Canary Wharf, E14 5JJ
Tel: 020 7006 4005
Email: graduate.recruitment@cliffordchance.com
Website: careers.cliffordchance.com/ukgrads
Twitter: @CCGradsUK
Facebook: CliffordChanceGrads
Instagram: @cliffordchancecareers
LinkedIn: clifford-chance-llp

Firm profile
Clifford Chance is a leading global corporate law firm. But we’re not a typical one. Far from it. Life here means doing the best work for exceptional clients while being yourself. We look for individuals, not for ‘typical lawyers’. We’re focused, but we know how to have fun. And we collaborate. At every level. Which makes this a brilliant place to learn. To find your feet quickly. To get ahead.

What we do and where:
We give expert legal advice on every aspect of commercial law. And our clients? From infamous corporations, governments and global banks, to not-for-profits and charities, we help just about everyone with our specialist knowledge and skills. That variety definitely makes life here interesting. As does the scale and scope of what we do. Our work covers corporate; global financial markets; real estate; litigation and dispute resolution; plus tax, pensions and employment. And when it comes to where we are, we work in major financial centres across the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

How you can get involved:
You don’t need a law degree to join us. (About half of our trainees come from non-law backgrounds.) What matters is that you’re resilient, curious, creative and open to new challenges. You’re someone who loves to learn. A great problem solver. A smart thinker. You’re commercially-savvy, solutions-oriented and up for working as part of a close-knit team.

One of the ways you can show us you have what it takes is to experience life here before you apply for your Training Contract. You can explore the possibilities available by attending one of our virtual events or completing one of our free Global Virtual Internships — open to everyone. These offer unparalleled access to legal resources whilst revealing the people and culture in a way that has never been done before.

Main areas of work
Corporate; global financial markets; real estate; litigation and dispute resolution; tax, pensions and employment.

Training opportunities
All of our trainees rotate through a two-year programme which gives them the opportunity to explore our practice areas. We also offer client secondments, international secondments and split-seat roles. It’s all about making sure they get the breadth of experience they need to thrive.

Other benefits
Benefits include free gym membership, pension scheme, on-site healthcare, private healthcare scheme, season ticket loan, cycle-to-work scheme, dental plan and more.

First-year opportunities
Clifford Chance SPARK: We will be running two of our award-winning SPARK schemes in 2021. The application closing date for our first year SPARK schemes is 10th December 2020.

University law careers fairs 2020
Visit our Events Hub to find out about our virtual opportunities:
www.careers.cliffordchance.com/london/what-we-offer/events-hub.html
Clyde & Co LLP

The facts
Overseas offices: 43
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 199/717/82
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £38,000 (London); £24,500 (Manchester)
Qualification salary: £68,000 (London); undisclosed (Manchester)

When we Clyde we come together... at a litigation and insurance-focused firm with a global footprint and healthy work/life balance.

The Firm
Each of the UK’s top 20 largest law firms by revenue has its own quirks and characteristics that help it stand out from the crowd, but Clyde & Co sits further apart than most. For a start, C&C is “weighted towards contentious work, and if you just want to do corporate law, this is the wrong place for you,” trainees said. Instead you’ll find rich pickings of energy, infrastructure, trade, transport and - most of all – insurance law. “The firm has a strong insurance bent and a lot of insurance seats, so it’s inevitable you’ll do at least one,” sources explained. “I knew I wouldn’t have to sit in a finance or derivatives department like the corporate-focused magic and silver circle firms.”

Chambers UK slots the firm into the top tier for contentious insurance, reinsurance, aviation, personal injury, and police law nationwide. Professional negligence is another Clyde & Co specialism, with the firm earning top rankings in London, Thames Valley and the North West for this practice. Among the other Clyde standouts, it’s worth highlighting top billing for real estate in the South thanks to the Guildford office. “Interesting insurance work, diversity of cases and the ability to specialise early on” were a draw for many trainees. Others touted Clyde’s reputation for offering a “good work/life balance,” and were pleased to find this to be true in practice.

“The firm has a strong insurance bent and a lot of insurance seats, so it’s inevitable you’ll do at least one.”

In England, the firm recruits most trainees into its London office; Manchester also takes a few, and Northerners were pleased that “it’s not London or nothing.” Look beyond the shores of Blighty and you’ll find Clyde’s presence across Europe, Asia, North and South America, Australia and the Middle East. The option “to do a seat abroad” appealed to some, though not every office offers a seat and Covid-19 may bring down the number that do for the time being (the firm hopes to return to its pre-pandemic oversea seat offering when government guidelines allow). We also heard “there’s a thirst to keep growing the firm” larger still. Clyde & Co in space, perhaps?

“Trainees have to do one transactional seat to fulfil SRA requirements; otherwise, there are no compulsory seats.” Insurance departments are a likely destination for most, as there’s a grand total of 30 insurance seats in London and Manchester at each rotation. There’s a twist in the tale for Londoners – they have to list one seat in the Guildford office as a preference each time. “It’s not mandatory to do a seat there, but it is mandatory to put one down and roughly half of us will have to go,” London insiders revealed. Before each rotation, trainees rank their choices from one to ten; where they go is calculated in part by a one-to-one meeting with the careers team, then finally by an algorithm through an app. “For the most part it seems to work, there...

Seat options: aviation; casualty; healthcare; corporate; employment; international arbitration; insurance; professional and financial disputes; marine; marine cargo; international trade; real estate; projects & construction; planning; insolvency; prop litigation; banking & finance; commodities/trade & energy; procurement; shipping & yacht finance; commercial IP; tech (data lab); catastrophic injury and large loss; volume claims & corporate risk; police, safety, health and environment regulatory
havent been many disappointments,” trainees said. Sources also told us: “The majority of what’s offered in London is also available in Manchester,” though the Northern office is the better bet for healthcare casualty work. In most departments, each office has a distinct work stream (construction is an exception).

The Seats

Insurance at Clyde includes both litigious and non-contentious practices. Some of the seat options for trainees include aviation liability and finance, political risk, product liability, corporate insurance, and reinsurance and Bermuda form. Some of the world’s largest insurers including Zurich and Chubb are on the firm’s books—Clyde recently represented the former in a £32 million claim brought by oil and gas company Dana, for damage to an oil umbilical in the North Sea. The firm has also recently begun advising the Motor Insurers’ Bureau, a private company administering a compensation fund for victims of accidents caused by uninsured drivers.

One of the insurance seats on offer is speciality reinsurance and Bermuda form. The team helps insurers on “high-value excess liability,” coverage which is only triggered for big money claims. “It’s normally over £100 million before the excess liability kicks in,” according to our sources. Bermuda form insurance policies include unique terms, including their settlement by arbitration. Trainees told us the work in this seat “tends to be quite document-heavy. There are hundreds of underlying claims that make up a case, and it’s a trainee’s job to manage the documents going into the claim.” As well as document management, the department offers “more analytical tasks” including low-level drafting, expert and witness interviews and correspondence with counsel.

“There are hundreds of underlying claims that make up a case.”

Professional negligence is known at Clyde as financial institutions directors and officers, or FIDO. Yes, that does sound like a dog’s name, but you’re barking up the wrong tree if you think the practice is cuddly: “During this seat I’ve had more experience of what it’s like to be a qualified associate,” a trainee told us. “There’s some bundling, but I’ve drafted letters to clients and only done two solid days of doc review, which in the grand scheme of things isn’t that bad!” The firm’s practice involves defending financial, legal, construction and insurance professionals who are being sued; a recent example was the world’s largest law firm, Dentons, defending a €6.5 million claim brought by investors after one of the firm’s clients dissolved.

Various different subgroups make up the sizeable aviation practice. Trainees complete a seat in the department as a whole, so could be getting involved in matters of various shapes and sizes – “it could be small aircraft or big cargo planes. It was a really good seat that I enjoyed a lot.” Though cases here can involve “a lot of file maintenance,” the role of a trainee includes a mix of drafting, research and document review as well as bundling. “Cases tend to cover multiple jurisdictions” by default, because that’s kind of the point of aeroplanes, “so you’re researching different discrete points of law.” Clyde keeps the names of its aviation clients hush-hush, but we can tell you a recent case involved a Commercial Court dispute between the seller and prospective purchaser of a Boeing 737 business jet, a $2.5 million battle for the deposit following the transaction’s collapse.

“...quite a lot of responsibility to see them through. Nine times out of ten you’re going to settle.”

Clyde & Co’s clinical negligence team practice encompasses industrial and occupational disease (“which comes up as ‘disease internally’”). The firm almost exclusively represents defendants, including NatWest, RBS, Aviva and Wagamama. Trainees had dealt with “lots of asbestos-related claims, the department’s been so busy recently!” Other common cases range from noise-induced hearing losses to individuals claiming to have suffered medical incidents from colleagues’ workplace behaviour. For example, “a person claimed their heart attack was caused by bullying at work.” Trainees here tend to receive their own pre-litigation files, safe in the knowledge that most will reach settlement. “You get quite a lot of responsibility to see them through,” sources felt, but “nine times out of time you’re going to settle.” The clinical negligence practice also covers more typical medical malpractice claims for clients like the Royal Society of Arts, the Medical Protection Society and NHS trusts. Clyde & Co represented
MPS in a potentially £1.2 million-valued claim alleging hip injuries following an operation.

To get a [international or client secondment], trainees submit a CV and one-page letter putting forward a business case of “what you’d bring to the team, and how it will help you and the firm in future.” No pressure. There tend to be “six or seven international seats” available each time, often including Tanzania, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Hong Kong, as well as “four or five client secondments.”

Trainee Life

The much-talked “work/life balance” that comes with a Clyde & Co training contract can vary by department. Some trainees told us they were “leaving at 9 or 9.30pm on a few occasions,” and had “worked whole weekends and finished around midnight or 1am. That’s sometimes necessary during the week as well.” Others told a happier story: “I don’t tend to stay past 7pm unless something crazy is going down. The firm takes wellbeing quite seriously and will tell you to go home if they think you’re working too late.” That’s especially true of Manchester, where trainees usually finish “between 5.30 and 6pm.” A source there said they “had to stay late maybe two or three times, and that was only until 7pm.”

Some treated their healthy levels of spare time as a “trade-off” for a salary they described as “fine, but slightly below market rate” for a firm of Clyde’s size. Others were less impressed... “When a lot of young people are earning more money and working considerably fewer hours than you, it makes you think, ‘hmmm, okay.’” A £68,000 NQ packet in London is indeed one of the lowest of the UK top 20 firms (the firm did not disclose its NQ pay for Manchester). Interviewees did at least agree that Clyde’s hiring process brings quality people through the door: “I was initially attracted by the people here, and that’s not changed. The support available is excellent.” Sources added that overall, “colleagues are very friendly and senior lawyers don’t throw their weight around. Partners speak to you like you’re an actual person.” Where some firms have a graduate recruitment team in one office that monitors all trainees remotely, Clyde & Co has “someone based in Manchester as well as London, so there’s someone here to get to know you as a person. You don’t feel like an add-on.”

“Senior lawyers don’t throw their weight around. Partners speak to you like you’re an actual person.”

With a cohort of just five joining in Manchester each year, “you become closer as trainees in this office. It’s a very friendly office: because it’s open plan, you sit near partners and senior associates.” There’s a similar vibe in London: “I’ve worked directly with partners and head counsel in all my seats on a day-to-day basis. Everyone encourages me to ask questions and makes sure I feel comfortable.” Clyde & Co brings everyone in the UK offices together for quarterly drinks, and “inter-department socials” encourage a “good level of trainee ‘togetherness’. Every Friday it seems like there are drinks trolleys with 50 people from insurance alone.” Corporate is another standout on the social front, thanks partly to its annual ski trip.

An overly masculine tone to some activities did draw criticism. “There’s a lot of going to pubs and the football; I can’t imagine many of my female colleagues would like that too much,” a thoughtful male source noted. Despite some concerns about “a bit of an old boys’ club,” female sources were happy to receive “the support of fellow women. Grad recruitment and the wider HR team are making changes which I’m confident will improve things.” Trainees had similarly mixed feelings about diversity more generally: some felt “the firm is actively learning and improving,” but others argued that “while Clyde may talk the talk, it doesn’t take long to notice a lack of gender diversity in the partnership, and racial diversity full stop.” Open discussion of the Black Lives Matter protests, Pride events and a firm-wide email outlining the stress on Muslim colleagues during Ramadan were all popular steps, as was “active management of the less PC partners. The firm took stock and ran the training from top to bottom.”

“The firm took stock and ran the training from top to bottom.”

Even our more critical sources were very happy with their choice to train at C&C: “My time here has been absolutely outstanding,” one concluded. “There are always going to be ups and downs, but it’s mostly been very positive and I’m looking to qualify here.” Some departments run interviews for NQ positions, depending on how many apply for each role. Clyde retained 36 of 40 qualifying trainees in 2020, with one fixed-term contract.

Home is where the work is

Covid-19 slowed down some departments’ workstreams, but others like insurance remained busy; sources said that “the firm was good at moving trainees so that people weren’t stuck in a seat with nothing to do.”
Clyde & Co

The St Botolph Building, 138 Houndsditch, London EC3A 7AR
Tel: 020 7876 5555 Fax: 020 7876 5111 Website: www.clydecograduates.com
Email: graduaterecruitment@clydeco.com Twitter: @ClydeCoGraduates

Firm profile
Clyde & Co is a leading, sector-focused global law firm with 440 partners, 1800 lawyers, 2500 legal professionals and 4000 staff in over 50 offices and associated offices worldwide. The firm specialises in the sectors that move, build and power our connected world and the insurance that underpins it, namely: transport, infrastructure, energy, trade and commodities and insurance. With a strong focus on developed and emerging markets, the firm has achieved compound average annual revenue growth of 13% over the last ten years, making it one of the fastest growing law firms in the world with ambitious plans for further growth. We view diversity and inclusion as critical to the international nature of our business and have created a working environment where people from different backgrounds can flourish. We run a number of vacation schemes in our London and Manchester offices each year, during which students join us for two weeks and learn about the firm and how the law is applied to our core sectors. We also run Bright Futures – a nine month programme aimed at first year law and second year non law students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds – and insight days during which students join us for a day in the office to gain insight into the culture and work of the firm.

Training opportunities
We recruit for our training contract exclusively through our vacation scheme. We offer training contracts in London, Manchester and Edinburgh. The training contract consists of 4x6 month seats. There are no compulsory or guaranteed seats. Seats are chosen on a rolling basis. There are opportunities to second to our clients, our international offices and our Guildford office.

We also offer training contracts in MEA. These are 4x6 month seats between Dubai and Abu Dhabi

in corporate, employment, construction, IP/commercial and dispute resolution. International secondments to UK offices are available.

We also offer training contracts in Hong Kong. International secondments to UK offices available.

Vacation scheme
Applications open on 1st October 2020 and close on 3rd January 2021. Applications screened on a rolling basis so early application advised.

London:
- Clyde & Co Bright Futures Programme (22nd – 26th March 2021). Aimed at first year law and second year non-law social mobility students
- Summer 1 Vacation Scheme – 14th - 25th June. Aimed at penultimate year law students
- Summer 2 Vacation Scheme – 5th -16th July. Aimed at penultimate year law students

Manchester:
- Summer Vacation Scheme 20th -31st July. Aimed at penultimate years and above

Other benefits
Life assurance, private healthcare, cycle to work schemes, gym, dental insurance, pension scheme, restaurant, employee assistant programme, childcare vouchers, season ticket loans, online benefits, etc.

Insight days and first-year opportunities
We will be running a number of Insight Days throughout 2020 and 2021 in both our London and Manchester offices. These are open to first year university students and upwards. Applications should be made via our website from 1st October 2020.

Clyde & Co Bright Futures Programme (1 week). The day includes an overview of the firm, presentations, development workshops, networking opportunities with the current trainees and plenty of application tips. Due to the ongoing COVID_19 pandemic, Clyde & Co insight days are taking place virtually via Zoom.

University law careers fairs 2020
Clyde & Co will be attending the Legal Cheek and All About Law fairs this year.
The Firm

Pub quiz time: what was the largest ever merger in the history of the UK legal industry? The 2017 triple tie-up between CMS, Nabarro and Olswang is the rather obvious correct answer. With 70+ offices spanning Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America, this is the world’s sixth-largest law firm by headcount and a UK top 10 outfit by revenue. Adding to an already impressive network of domestic bases in London, Bristol, Sheffield, Manchester, Reading and Scotland, CMS pursued its ‘One North’ strategy by setting up shop in Liverpool in 2019.

Prospective trainees who knocked on the doors of CMS were keen to explore its international reach and large array of departments. “The next-generation vacation scheme” also proved popular: the CMS Academy offers exposure not just within the firm, but also with clients. A graduate of the Academy sang its praises: “The experience was more valuable than I could have imagined. It not only confirmed to me that I wanted to be a commercial lawyer – but more specifically a lawyer at CMS.” Others felt welcomed to the firm by its inclusive hiring. “I got the impression that most firms wanted Oxbridge and Russell Group candidates,” one recalled. “I sincerely felt CMS just wanted me to be myself.”

“I sincerely felt CMS just wanted me to be myself.”

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

How to get into CMS

A triple merger is always big news – when it’s formed a firm with the size and practice variety of CMS, it’s essential reading.

The Seats

Now 300 lawyers strong, the firm’s real estate department is one of the largest in its operation. Each subgroup deals with different aspects of property law: the trainees we spoke to either worked on transactions, finance or disputes. The team advises clients from sectors including student accommodation, hotels, healthcare and retail as well as household-name tech conglomerates. “We do
I was advising across a dozen jurisdictions. We were working on a renewable wind project: advising Global Student Accommodation on the £60 million financing of a 350-bed premises in Whitechapel. One interviewee gave a glowing review of their time here: “This seat showed me that litigation isn’t all about bundling.”

CMS also has a dedicated energy seat, where the team helps clients on projects for onshore and offshore wind, hydro and power infrastructure. With lawyers in 31 countries contributing to this team and projects all over the globe, it’s a good pick for international matters. The firm was appointed by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company to advise on its procurement of a waste-to-energy power project; and counselled SSE on a north Scotland wind farm and the related land agreements. Energy disputes fall in here too. A trainee involved in international arbitration outlined an example: “There was an incident at a biomass energy power plant—it was interesting as the dispute was going on in Europe and the Middle East, but the mediation took place in London.” Trainees expend their own energy on drafting security documentation, taking board minutes and helping with expert reports. One interviewee gave a glowing review of their time here: “This seat showed me that litigation isn’t all about bundling.”

Whether it’s a supplier, contractor or funder, the construction team is prepped to help clients get building off the ground; there’s a fair degree of overlap with the projects-focused energy team. The 2017 merger has only boosted CMS’ international reach: the London team has recently worked on matters in Abu Dhabi, Iraq, Turkey, Slovakia, Qatar, Singapore and Saudi Arabia. Other matters are closer to home: the Sheffield squad recently helped Austrian contractor BUG on three disputes linked to one of Europe’s tallest residential buildings, the Manchester Beetham Tower. Trainees’ main role is to help prep documents, complete due diligence reports and draft collateral agreements and warranties. One got stuck into a hotel construction project: “I went to the building site with advisers and two CMS associates and got to meet the client in person.” We also heard of trainees providing “the latest coronavirus guidance” to clients.

a mix of large corporate transactions and landlord/tenant work,” trainees said. Clients here include office space giant WeWork, whom the firm advised on deals across the UK, Belgium, Hungary and Romania, as well as real estate investment trust NewRiver and investment firm Aberdeen Standard. “Within my first four weeks in real estate I drafted a lease, and I’d written up important ancillary documents like licences and rent deposit deeds prior to that,” a source recalled. “There’s always high-level work to do because it’s such a big team.”

“Contentious and advisory employment work is on offer to trainees in the eponymous seat. CMS largely advises employers like Marks & Spencer, Samsung and Royal Mail. In a project that may well be replicated as attitudes to working shift, the firm advised the Wellcome Trust on planning for a shift to a four-day working week. Sticking to a busy five-day week for now, trainees helped employers defend unfair dismissal claims or deductions from wages. An interviewee reflected on the first case they got their hands on: “I was advising across a dozen jurisdictions.”

Contentious and advisory employment work is on offer to trainees in the eponymous seat. CMS largely advises employers like Marks & Spencer, Samsung and Royal Mail. In a project that may well be replicated as attitudes to working shift, the firm advised the Wellcome Trust on planning for a shift to a four-day working week. Sticking to a busy five-day week for now, trainees helped employers defend unfair dismissal claims or deductions from wages. An interviewee reflected on the first case they got their hands on: “I was advising across a dozen jurisdictions.”

I was advising across a dozen jurisdictions.”

Formed from legacy CMS and Nabarro’s teams, real estate finance is now a distinct seat in its own right. The group advises both borrowers and lenders on transactions including development finance and restructurings. “I started by trying to figure out how to work the computer,” a new arrival here chuckled, before tucking into research, drafting board minutes and shareholder resolutions, and managing conditions precedent. Big banks like Lloyds, HSBC and Santander are clients; CMS recently advised Global Student Accommodation on the £60 million financing of a 350-bed premises in Whitechapel. One source here worked on a renewable wind project: “I viewed all the documentation involved with the registry and drafted the ancillary documents.”

Formed from legacy CMS and Nabarro’s teams, real estate finance is now a distinct seat in its own right. The group advises both borrowers and lenders on transactions including development finance and restructurings. “I started by trying to figure out how to work the computer,” a new arrival here chuckled, before tucking into research, drafting board minutes and shareholder resolutions, and managing conditions precedent. Big banks like Lloyds, HSBC and Santander are clients; CMS recently advised Global Student Accommodation on the £60 million financing of a 350-bed premises in Whitechapel. One source here worked on a renewable wind project: “I viewed all the documentation involved with the registry and drafted the ancillary documents.”
Trainee Life

“We have a culture of hard work and encourage one another at CMS; success is always celebrated,” trainee sources declared. They struggled to pick out culture differences between offices, but we heard “London has the latest gizmos.” Sheffield is upgrading to new space at 1 Charter Square in the city, with additional space for up to 350 people. “Our current office is a bit outdated – the new site is much more fitting of our status, it’s a huge upgrade,” trainees declared. Sources in Bristol were less chuffed: “We have a car park, that’s as good as it gets!” The Bristol office has recently undergone an extensive refurbishment, improving facilities and optimising space for around 150 staff.

“The new site is much more fitting of our status, it’s a huge upgrade.”

Wherever they’re based, trainees can get in on the nationwide WhatsApp chat with associates – the perfect platform to exchange outfit pics before firm social events. One of the most popular (for which dressing up is of course not required) is the CMS World Cup football tournament. Lawyers and staff from all levels of seniority and countries come together for a weekend of sporting activities: “We all come to play together and literally hundreds of people attend.” Other socials include quizzes, pizza nights and the infamous trainee ball (including a fancy weekend stay in London with a three-course meal and DJ night).

Hours are pretty fluid across offices; if we were to pin down an average working day, it would run 9am to 6pm. Though trainees in regional offices may not get paid the same as their London counterparts, they do have slightly shorter average hours; a source in Bristol told us that “if you are still in at 7pm you will be one of the only people here. It’s very rare to leave after 6pm.” Londoners are more likely to still be going at it by 9pm, though even that’s quite rare. Upon qualification they’re compensated with just over £20k more than their Bristol colleagues, who themselves earn a little more than Sheffield NQs. A source there was not impressed, noting that “qualification salaries in London are almost double what we get in Sheffield. I think people can forget this is still a fairly expensive place to live.” To kick off the NQ process, trainees can apply to advertised vacancies six weeks into their fourth seat. Applicants submit their CVs and a cover letter before interviews take place. In 2020, CMS retained 66 of 92 qualifiers, with four placed on fixed-term contracts.

“If you are still in at 7pm you will be one of the only people here.”

Throughout the training contract, the graduate recruitment team is on hand to address any concerns. It makes sense that they’re based in London given so many trainees are there, but regional voices noted that “sometimes we have to shout a bit louder to be heard.” During induction, all trainees head to the capital for two full weeks of training. Most were impressed with the introductory programme; each department then offers training at the start of each seat. “Both of my seats have had excellent training resources,” a first-year confirmed. “Most of the team leaders care about your training and development and invest their time in trainee career progression, taking the time to ensure we understand the wider legal or sector issues surrounding a matter.”

They were also largely impressed with the firm’s approach to wellbeing: “The support given to our mental health is second to none,” one gushed. Newcomers get access to mental health resources even before starting their training contract; upon arrival, they can consult a wellbeing ambassador in each department. Other CMS internal networks include gender equality, LGBT+ and ethnicity groups.

Quali-fly with me

Once qualified, associates can visit overseas offices for extended stretches – they’ll need to submit a short piece of writing explaining why they want to go and, as with trainee secondments, may need to interview.
CMS

Cannon Place, 78 Cannon Street, London, EC4N 6AF
Tel: 020 7367 2000
Website: www.graduates.cms-cmno.com/chambers
Email: grad.rec@cms-cmno.com

Firm profile
CMS is a future facing law firm combining top quality sector expertise with international scale and a strategy to become a progressive technology-driven firm. The firm focuses on delivering rewarding futures for its clients, its communities and its people.

Across its six core sectors of energy, financial services, infrastructure and project finance, life sciences and healthcare, real estate and technology, media and communications, CMS has some of the most creative legal minds. Its lawyers are immersed in the clients’ worlds, are genuine experts in their fields and are knowledgeable about business issues faced daily by organisations.

Main areas of work
CMS always strives to put their clients at the centre of what they do. As well as their industry sector focus, they are also a full service law firm working across banking and finance, commercial, competition and EU, consumer products, corporate, dispute resolution, employment and pensions, hotels and leisure, infrastructure and project finance, insurance and funds, intellectual property, private equity, real estate and construction and tax.

Training opportunities
CMS welcomes applications from both non-law and law graduates who can contribute fresh thinking, an international outlook and who possess excellent personal skills alongside a deep understanding of the business of law. The culture at CMS is open, honest and approachable, valuing innovation, collaboration and inclusivity.

CMS offers two-year training contracts in London, Bristol, Sheffield, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Upon starting, trainees complete a comprehensive induction programme. During the training contract, trainees undertake four six-month seats across various practice areas. There may be an opportunity to be seconded to one of the firm’s clients or to a UK or international office.

The CMS Academy is currently the main route to securing a training contract.

Vacation scheme: CMS Academy
The CMS Academy is CMS’s next generation vacation scheme. It starts with a one week ‘business of law’ training programme in London. This includes panel discussions with clients, case studies, work simulation exercises and client visits amongst others. It is an intense but rewarding week; students will experience first-hand the firm’s commitment to making them the best lawyer for the future.

The second part of the programme includes a two-week internship in one of the UK offices. Participants gain real experience in a commercial environment and develop skills needed to succeed as a trainee solicitor.

Eligibility criteria for programmes can be found on the website: www.graduates.cms-cmno.com.

First-year opportunities: First Steps
CMS also offers a First Steps programme, providing an introduction to commercial law and what it is like to work in a global law firm. This one-week programme offers an introduction to CMS, skills sessions and an opportunity to shadow our fee earners. A presentation and social events will both enhance your technical skills, interpersonal skills and networking skills. Participants gain real experience in a commercial environment and develop skills needed to succeed as a trainee solicitor at a future-facing law firm.

Eligibility criteria for programmes can be found on the website: www.graduates.cms-cmno.com.

Other benefits
Gym membership/subsidiary of up to 50% of gym fees, life insurance, pension scheme, private medical insurance, season ticket loan, cycle scheme, eye and dental care and 25 days holiday plus Holiday Purchase Scheme (5 days).
Collyer Bristow LLP

The facts
Locations: London
Overseas offices: Geneva
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 35/44/5
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £34,000
Qualification salary: £57,500

From its long-established base in Bedford Row, Collyer Bristow continues to shower its quirks and perks upon a few lucky trainees each year.

The Firm
Following the firm’s re-brand in 2019, Collyer Bristow has been promoting its core values of individuality, creativity and collaboration throughout the firm. “There’s definitely a culture of re-branding happening at the moment and it’s nice to see how there’s no staple Collyer Bristow persona – everybody can be themselves,” a trainee observed.

“What’s definitely evolving and becoming more of a creative space.”

What else is new? Interviewees told us of an improved development structure that’s been put in place for both trainees and associates. In addition, “we recently had our IT updated with brand new systems that aid document management, which has helped with the shift to remote working. It’s definitely evolving and becoming more of a creative space.”

Common points of attraction among the current trainee cohort included the firm’s “strength in areas of law not offered at all firms, like conflict-free banking litigation and media & privacy.” Another draw was that “the intake’s small enough for trainees to be given real responsibility and to get to know people around the firm.”

Expertise-wise, Collyer picks up Chambers High Net Worth’s attention when it comes to private wealth law, but also scores marks from Chambers UK for its family, defamation/reputation management and real estate prowess. The firm offers an array of commercial practices alongside its more personal legal services, including corporate, employment and IP. It also has a broad contentious offering that handles cases tied to its services elsewhere in the firm, such as tax and banking.

The Seats
First-seaters choose from four available seat options, “which are basically left over from the second-years since they get priority.” Fair enough (second-years getting priority is how it works in most firms). Going forward, however, trainees sit down with HR midway through each seat to discuss their options (of which there are eight available). While there are no hard and fast requirements “they do encourage people to do at least two seats in the dispute resolution department as it is the largest.”

The dispute resolution department covers the likes of commercial, banking and finance, employment, IP and real estate-related matters. “The disputes team are such a joy to work for,” one happy interviewee commented. “They’ve mastered the art of challenging you while also giving you all the supervision you need.” In banking and finance disputes, the work mostly centred on derivatives and swaps claims, with clients ranging from small businesses and billion-dollar entities to funds and individual investors. The team recently acted for a UK-based trader at a US hedge fund and disputed sanctions imposed on him by the Frankfurt Stock Exchange over the use of his trading ID by colleagues. “It’s a pretty full-on seat with big matters and big clients, but the client exposure helps you get to grips with certain aspects. We help with the research tasks, prepare bundles for court and handle the initial meeting with counsel and clients.”

Those in the commercial disputes team gained a lot of court experience by attending trials and Court of Appeal

Seat options: private wealth (tax & estate planning, private client property, family); real estate (contentious & non-contentious, including construction); dispute resolution; corporate & commercial

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired
More on Collyer’s dispute resolution practice
hearings. “We typically are a small part of the big process and deal with disclosure points, research and bundling, plus we get to draft witness statements.” The team was recently instructed by Vald Nielsen Holding and Newwatch Limited to advise on a £40 million shareholder dispute. The specialist media and privacy practice can be found under the firm’s dispute resolution banner. This small arm of the practice forms part of the firm’s offering to high net worth clients and allowed trainees to gain experience on phone hacking claims, reputation management matters and ‘right to be forgotten’ cases. “We draft letters of action, take client instructions and manage correspondence with the other side to reach settlement,” a source explained.

Tax and estate planning (TEP), property and family matters can all be found in private wealth. Wills, trusts, probate and complex personal taxation questions are the bread and butter of a seat here. “A third of my time was spent working on immigration matters for high net worth individuals,” an interviewee recalled. “It’s great work for a trainee since a lot of it is form-based – you’re taking instructions from the client and filling in the forms. The other two thirds were spent dealing with wills and lasting powers of attorney (LPAs).” Another source described the seat as “pretty technical with complicated aspects of law, but there’s a real sense of community learning and everyone is always interested in discussing the technical parts you’re not sure about.”

The tax planning team represents both “domestic and international clients – quite a few are from the US and Turkey.” On the family side, we heard there’s a “good balance between children and financial matters.” The team also handles pre-nups and divorce cases. Sources reported a high level of autonomy throughout the seat: “There have been occasions where I’ve gone to court on my own for a child custody case. It’s a difficult subject matter, but the team are so lovely.” Interviewees in the property seat found themselves “involved in preparing reports on titles, drafting simple licences and leases, and assisting on residential conveyancing.” Towards the end of the seat they were “given files to run, which involved marking up sale contracts or repairing them, as well as dealing with the post-completion side of the matter.”

The ‘CoCo’ umbrella covers corporate and commercial work. Here you’ll get to grips with IT contracts, data protection work and the sales and purchases of small and medium enterprise (SME) businesses. As a trainee “you can do a bit of everything if you express any particular interests. You can find yourself working on an administration of a well-known company one day and then preparing terms and conditions for a client in the entertainment industry the next day.” On the commercial side, daily responsibilities consist of “drafting first versions of agreements such as non-disclosures, terms and conditions, website privacy policies.”

Over in corporate, sources reported increased activity on the restructuring and insolvency side in the wake of Covid-19. However, “we usually assist with M&A transactions by preparing ancillary docs, attending advisory calls, updating the conditions precedent (CP) checklist and producing bibles.” The team recently acted for the buyer of Manor Renewable Energy and advised on the domestic and international private equity aspects of the transaction. Under the CoCo umbrella, fintech is a growing area of focus for the firm. The team advises challenger banks, forex companies, and clients using blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies.

Trainee Life

“Quirky, creative and friendly” were some of the recurring words trainees used to describe Collyer Bristow’s culture. Trainees emphasised how the atmosphere is “partner-led: it varies with some partners really wanting to be involved and others remaining more aloof, but in general everyone loves what they do, and we’re interested and invested in each other.”

We heard that while the social life at Collyer Bristow may be a tad muted compared to other firms, all the stops are pulled out for big firmwide events. Recent formalities were held at the Law Society, the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park and Gray’s Inn (with one of the partners leading the band!). “We had one Christmas party at the ArcelorMittal Orbit in Stratford.” If you’re unfamiliar, this is a 114.5-metre-high observation tower, complete with a wrap-around slide that trainees used to let their hair down (or up, given the wind tunnel effect).

“You’re never put in a position where you can’t ask for help, even during lockdown.”

Trainees here typically get more time to pause and examine their inner lives than many of their contemporaries in large City firms. The hours sit at the more forgiving end for lawyers in the capital, with days averaging out at a 9am start and 6.30/7pm finish. That’s not to say there aren’t some long days here and there: “There have been a few late nights in banking & finance disputes or when trainees were called upon to help out on a big litigation task, but considering the office shuts at 11pm, no one stays too late!” a trainee explained.

When asked about the training and support at the firm, trainees were full of praise: “You’re never put in a position where you feel you can’t ask for help, even during lockdown.”
We’ve been told it isn’t a problem to just pick up the phone and call our supervisors.” Collyer Bristow’s supervisors are referred to as ‘development coaches’ and trainees are assigned one for each seat they complete. “We run through a specific form/checklist, but also talk through technical matters, areas to develop, pastoral wellbeing issues and how to build up business development and networking skills,” one interviewee informed us. Another source highlighted the broader context of this support: “The firm is keen to give us a rounded training contract that allows us to improve our commercial awareness and technical skills. The additional development coach structure makes it much easier to keep track of goals and objectives.” In response to trainee feedback, the firm also implemented a career development framework to develop associate performance.

The qualification process this year “has been quite opaque. We do understand that a lot of law firms have been dealing with similar delays, but there’s been a real lack of communication as to what’s going on and when the decision will be made,” a representative source summarised. In 2020 the firm offered three of its four qualifiers a permanent position, and ultimately retained two as NQs.

Retail therapy

Trainees can bring their friends and family along to CB Boutique, a shopping event where the firm invites female entrepreneurs to set up shop in the office.
Collyer Bristow LLP

4 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4TF
Tel: 020 7242 7363  Fax: 020 7405 0555  Twitter: @Collyer_Bristow
Email: recruitment@collyerbristow.com  LinkedIn: CollyerBristowLLP
Website: www.collyerbristow.com

Firm profile
This long-established London firm provides high quality, individually tailored legal advice, often with a cross-border aspect, to a portfolio of international and domestic clients, including commercial businesses, wealthy individuals and families, and ambitious entrepreneurs. The firm has a particular reputation for its private wealth, business, real estate, and dispute resolution services. Clients choose Collyer Bristow because they, like those within the firm, appreciate individuality and creativity. Clients acknowledge that their needs may be unique or more complex, and that in progressing their legal issues they value a more engaged and collaborative service from their lawyers. They recognise that the Collyer Bristow approach is one of building understanding and trusted relationships with clients. Lawyers at the firm take time to gain an understanding of their clients and the individual objectives behind every transaction or dispute.

The firm is well known for its support of the contemporary arts, having operated a ground breaking in-house art gallery for 30 years, and sponsoring art and literary prizes.

Main areas of work
Collyer Bristow is known for its strength in private wealth (including tax and estate planning, family, media and privacy, residential real estate, and business services for owner managers); commercial real estate (contentious and non-contentious and including construction) and dispute resolution (banking and financial disputes, commercial litigation, employment, and IP), as well as corporate and commercial services.

As well as its strength in private wealth and real estate, the firm also has significant cross-practice expertise in the media, arts and culture and financial services sectors.

Training opportunities
The firm is looking for individuals who are able to demonstrate a strong academic performance, having gained a 2:1 or on track to achieve this. Successful candidates will be motivated individuals who possess strong commercial awareness, common sense, good communication skills and an ability to understand a client’s needs.

Trainees spend six months in four of the firm’s five key practice areas, working with a range of people from senior partners to more recently qualified solicitors. The firm has mentoring, allocated seat supervisors, training and appraisal programmes, which nurture the development of technical expertise and client advisory skills. Trainees are expected at an early stage to take responsibility for their own files and to participate in managing the client’s work with appropriate supervision and are encouraged to take part in the firm’s business development activities.

Other benefits
Life assurance, pension, private medical insurance, employee assistance programme, season ticket loan, 25 days’ holiday.
This tech-savvy firm brings a Cali-cool vibe to the City, and uber-modern clients with it.

The Firm

Everything’s exciting when it’s new. Part of the fun of the trainee experience is how new everything is, taking your first steps in the big bad legal world. Cooley is pretty new to the UK scene itself, having set up shop in London in 2015, and trainees described it as a “really exciting and dynamic place to work.” They also drew our attention to the “cool” clients – eBay, Universal Music and Sony are among the big names, but perhaps the most exciting opportunities come from work with the start-ups which aim to be the giants of tomorrow. Like Cooley itself, many of these hail from California’s Bay Area.

Chambers UK ranks the firm for mid-market M&A, product liability, insurance, public international law, and transactional life sciences. Interviewees noted that Cooley is “huge in life sciences” and also does a fair bit with media and broadcasting outfits: “Even though we don’t have hundreds of people working in the UK, we’re still exposed to the same level of clients as bigger firms. It just feels more personal.” The London office’s revenue is in fact growing faster than that of the firm as a whole, clocking in at a tidy $72.9 million in 2019. Trainees and NQs are reaping the benefits – Cooley’s whopping £120,000 qualification salary is one of the highest in the City today.

“We’re still exposed to the same level of clients as bigger firms. It just feels more personal.”

Money isn’t the only reason why trainees flocked to the firm's doors: several cited the small intake of four new starters a year as a big draw. “We get to know all the partners and associates, rather being a tiny cog in a huge machine,” they explained. This makes for “a really friendly vibe: everyone’s doors are always open, and everyone wants to help you.” Cooley’s recruitment team meets all new arrivals to set the tone of the training contract and learn if they have any seat preferences, “then feed those back to the teams and try and match us up. It’s partly based on trainee preferences and partly on business need.” Although second years’ choices are prioritised, many first years got what they wanted too. Looking for room to improve, the firm is aiming to speed up the process “so it’s less last-minute,” according to trainees.

The Seats

Trainees typically complete two litigious and two transactional seats. Some do split seats – for example, mixing M&A from the corporate and life sciences groups. Employment and compensation and benefits are “closely linked,” and physically sit next to each other, so they’re another common combination. Cooley also permits trainees to repeat seats: “They understand that you’ll want more experience in the department you want to qualify into. I’m repeating my first seat and I’m more confident; previously I wasn’t really sure what was going on, so I’ve got more responsibility this time.”

Compensation and benefits, or ‘Comp and Ben’ as it’s fondly known, brings together corporate governance, remuneration agreements, employee benefits, equity investment issues and more. Trainees were tasked with ensuring agreements complied with local legislation “so
that employers around the world can use them; that was really interesting.” They were pleased to get “really hands-on supervision. By the end of the seat you can draft option agreements yourself.” Cooley’s employment practice balances advisory and contentious work (in the form of unfair dismissal claims), but the see-saw tipped towards advisory during the coronavirus pandemic. Clients here include Universal Music, Eve Sleep and the Airline Traffic Publishing Company, whom the firm has acted for in employment tribunal discrimination cases. Advising on furlough schemes and “drafting updates on legislation,” trainees in employment tackled due diligence, taking witness statements, managing data rooms, disclosure and bundling.

The last of those is inevitable in a litigation seat too, “but there’s usually only one trainee per case so we’re really embedded within the team.” Cooley’s practice attracts “giant companies and little businesses; we work across all kinds of sectors.” Examples include technology, pharmaceuticals and online gaming. The firm recently represented life sciences company Allergy Therapeutics in a High Court clash with a Canadian company over their global clinical trials. Other clients include eBay, StubHub and the University of Notre Dame in England. Document review is a “big part of the seat,” but trainees also respond to disclosure requests, “which is really good experience as a first seater.” Client interaction is common during conferences and witness interviews: “The firm makes a big effort to put us in front of clients and see partners’ different styles when they’re communicating with them. We’re not just behind the scenes.”

“Where the other side has four or five trainees on a transaction, we often have just one.”

Client contact is also high in the technology transactions group (TTG). Start-ups are a linchpin of this practice, but larger companies can be found here too: biotech multinational Bavarian Nordic called on Cooley during its €796 million acquisition of the global rights to two commercial vaccines from GlaxoSmithKline. Trainees in the seat handled commercial contracts and assisted team corporate with “tech or IP-related diligence.” TTG also has a hand in data protection and privacy law. A source described their highlight of the seat as “getting to taking the lead on certain projects which were specific to clients’ needs; getting an idea of the type of the agreement they needed and drafting it from scratch or reviewing what they already had.”

The broader corporate department is characterised by lean deal teams: “Where the other side has four or five trainees on a transaction, we often have just one. The partner and associate will really rely on us.” As such, one source got to draft the main transaction document on a deal, a rare treat for a trainee. Cooley’s practice specialises in technology, telecommunications, media and life sciences deals; the team represented Singapore’s sovereign wealth fund GIC in its acquisition of a 9.9% stake in pest control specialist Anticimex. The corporate seat’s known for offering client contact: “We get more interaction than in litigation because deals move so quickly.” Although corporate law can “test and push you,” interviewees praised supervisors for “sitting down with trainees and going through any mistakes, to help us improve for the future.”

Trainee Life

In normal circumstances, trainees all share an office with their supervisor; during the 2020 lockdown, our sources had daily contact and each department ran group check-ins “to make sure everyone was okay. Managers liken us all to a family, which is really sweet; they’re really good at making everyone feel included.” Trainees unanimously felt that “everyone takes a big interest in learning and development,” and even London managing partner Justin Stock sits in on associate and trainee committee meetings. There are also departmental committees comprised of all associates in a practice group internationally: “It’s a chance for people to air concerns and come up with a collective solution, which then goes to the partners.”

Many were impressed that pro bono is “valued at the same level as billables and nobody ever says ‘oh, it’s only pro bono.’ The cases are really useful for getting first-hand experience.” Common examples include social security and benefits cases, asylum and immigration matters – voicing an interest is all that’s needed to get involved. Similarly in keeping with US firm stereotypes, hours across the board at Cooley can get long: “You can expect 11-hour days.” One particularly unlucky trainee worked until 1am for a fortnight to close a deal, but even they were magnanimous about it all. “The team is really supportive, and we chose this career – no one came into it oblivious about late finishes.”

“It’s a rite of passage. That’s how everyone gets to know us and size us up!”

Cooley isn’t all work, no play – a dedicated budget for trainees is part of a shining social scene. They’re also put in charge of organising the Christmas quiz: “It’s a rite of passage. That’s how everyone gets to know us and size us up!” Outside the festive season, the firm hosts office-wide socials known as “Cooley Relax & Rewind,” plus events hosted by the firm’s inclusion networks. The Minority Associate Network runs film screenings, while the
Women’s Network has a book club. Insiders noted that many first years in the trainee cohort had international backgrounds, and the vast majority were female: “There’s top-down commitment to diversity. It’s not just a box-ticking exercise.” The London office has previously hosted talks from diverse California-based partners. Cooley’s hot on wellbeing, too, offering free yoga and bi-weekly mindfulness sessions.

**Sitting with the Cool kids**

“Cooley is really keen on people who have interesting backgrounds or a cool previous career,” trainees revealed. “Anything that makes you stand out and shows you’re a well-rounded person will help your application.” In 2020, Cooley retained two of four qualifying trainees.
Cooley (UK) LLP

Dashwood, 69 Old Broad Street, London, EC2M 1QS
Tel: 020 7583 4055
Email: uktrainee@cooley.com
Website: www.cooley.com/uktrainee
Linkedin: Cooley LLP

Firm profile
Cooley lawyers solve legal issues for entrepreneurs, investors, financial institutions and established companies, with a significant emphasis on technology, life sciences and other high-growth industries. Clients partner with Cooley on transformative deals, complex IP and regulatory matters and high-stakes litigation, often where innovation meets the law. The firm has 1,100+ lawyers across 16 offices in the US, Asia and Europe. Cooley took home The Lawyer’s International Firm of the Year award in 2018 and has won in various categories at the Transatlantic Legal Awards in 2018 and 2019. Additionally, Cooley has been named a Fortune Best Company to Work For seven years in a row.

Main areas of work
Cooley’s London office has been named London Office of the Year at the British Legal Awards twice since opening in 2015. It has built out robust practices, including corporate/M&A, finance, venture capital and private equity, capital markets, technology transactions, insurance, litigation, IP, product compliance & liability, white collar crime, tax, employment, competition and privacy and data protection, among others.

Training opportunities
Cooley’s training experience will revolve around small groups of trainees and really hands-on involvement. We truly believe in learning by doing. Trainees spend four six-month periods in some of the firm’s corporate/transactional and litigation areas. Trainees give preferences for seats and there may also be opportunities for client secondments from time to time. The focus is on your development as a truly commercial lawyer. Supplementing your hands-on learning will be a programme designed to increase your knowledge and skill for the work Cooley does. Practice group programmes and firm-wide opportunities will enhance this. Working alongside and learning from some of the best lawyers in their fields will give you a fantastic start to your professional life. A multilevel support network of partners, mentors and a buddy system ensures you have a targeted level of guidance.

Vacation scheme
The Summer Programme is the only route into being considered for a training place. Apply online by 31 January 2021. Two structured two-week placements for up to ten students.

Other benefits
Life assurance, pension (firm contribution 5%), STL, private healthcare, employee assistance and mental health and wellbeing support services, critical illness cover, wellness program, virtual GP services, cycle to work scheme, gym membership/fitness reimbursement, on-site café, mortgage surgeries, back-up child/adult care, discount, cashback and concierge services, other sports and social activities.

Open days and first-year opportunities
One open day in December for those interested in applying to the summer programme. Application deadline 23 November 2020. Apply online: www.cooley.com/uktrainee. Check website for dates and details of other events in 2021.

University law careers fairs 2020
National virtual events including Bright Network Future Lawyers, in addition to Bristol, Nottingham, Queen Mary, Oxford, Cambridge, King’s College London, Birmingham, further TBC.
Life sciences is the lifeblood of Covington’s London office, where a small trainee cohort are “very passionate” about their firm’s work.

The Firm
Can you confidently say that you are the best at something? Few of us would make such a bold declaration—but when it comes to life sciences, Washington, DC’s Covington & Burling can make a reasonable argument that nobody does it better. This is the only firm ranked for life sciences by Chambers Global, Chambers UK, Chambers USA and Chambers Europe; their expertise guarantees a steady flow of work from industry giants, including the likes of AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Merck. It also ensures the firm attracts a carefully selected crop of fewer than ten trainees a year “wanting to practice law at the highest level.”

Our interviewees didn’t shy away from the fact that “the work is often highly technical,” but they were keen to emphasise that a scientific background was not a prerequisite for joining the firm. “There’s a scattering of PhDs at Covington, but we’re not patent attorneys so a technical background isn’t essential,” one source made clear, adding that “it’s more important to be able to pick things up quickly—that’s a key skill for any lawyer!” Another weighed in: “The firm really appreciates people having different backgrounds. I get the sense that they put a big premium on personality and people with passion for a particular subject area.”

“There’s a scattering of PhDs at Covington, but we’re not patent attorneys so a technical background isn’t essential.”

Sources were also keen to highlight the “huge diversity of work on offer outside of the life sciences sector,” which spans everything from energy and technology to media and financial services. A look back at the firm’s Chambers UK rankings reveals additional accolades for private equity, product liability, data protection and M&A. There’s even a top ranking for public affairs work, a reflection of Covington’s lobbying prowess in the US. “Our disputes team is the firm’s dark horse,” one of our sources added. “We absorbed a lot of the big players from King & Wood Mallesons when it went into administration.” Many felt the nature and diversity of the work on offer sets C&B apart “from a lot of the other US firms operating in the market, which are much more focused on finance and private equity.”

The Seats
Trainees must complete mandatory seats in both the corporate and dispute resolution departments and pick five preferences to rank among the firm’s ten or so other seat options. More adventurous options include pharma-themed client secondments and an overseas seat in Brussels; the firm also recently opened up a new seat in the Dubai office. Most of our interviewees had no beef with the system, but conceded “it’s not always clear how decisions are made,” agreeing that “some more structure would be appreciated.”

Two teams fit under C&B’s life sciences umbrella: the transactional group mainly handles contracts, licences and collaboration agreements, while another department handles the regulatory aspects. As well as pharmaceutical giants, the firm also represents biotechnology, digital

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Covington
health, diagnostic and medical device companies, often in regulatory proceedings before the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP). For example, recently they’ve advised pharma company PTC Therapeutics on procedural rights after requests from the European Medicines Agency for access to their clinical trial data. As for transactions, Covington acted for German-headquartered BioNTech on its $150 million IPO; and for AstraZeneca in mooted sales and licence to Cheplapharm of commercial rights to antipsychotic medications, for $280 million total.

“More recently we’ve been dealing with lots of coronavirus-related issues,” trainees revealed. “For example, a lot of clients are wanting to produce and manufacture hand sanitiser and face masks to get out to public and key workers; we help them with navigating the regulatory framework to achieve that.” One insider felt the level of technicality that comes with life sciences work can “somewhat limit your responsibility as a trainee,” adding that “there’s more of an emphasis on learning and training.” However, our sources were still drafting clauses and small agreements, proofreading documents and attending meetings. They revealed that the regulatory seat is “extremely research-heavy. If you don’t love research, don’t do this seat,” one warned. Those who do enjoy it might consider opting for a spell in the **food & drugs** team, which is similarly big on getting trainees researching. A source explained: “You spend a lot of time looking at the restrictions around advertising a particular pill or product. It really makes you look at the adverts on the Underground differently!”

“It really makes you look at the adverts on the Underground differently!”

The broader **corporate** department also advises life sciences clients; others include globally recognised names from the tech, media and communications sectors. The team recently advised founders of British film visual effects company The Foundry on its £410 million sale to the US-based Roper Technologies. A source told us that “the team also handles some restructuring, private equity and venture capital deals.” They go on to explain the role of the trainee on matters: “You really get to grips with all the cogs in a company’s structure. I was filing lots for Companies House and sitting in lots of calls with clients.” Cross-border transactions and collaborations with Covington’s US offices are common.

“Our disputes team covers all the sectors the firm is involved in,” trainees clarified. “We have clients in the financial services, energy, tech, media and life sciences sectors.” There’s also a sub-team that handles commercial and investor-state arbitration. Covington recently represented the World Anti-Doping Agency during defamation and negligence claims involving Liverpool Football Club and player Mamadou Sakho; they also acted for German-based Deutsche Telekom in a conspiracy claim brought by the administrators of Phones 4u. There’s plenty for trainees to cut their teeth on in this seat, from bundling and disclosure to “preparing presentations to a board of directors and helping to develop expert reports. I think disputes is one the groups with the best team spirits - there’s always lots of social events going on.”

Trainee Life

Speaking of socials, Covington has a softball team, a Christmas party and a multitude of welcoming drinks to keep keen trainees occupied. Interviewees made it clear that “people have lives and families outside of the firm, so they aren’t the sort to stick around for a drink every night.” Turning their attentions to the idea of a Covington ‘type’, trainees said: “People in the firm are normal but also very passionate about the work they do, not just from a work perspective but also in an academic sense.” One went further: “We’re quite nerdy. There’s definitely a ‘kooky’ character to the firm, as we have so many eccentric personalities.”

“...very passionate about the work they do, not just from a work perspective but also in an academic sense.”

Reflecting Covington’s American roots, “**pro bono** is something that the firm takes seriously. There have been lots of immigration law cases that we’re encouraged to get involved with, the hours of which all count towards billables.” Less happily, the firm also brings with it a US work ethic and “the hours are not the friendliest.” Their intensity varied between our interviewees, but trainees indicated ten-hour-plus days were common. They should prepare for later nights as well, but also “quieter periods where you can leave at 6pm.” Transactional seats tend to have more demanding hours while litigious and regulatory departments will be a bit more predictable. One trainee summarised: “On average, I would say I’m eating dinner in the office twice a week.”

Fortunately, prospective trainees can look forward to some fantastic views when wistfully staring out the window 16 hours into a shift, as the firm is due to move to 22 Bishopsgate some time in 2021. “It’s the second-tallest building in London and we’re going to be on the top floor!”
Quick to defend their firm, trainees declared that “the hours are similar to what you’d work at the magic circle,” which sounds about right. They also hoped Covington would ease restrictions on flexible working for trainees and NQs in the wake of Covid-19.

Trainees appreciated that “the firm tries to create roles where they can” when qualification season arrives. “Some departments are known for offering roles only every few years – such as employment,” we heard. “Corporate and litigation typically have the highest capacity for NQs.” Covington retained all eight qualifiers in 2020, and even brought in a ninth NQ to start in September 2021.

CovingtonONE

C&B hosts an associate integration seminar every year in Washington, DC for the entire firm. “They put on loads of parties and it really reinforces a one-firm feel,” insiders told us. These trips have been put on hold until the pandemic is under control.
Firm profile
Covington & Burling LLP was founded in Washington, DC a century ago. Today, Covington has more than 1,000 lawyers and advisers across our global offices. We advise clients on their most challenging and complex matters. Our work has an international element, and all our practice groups operate across borders. Our distinctively collaborative culture allows us to be truly one team globally, drawing on the diverse experience of lawyers across the firm.

At Covington, you will have an opportunity to work on cutting-edge deals for clients such as Microsoft, AstraZeneca and Facebook, Fortune 100 businesses and leading technology, life sciences and media companies. We have represented Facebook, Inc in its US$22 billion acquisition of WhatsApp and its US$1 billion acquisition of Instagram. We also advised Illumina on a four-year project that will map genomes for breakthroughs into cancer and rare diseases. Most recently we have advised on a deal in which Pfizer & BioNTech have agreed to work together to develop a covid-19 vaccine.

Main areas of work
Corporate advisory (capital markets, M&A, finance, private equity, venture capital and funds), commercial litigation, data privacy, competition, employment, financial services, insurance coverage disputes, intellectual property, internal investigations and compliance, international arbitration, life sciences, project development & finance, tax, technology regulatory.

Training opportunities
Trainees complete four six-month seats. All trainees undertake a seat within the corporate and dispute resolution practices and optional seats in employment & benefits, life sciences regulatory and life sciences transactional, project development & finance and technology regulatory. Client secondments are available, alongside secondments to our Brussels & Dubai offices.

All trainees are supervised by a senior lawyer and have access to a support network and a mentoring programme. Trainees benefit from the responsibilities and opportunities found within a close-knit office, combined with the resources and prestige of a leading international firm. You are quickly able to start contributing to teams and participate in meaningful work.

Vacation scheme
Our vacation schemes provide an opportunity to become integrated into the firm, and participate in real work, group activities and a series of presentations from across practice groups and offices. Students work on an independent research project focusing on a practice area of interest, providing a valuable insight into the work of a Covington lawyer.

Other benefits
Trainees have access to a full benefits package including: pension scheme, health insurance, life assurance, independent financial advice, 25 days’ holiday, an employee assistance programme, child care vouchers, a dental plan, emergency care cover and interest-free season ticket loans.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Insight Days are aimed at candidates who are still researching their legal careers. The one day programme provides an insight into the firm, its practice areas and the skills you will need to develop to become a successful lawyer.

University law careers fairs 2020 TBD.
Cripps Pemberton Greenish

The facts
Locations: Tunbridge Wells, London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 63/110/15
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £26,000 (£34,250 London)
Qualification salary: £42,500 (£53,000 London)

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired by Cripps
Interview with managing partner Gavin Tyler
More on working hours and social life

Tunbridge Wells’ Cripps is the real McCoy of property and private wealth work. It offers its trainees “quality matters,” a “supportive culture” and a growing London presence within its packet.

The Firm
Following its late 2018 merger with Londoner Pemberton Greenish, Cripps has been riding high. The combination boosted the firm’s core real estate and private wealth practices in particular, but we decided to check in with managing partner Gavin Tyler to get the latest: “Our litigation, employment and family teams have all experienced an upswing in work. The residential property group has also been very robust and in June they revised their budget up by 280%. On the downside, commercial real estate has felt a pinch in work, as businesses are struggling to pay their rent due to Covid-19.”

“We’re looking to develop the digital side of the business in the future.”

Of course, 2020 is the year where everything has been affected by the global pandemic, but Tyler highlights how the firm has been looking to develop positively in light of it: “We are doing a big review of our five-year plan and are focusing on our service approach. The pandemic has made us look at how we can better use technology to improve our clients’ experience and the services we provide for them. We’re looking to develop the digital side of the business in the future.”

At the moment, CPG picks up a whole host of top-end Chambers UK rankings in the south of the country, especially for areas such as real estate, real estate litigation, planning, corporate M&A, banking & finance, professional negligence and litigation. On its home turf of Kent, CPG’s family and agricultural/rural affairs expertise shines, while Chambers High Net Worth rates the firm as a premier outfit for private wealth law (and related disputes in the area) in Kent and in the South, and as a national leader outside of London. Speaking of the capital, CPG does have an office in Chelsea, where it has recently added two lateral hires in the family and employment practices.

CPG’s heart and soul is in the Kent town of Tunbridge Wells, but the firm also recruits trainees in London. For our trainee sources it was CPG’s “open culture,” “quality matters” and size that convinced them to join. “I wanted to be in a mid-sized firm that had links to the capital but promoted the maintenance of a better work/life balance. I also wanted to go to a firm that had a smaller trainee intake.” The chance to go on a client secondment (the firm runs at least one or two a year) was also a big pull for our interviewees. These typically last for three months and expose trainees to “a lot of commercial contracts and ad-hoc work” that crops up inside a business.

The Seats
Towards the close of summer, incoming trainees receive a list of what seats are on offer. From this they reply with their top five choices. “You aren’t forced into anything,” one source confirmed (thankfully!), adding that they’d got “all of my preferred choices, just not in the right order!” Trainees determine all of their seats before starting, but these are subject to change based on business need. Cripps
doesn’t have any compulsory seats, but trainees are likely to do a stint in one of its real estate departments.

The commercial property seat contains two teams: one focuses on planning, construction and investment work, while the other deals with corporate real estate work. The latter is internally referred to as “the green team,” where trainees get stuck into a lot of work for landlords and property funds. The team typically advises developers, investors and high net worth individuals. It has previously acted for clients including Endurance Land, The Dulwich Estate and Tristan Capital. The group acts as sole legal adviser to the joint owners of the centre:mk in Milton Keynes, which involves handling all of the lettings, asset management and construction work tied to the shopping centre. “I was mostly drafting leases – for shopping centres – but also answering enquiries tied to those leases and reviewing title documents,” said one trainee. “I also worked on the sales of portfolio properties too.”

“Client contact is high up on the agenda for all trainees here.”

Over in property disputes, the team covers the likes of easement and covenant claims, as well as developer disputes. Clients here include government departments, well-known retailers, landowners and investors with property portfolios. The Home Office, the Crown Prosecution Service and M&G Real Estate are current clients. A recent case saw the team act for indemnity insurer ERGO on eight rights to light claims valued to be worth over £150 million. According to trainees, the group acts as a “support team” for the rest of the real estate division, dealing with “anything that may get contentious, like lease renewals and break notices, for example.” There are also some contentious construction matters, as well as disputes over property boundaries and rights of way issues. Our sources had been “allocated tasks like contacting and instructing counsel, getting experts involved and drafting up court documents for proceedings.” Life here can be fast-paced and highly structured as there are “strict court deadlines and procedures that need to be followed.”

Mid-market M&A and private equity deals are on offer in the corporate seat, where CPG’s lawyers are recognised by Chambers UK for their work in the healthcare, financial services and technology/media sectors especially. Clients include private equity-backed outfits like Uniguest Holdings, as well as AdEPT Technology and Broden Media. The group recently represented Uniguest as it acquired a global business called Tripleplay, which operates in the digital signage sector – the transaction covered seven jurisdictions including the US, Australia and Singapore. A trainee explained that the corporate division as a whole “encompasses sales and purchases of companies, employment issues, commercial contracts and commercial dispute resolution.” For those focusing on the transactional side, “you’ll be assisting with the sale and purchase documentation, answering enquiries, dealing with disclosure and managing data rooms.” One particularly enjoyed “the problem-solving element of dealing with disclosures - you come across elements that need to be fixed or explained. Client contact is high up on the agenda for all trainees here.”

Residential conveyancing also offers a great deal of responsibility to trainees. “I tended to have my own files,” one trainee reported, “which involved opening the file with a new client, carrying out searches on the property, drafting reports on title, and dealing with the exchange and completion of a sale or purchasing.” A lot of the work was related to agricultural land, with a source noting how they’d drafted “a licence to allow someone the right to have animals grazing on their land.”

Trainee Life

At CPG you can say goodbye to those Sunday blues that settle in when thoughts of Monday morning arise: “It’s always a pleasure to go into work – I’ve never met anyone who I didn’t want to speak to again!” one trainee enthused. Other sources described the culture as “open” and “supportive,” with one explaining that their supervisor “has been fantastic and incredibly patient during this time when trainees have needed more support. I think that’s a reflection of the kind of people the firm employs. Everybody genuinely cares, which is important!” Managing partner Gavin Tyler confirms that “we are interested in people who share our views on the world. We are ethically focused and we put our people before profit. We are all about the team effort. We focus on good people who work hard and love what they do.”

“It’s always a pleasure to go into work.”

Trainees felt that this approach filtered down into training and development. “The firm values its people and it invests a lot into us. There are monthly know-how meetings in each division, as well as knowledge-sharing platforms and practice support lawyers who do a lot of work to make sure we are up to date with the law.” Another source commented on how the firm “fosters a strong learning environment,” and highlighted the initial three-week burst of
training sessions that trainees get when they first start. “Seat handovers can always feel daunting as everything is new again,” said an interviewee, “but the teams I’ve worked for have always been extremely supportive, which made the process easier.”

At the time of our calls trainees said that the qualification process was still “up in the air because of Covid-19,” but they were confident that things would run smoothly as they had done in previous years: “We are lucky because the number of trainees is usually similar to the number of positions available, so it’s typically straightforward.” Another anticipated that NQ job interviews would take place in July. The qualification process was still ongoing when we went to press in 2020.

The future is diverse...

Managing partner Gavin Tyler tells us CPG is “putting its efforts towards ensuring there’s diversity in our trainee intakes.” 2019 marked the launch of the firm’s first-ever open day, which was designed to attract a more diverse pool of candidates.
When it comes to representing international states, New York’s Curtis Mallet is nailing it.

The Firm

What do Coca-Cola, toilet seat covers, iPads and Curtis all have in common? They’re US imports the Brits have embraced. But despite its US heritage, the firm actually has more international offices than American ones: three are situated in the US (the New York HQ, plus its DC and Houston bases) and 14 others are spread across Europe, Asia, South America and the Middle East. The firm’s client roster reads like the table plan at a United Nations dinner: Cyprus, Spain, the Dominican Republic, Uganda and Russia are just some of the countries Curtis represents. In fact, the UN crops up on the client list, too. It’s hardly surprising, then, that Curtis has nabbed four Chambers rankings for its international arbitration prowess alone – in France, Latin America, the US and global-wide – and those are only a few of the firm’s 26 rankings to be found across Chambers’ guides. Other areas that stand out include international trade, dispute resolution and corporate/M&A across various jurisdictions.

Instead of embarking on a sports-car-shopping-spree midlife crisis, Curtis’ 45-year-old London office has stuck with its strategy of keeping lateral numbers low and maintaining its Smart-car sized headcount – the London office, for example, houses around 25 lawyers, which was something that got our interviewees’ engines going: “I never wanted be one of 60 trainees,” said one source. There’s no danger of that at Curtis, which only takes on one or two trainees a year. Others were sold on the fact that “it brings in really international work because it’s got offices all over the world – nothing is ever purely English law.”

The Seats

Given its size, Curtis doesn’t offer a rotational seat programme. Instead, “you get involved in whatever work is available so you can direct the training contract as you like.” The benefit is that “you’re not stuck in something you don’t like for six months, but you can also spend longer than six months on the things you enjoy.” What’s more, the lack of “arbitrary” rotations means “you can see most of your work through to the end.” Interviewees were pleased to say that “no one office is dominant” and that departments don’t dominate the client base, either. Although more senior lawyers “are firmly in one camp or the other, elsewhere people will dabble in another department if the work calls for it.” This enables, for example, corporate lawyers to get involved in disputes matters for a client who they’ve already worked with on their primary area of expertise.

International arbitration is the name of the game at Curtis: “It’s very proud of its reputation.” The firm “more or less only represents state entities,” trainees informed us. Chambers Global praises Curtis for its work on investor-state disputes, especially those occurring in the telecoms, oil & gas, mining and banking sectors. Clients here include all the countries mentioned in the introduction. Lawyers in this area have been busy representing India in seven arbitrations, including one involving Vodafone over taxation measures and another that revolved around enforcements being put on state-owned company Antrix. As soon as they joined the group, trainees got involved in organising evidence, drafting briefs and even going on trips abroad to meet clients. One insider was particularly keen to tell us: “Every matter I’ve been on has involved teams from all over the world, including those in Mexico and New York.” The firm has recently begun taking on more commercial arbitration matters, thanks partly to a lateral partner hire.
“Every matter I’ve been on has involved teams from all over the world.”

The work in corporate is “slightly more wide-ranging than it is in international arbitration – it’s more of a general practice with M&A and commercial contract work too.” We heard there’s a lot investment management work, which sees the team representing the likes of funds, fund sponsors or other investors: “A lot of the work comes out of New York, but we have state entity clients in Europe and further afield.” The London office recently supported colleagues in Dubai on a venture capital investment into UK-based food tech business KBox Global – a deal that also involved structuring and tax advice.

Commercial litigation is known for affording trainees a lot of responsibility: “Within a week of joining the firm I was drafting summaries on a High Court case worth £9.6 billion!” That’s pretty darn good for a first week. A London-based partner recently led a case on behalf of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs against Qatar’s allegations that the state has violated an international convention on racial discrimination by restricting the entry of Qatari citizens for national security reasons linked to terrorism. When they’re not busy defending some of the world’s most wealthy states in court, the usual bundling and legal research tasks are par for the course for trainees. One interviewee had a whirl “researching case law that helped us prove our arguments – I was in court when the QC presented the arguments that relied on my research!” Doc review gets a bad rep, but those with additional language skills are able to break the tedium by reviewing said documents in other languages. Trainees are commonly the point of contact on cases: “I was on client calls and giving them updates on the arguments we were preparing. I also really enjoyed briefing team members on developments: you’re the person who knows the documents, so people rely on you to fill in the gaps.”

“We’re treated like junior associates from the moment we join.”

Irrespective of the department trainees are working for, they’re awarded a hella lotta responsibility: “They can’t afford not to – there are only a couple of us!” One interviewee pointed out that “if I was one of a hundred trainees, I’d probably be doing a lot of photocopying.” Another put the high responsibility down to the fact that firms in the US don’t hire trainees, “so we’re treated like junior associates from the moment we join.” Even though “it’s a steep learning curve, there’s always someone to help you.”

Trainee Life

It’s worth noting that there isn’t a formal training programme: “You learn on the job. We have monthly office-wide training but nothing specific to trainees.” The firm does, however, “support us going to workshops at other firms. We have such a fantastic arbitration practice they should do formal training on it here!” Trainees can rely on informal training to see them through as well, and insiders praised the partners for being far from curt: “There’s no such thing as not being able to speak to them if you’re juggling deadlines, which is nice.”

The office set-up also lends itself to a collaborative environment: each trainee typically shares an office with an associate. One interviewee recalled an especially collegial time: “I was once working over the weekend with partners based in the US who I’d never worked with before. My supervising partner was abroad, but she still emailed me asking if I was okay and if I needed anything.” At the same time, sources warned future trainees to not “expect anyone to hold your hand. You need to be confident enough to ask questions and let people know if you’re struggling.”

“There’s a very cosmopolitan atmosphere.”

Aside from confidence, what else does Curtis want in its trainees? “Curtis wants well-rounded people – not just those who are good at their job, but those who can hold a conversation too,” replied one insider. It’s likely, therefore, that you’ll hear discussions about politics or current affairs when you’re walking the halls, and often in several languages too. “I’m actually one of the few monolingual people here,” said one source. “A lot of people grew up abroad so there’s a very cosmopolitan atmosphere – international outlook is a characteristic that runs through the lawyers here.”

There are other factors that bind people together at Curtis. A lot of the partners “have been with the firm for over 20 years, and a lot came over from the US, so people know more about each other than just work.” A case in point: “An associate had a baby recently and some of the partners gave him hand-me-downs.” That’s very cute. This family-oriented culture also permeates the more senior ranks and helps with inclusion, according to sources. One explained that “a partner I work with is married with children and she’s very prominent in the firm – most female lawyers look up to her and see that yes, you can have a family and also progress your career.”
And finally...

Pledge of Allegiance: In keeping with treating trainees like associates, “there’s very little fanfare around qualification. You basically just carry on what you’re doing.” At the end of the training contract you tell the firm where you want to qualify, they review your work and “unless you’ve done something outrageous, you’ll be retained.” Our interviewees weren’t interested in moving elsewhere, with this one explaining that “nobody does arbitration as well as Curtis, so I certainly want to stay here.”
Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP

99 Gresham Street, London EC2V 7NG
Tel: 020 7710 9800   Fax: 020 7710 9801
Website: www.curtis.com
Email: recruitmentlondon@curtis.com
LinkedIn: Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP

Firm profile
Curtis is one of the longest established international firms in either London or New York. It was one of the first US firms to open in Mexico City in 1985 and remains the only US-headquartered law firm licensed to practice in Oman. In London since the mid 1970s, the firm operates out of 16 offices across Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas. The firm is well known for representing state-owned energy companies and governments around the world, but also has many institutional, corporate, multinational, HNW and private clients. Curtis has a full service offering in most of its offices, as well as highly regarded international practices, such as international arbitration, international trade and investment funds.

Main areas of work
Curtis’ core practices in London are: international arbitration, investment management, litigation and corporate/commercial law. The latter includes M&A; private placements; public offerings; venture capital and private equity; fund formation; joint ventures; infrastructure projects; and debt finance.

Training opportunities
Curtis provides an international and dynamic environment. Applicants will need energy, enthusiasm and an ability to get on well with people of all kinds, as well as excellent academics. A proactive approach is a plus, as are languages and a willingness to travel. Curtis’ London office is small, friendly, diverse and internationally minded. As a key hub for the firm’s European and African activities, many of our overseas partners and colleagues visit regularly. Instead of a traditional four seat method, we offer flexible but non-rotational training. This allows for a highly tailored approach that plays to individual interests and talents. Our second year trainees spend up to ten weeks participating in the summer associate programme in New York.

Other benefits
The range of benefits includes private health care, travel season ticket loan, pension and income protection, life cover and an employee assistance programme.

Open days and first-year opportunities
On an ad hoc basis by emailing recruitmentlondon@curtis.com

University law careers fairs 2020
Birkbeck, Cambridge, King’s College London, Oxford, Queen Mary University, UCL, University of Exeter, and others on an ad hoc basis.
Davis Polk & Wardwell London LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 9
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 8/60/5
Seats: 4x6 months; New York
First-year salary: £55,000
Qualification salary: £135,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Davis Polk
Becoming a capital markets lawyer

Get a taste of the Big Apple and bite into “robust corporate finance work” with an international flavour at this New York titan’s small London office.

The Firm
Whether it’s a fondness for Frank Sinatra, the joys of Broadway, or just hours spent binge-watching Sex and the City, there are many ways to fall in love with New York City; one novel way is to join international legal titan Davis Polk, which set up shop there all the way back in 1849. A training contract in the firm’s London office comes with a guaranteed secondment to the city so nice they named it twice. “You are treated as a junior associate from the get go,” as there’s no such thing as a trainee in the States; most do a corporate or finance seat on their secondment, but other options like IP can be available.

Exciting as a trip across the pond can be, it would be wrong to downplay Davis Polk’s appeal in London. Chambers UK ranks the firm highly for both debt and equity capital markets, and trainees appreciated that DP is “very transaction-focused,” though seats in tax, financial regulation and antitrust are also on offer. Then there’s the money – Davis Polk boasts the highest trainee salary in the UK, paying first-years £55,000 and second-years £60,000. NQ salaries recently jumped by 13% to £135,000 – plenty of spending money for the Empire State gift shop. Looking past the big bucks, many were attracted by Davis Polk’s smaller trainee intake. With around four new arrivals each year, trainees could hardly avoid bumping into each other on trips to the coffee machine. “We have to get on, we can’t avoid each other,” one joked.

“Once in the seat there’s a lot of flexibility around the type of work you get.”

More seriously, fewer trainees typically means a less rigid training contract experience, and Davis Polk’s no exception. The seat allocation process is mostly informal, though the firm likes all trainees to do a seat in corporate, finance and one specialist department (tax, financial regulatory or antitrust). “Once in the seat there’s a lot of flexibility around the type of work you get,” we heard. It’s also common for trainees to repeat seats depending on the demand in each department.

The Seats
Public and private M&A, capital markets and venture capital all make an appearance in the corporate group. Davis Polk’s US and UK corporate teams are often working in sync on transactions from the buy or sell side; major clients include investment bank Evercore, insurance service firm Charles Taylor and Comcast. The firm recently acted as lead US and UK adviser on Comcast’s £30.6 billion takeover of Sky. Trainees working on the public M&A side of the practice handled procedures including schemes of arrangement: “We advised on the sale of a public company which was then delisted. I was involved in drafting all the documents, liaising with the clients, running signings and helping out with shareholder meetings.” There’s similar responsibility on offer in private equity deals. “I was involved start to finish,” an interviewee said. “At the closing I was running the process on my own, which shows how great Davis Polk is at giving trainees responsibility. I organised all the closing documents and liaised with the solicitor on the other side.”

Interviewees with a liking for capital markets were able to take a role on initial public offerings (IPOs). “Trainees get involved in every aspect including drafting, verifying information that goes into company books, and connecting with the management team and client company,” one

Seat options: corporate; finance; tax; financial regulatory; antitrust
Chambers UK rankings

Capital Markets

of our sources said. “My supervisor had come from another firm and was quite surprised with the work I was doing as a trainee.” Davis Polk is adept at both debt and equity capital markets, with a strong presence in Europe and emerging markets. A source who’d done a capital markets seat in New York told us it’s “one of the main practices there and the volume of deals is crazy. They just keep coming!” Their responsibilities included being “in the hot seat during the closing process. Once I made sure all the documents had been signed, I could then give the go-ahead to the bank to release the bonds into the market.”

“My supervisor had come from another firm and was quite surprised with the work I was doing as a trainee.”

Davis Polk’s finance group focuses on cross-border acquisition finance and public bid financing, with large banks forming the core clientele. Multinational lenders like Barclays, Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan rely on the firm’s services: a recent matter example saw clients Morgan Stanley and MUFG Bank provide a $38 billion senior unsecured bridge loan facility for American pharmaceutical company AbbVie. Trainees here worked on a mix of UK-based financings and the overseas aspects of American deals, particularly loan financings. “I was drafting a loan for a private individual; the Swiss government was involved, and all of the security was going through the UK,” a source recalled. “My job was amending the loan agreement and liaising with the bank.” Another trainee “got exposure to plenty of US-style loan documentation. As for the UK side, I was drafting the required legal research.” Conditions precedent checklists are another common task in the early going.

Trainees can do their ‘specialist seat’ in tax, financial regulation or competition (also known by the American term antitrust). The last of those spans regulatory issues on cross-border M&A transactions as well as general behavioural and compliance issues. Some of our sources worked on exciting abuse of dominance cases (where a company exploits its market-leading position to limit competition), but most spent their time on merger filings. “That’s the firm’s focus – we look at every transaction that comes to the firm and assess on a global scale where we might need to submit a filing,” trainees explained.

Also acting in an auxiliary role on private equity, M&A, capital markets and cross-border transactions, Davis Polk’s tax team takes trainees too. Here and in financial regulatory, they will often work on multiple transactions at a time, “running tax analysis and advising on what the best course of action is.” The firm advised Pfizer on tax aspects of its off-patent and generic medicines business Upjohn’s combination with global pharma company Mylan. Lloyds Bank, Citigroup and AstraZeneca are also on the books.

Trainee Life

“There is an expectation that people will go beyond just doing the work they are given and take an actual interest,” trainees told us. This bears out in an office-wide presentation every Tuesday, where a different lawyer gives a presentation on something they’ve accomplished in their practice area. With approximately 60 lawyers split between only two floors, “the culture is very much the same in every corner.” Much of it seems to have survived a journey over the Atlantic – from trainees’ comments, you’d think the New York office was just next door. “We operate as one firm and I reach out to my colleagues in New York all the time,” they said. “We’re very much integrated.”

“There is an expectation that people will go beyond just doing the work they are given and take an actual interest.”

Of course, socialising with American colleagues is more difficult; Londoners are more likely to head out for spontaneous, informal dos than run big events. One exception is the biannual European lawyers’ weekend: Davis Polkers from the London, Madrid and Paris offices get together for a weekend of dinners, activities, presentations and drinks. Diversity events, including an LGBTQ quiz night and a talk on injustices faced by black women in the law, were also popular among trainees. Some also went on trips to East London schools, giving presentations and running Dragons’ Den-style exercises. Pro bono too is a Davis Polk staple: “It was really beneficial to work for real people that need your help,” sources reflect.

More manageable seats like competition come with (mostly) regular 9am to 6.30pm days: “You’re working towards regulator deadlines, so the workload is more predictable.” Corporate is a different story – “the nature of transactional work is that deals are more of a sprint than a marathon.” Bpm finishes are far more common, and trainees can be in the office much later around closing time. “A lot of people say you qualify into your busiest seat, that was true for me,” one said. Qualification’s a loose affair, as interviews are only necessary if more than one trainee applies for the same position. In 2020, Davis Polk retained all four of its qualifiers.
Firm profile
Davis Polk is an elite global law firm with world-class practices across the board. Industry-leading companies and global financial institutions know they can rely on Davis Polk for their most challenging legal and business matters. The firm’s top-flight capabilities are grounded in a distinguished history of 170 years, and its global, forward-looking focus is supported by 10 offices strategically located in the world’s key financial centers and political capitals — New York, Northern California, Washington DC, São Paulo, London, Paris, Madrid, Hong Kong, Beijing and Tokyo. The firm’s lawyers collaborate seamlessly across practice groups and geographies to provide clients with exceptional service, sophisticated advice and creative, practical solutions.

Main areas of work
The London team consists of around 60 UK and US qualified lawyers. They represent corporate, private equity and investment banking clients on a wide range of capital markets, M&A and finance transactions, many of which are cross-border in nature. The team includes highly-rated tax, financial regulatory and antitrust lawyers, who in addition to standalone advisory work, assist the corporate and finance teams on transactions.

Training opportunities
The two-year London training programme provides excellent training and a range of experiences to ensure a successful start to a career as an English law-qualified lawyer. Before joining, future trainees will receive training to help them complete the first and second stages of the SQE. Throughout the training programme that follows, trainees experience the corporate and finance practices, spend time in a specialist area of law (tax, financial regulatory or antitrust), and work in the New York office for six months. They receive tailored training, take on real responsibility and have extensive access to partners.

Vacation schemes
Davis Polk expects to host two groups of law students on its summer vacation schemes, each for two weeks, from which the firm will recruit its 2023 intake of trainees. Students will have the opportunity to work on transactions for a variety of the firm’s clients and attend information sessions focused on the work of each practice area. Students will gain first-hand experience of Davis Polk’s culture through interactions with lawyers and attendance at a number of social events.

Applications for the 2021 scheme will be considered from penultimate-year law undergraduates and law postgraduates wishing to join the training programme in August 2023. Applications will be accepted between 1 December 2020 and 9 January 2021. Interviews will take place in January 2021 and the firm expects to offer around 20 places for the scheme.

Getting to Know Davis Polk Sessions & Law Fairs
This autumn the firm will run Getting to Know Davis Polk Sessions virtually (6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on 16 November, 24 November and 26 November 2020) and attend a number of virtual law fairs. For details visit careers.davispolk.com/training-london

Other benefits
The firm offers trainees employment benefits including private medical insurance, life insurance, critical illness insurance, permanent health insurance, pension scheme, season ticket loan, subsidised gym membership, Employee Assistance Programme, medical cash plan, cycle to work scheme and 25 days holiday.
Debevoise & Plimpton LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 9
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 24/102/18
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats
First-year salary: £50,000
Qualification salary: £134,800

Looking to “be part of a big, international law firm” alongside “lovely and incredible people”? Try BigLaw the Debevoise way.

The Firm
BigLaw is the US term for the legal elite. It conjures up the type of law firm the Ivy League grads set their preppy gaze on from senior prom onwards: big clients, big salaries, big towers, big hours, big office views, big bragging rights. And there’s no denying that Debevoise is a fully signed-up member of the BigLaw family. But the BigLaw family has many members, and they’re not all like the patriarchal grandfather, or the horribly competitive uncle who ruins board games; Debevoise is more like the cultured, switched-on aunt who takes you under her wing. She’s formidable and expects the very best from you, but she has a heart of gold. It’s clear Debevoise has exported its cultural brand to London. “The Debevoise type is academic, but extremely nice,” said a trainee. “The people are wonderful to work with, but make no mistake: everyone is trying to be the best and make sure the work we produce is absolutely stellar.”

“The Debevoise type is academic, but extremely nice.”

Debevoise set up shop in London just over 30 years ago, and in that time has earned market recognition of its own. Chambers UK awards the firm impressive UK-wide rankings for its commercial arbitration, investor-state arbitration, and private equity investment funds expertise, as well as a nod to its corporate insurance know-how. In London, the firm goes toe-to-toe with the best firms for financial crime and public international law and gets recognition for commercial and corporate litigation and sponsor-side banking and finance. Many interviewees were drawn to the firm for its incline towards dispute resolution work, where most knew they “were a big name.” Beyond the work itself, trainees were also looking to be part of a smaller intake while “being part of a big international firm that does really cool work.”

The Seats
Upon arrival, trainees are given their first seat by the firm. For the subsequent seats, trainees put forward two preferences which the firm takes into account alongside seat availability. With a reasonably small intake, sources were pleased to find they got their choices most of the time. “There’s no lottery to it - you speak to fellow trainees and everyone has an idea of where other people are going next.” Debevoise also offers international secondments to Hong Kong and Moscow.

Debevoise’s M&A group is roughly split between corporate finance M&A and insurance M&A. Trainees sitting here found the work to be “super varied - I didn’t work on the same type of matter twice!” Matters stretched from public and private M&A, public-to-private transactions, some private equity work, and the occasional capital markets matter. “We’re also leaders in the emerging markets field, so there’s some of that too.” On the insurance side, sources dabbled in “a lot of sponsor-backed M&A deals, like sponsors selling portfolio companies or secondaries co-investing in projects.” The team recently acted for Hamilton Insurance Group in its acquisition of Pembroke Managing Agency and Ironshore Europe DAC from Liberty Mutual. Elsewhere, lawyers also advised private equity company Clayton, Dubilier & Rice on its acquisition of contract catering company Westbury Street Holdings for Seat options: private equity, insurance, international disputes and investigations, financial institutions, funds, M&A, finance, capital markets and tax.
around $1 billion. Day to day, trainees were involved in “a lot of commercial and legal research,” “helping out on due diligence,” and “negotiating and drafting NDAs.” On certain deals, sources were also able to up their responsibility with “work on the main SPA” or “the first attempt at a partnership agreement.”

“I didn’t work on the same type of matter twice!”

Trainees can also do a separate funds seat, where the team deals with the whole gamut of funds work: “advising on fund formation, capital-raising, and investments into private funds.” Sources got exposure to many private equity clients in particular here, and dealt with the occasional regulatory matter for them. The team recently advised LCM Capital on the formation and fundraising of its flagship fund, COP 4 SLP, and also advised GHO Capital on the formation and fundraising of its second European healthcare fund. Sources regularly helped out on closings – “assisting in terms of trying to get all the documents together on time” – and drafted various ancillaries for transactions. Then as the seat developed, sources noted getting “more involved with the actual negotiations with investors, assisting with drafting side letters, and recording the comments and queries from investors.”

“Matters are usually very high value or have particularly complex legal issues behind them.”

As for disputes seats, international arbitration is another strong point for the firm. The team sees its fair share of commercial arbitrations alongside investment treaty arbitrations. “The matters are usually very high value or have particularly complex legal issues behind them,” sources reflected. On the commercial side, the team acts for Joma Industrial Source Corporation in a multi-jurisdictional arbitration. On the investor-state side, they represented The Nova Group Investments against the Romanian government in an ICSID claim. Being a disputes seat, trainees were doing a lot of research here and subsequently found themselves “writing memos on complex pieces of law.” There was also a lot more “typical trainee tasks” in the vein of “proof-reading, and finalising reports and letters.”

On the white-collar team, sources were able to experience a number of investigations, as well as sanctions-related issues and some data/cybersecurity work. The team continues to advise Rolls-Royce on ongoing matters stemming from the 2017 SFO investigation, and it recently conducted investigations on behalf of Mobile Telesystems, looking into historical activities of its subsidiary in Uzbekistan. As you might imagine, the seat involved a hefty amount of due diligence in terms of “looking through companies’ documents, checking for red flags or anything dodgy, and running general background checks.” Trainees also got stuck into “research and writing updates to clients” and occasionally “preparing interview outlines and drafting parts of legal advice memos.”

The commercial litigation sees “a wide range of disputes.” These could be “complex international disputes of high value, fraud matters, shareholder disputes” or more standard contractual disputes. Recently, the team represented Russian oil supplier Tatneft as claimant in an action against four Ukrainian businessmen. Elsewhere, the team represented British American Tobacco against PricewaterhouseCoopers, alleging PwC was negligent and in breach of contract over two audits of an entity called Windward Prospects. Sources also noticed a fair bit of overlap with the firm’s international arbitration/public international law practice, as well as “helping the private equity side with disputes stuff.” Typical trainee tasks included “a lot of research on case law,” as well as “identifying commercial risks for clients.” There were a few admin-y bits like checking bundles, but sources also appreciated being brought along to meetings with clients and other firms. Although trainees were generally happy with the level of responsibility they were able to get in disputes seats, they admitted that pro bono-related litigation usually came with more responsibility.

Trainee Life

One source summed the culture up neatly: “Everyone here is putting their all into everything they do, but there’s a nice camaraderie that works alongside that.” The small trainee intake encouraged a “close-knit” environment, which led sources to believe that “they’re fairly careful with the hiring they make.” Looking around the firm, multiple interviewees flagged that Debevoise has a habit of filling its ranks with “people that are ridiculously smart,” which, for trainees, made the firm “the best place to work.” Other reiterated that “everyone takes the time to teach trainees and juniors,” meaning that trainees benefited from a “learning culture where everyone wants what’s best for you.”

“It’s an incredible moment as a trainee to be able to help people.”

This ‘learning culture’ also extended to the firm’s approach to pro bono – in the US Debevoise is something
of a trailblazer in this regard. “It’s super encouraged and we’ve always had really good pro bono managers who are keen to get people involved.” There are different opportunities available depending on whether trainees are sitting in a transactional or litigious area: transactional opportunities include “providing legal advice to businesses with a charitable side to them through UnLtd social enterprise” as well as “more discrete tasks like a few hours advising on how to set up a charity.” On the litigation side, the firm is involved in some bigger matters trainees can help out on such as “working on a project for the Centre for Reproductive Rights in Nicaragua.” Others also mentioned working on welfare benefits appeals: “You’re dealing with individuals who are really struggling. It’s an incredible moment as a trainee to be able to help people.”

“It’s not a 9-to-5 job,” we were unsurprised to hear. “Whether you’re a trainee or an NQ, it’s always going to be pretty long hours.” Most would kick things off at a standard 9.30am, and on a regular day, would finish somewhere between 7pm and 8pm. As is to be expected, this fluctuated drastically depending on the seat and what matters were on at the time. “If you’re having a slow week, you could leave at 6pm. But if a deal is on or a client requests something, you’ll probably need to work late.” This meant anything from 12-hour days to 12am finishes. Sources admitted “it’s difficult to have a social life outside the office during the week,” but caveated that they “rarely have to work weekends,” which was appreciated.

Qualification is usually a fairly informal affair at Debevoise. “Trainees are encouraged to reach out to partners in teams they’d like to be considered for and have conversations about whether or not there might be room. You then submit your choices to HR and they discuss with partners who should go where.” Sources felt the firm “really tries to keep its trainees,” but at the time of our calls the firm was not disclosing its retention rate.

Rhyme time
Debevoise may attract cultured people, but don’t go pronouncing the firm’s name with French panache. Debevoise rhymes with poise, noise and Backstreet Boys.
Debevoise & Plimpton LLP

65 Gresham Street, London EC2V 7NQ
Tel: 020 7786 9000
Website: www.debevoise.com/careers/london
Email: londonrecruit@debevoise.com

Firm profile
Debevoise & Plimpton is a leading international law firm with market-leading practices with offices in New York, Washington DC, London, Paris, Frankfurt, Moscow, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tokyo and Luxembourg. The London office works on many of the highest profile and most complex transactions in Europe and worldwide. We do this by virtue of our English and New York law expertise and our close integration with our other offices. Our clients look to us to bring a distinctively high degree of quality, intensity and creativity to resolve legal challenges effectively and cost efficiently. The firm’s culture fosters a collaborative approach across disciplines and regions, and, as a result, clients benefit from the dedication, cohesiveness and superior quality that we bring to all of our work worldwide.

Main areas of work
In developing our practice in London, we have sought to replicate the core strengths of our practice worldwide. Our focus is on private equity, insurance, international disputes and investigations, financial institutions, M&A, finance, capital markets and tax.

Training opportunities
One of Debevoise’s basic principles is that each of our associates should become a ‘well rounded’ lawyer – an effective counsellor, advisor, and advocate – who can combine specific legal knowledge with the ability to deal with a broad range of situations. We believe that lawyers best develop their skills through a combination of formal training and on-the-job experience, in a respectful and collegial environment.

The two years are split into four six-month seats and trainees have the opportunity to gain experience in at least three distinct areas of law with a mandatory seat in litigation/arbitration. Trainees may also have the opportunity to spend time in the Hong Kong and Moscow offices.

Vacation scheme
Debevoise offers two-week vacation schemes which run in the spring and summer each year. We look for students whose personal qualities, academic records and other achievements demonstrate exceptional ability, motivation and potential for growth. The vacation scheme is open to both law and non-law graduates. We are looking for individuals who have consistently high levels of achievements both at A level (or equivalent) and at university. Applicants should be expected to achieve a 2:1 in any degree discipline and have a minimum of 144 (new tariff) UCAS points at A level (or equivalent). Apply online between 1 October 2020 and 3 January 2021 for spring and summer vacation schemes in 2021.

An online application form will be available on our website during these times. Anyone interested in a training contract with Debevoise should apply for a place on our open days which act as a gateway to our vacation schemes. We hire all of our Trainees from the vacation scheme. Vacation scheme students are paid £500 per week.

Other benefits
- Private health care (medical, dental, and private GP)
- Life and Income Protection Insurance
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Group personal pension plan
- 22 days vacation
- Cycle to work scheme
- On-site subsidised café
- Interest free season ticket loan
- Discretionary qualification leave on completion of your training contract

Open days and first-year opportunities
The firm holds open days to recruit for the vacation schemes, normally in February or March. Around 90 candidates will be invited to attend. On the day, candidates will meet the graduate recruitment team, will spend time with a mentor and will participate in an informal networking lunch attended by trainees, associates and partners. There will also be a commercial assessment. The day is intended as much for candidates to get to know the firm as the other way around.

Deutsche Bank

Website: www.chambersstudent.co.uk

The True Picture
Dechert LLP

The facts
Locations: London
Overseas offices: 25
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 49/98/18
Seats: 6x4 months; overseas seats; client secondment
First-year salary: £45,000
Qualification salary: £120,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Dechert

In Philadelphia born and raised; a six-seat training contract is how I spend most of my days.

The Firm
Firstly, let’s get the name right before you go anywhere near an interview at this formidable firm: it’s pronounced ‘Deck-urt’, with the stress on the first syllable. In many ways this Philly-founded firm-gone-global has much in common with many US outfits operating in the London market. Firstly, you’ve got strong finance, funds and corporate focused practice areas with corresponding Chambers UK rankings. Then you’ve got an intimate intake of just ten trainees at each rotation. And finally, and let’s face it most importantly, you’ve got the sky-high pay packet, with NQ salaries comfortably north of £100,000. “If I was going to work hard, I wanted to be paid well for it,” one insider reflected frankly.

“I didn’t know where I wanted to qualify, so having the opportunity to experience more departments was something I valued.”

However, they also pointed to a number of more unique features up the firm’s sleeve; chiefly being the only US firm in London to offer a six-seat rather than four-seat training contract. “I didn’t know where I wanted to qualify, so having the opportunity to experience more departments was something I valued,” one source declared. Another added: “While we do represent what you think of as a traditional US firm in having a strong corporate, funds and finance offering, we also have some more niche seats such as white-collar, IP and employment.” Taken together, our interviewees felt Dechert offered a compelling package.

One source went as far as to say that “we don’t even feel like a US firm,” citing the fact that the firm’s London origins can be traced back to the merger between UK-based Titmuss Sainer and then Dechert Price & Rhoads. They add: “We have the support of the big offices in the US and a great international reach, but we don’t feel like a satellite or support office - we definitely have our own autonomy.” Some source reasoned this removed the firm from some of the less desirable aspects of American firm culture; think “an obsession with billable hours,” or “a cutthroat environment.” One Americanism the firm has retained, however, is a healthy approach to pro bono. “As a minimum, everyone is expected to bill 25 hours of pro bono a year,” sources explained.

Trainees’ first seat is automatically allocated upon joining the firm, but they can indicate if they’d prefer to start in a transactional or contentious group. Everyone must complete a seat in the financial services group but are otherwise free to choose their other four seats. “You’re always certain to be allocated one of your top three preferences,” one source remarked, “even more so in the second year.” The firm also offers a number of client and international secondments, the availability of which can be changeable depending on the firm’s business needs. As one insider revealed: “There used to be placements in Singapore, Brussels and Dublin, as well as a position shadowing a judge at the Royal Courts of Justice, but they’ve all been dropped recently.” Another source expressed disappointment “that there are no placements in America available either.” However, others were consoled by the fact that “the firm is always exploring new options.” Some of the more exciting current options include a funds seat in Luxembourg and placement with Airbus in Toulouse.

Seat options: corporate and securities; leveraged finance; finance and real estate; financial restructuring; financial services; intellectual property; employment; international arbitration; commercial disputes; white collar crime
The Seats

“Funds has a bit of a scary reputation around it,” one insider revealed. “Unlike corporate where you can go in and grasp what’s happening straight away, funds is a bit like staring at alphabet soup – you have no idea what people are saying.” It’s a practice made up of some 200 lawyers over 16 of the firm’s offices. In an advisory capacity the firm works with financial services firms, asset managers and investment funds, representing clients ranging from small start-up and boutique operations to enormous financial institutions. Here trainees may be helping to ensure funds comply with regulatory requirements or assisting on the structuring of a fund. Many of our interviewees had experience “working on the launching of hedge and private equity funds,” too.

Though referred to as “one of the more intense seats,” sources also recognised it “as a great learning experience,” with tonnes of responsibility for those eager to impress. One expanded: “You get the first stab and lot of funds-related documents such as a prospectus, subscription agreement, or limited partnership agreement.” The group also challenges trainees’ organisational abilities. “You might be sending out a board pack or collating documents to send to a director of a fund. It’s always your number on the bottom of the work so expect client contact too!” Recently the team have advised Soloda Investment Advisors on the establishment of a Cayman Islands-domiciled macro fund, and represented Generali Investment on its acquisition of CM Investment Solutions, a London-based alternative asset manager with $11 billion of assets, from Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

“I have a lot of plates spinning at any one time.”

Over in the corporate group, there’s a wide spread of mid-market M&A deals, capital markets, leveraged finance, and private equity work. “You’re usually assigned to one of the subgroups,” sources explained. The department also operates across a range of sectors including life sciences, mining, technology and, of course, financial services. Recently the group advised Crown Holdings, a leader in consumer packaging, on its $3.9 billion acquisition of Signode Industrial Group. “I have a lot of plates spinning at any one time,” one trainee told us. “Compared to litigation where I was typically handling three matters over the course of a four month-period, here I’d have six things on my plate that needed completing within a week.” Trainees’ main role here was monitoring checklists, liaising with counsel and drafting ancillary documents – typical of a corporate seat.

Within Dechert’s trials and investigations group you can find seats in commercial litigation and white-collar crime. Recently, lawyers in the former represented funds managed by Franklin Templeton Investment Management in a high-profile challenge to the restructuring of $500 million of notes issued by the International Bank of Azerbaijan. In white-collar crime one source explained that “there are a lot of big, slow-moving investigations going on.” They add: “I thought I would be photocopying, but I was running big disclosure exercises, sitting in on client interviews and conducting fact-finding missions.” Dechert also offers a seat in international arbitration, for which the firm is recognised among the worldwide leaders in Chambers Global. In London “it’s a relatively new team that they’re looking to grow,” one trainee told us, who was kept busy “preparing for hearings, managing evidence bundles and drafting pleadings.”

Trainee Life

At Dechert, “you don’t have so many of the 22-year-old coming straight out of university types,” one insider told us. “Most people are in their late twenties having spent a few years doing something else first, which makes for a more mature intake,” they finish. Most, but not all: new graduates definitely shouldn’t be discouraged from applying. For those looking for the ‘work hard, play hard, drinks every night’ City vibe, Dechert may not be the firm for you. That’s not to say its antisocial: “we definitely make a conscious effort to celebrate birthdays and every so often there will be big events, but it’s just not every week.”

“I haven’t found it intimidating at all. I asked so many questions in my first seat that I even annoyed myself.”

Moreover, while the prospect of joining an elite global firm may be somewhat daunting, one source was keen to point out that “I haven’t found it intimidating at all. I asked so many questions in my first seat that I even annoyed myself, but I never felt I was a hindrance to anyone or that I was getting on their nerves.” Another weighed in: “As long as you’ve shown you’ve tried and you’ve shown your thought process, they are happy to help. One partner sat down with me for an hour drawing graphs on a whiteboard and making notes to explain something when I didn’t understand.”

Talking work/life balance, one insider reflected that “I was really expecting burnout culture and burning the candles at both ends to be much more prolific at US firms,” adding that “trainees rarely work weekends.” Another added: “in litigation I was mostly leaving between 7pm
and 7.30pm, while in corporate it was closer to 8pm most nights.” However, we also heard reports of more intense periods where leaving at 10pm was closer to the norm. “You’re always going to have to stay really late if you want to throw yourself out there and meet every single deadline,” a trainee thought. “However, if you’re good at managing your work, and don’t overburden yourself, from my experience there will be plenty of times when you can leave at 7pm.”

Trainees can choose to apply for up to two positions come qualification. Dechert hasn’t had a glowing retention rate recently, having kept just six of its ten trainees in the past two years. Our sources agreed that “the process could use more transparency.”

And finally...

Dechert is one of several firms to offer work experience under the Aspiring Solicitors scheme.
Dechert LLP

160 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4QQ
Tel: 020 7184 7000  Fax: 020 7184 7001
Email: graduate.recruitment@dechert.com
Website: www.dechert.com
www.dechert.com/careers

Firm profile
Dechert is a global specialist law firm with approximately 1000 lawyers across 26 offices. We have some of the world’s leading lawyers advising on both domestic and cross-border matters. The firm is frequently retained to work on the most challenging transactions and disputes, and prides itself on its ability to deliver premium legal services and sound business judgment to its clients. Dechert lawyers bring to their assignments a focus on quality, responsiveness and value for money. We are driven by one key principle: exceptional client service.

Main areas of work
In London, our lawyers are active in Dechert’s core practice areas of corporate and securities, financial services and investment management, finance and real estate, trials, investigations and securities, which incorporates our white collar and commercial litigation teams. Our clients include corporations, financial institutions, sovereign states, quasi-sovereign entities and private and high-net-worth individuals all over the world. Dechert undertakes work for 40 of the ‘Fortune 100’ companies, and advises 24 of the top 25 global asset management firms, and 41 of the top 50 global private debt firms.

Training opportunities
We take your training seriously, both before and after you qualify. We have a full, and lively, training programme which covers the whole range of skills you need, from technical legal issues and substantive skills training in each practice area to the Critical Skills Institute, which is focused on leadership, management, communication and client relations.

Our trainees undertake six seats of four months each, with each trainee being seconded to a client or one of our international offices, providing a truly broad legal foundation. Working closely with partners and associates, and with a small trainee intake, no two trainees’ training contracts will be the same. Following qualification, our NQs attend orientation in Philadelphia.

We are looking for candidates who have a genuine interest in business and our clients, are ambitious and who have a keen sense of building community, both within the workplace and with our clients.

Vacation schemes
We recruit all of our future trainees from two vacation schemes, in spring and summer. Our two week schemes are designed to give you an idea of what it will be like to be a trainee solicitor at Dechert. Each week you will sit in a different practice group and you are given real work to do by our lawyers. Exactly what you will do will depend on which practice group you sit in, but it will include research, drafting and attending meetings. You will also attend training sessions on a range of topics, such as legal writing and negotiation. In 2018, Dechert won Best Training – Vacation Scheme, due to the in depth, comprehensive training we deliver to our vacation scheme participants.

Before you start the scheme, we will ask for your practice area preferences and then try to place you in those groups. You will be allocated a supervisor (an associate or partner) and both a partner and a trainee buddy, but will receive work from people at all levels from across the group. Social events, such as evening activities and dinners, are an important part of the vacation schemes as they enable you to build your relationships with Dechert trainees, associates and partners.

Other benefits
Life assurance, an employee assistance programme, subsidised gym membership, subsidised on-site café, private medical and dental insurance, annual health assessments, pension scheme with firm contributions, season ticket loan and cycle to work scheme.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Visit our website for a full list of Dechert’s bespoke open days in 2020/21.

University law careers fairs 2020/21
Visit our website for a full list of the careers fairs we will be attending in 2020/21.
Dentons

The facts

Locations: London, Milton Keynes, Scotland
Overseas offices: 170+
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 180/382/81
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £44,000 (London); £31,000 (Milton Keynes)
Qualification salary: £75,000 (London); £48,000 (Milton Keynes)

The world’s largest law firm has Den-tonnes of offices and quality to match quantity, but power hasn’t gone to their heads.

The Firm

If you’re weighing up potential training contracts and looking hardest at firms with an international presence, it would be hard to miss Dentons. This is a firm with 170+ offices worldwide—it’s in more countries than Costa Coffee, Nando’s or Armani. “The firm is super ambitious and it’s entertaining to watch how quickly we’re spreading across the world,” one trainee commented. Expansion has come from both one-off office openings and mergers—some of the most important have included its 2015 tie-up with Chinese firm Dacheng (giving it rare access to China and securing its place as the world’s largest law firm); and the 2017 acquisition of Scottish outfit Maclay Murray & Spens, bringing more trainees into the fold here in Britain.

The firm recently closed its office spaces in Aberdeen and Watford—staff in both locations will henceforth work remotely. Our interviews took place prior to the change, but sources were largely unperturbed by the firmwide need to work from home in 2020. Dentons has already proven itself on the tech front, introducing NextLaw Labs to its Silicon Valley presence way back in 2015. The firm describes the venture as “an ecosystem of myriad cutting-edge technology partners.” We’ll translate that for you—it’s a technology hub developing programs to help lawyers work more efficiently.

“It’s entertaining to watch how quickly we’re spreading across the world.”

Given the firm’s size, an in-depth look at its Chambers rankings could fill a whole website, so we’ll summarise: Dentons appears 62 times in the Chambers UK standings, an incredible 124 times in Chambers Global and an even more impressive 132 times in Chambers Europe. Most of the England trainees can be found in the London office, but Milton Keynes recruits a cohort each year. For some, Dentons’ presence outside the capital was a big draw: “I wanted to benefit from a large law firm, without having the pressures and expectations that come with working in London.” MK trainees technically do a joint training contract, but some do all their seats in the same office. The firm’s Scottish offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh also welcome trainees (about ten each year).

Seat allocation became uniform across all UK offices from 2019, “so all seat options and secondments are now up for grabs for all trainees.” Trainees outside London can now apply for international secondments, if they can figure out the “ridiculously long” process. Before starting, everyone gets a “massive document” setting out all the seat options, typical tasks within seats, and stories from trainees who’d already sat there about what to expect. After a follow-up ‘seat fair’, future trainees rank 12 or so options for their first seat. It gets more complicated during seat rotations: everyone ranks three to six seats, allocating ‘percentage of preference’ to each, and provides a cover letter and CV. “The form changes slightly every rotation, so you can’t even copy past versions,” sources grumbled. “Dentons likes intensive paperwork for everything…” The firm told us the system is based on feedback from trainees of previous years. Though we heard complaints...
Chambers UK rankings

| Asset Finance | Intellectual Property |
| Banking & Finance | Litigation |
| Banking Litigation | Outsourcing |
| Capital Markets | Planning |
| Commercial Litigation | Private Equity |
| Commodities | Professional Negligence |
| Competition/European Law | Projects |
| Construction | Public Procurement |
| Corporate/M&A | Real Estate |
| Data Protection | Real Estate Finance |
| Employment | Real Estate Litigation |
| Energy & Natural Resources | Restructuring/Insolvency |
| Environment | Retail |
| Franchising | Tax |
| Hotels & Leisure | Telecommunications |
| Information Technology | Transport |
| Infrastructure |  |

that the system is “a bit of a numbers game, it’s all a bit arbitrary,” most trainees got their top choice at least once. Keep in mind that banking is compulsory in London.

The Seats

Banking is the firm’s largest department and houses three subgroups. Group A does general banking including acquisitions, leveraged finance and inter-bank lending; B handles asset, project and trade finance; C is for capital markets, derivatives, regulatory and structured finance. Dentons’ roster includes big names like Goldman Sachs, J.P. Morgan and Credit Suisse.

“So many random queries come in, the variety keeps things interesting.”

The firm is best known for advising lenders, but one source in banking A got lucky and saw some borrower-side work, too: “It’s really useful to draft documents from both perspectives because they have completely different areas of focus.” Dentons deals usually reach the high millions, sometimes tipping into the billions; in one example, the firm advised Ryanair on a €750 million syndicated facility. Interviewees praised supervisors for letting them “take free rein during deals and develop client relationships” once they’d proven themselves, with continued supervision; they also handled tasks like conditions precedent checklists. “It was awesome that I got to show I understood what I was doing, rather than being micromanaged,” one trainee explained. Another declared they “could shout from the rooftops about this incredible group of people. Even when I screwed up I was never made to feel stupid.” That’s not to say the expectations in banking aren’t high, and we heard “you’re ready to work like an NQ in the department by the end of the seat.”

Contentious and regulatory financial issues fall into the disputes banking and finance sub-team. Trainees dabbled in a varied palette of cases, including more commercial disputes. “I worked on a freezing injunction where I was rushing down to court, which was all very exciting,” one said; another noted that regulatory matters can revolve around weird and wonderful issues, like rules for transporting animals. “So many random queries come in, the variety keeps things interesting.” Dentons defended RBS against a £470 million LIBOR claim brought against it by the developers of the More London site. Financial institutions aside, the firm’s disputes clients include the Government of India and First Milk. A seat here also calls for costs recovery, “which is the negative side. I waded through three months’ worth of work and allocated the costs; it’s partly about what the client owes the firm and partly about what we’d get from the other side if we won, then justifying it all, which was painful to say the least.” It should be noted that a disputes seat is ‘strongly encouraged’ for trainees in Watford and Milton Keynes. Even those who didn’t fancy themselves as litigators were “pleasantly surprised” by their time here: “It’s useful to know what happens when things go wrong for clients even if you don’t want to be a litigator.”

Unlike at many big firms, Dentons’ corporate trainees typically sit across the whole department, rather than specialising in a specific practice. Sources felt this set-up “is great if you don’t know what you like, but if you do know then you won’t necessarily be able to specialise.” That said, “the corporate group really wants to know what you want out of the seat and they make sure you get it. The key is to have open dialogue – I told my supervisor what I wanted to do because ultimately it’s my career, so I didn’t have to work in the areas I didn’t want to.” Dentons has set its sights on higher-value M&A over the last few years, as well as big IPOs. “The department brings in big-ticket deals and we’re often on the other side of magic circle firms,” sources noted. The firm was recently across the table from Linklaters, advising global investment firm KKR on its €7 billion acquisition of Unilever’s spreads business. In a recent tech deal, Dentons advised Syncsort on its $700 million purchase of Pitney Bowes’ software solutions business. Trainees summarised this seat as “fundamentally interesting and really challenging, which is great from a learning perspective.”

“But the end of the seat I was running my own matters and had direct client contact, which really helped boost my confidence.”

Pensions and employment both fall into the people, reward and mobility group. Trainees here acted as support on corporate deals and advised clients on the possible effects of Covid-19 in Latin America, Asia, Europe, South Africa and the Middle East – “managing everything at once was pretty intense.” Hours can stack up when you’re jug-
Dentons

Trainee Life

Trainees’ hours were pretty consistent across seats: consistently high. “The timings are absurd, I’m just so tired,” one in corporate complained. “I was on a massive private equity deal pretty much 24/7 for nearly two months and I’ve often been sat at my desk at 10pm.” As Dentons pushes for greater-value deals and cases, it makes sense that demands on trainees will grow. “New York timelines make for such a tight turnaround,” according to another source. Interviewees in employment had similar tales to tell: “I was doing 60-hour weeks for a fortnight or so.” We should stress that this experience wasn’t universal: contentious seats tend to come with more forgiving hours, and Londoners were working later than trainees in Milton Keynes.

Despite its innumerable locations, sources agreed “Dentons has a polycentric culture and each office operates independently, so it feels like you’re at a regional firm rather than the world’s biggest – in a good way.” Departments don’t tend to socialise together, each making their own way. “Some are very good at socials and some don’t do many. Banking and corporate have drinks trolleys once a month, but the smaller groups like disputes don’t do much.” There are separate team and trainee budgets, and “we usually go out every couple of months, if a new person joins or at Christmas.”

“No train, no gain:

In addition to PSC training, Dentons hosts additional trainee-specific sessions on soft skills, plus “firmwide training about what clients want, which is very useful.”
Dentons

One Fleet Place, London EC4M 7WS
Tel: 020 7242 1212
Email: graduaterecruitment@dentons.com
Website: https://challengers.dentons.com/

Facebook: DentonsUKEarlyTalent
Instagram: @dentonsglobal
Linkedin: Dentons

Firm profile
We are Dentons. The world’s largest law firm. We’re the lightbulb moments. The bold ideas. The international deals. We’re 10,000+ lawyers globally; 800+ in the UK and 40+ trainees a year. We’re a truly global, polycentric firm. Working across 175+ locations in 70+ countries. Turning our ambitions into reality. Breaking tradition. Moving with innovation. Making the decisions that will take us from largest to leading. From now to next. We welcome people who are driven to challenge. To innovate and shape. We are the future of law.

Main areas of work
We are who we are because of the work we do and the scale on which we do it. Our work spans 75 countries, with our 10,000+ lawyers speaking over 80 language. Our 270 award wins in 2019 highlight our recognition in the market, and the quality of work trainees are involved in.

Trainees are able to choose from a wealth of seats, to work with experts across our trainee practice areas: banking and finance, competition, corporate, dispute resolution, ETI (energy, transport and infrastructure), private client, PRM (people, reward and mobility), real estate, tax and TMT (technology, media and telecommunications).

Work is also about more than work here. It’s about the environment too, and the feeling you get from your team, office and beyond. Our teams are also focused on inclusion and diversity, giving back, and on looking forward with innovation.

Training Contract
The business of law is changing, and we want you to be right there with it. To take us from largest to leading, we’re looking for our trainees to think big and see the future of law in a new way.

On top of our existing development program, our market leading training contract includes three new modules: legal project management, innovation and resilience. All designed to help you become the lawyer of the future.

Our training contracts consist of four six-month seats, where along with seats in our practice groups, trainees have the opportunity to work in one of our global offices, or directly with one of our clients over a six-month secondment.

The modernised training contract marks the first stage in your journey from lawyer to leader. The lawyers of the future start here.

Vacation scheme
Deciding where to start your career is a big decision. Balance real work with training and networking on our schemes to see what your career at Dentons could look like. Our two week scheme will give you, and us, an insight into whether we’re a good match.

By attending our Vacation Scheme, you’ll automatically be assessed for our Training Contract. This could be the start of something much bigger.

Spring (London only) – 6th – 16th April 2021
Summer (London, Milton Keynes, Glasgow & Edinburgh) – 5th – 16th July 2021

Want to get a feel for what a legal career with us is really like? Our vacation schemes balance real work with training and networking, to give you a holistic view of Dentons and an insight into our way of life. We offer two-week long vacation schemes in the below locations:

Recruitment
There is no such thing as a typical solicitor at Dentons, and that’s the way we like it. We want you to be you, with all your quirks, interests and ambitions. We look for applications to have, or expect to achieve, a 2:1 degree and a minimum of ABB at A Level (or equivalent).

Application Process: Online application form > Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Test > Behavioural Telephone Interview > Assessment Centre
The facts

Locations: Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Sheffield, Scotland
Overseas offices: 90+
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 235/609/110
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £28,000 (£45,000 in London)
Qualification salary: £44,000 (£76,000 in London)

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

How to get a DLA Piper training contract

Law firms either head for global markets or regional – one firm does both, and does it very well.

The Firm

What’s regional and international? Aunt Diane on the Mai Tais on a beach in Corfu? Perhaps, but we were thinking more along the lines of the enormous global law firm DLA Piper, which has seven UK offices in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds and Edinburgh. Across these bases, trainees found “cross-border opportunities in the regions” as part of a “giant international network that has solid financials.”

“We’re all so internationally minded.”

DLA’s global turnover of $3.11 billion makes it the third largest firm in the world by revenue. And with over 90 offices in 40 plus countries, plus multiple affiliations elsewhere, it’s hard to find a major world centre that isn’t graced by its presence (most recently it opened in Dublin). This “breadth of global presence” was a major draw factor for trainees: “We’re all so internationally minded.”

Chambers Global recognises the firm as world elite in areas such as commercial contracts, franchising, and TMT, and bestows it with rankings in 44 jurisdictions around the world from the US to Timor-Leste. On home soil, DLA has so many Chambers UK rankings that you’d get RSI just scrolling through them all. Among them are top accolades in London in mid-market corporate/M&A and IT, while outside the capital it’s a national leader in both those areas, plus banking and finance, litigation, employment, pensions, restructuring and tax.

The Seats

DLA’s litigation and regulatory department covers arbitrations, corporate crime investigations and commercial litigation – “a lot of big, juicy, high-stakes litigation and cross-border disputes.” The team recently represented recycling technology company Renova Industries in multi-jurisdictional proceedings against potash company Emersom. Different offices have slightly different flavours – Manchester for example does a lot of construction work, while Sheffield has an emphasis on telecoms work. The London team handles a lot of international arbitrations, such as representing the Republic of Kenya in a $2 billion claim brought by mining investor Cortec. Right now, the team is advising clients on a lot of Brexit-related regulatory questions, on topics like disclosure to HMRC and export control. Trainees enjoyed the variety on offer: “One day you can be working on a dispute to do with technology companies and the next a matter to do with soil!” Trainees can expect to do a lot of research and disclosure tasks, as well as court work like preparing bundles. Interviewees got to draft documents like settlement claims. “I’ve enjoyed being able to contact the other side to ask them ques-

Seat options: corporate; employment; finance, projects and restructuring; intellectual property and technology; litigation and regulatory; real estate; and tax.
tions on smaller claims,” one highlighted. Another said: “If you’re willing, you get wicked first-hand exposure to the client,” which includes attending meetings and mediations, writing letters, and “going to swanky client events.”

The prongs on DLA’s corporate trident are M&A, private equity and public company capital markets. The team deals with a lot of venture capital, fintech investment, matters in the energy sector, and public sector work. Deals are typically mid-market, with values in the hundreds of millions – for example, the firm recently advised Merlin (the entertainment company that owns Alton Towers) on the sale of two ski resorts and an airport in Australia to a US buyer for AUD174 million. The team also represented consumer goods company Unilever in their acquisition of Graze (which makes those healthy snack boxes). On the private equity side, the group recently advised Hyundai in its €100 million investment in Luxembourg-based Arrival, an electric vehicle company. “I worked on M&A transactions, reorganisations and public company work,” one told us, “and I had the opportunity to attend client offices and negotiation meetings.” Trainees also drafted consent letters and house forms, and reviewed shareholder agreements and articles of association. Qualifying into this department is “definitely a lifestyle choice – the team works extremely hard!” On the plus side, “the training you receive is exceptional,” according to a Birmingham trainee. “You don’t realise how much you’ve learned until someone asks a question and you hear yourself explaining the answer.”

Over in intellectual property and technology (IPT), trainees got to grips with commercial contracts, data protection and – of course – IP work. Though trainees primarily work in one sub-stream, they can have a “really varied experience sampling different kinds of work.” The department works on many public procurement contracts, with “massive government clients.” Sheffield is a bit more niche, handling pure trade mark, copyright and patents work. The team recently advised Merlin (again, the entertainment company) on its partnership with payment company Adyen for its point-of-sale payment system in over 130 of its attractions. On the IP side, the firm’s clients include Nike, Brewdog and Emirates Airlines. “I’ve particularly enjoyed working on some outsourcing projects with large, recognisable clients and have had the opportunity to hone my drafting skills,” said one interviewee. Trainees tend to conduct diligence: reviewing existing contracts and inputting changes.

“The London office offers a pro bono seat to one lucky individual, who “gets to do a lot of fantastic work with UNICEF, Save the Children and other incredible charities.”
But there’s no need for trainees to get too competitive over bagging a spot here, as “one of the big selling points for DLA is the range of pro bono opportunities” across offices. That could mean advising on debt, assisting charities with corporate work, or even going to Greece to help refugees. The Manchester office works with anti-slavery charity Hope for Justice. “Supervisors are understanding of you doing it,” said trainees, but of course, “you’re not supposed to do it if you’ve got a tough deadline; it’s down to you to be sensible.”

Reviews of trainee support and supervision at the firm were pretty positive but not everyone was piping the same tune. A Manchester source summarised: “There’s a range of quality of supervisors and I found this directly impacted how I experienced the seats. Some were focused on training the trainee whereas others had little engagement.” The majority described “fantastic training,” with a Londoner telling us: “Each seat has dedicated training sessions and a knowledge team who help with everything from where to find a particular resource to how to file a certain type of document.”

Trainee Life

Interviewees across offices described a “down to earth” culture. “You expect at a big law firm people will have an ego to match,” one recalled, “and some do – but they are few and far between!” A couple of trainees pointed out that DLA Piper’s company values are “a prominent feature of the firm, and everyone will be able to tell you what they are. They’re even on our desktops!” Pro tip – it might be worth checking these out on DLA’s website if you land an interview. A ‘values committee’ in each office even organises activities themed around the values. “We had ‘Be Bold’ month, which included wearing bright colours,” one insider told us. “At the moment, it’s geared very much towards mental health awareness.”

DLA had a “big focus on wellbeing, even before lockdown,” though some felt that the initiatives “don’t squarely address some poor attitudes in the workplace.” Elsewhere, we heard of offices celebrating cultural and religious holidays, “which feels really thoughtful and touching.” We also heard about the firm’s “very active and well-supported” LGBTQ+ group IRIS, and its social mobility initiative HeadStart, “which helps students from less privileged backgrounds to access work experience.” Interviewees were open that “there could be a bigger push to promote racial diversity,” but overall they were “really glad that DLA is doing things actively to help promote inclusion.”

On the social side, “it’s less of a pub culture than I thought,” one Londoner expressed, instead describing a “family-oriented” atmosphere. That didn’t mean they were without their fun, as this Liverpudlian explained: “From an induction at Sandhurst to Burns Night in Edinburgh and the Grand National in Liverpool, DLA do a lot to integrate the trainee group and I have made some great friends for life.”

“From an induction at Sandhurst to Burns Night in Edinburgh and the Grand National in Liverpool...”

Interviewees across some of the smaller regional offices described a “tight-knit” feel where “everyone knows everyone.” All offices are stocked with free fresh fruit “to promote a healthy lifestyle,” and the Manchester office enjoys “a beautiful view of the city.” We heard London is the “big, posh office – they have their own gym!” It’s also home to “a sleeping room if you’re feeling stressed.”

So how stressful can it get? Well, each seat comes with a different timetable. Trainees in seats like real estate and property litigation found themselves leaving by 6.30pm most nights, with the “rare late night leaving around 9pm.” Unsurprisingly, corporate and other transactional seaters were more likely to leave around 8pm, but “you stay as late as you need to around the peaks.” Thankfully “people tell you to go home early the day after,” and a Birmingham trainee told us “the team makes an active effort to make sure you finish on time on a Friday.”

First-year trainees get a salary of £28,000 (£45,000 in London), which trainees felt “is proportionate for what we do” in most seats. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, DLA is offering upcoming trainees £10,000 to delay their training contract by a year and £5,000 to delay until February 2021. It’s also one of many firms to cut NQ salaries. London NQs will start on £76,000 down from £78,000, and cuts will be proportionate in the regions (£44,000 down from £46,000).

Qualifiers apply for up to three positions. Those who don’t get their first choice go through “a sort of clearing round” to vie for their other choices. Though the qualification process at DLA usually goes smoothly, remote working has meant that “communication this year has been pretty poor, so there’s a lot of anxiety.” In the end, the qualification process was delayed by two weeks and the firm did not disclose its 2020 retention figure.
DLA Piper

160 Aldersgate St, London EC1A 4HT
Email: graduaterecruitment@dlapiper.com
Twitter: @DLA_Piper_Grads
Website: www.dlapipergraduates.com
Facebook: dlapipergrads
Instagram: @dlapiper
Linkedin: dla-piper-uk-graduates

Firm profile
DLA Piper is one of the world’s leading business law firms. With over 90 offices in more than 40 countries, the firm provides seamless local and cross-border advice. The firm believes great businesses can make a better world. That’s why, every day, DLA Piper helps its clients succeed.

Main areas of work
Unlike many law firms, DLA Piper is organised to provide clients with a range of essential business advice, not just on large scale mergers and acquisitions and banking deals but also on people and employment, commercial dealings, litigation, insurance, real estate, IT, intellectual property, plans for restructuring and tax. We have a comprehensive, award winning client relationship management programme and our brand is built upon local legal excellence and global capability.

DLA Piper has the following practice groups: corporate, employment, finance and projects, restructuring, intellectual property and technology, litigation and regulatory, real estate, tax.

Training opportunities
Our graduates complete four six month rotations, and the majority will undertake an international or client secondment. Our industry leading training is designed to equip our graduates to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to become the future leaders of our firm.

Summer internship
Our Summer Internship is designed to give students a real insight into DLA Piper. The programme runs across our eight offices in the UK and Ireland, and is three weeks in duration, commencing with a week-long induction programme in our London office. The induction programme gives students the opportunity to hear from our senior leaders, to participate in professional skills training, to attend networking events and to participate in responsible business activities.

Students spend the second and third weeks of the Summer Internship undertaking work experience placements across two of our practice groups in their chosen office location.

Other benefits
Life insurance, private healthcare, cycle to work schemes, gym, restaurant, employee assistance programme.

Open days and first-year opportunities
At DLA Piper we offer a three-day Insight Programme specifically for those in their first year of a law degree or second year of a non-law degree and who are interested in a career in law. We also host Open Days in all of our offices in the UK and Ireland for students from any degree discipline.

University law careers fairs 2020
Ireland: Dublin City University (DCU), Maynooth University, National University of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, Technological University Dublin, University College Cork, University College Dublin, University of Limerick, Queen’s University Belfast.
Dorsey & Whitney was born in the USA, but it bucks some of the trends in its London calling.

The Firm
In many ways, Dorsey fits the US-firm-in-London bill. It has a small trainee intake (only two a year), a strong international and US presence (18 overseas offices, 13 of which are stateside), and competes in the capital for “interesting, complex, top-end work.” These factors were a big draw for the chosen few who were offered training contracts, with the caveat that Dorsey seemed “more giving” to our interviewees than other US firms in London. “It definitely feels more English in terms of its expectations, like how much you’re expected to bill and how available you should be,” said one trainee. “Things like 11pm finishes aren’t common,” said another. “The firm respects your life outside of work.”

“It doesn’t feel like a satellite office. The London office has a lot of homegrown work.”

In London, Dorsey has a handful lawyers who are Chambers UK-ranked in AIM capital markets, corporate/M&A and tax work. The firm also achieves Chambers USA rankings in eight different states, with particularly impressive expertise in its home state of Minnesota. Areas including corporate M&A, litigation, and real estate all achieve top-tier recognition – and these are all prominent parts of Dorsey’s offering in London too. In this vein, trainees added: “What also separates us from some other US firms here is that we’re really big on both corporate and litigation.” Despite the London office’s small headcount of around 30 lawyers (including trainees), insiders also asserted that “it doesn’t feel like a satellite office. The London office has a lot of homegrown work.” International work from the US does come through from time to time, though most sources reckoned “it’s not the majority of our work.”

The Seats
Dorsey has five seat options, which makes seat allocation a simple affair. Trainees are required to complete two seats from corporate, capital markets or banking and then one seat in litigation and one seat in real estate/IP. Despite its respectable overseas presence, there aren’t currently any international opportunities on offer but there are potential client secondments available.

“I’ve done deals in the media space, in the tech space, and I’ve even done deals involving other law firms.”

The firm’s corporate team covers a variety of work, including M&A, capital markets, and some leveraged finance matters. Clients are equally varied, both in terms of size and sector: “I’ve done deals in the media space, in the tech space, and I’ve even done deals involving other law firms – like if they’re being sold to other firms or to private equity sponsors.” Others noted doing “work for both emerging companies as well as bigger clients.” The team recently advised telecommunications company Liberty Latin America on its $1.95 billion acquisition of AT&T’s wireless and wireline operations in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. Elsewhere, the team worked with long-time client This Is The Big Deal (which owns the energy auto-switch company Look After My Bills) on its sale to Go Compare for £12.5 million. Interviewees were able to gain experience in “drafting ancillary documents, reviewing share purchase agreements and investment agreements, and making amendments to partnership agreements.” On the capital markets side, trainees worked on several sec-
ondary issues – at the time of research, they noted: “IPOs are a bit dead at the moment.” The team generally does a fair bit of work on the Alternative Investment Market, though sources also got the chance to do a couple of matters on the Main Market as well. Similar to M&A tasks, sources got stuck into working on ancillary documents, doing verification, and “helping with closing agreements.” Overall, trainees felt “the team is good at holding your hand in the beginning, then once you show a semblance of understanding they let you go for it. It’s a good balance.”

Over in litigation, interviewees explained “the team is quite small, but they make up a substantial portion of firm revenue compared to how big they are.” Matters themselves are usually quite commercial in nature: the team recently acted for internet company Otello Corporation in a shareholder dispute with US-based Moore Frères & Company worth $70 million. In a high-profile matter, the team also defended technology solutions company Watchstone Group in a warranty and fraudulent misrepresentation claim arising from the sale of the professional services division of Quindell (as Watchstone was formerly known) to law firm Slater and Gordon. Day to day, the seat involved “doing research for associates and partners,” as well as “putting together bundles.” Sources especially appreciated the firm’s US presence in this seat, noting that “we have resources in the States that we can leverage for things like doc review.” They clarified: “We still do some doc review, but more often we do privilege review and letter drafting, which is more substantial.” Depending on timing, some were also able to get hefty amounts of experience in court, while others weren’t quite so lucky.

Trainees usually do the IP and real estate seat last. During this time, trainees are essentially working for both departments simultaneously, though the split will depend on how busy each department is. For one source, “there was a lot more work in IP than in real estate, so I probably did 80% IP and 20% real estate.” The IP side is “very trade mark-heavy.” For example, the team recently worked on trade mark oppositions at the UK and EU Intellectual Property Offices for Canadian digital media company Score Media and Gaming. On the opposite side, the team defended brokerage services firm CAMcap Markets in trade mark opposition proceedings brought by financial services company Capital Group. For trainees, this typically meant “tasks like IP searches” as well as “writing trade mark oppositions.” Sources held particular praise for the IP partner: “He will give anyone who is willing the opportunity to increase their responsibility.” On the real estate side, trainees had mostly dealt with Land Registry matters.

Trainee Life
With around 14 partners, seven associates and four trainees, Dorsey certainly sits on the tiener end of the scale in terms of office headcount. “On one hand you get the advantage of getting more responsibility and you also form bonds with people more quickly,” sources reflected. But with fewer colleagues, the downside is “there’s not always someone available to go to the pub on a Friday!” That’s not to say there’s no social side at Dorsey: sources flagged Christmas and summer parties as particular highlights, as well as occasional informal pub trips. “Alcohol isn’t the focus though,” they clarified. “We’ve also done things like bowling. The firm is progressive in the sense that they respect the fact people don’t always want to drink.” In terms of diversity and inclusion, interviewees felt “the firm is good at promoting diversity, but it would be good to see more in the London office.”

Interviewees also told us about their working hours. “The hours aren’t quite as rigorous as other US firms in London,” they reckoned. Most often, trainees found they’d start some time between 9am and 9.30am, and finish between 6.30pm and 7.30pm. Of course, “if you’ve got to work late, you work late, but if you don’t have to there’s no pressure to stay in the office until a certain time.” Seats like corporate had slightly less predictable hours, which meant “you could be leaving at 6pm or 11pm – it just depends on how busy we are.” Over the course of the training contract, trainees reckoned “it averages out to be quite favourable.” First-year trainees have a salary of £43,000, which is more in line with big UK firms than the mega bucks at US firms in London. This jumps to £79,000 on qualification.

Rather than a super formal process, qualification at Dorsey is more of a “discussion about whether you want to stay on and whether they want to keep you on.” The firm has to make a business case to keep trainees on post-qualification which is subject to approval from the US, though sources added they’ve “not heard of anyone not getting approved.” Due to the size of the litigation team, trainees reckoned “there’s potentially less scope to qualify there, but it’s not impossible.” In 2020, the firm retained one of two qualifiers.

Dorsey & BRITney?
“You’re not hearing American voices all the time,” trainees reiterated. “You deal with American colleagues now and then and tech support is American, but the deals we do are mostly European.”
Dorsey & Whitney (Europe) LLP

199 Bishopsgate, London EC2M 3UT
Telephone: 020 7031 3700
Email: cashman.michael@dorsey.com
Website: www.dorsey.com/careers
Twitter: @DorseyWhitney
Facebook: Dorsey & Whitney LLP
Linkedin: dorsey-&-whitney-llp

Partners: 14
Associates: 7
Total trainees: 2 x 1st year
2 x 2nd year
UK offices: London
Overseas offices: 19

Contacts
Graduate recruiter:
Michael Cashman
cashman.michael@dorsey.com
020 7031 3700
Training partner:
Michael Cashman
cashman.michael@dorsey.com
020 7031 3700

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 2
Applications pa: 250-300
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1 or other
Minimum UCAS points or A levels: N/A
Vacation scheme places pa: None

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: No fixed date
Training contract deadline, 2022: 31st July 2021
Vacation scheme applications open: N/A
Open day deadline: N/A

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: £43,000
Second-year salary: £49,000
Post-qualification salary: Currently £79,000 (under review)
Holiday entitlement: 25

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: No
Maintenance grant pa: £7,000

International and regional
Offices with training contracts: None
Overseas seats: N/A
Client secondments: N/A

Firm profile
Dorsey provides an integrated, proactive approach to its clients’ legal and business needs around the globe, with locations across the United States and in Canada, Europe and Asia. Industry leaders and successful companies turn to Dorsey for the edge they need to succeed in a highly competitive world. We serve clients in nearly all industries, but focus on six key industries — banking and financial institutions; development and infrastructure; energy and natural resources; food, beverage and agribusiness; healthcare; and technology — in which we have great depth and a history of achieving client success.

Main areas of work
Dorsey is a full-service law firm with an integrated network of practices that routinely work with one another. We have more than 60 practice areas including: benefits and compensation, corporate, finance and restructuring, health transactions and regulations, labour and employment, patent, public finance, real estate, regulatory affairs, tax, trusts and estates, trademark, and trial.

Training opportunities
The training contract comprises of four six month seats. Two seats are in Corporate/Capital Markets/Banking with one Litigation seat and one seat in Real Estate/IP.

Vacation scheme
We do not offer vacation scheme/work placements.

Other benefits
- Life Insurance
- Long Term Disability
- Private Health Care
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Season Ticket Loan

University law careers fairs 2020
TBD
After an impressive and “ambitious” run of expansion, DWF is hunkering down and immersing trainees in its commercial and insurance offering.

The Firm
Many law firms describe themselves as ambitious, but how many of them are ambitious enough to float on the stock market, acquire an additional law firm and buy a legal services firm, all in the space of a year? DWF was. Its £95 million IPO in March 2019 made it the largest UK-listed law firm and secured its status as a firm that’s “ambitious and a bit different.” Following this trend, DWF went on to make a jumbo £40 million acquisition of Spanish law firm Rousaud Costas Duran, which increased its headcount by over 400 and added offices in Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia. A year after completing its IPO, DWF acquired Mindcrest, a US-headquartered legal services company.

Despite these positive moves, it hasn’t been entirely smooth sailing. Not long after these developments, the world was plunged into a global pandemic, and unfortunately DWF was not immune to its impact. In cost-cutting measures, the firm shut up shop in Brussels and Singapore, and cut jobs in Dubai and Cologne. Here in the UK, trainees who were due to join the ranks in September 2020 have been deferred to February 2021. The firm’s 39 qualifiers were also hit with the news that the firm would be offering 25 NQ positions. “Our NQ list reflects the current market,” training principal Carl Graham tells us. “There’s less activity in corporate and transactional areas. It’s going to be difficult for people who are determined to enter the corporate world, but we continue to monitor the market, and business demand will adapt our trainee seats in line with this”. Going forward, Graham admits that “we’re not going to be as ambitious as we have in the past in terms of acquisitions, but perhaps that is just an inevitable part of our maturity as a public business.”

“A reputable firm, while not being too much of a corporate beast.”

Fortunately, the firm had already achieved many of its ambitions pre-pandemic – in addition to its ten bases spread across the UK, DWF has 26 overseas offices and additional connections with partner firms like LA-headquartered Wood Smith Henning & Berman. Hundreds of lawyers work across DWF’s UK bases, but trainees reckon the firm “strikes the right balance of having great clients and being a reputable firm, while not being too much of a corporate beast.”

Chambers UK awards the firm top national rankings for health and safety, volume claims insurance, personal injury, and product liability. The firm has several professional negligence rankings at a regional level, and scoops high accolades in the North West for its mid-market corporate/M&A, employment, IT, litigation and pensions work. The firm was founded in Manchester and this is where the largest number of trainees can be found today, closely followed by London. Leeds and Liverpool both took eight trainees, Birmingham took six, and Newcastle took two. The firm also hires for its Scottish offices.

Seat options: various commercial and insurance seats that vary by office and are subject to business need
Chambers UK rankings

- Banking & Finance
- Banking Litigation
- Competition/European Law
- Construction
- Consumer Finance
- Corporate/M&A
- Employment
- Energy & Natural Resources
- Health & Safety
- Information Technology
- Insurance
- Intellectual Property
- Litigation
- Local Government
- Pensions
- Personal Injury
- Police Law
- Product Liability
- Professional Negligence
- Real Estate
- Real Estate Litigation
- Restructuring/Insolvency
- Retail
- Sports Law
- Tax
- Transport
- Travel

The Seats

Seat allocation is largely the same across offices, in that trainees’ first seats are decided by the firm, and then for subsequent seats trainees can submit preferences from a list of available options. Seat options vary depending on the office. That said, sources added that core insurance and commercial seats are available in most offices. “In theory it’s possible to move between offices too,” one interviewee noted, “but I don’t know if that really happens in practice.”

DWF also offers numerous client secondment options. It’s actually a very common undertaking for trainees in London, which sources put down to the fact that “many key clients have their main offices in London.” There are also a couple of options in Manchester, and one source told us that a regional trainee had recently been placed with a client in London, with the firm putting them up in an apartment. Despite the number of international offices, the firm doesn’t currently offer overseas secondments – “hopefully there will be one in future,” trainees said. We’ll keep our fingers crossed.

“... defending or pursuing claims concerning fires, floods, and subsidence.”

Insurance is DWF’s biggest department. Depending on the office, trainees can sit in sub-groups including commercial insurance, professional indemnity, catastrophic personal injury and criminal defence. Commercial insurance matters included “defending or pursuing claims concerning fires, floods, and subsidence.” There were also “policy coverage issues” to contend with and small claims track matters, dealing with claims of £10,000 or less. DWF works with big insurance names like Aviva, NFU Mutual, and Tesco Insurance on claims including personal injury matters, fraud recovery, credit hire claims, and motor insurance matters. Although the experience was “a bit of a baptism of fire,” one source was pleased to report getting the chance to “manage my own caseloads.” After receiving the initial claim, this involved “drafting the acknowledgement of service, drafting instructions to counsel, and drafting defences.” Once the claim kicked off, trainees were tasked with “keeping the client updated, reviewing documents, and filing documents in court.”

With professional indemnity or catastrophic personal injury cases, the firm mainly works for insurance companies on the defending side. “If, say, there is an accident at work and the insurance company has to pay out, our main role is to try and get the best deal possible for the insurer,” trainees explained. In this seat they’d been able to “speak with witnesses, draft witness statements, and work with experts to review evidence.” Writing reports to insurers was also a big part of the seat.

In the corporate seat, sources came across “a lot of M&A – disposals, acquisitions, management buyouts” – as well as a growing amount of private equity work. A Manchester source recalled “working for a lot of private equity houses” during their seat. The team recently acted for Inflexion Private Equity on its investment into Grindeys Legal, a property and conveyancing services company. Elsewhere the team advised aerospace company Arlington on its £23 million acquisition of a thermostat business. Some had also worked on several restructurings. Typical tasks included drafting ancillary documents, due diligence and dealing with “day-to-day corporate queries.” In the Birmingham office, trainees can also do commercial work alongside corporate in the same seat. “It tends to be more ad hoc – I’ve drafted framework agreements for instance,” one source revealed. “It’s usually contract-based, like looking at contracts for clients.” More unusually, some offices also offer the opportunity for trainees to sit in the firm’s in-house legal team (known as Group Legal), where interviewees got stuck into “drafting lots of different contractual agreements like sponsorship agreements and legal service agreements.”

“... The claims were more high-value and complex than the small claim matters in insurance.”

Commercial litigation was quite a popular choice for trainees. Interviewees came across “a variety of commercial disputes for both claimants and defendants.” These could be typical breach of contract matters, shareholder disputes, contested probate matters, or copyright/IP disputes – just to name a few. In a particularly high-profile matter, the Manchester and Liverpool teams have been defending Morrisons in a civil claim brought by more than 8,000 employees and former employees of the supermarket whose confidential data was made public by an ex-employee. Elsewhere, the team acts for British Airways defending civil litigations stemming from the cyber attack and data theft it experienced in 2018. In this seat,
“the claims were more high-value and complex than the small claim matters in insurance,” one trainee reflected. This meant there were fewer opportunities to manage their own cases, but not zero: “I did have some cases to manage, but it wasn’t as large in volume.” Trainees still got experience drafting court documents, with the caveat that it’s “heavily supervised – it needs to be.” Sources liked being able to attend mediations and hearings as well, and appreciated “getting experience with alternative dispute resolution.” More admin-based tasks like bundling were inescapable here, and although interviewees admitted the seat generally had a slightly lower level of responsibility, sources still felt “it builds up as you get more comfortable with the subject.”

In the “busy” real estate team trainees encountered classic lease agreements and licences, development matters, and real estate finance work. Similar to insurance, trainees are often given their own matters which they’re “trusted to run with.” These often include lease renewals, general licences, rent deposits, and other “standard landlord/tenant real estate documents.” Sources also flagged opportunities to get involved in “more complex matters, supporting more senior fee earners.” One insider explained: “On these I would be assisting from a case management point of view.” Interviewees also noticed a lot of occupier side work “for big, household names,” estimating that these types of matters made up “about half the work of the team.” Examples include acting for adidas on the completion of its flagship store on Oxford Street in London, and advising Premier Inn on the £35 million development of two new hotels in Manchester and on the Isle of Man. The group also acted for Liverpool City Council in relation to its £17 million Park Life community sports development project.

Trainee Life
A common theme that came up with interviewees across all offices was the inclusive, “people-oriented” environment at DWF. “I always feel able to approach anyone with questions,” said one. Another source reiterated that “there’s a lot of partner contact – they’re not seen as scary people you can’t talk to. They’re willing to have a laugh.” This left most people with the impression that “everyone is welcoming, friendly and down to earth.” This atmosphere also meant regular socialising. “It’s not the kind of firm where you just go to work and go home,” they said. “There’s always stuff going on after work, whether it’s drinks, talent shows or pub quizzes.” Along with firmwide events like summer and Christmas parties, each office has its own social committee. All offices organise “a big social in the kitchen” called Friday Fridge once a month, except for Londoners, who organise a similar get-together on a Thursday (which is the new Friday, after all, and is called ‘Thirsty Thursdays’). Outside of drinks-related activities, Manchester sources recalled one team organising a hike and a “10 km hell run.” See you at the finish line.

Another big feature of the DWF culture is corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Sources highlighted the firm’s 5 STAR Futures scheme, which is “a work experience programme to help children from low socioeconomic backgrounds.” DWF also has its own foundation (DWF Foundation), which many sources had helped with fundraising efforts. Other CSR events included organising “a Christmas grotto at a women’s shelter,” and a “fashion show in partnership with Debenhams.” Trainees emphasised that “the firm is of the attitude that they expect you to be giving back,” and thankfully, “the firm gives you time to give back!”

On average, trainees estimated they worked a 40 to 50-hour week, though it would vary depending on the seat. Corporate, for instance, involved “working with companies from all over the world, which was a bit more gruelling in terms of hours.” In seats like commercial litigation, the hours more closely resembled 8.30am to 6.30pm, and most trainees agreed that the latest they’d stayed in the office was 8pm. Others added they’d “never felt the need to log in at the weekend,” and had enough time for their private lives away from the firm. Salaries vary by office, and our interviewees felt adequately compensated.

At the time of research, the qualification process had been delayed as a result of Covid-19 and a recent change in management. Usually, a jobs list will come out with vacancies across the firm. Upcoming qualifiers can list two choices (in order of preference), and then depending on the department, applicants may or may not be required to interview. Trainees are also free to “apply for jobs in other offices if there’s not a job you want in your home office and you’re willing to relocate.” DWF ended up retaining 24 of 39 qualifiers in 2020.

And finally...
The student becomes the master... To help trainees with career planning in the time of Covid-19, DWF is pairing trainees with partner mentors who had to navigate their early careers during the 2008 financial crash.
The True Picture

DWF Group Plc

1 Scott Place, 2 Hardman Street, Manchester M3 3AA

Tel: 0161 603 5000
Email: trainees@dwf.law
Website: www.dwfgroup.com/en/careers/graduate-recruitment
Twitter: @DWF_Graduate

Facebook: DWF Graduate Recruitment
Instagram: @dwf_graduate_recruitment

Firm profile
We are a global legal business, transforming legal services through our people for our clients. Led by managing partner and CEO Sir Nigel Knowles, we have 31 key locations and over 4,000 people delivering services and solutions that go beyond expectations. We became the first Main Market Premium Listed legal business on the London Stock Exchange in March 2019. We have received recognition for our work by the Financial Times who named us as one of Europe’s most innovative legal advisers, and we have a range of stand-alone consultative services, technology and products in addition to the traditional legal offering.

Main areas of work
We connect on a global scale, sharing our knowledge and technical expertise to identify and anticipate challenges. We are finding new solutions for clients within eight core sectors, including energy and industrials, financial services, insurance, public sector, real estate, retail, food and hospitality, technology and transport.

Training opportunities
At DWF, we use our values to help define and reinforce our culture, enabling us to recruit, retain and develop the highest quality people. This is reflected in our training contract, where our future trainees are made to feel part of the DWF team from the initial offer. Once within the business, our trainees get a high level of responsibility in terms of legal work, exposure to business development and CSR. Many of our trainees have the opportunity to undertake a client secondment. There are opportunities to learn from leading legal, technical and sector experts, and all our trainees are supported to go beyond their full potential with a range of training, practical day-to-day working and in-house learning and workshops.

Vacation scheme
The DWF vacation scheme takes place in June, dates of which depend on location. If you are in your penultimate or final year of a law degree, final year of a non-law degree or a graduate of any degree discipline then you are eligible to apply. Applications will be open from September until January, and you must make an online application via our application portal, Apply4Law. The business recruits the majority of its trainees through the vacation scheme, so it’s a good opportunity to get ahead and see why DWF is the right business for you. The two-week vacation scheme gives you the chance to work with partners, associates and trainees across two different practice groups. You’ll work on live legal matters and will be given responsibility right from the start. This is combined with a variety of internal workshops and presentations, helping you understand DWF as a business. You’ll also complete a group project that’s designed to aid your professional development and provide you with some of the essential skills of a successful commercial lawyer. As well as gaining fantastic experience, you’ll also be paid reasonably for your time on the vacation scheme.

Other benefits
Pension, healthcare, childcare vouchers, season ticket loan, life assurance, retail vouchers, employee assistance programme, subsidised staff restaurants in various locations.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Our open days are open to all first-year students, non-law students, graduates etc. Our application portal will open in September 2020, and you can apply via our website.

University law careers fairs 2020
Please see our website for the full list of law fairs that we are attending this year.
Eversheds Sutherland

The facts
Locations: London, Belfast, Birmingham, Cambridge, Cardiff, Ipswich, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Edinburgh
Overseas offices: 56
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 317/906/110
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; secondments
First-year salary: undisclosed
Qualification salary: undisclosed

Looking for a firm with a national presence, but don’t want to miss out on what’s going on in the rest of the world? Eversheds has offices all over the UK and internationally.

The Firm
“I’m pretty sure you’ll get this answer from most, but I was drawn to Eversheds for its international scope.” In one way or another, all of our interviewees flagged the firm’s international reach as a main reason for picking Eversheds. The firm was already a big deal before its 2017 merger with US-based Sutherland to form a mammoth global firm with nearly 70 offices across almost every continent. The combined Eversheds Sutherland now stands as one of the ten biggest law firms in the UK, and the top 50 in the world.

“I think one of the goals of the merger was to become a global giant firm, and I think they’ve achieved that,” sources said. “We’ve had quite a few office openings in the last few years and the merger has increased our revenue massively.” Most recently, the empire has expanded into Oulu (northern Finland) and boosted its presence in Chicago and San Diego via lateral hires. This is all excellent news for applicants who want an international reach, without having to sacrifice regional roots: Eversheds has 11 bases across the UK and hires trainees in Birmingham, Cambridge, Cardiff, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle and Nottingham. “It’s a big firm with a great reputation,” sources reflected. “I felt like there were lots of opportunities available to me here, and that I could maximise my potential.”

“Trainees can apply to seats in any office in the UK.” (At least one trainee per rotation goes to another office, so it’s not super common but possible). There’s a separate system to manage international seats and client secondments: “You apply almost as if you’re applying for a job – submit your CV, then there will be a response.”

Seat options: real estate; commercial; corporate; competition; banking; tax; restructuring; financial services; commercial disputes; financial services disputes and investigations; real estate litigation; construction litigation; pensions; and employment.

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Eversheds Sutherland

The firm’s departments (and seat options) cover a broad range of commercial practices, and its many Chambers UK rankings are about as varied as they come. Some of the highlights include UK-wide top billing for education, health and safety, investment funds, pensions litigation, Parliamentary law, public procurement, retail and rail franchising work; Eversheds also earns national leader status outside London for banking, construction, corporate, employment, IT, litigation, pensions, real estate, restructuring and planning. Trainees in the City said they were initially drawn to Eversheds by the prospect of “a global firm with down-to-earth people,” more frequently citing culture than work quality as a motivation for signing on here. The firm does score strong London rankings for mid-market M&A, pensions and real estate litigation.

Before each rotation, HR releases a list of which departments have room for a trainee. They all then rank three preferences that the firm takes into account when allocating who goes where. Not every department (and seat) is available in every office, but “trainees can apply to seats in any office in the UK.” (At least one trainee per rotation goes to another office, so it’s not super common but possible). There’s a separate system to manage international seats and client secondments: “You apply almost as if you’re applying for a job – submit your CV, then there will be a response.”

Seat options: real estate; commercial; corporate; competition; banking; tax; restructuring; financial services; commercial disputes; financial services disputes and investigations; real estate litigation; construction litigation; pensions; and employment.
usually be an interview with the client or office partner.” Secondments can be competitive, though sources noticed that among their cohort “everyone who wanted to do one has been able to.” Destinations included Paris, Dubai, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

The Seats
Each office has a slightly different corporate specialism, but the department as a whole handles M&A, capital markets, private equity and energy deals. Birmingham sources filled their time “primarily with typical M&A transactions and multi-jurisdictional reorganisations,” while some London sources were “advising energy companies on buying and selling of rivals in their industry.” Eversheds recently acted for energy company CGN in its $750 million acquisition of nine subsidiaries that came with a portfolio of solar and wind power plants in Brazil. Other clients include Shell, Nestlé, American Express and Inflexion Private Equity. Interviewees liked that “corporate sits in the middle of almost every team in the firm, so you’re able to learn massively and get insight into so many areas.”

If you’d like your property experience to come with contentious elements, the real estate litigation team is the place to go. Sources here had come across rent review cases, as well as clashes born out of the buying and selling of properties. In Birmingham, the team worked on behalf of The Haemophilia Society as part of the Infected Blood Inquiry. Sources here had come across rent review, and ordering and indexing property deeds.

“Corporate sits in the middle of almost every team in the firm, so you’re able to learn massively and get insight into so many areas.”

In their real estate seat, trainees came across a healthy mix of big deals and lower-value projects where they could take the reins. “From the off I was drafting and negotiating leases off my own back,” one happily recalled. Smaller issues could be “retail matters, where a new tenant was going into a shopping centre,” whereas larger ones might involve “assisting on major developments by reviewing agreements to lease.” On bigger portfolio deals, the team often works with “real estate investment funds or banks who own property or mortgages of property as investments.” Microsoft, Next, DFS and Sports Direct have all called on the firm’s real estate expertise. Recent deals include the £120 million sale of Morrisons’ store in Camden and the whopper £1.45 billion sale of Network Rail’s 5,200 property commercial estate to Blackstone and Telereal Trillium. On matters great and small, trainees were happy to “take client calls to discuss necessary changes to documents.” Other common responsibilities in a real estate seat include drafting licences, land and title review, and ordering and indexing property deeds.

“Corporate sits in the middle of almost every team in the firm, so you’re able to learn massively and get insight into so many areas.”

Commercial dispute resolution is another contentious option for trainees. Interviewees dabbled in a broad range of disputes, from classic breaches of contract and international arbitration to more niche product liability claims. Eversheds has represented Specsavers, John Lewis and Rolls-Royce on the litigation battlefield: in one of its largest recent cases, the firm defended the National Iranian Oil Company during $15 billion arbitration proceedings and ‘satellite’ litigation coming out of it. Closer to home, the team is acting on behalf of The Haemophilia Society as part of the Infected Blood Inquiry. Sources
found themselves with “a large volume of work” for online retailers, “responding to claims by individuals who weren’t satisfied with the service they received.” On bigger cases, trainees draft advice notes, complete legal research and dive into classic bundling and disclosure review. Some also got to help draft witness statements and pre-action letters to opposing counsel. A regional source recalled the highlight of their seat as “visiting the Court of Appeal in London for a larger case and collaborating closely with the instructed barrister.”

Trainees who did a seat in employment found they split their time pretty evenly between litigious and non-contentious projects. The Cambridge squad recently advised Urban Outfitters UK on relocating its distribution centre from Rushon to Peterborough, affecting around 300 employees and with £4 million in potential liability; over in Birmingham, Eversheds was on call for Ideal Standard UK during the closure of their bath manufacturing site in Hull, resulting in the loss of nearly 100 jobs. The contentious side of the practice gave trainees the chance to assist on tribunal claims and other litigation by “reviewing bundles and evidence, then drafting statements of defence.” Interviewees were often charged with liaising with chambers to instruct barristers too. For most, at least half of the seat was advisory in nature: “We’ve been advising clients on issues stemming from Covid-19, as well as on other employment-related questions including data protection issues.” Our sources drafted non-disclosure agreements, terms and conditions of employment and other policies.

“I feel I’ve got experience of what it’s like to work in a large commercial firm, even from a regional office.”

Trainee Life

Eversheds may have offices all over the UK, but trainees in most locations described a firmwide “very hard-working culture. Everyone wants to be the best and provide great service to the firm’s clients, but we’re well supported throughout the training contract by both supervisors and other partners on the team.” Reports from outside London were especially positive, as trainees reckoned they’d got the Hannah Montana best of both worlds: “I feel I’ve got experience of what it’s like to work in a large commercial firm, even from a regional office. It’s like we’re getting the City experience.” Sources found it “surprising how interconnected everyone is.” and commented that even in larger offices like London and Birmingham “it feels like a smaller firm than it actually is, because everyone is friendly and chatty.” Some admitted the culture can “differ from department to department” but emphasised that most are “interested in getting junior members of the team involved.”

Our sources were especially keen to get involved in pro bono. Trainees in the capital spent time at the Battersea Legal Advice Clinic, “helping whoever shows up on the day with their respective legal issues.” Examples range from customers trying to get a refund from a retailer, to individual potential employment disputes. Further north, Leeds trainees sought international pro bono including helping the Amicus organisation reviewing death row cases in the UK. On the volunteering front, Birmingham sources “visited colleges to give legal presentations,” while Cardiff trainees helped at “CV workshops for students from less privileged backgrounds.”

Looking internally, Eversheds also has initiatives to broaden its recruitment scope and offer support for diverse employees. Five firmwide D&I networks have representatives in each office. Interviewees highlighted Verve (the race and ethnicity network) and Perspective (LGBTQ+) as particularly active groups, “but all the committees run events throughout the year – everyone at the firm is invited and encouraged to attend.” Sources were also pleased to see “a surprising number of senior women” in their departments: “The representation has been increasing over time.” Eversheds aimed to have a minimum 30% female partnership by 2020 – at the time of our research it had reached 28.7%, so the firm was very close to its target.

“I’ve rarely had to work on the weekend. Over two years I’ve given up about three weekends for work, which is not bad at all.”

Reviewing their time at Eversheds, second-years noted that some seats come with more reasonable hours than others. Transactional departments tend to be more demanding, corporate especially: “When we were close to the exchange, it involved some 14 to 16-hour days.” Former corporate trainees were keen to add that when this happened, it was always “a team effort and it’s not like you have to stay while everyone else is in bed! If I have to work for longer, the associates and partners do too.” Litigation seats generally had “more humane hours,” with the occasional late night if a case went to court. All things considered, most trainees agreed they had enough time for their private lives away from the firm. “I’ve rarely had to work on the weekend,” one noted. “Over two years I’ve given up about three weekends for work, which is not bad at all.”

The firm usually releases a list of available NQ positions around Easter; second-years apply with a CV, cover letter and reviews from each seat. It’s then up to each team to choose if it wants to interview candidates for jobs (potentially including a case study or practice-specific skills-based questions). Covid-19 disrupted business as usual, delaying the internal recruitment process. “It’s been a very uncertain time, but the firm says they want to make sure as many of us as possible receive jobs,” trainees told us in the midst of the confusion. The pandemic also prompted Eversheds to introduce a ‘flexi-working scheme’ where
lawyers and business support staff could opt to reduce their hours to 80% for 80% pay. The firm ended up retaining 38 of 43 qualifiers on fixed-term contracts in 2020.

Making money moves?

Eversheds trainee and NQ salaries vary sizeably by office. Though the pay packet is highest in London, sources in the City were the most likely to suggest their future career moves may be in search of a higher salary.
Firm profile
Eversheds Sutherland is one of the world’s largest full-service law firms operating as one team, across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and North America. Recognised as the leading innovators in the legal sector, we provide new legal and business solutions to meet the needs of our clients. Eversheds Sutherland is about consistently delivering great service whenever our clients need it. We are committed to finding and developing talented legal graduates interested in becoming a solicitor. Our people are valued for their drive and legal expertise but also for their business advice too. We develop the same qualities in our trainees. With a structured solicitor training programme, our legal training contracts and graduate jobs allow you to establish the skills you need to achieve your aspirations.

The training programme allows you to focus your technical skills in each of the various practice groups as you rotate through four six-month seats. You will also take part in a full programme of personal and commercial development skills training too, including finance and business, communication, presenting, business writing, client care, professional standards and advocacy. From trainee to fully qualified solicitor, Eversheds Sutherland offer an environment for a highly rewarding legal career with unbounded opportunities for progression.

Main areas of work
Core work: Company commercial, litigation and dispute management, real estate and human resources (employment and pensions).

Training opportunities
Our firm attracts great people and we’ve created an environment where they can achieve great things. So it will come as no surprise that Eversheds Sutherland is home to some of the most innovative and inspiring lawyers in the industry — or that we look for trainees with the ambition and enterprise to keep us ahead of the competition in the future.

True, you will need a strong academic background and proven ability to apply your intellect to complex problems. But that’s just the start. Our trainees need to be multi-faceted people who combine extreme professionalism with outstanding expertise, genuine approachability and real personality.

Vacation placements
We run two-week vacation placement schemes in our office. Placements offer you a great opportunity to get a feel for what Eversheds Sutherland is all about, and most of our vacation students are amazed at the variety and level of work they can get involved in.

You will be paid £377 a week (London) or £326 a week (regions). We welcome applications from penultimate year law undergraduates, final year non-law graduates as well as candidates who have already graduated or taken different career paths.

Selected candidates will be shortlisted to video interview. If you pass this interview you will then be invited to a selection day. If you do well on the vacation scheme, you may be offered a training contract.

Other benefits
Life assurance, private healthcare, cycle to work schemes, gym, restaurant, gourmet card, season ticket loan, employee assistance programme.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Open days run during autumn term (open to all) and will be advertised online from September.

University law careers fairs 2020
University of York, University of Nottingham, Warwick University, LSE, University of Leeds, Cardiff University, Bristol University, University of Birmingham, Durham University, UEA, Newcastle University, UCL, KCL, University of Cambridge, Oxford, University of Manchester, Queen Mary’s, London, Northumbria, the Legal Cheek.
Farrer & Co LLP

The facts

Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 80/214/20
Seats: 6x4 months
First-year salary: £39,000
Qualification salary: £65,000

If you’re judging firms by the calibre of their clients, Farrer is as good as it gets, and it has a broader practice than you might expect.

The Firm

To the casual observer, Farrer & Co’s lodgings in a Grade II listed mansion in Lincoln’s Inn—and its long-established ties with high society—may lead to certain... assumptions. But trainees were clear that any description of Farrer as old-fashioned “would be a mischaracterisation. The firm’s historic roots may be in private client work, and to some extent Farrer has been built around that, but today we are very much a broad church with lots of different departments and teams.”

To be clear, the firm remains a go-to service for the world’s uber-wealthy and you can still find oligarchs, prestigious institutions like Eton, and royal family members on its books, but there’s more to Farrer than posh people with bags of cash. Trainees admitted that “the headline grabbers are always going to be those high net worth individuals,” but a training contract here also offers “opportunities to engage with universities, galleries, charities, museums and sports institutions.” Sources who’d worked in the firm’s corporate and commercial arm were eager to point out that “Farrer has branched out considerably from the firm’s historic core client base. We’ve even recently held an entrepreneurs’ week, targeting individuals and small businesses.” Ultimately, it was the sheer breadth of work on offer at Farrer that caught the eye of many of our most recent round of interviewees.

“The Firm has branched out considerably from the firm’s historic core client base.”

If you need evidence of the firm’s breadth of expertise, head to chambers.com for a full breakdown of their rankings. You’ll find the predictable top awards for private wealth, private wealth disputes, family, and high-value residential property from Chambers High Net Worth, but head to Chambers UK for recognition of Farrer’s agriculture, real estate, employment, family, and lower mid-market corporate practices in London. On a national scale the firm’s expertise in art and cultural property, education, charities, and publishing also earns top rankings. Trainees get the chance to see plenty of Farrer before qualifying: the training contract is one of the rare six-seaters.

The Seats

After their randomly allocated first department, trainees rotate through one seat each from commercial (employment, financial services, corporate, banking, charities or IP); private client (tax, innovation or straight private client); property (residential, rural or commercial); and contentious (disputes, family or reputation management). They also get a ‘top seat’ option that they get full say over. Sources were glad to get a broader experience than the four-seat model could offer but acknowledged that more frequent rotations “can be a bit of a rollercoaster and sometimes it does feel like starting a new job every four months. Meeting lots of people in different departments is exciting, but it can also be exhausting and by the fifth seat you’re excited to get settled down.”

Disputes at Farrer include property, commercial and contentious trusts, as well as more specialist areas such as international child abduction and a dedicated reputation management team. “As a junior you tend to remain a generalist for your first four to five years before specialising,” sources pointed out. One newbie reminisced: “In my first few days in the seat I was asked to go away and do some research for an hour, and then explain it immediately to a Russian oligarch over the phone — it was pretty terrifying!” Another confirmed that “you end up working for some bi-
In **commercial**, trainees see a crossroads between the activities of the super-rich and the companies they interact with. “**The scope of the department is super wide-ranging,**” one trainee emphasised, adding that “you see a lot of interesting clients including universities, galleries and cultural organisations.” The department’s eclectic roster includes the likes of the Natural History Museum, the National Gallery, Cycling UK and the Henley Royal Regatta. Farrer advises on a range of data, IP, trademark and compliance issues; “**There’s a lot of research to be done on the advisory side of things,**” sources highlighted. “If a client comes to us with a particular issue, the trainee is typically tasked with going back to the black-letter law to evaluate our position and put together a preliminary note of advice for the client, which the supervisor reviews.” Insiders working more on the data protection side told us that the firm “does a lot of data subject access requests. For trainees that means plenty of due diligence and going through emails, making redactions where necessary.”

**“You end up working for some bizarre people... it hasn’t been super aggressive litigation, but more like a game of chess.”**

Trainees also detailed working on “**art litigation for big auction houses,**” throwing up opportunities to attend meetings, conduct research and draft letters to court and opposing counsel. “**It can genuinely feel like something from the film Knives Out,**” one trainee joked – that doesn’t mean you get to work opposite Daniel Craig. Sorry. Farrer also does commercial work for varied clients including the British Airline Pilots Association and the Challenge Network. The firm advised Heartwood Wealth Management during the Ingenious film finance multiparty claim involving over 300 claimants with allegations spanning breach of duty, misrepresentation, potential negligence and breach of contract.

“**The clients are similar to what you’d find in family, but the work is entirely different**” in Farrer’s **private client** department. Most cases fall under the umbrella of trusts, estates and succession planning for international entrepreneurs with interests in countries across the world. “**Day to day, you have a lot of meetings,**” trainees told us; they otherwise kept their schedule busy drafting wills, conducting research into trusts, and conducting house visits in the form of estate valuations. One source described things bluntly: “**Clients are often rich, middle-aged people who have suddenly realised they will eventually die. Because of the calibre of the department, it’s always the partner mediating the relationship with the client.**” Things can get complex – recent cases have included providing advice to the trustees of a £1.4 billion landed estate on complex matters of trust law; and assisting an uber-wealthy Irish family with their wills and cross-border succession planning while considering English, Irish, French and Finnish law issues.

“**In your second year you can take a much bigger role running smaller transactions and acting as the contact for the client.**

Farrer’s **corporate** department is “**relatively small but growing quickly,**” sources explained. “It’s a partner-heavy group” operating in the lower mid-market, “**mainly working with smaller private companies on M&A.**” The firm recently advised the Open University on the £50 million sale of a 50% stake in its online degree platform to Australian recruitment business SEEK; and the Japan House London Trust on a restructuring involving the acquisition of the company operating London’s Japan House. “**You end up working with lawyers from across many departments,**” interviewees told us. “I’ve spoken to colleagues in the IP, tax and private client teams, trying to solve an issue from various perspectives. Companies we work with often have structures which are interlinked with a client’s trust.” Trainees who arrive here early in their training contract tend to handle more administrative tasks, but “in your second year you can take a much bigger role running smaller transactions and acting as the contact for the client.”

The **residential property** team is distinct in “**having a lot of partners who aren’t homegrown Farrer lawyers. There are a lot of laterals from big City firms, and as a result there’s a bit of a different personality and work drive in this department.**” Our interviewees flagged its reputation for a “**higher-hours culture,**” but those with experience in the department were keen to dispel any rumours. “**The quality of the supervision is great, and you’re given your own files to run as a trainee which is great,**” one told us. “At the moment I’m handling six different sale and purchases, a
couple of refinancings and licences. There’s supervision, of course, but I’m the one expected to know everything that’s going on.” The department works for clients including the Duchy of Cornwall and large landowners with an eye for future residential conversions. Just try not to get house envy: “I haven’t been able to visit any yet, but some of them look ridiculous in the photos.”

Trainee Life
The firm may represent clients with aristocratic and establishment ties, but sources emphasised that Farrer itself is “a meritocratic environment with responsibility available for those who can prove themselves.” Many felt that the firm is “making considerable efforts to encourage diverse candidates to apply,” including via outreach programmes to state schools in London. “I went to a state school and have never once felt unwelcome,” one source confided to us. “Our personal backgrounds have never been mentioned.” Farrer’s low representation of ethnic minorities at the partnership level shows work needs to be done to boost their diversity credentials, but the firm is far above the national average when it comes to gender diversity: 72% of associates and 43% of partners are women.

“Most days I finish by 6pm...”

“In my intake, almost all of us had done something different to law before coming to the firm,” an interviewee observed. “None of us came straight from university, so I feel we’d had more time to develop our interests.” Perhaps it was that extra life experience that helped “easy conversation” with partners at Farrer. Another trainee shared: “I’ve had some long and very casual conversations with individuals in the firm, chatting nonsense before realising they’re senior partners!” They clarified that “of course, you have some old-school partners who expect deference from trainees, but most are very down-to-earth kind of people who are willing to chat and grab a beer.”

Thanks to a vibrant social calendar, there are many opportunities to do just that. Highlights include the firm’s Christmas party, “usually held at a fancy hotel,” and a firm-wide summer BBQ “just in front of the building.” Farrer’s beautiful Lincoln’s Inn surroundings make it quite the occasion. When they’re not sharing a bite or a beverage, trainees get ample contact with senior lawyers during work hours – they get a partner supervisor for each of their seats as well as a partner mentor and another partner responsible for the whole trainee cohort.

Though some seats are more demanding than others – private clients tend to be less likely than businesses and commercial clients to need work done late into the night – our interviewees agreed “the hours here are less severe than at your typical corporate outfit in the City. There’s no expectation to stay longer than needed.” One suggested a “bad day” would be working from 8.30pm until 7pm, which they found themselves doing “about once a fortnight. Most days I finish by 6pm.” Another source weighed in: “I’ve had maybe two busy periods where I’ve stayed until 9 or 10pm every day for a week, and once until 1am. However, they were very specific situations and there’s never a situation where you finish one huge project and you’re straight onto the next one.” Most happily of all, not one trainee had pulled an all-nighter or needed to work weekends. “There are sometimes one or two days a week where I’ll eat at my desk, but on most days I get the chance to go out for lunch,” one source said. “It doesn’t feel like you’re chained to your desk here – people tend to have a coffee break at 11am and 4pm too.”

The lack of late nights was one reason why trainees wanted to stick with Farrer long-term. The firm’s qualifying process is, by industry standards, relatively informal. “There are no interviews or tests,” sources explained. “We have a relaxed series of chats with the training partner, who tells us what jobs are available and asks where we are interested in qualifying. What can cause anxiety is that we have no real control over the process beyond that.” Most were consoled by historically strong retention rates, and in 2020 the firm retained nine of its ten qualifiers.

From tweed blazer to trailblazer
The London firms with women as managing partners come top for retaining diverse lawyers. Charity lawyer Anne-Marie Piper took over as the firm’s first female senior partner in 2017. Women now make up 43% of partners and 72% of associates; Farrer power is the model to follow.
Farrer & Co LLP

66 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London WC2A 3LH
Tel: 020 3375 7000  Fax: 020 3375 7001
Email: graduaterecruitment@farrer.co.uk
Website: www.farrer.co.uk

Firm profile
Farrer & Co is synonymous with the highest quality legal advice and service. We advise individuals, families, businesses, financial services, educational and not-for-profit organisations on every aspect of the law, wherever the need arises.

Our clients present us with complex and varied challenges. Whether that’s a complicated family trust issue, a multinational corporate transaction, or an emerging threat to their reputation, they need clear thinkers who can advise on the best solutions, fast thinkers when speed is of the essence and agile thinkers who can produce a fresh approach to get the job done.

Main areas of work
We provide a range of specialist, high-quality legal services to businesses, charities and institutions, private individuals and families. Our clients include banks, major businesses and media groups, as well as schools, charities, high net worth entrepreneurs and landed estates. We work to provide a seamless and integrated legal service for every client. Our aim is to solve the difficult issues that matter to its clients, whether those are complex transactional, reputational, regulatory, constitutional or personal issues, or a combination of them. We pride ourselves not only on our technical ability and commercial acumen, but on our ability to provide practical, versatile and cost-effective solutions to our clients’ legal requirements. Our clients operate across the world, with activities and assets in multiple jurisdictions. As a result, the majority of our work has an international element, giving our lawyers worldwide experience in their specialist areas.

Training opportunities
Our training programme involves each trainee in the widest range of cases, clients and issues possible in a single law firm, taking full advantage of the extensive array of practice areas at Farrer & Co by offering six seats, rather than the usual four. This provides a broad foundation of knowledge and experience and the opportunity to make an informed choice about the area of law in which to specialise. A high degree of involvement is encouraged under the direct supervision of associates and partners. Trainees attend an induction programme and regular internal seminars. The training partner reviews trainees’ progress at the end of each seat and extensive feedback is given. We have a very friendly atmosphere and host regular sporting and social events.

Vacation scheme
We have three vacation schemes: one at Easter for two weeks and two summer schemes for two weeks each. Paid £300 per week. Around half of our trainees are recruited through our vacation scheme.

Other benefits
Flexible benefits scheme, sporting teams/clubs, season ticket loan, 25 days’ holiday, group income protection, group life assurance, company doctor, subsidised gym membership, subsidised yoga/pilates, pension scheme, private medical insurance after three months, well-person checks.

Open days and first-year opportunities
100 of the best vacation scheme applicants are invited to one of three open days held in late February/early March each year.
Fladgate LLP

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 84/81/13
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £38,000
Qualification salary: £64,000

Full-service Fladgate offers a “rounded training contract with comfort and familiarity between trainees and partners.” It’s also launched a shiny new vacation scheme...

The Firm
Covent Garden shops and restaurants come and go, but there’s one local institution on Great Queen Street that has stood the test of time. Fladgate’s knack for evolving along with its milieu and client base has kept it thriving for 260 years. In the early years, the firm helped make the UK the world leader in railway construction and was responsible for the creation of corporations like The Savoy Group. The firm’s advised a whole history textbook’s worth of famous names including Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and even Abraham Lincoln. In the 21st century the firm has maintained “interesting clients” on its books, but many of those are now of a more “entrepreneurial” nature.

Trainee recruitment partner Andrew Bessemer Clark summarises Fladgate’s appeal: “We also see ourselves as being attractive to both entrepreneurial clients as well as institutional clients. We have that real historic quality of service, strength and depth that allows us to act successfully for institutional clients, and so we feel we straddle quite a good place in the market.” Prior to the 1980s, the firm’s focus remained on property and private client law, but it’s since expanded its reach. Chambers UK now ranks the firm top in London for lower mid-market corporate/M&A, also awarding it strong scores for banking and finance, mid-market real estate, and real estate litigation.

“The breadth of opportunities wasn’t lost on potential trainees, many of whom arrived at the firm’s doors with an open mind. “I wasn’t sure where I wanted to eventually qualify,” one such source noted. “Fladgate offered a good chance of getting seats in multiple core practice areas of corporate, real estate and litigation.” Others were keen to be part of the “small intake of trainees,” seeing this as a potential path to securing “greater responsibility” early in their career. Finally, Fladgate’s famed ‘partner-led’ approach was another draw for many – “it meant getting the opportunity to work with partners directly from an early stage.”

In 2020 the firm launched its first vacation scheme. Unfortunately the Covid-19 pandemic meant this largely took place remotely, but the programme was still successful according to Bessemer Clark: “It involved one day in the office so that we could meet them in person and assess them.” He recalls meeting “incredibly impressive” candidates through the scheme, noting that the new regime would make for great experience for potential trainees while also benefiting the firm: “It allows us to be confident as and when we offer training contracts. Going forward, we will focus on hiring from the vacation scheme – we feel it gives a more rounded understanding of their ability and their suitability and gives them a clear understanding of what it is like to work here.”

The Seats
Fladgate likes trainees to do at least two seats across the firm’s core areas: litigation; corporate; property; and funds, finance and regulatory. This doesn’t mean three mandatory seats and just one choice: employment; private client; and commercial, sports and IP count as corporate options, for example. “I really enjoyed the range of

Seat options: corporate; dispute resolution; real estate; funds, finance & regulatory; commercial, sports & intellectual property; construction; real estate litigation; private client; employment
work that each seat brought me,” a happy interviewee declared. The firm allocates trainees their first seat; subsequent seats are then decided through meetings with HR.

Dispute resolution was a popular seat with our 2020 interviewees. Fladgate’s team punches above its weight, often sparring with larger City and even magic circle firms. Clients include both companies and individuals who’ve got into hot water: the firm recently represented Anthony Wollenberg, the CEO of a large casino, in litigation brought by the casino’s former chairman and majority shareholder alleging he was the victim of a corporate raid and had been defrauded of shares valued at over £30 million. Cases often come with international elements, such as defending German company Freudenberg in a £10 million clash over components for high-end Jaguar Land Rover models. Trainees in this seat were impressed with the training available, seeing their practice area knowledge grow nicely over time. “I've had a really good experience and got to work very closely with the partners throughout my disputes seat,” one recalled. The level of client interaction was slightly less compared with other seats, but this is common of dispute resolution; trainees can instead expect to do research and draft documents like claim letters.

“There was a really good team spirit that made all the difference.”

The firm’s commercial, sports and IP practice revolves around a smorgasbord of commercial contracts: supply of goods agreements, licences, management contracts, distribution and purchasing contracts… you get the picture. The practice also includes commercial advisory work: the team advised book distributor The Book Service (a subsidiary of Penguin Random House) on the restructur-ing of its payment and credit terms as part of the supply agreements with relevant bookshop chains to assist with cashflow issues, while making sure TBS could recover funds in the event of an insolvency situation. Fladgate also advises on contracts drawn up between companies and public sector bodies, recently acting for the Music Walk of Fame operators on the necessary planning and commercial agreements with Camden Council and TfL, preparing for what should be a popular tourist attraction. “I absolutely loved my time in CSI!,” an interviewee told us. “The team were fantastic and supported me throughout my seat.” This department is a better bet if it’s client contact you’re looking for.

Trainees in corporate likewise found they’d enjoyed an “excellent level of client contact in the department” as well as “lots of time with partners – they are very willing to give you interesting duties and explain matters and concepts.” The mid-market practice draws clients from real estate, technology and energy backgrounds including Red Tiger Gaming and Black Sheep Coffee. Proving they don’t only advise corporations with animal names, the team acted for the Ocado Group on the sale of its entire issued share capital in Marie Claire Beauty to Next for £8 million. Interviewees warned us that corporate comes with longer hours than other Fladgate departments. “I worked some heavy hours for a while,” one such source confirmed. “There was a really good team spirit that made all the difference.” They and others were also pleased to receive “quite a lot of responsibility on some decent-sized deals.”

“There is no one in the firm I would be scared to approach.”

A key part of Fladgate’s history, the real estate team continues to generate around 32.3% of the firm’s overall revenue. In this seat you’ll find mostly mid-market property deals, as well as some real estate advisory matters. The seat wasn’t a first choice for many among the recent cohort, and those we surveyed went on to tell us the work was less interesting than in other departments – but they were impressed by the extent to which they received client and partner interaction. Fladgate’s recent projects include advising fund manager Equitix on the £47 million acquisition of the freehold of Crickhowell House in Cardiff, acting as the administrative offices of the Welsh Assembly; and acting for magic circle barrister chambers Blackstone on an extensive redevelopment deal with Middle Temple.

Trainee Life

When quizzed about the distinctive elements of Fladgate’s culture, trainees pointed to a “really strong interest in who trainees are and what we want to achieve from people across different levels of seniority.” Terrifying partners are clearly not welcome here, as one source told us: “There is no one in the firm I would be scared to approach.” Others were surprised to find that “there is a high level of camaraderie, which can sometimes be hard to find in the corporate world,” and credited Fladgate with crafting a “friendly and relaxed” atmosphere.

For the most part, trainee hours were pretty reasonable. “Although there were some unsociable hours in my funds seat, this was the exception rather than the norm,” one recalled. Corporate was another seat with slightly heavier hours, while sources found dispute resolution and CSI II were more manageable. Respondents averaged a 40-hour working week, which you’ll struggle to find at many larger outfits.
The firm has recently reaffirmed its commitment to the mental health of lawyers and staff, according to our sources. Describing a “real effort to encourage openness,” they noted that alongside formal initiatives (like a panel event and the contribution from an external consultant)” partners have been open about their own struggles, making it possible for us to discuss similar issues.” There’s an active diversity and inclusion committee that’s “hosted some impressive lunchtime seminars with speakers from BAME and LGBTQ+ backgrounds.” Sources felt “the firm is lacking in diversity but does seem to have a genuine commitment to changing that.”

Trainees chat to HR about their preferred department to qualify into before a jobs list is released; they can apply for more than one, but all require an interview. At the time of our calls, Fladgate confirmed that it had retained four out of six qualifiers, but that more may potentially be kept on too.

Crystal ballin’

For more info on Fladgate’s future, see our full interview with training principal Andrew Bessemer Clark.
Fladgate LLP

16 Great Queen Street, London WC2B 5DG
Tel: 020 3036 7000  Fax: 020 3036 7600
Email: trainees@fladgate.com
Website: www.fladgate.com/graduate-careers/
Twitter: @FladgateGrads
Facebook: fladgategraduates
LinkedIn: fladgate-llp

Firm profile
Few firms can compete with us in our chosen space – delivering highly personal service for entrepreneurial, ambitious and fast moving clients with complex needs that are often international.

Our strategy is to combine brilliant teamwork and a truly personal service; connectivity and understanding across our clients’ worlds; and high quality specialist expertise and products that meet their needs.

For a relatively small firm to deliver the quality of work that we do, the range of expertise that we have and the depth of our relationships with clients are contributing factors that set us apart from our competitors.

Main areas of work
We have a broad skills base covering a wide spectrum of legal services arranged into four main offerings:

Corporate: including capital markets, M&A, tax, private capital, restructuring and employment.

Dispute Resolution: which includes regulatory, corporate governance and investigations, banking and financial services litigation, international commercial arbitration, insurance, contentious trusts and family, intellectual property, civil fraud and asset protection.

Funds, Finance and Regulatory: including investment funds, private equity, fund managers, asset and investment managers, promoters, sponsors and investors.

Private Wealth: including contentious trusts, estate and trust administration, family, international private wealth, immigration, and trusts and tax planning.

Training opportunities
Typically, you will complete four six-month seats. Each seat will bring you into contact with new clients and colleagues, and you can expect to gain real hands-on experience of a variety of deals and projects, both large and small. In each seat you will work alongside senior lawyers who will supervise your development and ensure you are involved in challenging and interesting work.

In addition to on-the-job training, each department has a comprehensive training schedule of seminars and workshops covering a range of legal and skills training. The firm has a modern culture and an open-door policy where trainees are given early responsibility and encouraged to achieve their full potential.

Seat options include: Corporate; Dispute Resolution; Real Estate; Funds, Finance & Regulatory; Commercial, Sports & IP, Construction, and Real Estate Litigation.

Vacation scheme
Fladgate recruit trainees solely through the vacation scheme which was launched in 2020. Fladgate holds four one-week vacation scheme placements across June/July.

The vacation scheme provides graduate students – our potential future trainees – an opportunity to gain hands-on experience and a good understanding of life as a Fladgate trainee. Participants will be assigned a supervisor, usually an associate, as well as a trainee buddy. Vac schemers will have the opportunity to attend departmental introductions, technical presentations and Q&A sessions with various partners, senior associates and experts at the firm. Alongside these sessions, vac schemers will be engaged in discrete tasks, group work, BD activities and networking and social sessions, providing them with an insight into our practice areas and the trainee role within them.

Other benefits
26 days’ holiday, new business bonus, fee-earner bonus, recruitment bonus, life assurance, YuLife wellbeing app access, group income protection, private medical insurance, employee assistance programme, online GP service, contributory pension, season ticket loan, gym membership loan, cycle2work, private dental, eye test vouchers and weekly personal training/yoga sessions.
South West stalwart Foot Anstey gives trainees a breadth of experience “without having to go to London.”

The Firm
Don’t really fancy working with all the stress-heads in the capital? Ever wondered why you don’t live near the beach? With offices in Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Taunton, Truro, and Southampton, Foot Anstey’s lawyers get to live this life. “The fact that it’s a regional law firm outside of London, but still offers that high-quality work” was a big factor drawing trainees from all over the country (however, there is an office in London too). Its profile in the South West proves it’s “one of the big regional players”: in particular, Chambers UK acknowledges the firm’s regional expertise in areas including employment, tax, litigation, banking & finance, real estate, and construction. Sources also flagged “the breadth of experience that the firm offers” as another attractive draw, in particular highlighting the firm’s Islamic finance team as “quite niche for the South West.”

“I wanted to get that range of experience of areas before deciding where to qualify.”

The Seats
Foot Anstey trainees will usually do six seats of four months each. “It was another one of the factors that drew me to the firm – I wanted to get that range of experience of areas before deciding where to qualify,” one source explained. First years will submit three ranked preferences for each of their first two seats from a list they receive prior to starting their training contracts. The process is then repeated at the end of the second seat for seats three to five. The final seat will usually be a repeat of the seat in which the trainee wishes to qualify. At the time of research, most sources were located in either Bristol or Exeter: “We have a one-firm policy – the firm encourages us to move about between different offices, though they try and keep you in the same place for at least eight months.” Most of the seats were in Bristol, Exeter or Plymouth, though seats in Truro and Southampton have been available in the past.

In the commercial seat, trainees generally found they were “acting for clients in assisting their general counsels or in-house legal teams on all sorts of advisory pieces, as well as commercial due diligence and contract reviews.” The team advises Welcome Break on various business contracts – most recently on new head office IT provisions – and also provides GC services for the Royal Shakespeare Company including advice on events contracts, music licensing and new marketing initiatives. Sources also noted that within commercial the firm has a number of specialisms such as data protection, IP and financial services. Trainees got regularly involved in supply and service agreements, which included “lots of client meetings” as well as actually “drafting them and putting that legal knowledge into practice.” Sources also tried their hand at “negotiating contracts and contract amendments,” which sometimes involved working cross-jurisdiction. Corporate support work was also a regular feature of the commercial seat.

The commercial litigation team is equally broad in scope. One trainee found it “interesting doing work for household names – I don’t know if that novelty wears off after you’ve been doing the job for a while, but it feels exciting.” To give

Seat options: commercial property; property, infrastructure & construction; energy; property litigation; Islamic finance; international succession & tax; UK succession & tax; employment; corporate; banking; restructuring & insolvency; commercial; commercial litigation
Chambers UK rankings

- Agriculture & Rural Affairs
- Banking & Finance
- Banking Litigation
- Clinical Negligence
- Construction
- Corporate/M&A
- Court of Protection
- Defamation/Reputation Management
- Employment
- Environment
- Information Technology
- Litigation
- Media & Entertainment
- Personal Injury
- Planning
- Real Estate
- Real Estate Litigation
- Restructuring/Insolvency
- Social Housing
- Tax

you an idea, clients include Signet Jewellers (owners of H. Samuel and Ernest Jones), Lloyds Banking Group and Bank of Ireland. The team also worked with Sky UK on multiple broadcast copyright infringement claims regarding their streaming service. Sources got stuck into “the normal contentious tasks you’d expect” such as drafting and preparing bundles, corresponding with counsel, and drafting various letters. One source reflected: “I had a really good opportunity to attend a mediation with two senior lawyers and the client, as well as the other side and their solicitors. I was observing and note-taking, but it was a great learning opportunity.”

“There’s no task I’ve volunteered for and been told I’m not allowed to do it!”

Property, infrastructure and construction covers both contentious and non-contentious work. On the contentious side, sources were generally “dealing with matters where someone has been contracted to build a building and there’s either been issues with the building or it’s been delayed, leading to a dispute.” In these cases, trainees could get their hands on “drafting witness statements, putting bundles together, and liaising with experts on the case.” Others mentioned drafting various letters, attending site visits, and attending adjudications and arbitrations – interviewees appreciated being “taken along to exciting events.” The team recently advised Acorn Property Group on their dispute with the contractor of a residential development regarding entitlement to payment of the final account and rectification of defects. On the non-contentious side, the work involved more “drafting of construction agreements” as well as the “negotiation and amendments of contracts” and general contract review. The team advised Green Frog Connect on engineering, procurement and construction contracts for the delivery of gas peaking power plants and battery storage in the UK, and also advises Screwfix and B&Q (part of the Kingfisher group) on construction contracts to do with distribution centres and retail units across the UK. This seat also included the opportunity to work on adaptations of houses – “where someone had a clinical negligence claim and needed their property adapted because of disabilities, we were helping do the consultant appointments or project manager appointments.” Overall, interviewees were pleased with the variety and the level of responsibility on offer: “There’s no task I’ve volunteered for and been told I’m not allowed to do it!”

Similarly, employment also covers “a mix of contentious and non-contentious work.” Sources reckoned that “especially with the current climate, employment lawyers are far busier than other lawyers at the moment.” Advisory work was particularly hot: “There’s a lot of behind-the-scenes work, which tends to be negotiating the terms of employment contracts and drafting settlement agreements.” Other non-contentious work often involved “responding to various queries that come in from clients” and “support on corporate deals.” The team provides employment advice to clients including Princess Yachts, Ensono and Reed & Mackay Travel. Contentious work typically took the form of working on employment tribunal claims, and sources noted that the firm is particularly “familiar with the regional tribunals in the South West.” For trainees, this meant regularly “preparing trial bundles and drafting witness statements.” Clients including Screwfix and W.C. Rowe (Falmouth) turn to the firm for employment tribunal cases.

Trainee Life

The most striking thing trainees noticed about the culture at Foot Anstey was that “everyone at every level really makes the effort to speak to you and get to know you.” Multiple sources praised the non-hierarchical atmosphere, noting that even the “managing partner is very approachable when he’s around – he tries to move around each office and does trainee lunches every few months.” As a result, interviewees felt “there is a strong investment in trainees – they want you to have a good quality experience.” Another factor that contributed to this sentiment was the firm’s “strong focus on having a healthy work/life balance.”

“It just gives you that bit of breathing space.”

In this vein, one source reflected: “My hours have been really fine. In my first seat, my supervising partner said: ‘To be clear, if you can leave at 5.15pm, leave at 5.15pm, so I did’!” Others agreed and noted they’d “rarely stayed later than 6pm.” Of course, the odd late night isn’t entirely avoidable, and sources emphasised that “it doesn’t mean you don’t work hard – where you need to put the hours in you will put them in,” but the latest any of our interviewees mentioned staying was 7.30pm. To top it off, the firm also offers its employees a ‘lifestyle hour’ where everyone is given one hour per week of ‘free time’: “You can use it to clock off early on a Friday, take a longer lunch one day, or have a lie-in one morning.” Interviewees were certainly a
fan of this initiative, noting that “it just gives you that bit of breathing space.”

Under regular circumstances, Foot Anstey usually publishes its NQ jobs list relatively early – around February. Second years can apply for up to two roles, then the teams interview everyone who has applied. Given the timing of the coronavirus outbreak, this year was slightly different: qualifiers had just had their NQ job interviews before lockdown began. Consequently, the decision-making process was postponed but the same number of NQ positions was maintained. Sources felt that “during that time the firm did communicate with us – they held webinars with the training partner and answered our questions. They tried to keep us updated with the job situation as it was being decided.” The firm ended up retaining five of ten qualifiers (with an additional two being retained on fixed-term contracts).

**Getting a foot in the door**

The firm helps trainees get a foot in the door with clients through their virtual training scheme: “We’re essentially a remote secondee for a client for the two years. It’s been really beneficial to build those relationships with commercial clients and learn about another business.”
Foot Anstey LLP

Salt Quay House, 4 North East Quay, Sutton Harbour, Plymouth, PL4 0BN
Tel: 01752 675000   Fax: 01752 675500
Email: recruitment@footanstey.com
Website: www.footanstey.com
Facebook: @footansteycareers
LinkedIn: @FootAnsteyLLP

Firm profile
We are a premier legal practice delivering specialist expertise to an impressive portfolio of regional, national and international clients. An entrepreneurial firm with history and tradition, we are on an exciting journey to become our clients’ most trusted advisor, enabling them to achieve their ambitions. How we do it is just as important as what we do. Our values of collaboration over convention, championing aspiration, being refreshingly human, embracing entrepreneurial spirit and delivering integrated thinking guide the way we act, every day, from the way we operate as a business to how we treat our colleagues and clients.

We like to think that our approach to business and developing client relationships makes us distinctly different to traditional law firms — and also attractive. As does our desire to ensure our lawyers and trainees operate in an environment where everything is tailored towards delivering specialist and forward-thinking advice to our clients.

Main areas of work
Through our network of offices across the South and South West, we work as one national team offering specialist legal advice and services to regional, national and international clients. We offer expert advice in Commercial Property, Energy, Projects Infrastructure & Construction, Property Litigation, Islamic Finance, Planning & Environmental, Commercial, Corporate, Dispute Resolution, Employment and Private Wealth.

Training opportunities
We welcome applications from law and non-law students who have a strong academic background, exceptional communication skills, and the vision to be part of our future. Our training programme is designed to help you reach your full potential. You will undertake 6, four month seats so you experience a greater number of practice areas. One of our significant differentiators is the closeness with which you will work with senior lawyers and partners. We believe being directly in the middle of good quality work will accelerate your learning and help you to develop into an exceptional advisory lawyer.

As one of our trainees, you will get exposure to situations to develop your legal and commercial expertise, in an environment that is friendly and supportive. This may be through your day to day work with your team and supervisor, on secondment with a client or as part of our award winning Virtual Trainee programme supporting national and international clients.

Vacation scheme
Our summer vacation scheme offers a week of work experience. Not only will you carry out "real work" but you will gain valuable insight into our business and the different areas of legal expertise. At the end of the week participants will take part in an assessment day after which successful candidates will be offered a training contract.

Other benefits
All trainees are entitled to our benefits package which includes: 25 days’ holiday, options to buy/sell holiday, contributory pension scheme, life assurance, cycle scheme, gym membership, discounted shopping, paid sabbaticals, Lifestyle Hour (the chance to take one hour off work each week to promote a healthy work/life balance) and the opportunity to exchange one day of annual leave for 15 hours holiday.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We offer work experience to 1st year students in the summer. All candidates will need to apply online via www.footanstey.com or contact recruitment@footanstey.com for information. We hold open evenings for potential trainees throughout the year which provide an opportunity to find out more about the firm, the application process and to network with trainees and lawyers.

University law careers fairs 2020
Bristol, Exeter, Cardiff, Birmingham, Southampton, UWE, University of Law, BPP.
Fox Williams LLP

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 35/51/6
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £37,000
Qualification salary: £62,000

This cunning Fox may be small, but it’s got the smarts to match law’s biggest gingerbread men—and the agility to dive into niches like fashion and professional services.

The Firm
You’re browsing a market stall on a sunny holiday, when you suddenly can’t believe your eyes—a designer bag? Then you see the price tag and really can’t believe it. Fast fashion knock-offs are everywhere, and the industry’s attempts to stop them are big business for lawyers. This is one of the many hypermodern areas of law that Fox Williams excels in. Founded in 1989 by former partners at big firms who wanted to shake things up, FW regularly outfoxes the competition in the financial services, natural resources, professional services, fashion technology and travel practice areas. “The year to April 2020 has been FW’s best yet,” senior partner Paul Osborne tells us. “Our profits are up 30%; we’ve also grown in headcount with some exciting partner hires.”

Several of the trainees we spoke to had their eye on the firm’s quirky specialisms before applying. “The firm is very well known for advising fashion clients, which fits my passion outside a work context,” one said. After all, who dreams of helping banks move money? Chambers UK grants FW top spots for partnerships and travel law, as well as strong rankings for financial services, employment, lower mid-market real estate and corporate/M&A. Fox Williams has earned its stripes with a headcount of little over 100, and just the one office in London. “The small trainee intake and high ratio of partners to other lawyers make for great responsibility and quality of work,” interviewees declared.

“…fits my passion outside a work context.”

With only six departments, every trainee completes a seat in all but two, but none of them are mandatory. Everyone submits their preferences to HR, who then try and align trainees with their choices. Interviewees noticed that real estate is a typical first seat: “You get to know the ins and outs of the firm in terms of its billing and client care.” Qualification is similarly unfussy: trainees tell HR where they’d ultimately like to qualify at the beginning of their fourth seat, and heads of department approve their hiring in a board meeting. Off the back of trainee complaints in previous years and poor retention figures in 2019, the situation looks to have improved in 2020 with all three qualifiers taking NQ roles at Fox Williams.

The Seats
Often the first landing point for trainees, real estate offers both transactional and litigious work linked to property. The firm’s largely lower mid-market practice balances residential and commercial property, regularly bringing in clients from the leisure and hospitality market. Canadian media company DHX took FW’s advice on leases and licences for existing and new space with a combined annual rent of £646,875; clients also include the Royal Marsden Foundation Trust, Hill Residential and international law firm Vedder Price. Trainees here learn the ropes on “lease extensions, drafting licences and reports of title,” and get litigious experience via drafting enforcement actions and statutory demands. Telecommunications work adds spice to the pot: “When companies want to put satellites and masts on top of commercial properties, we help them with that process.”

Trainees can also bounce between elements of the commerce and technology group; one told us: “You can dictate how you want your seat there to go.” While the department’s four partners specialise in commercial law, data

Seat options: corporate; employment; dispute resolution; real estate; commerce and technology

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Fox Williams
As at many firms, Fox Williams’ employment practice straddles advisory and litigious elements. “The seat is what you make of it,” with freedom once again for trainees to scope out their own interests. Some of the cutting-edge work here revolves around advising financial services, FinTech, insurance and professional services firms on regulatory issues. The firm advises both senior executives and employers – FW recently acted for the London office of a US law firm after two partners departed, with one issuing whistle-blowing proceeding in the Employment Tribunal. Trainees recently saw a milestone: the team’s first virtual hearing. “It was an interesting experience,” they said, “especially seeing everyone dressed up in their homes!” More typical tasks include working on settlements with clients and sending out discrimination letters. Here too, we heard “partners are happy for you to take on a lot of responsibility if you’ve proven yourself.”

“Partners are happy for you to carry out the most challenging tasks.”

Trainee Life
Feedback comes through monthly catch-ups with supervisors, and other partners tend to “take the time to explain how your work could be better, but don’t completely change your drafting style.” When workflow is steady (especially in property), 9.30am to 6.30pm is a typical day for trainees; the unlucky ones were finishing at 8pm, with corporate and employment tagged as the most “intense” seats. Weekend work is possible, but rare. Interviewees didn’t have too much to gripe about the hours, but some would have liked more pay for their efforts. “It’s on the cusp of market rate and there could also be better benefits,” one complained.

“The small size of the firm means everyone knows your name, so you’re not just another trainee.” That’s helpful given the firm’s full social calendar of events including yoga sessions, monthly breakfast outings, Easter egg hunts and escape room trips – nothing’s worse than forgetting someone’s name while trapped in a tight space with them. Fox Williams’ City office is anything but tight, with an open layout and full wall windows providing a view of Finsbury Square. The best news for trainees? “There’s always lots of free food and drinks!” A generous spirit carries across the firm culture, which insiders summarised as “welcoming, friendly and transparent.” Whether it be during kitchen catch-ups or Friday wine club (starting at 5.30pm sharp), Fox folks quickly got to know one another.

“The small size of the firm means everyone knows your name.”

Fox Williams’ diversity and inclusion committee arranges its own regular events including nutrition webinars, HIIT workouts and a celebration of World Culture Day. The last of those is one for the foodies: staff and lawyers alike

“Partners are happy for you to carry out the most challenging tasks.”

Trainee Life
Feedback comes through monthly catch-ups with supervisors, and other partners tend to “take the time to explain how your work could be better, but don’t completely change your drafting style.” When workflow is steady (especially in property), 9.30am to 6.30pm is a typical day for trainees; the unlucky ones were finishing at 8pm, with corporate and employment tagged as the most “intense” seats. Weekend work is possible, but rare. Interviewees didn’t have too much to gripe about the hours, but some would have liked more pay for their efforts. “It’s on the cusp of market rate and there could also be better benefits,” one complained.

“The small size of the firm means everyone knows your name, so you’re not just another trainee.” That’s helpful given the firm’s full social calendar of events including yoga sessions, monthly breakfast outings, Easter egg hunts and escape room trips – nothing’s worse than forgetting someone’s name while trapped in a tight space with them. Fox Williams’ City office is anything but tight, with an open layout and full wall windows providing a view of Finsbury Square. The best news for trainees? “There’s always lots of free food and drinks!” A generous spirit carries across the firm culture, which insiders summarised as “welcoming, friendly and transparent.” Whether it be during kitchen catch-ups or Friday wine club (starting at 5.30pm sharp), Fox folks quickly got to know one another.

“The small size of the firm means everyone knows your name.”

Fox Williams’ diversity and inclusion committee arranges its own regular events including nutrition webinars, HIIT workouts and a celebration of World Culture Day. The last of those is one for the foodies: staff and lawyers alike.

“The small size of the firm means everyone knows your name.”

Fox Williams’ diversity and inclusion committee arranges its own regular events including nutrition webinars, HIIT workouts and a celebration of World Culture Day. The last of those is one for the foodies: staff and lawyers alike.
contributed to a firm recipe book of dishes from different cultures. “Together we celebrate diversity in an exciting way: through food!” Sources more generally described FW as an “open and inclusive environment. The firm has made significant progress within the last year or so in its D&I initiatives, and I would only expect them to improve further with time.”

21st century Fox

Who thrives here? “Candidates who demonstrate a real knowledge of Fox Williams; inclusivity and positivity always stand out,” managing partner Peter Osborne advises. “We also look for them to engage with Fox Williams, whether that be through external outreach, social and charitable events or our sports teams.”
Fox Williams LLP

10 Finsbury Square, London, EC2A 1AF
Tel: 020 7628 2000
Email: application@foxwilliams.com
Website: www.foxwilliams.com

Firm profile
Our story is a little different to other City firms — our founding partners left their respective City practices in 1989 to found Fox Williams. Not only has this been enlightening, it has helped to shape our values and culture. We know, as a professional services firm, that the quality of our people is what sets us apart — which is why we are so committed to recruiting the best.

Main areas of work
We have departments in the following five areas – corporate, dispute resolution, employment, real estate, commerce and technology. Our sectors focus on financial services, fashion, professional services, technology/media/digital, fintech, travel and natural resources.

Training opportunities
Training contracts starting in September 2021 and September 2022. During your training contract, you will undertake four seats of six months in different departments.

Vacation scheme
Our one week vacation schemes run in spring/summer and are attended by those who have been successful at training contract application stage. Our schemes are used to assess the suitability of each candidate and give attendees a real insight into life as a lawyer at Fox Williams. Candidates will be paid £250 for attending the vacation scheme (subject to tax and NI).

Other benefits
The following benefits are available after six months service: private medical insurance, life assurance, permanent health insurance, salary sacrifice pension, biennial medicals, chargeable hours bonus, client introduction bonus, season ticket loan, cycle to work scheme, gym discounts.
A training contract at Freshfields will set you up for an exciting, border-crossing legal career. You may not feel so Fresh after a mega-deal, but the opportunity to develop is first-class.

The Firm

“The prestige was a huge draw,” one trainee quickly flagged when discussing their reasons for choosing Freshfields (a very common reason for sources!). If you want prestige, you can certainly get it in spade-loads at this magic circle outfit, with this interviewee commenting on the acclaim Freshfields draws from “the work it does with the biggest clients, resulting in stories you’d see on the front page of the Financial Times.” Indeed: where do we even begin when it comes to top rankings from Chambers and Partners? In Chambers Global, Freshfields essentially the legal world when it comes to corporate/M&A, competition, dispute resolution, public international law, employee benefits, and tax work (these are just the top rankings – there are many more high accolades awarded across several practices and jurisdictions). Closer to home, you’ll find many of these areas top-rated in Chambers UK, alongside London-based nods for pristine banking & finance (borrowers), equity capital markets, financial crime (corporates), and restructuring and insolvency know-how. On a UK-wide basis, Freshfields especially stands out for its financial services, private equity, product liability, public procurement and retail expertise. In summer 2020, the firm sent a bold strategic message when it opened up an office in Silicon Valley, becoming the first big UK firm to build a presence in California’s tech and life-sciences hot-bed.

To sum this all up: Freshfields is a high-end, full-service firm that caters for the legal needs of the world’s biggest corporations and financial institutions. It’s not just about sparkling rankings and headline-generating client matters, however. Sources also pointed to Freshfields’ “excellent reputation” for training its most junior members, with interviewees pointing to the firm’s unique eight-seat rotation system as a real boon for receiving a first-class introduction to practising law: “The eight-seat rotation is more beneficial for us than it is for the firm.” In addition, we more or less only heard good things about the firm’s culture. Again and again we were told how “friendly, down to earth and supportive everyone seemed.” And with all those overseas offices dotted across the globe, isn’t the opportunity to work abroad the icing on the cake? Be prepared to put your all into that cover letter though, as Freshfields receives over 3,000 applications for its 80-odd training contracts each year (all of which are London-based).

The Seats

“I wasn’t sure what area I wanted to qualify into, so the flexibility of the eight-seat contract was great,” enthused one trainee. Though, with just three months in each seat to make an impression, “you’ve got to hit the ground running,” though doubling up a seat is possible. As part of this system, “the firm wants all its trainees to do a six-month secondment, either international or client, in your final two seats.” Sources also explained that “you have to do the compulsory core seats,” which include two in the global transactions (GT) area – comprised of corporate, finance and real estate seats – and one in disputes “within your first 12 months, with the rest entirely at our discretion.” In terms of choices, “you can put down up to 12 preferences,” at each rotation, with six dispute resolution options, four corporate, four finance and five others available (antitrust, competition and trade; tax; IP; people and reward; and real estate). Very few reported getting their first...

Seat options: dispute resolution; corporate; finance; tax; antitrust, competition and trade; people and reward; IP/IT; real estate
choices for the first couple of seats, but we were told that this preference hit rate improved as trainees progressed in their contract.

“You would get into work and hear, ‘This person who has just been on the news has just instructed us...’”

The firm’s commercial disputes team does “bread-and-butter litigation,” as well as “investigations, crisis management matters and some arbitrations” (although there is a separate arbitration department). One source relayed that “Ninety per cent of our clients are firms you’ve heard of. Everyone has. I’m talking big names.” Some names are certainly recognisable, like Debenhams, Deutsche Bank, Sotheby’s and Volkswagen, while others are still a big deal but not necessarily household names: South African multinational telecoms company MTN and US food conglomerate Cargill, for example. One recent case is fit for a screen adaptation: Freshfields successfully represented Sotheby’s in its bid to retrieve the proceeds made by the fraudulent sellers of a fake painting credited to Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shabby $11 million). In another high-profile case, Dutch artist Frans Hals (which was sold for close to a not-so-shaby...
est brewer) on the $11.3 billion sale of its Australian subsidiary to Japanese food and drinks company Asahi. Such agreements could cover anything related to IP elements (such as brand rights and software licences) to commercial supply arrangements to the transfer of data assets. “Once you get past the trust barrier,” one source explained, “then you get good work.”

When you represent the world’s biggest firms that are looking to make the biggest moves, antitrust, competition and trade is an essential practice. The firm acts on behalf of clients like Australian investment bank Macquarie, Tesco, Pret A Manger, insurance outfit AON and private equity firm CVC. Freshfields recently worked with tech company Yandex on the European Commission’s investigation into Google with regard to its Android devices, which resulted in a record €4.34 billion fine for Google. It also advised the London Stock Exchange Group on its proposed acquisition of Refinitiv, which is a global provider of financial data and valued at $27 billion. We were not surprised to hear that trainees had worked “on a very high-profile case for a very large multinational company that all of us use.” Sources liked that “Freshfields was instructed because there wasn’t precedence. It was a novel matter on both sides, and it was interesting how everything was approached.”

Several people thought that “one of the main perks of being here is the people. There’s a range of personalities and most lawyers are very approachable, kind and enthusiastic.” As with any workplace, there are some people who might not be quite so lovely, but we were told that “HR makes valiant efforts to tackle” any poor and distinctly ‘un-Freshfields’ behaviour. In terms of human capital, the firm’s reputation for training seems well founded, with most interviewees across seats and departments giving it a thumbs-up. In addition to the assistance gained from “friendly and helpful” colleagues in various departments ("people are always open to answering questions"), trainees also undergo “a fortnight of induction and training exercises” at the beginning of the training contract. Trainees said that while there was “quite a lot of time spent on IT training, there needs to be more.” While there may be little niggles here and there, every person we surveyed felt they had chosen the right firm to train at and no one reported being unhappy. Around half of our sources did report being a bit stressed, but when all was said and done, this source encapsulated the overall feeling nicely: “The quality and variety of the work, throughout all my seats, has been exceptional and I’ve been encouraged to volunteer for projects that I’m interested in, with the aim of shaping my practice as a lawyer.”

Diversity at the firm was also spoke about positively by our sources. “The firm’s approach to diversity is not a tick-box exercise; it seems like something the firm has really bought into,” one interviewee reflected. The overwhelming majority were encouraging about the firm’s mental health initiatives, which have been highlighted by the firm’s support of knowledge lawyer Lloyd Rees, who has publicly shared his battle with mental ill-health. Sources also spoke highly of “Halo, the firm’s LGBT+ network. It’s something active that the firm has bought into.” Several mentioned the firm’s Stephen Lawrence Scholarship, which addresses “the disproportionate under-representation in large commercial law firms and other City institutions of black men from less socially mobile backgrounds.” Those who are awarded the scholarship receive career mentorship from members of the firm and Freshfields clients.

For those who want to stay as an NQ, the first step involves submitting a list of qualification preferences. The teams similarly “rank the trainees in the order they’d like to accept them in.” The good news is that “when placing us for qualification, the firm works off our preferences.” In other words, the “priority is what we want, rather than what the team wants.” Trainees described quite an informal process, as there’s “no CV required, nothing like that.” However, we were told that international positions in practice areas trainees haven’t sat in may well require an interview and a more formal application. Any concerns about favouritism were dismissed: “Each team puts their preferences down and discusses them among the entire

Trainee Life

As a magic circle firm, Freshfields comes with “high standards and high expectations.” What this means for prospective trainees is that good academics are a must, as well as a whole host of other important skills like being able to prioritise workload and having the ability to take in a vast amount of complicated information. In addition, “the hours can be long and intense,” with most sources reporting working (on average) a nine to ten-hour day. There are late nights when deals hit their flow or cases build to a crescendo. “The hours in the corporate seats can vary from you being able to leave at 5.30pm to you leaving at 11am the next morning!” one sleepy source told us. Others added that on those late nights “people appreciate the work that you do, and it does get noticed.” Some flagged that while there may be a “couple of one-off all-nighters where you receive little to no thanks for working hard, these are the exception not the rule.” On the whole, “people wouldn’t ask you to stay unless they were staying too.” Those who are still toiling away past 7.30pm can expense their dinner (up to £15) and also a cab home if they’re still at their desk past 9.30pm. It’s also worth noting that Freshfields was the only magic circle firm to keep NQ pay at £100,000 in the wake of Covid-19.

“The quality and variety of the work, throughout all my seats, has been exceptional.”
group, which should shake out favouritism. It's quite a well-rounded process.” In 2020, 67 of 77 qualifiers stayed with the firm.

Searching for seats in fields fresh and new...

International seats are currently available in New York, DC, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna, Amsterdam, Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Better start your TripAdvisor research now!
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP

Firm profile
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer helps some of the world’s biggest companies to grow, strengthen and defend their operations. If you’re keen to pursue a career in commercial law, we can offer you some of the most interesting — and challenging — work around. We support clients wherever in the world they operate so we must deliver a consistent high-quality service across the globe.

Main areas of work
As a trainee, you’ll work in a team, usually with an associate and a partner. It’s the team’s job to work out how we can help clients achieve their ambitions. Is it possible? What’s the best way to structure the deal or tackle the problem? What are the risks? You and your team will need to create solutions that work in the real, commercial world, not just the ones that reflect what’s right or wrong in law. We’ll show you how. Our lawyers focus on at least one industry sector and work in one of five practice groups: global transactions; dispute resolution; anti-trust, competition and trade; people and reward and tax.

Training opportunities
Our unique eight-seat training contract means you can experience a wide variety of practice groups across the two years. You’ll spend at least one seat in dispute resolution, as well as at least two seats in our global transactions group (across corporate, finance and real estate). You can submit preferences for where you want to spend each seat, and you can decide as you go through your training contract. During the final six months of your training contract, you’ll also get opportunities to apply for international, client and pro bono secondments.

Other benefits
Joining Freshfields opens the door to a comprehensive range of benefits, access to the many social networks that connect people across our 28 offices, and opportunities to take part in our award-winning pro bono programme. As well as agile remote-working arrangements in response to COVID-19, our new London office at 100 Bishopsgate has been carefully thought-out to facilitate collaboration and innovation, as well as support wellbeing and reduce environmental impact.

Vacation scheme
Open to penultimate year undergraduate students, our three-week vacation schemes are an exciting way to find out more about life at Freshfields. You’ll meet and work with trainees, associates and partners and learn about the market-leading work that we do on a day-to-day basis.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Applications for workshops and other virtual events open 5th October 2020, with various deadlines throughout the year. We’ll show you what life as an international commercial lawyer is like, and what sets us apart from other firms, so you can make a confident decision on whether to apply for a vacation scheme or training contract.
The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 4
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 20/60/5
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £45,000
Qualification salary: £131,000

From new office space in the heart of the City, Fried Frank opens its doors to “ambitious” trainees looking for fun with funds.

The Firm
Explosive growth is exciting, sure, but there’s a reason why most law firms would rather build out slowly. Fried Frank is a great example— with a small trainee cohort and well-chosen lateral partner hires, slow and steady is serving the firm well. Training principal Jons Lehmann confirms that they’re sticking to the plan: “We are now looking for three trainees for our 2020 and 2021 intakes. We have increased the number to remain consistent with our growth in London and what we are planning to achieve.” Describing the Fried Frank type as “intellectually capable and ambitious,” candidates were attracted to the firm by “the prospect of being among the first homegrown talents who could rise through the ranks.”

Making room for future arrivals, Fried Frank prepared for a 2020 office move to 100 Bishopsgate, a popular City space that’s also home to magic circler Freshfields and fellow US firm Paul Hastings. “The new office will be very interactive and a great working environment for everyone,” Lehmann explains. The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown put a spanner in the works, but it seems there’s no stopping Fried Frank: the headcount in London grew 17% in one fiscal year, “the highest growth of any of the firm’s four offices,” according to chairman David Greenwald. Recent lateral additions include partner hires into the litigation and capital markets departments.

“We are now going to be looking for three trainees for our 2021 and 2022 intakes as opposed to two.”

Interviewees also highlighted the firm’s targeted strength in asset management and funds advice, noting that “a lot of the work in London flows from the funds practice.” This translates to a single Chambers UK ranking for private equity investment funds practice. Lehmann confirms Fried Frank will offer “a mix of corporate, finance, asset management and litigation, and we are also going to add a corporate real estate seat to that rotation.” According to current trainees, first years tend to start in finance or M&A, with second years completing seats in funds and/or litigation. “The firm just decides for you,” one said.

The Seats
Fried Frank’s funds folks (try saying that fast as you can) advise private equity firms, financial institutions and hedge fund managers on massive fund formations. The UK team advises BlackRock—an investment management firm with $6.84 trillion in assets—on numerous funds totalling more than $10 billion in value, as well as other giant investors like Bain Capital and Goldman Sachs. Trainee responsibilities vary by deal size but in large and small matters they’ll have project management to contend with. “You basically manage the whole process and make sure the deals stick to the timeline,” a source explained. “We review subscriptions and documents from the investors, and work on the management of agreements via checklists, incorporating structures and preparing bibles.”

Hand in hand with funds is the finance department, looking after the money that backs investment funds as well as leveraged and real estate finance issues. The client base is similar here, with Bank of America, HSBC and Wells Fargo all on the books. Trainees here gave a special shout out to training principal Jons Lehmann: “He’s excellent at ensuring you have sufficient workload and trusting you with lots of responsibility,” they declared. “It’s

Seat options: asset management; corporate; finance; litigation; corporate real estate
an honour to work with individuals like him who really care about your development as a lawyer.” Day-to-day tasks here include managing conditions precedent checklists, amending security documents, and reviewing and drafting board minutes and shareholder resolutions. This team is smaller than its funds counterpart but deals with big money: US-based software development firm Informatica called on Fried Frank to advise on a $125 million credit facility extension. Sources suggested: “Finance has more of a focus on the training element than the corporate/M&A department. There’s a healthy balance between teaching us bespoke points and learning the basics as you go along.”

“You become a transaction magnet with totally new stuff coming in every day.”

Trainees in corporate/M&A and private equity suggested “around 60-70% of the work is private equity-related, the remainder is funds-driven M&A deals.” There’s no escaping funds at Fried Frank! “It makes sense given the firm’s client relationships with private equity funds and the overall focus on asset management,” sources agreed. In a typical cross-border transaction, the firm represented US-based non-profit Mayo Clinic in its proposed joint venture with Abu Dhabi Health Services Company. With the transaction oven hot, the team also helped deliver a £55 million acquisition of interests in Domino’s Pizza’s main franchisee in Iceland on behalf of the pizza chain itself. Trainees told us that “if you can take on high-responsibility work and not make a hash of it, they’ll pretty much step back and let you run with the deal.” In practice their workload included typical trainee tasks like due diligence, transaction management, liaising with the other side and reviewing fund documents. “You become a transaction magnet with totally new stuff coming in every day,” we heard. “We do a lot of cross-office dealings with the New York and DC offices.”

“There are two different sides to the department” in litigation, one of the firm’s smaller practices. “One partner deals with Russian and Commonwealth of Independent States corruption deals; the other handles commercial banking and financial disputes.” An example of the latter was Perrigo’s $2.44 billion fraud-driven claim following the €3.9 billion acquisition of shares in Omega Pharma Invest NV. As for the other side, Fried Frank defended Alexander Katunin in $200 million+ proceedings brought by Russia’s VTB Bank. “We prepare bundles for case management conferences, make sure hyperlinks work and check typos,” trainees here said. “It may not sound like much, but the documents are usually around 200 pages long and we’re left to get on with it.”

Trainee Life

Hours vary by department: litigation trainees enjoyed “more predictable hours with less reactive work, whereas transactional practices are driven by the clients.” Said clients can be demanding: with a 9.30am start, trainees estimated an 8 or 9pm finish on average. “When it gets busy it’s seriously busy,” they added. “There have been times when I’ve regularly worked past midnight for consecutive months, including a few weekends.” Trainees may have to work these US firm-typical hours, but they weren’t “bitter about it. It’s a collaborative effort and when things aren’t as hectic, partners are more than happy for you to leave at a normal time.” One felt the high expectations were proof of being “treated as adults. The firm expects you to take a level of ownership to get stuff done on time.” Long shifts are in fact by design as “the lean staffing on teams is part of Fried Frank’s model. They don’t want to work people to an early grave, but the staffing model allows the firm to make a decent amount of profit.” There’s enough cash left over for Halloween and Christmas socials, regular informal lunch events and other soirees. One trainee described the Fried Frank culture as “a collective partnership where we all get our heads down and muck in to get a matter through the door, then grab drinks to reflect and pat ourselves on the back before we start again.” Another pointed to a (by law firm standards) “flat structure,” thanks to the smaller headcount. “I was accepted as a real member of the team and treated like a proper colleague almost immediately.”

“The firm expects you to take a level of ownership to get stuff done on time.”

Interviewees emphasised that London “isn’t a satellite office for New York. We have our own culture and work stream.” They cited “the surprising amount of formal education and training provided” as further evidence. Supervisors make efficient use of time by “holding targeted sessions before a certain transaction kicks off, rather than blocking out an hour to have an academic discussion.” Though Fried Frank doesn’t run a formal mentor scheme, there were no complaints from our sources. “We have an executive coach who visits once in a while to talk through our personal and professional development at the firm,” they explained.

An informal NQ process was similarly popular: “You inform HR of your preferred department, they talk to the lawyers there and if they’re interested in taking you on, they’ll get back to you and sign you up,” interviewees summarised. “Since it’s such a small cohort, everyone knows each other very well – plus there haven’t been any Covid-related delays.” Fried Frank retained both of its two qualifiers in 2020.
Freedom Frank

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, trainees were pleased by “the direction coming from the chairman David Greenwald. The firm hosted videoconference talks on systemic racism and how to counter it in a professional capacity.”
Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson (London) LLP

100 Bishopsgate, London, EC2N 4AG
Tel: 020 7972 9600
Email: TrainingContractApplications@friedfrank.com
Website: www.friedfrank.com
LinkedIn: fried-frank
Twitter: @friedfrank
Instagram: friedfrank

Partners: 21
Associates: 55
Total trainees: 5
UK offices: London

Contacts
Graduate recruiter:
TrainingContractApplications@friedfrank.com
Training partner:
Jons Lehmann, jons.lehmann@friedfrank.com

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 3
Applications pa: 180
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1 or other
Minimum UCAS points or A levels: AAB

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: 1st October 2020
Training contract deadline, 2023 start: 30th June 2021

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: £45,000
Second-year salary: £50,000
Post-qualification salary: £131,000
Holiday entitlement: 25 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant pa: £8,000

Firm profile
Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP advises the world’s leading corporations, investment funds and financial institutions on their most critical legal needs and business opportunities. The Firm’s approximately 583 lawyers are based across North America and Europe.

Main areas of work
Antitrust and competition; corporate (asset management, capital markets, corporate governance, finance, mergers and acquisitions, private acquisitions and private equity); international arbitration; international trade and investment; litigation; pro bono; real estate; restructuring and insolvency; tax; and white collar defence, regulatory enforcement and investigations.

Training opportunities
Fried Frank offers a dynamic and engaging training programme which provides meaningful work assignments across UK, US and international mandates. Trainees spend six months working with close-knit teams of partners and associates across four departments in a hands-on learning environment. Working closely and socialising with partners, counsel, associates and staff, our trainees leave the programme with a clear understanding of what Fried Frank can offer them as a place to begin their legal careers.

If you are interested in joining an international Firm with quality work and training, please apply by completing our application form, located on our Firm’s careers website. Once complete, please return your form to TrainingContractApplications@friedfrank.com

Internship programme
Fried Frank offers internships with placements lasting between one and three months in our litigation department. Interns gain experience within the legal industry, while being exposed to top quality work and clients. Our internship programme details and application form can be found on our careers website. Please note that applications for our internship programme are separate to those for our training contract.

Other benefits
- Private Medical
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Subsidised gym membership and corporate rates
- Life Assurance
- Group Income Protection
- Cycle to Work Scheme
- Mortgage Advice
- Group Personal pension
- Back-up Family Care
A trendsetter among national outfits, stock exchange-listed Gateley has grown as both a law firm and something... more.

The Firm
The legal industry is moving fast. Organisations with non-law roots are nudging into the profession, seizing a slice of the pie. At the same time, law firms are diversifying their practices, biting into other professional services markets. Gateley has been one of the quickest off the mark: with Gateley Capitus (tax advice) and Gateley Hamer (property consultants) already in its operation, the firm acquired land referencing consultancy Persona Associates and management consulting group T-three in 2019. The following year another consultancy business, The Vinden Partnership, came into the fold as Gateley Vinden. Our trainee sources explained how these additional services overlap with the firm’s legal offering: “We refer clients to those services, and they come to us with legal issues. It’s definitely been great for increasing our commercial understanding as trainees.”

Gateley had already made history back in 2015, becoming the first firm to float on the London Stock Exchange. “The IPO set Gateley apart,” a source reflected. “It seemed forward-thinking then and we’re now offering a diversified legal business. Rather than solely legal, the firm is law-led.” This unconventional strategy may appear risky, but recent financials suggest the plan is paying off: results for the six months ending October 2019 saw a revenue increase of 11.8% to £51.8 million, with 93.7% derived from legal and 6.3% from non-legal services. To give you some context, that’s a shift from 94.8% and 5.2% the prior period.

Chambers UK focuses on the firm’s legal successes across the UK, with its strongest showings coming from banking, employment, real estate, litigation, corporate, and restructuring practices in the Midlands; employment, IP, pensions, and restructuring in the North West; and national leader rankings outside London for banking and restructuring. The Manchester office had the most trainees (11) at the time of our calls, just pipping the Birmingham HQ’s nine. Leeds, Leicester, London and Nottingham housed four each. Gateley has a Dubai office, but doesn’t offer an overseas seat at present.

“Rather than solely legal, the firm is law-led.”

Larger offices – like Birmingham and Manchester – offer trainees a wider range of seat options, whereas smaller ones have fewer departments. “Some teams and offices are a little more regional,” one trainee shared. “It’s determined by the clients instead of an intentional regional focus: ultimately this is a national firm and you feel like you’re a Gateley trainee rather than identifying with a particular office.” All newbies complete a two-week orientation in Birmingham, through which “you make mates across every office. Lots of teams are really good with cross-working – clients couldn’t tell we didn’t sit together!”

Seat options: banking; commercial dispute resolution; commercial; construction; corporate; ctm; employment; family; financial dispute resolution; pensions; residential development unit; real estate; regulatory; restructuring (advisory); restructuring (project litigation); shipping; tax
The True Picture

Chambers UK rankings

- Banking & Finance
- Litigation
- Banking Litigation
- Pensions
- Construction
- Planning
- Consumer Finance
- Real Estate
- Corporate/M&A
- Real Estate Litigation
- Employment
- Restructuring/Insolvency
- Information Technology
- Tax
- Intellectual Property
- Transport

The Seats

All trainees must do at least one corporate/transactional, property and contentious seat at some point in the training contract. First years get very little say over their destinations, with Londoners doing corporate and banking seats in their first 12 months. Some agreed that “you know that's the deal when signing up,” but others were more critical. “It’s less flexible than at other firms, but you can make it known where you want to go,” one said. There's some flexibility; for example, the corporate seat can also be in restructuring, banking or tax. “It's not as limiting as it sounds,” sources advised.

Gateley's property reach spans residential and commercial development, property finance, real estate investment and portfolio management. Acting for 18 of the top 20 largest UK house builders – including Barratt and Bellway – the firm also represents property investment managers. Most trainees found themselves in either commercial real estate or residential development unit (RDU). Trainees on the commercial side saw a “really good variety” including property finance, retail and commercial leases, and support on corporate transactional matters for a “really mixed bag of high-end commercial clients and SMEs.” The firm recently advised developer Barberry on the £37.5 million land price sale of a 45-hectare site in Cheltenham to the Borough Council, targeted for a cyber business park.

Trainees in RDU worked with house builders “acquiring land, dealing with infrastructure and development, and resolving any planning issues.” Several noted that “it’s quite a full-on department,” with one giving a full account of their experience: “I got 20 to 30 matters given to me on day one! Supervision levels were great but there are so many things going on at once: I was very much spinning plates.” The firm handles a mix of small and much larger projects, recently advising a consortium of seven residential developers on the Langley Sustainable Urban Extension, valued as one of the largest new housing schemes in the UK at around £1.5 billion. All our interviewees highlighted the “good exposure afforded by being thrown in the deep end,” and responded warmly to supervision. “Partners trust you to handle things but are always there to fall back on if needed,” one noted. Trainees worked on conducting searches and enquiries for newly acquired developments, drafting Land Registry forms, diligence reports on title, shadowing partners in larger contract negotiations and “taking the lead” on smaller files.

“I got 20 to 30 matters given to me on day one! Supervision levels were great but there are so many things going on at once.”

Advising UK clearing banks (the firm is on the panel for nine of the 11), corporate groups and asset managers, Gateley’s banking and finance practice splits broadly into real estate and leveraged finance. Big names here include Lloyds, HSBC and Santander, as well as private equity houses and debt funders. The team helped Maven Capital Partners in the inception of the Midlands Investment Fund, its first direct lending fund valued at over £250 million; as well as the £85 million management buyout of Hammonds Furniture, advising on the funding documentation for facilities provided by Frontier Development and HSBC. Trainees tucked into “lots of real estate finance” linked to the property practice, as well as acquisition finance and “acting for the major clearing banks and funds.” Here too, they were happy to handle plenty of responsibility. “I began drafting ancillary documents but moved up to the key documents on smaller transactions,” one recalled. “You get high-level work with lots of client contact; the supervision was also really good in that team.”

It may not be a City titan, but Gateley’s corporate department acts for many of the leading nominated advisers and brokers in the AIM and London Stock Exchange. Recent deals under the firm’s belt include Paragon Leisure Group’s sale of Notts County FC; and private equity firm LDC’s investment into digital, branding and PR agency group MSQ Partners. London trainees found themselves staffed on “mainly mid-tier acquisitions” as well as “some smaller-scale advisory work. In the smaller offices, everything is covered by the general corporate department instead of having smaller, defined teams.” Here and in the larger bases, trainees saw a comprehensive view of the firm’s practice. “We’re involved in everything,” one enthused. “They’re really keen to get you on the phone getting client contact.” Sources also ran through disclosure letters, board minutes and due diligence reports. “I got involved in drafting some ancillary documents,” an insider declared. “There’s no heavy drafting at the start, but I eventually got more input in share purchase agreements and helping to draft chunkier documents.”

A seat in commercial disputes can cover sectors as distinct from one another as healthcare – particularly in claims brought against NHS trusts – and sports litigation, for clients such as Manchester City FC or the UK Cheerleading Association. Gateley notably acted for Everton FC in £5.2 million High Court proceedings seeking damages from alleged breach of a commercial agreement. Variety
“An average claim might go on for five years and you’re only there for a specific six months.”

As at many firms, there’s a balance of disputes and non-contentious elements in restructuring. The firm acted for the administrators of the Jamie Oliver Restaurant Group in the closure and sale of the majority of the restaurant portfolio; and for administrators in the disposal of the Patisserie Valerie company group including Philpotts and Baker & Spice. On the contentious side, trainees enjoyed dealing with “court and civil procedure rules” and acting for “all the major insolvency practitioners.” The London office “does a lot of work for Russian clients or in former Soviet jurisdictions,” whereas trainees in Birmingham acted on cases linked to the Caribbean. “An average claim might go on for five years and you’re only there for a specific six months,” an interviewee explained. “You might be there during a hearing and have a lot on, or six months pass and you receive only one letter.” Most were far busier than that, drafting client letters and letters before claim, helping write preliminary reports to clients, or “setting out a strategy for litigation with lots of research and drafting some of the end report.” Most of the non-contentious side is advisory: “We advise companies in financial trouble on their duties. It requires quite a lot of research and is very technical black-letter case law, which I really enjoyed.”

Trainee Life

If you’re (for some reason) come looking to work until the early hours of the morning, Gateley is not the place for you. “9pm would be a normal late finish,” one source found, while another concluded that “on the whole hours have been good. Naturally it’s going to depend on department and workflow, but I’d typically get in around 8.30am and leave at 6.30pm; I’ve rarely worked past 10pm.” Corporate seats are more up and down and include the occasional later night: “I had one 3am finish in banking,” a source said, but this was the exception to the rule. All agreed they were paid well for their time. “It’s a good life here and I’ve got no complaints,” one concluded.

Trainees described the firm’s culture as “really sociable – people are decent, friendly and approachable. Everyone gets on and there are no negative stereotypes.” There were variations by office: Birmingham by virtue of size is “well connected” to the rest of the network with “everything managed out of this office.” Smaller bases like Leeds tend to gravitate towards whole-office shindigs: “We’re a very social bunch and it’s not unusual for us to go out for Friday drinks,” sometimes kicked off by the legal director announcing: “We’re all going to the Blackhouse [Grill on the Square], who wants to come?” In other locations too there’s a health social scene with “infamous cocktail events” and escape room trips. Designated CSR and social representatives get a budget to run fund-raising events for an elected charity: “Everyone is encouraged to nominate suitable charities.” Trainees also donated their time to “mock interviews for school kids who might never have been exposed to an office environment before.”

“I’d typically get in around 8.30am and leave at 6.30pm; I’ve rarely worked past 10pm.”

There were some complaints about lack of communication between the firm and trainee cohort – the more diplomatic voices we heard suggested “firmwide communication could be a bit more coherent.” In 2020 the covid-19 pandemic complicated what should be a relatively streamlined NQ process, and at the time of writing trainees were unsure of where jobs would be available. “I have lots of faith in the firm,” one declared. “Others feel like they’re in limbo; we’ve just got to hang on and see.” As we went to press, Gately had not yet confirmed how many of its 18 qualifiers would stay on.

Making a merger-er

The firm’s recent additions haven’t all been non-legal: Gateley acquired Belfast-based media and reputation management boutique Paul Tweed in spring 2020.
Gateley Legal

One Eleven, Edmund Street, Birmingham B3 2HJ
Tel: 0121 234 0000
Email: Stefanie.Ballmann@gateleyplc.com
Website: www.gateleyplc.com/careers/early-careers/trainees/

Firm profile
Gateley Legal is the legal business at the heart of legal and professional services group, Gateley. Founded in Birmingham in 1808, we have provided commercial legal services to individuals and businesses over the last 200 years. Since arriving as the new kids on the block all those years ago, we’ve earned our stripes in the legal industry, building a leading name and a revered reputation. Providing excellent client service to individuals and businesses across the UK is fundamental to our ethos of being forward thinking and straight talking.

We have over 580 professional advisers and employ over 1,000 people across ten offices located in Belfast, Birmingham, Guildford, Leeds, Leicester, London, Manchester, Nottingham, Reading and Dubai.

In 2015, we were the first commercial UK law firm to list on the London Stock Exchange’s Alternative Investment Market (AIM). The bold move to go public embodies our forward-thinking ethos. Our strategy is to differentiate ourselves in a crowded market, incentivise our people to retain and attract the best talent in the industry and diversify by acquiring complementary business services.

Main areas of work
Our specialist legal teams cover all types of legal services including: corporate, commercial, banking, real estate, restructuring, technology, construction, employment, pensions, dispute resolution, regulatory, private wealth and family, tax, and shipping and transport, as well as global mobility which encompasses the management of the selection and relocation of employees for international assignments.

Training opportunities
- Experience four, six-month seat rotations across a variety of legal practice areas – we also offer exciting client secondments
- Gain supervision and mentoring from highly experienced solicitors
- Receive an in-depth and supportive training schedule tailored to your needs and areas of interest to give you the skills and experiences you need for life as a qualified solicitor
- Gain opportunities to work directly with clients allowing you to build your practical legal knowledge, communication, client-care skills and an understanding of the markets within which our clients operate
- Study Professional Skills Courses to become a well-rounded solicitor
- Attend university law fairs to inspire our future trainees

Vacation scheme
Our Summer Vacation Placements give you the opportunity to gain paid hands-on legal work experience in one of our offices and provide a real insight into a future career in law. You will work in two legal practice areas during your two-weeks with us. We will provide you with a trainee ‘buddy’ and organise social events to help you get to know our people well. You will also have regular contact with our graduate recruitment team.

You can apply if:
- You are in your penultimate or final year of a Law degree, or have graduated after completing a Law degree
- You are in your final year of a non-law degree, or have graduated after completing a non-law degree

Other benefits
Our benefits include: private healthcare, Cycle to Work scheme, Sharesave scheme, GymFlex, travel pass loan.
Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 19
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 31/61/13
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seat; client secondment
First-year salary: £50,000
Qualification salary: £120,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired by Gibson Dunn
The Hong Kong training contract

Swipe right on Gibson Dunn, an internationally renowned litigation beast offering British youngsters a “malleable and tailored” training contract, top pro bono cases and a considerate culture.

The Firm
On a day when all the leaves are brown and the sky is likely to be grey, law students can turn to Gibson Dunn for their California Dreaming. “There’s something special and escapist about being at a Californian firm in London.” Born in LA in 1890, it took just under 200 years for the firm to leap across the pond, opening in London in 1979. Now a network of 20 offices across the globe, Gibson Dunn is renowned both in the US and worldwide for its blockbuster litigation cases: it’s currently representing the founders of Tinder in a high-profile breach of contract case worth billions of dollars. The firm also covers media and entertainment work that hits the press in big ways. Gibson is also working for AMC on the high-profile claim brought by a former The Walking Dead showrunner who seeks a larger share of the profits of the $3.4-million-budget-per-episode show.

Chambers Global places the firm in the worldwide top tier for corporate investigations and anti-corruption, and the firm also makes the worldwide shortlists in dispute resolution, competition, corporate/M&A, and private equity fund formation. The London office receives its strongest rankings in international arbitration, both investor-state and commercial, and it also gets nods for its competition and real estate finance work.

“There’s something special and escapist about being at a Californian firm in London.”

First formed in 2015, Gibson’s training contract is “fairly young and small;” meaning training here is “a malleable and tailored experience, with a lot of learning on the job.” Most Dunners arrive through the firm’s vacation scheme, which was described as “a short replica of being a trainee. You really earn your £500 a week!” Potential trainees are assessed using five assignments including a presentation and a drafting project – “I finished the vac scheme satisfied that even if I didn’t get the training contract, I’d learnt a huge amount that’d help me in my other interviews.”

Trainees are told of their first seat during their induction week. For subsequent seats, HR hand out a list of available seats, trainees give their preferences and HR match people up “most of the time.” An overseas secondment gives one trainee per rotation the opportunity to go to Hong Kong. The application process involves either an informal email or video interview depending on how many people go for the opening. “There’s a big trainee community in Hong Kong, so it’d be great to go and expand your network.”

The Seats
Gibson’s dispute resolution team has three branches: arbitration, investigations, and commercial and corporate litigation. Though trainees are assigned to a specific subgroup, “it’s more fluid than that. You can work across all three and dip in and out.” Commercial and corporate litigation covers a lot of big financial clients on litigations such debt enforcement and competition-based disputes, as well as media and energy sector matters. The team recently defended mining company Koza from the Turkish state’s attempt to interfere with its operations in a way that infringed public policy. Trainees get the unique

Seat options: finance and restructuring; dispute resolution; employment; tax; competition; corporate - energy; corporate real estate; funds; financial regulatory
opportunity to get “a bird’s-eye view on these massive, sprawling financial cases.”

Arbitration covers “bilateral investment treaty enforcement and interpretation.” The team go through a “long process of establishing whether we have jurisdiction to bring the claim and whether it’s the correct arbitral tribunal.” Due to the ambiguity of the jurisdictions involved in many of these cases, “one of the partners calls it the jurisdictional Wild West. It’s super interesting and very technically difficult.” The team recently represented Yukos Capital in an oil-related investment treaty case against Russia for $6.24 billion.

“...a bird’s-eye view on these massive, sprawling financial cases.”

The white-collar investigations group primarily works for large financial institutions, as well as some large corporates in sectors such as media, technology and real estate. The team recently represented Fender in connection with an investigation into the pricing of musical instruments. The group works on a lot of US companies’ UK regulatory work, where they “seek advice from us on potential conduct that might lead to a regulatory investigation here in the UK.” Trainees get to “see the dynamic between the client, firm and regulator. You’re all trying to work in the same way—so it almost feels not contentious.” Interviewees liked working with their US counterparts—“it’s a great way to expand your network.” Across the litigation practices, trainees undertake “intellectually challenging” research tasks, writing letters, drafting witness statements, and writing presentations and notes of meetings. Trainees also get to go to court and hearings: “We were all in the war room until 1am every night. It sounds weird, but it was enjoyable.”

The firm’s corporate seat is great for generalists. Trainees get to sample private equity, public M&A, private M&A and capital markets work (though the last was described as a “less essential component to the team”). Typical clients again include large finance and energy companies. The team recently represented Marathon Oil Company in its sale of UK North Sea to RockRose Energy. They also advised Emirates in connection with the initial public offering of Network International, the largest European IPO in 2019 for £2.2 billion. Trainees here typically run checklists, liaise the signing process with the other side, coordinate due diligence, draft diligence reports and “generally be the point person on the deal.” They also get to “communicate with local counsel and specialists within our Gibson network. You get a good sense of how the firm all fits together as a machine.”

Trainee Life

“Pro bono clients are treated the same as fee-paying clients, so you can really prioritise pro bono matters.” Gibson Dunn is a leader in the US for pro bono cases, and a lot of “high-profile, ground-breaking” pro bono work makes its way through the doors here too. London associate Ryan Whelan represented the heavily publicised ‘upskirting’ case, which successfully campaigned to outlaw the act in 2019. Partner Penny Madden is currently representing Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian journalist detained in Iran. Trainees told us about working for clinics and charities and on human rights cases and employment matters.

“Partner Penny Madden is currently representing Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.”

“From my first interview to now, I’ve never felt uncomfortable at the firm in the slightest.” Gibson Dunn is host to diversity initiatives that are “genuinely enthusiastic and ambitious.” The firm hosts lunches and events and on Mental Health Awareness Day they put free fruit out for the day. Great! Thanks, just for one day, that’ll make a massive help,” quipped a trainee. The firm has since made fruit free indefinitely. Overall, interviewees described the firm’s attitude as “affected by our West Coast US roots. It doesn’t matter who you are at all.” This fed into the feeling that the culture at Gibson Dunn is “certainly very welcoming and supportive. Everyone has that team spirit.” It’s common for staff to “congregate in the cafeteria in the middle of the building,” and the office in general has a “chilled atmosphere.” The small, around-100-attorney-strong office means that “it’s the sort of place you can stop and chat to anyone.”

Though there are some drinks and team dinners, there’s “not always as much socialising as there might be with other firms.” Luckily trainees get all their socialising done in one densely packed stint. Each year the firm runs a New Lawyers Academy retreat to California for all new starters worldwide. Trainees fly to a luxury Cali resort on a Thursday and fly back on the Sunday – “the jet lag was immeasurable.” We heard of “karaoke, ridiculous outfits and amazing food. We had one dinner overlooking the sea and honestly it looked like a wedding. We did a hot-seat-speed-dating exercise where we got to meet loads of different people.” Trainees realised “just how big the firm is. We came away from it really invigorated, thinking ‘wow, this really is a great firm!’”

“It’s the sort of place you can stop and chat to anyone.”
Back home, trainees benefit from “a large system of safety nets.” As well as their supervisors, trainees have a trainee buddy from the year above, and an associate mentor. During lockdown, the firm gave trainees partner buddies too, “just to keep us connected.” The buddy system makes trainees feel like a “valued part of the team. It goes a long way to making us happy.” Most interviewees finished work by 8pm each day. Some reported being in until 11pm “pretty much every night” during busy periods, especially in groups like litigation and corporate. When it came to salary, there were “no complaints! Not many firms pay more.” The firm’s £120,000 qualification salary means there is only a handful of firms that pay more in the UK.

The firm started the qualification process off early this year as “they understand everyone’s nervous given the climate surrounding the virus,” and management has “made a big point that they didn’t let anyone go during the recession.” HR managers kick off the process by asking where trainees want to qualify. Interviewees felt confident as the firm has historically enjoyed a 100% retention rate. In 2020, four of five stayed on.

**LA LA Land Lord**

Gibson Dunn appears to pull off something quite enviable in the US: it operates in the same league as the rather intense New York elite, but pulls it off with a more chilled vibe and a clear commitment to pro bono. Californian working culture must be to blame. Take a look at our US review in chambers-associate.com if you’re researching Gibson Dunn in detail.
Applications are welcome from students of any discipline in their first year of undergraduate study.

First Year Insight Day – 22nd April 2021

General Open Day – 8th December 2020

Vacation scheme
● 28th June – 16th July 2021 (three weeks)
● Pay: £500 per week

Our summer vacation scheme is intended for both law students and students of other disciplines in their penultimate and final year of study, recent graduates (in any discipline), and those already taking a GDL or LPC course. Gibson Dunn strongly encourages candidates interested in a training contract to apply for a place on our summer vacation scheme, rather than directly for a training contract. To date, the majority of our trainees have been recruited from our summer vacation scheme.

Early application is advised as places will be allocated on a rolling basis.

Other benefits
Full range of benefits including private medical insurance, corporate rates at a gym/fitness chain, life assurance, income protection insurance, travel insurance, pension, employee assistance programme and emergency back-up care. You will also benefit from individual annual book, client development and professional development allowances, attendance at US firm retreats and extensive Professional Development, Diversity and Pro Bono programmes.

Open days and first-year opportunities
● General Open Day – 8th December 2020
Applications are welcome from those who are eligible to apply for our summer vacation scheme.

● First Year Insight Day – 22nd April 2021
Applications are welcome from students of any discipline in their first year of undergraduate study.
Private equity and funds are the focus of Goodwin’s London office, while a new Cambridge base adds to its tech and life sciences expertise.

The Facts
Locations: London, Cambridge
Overseas offices: 11
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 37/85/14
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £46,000
Qualification salary: £125,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Goodwin

The Firm
It’s been go go go in London and Europe for US firm Goodwin. In the last five years, the firm’s European lawyer headcount has grown from 20 to nearly 200. In London, total revenue came in at just under $74 million in 2019, a healthy 12% increase on last year. The firm also continues to lure in lateral talent, with recent private equity hires coming from CMS and fellow US outfit Kirkland & Ellis. Keeping its foot on the pedal, last year Goodwin opened a Luxembourg office and became one of the first US players to open a second UK base in Cambridge’s so-called Silicon Fen, a hub for high-tech businesses and startups. Tech and life sciences are major areas for Goodwin in its native US, so setting up shop in Cambridge (with a team hired from tech whiz Taylor Wessing) clearly indicates the firm wants to keep building out its practice here in the UK.

“While I’ve been at the firm they’ve brought in new departments.”

For now, all trainees are recruited into the firm’s London base. Our sources were attracted to Goodwin’s focused approach on private equity, funds and real estate, which sit at the heart of the London operations. “And while I’ve been at the firm they’ve brought in new departments that fit into the pie,” one trainee pointed out, like a tech M&A group which focuses on venture capital. Chambers UK considers the firm’s mid-market real estate team to be top-notch in London, and awards further national commendations for investment funds and venture capital investment. Outside the UK, the firm has 11 offices spanning the US, Asia and Europe, with bases in Hong Kong, Paris, Silicon Valley and their initial office in Boston.

Goodwin’s training contract was only launched recently in 2018, a decade after the London office, so many of the processes are still relatively new and the firm is only just starting to welcome homegrown NQs into the fold. The trainee intake of about six a year was a big pull factor for trainees we spoke to. “When I do a deal I’m the only trainee,” said one. “There’s scope to have a lot of client contact.” Goodwin will be expanding its intake to eight-to-ten trainees a year from now on.

The Seats
Trainees indicate their seat preferences before each rotation (HR emails them before they start their first seat too) and the firm “tries to accommodate your preferences as much as possible.” Each trainee does four six-month seats; newly introduced is a litigation seat (previously trainees completed a course to get their contentious experience).

Goodwin’s private equity team covers the life cycle of investments, with work ranging from “fund formations and buyouts to M&A and restructurings.” The team also handles venture financing and joint ventures. Deals are typically worth tens or hundreds of millions, and sometimes edge over a billion. The technology and life sciences sectors are a focus, as are healthcare, finance and manufacturing. Clients include mid-market private equity houses such as Inflexion and Graphite Capital, plus real estate investment firms like Medical Properties Trust, which the firm recently advised on an acquisition of 30 hospital fa-
cilities, worth around £1.5 billion in total. Trainees were kept busy managing disclosure processes, attending meetings and conducting due diligence, and one told us: “By the end of the seat I was always on calls with clients.”

“I recently completed a deal at 6am over a glass of champagne.”

The focus of the private investment funds seat is on fund formation. “You do all kind of funds,” one trainee reported. “I worked on real estate funds as well as private equity funds.” The team recently advised asset manager MIRA on a €6 billion fund-raising. Client contact was good here too: “I sent stuff to our client under the supervision of the associates.” Any other highlights? “Probably being allowed to help update a limited partnership agreement,” said one. “It governs the fund vehicle. Being allowed to draft complex amendments to that was interesting.” On that note, “it’s quite a technical seat. There’s a lot of training involved and a lot of concepts.”

Goodwin’s real estate department encompasses both finance and more conventional real estate work. “A lot of the work focuses on M&A where the organisations involved hold a lot of property,” one source explained. We spoke to trainees who’d worked on everything from the sale of hospital portfolios and warehouses to large acquisitions of student accommodation. Recently the team advised London Square on an £80 million acquisition of Holloway Prison, set to be redeveloped to create 1,000 new homes. Bigger deals such as these see trainees mainly handling due diligence, but interviewees told us: “There are also smaller deals that you’re able to run with.” On those smaller deals, trainees were able to rack up drafting experience in the form of disclosure letters, leases, registry applications and press releases. Our interviewees indicated it was one of the more demanding seats. As one told us: “I recently completed a deal at 6am over a glass of champagne.” Chin-chin!

“I’ve worked with companies at the forefront of new drug creation, including the development of a coronavirus vaccine.”

Sources told us that “there’s been an explosion of work” in Goodwin’s tech and life sciences department, underpinned by the new Cambridge office. The team represents emerging companies, venture capital firms and investors on transactions including licence agreements, M&A deals and securities offerings. The London team also has expertise in early-stage financings and capital markets, as well as regulatory, IP and data privacy issues. One source told us: “I’ve worked with companies at the forefront of new drug creation, including the development of a coronavirus vaccine.” Recently, the firm advised Avacta Life Sciences on a joint venture in South Korea to develop cell and gene therapies for immune-mediated diseases. Trainees also worked on data privacy, IP and software agreements. It’s a team where “you’re treated like an NQ,” one source told us, adding: “I was often having a first crack at all the main transaction documents.”

Trainee Life

Our interviewees summed up Goodwin’s culture as “dynamic, vibrant and progressive.” One felt “there’s a real cosmopolitan feel to the firm – the trainee group is diverse in every sense of the word.” Another insider elaborated: “Everyone here has their own stylistic presence and we’re all very outgoing.” Some felt confident enough to “casually have a chat in the toilet with partners,” but not everyone was so comfortable. “I would be lying if I said I had a casual relationship with partners,” said one. “I would always ask another trainee a question before walking into a partner’s office.” However, after a drink (or two) all nerves went out the window. “We had a rooftop party last year with a big barbecue and it was very much the partners leading us to the next bar!”

Sources described a variety of diversity initiatives, such as the recent celebration of Black History Month and women’s movie nights. There’s also a pro bono programme. The firm does a lot of work with the California Innocence Project, which trainees can get involved with too. “The project helps inmates who have been wrongly convicted,” a trainee explained. “They tell us their story, we listen, and then give them guidance.” Goodwin also chooses a ‘charity of the year’ to support – this year it was children’s charity Impetus.

According to our interviewees, a standard working day at Goodwin ran from around 9.30am to 7pm, which sounds pretty jampy for a US firm. They clarified that “the hours in private investment funds and tech and life sciences are consistently later.” They’re compensated with the big bucks synonymous with US firm – incoming trainees start on £46,000. The NQ salary is a very tasty £125,000. At the time of writing, our interviewees couldn’t give us much information on how the firm managed the qualification process, but “because we’re such a small cohort, everyone knows who wants to qualify where.” According to the firm, growing trainee numbers has led to a more formalised process, with fourth-seaters submitting applications to any practice area which is hiring; each department then runs its own process. In 2020, the firm retained five of six qualifiers.
Qualify with Goodwin

Once qualified, associates can celebrate their hard work by applying to Goodwin’s global rotation programme, which allows associates to spend two weeks apiece in two different international offices.
**Goodwin Procter (UK) LLP**

100 Cheapside, London, EC2V 6DY  
Tel: 020 7447 4200  
Email: hrrecruiting@goodwinlaw.com  
Website: www.goodwinlaw.com/careers/people-and-culture  
Twitter: @goodwinlaw  
Facebook: @JoinGoodwin  
Instagram: @join_goodwin

**Firm profile**

Goodwin is a Global 50 law firm with offices in Boston, Cambridge, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, Luxembourg, New York, Paris, San Francisco, Silicon Valley and Washington, DC. Excelling at complex and sophisticated transactional work and precedent-setting, bet-the-company litigation, the firm combines in-depth legal knowledge with practical business experience to help clients maximise opportunities, manage risk and move their business forward. We have more than 1,200 corporate and litigation lawyers worldwide. The firm hires talented, motivated people committed to excellence, innovation, collaboration and client service and believes that every lawyer and staff member deserves a supportive, meritocratic environment in which people of all backgrounds are given the opportunity to excel and thrive. Our growing London office is home to more than 100 lawyers who provide an integrated legal service offering across offices and geographies.

**Main areas of work**

Private equity, private investment funds, finance, real estate industry, technology and life sciences, tax, litigation.

**Training opportunities**

Goodwin’s London office recruits eight to ten trainees each year and offers a variety of training in our core practice areas including tech and life sciences, private equity, private investment funds and real estate. Our size and continued growth allow us to offer our trainees and associates increased responsibility and meaningful client contact from the outset. We work in small teams, which gives our lawyers the opportunity to work directly with, and be mentored by, senior colleagues, and to develop a network that will be an invaluable part of their future career development.

Goodwin trainees will complete four 6-month seats.

**Vacation scheme**

The Goodwin summer vacation scheme provides real insight into what it is like to train and work at Goodwin and gives us a window to get to know students better.

Students will witness first-hand the work we do for our clients by shadowing associates, attending client and business unit meetings, and attending information sessions focussed on the work of each practice area in the London office.

Students will leave our programme with valuable mentors and a large professional and social network.

Goodwin will run two summer vacation schemes, from which we will recruit a proportion of our 2023 intake of trainees. We will be accepting applications for summer 2021 vacation schemes from 1st December 2020 through to 15th January 2021.

To apply please visit www.goodwinlaw.com/careers/people-and-culture

**University law careers fairs 2020**

- Nottingham University: 19th October 2020
- Oxford University: 21st October 2020
- Cambridge University: 22nd October 2020
- Durham University: 17th November 2020

**Application criteria**

- Training contracts pa: 8-10
- Applications pa: 500
- Minimum required degree grade: 2:1 or other
- Minimum UCAS points or A levels: AAB
- Vacation scheme places pa: 20

**Dates and deadlines**

- Training contract applications open: 1st January 2021
- Training contract deadline, 2023 start: 31st July 2021
- Vacation scheme applications open: 1st December 2020
- Vacation scheme 2020 deadline: 15th January 2021

**Salary and benefits**

- First-year salary: £46,000
- Second-year salary: £50,000
- Holiday entitlement: 27 days

**Sponsorship**

- LPC fees: Yes
- GDL fees: Yes
- Maintenance grant pa: GDL: £8,000, LPC: £10,000
The True Picture

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 39/38/9
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £37,000
Qualification salary: £60,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Harbottle
More on the office and hours

In-house yoga, “Ottolenghi-style” food and some of the best media and entertainment work you’ll find – welcome to the lives of trainees at London-based Harbottle & Lewis.

The Firm
One way we at Chambers Student kept busy during lockdown (in our downtime, of course) was by having a little peruse of tabloids’ gossip columns. Many of the more scandalous stories we came across will no doubt provide work for Harbottle & Lewis’ lawyers at some point down the line. From Kate Moss and the Beckhams to the senior members of The Royal Family and Melania Trump, you’d be hard-pressed to find a firm that counsels more celebrity clients through cases against said gossip columns than this top-ranked defamation-defeating dynamo.

However, trainees didn’t decide to ply their trade at Harbottle purely for its media and entertainment expertise (it’s nabbed no fewer than five media rankings in Chambers UK, covering advertising, theatre, publishing, film and TV, and gaming and social media). Newbies also thought Harbottle’s relatively small size was a good place to cultivate their careers: “I had conversations with absolutely everyone when I was doing work experience here and everyone is happy to get you on board.” Others highlighted Harbottle’s “really fantastic corporate commercial work.”

We’re inclined to agree, given the firm’s also picked up a ranking for its mid-market corporate work in Chambers UK: “The lawyers have come from the magic circle so they have really interesting clients, but it’s not like City firms where everything is for banks.” Indeed, Harbottle’s corporate, private equity and IP work typically involves matters for media, entertainment, tech and communications sectors. Chambers High Net Worth also rates Harbottle’s private wealth, defamation/reputation management and family work for HNW individuals.

The Seats
Trainees submit their seat preferences about a month before starting the training contract and for subsequent rotations find out where they are going about a month before moving on. An insider said that whether you get your top choice each time is “luck of the draw. You have to be [sensibly] forceful about it and keep reminding them of where you want to go.” Fortunately, “most people get their first or second choice.”

“We get to work with household names – it’s amazing!”

The employment seat is “really interesting because it gives you a mix of contentious and non-contentious work.” On the disputes side, newbies get involved in “gearing up for tribunals or settlements” by helping to prepare witness statements and “going to chambers numerous times for conferences with barristers and clients.” A recent tribunal case saw the firm successfully defend Harrods against an unfair dismissal claim. Drafting experience comes in the form of writing employment contracts and consultancy agreements using templates and tailoring them “to the client’s specific situation.” Because we came calling during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, non-contentious work had involved related research tasks – namely how employers should handle the situation. Trainees in this seat are also responsible for organising ‘Know-How’ sessions: “Every other fortnight one department presents on the biggest cases or goings-on in that area for the rest of the firm.”

Seat options: family; private client & tax; litigation (commercial litigation, IP litigation and media & information); employment; property; corporate; media and entertainment; film, TV and theatre
TME (technology, media and entertainment) is unsurprisingly the most popular seat “so they usually take two trainees at a time to accommodate everyone.” This is generally considered “the commercial seat” and involves “a lot of industry-focused matters” in areas such as advertising, sport and video gaming (the work doesn’t involve playing FIFA, unfortunately). Trainees had helped with agreements between magazines and for “elite athletes in different types of sports,” plus conducted some work with professional football clubs: “It was so exciting!” Non-sporty types can get involved in work “with production companies and household names, which was amazing!” Speaking of which, the firm recently acted as production counsel for Netflix as it made its first UK-shot film, Rebecca. We got the impression that TME offers the most varied work: “You work across the whole floor, so you encounter all the sectors.” On the advertising side, the group advised David Beckham on brand ambassador/endorsement deals with the likes of adidas and Haig Club whisky, while on the gaming side lawyers here represent Microsoft, The Pokémon Company and games studio Dream Harvest.

“I don’t feel like a small cog in a giant wheel.”

There isn’t a shortage of “the biggest household names” over in litigation, either. This seat is split into two three-month stints, between commercial litigation and IP on the one hand, and MIC (the Media Information Group) on the other. Commercial litigation “isn’t as hands-on” as the media half according to a source: “There’s a lot of admin, but you do get to draft cease and desist letters.” The media side sees trainees assume a Malcolm Tucker-type role: “Fundamentally, your job is to keep stories out of the press and to stop potential defamatory broadcasts from happening.” Case in point: the firm recently acted for none other than Prince Harry, when LA-based Splash News used a helicopter to photograph his private home. “Nuff said.” Another matter saw the team file a successful complaint against The Daily Telegraph for Melania Trump over false claims made about the First Lady’s past. Naturally, it’s a fast-paced seat: “You’ll get a call from someone saying, ‘This is being broadcast next week,’ so you have to rush around the clock to shut it down – it’s so exciting!” Trainees thought that “it’s the least legal seat – there’s a lot of screenshotting and monitoring newspapers.”

“A lot of our deals are for clients in the film and TV sectors,” explained one interviewee when discussing the corporate seat. Here trainees deal with the business mechanics behind the scenes, however. “We do a bit of private equity and venture capital too, like fundraising rounds for small companies – that’s how we differentiate ourselves. We get to meet the founders and watch the companies grow, which is nice.” Harbottle recently represented Gordon Ramsay’s restaurant group on its multimillion investment from LA-based private equity outfit Lion Capital; the team also acted for independent film and TV production company All3Media Finance on its acquisition of live sports programmers Aurora Media Worldwide. High levels of client exposure were reported here: “You take notes and run through the warranties with clients in disclosure meetings.” Irrespective of the type of deal, “we have small teams, so trainees genuinely play a crucial part. I don’t feel like a small cog in a giant wheel!” That being said, “we also have to do a lot of house stuff, like updating spreadsheets, which isn’t as exciting as the client-facing parts.”

Trainee Life

“The culture is best demonstrated by our wellness package,” said one insider, and what a wellness package it is: daily fitness classes, fortnightly massages, monthly therapy sessions and fortnightly talks on mental health are all free. Managing partner Glen Atchison tells us more: “We could have fit everyone on two floors in our new building, but we took four so that we had the room to grow and could have dedicated wellness and breakout rooms. Our yoga/fitness studio is better than most of London’s, given our river view.” Can Chambers Student have some guest passes please? Interviewees were pleased to report that “the fitness classes break down the barriers between us and senior people. I’m often doing yoga next to our managing partner, which probably doesn’t happen elsewhere!” Even in the midst of a global pandemic, fitness classes continued via Zoom to “keep our sense of community.”

“I’m often doing yoga next to our managing partner, which probably doesn’t happen elsewhere!”

If yoga isn’t your cup of tea, you can also ‘break down barriers’ in Harbottle’s eighth-floor café. There aren’t any Mean Girls-style “You can’t sit with us!” vibes here: “In my second week I was eating lunch with another trainee and a partner asked if they could join us, which was a big deal. There’s no social hierarchy.” It’s also a phone-free zone, “so everyone sits together and chats for an hour.” Every trainee we spoke to waxed lyrical about the “Ottolenghi-style” lunch, which is far from school dinner stodge: “It’s genuinely amazing. It’s on another level. We have an app on our phone with three different options every day and it’s all free,” said one trainee, while another added: “I really missed it when I was on secondment!”
Further bonding comes in the form of quarterly inter-departmental hiking trips: “They take ten people from different levels, including support staff, and we walk through the Lake District for three days, staying in hotels along the way. We don’t have to take annual leave for it and they encourage us not to take our phones. It’s such a good bonding experience.” As trainees walk towards qualification, things tend to remain quite informal: “If there’s a department you want to qualify into you chat to them, and if they have room and like you they’ll take you. It can be problematic that a lot of people come here for TME work, so if everyone wants to qualify there I would be surprised if they took us all on!” Both of Harbottle’s spring 2020 qualifiers stayed on at the firm as NQs, but due to Covid-19 the firm did not retain any of its three autumn qualifiers.

**Business Class**

Trainees can get involved in each department’s business development activities regardless of whether they’re sat with that group or not: “It’s really fantastic and something you probably couldn’t do at bigger firms.” The sports lawyers recently let a trainee attend a conference on their behalf “because they knew that person was interested in the area.”
Firm profile
Over the last 60 years, we have acted on behalf of some of the most creative, talented, entrepreneurial and successful people, businesses and corporates across the Private Client and Technology, Media and Entertainment sectors. Our clients range from start-up businesses to multinational companies; early stage entrepreneurs to established industry leaders; and household names to private individuals. We pride ourselves on providing strategic and pro-active legal expertise that is delivered with industry insight and a commercial approach.

Examples of some of our clients include: Working Title; Universal Music; Nissan; Emirates; Magic Light; National Theatre; Open Table; Hachette UK; Take-Two Interactive/Rockstar Games; The England Cricket Team; Angelina Jolie; Melania Trump, Niklas Zennström (founder of Skype), CrowdEmotion and Virgin Group.

Main areas of work
As a full service firm we provide innovative and specialist advice on corporate, commercial, employment, family, finance, intellectual property, litigation, private wealth, property and tax law. We also advise on regulatory matters and the legal issues faced by organisations and individuals in the media spotlight, such as defamation, information protection, privacy and image rights. Our service consists of giving in-depth commercial advice to clients in all areas of the communications and creative industries including advertising, broadcasting, charity, digital media, fashion, film, music, publishing, sponsorship, sport, television, theatre and video games. As we have been at the centre of many of these industries’ largest and most high profile transactions and cases, we have a strong reputation for our work in these areas.

Training opportunities
During your two-year training contract with us, you will be given the opportunity to thrive in our key practice areas, spending six months in four different seats which include; corporate, employment, family, tax/private client, litigation (commercial and media and information), property and commercial (music, sport, advertising, interactive entertainment, intellectual property, publishing, broadcasting, theatre, film and television). Our smaller trainee intake coupled with the firm’s unique positioning to provide clients with an end-to-end service, gives our trainees quality exposure to many different parts of the business, providing invaluable commercial knowledge and ensuring they have responsibility for a full range of legal tasks.

Additionally, we host internal weekly seminar programmes in both legal topics and industry know-how. An open door policy and a pragmatic entrepreneurial approach to legal practice will provide a stimulating working environment.

Other benefits
Lunch provided daily; season ticket loans; private medical insurance, group personal pension scheme; 25 days holiday; childcare vouchers; cycle to work scheme; free on-site yoga, massage therapy and fitness classes; employee assistance scheme.
Herbert Smith Freehills

The facts
Locations: London, Belfast
Overseas offices: 24
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 160/476/121
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; client secondments
First-year salary: £45,000
Qualification salary: £105,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into HSF
Breakdown of HSF’s disputes groups

HSF proves that full-service magic can come from outside that circle.

The Firm
All that glitters is not gold, so we’re told in Lord of the Rings. If any firm challenges the need for the term ‘magic circle’ (and makes it look somewhat outdated), it’s Herbert Smith Freehills. It’s long been considered a quality rival to those big five, and in litigation the firm is a true leader. Along with the top US firms in London, a group ing within the global elite would be more fitting for HSF. Chambers Global identifies the firm as a worldwide leader in business & human rights law (where it is one of just two firms with this accolade) and dispute resolution and projects. In London, Chambers UK recognises the firm’s prowess in various litigious areas, including banking disputes, commercial & corporate, financial crime, international arbitration (on the construction end of things), and employment. But disputes know-how isn’t HFS’s one ring to rule them all: projects & energy is a huge deal here, and HSF also gets top billing in Chambers UK for its construction, real estate, administrative & public law, employee share schemes & incentives, insurance, investment funds, and rail transport work.

“...genuine commitment to improve diversity.”

For some, the huge draw was the firm’s strong litigation and corporate practices, plus its global presence, which makes the work “international in nature.” For others, “the ability to get involved in pro bono as a trainee” and the firm’s “genuine commitment to improve diversity” were appealing. Others mentioned the firm’s culture, while, for others, “the firm has a good reputation, the work is interesting and the money is good.” All trainees are based in HSF’s London office, which can be found in Exchange House close to Liverpool Street station in the City.

The Seats
As a disputes heavyweight, it should come as no surprise that HSF requires every trainee to complete a contentious stint. Two transactional seats are also compulsory. Before starting the training contract and towards the end of each subsequent seat, trainees put down six preferences from a list of seats within corporate; finance; real estate; disputes; employment, pensions & incentives; and competition, regulation & trade. “One thing that’s really good about the training contract is that you can really specialise in what you want,” one trainee explained. “If you absolutely loved real estate, for example, you could do real estate, real estate disputes, real estate finance and a real estate secondment.” That would depend, of course, on whether you got your top choices every time.

Seat allocation at HSF involves an algorithm – a system that got mixed reviews. Some thought it “works quite well. Before it was someone’s full-time job in HR, and people would moan about it anyway!” With the current system, “the algorithm puts in all the rules, where you’re allowed to be and what your preferences are. Then HR step in and manually move people around.” From what we could ascertain, “most people get their preferences.” However, others thought the system was “opaque. People have put something down as a fifth option and others have put it as their first, and those in the former category have got it.” The training principal and HR recently met with trainees to provide them with a bit more clarity on how the algorithm system works.

As you might expect from a global outfit like HSF, the firm offers both international and client secondments. Most trainees embark on one of these options during their contract. Neither are available as first seat options, but trainees are asked to put at least one secondment...
Talking of disputes, the department is split into seven distinct groups. For example, Group 2 covers general commercial litigation, as well as energy (oil, gas, electricity, natural resources and utilities), media, competition and professional negligence disputes. Group 5, meanwhile, does specialist international arbitration work; investment treaty and international commercial arbitrations; public international law and boundary disputes. Clients include governments, state-owned entities, major international corporations and financial institutions. For a full rundown of the groups, go online. In addition to the seven groups, disputes also houses the firm’s IP team. Recent highlights for HSF’s disputes arm include representing Standard Chartered Bank and its Hong Kong subsidiary during a series of arbitrations over its investment into a power station based in Tanzania; defending Lloyds Banking Group during a group litigation brought against the bank that alleged breach of duty with regard to advising shareholders and sharing information; acting for three defendants (including two individuals) who were accused by online grocery shopping outfit Ocado of plotting to use the company’s confidential information in order to succeed in another similar business.

“...a lot of responsibility given to us, as we drafted emergency documents.”

For trainees, disputes seats, whatever their flavour, “tend to be quite admin-heavy.” Sources explained that a lot of the complex strategising is done “at the senior levels,” so trainees can expect to do “lots of billing and bundling” alongside a fair bit of project management work on cases. “Doc review is a huge element of being in disputes,” said one source, “so you review thousands of documents to understand the root of the matter.” However, sources interviewed did say that “the firm tries to balance” the more administrative aspects with more substantive work. “Towards the end of the seat it got more interesting as people came to trust me a bit more,” recalled one. Trainees also mentioned “drafting notes and minutes, doing research, and being part of team and client meetings – either in a silent capacity or to take notes.”

Advising major names on their investments and developments is the name of the game in HSF’s real estate department. Clients include investment companies like Brookfield and Aberdeen Standard Investments, as well as developers like Chinese company Greenland. The team recently represented private equity outfit Blackstone and its partner M7 Real Estate on several UK acquisitions, including that of Hansteen, a London-listed warehouse landlord. They’ve also been advising developer and investor British Land and its joint venture partner on various big development sites in the City, including locations in and around Liverpool Street, Exchange Square and Finsbury Avenue. Like disputes, there’s a “shift from admin to drafting” as trainees progress in the seat. While our impression of disputes was of larger matters being the norm, “in real estate there are quite a few small matters, which you can handle by yourself.” Trainees added that during the Covid-19 crisis there was “a lot of responsibility given to us, as we drafted emergency documents.” Several trainees mentioned having “fantastic client contact,” with one explaining that they’d been “emailing clients directly and had good opportunities for exposure to the other side.” Sources admitted the work can be “quite dry in parts and document-heavy: creating transaction bibles and managing documents around completion can be both stressful and not massively fulfilling.” Despite that, sources were glad to run the smaller matters and said it was a “really supportive and friendly team; the partners aren’t scary!” Good to hear. Trainees also enjoyed the “pace of the department.”
Chambers UK notes HSF’s corporate abilities in the technology, financial services and real estate sectors. Public M&A deals are a notable strength for the department; recent highlights on this front include acting for Virgin Atlantic on the set-up for its consortium bid (via an entity called Connect Airways) to acquire the airline Flybe, as well as representing telecoms equipment manufacturer ARRIS International on its mega acquisition by CommScope for $74 billion. The latter involved parties in the US, and many deals here have cross-border elements. Another international deal saw HSF representing Sky on its acquisition of a stake in video software provider Synamedia (which has a workforce spread across China, Canada, the US, the UK, India, Belgium and Israel). Sources here said they spent a fair amount of time reviewing contracts, conducting due diligence and drafting ancillary documents, alongside project managing deals. While the department is no stranger to huge deals like those mentioned above, there’s still scope for trainees to take on smaller transactions, which enabled one interviewee to run “a couple of signings by myself.”

“...pro bono work builds so many skills as you manage the cases yourself.”

For those looking for something different to supplement their work, pro bono was described as “one of the best things the firm does. Every trainee is required to volunteer for the Whitechapel Legal Advice Clinic.” The firm requires trainees to “go there once every six weeks to work on a case or two.” The clinic provides employment, housing and consumer advice to those who need it. For HSF trainees, doing this work led to “so much responsibility. You interview a client and take on their case.” Some attended employment tribunals, where they “stood and represented clients.” Overall, sources felt that “pro bono work builds so many skills as you manage the cases yourself.” Another commented that the clinic is where they “learnt the most. I want to qualify into disputes because of Whitechapel.” During the Covid-19 crisis, trainees said there was a lot of work “for people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic.”

Trainee Life

Trainees felt positive about the level of support they’d received from senior lawyers and felt nurtured by the partners. Across the seats, interviewees commented on the good training they’d had on interesting work. For the 60-odd first-year trainees, a big plus was that the firm requires them to all do their LPC at BPP. With the introduction of the SQE, HSF will continue its relationship with BPP, and expects its trainees will begin coming through that route from November 2022. “There’s a nice camaraderie that comes out of it,” the BPP grads said. “Trainees are social and keen to stay connected.” On top of this historical link, the firm “does quite a lengthy induction process,” which trainees said instilled a “sense of helping each other out.” Trainees are my “first port of call for questions on new tasks,” one added. This is not to say that those higher up were unavailable to trainees, as several sources also highlighted the “approachability of partners” and the “supportive culture at the firm. HSF has a reputation for having a more compassionate work environment,” and our interviewees’ comments go some way to back this up. One trainee cheerfully admitted that they’d “made some mistakes, and it was good to feel like I could admit that freely without being yelled at” Sources added that “when you start, the importance of mental health is hammered into you. You know where the mental health champions are on your floor.” We also heard that the firm leans “heavily into mental health week.” While respect for mental wellbeing runs throughout the firm, several sources mentioned that the culture was often “completely different in different teams,” especially when it came to the social life: “Some leaders are great managers of the teams and are good at putting on social events. And then there are other teams where nothing happens.” Despite around half of our respondents saying they were stressed, they also overwhelmingly said they were happy, which leads us to speculate that the stress reported is hopefully that of the good, motivational kind.

In terms of hours, interviewees felt that HSF is better in comparison to its competitors, with most sources reporting working between eight and ten hours a day. However, we were warned that when cases got busy, “that’s... yeah... very intense, with very late nights.” How late? “Usually 10pm to midnight, with a week of 2am finishes.” Brace yourselves for some late nights when deals heat up too. However, we heard that holidays are “well respected,” irrespective of where you are in a matter. Our sources admitted that “you work incredibly hard on a consistent basis,” but most felt that both the workload and the hours were manageable. For those looking to stay on at the firm, sources explained that HR “calls you to find out where you want to qualify and what your second preference is.” Meanwhile, practice groups meet to figure out how many NQs they need. HR “then approach the teams to tell them how many want to qualify into that team and find out how many the department can take.” Once HR has had those conversations, “it publishes a vacancies list, normally around May.” Trainees then submit written applications for NQ roles that interest them, with each one consisting of a “cover letter, your performance reviews in a pack and a mini CV, which you then send to the team you want to qualify into.” After that there are interviews and trainees usually find out what their destiny will be in June each year. In 2020, 49 of 64 qualifiers took up NQ roles with HSF, with one fixed-term contract.
Herbert Smith Freehills LLP

Exchange House, Primrose Street, London EC2A 2EG
Tel: 020 7374 8000
Email: graduatesuk@hsf.com
Website: www.careers.herbertsmithfreehills.com/uk/grads
LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/herbert-smith-freehills/ 

Firm profile
The future of law is here.
We are Herbert Smith Freehills, a leading, full-service, global law firm working on some of the world’s biggest cases and deals at the forefront of the world’s most exciting sectors. With an award winning depth of expertise across a wide variety of sectors, geographies and legal specialisms, we’re the firm where you can build your future in law.

Main areas of work
Our work is incredibly varied. We provide top-quality tailored legal advice to major corporations, governments and financial institutions as well as various commercial organisations. We operate at the forefront of many exciting sectors and combine legal expertise with a global perspective and local insight. Our dispute resolution practice is widely recognised as number one globally and this includes both our leading international arbitration practice and award-winning in-house advocacy unit. We can therefore offer a complete litigation service and a realistic alternative career to the Bar. We also specialise in finance, competition, regulation and trade, intellectual property, real estate and more. As a truly global law firm, we do this by attracting the brightest minds across the world to collaborate on work which has an international impact.

Trainee opportunities
Herbert Smith Freehills’ trainees are a part of it all. The training contract balances contentious and non-contentious work with pro bono opportunities and real responsibility. Trainees rotate around four, six-month seats with the opportunity to go on secondment either to a client or to one of the firm’s international offices. We only recruit future trainees from our vacation schemes and all candidates are guaranteed an interview for a training contract at the end of their vacation scheme. These schemes have been specifically designed to build and test the unique skills and knowledge required to succeed at the firm.

Vacation scheme
We provide paid vacation schemes in winter, spring and summer.
– Spring and summer vacation schemes: 14 September - 4 December 2020

Other benefits
Herbert Smith Freehills provide a number of employee benefits which include: 25 days’ annual leave, pension contributions, private medical insurance, life assurance, subsidised gym membership, cycle to work scheme, travel insurance, interest-free season ticket loan, access to a mortgage broker, corporate discounts and many more.

Open days and first-year opportunities
First Year Workshop: Applications open 1 January – 31 January 2021. The workshops will be held on 29 – 30 March 2021 and 12 – 13 April 2021.


University law careers fairs 2020
We will be attending 25 virtual law fairs in the UK. Details of these can be found on our website.
Hewitsons LLP

The facts
Locations: Cambridge, Northampton, Milton Keynes, London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 41/57/9
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £24,000 (Cambridge, Northampton, London)
Qualification salary: £40,500 (Cambridge, Northampton, London)

Property and private wealth-powered Hewitsons hopes to “capitalise on the Oxbridge corridor” and break into the UK’s top 100 firms.

The Firm
It might sound like a boat full of boffins, but the Oxford-Cambridge Arc is in fact a region of the UK that the government has committed to invest heavily in, building new homes and improving local infrastructure and transport links. Where there’s money, you’ll no doubt find lots of lawyers – and with offices in Cambridge, Northampton, Milton Keynes and London, Hewitsons is as well placed as any firm to reap the rewards. “We want to make sure we’re a part of what happens there,” trainees said. “This is definitely the area we’re looking to grow in and focus on in terms of both clients and practices.”

Hewitsons already represents various Oxford and Cambridge colleges as well as local businesses in the corridor. Its commercial practice earns impressive Chambers UK rankings in East Anglia covering construction, environment, IP, litigation, planning and real estate; the firm also scores accolades in Northampton and Cambridge for agriculture work. If you’re looking for something more... hush-hush, Hewitsons’ private wealth practice scores rankings in Cambridge, Northampton and Milton Keynes. Cambridge housed six trainees at the time of our calls; five were in the Northampton office; and London was home to three.

“This is definitely the area we’re looking to grow in.”

The firm sorts new arrivals into their first seat. Before each rotation, trainees discuss their preferences with HR about halfway through the current seat. “They asked me not only where I’d like to go next, but which seats I was generally interested in and which ones I’d rather not sit in,” one impressed interviewee said. As at many firms, second-years will normally get priority; each office offers a slightly different palette of seats with the widest variety available in Northampton and Cambridge. Head to our website for the full breakdown.

TheSeats
Sources found their private wealth seat to be “one of the busiest of all.” The team works for high net worth individuals and families including “longstanding clients with a lot of existing, long-term work. We do everything from the creation of wills to lasting powers of attorney to the formation of trusts – everything from the moment someone passes away to the distribution of the estate.” Trainees here also get insight into the firm’s tax practice, advising clients on inheritance tax planning. Interviewees agreed that “you get a lot of client contact in this seat” – one estimated they “see clients at least four times a week.” A private client seat also offers drafting experience. “I drafted an awful lot of wills, including interesting ones dealing with property abroad,” a trainee said; others drafted letters to clients and “lasting powers of attorney.”

A seat in property tends to focus on mostly commercial property, sometimes with residential and development aspects. Interviewees had a hand in commercial tenancies for shops, factories and offices; landlord/tenant work (“mainly working for the landlord”); leases and licence alterations, and leasehold enfranchisements. Some worked “on a couple of refinancing matters” too. Hewitsons’ team in Northampton recently advised the United Church Schools Foundation on the acquisition of

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Hewitsons

Seat options: agriculture; corporate; employment; contentious; commercial property; and private wealth
independent schools in Hertfordshire and Surrey; in Cambridge the firm acted for Hill Residential in transactions for the University’s North-West Cambridge development site. Sources in London dabbled in work on “high-end, high-value residential property, mainly based around Kensington and Chelsea.” As in private wealth, sources noticed that the firm has “quite a lot of long-term clients, so we’ll do renewals of a lease that we’ve worked on previously.” Day to day, trainee sources handled “lots of Land Registry applications” as well as a fair bit of research and reviewing agreements. Some had also “tackled the first draft of a report on title, drafted leases and some small licences.”

All things considered, trainees were pleased with the responsibilities available: “If I’m honest, the firm is brilliant at saying ‘have a go at this’.”

“The firm is brilliant at saying ‘have a go at this’!”

Corporate and employment are grouped into one seat in Northampton but are separate seats in Cambridge. In London, employment is usually paired with corporate insolvency. Trainees saw a mix of corporate deals including asset sales, company formations and restructurings; general corporate governance is also par for the course here. Hewitsons’ mid-market practice scores a top Chambers UK ranking in Northampton for its work with SMEs and owner-managed businesses, recently advising on the acquisition of the Lilac Rabbit public house in Isham by the local community via a new company, Lilacs Isham Limited. International businesses like ACF Technologies, Gambling.com and SMC can also be found on the firm’s client roster. In London, sources worked for “a lot of sports clients who need commercial assistance. We might be looking at service-level agreements for these large sport organisations.” Other common trainee tasks in transactional matters include managing data rooms, reviewing disclosure requirements, conducting company searches and general deal support research. “What’s interesting is I’ve been able to really focus on one area,” an insider said. “When queries come in from clients, I can deal with them myself – with supervision – and it’s nice to build those relationships.”

Hewitsons trainees can get contentious experience through a seat in commercial litigation, property litigation or contentious trusts and probate. The last of those covers “any dispute that arises after death – often in terms of people challenging wills for invalidity.” As in non-contentious private client, sources enjoyed “a lot of client contact” as well as experience writing letters and other court documents. Over in commercial litigation, trainees juggled various contractual disputes including in the agricultural sector ("the firm has a lot of farming clients and is on the National Farmers’ Union panel"), as well as some probate-linked litigation. The Cambridge office regularly handles cases linked to the nearby ‘Silicon Fen’ – invariably IP and patent litigation for science and tech clients. Hewitsons acted for a soft drinks brand in a trade mark dispute involving multiple multimillion-pound proceedings in the EU and UK trade mark registries. Trainees found they were “doing intensive research, as there’s always something new in every dispute,” and preparing mediation bundles and witness statements. The firm’s commercial disputes clients include the British Institute of Interior Design and RSPB.

Trainee Life

“A lot of people have been here for a very long time,” a trainee told us. “What that means is people know each other very well and the firm has more of a family feel.” In Northampton, the open plan office ensures plenty of face time with your work family, but even in other bases with “more split, traditional offices, there’s never an issue of not being able to knock on someone’s door. Nobody feels intimidating or unapproachable.” Trainees across Hewitsons told us they were “encouraged to visit other offices and meet people. When a firm is spread out like this, there’s a risk that each office becomes its own colony, but Hewitsons has done well to prevent that.” The secret to the firm’s success? Inter-office rounders matches and a firmwide pub quiz. In Cambridge, the social scene is largely a sporty one: netball, football and cricket teams participate in local leagues, competing against other law firms. Northampton suggested that “more charity events” are the norm there.

“On the rare occasions you have to work late, people check in to make sure you don’t stay too long.”

Trainees across the network were please to find their hours had been “very reasonable” so far. Of course, they can “vary depending on how busy you are,” but sources emphasised that “on the rare occasions you have to work late, people check in to make sure you don’t stay too long.” Most interviewees rocked up to work by 9am and left “just before 6pm on an average day.” Several found “the private wealth seat was the busiest – I left after 6 more times in that seat.” On the other hand, trainees in commercial property were often able to head home by 5.30 – even our sources in London were impressed, describing the hours as “one of the perks of working at Hewitsons.”

Before qualification season, HR sends round a list of NQ positions available across all four offices. Teams then
hold interviews ("which really feel more like conversations than interviews"), and soon let trainees know whether they’ve been offered the job or not. There was disappointment in London in 2020, as no NQ jobs were available there. Nationwide, Hewitsons retained four of seven trainees.

All I want for Christmas is...

Hewitsons holds a firmwide Christmas party every two years, bringing everybody to one location; on the in-between years “each department gets some money to go towards Christmas dinners.”
Hewitsons LLP

Shakespeare House 42 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8EP
Tel: 01223 461155
Email: contactus@hewitsons.com
Website: www.hewitsons.com/careers/trainees

Firm profile
Established in 1865, the firm handles a range of work for businesses, public sector clients and private individuals. The firm has offices in Cambridge, London, Northampton and Milton Keynes.

Main areas of work
The firm has six business units which are agriculture, corporate and employment, private wealth, real estate, residential property and contentious.

Training opportunities
Training is provided over four six-month seats and the firm is generally supportive of those trainees who are able to reduce their training time. The firm works closely with the trainees so that they can train in areas of their interest.
Trainees will be supervised by a partner and their professional development is monitored throughout.

Work experience
The firm operates a vacation scheme in June, July and August for undergraduates. A selection process with interview applies.
Application is by way of letter and CV to sallydenton@hewitsons.com

Other benefits
22 days holiday rising to 27 days, Death in Service – three times salary, income protection insurance, private healthcare (subject to eligibility period), cycleShare scheme.
If shipping and logistics float your boat, then set a course for the shining shores of HFW.

The Firm
Yo ho, me hearties! Raise anchor and pipe up the crew, we’re entering the stormy waters of maritime law. “HFW is one of the first names to pop up when you Google ‘shipping law,’” trainees recalled of their time researching potential employers. “Before arriving, I knew the reputation of the firm, particularly the piracy stuff...” That doesn’t mean HFW’s lawyers are swigging rum and talking to parrots: the firm’s one of the pre-eminent names in piracy law, even though it’s a fairly small chunk of its practice. Recent cases include helping to secure the release of 37 hostages from seven different vessels in the Gulf of Guinea area in 2019, and working pro bono to secure the release of Mohammad Sharif Panahandeh after his kidnapping by pirates and four-year captivity.

Casting eyes over the seven seas, HFW boasts 20 offices worldwide. Shipping is one of the firm’s strongest suits, earning it a top national Chambers UK ranking, but it’s far from the whole story: since 2003, HFW’s self-described six major areas of business have included shipping; energy and resources; aerospace; insurance and reinsurance; construction; and commodities. It also picks up top prizes in Chambers UK for aviation, commodities and transport logistics. HFW opened a new office in Monaco last year. The Middle East has been a recent focus for growth—the firm expanded its construction practice there and now has specialists in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Kuwait City. Latin America has been another focus in recent years: the firm has a cooperation arrangement with Brazilian firm CAL, which has offices in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

“I only applied for law firms that provided the option of an overseas seat. HFW went one better: the overseas seat is guaranteed for all trainees.”

HFW typically recruits around 15 trainees a year. “I wasn’t sure whether I wanted to be a litigator, a corporate lawyer or a finance lawyer when I first applied,” one told us. Keeping an open mind is great, but it’s hard to avoid litigation work at HFW, and trainees are likely to do three of their four seats in contentious departments. If a trainee is particularly interested in transactional work, the firm tells us it will try to accommodate their preferences.

Applicants should also prepare for some travel: “I really wanted to work abroad so I only applied for firms that provided the option of an overseas seat,” a source said. “HFW went one better: the overseas seat is guaranteed for all trainees.” The firm expects this will resume as normal once government guidelines allow. The mandatory trip was a big hook for many of our interviewees, alongside the firm’s niche practices.

The Seats
We also heard that “most people do a shipping seat” (finance and litigation options are available), and everyone will sit in at least one transactional department to meet SRA requirements. Before starting, trainees put down “three preferences, and the firm tries to guarantee one first preference across the training contract. It usually works out and most people get their second or third choices each time.” Litigious seat options include shipping; insurance and reinsurance; energy and resources; commodities;
Insiders said the shipping litigation department “gives you responsibility straight away. You’re not treated as a first-seater, but as someone who wants to get to work.” HFW has recently acted for shipping giant DFDS Seaways during the dispute between Eurotunnel and the UK government over the tendering process for extra ferry capacity in case of a no-deal Brexit; and the wonderfully-named Norwegian insurance firm Den Norske Krigsforsikring for Skib, after a vessel was attacked in Fujairah anchorage in May 2019 by hostile forces using explosives. One of our sources recalled working on a “grounding case where a ship hit a reef, and the cargo owner sued the ship owner for the delay.” They helped deal with salvaging issues and “the subsequent arbitration, as there was a dispute over the cost.” Another trainee outlined the course of their seat: “Over the first few days you’ll ask supervisors to check work, but one said: ‘I don’t think you’re going to write anything out of this world, so feel free to draft and send it.’” Tough love? Day-to-day tasks for trainees include bundling; liaising with counsel; drafting settlement agreements, instructions for experts and advice notes; and legal research.

HFW’s dedicated energy and resources seat scored unanimously good reports from trainees. It handles a lot of corporate work, but this ain’t your average City practice – deals involve transport, ports, terminals and related infrastructure. “All the training sessions are mandatory in transactional seats,” interviewees revealed. “We get generalist training about financial instruments like guarantees, bonds and indemnities.” Advising funds makes up a sizeable chunk of the firm’s transactional wing: clients include Thomas Miller Investments, Markerstudy and the Underwriter Group. HFW recently represented the founder of WH Ireland on the establishment of a dry bulk freight operator based in Singapore, financed by a $105 million fund-raising; and the AIM-listed Regal Petroleum during its $40 million acquisition of oil and gas production assets in Ukraine.

“Getting to grapple with a different legal system was very interesting.”

The majority of our sources enjoyed their international secondment. “We were really well taken care of in our seat abroad,” they explained. HFW organises accommodation close to their office for travelling trainees and gets them settled in quickly; most that we spoke to agreed they got “so much more responsibility abroad,” which they were happy to receive, though there were drawbacks. “The hours have been crazy, to be honest with you,” a trainee confided. “I’ve regularly worked 55-to-60-hour weeks.” Others had a very different take: “The secondment has been too relaxed for me. It got to be mind-numbing at times.” Weighing up respective pros and cons, everyone

Commodities is another HFW specialism. The firm represents four of the six supermajors (aka the largest privately-owned oil and gas companies) and 14 of the 16 largest commodities trading businesses. HFW represented Turkish bank Garanti in a High Court case brought against Drum Risk Management, alleging the ‘misappropriation’ of millions of dollars’ worth of coal. Five trainees sit in this big group, usually within partner-led subgroups, which may focus on a certain type of commodity such as sugar, grain or general shipping commodities. A word of caution: this can be an intense seat as the teams deal with different time zones. As such, we heard that some partner supervisors in the department have a bit of a reputation for their high expectations of trainees. Drafting opportunities include “contractual terms, claims submissions and letters. It feels good to get that responsibility.” Many rounded things off with public-facing work, “writing client alerts and promotional materials.” Most trainees enjoyed their seat here, though a few complained of boredom in their work tasks. These included “managing disclosure and document handling,” as well as “going to visit client offices. It’s a very document management-heavy seat, with some research and client interaction.”

Shipping at HFW comes in wet and dry forms. Wet shipping deals with issues that arise at sea – “collisions, salvages, groundings” – while the dry work involves contractual disputes, “mostly cargo stuff: bills of lading, loss of cargo, non-delivery of goods, etc.” In contrast to some of the more “lawyerly” departments of the firm, interviewees described shipping as “really open door: people just walk into each other’s offices and you feel free to speak your mind.” The firm’s shipping practice involves advising on offshore contracts, as well as cybersecurity (to stop a different kind of piracy!) and shipping technology concerns. HFW acted for Riverside Resource Recovery on construction negotiations for multiple barges in Europe, and the associated security arrangements. “I don’t think there’s a more international area of law than shipping, as goods are moving all around the world,” a trainee reasoned.

“I don’t think you’re going to write anything out of this world, so feel free to draft and send it.”

construction; and aerospace, though several of these departments also have a transactional component.
“had a pretty good experience overall. Getting to grapple with a different legal system was very interesting.” Scoring the international seat of your dreams can require some clever negotiation: “You have an initial chat with HR about preferences and they help you piece together what you want. As you’re guaranteed one first-choice seat, you can try to offer to sit in a London department you didn’t want in exchange for choice of the international seat.” Very crafty.

Trainee Life

“The general trend is that there are lots of explorers here – if you don’t like to travel, you’re a bit buggered, actually.” Trainees described the folks at HFW as “generally friendly, approachable and down to earth,” and found they fit right in. As befits a firm of adventurers, seafarers and explorers, we heard tales of colourful language tickling trainees: “One of the quotes I remember from a senior associate was ‘Arses are for sitting, not kissing. If you don’t have work, go home.’” The hours at HFW are fairly forgiving by City firm standards – “8.45am to 6 or 6.30pm in the office is normal,” and most trainees worked eight-to-ten-hour days on average. “If you’ve got something urgent to do, stay, but if you’ve got something that can be done tomorrow, then you can do it tomorrow.” This general attitude might be why HFW doesn’t fork out for “after-hours food or taxis” for trainees who do have to work late. Interviewees had plenty of time to enjoy a “pretty good social culture. There are usually midweek drinks down at the Habit wine bar downstairs.”

“‘Arses are for sitting, not for kissing. Go home.’”

Hours and social life got a thumbs up, but trainees gave more mixed reviews on training and supervision at HFW. “I spent a lot of time in my current seat twiddling my thumbs, and then went out and got work from other departments,” a frustrated source said. “I have been disappointed by my supervisors. The first was a brilliant lawyer at the top of their game but they gave me no feedback for six months; I didn’t understand why you’d take a trainee but not take time to train them.” Around one in three trainees were unhappy with the initial levels of training; for the majority, “the supervision was fantastic” overall. “When I was super busy my team would be checking to see if I could leave my tasks until the next day or get help from another trainee.”

In addition, the firm runs two trainee technical training programmes throughout the training contract: one focusing on transactional law and the other on dispute resolution. HFW fared well at keeping trainees in the loop during the 2020 coronavirus lockdown: “We’re on Zoom every bloody day!” They took that as a good thing, to be clear! “The firm has run quizzes and team meetings every week; everyone is making sure that trainees are okay and even bad news has been given to us transparently and clearly.”

Our interviewees were happy to concede what they didn’t know – “as a first-seater you’re still trying to find your arse from your mouth” – but all agreed that the firm’s diversity efforts “could be better. I’m afraid it reflects that of the clients, and shipping is a male-dominated industry.” Gender diversity levels are “fine at trainee level but there are fewer and fewer women as you look up the ranks.” In 2015, HFW set itself a target to hit 30% female partners by 2020; today women partnership stands at 14%. “It makes a huge difference for a junior woman to see role models, and more could definitely be done to encourage women into senior legal roles.”

The picture isn’t much better in terms of ethnic or LGBTQ+ diversity, “which makes you wonder how diverse candidates feel about coming into the firm.” While there’s plenty of work to be done here, the firm earned more positive feedback on its approach to mental health: “We’re part of the mindful business charter, and HFW does seem to care about the wellbeing of trainees, even if some partners still have old-fashioned views.”

As qualification approached, most of our interviewees were, however, hoping to stay on with the firm long-term, noting that “as there’s a relatively small trainee cohort, we’re all very close,” so competitive spirit was nowhere to be found. “Although a law firm is hierarchical by nature, HFW doesn’t always feel like that.” HFW retained 12 of 17 qualifiers in 2020, but the firm usually holds on to at least 80% of its trainees.

No filter

For a more visual take on trainee life at HFW, check out the life_at_hfw Instagram account; it’s run by the trainees themselves, and they’ve given us some real food envy during our research process.
Firm profile
We are a sector-focused, entrepreneurial law firm. But there’s more to us than that. We have a passion for the sectors we work in — whether we are solving complex issues across construction, aviation and shipping, or providing advice across insurance, commodities and energy. We’re people who like to get things done. Our clients say ‘less traditional’ – ‘progressive’, even. We say we’re specialist lawyers here to add value to our clients.

Main areas of work
Aerospace, commodities, construction, energy, financial institutions, insurance and reinsurance, logistics, mining, ports and terminals, shipping, space, yachts, travel, cruise and leisure.

Training opportunities
Every year we recruit only a small number of trainees — around 15 per year split across a September and a March intake. This enables us to give every trainee our full attention, and means that your individual contribution makes a real difference. A training contract at HFW consists of four six month seats — very often three contentious seats and one transactional seat. Typically trainees spend at least one seat outside of London in an international office. Overall, we aim to provide you with a dynamic, supportive and varied environment in which you are challenged to become the best lawyer you can be and encouraged to contribute to the success of our global business.

Vacation schemes
Our vacation schemes are a key part of our recruitment process for trainees and we interview all of our vacation scheme participants for a training contract. Completing a vacation scheme provides you with a valuable insight into our industry sectors, our global reach and our culture. We typically recruit around 85% of our trainees from our vacation schemes.

Other benefits
Study assistance and grants; generous contributory pension; optional season ticket loan; group life cover, personal accident insurance and income protection; non-contributory medical insurance; private GP scheme; other voluntary benefits including gym membership, cycle to work scheme, dental insurance, dining card, home insurance, travel insurance, Give as You Earn. Music lessons and on-site massage.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We run an open day for individuals who are in at least their penultimate year of a law degree/final year of a non-law degree in the winter of each year.
We run an insight day aimed at first year students in the spring.

University law careers fairs 2020
We will be attending a number of virtual law fairs and events in 2020. Please see our website for details.
Hill Dickinson

No. 1 St Paul’s Square, Liverpool, L3 9SJ
Tel: 0151 600 8000
Email: recruitment@hilldickinson.com
Website: www.hilldickinson.com

Firm profile
At Hill Dickinson, we understand that our people, our clients and our communities are at the heart of everything we do. We are an internationally recognised law firm that delivers advice and strategic guidance spanning the full legal spectrum across the UK, Europe and Asia. With more than 850 people, including 185 partners and legal directors, our trainees gain direct exposure to clients from the start, working alongside experienced lawyers and partners as an integral part of the team.

Main areas of work
As a full-service law firm, we offer the full range of commercial legal services, from employment, property and construction, to corporate, commercial and dispute resolution. We have notable strength, experience and presence in a number of market sectors, including, marine, transportation and logistics, retail, public and private health (including life sciences), international trade, education, and banking and financial services. For ease, we arrange all sectors under three broad business groups: marine, health and business services. Our client base includes multinational companies, major corporations and public sector organisations, as well as private individuals.

Training opportunities
- An award-winning mentor – Winner of Best Training Principal 2019 (LawCareers.Net Training and Recruitment Awards), our training principal, Richard Capper, is responsible for your overall training and will ensure that you have a valuable and worthwhile experience with us.
- A specialist approach – Our training contracts offer tailored, focused routes, which puts you in control of your career from day one. You have the choice to train in the area of law that you want to progress in, allowing you to become a specialised lawyer from the outset.
- Recruit to retain – Our small intake of up to 15 ensures that each trainee has our full attention and means that we have the resources to give you as much support as you need at the beginning of your career.
- Stimulating work – You will be given immediate responsibilities and challenging tasks as you become a valued and important member of our team. We involve and positively acknowledge the role of trainees working with experienced colleagues in large corporate deals and cases.
- Giving back – Whether it’s volunteering at a charity you wish to support personally, working with our community partner charities or getting involved with some of our firm-wide environmental, diversity and inclusion initiatives, we’ve got something for you.
- Wellbeing – We have a dedicated programme offering a variety of activities and benefits to support you. We want our people to have a good work life balance and encourage an agile and flexible approach to working.

If you want to find out more, please visit our website at hilldickinson.com/graduate-recruitment where you will find all the latest updates on our programme in line with the introduction of the SQE.

Vacation scheme
Our insight schemes are designed with you in mind to give you the opportunity to see what life is really like at Hill Dickinson. Over the course of the scheme, you will have the chance to immerse yourself in Hill Dickinson’s culture and experience first hand the welcoming and approachable working environment we have built. Please visit our website for further details.

Other benefits
Our benefits are comprehensive and designed to meet your needs; we regularly benchmark them to ensure they remain competitive and are always open to new ideas. Some highlights are: pension, travel insurance, buying and selling holiday entitlement, permanent health insurance and life assurance, bike to work, season ticket loans, BUPA cover and we’ll even give you your birthday off (paid).

University law careers fairs 2020
Please visit our website for further details.
Hodge Jones & Allen Solicitors Limited

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 47/64/15
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £26,000
Qualification salary: £35,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into HJA
The personal injury practice
Diversity and inclusion

Hodge Jones & Allen is continuing its fight for justice, which means trainees here can get plenty of experience on human rights, criminal, social housing and personal injury cases.

The Firm
If what motivated you to study law was the prospect of helping to secure justice for clients, then HJA might have the training contract for you. This has been at the heart of what HJA does since its inception in 1977 on Camden High Street: to help individuals in need to bring cases against an opponent no matter how big and powerful. Over time, and as Legal Aid budgets fell, HJA evolved to strike a balance between publicly funded work and matters brought in by paying clients. Our interviewees found that balance to be an attractive component to training at the firm. Raj Chada (HJA’s head of criminal defence, financial crime and regulatory) tells us “every citizen should be entitled to the best recourse to the law. The only way to achieve that is by having lawyers working on top-end cases teaching juniors to do the work. This way the knowledge filters through and everyone gets the service they need.”

Alongside this commitment to training up the next generation is ongoing dedication to the firm’s founding principles, as Chada explains: “We will be developing our work on more high-profile cases, more cases that aren’t just publicly funded, while maintaining our ethos in the midst of that: the David versus Goliath approach. We always want to be on the side of the underdog and to attract the best lawyers.”

On a UK-wide basis, Chambers UK ranks HJA in the top tiers for its police law; civil liberties & human rights; social housing; product liability; and administrative & public law expertise. Claimant and tenant-oriented work is the name of the game in these areas. In London, HJA picks up nods for its claimant personal injury and clinical negligence work, as well as for its general crime and financial crime practices. In total, HJA covers 14 areas of law, including employment. Everything is broken down into ten departments and trainees rank all of these in order of preference when it comes to each seat rotation. There’s “a box where you write comments” next to each option, and once you’ve made your choices “HR will try to allocate seats to people as fairly as they can. If your first seat is low down on your preference list, your next will generally be higher.”

“There’s definitely a sense of camaraderie and that we’re here to fight the fight.”

The Seats
The civil liberties department is “probably the most competitive and popular” option on the list due to its focus on human rights. HJA’s lawyers bring cases against bodies including the Crown Prosecution Service, the Ministry of Defence, immigration detention centres, the prison service, police forces – basically any centre of authority. The department has been working on a range of matters arising from recent protests and actions including “Extinction Rebellion cases tied to the Section 14 notice – there was a judicial review and all the arrests were classed as assaults. There are about 500 people in compensation claims.” The team has also worked on cases relating to the Grenfell Tower inquiry, as well as a case concerning the UK government and its responsibility to protect life in relation to air pollution, following public outrage at the death of a child suffering from asthma. The seat offers a fair amount of “freedom and leeway,” with sources reporting “a lot of responsibility when making decisions and taking things forward. It was fantastic and the team’s brilliant!”

Seat options: civil liberties; clinical negligence; crime; dispute resolution; employment; family; housing; personal injury; private client
The crime seat is well known among trainees for being “really exciting, really chaotic and really busy.” With matters mainly funded through Legal Aid, trainees gain experience in “criminal defence work, so we act for clients who have been accused. There’s a lot of going to court and prisons: I had a number of clients in prison who I would go to see to pass on advice.” Trainees again saw work coming in from protest matters, which included the defence of activists who protested at Stansted airport (the ‘Stansted 15’) and the acquittal of activists protesting at the Defence & Security Equipment International Trade Fair (the largest arms fair in Western Europe) in London. The department also handles cases relating to terrorism, sexual offences, fraud and organised crime; working alongside colleagues in the civil liberties department is common. One source told us that “whoever you work for will have a specialism, but you will get an opportunity to try everything. You can also become a police station rep and the firm will sponsor you to do that course and get the accreditation.” An interviewee highlighted that “there’s definitely a sense of camaraderie and that we’re here to fight the fight. There have been lots of actions against the police and it really feels like you’re fighting for justice, as clichéd as it sounds.”

Sources told us that the clinical negligence seat is “heavily intensive on the medical knowledge front. On top of being in tune with the legal aspects, you have to go to a lot of medical seminars. If you’re interested in biology, it’s a very interesting area of law.” The team includes several former medical and healthcare professionals, who deal with matters against prisons, care homes and other institutions. The department has also recently worked on a number of cases related to birth injuries. Other cases concern surgical errors, GP negligence, neurological issues, orthopaedics and more. The department provides services for both lower and higher value claims and operates mostly on conditional fee arrangements alongside some Legal Aid funding. Pleased to gain experience in “civil procedure rules and client care,” trainees gave a big thumbs up to responsibility levels: “I was assisting a partner and he would regularly give me his cases to look after – off my own volition I would take on work that needed to be done.”

Trainee Life
Sources agreed that HJA is “a wonderful and fascinating place to work.” Among the reasons for this is the firm’s “great work/life culture,” which for some was “formed and maintained” in the office’s basement bar. “That’s where you get a real sense of our identity,” Word has it that the bar is the central hub where “you end up mingling with people all across the firm, so you end up chatting with different teams you hardly come across.” HJA also puts on the usual “Christmas party and summer social. It’s nice to get to know your team outside of work.” In addition, in-house events for junior lawyers are held “just for us to build connections and work on networking skills.” Even more skills can be learnt via the fundraising work that the firm gets involved in. We heard that several teams raise funds for different charities and that “juniors are involved in the marketing side of things.”

There is “a hierarchy in the firm” but the experience of it “varies from department to department.” At the same time sources felt that “we’re transitioning away from the conventional hierarchy through the employee committee we’ve set up.” In addition, “we felt like the appraisal system could be better, so we’re now in the process of drafting one,” one interviewee commented. “We feel it could be more tailored to the trainees and could provide a deeper level of feedback.” Another source added: “We want it to be more discussion-based.” The firm tells us the updated system is still in the works.

“We’re not a corporate firm so I can accept we’re not getting ridiculous amounts of money,” a trainee stated, representing the opinion of many others in the cohort. Fortunately, HJA trainees don’t have to experience the gruelling hours that those at the big City corporate firms do. “I think a good day is 9.30 to 5.30,” an interviewee suggested. “That’s not really unheard of. No one would bat an eye if you left then.” The latest you’re looking at is a 9.30pm finish, though we’re told that’s rare. Sources also mentioned that it’s not uncommon for a colleague to give you a friendly nudge in the direction of home when you’re pulling a late one: “There’s never been pressure for you to stay, in fact there’s been the opposite!”

“I really believe in fighting for people’s rights. I’ve really bought into the ethos and think we’re the best at what we do.” Every trainee we spoke to was keen to stay after their contract ended, largely because of the principles at HJA’s core. One trainee put it like this: “I really believe in fighting for people’s rights. I’ve really bought into the ethos and think we’re the best at what we do.” We’re told by sources “there’s an interview for NQ positions. It definitely is a formalised process.” So, if you want to take a shot at a department and “you’re in your fourth seat and you know there’s a job available, you approach the head of department.” From then on, you’ll be assessed on the same terms as external candidates. In 2020, five of seven qualifiers were retained, with one fixed-term contract.
Hodge Jones & Allen Solicitors

180 North Gower Street, London, NW1 2NB
Tel: 020 7874 8300
Email: lgill@hja.net
Website: www.hja.net
Twitter: @hodgejonesallen
Facebook: hodgejonesallen

Firm profile
Hodge Jones & Allen was founded in 1977 and to this day remains committed to providing first class legal help to both individuals and organisations.

Our philosophy has always been to enable individuals to have access to justice where otherwise they might be denied it and this ethos remains as strong today as it did back then. We strive to right wrongs, achieve justice for all and get the very best results for our clients. People have always been at the heart of our firm.

'We have been on the forefront of the legal sector - changing lives, making headlines and advancing the law, since our inception and hope to continue this for many years to come’ - Patrick Allen, Senior Partner.

Main areas of work

Training opportunities
Applications from both law and non-law graduates are welcome. You should be able to demonstrate a consistently high level of academic and personal achievement. We generally expect an upper second class degree.

The firm is looking for people who:
- Communicate clearly and effectively
- Have an excellent academic record
- Can demonstrate they are interested and committed to the work the firm does
- Are hard-working and dedicated
- Understand and share the ethos of the firm
- Have a record of achievement in extracurricular activities

A two year training programme across four seats. You will be regarded as a fee earning member of staff during this time, and you will be expected to provide a high quality legal service to all our clients, under the supervision and training of a qualified solicitor. The firm will also support you through your Professional Skills Course.

Other benefits
The firm has the following benefits:
- Pension
- Life Assurance
- Permanent Health Insurance
- Birthday leave
- Volunteer Day
- Interest free travel loan in second year
- Piano lessons
- Sports and social committee
- Cycle to work scheme
Hogan Lovells

The facts
Locations: London, Birmingham
Overseas offices: 48
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 139/409/92
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; client secondments
First-year salary: £46,000 (London); £29,000 (Birmingham)
Qualification salary: £90,000 (London-£85,000 in 2020); £46,000 (Birmingham)

Who needs the sorting hat? Trainees say this transatlantic titan is a “Hufflepuff with a backbone.”

The Firm
“Today, the most significant factor differentiating firms at the top level is the divide between US and UK firms.” This was the opinion of trainees at Hogan Lovells. While acknowledging the prestige of the magic circle label, they felt “it’s a label that’s becoming less relevant.” The prestige of the magic circle firms is beyond doubt, but it’s also true that over the last ten years big US firms have steadily increased their foothold in the capital. While more of a transatlantic firm than US firm in its culture, Hogan Lovells identifies closer with the emerging global elite than the old-school London pack. It’s been a decade since US firm Hogan & Hartson joined forces with UK firm Lovells to create this Anglo-American juggernaut. In numbers, global revenues of $2.25 billion make Hogan Lovells one of the ten biggest firms in the world.

“I’ve had contact with people from Mexico to the Philippines – just about every continent to be honest!”

With a network of 48 offices spanning 26 countries, Hogan Lovells appealed to trainees looking for a firm with “a strong international outlook.” And London’s status as the firm’s largest office meant even more good news for trainees: “I’ve had contact with people from Mexico to the Philippines – just about every continent to be honest!” Sources were equally attracted to the firm’s “wide array of practice areas on offer,” many of which come with top-notch Chambers UK rankings attached to their name. In London, the firm’s banking, litigation and pensions teams are top-ranked, while Hogan Lovells boasts a further 14 top national rankings, including public law, data protection, trade finance, civil fraud, financial services, infrastructure, product liability, insurance, pensions litigation, and life sciences. Visit chambers.com for the full breakdown.

Six months before starting, incoming trainees are invited to learn about their seat options at a seats fair, after which they’re required to submit a list of their preferences. They can resubmit these preferences six months later, and then they’re locked in for the remainder of the training contract. Our survey indicated that the majority of trainees were content with the system, but some did express frustration at not being able “to adjust your choices as your opinion evolves.” Trainees are required to complete a seat within each of the firm’s core practice groups: litigation, corporate and finance. Sources suggested that more niche seats including IP and data protection are “harder to secure,” because they typically house just one or two trainees at any one time.

A range of client and international secondments are also up for grabs for second-year trainees. To bag a spot, “you have to indicate your desire to go on a secondment in your

Seat options: corporate & commercial regulatory; real estate; pensions; investment funds & insurance regulatory; tax; competition, public and EU law & international trade; business restructuring & insolvency; international debt capital markets; banking & loan finance/banking – infrastructure, energy, resources & projects; infrastructure, energy, resources & projects; commercial litigation, financial services and investigations; commercial litigation, product insurance law and regulation; corporate litigation, fraud and investigations; international arbitration and construction & engineering; real estate – disputes; employment; intellectual property and technology
initial seat plan.” Trainees find out if they’ll get to go during their first seat and are then asked to rank their preferred secondments. “There aren’t as many international secondments as advertised,” one felt, adding that “spots in New York and Singapore tend to be oversubscribed.” However, another source felt that “if you’re dead set on the idea and make it clear to HR, there’s a very high chance you will be able to complete a seat abroad.”

“I was probably managing 30 or so distinct matters at any one time.”

The Seats

Among the firm’s disputes teams you’ll find the financial services disputes group, which represents banks and financial institutions facing contentious regulatory issues, investigations by regulators and disputes with borrowers – clients and case specifics are kept highly confidential. One trainee told us about their involvement on a “multi-million-pound dishonest assistance claim. I was mainly taking notes at witness interviews, one of which started at 4pm and ended at 11pm!” Another told us the team still does a fair bit of work related to the fallout from the LIBOR scandal, which hit the headlines in 2012. Due to the nature of the work in this seat, “everything needs to be checked, checked and checked again,” meaning trainees get quite a lot of oversight from senior associates and partners. “I didn’t feel micromanaged though,” one told us; “the team is very nice.” Sources reported proofreading expert reports, conducting research and drafting notes of advice.

Real estate sits within the firm’s broader corporate and finance group. “Out of my whole training contract, it’s the seat where I had the most responsibility,” one source told us, a sentiment confirmed by our wider survey where real estate scored highest among the seats for client exposure. “In my first week I was calling people to complete transactions,” another source weighed in. “I was probably managing 30 or so distinct matters at any one time.” There was a lot of asset management work, “which mainly involves renewing and drafting leases and licences to alter.” Our insiders also had chances to work on larger matters, typically working for “major investment institutions such as pensions funds,” as well as private equity houses and sovereign wealth funds. For example, the firm recently ran an auction of offshore wind farm leases on behalf of the Crown Estate. The team also advises clients in the hotel sector, and recently acted for Israel-based Fattal Hotels on its £1 billion acquisition of four London Grange Hotels.

The corporate group handles everything from M&A to private equity and corporate governance, as well as venture capital and a bit of advisory work. Like real estate, trainees explained that “there are opportunities to develop an actual relationship with the client,” alongside chances “to take a first stab at drafting key and ancillary documents.” Hogan Lovells was behind the scenes in the launch of BritBox, acting for ITV on the joint venture with the BBC. The team also recently advised Fortress Investment Group on its £95 million acquisition of Majestic Wine (now called Naked Wines).

“… conducting research on the regulation of cryptocurrencies.”

A seat with Hogan Lovells’ banking and lending team technically counts as another corporate seat, but “also overlaps with finance,” sources explained. One insider told us: “Recently, a lot of the work I’ve been on has involved looking at how products and licences need to be amended to comply with FCA rules, particularly within the FinTech industry.” Sources described it as a research-heavy seat, which for one trainee meant “conducting research on the regulation of cryptocurrencies.” For another it meant “working on a research project on the potential regulations facing a loan offering from our client in over 35 jurisdictions.” The team advises both banks (like Lloyds, HSBC and Citibank) as well as non-bank lenders like investment company Ares Management, which the team advised as the lender of £600 million to VetPartners, which operates hundreds of veterinary practices in the UK. On the bank side, the team acted for RBS and NatWest in connection with £115 million of funding for Francisco Partners to acquire software company ByBox.
There’s a surprising range of work within Hogan Lovells’ 
tax group (another corporate option), which covers bonds work, transfer pricing and tax litigation, as well as real estate, finance and employment related work. One trainee explained that “because there’s such a broad spectrum of work, you end up working on all kinds of technical queries and questions,” adding: “Typically, I’m working on three to four things in a given day that are all completely different.” Even though they had a lot on their plates, trainees said this seat has a slightly slower pace compared to other corporate seats. “It feels good not to just be slogging away at one transaction for months on end,” one said. “Here you have time to get to grips with the details and do some in-depth analysis. There’s a lot less documentation involved so you’re doing a lot more research rather than drafting.” Recently, the team advised the Department for Education on the securitisation of £4 billion of income-contingent repayment student loans.

One finance option is Hogan Lovells’ varied capital markets practice, which deals with high-yield bonds, structured finance, securitisation, derivatives, corporate bonds and equity capital markets. Like tax, the work is “highly technical and complex.” But unlike tax “it’s very fast-paced, commodified work. You’re under a lot of time pressure and often don’t have time to think about the finer details of a transaction – it can be quite stressful.” Trainees here don’t have to wait long before they’re juggling the drafting of board minutes and resolutions, alongside proofreading and inserting amendments into key documents. Recently the team advised hotel management company Radisson on its issuance of €250 million high-yield bonds, and advised financial institution Urban Exposure on its £150 million initial public offering on the Alternative Investment Market.

Trainee Life

One source described Hogan Lovells’ culture as “Hufflepuff with a backbone.” As the Hogwarts house known for being the most inclusive, our sources were certainly impressed with Hogan Lovells’ efforts on the diversity and inclusion front. In our trainee survey, the firm scored highly in all diversity metrics including: efforts in recruiting diverse candidates; inclusivity training; diverse staffing of teams; and efforts to promote and retain a diverse group of lawyers. Of course, with ethnic minorities accounting for just 17% of UK associates, the firm still has room for improvement.

Hufflepuffers are also revered for being ‘unafraid of toil’ and the hours that the lawyers here work suggest there are no cowards here. Finance seats were flagged as the most punishing by our insiders. “At one point during my capital markets seat I was leaving at midnight for three weeks straight,” one shared. Similarly, another source recalled “finishing at 6am and having to start again at 9am.” Not fun. However, there were also plenty of gentler periods where trainees could head out of the door early. “There are times when you’re wired and just running on adrenaline, but importantly, you’re given the time and space to crash,” one explained. “If I’m deemed to have been working too much, senior lawyers tell me to stop. My supervisor has recently established clear lines that I wouldn’t work too much after a super busy period.” While a significant number of our survey respondents did indicate that they were stressed, trainees praised the firm for being proactive in addressing mental wellbeing, explaining that “there are a ton of resources to make use of, including an on-site therapist.” Whether that inspires comfort or concern is down to you.

Trainees can fix themselves an altruistic high through engagement with the firm’s rave-reviewed pro bono programme, singled out for acclaim by nearly all participants in our trainee survey. The cornerstone of this is the HL BaSE programme, a conference over two days for associates across the firm’s European offices to learn about social enterprises and get matched up with pro bono assignments. Trainees thought “it’s an excellent initiative as you can do work you might not experience in your seats, and you realise the firm’s global presence by meeting peers from around the world.”

Having a large trainee intake of around 50 a year, we were unsurprised to hear that informal socialising was frequent, though one source felt “it has petered off since the beginning.” A number of more formal socials throughout the year tend to draw a bigger crowd, including firm-wide Christmas and summer parties, the most recent of which was held at the Natural History Museum. Practice groups also organise their own frivolities. For example, litigators headed to the five-star Ham Yard Hotel in Soho for their latest Christmas social.

In the run-up to qualification, the firm circulates a jobs list. Trainees apply and can rank multiple choices. This is then followed by interviews led by the practice groups themselves. “My sense is that the process is quite formal compared to other firms,” one source observed. “I was required to do a written exercise for mine.” In 2020, Hogan Lovells retained 40 of 56 of its cohort, with two fixed-term contracts. Prior to the pandemic, NQs enjoyed a salary of £90,000, which has since been cut to £85,000. Some of the firm’s competitors have taken similar decisions.
Hogan Lovells

Hogan Lovells, Atlantic House, London, EC1A 2FG
Tel: 020 7296 2000
Email: graduate.recruitment@hoganlovells.com
Website: www.hoganlovells.com/graduates
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/hogan-lovels/

Firm profile
Meet the firm changing the game. Right now, Hogan Lovells lawyers are working worldwide on cases that shape legal precedent; projects that enable innovation for prestigious clients. And across 48 global locations, we’re doing it all seamlessly, as one team.

Main areas of work
When you’ve got the international reach we do, it means your work grabs headlines everywhere, and you’ll work with household-name clients on every continent. Plus, within a huge range of practice areas – corporate, finance, global regulatory, intellectual property, and litigation – you’ll learn from a diverse network of specialists. You’ll develop the agility to adapt with changing industries, discover the interests that drive you, and develop the commercial edge that sets us apart.

Training opportunities
Part of what makes us game-changers is our ability to stay ahead of the curve in a changing world. That’s why this year, for the first time, you’ll find not just traditional opportunities and training contracts, but various virtual opportunities to get to know the firm first, including virtual internships, insight events, webinars, workshops, law fairs and more.

Each year, we take on up to 50 graduates (from law and non-law degree subjects) as trainee solicitors. Here’s how it works: on a two-year training contract, you’ll do four six-month seats across our different practice areas. Plus, for one of those seats, you’ll have the chance to apply for an international or client secondment. You’ll also have hands-on support and the expert guidance you need.

Vacation scheme
With the firm’s opportunities always highly regarded, it goes without saying that our vacation schemes – designed for penultimate and final-year students, as well as graduates – will be packed with insight and experience. What’s more, with around three quarters of trainee solicitors having taken part in a vacation scheme with us, it’s fair to say you’ll get a lot from it. You’ll delve into key practice groups, get to grips with legal research, meet the team – and imagine your future at Hogan Lovells.

Other benefits
Bonus scheme, gym membership, life assurance, pension scheme with company contributions, private healthcare, season ticket loan, subsidised restaurant, access to a dentist, doctor and physio-therapist, discount at local retailers.

Open days and first-year opportunities
For first-year students, our virtual insight events allow us to reach more widely than ever, with 100 places on offer in spring and summer. These events are packed with tailored workshops, presentations and interactive opportunities to help you find out more about life and work at Hogan Lovells. We’ll also give you top tips and advice on how to make your application for a vacation scheme or training contract stand out.

University law careers fairs 2020
Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, City, East Anglia, Edinburgh, Exeter, King’s College London, Leicester, Leeds, London School of Economics, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Queen Mary University of London, Sheffield, SOAS, University College London, Warwick, York.
Howes Percival LLP

The facts
Locations: Cambridge, Leicester, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Northampton, Norwich
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 51/59/14
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £27,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Howes Percival

At this regional firm, trainees are unleashed in the East on a feast of seats.

The Firm
Not many firms can say they were named after a married couple, but that’s the case for Howes Percival, which got its name thanks to the marriage of Richard Howes (an 18th century solicitor) and Mary Percival. Howes founded the firm in Northamptonshire well over 200 years ago, and today the East Midlands remains a key region for the firm alongside East Anglia. The firm’s regional ties are clear from some of the names on its client list, like Leicestershire Cricket Club and Norwich Cathedral, but it also works with companies that have a more national scope, such as HSBC and the Co-op. Chambers UK ranks Howes Percival top in East Anglia for its corporate/M&A work with small and medium businesses (it’s also highly ranked in this category in the East Midlands, a more competitive market). The firm picks up additional high rankings in East Anglia in planning, litigation, real estate and restructuring.

“Supervisors really care about how you’re developing.”

Howes Percival’s headcount has gone up by 21% in the last three years, while its “people-focused strategy” has thrown a spotlight on learning and development. The firm did bag a top 100 spot on the list of best companies to work for in 2020 by The Sunday Times, with interviewees describing a “warm and caring” atmosphere. “Supervisors really care about how you’re developing,” they told us, “and partners work hard to make sure you’re getting a good breadth of experience.” Trainees can be found in five of the firm’s six offices – Northampton, Leicester, Milton Keynes, Cambridge, and Norwich. The smaller Manchester base, which houses a solvency team, currently doesn’t offer seats.

The Seats
Trainees wanted to make one thing crystal clear about seat allocation: “The firm absolutely expects you to do a seat in at least one other office. You’d be naïve to think that you could stay in one office for two years.” Trainees were “really grateful” to be given three months’ warning before changing offices, but pointed out there’s no financial aid for moving – meaning trainees may face a mammoth commute at some point. “I knew what I was signing up for,” said one, echoing most interviewees. First seats are allocated at random “like a wild card,” while subsequent seats are discussed. Some seats are only available in certain offices, such as estates in Norwich and IP in Milton Keynes or Northampton.

“...immersed from day one in everything from Stamp Duty to registering property at the Land Registry.”

Trainees are likely to do a seat in commercial property, where interviewees were “immersed from day one in everything from Stamp Duty to registering property at the Land Registry.” The firm acts for clients “ranging from small businesses to large corporations” – it recently acted for housebuilder Persimmon Homes in the £8.3 million purchase of a residential development site in Thurston, in Suffolk. Trainees described working on planning matters, leasehold sales and purchases, and developments.

Seat options: corporate (Northampton, Leicester, Norwich); litigation (Leicester, Cambridge); IP (MK, Northampton); property litigation (Northampton, Cambridge, Norwich); insolvency (Northampton, Leicester, Norwich); estates (Norwich); employment (Northampton, MK, Norwich, Leicester); and commercial property (Northampton, Leicester, MK, Norwich, Cambridge).
which meant helping developer clients “go all the way from purchasing land to setting it up for the agreement for lease.” They also had to get to grips with “really interesting and complex Stamp Duty Land Tax transactions. Some people try not to get involved with those but it’s good to know how they work.” Trainees drafted documents like clauses, leases and reports for clients – one of these involved “a review of a lease suggesting amendments.” Trainees got to talk with clients directly, “and the partner helps if I have questions.”

In contrast to the commercial work in property, trainees in property litigation had worked more with individuals in “neighbour disputes, disputes with builders, and boundary disputes.” This meant client contact from the get-go, in “face-to-face meetings or telephone conferences.” Trainees then wrote letters for clients “to set out what their options might be.” The team also has experience working with companies – it recently represented Ford Retail in a £300,000 dispute over land contamination.

Trainees may do a seat with the corporate, commercial and banking team, which works with clients ranging from local businesses all the way up to big banks like HSBC. Corporate work covers asset sales and purchases, mergers and de-mergers, while the commercial side involves working on contracts and terms and conditions. On the banking side, the team handles loan agreements and refinancings. Healthcare and leisure are key industries for the group – it recently represented Craft Leisure in its £14.7 million purchase of Norfolk Broads Holdings, which provides river trips, boating holidays and boat hire in the Norfolk Broads. Typical trainee tasks involved drafting minutes, resolutions and agreements, as well as communicating with lawyers from other firms. There was also a “nitty-gritty boring side” to the seat (read: doc review), but lucky trainees found more responsibility on smaller deals, “perhaps in the tens of thousands of pounds, or something for an individual.”

The estates seat (only on offer in Norwich) covers private client and agricultural work. The team advises high net worth individuals and families on estate planning, wills and probate matters, tax issues, trusts, and powers of attorney. Lawyers here also help farmers in the buying and selling of land, which trainees said mirrors “all the normal property work but with extra layers of complexity.” Here trainees conducted a lot of research, drafted applications, and got to interact with clients.

“Partners always come around and chat – you can see they’re normal people that joke around.”

In IP, trainees saw “a real range of clients and topics that keep the seat really interesting and fun.” The work is mostly contentious, with the team handling copyright, trade mark, design rights, patent, defamation and privacy claims. Recently the team represented the Business Software Alliance, acting against UK companies using software of BSA members (which include Microsoft and Adobe) without a licence. Trainees worked on trade mark renewals and something called “central trade mark portfolio monitoring – relaying any infringements that come up to the rest of the team.” They were delighted if they got to see matters go beyond the pre-action stage: “It’s the absolute best, though clients don’t prefer it!”

Trainee Life

Trainees reckon the firm’s salary is “competitive for the area,” and described average hours of 8.30am to 5.30pm with “very occasional evening work.” One reckoned “I can count on one hand the times I’ve had to work over lunch.” Lunchtimes instead were reserved for hanging out with other trainees. It’s completely open-plan in Northampton, which sources felt “makes for a really relaxed environment. Partners always come around and chat – you can see they’re normal people that joke around.” Leicester is also transitioning to open-plan, which interviewees hoped would “improve cross-team friendship.” Down in Milton Keynes they’re “a really fun, laid-back, sociable bunch” who “have lunches for any arrivals, departures and birthdays.” The Norwich office is “right in the city centre, with a pub next door.” How convenient!

“The firm notices who willingly gets involved.”

Extracurricular activities are a big deal at Howes Percival, and trainees are expected to “muck in.” As one put it: “You don’t just come in, do the work and go home. The firm notices who willingly gets involved.” This might mean helping with the firm’s social media, attending university law fairs, or preparing seminars. There are also various committees – charity, sports, diversity and social – trainees can join. One of the most talked-about extracurricular responsibilities was car park duty, which trainees help out with when the firm hosts seminars. “You’re there in your high-vis,” said one. “At least it keeps you humble.”

Trainees felt “the firm places value on your personality, background and worldview.” Some felt Howes’ “strongest point” was its representation of women, who make up almost a third of the partnership – “women are bossing it here!” In other facets of diversity, trainees acknowledged there more was to be done, but praised the firm’s empha-
sis on promoting diversity in recruitment and “making sure we’re approaching all types of students at law fairs.”

In previous years trainees have had some reservations about qualification feeling too last-minute and “hush-hush.” This year, the firm resolved to circulate the jobs list by the end of seat three, “but that’s not happened yet. It creates a bit of paranoia.”

And finally...

Howes Personal... Trainees can spend ‘charity days’ with an organisation of their choice. One group chose Leicester South Foodbank, helping to package boxes for families and process donations.
Howes Percival LLP

Nene House, 4 Rushmills, Northampton, NN4 7YB
Tel: 01604 230400
Email: katy.tebbutt@howespercival.com
Website: www.howespercival.com
Twitter: @HPGradRecruit
Facebook: @howespercivalgrad
Instagram: @HPGrad

Firm profile
Howes Percival LLP is a leading commercial law firm. Our working environment is progressive, focussed but friendly professional and our corporate structure means that fee earners are rewarded on merit and can progress to associate or partner status quickly.

Main areas of work
The firm is a recognised market leader in corporate and commercial, commercial property, planning, employment, commercial and property litigation, construction, IP/IT, insolvency, regulatory, family and private client among other things.

Training opportunities
Trainees usually complete four six-month seats. They report direct to a partner or director and after three months and again towards the end of each seat will be formally assessed by the fee earner training them. Trainees will be given every assistance by the fee earners in their department to develop quickly and will be given responsibility as soon as they are ready.

Vacation scheme
We offer one week placements in June and July at our Leicester, Northampton and Norwich offices. Closing date for applications is 31st March 2021. Please apply via the application form found on the graduate page of our website.

Other benefits
Staff benefit from a flexible benefits package, including contributing pension, private medical insurance and 25 days holiday per year.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We offer open days in Norwich and further details of these are found on our website.
Irwin Mitchell

The facts
Locations: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Chichester, Gatwick, Leeds, London, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Newbury, Newcastle, Reading, Sheffield, Southampton, Scotland
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 190/1,560/108
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £38,000 (London); £26,500 (elsewhere)
Qualification salary: For business legal services stream: £41,500 in the regions and £60,000 in London. For personal legal services stream: £36,500 in the regions and £50,000 in London.

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Irwin Mitchell
More on employment and private wealth seats

It’s an Ir-win-win for incoming trainees curious about both the personal and business sides of the law at this renowned national outfit.

The Firm
Emerging from law school, the first real choice you’ll have to make is whether you want to represent companies or individuals. This decision will usually take your career in fundamentally different directions, but at Irwin Mitchell that’s a moot point. When trainees join Irwin Mitchell they choose a stream, either personal legal services or business legal services, but for one seat out of four, they now get to experience lawyering on the other side. “It’s an interesting change,” one source reflected, “as you’re still doing most of the training contract in your stream, but it encourages client sharing and growth.”

“Clients talk to a face rather than a job title. We’re relatable and are bucking traditions for the stereotypes about lawyers.”

Irwin Mitchell was traditionally known for its strength on the personal legal services side (you may well have seen the firm’s personal injury claim adverts on TV), and this very much shows in the firm’s Chambers UK rankings. For personal injury and clinical negligence work, you’ll find that Irwin Mitchell rules the roost in most of the regions its ranked in. On a UK-wide basis, the firm is rated as one of the best out there for Court of Protection and product liability matters, while its civil liberties and human rights, police law and education work also come highly recommended. You’ll also find IM’s private wealth law capabilities celebrated in Chambers High Net Worth. Though it’s not all individual-based at IM. “We’re completely full service—anything for anybody, that’s us!” one source pointed out. On the business side, you’ll find that IM comes in for praise for its real estate, planning, restructuring/insolvency, corporate/M&A, employment, IT, banking and litigation expertise. IM’s business hotspots (according to Chambers UK rankings) include its home turf of Yorkshire and the South (where the firm’s merger with regional outfit Thomas Eggar in 2015 brought a range of commercial clients and work into the mix).

IM boasts 15 offices across the UK, with the largest being Sheffield. Despite this broad presence, we heard that shared cultural dynamics prevail: “We have a massive ‘one IM’ approach: even in a particular stream within a particular office, you’ll work with people across the whole business.” Another interviewee added: “There are experts in every single office, so knowledge is equally weighted across the whole country.”

The Seats
At the time of our calls, most trainees were based in either Birmingham, London or Sheffield. The rest of the trainee cohort were scattered evenly across the remaining bases. Despite the new structure, the offices in Cambridge, Chichester, Bristol and Newcastle only offer PLS routes, while Gatwick, for example, only offers the BLS contract. We’re told moving across offices for seats “isn’t

Seat options: visit our website for the full breakdown by office and stream
“We’ve had lion attacks, a shark attack, injuries sustained on boats and someone getting hit with a canoe on the head.”

Our sources similarly commended the variety of work on offer in medical negligence. “There are five or six sub-teams due to the sheer size of the department,” one source informed us. “We’re all dealing generally with medical negligence but within specialist areas, like child abuse, birth trauma, diagnosis delays, and cosmetic and dental claims.” Another interviewee added that “it’s a very technical seat where you have to get used to the scientific terminology.” And pretty quickly by this account: “I took a witness statement in my first week!” one trainee enthused. “I also attended joint settlement meetings, went to trial and did the bundling for that; it was really fun to get stuck in and prepare everything.” Rookies also celebrated the other opportunities on offer: “My favourite thing was speaking with experts as a trainee. We get to instruct them, ask them direct questions and attend all the conferences.” Happily, this source relayed: “I never felt like I wasn’t allowed to try something.”

International personal injury sees trainees assisting British nationals who’ve been injured abroad, as well as foreign citizens who have secured injuries in the UK. Sources again highlighted the “broad umbrella of serious injury claims” that cover more or less anything you can think of, as this interviewee explained: “We’ve had lion attacks, a shark attack, injuries sustained on boats and someone getting hit with a canoe on the head.” Other matters were centred on issues with travel agents, instances of food poisoning and gastric injuries. “Legally speaking, it’s quite substantial” as an area to practise in, owing to the fact that it’s “more complicated to bring international claims, as the cases are bigger and more intricate.” So, whether they were reviewing medical records, making sure evidence was sufficient enough to be served to defendants, or just conducting the run of the mill search to “find experts in niche areas like safari standards in X country,” trainees praised the exposure: “I felt that I was never just someone helping a fee earner – you really get involved and I was always encouraged to give my opinion and to think outside the box.”

“I took a witness statement in my first week!”

For the BLS track, things are more conventionally commercial. In IM’s commercial litigation team, sources found that “one moment you’re doing a big case on a shareholder dispute and then you’re on a contractual dispute with a cleaning company the next.” The range is also there with regard to value: “We could be doing a financing dispute over a £12,000 car and then a contractual dispute for over £2 million.” Interviewees reported drafting letters...
before action, claim forms, court correspondence and settlement agreements, as well as being on phone calls with clients. “You might be notetaking on a client call, but you’re exposed to a lot,” one trainee found. There’s no really a chance to feel siloed here, as “you work nationally across the whole firm with other teams. We had a massive disclosure job, which had three million documents needing review and the whole litigation team were doing that.” Clients across Yorkshire include specialist recruiter Rullion Group, automotive supplier Transcal Group and French company Helis. The firm recently represented Transcal during a case that involved a breach of warranty under a share purchase agreement.

The firm’s real estate team is split between transactional matters and disputes. Trainees noted that Sheffield, London, Birmingham and Manchester offer both, while the Leeds base is purely transactional. Gatwick, meanwhile, offers real estate, construction and planning. In London, real estate clients include HSBC, iconic department store Liberty London and Honda’s research and development arm. Lawyers have been advising private bank/wealth manager Coutts & Company on several investment loans worth up to £50 million. On the non-contentious side, “we worked on an awful lot of landlord/tenant work, with lots of portfolio investments, as well as corporate investor/occupier matters.” The drafting of lease agreements, sale agreements and environmental deeds coloured non-contentious life for trainees, as did Land Registry work and post-completion tasks on deals. “Doing some completion work by myself was terrifying after drafting docs back and forth for months,” this interviewee recounted, “but completion is a monumental moment and it felt amazing!” There’s “lots of clients crossover” with the disputes side, and trainees found themselves “working for landlord and tenants, portfolio and asset managers, lots of receivers for banks, and individuals in rental disputes.”

Trainee Life

“From day one we went straight out to help at a local charity painting walls—it’s been like that ever since!” Plainly speaking, corporate social responsibility (CSR) work is highly valued at IM. “There’s an expectation that you’re not just here for matters, but also business development and CSR work,” noted one source. Each office reportedly raises money for a specific charity: we heard, for example, that the Manchester office ran a 10km ‘sleep walk’ for the latter and have also been conducting mock interviews for those looking to get back into employment. The firm gives its lawyers two days of paid voluntary leave each year, so you “can get involved with an existing CSR relationship or one you’d like to develop.” IM also established a free helpline for those suffering domestic abuse in the time of the Covid-19 lockdown.

“I can’t think of anyone at the firm who I’d not want to talk to!”

Culturally, the emphasis on connection and care is discernible in the office: “There’s an underlying sense that it’s not just about coming into work; it’s about getting stuck in with the firm, owning responsibility and developing relationships with people.” Another interviewee added: “I can’t think of anyone at the firm who I’d not want to talk to!” Across the firm, “the culture is so flat” in the sense that “everyone treats us as equals; you can chat with anyone without fear.” One trainee nicely summarised the collective view: “I think generally speaking, people work at IM not because they want to make the most money, but because they want to do it for noble reasons, which comes with an underlying ambition, tenacity, and drive to do the best they can for people.”

Regarding diversity, “they’re putting in so much time and effort,” with sources highlighting “tons of initiatives” for various causes: IM Respect, IM Equal and IM Age are examples of such groups. “It feels like a genuine commitment and not just window dressing,” one trainee commented. Trainees pointed to the recent shrinking of IM’s gender pay gap (from 12.8% to 10.3%) as an example of the firm’s commitment, alongside a 77% female partner class made in 2019. “The women’s statistics say it all,” a source enthused. Across the offices, interviewees observed the celebration of difference: “There’s such a range of people and no one notices or cares about the differences!”

“There’s always something going on; you’re never an outcast or alone.”

Diversity initiatives take on a social element, too. “Our CSR events focus on things socially. IM Equal putting on a drag queen bingo night was an example of these two aspects marrying up.” Beyond this, trainees highlighted a wide array of sports teams, office-wide murder mystery events, pizza and bingo nights, and more occasions for connection: “There’s always something going on; you’re never an outcast or alone.” Our interviewees also commended the two-week Professional Skills Course (that each newbie attends prior to the contract) for being a great way to connect with the entire trainee cohort (trainees spend three days in Sheffield and the complete the remainder of the course in Birmingham).

Hourly demands proved to be another positive talking point: “They really encourage you to have a life outside the IM walls.” As such, “it’s not all-consuming here, and they’re always stressing the importance of a good work/life balance.” Slight differences do emerge between the PLS and BLS streams, however. “It’s very rare that I’ll leave the
office late. If it’s after six, it’s a rarity,” one PLS trainee commented. For BLS trainees there’s a “more corporate demanding hours ethic,” so finishing times tend to fall somewhere between 7pm and 8pm. “There was a big job where I had to stay until 10pm once, but that was an anomaly and they’re so thankful when you do stay late.”

Further differences emerged when it came to compensation: first and second-year trainees are paid evenly across the firm, but BLS NQs go on to earn more upon qualification than their PLS counterparts. For some, “it’s a point of contention” and was said to “divide opinion.” Others had a more measured view and considered the increased potential for profit-making in the business sphere: “It’s the nature of the industry.” Another added: “They’re super transparent and it’s never hidden! If you’ve got an issue, go elsewhere!”

Speaking of people potentially leaving, IM has a good track record for holding on to its trainees: 2019 saw the firm retain an impressive 45 of its 47 qualifiers. Yet amidst Covid-based realities, qualification remained a concern for some: “We’re all a bit worried about qualification. Some people qualified six months early because of paralegalling time brought forward. But for us fresh out of uni, we’re concerned a little bit.” Another added: “It’s a waiting game... waiting for that email to come through.” Despite the uncertainty, trainees commended the firm’s transparency and thought that “they’ll do everything they can to keep as many people as possible.” In 2020, IM retained 47 of 52 qualifiers.

Patience is a virtue
The global pandemic has caused IM to delay its 2020 training contract start date for six months.
Irwin Mitchell LLP

Riverside East, 2 Millsands, Sheffield S3 8DT
Tel: 0370 1500 100
Email: earlycareers@irwinmitchell.com
Website: www.graduaterecruitment.irwinmitchell.com/
Facebook: www.facebook.com/IrwinMitchellSolicitors/
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/irwin-mitchell/

Firm profile
We’re legal experts with a difference.
We’re more than just a law firm – we’re a group of like-minded, friendly people working together to help individuals and businesses navigate life’s ups and downs. We are based across 15 offices in the UK and we focus on what really matters: our clients, colleagues and communities.

Main areas of work
As a full-service law firm, we provide business services for organisations, personal legal services to individuals, and private wealth services to private clients. For business legal services, the firm offers expertise in: Banking and Finance, Commercial, Commercial Litigation, Corporate, Employment, Insolvency and Real Estate. Clients can be growing businesses to large companies and come from a range of sectors, including: Technology, Consumer, Financial Services, Manufacturing, Media and Entertainment, Real Estate and Education.

For personal legal services, the firm remains one of the leading practices in the UK. We cover all the key injury areas, such as: Personal Injury, Serious Injury, International Travel Litigation and Medical Negligence. Within the personal legal services training contract, we also offer a wide range of services for private clients, including: succession planning, tax, reputation protection and family matters.

Training opportunities
The firm’s training contracts allow you to see work covered within personal legal services (PLS) stream or business legal services (BLS) stream, with some trainees having access to experience both divisions where possible. You will undertake 4 x 6 month seats.

We are known for our Personal Injury work and within PLS most of the seats fall under this area and in some locations we also offer Private Wealth options. Within BLS our teams work nationally across seven locations and each office offers different seat options dependent on departments available and business need. Please see our online brochure for further details of which seats are available in which office for PLS and BLS.

Vacation scheme
Our work placements are a vital part of our recruitment strategy and take place during June and July. A large proportion of our trainee solicitors have undertaken a work placement with the firm therefore we encourage all those interested in joining us to apply for a legal work placement. Those who are able to start in 2023 are eligible to apply. Candidates can apply online from the 1 November 2020. We pay the national living wage and the scheme is for two weeks.

Other benefits
25 days holiday, employee assistance programme, online GP service, contributory pension scheme, health plan, death in service cover, critical illness cover, recognition scheme, season ticket loan, two CSR days a year, sports team sponsorship.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We offer Open Evenings in all our offices and we are looking to run these virtually to students across all years. Please check our website for further details and/or click our ‘Get Updates’ button on our website.

University law careers fairs 2020
Individual university attendance TBC.
The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 42
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 50/100/31
Seats: non-rotational; client secondments
First-year salary: £52,000
Qualification salary: £100,000

No seats? No way! Yes way if you’re at Jones Day. The only seat on offer here is the driver’s seat, as trainees are “given free rein to try any practice area.”

The Firm
When you’re fresh out of uni, no one expects you to be completely clued up on the world of law firms. But “even not knowing a whole lot about the market, you could tell Jones Day was a prestigious firm,” said one trainee at this jumbo firm. Indeed, Jones Day is among the world’s highest grossing law firms, with a presence spanning 18 countries. Not bad for a firm that started out in Cleveland, Ohio. But as we touch on the firm’s US roots, be warned: “the firm hates being referred to as a US firm.”

Interviewees were quick to tell us: “We’re not like many of the US firms in London.” How so? “For one, we entered the London market through a merger with an established English firm” – this was all the way back in 2003 with a mid-sized City firm, but trainees felt over the years the firm has “retained a lot of its older English elements” culture-wise.

“When I explain it to my friends who are lawyers, they think it sounds mental.”

They also pointed to the firm’s business model as a distinguisher. “Unlike most firms which are LLPs, the firm’s structure is a general partnership” (the firm refers to it as a true partnership), which basically means individual partners have more control over the business. The main difference trainees felt on the ground was that “it promotes an idea of global collegiality.” Cue the firm’s slogan: ‘One Firm Worldwide.’ Give or take the odd dissenting voice (one felt “you can’t get away from the American connection”) everyone agreed that the atmosphere at Jones Day “isn’t what you’d imagine in terms of the stereotypical US firm–there are no obvious pressing obsessions with billable hours.”

We can’t go much further without mentioning the most distinctive element of being a Jones Day trainee: the non-rotational training contract. “When I explain it to my friends who are lawyers, they think it sounds mental,” one source told us. In short, “you are literally given free rein to try any practice area and work with anyone you want in the firm.” Trainees still have to satisfy SRA requirements by doing 350 hours in three different departments, but there are no seats. “It does feel bizarre on the first day,” one remembered. “You have to psych yourself up a bit” to get work. “My strategy was to knock on all the doors of my floor and then on all the doors of the practice areas I was interested in.” They did reassure us “there’s also nothing wrong with sending an email rather than bowling up to a partner’s door shouting ‘HOW ARE YOU DOING?’ It’s not just for extroverted, ‘out there’ geezers.” Out there or not, the firm recruits pretty much exclusively through its winter, spring and summer vac schemes to ensure trainees are suited to the unstructured system.

“There is no one standard experience at Jones Day.”

“Once you introduce yourself to partners, you’ll typically be included on the capacity requests they send out,” trainees explained. It’s a system “where your reputation and how you’re perceived means a lot,” one emphasised. “Partners talk between departments, which can help in securing work.” The biggest challenge interviewees encountered was managing their workload. “It can be hard to find the middle ground sometimes,” they said. “You need to be organised and communicate well. If you can do those two things, it’s an amazing system and you’ll be a better lawyer for it.”
Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competition/European Law</th>
<th>Litigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/M&amp;A</td>
<td>Private Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Real Estate Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>Restructuring/Insolvency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the degree of autonomy trainees have, “there is no one standard experience at Jones Day.” For example, one interviewee said: “My time has been more akin to that of a traditional training contract in that I’ve worked in four distinct areas.” Another told us most of their time had been dominated by a single case, “around which I’ve been picking up work from other departments.” This trainee felt “one of the best things about the system is that you can see cases through from start to finish rather than dropping out at a certain stage. There’s no sense that you’re part of the team temporarily.”

Qualification is an informal process at Jones Day with no interviews. “In the ideal situation, you would have spent your first year and a half sussing out the area you want to qualify into before dedicating your final six months in that area,” one outlined. “It’s pretty clear who wants to qualify where towards the end of second year.” It’s down to trainees to keep partners in the loop about their goals, with some of our sources suggesting the process could use “some more transparency.” In 2020, all 20 qualifiers were kept on.

The Departments

The firm’s banking and finance team works on both the lender and borrower side of financings, refinancings and restructurings. Work falls under two main banners here: leveraged finance and real estate finance. Trainees who got experience in the latter said: “You spend a lot of time managing CP checklists and chasing the insurer brokers, real estate lawyers, and the other side to get everything you need. You have to have a lot of reminders set in your calendar!” Clients include big banks and financial services companies like Wells Fargo, which the firm recently advised on a £50.4 million agreement to finance part of the Farrington Crossrail Station development. On the leveraged finance side, “you’re often working with other departments. For example, I’ve done some distress finance work so I’ve been working a lot with the insolvency team.” Trainees racked up drafting experience with loan agreements, letters and security agreements. Refreshingly, interviewees who spent time in this group pointed out that most of the team is made up of women.

The firm’s global disputes practice has a penchant for white-collar crime, investigations, investor-state arbitrations, and civil fraud (which the firm is highly ranked for by Chambers UK). “The work is what a lot of people would consider the sexiest,” one shared. As you can guess from its name, the department has a distinctly international outlook. “I’ve been working a lot with colleagues in Beijing and Washington,” one told us, who relayed rumours of trainees being sent to locations like Singapore. The firm recently obtained a $40 million award for Canadian client World Wide Minerals in proceedings against the Republic of Kazakhstan involving the expropriation of its mining assets in the late ’90s. “In the months I’ve been here, I’ve had good exposure to most stages of a dispute,” one trainee remarked, who was kept busy “attending trials, drafting witness statements and maintaining correspondence with the other side.”

“I was sitting on live negotiations with the other side alongside the partner for four days straight.”

Jones Day’s corporate team is well known for its mid-market activity – Chambers UK ranks the firm highly for its work in this space in London. That’s not to say there aren’t “chances to work on some monster deals every now and then” too. For example, the firm recently advised online gambling company The Stars Group on its $14 billion merger with Flutter Entertainment. In the mid-market arena, the team recently advised Blackstone on its €175 million investment in Superbet. It was lower-value matters that were most coveted by our interviewees. On these types of deals, trainees said “you’re typically staffed with a partner and associate and the clients have higher expectations of you” – probably because trainees on these types of deals are simply more visible to clients. In one example, “I was sitting on live negotiations with the other side alongside the partner for four days straight.” Of course, this was supplemented by more administrative tasks such as due diligence.

Real estate is another one of the London office’s core departments, which incorporates construction, environment and planning work too. The team’s focus is almost exclusively commercial. Recent examples of work in the capital include representing TV company Pinewood when it let out a couple of studios to Disney and Netflix, and advising private equity investor CIT Group Partners on setting up a joint venture to invest in the development of Colechurch House in Southwark. The firm has also played a role in advising a client on the £3 billion redevelopment of Elephant and Castle. “There are some small leases which trainees can run with,” one source explained. On the construction side, trainees described “making appointments with architects and consultants, and then reviewing the comments they’ve made.”

Trainees might seek out work in some of the firm’s smaller departments, such as employment, competition or intellectual property. The work is mostly litigation with a mix of non-contentious patent and trade mark work thrown in.
too, but trainees pointed out they did “exclusively IP litigation; you’re not going to be doing filings or trade marks.” One source said this was “a good area to branch into for someone who enjoys litigation and wants something more technical.” Given the level of technicality, trainees here spent time conducting research and “trying to get your head around the issue at hand!” Once up to speed, trainees might get to draft witness statements as well.

“Partners give work to those who perform, not those who are the loudest.”

Client secondments to banks, financial institutions, real estate firms and regulators are also available to trainees. Overseas seats aren’t so hot, which was a source of frustration for some. However, one or two trainees from each intake usually spend six months in the Dubai office.

Trainee Life

Talking culture, trainees were quick to bring the non-rotational system back into the conversation. “What should invite competitive behaviour doesn’t,” one reflected. Instead of competing with one another, they said “the best support network you have is the trainee cohort. You can trust that if you email round the group asking for help on a matter, someone will respond.” So not everyone is a type-A schmoozer? Apparently not. “If you’re super competitive, people will hate you!” trainees told us, with one suggesting “maybe in the past there was a typical Jones Day trainee, but not anymore.” Trainees described a more “balanced” bunch. “I consider myself introverted,” one shared. “I’m not shy but I don’t like being the centre of attention either.”

Ultimately, our sources made clear that “partners give work to those who perform, not those who are the loudest.” In fact, one even observed that “to some extent the partners are competing for the trainees’ attention, which breeds a true open-door culture and makes everything feel quite informal.” Another agreed: “It feels like everyone is on the same level. For example, trainees and partners share the same canteen.” That might sound trivial but this isn’t the case at every firm. “The dress code is pretty relaxed” too—jeans are common attire on Thursdays and Fridays, with “some people just wearing sportswear on Friday” (although we should point out they’re probably not rocking up to client meetings in their spandex).

“I would consider leaving at 8pm to be standard.”

So, what does this non-rotational malarkey mean for trainees’ work/life balance? “It can be hard,” one acknowledged. “When you have seats, you can ride the natural peaks and troughs of business, but I feel pressure to be busy all the time. I would consider leaving at 8pm to be standard.” Another weighed in that “it can be hard to gauge what’s the right amount to be working, especially as the firm is shy about giving a number.” Trainees did their own detective work instead: “We’re all on a WhatsApp group in which we compare hours and from there you can start to get a rough average.” We did hear plenty of stories of trainees being able to get out the door at 6pm, but inevitably the promise of a six-figuresalary upon qualification means trainees work some pretty long hours here.

When everyone has different schedules, “it can be hard to coordinate socially,” sources reflected, but not “out of an unwillingness to do so.” Concrete opportunities to let their hair down include the firmwide Christmas party (most recently at St Paul’s Cathedral), which is supplemented by department-led festivities. One source told us they felt the firm had a done a good job of moving “away from a boozy culture of going to the pub to schmooze partners on a Friday. There isn’t pressure to socialise if you don’t want to.”

**Jones Dayum!**

The firm frequently tops Bloomberg’s M&A league table for doing the most M&A deals worldwide.
Jones Day

21 Tudor Street, London EC4Y 0DJ
Tel: 020 7039 5959
Email: recruit.london@jonesday.com
Website: www.jonesdaylondon.com

Firm profile
Jones Day is a global law firm with more than 2,500 lawyers in 43 offices across five continents. The Firm is distinguished by: a singular tradition of client service; the mutual commitment to, and the seamless collaboration of, a true partnership; formidable legal talent across multiple disciplines and jurisdictions; and shared professional values that focus on client needs.

Main areas of work
Jones Day’s strengths in London reflect the firm’s rich heritage in M&A and global disputes. Our 200 London-based lawyers collaborate within the UK and across our worldwide offices, to guide clients through the most demanding and complex global matters: including cross-border M&A; real estate and finance transactions (including banking, capital markets, investment funds, private equity and structured finance); global disputes; and regulatory matters involving the UK, US and other authorities. Additional specialist areas include business restructuring; competition/antitrust; corporate criminal investigations; corporate tax planning; employment and pensions; intellectual property; and projects and infrastructure.

Training opportunities
As leaders in cross-border M&A and global disputes, we look to recruit extraordinary people who are committed to a legal career; want to work on international matters; and can become part of our future — not just qualify with us. Successful candidates have a minimum 2:1 (law or non-law) degree; strong intellectual and analytical ability; good communication skills; and demonstrate resourcefulness, drive, dedication and the ability to be a team player.

In our rare and distinctive, non-rotational system of training, you will seek and receive work across all departments at the same time, to provide flexibility, responsibility, faster development of potential and the opportunity to compare and contrast different disciplines alongside one another. Your work will vary from small cases which you may handle alone (under the supervision of a senior lawyer) to larger matters where you will assist a partner or an associate solicitor. The firm runs a structured seminar programme to support the practical teaching you receive from associates and partners with whom you work.

Placement schemes
We have 70 places for two-week placements in the winter, spring and summer vacations. We pay an allowance of £500 per week. Apply for a placement if you want to train at Jones Day. We expect to recruit our trainees from our placement candidates. You will see how the firm’s non-rotational training system works in practice by taking on real work from a variety of practice areas and meet a range of lawyers at various social events. All our placement schemes are open to final year law and non-law students, graduates and postgraduates, as well as career changers. Our schemes are also open to penultimate year students undertaking a qualifying law degree. We recruit on a rolling basis.

Visit the website for more details.

Other benefits
Free gym, subsidised cafe, private healthcare, season ticket loan, group life cover, salary sacrifice schemes and personal pension.

Opportunities to meet us
All our ‘Question Times’ at our offices or online are open to all, including first year students. Check out the events page on our website.
A training contract at the London base of this US giant will open the gates to an internationally flavoured legal career.

The Firm

Charles and Camilla getting hitched may have dominated the front pages in 2005, but elsewhere in the legal press another union was grabbing the headlines: the joining of US mega firm K&L Gates with City outfit Nicholson Graham & Jones. From then on it was all engines go, with a snazzy base in One New Change (complete with “amazing views” of St Paul’s) to inspire K&L’s lawyers to pull off the firm’s global ambitions. Indeed, law firms don’t get much more global than K&L Gates, which has 44 offices spread across five continents. When speaking with our US sister guide Chambers Associate earlier in 2020 (just before the Covid-19 pandemic took hold), global strategic growth partner Craig Budner told us that K&L is “a globally integrated law firm – philosophically, we are a firm that encourages collaborative solutions and alignment across practices, industries and geography.”

In London, Chambers UK recognises K&L’s real estate expertise especially, awarding it rankings in areas such as construction (for supplier and purchaser work) and finance. The firm’s mid-market corporate/M&A capabilities also feature. On a UK-wide basis, it’s K&L’s insurance policyholder and capital markets AIM work that stands out. That’s not the extent of K&L’s London offering, though. One trainee recalled how they were “attracted to K&L’s white collar crime practice, which only boutiques usually do.” Other sources wanted a London firm with a strong reputation, “but also to be part of a small cohort – it’s easy to get lost in the crowd otherwise, and here you get better training as a small group.” As you can reasonably expect, K&L London does a fair bit of international work, which was another draw for our interviewees. For example, “the corporate team does a lot with US and European clients, so it doesn’t feel like you’re working in an English firm!”

The Seats

Newbies are assigned their first seat, but list three preferences for each of their subsequent seats at mid- and end-of-seat meetings with HR. “It’s good that they put you outside your comfort zone initially,” thought one insider, “and then take into account what you want to do for the rest of your seats so you can shape your career.” Most interviewees got their first choice for at least two of their seats.

“I spent a lot of time with a famous QC, so that was cool!”

K&L’s white collar crime group is distinct from the broader litigation practice. Here the advice covers the likes of insider trading, internal investigations, bribery and corruption, and anti-money laundering. Clients include the Qatar Free Zone Authority, construction company Laing O’Rouke and public service provider Serco Group. The group have been advising the latter since 2013 on various matters, but recently did so on the company’s response to the Serious Fraud Office’s criminal investigation into its alleged overcharging of electronic monitoring contracts to the government. Sources told us that this seat is known for high levels of client contact, with one revealing: “I got to go to some client meetings alone and talk through documents which might help with their defence.” Others were able to work on a “massive” government inquiry, which involved “doing some interviews, which was amazing for the
stage I was at in my training contract!” More desk-based tasks revolved around drafting witness statements and taking attendance notes.

Those who’d sat in commercial litigation told of working on energy, bankruptcy/insolvency and tax cases, as well as assisting with preparations for arbitrations. The firm also handles construction litigation, aviation litigation, sports litigation and corporate disputes. Trainees spent a fair few days in court: “I was just observing most of the time, but I did get to make an application once.” Others “got very lucky” and ended up on a Supreme Court case as “the team was ramping up for the hearing, which I ended up attending. I spent a lot of time with a famous QC, so that was cool!” Less scintillating work comes in the form of bundling and making court filings. Interviewees found the research side “satisfying because you try to get to the bottom of legal issues and find a solution.” Some trainees also reported working on more niche matters, and found that on these they got “quite a lot of client contact” and the chance to produce “a big client memo on a very new area of law, which was really interesting.”

Important sectors for K&L’s corporate department include real estate and energy, with Chambers UK highlighting how the deals often involve jurisdictions in Europe and the Middle East. Clients are frequently US companies looking to establish or enhance their activities in these regions. Trainees are free to tap into different areas of interest, which for one consisted of “a broad of range of public and private M&A matters, plus capital markets work.” On the M&A side, the team recently advised food colouring manufacturer D.D. Williamson & Co on its acquisition of the natural colours business of DuPont, which involved parties in the US, Chile, the Netherlands and the UK. A recent equity capital markets matter, meanwhile, involved advising oil and gas company Faroe Petroleum on a £650 million hostile takeover by Norwegian operator DNO. Trainees were pleased to be exposed to business development tasks, with one enthusing about how they’d “researched various broadcasters in different countries, which we’ll eventually contact about representation – that was pretty fun.” A favourite trainee task was verification, which involved making sure that everything written in a document was true at the stage when a company applies to join the Alternative Investment Market (AIM): “That’s a really interesting task because you get to learn about the industry and the client’s business.”

Trainee Life

Pro bono work is a big deal in the US, and at K&L London the story’s no different: “Pro bono’s strongly encouraged, especially among trainees because we don’t have billable clients.” Some sources had picked up pro bono work from the seats they’d done: “I was the prime candidate for a certain matter because I’d done a seat in the area. I was successful in the case and people were really nice and picked up on it.” Others went to the Battersea Legal Advice Centre once every few months “to advise as many people as we can for the evening.” Trainees are expected to do pro bono alongside their usual work “but it’s definitely manageable. I had a big case on, so I was hesitant about taking on pro bono, but the team really encouraged me and helped me with it.”

“...people here really made an effort to train me...”

This level of support came up a lot in our interviews. “They expect a lot of you but not so much that you’re overwhelmed,” explained one insider. “They also don’t expect you to know everything from the get-go. Two of the partners I work with trained here so it’s nice to see that long-term career development as well.” Training happens in individual seats “but the quality depends on how busy the teams are – sometimes you’re just thrown in because they desperately need someone to help.” On a “normal day,” however, “people would always give me clear instructions, so there’s a strong support network.” Another agreed and relayed that the “people here really made an effort to train me when I joined and involved me in team meetings – the team took me out for coffee too, so it’s an inclusive place.”

Although “US firms have a bad rep for scary hours, that’s not the case here,” one source assured us. Another insisted that the “late nights aren’t horrendous” and typically mean a midnight finish during court cases. Wrapping up and heading out by 6pm is the norm otherwise, except, of course, for those in corporate. Like most firms, corporate is known for having the worst hours, with this trainee explaining that they’d “have dinner at the office most nights, but leave by eight or nine so I’d still get a good night’s sleep and go to the gym in the morning.” Fortunately, trainees felt that compensation is definitely competitive with our peer firms. Trainees start on £43,000, and NQs enjoyed a £10k pay bump in 2019, bringing their pay cheque up to £85k for the year: “That definitely boosted morale!”

The NQ process “has been more rigorous since 2019 and we now have a formal interview process,” according to trainees. Of course, this year’s process was “pandemic-dependent,” but interviewees had still had “conversations with various practice leaders.” In 2020, five of eight qualifiers stayed at the firm.
K&L Gates LLP

One New Change, London, EC4M 9AF
Tel: 020 7648 9000  Fax: 020 7648 9001
Email: trainee.recruitment@klgates.com
Website: www.klgates.com

Firm profile
K&L Gates is a fully integrated global law firm with lawyers located across five continents. Our broad global platform allows us to guide clients through the legal challenges inherent in the ever-changing international landscape. K&L Gates represents leading global corporations in every major industry, capital markets participants and ambitious middle-market and emerging growth companies. Our lawyers also serve public sector entities, educational institutions, philanthropic organizations, and individuals. We are leaders in legal issues related to industries critical to the economies of both the developed and developing worlds – technology, manufacturing, financial services, health care, and energy, among many others.

Main areas of work
K&L Gates is active in the areas of corporate/M&A, capital markets, private equity, restructuring and insolvency, banking and asset finance, structured finance, derivatives, aviation, funds, antitrust, competition and trade regulation, public policy, real estate, planning and environment, intellectual property, media and sport, construction, energy, infrastructure and resources, insurance coverage, regulatory, tax, employment, litigation, international arbitration, investigations, enforcement and white collar crime plus other forms of dispute resolution.

Training opportunities
The firm ensures each trainee is given exceptional opportunities to learn, experience and develop so that they can achieve their maximum potential. Trainees spend six-month seats in four of the areas mentioned above. Each trainee sits with a supervisor and is allocated an individual mentor to ensure all round supervision and training. The firm has a thorough induction scheme and career development programme. High importance is placed on the acquisition of business and professional skills, and early responsibility. The training programme consists of weekly legal education seminars, workshops and a full programme of skills electives. Pro bono and corporate social responsibility activities are also encouraged.

Vacation scheme
The firm’s formal summer legal work placement scheme is open to law and non-law students and other relevant postgraduates. Your two weeks with us in July will provide you with broad exposure to opportunities in diverse areas. We aim to give you a seat in at least two departments, and wherever possible we will allocate you to a seat of your choice.

Other benefits
Subsidised sports club membership, season ticket loan, permanent health insurance, life assurance, GP service, cycle to work scheme, employee assistance programme and pension.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Open days are held monthly from December through to May each year. Please express your interest in attending an open day when applying for a training contract or a legal work placement, and we will respond accordingly.
Kennedys

The facts
Locations: Belfast, Birmingham, Cambridge, Chelmsford, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Manchester, Sheffield and Taunton
Overseas offices: 39
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 131/424/44
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £27,500 (£38,500 London)
Qualification salary: undisclosed

Insurance litigation – disputes about things that went wrong – is a big deal at Kennedys; the irony is trainees find life here very agreeable.

The Firm
Next time you’re watching an explosion-filled blockbuster, take yourself out of the action for a moment and imagine the insurance claims that such devastation could cause. If your brain already works like that, Kennedys might just be the firm for you: a global outfit with 39 offices spanning 22 countries, it’s capitalised from two big mergers in the last few years to register turnover north of £210 million a year, putting it comfortably in the UK’s top 30 firms by revenue. That’s an empire built on insurance and litigious expertise: Chambers UK ranks the firm top nationwide for clinical negligence, contentious insurance, personal injury, product liability, and travel.

Perhaps surprisingly, Kennedys’ rapid expansion began in 2008 and 2009. Aggressive expansion in the middle of a global recession suggests a firm that doesn’t over-leverage itself (their insurer clients must be delighted) and indicates that Kennedys could be in for a period of rapid growth in the post-pandemic economy as the insurance market goes into overdrive. Though the firm is sizeable, it takes on just over 20 trainees nationally each year, and our interviewees confirmed “you don’t feel like you’re just a number.” A small handful already had history with the firm, having started there as paralegals before applying.

“The Firm is planning to sponsor the LPC. In the past it didn’t.”

Moving forward, we heard that “Kennedys is planning to sponsor the LPC. In the past it didn’t,” so there could be more opportunities for those who aren’t keen on the paralegal route. It’s expected that sponsorship will continue to the SQE as it replaces the old route. By far the largest trainee cohort was based in London; Birmingham, Cambridge, Chelmsford, Manchester, Sheffield and Taunton also welcome newbies. Everybody completes four six-month seats, which are split into three main categories: insurance, liability and commercial. “There are technically no compulsory seats, but you’ll definitely do a liability seat or two in your first year, because the teams are big and insurance seats typically go to second years,” insiders revealed.

The Seats
In the liability category, you’ll find seats in regulatory, travel and (funnily enough) liability; insurance options include aviation, marine, casualty coverage, property/energy/construction, professional liability, product liability and life sciences (“I’ve no idea why they’re not liability…” ) and financial and political risk. Kennedys’ commercial seats are corporate, employment, insolvency, property, and international arbitration and commercial litigation. From September 2021, some incoming trainees will join a team within one of the firm’s specific divisions (like healthcare, liability, insurance or commercial) through a new SQE training programme. Trainees on the traditional training contract route will still do seats across the firm’s offering.

Trainees also have the options of client and international secondments. Trips to Hong Kong are “ad hoc,” but if you want to do a seat in Bermuda “you have to apply before starting the training contract.” Client secondment oppor-
“There was a bizarre case involving an airline carrying rhinos.”

A seat in travel revolves around mostly “low-value, fast-track claims alleging sickness abroad.” Small claims may be the bread and butter but Kennedys also handles bigger matters: the firm acted for TUI on the inquest into the deaths of British nationals in a terror attack on a beach in Tunisia in 2015. Trainees normally “handled their own case-load, managing the procedural timelines and running any files to trial at the county courts (also known as fast-track courts).” Sources described working on “20 or 30 active cases at a time, interviewing witnesses and drafting ancillary documents, from witness statements to client advice.” Kennedys counts Mark Warner Holidays, Virgin Holidays and Disney US and France on its client roster, and much of the work trainees can expect to engage in derives from compensation claims from holidays gone wrong – firstly by determining their veracity, and advising the client on whether to settle or go to trial.

While we’re talking all things travel, our favourite story came from the aviation department (which counts as an insurance, not a liability seat). “There was a bizarre case involving an airline carrying rhinos,” a still-bemused source began. “The male rhino was improperly tranquillised and travelling with a female in heat...” Hold your ‘horny’ jokes. “The male broke through the enclosure while in mid-air... that’s the kind of stuff you’re dealing with in aviation. Anything you can think of.” To give a general definition, Kennedys’ practice deals with individual plane incidents that lead to insurance claims. The firm was sole counsel to British Airways on liability from passenger claims after Flight 2276 from Los Angeles to Gatwick caught fire during take-off and the passengers and crew had to be evacuated. Kennedys also represents big names Etihad Airways, Ryanair, Aer Lingus and easyJet. Our trainee sources described lawyers in the team as “super supportive” and suggested they “had exposure to a spread of general aviation law, dealing with and preparing for inquests and aviation policy work.” This is a department which may be heavily affected by the coronavirus pandemic, which may generate different work.

“It’s probably one of the best places to do your first seat.”

While team aviation mostly deals with single incidents, product liability (life sciences) leans towards “mass litigation.” Described by trainees as “70% insurance and 30% liability,” the department acts for defendants on “a lot of class-action claims, typical for product liability departments.” Naturally that means “the work is quite reactive.” Johnson & Johnson Medical is one key client: Kennedys has handled defence and product claims across the EMEA region and acted for the company during Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review investigations into pelvic mesh products. For trainees, the bulk of this seat involved “helping manage non-lead claims, notifying clients of changes in cases and providing monthly updates.” On big-volume cases, trainees input “every new claim into a spreadsheet, with all the rest of the information.” They’re responsible for “checking all the facts, requesting medical records, drafting letters of response, disclosure and liaising with experts.” Although trainees would “occasionally bundle, most of the admin is done by support staff” in the department. Many came away with happy memories of the seat: “I loved it. It was really interesting, and the people were absolutely fantastic.” Because of the mix of insurance and liability-style work “it’s probably one of the best places to do your first seat and you can decide which one you prefer,” sources reasoned. There’s also a “fair bit of cross-border work” as some cases involve multinationals.

Commercial seats are available in the London and Manchester offices. “The commercial dispute work that runs off the insurance work we do” falls under commercial litigation and international arbitration. Kennedys may “be helping an insurer with a contract with a third party,” trainees gave as an example. The department also han-
dles “breach of contract disputes and a lot of property litigation.” International arbitration cases vary from multi-jurisdictional clashes over pomegranate juice exports to disputed construction of oil platforms; Kennedys recently represented an Irish energy company in a dispute with a US business, with arbitration commencing in the UK. Trainees in the litigation and arbitration seat were “drafting tons of different kinds of agreements, something different every day.” They clarified that “one or two fee earners deal with arbitration, it’s 90% commercial litigation.” Outside of London there’s a strong banking and finance litigious practice, acting for clients like Metro Bank and the Euro Hotels Group. Sports clients are a common theme in the Manchester office, including clubs and directors.

Trainee Life

Insiders suggested that Kennedys encourages a “good work/life balance. You won’t be working crazy hours: I’m hardly ever in the office before 8am or past 6pm.” That’s partly down to the firm’s focus on litigation: deadlines for court filings typically close at 4pm, which means the office can be “really manic until then before you can breathe again.” That’s not to say later nights won’t be needed, but if “it’s an ‘all hands on deck’ situation then you’ll know about it long beforehand.” A consistent diet of litigation and insurance law can be stressful (disputes are big arguments, after all) and we heard that Kennedys aims to avoid unnecessary stress. Across UK offices, trainees described their colleagues and supervisors as “friendly and supportive,” appreciating opportunities for “flex schedules and working from home” even before the national lockdown. “When I’m done for the day, I can just leave,” said one. This doesn’t mean trainees are mollycoddled: “If you show supervisors you can manage yourself they let you get on with it. Even paralegals can get their own cases, so trainees are trusted from the get-go.”

One way to limit hierarchy is an open plan office: both Manchester and London are open plan, and trainees suggested you “wouldn’t know a partner from an associate. It’s great that you can hear discussions between partners and senior associates; that’s a great way to learn.” Sources added that “despite the size of the firm, you’d struggle not to get on with people. Kennedys prides itself on making sure all its people are like-minded,” with the aim of creating “a family unit. It feels like that, and no matter which office I’ve worked in, they care about you.” It’s true that across the offices we spoke to, trainees were chummy with the rest of their cohort – the squad in Cambridge host trainee lunches, while Manchester and London trainees were more likely to go out for drinks after work. Londoners suggested the juniors there “will always try and do a big drinks event every so often,” while others highlighted that “departments themselves are quite social,” with informal drinks every Friday night in some cases.

“No matter which office I’ve worked in, they care about you.”

Formal responsibility for supervision and mentoring falls in the lap of each seat supervisor, but first years also get a “second-year trainee buddy.” Having forged close relationships with their supervisors, our interviewees told us: “You don’t need to organise anything with them in advance to have a meeting, but most want a formal meet-up every three months.” Feedback comes “from everyone you’ve done work for,” and there’s additional training available in the form of “writing courses and online tutorials on subjects like drafting witness statements.” A strong mentoring system is essential to promoting from within the ranks, but the firm still struggles with diversity at partnership level: just 3% of partners come from ethnic minority backgrounds. Kennedys fares better in gender diversity, with around 30% women partners (close to the national average) and about 70% female associates and trainees.

On the eve of qualification season, “HR speaks to each department to find out how many trainees they want to take on.” To manage expectations, the firm reveals this information to trainees before they “submit an application to any teams you’d be open to qualifying into.” In 2020 Kennedys retained 21 of its 23 qualifiers. Trainee and NQ salaries are higher in London than the firm’s other offices, but our sources outside the capital weren’t salty – there were some murmurs that the London and Northern offices aren’t as connected as they could be, but sources approved of “cross-office article writing and business development.”

JFKrazy

The firm changed its name from Kennedy, Genese, Syson & Lewis to the snappier Kennedys in the 60s – JFK was president of the USA at the time, and the name was all the rage.
Kennedys

25 Fenchurch Avenue, London, EC3M 5AD
Tel: 020 7667 9667 Fax: 020 7667 9777
Email: hr.admin@kennedyslaw.com
Website: www.kennedyslaw.com
Facebook: KennedysTrainees
Twitter: @KennedysLaw

Firm profile
Kennedys is a global law firm with unrivalled expertise in the insurance/reinsurance and liability industries. With over 2000 people worldwide across 39 offices in the UK and Europe, the Americas, Asia Pacific, and the Middle East, we have some of the most respected legal minds in their fields. We act for insurers, re-insurers, self-insured’s, Lloyds Syndicates, claim handlers and brokers, TPA’s, self-insured national public transport companies, corporates, retailers and local authorities. Our lawyers understand the impact of not only current, but also proposed regulations and advise our clients on the implications this will have on their business.

Main areas of work
Kennedys lawyers provide a range of specialist legal services for many industries including: Insurance and reinsurance, healthcare, construction, transport, maritime and international trade, rail and aviation. There is also a particular focus on dispute resolution and litigation.

Training opportunities
The purpose of the training contract is to give trainees a mix of experience and skills that will set them up in their legal career as a lawyer with Kennedys.

Kennedys ensures that their trainee solicitors are given sound training in the core disciplines. All supervisors are approachable and ready to offer support when needed. Our training contracts are two years in length and you will undertake four six month seats within areas such as insurance and reinsurance, liability, corporate and commercial and healthcare.

We develop careers in an innovative and collaborative global environment, with a variety of training opportunities available. This includes secondment opportunities to clients and our global offices. We believe that supporting individual growth and development puts us in the best position to attract and retain talented individuals.

SQE Training Programme
Kennedys are excited to announce we will be introducing a new innovative training programme for graduates. Our programme will prepare you for the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE), the new route to qualification that is coming into effect from Autumn 2021. The new SQE training programme will take the form of a Graduate Solicitor Apprenticeship and allows you to start working and earning at Kennedys immediately after university, while gaining qualifying legal work experience in one of our teams before sitting the SQE1 and SQE2 exams to qualify as a solicitor. You will also be awarded a Postgraduate Certificate from BPP.

Prospective trainees looking to start the SQE training programme must have completed a law degree or the GDL/PGDL prior to starting with Kennedys.

The two year six-month training programme will involve working at Kennedys four days a week and having one day off a week to study at BPP. In addition to a dedicated supervisor at Kennedys, you will have a tutor and skills coach at BPP, to ensure that you have all the support you need at work and with your studies.

Other benefits
Life insurance, income protection, employee assistance programme, pension, private medical insurance, season ticket loan, child care schemes, gym membership, fitness subsidy, eye care vouchers, corporate GP, 25 days holiday, increasing to 27 after five years.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Open days are open to anyone interested in a career in law. We will advertise our open days and evenings via our website and Facebook page.
Variety is the spice of life at leading crime outfit Kingsley Napley.

The Firm

Strawberry laces, jelly snakes, gummy bears, and cola bottles... No one normal goes for a pick 'n' mix and comes home with just one kind of sweet. The same is true for experience-hungry trainees: variety in seat options makes life that big better and gives you options in your career. With this universal truth established, consider eclectic London outfit Kingsley Napley. Few firms can offer seats in both crime and corporate, or immigration and clinical negligence, as our interviewees testified: “I couldn’t find any firms that offered the combination of seats I wanted to do.” The Kingsley Napley trainees steered clear of firms that had “a heavy corporate weighting,” and while KN does do corporate and commercial work, you’ll also find lawyers in crime, disputes, employment, family, public law, and more.

“Traditionally the firm has been more litigation-based,” one insider explained, “but many of the transactional and advisory teams, including real estate, private client and corporate, have grown significantly in recent years.” In London, the firm gets top rankings from Chambers UK in several crime categories and immigration; at a national level its professional discipline and POCA (Proceeds of Crime Act 2002) teams achieve top marks. Chambers High Net Worth also recognises the firm’s strength in financial crime, reputation management and family law.

“Most trainees are in their late twenties and early thirties.”

It’s worth emphasising here that few of KN’s trainees join the firm fresh out of university. “Around half of my intake worked as paralegals at the firm before securing a training contract, while the other three all came with work experience,” one explained. That doesn’t mean it’s a no-go for fresh-faced graduates, but expectations should be tempered given that “most trainees are in their late twenties and early thirties.” With a little more life experience under their belts, it’s unsurprising that our sources prioritised “longevity in a firm” when considering their options for training contracts. In particular, one found KN’s impressive gender diversity stats “highly encouraging for my long-term prospects” – more than 50% of partners are women. What else drew this bunch in? “The firm has a good social conscience with a real belief in giving back to the community,” one felt. “It’s not just something they say on their website.” More on that later.

The Seats

Trainees liked KN’s simple approach to seat allocation. “Before starting, the firm sends out a booklet with summary information on all the seats,” they explained. “You select five, one of which must be non-contentious.” All our interviewees managed to secure at least three of their preferences, which are locked in for the duration of the two years.

“I’ve had loads of opportunities to attend trials at the Crown Court.”

Only second-years sit in disputes and crime, which was particularly popular for the “unique level of pressure that's on you when somebody’s liberty is at stake.” Due to client confidentiality, examples of recent work are hard to come by, but lawyers here commonly work for wealthy (and often well-known) individuals and organisations in relation to offences like sexual misconduct, drugs, violence – you get the picture. The team also tackles corporate crime in the form of white-collar litigation, though our interviewees got most of their experience in “the juicier” general crime group. “I’ve had loads of opportunities to go down to police stations and attend trials at the Crown Court,” one

Seat options: immigration; dispute resolution; criminal; corporate & commercial; clinical negligence; regulatory; criminal; public law; family; private client; employment
Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative &amp; Public Law</th>
<th>Financial Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banking Litigation</td>
<td>Fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Negligence</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defamation/Reputation Management</td>
<td>POCA Work &amp; Asset Forfeiture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Professional Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Matrimonial</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Crime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

revealed. Day to day trainees were kept busy “reviewing disclosure from the CPS, making sure our records are all up to date, and taking witness statements.”

The large disputes team acts for “a big mix of corporations, entrepreneurs and individuals,” handling everything from reputation management and contentious trusts and probate work to more standard business disputes. Among the reputation team’s glitzy clients are footballer Rio Ferdinand and actress Michelle Dockery (you know, Lady Mary in Downton Abbey). The team recently represented Rebekah Vardy after Coleen Rooney dropped that infamous video on Twitter. Trainee tasks here include reviewing disclosure schedules, research, drafting, and (“on a bad week”) an inevitable amount of bundling and doc review.

In the clinical negligence department, “partners tend to specialise in areas such as cerebral palsy or brain injuries, but as a trainee you’re free to work with everyone in the team,” which also includes personal injury specialists. We heard reports of trainees working on everything from breast surgeries gone wrong and delayed cancer diagnoses to motorbike accidents. The firm recently represented Lady Christine Brownlie after her husband died in a car crash in Egypt. One junior detailed “attending a round table meeting to secure a lump sum payment and recurring annual payments for a client with cerebral palsy.” Plenty of writing opportunities were also available to trainees in the form of engagement letters, initial fee agreements and witness statements. Sources also pointed out that trainees in this seat volunteer at the Action against Medical Accidents centre in Croydon twice a month, “assisting clients with issues such as duty of care and how to make a complaint.”

Immigration is one non-contentious seat option at the firm (others include corporate and real estate). The immigration group has two main focuses: corporate and private client. The seat was previously split so trainees spent three months in each stream, “but now you’re free to work across the two for the full six months.” On the corporate side, the firm works with HR teams handling visas for employees moving to the UK. One trainee expanded that “it means you’re working on a lot of applications for Tier 2 sponsorship,” – i.e. sponsorship for a general work visa – “as well as assisting with advertisements on employers’ websites.” Meanwhile on the private client side, trainees mostly assist uber rich clients with “any enquiries they might have.” Completing spouse applications was a common trainee task, for example.

Trainee Life

So how about that “good social conscience” trainees mentioned earlier? Well, first they pointed out the firm has a designated pro bono officer, “who’s lovely, and always open to suggestions.” One insider highlighted that “we’ve recently been helping people with welfare benefit claims by appealing decisions that have come from the Department for Work and Pensions.” We also spoke to trainees on the charity committee, which last year helped organise a “very successful” competition themed around Strictly Come Dancing. Then there’s the environmental committee, which has been going for a year or so. “Over Christmas we introduced an eco-friendly wrapping initiative attempting to raise awareness around single-use plastic.” Trainees were hopeful that KN’s new office (near Old Street) will be designed to “ensure we can be as green as possible!” The firm is set to move in 2021.

“You don’t have to be able to sing. We don’t sound great.”

With fewer than 180 lawyers under the roof, “social interactions are never awkward as you know most people’s names!” Trainees indicated the firm “goes all out” when it came to socials. “They booked out The Fountain Room in London for the Christmas party;” one insider told us, “which is essentially a big tent in the middle of London. And they put money behind the bar.” Trainees are welcome to join an “inclusive choir” – inclusive in the sense that “you don’t have to be able to sing. We don’t sound great.” Even a pandemic can’t stop the party. At the time of writing sources informed us the firm had just appointed a “head of cyber fun” charged with keeping up the firm’s social side during lockdown.

KN trainees start on £34,000, graduating to £58,000 on qualification. You’ll find bigger salaries in London, but trainees said: “The lower salary is reflected in the hours.” One caveat: “It does vary by department.” Corporate was flagged for having “silly hours.” For most, a standard day ran from around 9.30am to 6.30pm or 7pm, with just a handful of nights working past 8pm.

The firm’s structured qualification process requires trainees to submit a CV, cover letter and application pack consisting of bundles of work from across their seats, appraisals, and a marketing plan. “It’s pretty stressful and all-consuming,” one source vented, adding that “I’m not sure what more they could learn from me that they haven’t
after spending six months in the department!" Fortunately, trainees found “the firm is very supportive” throughout the process, and all our interviewees were consoled by KN's stellar retention rates – from 2010 to 2019 only three of 54 qualifiers weren’t kept on. In 2020, the firm retained four of six qualifiers.

Fit for a Kingsley

All trainees get a £200 wellness bonus “to do something that benefits wellbeing, such as a spa day or getting a new desk.”
Kingsley Napley LLP

Knights Quarter, 14 St John’s Lane, London EC1M 4AJ
Tel: 020 7814 1200  Fax: 020 7490 2288  Twitter: @knecareers
DX 22 Chancery Lane
Website: www.kingsleynapley.co.uk

Firm profile
Kingsley Napley is an internationally recognised law firm based in central London. Our wide range of expertise means that we can provide support for our clients in all areas of their business and private life. Many of our lawyers are leaders in their field and our practice areas are highly ranked by the legal directories. We are known for combining creative solutions with pragmatism and a friendly, sensitive approach. The relationship between lawyer and client is key. We work hard to match clients with lawyers who have the right mix of skills, experience and approach in order to achieve the best possible outcome.

Main areas of work
Clinical negligence and personal injury, corporate and commercial, criminal litigation, dispute resolution, employment, family, immigration, private client, public law, real estate and regulatory and professional discipline.

Training opportunities
The firm looks for both legal and non-legal graduates who have a strong academic background (achieved a 2:1 degree). A trainee will need to demonstrate commercial awareness, motivation and enthusiasm. To be successful you will need excellent communication skills with the ability to be a creative, practical problem solver. We look for team players who bring something to the table and have a long-term interest in Kingsley Napley and the areas of legal practice it focuses on. The training contract will consist of four seats in both contentious and non-contentious practice areas, which aim to provide trainees with a wide range of skills and practical experience. Individual preferences for seats will be taken into account, but will also be balanced with the firm’s needs. Trainees work closely with partners and lawyers at all levels in a supportive team structure, and have regular reviews to assist with development. The firm has a friendly and open environment which gives trainees the chance to meet clients, be responsible for their own work and join in marketing and client development activities.

Other benefits
Private health insurance, income protection insurance, life assurance, pension, corporate cash plan and 25 days holiday per year during training. Trainees are also eligible to participate in the firm’s flexible benefits scheme.

University law careers fairs 2020
● Bright Network Festival – 7th September 2020
Kirkland & Ellis International LLP

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 130/210/21
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats
First-year salary: £50,000
Qualification salary: $190,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Kirkland

This US-born titan excels in the London market, playing off its penchant for all things private equity.

The Firm
If it’s financial security you’re looking for in a time of economic unease, you’ve come to the right place. 2019 saw US giant Kirkland & Ellis become the first ever law firm to hit (and exceed) $4 billion in revenue – it went to a whopping $4.15 billion last year. Breaking that record was a firm-wide effort between 15 offices worldwide, nine of which are in the US. But from what we can gather the UK base in London had a significant role to play in the story. Trainees told us the office has “grown exponentially over the past decade” and from our stats we can see that lawyer (partner and associate) headcount grew by 12% between 2019 and 2020 alone.

Trainees proudly told us “Kirkland & Ellis is a leader in all things private equity.” We always advise you to treat bold declarations with caution, but private equity work is key at Kirkland (as opposed to many firms who gain their renown working for blue-chip corporates). The firm is ranked top worldwide by Chambers Global and sits among the UK’s crème de la crème for private equity investment funds and high-end private equity buyouts, according to Chambers UK. In London specifically, Kirkland ranks top for restructuring and its sponsor-side banking and finance work. It also wins accolades in the capital in high-yield capital markets, tax, and financial crime: corporates.

“I’m very ambitious, and I wanted a firm that reflected that.”

Record-breaking firms attract highly driven people. “I’m very ambitious, and I wanted a firm that reflected that,” one trainee told us. These go-getters were drawn to Kirkland’s smaller intake in the hopes of getting “a lot of exposure” and responsibility early on. “You’re part of a team and everyone contributes,” they confirmed. This went hand in hand with high expectations, and sources reiterated that “you can have a laugh, but everyone expects you to give your all.”

The Seats
Every Kirkland trainee does two compulsory seats with the corporate and debt finance teams – the firm’s two biggest departments. For the remaining two seats, trainees can submit their preferences. “It’s a pretty informal process,” they explained. “When you’re midway through your current seat, graduate recruitment will ask for your preferences. From there, they collate everyone’s choices and work hard to make sure everyone gets what they want.”

Under typical circumstances, the firm also offers two international secondments: a debt finance secondment to Hong Kong, and a corporate secondment to New York. We heard that trainees in the past have gone on to qualify in these offices and related practices.

Debt finance work is “one of the things Kirkland in London is well known for,” andas such, trainees in this seat felt they’d got stuck into “really exciting work.” The practice covers “all the finance work around leveraged buyouts and helps clients with the raising of debt.” The team acts exclusively for sponsors in these deals and helps out when it comes to “negotiating the loan of debt they borrow from banks.” The team has worked for big private equity companies such as Blackstone, Bain Capital and Advent International, and recently advised Thoma Bravo on its...
Kirkland & Ellis International LLP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chambers UK rankings</th>
<th>Investment Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banking &amp; Finance</td>
<td>Private Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Markets</td>
<td>Restructuring/Insolvency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition/European Law</td>
<td>Tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Crime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Property</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

£3.1 billion offer for cybersecurity company Sophos. Sources also told us the firm has recently been handling “more distressed financings with the restructuring team.” For trainees, work in this seat involved running the conditions precedent process, reviewing subscription booklets and negotiating side letters. Sources were also “given the reins on all things KYC [Know Your Customer]. Although it’s not a very legal task, it can be invaluable because the deal won’t go through if the banks aren’t given KYC approval.”

**“Because we’re often working for private equity sponsors, the angle and the pace of the transactions is very different.”**

Over the last four years, Kirkland’s corporate team has “almost doubled in size.” Trainees here got involved in M&A transactions spanning “multi-jurisdictional headline deals to UK-based deals, from smaller portfolio company transactions to larger sponsor-level transactions.” Some trainees also dabbled in “reverse IPOs – taking companies private – as well as a lot of management incentive plans.” Billion-pound price tags are common: the team recently advised investment management company GLP on the £18.7 billion sale of its logistics business to Blackstone, for example. It also advised private equity outfit TDR Capital and Stonegate Pub Company on their £1.27 billion offer for pub company EI Group.

Interviewees noticed that the main documents they worked with were “are the same as other firms, but because we’re often working for private equity sponsors, the angle and the pace of the transactions is very different.” Trainees described “highly focused” clients: “They really understand the transaction and push you harder.” Day to day, trainees often started out with tasks like “reviewing data room documents and managing local counsel.” As the seat progressed, they moved on to “drafting the due diligence report, liaising with counsel and internal teams, and sometimes getting the chance to do the first cut of the shareholder agreement.”

**Work is mostly transactional at Kirkland, but there is a litigation side to the firm too. The group is roughly split into four subsections: High Court litigation, IP litigation, international arbitration and white-collar crime.** “As a trainee, you can get stuck into all of them,” insiders told us, adding that their assignments might depend on what their supervisor does. The team recently acted for manufacturer Galapagos in proceedings that arose from a challenge to a $505 million restructuring. The team also represented software company Liveperson, which was sued by a former agent alleging the company owed them money. There’s a fair bit of deal support work for the corporate team here, like looking into “the white-collar or anti-bribery aspects of target companies.” On arbitrations, the trainee role included “turning comments into a plea or submissions, doing some case research, and some letter writing.” Sources found the seat “quite cerebral. You often “mega fund” thrown in. In the latter category, the team recently advised capital market company L Catterton on the formation of a $1.45 billion fund for investing in Asia’s lifestyle and branded goods sector. Elsewhere the firm advised Resolution Capital – a real estate securities company – on the formation of a $3.5 billion investment vehicle for investing in life insurance portfolios. Throughout this seat, interviewees appreciated being “included in client meetings with the main fund-raising guys” and getting “regular contact with clients on the phone.” Other typical tasks included “drafting lasting powers of attorney and taking the first cut at side letters.” One source recalled: “I also ran my own deals because when investors want to transfer out of a fund or transfer interest to someone else, it’s basically a mini deal in itself. Trainees get to run with those with supervision.”

**Restructuring** was a particularly popular choice among our interviewees. For many law firms, it’s an area that has seen an influx of work following the outbreak of Covid-19. Trainees worked on “a lot of retail restructurings for high-street companies.” Recent clients include well-known names such as Forever 21, Mamas & Papas, Pizza Express and South African retail company Edcon on its $1.6 billion restructuring. One source explained how a matter might go down: “If the company goes bust, it enters into a company voluntary arrangement which helps them stay afloat.” Part of this includes “agreeing with landlords on a subsidised rent for a period” and generally “helping companies restructure their debt.” Trainee responsibilities included attending board meetings and taking signatures, legal research, and occasionally helping with “client information presentations.” Sources here felt that “sometimes they throw you in the deep end, but there’s always someone around to help.”
spend hours at a time reading through case law to pinpoint an area of law that’s uncertain. The answers are rarely an easy find!”

Trainee Life
“Outwardly, it’s a firm that’s seen as quite aggressive,” trainees acknowledged, “particularly in the debt and corporate markets, but you don’t feel that within the team.” All of our sources impressed upon us that “everyone is respectful and it’s a very professional work environment.” Others reiterated that “people are generally friendly, no matter how busy they are.” Of course, you don’t get to the top of the AmLaw 100 just by being “friendly,” and trainees emphasised that “people do expect a lot. Everyone pushes each other to be the best.”

“How Most of the time, the hours are longer than the average person’s hours.”

Pushing for perfection was borne out in the hours trainees spent in the office: “You work as hard as you need to get the work done.” Depending who we spoke to, the average time trainees left the office fell somewhere between 7.30pm and 9.30pm. On later nights though, trainees felt supported: “Every time I’ve been here late, most other people on the team were there too.” Because hours varied “massively month to month, sometimes even week to week,” trainees could go through a period of “11-hour-plus days.” Alternatively, “if you have a quiet week, you’re not expected to be at your desk 24/7. There have been days where I’ve left the office at 6pm.” Ultimately, interviewees said “most of the time, the hours are longer than the average person’s hours.”

But then, Kirkland doesn’t attract average people. “The hours aren’t necessarily a negative thing,” one felt. “They pay off in incredible experiences and responsibility.” This perspective won’t be uncommon at Kirkland; trainees said everyone is “very entrepreneurial, driven and targeted.” Sources were also keen to add that “it’s a true meritocracy—not the kind of place where you wouldn’t feel you could raise a point just because you’re junior. It doesn’t matter what level you are. All that matters is the work you produce.”

Sources noticed Kirkland’s American roots shining through in one aspect more than others: its pro bono commitment. Although participation isn’t mandatory, “all attorneys are expected to do 20 hours of pro bono every year, and most trainees do it.” Lawyers get weekly emails outlining the opportunities on offer, and so far, our sources had been involved in matters like employment tribunals and advisory work on charitable statuses. Interviewees appreciated getting “valuable experience as a trainee” this way.

They also flagged other features of Kirkland life that helped with their overall development, such as “a strong women’s leadership programme.” Others pointed out “you’re working with people who are market-leading in their field, so you’re learning from the very best.” Trainees were further spurred on by the firm’s partner track, which is among “the most defined in the market.” Associates here can be promoted to partner from their sixth year, as opposed to their eighth or ninth year which is usually when associates are considered for partnership.

Trainees nearing the end of their training contract face an informal qualification process: they’ll have a chat with HR and the training principal about halfway through their final seat to discuss where they’d like to qualify. They’ll usually “have a discussion with partners in the relevant teams beforehand to express interest” too. Recent NQs recalled that “the process was wrapped up within a week.” In 2020, the firm retained nine of ten qualifiers. They can look forward to a bumper salary of $190,000 (trainees start on a measly £50,000).
Firm profile
Kirkland & Ellis is a global law firm specialising in advising on private equity M&A and financing transactions, fund formation, litigation and restructuring. The firm is pre-eminent in those areas globally across its 15 offices in US, Europe and Asia. The firm has developed its leading position by focusing on, empowering its lawyers with accelerated career paths to partnership, rewarding dedication, focus and teamwork and allowing its lawyers to be entrepreneurial and client facing at all stages in their careers.

Main areas of work
The firm handles complex corporate, debt finance, investment funds, restructuring, real estate finance, tax, financial services regulatory, international arbitration and litigation, antitrust and competition, technology and IP transactions, IP litigation and capital markets matters.

Training opportunities
The principal focus of the training is on transactional law with a specialism in private equity. Trainees complete four, six month seats and obtain training in areas such as corporate M&A, debt finance, investment funds, restructuring, real estate finance, international arbitration and litigation, financial services regulatory, antitrust and competition, and tax. In addition there are opportunities to undertake an overseas secondment to enable trainees to experience the international resources and capabilities of Kirkland & Ellis.

Our trainees gain experience through active involvement in deals throughout their careers together with extensive technical training.

Vacation scheme
We offer placements throughout the spring and summer months. Candidates are eligible to apply if they are in their penultimate year of a law degree, final year of a non-law degree or beyond. We look to recruit as many of our future trainees as possible from the vacation scheme.

Other benefits
Benefits include private medical insurance, travel insurance, pension scheme, bonus scheme, employee assistance plan, discounted gym membership, dental plan, cycle to work scheme, season ticket loan, and concierge service.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Our open day taking place in November 2020 is aimed at those eligible to apply for our vacation schemes and training contracts. The deadline for applying is 1 November 2020.
Our open day taking place in March 2021 is aimed at those in the first year of a law degree or penultimate year of a non-law degree. The deadline for applying is 14 February 2020.

University law careers fairs 2020
Bristol; Cambridge; Durham; Exeter; Kings College London; LSE; Nottingham; Oxford; Queen Mary; UCL
Globally minded trainees met their perfect match in Latham’s “absolutely seamless” international network, with a Cali twist.

The Firm

Founded in Los Angeles in 1934, this superstar law firm was born against a backdrop of dazzling lights, cameras and action. Latham started life as a tax and labour outfit, with namesake Dana Latham going on to be the US Commissioner of Internal Revenue under President Eisenhower. Nowadays, Latham & Watkins is a very different beast – one of the world’s largest international firms with a varied practice, it claims to have no one headquarters. Firm leadership is indeed spread across the world (though all the administration’s Chief Officers are based in Los Angeles, New York or London). “We have very much a ‘one firm’ approach,” trainees agreed. “The global network is absolutely seamless; it’s so easy to get in contact with people if you’ve got a query on a specific point and you can have a great relationship with lawyers around the world.”

“Latham London life actually has quite a Californian, relaxed style.”

It seems Latham has exported some Cali cool worldwide: “Latham London life actually has quite a Californian, relaxed style,” we heard. That means flexible working is commonplace and senior lawyers “don’t care what you sound or dress like. We all dress to our day.” Trainers and the occasional activewear is A-OK, “as long as you’re not wearing pyjamas!” Our sources clarified that there’s “no hint of London being a satellite office,” and in fact it’s been “growing significantly and consistently for the last decade.” Most recently, two lateral partner recruits to restructuring in 2018 helped the group become “extremely busy,” and it’s doubled in total headcount in the years since. Growth has affected the training contract too; “Two years ago restructuring had one trainee per seat, but now they take three or four.”

The Seats

Trainees submit three preferences ahead of each seat rotation. “We all usually get at least one of them, but it’s sometimes just down to luck,” insiders suggested. International secondments are also available, usually for second years only: trainees apply with a supporting statement, but be warned, “some people applied every time for all the secondments and didn’t get any. It can be heartbreaking.” The most popular secondments are to Singapore and Hong Kong, “and occasionally you’ll get a seat in Dubai or Moscow,” but it’s important to note that “it’s rare for there to be a US secondment, which I wish I had known sooner!” There’s also a client secondment to the investment firm Carlyle available. Secondees described their trip over-

Seat options: banking; benefits & compensation; competition; data & technology transactions; entertainment, sports & media; environment; equity capital markets; financial regulatory; funds; mergers & acquisitions; project finance; real estate; restructuring & special situations; structured finance & derivatives; litigation (which includes international arbitration and white-collar); tax; UK debt capital markets
seas as a “really unique experience. The firm looks after you so it’s a smooth and easy process.”

Latham’s corporate department deals with private equity and M&A, though there are “smaller specialised teams within it for public and equity capital markets deals.” Trainees usually act as generalists, as the firm “encourages you to keep your practice broader to build up knowledge.” Retail, oil and gas, healthcare and startup companies are the firm’s primary clients, with pharmaceuticals becoming a growing specialism. “Deals tend to be huge, with big client names. Some are more glamorous than others though – sometimes it’ll just be some ginormous packaging company you’ve never heard of,” a source shared. Latham’s private equity involvement is usually on the buy side, which means “working on a lot of auction processes for large businesses.” When the team does sell-side work, it’s usually for “major private equity houses that have a portfolio company they’re trying to sell. That can be interesting because the timelines are much quicker.” The group recently represented PE house BC Partners on the €3.25 billion sale of French digital animal identification and monitoring company Antelliq. Wild stuff.

“...more than happy for you to take on tasks that would usually be assigned to an NQ.”

Within corporate, equity capital markets spans IPOs, financings and an increasing number of placings. The team usually works for the bank involved in the transaction, though a growing section of the team acts company-side. As ECM only takes one trainee at a time, “it’s naturally a really busy seat as a lot of the higher-level work flows down to you.” Latham recently advised the underwriters on the $25.6 billion IPO of Saudi Arabia’s oil company Saudi Aramco – the biggest IPO of all time. Trainee tasks in this seat largely follow the general corporate template, though we heard that due diligence is more prevalent in private equity. Those cutting their teeth on M&A may get a crack at the initial draft of a sale or purchase agreement if they’re lucky, “which is a good stepping stone towards drafting bigger, meatier documents.” Trainees will inevitably run “transaction management, communicating with clients and local counsel, reviewing authorisations and compiling signature pages.” We heard that corporate supervisors are “more than happy for you to take on tasks that would usually be assigned to an NQ once you’ve proven yourself a little bit.”

Following its lateral boost, restructuring is a growing concern at Latham’s London base. Part of the expansion involved introducing a ‘Tactical Opportunities Team’ – “it makes you feel like a spy, but they’re actually accountants and market specialists. They do analysis to augment the team’s practice and identify potential clients.” Latham’s niche is “enormously complicated restructurings, often with dozens of lenders,” and cross-border issues are the norm so there are “complex regulatory and political issues to navigate as well.” The team recently acted for a committee of lenders to Poundland and Bensons for Beds parent company Steinhoff in an €8.8 billion cross-border restructuring. Trainees found working on administrations “exhilarating – there are hard deadlines and thousands of jobs are at risk,” and described their tasks as “like corporate transactional work, but with a twist.” The twist is that administrative processes mean “you get to boss corporate around for once. You keep a lot of plates spinning.” Careful spinners conducted due diligence while chasing responses and creating step plans “acting as an idiot’s guide to buying a company, with complicated diagrams of who owns what.” Interviewees found this “a good way to get to grips with the whole process from start to finish, even if you don’t sit in restructuring for the whole deal.” There can be a contentious element to the group when a party isn’t paid in full, after which trainees will contact local counsel and conduct research and analysis.

“You get to boss corporate around for once.”

The disputes team covers commercial litigation, international arbitration, and antitrust and competition. Commercial disputes and arbitration have a lot of crossover, with trainees dipping into work from both, but “competition is very sectioned off – they do their own thing as the work is quite different.” Latham’s international arbitration practice includes investment treaty, public law and commercial arbitrations, but trainees mostly see the last of those. Energy and construction clients are the most common to appear: the team represented Austrian construction company Strabag in the first ICSID Convention arbitration brought against Libya, involving questions of international treaty law and foreign investment during a civil war. The commercial litigation practice tilts more strongly towards banking, including shareholder and warranty disputes involving banks, private equity houses, large corporates “and even individuals.” Trainees in both subgroups write letters, complete legal research and
Trainee Life
As with many US firms, Latham opts only for “limited training at the start of each seat,” rather than an intense regime, as the firm prefers trainees “to think on their feet and learn quickly on the job.” This means that to stand a chance of getting in the door, candidates “need to be doers. You’ve got to be comfortable figuring things out for yourself.” Though this approach to work “can be stressful,” rest assured there’s “a good balance between being actively supervised and being independent,” sources said. An associate committee acts as “a great point of contact for reaching out to management. It makes for firm-wide openness on that front.”

Before they arrive, future trainees get a current trainee buddy, who “takes you for lunch and answers any questions you have before joining. It gives you grounding and means you’re less nervous when you arrive.” Once through the door, trainees in turn have a junior associate mentor, and some departments like corporate also provide senior mentors. Mentors get a monthly budget to “go to lunch, dinner, sports games, the theatre, or even get their nails done with the trainee. It helps you feel included at Latham.” The inclusion keeps on coming thanks to a social committee which organises events including karaoke, drinks, ping-pong and shuffleboard tournaments. Some teams host their own socials too, such as banking and corporate’s annual ski trips – “it’s a great way to get to know people outside of work while hitting the snow.” During the 2020 lockdown these socials turned virtual with weekly Zoom drinks seshes: “People make lasting friendships here. I have a load of colleagues that I’d consider friends first and foremost.” As for inclusion and diversity, interviewees reckoned it’s “a big focus” at Latham & Watkins: “One of the benefits of it being a huge firm is the massive diversity support network,” one noted. “We have countless different affinity groups and they host all sorts of events.”

“Enjoying the job means I don’t really mind staying in late.”
Several sources were “really encouraged to do pro bono” – we heard of volunteering at legal advice clinics, including a benefit appeals clinic in Bethnal Green. Work also spans large-scale research reports to the UN on human rights issues. Insiders found pro bono “a great way to step up and get client contact or drafting experience. The firm likes to keep us busy, so pro bono counts towards your billing target once you’re qualified.” Trainees don’t have billing targets, but qualifiers go through a transition period to hitting 1,900-equivalent once qualified. Most interviewees found themselves out the door by 8pm each day, “and once or twice a week you’ll stay until 10 or 11pm.” Of course, there are “certainly times when it’s busier than that – in corporate I’ve done some 16-hour day periods.” Though this “can be tiring,” trainees felt Deliveroo dinners, taxis and “enjoying the job means I don’t really mind staying in late.”

Qualification itself was universally seen as “painless. HR circulates a list and you tell them where you want to qualify.” The process has changed ever so slightly in 2020 – trainees can now submit more than two qualification preferences and have the option to not rank them if they don’t want to. The process usually goes down “without too much reshuffling” and Latham has a strong retention record, averaging nearly 90% in the last nine years. Four of 2019’s intake qualified abroad (three into the US and one into Dubai). Anyone looking to so needs to “make your own opportunities and reach out to HR to let them know it’s on your mind.” Those who go are “fully supported,” and get the opportunity to “learn the nuances between each country’s laws.” One of our sources gushed: “I don’t know why I’d leave Latham any time soon, I’m having a great time.” For those that don’t see themselves as a future partner, “Latham is a great place to build a good network then go in-house eventually.” In 2020, 23 of 24 qualifiers stayed on. Out of those who stayed, one went to Latham’s Dubai office, another went to the Paris base and one ended up in the US.

Elementary, my dear Watkins!
Latham pays one of the highest NQ salaries in the UK – interviewees were unsurprisingly “very satisfied with the firm’s compensation system.”
Latham & Watkins

99 Bishopsgate, London EC2M 3XF
Tel: 020 7710 1000   Fax: 020 7374 4460
Email: londongraduates@lw.com
Website: www.lw.com/londongraduates

Firm profile
Latham & Watkins has more than 2,700 fee earners in offices across Europe, the US, the Middle East and Asia. Our non-hierarchical, collegiate style and ambitious and entrepreneurial culture makes Latham & Watkins a unique place to work. Over 70% of the firm’s transactions involve five or more offices and the collaborative atmosphere is strengthened by the firm’s diversity. Described as one of the “Top 10 Most Innovative Law Firms in Europe” by the Financial Times’ 2019 report of the most innovative law firms, our award-winning London office is home to over 400 lawyers and recognised for its work advising some of the world’s leading corporates, financial institutions and private equity firms on market-shaping transactions, disputes, and regulatory matters.

Main areas of work
Our leading finance practice has earned an exceptional reputation in the market, regularly advising on all types of leveraged, acquisition and project finance work. We have market-leading experience in M&A, debt and equity financing, high yield, restructurings, recapitalisations, divestitures, data privacy and cyber security, and outsourcing. We also offer comprehensive tax and environmental advice for complex multi-jurisdictional transactions and disputes. With more than 600 litigators located in 19 major business centers globally, we are one of the few firms capable of providing clients with immediate, high-quality legal expertise anywhere in the world, whether our clients’ needs are local or international.

Over the last 10 years, our lawyers provided approximately 3.7 million pro bono hours globally in free legal services to underserved individuals and families and the nonprofit sector valued at approximately US$1.8 billion.

Training opportunities
Latham offers a training contract with real responsibility on global matters combined with supervision from the best lawyers in their field. In addition to a sophisticated training programme, trainees also benefit from a core three week trainee foundation designed to bridge the gap between law schools and practice. There is also training in each seat. After induction trainees complete four, six month seats. Two of these will be in corporate and finance. Trainees have the opportunity to apply for a secondment on either their third or fourth seat. The firm has an average retention rate of 96%.

Vacation scheme
We run three vacation schemes over the academic year. Our vacation schemes are an exciting opportunity not only for us to get to know you, but also for you to get to know us. During the course of one or two weeks, you will sit in two practice areas. You can expect to be involved in client calls, court visits, Q&As and training, as well as group work and social events. You will also have the opportunity to interview for our training contract.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We have designed our open days to give you an insight into life at a commercial law firm and the culture at Latham. Visit lwcareers.com for more details on opportunities and application deadlines.

- Penultimate year law students, all final year students and graduates: November/December 2020
- First and second year students: February/March 2021

University law careers fairs 2020
We visit campuses across the UK. Look out for us at law fairs, virtual events, in your careers services and working with your law societies. This year we are visiting: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Exeter, King’s, Leeds, LSE, Nottingham, Oxford, Queen Mary, UCL, Warwick, York, Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews, Queen’s Belfast, Cardiff, Trinity College Dublin.
Leigh Day

The facts

Locations: London, Manchester
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 52/120/19
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments
First-year salary: £32,000 (London); £25,600 (Manchester)
Qualification salary: £48,000 (London); £33,600 (Manchester)

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

Get hired at Leigh Day

Rapacious businesses, the scurrilous press, dodgy politicians: Leigh Day are on to you.

The Firm

“I came here to help people,” explained one Leigh Day trainee. The firm, a predominantly claimant-representing firm, does precisely that, taking on big corporations and even governments in its quest to hold them to account. A survey of UK news at the time of writing saw Leigh Day representing 54000doctors.org, which demanded the UK government reveal the results of a 2016 flu study called Exercise Cygnus; representing the family of Errol Graham, who starved to death after his benefits were cut off; and acting as pro bono counsel for a lawyer struck off for losing a briefcase of work documents and then lying about it. The firm, with offices in London and Manchester, rules the roost UK-wide in administrative and public law, civil liberties and human rights, environment, personal injury, and product liability. In London, Leigh Day’s work in clinical negligence and personal injury, as well as its employment work, receives top billing. The firm takes on between seven to 11 trainees a year, with the majority headed for the London office.

“High-value, difficult, complex and sad cases: massive cases.”

“You don’t come into this area of law for the money,” trainees told us, “but we get paid well for the work we do.” Being at the top of the tree in their practices makes a difference here. The salary is certainly decent, particularly at first-year trainee level, but below the London average at NQ level. Despite “working as hard as corporate firms, who we often come up against,” none of the trainees had any grumbles. “It’s interesting work and you can’t get it anywhere else.” For those interested in the firm, “you have to be passionate to work at Leigh Day. It’s a lot about your character as well.”

The Seats

Leigh Day’s training contract is two 12-month seats, which sources liked. “With any new job it takes a while to settle in,” said one. “I’m pleased that my first seat was a year, because once I got over the bumpy period I could work on cases properly.” Another trainee thought that because it was “inevitable that you’ll get more experience in year-long seats,” Leigh Day trainees probably did “more substantive and less administrative work” than peers at other firms. There are “seven departments” at Leigh Day in London, “six that take trainees: clinical negligence, personal injury, product liability, human rights, employment, and international group claims.” There’s also a regulatory and disciplinary department, “which doesn’t take trainees” currently due to its smaller size. In Manchester, international, human rights and product liability are off the table as seat options (although the office is starting to do some product liability work). Because “the first seats are randomly allocated,” and with “the firm trying to guarantee one of your three preferences for your second seat,” first years were likely to end up in personal injury, clinical negligence, or product liability, with second years bagging the popular international, human rights, or employment.

“During Covid, a lot of prisoners are claiming they’re eligible for early release.”

The firm’s human rights team – the first to be established in the country after the 1998 Human Rights Act – remains

Seat options: clinical negligence; employment; personal injury; consumer law and product safety (London only); human rights (London only); international (London only)
The biggest human rights team in England, and the work is remarkable. Recently the firm took part in Milasi Josiya & Others v British American Tobacco (BAT), where almost 2,000 tobacco farmers in Malawi, hundreds of whom are children, allege BAT forced them to work for low wages, while reaping tremendous profit. On top of several high-profile multinational cases, the department also does a lot of “prisoner work,” which comprises “much faster, lower-value cases.” So, for example, “during Covid, a lot of prisoners are claiming they’re eligible for early release.” Sources said that while there are “some bigger cases,” it’s “mostly simpler matters.” Sources said that “you get to know your clients” and develop a “good understanding of the prison environment, which has been interesting.”

The clinical negligence team deals with “high-value, difficult, complex and sad cases: massive cases.” The result is that for many, “you’re never going to see anything from beginning to end in that seat.” The firm secured a seven-figure settlement for a woman who was left with permanent disability following a misdiagnosis and the concomitant incorrect treatment of a wound. Sources said the seat was initially “difficult without a medical or scientific background, but by the end of the year I could navigate my way around those cases.” Trainees were “given the opportunity to experience a range of tasks” such as “drafting witness statements, orders, and correspondence with the court, and reading through records to find out what happened.” Sources said: “The work was really rewarding, attaining life-changing awards for our clients.”

People become experts on metal-on-metal hips, for example, for three years until the case closes.”

The scope of the product liability (consumer law) team “is really broad – hard to describe,” one trainee mused. “There are six partners, each with a different area.” Work ranges from “medical devices and fire claims from faulty white goods,” to the “VW emissions case,” where VW is accused of covering up the harmful nature of diesel emissions, to “allergy claims, breast implants” and even “financial work” where investigations and litigation relate to financial products. For those working in the department, “people become experts on metal-on-metal hips, for example, for three years until the case closes.” There “can be a lot of research into the product and the recall, especially when investing new claims,” sources added. Trainees mentioned “working on disclosure, daily client contact, reviewing medical reports, advice to clients, team discussions on strategy and tactics, cost negotiations, drafting witness statements, meeting with counsel and going to trial.” Basically, you “got exposed to every aspect of the case.”

The firm did listen to the time of writing saw the firm representing 13,000 police officers, 200 teachers and over 40,000 predominantly female ASDA shop workers in the largest-ever private sector equal pay claim, whose final value is predicted to be over £1 billion. While some trainees did “a mixture of group actions and individual, a lot of trainees work solely on group action.” Sources said that “group action work is more administrative and more about how you manage that many clients.” When the firm launches “a group action and we’re recruiting more clients,” trainees would be “drafting content for the website and using the case management system to be ready for the new clients.”

Trainee Life

One area where some trainees felt the firm didn’t live up to its own values was its decision not to pay for the LPC. “Not paying for the LPC is exclusionary,” sources thought. The trainees “who can afford to pay for their LPC are likely to be middle class, white and privileged, and the firm is supposedly about the underdog. There’s no diversity in our year and they wonder why, but the answer is obvious.” To inject a little perspective: the UK firms paying for law school are almost exclusively corporate and commercial firms, where budgets are bigger. Nevertheless, trainees praised the firm’s decision “to do a scholarship for one trainee” as “a step in the right direction.” But they were worried that “the criteria to satisfy that are likely to be very narrow.” Trainees also said that “the NQ process makes me a bit anxious: quite often it happens quite late in the year.” We heard that “last year it was August, which was concerning for second-year trainees who are worried about having a job come September.” The firm’s reasoning for holding the process at this time is so that they can offer more jobs. While trainees said that “the firm did listen to the time concerns,” with the upheaval of the Covid-19 crisis, our sources were uncertain what would happen this year. In the end, the process was delayed by a month, but the firm retained all seven trainees in 2020, with one fixed-term contract.

Leigh Day’s commitment to a “great work-life balance” is a genuine commitment, it seems. Note how the contracted hours “9.30am to 5.30pm” are something of a novelty in London (there’s more flexibility in Manchester). And “if I’m here at 6.30pm, I’m one of the last ones here.” Hours aren’t a cause of stress, but there can be a psychological toll of working on cases “where people die or suffer horrific injuries. I can’t think of an area where things aren’t
emotionally challenging; it comes into all of the work we do,” one trainee candidly told us. “But,” trainees reassured us, “our HR department does a lot of pastoral care.” On top of “encouraging us to think about our mental health, the firm also offers an employee assistance line,” which offers independent counselling. A source added: “I can speak to my supervisor if I have any concerns. The firm takes on challenging cases and so they make sure we’re okay.”

Leigh way or the highway

Our sources were “so proud to work at Leigh Day.” The firm “recruits a certain type of person,” so even if people had very “different backgrounds, they have the same values. All the people I know at the firm have principles.” Trainees said: “It’s what binds the firm together. It’s more than just a law firm making money. The work is bigger than just its cases.”
Firm profile
Leigh Day is a top 100 law firm committed to claimant-only cases, ensuring that individuals have the same access to justice as the UK Government and large corporations. It is not afraid to take on difficult and challenging cases involving medical negligence, serious personal injuries, discrimination in the workplace, defective products and human rights abuses in this country and overseas. Lawyers at Leigh Day offer a market-leading service to their clients who include individuals from around the world, charities and global NGOs.

Main areas of work
- Clinical Negligence (London and Manchester)
- Employment (London and Manchester)
- Personal Injury (London and Manchester)
- Consumer Law and Product Safety (London only)
- Human Rights (London only)
- International (London only)

Training opportunities
The firm has intakes every September and welcomes applications from both law and non-law backgrounds. However, as we recruit trainees one year in advance, law students should be in their final year of studies (or have graduated), and non-law students will be undertaking (or have completed) their Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), on application.

We are looking for future solicitors and partners with the ability, passion and drive to take forward our ground-breaking claimant work.

Successful applicants will share our ethos and passion for providing access to justice to all and the commitment to the highest standards of client care; while demonstrating the ability to approach problems with persistence, intellectual rigour, logical judgement and critical reasoning.

Other benefits
29 days holiday, life assurance, contributory pension scheme, private medical insurance, employee assistance helpline, interest-free season ticket loan, cycle to work scheme, gym membership, social groups and activities.
Lewis Silkin LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Cardiff, Oxford
Overseas offices: Dublin, Hong Kong
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 57/155/13
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments
First-year salary: £38,000 London; £28,500 Cardiff
Qualification salary: £62,500 London; £57,875 Oxford; £46,875 Cardiff

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Lewis Silkin

“People come from all walks of life. Diversity runs through the firm.” This forward-thinking, creative firm offers the legal market something a little different.

The Firm
“I was previously a journalist.” “I used to work in theatre.” “I was originally going to take a music gig.”—These were typical career stories of the trainees we interviewed, finding their thirst for creative input and industry expertise both satisfied at Lewis Silkin. The founder, coincidentally also called Lewis Silkin, was born into a family of Jewish Lithuanian refugees, and although disadvantaged, Silkin relied on grit and innovation to build his firm. This is a dynamic, forward-thinking firm famous for its work in immigration and employment, and for the media clients it draws in.

The firm has offices in London, Cardiff and Oxford, and overseas bases in Dublin and Hong Kong. At the time of our calls nearly all trainees were based in the London office and just one was in Cardiff. Lewis Silkin focuses on two areas of practice: Employment, Immigration and Reward (EIR); and Creators, Makers and Innovators (CMI). Under both these umbrella terms lay the firm’s 12 legal practice groups; CMI includes sectors like advertising, music, digital and social media, publishing and fashion. Under the EIR blanket hides sectors like equality and diversity, workplace investigations and sports.

“The actual interview was obviously terrifying, but they made it as relaxed as it could be.”

Chambers UK grants Lewis Silkin high honours in employment in London, Oxford and Cardiff. London also earns good rankings in corporate, immigration, and IP; and UK-wide media & entertainment, advertising, retail, and sport are also noteworthy. The firm looks for around six trainees to join each September. Much of the interview process is pretty standard, consisting of a video interview, psychometric testing and an in-person interview, but… wait for it… no suits allowed. Applicants are encouraged to dress smart-casual to help ease the stress of the big day: “The actual interview was obviously terrifying, but they made it as relaxed as it could be.”

The Seats
There are now seven permanent seat options, and immigration and real estate seats are available on an ad hoc basis. One noted: “You’ll pretty much do everything anyway, there is no need for a formal structure.” The one rule? Trainees must complete at least one seat in the London office due to Cardiff maintaining only two seat options. The training contract is typically 4x6 month seats, one being a client secondment, but it was also common for sources to complete split seats.

Employment being the biggest department at Lewis Silkin meant trainees received a wide variety of work, from working on abuse allegations concerning Tibetan Buddhists to so-so contract and policy review. The group maintains specialist teams, focusing on High Court litigation, trade unions, data protection and international work. Recent growth has led to a focus on investigations, which

Seat options: commercial; corporate; data and privacy; dispute resolution; employment; employment (High Court dispute resolution); IP and brands
Chambers UK rankings

- Commercial Contracts
- Corporate/M&A
- Data Protection
- Employment
- Immigration
- Intellectual Property
- Litigation
- Media & Entertainment
- Partnership
- Retail
- Sports Law

is where most trainees we spoke to received work. The #MeToo movement has propelled much of this focus: “It can be both fascinating and harrowing. You may find yourself in a small room for eight hours frantically typing about chilling allegations.” Clients work in areas like gender or race discrimination, and allegations of fraud and sexual misconduct. Lawyers go into these situations as independent investigators, conducting interviews with the subjects: “We watch their body language to try to decipher if they are a credible witness, like a judge would do in court.”

“You may find yourself in a small room for eight hours frantically typing about chilling allegations.”

Other sources in the seat listed tasks like attending preliminary hearings, drafting settlement agreements and subject access requests, and submitting defence claims. “It was a steep learning curve, but I felt protected while doing it.” The client pool has big fish in it like Sainsbury’s, commercial brands and IP. Clients come to the firm seeking advice on advertising regulatory issues,” and worked in patent, trademark and design portfolio management. Following the recent launch of The Collective, the firm has been at the forefront of business advisory for those in the luxury and lifestyle space, like the one and only Jean-Paul Gaultier. Lewis Silkin was involved in Gaultier’s Fashion Freak Show; work included advising on music clearance issues in Italy, Russia, the UK and Spain. Other clients on the team’s VIP guestlist include Mercedes-Benz, Hermès and Liberty. Back down to earth for a second: trainees on these clients were heavily involved with ad clearance work. “We inform clients on the level of risk to their advert, for example, car adverts that promote reckless speeding. If the client has released the advert and received a complaint, it’s a case of defending them to the ASA.” Typical trainee tasks include “contract review, working on venue hire agreements, attending client counsel conferences and researching ASA rulings.”

Dispute resolution covers a full house of litigation, arbitration and mediation. Trainees often worked on trials in the High Court: “It was just me and my supervisor on the case. I was involved in everything.” On such trials, trainees are tasked with preparing trial bundles, helping with witness statements, reviewing evidence in the discovery process and creating the pre-trial checklist. A certain resilience is called for: “You’ll get pulled into litigations from all corners of the firm.” For example, a source worked closely with the employment team, acting for Secarma (a cybersecurity company) in the Court of Appeal: “The defendant had arranged a team move by taking Secarma’s employees to set up a competing business. We were trying to stop them from taking advantage of the expertise of the people who had left their place of work.” Other clients include House of Fraser, Ford and Deliveroo.

“It was just me and my supervisor on the case. I was involved in everything.”

“Most trainees have done a client secondment” at Lewis Silkin. Sources spoke of doing client secondments in employment, commercial and litigation. Like seat allocation, the secondment structure is not set in stone; “it depends on how long the client wants you or how long you want to go.” One source went to Mercedes-Benz for six weeks: “I worked alongside my supervisor – it was a useful experience.” Another secondee found themselves helping an organisation through the Covid-19 crisis: “I was helping the commercial team keep up to date with the coronavirus regulations that had changed overnight, like travel bans. As the situation progressed, I worked with the HR director to pull together their policies, like furloughing and working from home.”

Trainee Life

The theme of the firm’s practice area strengths trickles down into the culture. Sources mused that “senior staff are aware of best practice when it comes to treating trainees.” Our interviewees thought this unique insight into staff wellbeing benefited them too. The diversity and inclusion committee put on an initiative called #ThisPlaceMinds, where “people share their own personal struggles with mental health.” The firm also has a counsellor who provides confidential sessions. Lewis Silkin has always been one of the stronger performers in our diversity survey, which has been achieved through multiple measures large and small, like removing the gendered terms from their email signatures. The very reasonable working hours also contribute to a positive firm culture – the majority of interviewees worked from 9am to 6pm, and “it’s rare you would have to log on in the evening or work weekends.”

“The partners hosted a Lewis Silkin MTV Cribs and showed us all around their houses on webcam.”
“People don’t have a rigid idea of roles here” – starting with the employment department in London, the place is being refurbished to encourage a non-hierarchical structure. “The walls were removed from around us, people can chat freely now, and I don’t think any partner has their own office.” The firm’s efforts seem to be working: “Most partners I wouldn’t mind making a cup of tea with.” During the pandemic, partners have kept their metaphorical doors open, with virtual coffee breaks and catch-ups. Even the qualification process is a “relaxed and open conversation.” Lewis Silkin retained all four qualifiers in 2020.

A lot of sources came to Lewis Silkin in search of a career change, with most coming from untraditional routes to legal practice. This means some vibrant personalities and spirited socials. When asked to define the culture, “innovative,” “kind” and “ethical” were the trainees’ buzzwords. A pandemic isn’t enough to stop Silkins from having a knees-up either; recent ‘events’ have included video pub quizzes: “It was absolutely hilarious, the partners hosted a Lewis Silkin MTV Cribs and showed us around their houses on webcam.” Other recent socials included a Harry Potter-themed Christmas party and summer boat party, all gossiped about in detail on the “active WatsApp chat.”

Pot it like it’s hot
Trainees from the Oxford, Cardiff and London offices get together during CSR initiatives, one being the gardening challenge. Lawyers can volunteer at St Mary’s Secret Garden to offer ecotherapy activities to people with support needs.
Lewis Silkin LLP

5 Chancery Lane, Clifford’s Inn, London EC4A 1BL
Tel: 020 7074 8000
Email: train@lewissilkin.com
Website: www.lewissilkin.com

Firm profile
We work with leading businesses helping them protect and enhance their most important assets – their people, their ideas, their brand and their future. We call it ‘Ideas. People. Possibilities’.
We aspire to be the leading legal and related services firm for creative, innovative and tech-focused businesses. We don’t try to do everything, but what we do, we do well. We offer market leading practice areas including our pre-eminent employment & immigration, commercial, IP, data and dispute resolution groups as well as a deep cross-firm market expertise in our chosen sectors.
Our clients range from large multinational corporations and FTSE 100 companies, to household name high growth startups and small owner managed business and entrepreneurs.
People are at the heart of our firm, united by a passion for creativity, technology and innovation. Our firm’s culture is encapsulated by an ethos of bravery and kindness and guided by our values of Integrity, Clarity, Unity and Excellence (our I-CUE). We support each other, our clients and our community, we embrace diversity and we are all able to bring our full selves to work.

Main areas of work
Our major practice areas include: brands and intellectual property; commercial; corporate; data and privacy; dispute resolution; employment; immigration; investigations and regulatory; partnership; real estate; tax, reward and incentives; and trade mark and portfolio management.
We provide services through key sectors including advertising and marketing; financial services; media and entertainment; professional services; retail, fashion and hospitality; sports business; and technology.

Training opportunities
We offer hands on and supportive training contracts which consist of four six-month seats sitting within legal practice groups across the two business divisions. There’s also the opportunity to participate in a client secondment.
Trainees will enjoy responsibility from day one and will gain a broad range of contentious and non-contentious experience. We aim to attract applicants from diverse backgrounds; we don’t mind if you’re fresh out of law school or someone with previous experience in another industry.

Vacation scheme
Our London Spring workshop in April is a great opportunity to gain an insight into what it’s like to work for a fun, fast-paced and innovative law firm. There are a variety of talks, interactive activities and the opportunity to spend a day in one of the legal practice groups. We also run vacation scheme weeks in our Cardiff office in June.

Other benefits
Benefits include individual and firm bonus scheme, life assurance, group income protection, health insurance, group pension plan, season ticket loan, cycle to work scheme and subsidised gym membership and canteen.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We run an Open Evening in both our Cardiff and London offices. These provide an insight into what it’s really like to work at Lewis Silkin and the opportunity to network with fee earners across the firm.
The strongest Links: one of the biggest names in the City; a giant of the cross-border market; a training experience that’s hard to beat.

The Firm
When we interview trainees at magic circle firms and ask them what drew them to their firm, “the prestige” is a predictably common response. But Linklaters trainees went further, distinguishing their firm for “how consistently strong the firm is across three disciplines,” (corporate, banking and disputes) and “the broad offering of seats in areas which are all so highly regarded.” A scan of the firm’s high-end rankings in Chambers UK proves their point: Links sits at the top table for banking, capital markets, competition, environment, litigation, pensions, employee schemes, financial services, infrastructure, projects, energy, retail and transport.

Once you’ve caught your breath, move on to the Chambers Global rankings, where the firm earns global leader status for banking, capital markets (debt, equity and structured finance), M&A, employee benefits, projects and energy. International prowess was a popular draw for Linklaters trainees: “I wanted to work at a firm with a large global network because that provides a lot of opportunities both in terms of work variety and international clients.”

“The strongest Links: one of the biggest names in the City; a giant of the cross-border market; a training experience that’s hard to beat.”

“The seats option: please go to chambersstudent.co.uk to see the full list.

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Linklaters

The strongest Links: one of the biggest names in the City; a giant of the cross-border market; a training experience that’s hard to beat.

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 29
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 182/686/201
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; secondments
First-year salary: £47,000
Qualification salary: £90,000

The Seats
The majority of trainees go on secondment (either to a client or overseas) for their final seat. This year’s cohort explained that Linklaters has moved to “an algorithm-based approach” for seat allocation, which was being trialled at the time of research and has now been fully implemented. Although sources were still slightly unsure of the newly computerised regime, one clarified that “you now rank all the seats from one to ten on this software, which puts it through an algorithm that allocates peoples into seats.” With the system still in its infancy, “HR were running the process manually in parallel to make sure everything goes okay.” We subsequently heard that all went well, so the
The True Picture

426

Transaction management aside, interviewees also got to those jurisdictions and chase local counsels for responses. “This meant it would often fall to trainees to coordinate those jurisdictions and chase local counsels for responses.” Transaction management aside, interviewees also got to “draft non-disclosure agreements” and “have the first go at amending clauses in meeter documents.” Bottom line: corporate trainees won’t be in the driver seat of deals, but will get some enviable names on their CV.

“It’s quite fluid in terms of how work is allocated and cross-group staffing.”

When corporate advisory matters cropped up, sources were also able to “respond to queries from clients and come back to them with various pieces of research.” Corporate governance and company secretarial advice are part of Linklaters’ practice; the firm also helps clients comply with market abuse regulations. One source shared: “I’ve been pleased with how the corporate seat has gone in terms of the types of work I’ve been able to do. I’m keen to get involved in as much as possible to try and develop skill sets.”

Seats in structured finance, equity capital markets (ECM) and derivatives and structured products all fall under the capital markets umbrella. In the firm’s structured finance seat, deals revolve around securitisations. Trainees came into contact with “quite a lot of mortgage-related work, often for banks or mortgage companies” as well as some “private equity deals and distressed buyouts.” The team acted for the London branch of Citibank on its acquisition and securitisation financings of a c. £5 billion portfolio of UK residential mortgage loans and unsecured consumer loans; and advised Credit Suisse and Merrill Lynch on a £3 billion UK residential mortgage-backed securitisation. The structured finance group has a “reputation for being one of the busiest in the firm,” so sources found they were “chucked in” right away. One reminisced: “From day one I was calling clients, drafting and managing documents.”

Unlike in corporate, where trainees were more likely to act on one or two larger transactions, in structured finance “you’re more likely to be on six to eight transactions at a time.” This means teams are smaller and trainees act as “the first point of contact for clients.”

In the derivatives and structured products seat, trainees saw “a lot of repackaging deals” as well as advisory work. One recalled working on a “complicated special purpose vehicle (SPV) structure, repackaging debt to new investors,” while others ploughed through “more tailored and specific over-the-counter (OTC) derivatives.” Clients here are mostly major banks, plus some companies like Vodafone; the firm also recently advised the International Swaps and Derivatives Association trade group on global interest rate reforms. “Composing the terms sheets for transactions,” trainees often dealt with the signings and completions too.

“... the first point of contact for clients.”

Linklaters’ banking department also splits into multiple seats including leveraged finance, restructuring and insolvency, global loans, and financial restructuring. Leveraged finance involves “leveraged buyouts for banks, normally backed by big private equity firms.” Trainees were also staffed on refinancings for existing deals. In one deal of this type, Links advised The Carlyle Group and PIB Group on the £204 million refinancing of the latter; the firm also acted for CVC Capital Partners on the €650 million refinancing of the former. Sources reckoned the leveraged finance seat can be “very process-heavy” with more structured roles and tasks for trainees: drafting ancillary documents, running conditions precedent checklists, and “helping out on smaller tasks related to the

system is now running independently with review from HR to ensure everything is functioning as it should.

The corporate team grapples with private and public M&A, private equity deals and sector-focused corporate work—often with energy and tech clients. Trainees tend to spend most of their time on the area their principal works in, though noted “it’s quite fluid in terms of how work is allocated and cross-group staffing.” Linklaters’ mega clients include Sainsbury’s, Unilever and Just Eat, whom the firm advised on its recommended merger with Takeaway.com, to form a £9 billion entity. The team also acted for Chinese steelmaker Jingye Group on the acquisition of the assets of British Steel – its first acquisition outside China, with £1.2 billion commitments attached. Given Linklaters’ magic circle status, our sources mostly came across “large deals often involving multiple jurisdictions.” This meant it would often fall to trainees to “coordinate those jurisdictions and chase local counsels for responses.”

Transaction management aside, interviewees also got to “draft non-disclosure agreements” and “have the first go at amending clauses in meeter documents.” Bottom line: corporate trainees won’t be in the driver seat of deals, but will get some enviable names on their CV.

“... the first point of contact for clients.”

Linklaters’ banking department also splits into multiple seats including leveraged finance, restructuring and insolvency, global loans, and financial restructuring. Leveraged finance involves “leveraged buyouts for banks, normally backed by big private equity firms.” Trainees were also staffed on refinancings for existing deals. In one deal of this type, Links advised The Carlyle Group and PIB Group on the £204 million refinancing of the latter; the firm also acted for CVC Capital Partners on the €650 million financing of the acquisition and take-private of French-listed insurance business April Group. Sources reckoned the leveraged finance seat can be “very process-heavy” with more structured roles and tasks for trainees: drafting ancillary documents, running conditions precedent checklists, and “helping out on smaller tasks related to the

system is now running independently with review from HR to ensure everything is functioning as it should.

The corporate team grapples with private and public M&A, private equity deals and sector-focused corporate work—often with energy and tech clients. Trainees tend to spend most of their time on the area their principal works in, though noted “it’s quite fluid in terms of how work is allocated and cross-group staffing.” Linklaters’ mega clients include Sainsbury’s, Unilever and Just Eat, whom the firm advised on its recommended merger with Takeaway.com, to form a £9 billion entity. The team also acted for Chinese steelmaker Jingye Group on the acquisition of the assets of British Steel – its first acquisition outside China, with £1.2 billion commitments attached. Given Linklaters’ magic circle status, our sources mostly came across “large deals often involving multiple jurisdictions.” This meant it would often fall to trainees to “coordinate those jurisdictions and chase local counsels for responses.”

Transaction management aside, interviewees also got to “draft non-disclosure agreements” and “have the first go at amending clauses in meeter documents.” Bottom line: corporate trainees won’t be in the driver seat of deals, but will get some enviable names on their CV.

“... the first point of contact for clients.”

Linklaters’ banking department also splits into multiple seats including leveraged finance, restructuring and insolvency, global loans, and financial restructuring. Leveraged finance involves “leveraged buyouts for banks, normally backed by big private equity firms.” Trainees were also staffed on refinancings for existing deals. In one deal of this type, Links advised The Carlyle Group and PIB Group on the £204 million refinancing of the latter; the firm also acted for CVC Capital Partners on the €650 million financing of the acquisition and take-private of French-listed insurance business April Group. Sources reckoned the leveraged finance seat can be “very process-heavy” with more structured roles and tasks for trainees: drafting ancillary documents, running conditions precedent checklists, and “helping out on smaller tasks related to the
main finance documents.” On the restructuring and insolvency side, the trainee role was similarly carved out, but the matters differed – sources saw “restructuring transactions for companies that couldn’t meet their debts and needed to discuss new arrangements with their creditors.”

Dispute resolution is one of the firm’s largest groups “because it doesn’t split out into specific litigation types,” insiders explained. “It’s all combined and the range of work is quite broad.” As such, each trainee we spoke to had quite different experiences: “You wouldn’t necessarily see the full range of work that goes on in the department in just six months.” Some dipped into competition litigation “where a company’s accused of abuse of a dominant position in the market,” while others were staffed on investigations into contentious regulatory matters. Linklaters acted for price comparison site Kelkoo in a claim against Google, seeking damages over alleged anti-competition abuses by the search giant. The firm’s other disputes clients range from Goldman Sachs and PricewaterhouseCoopers to the Association of Football Agents UK. A disputes seat involves plenty of research and preparing bundles for trials; sources enjoyed also getting “to take the first draft of a client email or memo and go to conferences with barristers and QCs to take notes.” Some admitted “there’s certainly less client contact,” which is generally true of disputes seats, but most felt they were “still involved to an appropriate level.”

Trainee Life
We heard that the firm makes it a mission to put the ‘link’ in Linklaters: “They’re great for teamwork. I was struck by how welcoming people were and instantly felt part of the group.” Sources also gave examples of the firm doing “a good job of fostering relationships, particularly between trainees of different intakes. Some people I worked with in my first seat are now qualified – building those relationships is important for later on.” All future trainees (who need to) complete a Links-specific LPC together, and trainees found solace in “having friendships to build on when we come into the firm. Linklaters is so big and can be somewhat intimidating, but that makes a massive difference.” The intensity of the workload can also be daunting to start with – “it’s definitely not a place to be shying away from work” – but trainees agreed that “despite the firm expecting a lot from us, everyone is super helpful and willing to train juniors.”

“It’s definitely not a place to be shying away… but everyone is super helpful and willing to train juniors.”

Interviewees learned plenty on the job, but we’d be amiss not to mention the formal training at Linklaters. First is the New Lawyers Programme, wherein the firm “brings together trainees from across its global network” for initial sessions before the first seat. Going forward, the departments “split up the training differently.” For instance, a source in corporate “completed two full days of training,” whereas in capital markets another “had ten weeks of Wednesday-morning trainings.” Interviewees flagged other optional sessions too, including “seminars on different legal issues that may crop up” or “updates on major current deals.” Trainees also appreciated that “feedback is really encouraged at Linklaters – as well as the feedback from your supervisor, you’re also encouraged to seek it from whomever you work with to get input from a broad variety of people.”

Diversity and inclusion is another area that “Linklaters puts time and money into,” sources noted. They also, however, didn’t shy away from declaring that “there’s definitely still a long way to go: Links is not an exception to the systematic problems in the industry at high levels.” Among the firm’s 2020 partner promotions, a 73% majority were male. “We’re told partner promotions are merit-based, so it’s tough to judge, but communications from the firm suggested they will try to do better.” Current efforts include an array of diversity societies and committees for lawyers to get involved in, plus an internal D&I website where the firm “publishes articles and videos to help with awareness” and share the experiences of diverse employees.

“Ten to 12-hour days.”

Perhaps the most pressing question is... does the firm put the ‘later’ in Linklaters when it comes to hours? Trainees came to the consensus that “it’s a bit of a mixed bag.” Some had occasional periods of “real quiet, looking for things to do,” but this would inevitably be followed by getting “totally slammed, especially when coming up to a big deadline.” The latter was certainly more common, and for many could necessitate “ten to 12-hour days,” but sources added that “after you’d finish one of those deals, supervisors are really good about giving some time off in lieu.” Add the £47,000 trainee starting salary and super-juicy £90,000 NQ rate, and things don’t look too bad after all.

Linklaters aims for qualification to be “based on open communication,” encouraging trainees to keep in touch with teams they liked throughout the course of their training contract. Usually partners “will have made it clear at the end of each seat whether there might be space in that department for an NQ.” Fourth-seaters fill out a preference form, and HR speaks to partners to calculate “how to match supply with the demand.” In 2020, Linklaters retained 82 of 94 qualifiers over its spring and autumn retention rounds.

The firm moved its graduate recruitment process online in summer 2020, via the TopScore digital platform. Head to our website to learn more.
The True Picture

Linklaters LLP

One Silk Street, London EC2Y 8HQ
Tel: 020 7456 2000  Fax: 020 7456 2222
Email: trainee.recruitment@linklaters.com
Website: careers.linklaters.com
LinkedIn: Linklaters
Twitter: @LinklatersGrads
Facebook: @linklatersgradsuk
Instagram: LinklatersgraduateUK

Firm profile
From a shifting geopolitical landscape to the exponential growth in FinTech, this is a time of unprecedented change. At Linklaters, we’re ready. Our people go further to support our clients, with market-leading legal insight and innovation. And we go further for each other, too. We’re people you want to work with, generous with our time and ready to help. So no matter what the future holds, with us you’ll be one step ahead. Great change is here. Get ready.

Main areas of work
Rather than specialise in just one area, we’re proud to have best-in-class divisions across the board, in corporate, finance and projects, and dispute resolution. And in practice, they frequently work together to advise clients. As a Linklaters colleague, our breadth of expertise means that, wherever you focus, you’ll be involved in the very best work, and benefit from continuous, tailored training from experienced lawyers.

Training opportunities
The Linklaters training programme offers the knowledge and support you need to hit the ground running. Non-law graduates spend a conversion year studying the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), and all graduates complete the bespoke Legal Practice Course (LPC) before starting training contracts. From Autumn 2021, there will be a new route to qualification, known as the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE). Trainees joining the firm from Spring 2023 will qualify via the SQE route. We will support our future joiners through the SQE and have joined the City Consortium (made up of six leading law firms). Over two years you’ll take up four six-month seats (placements) in different practice areas and sometimes abroad, for the breadth and depth of knowledge you need to develop and qualify. Throughout your career, you’ll be supported with world-class training courtesy of the Linklaters Learning & Development team.

Vacation scheme
Our two-week Winter and Spring vacation schemes, and our four-week Summer vacation schemes are open to penultimate-year students, final-year students, graduates and postgraduates studying both law and non-law subjects at UK and Irish universities.

Other benefits
For the GDL and LPC, Linklaters covers all costs, and we also offer maintenance grants. Financial support of a similar level will be provided for the SQE route. Other benefits include performance-related bonuses, a contributory pension, private medical insurance, life assurance, income protection, in-house healthcare, family friendly benefits, an in-house gym and subsidised restaurant, an interest free season ticket loan and holiday travel insurance.

Open days and first-year opportunities
For information on our events, keep an eye on our calendar (careers.linklaters.com/en/early-careers/meet-us), or sign up to our mailing list.

University law career fairs 2020
You can also visit our events calendar to find out when we’ll be visiting your university.
Macfarlanes LLP

The facts
Locations: London
Overseas offices: Brussels
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 91/291/62
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £44,000
Qualification salary: £80,000

Private wealth mastery, litigious expertise, corporate clout... though it has just two offices, this firm is still a big Mac.

The Firm
Clan Macfarlane had a long and exciting history. Tales of heroism, battlefield opposition to Mary Queen of Scots and claiming the Scottish earldom of Lennox... these probably weren’t on the mind of John Embleton Macfarlane when he joined George Watson Neish as a partner at a City law firm in 1894, but the firm now known as Macfarlanes does have a drive for victory and success that would make the knights of old proud.

Today the firm has conquered the realms of mid-market banking and finance and corporate/M&A in London, and mid-market private equity buyouts UK-wide, according to Chambers UK. Macfarlanes also scores rankings in various other litigious and transactional practice areas. Perhaps most intriguingly, the firm also stands out from the big corporate City crowd thanks to a top-tier private client practice, and Chambers High Net Worth puts the firm top in London for private client and nationally for high-value residential real estate. “The great mix of clients Macfarlanes has was a real draw for me,” one trainee declared. “It feels like they treat everyone they deal with like a private client.”

“...looking for a training contract with a fair bit of responsibility and a personal touch.”

With a varied high-power practice, and an annual intake of over 30 trainees, you might expect the firm to have several UK and international offices, but in fact Macfarlanes has just one home base in London and one more overseas in Brussels. “The size of the firm was definitely appealing,” sources reported. “It’s smaller than comparable firms but punches above its weight.”

On top of “great exposure to good-quality work and client experience,” trainees said they were “looking for a training contract with a fair bit of responsibility and a personal touch. Macfarlanes has both.” This personal touch starts before the training contract itself: trainees all do their LPC at BPP and it’s likely that similar arrangements will be made under the SQE. “We were invited into the firm every month to chat about where we wanted to sit, but also for Christmas dinner and drinks events,” a trainee reminisced. “Nowadays I consider most of my intake to be friends first and work colleagues second.”

The Seats
Before trainees get going, “graduate recruitment gives everyone the seat list and explains how it all works. You then email in your preferences” (this year it was done on a Zoom call). Trainees must complete one seat each from four different ‘buckets’ – interviewees clarified “there’s no specific order and you can list up to three preferences in each bucket, but you must do a seat in each one.” One bucket includes litigation, investment management and financial services; another has employment, private client, private client property and banking and finance. Commercial, competition, tax, real estate and derivatives and trading fall under a third bucket. In the third bucket, most trainees will sit in corporate M&A, but the firm has also introduced a legal tech seat in this category.

Seat options: corporate M&A; legal tech; litigation; investment management; financial services; private client; private client property group; employment; finance; tax; real estate; commercial; competition
You can ask to do things and supervisors will let you have a go.” For one source, this meant taking “substantive expert evidence and witness statements” for a case.

Interviewees described competition as “one of the most popular departments at Macfarlanes,” and (appropriately enough) there’s stiff competition to get a seat here as “it only takes two trainees at a time.” The practice sits between transactional and litigious work, the latter including some “real Billions-style excitement.” The most obvious example was a recent dawn raid: “We got a call from a client telling us that the regulator was arriving. Their message: ‘Get here, stat!’” Trainees in this seat have “responsibilities that are fundamentally similar to those of senior counsel: protecting the client’s rights in terms of access to documents and assisting with interviews.” Competition clients range from the BBC and Associated British Ports to global packaging company Amcor, whom the firm advised during its $6.8 billion acquisition of rival Bemis. Macfarlanes was charged with securing Phase I conditional European Commission merger control clearance for the transaction. Trainees took roles on long-running investigations, “prepping evidence. With these investigations there are hundreds of thousands of documents, which we have to summarise and make sure everything is organised.” Once the key documents are located, trainees need “piece everything together to create a cogent narrative.” Better brush up on your storytelling.

Investment management has transactional and advisory elements. “There’s two aspects to it – we represent managers establishing funds, and the investors themselves,” trainees clarified. The firm advises major players like Goldman Sachs and Legal & General, and recently worked on a review of the investment objectives and policies for FTSE 250 wealth management firm Quilter’s 73 funds in the UK. Our sources worked on “several fund reviews, which offer quite a lot of autonomy. We get lots of interaction with investors during the seat – often we’ll have 30 or 50 coming in at once.” Much of the trainee’s role is “process management, liaising with fund managers and getting documents ready. The level of responsibility we get over them is breathtakingly impressive.” Once they’d caught their breath, interviewees also helped draft private placement memoranda and ancillary documents. “It’s a fast-paced team and the seat was a very enjoyable experience,” one concluded.

“It all felt complicated, high-level and difficult… in a good way.”

Compared to other seats, insiders said private client is “less admin-heavy, with no due diligence or bundling to do.” The trade-off is that supervisors are more likely to “check your emails before you send them out to the clients.” A seat here encompasses estate, tax, wills and probate planning for high net worth individuals. “I initially didn’t want...
to do the seat, but I’m so glad I did,” a trainee reflected on their time in the department. “I’ve had a lot of client exposure with entrepreneurs and old money.” Some matters can resemble M&A or restructuring, but “you’re working on it from a different angle as the client type is different.” Trainees here get to do “quite a lot of drafting for wills, loan agreements, lasting powers of attorney and trust restructurings.” Research is also common: “We might need to research a really complicated tax law or regulation. It all felt complicated, high-level and difficult… in a good way. It’s like being back in uni because it’s so academic.”

Trainee Life
Much like a university, Macfarlanes seems to prioritise education for its trainee cohort. There are several layers of partner support available: firstly, each trainee gets a partner principal who “acts as a kind of mentor but is mostly there to help you in the journey of the training contract.” Part two is the introduction of trainee-solicitor-committee (TSC) groups to break each intake into smaller groups; these meet for “quarterly meetings that are chaired by the same partner across the two years. The agenda can include anything you can’t discuss with your supervisor.” Then you’ve got the seat supervisors “that you share a room with,” and sources suggested you can “always have a conversation with graduate recruitment if you’re unhappy.” During lockdown, the firm also introduced a junior buddy scheme while people were working from home, pairing trainees with an NQ or junior associate for informal catch-ups.

With all this attention available, it was no surprise to hear trainees tell us “it feels like everyone is there to help you. As much as there is a hierarchy in our work, the firm cares about their trainees.” They agreed that a “culture of collaboration” was made possible by the firm’s smaller footprint and “all being in one building, we’re always working with different departments so there’s a sense that we’re all in this together.” The firm also runs an anonymous annual survey, so trainees can voice concerns they may have and provide feedback on the training contract.

“If you’ve got capacity, but you’ve been working really long hours, supervisors will take notice and ask someone else to cover it.”

As for our own research, one of the most contentious topics was hours. Ten-to-12-hour days were far from rare, and some trainees were keen to tell tales of trying times. One frequently worked 9am to 9pm in their litigation seat when it wasn’t busy, and until “midnight, 2, 4 or 5am” when it was; another spent “a month doing 16-hour days” in corporate. Others suggested that “the days reach 12 to 14 hours once you’ve qualified and that’s fairly representative of most departments.” You won’t go hungry at least, as the firm funds dinner for anyone still in the office after 7.30pm. There were also sources keen to paint a happier picture: “They’re conscious of our workload. If you’ve got capacity to take something on, but you’ve been working really long hours, supervisors will take notice and ask someone else to cover it.”

Each seat comes with intensive training sessions, which are “front-loaded so that you’re doing most of the learning at the beginning of your seat.” Sources warned that private client likes to do its training in the morning from 8.30am, which some (presumably coffee-driven) folks thought was a rather early start. As for the evenings, the firm runs netball and football teams as well as regular social events including celebration for Pride month and three different Christmas parties. During lockdown, a virtual book club was established.

Qualification kicks off soon into the fourth seat and offers are made based on the capacity for NQs in each department. Trainees submit their preferences to HR, and if multiple candidates apply for a role there may be interviews. All of Macfarlanes’ qualifiers stuck with the firm in 2019, and it retained 26 of 30 in 2020. Looking longer-term, there were concerns that Macfarlanes still has a way to go with retaining its female talent as women make up just 14.4% of partners at the firm. Sources told us there are “lots of initiatives in place to work on the issue. It was however a bit of a shock when the last partner class included nine men and just one female partner.” After these internal promotions, the firm brought in two women partners laterally. Trainees did appreciate that the firm was addressing concerns head on: “I remember seeing press releases specifically addressing the fact that they haven’t done enough, which is quite admirable.” Part of taking responsibility, trainees noted, is “trying to build internal BAME, female and LGBTQ communities and making us feel like there’s a place for everyone in the firm.”

Helping out Macnear and Macfar:
All trainees are registered to help at East London charity St Hilda’s legal clinic when they first start. It isn’t compulsory for trainees to do pro bono, but “we discuss it in our performance reviews.”
Macfarlanes LLP

20 Cursitor Street, London, EC4A 1LT
Tel: 020 7831 9222 Fax: 020 7831 9607
Email: gradrec@macfarlanes.com
Website: www.macfarlanes.com

Firm profile
Macfarlanes is a distinctive London-based law firm, focused on its clients and on delivering excellence in the international legal market. The firm is known for the quality of its work; not just in dealing with the full range of corporate and commercial matters, but in advising clients on their private affairs as well.

Macfarlanes has made a deliberate choice to remain smaller than many of its peers. The cohesive nature of the firm means that clients benefit from collective experience and close-knit teams. The firm has decided against growth at the expense of quality, against size at the expense of efficiency and agility. So whilst large enough to advise on the most complex matters, the firm is also small enough to ensure that its people and work are exceptional, without fail.

Main areas of work
Our main practice areas are: commercial; competition; corporate and M&A; derivatives and trading; employment; finance; financial services regulation; investment management; litigation and dispute resolution; pensions; private client; private equity; real estate; restructuring and insolventy and tax.

Training opportunities
Woven into every aspect of life at the firm is an enduring commitment to the development of trainees. Training begins with tailored electives on the LPC and a week-long induction at the start of your training contract. During the two-year training contract you’ll be working on real cases, doing real work for real clients from day one. As a trainee you will complete four six-month seats including a compulsory corporate and M&A seat. Our seat rotation is designed with trainees in mind — we want to give you enough flexibility to shape your training contract and do seats that interest you. Support and guidance are, of course, vital and you will find your supervisor a valuable source of information and inspiration.

Vacation scheme
The vacation scheme is designed to give you a two-week snapshot of life as a trainee. You will be given as much hands-on experience as possible, enabling you to develop a real understanding of the firm’s culture and work.

Macfarlanes offers an Easter and two summer vacation schemes. Each scheme runs for two weeks and remuneration is £400pw. The firm welcomes applications from students who are in at least the penultimate year of their degree from any degree discipline, with a predicted 2.1 or above. Applications are online via the website.

Other benefits
Flexible benefits package including life assurance, pension scheme with company contributions, private healthcare and discretionary performance related bonus scheme.

First-year opportunities
For first-year students the firm offers an insight day to provide an overview of a City law firm. Macfarlanes welcomes applications from candidates with either a law or non-law background with outstanding academics. Candidates need to be in either the first year of an undergraduate degree or second year of a four year undergraduate degree.

Applications are online via the website and close on 28th February 2021.

University law careers fairs 2020
BPP, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Durham, Exeter, Nottingham, Oxford, UCL and York, plus others to be confirmed. Macfarlanes will also be hosting events at their London office. Further information can be found on the firm’s website.
The True Picture

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 17/36/6
Seats: 4x6 months; occasional client secondments
First-year salary: £36,668
Qualification salary: £64,445

For trainees looking to Tee off their career in a smaller firm with big property work and lots of drive, Maples is a hole in one.

The Firm
Real estate enthusiasts, unite! For a proper introduction to property law, London’s Maples Teesdale is the real (estate) deal. “I wanted somewhere that was known for property and specialises in it, so I could understand the sector from the perspective of various practice areas,” one of our trainee sources declared. All the firm’s Chambers UK accolades revolve around real estate, whether it’s real estate litigation, construction or a high ranking for mid-market real estate transactions. “Every seat you do can be property-related,” insiders said. “So whichever department you qualify into, you’ll have a wealth of knowledge about the work.”

With just over 50 lawyers under its one roof, Maples is by nature “more personable than a megafirm,” according to its six trainees. “I feel like I’ve got a work family - this is a place that makes you want to stay and be part of it all.” They gave a special shout out to managing partner Chris Wilson, “such a nice guy and a really caring leader. That permeates throughout the rest of the firm, and everyone understands that life sometimes gets in the way – many partners trained at big firms then moved here for a quieter life.”

“...make allocation work across the board. It’s a flexible and fluid system.”

Maples sorts out trainees’ starting seat for them – they find out where they’re going a month in advance. From there, rotations are determined by an informal chat between trainees and the training partner: “That’s also when they’ll tell us if any secondment opportunities are available.”

Example destinations are long-term asset management client BMO Real Estate Partners and other high-profile companies. “The firm takes our interests into account and tries to make allocation work across the board,” insiders agreed. “It’s a flexible and fluid system.” As there are only six trainees total, “you tend to know which seat you’re likely to get.” Sources suggested “it’s not just a repeat because you can’t do every type of work in a department the first time round.”

The Seats
“Everyone comes here because they want a property seat,” and they’re all guaranteed to get at least one: “commercial property basically makes up our whole firm and that department needs the most help.” To get acquainted with Maples, most trainees start off here. Those we spoke to thought this worked well “because you get a broad variety of work from across the team, so you get to know lots of people quickly.”

Projects like wayleaves “are really good for trainees to handle because they’re not particularly high-value but are reasonably complicated as they actually involve the law,” we heard. There’s also “a fair amount of back and forth negotiating the terms,” though some were disappointed to “liaise with managing agents rather than the clients themselves” and felt “the seat would be more interesting with a bit more responsibility for us.” On larger matters, Maples represents mega clients like the City of London Corporation and Lord Sugar’s property company, Amsprop; the firm recently advised Legal & General on the £60 million sale of a Sainsbury’s. Pension funds make up a large portion of the firm’s client base: “We help them with anything from asset management, like rent reviews, to sales and purchases.”

Seat options: corporate; litigation; commercial property; construction; real estate finance
If client contact is what you’re looking for, a seat in the construction department might just scratch that itch. “We have more direct client contact because, in addition to surveyors, we’re dealing with a mix of other professionals throughout the matters,” sources explained. “Contractors and various different consultants will also be involved.” Trainees saw similar clients as in commercial property: co-living space operator The Collective recently called on Maples Teesdale to advise on developments totalling £750 million in value. There are however differences in this seat too, as trainees “take a more direct role. We make sure documents truly reflect what’s happening on a building site.” Responsibilities including drafting ancillaries and collateral warranties, plus reporting on primary construction documents like building contracts. “You’re part of the team for sure,” insiders enthused. “You really get to contribute and you’re treated more like a junior lawyer than a trainee.”

“You’re treated more like a junior lawyer than a trainee.”

“We’re a real estate firm, so the corporate group works with companies that own real estate,” trainees said. Examples include advising property investment and development company Martin’s Properties on its corporate reorganisation; and real estate investment management firm Ellandi on the £20.2 million sale of Grays Shopping Centre in Thurrock. Sources described the department as a “satellite” that’s home to just a couple of partners and associates, “so they’re either really busy or dead” as is common in transactional law. A few late nights are par for the course, “but I never worked past 10pm, and that’s unheard of in other departments,” we heard. Typical trainee tasks in a corporate seat include administrating partnership structures and getting documents agreed and signed; less hard-hitting work involves drafting board minutes and “researching topics that aren’t big enough to send to external advisers, like employment queries.” Many praised the team for letting trainees email and call clients directly, and although “important drafts are always checked, there’s little micro-management.”

Coming into real estate finance, trainees were pleased to see many of the same clients they’d worked with in the commercial property and corporate seats: “What really distinguishes Maples is that you get to see the same trans-actions handled from different perspectives by each group. You then understand how it all fits together.” A trainee in real estate finance gave the example that “you immediately understand how the due diligence process works on the property aspect of a loan transaction, because you’ve already done a property seat.” Maples advises both borrowers and lenders on “anything from portfolio loans for big investors, to advising smaller borrowers who’ve had issues with debt. It’s really interesting working on both sides.” The firm acted for real estate investors PATRIZIA AG on a series of refinancings totalling £72 million in value as well as £136 million of asset disposals.

Trainee Life

Each seat has partner supervisors who remain in the role year-round even as trainees rotate, so they’re used to imparting wisdom. Some sources felt that “because supervisors are so senior they’re far removed from the tasks trainees do, so I feel like I can’t ask smaller questions.” They were happy to approach other colleagues with these queries: “We really do have an open-door policy, it’s not just a tagline. We can chat to anyone at any point whether it’s about work or not.” Matter teams are small enough (and inevitably partner-led) so that “everyone gets good supervision.” There’s also a training partner, Anastasia Klein, on hand: “She’s made it clear she’s our voice in the firm and is our first port of call for any problems we might have. We had weekly trainee calls with her during the coronavirus lockdown.”

In the office, trainees all sit with their partner supervisor. “If I didn’t get to sit with a partner I probably wouldn’t go out of my way to ask about the firm’s business,” said one of the trainees who credited Maples with general transparency. “The firm tried to move premises in 2019 but it fell through because of costings issues. The firm was totally transparent about it.” Trainees also get to ‘speak out’ - they each get to host a training session on a subject of their choice to help hone their presentation skills.

As for firm-led training, “nobody here would shout at you if you made an honest mistake. You don’t have to cover anything up and I feel genuinely valued for the work I do – the firm hires people to keep them, not just to do cheap work.” One source was left extremely confident of their long-term future at Maples: “I think the managing partner would take it personally if I left the firm.” In 2020, the firm ended up retaining all three qualifiers.
Maples Teesdale

30 King Street London EC2V 8EE
Tel: 020 7600 3800 Fax: 020 3465 4400
DX 138754 Cheapside
Email: enq@maplesteesdale.co.uk

Website: www.maplesteesdale.co.uk
Twitter: @maplesteesdale

Firm profile
Maples Teesdale are the UK’s leading commercial property law specialists, providing innovative, full service and truly partner led services to UK based and international clients. The firm’s sole focus is real estate. This means that all of the firm’s experience, knowledge, work and industry relationships are sharply focused on helping clients and their property requirements. Maples Teesdale takes a real and long-term interest in the industry.

Main areas of work
Commercial property, construction, corporate, finance, litigation and planning.

Training opportunities
Maples Teesdale trainees are the future of the business. You will receive the best training possible in a friendly and supportive environment. At the same time, the firm will ensure that your training contract is stimulating and rewarding. As a specialist real estate practice, the firm’s largest department is commercial property. This is supported by construction, corporate, finance, litigation and planning.

Trainees have the opportunity to gain experience, skills and knowledge across these different departments in four, six-month seats. There may also be an opportunity to spend time on secondment with clients. During each seat rotation, trainees sit with a partner who acts as their supervisor allocating work to them and ensuring that they are also getting regular opportunities to work with a variety of fee-earners. They also play an active role in advising and developing their trainee throughout their training contract. Maples Teesdale want you to feel part of the team from the outset.

The training is very ‘hands on’ and aims to give you as much responsibility as you are confident to handle. You will be actively encouraged to become a valuable member of the team, drafting documents, doing research and attending client meetings.

Other benefits
Pension, Ride2Work cycle loan scheme, interest free season ticket loans, life assurance, private medical insurance.
Marriott Harrison

11 Staple Inn, London, WC1V 7QH
Tel: 020 7600 3800 Fax: 020 3465 4400
DX 0001 London, Chancery Lane
Email: enquiries@marriottharrison.co.uk
Website: www.marriottharrison.co.uk

Firm profile
Marriott Harrison is a leading independent London law firm recognised for the high quality and personable approach of its lawyers.

The firm provides a partner-led service for clients across a wide range of commercial practice areas and sectors, with a particular focus on owner-managed businesses and investors into those enterprises. It operates at a level which is often only matched by firms several times larger, deploying specialist teams of lawyers who work at the highest levels of competence in each of its core practice areas.

The firm’s lawyers have diverse professional backgrounds. Some have had previous non-legal careers, others have considerable experience at magic circle or major city firms and an increasing number are home grown.

Main areas of work
Corporate, commercial real estate, restructuring, banking, commercial, IP/IT, employment, dispute resolution.

Training opportunities
Seat options: Corporate, Restructuring & banking, Commercial & IP/IT, Employment, Dispute resolution, & Real estate
4 x 6 month seats, with corporate and a contentious seat both compulsory. All trainees sit with a partner.

Vacation scheme
MH aims usually hires its trainee solicitors exclusively from its summer vacation scheme.

Every participant in the summer vacation scheme will work in the office for one week between June and July and will typically attend with three other participants. Anyone ready to start a training contract in the following calendar year is eligible to apply, with applications to be made by 31 March each year.

Other benefits
Life insurance, private healthcare, weekly in-office yoga, season ticket loan, CSR days, enhanced pension contributions.
Mayer Brown International LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 26
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 79/148/29
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments; overseas seats
First-year salary: £46,000
Qualification salary: £90,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Mayer Brown
Becoming a finance lawyer

If a Mayer Brown training contract were a cake, it would be a base of big-ticket transactions and sweet deals, a thick frosting of litigation, a blob of fast-paced learning, and a cherry on top of a guaranteed client secondment.

The Firm
Can’t make your mind up between litigation and transactional law? As the classic meme would suggest... why not both? Trainees described international giant Mayer Brown as a “half and half firm, with both a strong transactional and litigious reputation.” True-dat, according to Chambers UK’s rankings: the firm scores well in London for banking, capital markets, construction, corporate, employment, pensions, professional negligence disputes, and real estate alike. The Mayer Brown of today was formed from a 21st century merger between three firms dating back to the 19th based in Chicago, London and Hong Kong respectively. With 27 offices lining the “backbone of the global economy,” it’s also worth highlighting the firm’s 11 worldwide Chambers Global rankings spanning capital markets, immigration, outsourcing, projects and more.

“Both a strong transactional and litigious reputation.”

Mayer Brown recruits around 15 trainees a year in London. That’s fewer than some comparable US giants, but with a training contract lineage stretching back decades to before the merger, it would be a mistake to dismiss this as a satellite operation. The firm has recently grown its headcount in the City with lateral partner hires into its finance practice. Trainees were full of love for their colleagues: “It’s not just about the friendly lawyers, I love the kitchen staff too,” one declared. “The partners realise that we need to be relaxed in order to do our best possible work – it feels like we mix American passion with a more jovial English side.”

Trainees get some say in each of their seats, from first to last. They all submit three ranked preferences before each rotation; if too many have similar destinations in mind, grad recruitment will conduct negotiations. “The process is pretty transparent, and it’s been useful having one-to-ones with grad recruitment,” sources said. All trainees must do at least one transactional seat and one contentious seat. “Around 95% of trainees will also do a client or international secondment,” we heard. “International seats aren’t readily available, which is a bit crap; the firm are definitely trying to cut back on those and are pushing for more client secondments.” Others told us “the ratio is transparent when signing up: 60:40 client secondments to international.”

The Seats
Most interviewees spoke highly about their client secondments. Corporate and commercial, insurance, employment and commercial real estate options may be on the table at each rotation; previous examples include large consumer goods and financial data companies. “I would say my secondment was the time I learnt the most by far as a trainee,” one said. “You’re essentially treated as an associate, working on around 15 matters at a time and acting as the primary communicator with clients.” International seat options: banking and finance; corporate and securities; competition/antitrust; employment; intellectual property; commercial dispute resolution; construction and engineering litigation; insurance & reinsurance; pensions; real estate; restructuring, bankruptcy and insolvency; tax.
Mayer Brown International LLP

Chambers UK rankings

- Banking & Finance
- Banking Litigation
- Capital Markets
- Construction
- Corporate/M&A
- Employment
- Energy & Natural Resources
- Information Technology
- Insurance
- Litigation
- Outsourcing
- Pensions
- Pensions Litigation
- Product Liability
- Professional Negligence
- Real Estate
- Real Estate Finance
- Restructuring/Insolvency

al seats change regularly but have previously included stints in Chicago, Hong Kong, Singapore, Frankfurt and Paris. “Although the prospect of flying overseas as a trainee might sound amazing, it isn’t that simple, because you form ties in the UK,” interviewees clarified. One suggested: “You’ll have the opportunity to travel as an associate, but the learning experience of a client secondment is invaluable.” It’s worth considering too that trips abroad may be limited further by the Covid-19 pandemic.

London’s corporate team advises on M&A, funds and corporate finance for clients in the financial services, consumer goods, private equity, energy, telecoms, tech and media sectors. Names you might recognise include Unilever and Entertainment One; the team advised the latter during its $4 billion acquisition by toy giant Hasbro. Mayer Brown is also a major player in the mining sector, recently acting for Sumitomo Metal Mining on the $1.2 billion acquisition of a 30% indirect interest in the owners of the Quebrada Blanca Phase 2 project in Chile. Trainee tasks in corporate include due diligence, drafting board minutes and resolutions, as well as “physically assisting with signings in our office. We prepare a schedule of documents, set up the signing table and meet the clients.” Insiders told us they got “opportunities to work with other departments such as finance, employment and pensions. There’s also good potential for cross-office work: I’d find myself helping partners in New York or assisting clients in Asia with investments in the UK.”

“If you have a certain interest, the firm has the flexibility for you to pursue that.”

Nine subgroups make up the banking and finance department, including real estate finance, capital markets, project finance and asset-based lending. “As a banking and finance trainee, you’re there for the whole department, bouncing around multiple matters at once. If you have a certain interest, the firm has the flexibility for you to pursue that.” Mayer Brown advises large international banks and private equity houses; US-based PE firm Francisco Partners called for advice on multiple deals including the 3.7 billion Danish kroner acquisition of Scandinavian software firm EG. Trainees here largely take an adminis-

Contentious fare comes in four teams – commercial dispute resolution, construction and engineering litigation, insurance litigation, and international arbitration – which all fall into the broader litigation dispute resolution practice. Trainees have the flexibility to move between the four groups when they have room on their plate. Commercial dispute resolution (CDR) includes M&A disputes, shareholder quarrels, contractual debt, white-collar crime, tech disputes and even pensions litigation. The firm has advised in litigation for UBS, P&O Ferries and Merchant Navy Ratings Pension Fund, as well as eOne during its High Court clash with foreign exchange group Monex Europe over currency trading commissions. Responsibilities for trainees in disputes include drafting court orders, bundling and legal research. International arbitration comes with similar tasks; sources there “really enjoyed the lean team, as it allowed for incredible responsibility and exposure to substantive work. I’d be working on an entire arbitration from the commencements to the post-hearing briefs.”

“It can be scary as hell, but you sure do learn fast and help is always available.”

Trainees in insurance litigation spent most of their time helping insurers defend during coverage claims on warranties, indemnity and financial lines; clients range from financial institutions and real estate consultancies to other lawyers who’ve got into sticky situations. Big-name insurers on the books include Chubb, Liberty Mutual and Zurich. In a recent professional negligence case, Mayer Brown represented two partners at accounting firm BDO in c. £250 million proceedings after the administration of the One Blackfriars development. “It’s a very autonomous seat,” according to trainees who had mixed feelings about their independence. “It can be scary as hell, but you sure do learn fast and help is always available. I’d definitely recommend the seat as the team are very kind and they take time out to support you.” Workloads for the self-starters here included drafting witness statements, putting together instructions for disclosure, drafting letters and meeting notes. “We also get opportunities to lead certain client calls and, unlike CDR, trainees in insurance can get away from the bundling.” One-nil to the insurance team.
There’s a mix of disputes and non-contentious matters up for grabs in the construction department. Among the biggest clients here are UK national giant Wates, which has been on Mayer Brown’s roster for most of the 21st century, as well as SSE and British Land. International arbitration in the construction sector can also be found in this department. Compiling bundles, preparing for trial and taking attendance notes, trainees in this seat “also research anything and everything by taking a trip down to the firm’s information centre, which is staffed with full-time research staff.” Telling us they felt “invested” in the practice throughout their time here, our sources proudly described themselves as “a genuine asset to the team.” How very modest of them.

Trainee Life
Fledgling lawyers’ first two months at Mayer Brown comes with a structured training regime; throughout the whole two years, “training is always frontloaded in each seat. This helps you build up a good body of notes before you dig into the meaty bits.” The finance department follows “a university course structure. We’d have sessions on getting to know the background of securitisation or learn what derivatives and leveraged finance are; we then learn how to build on that knowledge in more practical terms.” During the 2020 lockdown, trainees took part in ‘zoominar’ lectures as well as optional talks by barristers on topics like “how to measure human rights regulations in corporations, or generally assess the development of certain laws during the pandemic.”

“There are many benefits to a small intake,” a source posed. “There aren’t as many faces to learn on the first day.” It’s also super helpful when you also have colleagues all over the world to get friendly with; trainees told us that the firm’s international nature is immediately apparent and that the firm is “essentially one unit. We don’t really see a difference between the offices since we work together regularly and it’s very seamless.” Operating on a global scale usually means long hours, and Mayer Brown is no exception. “The hours in finance, corporate and occasionally litigation are awful,” interviewees admitted. “It can go one way or the other: you can either leave at 6pm or you’re not finishing until 11pm.” Well aware of the high expectations in advance, sources agreed: “It’s natural to have late nights in banking and finance but everyone will be punching in and out together; it’s nice to know you’re not stuck on your own.” Real estate and employment seats tend to come with friendlier 5.30 or 6pm finishes. “There’s no face-time pressure and I’ve definitely been told to go home more than I’ve been told to stay,” a happy chappy concluded.

As part of their hours demands, trainees have an annual 20-hour pro bono target. “We love pro bono,” one who’d breezed past the goal said. “We get awards if we do 100 hours and there were around four trainees who hit that last year.” Trainees can get involved with external organisations like the Islington Law Centre and Zacchaeus 2000 Trust, advising clients pro bono on housing benefits. “It’s so worthwhile and enriching knowing that we can help change people’s lives.”

“It’s so worthwhile and enriching knowing that we can help change people’s lives.”

Our sources were similarly impressed with Mayer Brown’s approach to diversity and inclusion: “I think they are excellent. Alongside having the support of Sally Davies as UK senior partner, there are also active affinity groups” including a Women’s Network, an LGBT+ network, the Fusion Network for BAME lawyers and the Work&Me family group. While the Black Lives Matter movement swept the globe and protests erupted in London, the Fusion Network organised an internal viewing of Mellody Hobson’s TED Talk, followed by a discussion on the topic of race and discrimination. “Around 90 people attended, and the head of litigation sent out a reminder to the whole department without a prompt from us to ask people to spare an hour in their day and join in,” one source told us. Another recalled they “saw people on the call I wouldn’t expect to be interested talking about racial justice and equality. It was incredible to see them actively take part.” As a follow-on, the firm’s chairman in the US circulated weekly progress updates; Mayer Brown also ran its first Black History Month Event, “a big success with around 200 clients attending.”

The Covid-19 pandemic delayed the start of 2020’s qualification process by six weeks, but insiders said “there weren’t any nasty surprises” once it got going. Conversations start during the third seat, with graduate recruitment gauging trainees’ preferences and preparing a business case for the management committee. “Despite the initial worry, we’ve been told that the hiring ethos hasn’t changed, and the firm is still aiming for maximum retention,” insiders declared. Mayer Brown went on to retain 11 of 15 qualifiers in 2020, with one on a fixed-term contract.
Mayer of London:

During the height of lockdown, trainees felt that Mayer Brown stepped up their game when it came to mental health and wellbeing: “The firm is hot on mental health. There’s been a big push by management to overcommunicate, and we have daily check-ins with our supervisors and catch-ups with HR.”
Firm profile
Mayer Brown is a distinctively global law firm, uniquely positioned to advise the world’s leading companies and financial institutions on their most complex legal needs. With extensive reach across four continents, Mayer Brown is the only integrated law firm with approximately 200 or more lawyers in each of the world’s three largest financial centres — New York, London and Hong Kong — the backbone of the global economy. Mayer Brown has deep experience in high-stakes litigation and complex transactions across industry sectors, including its signature strength, the global financial services industry. Mayer Brown’s diverse teams of lawyers are recognised by clients as strategic partners with strong commercial instincts and a commitment to creatively anticipate their needs. The firm’s ‘one-firm’ culture — seamless and integrated across all practices and regions — ensures that client receive the best of our lawyers’ collective knowledge and experience.

Main areas of work
Our lawyers have expertise across a wide range of areas including corporate, finance, real estate, litigation (including dispute resolution, construction, insurance and reinsurance, antitrust and competition), employment, pensions, tax, financial services regulatory and intellectual property.

Training opportunities
Our training contract offers four six-month seats which you can tailor across a broad range of our main practice areas in London (as listed above), and international secondments. If you don’t want to stray too far, you have the option to gain valuable in-house experience by going on secondment to one of the firm’s major clients in London. While Mayer Brown is a global law firm, our London office remains a tightly knit team with an open and inclusive culture. You will be given significant opportunities to assist on matters which may be multidisciplinary, cross-border, complex and high-profile in nature.

We are looking for candidates who not only have a consistently strong academic record including a minimum of a 2.1 degree (predicted or obtained) in any discipline, but also who have a wide range of interests and achievements outside their academic career. Additionally, we would like to see innovative candidates who can demonstrate a drive for results, good verbal and written communication skills, and an ability to analyse, with good judgement and excellent interpersonal skills.

Vacation schemes
We run three two-week vacation schemes each year; one in the spring and two in the summer. You will gain experience in two key practice areas and be involved in seminars and social events including a trip to our Paris office. Our vacation schemes are the main pipeline for our training contracts each year and we welcome applications from penultimate year, finalists and graduates too.

Other benefits
Benefits include 25 days holiday per annum, an interest free season ticket loan, subsidised sports club membership and membership of private health scheme.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We offer a number of open days throughout the year. Please see our website for dates and how to apply.

University law careers fairs 2020
Due to the current environment we will be attending virtual law fairs between September-December 2020. Please visit our graduate recruitment website for further information.
Memery Crystal LLP

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 32/43/5
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £38,000
Qualification salary: £65,000

Lean teams keep trainees keen at a growing London outfit where “entrepreneurial” corporate work is the AIM of the game.

The Firm
Fear not, brave adventurer, you haven’t stumbled upon a Dungeons & Dragons textbook. This Memery Crystal is not a magic spellcasting jewel—it’s a small but growing London law firm with an ‘entrepreneurial’ approach to legal practice. Chambers UK awards the firm a top ranking nationwide for Alternative Investment Market (AIM) capital markets work and further recognition for its energy and natural resources practice; as well as lower mid-market corporate and real estate work in London.

MC markets itself as ‘commercially aware, entrepreneurial in spirit, international in outlook, and pragmatic in approach.’ When we were in school our teachers always told us to show our working, so what does the firm mean by this? Trainees suggested a smallish headcount of 80 or so lawyers allows it to adapt to changing industries quickly: “We’re able to be a bit nimbler than larger firms, and keep up with key market trends,” one junior noted, highlighting the firm’s desire to be “the market leaders” on the legal front of the medicinal cannabis industry as a prime example. “Memery Crystal is an outward-looking firm with a core approach of helping entrepreneurs and small businesses grow,” they argued, with the benefit that working with entrepreneurial clients creates a more entrepreneurial firm. Makes sense.

“We’re able to be a bit nimbler than larger firms and keep up with key market trends.”

Sources looked beyond the firm’s sole London base to point out that “Memery Crystal’s work often has an international element to it, and lots of our clients are trading overseas.” The firm acts for international clients in High Court proceedings and maintains a strategic partnership with Yingke, the largest China-based law firm. As for pragmatism... MC sticks to a small trainee intake, so each can get a breadth of experience.

The Seats
“Everyone is assigned their first seat,” but the firm keeps trainees’ preferences in mind for the three remaining six-month seats. “We never have issues with allocation! Having a smaller intake means most people do all the seats they want to,” we heard. Memery Crystal doesn’t have mandatory seats, giving more power to the trainees: “If a department needs assistance, they can bring in a paralegal rather than force a trainee to sit there.”

Sources described MC’s corporate department—the firm’s largest—as a “very different and distinctive offering” in the London legal scene... why? “The firm’s clients are always interesting businesses like cannabis or ultrasound companies,” one explained. “Deal teams are very lean and you get lots of responsibility, which I like.” Memery Crystal tackles both traditional lower mid-market M&A and equity capital markets, with the latter geared towards the natural resources and tech sectors. “It’s such varied work,” a trainee enthused. “Reductions of capital, verifications, listings, venture capital investments... we see them all.” The firm recently advised longstanding client Gaming Realms on the £11.5 million sale of its subsidiary Bear Group to River iGaming; other clients include Pure Gold Mining and Gulf KeyStone Petroleum. Interviewees worked on schemes of arrangements for public companies going private, and commodities filings for mining companies changing jurisdictions; they drafted various documents as part of the deals. Many also enjoyed “working along-
Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital Markets</th>
<th>Real Estate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/M&amp;A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy &amp; Natural Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

side the much bigger law firms who help fund clients’ projects we’re working on.”

“I got to draft key correspondence with clients, witness statements, and instructions to counsel.”

A dispute resolution seat covers a “very broad spectrum” including commercial litigation, civil fraud, shareholder and company disputes and some arbitrations. Our interviewees also got stuck into “quite a few insolvency matters” for financial markets and institutions – this practice may grow in the wake of Covid-19. “There’s quite a bit of international work here,” a trainee declared. “I’ve worked on disputes based in Spain, Italy and Israel.” Others dipped their toes in “a couple of maritime cases” and tax disputes for asset management funds in Italy. The firm represented independent commodities broker Marex Financial in a Supreme Court appeal addressing reflective loss rules and asset stripping. Big cases can mean smaller responsibilities for trainees, but the ones we spoke to found room for growth: “I was involved in all stages of the bog-standard trainee stuff like bundling and document review,” one said. “Over time, however, I got to draft key correspondence with clients, witness statements, and instructions to counsel. It’s now a really good seat to look back on.”

“Partners have specialisms in technology, licensing agreements, IR, gambling and data protection” in commercial IP and tech (CIPT), all of which fall into one seat. Household-name clients here include the Telegraph Media Group, West Bromwich Albion FC and the Health Lottery. The firm also represents the Saudi national oil and gas company Aramco, recently providing advice for its R&D IP company. Trainees in this seat are “in charge of the due diligence” for commercial contracts and got to do “some really good IP research,” including putting together a cease and desist letter for a trade mark dispute. Cases here also involve “a fair amount of contract review for licensing agreements.” Trainees identified some issues with “unstructured workflow and staffing, there’s not always enough delegation on matters,” but they appreciated the variety of interesting clients and cases in the department.

Memery Crystal’s employment department mostly advises employers. Financial services, technology, energy, retail and fashion businesses call on the firm’s advice – “the clients range from multinationals to smaller UK established start-ups,” according to trainees. Fashion retailer Karen Millen called on MC to advise on employment aspects of their pre-pack administration acquisition of women’s wear brand Coast – both were later acquired by Boohoo. “My start in the seat was quite interesting as I was in a client meeting on the first day,” one of our sources said. They noticed expectations rise over time: “I’m now given the same tasks, like drafting settlement agreements, but for a shorter turnaround. The shift in expectations has been based on timing more than quality.” The seat was popular for its mix of contentious and non-contentious matters including settlements, redundancies, terminations and disciplinary advice: “You will get a chance to work in all those fields.”

Trainee Life

A small headcount means “you get to know everyone’s name,” so don’t panic if you have a bad Memery for faces (panic at our jokes instead). “From the print room to marketing to IT to the secretaries, people know each other and there’s not a divide between support staff and lawyers,” sources stressed, keen to promote the lack of hierarchy at the firm up to the very top: “Name partner Peter Crystal sits near me. He’s very friendly and says ‘hello’ all the time.” A newish open plan office on Fleet Street helped increase “connection between departments,” and growth in the junior ranks has boosted spirits: “Since we’ve upgraded the trainee intake to five and brought in more paralegals, there’s a sizeable cohort who lunch and drink together. There’s no feeling of competition between trainees.”

“My start in the seat was quite interesting as I was in a client meeting on the first day,” one of our sources said. They noticed expectations rise over time: “I’m now given the same tasks, like drafting settlement agreements, but for a shorter turnaround. The shift in expectations has been based on timing more than quality.” The seat was popular for its mix of contentious and non-contentious matters including settlements, redundancies, terminations and disciplinary advice: “You will get a chance to work in all those fields.”

The social scene at MC is “not just hanging around the beer tap in the kitchen or the social committee organising drinks,” and trainees enjoyed “casual conversations about TV and our weekend plans with colleagues. Partners will come and join as they’re interested in what we’re up to.” Horror stories of partners beating trainees were nowhere to be found; instead we heard “the firm balances work incredibly well and encourages you to have a life outside the walls of the office. If you can leave at 5.30, do it; but if you need to stay until 10pm, that’s also expected of you.” 10pm was a late night for our sources, with several telling us they’d “never once stayed past 12pm. We have a really good work/life balance.” Seasonal parties, firmwide pub quizzes, first-year treasure hunts and Thirsty Thursdays at Stella’s canteen (named not after the lager, but a vetran secretary) help jazz up the ‘life’ side of the equation.

Trainees get two reviews in each seat. They felt “the balance between formal and informal feedback really benefits you. Many of the senior lawyers at Memery Crystal trained here and remember what the training contract is like, so you can ask them any questions.” Perhaps looking to follow in their footsteps one day, sources agreed “the firm really
wants to see you run. It’s a small intake so they’re fully invested in you.”

How good is your Memery?

Qualification at MC is “not very formal, we just chat with HR.” The firm kept all four qualifiers in 2019 and retained all six of its qualifiers in 2020.
Memery Crystal LLP

165 Fleet Street, London, EC4A 2DY
Tel: 020 7242 5905  Fax: 020 7242 2058  Twitter: @MemeryCrystal
Email: recruitment@memerycrystal.com  Website: www.memerycrystal.com/careers/trainees/

Firm profile
We are commercially aware, entrepreneurial in spirit, international in outlook and pragmatic in approach. Founded in 1978, Memery Crystal is now recognised as one of the UK’s leading law firms in our specialist areas, regularly cited in Chambers UK and The Legal 500.

We have a strong internal culture, based upon a set of core values, which underpins our individuality, our emphasis on long-term client relationships and our collegiate and entrepreneurial approach. We act for a broad range of clients, from individual entrepreneurs and owner-managed businesses, to City institutions, educational organisations and multi-national corporations.

Unusually for a single-office firm, we have a strong international focus, which we see as vital to our vision of remaining independent in a globalising economy. We have considerable cross-border transactional experience and have built strong relationships with other independent law firms around the world. Our key strength lies in the quality of our award winning people. We seek to recruit and retain leading individuals, who provide the highest level of service to our clients.

Main areas of work
Our main practice areas include equity capital markets, public and private M&A, corporate finance, real estate, dispute resolution, commercial contracts, employment and tax. We act for a broad range of clients, from multi-national companies to financial institutions, owner managed businesses and individual entrepreneurs. The main sectors that we work in include: media and technology, retail and leisure, real estate and natural resources.

Training opportunities
Trainees will rotate seats every six months and we aim to give second-years their preference in seat choice. During their training contract trainees are given on-the-job training and mentoring and are invited to all sessions in the firm’s internal training programme. Due to our partner-led service, trainees will work closely with partners from all departments, and will receive regular feedback in addition to their appraisals every three months with their supervisor and a member of HR.

Vacation scheme
In addition to our summer graduate recruitment, we run an annual vacation scheme over Easter. This is a great opportunity for you to really get to know the firm, our culture and people. To qualify for a vacation scheme placement in 2021, you should be applying for a training contract to begin in 2023.

Other benefits
25 days’ holiday (increases to 30 days with length of service), private medical insurance, life assurance, interest-free season ticket loan, subsidised gym membership, group pension scheme, travel insurance, childcare vouchers and cycle to work scheme.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We hold an Open Evening in Autumn for candidates to meet our partners, lawyers and trainees and to find out more about the firm. To apply for a place at the evening please e-mail a covering letter and cv to hseaward@memerycrystal.com. The evening is open to those applying for training contracts starting in September 2023.

Partners: 32
Associates: 43
Total trainees: 9
UK offices: London

Contacts
Graduate recruiter: Helen Seaward
Training partner: Alex Barnes

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 5
Applications pa: 250
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1 or other
Minimum UCAS points or A levels: 128
Vacation scheme places pa: 16

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: 1st November 2020
Training contract deadline, 2023 start: 31st July 2021 (mid-day)
Vacation scheme applications open: 1st November 2020
Vacation scheme 2021 deadline: 31st January 2021
Open day deadline: Autumn 2020

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: £36,000
Second-year salary: £40,000
Post-qualification salary: £65,000
Holiday entitlement: 25 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant pa: No
Michelmores LLP

The facts
Locations: Exeter, Bristol, Sidmouth, London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 60/108/17
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £28,000 (Exeter)
Qualification salary: £40,500 (Exeter); £44,000 (Bristol); £60,000 (London)

Michelmores LLP

There’s Mores than meets the eye at this Exeter-born firm, which boasts a platform for international work in the South West and a growing London presence.

The Firm
Who doesn’t love the South West? While some might delight in the fabulous beaches, the cream teas, the pasties, or the Riviera chic, the discerning readers of Chambers Student will be on the hunt for quality training contracts in the region. “Of the regional firms in the South West, it’s the one that stands out,” a trainee beamed. Other interviewees were particularly drawn to the “really good quality of work” on offer, as well as being able to do “international work – even in the regions.” The firm estimates that international work makes up around 15% of its yearly turnover. Its core focuses are private wealth, real estate and finance within a number of sectors and practice areas. “The private wealth work we’ve done has really complemented the international work we do,” training principal Alexandra Watson tells us. “We’ve done some huge transactions with international elements – a good example is our work for Soros Economic Development Fund [SEDF].” Watson is referring to Michemores’ advising of SEDF on the sale of its majority stake in Aspada (an Indian venture capital firm) to investment management company LGT.

Private wealth law is one of the firm’s top-ranked areas of expertise in Chambers High Net Worth. Michelmores also picks up accolades for its agriculture, lower mid-market M&A, litigation, real estate, and restructuring/insolvency practices (among other areas) in the South West in Chambers UK. It’s also ranked UK-wide for its education work, both for schools and higher/further education institutions. As part of its business strategy, the firm has been conducting focused research into millennials and their investment habits: “In the coming years, millennials will end up inheriting a lot of wealth. They will have a distinctive private wealth strategy and so we are looking at growing that part of the firm’s offering,” says Watson. Trainees also noted that the firm wants to “win more high-quality work in London and continue expanding the office there.” Many had done at least one seat there. “We’re moving towards a one-firm mindset, so trainees are encouraged to do seats in either London or Bristol,” one source confirmed. The firm does have one London-based trainee and also sees the value of having trainees elsewhere visiting the capital for either a seat or related work.

The Seats
The firm sends out a list of available seats and locations about a month before each rotation. Trainees put down around three preferences, then HR allocates seats. Michelmores has recently switched things up in terms of who gets priority: “It used to be that second years got priority, which is the case in a lot of firms. But now, those going into their second and third seats get priority.” The reasoning for this change was that those entering their fourth and final seat would be close to choosing their NQ area, so it made sense to ensure that they’ve had exposure to their main areas of interest before that point. “It was something we had previously raised as being a concern, so I think people are happy with the change,” sources reflected.

Seat options: Exeter: commercial litigation; commercial; corporate; employment; banking, restructuring and insolvency; tax, trusts and succession; contentious probate; education; projects; construction and engineering; transactional property; planning; and property litigation. Bristol: tax, trusts and succession; agricultural property litigation; and transactional property. London: commercial litigation; corporate; transactional property
Michelmores’ corporate team covers the full sweep of transactional areas, from capital markets to private equity M&A to sustainable investments. In addition, the group deals with “lots of different jurisdictions,” but its impact investment practice is especially focused on investments in the Middle East and Africa. A recent deal saw the team advise sling manufacturer Silvalea and its sister company D-ansermed on its sale to Savaria Corporation for £4.6 million. The work can also tie into the firm’s private wealth matters: “One of our big clients is a large private wealth company that buys lots of smaller private wealth companies. We’ve done something like 50 acquisitions for them over the past two years.” A case in point: the team recently acted for Succession Groups on its acquisition of IPA (Investors Planning Associates), Ellaby Pollad, Warde Graham Consulting and Killermont Investments. Day to day, trainees were able to get involved in a range of drafting, from the more typical ancillary documents to “having a go at drafting subscription agreement letters and legal opinions.” Some went further and had “helped on articles of association and even on the share purchase agreement.” Sources also found they were tasked with “producing knowledge reports for the month to then present them to the team.”

Transactional real estate is loosely split into sub-teams, including secured lending, commercial property, residential development, and planning. Interviewees worked on the likes of compulsory purchase orders, lease renewals, landlord and tenant work (“like managing landlords’ estates and assets, or granting leases”), and management agreements for residential developments (on which they played a more assistance role). Recently, the team worked on a property acquisition for Ashton Bentley Estates, which purchased a tourist attraction business; it also worked for the University of Exeter on a lease of land at Exeter Science Park. Sources noticed that “trainees are given a lot of responsibility on the management of files like lease renewals or surrenders” and found there was “a lot of opportunity for client contact.” Some had even been able to “get involved in negotiating alterations to leases for tenants.” This trainee was especially pleased that “the team was happy to let me be on the front line in negotiating and drafting those myself.” The seat also involved some more typical due diligence, Land Registry applications and post-completion work.

The tax, trusts and succession seat involves a fair chunk of will-drafting (as you may reasonably expect). Aside from that, sources also got stuck into “drafting trust documents and advising trustees on administering trusts and their other obligations.” The team’s clientele is a reportedly “good mix” of high net worth individuals and “repeat clients who have been loyal to the firm for 30 to 40 years.” No matter which, trainees told us they were able to have direct contact with clients. Other trainee tasks included drafting lasting power of attorney documents and letters of wishes to accompany the wills, as well as general trust admin and taking notes at client meetings. The firm has a separate team that deals with any contentious aspects that crop up in this area.

The education team incorporates a mix of the firm’s expertise, from property work to the more commercial and corporate elements. For some, the work was “largely to do with the ‘academisation’ process for schools,” which included the conversions themselves, as well as converting multi-academy trusts to a single-academy trust. The seat also involved giving a hefty amount of advice, like “advising on government guidance from the Department for Education.” The team’s client roster is made up of more academy trusts than you could shake a whiteboard pen at; a recent matter saw the department advise Ambitions Academies Trust on the overturning of a multimillion-pound government loan. Trainees got stuck into property-related tasks like drafting leases, licences to occupy and easements, as well as corporate/commercial-related tasks like “transfers of schools or assets.” One source recalled “getting more involvement in drafting commercial transfer agreements, which enabled schools to move.” Overall, interviewees found it to be “a good seat to do because you get a broad overview of lots of areas.”

Trainee Life

“The firm is very keen for trainees to be treated as equals,” interviewees reflected. This meant that “partners speak to you how they speak to each other – they’re very approachable.” Trainees appreciated this atmosphere and found it made it easier to facilitate “lots of collaboration, across both teams and offices.” Sources reiterated that “you’re encouraged to go to different offices and get to know people. There’s a big push for it to be ‘one firm.’”

Even on the social side trainees noted that “the firm will do what it can to get Exeter lawyers up to London if the event is there, or vice versa.” The Bristol and London offices were said to be “better on the social side,” mostly because of their proximity to bustling city centres. “The Exeter office moved to the edge of the city around 15 years ago, so it is no longer within walking distance of the pubs and bars.” That said, Exeter sources appreciated that “the firm does make an effort to put on events where it can.” Source highlighted an annual summer ball, periodic drinks, various charity
events and “events for current and future trainees so we can get to know each other.”

On average, sources found their working hours to be “really reasonable.” Unsurprisingly, they varied depending on the team and the office: London hours were almost always a little longer, but “compared to others [firms in the capital], it was still a good work/life balance.” One interviewee recalled thinking they’d “never get to go home in my London seat, but I was surprised to find I was leaving on average around 6.30/7pm.” Some trainees had “got caught on an overnight completion” but many reiterated that “it’s very rare.” Most averaged closer to 8am to 6pm days.

Second years were due to go through the qualification process at the time of our research, but things were slightly up in the air due to the coronavirus outbreak. “The jobs list was supposed to come out last week, then second years would’ve picked up to two roles to apply for with a cover letter and a CV. You’d usually only have to interview if there’s competition for the role.” Despite the general uncertainty, trainees were grateful for regular communication from the firm: “Our training principal has been brilliant at keeping in touch with everyone and reassuring us. She has two video calls a week with everyone to check we’re okay working remotely and getting enough work.” In 2020, all eight second-year trainees were retained for NQ roles.

**The more the merrier:**

Those who’d been to the London office highlighted “organised drinks on the last Thursday of the month,” as well as plenty of ad hoc get-togethers.
Michelmores LLP

Woodwater House, Pynes Hill, Exeter EX2 5WR
Tel: 01392 688 688 Fax: 01392 360 563
Email: gradrecruitment@michelmores.com
Website: www.michelmores.com
Twitter: @MMCareers
Facebook: MichelmoresCareers
Instagram: @michelmorescareers

Firm profile
Michelmores LLP is headquartered in Exeter, with offices in Bristol and London. We have a strong national and continuously growing international presence and we offer specialist legal advice across a wide range of sectors, including private wealth, finance and investment, real estate and technology and innovation.
Collaboration and team work are central to our strategy and our lawyers have access to high-quality work and clients, whatever their location. Our growing client base includes Santander, the Met Office, Greenland Group and Finnfund, to name a few. We put a strong emphasis on home grown talent and retaining our trainee solicitors, who are central to our growth plans. For the past three years we have retained 100% of our trainees.

Main areas of work
Michelmores is a full service firm, providing legal advice to a broad range of local, national and international clients. Our legal teams include: agriculture property litigation, banking, restructuring and finance, corporate and commercial, commercial disputes, commercial real estate, contentious probate, education, employment, projects, specialist real estate, tax, trusts and succession and technology and innovation.

Training opportunities
Our trainees typically join us at our Exeter HQ and spend a period of their training in either Bristol or London, with the opportunity to qualify into any location. Our training contracts comprise four seats of six months and enable our trainees to experience a wide range of practice areas. Operating as one firm, we offer trainees a high level of responsibility and a supportive and inclusive training environment, where each individual is able to thrive.

Vacation scheme
Our summer vacation scheme runs every July at our Exeter HQ. The scheme is as much about you getting to know Michelmores as a place to work, as it is about us getting to know you. You will have the opportunity to spend time in one department for the week, as we aim to give you a real hands-on insight into one area of law and life as a trainee. Our vacation scheme is open to all undergraduates and graduates from any discipline.

Other benefits
In addition to sponsoring the LPC and offering a £5,000 bursary, our benefits include: private medical insurance; in-house gym; group personal pension plan; a day off for your birthday; ability to buy and sell holidays; a day off each year for volunteering; free subscription to Headspace; free fruit; social events, such as our late summer ball and annual firm quiz; running club and choir.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We will be holding virtual Open Days across December and January. Our virtual Open Days are open to anyone interested in pursuing a training contract, including first year students. Further details will be added to our website later in the year.

University law careers fairs 2020
University of Exeter, University of Bristol, UCL, University of Law, University of Cardiff, University of Durham and University of Birmingham.
Mills & Reeve LLP

The facts
Location: Birmingham, Cambridge, Leeds, London, Manchester, Norwich
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 133/360/41
Seats: 6x4 months; occasional client secondments
First year salary: £27,000
Qualification salary: £43,000 (£63,000 London)

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Mills & Reeve

With offices dotted across the UK and clients from both the public and private sector flocking to its doors, M&R is on course to continue its impressive growth.

The Firm
Rewind to 2015 – in your wildest dreams (or nightmares), could you ever have predicted what would happen in the following five years? Cambridge-based legal eagles Mills & Reeve surely didn’t when they set a five-year target to reach £100 million in revenue by 2020. It says a lot about the firm’s resilience that they smashed through the goal and logged £114.11 million in 2019/2020. A 2017 merger with London real estate and construction boutique firm Maxwell Winward gave M&R a nifty helping hand, while also helping to expand an already varied practice. Even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, employees received £1,000 bonuses in 2020.

Chambers UK gives a thorough account of the firm’s expertise. To start, there’s nationwide top rankings for healthcare and education law, reflecting Mills & Reeve’s storied work for public sector clients. The main course is a feast of regional rankings including top-tier recognition for family law in Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester and Norwich; a gold star for professional negligence in the North West; and 11 top spots in East Anglia spanning transactional and litigious practices alike. Room for dessert? Check out Chambers High Net Worth, which hands the firm private wealth law rankings all over the UK.

“It’s a big draw knowing that we can get so much exposure to several different areas.”

If you can’t decide which of the firm’s practices sounds most appealing, the good news is that trainees rotate through six seats rather than the usual four: “It’s a big draw knowing that we can get so much exposure to several different areas.” Sources were looking for a firm which offered the best of both worlds, “the commercial practices but also the niche areas. Mills & Reeve has great sports, family law and private client practices, plus they offer charity work and CSR opportunities. The client base itself is pretty diverse too with education tech, and government clients as well as corporate businesses.” Trainees were also impressed with firm growth, which hasn’t showed signs of slowing; at the time of writing, M&R had recently made lateral hires into its planning and insurance practices.

Training contracts are currently on offer in the firm’s Cambridge, Norwich, Birmingham and Manchester offices; at the time of our calls there were 18 trainees in Cambridge, nine in Birmingham and seven apiece in Manchester and Norwich. Trainees also have the option to do one-off seats in London and Leeds, but for now neither office is taking trainees on a permanent basis.

Mills & Reeve’s six-seat training contract proved popular among sources. “There are a lot of areas to explore and I’d say that by the end of my training contract, I’ll have done all the seats I wanted, so it works well,” one trainee suggested. During the seat allocation process, trainees let HR know their preferred departments. Even first-seaters get some say: “Graduate recruitment does a great job at talking you through the process and handling preferences from around 40 trainees.” Second-years’ preferences do take priority, but with a seat in another office available, most trainees get their preferences in most cases. Insiders appreciated that if you do move locations “the firm

Seat options: banking; corporate; commercial; construction; dispute resolution; employment; family; insurance disputes; intellectual property; IT; planning; private client; projects; public law; real estate; regulatory; restructuring and insolvency
will cover rent increases in the new city” and additional costs of moving.

The Seats
Most trainees end up doing some kind of real estate seat, whether in the main department or a related one like planning or construction; as 30% of Mills & Reeve’s turnover comes from real estate work, it’s hard to miss. “Planning is only available in Cambridge,” we heard. The firm’s real estate clients range from investors and landowners to major corporations and education and healthcare providers.

General real estate matters range from large-scale investment transactions and landlord/tenant leasing to portfolio management and corporate real estate. The Manchester office has been advising the University of Salford on its £850 million regeneration project, while in Cambridge the firm acted for the Cambridge Leisure and Ice Centre on the site search and development of an ice rink. Trainees here typically “draft licences and leases. We’re trusted to coordinate documents and supervise negotiation and completion on a big transfer; on disputes we research complex points and advise clients on sensitive covenants.” Additional tasks include filling out Land Registry forms and compiling reports on title. GP practices, care homes and private hospitals are the client base for the healthcare sub-team: “I learnt a lot about the structure of the healthcare system and NHS,” a trainee reported. “It felt like really important work... we were making a difference for individuals and healthcare providers.” Mills & Reeve recently advised a clinical commissioning group in the South West on the route to procurement for a £1.05 billion long-term care provision contract.

“It felt like really important work... we were making a difference.”

Trainees in Birmingham mix contentious, transactional and advisory elements in real estate; the Cambridge and Norwich offices offer a distinct real estate disputes seat. “The department really tested my research and drafting skills,” an insider said. “On the other hand, there wasn’t a lot of client contact.” A source who’d split their time between the two sides of real estate described it as “a different experience to other split seats. Because the teams sit together, communication between them is good and I could figure out which side I preferred.” Mills & Reeve has assisted the South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust on property litigation support for two new mental health hospitals.

M&A, private equity and capital markets all fall into the corporate seat. The firm excels in the healthcare field here too, while also carving niches in charities, tech and life sciences. Strutt and Parker Farms called on the team’s expertise during the sales of its anaerobic digestion subsidiaries; Mills & Reeve has also advised the world’s largest beverage bottler, Refresco, on its £25 million acquisition of a bottling plant and distribution centre in Milton Keynes and Northampton from Coca-Cola. Keen not to bottle it themselves, trainees dived into “drafting ancillary documents, board minutes, loan notes, resolutions and share purchase agreements,” as well as aiding on post-completion steps. Though client contact was rare in corporate, sources relished “opportunities to get involved in a wide variety of deals spanning different sectors.”

“There’s a good level of responsibility with quick turnaround times.”

Trainees doing a seat in commercial, IP and IT came across plenty of public sector matters including contract reviews, public procurement and commercial cases within the healthcare sector (the firm is top-ranked nationally by Chambers UK for this area). “There’s a good level of responsibility with quick turnaround times,” they agreed. “You’ll generally draft commercial contracts, review documents, attend client calls and meetings and research interesting points of law.” Mills & Reeve advises on some massive projects: recent examples include working for the Ministry of Defence on its ominously named £3.2 billion MORPHEUS programme to upgrade battlefield and tactical communications systems. On the IP side, the firm manages the trade mark portfolio of Microsoft-owned video game development studio Ninja Theory.

What Mills & Reeve calls regulatory, public and commercial disputes is what other firms would dub commercial litigation, though it comes with other niches like cybersecurity and defamation. The firm acts primarily for defendants (but also some claimants) in the technology, life sciences, food and agribusiness, private client, health and education sectors. “We’ve done lots of data protection, specifically subject access requests,” a source noted. “We have to figure out how to deal with those processes and then if things go wrong and become a dispute, we go to
court.” Recently the team has secured a £10 million world-wide freezing order and proprietary injunction against Interlink Metals’ former UK-based sales agent and associate companies; and acted for a hedge fund manager in one of the first ever English law crypto-asset shareholder disputes. “Disputes is a busy team,” sources noted. “Trainees will be dealing with anything from drafting court documents and bundling to drafting instructions to clients and researching points of law.”

Trainee Life

Interviewees told us that the firm encourages trainees to “work and collaborate across offices and to see everything as a one-firm initiative rather than acting as satellite offices” to the Cambridge HQ. Many were impressed by “the level of interest in us as individuals by the partners. They will frequently take you to the side and discuss anything you’re not sure about for your own learning and development.” Sources described Mills & Reeve’s culture as forward-thinking: “We have an internal Innovation Hub which acts as a forum in which anyone can share ideas or tips for efficient working.” It’s not all serious tech thoughts – when we came calling, “the current major topic was which brand of squash we should be drinking. It’s safe to say we’ll revert to Robinsons.” Don’t get them started on which flavour is best...

“…to leave around 5pm to catch the train. No eyebrows would be raised.”

While Mills & Reeve may strive for its “one firm” work ideal, sources noted cultural differences between its offices: “I suppose Norwich has a more united front when it comes to events,” one said, citing the “whole office having bacon and sausages in the morning.” Because Cambridge is the largest base, it tends to be “more team and practice-driven in a social events capacity. If you want to go out with people every month, there will be opportunities to do that; but if you’d rather keep yourself to yourself then nobody will hold it against you.” Birmingham interviewees told tales of end of month socials in the office’s basement with a different theme every time: “We supported a mental health initiative in January through being active around the office, and we all took part in doing a step count challenge across the floors.” As for Manchester, trainees prefer to keep active in one place with regular yoga sessions. Life at Mills & Reeve isn’t all downward dog and cooked breakfasts: the Cambridge office houses a NextGen business development group, helping young lawyers build connections with clients and prepare for potential futures as rainmakers.

Since the majority of the trainees we spoke with were avid commuters, most would get into the office a tad earlier (around 8.45am), “to then leave around 5pm to catch the train. No eyebrows would be raised.” Several found their hours “market-driven” with transactional practices calling for longer stints in the office. What does longer mean? “9 or 10pm finishes with maybe two or three stretching to midnight,” sources said. They were well prepared for such eventualities and noted that when they did have to put in extra time, “it’s consistently recognised by supervisors as going above and beyond. There’s definitely no facetime culture.” A mix of busy and slow periods was also common in the family department, whereas litigious practices were more predictable.

Given these reasonable hours, most were content with their salary and praised the benefits on offer at Mills & Reeve: “On top of the 25 days’ holiday allowance, we get an extra day during the Christmas period or for other religious reasons. You can also get an extra day off for your marriage and up to two days if you’re moving house.” If anyone had a cross to bear, it was a few trainees in the Cambridge office who believed they were “having to fund a London standard of living on Leeds wages. We need to be better compensated.” The firm told us it looks to pay market rate in the locations it operates in.

The NQ process kicks off around March, with the firm releasing a jobs list across all offices. “If more than one person applies for the same job there will be an interview, otherwise it’s just an application form,” interviewees clarified. “There’s always central communication to confirm official timelines, and job decisions are typically made in April.” We spoke to trainees who were keen to stick with Mills & Reeve for a while: “It isn’t a place where you’d stay for three years before moving on. People stay here because they genuinely like the workplace and have built long-lasting relationships.” The firm retained 17 of 18 qualifiers in 2020, with one on a fixed-term contract.

Where there’s a Mills, there’s a way:

The firm has “recently appointed a diversity and inclusion officer to run events firmwide and raise awareness of internal gaps.” Existing initiatives include annual leave for religious festivals such as Eid, Christmas and Ramadan; a BAME and Allies Network; the Spectrum network for LGBTQ+ folks and allies; and signing up to the Social Mobility Pledge.
We are attending the Legal Cheek and AllAboutLaw virtual law fairs series.

University law careers fairs 2020

Sports & social committee, subsidised restaurants, season ticket loan, employee assistance programme, flexible benefits scheme, pension scheme, life assurance, bonus scheme, 25 days holiday a year,

Other benefits

Teams every two to three days.

You will work with a variety of lawyers around the business over the course of two weeks, changing research, attending court hearings and meeting clients.

Vacation scheme

Our award-winning summer vacation scheme is the ideal introduction to Mills & Reeve and gives you a real taste of life as a lawyer. You will be placed in real-life situations, preparing draft documents, researching, attending court hearings and meeting clients.

You will work with a variety of lawyers around the business over the course of two weeks, changing teams every two to three days.

Other benefits

Flexible benefits scheme, pension scheme, life assurance, bonus scheme, 25 days holiday a year, sports & social committee, subsidised restaurants, season ticket loan, employee assistance programme, membership costs for junior lawyers groups.

University law careers fairs 2020

We are attending the Legal Cheek and AllAboutLaw virtual law fairs series.
Mishcon de Reya LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Singapore
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 128/288/32
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £42,000
Qualification salary: £72,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Mishcon

Mishcon Impossible? Not so for this suave London outfit, which takes on the big cases of our times and maintains its cool in stellar private wealth and transactional practices too.

The Firm
When Andrew Scott (of Fleabag priest fame) plays a firm's deputy chairman in a star-studded and widely praised film, you know that the firm in question must have something special about it. The film, Denial, detailed the libel case brought against Mishcon's client, Deborah Lipstadt (played by Rachel Weisz), by Holocaust denier David Irving (Timothy Spall). Mishcon's deputy chairman, Anthony Julius, represented Lipstadt in real life and got the full Andrew Scott treatment on the big screen. Another claim to fame for Julius was acting for Lady Diana during her divorce from Prince Charles.

As you can ascertain from above, Mishcon's cases get quite a bit of attention in the public domain. This has been especially true in recent years throughout the firm's representation of Gina Miller, first in 2017 to prevent Theresa May from invoking Article 50 without Parliamentary approval, and then again in 2019 for a judicial review of Boris Johnson's decision to prorogue Parliament in the run up to Brexit. "It's not necessarily the type of work you do every day," a Mishcon trainee admitted, "but it's interesting that the firm positions itself like that. It engages in the important topical issues of the day."

Chambers UK showers praise on several of Mishcon's contentious practices including financial services, civil fraud, insurance, defamation/reputation management and tax (UK-wide), as well as banking litigation, employment, and real estate litigation (in London specifically). But Mishcon certainly isn't a one-trick litigation pony: beyond its litigation practice, the firm also focuses on corporate, employment, IP, real estate and private client. The firm achieves top-tier rankings for its lower-mid market corporate M&A work, and gains other accolades in competition, IP, gaming, sport, and planning. In Chambers High Net Worth, the firm garners an array of top rankings for various areas of private client work, including art and cultural property, private wealth disputes, private wealth law, defamation, family (high net worth individuals) and financial crime (high net worth individuals).

The Seats
For their first seat, trainees highlight their preferences for general departments as opposed to specific seats. For their following seats, trainees submit three team-specific preferences from a list that also states who the supervisors are for each seat. Most interviewees received "a mixed bag" of their preferences: "HR does their best to accommodate everyone's preferences, but it's not always possible." Sources agreed that "they try to guarantee your first choice at least once, but there's only so much they can do."

"... a lot of international matters, as well as high-profile matters that garnered much media attention."

Trainees can undertake several seats within the dispute resolution realm. These include finance and banking litigation; fraud defence; insurance litigation; and tax litigation. Fraud defence was popular among sources, who emphasised its "very busy" and "fast-paced" nature. "The team specialises in obtaining injunctions or discharging injunctions brought against clients," interviewees revealed. During their six months, trainees had seen "a lot of international matters, as well as high-profile matters that garnered much media attention." For instance, the team

Seat options: real estate; corporate; litigation; private; employment
Mishcon’s insurance litigation team primarily acts for policy holders against insurers. One trainee highlighted the number of sectors that you can encounter in the seat: “With insurance, you might be working with an individual in relation to their expensive car or you might be working for a pharma company against their insurer.” The team acted for Jersey-based care home Cheval Roc on an insurance coverage claim against Zurich in connection with a landslide affecting the client’s property and business. Sources felt they’d got especially good exposure to clients through “meetings for witness briefings.” Elsewhere, doc review was a common task, as well as working on expert reports and taking the first draft of witness statements.

“... a few smaller matters that you tend to run on your own – there’s a lot more responsibility in that sense.”

On the non-contentious side of things, many interviewees had spent six months in a real estate seat. Sources here got involved in “a good mix of work,” including various leases and lettings, sales, licensing matters, and occasional cross-over matters with the planning team. The group continues to advise Capital & Counties CG on its Covent Garden portfolio worth £2.6 billion (and most recently advised on its purchase of 5 and 6 Henrietta Street for £35 million); it also guided property developer Chelsefield through the legal aspects of its development next to Knightsbridge tube station. Many interviewees highlighted that the real estate seat provided “a few smaller matters that you tend to run on your own – there’s a lot more responsibility in that sense.” On this front, sources took charge of things like “assignments of leases and wayleave agreements.” Other tasks included managing data rooms, completing Land Registry forms and SDLT (Stamp Duty Land Tax) returns, and reviewing sections of documents. From time to time, sources were also able to “have the first go at a sale agreement or lease agreement.”

The firm’s employment practice is one of the smaller departments at the firm. It handles both contentious and non-contentious matters, so trainees saw “the full gamut: from High Court tribunal claims to advisory work to employee handbooks and equal opportunity policies.” The team recently advised Harrods on three tribunal cases; one was brought by an existing employee in relation to detriment whistleblowing treatment, while another surrounded an employee termination for gross misconduct. Day-to-day responsibilities were varied for trainees: on contentious matters, sources told of “attending client meetings, having the first draft of settlement agreements and liaising with counsel.” Trainees were also able to attend tribunals and mediations when opportunities arose. On the non-contentious side, interviewees mentioned helping with the “drafting of advice for senior executives as well as employees” and “conducting training sessions for clients.”
Mishcon’s private seats cover the likes of immigration, reputation management, private commercial litigation, private wealth disputes, and tax and wealth planning. Multiple sources had spent time in the private commercial litigation seat. “But how can commercial litigation be private?” we hear you cry. We had that same question. One source admitted that “the name didn’t make much sense to me at first,” but went on to explain that “it involves private client work, but instead of family or trust matters it relates to high net worth individuals’ business interests.” For trainees, this involved “a lot of pre-action correspondence and writing strongly worded letters,” as well as a decent level of client exposure: “It involves a lot of problem-solving for clients.”

Trainee Life
Seats came with varying working hours, though many admitted that “it’s generally been quite a busy training contract.” Most agreed that real estate had better hours (often 9am to 7pm), while litigation seats were more likely to have “a number of shockers – but not for prolonged periods.” During busier spells, trainees might leave closer to 9pm, with the occasional 1am finish (i.e. a ‘shocker’). Sources weren’t too fazed though, and noted that “when you’re on an injunction, that’s just the way it is.” Most felt they could make time for their private lives, though warned that “if you’ve got a busy week, you probably wouldn’t book plans for 6.30pm on a weekday.” Beyond that, trainees felt encouraged to take leave as and when, and make the most of their weekends uninterrupted.

“The firm is full of big personalities,” interviewees highlighted. “That’s something that’s looked upon favourably – they’re looking for people who are good with clients and are able to work their way around a room.” Although sources were acutely aware that “it’s a commercial environment where people take the work seriously,” they also found Mishcon to be “a place where you can feel at home and be supported, especially as a junior member of the firm.” Trainees especially appreciated the mentoring system in place, which sees them paired up with “a senior partner who you can talk to.” Alongside this, there’s also a ‘buddy system’ which pairs first-years up with second-years: “They always ensure there’s people you can talk to.”

Other interviewees added that though the people at Mishcon are serious when it comes to work, they are “also looking to appreciate the fun things.” Sources were pleased to say that “you can usually find people to go for a drink with on a Friday if trainees aren’t completely slammed.” Firmwide, trainees highlighted the firm’s “very good” summer party (“last summer it was at the V&A!”) but noted that events “tend to be split by department, just because it’s easier to manage at that level.” Trainees are also tasked with organising “fundraisers for our chosen charity – we put on quizzes, bake sales, we do Tough-Mudders – it’s a nice way to get to know the rest of the firm.”

The firm also takes its diversity efforts seriously, trainees reported. “It’s something that’s on everyone’s radar,” a source reflected. Others praised the firm’s diversity and inclusion committee and noted that Mishcon is “doing a lot of work regarding recruitment at both trainee-level and more generally.” This trainee also flagged how Mishcon’s “looking at what kind of barristers we instruct because it’s often very male-dominated.” Like most law firms, “if you look at the statistics, it’s not as diverse as it should be,” but interviewees were encouraged by the presence of “groups set up to tackle areas like socio-economic, ethnic, and LGBTQ+ diversity.”

In the build-up to qualification, the firm releases a jobs list and trainees must apply for two or more positions. Trainees apply with their ‘Mishcon CVs’, which outline what experiences they’ve gained from their seats and how that applies to the role. Some were under the impression they should speak to partners “to express interest in qualifying in the area and get the ball rolling,” while others reckoned the firm is trying to “eliminate the ‘coffee culture’ element to qualification.” Trainees then interview with their chosen departments and should be prepared to undertake “a case study or activity” in some instances. In 2020, Mishcon retained 13 of 16 qualifiers.

Mishcon Position:
Alongside the firm’s clients and practice expertise, trainees were also drawn to the international work on offer. Sources flagged Mishcon Private as an area where “we get a lot of international work – it’s not just UK-based.” Mishcon closed its New York office earlier in 2020, but also opened a new office in Singapore.
Mishcon de Reya LLP

Africa House, 70 Kingsway London, WC2B 6AH
Tel: 020 3321 7000
Email: trainee.recruitment@mishcon.com
Website: www.mishcongraduates.com
Twitter: @Mishcon_de_Reya
Facebook: Mishcon de Reya LLP
Instagram: @mishcon_de_reya

Firm profile
Based in London with offices in New York, Mishcon de Reya services an international community of clients and provides advice in situations where the constraints of geography often do not apply. The work we undertake is cross-border, multi-jurisdictional and complex.
Our clients are dynamic and sophisticated and we reflect that in our belief in challenging the conventional or accepted ways of working. We fiercely guard our clients’ interests, recognising the significant nexus between business affairs and personal affairs.
We appreciate the privilege of sitting alongside our clients as a trusted advisor. Building strong personal connections to our clients and their businesses is important to us. It is for these reasons we say ‘It’s business. But it’s personal’.
Mishcon de Reya has grown rapidly in recent years, showing more than 100% revenue growth since 2010. A central role played by the Academy, the firm’s in-house place of learning, development and new thinking, the active and innovative social impact strategy and various diversity initiatives are reflected in its platinum level award from the investors in People standard.

Main areas of work
We are organised internally into six different departments: corporate, employment, dispute resolution, intellectual property, private and real estate. The firm also has a growing number of specialist groups which include: art; betting and gaming; finance and banking; fraud; immigration; and insolvency.

Training opportunities
Our trainees are typically high-achieving and intelligent individuals with good interpersonal skills and out-going personalities. Strength of character and the ability to think laterally are also important.
Trainees have the opportunity to gain experience, skills and knowledge from across the firm in four six-month seats involving contentious and non-contentious work. Because of the relatively few training contracts offered, trainees are exposed to high-quality work with lots of responsibility early on. Trainees are supported with a wide ranging training and development programme in addition to the Professional Skills Course. Trainee performance is monitored closely and trainees can expect to receive regular feedback in addition to mid-seat and end-of-seat appraisals.

Vacation scheme
We run three vacation schemes, one in Spring and two in Summer.
As well as being paid for the vacation scheme, those not living within commuting distance of London will be provided with free accommodation. Our vacation schemes have been designed to provide students with an opportunity to gain an insight into the role of a trainee, our culture and our people. We run a fun and informative workshop programme covering all practice areas of the firm, combined with individual and group work sessions.

Other benefits
Whilst on the training contract there are core benefits including: 25 days holiday, income protection and life assurance. Other optional benefits include: health screening, dental insurance, private medical insurance, travel insurance, critical illness cover, gym membership, season ticket loan, group pension scheme, yoga classes, childcare vouchers, cycle scheme, in-house doctor, bonus scheme and give-as-you earn schemes.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Our open day will run on Thursday 26th November 2020 and our first-year open day will run in March 2021. Please see our website for more information www.mishcongraduates.com

University law careers fairs 2020
BPP, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Kings, LSE, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield, UCL, Warwick.
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 30
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 40/58/17
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; occasional secondments
First-year salary: £47,000
Qualification salary: £115,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Morgan Lewis

Philly spread: the petite London office of this US giant is a grower, not a shower.

The Firm
Morgan Lewis – or more specially, its London office – is proof that you need to see the full jigsaw to appreciate each individual piece. The firm as a whole is a global giant that made more than $2 billion revenue in 2019, has offices in 15+ countries (including 17 in the US alone) and scores upwards of 30 rankings in Chambers Global. You’d struggle to guess any of this based on the firm’s modest London presence. The office houses almost 100 lawyer-sand welcomes fewer than ten trainees a year; Chambers UK awards the firm one ranking in securitisation. “Historically this was an American outpost,” trainees admitted. “But we’re no longer just backup lawyers in London and this is a genuine office in and of itself.”

While the UK base does take an auxiliary role on US-led deals, that’s not the whole story, and Morgan Lewis’s commitment to the London office is clear: in 2020 the firm added a four-person investment funds team from Morrison & Foerster, building on last year’s high-profile lateral hiring spree of three corporate partners and two tech lawyers. "We’re growing quite quickly and effectively,” one trainee mused. “I don’t see any signs of things slowing down.” The firm’s trainee intake has also nearly doubled within just five years. The appeal for new arrivals came down to a small intake, and big starting salary: £115,000 for NQs. “I think they’re very generous,” one deadpanned.

“We’re growing quite quickly and effectively. I don’t see any signs of things slowing down.”

These are common themes among US firms, so what helps Morgan Lewis stand out? “It interested me more than other US firms as it wasn’t just finance and banking,” according to one source. Other practices like antitrust and labour and employment are fully-fledged departments “rather than mere support for the corporate teams.” Trainees do four seats of six months apiece and “by the time you’re done, you know most of the partners in London.” There are no mandatory seats, trainees simply submit first and second preferences to HR. “It works well,” a source said, “I’ve always got what I’ve asked for.” International secondments are available at Morgan Lewis, but destinations change yearly and the uptake varies as (perhaps surprisingly) “they’re not always highly sought after.”

The Seats
Morgan Lewis’s corporate group – aka corporate and business transactions – is a “broad umbrella” with tech transactions, life sciences and investment management nestled underneath. Trainees are “drafted onto discrete matters” in M&A, private equity, outsourcing, projects and more. The firm has represented General Motors, Grosvenor Capital and We Soda – recent projects include advising Russian tech giant Yandex NV on a restructuring and Abercrombie & Kent on the acquisition of the world’s oldest travel company Cox & Kings. Londoners often handle the UK elements of US deals and we heard of trainees getting stuck into drafting board minutes, share purchase agreements and term sheets, as well as document review and due diligence. One found themselves grappling with “Russian law nuances for New York-specific documents;” while another “drafted the due diligence report for a small

Seat options: antitrust; corporate; finance; investment management; labour & employment; litigation; structured transactions
venture capital investment. They were giving me a lot of real responsibility.”

The finance department tends to act lender-side for banks and large lending institutions like HSBC and Wells Fargo, though Morgan Lewis does advise some borrowers too. Asset-based lending is common: “We work on a lot of security-backed facility documentation for lenders,” trainees said. The firm advised the European Bank for Restructuring and Development on a loan to Chinese company Universal Energy, financing construction of a new 30-megawatt solar power plant in Kazakhstan; and investment adviser Cyrus Capital on £110 of million working capital facilities for beleaguered airline Flybe. Trainees dipped into such varied projects as music and film finance, project finance in Europe and Asia, and sovereign bond financing. We got insight into how Morgan Lewis operates: “All the documents have to be in a certain font. If not, partners won’t read them.” That may sound ridiculous, but the trainee said: “You suddenly realise it’s indicative of their consistency and attention to detail.”

“You suddenly realise it’s indicative of their consistency and attention to detail.”

There’s also a structured finance practice that focuses on capital markets and securities, structured transactions, and warehousing for formidable clients like BlackRock, Citigroup and Merrill Lynch. “A small, partner-heavy team” means trainees get “lots of associate-level work, though it’s very document-heavy. Confirming 16 different documents may sound dull, but it feels quite important.” In a mega matter, Morgan Lewis advised JPMorgan on the establishment of a $20 billion collateralised commercial paper programme targeting US and European investors.

Commercial litigation, arbitration and white-collar investigations all appear in the disputes department. Typical clients include huge multinational companies and banks; insurance is a growing niche. Trainees’ experiences vary by who their supervisor is, but they’ll typically be preparing trial bundles, completing factual and legal research or taking notes in hearings. One got to interview witnesses in Eastern Europe, “which was fantastic experience.” The competition group has a “European focus” rather than American leanings – sources noted a split between investigations, merger control and competition litigation. Sainsburys, Procter & Gamble and Tata Steel are all competition clients, and Morgan Lewis played a role in the landmark Court of Appeal ruling that multilateral interchange ‘swipe’ fees infringed EU antitrust rules. Common tasks for trainees here included bundling, proofing submissions and advising companies drafting supply and commercial agreements.

Amazon, McDonald’s, Deutsche Bank and Oxfam are some of the mega clients in employment. Combine a global scope with the unprecedented effects of Covid-19 and you get “an incredibly interesting time to be in employment law.” Trainees dealt with ad hoc company queries, grievances, tribunal disputes, data protection, redundancy claims and the “employment aspects of corporate deals.”

Trainee Life

The firm enforces a mandatory 20-hour minimum pro bono commitment. “100% of fee earners meet it,” trainees confirmed, warning us: “You’ll be chased if you don’t bill those hours.” Some of their favourite projects were assisting food banks; domestic violence and non-molestation cases; and collaborating with the Amicus charity to help US death row prisoners. With so much on offer, trainees need not stop at 20 hours: “I’ve done 178 this year,” one declared. Love for pro bono aside, Morgan Lewis has “never had that stereotypical US corporate office vibe,” sources insisted. They were more likely to highlight the firm’s international outlook, especially as “the chair of the firm is amazing at fostering a global feeling of unity between the offices.”

“The chair of the firm is amazing at fostering a global feeling of unity between the offices.”

Here in the UK, the social scene varies by team. “We have some groups that are super social, and others that really aren’t,” a trainee suggested. There’s a budget for the intake to spend on events – a comedy club trip was one highlight in 2019 – but socials “spring up more naturally” alongside formal seasonal parties and month-end internal kitchen drinks. Sources reckoned more could be done on the diversity front, acknowledging it is “taken seriously. The issue with smaller offices like ours is they might not have the same resources as larger ones, or staff specifically dedicated to diversity.” They pointed to the firm’s US efforts as proof of a commitment to the cause: Morgan Lewis has a 25% female equity partnership in the States, far higher than average. As for London, interviewees championed the annual community impact week, links with underprivileged local schools, and a new diversity task force as evidence of progress.

“The US firm ‘up all night’ reputation hasn’t really proven true,” a grateful source noted. “The hours can be really long, but not nightmarishly so.” Teams differ – a seat in funds can be “quite taxing,” as can competition. Transactional departments typically finish later, but “a 12-hour stretch would be considered a fairly normal, long day”
across the firm as a whole. Weekend work plagued some, but it wasn’t common. “It’s a huge positive that we’re so busy,” one source enthused. “People hate having nothing to do more than they hate long hours.” That’s the spirit...

Trainees were less chuffed with qualification, lamenting that “it’s not transparent at all. That’s one thing that needs improving.” In 2020, the firm retained five of eight qualifiers.

Where there’s Well, there’s a way:

Morgan Lewis runs a firm-wide ‘ML Well’ health and wellbeing initiative, inviting speakers to deliver stress management talks alongside an online portal for employees with concerns.
Firm profile
With 31 offices across North America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, the firm provides comprehensive corporate, transactional, regulatory and litigation services to clients of all sizes across all major industries. The firm’s regulatory and industry focused practices help clients address legal, government and policy challenges. Founded in 1873, Morgan Lewis comprises more than 2,200 legal professionals.

Main areas of work
Morgan Lewis’ London office offers a wide range of business and commercial services, including: competition; corporate; debt and equity capital markets; finance and restructuring; labour and employment including employment litigation and immigration advice; investment management; structured transactions; tax; international commercial disputes; arbitration and white collar matters. Morgan Lewis is also strong in various business sectors, including life sciences, financial services and technology, where the firm’s leading regulatory and commercial lawyers provide a real insight into their industries.

Training opportunities
Morgan Lewis’ London training programme is led by an experienced training principal. Other partners and our trainee supervisors also have broad experience of working with trainees. Following a full induction into the firm, the programme will provide you with consistently high-quality, challenging assignments, working directly with senior lawyers across a range of practices and industry groups on complex and frequently cross-border matters. Through this hands-on and varied experience, you can expect to build a thorough understanding of the firm’s business and of working with international, high-profile clients.

Over two years you will complete four, six-month seats with the opportunity to gain experience in at least three distinct areas of law. International secondment opportunities to our Dubai and Singapore offices may also be available. In addition to formal appraisals, the office environment allows regular contact with, and feedback from, the training principal, supervisors and other lawyers. Trainees will have the opportunity to actively participate in all in-house associate training sessions, and to take part in pro bono work and business development activities.

Vacation scheme
Morgan Lewis offer a limited number of placements during the summer each year. The aim of our placement scheme is to provide candidates the opportunity to gain an insight into life as a trainee at the firm.

To apply for a place on our summer programme applicants should complete the firm’s online application form which is available on our website www.morganlewis.com. The closing date for applications is 31st January 2021.

Other benefits
Life assurance, private medical and dental insurance, long-term disability insurance, pension, season ticket loan, employee assistant programme, cycle to work scheme and NQ qualification leave.

University law careers fairs 2020
The London office of this tech-focused MoFo is growing year on year.

The Firm

What do you call a California-headquartered firm in London with “a big tech focus” and “an incredibly strong international presence?” Morrison & Foerster, if we’re being formal. Otherwise, MoFo is just fine – the nickname is actually used by the firm itself. Excited trainees spoke glowingly of MoFo’s “massive, techy deals” and “huge, global clients.” A lot of these clients are tech companies or companies that invest in tech, like Tokyo-headquartered conglomerate SoftBank, which is a key client of the firm. Technology is an important sector for the firm, but MoFo has other strings to its bow – clients of the London office include financial institutions, investors, private equity houses and real estate companies.

Chambers Global ranks MoFo highly in data protection, outsourcing, and its technology, media and telecom work. Locally, Chambers UK notes the firm for capital markets, IT, and outsourcing. MoFo scoops dozens more rankings in its native US, as well as in the Asia-Pacific region – given the prevalence of the tech industry there, it’s some key jurisdictions for the firm. Go to chambers.com for a full breakdown.

“There are new partners coming in quite regularly.”

MoFo has 16 international offices – nine in the US, five in Asia-Pacific and two more in Europe in Berlin and Brussels. London is a strong piece of the MoFo puzzle. With a current headcount of over 80 lawyers, sources noticed “there are new partners coming in quite regularly and bringing new clients.” The firm recently boosted its white collar and investigations practice with a couple of partners from King & Spalding, while the finance department doubled in size in the last year with a flurry of hires including partners from Latham & Watkins.

The Seats

Listen up MoFos. The firm decides where trainees sit first. For subsequent seats, trainees state their preferences, with second-years taking precedence. Sources said trainees are likely to sit in corporate, finance, or litigation. We also heard split seats were “fairly common.” The firm tries to ensure “the seats will complement each other,” such as finance and restructuring, or tech transactions and data privacy.

For one lucky MoFo (usually a second-year), there’s an opportunity to do a secondment in the firm’s Singapore office. Unsurprisingly this is an in-demand spot, so “the firm evaluates who goes based on what you’ve done so far and what your interests are.” This year’s secondment didn’t go ahead due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“You could be working for a tech company and then an investment company.”

Corporate “was absolutely the best seat to have done first,” according to one giddy trainee. “You get exposed to loads.” The team handles private and public M&A, venture capital and corporate reorganisations, but M&A formed “the
Chambers UK rankings

| Capital Markets | Outsourcing | Information Technology |

main core” of trainees’ work. “No day is the same,” they said. “You could be working for a tech company and then an investment company.” The team recently acted for SoundCloud in its $75 million investment from broadcasting company Sirius XM. Trainees were tasked with “due diligence, putting comments into the transaction document, and drafting ancillary documents.” They were pleased with their responsibilities, with one telling us: “I did a fair bit of project management, coordinated the review processes and got a reasonable amount of client contact.” Despite being “very busy,” sources said “you never feel like you’re on your own. You’re well looked after.”

Over in finance, trainees can gain experience with both borrowers and lenders in acquisition and leveraged finance, corporate banking, derivatives, debt trading and investment, and restructuring. The firm recently advised fund managers Pemberton Asset Management and GoldPoint Partners as lenders in a $155 million refinancing. Sources were “mainly involved in leveraged finance deals,” but we heard of trainees working on “refinancings and receivables financing” too. Trainees had “administrational and organisational tasks, like indexing files.” Sources found this seat was more about “where things are rather than ‘here’s what the law says,’” so it was their job “to help associates find the relevant emails.” And as with many transactional departments, “you’re swamped with hundreds of emails!” Trainees could also expect to review “ancillary documents like board minutes and directors’ certificates.”

The litigation department does “traditional commercial litigation, white-collar crime and investigations. We also have an arbitration practice and we do civil litigation.” The firm recently acted for the liquidators of investment vehicle Saad Investments in a long-running dispute to recover $400 million in damages from Samba Financial Group. Sources felt they’d been given “meaningful tasks, such as interviewing employees, writing reports and developing the chronology of that individual.” There was also doc review, research, formulating arguments, drafting witness statements and letters to opposing counsel to do, along with “summarising case judgments, analysing news (keeping track of news updates), and attending hearings.”

The technology transactions seat is precisely that: “a commercial tech seat dealing with commercial tech contracts.” The group does a lot of advisory and outsourcing work for tech companies, guiding clients on working with AI, the Internet of Things, cloud computing, social media, blockchain, and semiconductor technologies. The team works with big global companies (like UPS) as well as emerging tech clients (like gardening app Candide). The team recently represented Ubitricity, which provides charging points for electric vehicles, on contracts for the installation of charge points in Portsmouth, Hamble-Smith and Berkshire. Trainees here could expect to do “drafting, liaising with outside counsel, due diligence, and research.”

“Helping people who’ve tried to claim disability benefits.”

And one more thing about the work at MoFo – it’s a no-no if you’re not into pro bono. Like most American firms, MoFo takes pro bono seriously. Associates have a pro bono hours target to hit and it’s highly encouraged at the trainee level too. Firmwide pro bono counsel Rachel Williams circulates opportunities. To get involved, “you flag your interest then try to get a partner or associate on board.” Trainees told us they’d been “encouraged to take the lead” on pro bono matters. In London, MoFo works with anti-poverty charity Z2K, “helping people who’ve tried to claim disability benefits and had their application denied.”

Trainee Life

In its native US, MoFo has Californian roots (headquarters are in San Francisco). Year to year, our trainee interviewees often describe a ‘California influence’ on the firm’s culture. But don’t be mistaken: no one here is kicking back in flip flops. MoFo is as busy as US firms come. “Every department has peaks and troughs,” which could mean “late nights or early mornings when there’s a big project on.” On average, trainees can expect to be in the office for about ten hours a day.

“When you’re pulling late night finishes, you’re doing it for people you want to work with.”

A better example of the firm’s Cali cool might be the office’s dress-for-your-day policy. But above all else, what really stood out to our sources this year was “the firm’s sense of community,” which meant that “when you’re pulling late night finishes, you’re doing it for people you want to work with.” On the social side, trainees highlighted impromptu get-to-know-you lunches, “fortnightly cheese and wines (which are really pizza nights)” along with “informal drinks on a Friday at around 5pm.” During lockdown, the firm organised a pub quiz: “About half of us tuned in.” That’s enough to give you MoFo FOMO.

Trainees are compensated with a chunky salary befitting of a US firm: trainees start on £46,000 and NQs are ushered in with £118,000. Our sources were keen to stay at MoFo. To do so, “you communicate your choice [of practice] and grad recruitment will approach the head of department. They’ll see if there’s a business case for you
The True Picture

qualifying there.” In 2020, the firm retained all five qualifiers.

One area trainees felt the firm could improve is gender diversity at partner level. At the time of writing, MoFo’s last two partner hires were women. Trainees also said “the firm continues to be active in driving its D&I initiatives” and were encouraged that “the firm wants juniors to drive these diversity initiatives and ideas.” The London office established its first ethnic minority affinity group in 2020.

One friendly MoFo:

“When I was working late, associates would frequently check in to see how I was doing – they weren’t even part of the deal! The firm markets itself as being a friendly place and it really, really is.”
Morrison & Foerster (UK) LLP

The Scalpel, 52 Lime Street, London, EC3M 7AF

Telephone: 0207 920 4000
Email: rnasskau@mofo.com
Website: www.careers.mofo.com/london/

Firm profile
Morrison & Foerster is a leading global firm, with over 1,000 lawyers in key technology and finance centres in the US, Europe and Asia. In Europe we have a team of around 130 lawyers in our strategic hubs of London, Berlin and Brussels. We work alongside our colleagues in the US and Asia, drawing on cultural, jurisdictional and market knowledge to deliver the best advice and client service. Dynamic technology and life sciences companies, some of the largest financial investors and financial institutions, leading consumer product companies, and other market leaders come to MoFo for our expertise, knowledge, advice, and individually tailored client service. We handle some of the world’s largest cross-border transactions and resolve some of the biggest disputes across multiple jurisdictions. Our firm was built on, and continues to succeed, because of the talent of our lawyers and their innovative approach in the practice of law. We practice in a collegial environment where we value teamwork, diverse perspectives and employee wellbeing. As our nickname MoFo suggests, we take our work seriously but we don’t take ourselves too seriously.

Main areas of work
Bankruptcy and restructuring, capital markets, corporate/M&A, tax, data privacy, employment, equity derivatives, financial services regulation, financial transactions, high-yield, investigations, disputes, arbitration, private equity real estate, outsourcing and technology transactions.

Training opportunities
Trainees are given the support and training required to excel in their work; from trainee induction sessions, regular training via our MoFo Academy and significant daily responsibility. This combination enables our trainees to develop the necessary skills to deliver exceptional client service on complex global matters. The training period consists of four six-month seats, with the potential of a seat in our Singapore office. There is an active mentoring programme and a formal review process four times annually to provide continuous support and development.

Vacation scheme
We are looking for dynamic and driven individuals who can display a genuine enthusiasm for a career in law. We value diversity, have a strong commitment to pro bono and want our future trainees to share this philosophy. In 2021, we will be running two two-week summer vacation schemes from 14th June to 25th June and from 28th June to 9th July. Our vacation schemes provide insight into life at MoFo and offer the opportunity to consider whether we are the right firm for you. Summer associates will gain a good picture of how much responsibility our trainees are given; it’s also a chance to meet and learn more about our London-based attorneys and staff.

Other benefits
Pension, medical insurance, dental insurance, group life assurance, group income protection, employee assistance programme, best doctors, gym membership, childcare vouchers, season ticket loan and cycle scheme.

University law careers fairs 2020
We will be attending a number of the virtual law fairs scheduled for this Autumn, including:
- Cambridge Law Fair
- Oxford Law Fair
- Durham Law Fair
- Warwick Law Fair
- Kings College London Fair
- Three Aspiring Solicitors Diversity Law Fairs
Muckle LLP

The facts
Location: Newcastle
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 34/46/5
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £24,500
Qualification salary: £37,500

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Muckle

It’s centenary time for this North Eastern powerhouse, and if you give a Muckle about practising law with some personality, you’ll keep reading.

The Firm
This Newcastle-based legal outfit has carved out a premier reputation for itself in the North East since its founding in 1920 – so much so that its work and name carry far beyond its local stomping ground. Trainees recalled that they were eager to get in on the unique “community feel” that Muckle created: “I really like that we have one office. It’s a fairly large office but you still know everyone and feel connected to the firm.” Interviewees felt that having just the one location didn’t have any drawbacks, especially considering the sense of “stability” it brings. Others flagged the appeal of Muckle’s strategic stance and emphasised that “we’re trying to be leaders in the North East, but that doesn’t stop us from taking on national work.” Indeed, one notable example of this reach is the firm’s representation of The Football Association (without any bias towards the Toon Army, we’re sure) and its Chartered Standard Clubs across the country.

“We’ve always tried to grow with strategic add-ons to the work we do as a firm.”

On its home turf of the North East, Chambers UK awards Muckle tip-top rankings for both its banking & finance and corporate/M&A expertise, and commends its construction, employment, IP, litigation and social housing practices. “We’ve always tried to grow with strategic add-ons to the work we do as a firm,” graduate recruitment head and partner Kevin Maloney elaborates. “In the North East, there’s a lot of landed estate particularly in Northumberland, so we’ve grown our agricultural and estates offering with the recruitment of David Towns.”

The Seats
Trainees’ first seats are allocated to them before starting. From the second seat onwards, trainees have a catch-up with Kevin Maloney, in order to discuss “what you’ve enjoyed, what you haven’t enjoyed, and what preferences you have.” Of course, the firm takes into account business need, but trainees felt it mostly “balances out” with their preferences. In addition, “you don’t really know what you’re going to like until you try it,” a sage trainee pointed out. The element of any surprise is typically removed to make the final seat, as “you usually get your preference.”

“Really good at making you feel like you helped facilitate the transaction.”

Trainees that had sat in corporate found it to be “a very busy and exciting team.” It’s one of the firm’s biggest departments (next to real estate) and covers the classic corporate transactions including sales, and asset and share purchases. Sources had “acted for buyers and sometimes for sellers,” which involved “drafting shareholder agreements, articles of association and lots of ancillary documents.” Trainees were pleased to get decent client contact too: “I’ve recently been speaking to clients on the phone and sitting in on client meetings.” The team recently acted for Hays Travel on the acquisition of 555 former Thomas Cook stores. Further afield, the group recently represented Sandman Hotel Group during its acquisition of Portmarnock Hotel & Golf Links in Dublin. It’s not all deals and acquisitions though: “There’s some non-transactional stuff, like advising on company structures and buy-back agreements. It’s a good balance.” Overall, sources appreciated that the people in the corporate team are “really good at making you feel like you helped facilitate the transaction.”

Seat options: corporate; banking, restructuring & insolvency; commercial; construction & engineering; real estate, employment; dispute resolution; charities & social enterprise; education & private client.
In the dispute resolution seat, trainees had come across “any dispute you can think of! There’s such a variety of experience within the firm, so we end up dealing with a lot.” This included “simple contractual disputes, construction disputes, procurement cases and IP matters,” among other areas. Elsewhere, trainees cut their teeth on “breach of warranty claims and breach of SPAs [sales and purchase agreements]” with the occasional “debt recovery matter or other ad hoc query” thrown in for good measure. Recently, the team advised the Caribbean Premier League in relation to IP issues over unauthorised use of CPL’s name and registered marks, as well as in relation to contractual disputes with franchise holders. The team also represented Mandale Construction Limited in relation to a group action brought by homeowners over alleged defects in six properties built by the client. Day to day, sources found they could “get involved in client meetings and calls very early on” and appreciated the “experience and exposure to the whole disputes process.” Other typical tasks included reviewing agreements and other documents, as well as drafting advice to clients. “I started to get more autonomy as I went through the seat,” one trainee described. “Everything was still checked, but it was more driven by me.”

Real estate covers development, corporate support and education sector matters. Among highlights of late, the department acted for the North Air Ambulance Service, Teesside, during its acquisition of a new headquarters building, which included the development of the site to include an office block, operations room and a new aircraft hangar. Elsewhere, the firm’s real estate lawyers also advised the McAleer Family Trust on its acquisition of Bridge House, Guildford, from Aviva for £17.7 million. Trainees sitting here got stuck into tasks like “drafting lease reports, SDLT [Stamp Duty Land Tax] returns, and a lot of Land Registry work.” To read about Muckle’s banking seat, go online.

Trainee Life

A gander at the firm’s website reveals that there is a ‘Muckle Way’ to working; this involves promoting the values of trust, teamwork, respect and care. How does this play out in practice? “I can’t think of a single person who works here who doesn’t have most of those things,” a trainee reflected. Sources also noticed similarities among colleagues in that “everyone is really good at their job – they are insanely clever – but they also have personal skills.” This allowed interviewees to “feel more comfortable with the people you work with.” Muckle also holds regular social events to reinforce this sense of camaraderie: “The BEAM team [Be Engaged at Muckle] put on social events for employees. We had a table tennis tournament when it was Wembleon, and there’s a trainee-organised quiz, which is an annual tradition.” Another trainee highlighted a suitably festive “trip to Leeds to go around the Christmas market.”

“It definitely looks like a diverse place to work.”

Looking around their office, interviewees were also pleased to see “it definitely looks like a diverse place to work. I’ve had more team heads who are women, which is nice.” Gender diversity at Muckle won much praise, while ethnic diversity was summed up like this: “There’s definitely representation – not as much as female representation, but overall, it’s pretty diverse.” Every so often, the firm schedules certain weeks in the calendar to honour aspects of diversity and wellbeing: “There was a specified diversity week, a ‘green’ week, a mental health week, and a healthy eating week,” one source eagerly reported.

Hours-wise, things kick off a little earlier at Muckle: most reported getting to the office for around 8.30am, regardless of seat. Home time was considerably more variable: “If I’m not busy I can get out at 5pm on the dot, but it depends on what needs to be done,” one representative interviewee summarised. In corporate, trainees were generally leaving closer to 7pm, though “when transactions were on, it would be a lot later.” However, when these late nights rolled around, trainees reiterated that “you’re never staying alone,” with this source adding that “when I’ve stayed until 11pm, the whole team has been here too.” While the hours can sometimes be long, interviewees still reckoned they had enough time for life away from work because “people don’t want you staying for the sake of staying.”

Come qualification time, sources revealed that the process is “relatively informal, mostly because we don’t take a huge cohort of trainees.” Indeed, with an intake of four to five trainees per year, several years have garnered 100% retention stats. At the time of our calls, the firm retained its sole qualifier, while another second-year was due to go through the qualification process later in 2020. All trainees need to do is have “informal chats with team heads and Kevin [Maloney, training principal] so they can gauge interest. Then they tell you well in advance whether there’s room in the department you’re interested in.”
Muckle LLP

Time Central, 32 Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4BF
Tel: 0191 211 7777
Email: alison.appleby@muckle-llp.com
Website: www.muckle-llp.com/careers/graduate-recruitment/
Twitter: @MuckleLLP

Firm profile
Muckle LLP is a leading commercial law firm in the North East of England. The firm has an excellent client base of successful private and public companies, property investors and developers, financial institutions and public sector and educational organisations, which recognise that its innovative commercial skills are a major benefit in enhancing its service delivery to them.

Main areas of work
Corporate; banking; restructuring and insolvency; commercial; construction and engineering; real estate; real estate dispute resolution; employment; dispute resolution; charities, sports and education; private client and agriculture, estates and rural property.

Training opportunities
Each trainee undertakes 6 months in each of 4 seats. There are no compulsory seats. We discuss seat rotations with trainees and where possible we try to accommodate preferences but these are always subject to business requirements.

Vacation scheme
The closing date for applications for the vacation scheme is 31st January each year. Applicants for the 2021 vac scheme need to be in a position to be able to start a training contract in September 2023. Successful candidates are selected at interview. The vacation scheme takes place in June/July each year across 4 weeks with each successful candidate undertaking one week. There are usually 20/25 applicants on the vac scheme each year. The scheme is unpaid. Trainees are recruited either via the vacation scheme or by direct application which no preference on either.

Other benefits
27 days holiday a year and flexible holiday option, pension, permanent health insurance after six months service, life assurance, corporate discounts and salary sacrifice schemes.

University law careers fairs 2020
University of Newcastle upon Tyne and Northumbria University.
Europe’s largest sports boutique law firm remains in a league of its own.

The Firm
If full-service law firms are like decathletes, with an all-rounder approach but with the occasional dodgy shot-put, boutique firms resemble 100-metre sprinters – they do one thing, and they do it very well. The squad at Northridge focuses squarely on sport and the varied legal challenges it poses. The firm was founded in 2017 by four departing partners from Charles Russell Speechlys, and it hasn’t taken long for Northridge to pull ahead of the pack: Chambers UK ranks it as one of only two firms in the top tier for sports law nationwide.

Within this 25-a-side team, Northridge hires just two or three trainees each year. “The size of the firm creates greater opportunity for trainees to make an impact,” our sources told us. “Trainees are relied upon to perform key tasks – and we’ve now got a body of work under the Northridge banner that we can point to and demonstrate what we’re capable of.” Clients like the Football Association, Chelsea FC, Premier Rugby Limited and the British Horseracing Authority are among the prestigious names on the books. “Undoubtedly the biggest draw of the firm is the calibre of clients,” trainees said. “Across all areas of the practice, we see household names.” That doesn’t mean Northridge has settled for its current league table position: “The firm has kept up its push for innovation and momentum, which you might not get at a more established firm. There’s a constant appetite to be as forward-thinking as we possibly can.” In one example, the firm established a gambling and betting practice in 2019 with the introduction of partner Melanie Ellis.

“...we’ve now got a body of work under the Northridge banner that we can point to and demonstrate what we’re capable of.”

Trainees spend roughly six months at a time in contentious and non-contentious teams, and “everyone does a secondment” of some length. “There’s some flexibility between the disputes and non-contentious sides,” a source said; bottom line, this is a less rigid training contract than most. The relaxed approach has pros and cons: trainees might get more say over their workload but lack the certainty of a “well-trodden path” as at bigger firms, and boutiques come with fewer options by default. “Where I go depends on client needs and where the work is in the firm – I could be seconded next year, but it’s up in the air,” a source explained.

The Seats
Contentious work at Northridge includes litigation, sports arbitration, disciplinary processes, rights of appeal (“always involving the Court of Arbitration for Sport”) and regulatory issues “before big governing bodies, acting as secretariat for barristers running reports.” The firm recently represented Premier League Rugby in “landmark proceedings” brought against Saracens Club for breaches of salary regulations; and Chelsea FC, successfully reducing a two-window transfer ban to one after a case of transfer of minors was referred to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. “Because of the team’s size, you’re very much a part of things once you’re staffed on a project,” sources suggested. “Inevitable” trainee tasks like drafting emails and document review are present here, but sources warned/boasted that “you’ll be exposed to work that’s normally set aside for an associate.” Drafting witness statements, letters, or text for an independent report; project case management; “communicating with clients without having to be filtered”; or “niche and often fairly original” research tasks are a few examples. “We’re often dealing with issues that haven’t been considered in a sports context before,” a source explained. “The jurisprudence is quite young in sport, so you’re coming up with potentially ground-breaking solutions and finding precedent.”

Seat options: all areas of Northridge’s practice, both contentious and non-contentious
On the non-contentious side, trainees can juggle M&A, investments, and corporate and sporting governance. Northridge has recently got to grips with the growing trend of transfer receivables, a process whereby football clubs pay in instalments for the transfer of a player “with banks getting involved to loan the money to clubs up front.” The firm advised Deutsche Bank on the launch and establishment of its football receivable financing practice in 2019; depending on the transaction, the firm might advise the lender or club. “A steady stream” of commercial deals includes contracts, talent endorsement deals and sponsorship agreements, Northridge again acting on both sides in different deals. The firm advised Betway during negotiations of its multimillion-pound title sponsorship renewal for West Ham Football Club. Trainees were quick to “take on some of the drafting and substantive work” alongside the basics including contract review. “You might be dealing with a footballer and engaging with a brand in a talent endorsement deal, so you draft the contract and liaise with brand teams or the player’s agents.”

“The jurisprudence is quite young in sport, so you’re finding precedent.”

“We’re at the forefront of exciting and niche areas, with lots of exciting corporate work with startups,” trainees told us. They also enjoyed international travel as “lots of disputes are heard in Switzerland,” and the firm has advised clients on prep for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Northridge aims to continue running client secondments for trainees, which are usually UK-based but in the past have occasionally been situated abroad. “If you get the opportunity for a secondment, its rarely a bad thing,” one source said. “You get input into where you’re placed, but it wouldn’t make a lot of sense to question any you end up with because they’re so valuable.” Common destinations include the FA, prominent Premier League football clubs, or entertainment agencies like CSM Sports and Entertainment.

Trainee Life

Though the firm has expanded its practice since it began, “Northridge has demonstrated a willingness to maintain the initial culture,” according to our sources. “You’re not at a major law firm where you’re invisible; there’s still a sense of excitement knowing that we’re all in something quite unique together.” It’s easier to get to know your colleagues when “you can fit everyone round a dinner table. The firm’s size allows for connection between everyone, and there’s a real understanding that even as a junior you may have good knowledge in a particular area.” One of the benefits of growth, though, is that “the social life has become a bit more structured. More thought is put into running events, though there’s still that culture of people informally going for a beer on Friday.” Interviewees sang their hearts out at karaoke, got festive at seasonal parties and pooled their wits for a Sherlock Holmes escape room.

“There’s still a sense of excitement knowing that we’re all in something quite unique together.”

In 2019 the firm rolled out its Northridge Track scheme, partnering with early growth stage companies “with an interest in the sports and entertainment markets, and the application of technology within them.” The purpose of the scheme is to assist with fund-raising activities in this space and to help create new business relationships. Trainees reckoned this exemplifies the “firm’s approach and strategy, it shows we’re operating commercially as well as legally.” Another addition was the appointment of Tessa Jones as the firm’s first legal director: “She’s really interested in training and takes a big interest in trainee development. Lawyers here are so busy, but now there’s someone pushing you to develop yourself.” Trainees generally felt “well supported throughout” their training contract.

“There are times when hours are softer and times when you’ll be in late,” we heard. “It’s fairly in keeping with conventional City firms.” Interviewees reported more “peaks and troughs” in contentious practices: 9.30am to 7pm is an “ordinary” day when the tide is steady, but more intense waves call for “a couple of weeks working beyond midnight each night as well as the occasional weekend.” The non-contentious side is “more predictable,” and trainees said it’s “rare to be working super late nights or into the morning.” As well as healthy starting salaries (£38,000 for first years and £40,000 for second years), the firm’s profit-sharing bonus helps sweeten the deal: “It helps you to see this as your business to an extent, and makes you feel invested beyond how a normal trainee might.” The bonus is tied to how the firm performs overall, so the idea behind it is to encourage everyone to contribute to Northridge’s success and reap the rewards of that success. The firm isn’t as obviously forward-thinking on diversity: “At the moment, there is an over-representation of men,” as in much of the sport world. “We’ve still got work to do and it’s something the firm is continuing to address,” sources agreed. They pointed to the incoming trainee class – three out of four are women – alongside promotions of senior female colleagues and charity initiatives with Stonewall as evidence of a more diverse future to come.
Northridge Law LLP

90 Bartholomew Close, London, EC1A 7BN
Tel: 020 3957 8800
Email: careers@northridgelaw.com
Website: www.northridgelaw.com

Firm profile
Northridge was launched in October 2017 by a team of the UK’s most prominent sports lawyers, creating the biggest sports law practice in the UK.

Having previously grown a top tier sports practice, our founding partners were ideally placed to position themselves at the forefront of the market. The firm launched with 16 fee earners and an enviable client list (including The Football Association, leading Premier League football clubs, the Welsh Rugby Union, Premiership Rugby and sports stars such as Thierry Henry and Cesc Fabregas).

But we are not just about sport. Our skills and approach allow us to advise when the stakes are highest, regardless of the industry.

The success of this strategic vision is already evident: having retained our existing clients we quickly attracted major new clients — marking the firm out in only a few short months as a leader in its field.

Main areas of work
Our large contentious team at Northridge represents clients in commercial disputes, challenges to rules and regulations, and in disciplinary proceedings.

We are also market leaders in the governance and regulation of sport. Our team has unique depth of experience and is trusted by clients to advise and support them on the most sensitive and high-profile issues.

We provide the full range of corporate and commercial advice. Our abilities as ‘deal-makers’ in sport are widely recognised and we also have a wealth of experience in technology, media, retail and beyond.

Training opportunities
During your training contract you will receive high quality training in all areas of our practice, both contentious and non-contentious. A secondment to clients such as The FA or a Premier League football club is also envisaged as part of each trainee’s two-year contract.

Vacation schemes
The firm offers a vacation scheme. The deadline for applications for placements in 2021 is 31st January 2021.

Other benefits
In addition to traditional bonuses based on recorded hours and other individual contributions, each member of the team (including trainees) automatically shares in the firm’s profit pool.

Benefits include private medical care, permanent health insurance, life assurance, pension, market leading enhanced maternity pay, season ticket loan and 25 days’ holiday (changing to unlimited holiday on qualification).
Norton Rose Fulbright

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 50+
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 154/352/99
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments; overseas seats
First-year salary: £48,000
Qualification salary: £87,500

This Rose in the concrete jungle takes its finance-focused brand to the far corners of the earth.

The Firm
"On one deal I worked on, there were seven jurisdictions involved," one of our trainee sources recalled. "We worked like one big machine, as if we were all in the same time zone – it really struck me how seamless everything was." It’s a good thing the firm is such a well-oiled operation: with 50+ offices globally from Austin to Brussels to Cape Town (and most of the rest of the alphabet), NRF is about as international as the law can get.

"I’ve never worked on a domestic transaction... ever," another trainee in the corporate department realised during our call.

Worldwide, the firm’s greatest strengths lie in infrastructural finance and large-scale investment projects. Chambers Global recognises the firm as a worldwide leader in projects and shipping finance, and the firm amasses numerous strong rankings around its core of finance expertise. Beneath that umbrella, juniors find opportunities in a lot of interesting specialist areas like climate change, energy, agribusiness, asset finance, aviation, commodities, insurance and mining – the London office is the nerve centre of all of this world-class expertise. "Norton Rose Fulbright has a reputation as one of the strongest firms in the City," trainees said of their motivation for joining. "They’ve got real strength in the banking sector, so they’re ideal if you want to specialise in that."

Beyond all the transactional and financial work, trainees can get stuck into disputes too. Unsurprisingly, the firm is in its element in cross-border disputes and investigations, for which Chambers Global ranks the firm. The firm also has a growing presence in the tech sector.

"I’ve never worked on a domestic transaction... ever."

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Norton Rose Fulbright

The long list of international secondment opportunities was another attractive notion. Popular destinations are "becoming more and more competitive to secure," according to interviewees. Overseas seat options vary with each rotation, but common locations include Hong Kong, Athens, Moscow and Singapore; there are also popular seats in project finance in Sydney, and asset finance in Paris. The latest addition to the menu is New York, following an office move for London’s global head of trade finance to the Big Apple. To get an overseas seat, trainees submit a CV that’s passed on to their office of choice; the decision is relayed back to London on whether the trainee is a fit for the type of work on offer. "It’s always good to get in touch with a partner in the overseas office and build a connection prior to applying," sources advised.

As for the process in London, trainees complete a form at the beginning of the contract and then at the end of each rotation. Each trainee ranks their top three preferred seats and supervisors. All trainees are required to do a seat in banking and a seat in corporate, plus two optional seats (possibly including a secondment). Veterans of the process told us: "The more senior you are, the more say you get. The trainee development team do their best to accommodate everyone but there will always be negotiations and compromises made.” Trainees also complete mandatory
The Seats

NRF’s banking department consists of four subgroups: project finance; asset finance; derivatives and capital markets; and general banking. Everything’s mapped out “in a huge leaflet which trainees receive before they start, explaining exactly what each team does.” In the general banking practice you’ll find asset-backed lending, acquisition finance, restructuring and refinancing; advising clients in industries ranging from energy and infrastructure to life sciences and healthcare. You’ll recognise names like Shell, JP Morgan and Coca-Cola, whose bottling company HBC called on NRF when extending its €800 million revolving credit facility. The firm advises both borrowers and lenders, acting for Wells Fargo during its £20 million asset-based facility for Laura Ashley. Trainees in banking generally “manage and run the conditions precedent checklists” while also getting to draft “insurance and indemnities contracts, warranties and security documents.” Sources who did a general banking seat in the Dubai office found “there is a lot more responsibility here as opposed to London, as the team is much smaller. I would do a lot of background work for associates in London, but in Dubai it would sometimes just be me and the partner.”

A high-flying aviation practice is the engine of the asset finance team, which also tackles rail and shipping matters. Lawyers here advise on all aspects of aircraft sale and purchase transactions, including manufacturer purchase orders. easyJet, P&O Ferries and Société Générale are some of the clients here; Norton Rose recently advised the transportation finance division of DZ Bank on the $6.4 billion sale of its aviation finance group to Japan’s Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group. Trainees have the opportunity to work in all three areas of asset finance, and this is “an excellent seat for training as we do a great deal of transaction management.” Typical tasks range from drafting security documents to CP checklists and marking up client comments on documentation. “We also often visit ship registries around London to do signings in front of the registry officials,” a source told us. “It’s really great to get out there.” The airline industry has had a rough time that’s only got worse following the global Covid-19 pandemic – this might lead to opportunities for NRF’s contentious aviation practice.

“…the money maker at Norton Rose, which is why it’s the busiest seat.”

Trainees suggested that project finance is “known as the money maker at Norton Rose, which is why it’s the busiest seat.” A mammoth list of sectors fall in here: power, renewables and nuclear, oil and gas, mining, petrochemicals, water and waste, social infrastructure, and telecoms. Trainees have the option of spending three months doing more ‘pure’ projects work, and the other three on the financing side: “I was able to deal with the start of a power purchase agreement project, which was great experience,” one said. “Although there’s a lot of admin work involved such as managing the conditions precedent, the firm started giving me more client access as I began to build confidence.” Some of the largest recent projects with NRF’s name attached include the Beatrice offshore wind project in Scotland, for which the firm advised a consortium of lenders on a £4.1 billion refinancing; and the Canadian capital Ottawa’s Stage 2 Light Rail Transit Project (the city’s government is the client).

Our sources described the derivatives and capital markets seat as “very technical, and not so popular” as a result. The department splits off into securitisation, derivatives, bonds and trustee subgroups, but though “there are four separate units, the new head of the team is keen for us to operate as one team and make sure trainees get as much variety of work as possible.” Norton Rose advises both debtors and creditors, often on international projects like the Republic of Kazakhstan’s double-tranche €1.15 billion international bond issuance. Trainees had the chance to work on the bonds team on issuances for soverigns. “I really enjoyed going through the consistencies, cross-checking figures, corresponding with the Financial Conduct Authority, drafting announcements and compiling signature packs for the bond issue documentation,” one such source said. Trainees who sat with the “smaller securitisation practice” were quick to praise the level of supervision as well as the opportunities available to “see and gain experience in the more technical areas of law.” The firm recently advised AIG as the insurer on receivables sold by Manchester-based direct debit system op-
The True Picture

The True Picture

Norton Rose Fulbright

chambersstudent.co.uk

474

erator FastPay into a securitisation structure, with a first tranche valued at $80 million.

“…gain experience in the more technical areas of law.”

Norton Rose’s corporate department is carved up by client type rather than practice—one team handles M&A and equity capital markets for a range of businesses, while the other solely advises financial institutions. Big banks like HSBC, Lloyds and Santander fill out the roster – NRF acted for Citigroup and Goldman Sachs as financial advisers to private equity firm Advent during its £4 billion acquisition of UK defence and aerospace manufacturer Cobham. Trainee tasks in the corporate seat range from “basic day-to-day document lists and making sure large corporate transactions are all up to date,” to more demanding “drafting of outsourcing agreements and managing service agent agreements.” There’s also an insurance side to the practice. “We see a lot of portfolio business transferring from one insurer to another. That comes with a combination of corporate and litigious elements,” one trainee explained. “I was revising and drafting court documents, preparing bundles and occasionally sitting in on sanctions hearings.”

The dedicated disputes seat comes with litigation, commercial arbitration and investigative cases for clients in tech, mining, commodities and a host of other industries. Trainees are tasked with contacting counsel and communicating between parties, preparing data rooms, legal research, due diligence and interaction with government entities. “The tasks aren’t as high-level due to the nature of litigious work,” a source suggested. Norton Rose’s litigation clients include HSBC and the Gwynt-y-Mor offshore wind farm, which sought assistance with an Ofgem judicial review valued at £14 million. The department also acted for Spanish construction firm Sacyr in ICC arbitration and English court proceedings defending $900 million claims brought by the Panama Canal Authority following the canal’s expansion.

Trainee Life

Throughout each seat, sources appreciated the trainee development team keeping communication channels open and providing transparency wherever possible, especially during the 2020 lockdown: “Given the current economic climate, those phone calls have been so reassuring.” Norton Rose asked lawyers and staff to volunteer to reduce their working hours by up to 20% in response to the pandemic. “The decision was taken by an optional vote with widespread approval,” we heard. If anything, trainees were less impressed with the firm’s efforts prior to lockdown, with a few grumbling that “the trainee development team isn’t as organised or helpful as it could be. It can be really frustrating when that delays us finding out about seat rotations.” Some also bemoaned “inconsistency in how we receive feedback,” and some departments did better than others at work allocation. Corporate seemed to be the best performer in that sense; capital markets drew the most criticism.

Supervisors were generally praised for their attitude towards trainee hours and workload: “There’s no face-time pressure, and my supervisor actively tells me to leave when there’s no work to be done.” Trainees in most seats got started at 9am and could finish up by 7pm, outside of some extreme exceptions. “There were some 5.30am finishes when I was working on bond issuances,” a trainee in capital markets yawned. Uncertainty around “when to start and stop” can creep in during remote working periods, but “it isn’t horrific; it’ll just take time getting used to.”

“…James Bond-like with their laid-back and humble personalities. People are extremely clever.”

Our interviewees pointed to the firm’s flex scheme and general support during the troubles brought by Covid-19 as evidence of a supportive and globally in-sync culture. “The response wasn’t just taken at management level and passed down; everyone was consulted about it and had a say,” they said, using this as an example of Norton Rose’s standard way of doing business. Looking around at their peers, one trainee described colleagues as “James Bond-like with laidback and humble personalities. People are extremely clever, but everyone is very down to earth.” Presumably they’ve never seen the Roger Moore Bond films. Where NRF definitely differs from 007 is in dress code, as “there’s a strong respect for individual and personal interests, as well as work/life balance. Having a life outside of work is strongly encouraged and attitudes towards clothes and expressing your individual personality are relaxed.”

Looking at the global picture, another trainee told us that “having a very diverse group of people helps ensure the international culture of the firm is prevalent,” and vice versa. Working with colleagues all over the world understandably promotes an inclusive mindset. Trainees reckoned the firm is “best at ethnic diversity,” though still with room to improve there and in gender, LGBTQ+ and other respects. Conversations around mental health and wellbeing have become more common in the current climate. “The global head of financial institutions, James Bateson, sponsors the Breathe Network, which distributes a newsletter with articles on how to monitor and maintain your mental health while working from home,” we learnt. “There are also daily emails to remind us of the trainee development mental health first aiders, and there are counselling sessions available.”

To avoid competition between trainees, NRF doesn’t publish a jobs list before the NQ process begins. Trainees can
submit applications to up to three departments and don’t need to have completed a seat there. “Although there’s been uncertainty, I don’t think anyone is too concerned - the firm is keen to keep their trainees on.” Once the process concluded, 32 of 41 qualifiers stayed on at Norton Rose.

**Early blooming Roses:**

The firm runs a partner mentor scheme for new trainees, who also get a third or fourth seat mentor “from the start of the LPC, to gain useful insight before joining and build an ongoing relationship throughout your training contract.”
Firm profile
We provide the world’s preeminent corporations and financial institutions with a full business law service. We have more than 3,700 lawyers and other legal staff based in Europe, the United States, Canada, Latin America, Asia, Australia, the Middle East and Africa.

Main areas of work
Recognised for our industry focus, we are strong across all the key industry sectors: financial institutions; energy; infrastructure, mining and commodities; transport; technology and innovation; and life sciences and healthcare. Through our global risk advisory group, we leverage our industry experience with our knowledge of legal, regulatory, compliance and governance issues to provide our clients with practical solutions to the legal and regulatory risks facing their businesses.

Wherever we are, we operate in accordance with our global business principles of quality, unity and integrity. We aim to provide the highest possible standard of legal service in each of our offices and to maintain that level of quality at every point of contact.

Training opportunities
There’s no progress more vital than what you’ll experience on our training contracts. Over two years – broken into four six-month seats – you’ll hit all kinds of new firsts with us, big and small.

You’ll explore new areas, for instance. Each seat will take you through different sectors and practice areas, with at least one seat in each of corporate, banking and litigation. One of your seats will almost certainly be on secondment too – your first encounter with working in a new country, or maybe six months spent working in a client office. As you move from one milestone to the next, you’ll have a sizeable team at your back. A partner mentor to turn to and to learn from. A trainee buddy to teach you the ropes. And the whole trainee development team, to keep you on track from day to day.

An impeccable academic record and intellectual rigour are prerequisites. We expect successful candidates to have at least AAB at A-level (or equivalent) and be on track for a 2:1 (or equivalent).

You’ll have an enquiring mind, strong interpersonal skills, and the motivation to make constant progress. You’ll never stop pushing yourself forward, grasping every opportunity – both at home and abroad – that our firm has to offer. You’ll be interested in business too, and keen to build relationships within a firm that’ll help you make progress with purpose.

Vacation schemes
Finding the place you want to start your career is a moment you’ll always remember, and that’s exactly the kind of insight we offer on our vacation schemes. Whether you’re with us virtually or in person, we pack a lot into these four schemes. You’ll network with colleagues. You’ll present group projects on legal issues. It’s a lot of new ground to cover, but if you want to understand what it’s really like to work here, nothing else comes close.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Everyone remembers the first day they walked through the doors of their future firm. For many of our lawyers, that happens on our open days and first step programmes. First Step caters to first-year undergraduates, while our open days are designed for undergraduates, graduates, first years and career changers of all degree subjects. Either way, it’s the opportunity to step through our doors, make a first impression, and use our packed schedule of interactive sessions to discover whether law is right for you. For more information and to apply please visit our website.
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 25
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 34/50/14
Seats: 6x4 months
First-year salary: £45,000
Qualification salary: £120,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Orrick

Like the waltz’s triple meter, Orrick’s three-sector focus on tech, energy and finance is the heart of its global operations.

The Firm
What makes a waltz a waltz? What makes it so distinctive? It’s the 3:4 beat. That beautiful, continuous oom-chaa-chaaa flowing through the piece. But since you came here to learn about legal careers, we’ll be brisk: in the legal dancehall of fame, Orrick is the mighty waltz, with the three beats oom-chaa-cha-ing through it: technology, energy and finance. “These are pervasive throughout the firm,” trainees told us. “Even if you don’t do a finance seat, you’ll come across the area anyway.”

Orrick started life in sunny California and went on to establish its expertise in these key sectors, with particular skill in the projects sphere. In its London base, the firm is highly ranked in venture capital in Chambers UK; renewable energy and commodities trading are also strengths. Trainees wanted to “be part of a smaller, more agile team” in London alongside Orrick’s international reach – the firm has over 25 offices across the US, Europe and Asia. The firm’s intake size was another selling point, with one source reckoning “you’d have to fight over getting a small piece of work” at firms with bigger intakes. “Here, you’re one of six so you can build connections and learn more.”

The Seats
Orrick trainees get to do six seats, each lasting four months. “I really like it,” one source said. “Four months is just enough time to really get a feel for an area, and then you get to see so much more.” A transactional/corporate seat is compulsory, as is a contentious seat. Real estate used to be a key seat, but the firm currently doesn’t offer it since the departure of a ten-lawyer team to Forsters. Seat allocation is “pretty straightforward” – trainees are assigned their first seat randomly, then for following seats they submit three preferences to HR. “You normally get one of your three preferences,” said trainees. The firm also offers client secondments.

“You tend to be dealing with multiple companies, like three or four at once.”

For their corporate seat, trainees sit with either M&A or the technology companies group (TCG) – many end up doing both over the course of their training contract. TCG focuses on venture capital work not only in the tech sector but also life sciences and energy. The team works with a lot of start-ups and early-stage companies on their funding rounds and advises them on corporate governance. The team recently advised software platform Codility on its $22 million Series A financing. There’s also some work with investors: the team recently advised Stripe and Goodwater Capital on a £144 million financing round in Monzo, for example. “It’s an exciting and fast-paced area,” trainees reflected. “You tend to be dealing with multiple companies, like three or four at once.” As a trainee, typical tasks included drafting ancillary documents and “managing the signing process.” Trainees also appreciated getting “a lot of direct contact” with people outside of the firm, like shareholders: “It’s a good way to build up confidence.”

Trainees found transactions in M&A quite different to those in TCG, “in that they tend to be quite drawn out – they happen over months rather than weeks.” The team mainly handles mid-market deals and a hefty amount of renew-
able energy M&A: it recently advised NextEnergy on an £8.5 million acquisition of a solar project in Northern Ireland. Beyond the energy sector, the team advised French TV studio CANAL+ on its acquisition of ROK Studios, a Nigerian production house. There was sometimes overlap with TCG: “When clients have grown, we help in selling them on.” Interviewees experienced “a lot of buy-side mandates” which entailed “a lot more due diligence.” Along with getting to draft ancillary documents, trainees were also tasked with “managing the documents list, which was often 30 to 40 pages long!”

“Big infrastructure projects.”

The energy and infrastructure team is known for its renewables expertise, but it also has oil and gas clients. (The big news here is that Orrick recently nabbed a renewables team from Watson Farley Williams). “Big infrastructure projects” are the norm here, and interviewees described a smattering of project finance work too. Trainees worked on projects including offshore wind farms, broadband infrastructure and solar projects. The team recently acted for Future Earth Energy on a £150 million energy-from-waste facility in Derbyshire, and advised Conrad Energy on the acquisition and development of three power plants. Trainees here also found themselves “assisting the M&A team in buying and selling energy assets.” This included working on operation and maintenance agreements, engineering procurements and construction contracts. Energy trainee responsibilities were similar to those of corporate seats, though some mentioned getting “assisting in drafting shareholder purchase agreements and attending client meetings.”

In previous years, trainees could do a split seat between competition and litigation. Now the seats are separate, and there isn’t any litigious work in competition. The team deals with merger control matters and assists clients with investigations by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) or the European Commission. Clients include big names like eBay and Microsoft – the team recently helped Telenor get initial merger clearance from the European Commission for its £3 billion acquisition of a majority stake in a Finnish telecommunications group. The seat was “quite research-heavy” for trainees and involved a fair bit of proofreading and drafting articles.

Litigation and arbitration sources dabbled in FCA investigations and “large, 20-year-old disputes,” as well as “cases in the commercial court or the Queen’s Bench Divi-

sion.” Testimony to the firm’s finance strengths, major accountancy firms call on Orrick in times of need, including members of the Big Four. For example, the team recently acted for KPMG in relation to the collapse of Carillion, advising on investigations by regulators like the Financial Reporting Council. The firm also represented EY in a £13 million claim brought by a former partner who alleged he was constructively dismissed. Trainees can also decide to devote a litigation seat entirely to cyber and data privacy, which is “a new area the firm is looking into” – two partners who focus on this space recently joined the team. Alongside research, doc review and bundling, interviewees found “there’s also good opportunity for courtroom experience.”

Trainee Life

“There’s always a buzz around the place,” trainees told us, highlighting “the fact we work with tech clients – a lot of that culture comes to us from the industry.” Trainees felt the innovative culture associated with tech companies had rubbed off on the firm, “not just as a matter of branding, but in the way people work.” Others pinned Orrick’s buzz on its California roots, noting: “We still have a West Coast style, even in London.” This translated into an environment where “everyone from PAs to partners is willing to have a conversation with you.”

Another US law firm staple you’ll find at Orrick is pro bono. All lawyers have a 20-hour target and “almost everyone goes above and beyond that.” Trainees felt “spoiled for choice” with pro bono opportunities. Many had worked with charities LawWorks and Together for Short Lives, providing advice to support children with serious conditions and their families. “We help make sure the local authority and the NHS are giving them the appropriate care packages,” one trainee explained. The firm also works with learning disability charity Mencap, “representing people trying to get their Personal Independence Payments reinstated.”

“Quite a few 11pm finishes.”

When it came to having a life outside the firm, trainees admitted “some weeks are easier than others.” Overall, most found their hours “quite good,” but be warned: ‘quite good’ for this bunch meant 9am starts and 8pm finishes on average. “We know what we’re signing up for,” they insisted. As expected, corporate seats usually required later stints with “quite a few 11pm finishes.” Equally though, sources found “if you don’t have that much to do, teams are happy for you to take advantage of that.” Many noted they “felt appreciated” when they worked hard hours. We’d also feel appreciated on a trainee salary of £45,000, which takes a “massive jump” to £120,000 for NQs. It’s not the highest-paying of the US firms, but none of our interviewees sniffed at it.
**Qualification** starts out informally at Orrick. Trainees usually have a chat with partners in the practices they’re interested in to gauge whether there’s space for an NQ. During the fifth seat, they can apply for up to three departments. This then “gets discussed at UK partner level,” before being taken to the US for final approval. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Orrick offered all six qualifiers fixed-term contracts until the end of 2020, and delayed its final decision on permanent NQ positions until later in the year.

**Ten lawyers a-leaping:**

Orrick’s social highlights included the Christmas party and letting off steam at a trampoline park in Wandsworth.
The True Picture

Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP

107 Cheapside, London, EC2V 6DN
Tel: 020 7862 4600 Fax: 020 7862 4800
Email: recruitlondon@orrick.com
Website: www.orrick.com/careers/london/graduate-recruitment
Twitter: @orrick
Facebook: orrickrecruiting

Firm profile
Orrick is a global law firm with more than 1,100 lawyers in 25 offices located throughout North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. We focus on three sectors: technology and innovation, energy and infrastructure and finance. We aim to be a best place to work for the best talent and we are always adapting to the ever-increasing pace of innovation. Financial Times selected Orrick the Most Innovative Law Firm in North America for 2016-2018 and runner-up in 2019, and Fortune named us 15th on its 2019 list of the 100 Best Places to Work, the fifth year in a row we’ve been listed.

Types of work
Orrick has earned a global reputation advising both established and emerging companies, banks and international financial institutions. Our clients include the most disruptive technology companies, 20% of US and UK unicorns, 10 of the world’s largest 25 public tech companies, 7 of the top 15 energy companies globally, 14 of the top 20 global financial institutions, 2 of the 3 most successful fintech companies and 3 of the top 10 most active VC investors in European fintech, funds and government entities. We were named a 2019 Technology Group of the Year by Law360, and rank 3rd globally for venture capital and #1 in Europe for the past 17 consecutive quarters (PitchBook). Chambers ranks us Band 1 for both renewable energy and infrastructure.

Main areas of work
Antitrust and competition, arbitration, banking and finance, banking and debt capital markets, capital markets, commercial law, commercial litigation, emerging companies, employment, energy and infrastructure, intellectual property, international dispute resolution, mergers and acquisitions, private equity, professional negligence, restructuring, structured finance, tax and technology.

Training opportunities
If you set your standards high and have a strong work ethic then Orrick could be for you. We are looking for bright, talented graduates of any discipline who are looking for a firm offering a broad-based training contract. Applicants should have or be on track to achieve a 2.1 degree. Orrick is a firm for those looking for a high level of responsibility from day one. We value team players and aim to give individuals the opportunity to flourish in an inclusive and supportive work environment, encouraging interaction across our international offices. We support learning through a focus on training and a mentoring programme that will provide trainees with the right foundation for building their legal career. A genuine open door policy means trainees work closely with partners and associates. Our two-year training programme is made up of four six-month seats with regular appraisals throughout. Our dedicated trainee partner oversees the supervision of our trainees. There is an extensive training programme with regular and focused sessions on legal and soft skills to enhance your development as a lawyer.

Other benefits
Pension, group income protection scheme, life assurance, private medical insurance, dental care, subsidised gym membership, season ticket loan and childcare voucher scheme.

Vacation scheme
The primary route to applying for a training contract with us is to apply for a space on one of our summer vacation scheme programmes which will take place in June and July 2021. Our vacation scheme offers participants an opportunity to London office of a US law firm in action and get an insight into what life as a trainee would be like here. During the two-week scheme you’ll spend time in two of our London practices, working on real work alongside our trainees, associates and partners. There will also be a variety of social opportunities and events that run throughout the scheme, giving you an opportunity to really get to know our team.

University law careers fairs 2020
Aspring Selectors, Bristol, City, Oxford, Cambridge, UCL, University of Law, BPP, Surrey,
The True Picture

Osborne Clarke LLP

The facts

Locations: London, Bristol, Reading
Overseas offices: 26
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 148/315/45
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments
First-year salary: £38,000 (Bristol); £43,000 (London and Reading)
Qualification salary: £52,000 (Bristol); £54,000 (Reading); £71,000 (London)

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

How to get into Osborne Clarke

Future-facing Osborne Clarke has a decidedly ‘unstuffy’ approach to practising law— a stance that pays dividends for trainee happiness across its UK network in Bristol, London and Reading.

The Firm

If you were to create a word cloud of OC’s homepage, it’s very clear which words would loom large. There are (at the time of writing) five mentions of the word ‘digital’, four variations of ‘transform’, a handful of appearances of ‘strategy’ and a few of ‘evolve’. The message OC is putting out there is received loud and clear: this is a firm that’s gearing up for the future. It’s certainly a message and image that piqued the interest of many interviewees. “The tech focus was a big draw,” one confirmed, adding that “it does pervade everything we do. The OC solutions team are always presenting new ideas to clients, and the transition to remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic has been very smooth.” Others were attracted by the firm’s track record of expansion: “It’s great to be with a firm that’s aspirational. While we started as a regional firm in Bristol, we have gone on to expand throughout much of the world.” Indeed, today OC boasts a network of nearly 1,000 lawyers spread across 26 offices worldwide.

“We are a leader in Bristol for sure.”

“Alongsid CMS and Burges Salmon, we are a leader in Bristol for sure,” a source confidently declared, while another billed OC as “the top firm in Reading.” Their claims are largely supported by Chambers UK, which rates the firm highly as a national leader outside of London in a host of areas including corporate/M&A, banking, employment, and information technology. Across Bristol and Reading, OC picks up a clutch of 14 top rankings in most commercial areas of practice, including IP, corporate, banking, and real estate. In London, sources were humbler, reflecting that “we don’t yet have the resources to be considered a major player.” However, they remained assured of the firm’s ongoing ability to “attract high-quality work,” as evidenced by top-bracket nods to the office’s mid-market real estate expertise, as well as its IP, employment, and corporate/M&A abilities.

Bristol and London take on a fairly even split of OC’s trainee pool, while the Reading office typically takes on around three newbies every year. Before starting, all trainees are provided with a list of the available seats in their office from which they are required to submit their top five preferences. It’s worth emphasising that while Bristol and London have largely similar offerings in terms of seats, Reading is more “limited to the core areas,” sources pointed out. This includes seats in disputes, employment, commercial, corporate, banking, and property. We were also informed that moving offices between seats is “feasible but not too common” and done on a case-by-case basis. None of our interviewees reported any significant issues with the assignment system. One insider appreciated the “firm’s personal approach to the process” and explained that “they take the time to meet with everyone for a proper chat.” However, there were some grumbles concerning “how late in the process you find out what your next seat will be.”

Seat options include: corporate tax; employment; incentives; commercial; corporate; commercial disputes; property disputes; banking; real estate; planning; projects. Go online for the full breakdown by office.
The True Picture

The Seats

Under OC's disputes umbrella, you will find construction, regulatory, insolvency, IP disputes and employment litigation teams. Trainees can also opt to spend a stint within OC's commercial litigation team, which “handles lots of cool stuff, including arbitrations, data protection issues and corporate disputes, often in the technology, energy and projects sectors.” Clients include BB Energy Group, PWC, Vodafone, Dell and the master of mouth-watering food advertisements, Marks & Spencer. “You tend to have your own section of a case to manage,” sources explained, “which involves a lot of tracking documents, conducting research and acting as a point of contact for our overseas offices.” We also heard of trainees in their second year reviewing certificates of title on an energy deal,” taking charge of. On larger transactions, trainees may be advising provided to logistics group Logicor. Smaller transactions, “which can involve selling garden land for £10,000 to a residential buyer,” are also available for trainees to take charge of. On larger transactions, trainees may be “reviewing certificates of title on an energy deal,” drafting reports on title or even “running the whole completion call with the directors of a big housing company!”

London's real estate team focuses on commercial matters, while Bristol tackles a fair bit of residential work too, representing large housebuilders such as Taylor Wimpey. In Bristol, the firm recently advised housing association Sovereign on setting up a joint venture with Crest to develop 1,200 homes, as well as a school and shops, on the outskirts of Bristol. In London, OC’s lawyers acted for private equity-backed Uncommon on its £80 million acquisition of Templar House in High Holborn (the former site of London Underground’s headquarters); they also advised Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs on the real estate due diligence aspects of a senior loan that was being provided to logistics group Logicor. Smaller transactions, “which can involve selling garden land for £10,000 to a residential buyer,” are also available for trainees to take charge of. On larger transactions, trainees may be “reviewing certificates of title on an energy deal,” drafting reports on title or even “running the whole completion call with the directors of a big housing company!” The firm also has a smaller property litigation arm, which kept one trainee busy with lots of ‘right to light’ cases. “It’s an archaic area of law where you have to serve and keep track of notices on every single interested party. It involves a lot of paper!” Recently, the team in London defended fund manager Foresight Group after one of its subsidiaries, Kent Solar, was accused of trespassing due to its placement of an electricity cable (across the River Medway) to connect its solar farm to London Underground’s headquarters); they also advised Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs on the real estate due diligence aspects of a senior loan that was being provided to logistics group Logicor. Smaller transactions, “which can involve selling garden land for £10,000 to a residential buyer,” are also available for trainees to take charge of. On larger transactions, trainees may be “reviewing certificates of title on an energy deal,” drafting reports on title or even “running the whole completion call with the directors of a big housing company!” The firm also has a smaller property litigation arm, which kept one trainee busy with lots of ‘right to light’ cases. “It’s an archaic area of law where you have to serve and keep track of notices on every single interested party. It involves a lot of paper!”

The Se</p>

OC's projects group has three strands: energy, renewables and regulation; project finance; and construction. Insiders told us that incoming trainees should be mindful that most of the project finance work is done in London, while Bristol tackles most of the construction issues. “The projects team deals with large-scale developments such as hospitals and student accommodation, plus developments for the armed forces,” one source summarised, before adding: “We will take that project from its infancy in terms of investment, all the way through to construction, operation, management and refinancing.” Recently the team acted for EE on the £896 million Emergency Services Network project contract, which was designed to provide a next-generation communication system for the three emergency services and public safety users; advised fund Foresight Solar on a £245 million debt refinancing for a portfolio of solar assets; and represented private sector partner Equitix and Graham on a bid to build new student residences on the University of York's East Campus.

“I was running the whole completion call with the directors of a big housing company!”

The regulatory disputes team mainly focuses on product liability and public procurement cases – “a pressing subject in the current climate resulting from Covid-19,” as sources pointed out. Food and products are specialisms, but OC also handles health and safety crisis management. One trainee provided us with a rather vivid example: “If someone fell down a lift shaft in a shop and died, we would be called in to handle all the legal aspects.” On a less traumatising note, the firm recently represented Siemens Mobility as it secured a contract from London Underground to supply new trains (worth over £1.5 billion) for the Piccadilly, Bakerloo and Central lines. “Your responsibility can be limited on the basis that cases are incredibly technical,” one insider told us. “However, the team is fantastic and they make an effort to include you as much as possible. I’ve sat in on strategy calls, attended hearings and drafted a lot of the correspondence to the other side.”
the national electricity grid. The matter was settled on favourable terms.

“Your workload can be incredibly broad…”

OC’s commercial team has a wide remit and was flagged as one of the firm’s more popular seats by our insiders. “You have partners who focus on transport and energy; partners who focus on gaming and apps; retail; aviation; as well as advertisement and technology.” Aviation in particular was identified as a hot topic due to the impact of Covid-19 on the industry. However, other businesses have thrived under Covid-19, like Amazon: the firm recently worked with Leaseplan to review the contractual framework governing the purchasing, leasing and maintenance of delivery vehicles to Amazon’s UK local delivery network. The department also acted for Eversholt Rail Group during its collaboration with Alstom to develop a new hydrogen-powered train. The future is now! “Your workload can be incredibly broad,” trainees emphasised; they were kept busy on everything from drafting sponsor agreements to reviewing supply contracts.

Trainee Life

OC makes its intentions clear on its website: ‘For us, stuffy stereotypes and fussy formality have been left in the past – where they belong. We push forward because we don’t have time for rigid hierarchies and inflated egos, but we make time for energy and ambition.’ This sounds pretty ideal to us, but how does this refreshing stance stand up to reality? Quite a lot apparently. “I have quite a loud, outgoing personality and I was conscious that I might not fit in the serious world of law, but everyone has been very willing to chat and make me feel welcome,” one relieved source relayed. To keep things casual, there’s also “a dress for the day policy, so most people will be wearing jeans and a jumper,” another pointed out (although more formal attire is worn for client meetings and court visits, etc...). Our interviewees also expressed surprise at the willingness of senior members to train the firm’s junior members, as this trainee detailed: “I was recently tasked to review a certificate of title and add my comments. The partner took the time to go through the document page by page for a couple of hours to make sure I understood the task.”

In Reading, we were unsurprised to hear of a more intimate office environment. “We don’t have a high turnover of staff, so you tend to be the new person for a long time,” one insider pointed out, adding that “it means everyone is keen to check in on you all the time.” Some sources felt that social cohesion may be more limited in London where the office is spread over three floors compared to Bristol, “where we have the building to ourselves and our own atrium.” However, London sources felt their newly revamped cafe created ample mingling opportunities for everyone at mid-morning and lunchtime, remarking that “it’s been great way of getting people to mix together from all the different floors.” There are many opportunities to socialise outside the office too. We were told that “the banking team loves going for a beer after work” and that trainees have a budget to put on a social every six weeks (one of the last socials pre-lockdown was held at Bounce in Farrington). There’s also an annual Christmas party (which, in the past, has been held at the Oxo Tower and the Hilton Hotel), a summer party and a variety of sports teams to join.

“It’s recognised that bad mental health comes from being overworked and under-supervised.”

Bringing it back to the style of supervision, our interviewees reflected that “they always want you to be busy, but never overworked. It’s recognised that bad mental health comes from being overworked and under-supervised.” Thankfully, sources were pleased to report that “by the standards of a City firm, it’s pretty good in terms of work/life balance.” One trainee expanded on this point: “I’m currently averaging 9am until 6.30pm. In transactional seats, you might be busy for a week and be in consistently late. For example, in banking I did around three of those weeks in a six-month period.” On the whole, there wasn’t a huge discrepancy in hours between trainees in Bristol and Reading, with those working in London clocking in a handful of extra hours a week.

OC opts for a structured approach to qualification. One trainee provided a helpful breakdown: “We speak to HR about our preferences, which they then relay back to the business and provide a list of the jobs available. Typically, you’re required to do an application and go through an interview process with the head of the department.” The resulting experience is “not overwhelmingly scary, and the firm makes an effort to keep everyone on.” True enough, OC’s retention rate has been consistently decent over the years. 2020 proved no different, as all but one out of 23 qualifiers were kept on.
Osborne Clarke LLP

Firm profile
Osborne Clarke LLP is an award-winning multinational law firm. The firm has grown rapidly, with 26 global offices and it is proud to say that its influence and impact can now be applied almost anywhere. The core sectors Osborne Clarke works in all thrive on innovation; digital business, energy, financial services, life sciences, real estate, retail, recruitment and transport. The firm’s sector teams include lawyers from all legal disciplines, effortlessly blending expertise, insight and enthusiasm. Crucially, they think sector-first, organising themselves around the current affairs and future challenges of the industries they serve, rather than traditional legal practice areas.

Main areas of work
Main areas of expertise include; banking and finance, business regulation, commercial, corporate, employment and benefits, litigation, pensions, projects, real estate, restructuring and insolvency and tax.

Training opportunities
Osborne Clarke’s high profile clients expect the firm to be brilliant, so they put a lot of effort into helping their people be the best they can throughout their careers — not just at the start of it. The firm fosters the brightest and the best, with class-leading training and development programmes, and a unique climate of learning and discovery for everyone. Osborne Clarke places value on individuals and respect their needs, motivations and choices. Workplaces are designed to promote collaboration, often featuring open plan structures that make it easy to fit-in, mix and get involved. Trainees will also find flexible and imaginative approaches to everyone’s work/life needs, with a connected infrastructure that is adaptive and tailored to bringing out the best in people. Trainees will complete four seats: corporate or banking, real estate or tax, litigation, and one other. In each seat, a senior lawyer will supervise their day-to-day progress and give trainees regular feedback, so they know how they’re doing. They’re there to help trainees up their game. Every three months, there will be a formal progress review to help trainees track their development. Osborne Clarke’s trainees get lots of responsibility. And they find that it’s what differentiates their training contracts from others.

Vacation scheme
Each of the firm’s vacation scheme placements runs for two weeks over the summer and offers a great opportunity for candidates to really get to know the firm. The placement follows a structured programme which allows candidates to spend time in two different departments and get involved in real client work. Beyond work there are plenty of social events organised by our trainees.

Other benefits
25 days’ holiday (plus a Christmas shopping day), pension, permanent health insurance, private medical insurance, life assurance, cycle to work scheme, employee assistance programme and season ticket loan.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Osborne Clarke’s two-day Insight Scheme for first-year law and second-year non-law students is designed to equip candidates with the tools needed to apply for the firm’s vacation scheme. The two-day programme, which runs over Easter, will give an insight into the firm from partners, trainees and the recruitment team, along with the opportunity to shadow one of the firm’s lawyers.
Paul Hastings (Europe) LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 22
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 29/71/14
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments
First-year salary: £50,000
Qualification salary: £133,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Paul Hastings

Move over HP, trainees are feasting on PH sauce: brewed in California and on the rise in London, it’s seasoned with juicy finance work and an “entrepreneurial” tang.

The Firm
“I was looking for a US firm with a smaller trainee intake,” one of our interviewees began. A solid start to a law firm dating profile; so why did they end up swiping right for Paul Hastings? “You get high-level work from the start here,” they suggested. “I wanted to hit the ground running.” Born in California, PH has expanded its empire to 22 offices worldwide; the London base is squarely focused on all things finance. This clear vision for the practice was also appealing for trainees; the firm’s Chambers UK rankings in capital markets, real estate finance, restructuring, and hotels and leisure law sweetened the deal.

Following several years of expansion and lateral hires from the likes of DLA Piper, Cooley, Hogan Lovells and Baker McKenzie, the Paul Hastings London crew outgrew its previous two-building office space. In 2019 the team relocated to 100 Bishopsgate, filling the 36th and 37th floor. Interviewees were chuffed to bits about the move: “It has greatly improved our culture, we’re all now physically one team,” they reasoned. “Now we’re all in the same office, the socials are much better attended, and we truly work and operate as one.”

“I got to run with the transaction. I was instructing local counsel and I was on calls to the client every night.”

With just over 100 lawyers in the London digs, Paul Hastings recruits fewer than ten trainees each year. The firm directly allocates first seaters into a department; trainees get more say over where they’re going next the longer they’ve been with the firm. Sources picked up on an unwritten rule that trainees should do a corporate and a real estate seat; because Paul Hastings is so finance-focused, many end up doing a short litigation course to fulfil SRA requirements. Split seats and client secondments were also not unheard of, but “the lack of an international seat was a little disappointing to some.” Despite the quite small intake, there can be some competition between trainees for popular seats, especially following the firm’s expanded London presence. “Build a relationship with the partner in the team you want to join, and they will then push for you,” insiders advised.

The Seats
Paul Hastings’ leveraged finance practice advises on bank and bond financing transactions for lenders, sponsors and borrowers. With the likes of NatWest, Barclays and Goldman Sachs filling up its client list, the firm helps move some big money: PH advised those banks and more in arranging a $3 billion financing package for British market research business Kantar. Working on loan deals, trainee sources waxed lyrical over the level of responsibility they received because of the firm’s lean staffing model. “I got to run with the transaction. I was instructing local counsel and I was on calls to the client every night,” one source said. Other common trainee tasks in this seat include managing the conditions precedent process and drafting ancillary documents, creditor agreements and notice letters.

Seat options: corporate/M&A; private equity; leveraged finance; restructuring; structured finance; CLOs; credit funds; private funds; corporate real estate; real estate finance; data privacy; litigation; employment; financial services regulation and tax
The **real estate finance** seat also includes some fund finance work. This department dedicates their efforts to corporate, finance and tax for real estate, regularly advising on both sell and buy-side joint ventures. For trainees, that meant mostly working on CMBS (commercial mortgage-backed securities): “They’re large-scale real estate loan agreements – to purchase a skyscraper, for example.” Paul Hastings recently advised Deutsche Bank on a £142.5 million CMBS for a loan backed by the Intu Shopping Centre in Derby. Trainees who dipped into the fund finance side tackled financings for hedge funds: “The client was lending to a big fund in Ireland and there were 12 borrowers within the structure. I had to make sure everyone signed the documents, it was pretty intense.” PH’s big name clients include AIG and JP Morgan. Trainees here also handled conditions precedent, amended facility agreements and drafted non-disclosure agreements.

**There were a few late nights, but it was all good fun.”**

As well as CMBS, **structured finance** lawyers at Paul Hastings specialise in RMBS (residential mortgage-backed securities) transactions, fund-linked products and collateralised loan obligations (CLOs, which get their own seat). The practice involves big finance clients once again: PH advised Citigroup as the arranger and placer on a €478 million CLO. Trainees in the structured finance seat were mostly busy with RMBS deals. Hectic closings come with long hours, but big responsibility too: “There were a few late nights, but it was all good fun. My role was to finalise about 100 legal documents with all the parties involved; I then spoke to accountants to get the cashflow sorted and money transferred to the lenders.” Uncle Ben would be proud.

That’s not all for capital markets – trainees can also do a **credit funds** seat including tax and CLOs. This is “one of the busiest seats” as it’s a fast-growing area at Paul Hastings. The firm advised Fairfield Real Estate Finance on all its loan-on-loan (LOL, funny enough) facilities totalling £100 million. Credit funds deals are often private, but the clients tend to be the same large financial organisations that crop up time and again. Trainee responsibilities are similar too – those we spoke to spent their days drafting procurement policy note (PPN) documents and most-favoured-nation (MFN) agreements, and managing conditions precedent. “I'm constantly on the phone to clients,” a source boasted. “It’s a small team so you get to do lots of drafting, and the team is happy to give you responsibility once you’ve built some experience.”

**Trainee Life**

“We get a lot of responsibility to run deals,” interviewees agreed. “It can be both stressful and challenging. We get to work on high-profile matters which means we naturally have more work.” With more work comes more takeaway-fuelled late nights: 8pm finishes meant “a good day,” but our sources were still in the office at 10pm, midnight and even 3am when matters reach their peak. “It is quite gruelling at times, and during some seats I took a taxi home every day,” an especially tired trainee reported. “I worked back-to-back 2ams for a couple of weeks.” **Busy periods** come and go, and like its fellow American titans, Paul Hastings compensates its hard-working team very well indeed. An impressive £133,000 **NQ salary** will pay for as many Ubers home as you could need.

A modern glass **office** gave PH trainees the chance to take collegiality to the next level: “The other day I was waving to my colleague through my office window while he was out for dinner.” There’s also a heavily-discounted gym downstairs and “amazing meeting rooms” to charm clients in. Paul Hastings doesn’t run many formal socials, leading to one unforgettable complaint: “We don’t have big balls like they do at other firms.” Make of that what you will. When they had evenings to spare, trainees also enjoyed a casual drink every so often.

“I called the associate on the deal while they were on holiday... I woke them up, but they were more than happy to help.”

Matthew Poxon took on the role of training principal in March 2020, and strengthening care and support for trainees has been at the forefront of his priorities. Interviewees were full of compliments for supervisors: “My last partner was really supportive, especially for junior female lawyers and trainees,” one said. “I had a query of how to react to a situation at work; she instantly gave me a call and talked me through it.” Associates also had trainees’ backs, sometimes a bit too enthusiastically... “I called the associate on the deal while they were on holiday,” a source recalled in guilty tones. “I woke them up, but they were more than happy to help!” We’re sure they were.

With the Los Angeles HQ calling the shots on a global scale, some trainees felt London can be left out of the loop on firm-wide decisions. That’s an issue come qualification time, as HR in the UK seeks final hiring approval from the States before making offers. Before then, trainees declare an interest in a chosen practice area to qualify into, but many weren’t sure when they’d get the good news (or not). “Some intakes are approached early on in their fourth seat; others have found out they are qualifying one or two months beforehand,” we heard. Paul Hastings did not wish to disclose its retention figure in 2020.
Yin to my Yang:
The firm recently launched the PH Balanced initiative, a platform that provides support on the topic of work-life balance. The group hosts discussions and programmes addressing mindfulness, mental health and stress management.
Paul Hastings

100 Bishopsgate, London, EC2N 4AG
Tel: 020 3023 5100
Email: graduaterecruitment@paulhastings.com
Website: www.paulhastings.com
Linkedin: Paul Hastings
Twitter: @Paul_Hastings
Facebook: Paul Hastings LLP

Firm profile
With lawyers serving clients from 22 worldwide offices, we provide a wide range of services across Europe, Asia and the US.

Who we are
We are client-focused professionals with a commercial mindset and a collaborative approach to delivering value in everything we do. We combine business acumen, industry knowledge and deep legal expertise. We think and act creatively and proactively to meet the needs of our clients.

As well as being client-centric, we are people-centric. We value each individual and their unique perspective. Paul Hastings is not for the hierarchical or the entitled but for the inclusive, creative and entrepreneurial. We hire smart people from diverse backgrounds who are the right fit for our collegial, client-centric and future-focused culture.

Main areas of work
Our London office focuses on corporate M&A, private equity, leveraged finance and private/credit funds. There are also opportunities to gain experience in other practice specialisms, including real estate finance, securitisation, corporate and structured finance, tax, payment systems, financial services and regulation, fintech, data privacy, employment, litigation and corporate crime.

What we do
We advise clients on matters that are of the highest value to them. We help them maximise opportunities, create and protect value, and nimbly manage risk in a dynamic, uncertain marketplace.

We always play to our strengths. We don’t offer ‘products’ or ‘off-the-shelf’ solutions. Each client is unique and each challenge demands a tailored approach. We can deliver creative solutions because we are leaders in our chosen practices and industry sectors.

How we do it
We pride ourselves on the strong relationship we develop with our clients. We invest time in understanding their businesses and what it takes to make them even more successful.

We encourage and reward entrepreneurial flair, original thought and new ideas. Our people have the confidence, experience and expertise to question and to continually sharpen our thinking and the solutions we offer our clients. We empower our people to deliver those solutions and because of this, our teams can move mountains to provide exceptional client service.

Training Programme
We offer an extensive and instructive training programme for our trainees, spending six months in four practice areas with opportunities for a client secondments.

Work placement
We offer informal work placements over the summer months and applications should be made in January.

Other benefits
Standard benefits to include private medical, pension, life insurance, employee assistance programme and active wellbeing plan (monthly allowance for gym/wellbeing activities).

Open days and first-year opportunities
Spring 2021 and open to second/third year undergraduates. Apply from January 2021.
The facts

Locations: London, Basingstoke, Birmingham, Cambridge, Guildford, Oxford, Reading
Overseas offices: 6
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 125/226/24
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £30,000 (£38,000 London)
Qualification salary: £50,000 (£62,000 London)

"A fascinating array of work" awaits trainees at an increasingly international outfit with seven offices in the UK.

The Firm

June 2019 probably feels like a million years ago now, but we should not forget this momentous month – for it is when Penningtons Manches merged with shipping-focused Thomas Cooper to form a firm with specialist flavours. We’ll let Chambers UK lay them out for us: PMC earns strong rankings for corporate, employment, family, clinical negligence, personal injury, immigration, real estate, IP, IT and travel across various regions of the country. The firm has offices in London, Basingstoke, Cambridge, Guildford, Oxford, Reading and Birmingham and all but the last house trainees; you’ll also find the PMC banner flying over cities in Europe, South America and Asia.

Penningtons coupled up with Thomas Cooper to strengthen its litigation and international arbitration practice, and former TC trainees were delighted with the merger: “The resulting firm is a good size, it has a great range of seats and everyone is so supportive.” When we called up PMC’s cohort, 18 trainees were in the capital; five were in Guildford; Oxford housed four; another four split their time between Basingstoke and Reading; and two were in Cambridge. Many were drawn to the firm by colourful seat choices like marine trade and energy, social housing, clinical negligence and IP/IT, but prospective applicants should note that not every seat is available in every office. Employment and IP/IT are only available in London, Reading, Cambridge and Oxford, for example. London has the largest range of seats as a whole.

“Trainees only had good reports on the vacation scheme and initial application process: “Out of all the applications I submitted, I found PMC the least invasive, it wasn’t too centred around critical thinking nor was it too rigorous. Everybody was super friendly.” Happy to be part of a modest intake, trainees told us they “received a lot of client contact in all the seats, often working on high-value, cross-jurisdictional matters.” Management is hoping to offer international seats in future: the Covid-19 outbreak delayed those plans for now but they are hoping to launch this in 2021.

The Seats

Trainees submit top seat choices to HR and discuss department rotations two months in advance. “I was lucky, I got all my choices,” one beamed; others who were less lucky weren’t put out, “it’s what you sign up for.” It’s rare to move offices during the training contract – regional trainees may get to relocate but are unlikely to get a spot in London. PMC doesn’t have any compulsory seats and trainees can do the same seat twice over if they particularly enjoyed it and/or hope to qualify there.

M&A is the name of the game in corporate, especially for tech and life sciences clients: in the early months of 2020, nearly 50% of transactions fell under the tech or life sciences umbrella. The other half came from private wealth,

Seat options: corporate; banking & finance; commercial dispute resolution; marine, trade & energy; real estate investors; property litigation; construction, social housing; commercial IP/IT; employment; personal injury/c clinical negligence; family; private client; contentious private client (go online for breakdown by office)
real estate or retail clients. All Saints, Onward Luxury and Gordon Murray Design are on PMC’s books – the firm recently advised shareholders of medical communications agency ISO Health on its acquisition by the W20 group, and Pookchurch on its merger with Bolney Wine Estate to form one of the UK’s largest vineyards. Trainees received plenty of responsibility in the seat, often working directly with partners: “It was just myself and the partner on a file, and the client needed help with company filings. I was taking board minutes, drafting resolutions and liaising directly with the clients.” Penningtons often acts in private equity and venture capital investments, typically in the lower mid-market.

“You’re relied upon a lot and receive endless client contact.”

There’s often overlap between corporate and private client; this team handles personal wealth management, tax planning, asset protection and advising family businesses. High net worth individuals fill up the department’s client roster. Trainees were drafting “wills, tax compliance, probate and letters to banks and trustees.” As a seat with ‘client’ in the name it’s only right that it comes with plenty of client contact: “I attend around four meetings per week.” Trainee roles include taking notes and drafting letters based on the results. “The private client seat is great, you’re relied upon a lot and receive endless client contact,” a source said.

Marine trade and energy legal issues range from casualties at sea to commercial shipping disputes. PMC acts for shipowners, yacht firms and renewable energy companies in a mix of wet (incidents at sea) and dry (land-based) shipping cases. “Dry shipping involves a lot of contractual disputes and it’s quite litigation-heavy,” a trainee noted, which means plenty of opportunities to go to court and attend hearings. “I went to a big three-week trial a couple of months into the seat,” one beamed. Matters may involve salvage issues, the process of recovering a ship and its cargo after problems at sea: “We would work on the cargo dispute if a vessel had been hired out and delivered back late or damaged in transit.” Typical trainee tasks in the seat include bundling, technical research, drafting witness statements and instructing counsel and experts. A source with a taste for litigation was left very satisfied, finding the cases here “extremely interesting.”

Education, tech, life sciences and hospitality clients call on PMC’s help with employment issues, including discrimination claims and confidentiality agreements. Ocado, 20th Century Fox, the AA and several major law firms covered in Chambers Studentedf work into this department recently. Matters can get sticky – non-profit organisation CABI recently needed advice when a complaint was filed against an overseas employee who’d allegedly used discriminatory language about one of their colleagues in another jurisdiction, a case involving parties in Brazil and Trinidad & Tobago. Trainee workloads in this seat split evenly between contentious and non-contentious matters, but settlement agreements were the most common fare. “If someone is having a tough time at work, they come to us,” they summarised. Sources attended client meetings, tribunal hearings and High Court cases, with matters hotting up in the run-up to Christmas: “We had a three-day window to get 45 witness statements drafted. I drafted ten in two days, which were then used in court; it was a highly valuable experience.” Following the festive mayhem, trainees settled down to draft disclosure letters and direct overseas counsel.

“We had a three-day window to get 45 witness statements drafted... it was a highly valuable experience.”

There’s a similar advisory practice in IP, IT and commercial. Tech and life sciences start-ups seek help with commercial exploitation issues and IP protection; media, fashion and retail brands can also be found here. We heard from trainees who’d advised on cases of all stripes, from the advertising boards displayed on primetime television to IP rights on flour derived from peas. Wait, what? “The client company wanted to isolate a protein to develop a flour equivalent for people with gluten intolerance,” insiders explained. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, trainees found themselves drafting facemask disclaimers, “doing research and putting together the statement. We had to make it clear there was no guarantee of avoiding contracting Covid-19 while wearing a mask.” Article writing, drafting policy agreements and GDPR compliance filled the rest of trainees’ days; they found supervisors here were “particularly good at giving feedback” on trainee strengths and weaknesses.

Penningtons’ clinical negligence practice encompasses birth injuries and delayed diagnosis of cancer claims, primarily representing the claimant. Some partners have a broader personal injury docket – the Guildford office picks
Trainee Life

Referring to their colleagues by the adorable nickname ‘PennPeople’, trainees described team PMC as “friendly, talented and down to earth,” suggesting that this is also what the firm looks for in trainees. Every office has an open plan layout, which helps lawyers of every seniority get comfortable with one another: “Open plan really helps to prevent the daunting knock on a partner’s door.” Another source described partners as “very approachable, you work and laugh with them while you’re here.” DMCs in the kitchens are essential to the foundation of firm friendships – the collegial spaces are “a social hub” in offices like Guildford. If you’re looking for a more happenin’ social scene, London is where it’s at – there’s a drinks trolley in the office every Friday. “A different floor hosts the drinks every week and we all congregate together on that floor.” Impromptu hangs are less likely in smaller bases like Cambridge where “there aren’t really casual drinks events.”

As for firmwide socialising, Penningtons runs an annual ski trip. Across the network you’ll also find a cinema club, sports competitions, curry night and even cake making contests for trainees to unleash their inner Mary Berry. “The whole firm gets together every three months” in some form, and trainees across the UK plan what they’re going to wear (thus avoiding awkward matching outfits) to firm-wide dinners and drinks on the active WhatsApp group. We also heard about the ‘coffee randomizers’ diversity and inclusion initiative, where anyone and everyone from an office is welcomed to come together and discuss pressing topics and how the firm can address them, such as “religious worship.”

“If I need anything, I know I can catch up with my mentor over lunch.”

PMC’s diversity committee oversees a panoply of groups including LGBTQ+, gender, ethnic minority and mental health initiatives. Aiming to improve employee wellbeing, the firm recently appointed several employees to take up the mantle of ‘mental health champions’ and provide a check-in service for colleagues. “We can chat to them about any problems,” interviewees confirmed. Penningtons also monitors physical health via a station where anyone can check their general health and blood pressure – helpful if all that bundling has you feeling faint.

We heard nothing but good about the firm’s training and support systems. New arrivals receive a partner mentor for the duration of the training contract along with a buddy and supervisor in each seat. “If I need anything, I know I can catch up with my mentor over lunch,” a trainee noted. HR keeps an eye on mid-seat reviews to make sure everyone’s getting the right work; commercial litigation takes things a step further with a checklist “to make sure you’re getting the right exposure – we all have to attend a mediation, receive sufficient client contact, and draft court documents.” Every three months, the managing partner leads a meeting to discuss plans for the future and keep trainees up to speed; “sustainability and the environment are both a big push right now,” we heard.

“In two years I’ve been in the office past 8pm twice.”

Trainees spent longer in the trenches in some departments than others. Litigation and shipping seats are notorious for longer hours, but insiders had very few complaints in general – an average day for most ran from 9am to 6pm. Late nights can drift closer to 9pm, and PMC compensates Deliveroo for anyone still in the office past 8pm. Don’t reach for those chopsticks yet: “In two years I’ve only been in the office past 8pm twice,” a source revealed. “Partners usually leave around 6pm and there’s no face time culture.” With that in mind, trainees noted a wage disparity between the London and regional offices, but most were left unfazed: “Londoners get paid more but the regional salary is still very generous.” Qualification salaries rise to £50,000, or a decent £62,000 in the capital.

When HR releases the NQ job vacancies, trainees submit a cover letter and CV online to the department they want to qualify into. Interviews will follow shortly after. The firm offers meetings early in the qualification process to provide tips on how to get a cover letter in tip-top shape. Penningtons retained 15 of 18 qualifiers in 2020, with one on a fixed-term contract. A point to note: trainees are technically able to apply to any office location for an NQ role, but are more likely to move offices further down the line.
Penningtons Manches Cooper LLP

125 Wood Street, London EC2V 7AW
Tel: 020 7457 3000 Fax: 020 7457 3240
Email: traineepost@penningtonslaw.co.uk
Website: www.penningtonslaw.co.uk

Firm profile
Penningtons Manches Cooper is a leading UK and international law firm which provides high quality legal advice tailored to both businesses and individuals. Today, we have UK offices in the City of London, Basingstoke, Birmingham, Cambridge, Guildford, Oxford and Reading while our growing overseas network stretches from Asia to America through our presence in Singapore, Piraeus, Paris, Madrid and Sao Paulo.

Main areas of work
Our main areas of practice are dispute resolution, corporate and commercial, real estate, private client and family. We have established a strong reputation in a variety of sectors, particularly private wealth, shipping, technology and property. By joining forces with the partners and staff of Thomas Cooper in July 2019, we have added significant depth to our core practice. The move builds on the expansion of our litigation and arbitration offering and has introduced us to the maritime community in which Thomas Cooper has long been a key player. Among our clients we count multi-national corporations, public companies, professional partnerships, banks and financial institutions as well as private individuals, owner managed businesses and start-ups. Our broad international focus is supported by well-established links with law firms throughout the world. Penningtons Manches Cooper is a member of Multilaw and the European Law Group, networks with representatives in over 100 countries, and many of our lawyers play leading roles in various international bodies.

Training opportunities
Penningtons Manches Cooper seeks high calibre candidates with enthusiasm, drive and resilience, good communication skills and commercial awareness. Strong academics are expected: three or more good A level passes and preferably a 2:1 or better at degree level. The firm has UK offices, giving you the opportunity to work in or outside London. The ability to work outside London, while at the same time being part of a firm with a City presence, appeals to many of the trainees that we recruit. Whichever office you are based in, you will be given a thorough grounding in the law, with four six-month seats across the firm’s divisions. Trainees get immersed in the work and culture of their own office, but come together with all the trainees on a regular basis and with the whole firm at social and sports events. The firm is dedicated to delivering a varied training programme, avoiding too specialised an approach before qualification. Penningtons Manches Cooper knows its trainees are happiest and most successful when busy with good quality and challenging work. The value of giving its trainees responsibility and allowing direct contact with clients is recognised, with the knowledge that experienced solicitors are always ready to give support when needed.

Vacation scheme
The firm offers vacation scheme placements and applications are accepted from 1st October 2020 – 31st January 2021.

Other benefits
Life assurance, critical illness cover, pension, private medical insurance, minimum 24 days holiday, interest free season ticket loan, sports and social events.

University law careers fairs 2020
We are attending virtual law fairs this year and will be at All About Laws Virtual Law fair Series from 26th October, Legal Cheeks Virtual Law fair on 10th November and BPP’s National and Regional Virtual Law Fairs throughout autumn. For more information please visit our website.
Peters & Peters Solicitors LLP

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 12/27/4
Seats: 2x10.5 + 1x3 months
First-year salary: £40,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed

“Trainees do everything NQs do” at business crime, fraud and litigation extraordinaire P&P.

The Firm
“We’re a specialist firm and we do what we do incredibly well,” Peters & Peters managing partner Helen McDowell begins. “If you ask people why they want to join us, the work is one of our main draws.” This is not the kind of firm that offers every legal practice area under the sun and in fact there are just two departments: business crime, and commercial litigation, civil fraud and asset recovery. “We might be small, but we really do handle the best cases around,” trainees declared. “The business crime group handles many of the largest prosecutions, so commercial and civil litigation can be overshadowed, but we’re often opposite magic circle firms on those cases – we really do punch above our weight.” Some of the partners have even given evidence to Parliamentary committees on issues like Brexit and extradition.

Our sources were initially attracted to P&P by its laser-focused practice. “It was one of the first firms to do financial crime work, which I thought was really interesting,” one declared. It would therefore be criminal of Chambers UK not to rank the firm top for financial crime, which it does; Peters also scores strong rankings for extradition, contentious regulatory financial services, POCA work and asset forfeiture, and civil and tax fraud. Though it has just the one office in London, the firm has the international reach you’d expect in these practice areas. “Much of our extradition work involves Interpol notices, which are fascinating as they’re sometimes used as a political tool,” Helen McDowell tells us. “That means our lawyers have to understand andanalyse the context and motivation for issuing such notices.” Representing Hermitage Capital Management and its founder Bill Browder in one high-profile Interpol case, P&P helped secure dismissal of the extradition notice brought by Russia on political grounds. We’d recommend reading into this fascinating case if you’d like to learn more about extradition law.

The Seats
Trainees’ first port of call is usually the business crime department, which handles traditional white-collar crime, fraud and tax cases. Extradition orders, sanctions issues, and Proceeds of Crime Act advice are some of the juiciest flavours here – trainees suggested “anything can pop up at any time” and every day is different. Where the department once worked almost exclusively for individuals, it’s expanded into internal investigations for corporate clients as regulations have become stricter. “Much of our extradition work involves Interpol notices, which are fascinating as they’re sometimes used as a political tool,” Helen McDowell tells us. “That means our lawyers have to understand and analyse the context and motivation for issuing such notices.” Representing Hermitage Capital Management and its founder Bill Browder in one high-profile Interpol case, P&P helped secure dismissal of the extradition notice brought by Russia on political grounds. We’d recommend reading into this fascinating case if you’d like to learn more about extradition law.

Seat options: business crime; commercial/civil litigation; external secondment

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Peters & Peters

secondment, usually to City-based employment firm CM Murray. “It’s partly a business development secondment because we refer a lot of work between us,” a trainee noted. Qualification is informal by default: “The firm is trying to be more transparent about it. We know that we have to write a short application form, but everyone doubts they’ll base much of the decision on a nice letter.” Insiders were happy to note “you can pretty much choose which group to qualify into so long as you’ve done well. They want to keep people on.” The firm retained one of two qualifiers in 2020.
Sources said the team let them liaise directly with clients and experts and felt they did “basically everything that NQs do,” albeit “with more supervision because smaller cases require only a trainee and a partner. We don’t just do loads of photocopying.” Trainees had also been grabbed at a moment’s notice for a client meeting – you have no idea what the case is about, but you take notes anyway and pretend you know what you’re doing!” Recent cases have ranged from representing the Hungarian national oil and gas company MOL, accused by Croatia of obtaining a $100 million commercial advantage with a $10 million bribe, to acting for a former Barclays senior executive in a Serious Fraud Office prosecution based on payments made to a Qatari sovereign wealth fund. Trainees are unlikely to go to court, as most cases will still be in the initial stages during their time in the seat.

“We work across jurisdictions all over the world and sometimes represent nation states.”

Commercial litigation, civil fraud and asset recovery primarily deals with injunctions, search and disclosure orders; fraud is also a large chunk of the practice. “We handle lots of significant cases which have an international element,” Helen McDowell notes. “From Africa and the Middle East to Russia, we work across jurisdictions all over the world and sometimes represent nation states.” Case in point, the group recently represented the Republic of Mozambique in $2 billion proceedings surrounding sovereign guarantees brought against private defendants. Peters also represented the Secretary of State of Health and Social Care and the NHS Business Services Authority in a £250 million+ claim against multinational pharma group Servier, alleging breach of EU and UK competition rules in its sale and supply of a blood pressure-lowering drug to the NHS.

Trainees’ responsibilities in this group are “kinda similar” to those in business crime, but typically with more court time included: “If there’s a case on, they’ll let us go and take notes.” The firm’s matters often involve the Middle East or the British Virgin Islands and most Peters trainees get “to travel at least once. Hardly any of our litigation only involves London.” It’s not all courtroom drama and international travel – less scintillating desk work includes drafting witness statements, applications and instructions to counsel.

Trainee Life

Working hours “aren’t too hectic,” a source suggested. “I’ve been able to take stock every so often and actually learn.” That’s fairly easy when average days run from 9.30am to 5.30pm and trainees usually “only stay late once or twice a year because we don’t have many tight deadlines.” This remains consistent between the two groups. “Some people are mad keen and work loads but we can set our own hours,” a savvy source said. “You obviously can’t stroll in at 2pm, but there’s no expectation to work late or at weekends.” Supervision is generally hands-off: “They let us get on without breathing down our necks. I know I don’t have the final say on much, but I’m trusted enough to have a go.” Relationships can “vary by fee earner: some are really good at giving us responsibilities that’ll benefit us in the long run, others just want things done and give us tasks a paralegal could do.” Trainees can track their progress via frequent catch-ups with the training principal and a self-appraisal form for the midpoint and end of seats. “They’re very constructive and a good way to keep on track,” we heard.

While agreeing the trainee and NQ salary are “fair given the hours,” we heard “some people still complain we don’t earn as much as trainees at US firms. We often get calls from recruiters telling us we can double our salary.” Trainees told us the firm “didn’t give us much info about the decision making” during the Covid-19 pandemic, and concluded “transparency is a bit of an issue generally.” P&P did accelerate bonuses as a means of helping lawyers and trainees get through potential financial hardship.

“What stands out the most is that people genuinely enjoy being around each other, in and outside of work,” trainees said of the Peters culture. “There’s an easy-going atmosphere during the day, which culminates in socials everyone attends – there’s always some sort of event lined up.” The dedicated social committee organises firm-sponsored drinks about four times a year, plus Christmas and summer parties. Impromptu social nights are also common; P&P also did well to maintain a close-knit atmosphere during the 2020 lockdown. “HR called everyone once a month to make sure we were doing okay and gave us all the equipment we needed.”

The international slant to Peters’ work means “several paralegals are qualified lawyers from other jurisdictions,” but trainees were critical of a lack of ethnic diversity at the firm. “The D&I committee meets once a quarter to push initiatives: we played videos on BAME history in the kitchen and had food events during Black History Month,” they recalled. More impressively, women account for 50% of the partnership, which you’ll struggle to say of many other City firms.
Downward facing trainee: 
Trainees credited Head of HR Nikki Leatherland for “a hugely increased focus on mental health: the firm now provides mental health first-aiders, wellbeing seminars and weekly yoga sessions.”
Peters & Peters Solicitors LLP

Firm profile
Peters & Peters is a specialist practice best known for providing expert advice in business crime and regulation, civil fraud and commercial litigation. We act for governments, corporations, financial institutions, professionals, executives and high net worth individuals. We also regularly advise foreign regulators and international organisations. Many of our cases are high profile, complex and international in nature. Peters & Peters has been ranked as ‘top tier’ by the leading legal directories across its practice for many years.

The firm prides itself on being able to provide a welcoming, supportive and collegiate environment, exposure to high quality work and the opportunity to work with some of the most talented lawyers in our fields of practice. Peters & Peters was also one of the first practices to develop a multi-disciplinary approach to fraud cases, handling both civil and criminal proceedings, including asset recovery matters. In doing so it has forged close working relationships with foreign law firms.

Main areas of work
The firm’s key practice areas include anti-money laundering; anti-bribery and corruption; commercial and trust litigation; competition litigation; corporate investigations, criminal antitrust (cartels); economic sanctions; extradition and mutual legal assistance; financial regulation; fraud (civil and criminal); HMRC inquiries and investigations; insider dealing; international asset tracing and private prosecutions.

Training opportunities
Peters & Peters is a friendly firm, with a supportive culture and regular social and CSR activities. We value our trainees highly and make every effort to assist them in becoming fully integrated into the firm. Each trainee will be allocated a mentor and benefit from comprehensive training, ongoing feedback and regular performance reviews. Our trainees sit with a partner or experienced lawyer and will have the opportunity to get involved in all aspects of the firm’s work including client meetings, business development activities and often international travel.

We are looking for trainees with strong academic ability, who will be able to cope with complex legal issues and technical drafting. We recruit from a wide range of universities, taking both law and non-law graduates who have achieved a degree at 2.1 level or above. As ours is very much a people business, candidates must demonstrate strong presentation and communication skills, as well as the ability to work well in teams. Applicants should be commercially aware and demonstrate a keen interest in our work. They will also be proactive, enthusiastic and have a sense of humour.

A career with Peters & Peters will be both exciting and challenging, but we require individuals who are tenacious, driven and committed to taking on a steep learning curve. In return you will benefit from early responsibility, a rewarding career, plenty of support and the opportunity to carry out high quality and stimulating legal work. As a trainee you will spend time within our two departments (business crime and commercial litigation/civil fraud) and will also have the opportunity to experience a different area of law through an external secondment. The firm deliberately has a small trainee intake to ensure quality training, exposure to a wide range of practice areas and to maintain our excellent trainee retention rates.

Other benefits
25 days holiday, pension scheme, BUPA private medical insurance, life assurance, interest free season ticket loan, employee assistance programme and subsidised health club membership.
The facts

Locations: London, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Scotland, Northern Ireland
Overseas offices: 17
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 335/1,152/138
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments
First-year salary: £27,000 (£41,000 London)
Qualification salary: £44,000 (£72,500 London)

Pinsent Masons has plenty of authority in the British legal landscape, but trainees say it’s “as non-hierarchical as firms get.”

The Firm

Pinsent Masons has a jumbo presence in the UK: it’s got around 1,650 lawyers, eight offices from London up to Aberdeen, and over 130 Chambers UK rankings (over 50 of which are top-tier). And it’s not all about our fair isle. Pinsent has 16 more overseas offices, serving Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region. Chambers Global bestows it with no fewer than 30 rankings, and it’s one of just two firms with a top worldwide ranking in construction—an area of particular strength for the firm.

Given this sheer enormity, trainees were surprised to find a “personal” feel to the application process: “In the interview they asked me questions like, ‘Who in your family do you admire?’” But before you wax lyrical about Aunt Diane’s unparalleled baked goods and her subsequent Instagram fame, consider this. Senior partner Richard Foley points out that 90% of the firm’s revenue comes from clients in five sectors: financial services, infrastructure, energy, real estate, and technology and science. Pinsent picks up Chambers UK rankings in all of these areas, winning top accolades in and outside London for construction and planning work particularly. Outside the capital, Pinsent is considered a national leader in banking and finance, corporate/M&A, litigation, real estate litigation, employment, pensions, IT, and IP. For a full list of rankings go to chambers.com.

“The facts, from our strategy down, with the reasons we believe we exist, i.e. to champion change, to promote progress and to make business work better.” He goes on to say this includes “being vocal about using technology and process to deliver legal services and about the importance of diversity and inclusion, because those are the things that drive the changes that will help us to deliver better services to clients.” Some of our interviewees were indeed attracted to the firm’s efforts to “look for a diverse workforce.” We heard “a lot of people here have had career changes – not everyone is 22 years old.” Out of Pinsent’s 140 or so trainees on our list, around two-thirds were based in the four English offices: more than 40 in London, 20 in Birmingham, and around 15 apiece in Leeds and Manchester.

The Seats

Trainees rank their seat choices before each rotation, and as is the case with many firms, “there’s no guarantee you’ll get your first choice.” But it’s also often the case that trainees who may initially have been “a bit miffed” with their seat placement ultimately ended up enjoying their experience. There aren’t any international secondment opportunities, “but there’s a good list of secondments to our UK clients.” Client secondments are run on a case-

Seat options: banking and restructuring; pensions; projects; property development and investment; property planning and environment; energy and infrastructure; property disputes; construction advisory and disputes; IP; litigation and regulatory; commercial; corporate; tax; employment; EU and competition. London only: financial regulation; insurance; contentious tax; technology, media and telecoms.
by-case basis. Trainees might also do a seat in a different office to the one they join.

“Big infrastructure projects like airports.”

Work in projects, construction and engineering is split into two branches: construction and real estate projects. The construction arm involves “big infrastructure projects like airports.” Case in point, Heathrow Airport is a client of the firm, and Pinsent recently advised Vinci Construction Grands Projects on an engineering, procurement and construction contract for the Nikolai Tesla Airport in Belgrade. Real estate projects encompass hotel developments and student accommodation – the firm recently advised three universities (York, Leicester and Brighton) on multimillion-pound student accommodation projects. Trainees were called on to do any research required at the start of a project, and project management was another key task: “We have an overview of what’s happening, so if partners come to you with a question you can answer it immediately.” Trainees also got client interaction: “They email me their questions directly without CC-ing my supervisor.”

Construction disputes may be “a bit of an alien concept at first,” but trainees can get up to speed with 40-odd training videos (that’s one way to kill time in lockdown). To give an example of contentious topics in the world of construction, the firm recently represented a consortium of contractors in a £25 million dispute concerning the design of the Mersey Gateway Bridge between Runcorn and Widnes in Cheshire. Trainees in this seat are likely to work on adjudications, “which are really interesting.” Standard tasks included bundling and pulling exhibits together, “but I also got to draft big parts of witness statements which are extremely technical – one was over 200 pages long!”

The property development and investment team handles some big transactions, such as the £150 million acquisition of an Aparthotel for Aviva Investors. The firm also does work in the residential property space – it recently advised Guildford Borough Council on a residential scheme of 1,500 new homes, for example. Trainees reported handling matters start to finish: “As soon as the instructions come in you open the file, negotiate the documents, keep in contact with the client, and close the file.” Sounds a bit daunting to us, and trainees acknowledged this one is “easier to do as a third seat because it has by far the most responsibility.” Trainees were also responsible for drafting documents and producing lease reports – “I reviewed 180 for one project!” Property folks also “have links with the projects team,” which handles a lot of lease agreements. Sources said these are “a lot more complicated so trainees can’t run them alone, but it’s really interesting to be involved in.”

Over in property litigation, trainees described two workstreams: disputes and asset management. The latter involved serving statutory notices of dilapidations, and trainees reported “lots of contact” with clients’ agents, “which are usually surveyors or asset managers.” The disputes here aren’t usually too dramatic; “it’s more about disputed cost.” For trainees that means a fair amount of bundling. Pinsent recently brought a ‘right to light’ claim for RR Wing Portfolio, which is challenging the construction of a 37-storey student accommodation development in Leeds.

Trainees may sit with planning, energy, environment and infrastructure. The planning team recently advised Land and Lakes on its £120 million development on the Isle of Anglesey and is also advising Heathrow Airport on its £176 billion expansion project to develop a third runway. On the energy and environment side, the firm works with clients in the oil and gas, renewables and nuclear power industries. The firm recently acted for Total on its £17.6 billion expansion project to develop a third run.

In travel, the planning team recently acted for R exchanging documents and producing lease reports – “I reviewed 180 for one project!” Property folks also “have links with the projects team,” which handles a lot of lease agreements. Sources said these are “a lot more complicated so trainees can’t run them alone, but it’s really interesting to be involved in.”

Over in property litigation, trainees described two workstreams: disputes and asset management. The latter involved serving statutory notices of dilapidations, and trainees reported “lots of contact” with clients’ agents, “which are usually surveyors or asset managers.” The disputes here aren’t usually too dramatic; “it’s more about disputed cost.” For trainees that means a fair amount of bundling. Pinsent recently brought a ‘right to light’ claim for RR Wing Portfolio, which is challenging the construction of a 37-storey student accommodation development in Leeds.

Trainees may sit with planning, energy, environment and infrastructure. The planning team recently advised Land and Lakes on its £120 million development on the Isle of Anglesey and is also advising Heathrow Airport on its £176 billion expansion project to develop a third runway. On the energy and environment side, the firm works with clients in the oil and gas, renewables and nuclear power industries. The firm recently acted for Total on its £17.6 billion expansion project to develop a third run.

In travel, the planning team recently acted for R
Trainees in corporate reckoned they “spent less time at the printer than friends” in this seat at other firms. Still, they’re not the ones running negotiations: rookies are responsible for managing the due diligence process, running data rooms and “making sure the external specialists keep to deadlines.” A recent highlight saw the firm advise the Zurich Assurance on the £15 billion sale of its UK pensions business. It also advised Kids Planet Day Nurseries on the acquisition of several nurseries. A London trainee pointed out that not all clients are based in the capital, “so we don’t have many physical meetings, but I was usually invited to join client calls.” This seat is a firm favourite among newbies “because in every transaction you learn about a business you don’t know and their quirks are interesting.” Others were pleased that “it’s always a team effort, so if I’m working late, the whole team is working late, and we go out to celebrate when the deal is complete.”

Trainee Life

Corporate and construction disputes were said to have the longest hours, “but I’ve never pulled a literal all-nighter.” The latest clock out we heard among sources was 3am, but a second-year reckoned their average finishing time was no later than 7pm. Trainees said there isn’t a culture of staying “until everyone else leaves – if I need to leave at 6pm for a gym class, no one is going to tell me I have to stay on the off-chance someone needs me.” The firm’s ‘Dress For Your Day’ dress code means they can go straight from the office to the gym without an outfit change: “I wore a tracksuit to the office the other day. So if I’m working late, the whole team is working late, and we go out to celebrate when the deal is complete.”

Across interviews, trainees praised their supervisors: “They’re really good at protecting trainees against how some people might want to use them.” Even if your supervisor isn’t around, “not once have I been scared to ask someone senior if I didn’t know what I was doing.” On this note, trainees said Pinsent is “as non-hierarchical as firms get.” They felt the office setup lends itself well to a flat hierarchy. In London, “it’s all open plan so the partners don’t sit separately from us.” A hot-desking system means “you get exposure to lots of different people – every day if you want.” The firm tells us all offices are moving to an open plan and hot-desking setup. When it came to remote working, “nobody actually worked from home until Covid-19 hit.” Speaking of which, interviewees were pleased when a WhatsApp group was set up for associates and trainees: “I always had people reaching out to make sure I was okay.”

At the time of our interviews, sources observed “a lot of promotions go to women” – half of the firm’s 2019 partnership promotions were women; in the 2020 class eight of 13 were men. Trainees did draw attention to a “lack of ethnic diversity – all the UK trainees were in a room recently and only five out of 140-odd were ethnically diverse, which made me uncomfortable.” The firm’s race and ethnicity initiative SUN was established in 2018 to identify and respond to the obstacles ethnically diverse people face in recruitment and career progression. On the LG-BTQ+ front, the firm was named the most inclusive UK employer by Stonewall in 2019. The firm has several diversity networks lawyers and trainees can join, including a mental health group. Pinsent Mason-ers can also get involved in their community through the firm’s CSR programme: Starfish. As well as helping high school students with reading and maths, trainees can assist home-less people with job applications through its partnership with Buses 4 Homeless.

“The partners are always up for a pool night.”

When it came to socialising, trainees reported office-wide socials like gin tasting. “You don’t have to be the biggest drinker though,” they clarified. “They cater for everyone.” Trainees were disappointed “there’s nothing for us in the budget” for trainee-specific socials, but each office has its own social committee with money set aside for events. Given the size of the firm, the social life varied by team. On a smaller team in the London office, “the only time we socialised was if someone was leaving,” whereas other groups “do drinks all the time.” In Manchester, “the partners are always up for a pool night“ – that’s the sport by the way, before you get your swim gear out.
Firm profile
At Pinsent Masons we are a purpose-led professional services business with law at its core. We recognise that our clients rarely have legal problems; they have commercial challenges and opportunities. That’s why we combine legal expertise with a wide range of complementary professional disciplines - enabled by process and technology – to address our clients’ most pressing needs. With over 480 partners and more than 3000 people operating globally from 25 offices around the world, our people champion change, promote progress and enable everyone to make business work better for people.

Main areas of work
At Pinsent Masons we believe that if we do business in the right way and for the right reasons, success will flow from that. Some highlights from the last year include:

• Launching the Mindful Business Charter with Barclays and Addleshaw Goddard. Over 50 organisations have now signed up
• Proud to be the highest ranked law firm on the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2020
• Being ranked as a Times top 50 employer for women

Training opportunities
The two-year training contract comprises four six-month seats, spent in four different practice groups, and combines regulatory and skills training. Seat allocations take account of trainees’ preferences and aim to strike a balance between their choices and the firm’s requirements. In each seat trainees will be supervised by a senior colleague who will guide them through their learning and development. There is also full support from Pinsent Masons’ Graduate Development team who will meet trainees regularly to discuss their on-going performance.

Vacation scheme
Over the course of a number of weeks, attendees will be fully immersed in all aspects of working life at Pinsent Masons. We design, structure and develop the placement programme to give you an experience which is practical and enjoyable whilst authentically reflecting the Trainee Solicitor experience. Working alongside trainees and qualified solicitors on real client projects, you’ll enjoy structured work-based learning, skills training and presentations. The programme is available across all of our UK offices — with placements available in London, Aberdeen, Belfast, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds and Manchester. We typically recruit around 60-70% of our trainee solicitors through this programme, but acknowledge that not everyone can undertake a placement and fill a number of Training Contract placements directly.

Other benefits
Private medical insurance; pension; life assurance; childcare vouchers; dental insurance; gourmet society and/or taste card; travel insurance; employee offers- discount website on a variety of providers and services; various social and sports clubs.

Insight evenings
Details of the dates and deadlines for the firm’s events are available online. Pinsent Masons’ events are open to all law and non-law students.

University law careers fairs 2020
Please find all details on our website.
Reed Smith LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Leeds
Overseas offices: 30
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 115/206/50
First-year salary: £45,000
Qualification salary: £90,000

You won’t be caught in the reeds at this US export: trainees get into the depths of “market-leading deals” in a firm that’s still “got a human touch.”

The Firm
It may be headquartered in Pittsburgh and boast 30 offices across globe, but London is actually Reed Smith’s biggest office, with the City’s Broadgate Tower housing no fewer than 380 of its lawyers. Internationally, Reed Smith shines when it comes to its shipping expertise (both on financing and litigation fronts), which is ranked by Chambers Global in various jurisdictions but most notably in the Asia-Pacific region. Other strengths from its US roots include insurance, healthcare, corporate M&A, private equity and bankruptcy/restructuring. Many of these areas are prominent in the London office too, and it comes as no surprise to find RS rated as one of the best in the UK for its insurance, shipping and commodities work. The office is ranked for many of the typical big City practices too (like banking, corporate, litigation and real estate), but is particularly commended for its work in the media & entertainment space, especially when it comes to the music, film, TV and gaming industries.

When speaking with our US sister guide Chambers Associate in 2019, firmwide managing partner Sandy Thomas told us that the firm will continue to grow in line with client demand, but that growth won’t come at the expense of RS’ employees’ wellbeing: “That’s at the front and centre of our strategic development. We handle really important issues for others, which often involve a lot of conflict. There are some stresses we can’t eliminate, but others we can.” For our trainee sources, it was this kind of culture and atmosphere that won out when it came to making their decision on where to train. Interviewees were keen to flag that despite the assumptions people make about US firms, “it’s not full of Type A people,” with this trainee declaring: “I’m not cut out for a cut-throat firm!” Another explained that “it’s not a caricature firm where it’s all bill, bill, bill and everyone’s angry all the time.” Phew.

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Reed Smith
Pro bono at Reed Smith
Compensation at Reed Smith

The Seats
Seat allocation has “definitely improved” since the arrival of a new trainee development officer in 2019. Trainees previously gave four seat choices without any form of discussion with HR, but now get to meet with HR after submitting their (unranked) preferences. Some felt that “it’s more personal now and you can tell they take our preferences into account,” while others were of the opinion that “you still don’t get much input, so it’s a mildly opaque process.” Every incoming first-seater must indicate four seat and four (ranked) secondment preferences, but this is optional for their following seats. International secondments to offices in New York, Athens, Singapore and Dubai are offered every six months, plus a handful of client options like stints at Shell and Barclays.

Transport is “an excellent place to start for a first-seater,” an insider suggested, given the high volume of client contact and the partners’ dedication to showing newbies the ropes: “The volume and variety of work means that your legal skills will progress more than they might in another practice area.” This department used to be called ‘shipping’ but underwent a name change in 2019 as it covers both shipping and aviation matters (though seafaring affairs form the bulk of the practice). The shipping portion deals with both ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ matters. Wet shipping usually involves things that happen at sea, like vessel collisions and pollution issues, while dry shipping covers the contractual elements (like a charter party), though both strands have disputes elements. We assume their names are ‘wet’ and ‘dry’ because the sea is wet and contracts are dry (joke!).

Seat options: energy and natural resources; entertainment and media; European corporate; financial industry group; global commercial disputes; IP, tech and data; labour and employment; real estate; transportation; tax
“The arrests were the most exciting part because I got to work with foreign lawyers on high-speed and very commercial issues.”

Trainees work in either the transport litigation or asset finance sub-groups. Litigious work on the wet side involved researching different areas of shipping law, managing hefty disclosure exercises and assisting on various international vessel arrests: “The arrests were the most exciting part because I got to work with foreign lawyers on high-speed and very commercial issues.” On the finance side, “the team deals with client bids on non-performing loans, so trainees do the due diligence and project management, which involves navigating big Excel spreadsheets.” The finance folks gave fewer positive reviews than their litigation counterparts, citing low levels of client contact and an admin-heavy role. Long hours are to be expected here, but at the same time “the team does some very impressive market-leading deals. The commitment to the job that the associates and partners showed was eye-opening.”

All the big financial institutions appear on the client roster, like Deutsche Bank, Bank of America Merrill Lynch and HSBC, plus key industry players like shipowner Gard, specialist marine insurer Standard Club and emergency management company Ardent. The team recently represented Donjon-SMIT OPA-90 (a marine salvage and management company Ardent. The team recently represented a global investment management firm during the securitisation of a €535 million loan portfolio secured by shipping vessels, real estate and wind parks (some of which were subject to international enforcement proceedings). Crikey. Some trainees worked in the structured finance sub-group, where they managed conditions precedent (CP) checklists and drafted documents for wider securities transactions. It’s reportedly a great seat training-wise: “My supervisor would draw out the structure of a deal on a whiteboard to show me where each agreement went in the deal and went through everything clause by clause so I knew what I was doing.” Even though it’s a technical area of law, trainees enjoyed the seat “because you’re really encouraged to ask questions, and late nights are easier when you’re surrounded by lovely people!” That said, 11pm finishes are few and far between, thankfully. Although some “mindless doc review” is par for the course, rookies enjoyed liaising with internal teams and external counsel on bids for non-performing loan portfolios, and getting the responsibility to run matters, “which showed the trust and confidence the team had in me.”

There’s less responsibility on offer over in labour & employment, according to sources, who put this down to the fact it involves high-value and complex issues. Rookies experience both the litigious and transactional elements of employment so it’s “a very varied seat with a range of tasks.” Trainees are expected to handle bundling, draft settlement agreements and take notes at hearings on the contentious front. Whatever they were doing, sources found the subject matter more engaging than it can be in other seats and “received great one-to-one training from...
the partner-supervisor.” This combo made the department a target for qualification for some interviewees. The most exciting part of the seat was said to be attending tribunals: “It was good to see how things work in practice and being able to meet clients and listen to them every day.” Given its cross-border capabilities, the firm has recently assisted Netflix and Alibaba with the employment elements of their respective international expansions. Other clients include Channel Four, PwC, Microsoft and the Royal Bank of Scotland. Trainees were pleased with this team’s relaxed start time and consistency (sources would typically know how their week would look in advance), although the day wouldn’t usually end until 9pm.

Reed Smith’s global commercial disputes team covers a hefty mix of finance, insurance, white-collar crime and media disputes, as well as public inquiries and international arbitration matters (on both the commercial and investor-state side). Trainees can experience all of these areas or opt to focus on just one. Insiders pointed out that not many City firms handle international arbitration, “so I got a unique insight into something which is essentially its own body of law, plus there were loads of different procedures to learn, which was interesting.” This branch attracts several industry-leading clients, like Shell, mining company Vale and specialist protection & indemnity (P&I) insurer Steamship Mutual Insurance. The group recently represented a consortium of defendants – including Ukrainian oligarchs – in a $1 billion dispute concerning Crimea-based assets and allegations of conspiracy (among others) arising from the sale of major steel corporation, Industrial Union of Donbass – one of the largest transactions in Ukrainian history.

We’re told that the public inquiry side involves associate-level work: “I reviewed literally thousands of documents to find evidence that helped our client and helped frame our arguments, which was exciting!” Although “there’s a lot of responsibility for someone fresh out of law school,” trainees are also expected to handle the “standard, boring tasks” like bundling, “which is possibly the worst thing in the world. You can’t get away from it, so I don’t want to be a litigator anytime soon!” said a more transactional-oriented source. Despite this, “the team lets you take on more and more responsibility, so by the end of the seat you get more drafting work and take control of trial prep.” Sources scored this seat highly for enabling them to develop their legal skills but revealed that partner and client contact is few and far between and that the hours can be long: on occasion sources had worked until 4am. At the same time, multi-lingual trainees were pleased they got to make use of their language skills by translating documents. In fact, RS has a database of its trainees and lawyers who speak a foreign language in case they’re needed on a billable or pro bono matter: “We’re an unusually multi-lingual intake: half of us are non-English.”

Trainee Life

Interviewees tended to agree with this assessment of the support available at RS: “Throughout every seat, I felt like the higher-up lawyers looked out for me like parents do. Even though partners don’t have much spare time, they want us to think they do. In a nice way!” Trainees were pleased to have regular catch-ups with their supervisors but at the same time didn’t feel micro-managed. “They don’t have to be about work,” said one source about their supervisor chats. “I actually talk to mine about everything except work!” RS London managing partner, Andrew Jenkins, also got a shout-out: “The way he leads the firm is inspiring. He creates such an open and warm atmosphere – which I didn’t think was possible in private practice – by doing things like bringing his husband to events.” As to preserving good mental health, the firm has a ‘Wellness Works’ programme which includes mindfulness events and initiatives to encourage healthy living.

“In the main people stay positive – even when the stresses of the job are at their most acute.”

The diversity and inclusion groups play quite a large part in the social life at RS; examples trainees talked about included a breakfast seminar to celebrate Chinese New Year and a talk about transgender issues in the workplace. The firm also curated videos of RS people cooking their favourite recipes to celebrate Diversity Month. Interviewees ranked the firm highly for its D&I efforts overall: “Lots of my peers joined the firm because they were so impressed with the visibility we have,” said one, while another added that “there’s a lot of open conversation around topics like religious observations; trainees spoke about their experiences of Ramadan during lockdown and wrote blogs about Eid that were circulated throughout the firm.” RS recently made the employee handbook gender-neutral too. There are still a few impromptu gatherings within teams though, lockdowns permitting. For example: “Asset finance has long hours, so every so often people would say, ‘I’ve had enough, let’s go to the pub!’ One day in the summer the cricket was being shown in Broadgate Circle, so we got a beer and watched a bit of it, which was lovely and quite different to reviewing loan docs or whatever we were doing!” All of this was felt to produce a culture with “very little judgement or negativity. In the main people stay positive – even when the stresses of the job are at their most acute.”
Enough room at the inn:
The NQ process varies depending on the group trainees want to qualify into: some groups set case studies, some do multiple interview rounds, and some don’t interview at all: “There are always enough jobs because we’re a relatively small intake. They want to retain as many people as possible.” In 2020, 19 of 26 qualifiers were retained.
We will be hosting and attending a mix of events in partnership with universities and societies.

University law careers fairs 2020

Undergraduate open days: Applications will open October 2020.

Open days and first-year opportunities

Undergraduate open days: Applications will open October 2020.

University law careers fairs 2020

Vacation placements

Our winter and summer vacation schemes offer students the opportunity to gain a strong insight into life at Reed Smith, as well as providing a solid account of the type of work encountered as a trainee. The winter vacation scheme lasts one week and gives the students the chance to experience one seat, and the summer vacation schemes last two weeks, letting them try two seats. Alongside their seats, students will have the opportunity to attend various sessions to improve their legal and business skills. These include a pro bono exercise and a variety of workshops, covering topics such as cultural intelligence, presentation skills, and business development. These sessions, alongside feedback from the seats, will allow the Graduate Recruitment Team and other people from across the business to assess the students suitability for becoming a Reed Smith Trainee. Additionally, throughout the vacation scheme, the attendees will get to experience the real culture of our firm through informal, relaxed socials alongside our trainees.

Other benefits

In addition to a competitive salary (for 2020, not less than £45,000 pa in London), our trainee solicitor benefits package includes: 25 days’ annual holiday, cycle to work scheme, subsidised cafeteria, discounted gym membership, permanent health insurance, dental insurance, season ticket loan and much more.

Salary and benefits

First-year salary: £45,000
Second-year salary: £49,000
Post-qualification salary: £90,000
Holiday entitlement: 25 days

Fees and Benefits

GDL fees: Yes
LPC fees: Yes
Maintenance grant: Yes
GDL: £3,000 LPC: £7,000

International and regional

Overseas seats: Dubai, Singapore, Athens, Paris
Client secondments: Yes
This “lean, mean private equity machine” and finance fiend is celebrating ten years in London.

The Firm
It may feel as though several centuries have passed since 2010, but it was a mere decade ago that Ropes & Gray set up shop in little old London. “It still feels new, dynamic and exciting,” said trainees, but “we’ve now established our foundations in the market.” Finance and funds are key strands of work, but trainees singled out private equity as the office’s “central core,” with one declaring: “We’re a lean, mean private equity machine!” Private equity is a major focus for Ropes & Gray worldwide (the firm is highly ranked in Chambers Global), so a word of advice: “If private equity doesn’t interest you in any way, don’t apply!”

Trainees were tuned in to “the prestige that comes from the Ropes & Gray name, which is so big in the US,” especially in its native city, Boston. Sources felt the London office “leverages that prestige while setting our own direction – we’re not a satellite office.” According to trainee recruitment partner Ruchit Patel, the firm expects to grow its asset management, restructuring and antitrust in the next few years. He adds: “We’re attacking the elite financing work, elite private equity mandates, and elite work for strategic firms – all work that should provide trainees with a rich and rewarding experience.” Currently, Chambers UK notes the firm’s high-end private equity capabilities nationwide, as well as its mid-market banking and finance, high-yield capital markets, and corporate financial crime work in London.

“The Standard of work we’re exposed to is wonderfully exciting and very complex,” enthusiasts told us. On the larger deals, trainees are “a long way down the pecking order doing process-driven stuff,” but on smaller transactions, “they let us get our hands on a lot – at times you’re treated like an NQ.” As well as conducting “strange and bespoke research tasks,” trainees got to draft minor transactional documents.

The Seats
Trainees usually submit their seat preferences in a “five to ten-minute informal chat with HR,” but one guarantee is that everyone will sit in private equity at least once – “maybe twice!” The team is known for its buyout capabilities, handling mid-market deals all the way up to “massive deals with huge clients” like TPG Capital. Trainees saw a lot of work with clients in the healthcare space – for example, it recently advised Baring Private Equity Asia on its $1 billion acquisition of medical device maker Lumenis. “Entrepreneurial atmosphere.”

Ruchit Patel continues that as the firm grows, so will the intake size. “Historically we’ve taken about six or seven trainees a year,” he says. “Looking forward, we’re thinking the intake will be close to ten or more.” The firm’s current intake size combined with an “entrepreneurial atmosphere” made trainees feel “part of the firm’s business development.” For example, “you can just chat with the managing partner about business and suggest ideas.”
US.” Second, “if a private equity client has a big acquisition, we’ll do all the financing work.” And finally, there’s the “pure, big-ticket” finance matters that partners bring in directly. Working on big deals was “exhilarating” for trainees, “as you feel really involved. Even unglamorous tasks are valued!” These might include looking after checklists, liaising with local counsel, drafting letters, and lots of “process management responsibilities.” One lucky trainee per rotation can also apply to do a finance secondment in the Hong Kong office.

The antitrust team works with a lot of tech and pharma companies including big names like Google and Pfizer. “It’s so, so cool!” trainees praised. “Some of these huge companies have internal antitrust counsel, but they outsource the most complex and cutting-edge work to us.” The department mainly handles two types of work: merger reviews and investigations. On merger reviews trainees are in charge of due diligence and merger analysis. “It’s more exciting than it sounds,” they assured us. “You’re having to become an expert on something you previously had no concept of.” One trainee recalled drafting “a whole suitcase full of files” to submit to the European Commission.

Asset management is the new seat in town – and interviewees said: “It’s been really busy!” Trainees here get involved in regulatory enforcement, private investment funds and derivatives. On the regulatory enforcement side, the team works with “private equity houses that are marketing their fund in the EU.” Trainees might get a go at drafting marketing applications “and all the appendices to file to the local regulator.”

“We’ve always been encouraged to do pro bono.”

As is common in US firms, pro bono is an important fixture at Ropes & Gray. “We’ve always been encouraged to do pro bono,” trainees told us. “There’s not a strong distinction that pro bono hours are less important than client billables.” In fact, everyone has a 20-hour target. Some of the pro bono work is connected to private equity and finance, such as assisting “a private equity fund that wants to set up a semi-charitable arm.”

Trainee Life

Given that the office has only been around for ten years, “we’re only just starting to see people that trained here become senior associates.” Most current partners joined Ropes from other firms, “which means there’s no fixed way of doing things,” trainees said, elaborating that “you don’t have to fit into an archaic machine. It’s less hierarchical and more inclusive.” Trainees were “proud” to see a lot of women partners in the London office – the latest data from the firm shows that 46% of partners in London are women. We also heard that the firm has placed a lot of emphasis on work related to Black Lives Matter in recent months.

During lockdown, some interviewees appreciated “team bonding sessions via Zoom every evening.” One felt it reflected the overall culture of “making sure people don’t feel left behind.” Beyond the limitations of lockdown, the firm throws Christmas and summer parties, and sporty Ropers can get involved in football, running and cricket. Some wanted to see more socialising across teams. “Trainees are often the link between everyone,” one said. “We know the lay of the land better than the senior people!” Trainees themselves often lunch together and get drinks on a Friday. “We’re all mates, which is good when you want to have a good old moan!”

“When the hours are long, all the bubble baths in the world won’t help!”

And here’s where the going gets tough. “On busy days, you’re not leaving the office,” one warned. “In my first few weeks, I saw a couple of people who’d done all-nighters with frazzled looks on their faces like, ‘is it daylight already?’” Among our interviewees, some clocked off around 8pm while others “rarely left before midnight.” At the firm’s office on Ludgate Hill, “we have an amazing rooftop terrace with really beautiful views, but no one uses it because everyone’s working all the time!”

Trainees get support from their supervisor, who’s usually a senior associate: “If you’re going away for the weekend, they make it known that you’re not to be bothered at all.” Newbies also get buddied up with a second-year trainee, who for one was “the first person I call if I ever have a problem.” The firm also doles out a monthly wellness allowance of £33 to help soothe the sting of long hours.

“I spend mine on candles, bath bombs and self-help books,” said one self-care guru. Not everyone was sold on the concept, with one commenting: “When the hours are long, all the bubble baths in the world won’t help!”

How about a mighty salary then? The firm recently upped the first-year trainee salary to £50,000, while NQs can build up a beautiful bath bomb collection with £130,000. Ropes’s qualification process is usually “super informal,” which means it “favours confident people who can have frank conversations with partners.” This year’s process – in the midst of lockdown – had to be “a bit more formal.” There are always nerves around qualification time, but interviewees here found it “much less scary when you know the firm wants to develop homegrown talent.” In 2020, all five qualifiers were kept on.
Ropes & Gray International LLP

60 Ludgate Hill, London, EC4M 7AW
Phone: 020 3201 1500
Email: londontraineerecruitment@ropesgray.com
Website: www.ropesgray.com

Firm profile
Since opening our London office in January 2010, we have assembled a fully integrated team built around bank/bond financing, financial services regulatory, funds, M&A, private equity (including real estate), restructuring and insolvency and tax. Our thoughtfully constructed, bespoke London office offering augments the firm’s traditional core strengths, such as private equity and funds, while retaining the flexibility to identify and capture future growth areas. Clients have access to valuable insights and expert advice from lawyers with an in-depth understanding of UK/European transactions and market practice in Europe, Asia and the United States.

The London office’s government enforcement group regularly counsels a premier global client base concerning compliance with broad and impactful international statutes, including the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and UK Bribery Act, while the office’s litigation lawyers develop effective strategies for advocating on behalf of clients in various jurisdictions.

High-quality international transfers and lateral recruits make up the London team, which collectively speaks 17 languages and represents 13 nationalities. We are market insiders with a strong reputation within the UK and European business community and we have longstanding relationships with leading local firms in all major European and Asian jurisdictions.

Culture
We are looking for people with an entrepreneurial approach to dealing with clients and business development. Direct client contact is taken for granted and not just at senior levels – all our lawyers are encouraged and supported in playing their own part in active business development. This is balanced by an open door policy ensuring candidates will have the support needed to build a successful career.

Training opportunities
The training contract in London is comprised of four six-month seats. We also offer an international seat in our Hong Kong office.

Trainees who join us receive the best training available. This is reflected in the standard of both the in-house ‘Trainee Training Programme’ and the practical training overseen by a supervisor. The small number of trainees we take on means we’re genuinely able to offer early responsibility and challenging work.

Vacation scheme
Our two-week paid scheme is a valuable opportunity for you to experience first-hand what it is like to be a trainee at the firm, and to understand the firm’s culture and expertise. You will also learn about how law firms work as a business, and how we differentiate ourselves from our competitors.

During the two-week scheme you will complete practice group and client work at trainee level. You will also be mentored and supported by your trainee ‘buddy’ and will be invited to an evening event with all of our trainee cohort. You can also expect to meet lawyers from each practice group, attend workshops, and you will have the opportunity to interact with our employees at social networking events.
RPC

The facts
Locations: Bristol, London
Overseas offices: 2
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 93/260/28
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; client secondments
First-year salary: £35,000 (£38,000 London)
Qualification salary: £48,000 (£68,500 London)

In need of a lil’ TLC? Check out RPC: insurance and litigation expertise meets a culture built on gratitude.

The Firm
The Famous Five, Chanel No. 5, 5ive... all excellent examples of why five is as good a number as any. National law firm RPC certainly thinks so, with five strategic ‘pillars’ of focus for its practice: insurance, regulatory, retail, commercial financial disputes, and technology. “Considering it’s not the largest firm, RPC has a great commercial practice,” trainees declared. “They work for impressive clients.” You will indeed find big names like Instagram, Pizza Express and Google on the client roster – trainees can even score a secondment to the search engine giant.

RPC is perhaps best known for its insurance and reinsurance expertise, and much of its practice pivots on litigation – if disputes aren’t for you, neither is this firm. That’s not the whole story, as Chambers UK makes clear with top rankings in London for the lower mid-market corporate practice as well as professional negligence and banking litigation. Nationwide the firm’s accolades span defamation, commercial contracts, media and entertainment, contentious tax and more; RPC’s Bristol base also scores a top spot for professional negligence. The firm made international moves in 2016 and 2017, forming a joint venture with Singapore outfit Premier Law before formalising its combination with a partner firm in Hong Kong. Both overseas offices offer seats to trainees.

“I didn’t want to be lost in a sea of trainees.”

Describing the lawyers they met during their application process as “friendly, passionate and intelligent,” trainees were largely sold on the firm by its culture. Some were keen to be part of a relatively modest intake of fewer than 15 newcomers a year: “I didn’t want to be lost in a sea of trainees.” Sources went to on to find their interviews straightforward and relaxed. “I felt like they were trying to get the best out of me rather than trying to catch me out,” one told us. It’s worth noting RPC pays closer to the top of the market in Bristol than London, though City trainees do get a cost of living uplift. Firm-wide financials were decent in 2020, even in the wake of Covid-19: turnover grew 1% to £110.1 million. In a now apparently prescient move, RPC boosted its restructuring team in January 2020, bringing in the head of DWF’s practice group (restructuring looks to be a busy area post-lockdown).

On chambersstudent.co.uk... How to get into RPC

Seat options: corporate; commercial and banking litigation; restructuring and insolvency; tax litigation; white-collar crime and compliance; insurance (construction, professional and financial risks, property and casualty, property and casualty international); MIPTOC (media, IP, technology, outsourcing and commercial contracts)
Claims here involve any kind of damage. The team gives credit where it’s due and says thank you. It’s really nice to have your work acknowledged, especially by the clients.”

Large insurers also make up the client base in property and casualty. Claims here involve any kind of damage to property you could imagine – RPC recently defended a multimillion-euro liability class action arising out of a catastrophic fire which destroyed a retail park in Portugal. Interviewees were attracted to the off-the-wall cases here – 13 different jurisdictions.

First of the MIPTOC seats, the media department welcomes work from mega names like YouTube, Facebook and Paddy Power. Teams tend to be small here, so “you get a lot of client contact” beyond drafting emails. Trainees received a good mix of non-contentious and disputes practice. On the litigation side, RPC handles sizeable content and commercial disputes involving media companies: a prominent example was for Ingenious Media, with proceedings brought by investors going up to the High Court. “I’ve worked on about ten matters,” a source here said, “including defamatory hearings and data protection actions.” The former was a popular substream: “It’s all about deciding if a piece of writing is slandering whomever or whatever it concerns.” Non-contentious media involves advising on pre-publication regulatory and agreement issues, considering commercial and data protection regulations. Instagram, Juul and Jet2Holidays have all relied on such advice.

IP is a hot area at RPC, with headcount growing 25% in 2020. Commercial litigation is part of the offering, with matters ranging from trademark infringements to database rights claims on behalf of tech and retail clients. Examples include Champagne Perrier-Jouët, the Telegraph and Jack Wills; the team also advised Sports Direct during its long-running clash with Rangers FC over IP licence agreements for the supply of branded products and kits. Trainees got heavily involved in court processes and attempted settlements between sparring companies. “I was invited to court to see two speedy trials during my seat,” one declared. “The senior associates were very jealous!” Less glamorous, they also got their teeth into bundling, witness statements and drafting licensing agreement letters. RPC advises both claimants and defendants, and cases move faster than in some other departments.

“I was running a project for a really high-value client. My role was to advise across 13 different jurisdictions.”

Commercial contracts is one of RPC’s few non-contentious seats; multinational clients from across the tech, data, IP, consumer and advertising industries fall in here. The firm advised Facebook alone on more than 200 contracts in 2019; bed retailer Dreams used the team’s expertise while negotiating branding and marketing rights for a tie-up with the British Olympic team. RPC’s roster also includes Coca-Cola, Charlotte Tilbury and House of Fraser. The seat takes on two trainees at a time and has a reputation as “one of the busier departments at RPC.” When advising clients on advertising, trainees review marketing materials “to ensure compliance with GDPR regulations.” Tech outsourcing involved getting to grips with large contract agreements, and thus data protection. Our sources took to high responsibility with pleasure: “I was running a project for a really high-value client,” one began. “My role was to advise across 13 different jurisdictions. I was in charge of the billing, invoicing and drafting client

**Chambers UK rankings**

- Banking Litigation
- Clinical Negligence
- Commercial Contracts
- Competition/European Law
- Corporate/M&A
- Defamation/Reputation Management
- Health & Safety
- Information Technology
- Intellectual Property
- Litigation
- Media & Entertainment
- Outsourcing
- Product Liability
- Professional Negligence
- Retail
- Tax
emails.” Trainees may also be charged with writing blog updates and articles for client websites.

It’s fairly common for RPC trainees to do client secondments. If they don’t get to go during the training contract, post-qualification stints are also available. Tech and retail businesses are the most likely destinations. Secondees loved the role reversal that came with their time in-house, pointing out that “you get to see how clients think as you effectively become part of their organisation.” Overseas seats in Hong Kong and Singapore are less common but also a possibility.

Trainee Life

Based on our trainee calls, RPC-ers weren’t just living for the weekend. “There is never a Sunday that goes by where I’m dreading going back to work tomorrow – it’s quite the opposite,” one announced. “I enjoy coming into the office and seeing everyone.” Others put this down to the firm’s hiring practices, describing their colleagues as “genuine,” “well rounded” and “friendly,” among other lovely adjectives. In both the London and Bristol offices we heard “the trainee cohort sticks together. I’ve got a ready-made group of friends here.” Both bases are open plan, sitting trainees between partners and associates alike. Londoners were keen to wax lyrical about their tall glass office walls, revealing a prize view of the Tower of London. “When I’m on my lunchbreak I take a stroll down the waterside,” one hopeless romantic shared.

“I’ve got a ready-made group of friends.”

Bristol trainees get to sneak a glimpse of the view during their many trips to London for training, including seminars and legal update sessions. There were some complaints that the system felt like a lot of take and not much give: “It gets frustrating to always be going up to London especially when you are busy,” a Bristol trainee grumbled. “London trainees never come here.” We’d point out that office in the capital houses the majority of the intake, but perhaps they’d enjoy the road trip? Bristol sources got their time to shine during Challenge RPC, for which trainees go on a “treasure hunt-like” pub crawl. Londoners had their fun with midweek trolleys, office pizza parties, “ridiculously competitive” pub quizzes and a plethora of sports clubs; RPC also runs much-anticipated Christmas and summer parties. According to trainees, media and IP top the list of most sociable departments. Even the 2020 lockdown wasn’t enough to stop the events train rolling – and while lawyers are renowned for their smarts, they apparently don’t fare so well at some ways of thinking. “My team lost the quiz both times,” a bemused trainee laughed. “I guess we are not so good on general knowledge!”

They were rather more impressed with partners’ attitudes as mentors. “While doing a piece of work for a partner, he sent me an email saying ‘thank you so much,’” one source shared. “Even if it is my job, he went above and beyond to make me feel valued.” Others shared stories of receiving thank you cards, vouchers and champagne when they had to work late. You shouldn’t have! No, you really shouldn’t have—9am to 7pm are the quite reasonable typical hours for trainees. Media and commercial contracts are the most demanding seats, calling for more frequent 8pm finishes.

“Even if it is my job, he went above and beyond to make me feel valued.”

“There’s a lot of focus on diversity at the moment,” more than one source noticed. “The firm encourages everyone to get involved, but there is much to be done at partner level.” allies@RPC includes a series of ‘streams’ including gender, LGBT+, mental health, social mobility, faith, disability and ethnicity. Each gets a six-month spotlight to “educate and celebrate their issue.” The ethnicity stream was taking the lead when we came calling, bringing in speakers to discuss their experiences including Michelle King, director of inclusion at Netflix.

RPC keeps trainees, lawyers and staff in the know via quarterly Town Hall meetings run by the managing partner, who fills eager ears in on the firm’s strategic plan. To track their own progress, trainees have a record diary to log their work; they each get a partner and associate supervisor to discuss the entries with. “The records need to show that you’re ticking off the requirements to qualify,” we heard. Trainees also booked casual coffee break catch-ups with their supervisors to “walk through tasks” or simply “discuss life.” As for qualification, the process kicks off in April when HR and the training principal explain the full timeline to trainees. Once departments have posted their vacancies, wannabe qualifiers get their applications in before interviewing with their chosen department. “The training contract have been great,” a fourth seater conclud ed, “but I’ll be glad when it’s over!” RPC retained 11 of 12 qualifiers in 2020.

And finally...

#NoFilter: For a visual account of the trainee experience at RPC, check out the @lifeinalawfirm Instagram account, which is open to posts from the trainees themselves.
R

RPC

Tower Bridge House, St Katharine’s Way, London E1W 1AA
Tel: 020 3060 6000
Website: www.rpc.co.uk/strikinglyreal
Twitter: @LifeinaLawFirm
Instagram: LifeinaLawFirm

Firm profile
At RPC, you can be you. In an environment that’s real. Strikingly real.
If you value character over conformity, the unique over the uniform, and ambition over apathy, let’s talk.
For us, success comes from building real-life relationships. Real-life relationships with our clients as much as our people. And it comes from thinking creatively to achieve the best commercial solutions. We thrive in an environment that’s collaborative, forward-thinking and where you’re free to express your personality. An environment that allows you to make the most of your strengths.

Main areas of work
Banking & finance, banking & financial markets disputes, commercial litigation, corporate, corporate crime & investigations, corporate insurance, competition, corporate finance, data protection, employment, energy, financial services regulation, health, safety & environmental, restructuring and insolvenuy, insurance & reinsurance, intellectual property, IT, media, pensions & benefits, personal injury, product regulation, professional negligence, professional practices, real estate, regulatory, tax, technology, outsourcing, international trade and arbitration.

Training opportunities
As a Trainee, we believe you’ll deliver your best if you’re free to be you. And that means being able to ask questions openly, being supported to develop your strengths, and having the right opportunities to grow. Our physical offices are non-hierarchical and open plan. This means from day one you’ll be sitting close to a partner. In our virtual office, we use video call technology to ensure support is available and to maintain our non-hierarchical culture. Whether you’re handling complex insurance claims, resolving large-scale global disputes, or providing commercial advice and transactional support, your opinions will be listened to and respected.
At least six months will be spent in four different areas of our practice, so you can discover where you fit in the best. You may have an opportunity to be seconded to one of our clients as an in-house lawyer. This will give you the chance to form genuine relationships with the people behind the cases.

Vacation scheme
We’ll show you the real RPC during our Summer Schemes. And be warned, it’s pretty striking.
You’ll be welcomed into our London office and given an opportunity to spend time getting to experience life in a unique law firm for yourself. It’s also our chance to get to know you and understand what you may be able to offer us. During these two weeks, you’ll be fully integrated into our teams, getting involved in projects and giving you a fantastic insight into whether a career at RPC is right for you. What’s more, our Summer Schemes can be delivered virtually. You will experience the same RPC environment and culture, just online.
Remuneration: £400 p/w

Other benefits
Along with a competitive annual salary, you’ll be offered a creative and comprehensive package of benefits. Our benefits package covers almost everything, from wellness festivals and social events, to extra annual leave, and family and wealth-related rewards.

Open days and first-year opportunities
London Spring Workshop:
For a great snapshot of RPC, our workshops are an insightful and fascinating opportunity to learn, network and get prepared for a career in law. Our London Spring Workshop can be delivered virtually.
London Insight Day:
Our insight days are just that. Insightful. Experience real life as a trainee through work shadowing opportunities, taking part in an application skills session and networking with people from all across the firm. Our Bristol and London Insight Days can be delivered virtually.
For further information about these events and details of how to apply please look online.

RPC

Website: www.rpc.co.uk/strikinglyreal
Tel: 020 3060 6000
Twitter: @LifeinaLawFirm
Instagram: LifeinaLawFirm

Partners: 94
Associates: 236
Total trainees: 28
UK offices: London, Bristol
Overseas offices: 2

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 15
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1
Minimum UCAS points or A levels: Three high-grade A-levels
Vacation scheme places pa: 24

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: 1st October 2020
Training contract deadline, 2023 start:
25th June 2021 (London)
14th March 2021 (Bristol)
Vacation scheme applications open: 1st October 2020
Vacation scheme 2020 deadline: 17th January 2021

Salary and benefits
First-year salary:
£38,000 (London)
£35,000 (Bristol)
Second-year salary:
£41,000 (London)
£36,000 (Bristol)
Post-qualification salary:
£66,500 (London)
£49,000 (Bristol)

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes

International and regional
Offices with training contracts:
London, Bristol, Hong Kong, Singapore
Client secondments: Yes

Firm profile
At RPC, you can be you. In an environment that’s real. Strikingly real.
Russell-Cooke

The facts
Locations: London, Kingston-upon-Thames, Putney
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 62/130/10
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £38,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed (varies by office)

This Putney-headquartered firm serves its trainees a balanced diet of property, commercial and private client flavours.

The Firm
The City isn’t everything – pootle up the Thames for a few miles and you’ll hit Putney, home of Russell-Cooke since 1906. Trainees that began their careers here arrived with multiple priorities: “I want to help people on an individual level, but my inner Harvey Spectre wants to explore the glamour of the corporate world too,” one declared. Suits fans looking for law with a personal touch may be seeking “the ability to do a seat in family law and charities, as well as corporate and commercial,” and RC offers just that. The firm’s recently done good work representing survivors of the Grenfell Tower disaster.

Chambers UK ranks RC top for public law involving children, and lower mid-market real estate, also handing out strong rankings for criminal, clinical negligence, family, charities, professional discipline and social housing law. Property is the largest single department overall, accounting for 30% of Russell-Cooke’s turnover at the last count. Litigation practices make up 32% in total, and another 28% is family and private client. Maths whizzes will have worked out there’s 10% left unaccounted for to fit the firm’s other practices.

“Good reviews of the work/life balance and friendly culture.”

Trainees will typically complete most of their seats in the Putney HQ, though may head to one of the firm’s two smaller offices in Kingston and Central London for a spell. New arrivals came in hearing “good reviews about the work/life balance and friendly culture,” whilst seeking work for high-end clients. They also looked to future opportunities. In 2020 the firm made up six new partners; compare that to an intake of eight to ten trainees a year, and you’ve got much better pure numerical odds of making it all the way than at a larger City outfit. First-seaters will start “wherever there’s a commercial need.” Following this, trainees chat with the training principal and submit three seat preferences. “Priority goes to fourth-seaters, but HR and the training partner are fantastic at having individual chats with us and accommodating everyone’s choices.”

The Seats
Around 80% of trainees do a stint in real estate: “The attitude is it’s compulsory but that’s not technically the case in practice.” This large team usually takes two trainees in the Putney office and two in the Central London Bedford Row base. Russell-Cooke is well known for representing both investor landlords and retailers as well as advising on residential sales, conversions and developments: the team recently advised Newable Properties on the £44.4 million sale of a portfolio of multi-let general industrial properties in East London to a large fund. “Deal turn-around times are around four to six weeks in order to get the completion and billing done,” trainees revealed. Other clients include household names like Matalan and Pret A Manger. “We were pretty much given free rein to run certain projects from start to finish,” a source said. “I enjoyed getting into the nitty-gritty of law and instructing counsel, drafting leases and licences and looking through voluminous documents to learn what’s relevant and needs to be disclosed.”

Sources housed in Bedford Row found themselves working “on classic land disputes and possession proceedings.

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Russell-Cooke

Seat options: charities; children and education law; commercial litigation; corporate/commercial; fraud and criminal litigation; employment; family; PI and clinical negligence; private client; property and housing litigation; real estate; trust and estate disputes; regulation
Renowned organisations like the WWF, British Heart Foundation and UNICEF are on the charities team’s client list. “The team is similar to personal injury in size and has three parts: charities and employment, property and government.” According to trainees in the seat “you’re basically doing corporate and commercial work with an additional layer of regulation on top of it.” The team recently advised Foundation for Future London in negotiations for a £10 million funding package from Westfield Stratford City to deliver learning, internships and start-up support in the arts and culture. “There’s a lot of data protection work to do” in this seat, alongside registering organisations as charities and drafting articles.

Trainee Life
“Every time you change seat, it feels like you’re starting at a completely new firm,” an RC trainee told us. We get similar feedback at other firms, but this was compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic: “The furloughing and pay reduction scheme put in place was poorly communicated and inconsistent across teams, as was the qualification process. Only some trainees had pay reduced, which caused unnecessary stress.” Other trainees argued that “during lockdown, the overall priority genuinely seemed to be people’s health. I felt like I could go to a number of partners or senior associates with problems.” Trainees were later reassured “the firm is reimbursing staff who have had to take salary deductions,” which did indeed take place.

“The payoff for being able to have a life outside of work.”

“I’d say Bedford Row is more relaxed in terms of people dressing down and being more sociable, in comparison to the HQ,” a source said. Russell-Cooke’s Putney base does come with “cool gadgets like various hot and cold-water dispensers,” to get exactly the temperature you want. Firmwide the culture doesn’t get very heated – “we don’t tend to get too stressed about things” – thanks partly to a sensible approach to hours. Contracted hours for trainees run 9.30am to 5.30pm, “but of course this varies throughout the departments.” Real estate more typically requires 6.30pm finishes, while trainees in PI and clin neg were “leaving at 5pm most days. You’ll definitely be asked why you haven’t gone home if you’re here past 6pm.” Our sources agreed a lower salary than at City firms was “the payoff for being able to have a life outside of work.”

With the foundation of a diversity network in 2019, trainees felt RC was “late to the game, it’s strange there was nothing in place already.” Sources felt the firm has down well to recruit candidates from different educational backgrounds, “but they could do better in terms of ethnic minority representation. We had events for Pride and Black History Month but lack momentum.” Retention after qualifications is an important step – for the “fairly informal” pro-

We also help tenants with deposit disputes.” There’s a dedicated property and housing litigation seat where you’ll find both private and legal aid work like disrepair claims, evictions and rehousing cases. “The Grenfell inquiry took up the majority of the work I witnessed in the seat,” an insider revealed. “We worked on big disclosure tasks and reviewed sensitive documents about the fire.” Russell-Cooke also represented the operators of Borough Market when an insolvent restaurant transferred its assets without permission. Trainees appreciated the “good level of client contact and chances to handle lower value cases” in real estate seats. “They give you a crash course of what it’s like as an associate on the team.”

“They give you a crash course of what it’s like as an associate on the team.”

There’s high demand for a family seat: the team works for “all sorts of high value clients on a mix of finance, children and divorce cases.” Surrogacy law, family property disputes and declaration of parentage represent growth opportunities for the practice. Day to day trainee responsibilities include “drafting lasting powers of attorney, simple wills and a couple of complex clauses,” as well as “attending client meetings and taking notes.” One insider said they were “encouraged to use their initiative to take action. For example, I received an email with information from the other side; I proactively anticipated the next steps and my seniors appreciated that.”

The firm’s clinical negligence and personal injury department involves trainees in both aspects. “It’s probably an equal mix of the two and is almost completely claimant work,” we heard. On an example of a clin neg case, the firm acted for a patient with a history of schizophrenia. After killing her mother, she served a hospital detention order but may be able to claim financial losses arising from actions whilst psychotic in a case that’s gone to the Supreme Court. Some trainees described the seat as “quite repetitive in terms of the law, but the linked facts will change.” Personal injury matters include inquests, stress at work and historic sexual abuse among others: Russell-Cooke recently represented a man who suffered spinal injuries in a waterslide accident in Benidorm. Interviewees spent this seat investigating information on damages, drafting letters of claim and witness statements, liaising with experts and “preparing court documents, if a case proceeds that far.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chambers UK rankings</th>
<th>Professional Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charities</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Negligence</td>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Social Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Matrimonial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cess, trainees state preferences to the training principal “who then sends out a jobs list later on.” The firm encourages trainees to keep up a dialogue “with the team you’re interested in qualifying into, to maintain those relationships.” In 2020, Russell-Cooke retained eight out of ten qualifiers.

Ready, Steady, Cooke! RC set up ‘The Lockdown Diaries: Trainee Edition’ in 2020 to showcase how trainees have been keeping their spirits high. The Great Trainee Bake Off was a popular event (when they were able to find flour and eggs, of course).
Russell-Cooke

2 Putney Hill, London, SW15 6AB
Tel: 020 8789 9111
Email: graduate.recruitment@russell-cooke.co.uk
Website: www.russell-cooke.co.uk
LinkedIn: russell-cooke

Firm profile
At Russell-Cooke we’re not tied to process, we’re not bound by departments or fixated on job titles. We are a team of lawyers who take a more thoughtful, more rigorous, more collaborative approach to training, to practising law and to working with our clients. We think carefully about what kind of law firm we want to be and the type of work we take on. We’re not driven by profit alone: we’re committed to publicly-funded work (not just a little pro bono for show). And we do the right thing by our people, too: we’re proud to offer a better work-life balance alongside high-level legal work. We’re pragmatic and thorough, and we don’t expect a formulaic way of working. We think ahead and we work together — with our clients and each other — to give the best advice.

Main areas of work
We believe we offer the most broad-based training contract. We act for individuals (ranging from individuals desperate for a legal remedy where a positive outcome will be life-changing to royal families, Russian oligarchs and celebrities) and for companies (ranging from start-ups to household names) as well as charities and social businesses. We advise individuals on crime, family, personal injury, housing etc. and organisations on corporate and commercial, intellectual property, employment, litigation, real estate and much more.

Training opportunities
We have a wide variety of seats on offer and we will work with you to accommodate your preferences where possible. We choose a small cohort of trainees so that there is plenty of opportunity for you to manage your own caseload and get a high level of client contact from your first seat. You will be fully supported by your supervisor and by internal and external training. Trainees do four seats, often including a seat in our core area of real estate. The availability of other seats depends on the needs of different departments but in the past trainees have undertaken seats in litigation, matrimonial, charity and social business, corporate and commercial, employment, children law, private client, trust and estate disputes, property litigation and personal injury and clinical negligence.

Vacation scheme
We believe that our one-week vacation scheme offers the right balance of support and autonomy, and really demonstrates what life is like as a Russell-Cooke trainee. You’ll work with a senior associate in the team, who’ll give you support when you need it, and autonomy when you don’t. You will also have other trainees and lawyers on hand to answer any tricky questions and give you feedback. At the end of the week there will be a form of assessment and interview with the chance of being fasttracked through the trainee recruitment scheme or even of offering a training contract then and there. You do not need to have completed a vacation scheme to be eligible for a training contract. There are 12 placements available across our London offices for two week-long schemes. You will be paid £500 per week.

Dates:
• Spring Vacation Scheme 1: 12-16 April 2021
• Spring Vacation Scheme 2: 19-23 April 2021
• Apply by 21 February 2021

Other benefits
Pension after three months of employment, 22 days holiday, employee discount card, recruitment referral fee, season ticket loan, cycle scheme, computer loan, legal services, maternity/paternity pay, childcare vouchers, life assurance on completion of three months’ probation, access to the employee assistance programme on completion of three months’ probation, access to clubs and social events, free yoga in the Putney office.

University law careers fairs 2020
Legal Check virtual law fairs.
New York’s sterling Shearman offers an international experience to a modest trainee cohort.

“The simple application was another of the reasons I applied,” a trainee told us. “Some firms ask you very convoluted questions, but Shearman’s process was straightforward.” Others were impressed with the extra mile the firm went to, in order to make life easier for applicants: “There was no centralised testing. The firm sent out people to our universities to conduct interviews, so we didn’t have to go to London; I got the feeling the firm valued my time and effort.”

“Shearman doesn’t fit the US firm stereotype in terms of culture; everyone is very understanding and supportive.”

To start their training contract, new arrivals settle into a “completely random” first seat. They then submit a minimum of five preferences before each rotation, keeping in mind that they must do at least two seats among the three core departments: finance, M&A and project development finance (PDF). It’s worth keeping an open mind to split seats and overseas secondments: “It’s down to client demand,” we heard. “You may be required to go overseas – if you’re needed, that’s that.” Getting summoned was no bad thing for sources: “I couldn’t have asked for a better training contract on reflection.” Beyond the core departments, popular seat options include antitrust and international arbitration.

Seat options: antitrust; funds; M&A; project development and finance; finance; litigation; international arbitration; financial institutions advisory; tax; employment; financial restructuring and insolvency

Cross-border mega deals and litigation are the fuel to Shearman’s fire. American deal support is a fixture here, but sources cut their teeth on plenty of homegrown matters as well. The appeal of the firm’s international practice brought more than a few trainees through the door; others were sold by the relatively small intake of 15 or fewer new starters each year. Once they’d settled in, interviewees discovered that Shearman had found a good midpoint between American qualities and British charm, celebrating the “relaxed” and “supportive” atmosphere.

“Shearman doesn’t fit the US firm stereotype in terms of culture; everyone is very understanding and supportive,” one said. The firm does stick to the American stereotype on salaries, paying out a super-sized £120,000 to its NQs.

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Shearman

The Firm
Close all your Airbnb tabs; a contract at Shearman & Sterling could be just the globetrotting ticket you’re looking for. From Wall Street to, well, the world, the firm’s international network of 24 offices offers newbies a training experience without borders. Whether they were on secondment to Singapore, New York, Abu Dhabi, Paris, or sat at their desk in London, trainees we spoke to were “collaborating with lawyers from all over the globe on most matters.” London’s an important piece of the jig-saw: Shearman scores strong Chambers UK rankings for projects, energy, banking, capital markets and financial services regulatory. Globally, the firm is most famous for its elite arbitration practice led from Paris. The firm has had a base in the capital since 1972 and favoured organic growth over mass lateral recruitment, but bolstered its arbitration and restructuring practices with new partner hires in 2020.

Cross-border mega deals and litigation are the fuel to Shearman’s fire. American deal support is a fixture here, but sources cut their teeth on plenty of homegrown matters as well. The appeal of the firm’s international practice brought more than a few trainees through the door; others were sold by the relatively small intake of 15 or fewer new starters each year. Once they’d settled in, interviewees discovered that Shearman had found a good midpoint between American qualities and British charm, celebrating the “relaxed” and “supportive” atmosphere.

“Shearman doesn’t fit the US firm stereotype in terms of culture; everyone is very understanding and supportive,” one said. The firm does stick to the American stereotype on salaries, paying out a super-sized £120,000 to its NQs.
I came forward with new areas of legal knowledge depending on what kind of asset is involved. It’s worth noting that M&A has historically been one of the more competitive departments in which to score an NQ spot.

The firm’s PDF group covers both a core project development practice, and the financing for the constructions. Shearman’s expertise lends itself to emerging jurisdictions, and the team is “particularly strong in the Middle East,” according to trainees. Clients have called for assistance on projects in Kenya, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Brazil and Argentina, among other countries. Nationalised public entities (like Japan Bank for International Cooperation and Bahrain Petroleum Company) and private firms alike are on the roster – Shearman has advised on the development and financing of multi-fuel waste-to-energy project in the Arab Emirate of Sharjah and the modernisation and expansion of the Middle East Oil Refinery in Egypt. 2018 saw the firm grow an infrastructure funds practice with two lateral hires from Baker McKenzie. One trainee described working on a renewables infrastructure deal linked to financing an airport: “It came with an interesting regulatory aspect because of all the cross-border elements. I organised the signings, so was talking to ambassadors and news reporters; the projects we advise on are hugely important to the country they’re carried out in.” Day-to-day tasks in this seat include drafting ancillary documents, signature packs and originals, and signing off on conditions precedent.

“The projects we advise on are hugely important to the country they’re carried out in.”

On a worldwide scale, arbitration is a Shearman signature practice, scoring a top-tier Chambers Global ranking. Commercial and investment arbitration both play a role here. The firm has recently represented the Arab Republic of Egypt in two investor-state disputes following the poor performance and termination of a long-term agreement for export of Egyptian gas to Israel, with upwards of $1 billion at stake. Trainees got to grips with disputes between private and public parties on both the company and state sides. “When I first joined the team I was working on a multibillion-dollar construction dispute in the Middle East,” one recalled. “There was a hearing in my first two weeks, it was a very exciting time.”

Trainees can apply to do an overseas seat as part of the normal assignment process. Sometimes it’s even easier than that: “My supervisor asked around if anyone was willing to go to Abu Dhabi,” an insider noted. “I came forward and off I went!” Trainees can generally voice an interest in jetting off to another office, especially if they can explain.

The Seats

As the largest of Shearman’s core seats, finance comes in many flavours – the two core parts of the offering are leveraged finance (the larger side) and structured finance. Capital markets has now also moved up to the finance floor in the London office. “Most trainees will get a large chunk of their work from the leveraged side and dip in and out of other teams depending on their supervisor or where is busy,” trainees told us. You’ll find both New York-based and English-sourced matters here for clients like Coca-Cola, Nokia and Investcorp, with Shearman usually advising lenders. To give you an idea of the money in play here, the firm recently advised the Bank of Nova Scotia on a $3.3 billion additional facility accession deed provided to subsidiaries of Virgin Media. As for structured finance, Shearman regularly advises European packaging producer Ardagh on hedging for its multibillion-euro financing structure. Common trainee tasks here include company search questionnaires (CSQ), drafting agreements, preparing legal opinions and keeping track of the conditions precedent. One source described their role as “a good set of tasks for a trainee – for example, the CSQ gives a deal overview and shows what needs to be done.” Trainees were wholly impressed with the finance department, especially for “the effort they put into training.”

“I’ve done a lot of drafting from scratch. You see the document from the very start and have the time to get comfortable with it.”

M&A offers a mix of both public and private deals with a strong cross-border focus; key clients include Goldman Sachs, Liberty Global and Intercontinental Exchange. Among Shearman’s recent deals, it’s worth highlighting ArcelorMittal’s $7 billion joint venture acquisition of Essar Steel India; and the $400 million separation of UKTV into two distinct operations owned by Shearman client Discovery and the BBC respectively. Joint ventures often appeared on trainees’ radars, as did infrastructure transactions – both came with plenty of drafting experience.

“I’ve drafted ancillaries, non-disclosure agreements and resolutions,” one noted; another told us they’d put pen to paper on a share purchase agreement. “I’ve done a lot of drafting from scratch. You see the document from the very start and have the time to get comfortable with it.” Trainees also took on research responsibilities: “You get to grips with new areas of legal knowledge depending on what kind...
how it will benefit their learning or build off of experience in a London seat. Some of the most common destinations include Singapore, Brussels and Paris. Although heavily sought after, overseas seats aren’t as competitively fought over as you might guess. “A lot of the offices rely on London trainees coming in,” one revealed. “There are also always trainees from all over the globe in the London office.” Because they take a role equivalent to junior associates, Londoners get a “kick up the butt” in their level of responsibility once abroad: “The teams are even leaner, so you’re constantly learning and getting to meet new people.” Got the global bug? You might even get a second golden ticket: “I’ve been overseas twice, and it’s been a very valuable experience,” a travel-happy source told us. The firm continued to run overseas seats during the Covid-19 pandemic, with trainees seconding from home where necessary.

Trainee Life
Shearman encourages pro bono with a 24-hour requirement; anyone that logs double that earns a congratulatory star. “The projects we’ve done even come up during our reviews,” trainees said, stressing the importance placed on pro bono. They’d worked with charities including local primary schools, Walworth Academy and the Spitalfields Crypt Trust. One source described helping people affected by Covid-19 on “a bitsize project with one of the partners. We help people in need by answering their queries.” Another source was impressed with the firm’s local community outreach: “We display artwork by the homeless throughout our offices, it’s lovely to see.”

“We display artwork by the homeless throughout our offices.”

A typical working day at Shearman starts at 9.30am, and if trainees find themselves twiddling their thumbs they are free to leave at 6pm. Most of our interviewees found little time for thumb-twiddling, with common late-night finishes at 11pm. Nobody complained about the need to put in the hours when necessary: “The firm recruits conscientious people. If you have work to do you’re expected to stay until its done.” Trainees noticed face-time expectations dropping once their supervisors got to know them. “If you are responsible, people understand that you have a life and don’t really bat an eyelid,” one said. The demands of transactional seats are “very up and down,” whereas litigious departments are more consistent (more consistently “tremendous” for some). Nourishment for the soul comes from compensated Deliveroo after 8pm and counselling sessions to help trainees de-stress. “Your supervisor is the first person to notice if you’re looking unwell,” an interviewee rather ominously suggested...

The most common adjective used by trainees to describe the Shearman culture was ‘supportive’. “Although the work is hard, the goal never feels too hard to reach,” they agreed. “If I’m in the office late it’s really not so bad as the firm has an immensely supportive atmosphere. I enjoy being around the people I work with.” Suddenly finding themselves out of the office during the Covid-19 pandemic, trainees weren’t too shaken up - one who was mid-secondment told us: “The team checks in everyday, which speaks volumes for the firm’s culture.” Team Shearman knows how to loosen their ties once in a while too: “A couple of the main partners came along to our karaoke night, they were dancing and singing with us,” a source said. “We are a very integrated team.” You know what they say – lawyers who sing together, stay together.

“If I’m in the office late it’s really not so bad as the firm has an immensely supportive atmosphere.”

When not unleashing their inner Britney Spears, trainees cut loose during the three formal trainee socials each year, for which they receive “a very generous budget.” Each department also has its fun, project finance taking the proverbial cake with “drinks every Friday.” At the time of our calls the WISER women’s committee had recently hosted an International Women’s Day celebration: “There was a panel discussion along with food and drinks – we saw a great turnout.” Though sources were impressed by Shearman’s efforts to push for diversity through internal organisations, they felt representation of women and ethnic minorities “could be better” at the senior level.

New arrivals get up to speed via weekly training sessions in each of the firm’s core departments, typically run around lunchtime. “I recently attended training on how to conduct the due diligence process in M&A,” one source said. “There are always opportunities to learn.” The appraisal portal provides trainees with easily accessible feedback via a portal dubbed ‘My Development’ – they can access comments from any lawyer they’ve worked with. “The team checks in everyday, which speaks volumes for the firm’s culture.” Trainees also get an NQ mentor, who helps to make the qualification process crystal clear. It all starts with “a casual conversation with a partner you have a good relationship with in the department you want to qualify into.” From then on, the firm runs qualification as it does seat rotation; trainees submit three department preferences to HR. Shearman retained 12 of 13 trainees in 2020.
Shearmanator II: Decampment Day:

The firm runs a European associate retreat, gathering lawyers from various offices for a conference. “There’s both training and networking,” trainees explained. “It’s great to meet everyone – those relationships don’t stop when you come back to London.”
Shearman & Sterling LLP

9 Appold Street, London EC2A 2AP
Tel: 020 7655 5000  Fax: 020 7655 5500
Email: graduates@shearman.com
Website: ukgraduates.shearman.com
Twitter: @ShearmanLaw
Facebook: ShearmanandSterlingUKGraduates
LinkedIn: shearman-&-sterling-llp

Firm profile
Shearman & Sterling is one of the world’s leading premier global law firms and was established over a century ago. The London office opened over 40 years ago and quickly became one of the leading practices, covering all aspects of English, European and US corporate and finance law. Globally there are over 900 lawyers, including around 200 partners.

Main areas of work
Our main areas of work include: M&A (including private equity), US capital markets, project development and finance, finance (including derivatives structured, acquisition and leveraged finance), international arbitration, litigation, antitrust, tax, financial institutions advisory, asset management, real estate and executive compensation and employee benefits.

Training opportunities
We look for trainees from a broad range of backgrounds who can bring their unique experiences to the firm. Working closely with partners and associates, trainees quickly have the opportunity to become an integral team member, taking on real responsibility from day one. Our trainees are enthusiastic and ambitious, and show a real willingness to learn and develop their skills across both technical and soft skill areas.

The two year training contract consists of four seats, each lasting six months. Two of these seats will be in our core practice areas (M&A, finance or project development and finance), while the remaining two are selected from the other practice areas. Trainees typically share an office with a senior lawyer allowing informal learning on the job, while the structured training programme at the firm ensures trainees get exposure to all the information they need to be a success now and in the future.

In addition to the cross-jurisdictional work trainees do in London, they are also encouraged to spend a seat in one of our overseas offices, allowing them to further build their global networks.

Vacation scheme
We run four vacation schemes each year and these are the perfect way to gain an insight into life at Shearman & Sterling. The scheme will see you experience two diverse practice groups (one each week), with your personal preferences catered to. The scheme aims to mirror the training contract in that everyone will experience at least one of our core transactional groups (M&A, finance and project development and finance) as well as being allocated a mentor and supervisor to provide advice and support, answer any questions and most importantly — provide you with some work.

Other benefits
Life assurance; long term disability insurance; annual eye test; access to group personal pension scheme with employer contribution up to 5%; subsidised gym membership; private medical insurance; travel insurance; private dental insurance; taxis and meals for out of hours work, cycle to work scheme, private GP appointments, mortgage advisor, massages and manicures onsite.

Open days and first-year opportunities
If you are not yet ready to apply for a training contract or vacation scheme, there are many other opportunities to meet us on campus or come into the office. We run our annual Head Start programme for first year law students and second year non-law students; this provides an insight into the training contract as well as helpful advice and practical tips on applications, law as a business and how to improve your commercial awareness. We also run open days each term to allow you to come into our London office for an introduction to the firm and to meet a range of firm representatives. We always recommend you try to meet us and have your questions answered before applying for a vacation scheme or training contract. Applications for all programmes will open on 1st September.
Sidley Austin LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 19
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 42/100/27
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; client secondments
First-year salary: £50,000
Qualification salary: £135,500

This Chicago native is known for all that jazzy finance, and there’s plenty of razzle dazzle in private equity too.

The Firm
“Sidley has a lot of depth,” said one trainee, reflecting on why this US giant stood out to them. “Alongside a strong finance practice and a growing private equity scene, they also brought in a life sciences team a couple of years ago,” which resulted in a new seat for trainees. Sidley is especially known for its capital markets work, with Chambers UK rankings in securitisation, structured finance, derivatives, debt, and restructuring, among other areas. And it’s worth taking note of that growing private equity scene, because it’s been a major focus for the London office over the last few years. It all kicked off in 2016 with the addition of a six-person team from Kirkland & Ellis (four of whom are still with Sidley). Fast-forward to 2020, and you’ll find more than 40 Sidley solicitors in London with a private equity string to their bow.

“Sidley has a lot of depth,” said one trainee, reflecting on why this US giant stood out to them. “Alongside a strong finance practice and a growing private equity scene, they also brought in a life sciences team a couple of years ago,” which resulted in a new seat for trainees. Sidley is especially known for its capital markets work, with Chambers UK rankings in securitisation, structured finance, derivatives, debt, and restructuring, among other areas. And it’s worth taking note of that growing private equity scene, because it’s been a major focus for the London office over the last few years. It all kicked off in 2016 with the addition of a six-person team from Kirkland & Ellis (four of whom are still with Sidley). Fast-forward to 2020, and you’ll find more than 40 Sidley solicitors in London with a private equity string to their bow.

The Seats
Trainees felt they had “so much say” in seat allocation. Before joining and at each rotation they submit three preferences for their placement. “It’s a very frank conversation with HR and they do their best to accommodate everyone,” they explained, “but of course second-years get priority.” Although there aren’t any compulsory seats, the size of the finance and corporate groups means that the majority of trainees will spend a rotation there.

“The influx of lateral hires over the last four years or so caught the attention of Sidley trainees when they were researching law firms. For one interviewee, “It was a big indication that the firm is ambitious.”

The Seats
Trainees felt they had “so much say” in seat allocation. Before joining and at each rotation they submit three preferences for their placement. “It’s a very frank conversation with HR and they do their best to accommodate everyone,” they explained, “but of course second-years get priority.” Although there aren’t any compulsory seats, the size of the finance and corporate groups means that the majority of trainees will spend a rotation there.

“I was the contact for the local counsel and all their signing needs.”

Four trainees sit with Sidley’s BFG, the global finance group (GFG). The team handles leveraged finance and structured finance, and there’s also some real estate finance work (one trainee sits in this specific area). For the most part, trainees’ work is shaped by their supervisors. The team is currently seeing a lot of restructuring matters and advising clients on the impact of Covid-19. “I’m sending out a lot of advice notes!” one trainee told us. On the structured finance side, the team has advised Polar Asset Management (a Canadian hedge fund) on nine Eu-

Seat options: banking and financial services; competition; debt & equity capital markets; debt restructuring, debt finance & structured finance; employment; healthcare and FDA; insurance; investment funds; IP/IT; litigation; M&A; private equity; real estate & real estate finance; regulatory and enforcement; tax, employee benefits and executive compensation
European collateralised loan obligations (known as CLOs) worth €1 billion in total. On a recent leveraged finance matter, the team acted for TowerBrook Capital on the £293 million refinancing of its portfolio company ICS. The group also has crossover with the private equity team on financing private equity buyout transactions (which are funded with leverage – which is to say loans). Trainees here got to draft loan agreements and shareholder resolutions, but just like the rest of the GFG cohort, “we need to keep on top of the closings.” For trainees across the group, “there’s a lot of exposure to project management.” That means “we run the conditions precedent and closing checklists, and liaise with opposing counsel and clients.” Oh, and as for the global part of global finance group? We heard of trainees working on cross-border deals that involved as many as 17 jurisdictions. On one deal, a trainee told us “I was the contact for the local counsel and all their signing needs, making sure they had the corporate authorisations we needed.”

Corporate takes in another four trainees per rotation. Again, work here is led by supervisors, so trainees may spend time on M&A, private equity, or a mix of both. “The work is much more technical on the M&A side,” trainees told us. “There’s a lot of project handling and overseeing completion checklists, but we also got a stab at drafting some new documents and that was fantastic. There was also some research legal involved.” The team recently advised gaming company Inspired Entertainment on its $120 million acquisition of Novomatic UK’s Gaming Tech Group. They also represented eBay on the sale of brands4friends (a German online shopping club) to a private equity firm. Some also got experience in public M&A with companies on the London Stock Exchange. The private equity team handles mid-market deals in the hundreds of millions – it recently advised Goldman Sachs, for example, on a $90 million investment in DocPlanner Group, an online healthcare booking platform. Trainees were responsible for tasks like incorporating comments into documents, preparing signature packs, and drafting parts of due diligence reports.

“I was able to draft parts of an EU Commission investigation document.”

Trainees might do an advisory seat in banking and financial services regulatory. “Having experience with the structured finance team is a plus as this seat covers funds and derivatives work as well,” trainees explained. Clients here include fund managers, banks and asset management companies. The team recently advised KPMG on its compliance approach in line with the EU Market Abuse Regulation. Brexit was a big feature in a lot of the work here. For example, the team recently advised Aon Securities on its investment activities in Europe pre- and post-Brexit. Amidst uncertainties, trainees were tasked with “researching and keeping up to date on what other EU countries are doing and drafting bullet point emails with the latest updates to send to clients.” Sources here enjoyed legal research and drafting advice notes. The seat also threw up the occasional unexpected challenge, like “having to find a lawyer in Mongolia who spoke English and had the niche expertise we needed.”

Other advisory seat options include competition, life sciences, tax and employment. The firm has some truly giant competition clients, including Apple, which it advised during a European Commission investigation into a complaint made by Spotify about Apple’s App store. Trainees here get to spend three months in the Brussels office. At the time of our calls, we heard the work in Brussels was more focused on cartel investigations in the EU, while London was handling more matters related to mergers. On the investigations side, “I was able to draft parts of an EU Commission investigation document,” one lucky trainee told us. Merger matters entailed “a lot of multi-jurisdictional analysis and filing preparation.”

London’s emerging life sciences department also works closely with Brussels, advising clients in pharmaceutical, biotech and medical spheres, as well as food and cosmetic companies. “I visited the High Court in the first week of the seat,” recalled one startled source. “It was a baptism of fire!” The team recently advised US pharmaceutical company Nektar Therapeutics on GDPR compliance in its European clinical trials.

“I’m struggling to think how I’ll spend my salary if I do qualify.”

Sidley’s usual overseas secondment options include an international arbitration seat in the Hong Kong office. There might also be other secondment options here and there as needed – for example we heard a trainee had spent time in the Geneva office with the world trade law team. The firm has previously offered a client secondment with Airbus in Toulouse.

In true American style, there’s “a big push” on pro bono in Sidley’s London office, though some suggested “maybe not as much as there is at other US firms” that set specific pro bono hours targets. Sidley does recognise pro bono contributions with awards and our sources felt “heavily encouraged to the point where every trainee is expected to have done one Personal Independence Payment appeal
during their training contract.” Plenty of our sources had exceeded this. The firm’s pro bono fellowship programme is in its second year, allowing “a trainee who’s about to qualify to work one to three months in-house at a charity of their choice.”

**Trainee Life**

At the time of our calls, a handful of trainees were going through the qualification process. “We have a week to choose which seats we’d like to qualify in and submit our CVs,” they explained. “Interviews are then set up with partners in those departments.” Appraisals play a big part in the decision, so “it’s important to treat every person you work with as if they’re above you, regardless of seniority.” In 2020 all nine trainees were retained, with one on a fixed-term contract.

“|I’m struggling to think how I’ll spend my salary if I do qualify,” said one flummoxed trainee, as they contemplated the £135,500 salary that greets Sidley NQs. With trainees starting on £50,000, “I’m already earning so much more than my mum ever has, so I can’t complain – but some people still do!” According to one critic, “if you equate the pay per hour, then it isn’t really that high.”

|There was one week where I worked until 3am every night – including Sunday!”|

We’ll leave you to do the maths and decide if you agree: trainees reported average hours of a 9.30am start with a 7.30pm finish, but with a lot of fluctuation in the transactional seats. “You’re either slammed or twiddling your thumbs,” said trainees, and one recalled “there was one week where I worked until 3am every night – including Sunday!” Trainees far preferred the more “predictable hours” in advisory seats.

With long hours, “socialising is perhaps not as prevalent as it is at traditionally English firms.” Even so, trainees described “a lot of fun” in the Sidley office playing foosball and ping pong with their colleagues, including partners. We also heard the firm has men’s and women’s football teams. “I’d actually consider people I’ve worked with here more as friends than colleagues,” said one.

Trainees did feel the London office was “lacking” in the representation of different demographics, “but not because they aren’t trying.” As well as working with Bright Network and Rare Recruitment, the firm recently appointed senior associate Alice Morgan as diversity and inclusion consultant. “She heads up diversity efforts in the European offices,” one trainee explained, “and has organised a few conferences like inviting BAME lawyers in the legal industry to talk to us at Sidley.”

With all of the firm’s new hires over the last few years, our interviewees did pick up on “a clear divide” between the ‘legacy’ teams at the firm and the more recent lateral hires. From the trainees’ perspectives, it was most obvious in training styles. “The private equity team’s approach is very much to build an active learning environment,” they said, or in other words, to learn on the job. All supervisors undergo some training, but not everyone was satisfied: “I think the younger supervisors need more training.”

At the time of our interviews, trainees themselves wanted to get more department-specific training, “because it gets super busy when you start a seat and there isn’t really much time to sit and read through the trainee handover notes.”

But it looks like the firm is now some way to solving this: the shift to remote working prompted Sidley to allocate trainees specific time to go through these handovers and get up to speed without the benefit of being in the office. NQs get to attend corporate college in Chicago HQ, which continues into third, fifth and seventh year. Beyond this US excursion, trainees felt the London base has a more familial link with the firm’s other European offices. The firm hosted its first EU lawyers conference this year at an estate in Windsor, “and all the lawyers from the Munich, Geneva and Brussels offices flew over.”

**Red Hot Sidley Peppers:**

It wasn’t all work and no play at the conference: “We put together a band with a guitarist from Brussels, and a pianist and bass player from Geneva. It was really enjoyable.”
Sidley Austin LLP

70 St Mary Axe, London, EC3A 8BE
Tel: 020 7360 3600
Email: graduaterecruitment@sidley.com
Website: www.sidleycareers.com/en/europe

Firm profile
Sidley Austin LLP is one of the world’s largest full-service law firms. With approximately 2,000 lawyers practising on four continents (North America, Europe, Australasia and Asia), the firm provides a broad range of integrated services to meet the needs of its clients across a multitude of industries.

Main areas of work
Corporate, competition, debt and equity capital markets, debt finance; including structured finance, debt restructuring and derivatives, employment, financial services regulatory, healthcare and FDA, food and drug law, hedge funds, insurance, litigation, private equity, real estate and real estate finance, restructuring and tax.

Training opportunities
The firm is not a typical City firm and it is not a 'legal factory' so there is no risk of being just a number. Everyone is encouraged to be proactive and to create their own niche when they are ready to do so. Trainees spend time in the firm’s main groups. In each group trainees will sit with a partner or associate to ensure individual training based on ‘hands on’ experience. You will be encouraged to take responsibility where appropriate. Regular meetings with your supervisor ensure both the quality and quantity of your experience. In addition, there is a structured timetable of training on a cross-section of subjects.

Vacation scheme
We run a one-week winter vacation scheme and two-week vacation schemes in spring and summer each year. You will experience the day-to-day life of a lawyer at the firm and will have the opportunity to undertake real work rather than just observing or shadowing. This practical experience will be supplemented by a programme of presentations and workshops that will ensure you get to know as much about the firm as you possibly can during the placement. We aim to recruit all of our trainees from the vacation schemes.

Other benefits
Private health insurance, life assurance, contribution to gym membership, interest-free season ticket loan, income protection scheme and pension.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Sidley Austin LLP are offering first year students the opportunity to attend an Open Day. Open days will be held throughout the year. For more information please visit our website.

Sidley Austin LLP, a Delaware limited liability partnership which operates at the firm’s offices other than Chicago, London, Hong Kong, Singapore and Sydney, is affiliated with other partnerships, including Sidley Austin LLP, an Illinois limited liability partnership (Chicago); Sidley Austin LLP, a separate Delaware limited liability partnership (London); Sidley Austin LLP, a separate Delaware limited liability partnership (Singapore); Sidley Austin, a New York general partnership (Hong Kong); Sidley Austin, a Delaware general partnership of registered foreign lawyers restricted to practising foreign law (Sydney); and Sidley Austin Nishikawa Foreign Law Joint Enterprise (Tokyo). The affiliated partnerships are referred to herein collectively as Sidley Austin, Sidney, or the firm.
Simkins LLP

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 20/15/5
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £34,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Simkins

Nice to media – London boutique Simkins represents top names in the music, publishing, film and television industries.

The Firm
“If you’re interested in media, entertainment AND the law, it only takes quick research to find which firms are going to be right for you.” Interviewees at Simkins weren’t wrong – their firm is one of only a handful focused solely on the shining lights of media and entertainment, and it picks up Chambers UK rankings in the sector for publishing, music, film and television. Defamation and reputation management is another Simkins speciality and ranked practice: the firm recently represented Sir Cliff Richard in a ground-breaking privacy case also involving the BBC and South Yorkshire Police.

Given that nearly everyone in the world would count music, film or media in some form among their interests, it’s no surprise that competition is fierce for Simkins’ two or three training contracts each year. Our research suggests that across all firms, applicants have a 2% chance of scoring a training contract; at Simkins, it shrinks to just 0.6%. In order to separate the Tom Cruises from the Tommy Wiseaus, Simkins’ application process involves a unique “intense” week-long vacation scheme. “Coinciding with the summer party, it’s a week of exercises, role-plays with partners and reading through case materials,” sources explained. “It’s great because you end up meeting at least 75% of the firm before starting.” Each year, eight or so candidates participate in the vacation scheme, with just two progressing to training contracts. May the odds be ever in your favour.

“The seats in the Simkins training contract, which keeps things simple: four mandatory seats in corporate, commercial, property and disputes. “It’s a good system as it removes any potential politics,” trainees agreed. “Commercial is typically the most popular and property the least popular seat; however, all of them provide great experience.” With just 40-odd lawyers under Simkins’ roof (including trainees), you’re likely to have worked with pretty much everyone by qualification season.

Commercial litigation, defamation/reputation management and employment together make up the disputes seat. Many of our interviewees had also spent three months handling contentious matters with the employment team. “Reputation management is a lot more reactive to live events and cases tend to have much more urgency to them, whereas employment law is more procedural,” one trainee explained. They and others enjoyed attending tribunals and hearings: “You’re mainly making notes but also getting direct exposure to a barrister doing their thing,”

Seat options: commercial; corporate; disputes; employment; property
Chambers UK rankings

Defamation/Reputation Management  Media & Entertainment

which is great.” Simkins advised FirstGroup on the termination of the CEO’s PA following a period of absence to participate in the Polish Love Island – she hadn’t asked for permission and was sacked for gross misconduct. Who says law is boring? Reputation management comes with chances “to conduct a mix of legal and non-legal research. You might be looking at an individual’s Twitter feeds or digging about into other people’s lives.” IP disputes are another fixture: Simkins recently represented Frank Recruitment in a dispute with Pearson over the ‘Pearson Frank’ trademark that reached the General Court of the CJEU.

“Commercial is the busiest department and the one people look forward to most,” sources reiterated. “You are free to source work from any of the partners and each of them has a specialist client base.” If you’re glued to your Spotify account, for example, you might make a beeline to the partner specialising in advising musicians on record deals, songwriting royalties and other music contracts. In 2019 the firm advised the legendary Cher on all aspects of her European touring arrangements; they also counselled Firecracker Films on the life rights and co-production agreement for West End production Everybody’s Talking about Jamie, based on the Jamie: Drag Queen at 16 documentary. “We get great drafting opportunities,” trainees said. “In my time in this seat I’ve helped draft location agreements, director agreements, a producer’s agreement and a book option agreement.”

“Anything the senior associates are doing, you can have a crack at.”

“A lot of the corporate work is generated from matters in the commercial team that have a corporate element to them,” sources told us. That meant working on media company share sales, on a film financing or on the acquisition of a music label. “Anything the senior associates are doing, you can have a crack at,” a trainee declared. “I’ve been communicating with clients, drafting board resolutions and conducting legal research on case backgrounds – all under supervision.” The firm advised international music publishing giant BMG Rights Management on its acquisition of the World Circuit record label, which specialises in Cuban and West African artists and bands.

Simkins’ property team predominantly handles commercial property, “though there is a little residential work” that trainees can also sample. Despite the common perception that property is the least popular seat, every one of our interviewees valued their time there: “It’s probably the seat that offers most responsibility because as well as assisting more senior people on larger transactions, you’re having to run your own files early on.” This source elaborated: “You might receive instructions from the client from which you would draft a lease, send that to the tenant and then make appropriate revisions. There can be a lot of back and forth with different versions of the document; once something’s agreed, you would see it through until completion.”

Trainee Life

“I haven’t seen much, if anything, in the way of office politics,” a trainee said of Simkins’ day-to-day running, “Everyone’s keen to get trainees involved in the business development side of things – there’s a ton of networking events you can attend.” Others opted to talk about (relatively) laid-back relationships with partners: “I’ve had some of them – big names in the industry – casually come into my office to chat, joke and have a good time. There’s no need to feel worried about talking to anyone here, I’m definitely not having anxiety dreams about it.” Simkins keeps morale high with a vibrant social calendar including an annual Oktoberfest event, bingo evenings and a Burns Night celebration complete with haggis, whisky and bagpipes. Do trainees feel comfortable letting their hair down in front of partners? “At this stage, yes,” they agreed.

Most trainees told us they start work at 9.30am and finish around 7pm on a typical day. “There’s not a culture of having to work more for the sake of it, and there are periods where you can leave at 5.30pm and nobody will blink an eyelid,” several reported. There were also periods when trainees had worked later nights, wrapping things up at 10pm or 11pm in the most extreme examples. Weekend work was, however, avoided across the board, and trainees seemed chill about disconnecting: “I don’t feel guilty waiting to reply to emails on Monday, it feels like I can switch off.” Manageable working hours made our sources optimistic about their long-term future with Simkins, suggesting that “you don’t find people qualifying and then leaving for somewhere quieter. The hours here aren’t comparable to hours at other firms in the City and you’re not working yourself to death, so we often have people join from the bigger firms looking for a better culture and work/life balance.”

With very few trainees jostling for position, the Simkins cohort was unfazed by qualification. “It seems pretty informal,” they explained. “Typically, there are no interviews; it’s more of a chat about where you want to go during the mid-set review of your last seat.” Things might only get more structured if multiple trainees apply to the same department. Because Simkins recruits on such a small scale, “retention figures can be quite distorted” if just one person doesn’t stick around. In 2020 the firm did not disclose its retention numbers.
Strictly come drafting

Client secondments are available but “very ad hoc,” and it’s highly unlikely you’ll be working directly with Tom Hardy or Gal Gadot. Sorry.
Simkins LLP is a niche commercial law firm based in central London. We are best known for our work in the media and entertainment sector, but we also act for entrepreneurs and businesses in many other industries, including property, retail, professional services and finance.

We pride ourselves on really getting to understand our clients’ businesses so that we can provide the best practical advice, specifically tailored to our clients’ needs.

Our clients range from individual entertainers and entrepreneurs, through small and medium sized enterprises, to the largest multi-national corporations.

Main areas of work
We provide a full range of legal services: corporate, commercial, property, employment and dispute resolution.

Our specialist areas include intellectual property, contract law, defamation and privacy.

Our entertainment industry expertise covers all industry sectors including music, film, television, theatre, book publishing, advertising and digital media.

Training opportunities
Trainees rotate through four seats of six months each. Currently, the seats are in disputes, employment, corporate commercial and property. Secondment opportunities are available, but normally for not more than three months.

We will discuss seat allocation with you but, given the size and nature of our practice, we are limited in the extent to which we can take individual preferences into account.

Vacation scheme
Following interview, successful candidates will be invited to attend a work placement for one week at our offices at Lynton House, during which, candidates will be given the opportunity to work shadow lawyers within the firm and will participate in a number of practical, legal and analytical exercises. The firm will offer up to eight work placements.

There will be one placement week in 2021 – it will take place in the week beginning Monday 9th August 2021. Following the work placement, if you are successful, an offer of a training contract to start in September 2023 will be made at some time shortly after your attendance on the work placement.

Other benefits
Pension, PHI, GIP, DIS, STL, CTW scheme, cash plan, EAP, payroll giving.

Open days and first-year opportunities
New trainees to the firm are individually assigned a year two trainee to act as their mentor. Trainees are provided with a full induction programme when they join the firm. Trainees are allocated a training partner who remains available to them throughout their training contract. The contract consists of four six-month seats, working in our core practice areas, and/or at client secondments. During each seat, trainees are seated with an allocated supervisor, who provides day-to-day guidance and supervision. Mid-seat reviews are held at three months, with end of seat reviews being held at six months. All reviews are carried out with the trainee, their allocated training partner, their seat supervisor, and with the firm’s HR manager.
Simmons & Simmons LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Bristol, Cambridge
Overseas offices: 20
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 145/270/52
Seats: 6x4 months
First-year salary: £39,000 (£45,000 London)
Qualification salary: £52,000 (£79,000 London)

Looking for “a well-established City firm with an international outlook and a reputation for hiring (non-psychopathic) personable lawyers?” Right this way...

The Firm
Simmons’ big City name is an obvious draw for a lot of the trainees we interview, but the firm is no carbon copy of its Square Mile rivals; a few quirks and specialist areas mean there’s appeal here beyond the corporate-finance conveyor belt. A few of our sources were impressed by Simmons’ “progressive and pioneering approach” to modern technology, with the firm’s 2019 acquisition of tech solutions provider Wavelength putting the legal press on notice. “Simmons was among the very first, and one of the few firms at the time that set up a FinTech fund (in 2016), which was a major draw for me,” an interviewee noted.

More creative types were simply sold by the art collection: Simmons has been collecting modern art to adorn its office walls for the past three decades.

With roots in the City dating back to 1896, the firm has a history to rival the magic circle and a similarly global presence: 23 offices worldwide at the last count. Simmons also expanded its domestic presence into Bristol in 2012. “There’s very much a two-offices, one-firm approach” according to sources there – “in terms of work distribution, trainees get the same experience in Bristol.” The firm confirmed its commitment to the second location with a move to larger office space in 2019; it also pays one of the highest trainee and qualification salaries in the South West, albeit less than the London pay packet. The Cambridge base is home to the ‘Simmons Wavelength’ legal support team and does not take trainees.

To match its forward-thinking expansion into legal tech, Simmons has carved out an enviable niche in life sciences, earning three Chambers UK rankings for the practice. Its best performance is in finance, including five capital markets rankings and top prizes for hedge funds, commodities and financial crime; but the firm also tops the table for employment. Head to chambers.com for the full breakdown.

Trainees at Simmons do four six-month seats, including one contentious (competition, antitrust and trade (CAT); IP; litigation; or employment) and two non-contentious (the firm has various banking and finance seats alongside corporate, projects and real estate options). The last is trainees’ to choose depending on availability; they may also have the option to go on secondment to a client or overseas office. Options are reviewed every six months, although regular international secondments include Hong Kong and Dubai. “Responsibility levels can vary enormously between departments,” sources warned. It’s also worth noting that Bristol offers fewer seat options than the London HQ.

The Seats
Simmons’ finance-based seats fall under four categories: banking, financial services, capital markets and disputes. Each department has subgroups and trainees can request to practise in a specific one if they’d prefer to. In each of the groups, you’ll find a who’s who of the bank-

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Simmons

Seat options: corporate tax; IP; litigation; employment; banking; financial services; structured finance and derivatives; corporate; projects; ICT; real estate, competition

“Simmons was among the very first, and one of the few firms at the time that set up a FinTech fund.”
The firm’s banking department keeps most of its dealings confidential, but we can mention Simmons client Nurture Landscapes’ £40 million credit extension provided by HSBC. Sources characterised matters here as “a lot more fast-paced: deals usually complete in a fortnight, then you’re on to the next, so you have to juggle multiple deals for multiple clients.” That said, “the nature of the work means some days you have nothing on and the next day you’re at 100% capacity, so you never really know how your week is going to go.” Trainees were surprised to find “deals can sometimes have societal importance on top of being high-stakes, so we’re engaged in work that will make a difference. That’s not what you’d expect from banking, it’s usually quite faceless.” A common task in this seat is “really technical research,” which can pose “a cerebral challenge.”

Disputes can also be research-heavy, but trainees got their fair share of more scintillating responsibilities such as drafting letters to the other side, making court applications and liaising with counsel. Financial and commercial disputes alike fall in here: the group recently represented international mobile network operator Telefónica in a £25 million clash with Carphone Warehouse. Simmons’ disputes team also advises LG, BP and other companies with names longer than two letters. “Taking an active role” in cross-departmental client meetings, one lucky source revealed they only had one bundle to do in the whole seat. Others noted clear progression over their time in disputes: “A real highlight was when I was drafting letters to the other side – who were being really aggressive – and my drafts came back with only one or two changes from supervisors, where previously I’d had about half my drafts amended. It was like progressing from a secondary school Year 7 to Year 8!”

“A bit daunting for people who need their hand held, but it encourages you to be independent.”

School is also in session in real estate, where trainees reckoned they “had the most client-facing responsibility of all the seats. I was let loose with my own matters, which is typical for this department.” These cases tend to be lower-value asset management projects, “like if a client rents out a property and the tenant wants to redecorate. They won’t
always want to get involved in landlord/tenant disputes, so we negotiate a licence for alteration instead.” Newbies also play a smaller part in bigger transactions by running the due diligence. Simmons recently acted for Hines UK during its acquisition of a former Sainsbury’s site in Birmingham, to build student accommodation; the firm’s other clients include Legal & General and M7 Real Estate. Even first-seaters here get to run their own small files, especially if a departing trainee left work outstanding; it can “be a bit daunting for people who need their hand held, but it encourages you to be independent and makes you proactive in asking questions.”

Employment counts as a contentious seat at Simmons, but trainees reported a roughly 50/50 split between litigious and advisory matters. “It’s good for people who don’t want to be a litigator because you get to do the contentious seat alongside non-contentious work,” insiders noted. The firm almost exclusively represents employers, often in tribunal cases. Monzo, AXA and Invesco are among the companies on the roster; management consulting firm Russell Reynolds called on the team’s aid when a new hire’s former workplace attempted to block their recruitment. An employment seat comes with its share of “basic tasks like bundling and disclosure, which can be mundane, but you get more responsibility if you prove yourself and can move on to preparing witness statements.” Non-contentious work involves supporting corporate transactions, such as integrating employees following a company acquisition. Sources were pleased with the “huge amount of client contact: partners like us to be the first port of call.”

“All the partners I’ve met have been so approachable and down to earth, which is a bit strange given how intelligent and powerful they are,” one of our more starstruck interviewees suggested. Simmons may seek out “high-performance lawyers who never shrink away from work,” but we heard it’s also looking for “genuinely nice people who are human before anything else.” The trainee cohort is particularly close: “We did loads of activities during lockdown, like drinks and a virtual bake-off. Baked goods are a common fixture at the firm and on the 124th anniversary, staff and lawyers baked 124 cakes and donated the proceeds to charity.” We heard that one of the firm’s practice group heads hosts a summer garden party at their home; others make a point to check in with trainees even after they’ve left the department.

The true picture

The firm’s own efforts in recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce were a little less well received by some trainee sources, but Simmons has earned plaudits as a Stonewall Top Global Employer 2019 and a Times top 50 employer for women. Internal diversity groups include MERGE for minority ethnic lawyers, which provides a forum for diverse individuals to discuss any difficulties they face; they also receive a dedicated mentor. The Number One Club – named after the firm’s London address at 1 Ropemaker Street – is there for female lawyers and there are several religious organisations available too. All in all, sources agreed Simmons does “make an effort to make sure people’s voices are heard.”

Trainee Life

In keeping with its City compadres, several departments at the firm have reputations for requiring “brutal” hours on the part of trainees. “The people at Simmons aren’t put off by long hours because we know we’re doing some of the best work in the City,” insiders declared. Weekend work can be hard to avoid, and many made use of the office canteen or ordered takeaway post-8pm. “The partners are really good at rewarding people” who do have to put in long shifts. “They give us time off in lieu and the work is really interesting, so it never really feels like you spend your Sundays working.” Despite their heavy load, trainees are “very keen to snap up” pro bono and found “nobody gives you a hard time for doing it.” The firm does a lot of international work supporting human rights defenders and authored the Human Rights Defenders’ Toolbox, but trainees had also advised on smaller projects for regular pro bono clients like Macmillan and the Big Issue, or hosted CV workshops with under-resourced schools to “encourage access to the legal profession.”

There was some confusion (and a little discontent) surrounding the trainee assessment system. Each trainee receives a grade against broad criteria, “but how the assessors come to their decisions is quite opaque.” Insiders were more positive about their everyday training, especially given the challenging nature of their work. “The tasks end up being so complicated that you can’t find the answer, but that means we’re able to make judgement calls which the supervisor then challenges you on,” they explained. Simmons’ feedback system is gradually becoming more formalised to bring it in line with trainee development objectives. “My supervisors were brilliant,” one source said. “They were really interested in pastoral care and my career development while making sure I wasn’t overburdened or doing just grunt work.”

The Covid-19 pandemic delayed Simmons’ NQ process, but sources anticipated the firm would stick with its usual system: a jobs list comes out around the fourth seat, then trainees rank available departments in order of preference. A dating-app-style matching process determines which groups trainees will get jobs in. Simmons did not disclose its retention rate in 2020.
Simmons & Simmons

CityPoint, One Ropemaker Street, London EC2Y 9SS
Tel: 020 7628 2020
Email: recruitment@simmons-simmons.com
Website: http://graduates.simmons-simmons.com

Firm profile
We’re a truly international firm, with truly international reach. Every day, our expert teams across Europe, the Middle East and Asia come together to work on our clients toughest commercial challenges. Our lawyers are sector specialists so they’re experts in the areas that matter most to everyone’s future – from healthcare and technology to the financial forces that power our world.

We’re reimagining what a career in law looks like. It’s all part of our long-term strategy to change the way we work, so we can deliver smarter solutions – to our people and our clients. It means that when you join our firm, you’ll discover so much more than the practice of law.

Main areas of work
We view the world through the lens of our key sectors: asset management and investment funds, financial institutions, healthcare and life sciences, and technology, media and telecommunications. These sector teams are drawn from the core practice areas of: corporate; projects; information, communications and technology; competition and antitrust and trade; dispute resolution; intellectual property; employment; pensions and incentives; banking; structured finance and derivatives; debt capital markets; financial services; real estate and tax.

Training opportunities
We offer training contracts in both Bristol and London, and either way, you’ll spend two years discovering the innovation we’re known for. As well as moving through four six-month seats across our practice areas, you’ll also benefit from the Compass programme; our unique and progressive trainee skills academy that offers a combination of practical learning and online tools designed to support your journey through to qualification.

Vacation scheme
Discover what it’s like to be a trainee lawyer with one of our vacation schemes. Over one or two weeks in either Bristol or London, you’ll experience the work, the reach and the day-to-day buzz of our international firm. Throw yourself into this full programme of social events and work experience, and you’ll get a taste for our firm and the work we do, from research to drafting, and meetings to departmental training.

Winter vacation scheme (London): A one-week scheme aimed specifically at final year students and graduates of all disciplines. Applications open 1st October 2020.

Summer vacation scheme (London or Bristol): A two-week scheme open to penultimate and final year students and graduates of all disciplines. Applications open 15th October 2020.

Please note that we fill our roles on a rolling basis and advise you to apply as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

Other benefits
25 days holiday, pension contributions, private medical insurance including Virtual GP advice, discounted gym membership and health assessments, life assurance, employee assistance programme, eye sight tests, cycle to work scheme, payroll giving scheme, travel insurance, season ticket loan.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Spring insight scheme (London): A two-day workshop for first year students of all disciplines, as well as penultimate year non-law students. Applications open 15th January 2021.
A legal legend whose reputation precedes it: US-born Skadden seeks the driven and intelligent to train at its London base.

The Firm
Looking at Skadden’s fearsome global operation in 2020, it’s hard to imagine the firm as an underdog, but that’s how its story started. In 1948 a breakaway band of New York lawyers set out to challenge the stuffy NYC elite, and the rest is history. What really matters is the Skadden of today, whose “unparalled reputation” wasn’t lost on trainees. Seeking out the “top-quality work” on offer at this corporate law legend, they also sought to rub shoulders with colleagues as “enthusiastic, intelligent and driven” as themselves. True to US firm form, some cited the “smaller intake and responsibility that comes with that” as another big reason to sign on.

Having set up shop in London back in 1988, Skadden’s had a footing in the UK longer than most of its American rivals. Three decades of experience has paid off, with the firm earning enviable Chambers UK rankings for international arbitration, banking and finance, financial crime, corporate/M&A, and public international law. Incoming trainees knew that whether they picked a transactional or litigious practice, “Skadden would provide opportunities either way.”

...whether they picked a transactional or litigious practice, “Skadden would provide opportunities either way.”

Training principal Danny Tricot does clarify that “Skadden is not a firm that has to be in every area: we tend to grow organically, into areas we think clients will need us and that complement what we already do.” Recent lateral hires include two corporate partners from Allen & Overy, and a restructuring partner from Milbank. The latter turned out to be very opportune timing: “We hired Peter Newman in February, right before Covid-19 hit the UK and when an increased number of corporates needed restructuring advice,” Tricot reveals.

The Seats
Trainees are likely to complete corporate and litigation/international arbitration seats during their training contract. Skadden’s team still picks trainees’ first seat; going forward, “trainees have fairly regular meetings with HR and the training principal to discuss where you want to go for your next seats.” Second years are more likely to secure their preferences; for first years, “it’s more about where there’s space.” Skadden offers overseas seats in Hong Kong, New York and Brussels, and sources noted that “NYC is particularly competitive.” Any trainees who are interested can submit a formal application at the end of their first year. That’s business as usual – the coronavirus pandemic paused international secondments in 2020.

Though a corporate seat is compulsory, trainees have several options to pick from including M&A, capital markets and private equity. M&A at Skadden means both private and public deals – one interview worked on “a public merger with foreign parties,” as well as “a massive private deal where one of the private equity houses wanted to dispose of a large portion of their assets.” Be prepared for lots of zeros: Skadden recently advised Danish freight and logistics company DSV A/S on its £3.6 billion acquisi-
tation of Swiss transport and logistics company Panalpina; and the Phoenix Group on its $4.1 billion takeover of investment giant Standard Life Assurance. Insurance M&A involves “an added regulatory element to everything,” while trainees in private equity dealt “mainly with acquisitions by private equity houses, as well as some minority buyouts and occasionally setting up funds.” No matter where they sat, the role of a trainee was pretty consistent, revolving around document checklists, coordinating local counsel and “general project management.” One source looked back: “Once I got up to speed, my supervisor was happy for me to speak to clients directly.” Trainees also supervised closings and drafted ancillary documents; some were even able tackle the first draft of a share purchase agreement.

“It was a steep learning curve because they don’t really have a cap on responsibility.”

Litigation and arbitration comes with “a very broad spectrum of dispute types,” and trainees were able to “get exposure to both sides.” That meant big money commercial litigation, trusts and probate disputes, multi-jurisdiction arbitration and international investment treaty clashes. Skadden has advised Vodafone on its $5.6 billion bilateral investment treaty dispute with India. In a commercial case, the team represented IndiGo Airlines in a $400 million shareholders’ agreement suit. On such massive cases, trainees typically begin with “a lot of research” followed by “having a go at drafting a section of a document, using that research.” One source was happy to “see a tangible outcome of the trainee’s work” as the case went on. They and others quickly adjusted to cross-office collaboration; a recent deal “consumed three offices – London, New York and Hong Kong – and we were all working together,” trainees recalled.

The firm’s banking team tends to “mainly advise the borrowers” in deals, but lender-side matters float in from time to time. Acquisition financings, revolving credit facilities and syndicated loans can all be found here: Skadden’s team represented Belgian pharma company UCB in the $2.1 billion financing of its bid for US-based Ra Pharmaceuticals, with the client opting to finance under English law. Health diagnostic business Affidea appointed Skadden for a ‘flexible’ €580 million refinancing. Trainees here “take charge of local counsel relations” as well as drafting board minutes, authorisations, directors’ certificates and shareholder resolutions. Receiving “a lot of responsibility in coordinating jurisdictions and communicating directly with clients,” sources rose to the challenge presented by the department. “It was a steep learning curve because they don’t really have a cap on responsibility,” one acknowledged. “How it goes will depend on how much you can take on.”

Trainee Life

“Everyone is very driven and very proud of the work they do – that unites us all,” sources suggested. They were, however, keen to emphasise that their lives didn’t begin and end with Skadden: “People do prioritise work and strive for excellence, but not to the point where that’s the only thing there is.” Many also flagged the “social” and “friendly” aspects of life at the firm, with a nicely filled calendar of events. A general sense of cohesion comes from “being part of a smaller office where everyone knows who everyone is; that really helps.” The London office takes up four floors of 40 Bank Street, Canary Wharf; some trainees reckoned “each floor kind of has its own subculture,” as do different departments.

A smaller office also means that “everyone notices when you’ve done a late night – the next day they’ll say, ‘you’ve worked hard, make sure you go home early tonight.’” US firms generally get a bad rep when it comes to hours, so when trainees suggested their timings are “more reasonable than expected,” that may not mean very much. “I’ve never worked beyond 1am, which isn’t that bad,” one proudly declared. If you say so... Others described an average day as closer to 9.30am until 7pm, but some seats including corporate are more prone to ups and downs. “When it was busy I’d be finishing around 10.30pm, but equally there were times when I didn’t have much on and my supervisor would tell me to go by 5.30pm,” an insider explained.

“I’ve never worked beyond 1am, which isn’t that bad!”

We were impressed to find that trainees found time to fit pro bono into their schedules: “In America, the firm is very proud of its pro bono and does a huge amount. That attitude is definitely present in London too.” Multiple sources praised advocacy at the East London Family Court, while others had given advice at a domestic violence legal clinic. As well as these long-term projects, Skadden advertises “a lot of one-off matters,” including working with stateless individuals with securing citizenship and helping non-profit organisations set up as charities. The firm also matches its American cousins on the salary front, doling out £50,000 for first year trainees and £133,000 for NQs.
As qualification rolled around, trainees found “it’s generally clear that Skadden wants to try to retain everyone.” Second years were going through qualification preparations at the time of our research, and despite the uncertainty caused by Covid-19, they were pleased to find the process “followed the same timetable as in 2019.” Trainees submit their preferences for which department they’d like to qualify into; the team leaders then calculate if they’ve got space for however many NQs apply. In 2020, the firm did not disclose its retention figure.

Buy me dinner first...

“When you’re having to work late, there’s a budget for getting dinner and a taxi home, so you’re not put out,” trainees revealed.
Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom (UK)

40 Bank Street, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DS
Tel: 020 7519 7000  Fax: 020 7519 7070
Email: graduate.recruitment.uk@skadden.com
Website: www.bit.ly/2WKBh6V

Partners: 29
Associates: 74
Total trainees: 18
UK offices: 1
Overseas offices: 21

Contacts
Graduate recruiter:
Mathieu Pinto Cardoso
mathieu.pintocardoso@skadden.com

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 12
Applications pa: 1000+
Minimum required degree: grade: 2:1 or other
Vacation scheme places pa: 40

Dates and deadlines
2021 Vacation Scheme and 2023 Training contract application deadline: 31st December 2020

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: £50,000
Second-year salary: £55,000
Post-qualification salary: £133,000
Holiday entitlement: 25 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant pa: £10,000

International and regional
Overseas seats: Hong Kong, New York or Brussels

Firm profile
Since opening our London office in 1988, Skadden has established itself as a major player in the London legal market.
The firm offers a fully integrated UK, European and US practice operating from our London base and composed of some of London’s top-ranked lawyers.
Our clients, which we counsel on cross-border European and global matters, include major corporates, financial institutions and governments. Skadden’s global platform allows our lawyers in London to quickly marshall relevant experience across practices and offices.
More than two-thirds of our London partners are recommended as leaders in their field in Chambers UK, and the firm is highly regarded in each of its practice areas. Skadden is regularly ranked highly for ‘legal expertise’ in the Financial Times European “Innovative Lawyers” report.

Main areas of work
Skadden’s London office advises on M&A, capital markets, private equity, banking and finance, corporate restructuring, investment management, tax, insurance, government enforcement and white collar crime, international litigation and arbitration, EU competition, financial regulatory, employment, and IP, IT, data protection and cybersecurity.

Training opportunities
The firm seeks to recruit a small number of high-calibre graduates from any discipline to join their highly successful London office as trainee solicitors. The firm is looking for candidates who combine intellectual ability with enthusiasm, creativity and a demonstrable ability to rise to a challenge and to work well with others towards a common goal.
The firm can offer you the chance to develop your career in a uniquely rewarding and professional environment. You will join a close-knit but diverse team in which you will be given ample opportunity to work on complex matters, almost all with an international aspect, whilst benefiting from highly personalised training and supervision in an informal and friendly environment. Your training contract will be divided into four six month seats where you will be able to experience a diverse range of practice areas. The firm also offers the opportunity for second year trainees to be seconded to our Hong Kong, New York or Brussels office for a six month seat.

Vacation schemes
Skadden’s training contracts are offered to students who participate in our vacation placement programme, which provides participants with firsthand experience working on actual global transactions. The programme offers the opportunity for law and non-law students to experience the culture and working environment of the firm through vacation schemes. Placements are paid (£500 per week) and take place during Spring and over the course of the summer. The deadline for applications is 31st December 2020 for placements in 2021.

Other benefits
Life insurance, private health insurance, private medical insurance, travel insurance, gym membership, employee assistance programme and technology allowance, cycle scheme.
Slaughter and May

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 3
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 92/387/160
Seats: 4-6 seats of varied length; overseas seats; secondments
First-year salary: £45,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Slaughter and May - Interview with senior partner Steve Cooke

Excellence and intrigue define this kookier wizard among the magic circle.

The Firm
There are few names more formidable in the law than Slaughter and May. This weighty reputation is a concoction of rumour, truth and woolly terms like ‘prestige’. But if you want to know what prestige means in material terms, take a glance at the Chambers UK rankings, where clients consider the firm to be the crème de la absolute crème for corporate work. Slaughters is called upon by more FTSE 100 and 250 companies than any other UK law firm, and in 2019 it advised on four of the six largest M&A deals in the UK. Chambers UK bestows further top-tier rankings on Slaughters in areas such as banking and finance, competition law, financial crime, real estate, and tax.

This is how the firm gets its magic circle badge of honour. But “it’s different to other magic circle firms,” surmised one trainee, adding to the firm’s mystique. “It’s much smaller and those firms have more structure.” While Slaughters hasn’t pursued an overseas empire, this doesn’t stop it from “representing the higher-value and more complex work” typical of firms we’d bracket in the global elite. Slaughters eschews multiple international offices and utilises a ‘best friends network’ of equally lofty firms worldwide.

“It’s different to other magic circle firms.”

What it does have in common with the rest of the magic circle is its expectation for excellence – and we can’t see much differentiation on this front. Naturally over the years this has fed rumour that life at Slaughters can be unrelenting, but our trainee sources quickly dealt with this cliché: “Its reputation is worse than the reality.” But it is still demanding.

And the myth and intrigue continue in its closely guarded financial results – though this time do pay attention to the rumour mill, which has it that Slaughters is the most profitable in the City.

The Seats
A “distinguishing factor” at Slaughters is its multi-specialist approach to training. “I thought it was just marketing,” noted one source, “but you really get a chance to try lots of different things within individual groups.” The secondary aim is to immerse trainees in multiple areas, to push them to learn and develop at pace, and become more capable lawyers.

Seats in both corporate and finance are mandatory; otherwise, incomers submit their seat preferences before joining. And if you’re not wedded to these preferences, trainees have the option to resubmit their preferences three months in.

The firm’s corporate department covers three general groups, which “are broadly not that different, bar one having a stronger insurance focus.” Work is determined by supervisors’ practices, with trainees involved in public and private M&A deals, IPOs, joint ventures, private equity and capital markets deals for the likes of Burberry, Royal Dutch Shell, General Electric and many more household names. Notably, the firm advised GlaxoSmithKline on the creation of a “world-leading” consumer healthcare joint venture with combined sales of approximately £20 bil-

Seat options: disputes & investigations; competition; IP/IT; financial regulation; pensions, employment & incentives; real estate; tax; corporate; finance
“...plain-vanilla financings, which aren’t really plain or vanilla...”

We’re told responsibility and experiences differ and are often determined by timing and the supervisor’s specialisms. On the private M&A side, trainees shared experiences of working in “lots of secondary issuances,” drafting board minutes, company house filings, and corporate reorganisations crossing over with the tax department. On smaller deals, advisory work comes to the fore, with “varied, esoteric points coming in.” Smaller-scale work was popular, as “you get more substantive engagement on those random queries.” Trainees were also kept busy drafting share purchase agreements, reviewing corporate governance, and doing research into market abuse. “Generally,” shared one trainee, “the standard of work felt higher here than in other seats.”

The finance department similarly straddles a wide variety – including leveraged finance, acquisition finance, debt capital markets and restructuring – for an equally familiar clientele such as Ernst & Young, Crédit Suisse, Premier Oil and Ocado. The firm recently worked for AlixPartners as contingency planning advisers and prospective insolvency practitioners of the Thomas Cook group. Slaughters also lent its expertise to Wonga as it entered into advised agreements in every drug offered for every animal affected. It was important but tedious at times.” Another “rubbish task” saw a source spend “hours checking the consistency of a 60-page document making sure full stops were correct and there were no sentences over 25 words.” The link between the granular and big picture was not lost on sources.
though. “These things have to be done,” shared one interviewee, “as they lead to a better, fuller project.”

We spoke to several trainees in real estate, where “there's a good mix of corporate support and autonomy,” on “straight-up real estate work” and bigger projects, like drafting term sheets for hiring a football stadium or reviewing the charter agreements for floating oil and gas vessels. Work in financial regulations is “very complicated and technical,” and is split between transaction support and general advisory work, “advising companies on their regulatory regimes.”

**Trainee Life**

Overseas secondments are available through the ‘best friends’ network. And rather than just keeping up with the magic Joneses with their overseas network schemes, Slaughters may even offer something better: “It's a far more authentic experience as you’re mostly going to non-Slaughters offices,” one source shared. “You’re genuinely imbedded into the best firms around the world,” rather than network outposts. Landing an international secondment is reportedly “less competitive than made out,” with “almost everyone who applied getting one,” we heard. Others offered advice, finding that “you're more likely to go if you apply in your fourth seat.”

“I expected it to be stuffy, but it’s not; it’s an ordinary, modern workplace.”

And back to that Slaughters mythology we were on about earlier: “The traditional culture is overstated,” one found; “there’s a weird perspective that we’re 20 years in the past.” Another added: “I expected it to be stuffy, but it’s not; it’s an ordinary, modern workplace.” Although our sources felt the firm wouldn’t toy with “new-fangled ideas without good reason,” Slaughter and May did embrace modernity in establishing a legal tech project called Collabrate in 2019. “They just don’t jump on things quickly,” Slaughters offices,” one source shared. “You’re genuinely imbedded into the best firms around the world,” rather than network outposts. Landing an international secondment is reportedly “less competitive than made out,” with “almost everyone who applied getting one,” we heard. Others offered advice, finding that “you’re more likely to go if you apply in your fourth seat.”

“IT expected it to be stuffy, but it’s not; it’s an ordinary, modern workplace.”

And much like the institutions it often hires from, diversity at Slaughters invited criticism from trainees. “It’s noticeably not a diverse place,” told one trainee. “They don’t focus on the nuances of diversity,” thought another source, generalising that “women who make partner are still privately educated Oxbridge women.” Another added: “They care about it on paper,” but whether true or not, the firm did rise 55 places in the Stonewall rankings to the top 15, and it has also risen on social mobility indices. One source noted that “there's been growth with schemes to target specific groups” – such as RARE Recruitment, PRISM diversity training, mentoring schemes, the Law Springboard Programme, and more – but trainees felt that change is generational and slow.

This said, the firm is still a City trendsetter and innovation does find its place: this year saw Slaughters become the first law firm to set science-based climate change targets, committing to reduce absolute carbon emissions 50% by 2030.

“It would have been reassuring to know it’s a far friendlier environment than I thought it would be,” shared one trainee. “The doors are open, literally and figuratively.” Sources were also quick to dismantle the perception of unapproachable partners, noting they’re “just people! You can talk to them.” Another added that “there’s a hierarchy in terms of work, but I wouldn’t feel strange asking a partner a question.” Among trainees, a friendly yet slightly competitive air emerged. “Everyone’s scrupulously polite,” told one; “there's camaraderie rather than sharp elbows.” Though some sources experienced more of the latter. “People know how to work the trainee rumour mill and may often understate or overstate the hours they’ve worked to give off a certain impression.”

“It’s not that deeply entrenched hedonism, and most prefer it that way.”

And these rumours must flow freely with no billing targets. “The lack of target or eat-what-you-kill culture” fosters a strong team ethic, thought trainees. “Partners will help as there’s no ‘that’s my matter’ culture, and that bleeds into trainees.” But no extent of collegiality will reduce the working hours. “My hours have been better than I feared,” shared one tentatively, “but they’ve still been pretty awful at points.” Transactional seats are notoriously “up and down” with a “standard busy week being in until 10-11 in the lead to closing.” Overall though, sources perceived it “to be humane,” but work “can see into weekends and evenings.” Happily, one source found: “I’ve left at 6.30 as much as I’ve left at midnight.” And this is typical of any elite law firm.
Popular pastoral moves from the firm were increasing holiday entitlement to 30 days, introducing a four-week paid sabbatical for associates with at least three years’ PQE, and ushering in new working from home policies.

Is there any time for play? “There’s some socialising, but not as much as other firms; it’s an opt-in if you want culture” – an approach most warmed to. “It’s not lacking,” offered one trainee, “but it’s not that deeply entrenched hedonism, and most prefer it that way.” While social events “really depend on the group,” we heard reports of departmental drinks, bowling, karaoke, escape rooms, group dinners and more. “I’ve been in clubs with partners for team events, but you don’t have to go,” one source revealed. “If you want to leave at 9pm, it won’t inhibit you from progressing.”

On that note, qualification is “slightly less formulaic” and “comes down to preferences matching up with places available.” Retention is historically strong, and in 2020 the firm retained 68 out of 72 qualifiers. “They hire with the intention of keeping us all on,” one revealed cheerily.

And finally...

The firm places great emphasis on its “organic pipeline of talent.” Accordingly, it has only hired two external lawyers in its 130-year history.
Slaughter and May

One Bunhill Row, London, EC1Y 8YY
Tel: 020 7090 4454
Email: trainee.recruit@slaughterandmay.com
Website: www.slaughterandmay.com

Firm profile
Slaughter and May is one of the most prestigious law firms in the world. We advise on high-profile and often landmark international transactions. Our excellent and varied client list ranges from governments to entrepreneurs, from retailers to entertainment companies and from conglomerates to Premier League football clubs. We are a full service law firm to corporate clients and have leading practitioners across a wide range of practice areas including mergers and acquisitions, corporate and commercial, financing, tax, competition, dispute resolution, real estate, pensions and employment, financial regulation, information technology and intellectual property. Clients need us to ensure that the service we offer is cutting edge, both in terms of harnessing latest market developments, such as legal tech, as well as the quality of our advice.

Much of our work has an international element and in 2019 we worked with over 225 law firms in more than 80 jurisdictions. We are committed to a forward thinking, innovative approach to legal service delivery to complement the best in class, business focused advice on which our reputation is built.

We take great store in drawing strength from diversity. With 147 different degree courses from 70 different universities and 45 nationalities represented among our lawyers, our culture is extremely broad.

Training opportunities
We have approximately 80 vacancies for trainee solicitors each year. We look for candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds with a good 2:1 at undergraduate level from any university, and take an equal mix of law and non-law graduates. We use the Rare Contextual Recruitment System across all our trainee recruitment activity. The system helps us to identify high potential candidates by putting applicants’ grades and achievements in the context of their social and educational background.

During the two-year training contract, trainees turn their hand to a broad range of work, taking an active role in four, five or six legal groups while sharing an office with a partner or experienced associate. All trainees spend at least two six-month seats in our market leading corporate, commercial and financing groups. Subject to gaining some contentious experience, they choose how to spend the remaining time.

Our overseas offices and close working relationships with market-leading law firms in other jurisdictions mean there are opportunities for trainees to apply for a secondment in their second year. Our trainees come from a range of universities – it is the quality of the candidate, not the university that is important to us. We like people with a sharp intellect, independent thought and curiosity, commercial awareness, energy, spark and commitment, the ability to relate to others, common sense and judgement, integrity, a range of interests outside of the law, an interesting take on things, resolve and resilience, a good sense of humour and a willingness to take on responsibility.

Trainees are also encouraged to understand advances in the legal industry, and possibly even help to shape them, by joining our Innovation Network. The Network has over 200 members including an online forum for publishing thought and insight pieces, and for engaging in debate. Challenging the way we work through open-mindedness, diversity and creativity can have an enormous impact on results for our clients, our efficiency, and our wellbeing.

Vacation scheme, open days and first-year opportunities
We offer open days, workshops and work experience schemes to enable you to gain an insight into life as a commercial lawyer. Full details of these opportunities can be found on our website.
Squire Patton Boggs

The facts
Locations: Birmingham, Leeds, London, Manchester
Overseas offices: 41
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 105/311/47
Seats: 6x4 months; client secondments; overseas seats
First-year salary: £26,000 (£37,000 in London)
Qualification salary: £44,000 (£73,000 in London)

Regional pride combined with a giant global network defines this multi-layered firm.

The Firm
“Ogres are like onions,” Shrek taught us. No, not because they stink or make you cry, but because they have layers—much like Squire Patton Boggs (which certainly doesn’t smell or make you cry). The firm is the product of three mergers in the last decade, with legacy firms on both sides of the Atlantic headquartered in Cleveland, Washington DC, and little old Leeds. “We can appear to be a bit of a mismatch of identities,” interviewees reflected. “I think a few years ago the firm had more of a national identity,” one told us, “but increasingly our clients and systems are feeling more integrated—it feels like much more of a global outfit today.” The firm’s international operation of 45 offices in 20 countries was certainly “a massive appeal” to nearly all of our interviewees. Most recently, the firm opened an office in Milan.

“The firm prides itself on its regional roots.”

Right alongside that international reach, “the firm prides itself on its regional roots in the UK,” with offices in Birmingham, Leeds, London and Manchester. Trainees said the UK offices “continue to generate a lot of their own work, with the benefit of being able to tap into the firm’s global network.” As an example, one trainee told us that “we recently completed our pan-European real estate team conference,” while another enthusiastically relayed that they “recently worked with colleagues in Ohio, Prague, Spain and Germany.”

Sources conceded that “the firm’s branding perhaps isn’t as strong as some others,” with a couple admitting that they weren’t familiar with the firm until they started researching training contracts. They were, however, optimistic of the direction the firm is taking now. “There’s been a big focus on promoting our brand awareness in the market,” one explained. “We’ve been doing a lot of high-profile events in Manchester and Leeds, including sponsorship initiatives in conjunction with the Northern Powerhouse project” – if you’re not familiar, that’s the government’s pledge to boost economic growth in the north of England.

The firm certainly hasn’t struggled to attract the attention of Chambers UK, which designates nationwide rankings for its advertising and marketing, pensions litigation, sport, energy, and health and safety work. And the firm’s presence across the country is further confirmed by scores of regional rankings in Yorkshire, the Midlands, the North West and London for core areas like corporate, real estate and litigation. The firm is a national leader outside London for employment and tax law.

The Seats
Squire Patton Boggs has a trainee intake of about 25 a year, with London housing the majority of newbies – Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester all take around five or six each. Trainees here do six four-month seats, putting SPB in the minority of firms. This appealed to many of our interviewees who wanted “to sample a wide range of practice areas.” There are no compulsory seats, and the first seat is assigned at random when all trainees gather

Seat options: competition - antitrust; construction; corporate; data, privacy and cybersecurity; energy and natural resources; environmental, safety and health; financial services; intellectual property and technology; international dispute resolution; labour and employment; litigation (commercial); litigation (property); litigation (sports); pensions; planning; real estate; restructuring and insolvency; tax, strategy and benefits
in Leeds for a three-week induction. After that, trainees specify three preferences at each of their mid-seat reviews. Each office offers seats in the core departments of corporate, real estate, litigation, employment and financial services. More specialist areas like international disputes are only available in the London office. While some interviewees hadn’t secured their seat preferences in their first few seats, they were reassured that “the further you are through your training contract, the more your preferences are prioritised. Nearly everyone gets at least two of their preferences.”

SPB’s corporate team operates in the mid-market, covering M&A, private equity and capital markets. The firm handles deals in the industrial, healthcare, energy, financial services, media and sports sectors (the firm has several football clubs on the books). Some recent deals include advising US company CAA Sports on its £17.5 million acquisition of Base Soccer, a European football agency, and representing private equity firm ECI Partners on the £63 million buyout of management company KB Associates. “As a trainee you’re mostly involved on the project management side of things,” one source explained. “I’ve been drafting board minutes as well as establishing and taking down data rooms” – these are basically online filing systems that store important documents. In addition, “there’s a lot of client exposure.” Trainees fondly recalled “often dealing with people high up, trying to understand their business.”

“There are a lot of new, interesting concepts to get your head around.”

Over in the pensions department, funding arrangements, pension scheme closures, pension fund mergers and structural discussions all crop up. The work is predominantly advisory with a little bit of litigation thrown in. The group has a lot of long-standing clients for whom it makes amendments to existing pension schemes. For example, the firm advises trustees on all pensions matters of the £1.8 billion Kelda Group Pension Plan. The team also advised Hertfordshire County Council as the administering authority of the Hertfordshire Pension Plan. “On the face of it, it may not sound like one of the most exciting areas, but there are a lot of new, interesting concepts to get your head around,” one source said. Trainees had opportunities to draft deeds and attend trustee meetings.

SPB’s employment group is full-service, tackling transactional, advisory and contentious issues. “We do a lot of the bog standard employment and tribunal claims, but we’ve also been developing our investigations arm recently,” one insider revealed. In a litigious capacity, trainees kept busy “drafting settlement agreements, reviewing bundles and coordinating with barristers’ chambers.” One junior even got the chance “to attend a tribunal in person.” Others reported “helping to create and deliver training materials to clients.” The Birmingham team recently advised Jury’s Inns on employment issues arising from its £1 billion acquisition of four luxury hotels in London, which involved the transfer of around 1,000 employees.

“I’ve been conducting a lot of research in relation to mergers.”

The competition team works closely with SPB’s Brussels offices and “there are a few associates who frequently fly between the two,” sources in London pointed out. There’s a broad spectrum of work for newbies to cut their teeth on, including procurement challenges, merger control reviews, and competition litigation, as well as complaint handling for the Competition Market Authority (CMA), “I’ve been conducting a lot of research in relation to mergers,” one insider told us. “Recently it’s pertained to market definitions, which means looking at previous decisions made by the CMA or European Commission on how they’ve defined the market in relation to a particular product.” The firm recently defended World Sailing (the governing body for sailing) in relation to inquiries from the Italian Anti-trust Authority and European Commission about the selection of sailing equipment for the 2024 Olympic Games. It also advised Southend Airport in its dispute with a bus company over bus services between London and the airport.

The firm currently offers two overseas seats in the Brussels and Paris offices. The latter is normally reserved for French speakers – the firm does pay for refresher lessons, but if all you’ve got left from your GCSE days is ‘ou est la discothèque?’ it’s probably best to gracefully bow out of this one. You might have more luck Down Under: we heard the firm is opening up a new placement in one of its Australian offices. Competition for these seats is very fierce, with “around 12 people applying for each spot.” One lucky insider described the Brussels base as a competition-focused office, complete with “great colleagues and a great flat.”
Client secondments are also available, “each connected to a sector or area of law. For example, there are placements related to telecoms, retail, banking, and television.” Manchester and Leeds sources were happy with their in-house opportunities, and in London, “nearly everyone will do one over the course of their training contract.” Birmingham trainees were a little disappointed however. “It was pushed to us when applying that you could go on a client secondment,” one source explained, “but so far none of my year have been able to go.” We heard from the firm that it is always looking to provide more client secondment opportunities to trainees.

Trainee Life

More and more, mental health is becoming a bigger conversation in our working lives. At SPB, trainees were impressed with the firm’s approach. “On top of a wellbeing portal, there are lots of emails and webinars on how to improve our mental health, fitness, diet and ways to better manage stress and anxiety,” they explained. One source praised the London office’s managing partner Jane Haxby in particular: “Every Friday she’ll send an email out to the whole firm listing all the positive things happening in the firm; giving people shout-outs; providing client feedback; and promoting our charity obligations.” Overall, trainees thought “the firm is conscious of how to keep you perked up all the time. It reflects a drive to make people aware that there’s more to life than just billing.”

“You’re not going to be eating dinner in the office much, unless you’re in the corporate team.”

On a firmwide level trainees observed “some office politics,” in that decisions around salary and bonuses are made in the US. However, for the most part, “it doesn’t affect us day to day,” they were happy to report. “Our HQ may be in the US” – DC is the largest office but official headquarters are in Cleveland, Ohio – “but we don’t possess the same culture as US firms operating in the market.”

For starters, trainees don’t work as long hours as their peers in US firms. In the regional offices, “you’re not going to be eating dinner in the office much, unless you’re in the corporate team.” The Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds offices generally start emptying out between 5.30pm and 6pm, depending on workload. “Working past midnight is quite rare,” a Leeds source said. “I’ve only known a few trainees do it.”

SPB salaries also aren’t as high as US firms in the UK, with trainees in the regions starting on £26,000 and Londoners on £37,000. London’s NQ salary jumps to almost £30,000 more than that of their regional peers—but hours are longer in the capital. “I had a few periods where I was leaving at 11pm regularly,” one Londoner disclosed, while another mentioned “staying until 4am once during a busy stint in corporate.” Leaving by around the 7pm mark was more typical. And “you might need to do some light work on the weekend occasionally, but only a few hours here or there.”

“The firm’s London office is located in Devonshire Square (they’re moving into a new building in the same location very soon). Trainees here were grateful to work alongside “approachable” associates, but wanted to see the firm organise more trainee events – “we have to do a lot of the heavy lifting to organise them.” Up in Leeds, one source summed up the office culture as “a mix of taking the work seriously but having genuine fun at the same time. You can have a laugh with everyone including the partners.” Trainees here highlighted a game of office murder, “where you’re assigned a name, object and location where you have to ‘murder’ someone.” Those in Manchester were keen to tell us about their “unparalleled office space” in the brand new No. 1 Spinningfields tower in the city centre. Down in Birmingham, “we’re a close trainee bunch and hang out a fair bit,” one source told us. “It mainly involves drinking.” During lockdown, trainees across offices told us that “everyone in the firm has been busy sharing recipes and music recommendations. “There’s even an SPB Spotify playlist.”

Trainees broke down the firm’s structured qualification process: “It starts with a presentation laying out how it all works and giving us interview tips, after which we’re required to submit a tailored CV for each seat we’re interested in.” Next up are the interviews, and because trainees also have to submit all of their seat appraisals, “they can go into forensic detail about some of the matters you’ve worked on!” Some found the whole process “slightly redundant after spending four months in the seat,” but on the other hand “it’s good because you know where you stand.” This year the firm kept on 21 of 23 qualifiers.

Squire Patton Oz:

Trainees who complete the fast-track LPC may get to paralegal in Australia ahead of the training contract (there are also client secondment opportunities).
Squire Patton Boggs

Rutland House, 148 Edmund Street, Birmingham, B3 2JR
Premier Place, 2 & A Half Devonshire Square, London, EC2M 4UJ6
6 Wellington Place, Leeds, LS1 4AP
No.1 Spinningfields, 1 Hardman Square, Manchester, M3 3EB

Tel: 0161 830 5000
Website: www.squirepattonboggs.com/en/careers/opportunities/student-and-graduate/uk-training-contract-program
Email: careers@squirepb.com

Firm profile
We are one of the world’s strongest integrated law firms, providing insight at the point where law, business and government meet. A multidisciplinary team of more than 1,500 lawyers in 45 offices across 20 countries provides unrivalled access to expertise, guidance and invaluable connections on the ground. Recognised as having one of the broadest global footprints in the legal industry, we provide access to new knowledge, new markets and new expertise across the US, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia Pacific. Many of our UK clients are among the biggest names and brands in the world, from FTSE and Fortune 100 companies to emerging and fast-growth businesses, financial institutions, and regional and national governments.

Main areas of work
Business immigration; communications; competition – antitrust; corporate; data privacy and cybersecurity; energy and natural resources; environmental, safety and health; financial services; government investigations and white collar; insurance; intellectual property and technology; international dispute resolution; international trade; labour and employment; litigation; pensions; public and infrastructure finance; public policy; real estate; restructuring and insolvency; tax strategy and benefits.

Training opportunities
We offer a unique training contract, tailored to individual trainee needs. We provide a comprehensive induction programme at an external campus, followed by tailored department training for each seat and tailored skills training through seminars and workshops.

The programme comprises six four-month seats during the training contract. The key to the training contract is ‘involvement and responsibility’, which is achieved through the choice and number of seats that can be undertaken during the programme, including secondments to clients and our overseas offices. Trainees benefit from two-tier supervision and challenging work.

Vacation placements
We run a two-week summer placement scheme that provides students with genuine experience as to what life is like as a trainee solicitor.

Penultimate-year law students, final-year non-law students and all postgraduate students are eligible to apply for the summer placement scheme. All students who are successful in getting onto a placement scheme will automatically be considered for a training contract.

Other benefits
25 days’ holiday, death in service, life assurance, pension and income protection. Flexible benefits package that includes private medical insurance, dental insurance, cover, a cash plan, a Ride2Work scheme and a season ticket loan.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We encourage you to come and meet us at any of our firm-organised events, details of which can be found through our website and social media pages.

University law careers fairs 2020
Each year, we attend a number of university law fairs across the UK. To find out where we will be, follow our website news and social media pages for more information.
Stephenson Harwood LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 8
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 117/257/45
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats; client secondments
First-year salary: £43,000
Qualification salary: £75,000

Maritime law is a big rudder here, but it’s not all that steers the ship. From corporate and finance to litigation and real estate, trainees found plenty more seats in the sea.

The Firm
If you track down a Stephenson Harwood trainee at a law fair (virtual or otherwise) and ask them why they joined their firm, it’s likely they’ll tell you that among its other draws, “I was really attracted to the firm’s strong international reach.” South-East Asia has long been a key region for Stephenson Harwood—around a quarter of its lawyers are based there. Despite closing doors in Beijing in May 2020, five offices remain including Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Other overseas bases include Paris, Dubai and Piraeus, Greece. And if you know your ship, you might have noticed that many of the cities listed above are key maritime hubs. It’s no coincidence that Stephenson Harwood decided to anchor down in these places: the firm is one of just three firms to be ranked best in the world for shipping finance by Chambers Global (it also gets a respectable rating for shipping litigation).

So shipping is a key practice here, but trainees in the London office were keen to point out that “Stephenson Harwood also has really well-rounded transactional and litigation practices.” We’re inclined to agree: the firm picks up no fewer than 38 Chambers UK rankings for its non-maritime practices, including top marks for rail and restructuring.

“I feel like one of the team, not just a replaceable trainee.”

This year insiders also wanted to give new chief executive Eifion Morris a special shout out for his “fantastic” handling of the coronavirus pandemic: “One of his goals is to make everyone feel involved.” As well as “weekly updates on the measures they took to safeguard us, he also sent us light-hearted emails about how he’s making a shed!”

In other news, the firm recently hired Liz Cope as its first inclusion, diversity and CSR manager. Trainees praised the firm’s diversity and inclusion efforts, pointing to a career progression programme for women, which trainees felt had “reaped rewards” in the promotion of women at the firm. In 2020, half of Stephenson Harwood’s partner promotions went to women (three out of six). Trainees continued: “We also host amazing events where we invite people to speak about struggles they’ve had because of their background.” Past guests include Welsh rugby player Gareth Thomas.

All of this amounted to what trainees called a “non-judgmental” firm culture. “The partners are what sets us apart,” one elaborated. “They really engaged with me when I was a vac schemer.” The combined annual intake of around 20 trainees was another selling point: “I feel like one of the team, not just a replaceable trainee.”

“Regulations were changing daily so I sent out daily bulletins to clients!”

The Seats
Trainees have regular catch-ups with HR, “so if you really want to do a specific seat you can tell them early on.” Beyond that, newbies submit three preferences per rotation. “It’s best to cast the net quite wide” when submitting seat choices, but trainees are allowed to put down specific subgroups. Most of our interviewees got their first or second choice each time, but some options (such as cor-

Seat options: commercial litigation; corporate; employment, and pensions and private wealth; finance; marine and international trade; real estate and projects
Here they are.

20 life-changing opportunities. 20 spaces for future partners. 20 chances to start your career with an ambitious, international firm.

At Stephenson Harwood, we’re looking for the most inquisitive, driven people to join us.

Have you got what it takes? To find out more, visit shlegal.com/futuretalent

Stephenson Harwood. We welcome the best.

Follow us @shfuturetalent
porate projects) were particularly popular, “so inevitably some people get let down.” Trainees must do their litigious seat in either commercial litigation or marine and international trade (MIT).

The commercial litigation group covers a swathe of corporate disputes in the energy, financial services, shipping, aviation, art and real estate sectors. Clients range from energy companies and large hotel companies to investment management firms and government bodies. The group recently represented building company ENGIE in a dispute concerning alleged defects in the refurbishment of 100 Parliament Street, where the Treasury and HMRC are based. Trainees might sit within a ‘practice area seat’ within the wider litigation group. Under the property litigation banner, “it’s standard for trainees to draft letters about high street occupants not paying arrears.” Trainees encountered fairly “academic” work in regulatory litigation, in that “a problem comes in and it takes three or four hours of research to answer the question!” Trainees felt “invaluable to the team because we handle the smaller things” like doc review, which didn’t always feel very small – “there are millions of documents!” Trainees also “spent a lot of time converting paper bundles to e-bundles” during lockdown. The coronavirus pandemic threw up a lot of work with airline clients. “I had to track what the EU was saying about grounded planes,” one told us. “Regulations were changing daily so I sent out daily bulletins to clients!”

The firm recently represented DVB Bank (which specialises in international transport finance) in its claim to recover $12 million from two ship-owning companies and the guarantor. “Trainees have a more admin-heavy role in this seat,” one told us. Typical tasks were preparing court bundles, helping associates proofread court submissions, and taking the first crack at drafting witness statements.

“We liaise a lot with ship registries.”

Finance subgroups include shipping, rail, aviation, restructuring and banking. The shipping team recently advised an international financial institution on a $533 million revolving credit facility given to Teekay Tankers for the refinancing of 31 vessels. “Trainees are the first port of call for clients, so we liaise a lot with ship registries” – these could be government or private agencies. It’s an “email-heavy seat” for trainees, who also highlighted getting responsibilities such as attending meetings solo. “I spent a lot of time taking folders of documents to other firms for closing ship purchases,” one shared. On the rail side, the firm advises buyers and financiers on transactions. The team has several train operator clients: “We review their operating contracts which are 500 pages long and quite specialist!” The firm advised financier Lombard North Central (part of RBS) on the manufacture and supply by Vivarail of five train units as part of a £26 million network upgrade on the Isle of Wight. “I had a lot of contact with manufacturers’ in-house legal teams or the financier’s lawyers on the other side,” trainees told us. Rookies also handled “fiddly” director certificates for banks: “They certify various facts and have loads of appendices.” Trainees didn’t always find it smooth sailing in this seat: “It was a bit manic,” one recalled.

The firm recently boosted its private equity practice with the addition of three partners from Charles Russell Speechlys. The team recently advised Elysian Capital on its £116 million acquisition of Aspirations Care, a specialist care provider. Although “there will always be classic trainee tasks like bundling” in this seat, trainees also reported “a good amount of rewarding work” such as organising deal flow, getting signatures, client contact, and communicating developments and changes in documents to senior lawyers.

Under the wider corporate umbrella, trainees can sit in funds and equity capital markets. Sources told us work in this group had recently been shaped by political uncertainties. “Investment funds were holding off on raises be-
cause of Brexit,” one explained, “so there was an 18-month stretch when nothing was happening, but by summer 2019 we got really busy again.” The team recently acted for investment bank N+1 Singer on a secondary fund-raising of £231 million, as well as its move into the Main Market of the London Stock Exchange. Trainees reported working on similar kinds of matters, with investment funds launching or doing secondary raises on the Stock Exchange. A big chunk of trainees’ time went into the verification process for initial public offerings or investment fund-raising. In other words, “Whenever a company issues on the Stock Exchange, we have to prepare a document that’s hundreds of pages long setting out their financial position and make sure every statement has evidence to verify it’s true.” Cuea lot of back and forth with clients to get said evidence.

Development and investment are two key work strands for the real estate team, which often deals with shopping centres, office buildings, retail parks and hotels. The firm recently advised investment management firm LaSalle on the £32 million purchase of a shopping centre in Bristol city centre. In this seat, trainees “get to do a lot of drafting” of leases and licences. Interviewees said the team was particularly “good at giving trainees a lot of responsibility.” As one elaborated, “I was negotiating documents, plus I negotiated with partners at other firms, which was cool!”

Each rotation, trainees can apply for client secondments and international secondments to Dubai, Paris, Hong Kong, Seoul or Singapore. One source who’d spent time in an Asian office “found the work similar” to what they did in London, but with “a lot of correspondence with local counsel on deals in India and Chile.” Lockdown might have thwarted secondees due to fly overseas this time round, but trainees weren’t left stranded. “The overseas team put a lot of effort into doing regular video calls,” one told us, “so I didn’t feel out of my depth.”

Trainee Life
In 2019, Stephenson Harwood upped first-year pay to £43,000, second-year salary to £47,000 and NQ salary to £75,000. This is in line with and slightly above some other mid-sized commercial firms in London, though trainees pointed out: “We work opposite firms which pay our counterparts more.” Typical hours among our inside sources were 9am to 7pm: “I could count the number of times I worked until midnight on one hand.” Late finishes are most common in litigation and finance: “I finished around 9.30pm maybe once a fortnight.” Anyone working on client matters past 8pm gets a £10 dinner allowance, and after 9pm the firm foots the taxi bill.

“The firm encourages us to make things happen for ourselves – we’re not just lawyers, we’re entrepreneurs.”

It isn’t stingy on social events either. The “highlight” for interviewees was the biannual trainee dinner, which the firm puts on to welcome new intakes: “They turn one of the boardroom tables into a massive dining table and everyone goes out after.” The firm also hosts an annual young professionals networking evening to which trainees invite their friends and peers from other industries: “It’s a testament to how the firm encourages us to make things happen for ourselves – we’re not just lawyers, we’re entrepreneurs.” But when they do need a helping hand, they’ve got “fantastic supervisors” nearby. During lockdown, “the head of litigation sent me textbooks and old bundles so I could do a mock letter.” We heard similar stories from our interviewees, and this trainee summed it up: “Nobody is too busy to explain why you’re doing is important. Whether you’re a lawyer or secretary, everyone is valued.”

We heard the firm’s pretty hot on CSR initiatives. We heard tales of trainees rising at dawn “to cook bacon and eggs for about 200 homeless people,” through the Whitechapel Mission, which is one of the firm’s former sponsored charities of the year. This year the firm is sponsoring Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM). “We also do workshops on professional skills for schoolchildren in east London,” and trainees pointed out the firm “played a key role” in the establishment of a legal career programme with the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust.

When the qualification process rolls around, sources told us they don’t find out which jobs are available until ten days before the application deadline, “so you have to get all your ducks in a row before you know which groups you can join.” The firm assists trainees with CV prep before the jobs list is released, and “we’ve got a very high retention rate, which is very reassuring.” In 2020, 20 of 24 qualifiers stayed at the firm, with three on fixed-term contracts.

Welcome aboard:
Students doing their LPC through Stephenson Harwood “get a lot of interaction with the firm” before they join. “We were invited to the Christmas party, networking events and presentations. It made my first day a lot less daunting!”
Stephenson Harwood LLP

1 Finsbury Circus, London EC2M 7SH
Tel: 020 7809 2812 Fax: 020 7003 8346 Email: future.talent@shlegal.com Website: www.shlegal.com/futuretalent

Partners: 180+
Associates: 400+
Total trainees: 40
UK offices: 8
Overseas offices: 9

Contacts
Graduate recruiter:
Sarah Murray
future.talent@shlegal.com

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 20
Applications pa: 1,500
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1 or other
Minimum UCAS points or A levels: 320 or equivalent
Vacation scheme places pa: 40

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: 1st October 2020
Training contract deadline, 2023 start: 31st July 2021
Placement scheme applications open: 1st October 2020
Placement scheme 2021 deadline: 31st January 2021
Open day deadline: 31st January 2021

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: £43,000
Second-year salary: £47,000
Post-qualification salary: £75,000
Holiday entitlement: 25 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant pa: £6,000

International and regional
Offices with training contracts:
Dubai and Hong Kong
Overseas seats: Dubai, Hong Kong, Paris, Singapore, Seoul
Client secondments: Yes

---

Firm profile
Stephenson Harwood is a law firm of over 1,100 people worldwide, including more than 180 partners. Our people are committed to achieving the goals of our clients — listed and private companies, institutions and individuals. We assemble teams of bright thinkers to match our clients’ needs and give the right advice from the right person at the right time. Dedicating the highest calibre of legal talent to overcome the most complex issues, we deliver pragmatic, expert advice that is set squarely in the real world.

Main areas of work
Commercial litigation; corporate; employment, pensions and private wealth; finance; marine and international trade; real estate and projects.

Training opportunities
There’s a lot to look forward to as a trainee at Stephenson Harwood: top quality global work across a range of sectors, an environment that balances cutting-edge work with a respectful, friendly culture, and the chance to prove yourself on an international secondment. We work in small teams, so every person is critical — that’s why we’ll expect you to work to the best of your ability every day.

Our training is not only structured and practical but highly personalised, so you’ll have everything you need to develop along a career path that’s absolutely right for you. Following a week’s intensive induction and a comprehensive post-induction programme, you’ll complete four seats — each six months long — across different practice areas. You could find yourself working on anything from a high-profile, multi-million financial litigation case to a ground-breaking M&A deal. You could even spend time on secondment at a client’s office or do an international seat in our Hong Kong, Singapore, Seoul, Dubai or Paris offices.

Placement schemes
Our winter, spring and summer placement schemes will give you a real taste of life at the firm. We’ll make sure you’re involved in quality work and will try to help you experience any areas of law you’re particularly interested in. Typically you’ll spend one or two weeks in our offices, sitting with qualified lawyers and tackling some case work. You’ll also benefit from an organised programme of interactive sessions, talks and social events.

On your first day, we’ll assign you a buddy — a current trainee who’ll help you settle in, answer your questions and give you an honest overview of what it’s like to work for us.

A placement gives you a great opportunity to talk informally to existing trainees, lawyers, partners and support teams to find out just why the law and Stephenson Harwood are such attractive career options. What’s more, we’ll pay you £380 a week.

Other benefits
We want you to feel valued so we’ll offer you a range of flexible benefits including: critical illness cover, cycle2work loan, dental health scheme, subsidised gym membership, private health insurance and screening, life assurance, pension, private GP services, subsidised café, and a travel to work loan.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Come along to a virtual open day in November or December, and an in-house open day in January or March to get a good feel for what a career at a mid-sized international law firm is really like. You’ll meet partners, associates and trainees as well as the future talent team.

Our virtual open days take place on the 26th November 2020 and 9th December 2020. Our in-house open days take place on 20th January 2021 and 17th March 2021.
Stevens & Bolton LLP

The facts
Location: Guildford
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 45/90/13
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £35,000
Qualification salary: £50,000

This Bolton isn’t wandering from its Guildford heartland. With a mix of top-notch clients and bucolic bliss, S&B offers a mix that keeps trainees smiling.

The Firm
Who wouldn’t want that combo of a beauty spot by the River Wey and the chance to do great work for household names like Samsung, Philips and HSBC? Sign us up! Of course, this was very much the draw for our trainee insiders at S&B, who were unanimous in their aim to find “excellence outside of the City.” One representative source explained that they “weren’t interested in London and working in the City. S&B had the reputation for being one of the most successful independent firms outside of London with great clients. They sold themselves as a place where you’d get client contact and responsibility – and it’s lived up to expectations.” Another trainee liked the fact that S&B had “both top-tier and everyday clients. It’s a range that allows you to do the big transactional work but also help the business down the road.”

“I didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I needed a firm that covered a lot of areas!”

For those doubting this Bolton’s premier league credentials, a look at its standing in Chambers UK will convince you. S&B is considered a national leader outside of London for its corporate/M&A and IP expertise, while from a regional perspective in the South it excels at mid-market M&A; private equity; litigation; employment; IP; environment; IT; and banking & finance. In Chambers High Net Worth, S&B comes out on top again as a national leader outside of London for private wealth law. As these rankings show, there are plenty of options for incoming trainees to sample during their contract, which sources highlighted as another attractive feature of the firm: “I didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I needed a firm that covered a lot of areas!”

The Seats
While “nothing is strictly compulsory” when it comes to seats, we were told that it is likely that trainees will sit in S&B’s corporate department, which accounts for about a third of the firm’s business. Real estate and dispute resolution (to satisfy SRA requirements) are also common destinations. Before trainees start, the firm sends out an email asking for newcomers to set out three seat preferences, with most of our interviewees saying that they got one of them. For subsequent seat rotations, trainees typically have a chat with S&B’s training principal halfway through their current seat to discuss options. They once again submit three preferences, with the understanding that second years usually get priority. On the whole, sources had frequently got their preferences, and on the rare occasion when they hadn’t, they were given priority next time.

“In corporate, they’re happy for you to email the client directly once you’ve built up a relationship.”

Corporate is “central to the firm,” so trainees recommended that even if it’s “not something you want to qualify into, it’s good to do.” The department is ranked alongside much larger national firms for its expertise in the South. Among its clients are entrepreneurial outfits right up to large national and international companies, like Philips and distribution company Bunzl. A recent matter saw the team act for longstanding client and insurance broker Stackhouse Poland during its £265 million sale to US insurance giant

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

How to get into Stevens & Bolton

Seat options: corporate; commercial; finance, restructuring and insolvency; employment; tax; trusts and charities; family; commercial litigation; IP; commercial real estate; construction
One found that

Arthur J. Gallagher & Co (who were represented by a City firm). Sources liked “the excitement of the deals” and the “high-value stuff” (i.e. deals) encountered. Project management is a key role for trainees, which involves keeping track of docs on a “massive spreadsheet, especially when a company has so many subsidiaries!” There’s also plenty of “coordination with people in other teams” at S&B, which was deemed good for building commercial nous and connections. Other trainee tasks included conducting due diligence and drafting the likes of ancillary docs up to heftier first cracks at share purchase agreements (SPAs). “In corporate, they’re happy for you to email the client directly once you’ve built up a relationship,” a source here boasted.

S&B’s dispute resolution lawyers represent familiar names such as Allianz Insurance, Samsung, TM Lewin and TGI Fridays. Chambers UK gives a nod to the firm’s commercial and international arbitration capabilities, and highlights its expertise in the insurance, health, aviation, and energy sectors. On the aviation side, S&B recently acted for Gama Aviation during a £5 million dispute over the management of a corporate jet. Elsewhere, the team have been acting for CI Plus, which licenses tech specifications for electronic devices (and has members such as Sony, Samsung and Panasonic), against a German company for various alleged misdemeanours like infringement of licence terms and breach of confidence. S&B secured a court order for payment of €2 million in damages and £500,000 in costs for CI Plus. A source felt that there was “less freedom” and “a lot more close supervision” in this seat compared to transactional stints, but still had a jam-packed experience. What trainees do can depend on the stage of a case; if a matter is coming up to its closing stages then trainees can be “putting together witness statements and using the document management system to find and arrange evidence.” There was plenty of drafting experience to be had on the likes of witness statements, letters to opposing counsel and instruction to counsel.

Real estate is another biggie for S&B. Sources noted the commercial bent of the department, which is split between commercial real estate, construction and property litigation, with the last two covering “the contentious side of things; property litigation is busier than ever because of Covid-19.” For those on the commercial end, tasks included “drafting agreement letters that are specific to the Covid-19 crisis, which is interesting.” Others reported working on a “big development deal for a proper household name – that’s the level we work at and it was exciting.” This kind of matter involved “drafting emails, having a first go at amending agreements for licences and leases, handling Land Registry forms and submissions, and taking notes during calls.” Drafting commercial leases and assisting partners with the sales and purchases of properties were other highlights here. On the books you’ll find the University of Surrey, Octopus Healthcare Developments and investment platform Boundary Real Estate Partners; the team recently advised the last of these as it acquired a multi-let office and retail property in Leamington Spa for over £3 million.

Quite a few trainees had also completed a seat in finance, restructuring and insolvency. One found that many of the deals were for startup and “challenger” banks but did note the availability of “bigger deals to work on to.” Another had done work for both borrower and lender clients, and explained that they were “often in charge of the conditions precedent checklist, which requires you to keep the deal moving by getting the documents that are needed and securing corporate approvals – there are a lot of emails!” With insolvency the content gets more contentious, so trainees were drafting witness statements and getting all case elements ready to meet court deadlines. Banking clients include HSBC and Lloyds, while on the insolvency side the department recently advised administrators on the sale of a Brighton-based restaurant, Chilli Pickle, and its assets.

Trainee Life

Let’s start with the hours: most of the people we spoke with came in around 8.30am and left between 6 and 7pm. “People aren’t clock-watchers,” a representative source said, “and they expect us to manage our own hours.” As with any firm, there’s “time-critical work and the firm expects you to get it done,” which could lead to the occasional 12 or 13 hours in the office, but this was more the case for those in S&B’s corporate department. In other areas, the latest we heard trainees working was around 9pm. The firm’s approach, according to an insider, is to “work hard and be attractive to City-based clients expecting a City experience, but not at the expense of having your own life.”

“I had no qualms about asking a partner a quick question.”

As for the office set-up, the lines of communication are well and truly open, with this source emphasising that they “felt like a member of the team from day one. I had no qualms about asking a partner a quick question.” Trainees typically share an office with their supervisor and sometimes another lawyer, which insiders felt to be beneficial
to their development. With trainees encouraged to do their LPC at the University of Law’s Guildford branch, the “trainee group are incredibly close; we go out for lunch most days.” While there isn’t always a firm-wide Christmas party, each department gets together for a meal. In addition, there’s a summer party to look forward to. Sources also mentioned attending departmental drinks as well as ad hoc get-togethers to celebrate “someone’s birthday or an engagement, for example.” The range from festivities to fitness is covered, with various sporting teams to join, as well as a choir for those trainees who can hold a tune.

Stairway to Steven:

The qualification process follows regular check-ins with the training principal and HR in each seat. An NQ jobs list is released, and trainees apply for the positions they’re interested in. “They’re being very transparent at the moment,” a source told us. In 2020, six out of seven qualifiers stayed with S&B, with one fixed-term contract.
Stevens & Bolton LLP

Wey House, Farnham Road, Guildford GUI 4YD
Tel: 01483 302264  Fax: 01483 302254
Email: traineerecruitment@stevens-bolton.com
Website: www.stevens-bolton.com

Firm profile
Stevens & Bolton LLP is recognised as a leading national law firm, offering a full range of commercial legal services. We are recommended in 24 specialist practice areas by leading legal directories and have received widespread awards recognition. Based in Guildford, our single office approach ensures excellent communication and efficient co-ordination of our resources. We provide legal services both nationally and internationally, with an unwavering focus on quality. We advise a number of the top 100 and other FTSE companies, as well as many other substantial international groups, owner managed businesses and SMEs. As such, the work we carry out is both interesting and challenging. We participate in a wide range of charity and community initiatives, and have full regard to the importance of minimising our impact on the environment. We also organise social events over the year and there are a number of sports teams, including netball and football as well as a firm choir.

Main areas of work
Our main areas of work are corporate and commercial; finance; real estate; dispute resolution; IP; employment, pensions and immigration; tax, trusts and charities; and family.

Training opportunities
We welcome applications from candidates with either a law or non-law background, with at least 340 UCAS points and at least one A at A level, who have achieved (or expect to achieve) a 2.1 degree or higher (unless there are exceptional circumstances). Essential qualities include: very good communication skills, being a team player, adaptability, being able to manage competing deadlines and projects, drive and ambition, intelligence, attention to detail, business interest and enthusiasm to be a lawyer and to work for Stevens & Bolton.

Our trainees have genuine responsibility and experience of dealing with clients — and are made to feel part of the team from day one. Trainee seats will be available in most of the key business areas we specialise in, namely M&A and other corporate work, insolvency and banking/finance, commercial, personal wealth and families, real estate, IP, dispute resolution and employment, pensions and immigration. We do our best to maximise your ability to experience as many of those areas as possible and currently operate a four, six-month seat rotation. There may also be an opportunity for trainees to undertake a client secondment. We are dedicated to encouraging continuous professional development, delivered in a variety of ways to give our trainees the best chance to become rounded, assured and respected professionals. Training in technical and business skills and early exposure to stimulating work with a variety of clients is instrumental in providing a solid foundation. Our unique combination of factors — supervision when you need it, support from colleagues and the opportunity to embrace early responsibility as soon as you are ready — creates a compelling proposition at the outset of your career.

Vacation scheme
We run two programmes each year in the summer of one week in duration. Applications are accepted between 1st December 2020 and 31st January 2021.

Other benefits
25 days holiday, pension, private healthcare, life assurance and an interest free loan for rail travel or car parking.

Sponsorship
We pay the fees for the CPE/GDL and LPC and maintenance grant for each course of study. Any future trainees who are yet to take their LPC or the GDL are usually required to attend the University of Law Guildford.

University law careers fairs in 2020
For a full list of law fairs we will be attending, please see our website.
Sullivan & Cromwell LLP

The facts
Locations: London
Overseas offices: 12
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 16/56/9
Seats: 2x6 (1st year); 3x4 months (2nd year)
First-year salary: £55,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed

Sullivan & Cromwell is famous in the US for setting high standards. Its heavy transactional lean and international focus makes this US BigLaw with a British accent.

The Firm
Chambers Student: “What sort of person thrives at the firm?” Training partner Ben Perry: “Someone who has a range of skills and diverse attributes: they have legal, practical and emotional intelligence and the desire to be in a hands-on environment where people collaborate closely.” We couldn’t have put it better ourselves, so we didn’t try.

S&C has achieved near-legendary status in New York, and globally the firm works on “top-of-the-fold, cross-border matters,” and has a “stellar reputation.” In London the firm gives its “small intake” of trainees “access to top clients and a lot of early responsibility.” It’s a “steep learning curve,” our sources admitted. In the US, the firm sits on the top of the pile for a range of transactional and litigation matters heavily based around the capital markets, banking and finance sectors and so it’s no surprise that in London, which “specialises in transactional work,” the firm gets a nod from Chambers UK for its debt and equity capital markets; high-end corporate/M&A and restructuring practices. It’s US BigLaw with a British accent.

“Everyone has a choice to do an international secondment or a client secondment.”

The Seats
S&C’s seat arrangement is a little unusual: “We do five seats,” trainees told us. “Two six-month seats to begin with, then three four-month seats.” As a smaller offshoot of a global firm, S&C’s London office is more of a “general practice,” we were told. “We don’t have a lot of practice areas and you end up doing almost every single seat anyway.” There are about six options in London (plus overseas choices), so the fact that their first seat was up to the firm didn’t bother our sources. The firm does try to get a sense of trainees’ preferences ahead of starting the training contract, and for subsequent seats, “it’s a dialogue. You can say if you definitely don’t want to do something next, and if you really wanted to do something you could ask them, and they’d probably listen.” Whatever happens, everyone is likely to do corporate/M&A and a finance seat. To satisfy the contentious requirement “we do a week-long external course with BPP.” Additionally, “everyone has a choice to do an international secondment or a client secondment.” Trainees typically go overseas in their second year, and unlike local seats, the “international seat is dictated by the trainee.” The firm works hard to fulfil their wishes: trainees can ask to go to any of S&C’s offices, with “New York and Hong Kong the most popular options.” Other recent destinations have included Melbourne, Sydney, Paris, and Washington DC.

If you end up in corporate/M&A, and you will, you’re going to do “due diligence. Lots of due diligence.” It’s a department where the firm represents Apollo; the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB); Fiat Chrysler; Goldman Sachs; Qatar Investment Authority; and Rhône Capital among others, and recently advised Bayer on its $7.6 billion animal health business divestment to Elanco. Another recent highlight for the team was advising Chinese company C.Banner on its sale of Hamleys toy store to Reliance Brands. Our sources said in addition to due diligence, trainees could expect to “mark up purchase agreements, do random research tasks, do some drafting and some admin.” Described as being “a bit more stop and

Seat options: leveraged finance and restructuring; capital markets; M&A and private equity; project development and finance; competition; tax
Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital Markets</th>
<th>Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/M&amp;A</td>
<td>Restructuring/Insolvency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy &amp; Natural Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

start than the other seats I’ve worked in,” trainees acknowledg-ed that there are times “you’ll be given a task you won’t have done before with tight deadlines.” One trainee warned that “90% of M&As die at the first hurdle. You do a lot of work for offer to launch, but it’s only dependent on markets.” The feedback on the seat was mixed, some thought there “wasn’t much guidance,” while others said they “would definitely do it again.”

“It’s the most emails across any seat I’ve done.”

Competition/antitrust, meanwhile, was overwhelmingly described as a “positive experience” by our sources. The “team are lovely, intelligent people,” enthused one trainee. In addition to S&C’s corporate clients, the team has worked with Spirit AeroSystems Holdings, and Iveco and its parent CNH Industrial, among others. The firm recently advised Advance Publications on the competition-related aspects of its $1.7 billion acquisition of Turnitin. Unsurprisingly, most of the “work is to facilitate transactions in the corporate department.” What stood out for our sources was they “got to go along to international meetings,” which highlighted “the team being really integrated.” In competition, “a lot of early responsibility” meant “lots of client contact, participating in client meetings, drafting key documents” and dealing with “RFIs [requests for information] from round the world and working directly with clients to get the answers to those questions.” Other tasks included “industry research, reviewing the filings and updating the RFIs.”

But while early responsibility and hands-on lawyering were themes of most seats, project finance involved “more admin tasks. Most of the time I wasn’t doing what you might call lawyer work,” one disgruntled trainee confessed. “It’s not so legalistic,” admitted another. “You won’t be doing much research, analysis or drafting, more project management style.” Common tasks included “doc disclosure, reviewing commercial contracts and helping to mark those up.” Trainees also mentioned “drafting presentations with engineering and technical people, advising on the finance structure and legal aspects, and quite a lot of government engagement work.” We guessed that with that many “process-driven tasks” there’d be a fair number of emails. “It’s the most emails across any seat I’ve done. Could be getting over 100 on a busy day on one deal.” On the plus side, the work is truly international. S&C advised Rovuma on its $35 billion LNG development, a large natural gas project off the coast of Mozambique.

S&C’s capital markets practice has the clients to make any capitalist drool: BP; CPPIB; Ferrari and Goldman Sachs are all on the books. Matter values are often in the billions of dollars. S&C was involved in what was the biggest IPO in Asia in 2019, and the third largest globally, when it advised Budweiser and its parent company AB InBev on the beer company’s $5.8 billion global offering and listing on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. But for all its obvious street cred some trainees were unenthusiastic. “I wasn’t a huge fan,” one grouped. “A lot of it is ancillary work for the New York office, and it’s mostly debt capital markets,” we heard. For others, it was “a big step up from project finance... back to quite legalistic work.” Trainees mentioned “a lot of research. How do I comply with this EU directive? How do I comply with these financial regulations?” Finding the answers, we were told, could take you “back to the primary legislation to sift through, digest, understand, and condense and present the findings in an accessible way.” The work was “really varied. One day you could be doing research on European legislation. Other days you’re marking up a document for updates on Brexit. Other times you’re inputting comments, or putting together a bible.”

Trainee Life

Let’s start with the hours. From what we can determine, S&C is one of the firms where the stories about the hours that lawyers work is true. Everyone we spoke to said that 10–12 hours was standard – and that was before you got busy. Many of our sources had worked at least one all-nighter: the latest we heard was a trainee coming in at 10am and only leaving the following afternoon. We were also warned that “as NQ there’s a lot more responsibility. A big shift. The hours are a lot longer. I’ve been pretty busy, usually not leaving before 9 or 10pm. Sometimes working until 3, 4, 5am.” While every trainee thought that one department was “more stable” in terms of hours than others, our research showed that every seat could see you working until the early hours and over weekends.

“You’re working across time zones.”

Sources appreciated that “when you’ve worked hard, there is leeway to take some time out.” But the bottom line is that “lean staffing means responsibility. If you don’t do it, then it doesn’t get done. People say, ‘Go home,’ but you have to take on the responsibility. De facto you’ve got to do the work.” It’s an unavoidable reality of a firm with offices around the world working together, where “you’re working across time zones.” These demands are not unique to Sullivan & Cromwell.

While the hours were occasionally a source of frustration, mitigation was that “everyone is super friendly. It’s quite a young office, with quite a lot of juniors, which is good, because you can ask for help.” That said, we heard that “there
are people who are difficult to work with and it’s treated as though that’s just their personality and everyone just has to absorb that.” However, they must be doing something right; Perry says retention is always high and this year is no different: all four qualifiers stayed on at the firm.

And finally...

go online to find out about the firm’s diversity initiatives in our interview with Ben Perry, S&C’s training principal and graduate recruitment partner.
Sullivan & Cromwell LLP

1 New Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1AN
Tel: 020 7959 8900
Email: traineesolicitors@sullcrom.com

Firm profile
Sullivan & Cromwell LLP provides the highest quality legal advice and representation to clients worldwide. The firm comprises more than 875 lawyers who practice through a network of 13, highly integrated offices located in key financial centres in Asia-Pacific, Europe and the United States. The London office practices English, EU and US law.

Main areas of work
S&C London is perhaps unique in the scale, complexity and significance of the work carried out in an office of its size. Practice areas in which the UK qualified lawyers and trainees in the London office work include: leveraged finance and restructuring, capital markets, M&A and private equity, project development and finance, competition and tax.

Training opportunities
We seek trainees who have an excellent prior academic record along with strong academic credentials. You should possess genuine intellectual curiosity, integrity, strong interpersonal skills, commercial awareness and an ambition to succeed at one of the world’s leading law firms. Training contracts with S&C will be divided into at least four seats.

We aim to provide interested trainees with the opportunity to spend time in one of our other offices during their training contract. Our trainees have spent time on secondment in the United States, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

Vacation scheme
A two-week summer placement scheme during 2021; remuneration £500 p.w; apply by CV (including a full classification and percentage breakdown of all academic results) and a covering letter to traineesolicitors@sullcrom.com. Applications accepted from 2nd November 2020 through 15th January 2021.

Other benefits
Include private health insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, travel insurance, a group personal pension scheme, subsidised gym membership, concierge service and 24 vacation days each year.

Partners: 16
Associates: 56
Total trainees: 9
UK offices London
Overseas offices: 12

Contacts
Graduate recruiter: Kirsten Davies
traineesolicitors@sullcrom.com
020 7959 8900
Training partner: Ben Perry

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 4-6
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1 or other
Vacation scheme places pa: 6-8

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: 3rd May 2021
Training contract deadline, 2022 start: 16th July 2021
Vacation scheme applications open: 2nd November 2020
Vacation scheme 2021 deadline: 15th January 2021

Salaries and benefits
Holiday entitlement: 24 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant pa: £12,850

International and regional
Offices with training contracts: Hong Kong
Overseas seats: Other offices in the US, Europe and Asia-Pacific
Taylor Vinters

The facts
Locations: Cambridge, London, Oxford
Overseas offices: Singapore, New York
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 31/82/5
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £28,000 (£35,000 London)
Qualification salary: £47,000 (£63,000 London)

With recent office openings in Oxford and New York, tech-focused Taylor Vinters is in growth mode and picking up the freshest entrepreneurial startup clients on its way.

The Firm
Who needs to go to Silicon Valley when we have Silicon Fen on our doorstep? For the uninitiated, Silicon Fen is the area in and around Cambridge that’s known as a hotbed for innovation in the tech and life sciences sectors especially. It’s so good that even tech-oriented US firms – like Goodwin – are beginning to open up shop in the city to get access to all the startups and entrepreneurs based there. Of course, any newcomer will have to contend with Taylor Vinters, which has been on the scene and operating in these areas for a while now. Its HQ can be found in the Cambridge Science Park, where the firm’s lawyers have secured Taylor Vinters a Chambers UK ranking for its expertise in venture capital investments into growth companies. “I’m a bit of a tech geek,” said one trainee, “so it was the clientele that got me hooked.” Clients on the books of late include health tech company Thriva, which has developed home blood test kits, and Featurespace, a company that invented behavioural analytics technology to detect fraud and financial crimes.

As these examples show, TV’s target clients are those who are innovating in any sector. Clients can get a lot more than just early-stage investment advice too: TV picks up a whole host of other Chambers UK rankings, particularly for its IP, IT, litigation, employment, and mid-market corporate and private equity work. TV’s focus is also on the wealth that supports and develops innovative ideas. For this reason, you’ll find TV ranked highly in Chambers High Net Worth for its private wealth expertise, which is often put to use for wealthy entrepreneurs.

The firm’s knowledge is spread much further than Cambridge as well: TV has had a base in London for around a decade, where trainees have the chance to complete various seats. At the last count, 40% of trainees were in London and 60% in Cambridge. A Singapore office was opened in 2010 and gives the firm access to emerging tech markets in Vietnam and Indonesia, and over the past year TV has opened bases in Oxford and New York. The latter is primarily a “sales and consulting office to further our presence in the US,” a trainee told us. What’s clear is that TV is in growth mode at the moment, and sources felt very clued up on the firm’s plans.

The Seats
Trainees submit teams and locations when listing preferences, and it’s likely that everyone will complete at least one stint in London. Interviewees did feel that the firm could do more to support them between office moves. Although the firm aims to give a month’s notice before each rotation, sources noted that this hasn’t always been the case. At the same time, one reasoned that “it comes with the inherent nature of training contracts; we do need to be flexible as we’re a small intake and there’s a finite number of seats.”

Commercial and technology is split into sub-teams covering areas like life sciences, IT, charities and social ventures, data protection and privacy, and IP. The department focuses on the life sciences and technology sectors, with most trainees citing that they’d worked with clients from these fields. “I found it easier to engage in the work because of the cool clients, like 3D printing companies and

Seat options: employment; commercial & technology; ONE (international counsel); real estate; emerging companies; entrepreneurial wealth; corporate; commercial disputes
Trainees tended to have a biotech or tech focus. The corporate department is known for advising venture capital and private equity clients on investments in the tech sector. Beyond investment work, TV also has a core corporate offering that handles the likes of M&A deals and joint ventures. Clients in this core area include energy development business Clearstone, construction-focused Land Survey Solutions and manufacturing tech developer Betatype Group. Meanwhile, on the venture capital side the team has advised fund Playfair Capital on multiple investments over the past couple of years. Trainees tended to focus on mid-value transactions for both the buy and sell side: “We act more for the sellers than buyers, who are never too far away from all the science-y excitement either: “We worked on an IP audit for a doctor who developed a medical device.”

Sources in this seat spoke of doing a lot of company secretarial work for businesses looking to attract investment: “We check to see if there is anything that might put investors off. We make sure their registration and filings are up to date and look at their certificates too.” Aside from secretarial work, trainees had also worked on transactions involving companies in the solar energy and healthcare spaces.

The emerging companies team falls under the corporate department’s umbrella and was once known as ‘growth’. We were told the rebrand centred on refocusing efforts to attract more startups, although one source wryly said it was an attempt to erase any opportunity for confusion: “Lots of people were like, uh... what is the growth team?” Again, the focus here is very much on (as TV’s website terms them) ‘technology-driven’ businesses. Trainees were kept occupied with a fair amount of support work, like “marking up shareholder agreements and subscription agreements, reviewing term sheets for funding deals, and putting together evaluations for Enterprise Management Incentives [EMI].” As rookies progressed through the seat, they took on more of a management role, with one exclaiming: “I was the main point of contact for the CFO!”

Trainee Life
With such a fresh, techy client pool, innovation lay at the core of the firm’s identity, said trainees. “The clients have created a dynamic energy at the firm,” one pointed out, citing the internal PitchUp programme as a reflection of this: “It’s about how we can be more cutting-edge members of the firm.” We also picked up on a rather Cali/Silicon Valley startup vibe with regard to time management. “You don’t sit around trying to impress anyone,” one commented. “I’m free to manage my days however I would like as a trainee!” Well, within reason of course. Most of our sources worked from 8.30am until 5.30pm, but seats like real estate and corporate did involve slightly longer hours. As for compensation, some Cambridge trainees were a little frustrated with the 10% discrepancy in their salaries compared to what their London contemporaries receive: “We do the same work, and living in Cambridge is also expensive.” One insider, however, defended salary amounts by pointing to a good work/life trade-off.

Trainees were very positive about the level of interaction between the offices. One noted that TV has got communication between the London and Cambridge bases “down to a tee.” Another told how “the firm is keen to keep a fluid culture across its offices”—an aim that is aided by trainees visiting each other in London and Cambridge. “I go to London every fortnight to get face-time with my colleagues; we are one tribe and encouraged to be together.” Partners are also game when it’s time for team bonding. “Our managing partner was the quizmaster once,” one trainee recalled, adding: “You can have banter with partners.”

Sources rated the support they’d received as strong, with one gushing: “I’ve found my forever firm!” Trainees are appointed seat supervisors and a career coach to assist with any queries or concerns throughout the training process. Insiders felt like they were being kept in the loop about their career development and highlighted that during appraisals “you aren’t ambushed: if something wasn’t right, you would know about it well before your review.” The support system has really come to the fore during these uncertain times, thought trainees: “With everything going on, the firm has really pushed us to stay social electronically.” This kind of approach made insiders want to stay with the firm. Typically in April each year, an NQ jobs list is released, and qualifiers set about applying for the positions they want. “There are interviews, but they only become an area of concern if more than one person has gone for the
In 2020, three of five qualifiers were retained, with two on fixed-term contracts.

**And finally...**

Taylor shift: NQs have been known to visit the Singapore office and work with startup clients. At the moment, this opportunity isn’t available for trainees.
Taylor Vinters

Merlin Place, Milton Road, Cambridge, CB4 0DP
Tel: 01223 225148
Email: recruitment@taylorvinters.com
Website: www.taylorvinters.com

Firm profile
Taylor Vinters is a law firm supporting the businesses which drive the innovation economy, and the entrepreneurs and private wealth that underpin them. Our practice is global, operating from innovation clusters in the UK and Asia. With 28 partners and 80 lawyers across our offices in London, Oxford, Cambridge and Singapore, and more to come in New York, we help entrepreneurial clients make great things happen, whatever their size and sector. Our clients range from Fortune 500 technology multinationals through fast growth venture backed businesses and owner managed businesses, to individuals driven by great ideas. Our firm is purpose-driven and we are proud of our culture — read more at www.significant-times.com

Main areas of work
Our key practice areas include: corporate, commercial and technology, IP, commercial disputes, employment, insolvency, competition, charities and social ventures, real estate, matrimonial, private wealth.

Training opportunities
Your development programme will be tailored around your skills, interests and aspirations and you’ll experience real client work, responsibility and high levels of autonomy from an early stage as well as support through expert advice from some of the industry’s most forward thinking lawyers. During your two year programme, you’ll complete four seats in different legal disciplines, in our Cambridge and London offices, to help you decide which aspects of the law interest you most. During your training contract, you’ll also complete your Professional Skills Course (PSC), which we’ll pay for.

Please note that we recruit only from our Vacation scheme.

Vacation scheme
Our vacation scheme runs during June and July and lasts for two weeks. You’ll spend time in two different departments, in our Cambridge and London offices providing a fantastic opportunity to get first-hand experience of what it is like to work at Taylor Vinters. It may only be two weeks, but it will be an intense and exciting period of discovery — for you and for us. Our applications will open in the Autumn with up to 20 places offered each year. We hire only from our vacation scheme and to qualify, you must to be an undergraduate or postgraduate student who can start a training contract with us within two years.

Other benefits
25 days holiday plus the option to buy additional holiday, pension, private medical insurance, life assurance, season ticket loan, medical cash plan, recognition scheme, busy social calendar, wellbeing programme including pilates, EAP scheme, sports teams and weekly FitBit challenges (including £50 contribution towards a FitBit).

University law careers fairs 2020
- BPP (Cambridge)
- University of Nottingham
- University of Warwick
- UCL
- UEA
- BPP (London)
- Durham University
- University of Exeter
Taylor Wessing LLP

The facts

Locations: London, Cambridge, Liverpool
Overseas offices: 24
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 350/500/40
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments; overseas seats
First-year salary: £40,000
Qualification salary: £70,000

Taylor Wessing titillates trainees with its big tech focus, cool clients, and some seriously ‘grammable wall art.

The Firm

When we last visited Taylor Wessing’s London HQ, we learned that the firm sponsors the National Gallery’s annual Photographic Portrait Prize, and displays innumerable entries throughout the office. Like any millennial worth their salt, we spent the rest of the afternoon agonising over which filter would do justice on our Instagram page. But this isn’t Lonely Planet, and there are many more practical reasons to consider Taylor Wessing. For one, “its client base really stood out,” trainees told us. Alongside many familiar names like Burberry, Monzo and even Dame Vera Lynn, “there are loads of startups.” TW was “top of the list” for trainees who wanted tech, life sciences and IP work, with Chambers UK bestowing high rankings for all of these teams. Taylor Wessing’s alliance with Silicon Valley star Wilson Sonsini also speaks to TW’s talents in the tech and life sciences domain. But trainees went on to point out that “even though it’s strong in those areas, it’s not all the firm is known for.” Case in point, TW achieves its highest Chambers UK accolades in private equity and media and entertainment. The firm’s private client work is also noteworthy – TW is ranked top in London for private wealth law by Chambers High Net Worth.

“The most unconventional law firm I could find.”

With all of these practice areas on offer, one trainee described it as “the most unconventional law firm I could find,” a sentiment echoed by others. “It doesn’t feel like I’m working at a law firm,” one shared, “more like a well-established tech startup.” With a trainee intake of around 20 a year, “it’s nice to have a decent number of trainees for camaraderie and support, but not so many people that you don’t get to know others in the building.” All newbies join the London office, but TW also has bases in Cambridge and Liverpool (plus a ‘TechFocus’ office in Shoreditch), and a further 24 offices in 15 other countries. The firm doesn’t currently offer overseas seats (though this may be in the pipeline) but insiders happily pointed out that trainees occasionally get to spend a bit of time in a foreign office if the work requires it. For example, “the patent team might be working with a German office, so the trainee might go there for a couple of weeks to work on the matter.”

The Seats

Client secondments are fairly focused on the tech sector, with destinations including household names of the industry. Trainees are told which secondments are available in each seat rotation, but some felt there could be more transparency in the allocation. “It’s not always clear why some people get them over others,” one felt, while another source reasoned that “clients need secondees with certain experience. It’s not for the firm to send whoever they want and tell the client to suck it up.” At each seat rotation, newbies are asked to rank five departments. One source felt that “it opens us up to getting a seat we really don’t want,” explaining that “some other firms only ask for three choices.” True, but we should point out that there are also firms that ask trainees to rank more than five departments. Others were pleased with

Seat options: real estate; planning and environment; construction; banking and finance; private capital and corporate finance; corporate technology; private equity; private client; tax and incentives; financial services and competition; employment; pensions and mobility; disputes and investigations; commercial technology and data; IP and media; patents

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

How to get into Taylor Wessing
how “organised” the process was. “We meet with the grad rec team halfway through each seat and they ask us to think about where we want to go next, so we’re not panicking right before the deadline!” Trainees said the grad rec team was also “very good at telling us which seats will be hotly contested, like corporate technology.”

IP and media was another popular option. One trainee told us it was their favourite seat “because most matters are leanly staffed, so I got the most responsibility there.” The team covers trademarks, brand management and design rights. Clients include major telecoms companies, Taylor Wessing assisting with global trademark portfolio management. The team recently advised AdTech company Amobee on licensing its videology platform to ITV. There are also some fashion names on the client list, like Christian Dior’s perfume line. It was a “varied and fast-moving” seat for trainees, where “every day is different.” Interviewees helped to put commercial contracts and trademark applications together and enjoyed “constant” communication with clients and other law firms. It’s not technically a litigious seat, but there was a fair amount of contentious work on offer, which had rookies drafting cease and desist letters and witness statements. In a litigious capacity, the team recently acted for PlanetArt (which owns the photo-printing app FreePrints) against Photobox after it launched a competing app.

…”consolidating advice from our European lawyers for a US client.”

Distinct from IP and media, the patents team is divided between contentious and non-contentious work. “We’ve got a heavy life sciences focus but we do a bunch of telecoms work on the tech side too,” trainees explained. High-profile life sciences clients come in the form of Pfizer and Abbott Laboratories. The team recently defended the latter’s valve repair product MitraClip in infringement claims and proceedings against another company’s product. In this “really complex area of law,” trainees were “much more led by a partner” and given “more admin tasks” compared to other seats. “I spent most of the seat on litigations,” one source told us. “Trainees are responsible for keeping track of the documents and court dates.” Trainees also “attended a decent number of expert witness meetings,” where they’d draft attendance notes and statements. Unlike IP, there wasn’t much direct client contact, but sources did get to liaise with barristers, courts and outside counsel. On international cases, the team coordinates advice from TW’s international offices. For example, trainees might help with “consolidating advice from our European lawyers for a US client.”

The wider disputes team advises not only tech and life sciences clients, but financial institutions and professional services firms such as Deloitte. Taylor Wessing advised Deloitte in relation to Financial Reporting Council proceedings into audits it carried out. On another recent case, the team represented three entities in a Russian-owned investment group in $25 million claims against a former employee, alleging misrepresentation and breach of employment agreements. Trainees worked on professional negligence, High Court litigation, corporate crime, arbitration and product liability claims. Shareholder actions, joint venture disputes and warranty claims are also common, and the firm also has an investigations practice. “On my first day I had a six-hour meeting going through the key documents with witnesses!” one trainee recounted. Sources also got to draft sections of witness statements. Another trainee was drafted onto a case involving a lot of creditors, “which took up a big chunk of my seat. I was talking with 100 creditors every week!” Newbies also got to spend a lot of time in court: “I’d summarise the day’s proceedings then report it to the team and answer the client’s questions directly.”

“I interacted directly with CEOs and CFOs from early on.”

Over in private capital and corporate finance, trainees got involved in M&A, main market rights issues, private M&A and commercial contracts. Sources were “pleasantly surprised by the amount of responsibility” they got. One told us: “I was heavily involved in the entire deal rather than just paper-pushing.” Another said: “I interacted directly with CEOs and CFOs from early on.” Rookies were regularly on calls with directors for big fund-raises and share issues, but explained that TW also works with smaller startups too. “That work is usually associated with the corporate technology team but there’s a nice overlap between us.” For example, these folks recently advised Oxford-based startup Tokamak Energy on a £75 million fund-raising round.

Two trainees sit in TW’s private client seat, with one handling the litigious side and the other working in the non-contentious branch. Much of the work is for “ultra high net worth, high-profile people” – who’re also ultra confidential.
The work revolves around managing family structures and trusts. “Drafting straightforward wills and powers of attorney are tasks that trainees specifically do,” they told us. There’s a decent amount of research too, which trainees compiled into advice memos for clients. Given the nature of the work here, trainees praised this seat for getting a lot of interaction with the client. “I called clients directly and ran the smaller matters for them,” said one. Trainees found their responsibilities on the contentious side similar to the disputes seat, with rookies getting to draft witness statements and instructions to counsel (with a bit of bundling thrown in for good measure).

Trainee Life

Trainee supervisors tend to be either senior associates or partners. We heard “senior associates are more in tune with the type of work trainees do, so they were really hands-on,” while partner supervisors “are very good for giving us exposure to clients and helping with business development, like pitches and publications.” Either way, “they all want us to grow and develop.” Even during the upheaval of lockdown, “it was great to see how many people were still dedicated to mentoring us.” One trainee told us: “My supervisor was really good at keeping in touch, so if they were CC’d on an email to me and thought I’d want to discuss the content, they’d call me.”

“We’re never there just as observers – there’s too much work going on for that!”

In fact, trainees felt supported across the firm. “We’re integral to the teams,” they said. “We’re never there just as observers – there’s too much work going on for that!” The private capital and corporate finance seat reportedly demanded some of the toughest hours, where trainees typically work on investment banks’ schedules, meaning some 10pm finishes plus a couple of 2am finishes here and there. IP and media trainees clocked out around 8pm, while in disputes “we work intensely from 8.30am to 6.30pm but then we stop because the deadlines are court-driven rather than client-driven.” Trainee salaries normally start at £40,000 in first year but following the outbreak of Covid-19, all trainees took an additional ten days of annual leave at a cost of 8% salary spread out over a period of six months. Proving that Taylor Wessingers go through the mud together, the firm also cut the partnership draw by 20%.

Trainees didn’t pick up on any kind of social hierarchy at the firm either. “We all have lunch together in the canteen every day,” they told us, enjoying views overlooking the city. Certain groups run their own socials, like informal Friday drinks. The private client folks were known for being the biggest social butterflies, and trainees enjoyed regular pizza nights and drinks on the office’s roof terrace together. TW also hosts events with future trainees to help the cohort bond.” In the two-year period between finishing the firm’s vac scheme and starting the training contract, newcomers are invited to the summer and Christmas parties.

TW has mental health first-aiders on every team, who are trained to spot signs of mental distress: “They’re people of all levels, from secretaries to partners.” The firm also offers yoga and mindfulness classes every Wednesday, monthly massages, and a subscription to mental wellbeing app Headspace. One source was “pleasantly surprised with how the firm did regular catch-ups and social calls during lockdown. I feel like they’re genuinely concerned for our wellbeing.”

The pandemic did throw off the NQ process somewhat. Given how stressful qualification time can be at any firm, some trainees felt there could’ve been a tad more communication addressing the changes to the NQ timetable. That said, others recognised “it’s very difficult for them to know exactly what the situation will be in a couple of months.” Ordinarily, trainees chat with HR about where they want to qualify, submit an application to their preferred departments (they can apply to more than one) and then have an interview. In 2020, Taylor Wessing was yet to confirm a retention figure when we went to press.

TW’s School of Thought:

We heard several trainees and “very senior” partners alike can “take time out of their days to mentor state school students, which is a really good example of how TW views its people.”
Taylor Wessing LLP

5 New Street Square, London EC4A 3TW
Tel: 020 7300 7000 Fax: 020 7300 7100
Email: graduate@taylorwessing.com
Website: www.taylorwessing.com/graduate

Firm profile
Taylor Wessing is a global law firm that serves the world’s most innovative people and businesses. Deeply embedded within our sectors, we work closely together with our clients to crack complex problems, enabling ideas and aspirations to thrive. Together we challenge expectation and create extraordinary results. Specialising in technology, media and communications, life sciences and private wealth, we act for 32 of the world’s top 50 brands; some of the world’s most exciting start-ups and unicorns; and some of the world’s wealthiest families.

A diverse client base allows us to advise on more than just the law. We’re a firm that encourages new ideas and different ways of doing things. Our experts play an essential role in advising clients on business growth and protection, while introducing them to new people, new markets and fresh perspectives that will help their businesses stand out and flourish. Collaboration is key to our success. We recruit a wide range of students including those who haven’t studied Law.

Main areas of work
Our specialists attract the most dynamic clients in the industry. We do more than just advise on the law. Companies with innovative business models, emerging technologies and exclusive products, and high stake investments need to remain competitive and distinctive. This is how we work. We have an unrivalled network of industry leaders we work with and introduce our clients to. From start-ups to liquidity to global brands, clients work with us because it sets them apart.

‘Superb’, ‘outstanding’, ‘expert’, ‘strategic’ and ‘commercial’ are all terms associated with our reputation. We want everyone to enjoy working with us – as much as that is possible when providing legal advice. Efficiency is important, but anticipating needs for greater protection and security through creative solutions compliments the advice we provide to clients and will prepare you for future challenges of exceeding expectations.

Training opportunities
We have been recognised by LawCareers.Net for being the ‘Best Trainer’ among large City firms. Our award winning training combines our in-house Professional Skills Course with six-month seats in four different practice groups, including one contentious seat and one in our corporate or finance areas. Our programme is recognised for the extent of partner contact available to trainees. You’ll work closely with associates on high-quality work from the outset with client contact and secondment opportunities in their offices offered. Most importantly, regular support and feedback every step of the way ensures that your career goes in the direction you want it to.

Naturally, we expect you to be committed to a career in law, with a genuine passion to learn. Our people love what they do and want to contribute new ideas. They are team players who value and respect individuality, and the benefit of working in an inclusive environment. Qualifications are also important to us, and we look for a minimum of ABB grades at A level and a 2.1 degree in any discipline. We appreciate that not every candidate’s achievements look the same on paper, that’s why we use Rare Recruitment Contextual Recruitment System to consider everyone’s achievements in context. You should be confident, with good communication skills and the ability to build strong relationships. You’ll have the energy, ambition and creativity to take responsibility, challenge and make a difference. We recruit only through our vacation scheme for our 2023 training contract.

Vacation scheme
Taylor Wessing is ‘a great place to work’. We were awarded Firm of the Year 2019 by Legal Cheek, which recognises all aspects of our work, culture, clients, environment and opportunities for our people. Our award winning vacation scheme is designed for you to experience life as a trainee solicitor in a fast-paced and creative international law firm. You’ll spend two weeks in two different practice areas gaining first-hand experience under the supervision of associates and partners.

First-year opportunities
Join us on our first year 'Trailblazing' insight day in March 2021. It will give you the chance to learn more about us, attend skills sessions to help you with your vacation scheme applications and take part in a commercial business game. To be eligible to attend you must be a first year law student or penultimate non-law student.

Taylor Wessing LLP
The Firm

TLT has long been associated with the South West, but a glance at its bases – Bristol, London, Manchester, Scotland, Northern Ireland and its overseas outpost in Piraeus – tells us that this ain’t no West Country cream teas type of firm. The quality of work is high and increasingly international. 2020 has been an eventful year so you may have missed the news that corporate head John Wood assumed the role of managing partner in April, replacing the firm’s long-standing leader David Pester. Wood is currently overseeing the recently agreed strategic alliance between TLT and Holla, a Netherlands-based law firm with an aim to strengthen the firm’s international offering. TLT’s head of International Chris Owen states: “With the Netherlands a key business location and gateway to the European Union post-Brexit, we see cross-border work increasing. There are clear opportunities for our clients with a growing financial services sector, increasing investment in renewable energy generation as well as real estate, retail and logistics opportunities in mainland Europe amongst others.”

“The growth rates are impressive and it’s a young, innovative and dynamic workforce.”

Before we holla over to the Dutch, let’s look at the firm’s achievements at home. Chambers UK applauds TLT as national leaders outside the big smoke for its employment, banking & finance, social housing and IT practices. In the South West, Chambers UK awards top rankings for restructuring/insolvency, social housing, professional negligence, employment, IT, real estate and corporate/M&A. Trainees clearly sensed this was a good time to be at the firm: “The growth rates are impressive and it’s a young, innovative and dynamic workforce.” Interviewees also emphasised the open culture: “It was the first law firm that I felt I could be myself at, and show my own skill set off rather than try and pigeonhole myself in-line with the firm’s corporate slogans.” Another trainee source summed up the reasons behind their application to TLT aptly: “support system, no frills, no hierarchy and a drive and ambition to succeed.”

The Seats

First-seaters don’t get a choice when it comes to seat allocation, and “the majority are placed into a real estate sub-team, which is fine since the skills you gain in them help you in the other seats,” explained our sources. Trainees end up playing a game of “seat politics” when submitting preferences for the remaining stints. Following on from the first seat, since priority is given to fourth and third-seaters, “it’s hard to work out which of your preferences you’ll get, if any.” Sources advised that “as long as the trainee cohort is transparent and open with their preferences, you can play it well.”

Seat options: financial services disputes; corporate tax; incentives; pensions; employment; banking; commercial; commercial disputes; corporate; projects and construction; regulatory; restructuring and insolvency; tech and IP; energy and renewables; public sector; housing and regeneration; planning; property litigation; family; tax and estates (go online for breakdown by office)
TLT’s corporate department handles a mix of domestic and international M&A and private equity transactions; clean energy, engineering, retail and food and drink clients call on TLT’s expertise. The team recently acted for the shareholders of Lorient Group, a door sealing systems company, on its sale to ASSA ABLOY, a lock and security solutions provider. TLT also advised Herman Miller, a furniture manufacturer, on its $46.1 million acquisition of the remaining shares of Naughtone, a British furniture designer. “You can pretty much take the steering wheel on the smaller deals and act as the main contact for clients,” said one interviewee. Day-to-day tasks consist of deal management with preparing ancillary documents, dealing with the post-completion payment of stamp duty, drafting board minutes and shareholder resolutions, and snippets of due diligence. “There’s a good amount of secretarial support so they help out with creating bibles, allowing us to focus on the legal aspect of the deal.”

Energy was a popular corporate niche among our sources and Bristol offers a dedicated energy and renewables seat within the real estate department. “It’s essentially commercial property, so they should really rename the seat,” suggested one trainee. The work involves “a lot of drafting leases, reviewing documents, carrying out standard enquiries for contracts and properties, and liaising with the sellers and solicitors and removing restrictive covenants where possible.” A recent matter sees the team advising Punch Tavens in alleged environmental breaches related to noise and odour emissions from the premises that exceed statutory levels. The team also continues to advise the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on several strategic follow-up issues following the adoption of the Model Assignment of Rights Contract, a complex consumer contract.

We heard there’s some flexibility when it comes to trying out different areas of the practice: “They’re open to trainees assisting with the financial services side of real estate and they allowed us to get a very rounded view of property and clean energy developments.”

The treasured real estate department tries to grab a trainee for at least one of their seats. The group splits into specialisms ranging from real estate finance and planning to social housing and public sector real estate. In Bristol, there are different seats for each subsection; London offers a catch-all real estate seat. The team recently advised and necessitated SDLT planning for Loc8 Developments on the development of forward-funded multi-let leisure/food developments worth £15–£11 million in Plymouth, Swindon and Gloucestershire. The team also acted for UKRO Property Holdings I, a Hong Kong-based fund acquiring regional office properties across the UK, which aggregated a portfolio worth £100 million. Trainees reported handling “a lot of infrastructure agreements, drafting planning applications, doing reports on titles, working through the caseload of a remortgage and managing the checklists for clients.” Sources praised the “good level of client contact throughout the seat and expectation to take ownership. They’re happy for you to email and contact the clients directly.”

Over in financial services disputes and investigations (FSDI), the largest department in headcount, the team advises banks, building societies and financial services providers on a variety of regulatory issues. “There’s a broad range of mortgage enforcements and repossessions mixed in with PPI claims and professional negligence matters,” explained trainees. Clients include Royal Bank of Scotland, NatWest and Vanquis Bank.

“I had the opportunity to go to a tribunal within the first few months of the seat and attend a mediation on a debt recovery case.”

A typical matter sees the team instructing a UK debt buyer on its risk of product mis-selling claims by customers, its dispute with the seller of those debts, the firm’s interaction with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the interaction with the Financial Ombudsman Service. “The nature of the deals lends itself to less client contact and more supervision. My drafting skills have improved hugely and we get great feedback,” according to one trainee. Another source told us: “I had the opportunity to go to a tribunal within the first few months of the seat and attend a mediation on a debt recovery case.”

Advisory and contentious work for both individuals and employers flows into the employment department. Industrial action, employment tribunals, whistle-blowing and minimum wage disputes are a few of the work streams. With Covid-19 in the mix, “there’s been a lot of ad-hoc queries, with anything from advising clients on be-
reavement leave or TUPE to collective redundancy queries.” Another recent advancement in the employment sector, with the changes to IR35 (the off-payroll working rules), sees the team advising a number of clients on their employment and employee tax advice. As a trainee, you can expect to “draft witness statements, review employment contracts, draft policies such as parental leave policies and draft advices.” Corporate support makes up a fair chunk of the employment practice as a whole.

Trainee life

A typical working day begins at 9am and finishes around 6.30/7pm, “depending on the team.” We heard of a couple of late nights scattered throughout the transactional practices: “I had a 9pm finish twice in the first week, but again it wasn’t anything obscene.” In fact, TLT supervisors “go through your hours during the meetings and one of them saw that I had stayed past 7.30pm on some days and he told me it was stupid and that it doesn’t need to be done – so there’s certainly no facetime pressure.”

“No one’s seen to be at the bottom of the food chain; there’s a pretty flat hierarchy.”

TLT trainees noted a collegial culture across the teams and bases. “No one’s seen to be at the bottom of the food chain; there’s a pretty flat hierarchy,” said a trainee. One source recalled: “I sat next to the senior partner in one of my seats and we would spend the day exchanging jokes and having a good time.”

“TLT very much want you to be you, and are not looking for people who can rattle off corporate slogans,” said one source. “You work hard but never feel bad about leaving the office sharpish to attend a fitness class.” Trainees rated the social life pretty highly. “We’re a close intake so we go out for informal dinner and drinks all the time. The AGM which took place in Manchester last year was successful in getting trainees from across all the offices to bond. It would be good to have more formal firm-wide events though.”

On mental health and wellbeing, sources told us: “Our trainee ‘Future Talent’ manager is a keen advocate for mental health, and since starting has enrolled all trainees on external training designed to strengthen mental health coping mechanisms and to support building a professional career in law.” Our sources thought that “diversity and inclusion is another area that I think the firm performs well in.” The firm has recently released the gender pay gap report and “for the first time this report includes ethnicity pay gap data too.”

At the time of our calls, interviewees had some grievances to air about the informality of TLT’s qualification process. “Of course, things are up in the air across the legal sector with Covid delays but there haven’t been a lot of comms from HR yet and so there’s definitely been a sense of pressure amongst the cohort.” Pandemics aside, the process tends to be that HR advertises vacancies during the final seat following discussions with trainees across the course of the training contract. Interviews are a rarity. TLT retained 18 of 21 qualifiers in 2020.

Keep it 100:

In 2020, TLT announced its revenues grew 13% in the previous financial year to hit £98.8 million, nearing the landmark £100 million mark.
Firm profile
Pushing the boundaries of what being a lawyer really means, at TLT we set out to be something different, creating a new type of law firm… and we encourage you to be different too. Combining traditional legal practices with an innovative and commercially-agile mindset, we help our clients succeed by finding solutions and providing them with expert advice. Our sector approach means that we aren’t just knowledgeable about our clients’ businesses, but the whole industry in which they work, aiding them to make comprehensive and trusted decisions.

We are an ambitious and growing firm, with our people at the heart of it driving us forward. Law is a social industry and we pride ourselves in having a great culture and being people that our clients want to do business with. We have award-winning teams, over 60 of our lawyers are ranked as ‘Leaders in their Field’ and a recognised development programme.

We empower our trainees to embrace their differences, share their experience and voice their ideas giving you an ambitious platform to launch your legal career. Your tailored training programme allows you to gain technical legal experience, business development opportunities, daily client contact and soft skills training, as we believe that well-rounded trainees make the best lawyers.

Main areas of work
Our services support clients in three distinct areas:
Advisory: helping with strategic and day-to-day legal issues.
Disputes: helping prevent and, where needed, manage conflict.
Transactions: helping organisations expand, restructure or sell.
We have significant experience working with organisations in the clean energy; digital; financial services; leisure, food and drink; public sector; real estate and retail and consumer goods sectors and can advise in all three UK legal jurisdictions.

Training opportunities
Alongside the training that you receive in-seat, we encourage you to attend our Trainee Development Workshops, where you will gain an understanding of how to grow your personal brand, learn the soft skills necessary for business development and forming client relationships and also reflect on your mental wellbeing.

Vacation scheme
You will join us for one week in a team of your choice, working on real client matters, attending meetings and being immersed in TLT life. You will also have the opportunity to socialise with our trainees and network with our lawyers, giving you an authentic insight into our work and culture.
Candidates are strongly encouraged to apply via our vacation scheme. Our English and Scottish offices offer vacation schemes in Spring and Summer whilst our Northern Irish office offers a vacation scheme in September. For England, penultimate law students, final year law students, post-grad students and final year non-law students. For Scotland, penultimate law and final year law and law post-grad students. For Northern Ireland, Final year law or law post-grad students. Students are paid £300 per week.

Other benefits
We offer a full and flexible benefits plan designed to meet your lifestyle needs. This includes private health and medical schemes, the option to buy and sell holiday in addition to your annual allowance, retail vouchers, gym membership and more. As part of the firm’s commitment to giving back, you’ll get involved in community support work, pro bono legal advice, fundraising and environmental initiatives.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Please keep an eye out for virtual opportunities via our website.

University law career fairs 2020
Legal Cheek Fair, Aspiring Solicitors fair, Bristol Fair, Glasgow Fair, Strathclyde Fair, QUB Fair.
210-year-old City outfit Travers Smith deftly traverses both transactional and contentious matters and shows that firms are never too old to move with the times.

The Firm
Travers is “established and old, but always looking forward to the future,” said one trainee when summing up their firm of choice. We’d say that’s a pretty fair assessment, in the best possible way. Travers has long been viewed as a more traditional type of City firm with strength in all things corporate, but it has changed both its practice and image in recent years. “We move with the times and are a lot less conservative than we used to be in terms of outlook,” says finance partner and head of graduate recruitment, Danny Peel. On the practice front, Peel tells us how Travers has built up its disputes practice significantly over the last five to ten years. “We now have ten partners in our dispute resolution team, plus a specialist competition team who work on disputes in their area, and we work on some of the most high-profile cases in Europe. It’s been absolutely pumping for the last five years. We’re now coming up to the end of the HP trial, which is Europe’s biggest fraud case.”

A decade ago, Travers had a conservative image, with many associating the firm with a preference for Oxbridge candidates and a lack of diversity. We respectfully tip our cap to the work Travers has put in to overhaul this perception in recent years. The firm’s CSR & diversity director Chris Edwards got multiple shout-outs from trainees (“he really cares about the policies”), who also praised senior leadership for being “very vocal about their commitment to diversity.” Peel adds: “We’re doing a lot better from a D&I perspective than 15 years ago, but we’re on a journey and we acknowledge there’s a lot more we need to do. It’s a work in progress, but there is a strong will across the firm from senior leadership downwards to accelerate the pace of change over the next few years. We’re also focusing on our people and their mental health and general wellbeing, which links to a changing attitude in the new generations coming through in how they want to work and balance their work with other elements of their lives.” For more on diversity and inclusion at Travers, listen to our Chambers Student podcast online.

This emphasis on D&I was a pull factor for our sources, who highlighted “the number of initiatives that provide explanations for terms and identities, which makes for a diverse and welcoming environment.” Interviewees also didn’t pick up on a trad vibe, with one bluntly stating that “it doesn’t feel like a corporate machine compared to other firms.” Travers’ enduring reputation for corporate work appealed too, with this source highlighting how “we’re leaders in mid-market private equity.” Chambers UK rates Travers in the top group of firms for private equity buyout work in the UK, while in London the firm excels in areas such as banking & finance (borrower and lender side), mid-market corporate/M&A, and real estate.

Travers’ disputes work is climbing up the rankings too: its contentious regulatory work in the financial services space is praised UK-wide, while its banking, commer-

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: Paris
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 85/288/54
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seat; secondments
First-year salary: £46,500
Qualification salary: under review at time of publication

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

How to get into Travers Smith
cial and corporate, and general litigation expertise receive more than worthy nods in the capital. The other deal-clincher for our insiders was the firm’s size and scope: all operations are carried out from one UK office close to London’s Chancery Lane (there’s one other office in Paris, where trainees can spend a seat). “I didn’t want to be in a firm with multiple offices across the globe,” said one. “Here you have a single, unified culture in one place. You can bump into the senior partner in the lift!” From what Peel tells us about the firm’s plans, don’t expect changes to this setup any time soon: “We’ll still be fiercely independent. I cannot possibly see that we’ll merge.”

The Seats
Travers trainees must do at least one seat in one of the corporate departments and one contentious stint (either dispute resolution or employment). The seat allocation process was agreed to be relatively “straightforward. When you join, you just put your preferences down in order and HR does the rest.”

Corporate is split into two main areas: private equity and financial sponsors and corporate M&A and equity capital markets. “Strictly speaking they’re not sub-seats, but you can indicate a preference,” a trainee informed us. Those who do make a preference tend to do so towards private equity as it’s a “huge part of the firm and operates at a very high level.” The team helps private equity houses with the acquisition and disposal of their portfolio companies. Lawyers here recently advised private equity company Bridgepoint and other selling shareholders on the sale of financial services company Estera to Inflexion-backed financial services company Ocorian; this required the team to coordinate legal advice to sellers across ten jurisdictions. “It’s a busy department, but you’re exposed to new things every day. It takes a lot of training!” remarked one source. The corporate finance sub-team was labelled as more of a ‘general corporate’ department that covers public and private M&A, IPOs and equity capital markets work. A lot of matters involve “liaising with local counsel all over the world.” The team recently advised Sharia-compliant bank BLME during its $212 million cash takeover by Kuwait-based Boubyan Bank. There’s also a small infrastructure group that covers renewable energy deals and private equity investments into utility companies. Insiders who’d sampled corporate finance had assisted on verification processes, prepared completion documents, drafted board minutes, and even prepared and submitted bundles for court sanctions on takeovers. Trainees were able to run with their designated workstreams, as a source explained: “The partner was quite hands-off. It was very intense, but a great learning opportunity and I was still supported in my work too.”

The ever-growing dispute resolution department covers a multitude of litigation types, including competition, civil fraud, commercial fraud, commercial and financial disputes. “We have a new system where each trainee has a big case and a small case at any one time,” a trainee highlighted. “It’s great because you get a lot of responsibility on the smaller cases and learn very important lessons on the big cases.” As mentioned by Danny Peel above, the team’s largest case recently has involved counselling computer company Hewlett-Packard Enterprise (HPE) on a $5 billion case resulting from its $11 billion acquisition of big-data software company Autonomy. HPE alleges that the value of Autonomy was inflated by $5 billion. Trainees can go through stints of being in court “two out of five days a week, supporting barristers and sitting with witnesses. It’s awesome but also terrifying.” When not in court, newbies can be found supporting the “enormous trial processes,” which involves drafting letters and calling clients: “It was daunting to update them on progress. I was thinking ‘Oh my, do I even know what’s going on here?’ But it makes you read up on every little piece of the case to understand exactly what’s happening.” A very wise tactic.

“It’s awesome but also terrifying.”

The other contentious option is a stint in employment, which handles litigious and regulatory work, as well as transactional employment matters arising out of M&A deals. Trainees tend to be staffed on “lots of smaller matters, so there’s a lot to juggle.” Clients vary from household company names to “more traditional Travers clients like asset managers.” The department was unsurprisingly busy during lockdown, with employers calling upon the team for advice on furlough and redundancy-related issues. The team recently conducted an investigation for a FTSE 100 company into bullying and harassment claims made against a key senior employee, which resulted in the termination of the accused’s employment. The team continues to advise the company on the wider cultural issues connected to the investigation. Trainees here get involved in court bundling, research and drafting agreements. “The seat’s unique because you get to work across all three transactional, contentious and advisory ar-
“I'd raise red diversity and inclusion social out exclaimed Upon as another culture—both your professional and personal in “We've seen our a wide variety people who feel strongly about “I'm not going to lie, there have Qualifying trainees rank their top three exactly the same as usual, despite the pan

The True Picture

Travers Smith LLP

chambersstudent.co.uk

Trainee Life

Our sources detected a streak of ‘giving back’ in Travers’ culture. This has been boosted recently by the appointment of the firm’s first pro bono director, former senior counsel Sam Cotman: “We’ve seen our pro bono ramp up massively since!” Trainees told us about their involvement in local legal clinics and highlighted the opportunity to get involved in research projects that examine human rights issues. In addition, “people who feel strongly about certain topics can ask the firm if they can adopt them into their pro bono practice.”

Travers’ room system was also isolated as a key influence on the firm’s close-knit culture. Trainees sit in rooms with one junior associate, one senior associate and one partner. “You have all levels of lawyer working in one room. I can see what my life will be like in two years, three years and ten years!” This setup allowed interviewees to “learn by osmosis—you’re constantly seeing how your seniors deal with clients and tricky situations. You can swivel around and ask any question you want to.” The rooms were also viewed as “great for pastoral care—it gives you strong and open relationships. I still go for coffee with some of the people I used to sit with.”

“It humanises people and makes people comfortable talking about themselves.”

Returning to diversity and inclusion as another culture-shaper, sources highlighted how the office had been refurbished to include gender-neutral toilets on each floor, on top of other inclusion initiatives like the listing of pronouns in email signatures. We were told that Travers has gender, faith and LGBTQ+ committees, which organise workshops, events and holiday celebrations. There’s also a D&I book club and a mentoring scheme available. The most popular inclusion initiative cited was a campaign on the firm’s intranet where “various people throughout Travers—diverse or not—we write about their lives and experiences. It humanises people and makes people comfortable talking about themselves.” We also heard that the firm has started mandatory anti-racism and effective allyship training.

Ultimately, all these factors were felt to support a culture of “openness. No one’s in competition or trying to pretend they know everything. We’re humble and genuine.” Upon arriving, HR publishes a short profile of each trainee, which features “both your professional and personal interests. Everyone gets to know each other well from the outset.” We heard that trainee classes are “very close. We really do all get on well.” There are plenty of social outlets to get involved in including football, hockey and running teams, as well as a book club and a choir. “I genuinely enjoy spending time with people after work!” exclaimed one particularly social source.

Trainees tend to work a nine or ten-hour day and usually finish before 8pm. “I'm not going to lie, there have been times when it’s bad hours-wise, but I did know that it would happen occasionally at a City firm,” one source admitted. Those bad times can see trainees working until midnight, but we heard that “you get rewarded after a busy period with time off in lieu. Partners really appreciate it and they give you a break for a bit afterwards.” To sweet-en the deal further, trainee and NQ salaries were recently bumped up to “really competitive” amounts, although we heard that the NQ salary (£85,000) was under review at the time we went to press.

Sources anticipated that the qualification process would be “exactly the same as usual, despite the pandemic,” though it was brought forward “purely for trainees’ comfort.” Qualifying trainees rank their top three or four choices for HR. Departments are then asked on a blind basis (without knowing who’s applied) who they would like to come back. The training principals then look at where the preferences match. This process means that neither department or trainee know where
they came in terms of a preference list. The result is that trainees found qualification to be a “fairly calm and relaxed” process. The firm “tries hard to keep everyone on,” and those who don’t stay are usually looking to “qualify into a different area of law.” Interviewees noted that “a lot of the partnership trained at Travers. It’s certainly somewhere you can have longevity.” In 2020, 21 of 25 qualifiers were kept on.

And finally...

Lockdown, summer in the City: During lockdown, people across the firm (including members of management) sent “light-hearted daily emails – they let us know what’s going on and keep us going together as a whole.”
Travers Smith LLP

10 Snow Hill, London EC1A 2AL
Tel: 020 7295 3000
Email: graduate.recruitment@traverssmith.com
Website: www.traverssmith.com

Firm profile
It is not just law at Travers Smith. We treat our clients’ business as our business, their dispute as our dispute, their challenges as ours. We act for publicly listed and private companies, financial services and private equity clients, as well as other business enterprises involved in large and complex UK and cross-border matters, transactions and disputes. Our clients know that wherever in the world they or their ambitions lie, we will work as one of their team to get things done and they know that we do so in a straight-talking, thoughtful and open way.

Diversity and independence of thought are key to our success. We know each other well and we know that we get the best results when we act as a team – not just within our legal teams, but right across our firm where we welcome diversity of thought and views from everyone. This is our difference and we are proud of it.

Main areas of work
Our business comprises the following main practice areas: commercial, IP and technology, competition, corporate M&A and ECM, dispute resolution, employment, environment and operational risk, finance and restructuring, financial services and markets, funds, incentives and remuneration, pensions, private equity and financial sponsors, real estate, regulatory investigations and tax.

Training opportunities
The firm’s comprehensive training programme ensures that trainees experience a broad range of work. All trainees sit with partners and associates, which ensures a refreshing lack of hierarchy. It also means that trainees receive individual and extensive training from experienced lawyers, and can look forward to client contact, and the responsibility that goes with it, from day one. During the two-year training contract, trainees spend six months in our corporate department and another six months in either the dispute resolution or the employment departments. The firm offers you a choice for your other two seats in two of our other specialist departments. Trainees may also have the opportunity to spend six months in the firm’s Paris office. Travers Smith is a collegiate firm – we treat people with respect, allowing them to conduct business in the most effective way for our clients. This has led to a climate of shared goals, supported by a friendly and engaging team spirit.

We’ll give you responsibility from day one – you will quickly find yourself on the phone to clients, in meetings and handling your own work with all the guidance you need. As such the firm looks for people who can combine academic excellence with plain common sense; who are determined, articulate and able to think on their feet; who are self-motivated and have a healthy sense of humour. A law degree is not a necessity – just over half the trainees who joined last year came from a non-law background.

Vacation scheme
Students spend two weeks with the firm; each week they are able to experience a different department, sharing an office with partners, associates and trainees.
The work will include attending meetings, drafting documents and letters and carrying out research. We extend our internal seminar programme to include a number of talks, case studies and negotiating exercises specifically for students to give an authentic taste of a City lawyer’s work. The timetable also includes a City tour, plenty of social activities including softball and the option to be involved in sporting activities such as mixed hockey, netball and football. There are also working lunches and informal evening events.
Trowers & Hamlins LLP

The facts
Locations: London, Manchester, Birmingham, Exeter
Overseas offices: 5
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 139/217/46
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £37,000 (London); £28,000 (elsewhere)
Qualification salary: £68,000 (London); £44,000 (elsewhere)

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Trowers

Want to do some groovy real estate work while (peacefully) combating the country’s housing crisis? That’s Trowers power, baby.

The Firm
Amidst a nationwide housing crisis, the government faces huge demand for affordable homes. To bring housing to the masses, they need...well, they need housing powerhouses. That’s where Trowers & Hamlins comes in. Few firms in the UK are brave enough to wade into the political uncertainty and shifting budgets that come with social housing and public work. Fortunately, Trowers is one of them. “Our real estate work is a flagship of Trowers,” said trainees. “It’s the driving force of the firm.” The firm’s mid-market real estate work is ranked top in London by Chambers UK, and outside of the capital, the firm is a national leader in social housing work (it’s actually the only top-ranking firm in this field). “It excites me to think I’m learning directly from experts in our field,” said one insider. Clearly, anyone who digs real estate should take a second look at Trowers, but the firm also handles other types of work like commercial litigation, corporate, finance, employment and private wealth. “Several departments do have underlying property elements,” trainees helpfully pointed out, but it isn’t the entirety of the firm. Trowers gets additional national rankings for its work in local government, public procurement, international personal injury (claimant and defendant side), charities, projects, and administrative & public law.

At the time of our calls, around two-thirds of trainees were based in the London office, with a handful or so in Birmingham, Exeter and Manchester. “Trowers is very good at pushing a national team mindset,” they said. “We’re one big unit.” Those outside the capital told us: “We generate our own work and help out with London too.” As well as taking advantage of the national network of offices, trainees were keen to capitalise on the firm’s “international elements.” With four offices in the Middle East, Trowers picks up a top ranking in Chambers Global for its corporate and finance work in Bahrain, as well as additional rankings in Oman and the UAE. Trowers also has an office in Malaysia, where it was the first foreign firm to get a licence to practise in the country. For London trainees, the opportunity to do international secondments was another “big draw” (more on this below).

The Seats
Introducing Trowers’ newest team: real estate. “Wait, what?” we hear you cry. Up until 2020, the firm had delineated real estate departments, but now it all falls under one umbrella, including the two main streams: commercial, and housing & regeneration. Trainees in this...
Trowers & Hamlins LLP

Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative &amp; Public Law</th>
<th>Local Government Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Public Procurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/M&amp;A</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>Social Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litigation</td>
<td>Travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trowers’ banking and finance team works with banks, lenders and commercial borrowers on loans, financings and funds work. The team recently advised Global Net Lease on its £230 million refinancing, for example. Unsurprisingly, “the majority of the work has a real estate element to it.” Clients include private affordable housing finance lenders, and the team also works on funds for private commercial property developments. Sources reported “helping out on registered facilities and sorting loans,” as well as doing a little work with Middle Eastern lenders. Trainees were responsible for putting together conditions precedent checklists and drafting board minutes, but it’s “not just the usual trainee tasks—they’re happy for you to put your hand up and ask for more.” More could mean helping to create presentations, and getting drafting experience with facility agreements and loan agreements.

“One day you’re talking with bankers; the next you’re talking with the person installing the lifts.”

There’s more property-related work in the projects and construction seat, where interviewees worked mostly on the construction side. The “interesting” projects work available is mostly in the renewable energy sphere—trainees said: “If you want to get involved you just need to ask!” Another niche is public procurement, where the team helps private companies secure contracts from the government (Chambers UK ranks the firm nationally for this work). The Exeter office also offers trainees the chance to do construction litigation, whether it’s a dispute about faulty cladding or poor building work. Nationwide, the construction team works on development projects covering social housing developments, school buildings, business parks and office blocks. The team recently advised Berkeley Homes on the £1 billion Stephenson Street development in east London; it’s also representing the Museum of London in its relocation to Smithfield Market. Interviewees were happy with their client contact, and we heard this seat is also “drafting-heavy,” with development agreements, building contracts and construction reports. “I enjoyed drafting collateral warranties,” one shared. “They’re problem-solving-focused and you need to tailor it to the client’s needs.” Another felt “one of the most interesting and enjoyable aspects” of the seat was the variety of people they dealt with: “One day you’re talking with bankers; the next you’re talking with the person installing the lifts in the project.”

Trowers offers overseas seats in its Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Oman and Bahrain offices, usually as a second seat. These, however, are only available for London trainees, unless Londoners don’t want to go or someone drops out. Trainees in other offices weren’t “too fussed,” since “they make it clear at the interview stage and keep your expectations in check.” As for the lucky Londoners who get to go, trainees can submit a preference but don’t have the

seat now get to act as generalists, “making the most of the different specialisms people have in the group.” Interviewees speculated on the thinking behind merging the groups: “We’ve got strong social housing expertise, but we want to attract more private companies who invest in commercial property too.” The firm’s current commercial clients range from pension funds to general commercial property investors, which the firm helps on matters like leases, renewals and tenancy agreements. For example, the team recently acted for a Malaysian sovereign wealth fund on the 20-year letting of Aviation House in London’s Holborn to WeWork. In this “naturally drafting-heavy” area, interviewees got to draft leases and tenancy agreements themselves, remarking that this was “a good way to fully understand the business and learn what the firm’s about.” And then “once you’re ready, they’re comfortable to give you hands-on opportunities with clients.”

“It’s great to help out in the middle of a housing crisis.”

Housing and regeneration makes up a larger share of the real estate team’s work. The group works with public bodies such as Homes England as well as private developers on “large-scale site acquisitions.” As a trainee explained, “they buy large areas of land which will ultimately be built on for housing stock. Another part of the team then deals with the agreements for building on the land.” Then finally, the team deals with the sales of the individual plots that get built. “It’s a nice little Russian doll-type thing,” one commented. “Everyone goes further and further in with the creation of one housing project.” There’s also some charity sector work as well as grant funding, where “government bodies give away monies to housing associations to build affordable homes.” One interviewee felt “it’s great to help out in the middle of a housing crisis.” The group recently helped Homes England in its endeavours to make grant funding more flexible and apply £1.5 billion of funding to deliver more affordable housing. It’s also advising Enfield Borough Council as it embarks on a £6 billion regeneration project that includes the creation of 10,000 new homes. Trainee tasks here include legal research, presentation writing and drafting documents such as reports, grant agreements and lease transfers. Trainees might also be put in charge of the “transaction formalities – finalising applications, making sure everyone’s on track, and sending documents out.”
Trainee Life
Trainees said the firm’s many clubs (football, netball, yoga, book club) were “a really good way of integrating new people in the firm and getting to know people across departments.” There are regular socials across offices, including “drinks, pizza evenings and pub crawls—and it’s not uncommon to end up at karaoke!” The firm’s social committee is looking for ways to “make sure it’s inclusive of everyone” after the firm got feedback from an inclusion survey suggesting more alcohol-free socials. Future renditions of ‘Total Eclipse of the Heart’ may be on the quieter side without Dutch courage, but at least they’ll be in tune.

“It’s great to see a firm promoting Asian leaders and black female leaders.”

Efforts like these prompted trainees to rate the firm as “ahead of the curve” on diversity. Diversity network TrowersIncludes brings together groups of religion, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ individuals, age and social mobility. “The firm encourages you to be you,” trainees praised. For a Birmingham trainee, “one of the factors that influenced my joining is the fact that the previous head of the office was Amardeep Gill, and the new head is Yetunde Dania. It’s great to see a firm promoting Asian leaders and black female leaders.”

In terms of training, the firm hosts talks on topics from “updates in tax law to gender diversity. There’s also a lot of emphasis on developing non-law business skills.” All trainees do a three-week induction in London (regional trainees get put up in accommodation). “It’s a great opportunity to get to know your intake across offices,” trainees said. “Whenever I go to London, it’s really nice to catch up with everyone.” Culturally, trainees reckoned that there’s “a little separation between London and the regional side of the firm,” but quickly followed up that “it’s not a bad thing—it’s nice to go to another office and feel a different vibe.”

“I’d be surprised if a trainee was working past 7pm regularly.”

Interviewees rated their salary as “market standard and fair” in their respective cities (London trainees and NQs earn about £10,000 more than their regional counterparts). “There’s not a long-hours culture here,” they added. “I’d be surprised if a trainee was working past 7pm regularly.” Across offices, most people “leave between 5pm and 8pm,” with real estate and banking tending to be on the later side. Prior to the pandemic, trainees could also work from home on an ad hoc basis.

We also heard partners check in on trainees’ hours: “If you’re staying too late, they’ll do something about your workload.” Trainees also liked that partners are “open about needing an NQ” or not on the approach to qualification time, “so you can make your own contingency plans if need be.” During the final seat, a jobs list is sent round. Interested qualifiers submit an application and cover letter before taking part in an interview, “which is a bit bizarre seeing as it’s with people you’ve been working with for at least two years!” The interview contains a few of the usual questions, as well as a short exercise. Interviewees were heartened by the fact that “most of the successful people at the top here are people who’ve been loyal to Trowers since they trained, or even paralegalled here. There is a culture of longevity at Trowers.” In 2020, 19 of 23 qualifiers were kept on.

And finally...
Mistletoe and wine: Trainees described “prolific” Christmas parties at Trowers & Hamilns.
Trowers & Hamlins LLP

3 Bunhill Row, London, EC1Y 8YZ
Tel: 020 7423 8000  Email: graduates@trowers.com
Website: www.trowers.com/careers/students-and-graduates

Trowers & Hamlins is a national and international law firm. We’re here to help businesses and governments change the way we live and work for the better. We do this by providing commercial advice geared towards tackling tomorrow’s challenges in industry.

We pride ourselves on providing down-to-earth and commercially savvy advice to our clients and, no matter where our clients are, they have access to a connected network of lawyers across disciplines, jurisdictions and sectors.

Main areas of work
Our main areas of expertise include banking and finance, corporate, dispute resolution and litigation, employment and pensions, international, projects and construction, public sector, real estate (including commercial property and housing), tax and private wealth.

Training opportunities
We recruit 23 trainees every year, split between March and September intakes and based at our offices in London, Birmingham, Exeter and Manchester. All trainees work across a range of seats and those in London have the opportunity to spend time in one of our offices in the Middle East.

Training is divided into four six-month seats and you can expect to experience a broad range of departments and practice areas over the course of the two-year period. All trainees are teamed with a supervisor and from the outset, our trainees are given real responsibility and the opportunity to learn from hands-on experience in a supportive working environment.

Vacation scheme
Our summer vacation schemes are a good way of finding out what life really is like as a trainee at our firm. We offer 46 places schemes across our London, Birmingham, Exeter and Manchester offices each year. During your time with us, you will be involved in real work - drafting, undertaking research, attending meetings and interacting with a range of people across the firm. At the end of your vacation scheme, you will have an interview for a training contract.

We pay every candidate attending our summer vacation schemes. This is currently £300 per week in London and £250 per week in Birmingham, Exeter and Manchester.

Other benefits
Our trainees receive a competitive salary and benefits package including five weeks’ annual leave each year. The benefits currently include a personal pension, an interest-free season ticket loan, and private medical insurance.

Open days and first-year opportunities
We hold a winter open day in our London office and coffee mornings in our Birmingham, Exeter and Manchester offices in December and January each year. During the events, you will attend a number of presentations on topics ranging from application form tips to life as a trainee at the firm. You will also have the chance to network with partners, trainees and graduate recruitment.

University law fairs 2020
Please see our dedicated webpages for further details on this front.
Two Texan traits of “Southern hospitality” and energy expertise have translated over to V&E’s London base, where trainees get to see as much of the practice as they’d like. Everyone’s a Vinner…

The Firm
V&E may be a Big Mac on the global projects scene, but in the City it’s more of a mini slider sandwich with all the key ingredients: meaty energy deals, a lot of oil, a salad of seats, and a Gherkin (just nearby). “V&E doesn’t try to be all things to all people,” one of our trainee sources told us. “I wanted legal practice with a political angle, and the oil and gas work I’ve done has fit the bill because we look at the relationship between different countries.”

This is one of the US firms with the deepest roots in London, setting up shop all the way back in 1971, but Vinson & Elkins has kept its UK headcount on the lower side.

Chambers UK ranks the firm highly for oil and gas work and construction, recognising V&E for its projects practice too. Energy work is fo sho the headline here, but the Texan outfit’s no one-trick buckaroo: the broader corporate team quadrupled in size over just three years. Trainees can sample the practice with a bit more freedom than a traditional seat structure affords. New arrivals are “thrown in wherever they need you,” but get more say over seat two; the second year of the training contract is more flexible: as part of the non-rotational system, trainees may pick up or carry forward the work that most interests them. “It gave me the independence to shape the training contract how I wanted, and it means you hit the ground running as an NQ,” one reflected.

The Seats
“Oil & gas is our heritage. Our forte.” Based on trainee comments, it’s no surprise the energy transactions and projects (ETP) team works for some of the biggest players in the industry. “In my first week I was in client meetings with a national oil giant during a multibillion-dollar deal,” a trainee recalled. “It was a very exciting way to kick the seat off!”

International is the name of the game here, and the London team works closely with the Houston office “if we need input from a practice area we don’t have in London, or any help with US regulatory issues.” The firm recently advised J.P. Morgan in the first ever North Sea underwritten oil and gas financing, with $500 million senior notes issued for the $2 billion acquisition of Chevron North Sea by Ithaca Energy. Other clients on the books include BP and the Ministry of Oil of the Republic of Iraq.

“You won’t end up bundling for two years.”

V&E’s energy prowess feeds into its complex commercial litigation (CCL) group, which has a particularly strong and established presence in the construction and oil & gas sectors. Trainees felt they saw “the biggest complex construction cases possible. V&E is the place for that kind of work.”

The firm represented the Panama Canal Authority in a series of multibillion-dollar arbitrations with a consortium of European and Panamanian companies. “Arbitrations like that are so vast that trainees typically do more discrete, less exciting tasks like preparing bundles,” but don’t panic that you’ll be completely sidelined. “You won’t end up bundling for two years,” a trainee confirmed, “as mega arbitrations are also mixed in with small matters where you get to draft witness statements and email clients applying law to their circumstances.”

The litigious seat is known for its elite-level clientele: “So much of our work concerns the Middle East and we need to work very closely with the Dubai office.” London has a strong enough rela-
tionship with its sister office that one of our interviewees was on secondment to Dubai when we came calling; other sources “didn’t work with a single American client,” highly unusual for trainees at US-based firms in the UK.

The opposite is the case in capital markets, where trainees “work with major American banks.” Don’t be fooled by the department’s “very broad-sounding name” – V&E eschews an equity practice in favour of specialising in high-yield bonds. “We’re much more niche than many of our US counterparts,” a source declared. In a recent example, the firm represented Goldman Sachs in the issuance of €550 million worth of floating rate senior secured notes (bonds with variable interest rates). Trainees were pleasantly surprised by the drafting experience on offer, “the main thing this group does is draft big prospectuses.” This mammoth task involves liaising with local counsel, making sure the right people sign the right documents and “identifying which numbers need supporting.” Sound appealing? Capital markets is one of the easier seats to get “because it’s known for having the worst hours,” and we heard of one poor trainee who had to work from 10am to 4am for ten days in a row. “I was at the point where I forgot my own name, but the firm knew it was killer,” they explained. “I only had to work a few hours a day after that period.” Summing up their experience, another trainee said: “You have to sacrifice your personal life in capital markets, but there’s no other seat like it.”

“It’s nice to be invited into the room where it’s all happening.”

That said, the hours in M&A are similarly topsy-turvy: “You’ll do 20-hour days one week then 10-hour days the next.” Here too, the bulk of the work is international; we heard it’s very rare for both sides to have English clients, so trainees spend their days liaising with local counsel. “You need to have a basic understanding of how their legal system works so that you know which questions to ask and how to formulate the information coherently,” one said. V&E recently advised UK-based telecoms company Helios Towers on its purchase of a controlling interest in South African firm SA Towers. The firm’s corporate clients also include Africa Oil Corp and investment giant KKR. When they’re not busy with cross-border transactions, trainees are invited into local client meetings: “It’s nice to be invited into the room where it’s all happening, which isn’t always the case at other firms where optics are everything.” Other trainee responsibilities include verification and drafting board resolutions.

Trainee Life

Interviewees noticed V&E’s “Southern hospitality culture” come to the fore during negotiations: “We’re not aggressive and we don’t take a hard line. Senior lawyers emphasise that we must always be polite.” Several said “London is very much its own office, but we have a lot of Texans working here and people fly over from Houston all the time. It’s amazing that they remember what you talked about last time they visited, like the fact I’ve got a dog.” Sources were generally chuffed with the environment at V&E. “It feels like we’re all equals,” one declared. “Everyone, partners included, is keen to chat if you need to interact with another human.” Vinson & Elkins sits alongside fellow American giants Akin Gump, Latham and Kirkland & Ellis at the top of the market in London for compensation, paying its NQs a staggering £147,500 a year. As well as making other firms look cheap, V&E also matches US counterparts by investing heavily in diversity and inclusion. “We aim to take a progressive approach in the UK and we’re responding to the dialogue here too,” insiders suggested. Several highlighted the firm’s Women’s Initiative, which is “very prevalent across the firm. We often connect with the WIs at our US offices and had a virtual panel where we discussed how to cope with having children as a partner at the firm.” There’s diversity and inclusion training for juniors, mid-levels and partners (“absolutely compulsory, no excuses”) and an LGBT+ alliance is in the works.

“What really sets us apart is the informal support... you aren’t just one of a hundred trainees.”

Each trainee shares a room with a senior associate or partner, and new starters receive mentors when they arrive: “I go for a meal with mine two or three times a week and they help out, but what really sets V&E apart is the informal support,” an interviewee felt. “The office is so small that we all know each other, and you aren’t just one of a hundred trainees.” During the coronavirus pandemic, the firmwide WhatsApp group reliably came through with memes and funny videos, and V&E hosted virtual happy hours on Friday evenings. “They checked in with us every day, everyone was super supportive,” we heard.
Second Elkins:
Qualification is “relatively informal. You’ll likely have been working with your chosen team for at least a year and they won’t reject a trainee because they hired one recently, it’s about whether you’re a good fit.” V&E retained all four qualifiers in 2020.
Firm profile
Vinson & Elkins RLLP is one of the largest international law firms and has been repeatedly ranked as the world’s leading energy law firm. Founded in Houston in 1917 (and with an office in London for 46 years), Vinson & Elkins currently has over 700 lawyers with offices in Austin, Beijing, Dallas, Dubai, Hong Kong, Houston, London, New York, Richmond, Riyadh, San Francisco, Tokyo and Washington, DC.

Main areas of work
Cross-border M&A, private equity, corporate finance and securities advice (including London Main Market and AIM listings and international equity and debt capital markets), banking and finance, international energy transactions, construction, project development and finance transactions, litigation and arbitration and tax.

Training opportunities
The firm is looking for ambitious individuals with strong academic results, sound commercial awareness and rounded personalities. The ability to think laterally and creatively is essential, as is a need for common-sense and a willingness to take the initiative and assume responsibility from day one.

The firm currently offers five training contracts commencing each September. Trainees will gain wide experience in many different areas, working with a wide variety of associates and partners from across the firm. V&E is proud of the fact it has won several LawCareers.Net awards for the quality of its training with a further seven nominations.

Whilst the trainees are based in London, the firm is currently regularly seconding its trainees to other offices (particularly its offices in the Middle East and Houston).

Vacation scheme
We view vacation placements as a key part of our recruitment process. For summer 2021 apply by 31st January 2021, by way of online application form.

Other benefits
Private medical and dental, pension, season ticket loan, discounted gym membership, travel insurance, life assurance.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Open day in March 2021 for first year law students or second year non-law students. Apply by email to graduatercruitment@velaw.com with your name, university, A-level results and stage of education. Deadline is 7th February 2021.

University law careers fairs 2020
Ward Hadaway

The facts

Locations: Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 90/280/24
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £24,000
Qualification salary: £36,500

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

How to get into Ward Hadaway

Ward Hadaway has a way with trainees looking for a mix of regional and national work grown out of strong Northern roots.

The Firm

Ugh, London! Ruthless, expensive, busy old London – who’d choose it? Not the trainees at Ward Hadaway. “We’re proud to be Northern,” one beamed. “We’re proud of our Northern roots, and we’re proud to be a strong Northern firm.” Make no mistake, Ward Hadaway is a robust feature on the Northern legal landscape – an Angel of the North, perhaps? Trite Northern references aside, the firm’s commitment to the region is key: “They put an emphasis on those applying who are proud of the North East and want to see it grow.”

“There’s a real Northern focus but also national work.”

But not just the North East – headquarters are indeed in Newcastle, but the firm has two more offices in Leeds and Manchester. A spate of recent hires in Leeds has added to its commercial litigation, corporate and insolvency teams, while Manchester also welcomed in four new appointments to the family team, bolstering expertise in surrogacy and fertility matters. On the national stage, the firm is ranked for its healthcare and clinical negligence work. This balance of national and local expertise proved compelling for our sources: “There’s a real Northern focus but also national work.” Key regional clients include Newcastle International Airport, the University of Newcastle and local NHS trusts and councils, while on the national side the firm has worked for Bannatyne Group, NHS England, Aldi, the Woodland Trust, Highways England and big banks like Lloyds and Santander.

The Seats

Trainees sit in four seats for six months at a time. Newbies “roll off seat preferences” during mid-seat reviews, with the firm allocating those where possible. We’re assured the firm “wants your experience to be broad” and trainees were generally pleased with their placement, but a word to the wise: “It would be a miracle if you managed to do the training contract without a real estate seat.”

“From day one, I was drafting leases and contacting clients.”

The real estate department is broad, covering planning, commercial property, public sector work, plot deals, real estate finance and more. Alongside work for many national house builders such as Keepmoat Homes, the firm recently acted for family-owned Northumberland Estates on its acquisition and development of the Willowburn Retail Park in Alnwick. In another matter totalling £25 million, the firm acted for the Inn Collection Group in acquiring five hotels as part of the company’s expansion.
### Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Chambers UK rankings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture &amp; Rural Affairs</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking &amp; Finance</td>
<td>Intellectual Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Negligence</td>
<td>Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/M&amp;A</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Matrimonial</td>
<td>Restructuring/Insolvency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>Social Housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

into the Lake District. A trainee’s experience in this seat will depend on the work of their supervisor, but it’s likely to be “more commercial than residential.” Sources reported working on “everything under the sun,” from plot sales and “big commercial leases” to the building and selling of properties. “My supervisor was very keen for me to cut my teeth,” one praised. “From day one, I was drafting leases and contacting clients. They were no baby steps!”

Distinct from real estate is a seat with **housing.** “We act for loads of big house builders and housing associations on new developments,” explained one rookie. The firm works with social housing providers such as Home Group, Gentoo and Yorkshire Housing. It recently advised on an £11.5 million development for Livin Housing, a local housing provider in County Durham. On another matter, the team acted for the Newcastle Parks and Allotments Trust on the transfer of ownership of all of the city’s parks to a newly formed trust. Trainees got stuck into procurement, financing, workforce management, governance, planning and development work. And there was no shortage of interesting concepts to get to grips with, whether it was providing advice on easements (the right to use someone else’s land for a specific purpose), drafting Section 106 agreements (which are made between local authorities and developers), or handling first tranche sales, where a property is owned by more than one party. Sources gleefully reported plenty of drafting experience with sales contracts, report on title documents, and property analysis. For one trainee, a highlight was being allowed a seat at the table when the firm brought in a barrister on a complex area of law.” This team also hosts Housing Management Law School: a biannual event offering legal training to housing professionals, local authorities and housing associations.

The **corporate** department straddles M&A, private equity, capital markets, venture capital and restructuring work. It also houses a specific banking and finance team, and in Leeds, we were told that there’s an international debt collection team too. Trainees got to work on transactions ranging “from five figures to seven or eight figures” in value. Of note, the firm recently acted for Millex Investments on the £20 million sale of its tenant referencing service Van Mildert to Rightmove. Ward Hadaway also lent its expertise to IP services group Perfect Image in its management buyout by Chiltern Capital, a private equity house based in London. Trainees noted that contract work “tends to be more regional,” whereas the corporate governance “comes from around the country.” One particular highlight was working on “a large restructuring of a film production company.” For commercially focused trainees, Ward Hadaway also offers **client secondments,** which in the past have included a six-month stint with Newcastle-headquartered Virgin Money.

Ward Hadaway’s **dispute resolution** team covers all manner of commercial spats including procurement, financial, joint venture, director and shareholder disputes, as well as professional negligence claims, judicial reviews and disputed wills. In a highly publicised matter valued at around £200 million, the firm is representing a local NHS trust after its PFI contract was terminated, with the trust seeking damages and the PFI funders looking to recoup their investment. Ward also recently defended Aldi in a judicial review brought by one of the supermarket’s competitors questioning the validity of planning permission granted for a new store. The team acts for individuals too. For example, it recently represented a Chinese businessman in his dispute with a football agent in the UK, valued at around half a million pounds. Given the variation of these examples, it won’t come as a surprise that trainees dubbed this the “most varied seat,” citing involvement in disputes with insurance and energy companies, and some contentious probate work. Given that cases often run for years, trainees said that “you’re diving into certain points” of a matter rather than seeing it from beginning to end. Trainees’ days were coloured with tasks such as bundling, drafting letters before claim and witness statements, legal research, and handling bankruptcy petitions.

“**Stopping to chat with the managing partner isn’t a scary scenario!”**

The **family and matrimonial** group is having a growth spurt at the moment, having trebled revenue over the last five years. Given the highly sensitive nature of the work, we can’t provide any examples of recent matters. But beyond conventional areas of family law like divorce, the firm handles private and public law children disputes, as well as safeguarding children work. The firm also handles multi-jurisdictional cases with assets in the USA or other European countries. There’s crossover with the **private client** team, which is highly ranked by Chambers High Net Worth in Newcastle. As one trainee explained, “we do private law with child proceedings, finding suitable custody and maintenance agreements.” Trainees often worked on divorce and finance proceedings, and described a tiny bit of prenuptial work. In this vein, the team recently attended a wedding fair to discuss estate planning and wills with savvy brides and grooms. We heard “there were actually quite a few parents coming up, so it did generate some instructions and enquiries into prenups.” Task-wise,
Trainees liaised with clients, helped with disclosure work before court proceedings, assessed assets and liabilities in document review, and attended court hearings and negotiations.

Trainee Life
Northerners are known for their no-nonsense chat, warm personalities and strong cups of tea. So the questions beckons: are the tropes true at Ward Hadaway? “I was so nervous on my first day,” one trainee recalled, “but people stopped by and asked if wanted coffee or tea.” Interviewees across offices chorused: “It’s incredibly personable. The partners are very approachable, and you can have a laugh with them.” In fact, even “stopping to chat with the managing partner isn’t a scary scenario!” In the open-plan Manchester office specifically, “I can literally walk two steps to a partner’s desk and they’ll always put time aside for me.” There was more praise for trainee supervisors. “Even while working from home, I was getting lots of pastoral calls and caring emails,” said one.

“There are sometimes really rubbish cakes, but it’s amazing to see the effort.”
Trainees highlighted “an emphasis on getting people integrated” at the firm. Social calendars were filled up with awards ceremonies, lunches with local press, casual post-work beverages and organised seasonal parties. “There’s a nice balance of firm events and self-led trainee initiatives,” they explained, adding that “each department also has a budget to do team activities.” We heard one team took an excursion to do a Crystal Maze challenge. Beyond frivolities, “we do a lot of charity work. Last year, a few colleagues slept outside Manchester Cathedral to raise money for a homeless shelter.” Cake sales are also common: “There are sometimes really rubbish cakes, but it’s amazing to see the effort,” said one, channelling their inner Prue Leith.

On the subject of diversity, trainees found “the numbers seem to be a reflection of the lack of diversity in the North East” rather than the firm itself. Gender diversity is “getting better,” and trainees thought the firm was “quite strong in recruiting new female partners and loads of female trainees.” There are apparently “lots of ethnic backgrounds” in the Manchester office, “which make kitchen conversations really interesting.” The firm reportedly doesn’t have any specific diversity initiatives, “which is a shame.”

“My really late finishes have been few and far between.”
Trainees found their hours “pretty manageable” by all accounts, with 9am to 6pm coming out as an average day, though “it does vary between seats.” Naturally, there are “lots of long hours” in corporate, with one telling us they occasionally “worked into the dwindling hours” in that seat. But interviewees said this wasn’t the rule. “They encourage you to avoid late nights,” sources said. “My really late finishes have been few and far between.” As for salaries, first-year trainees start on £24,000, and NQs are paid £36,500, which is in line with other firms in the North East.

Explaining the qualification process, trainees told us that “usually, the list of jobs would come up, and you’d apply and then interview. But Covid has kind of blown it all wide open.” At the time of our calls, the process was on hold and “a lot of trainees have been furloughed, which is sad but not uncommon across the industry.” Despite uncertainties, trainees said: “We’re quite confident as a firm emerging from the crisis.” The firm had not released its retention figures by the time we went to press.

Award Hadaway:
Every year the firm honours growing Northern companies in the Fastest 50 awards.
Watson Farley & Williams

The facts
Locations: London
Overseas offices: 14
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 99/73/36
Seats: 6x4 months
First-year salary: £43,000
Qualification salary: £74,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into WFW

Is it a boat? Is it a plane? If it’s transport, WFW knows what to do—and with an overseas secondment guaranteed, trainees get to know transport rather well too.

The Firm
“"I wanted to be at a corporate law firm. I wanted international exposure. I wanted a sector-specific training contract... and I wanted to go abroad.” This interviewee certainly knew what they wanted—thankfully for them, WFW ticked all their boxes. Originally set up as a boutique maritime and aviation asset finance firm, Watson Farley has expanded into rail, energy—particularly renewables—and real estate. With 15 offices worldwide and a guaranteed secondment to one of them for all trainees, the firm is ideal for wannabe lawyers with wanderlust. An interest in moving money helps, as the training contract can be “very finance-heavy. I did four finance and one corporate seat and that’s not atypical,” a source said.

Watson Farley Williams’ Chambers UK rankings ram home that this is a firm that knows where to drop its anchor: it’s top nationwide for shipping finance and scores well for shipping, renewables, capital markets and aviation finance, plus for lower mid-market M&A in London. There’s been some to-ing and fro-ing in the partner ranks lately: an energy and infrastructure quartet left for Orrick in 2020, but the firm has also made lateral hires into its growing aviation practice.

“The Firm
“I wanted a sector-specific training contract.”

As for recruits at entry level, Watson Farley takes on 18 trainees a year, making it ideal for those seeking a “medium-sized firm” doing large-scale international work. Because WFW does a ship tonne of shipping, aviation and (some) rail asset finance, a seat in the department is mandatory for all trainees, as are a litigation seat and at least one overseas secondment—some do more than one. Unusually for London firms, Watson Farley rotates trainees through six seats of four months each, “though people often repeat a seat” to get more experience in a department prior to qualifying there. With energy and projects, real estate, and corporate (which houses tax and employment) rounding things out, many trainees concluded that they don’t get much choice over their rotations. “It’s likely you’ll sit in all the seats, the trick is to get the order right,” some savvy sources suggested. “By the time you start your last seat in May you already know if you’re going to qualify and stay at the firm.”

The Seats
As all the firm’s trainees complete a seat in asset finance, it’s a logical first port of call: eight to ten sit here at each rotation, and typically split their time between the shipping and aviation finance practices. Interviewees described working on “financing for cruise companies, including for new builds, and second-hand financings and loan transfers” on the shipping side of the practice. “We also do a lot of smaller things: ships looking to change their flag, adding a ship to a securities package and so on.” The firm recently advised MSC Cruises on a debt financing facility to fund building four new luxury class ships at the Fincantieri shipyard in Italy. As for aviation finance, along with what trainees described as “bog standard asset finance,” the department also handles “slot-based financing” where airliners trade take-off and landing slots, “which are worth a lot. A single weekly slot can sell for $75 million.” J.P. Morgan’s asset management wing recently

Seat options: assets and structured finance; corporate; projects; dispute resolution; real estate; tax; employment
SEEKING EXCELLENCE

Vacation schemes
Apply by
8 January 2021

Training contracts
Apply by
9 July 2021 for 2023 start

See our website for open day details
uktrainee.wfw.com
called on the firm’s counsel for a warehouse facility to help finance the cost of aircraft acquisitions. Trainees may also see rail finance work in this department.

Our insiders in the seat were largely impressed with the responsibility levels on offer – they spent their time on “drafting documents and face-to-face negotiation meetings,” as well as more regular trainee tasks like “emailing, filing and coordinating with foreign lawyers. The downside of being a trainee is there’s a lot of project management,” one of our sources lamented. With deals often involving “several different parties” across multiple time zones, transaction management can be “quite long and difficult.”

Sizing up the volume of work, most of our sources averaged ten-to-12-hour days, with a few later ones thrown in. In addition to fairly regular hours, several sources rated “the level of training” (high) and the nature of people in the department (approachable).

“A single weekly slot can sell for $75 million.”

The firm’s projects department is essentially the rebranded energy practice, another WFW flagship. “80% of our projects work is energy, and most of that is renewables,” trainees explained – WFW works on groundbreaking matters, such as advising multiple parties involved in what will be one of the world’s largest offshore wind farms, and one of the first few Taiwanese offshore wind farms. Clients include Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners, Invesco, Lightsource BP and National Westminster Bank. Sources said: “The projects are so much bigger in project terms as a baptism of fire. The last of those can be a mammoth, mind-numbing task,” a source said. “I’ll be reviewing a thousand documents every day.”

Hopefully you kept your life jacket – ships are back on the agenda in a litigation seat, “mostly in the form of contractual disputes.” For example, “there’s a lot of talk right now about the amount of sulphur that can be used in ship fuel,” following new shipping regulations aimed at lower carbon emissions. “Who pays for the changes in terms of the hardware of the ship? Do you put in a filter? Or buy cleaner fuel?” Clients in the department include shipping firm MSC, and the firm’s acted for banks like NatWest and RBS on shipping finance disputes; away from the ocean, WFW advised renewable energy projects developer Bester UK in a claim and counterclaim (totalling £24 million) over a sub-contract for the construction of the Wrexham biomass plant in Wales. Trainees told us there’s a “big construction bent” within the litigation department. “Disputes arise if there’s been a delay, or if what you’ve ended up with looks nothing like the design.”

“Who pays for the changes in terms of the hardware of the ship? Do you put in a filter? Or buy cleaner fuel?”

A guaranteed international secondment (or two, or even three as in the case of one trainee we heard about) can be a double-edged sword. Clearly, the opportunity to work and live abroad is priceless, even more so when “the firm makes it so easy: it does all the admin, you just get on a flight.”

A guaranteed international secondment (or two, or even three as in the case of one trainee we heard about) can be a double-edged sword. Clearly, the opportunity to work and live abroad is priceless, even more so when “the firm makes it so easy: it does all the admin, you just get on a flight.”

The potential drawback is less time getting to grips with the work and environment in the London office. Of Watson Farley’s 14 overseas bases, trainees can score a seat in six: Bangkok takes two trainees a rotation (one litigation, one corporate); Paris another two (aviation and shipping finance); Dubai welcomes one trainee into finance, who also acts as a general resource; Athens takes two into shipping finance; one goes to Hamburg for general asset finance; last but not least, Singapore takes two trainees into finance, but one remains more generalist to handle “whatever the team needs.”
If you’re picturing strolling down the Champs-Élysées, or sipping ouzo in a Greek café, allow our trainees to put you straight: “Lawyers abroad work extraordinarily hard,” a source who’d been to Athens found. As a trainee overseas, you typically get a “lot more responsibility. The teams are smaller than in London so there’s more substantive work.” A source arrived to find things “very, very busy. Pre-Christmas always is; add the overseas factor and it gets a bit manic at times.” Greece was one of the most popular destinations: “For a trainee, Athens is the best place to go. You’re left to deal with things on your own, but I’ve never felt like I didn’t have the support or guidance I needed. Everyone was on top of things despite it being busy.”

Trainee Life

Back in London, each seat comes with its own cultural quirks according to our sources. “The culture does differ between departments” – projects is perhaps most notable for “having a beer fridge they open on a Friday,” marking the group out as one of the most sociable. Team real estate got good reports from trainees; one dubbed them “incredibly friendly. I had department drinks in my first week; the people all make an effort to get to know you.” Pinning down a universal WFW vibe was harder, though we heard that “any negative press about the firm’s culture” is totally wide of the mark. “People are friendly. Normal,” trainees agreed. “I’ve never really noticed anything strikingly bad.”

Our sources said that “people socialise after work, but there’s not much organised for the whole company.” We heard about “monthly teas which are firmwide and welcome new starters,” along with an annual summer and Christmas party. Trainees revealed that a culture committee has been set up “to make more of an effort in terms of putting on firmwide social events.” In the meantime, they’ve taken it upon themselves to ramp up the community spirit: “Trainees in the same year group tend to get in touch relatively regularly. We’ll grab a cup of coffee or a drink at the end of the week, depending on work commitments.” All new arrivals complete the Professional Skills Course three weeks before starting, “that’s a good opportunity to get to know your intake.”

“You’re constantly working in other jurisdictions, so you are expected to be on call.”

Across departments, trainees were likely to work between ten and 12 hours a day on average. One notable trend was a dramatic increase in the lead up to Christmas, which appeared to be anything but the most wonderful time of the year at Watson Farley. “I’ve had two Christmases here and the firm does technically shut down, but you’re constantly working in other jurisdictions, so you’re expected to be on call,” a second-year told us. The festive period tends to be the busiest at many City firms and WFW trainees confirmed that “between January and the middle of February you’re quiet.” Our sources liked that “there’s not much of a culture of presenteeism. If you’ve finished, you can go home earlier.” Some suggested “there’s an element that depends on your supervisor and if they work really late hours, that means you do too.” An increased dinner budget is available for night owls; other office perks include free fruit until lunchtime and a dress-to-your-day policy in the London office.

Committing to “regular meetings between HR and trainees via a forum,” interviewees were largely impressed with the support and training available to them. They noticed the firm “seems to be actively taking on board trainee feedback.” HR is also responsive throughout the qualification process, which kicks off early in February: trainees can submit as many department preferences as they’d like, and decisions are made in April. “Your post-qualification sixth seat helps you build a more holistic view of full-time practice. It didn’t feel like a dead end to me,” a trainee clarified. The firm retained 17 of 18 qualifiers in 2020.

Brave new world

During the Covid-19 pandemic, WFW continued to get trainees overseas where possible; if they couldn’t travel, trainees were able to complete a ‘virtual’ overseas secondment remotely with an additional London supervisor.
Watson Farley & Williams LLP

15 Appold Street, London EC2A 2HB
Tel: 020 7814 8000  Fax: 020 7814 8017  Email: uktrainees@wfw.com
Website: www.wfw.com/trainee
Twitter: @WFW_UKTrainees

Partners: 171
Associates: 400+
Total trainees: 36
(18 first years and 18 second years)
UK offices: London
Overseas offices: 14

Contacts
Graduate recruiter:
Lucie Rees, Graduate Recruitment & Development Manager,
uktrainees@wfw.com
Training partner:
Kavita Shah, Assets & Structured Finance,
uktrainees@wfw.com

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 18
Applications pa: c600
Minimum required degree grade:
2:1 or equivalent
Minimum UCAS points or A levels:
ABB or equivalent
Vacation scheme places pa:
Up to 30

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications
open: October 2020
Training contract deadline, 2023
start: 9th July 2021
Vacation scheme applications
open: October 2020
Vacation scheme 2021 deadline:
8th January 2021
Open day deadline:
20th November 2020

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: £43,000
Second-year salary: £46,000
Post-qualification salary: £74,000
Holiday entitlement: 25 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant pa:
£8,500/£7,500 dependant on location

Open days and first-year opportunities
The firm currently runs Winter Open Days. Applications for these open in October, closing the following month. Anyone in their first year of university onwards is eligible to apply via the online application form.

University law careers fairs 2020
Please come along and see WFW at one of the following law fairs:
AllAboutLaw, Legal Cheek, Kent, Queen Mary London, Exeter and Durham.
The firm’s representatives would be delighted to meet potential applicants and answer questions.
Wedlake Bell LLP

The facts
Location: London
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 68/115/13
Seats: 4x6 months; occasional client secondments
First-year salary: undisclosed
Qualification salary: undisclosed

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
Get hired at Wedlake Bell

Ding dong! Wedlake Bell strikes in London to the chimes of real estate, private client, corporate and disputes.

The Firm
If you’d been hanging around in London for 240 years, witness to the bewildering changes the city has undergone, the events of 2020 would produce nary a bead of sweat. Wedlake Bell is nothing if not resilient, demonstrating all the cultural hallmarks of a firm that always moves with the times. In the search for a training contract, trainees here were “looking for a firm that had a good mix of private client and commercial work.” Wedlake Bell acts for both businesses and private clients, drumming up Chambers UK rankings in mid-market real estate, IP, construction and family work. Chambers High Net Worth also rates the firm in private wealth law.

“A good mix of private client and commercial work.”

Trainees were also drawn to Wedlake’s modest intake of around six a year. All told, Wedlake Bell houses around 180 lawyers. This size made for what trainees dubbed a “real” culture. “Yes it’s nice to have slick, shiny brochures,” one admitted, but trainees felt their firm has a focus on their day-to-day life. “There’s a clear effort to ensure people are taken care of,” whether through appraisals, yoga, ordeep, meaningful chats with supervisors (more on all of these below).

Trainees also spoke of “relaxed vibes, good food and good conversation” – no, they were not regaling us with tales of their best Hinge dates. In fact, this was how they described the firm’s “humanised” application process, which includes a meet-and-greet with a buffet and the chance to network. And for most of our interviewees it looked like it was turning out to be a real love story. “Since I’ve joined I’ve become a much happier person,” one reflected. “The firm is very much responsible for that.” Who’s cutting onions?

The Seats
Wedlake has four umbrella practice groups – private client, real estate, business services and dispute resolution – each of which contains several seats. Newbies submit choices at the start of each rotation; sources said the firm “takes into account your interests and skills to make sure you get a range of seats that fit you.” Trainees also happily pointed out that “the firm creates new seats if you have a particular interest in something.”

Three seats fall under the real estate umbrella: commercial property, residential property and construction. The firm’s real estate team acts for developers, investors, occupiers and lenders, including recognisable names like Hugo Boss, Taylor Wimpey and housebuilders Cala Homes. Healthcare and hospitality are key sectors for the team, which recently advised Care UK on the £230 million sale of 14 care homes. Trainees in commercial property got busy with “finalising leases and licences, and working on waiving agreements.” Trainees also got client contact in this seat. Some found this seat “quite tricky,” with one commenting that “people are extremely busy.” That said, one person’s ‘tricky’ is another’s “intellectually stimulating.”

Trainees on the residential property side sang a similar tune, with the work here geared towards the “sale and purchase of property.” A trainee gave more detail: “My typical tasks were drafting reports, drafting enquiries, and speaking with clients.” For one trainee, “a fond moment” in

Seat options: private client; residential property; corporate; IP and commercial; insolvency restructuring and recoveries; commercial litigation; employment; commercial property; banking; property litigation; construction
this seat was working on a lifetime mortgage “for a vulnerable elderly client who needed money for care.” As the seat goes on, “we get to run our own extension files start to finish.”

“A segue between sophisticated law and quite sensitive questions.”

Reflecting on the work in private client, trainees described the seat as “a segue between sophisticated law and quite sensitive questions. The human element was interesting.” The team advises high net worth individuals on wealth management, estate planning and wills. “The wills are pretty sophisticated,” a trainee commented. “You have to be really careful with the information you put down when you’re winding up an estate.” Beyond wills, trainees recalled supporting clients with “life housekeeping in the event that multiple members of their family passed away.”

Trainees in corporate tax told us that “the department is small, so you get a lot of responsibility.” It may be a smaller group, but lawyers throughout the firm often come here for help with tax questions, so trainees in this seat “get to build an internal network.” When they weren’t running around making friends, trainees had complex matters to get to grips with. “We’re advising on the way a client’s patent matches up with legislation,” one told us. “Because of the UK tax code, it can be quite challenging.” Matters were mostly advisory but could be contentious, with trainees getting to see “big disputes with HMRC.” Trainees may be called on to assist with tax aspects of transactions for the corporate team, which advises clients in energy, financial services, insurance, healthcare, hospitality and FinTech.

Work in construction revolves around advising purchasers, players in office developments and big hotel refurburs, and healthcare sector clients like BUPA and Care UK. There’s a private client flavour here too, as the firm represents high net worth individuals on expensive house and apartment developments. The firm recently advised one such client on the refurbishment of a penthouse in Grosvenor Square, for example. The team also provides specialist advice to other law firms: it recently supported a Canadian law firm on the £90 million purchase of a flower and herb farm by cannabis company Sundial to ensure Canadian law firm on the £90 million purchase of a flower and herb farm by cannabis company Sundial to ensure.

Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Intellectual Property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/Matrimonial</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The team is filled with people willing to run you through anything that you don’t understand.”

“You get to delve into the depths of IP law – it’s pretty cool.”

There are some pretty well-known names on the IP and commercial disputes client list, like Tesco, Lacoste and the brand behind Which? magazine. The team recently acted for French footwear company AIGLE in a trade-mark dispute with American Airlines. Trainees in this seat said: “You get to delve into the depths of IP law – it’s pretty cool.” Comparing it to transactional seats, trainees noted: “There’s a lot more hands-on supervision here because everything could turn up in front of a judge.” Trainees had a lot of correspondence with courts and were “drafting consent orders and letter responses to the other side.”

Trainee Life

Trainees described “outstanding” support at Wedlake Bell. While doing a client secondment, “I’d ring a partner from the firm if I had a question,” one recounted. “They called it the ‘Wedlake Bell hotline.’” Back at the mothership, “I’ve always felt like my training was at the forefront of my supervisor’s priorities.” As well as “super detailed” mid- and end-of-seat appraisals, “there are lots of professional development trainings” on topics from Excel to unconscious bias. The firm’s BAME network hosts a plethora of events and campaigns. At the time of our calls it was wellbeing week: “We’ve discussed mental and emotional health, done a bit of yoga and drunk smoothie shots.”

And how’s this for support? The firm dishes up porridge and soup for lawyers every day. “Around Wimbledon we were served strawberries and cream,” one satisfied trainee informed us. To stay in shape, trainees can attend firm-wide trips such as a ski trip, curling trip and walking trip. If you’re more about the food than the fitness, fear not – apparently the last walking trip in Kent was “more like a three-day pub crawl!” All jokes aside, trainees said Wedlake is doing culture correct: “The people here care about you.”

“I’ve been putting in more hours.”

Of course it’s not all strawberries, cream and jaunts in the Kentish countryside. Working hours were luck of the seat draw, with construction and commercial property requiring later finishes of around 7:30pm. A couple reported their latest finish was 10 or 11pm, “which isn’t bad considering we’re a City firm.” As for salaries, trainees said it “adequately reflects the hours we’re expected to put in.” Trainees did feel that the firm was putting a bit more emphasis on billable hours, with one telling us: “I’ve been putting in more hours.” We also heard “construction even states who’s billed the most hours that week. Whether it incentivises
people or not I don’t know – I find it a bit of a slog.” Another admitted: “My intention of staying here has slightly deteri
rorated,” but retention rates are usually pretty good – in 2020, five of six qualifiers stayed on.

All the Bells and Whistles...

Wedlake Bell brings a financial adviser into the firm to teach employees how to be more financially astute.
Wedlake Bell LLP is a medium-sized law firm providing legal advice to businesses and high net worth individuals from around the world. The firm’s services are based on a high degree of partner involvement, extensive business and commercial experience and strong technical expertise. The firm has approximately 140 lawyers in central London and affiliations with law firms throughout Europe and in the United States.

Main areas of work
For the firm’s business clients: Banking and asset finance; corporate; corporate tax; insolvency, restructuring and recoveries; commercial; intellectual property; information technology; media; commercial property; construction; residential property; employment.
For private individuals: Family tax, trusts and wealth protection; offshore services; residential property.

Training opportunities
In addition to academic excellence, Wedlake Bell LLP looks for commercial aptitude, flexibility, enthusiasm, a personable nature, confidence, mental agility and computer literacy in its candidates. Languages are not crucial.

Trainees have four seats of six months across the following areas: insolvency, restructuring and recoveries, commercial property, commercial litigation, construction, corporate, employment, IP and commercial, private client, pensions, property litigation and residential property. As a trainee, the firm encourages you to have direct contact and involvement with clients from an early stage. Trainees will work within highly specialised teams and have a high degree of responsibility. Trainees will be closely supervised by a partner or senior solicitor and become involved in high quality and varied work. The firm is committed to the training and career development of its lawyers and many of its trainees continue their careers with the firm, often through to partnership. Wedlake Bell LLP has an informal, creative and co-operative culture with a balanced approach to life.

Vacation schemes
- Places for 2021: Eight
- Duration: Three weeks in July
- Closing date: End of January, 2021

Other benefits
During the training contract: 25 days holiday entitlement, pension, travel loans, gym membership, private medical insurance, dental insurance, life assurance, permanent health insurance, cycle to work scheme, employee assistance scheme, additional holiday scheme and give as you earn.
Weil, Gotshal & Manges (London) LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 14
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 41/128/22
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats
First-year salary: £50,000
Qualification salary: £133,000

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Weil
More on social life and supervision

New York’s Weil keeps the City’s wheels turning, with its robust global capabilities in finance, restructuring, funds and capital markets.

The Firm
First things first: pronouncing a firm’s name correctly is essential, and for Weil you essentially say ‘while.’ The other vital piece of information is “it’s a corporate, restructuring, finance and funds powerhouse,” noted one trainee source. “It handles top-bracket work at a very high level; the deals are intellectually stimulating and never cookie-cutter.” This elite New Yorker has certainly provided its lawyers with more than just a slice of headline-hitting private equity and bankruptcy work. It has overseen some of the largest and most high-profile bankruptcies in recent memory, including those of major US names like Lehman Brothers, General Motors and Sears. Its private equity practice, meanwhile, is world-beating, positioned as it is at the very top of Chambers Global’s rankings for this area. Its prominence in the UK for this work is highlighted especially.

“...the responsibility is second to none. We’re treated as associates here.”

Weil braved the Atlantic crossing 25 years ago; now, the London office plays a crucial role in the firm’s global operation, which comprises 17 offices (eight of which are in the US). The London office is the firm’s second biggest and global revenue increased by 4% in 2019 – from $1.46bn to $1.5bn. Weil’s commitment to the City was revealed in its recent partnership promotion round: of the 16 partners promoted globally last year, four were made in London, bringing the UK partnership ranks to 41. In addition, Weil has continued to invest in its London offering via lateral hiring: five new lateral partners were brought on board last year. Most notably, the firm bagged an M&A expert from Linklaters to bolster its corporate practice.

Alongside its first-class private equity practice, Chambers Global also rates Weil highly for its corporate and finance expertise across seven jurisdictions around the world. For you, future trainee, the most important one for you to know about is the firm’s standing in Chambers UK. On a UK-wide basis, Weil’s private equity-related buyouts and investment funds expertise is highly regarded, while its know-how across banking and finance, capital markets, corporate/M&A, restructuring/insolvency and tax practices also comes in for praise.

The promise of big-ticket cross-border work aside, a training contract at Weil also comes with some of those factors associated with US firms in the City: lean teams, big exposure and even bigger pay cheques. Of course, trainees work mighty hard and the hours can be intense, but ultimately, as this source mused, the real pay-off is that “the responsibility is second to none. We’re treated as associates here, with structures in place for you to prove yourself as you do the same standard of work as a magic circle firm.”

The Seats
Trainees are required to do at least one finance and one corporate seat. Finance covers structured finance as well as banking, business finance and restructuring (BFR), while corporate covers corporate/M&A, private equity, funds and BFR. Litigation-oriented options consist

Seat options: private equity; private equity infrastructure; banking & finance; business finance restructuring; funds; structured finance; infrastructure finance; tax; and litigation.
of employment, regulatory, and BFR practices. Client secondments and overseas seats are reportedly quite rare. “Technically” you can go to Paris, Hong Kong, or New York, but language requisites and business cases are required “as they effectively lose a trainee” from an already finite pool.

First seats are assigned to trainees before they join. While “not quite a point of contention,” juniors aired a few grumbles about an “opaque” seat allocation system that “can be quite obfuscated,” which left many wanting it to be more “transparent.” That said, sources found that “generally, if someone doesn’t get their first choice, they’ll be prioritised for the next round and people are generally happy.”

Our sources also advised that “it doesn’t hurt to go and talk to the department. It’s worth doing as it gives them a heads-up.”

“You’re expected to take on lots of responsibility […] you do both the trainee and junior associate role.”

The corporate department is the firm’s largest in London and covers cross-border M&A, joint ventures, takeovers, and carve-outs. Juniors also noted a “new focus” on public M&A in addition to private equity work. Notably, the firm recently advised on the proposed $80 billion combination between two insurance giants, Willis Towers Watson and Aon; the deal is still to be completed, and at the time of writing it was the largest M&A deal to be announced in 2020. The firm has also worked on a number of ‘take private’ deals (where public companies are made private) of late, including private equity firm Advent International’s ‘public to private’ $4.1 billion conversion of UK-based defence and aerospace company Cobham, as well as the Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan Board’s (as part of consortium of private investors) $4.1 billion take-private acquisition of UK satellite company Inmarsat. “You’re expected to take on lots of responsibility,” one source reported, adding that because of the smaller team sizes “you do both the trainee and junior associate role.” On big transactions, other firms “had ten lawyers and we had four, so we pick up the slack.” Celebrating the exposure (“the level of client contact is incredible!”), one trainee also noted the variety of responsibility: “There are trainee tasks that feel very admin-focused, but with such big deals you also have so many work streams. I did get a lot of drafting experience on documents that ultimately got used in the transaction, which really made me feel valued and like an associate.”

The firm’s banking team provides a “great seat for you to learn the basics.” It covers both sponsor and lender side work on leveraged finance and high-yield bond matters. Juniors reported working with “mainly private equity sponsors” on the financing side, which involved being staffed on “pretty diverse stuff from big new financings to legacy transactions to reworking the financings of groups.” On the lender side, the firm represents private equity companies like KKR as well as major financial institutions like Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley. Weil recently advised the latter (alongside Bank of America Merrill Lynch) on the near €700 million refinancing and dividend recapitalisation for a European security solutions provider, Sector Alarm. For the sponsor side, Weil advised private equity firm Bain Capital on its 60% stake in research agency Kantar (worth $4 billion). “It’s quite procedural and transactional, so it’s a good seat to build up your organisational and project management skills,” said one trainee, pointing to their work on the inevitable conditions precedent (CP) checklists, board minutes and other transaction documents required. “I’m not slating that it’s a process task. You learn the job as you go on and it was naïve to think I’d be drafting banking documents!”

“I was afraid to pick up the phone when arriving. Two weeks later and I’m speaking to an exec in Paris about releasing signatures!”

For structured finance, trainees praised the “wide variety of work” on collateralised loan obligations (CLOs), non-conforming loans (NCLs), securitisations and derivatives matters. Of late, the group has worked on numerous CLOs for private equity and investment management giants like Carlyle, Blackstone, BlackRock and Oaktree. Newbies reported undergoing a “baptism of fire” in the first few weeks: “We were thrown on the biggest and most complicated transaction this team has ever done, and we didn’t even know how to turn on a computer at that point!” Another interviewee was “afraid to pick up the phone when arriving. Two weeks later and I’m speaking to an exec in Paris about releasing signatures!” Beyond the typical trainee tasks – like managing checklists, collating bibles, etc. – exposure is readily available “on more interesting things, like black letter law research, document analysis, and the drafting of some bespoke documents.”

The BFR team is roughly split between insolvency work – which covers contentious matters – and restructuring, which is focused on the more commercial and transactional elements of dealing with struggling companies. The firm has advised KPMG as special administrators of the broker MF Global on various issues following its 2011 bankruptcy declaration; recently, Weil assisted on litigation taking place in the UK and Germany. Weil also continues to act for the Lehman Brothers holding com-
pany in matters tied to its bankruptcy status and prioritisation of subordinated debt. Juniors championed “the really nice balance of technical issues and commercial elements” available in both strands. On the contentious side, sources reported working on the “nuts and bolts” of litigation, and told of drafting witness statements, interviewing witnesses, conducting legal research, and navigating civil procedures. “Because the teams are really lean,” one explained, “you’re told to have a go at putting together the first draft of a witness statement.” On the restructuring side, juniors commended both the variety on offer – “every transaction is different so you’re always doing variations on matters” – and the involvement in meatier tasks, such as being able to work on a lengthy explanatory statement for a scheme of arrangements, “which made me feel more like an associate than trainee.” Weil also looks to the future and focuses on the debt market “to see if certain companies are struggling and whether we can help them out.”

The private funds team assists with “the management process of setting up funds, which involves raising money, forming the fund, and handling the legalities about partnerships and structuring.” Some of the largest private funds are on Weil’s books, including InfraRed Capital Partners, Actis and PAI Partners. The team recently advised Actis on the development, launch and closing of its Long Life Infrastructure fund. Trainees reported contributing to fundraising work for large private equity sponsors, first-time managers and “people spinning out from private equity houses, which is really exciting to be a part of.”

Task-wise, juniors highlighted that the “work rolls down the hill,” so substantive drafting usually occurs later down the career line “as it’s all really complicated, but they do give you smaller documents to have a go at.” Conducting document review, liaising with clients, and providing admin support for closures are all common undertakings for trainees here.

Weil has a small litigation team that tends to focus on complex commercial litigation, as well as litigious support for BFR. “During my time,” one source revealed, “I’ve been involved in a High Court defamation proceeding; an international arbitration; a corporate investigation; disputes due diligence on transactional work for the private equity team; the work that was conducted around an estate; and the administration of a big private equity group.” Juniors therefore celebrated the team’s variety: “All in all, it’s a really good mix!”

Trainee Life

“We’re an English outfit with a US background,” declared one source when asked to sum up the London office. But does the American buck stop there? “I wouldn’t say the American influence really shapes us,” another reflected, highlighting how much of the work originates from London: “It feels like we’re important and not a subsidiary at all.” Juniors did note that only the firm’s high-yield team in London is comprised of US-qualified lawyers, “so it just feels like you’re in the UK working for an English law firm.”

That said, Weil London’s “massive emphasis” on pro bono takes its cues from lawyerly norms across the pond. “It’s one of my favourite things here and everyone respects it,” noted one source. “The target is 50 hours a year and people will work towards that. Some people do 300 hours!” Amounts aside, each hour is counted as billable, “so there’s no excuse not to do it.” Juniors reported working with the Innocent Project; providing local support for entrepreneurs and charities seeking to set up social investment tax relief funds; and assisting the Women of Impact partnership, which “gets women-led start-ups funded and it’s entirely for sustainable initiatives.” The firm also has five charities that it’s supporting until 2023; the focus here is on improving access to education in underprivileged communities.

“I wouldn’t say the American influence really shapes us.”

Yet another (stereotypical) cultural import concerns hourly demands. “It’s peaks and troughs,” told one junior. “The consistency of long hours is the crushing thing – and that doesn’t really happen here. People work long hours only when they have to.” Nonetheless, demands can be high: “I’ve been here until 3 or 4am, which was brutal. But on average I can get away at 9pm.” Another junior noted doing 11 hours a day on average. “The hours are long,” one junior warned. “I’m not going to sugar-coat it.” It’s fair to point out here that US firms get a bad rep for hours, but in reality the hours in most City firms (US-founded or not) focused on big-ticket corporate/finance work are the same – expect to work late nights wherever you go.

So, is it all-consuming? “It’s all-consuming in the sense that you don’t switch off that much – you always have your phone and if you get an email you might have to do something there and then, but the hours are massively department-dependent.” Private equity and BFR are understandably busy, whereas employment is reportedly more predictable. “The hours don’t bother me, but they’re not for everyone,” one source concluded. “You know what you’re getting into and no one’s under any false illusions.” With big hours come big rewards and Weil follows the big bucks payment pattern of US firms in the City: “The salary really is amazing and almost too much for someone my age! I’ve got nothing to complain about there.”

Culturally, “the defining characteristic of all trainees is that we’re all radically different and from all walks of life. We’re not a heavy Oxbridge contingent. There’s a lot more that’s different about us than the same.” More difference prevails beyond the trainee ranks: “Day to day, it’s a close-knit firm and the culture is very good. Some teams are
known for having a friendlier culture, whereas others are less relaxed.” Juniors across the board celebrated the lack of “macho posturing,” as well as the genuine support offered amidst the current global pandemic: “Talking about culture can feel like arbitrary corporate propaganda, but in the days of the apocalypse, you see it actually exists and proves it’s not a front and that the firm will stand behind its employees.”

Stay aweil:

Despite the global pandemic, juniors felt comfortable about qualification. “We’re thinking Covid won’t impact trainee retention. The reason for the small intake and the investment they’ve made is because they don’t want to lose trainees. That just doesn’t work for their business model.” In 2020, 12 of 13 qualifiers stayed with the firm.
Weil, Gotshal & Manges (London) LLP

110 Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1AY
Tel: 020 7903 1000
Email: graduate.recruitment@weil.com
Website: www.weil.com/ukrecruiting

Firm profile
With approximately 1,100 lawyers across the US, Europe and Asia, Weil operates according to the “one firm” principle, allowing it to bring the right mix of firm wide skill and local market presence to deliver coordinated legal advice to help its clients achieve their sophisticated goals and objectives. Established in 1996, Weil’s London office is the largest of its European offices and the hub of its European practice. The office is a leading player in the UK legal market and is consistently regarded as one of the most successful London offices of a US-based law firm. The firm supports a varied client base of European, US and global private equity houses, corporates and financial institutions on domestic and cross-border matters. Weil’s strategy is focused on long-term investment in recruiting and retaining exceptional talent at all levels. The firm’s people celebrate diversity and inclusion, and its award-winning pro bono programme is deeply ingrained in the firm’s culture.

Main areas of work
Weil provides clients with legal expertise at the highest level across its key practices of private equity, corporate/M&A, funds, banking and finance, structured finance, restructuring and dispute resolution, and has been involved in some of the most significant, high-profile and prestigious mandates across all its legal specialisms. The majority of the firm’s work involves multidisciplinary teams across the specialist fields of competition, corporate governance and compliance, employment, intellectual property, management incentives, pensions, real estate, tax and technology, leveraging the expertise of its full service capabilities for its clients.

Training opportunities
Weil offers a comprehensive and sophisticated training programme with direct input from leading partners alongside a tailor made approach to mentoring, career progression and development for each trainee. All trainees are required to complete four six month seats and two of those seats must be in corporate and finance.

Vacation scheme
Weil has up to 20 places on their two-week vacation schemes, which run during the spring and summer holidays. Applications are open to all post-graduates and undergraduates who are able to commence a training contract in 2023. A vacation scheme is a great way to experience first-hand what life is like as a Weil trainee. Throughout the scheme you will work alongside senior associates, carrying out trainee tasks and responsibilities. Remuneration £500 per week.

Other benefits
Private health cover; permanent health insurance; life assurance; pension (the firm will contribute to the group personal pension plan at the rate of 6% of your basic salary); birthday holiday and 25 days’ leave, with holiday entitlement increasing by one day after each year of service, up to a maximum of 28 days.

Open days and first-year opportunities
Weil offers a number of open days throughout the year.
Weil also runs a one-week fast track scheme for first year law students and second year non-law students.
Please visit the website for more information.
“Everything is 100% international” at this elite US outfit’s London base.

The Firm

“It’s not just marketing spin, White & Case is genuinely international,” one trainee affirmed, echoing the comments of many another we spoke with on the phone. The evidence? First, “it isn’t a firm where half the trainee intake is competing to complete a seat abroad – everybody is guaranteed an international secondment.” Second, “it’s becoming increasingly common for associates to qualify into other offices too. In the last round, associates qualified into offices in the Middle East, New York and Singapore, while one remained on secondment in Moscow for an extended period.” Third, sources highlighted the work, which is “always cross-border; matters nearly always require you to work with different teams from across the firm’s network.” For example, the firm’s London and Tokyo asset finance teams recently represented leading German financial institution Deutsche Bank on the financing of 12 Embraer E190 aircraft, which were to be leased to airlines based in Africa, Spain and Mexico. “Read the Financial Times, and there’ll always be companies mentioned that you are working with,” one junior boasted.

“Everything is 100% international” at this elite US outfit’s London base.

The Firm

“It’s not just marketing spin, White & Case is genuinely international,” one trainee affirmed, echoing the comments of many another we spoke with on the phone. The evidence? First, “it isn’t a firm where half the trainee intake is competing to complete a seat abroad – everybody is guaranteed an international secondment.” Second, “it’s becoming increasingly common for associates to qualify into other offices too. In the last round, associates qualified into offices in the Middle East, New York and Singapore, while one remained on secondment in Moscow for an extended period.” Third, sources highlighted the work, which is “always cross-border; matters nearly always require you to work with different teams from across the firm’s network.” For example, the firm’s London and Tokyo asset finance teams recently represented leading German financial institution Deutsche Bank on the financing of 12 Embraer E190 aircraft, which were to be leased to airlines based in Africa, Spain and Mexico. “Read the Financial Times, and there’ll always be companies mentioned that you are working with,” one junior boasted.

To look at what the firm has achieved in global clout, White & Case is moving in the same circles as the magic circle. Our trainee sources had sought “a firm that was well established in the City” when looking for a training contract. W&C “has been on the scene for decades” unlike some other US outfits in the capital – indeed, the firm opened shop in London in 1971, so it’s nearing its 50th anniversary in the city. W&C is also one of the biggest US outfits in the city, especially when you look at the number of trainees it takes on. With size comes some enhanced capabilities, and the firm has a plethora of Chambers UK rankings to its name. In London, it’s recognised for the strength of its banking & finance, capital markets, restructuring, and construction practices among many others. On a UK-wide basis, its arbitration, energy, private equity, and projects teams are all highly commended. Chambers Global similarly rewards the firm with top marks for its arbitration, construction and projects know-how, on top of a whole host of other rankings. Go to chambers.com for the full list. Given the firm’s global outlook, trainees felt that “speaking a second or even third language is a great string in your bow. However, it’s not essential by any means, as English is the global language of business.”

Trainees submit three seat preferences before their training contracts starts and continue to do so two months before each subsequent rotation. At least one seat must be a finance seat. While our survey results revealed some grumbles from trainees about their current assigned seat, generally our interviewees agreed that “you’re very likely to get one of your top three preferences most times.” Sources also felt it was important for future trainees to know that for those who put down real estate as an option, “you’re either placed into the real estate team or real estate finance team, there is no distinction made between the two.”

Overseas secondments are usually reserved for the final seats. Trainees are provided with a full list of secondment options, “from which you are required to rank your preferences by practice area, along with a covering letter explaining your interest.” In that letter, they can outline their interest in a specific office. Past seats have included Singapore, Dubai, Paris, and Beijing. Although it’s true all trainees are guaranteed a spot, some sources suggested

Seat options: bank finance; capital markets; competition; construction (contentious & non-contentious); corporate M&A; corporate private equity; disputes; EIPAF; employment, compensation and benefits; financial institutions advisory; FRI; IP; real estate; tax; white collar
there was some competition to secure a spot for “the more glamorous locations,” with one adding sassily: “Who wants to go to Frankfurt?” Ouch. Frankfurt sounds good to us. Our insiders also pointed out that “providing you know where you want to qualify, you’re able to complete both a client and international secondment.” The former are available on an ad hoc basis.

The Work
Arbitration and litigation are the two main groups that comprise W&C’s disputes umbrella. Trainees are typically placed within one of the two groups, though sources pointed out to us that “often you might work for both groups.” Within the litigation group you’ll find further subgroups including commercial disputes, regulatory enforcement, white-collar, and technology disputes. Clients include Goldman Sachs, Toshiba and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC). The department recently advised Ukrainian conglomerate System Capital Management throughout litigation/arbitration proceedings spanning London, Cyprus and Holland; the dispute revolved around the purchase of a Ukrainian telecoms operator and the many issues stemming from it, including fraud allegations, injunction relief and arbitration award enforcements. W&C ultimately secured a settlement. Trainees largely perform the same role in both arms of the disputes practice. “There’s an awful lot of proofreading and bundling,” one source said, but we also heard of trainees taking on more substantive tasks and “juicy work” such as preparing witness statements and conducting research. For example, one of our interviewees was kept busy with “research into how cryptocurrencies are interpreted around the world,” while another had looked into “the viability of bringing an arbitration claim to the UK.” In summary: “There is a lot of grunt work but a lot of intellectually stimulating research too.”

EIPAF is W&C’s energy, infrastructure, projects and asset finance group. Sources explained that “it depends on your supervisor what range of work you’re exposed to; some trainees work exclusively within one area such as mining or rail, whereas others work across all the areas.” Other strands include oil and liquified natural gas (LNG). On certain projects, the trainee role could be very process-driven, as this source explained: “Preparing packs for sponsors; proofreading; collating and printing documents for signing; checking all the documents had been signed; and collating the signature pages.” Recently, the department has acted on projects ranging from the $20 billion (plus) financing of a gas liquification facility in Mozambique; a hybrid project financing (including a sovereign guarantee) worth $2.3 billion for a subsidiary of Uzbekistan’s national oil and gas company; and the implementation of a public-private partnership for a new highway in the Czech Republic.

For their compulsory finance seat, trainees can choose from real estate finance, asset finance, banking & finance, and leveraged finance. On the banking & finance side, the team represented CVC Capital Partners and its Finnish healthcare portfolio company, Mehiläinen, in relation to its €380 million public offer to acquire a company operating in the same sector. W&C’s asset finance lawyers, meanwhile, have been busy advising Brookfield Infrastructure and its partners on the $8.4 billion acquisition of Genesee & Wyoming, which has a portfolio of railways operating across North America, Europe and Australia. Collectively, the seats scored poorer than other transactional seats in our survey, particularly when it came to how interesting the work was perceived to be and whether trainees would be happy to qualify in the area. One interviewee reasoned that “it’s not a reflection on the firm, but more on finance law” and explained that “the work is often repetitive and highly procedural” – this is often the case for trainees in finance seats at many firms. In banking, classic trainee tasks include managing conditions precedent (CP) checklists as well as “drafting and duplicating many of the minor documents.” Real estate finance only takes on one trainee per rotation, which means “responsibility is quite high,” while in asset finance sources found themselves “working closely with the partners for clients such as airlines, debtors and banks. There are similar structures in finance documents, but here the process is different, which makes it unique.”

“I’ve been able to run calls independently when a client has rung up and asked for advice.”

The corporate department is split in two areas: private equity and M&A. The latter has tended to focus on private M&A in the past, but in recent years more public M&A work governed by the Takeover Code has found its way into the group as a result of lateral partner hires. The team covers both regulatory and transactional matters and a variety of deal types, including those occurring in the oil and gas, pharma, and hotel sectors. Recently, the team advised a Nigerian oil and gas business, Seplat Petroleum Development Company, on its £382 million cash offer for AIM-listed Eland Oil & Gas, which has assets in
Nigeria. Sources indicated that “there were more drafting opportunities and a lot more client contact compared to the finance seats.” One added: “On some calls with partners, I would just be taking the minutes. However, there were also times where I’ve been able to run calls independently when a client has rung up and asked for advice.”

Trainee Life

Starting a new job can be scary, especially if it’s your first one straight out of university, and especially if it’s one with a prestigious law firm. However, our interviewees stressed that W&C is a “friendlier and less intimidating place than you would think. People are eager to talk to you and it doesn’t feel stuffy.” That’s good to hear. As with many firms, we did hear one or two reports of “some partners who you want to avoid as they seem to only speak with other seniors,” but most sources put this down to the realities of working in any large organisation. For the most part, interviewees agreed that partners “were very approachable and down-to-earth.”

“There’s no sugar-coating the fact that trainees at W&C work long hours- a reality underpinned by the international nature of the firm’s work. “Especially in the transactional world, your hours are ultimately dictated by wherever the client is in the world,” one source stated. Detailing the pressures that come with the job, another added: “If we receive a document at 9pm from a client, it is expected that it will be fully reviewed, analysed and returned by 9am, even if that means working very late.” Most trainees tend to be in the office until around 7:30pm most nights, with only occasional opportunities to leave at 6pm. At the later end of the spectrum, “it’s not unheard of to be working until 4am too.” Another source added: “I haven’t had too many long periods working past midnight. As you progress, you get better at prioritising and anticipating work more efficiently.” We also heard that “most people take lunch away from their desk and don’t tend to start working until 9:30am.”

While most trainees in our survey expected to qualify with W&C, our interviewees did highlight that “the level of churn increases when you’re on the associate track.” It’s perhaps unsurprising therefore that a desire for a better work/life balance was singled out as the most deciding factor in determining W&C trainees’ future career moves in our survey. Indeed, sources confirmed that “a lot of people opt to go to a smaller firm or in-house later on.”

Positively, trainees praised the firm for being proactive in addressing mental health, with “a tonne of resources available.” For example, the firm runs a series of monthly training sessions to support trainees’ mental health. The firm also offers free counselling sessions and has trained several mental health first-aiders in the office.

Lawyers at the firm may work hard, but they are partly rewarded with many a firm-backed social activity. The highlight of the year is the White & Case World Cup, which sees lawyers from around the globe get together in office teams for three days of football, volleyball and – for those who favour a less physically jarring activity, like us – a barbecue. In 2019, it all kicked off in Madrid. Anyone who wants to attend is whisked away for the three-day celebration and they don’t need to take annual leave to get involved. Back at base, sources felt that “some departments are more social than others,” with disputes being flagged as among the liveliest. “We also try to arrange informal trainee drinks most Fridays,” one source informed us.

The qualification process kicks off three months before the end of the fourth and final seat. HR reach out with a list of NQ options, from which trainees can select three to apply for. “Typically, you also reach out to the team you’re applying to,” a trainee explained. “Some departments require additional tests on top of looking at your reviews.” Trainees might also need to interview; it just depends on the department. In 2020, W&C retained 32 of 41 of its trainees, with two fixed-term contracts.

And finally...

The guaranteed overseas seat might see trainees jet off to Abu Dhabi, Beijing, Brussels, Dubai, Frankfurt, Geneva, Hong Kong, Moscow, New York, Paris, Prague, Singapore, Stockholm, or Tokyo.
White & Case LLP

5 Old Broad Street, London EC2N 1DW
Tel: 020 7532 2899  Fax: 020 7532 1001
Email: londontrainee@whitecase.com
Website: www.whitecasetrainee.com

Firm profile
White & Case is a global law firm of more than 2,000 lawyers worldwide. We’ve built an unrivalled network of 44 offices in 30 countries. That investment is the foundation for our client work in 180 countries today. Complex client projects, nuanced local market knowledge and global capabilities define who we are. Many White & Case clients are multinational organisations with complex needs that require the involvement of multiple offices. As part of our training contract, we offer every trainee a guaranteed six-month overseas seat.

Main areas of work
As a White & Case lawyer, you’ll work on fast-paced cutting-edge cross-border projects from the outset of your career. In London, our key areas of work include: bank finance (including regulatory compliance); financial restructuring and insolvency; capital markets (high yield and securitisation); dispute resolution (including antitrust, commercial litigation, intellectual property, international arbitration, trade, white collar and construction and engineering); energy, infrastructure, project and asset finance (EIPAF); corporate (including M&A, private equity, employment, compensation and benefits, investment funds, real estate and tax).

Training opportunities
White & Case is looking to recruit ambitious trainees who have a desire to gain hands-on practical experience from day one and a willingness to take charge of their own career. We value globally-minded citizens of the world who are eager to work across borders and cultures, and who are intrigued by solving problems within multiple legal systems. They should have an understanding of international commercial issues and an interest in working on big-ticket, cross-border work. We recruit both law and non-law students and owing to the nature of our work, language skills are of interest. Applicants will be welcomed for their individuality, their ability to contribute to the cutting-edge work we do and the energy with which they approach the job at hand. They should have achieved, or be on track to achieve, a solid 2:1, have a positive and friendly attitude, be enthusiastic and work well in teams. The training contract consists of four six-month seats, one of which is guaranteed to be spent in one of our overseas offices, including Abu Dhabi, Beijing, Brussels, Dubai, Frankfurt, Geneva, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Moscow, New York, Paris, Prague, Singapore, Stockholm, Tokyo. The remaining three seats can be spent in any one of the firm’s practice groups in London. Receiving a high level of partner and associate contact from day one, our trainees can be confident that they will receive high-quality, stimulating and rewarding work. Trainees work in small, focused teams, so their colleagues trust them to perform tasks accurately and efficiently. White & Case is a ‘high-stretch, high-support’ workplace that celebrates individual excellence and team success. We actively encourage our trainees to take early responsibility, and there is a strong emphasis on practical training, with plenty of support and feedback. Alongside the training contract, our trainees are encouraged to get involved in all aspects of our globally-renowned pro bono programme, often working directly with clients and even managing small matters. White & Case recruits and develops trainee solicitors with the aim of retaining them on our globally-renowned pro bono programme, often working directly with clients and even managing small matters. White & Case recruits and develops trainee solicitors with the aim of retaining them on our.

Vacation scheme, open days and first-year opportunities
We offer vacation scheme placements over the winter, spring and summer, open days and two-day insight schemes. These provide a great way to experience first-hand what life is like as a White & Case trainee as well as gain useful insight into the firm and the training we offer.

White & Case Virtual Learning Programme
Our virtual learning programme offers the opportunity to gain first-hand insight into life as a White & Case trainee and experience the realities of cross-border law. There is no cost to access the programme; it is self-paced to fit around your schedule, and no application form or legal knowledge is required. You’ll gain insight into the fast-paced cutting-edge projects our lawyers and trainees work on, and gain valuable skills by undertaking true-to-life legal tasks. Participation in the learning programme will be recognised on our application forms, and it is a great way to demonstrate your interest in law and White & Case. For more information and to apply for all opportunities please visit our website.
Boutique firm Wiggin is quite the bigwig in the world of media, tech and IP law.

The Firm
Picture this. You’re out for dinner with your old law school mates and one of them starts regaling the table with tales of the part they played in a carpet company’s tax filing. At the other end of the table, someone else mentions their firm had a hand behind Netflix’s hit series Sex Education. Who has your attention? Very few firms provide trainees with the possibility of working on the legal puzzles behind films and TV shows (such as His Dark Materials, Dracula and Rocketman), but Wiggin is one of them. Of course, we should point out that trainees aren’t mingling with Hollywood stars, but with clients like Netflix, Paramount, HBO, Amazon, Disney and Warner Bros on the list, “there’s never a boring day!”

“There are definitely no robots at Wiggin!”
Wiggin’s three core focuses are media, technology and IP. Chambers UK awards the firm top media and entertainment rankings for its film/TV and publishing expertise. It’s also highly ranked for its gambling work. According to training principal and corporate head Ben Whitelock, “a lot of the firm’s founders came from big City firms attracted by the idea of creating a specialist firm with an entrepreneurial culture.” Our trainee sources affirmed this vision. “It’s totally different from your average corporate law firm,” they felt. “Everyone is encouraged to bring their own personality to the team – there are definitely no robots at Wiggin!”

Wiggin has a miniature intake of just two to three a year, and at the time of our interviews, all trainees were based in London – the firm does recruit for its Cheltenham office too. Wiggin actually relaunched its training contract in 2018 after a three-year hiatus. In response to calls from trainees for a bit more structure in the relaunched contract, the firm is soon to implement a formal learning and development programme, which will include a two-week induction course plus training sessions at every seat rotation.

The Seats
First seats are automatically assigned and from there, “we have a chat with HR about our preferences. Since there’s only two of us, the firm is pretty accommodating.” We heard everyone does a stint in either commercial litigation or IP. There are also occasional client secondments with companies such as Vodafone, Telefonica and Warner Bros.

“...interacting with production teams to convey their needs to the associates.”
Wiggin’s film and TV expertise attracts gigantic film companies like Paramount, Disney, Warner Bros and 20th Century Fox Film, as well as online streaming giants like Netflix and Amazon. Within the team there are finance and production subgroups. As trainees detailed, “we handle a little bit of the selling [distribution] of films and TV shows, but we mostly work on production.” The firm recently advised Eleven Film on its production of Sex Education for Netflix, for example. Trainees told us: “We work on location contracts and extras contracts, we draft crew agreements and director agreements, and on a day-to-day basis we’ll be interacting with production teams to convey their needs to the associates.” On the finance side,
"we represent banks and investors in big film productions." For example, the team recently acted for Coutts, a private banking company, on the banking arrangements for Dracula. Interviewees reported a reduction of work due to Covid-19; “however, there has been a rise in online streaming platforms as they’re still commissioning a lot of work.”

The corporate team works across the firm’s key sectors, advising on investments, mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures and private equity deals. The team recently advised Toadman, a Swedish game developer, on its acquisition of UK-based Antimatter Games. The firm also advised private equity fund Clairvest on its £27 million investment in FSB Technology, a sports betting platform. As a trainee, “you do a lot of the basic documents that are part of the transaction, whether it’s writing the board minutes or reviewing shareholder certificates.” Interviewees liked working on smaller deals, “since you’re typically working alongside only a partner and legal director, so we have more responsibility.”

In litigation, “a lot of the cases centre on defamation and privacy claims,” including cybersecurity breaches, GDPR compliance and data collection. The team does a lot of defence work for news organisations facing defamation allegations. It recently represented Associated Newspapers against defamation allegations brought by the former technical director of the parent company of the manufacturer of insulation used on Grenfell. The claimant alleged that a MailOnline article defamed him by implicating him in the disaster. Trainees got plenty of exposure to defamation cases, as well as injunctive applications. “It’s a real melting pot of everything,” they praised, with one sharing: “I felt trusted to communicate with counsel, clients and opposing solicitors,” but as is typical in litigation seats, “there’s less client contact since everything you do has to be very precise.” For one, “some of the best days involved running down to the courts to file documents ahead of hearings!”

“Carrying out trademark searches is a big trainee task.”

The IP team handles a lot of trademark protection and online copyright disputes, as well as designs law, licensing and commercial IP matters. Wiggin recently represented Warner Music and Sony Music Entertainment in copyright infringement claims against TuneIn Inc, an audio streaming service. It also acted for Vans in High Court litigation against Primark relating to lookalike shoes. “Carrying out trademark searches is a big trainee task,” sources explained. “You basically go through a list of trademarks and compare those to what your clients want and see if it would infringe.” Elsewhere, “there are bits and pieces of trial work like putting together bundles and evidence prep.” Another interviewee pointed out that “there’s less client contact” than some other seats, “but you’re encouraged to sit in on calls with partners.” It’s a complex area of law, but the team holds bi-weekly training sessions to learn about “any articles and new cases that have come out, plus updates on AI and tech.”

Trainee Life

A standard day for trainees started between 9 and 9.30am and wrapped up by around 7pm. “I mean, there’s been a couple of late nights until 11pm when working on a big matter,” one trainee shared, “but it’s not usual.” Trainees in both offices start on a £39,000 salary which rises to £65,000 on qualification, which is largely in line with Wiggin’s competitor firms. There’s no formal NQ process at Wiggin; “it just comes down to whether your area of interest has capacity or not.” Retention rates have been strong in recent years, as training principal Ben White-lock notes: “Since we restarted the training contract, we’ve never let anyone go.” The streak continued in 2020, when both of the firm’s qualifiers were kept on.

“There’ll always be someone making a cup of tea in the kitchen.”

Trainees felt “the firm definitely reflects the culture of the clients” when it came to dress code. “There are certainly no suits to be seen in Cheltenham,” they said, while “London is a tad more business casual.” In the open-plan London office, “non-legal chats and laughs between different teams are a common occurrence.” During lockdown, “the partners have been trying their best to keep us in good spirits with funny firm-wide quizzes.” Wiggin’s social calendar usually consists of events like a Christmas party alternating between London and Cheltenham and organised coffee breaks. And when you can’t make the coffee meet, “there’ll always be someone making a cup of tea in the kitchen.” We heard in both offices, “everyone knows one another, and if they don’t, everyone will introduce themselves!”

In terms of diversity and inclusion at Wiggin, sources thought the gender balance was quite equal across the firm (and all of the trainees at the time of our interviews were women). “Wiggin is also very supportive of the LGBTQ+ community and we have a Wiggin Pride Week,” an interviewee pointed out. “The firm is also aware that it needs to do more in recruiting more ethnically diverse candidates.”
Gettin’ Wiggy wit’ it

The firm recently set up a pro bono committee “allowing people to get involved in all sorts of interesting work for various organisations, including youth choirs, homelessness charities and film charities.”
Wiggin LLP

Jessop House, Jessop Avenue, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 3WG
Tel: 01242 224114
Email: hr@wiggin.co.uk
Website: www.wiggin.co.uk
Twitter: @WigginLLP
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/wiggin

Firm profile
Wiggin focuses exclusively on media, technology and IP. They advise clients on the financing, exploitation and protection of their creative and commercial assets in these sectors.

Main areas of work
Alongside its specialist commercial expertise, the firm provides a full legal service across corporate, tax, finance, litigation, employment and property. Wiggin’s clients range from leading businesses in digital entertainment, film, television, video games, music, sport and esports and publishing through to platforms, content retailers, gaming and technology companies and early stage entrepreneurs.

The firm’s Brussels office provides legal support and lobbies EU decision makers on behalf of clients on a wide range of matters, including EU copyright, audio visual regulation, data protection, competition policy, trade and e-commerce.

Training opportunities
4 x 6 months

Other benefits
- Group personal pension
- Permanent health insurance
- Death in service
- Corporate gym membership
- Holiday buy / sell scheme
- Cycle scheme

University law careers fairs 2020
Attending virtual law fairs.

Wiggin LLP

Partners: 40
Associates: 55
Total trainees: 6
UK offices: Cheltenham, London
Overseas offices: 1

Contacts
Graduate recruiter:
Grace Walton
grace.walton@wiggin.co.uk
01242 224114
Training partner:
Ben Whitelock,
ben.whitelock@wiggin.co.uk

Application criteria
Training contracts pa: 3
Applications pa: TBC
Minimum required degree grade: 2:1

Dates and deadlines
Training contract applications open: 6th January 2020
Training contract deadline, 2022/2023 start: 30th May 2021

Salary and benefits
First-year salary: £39,000
Second-year salary: £42,000
Post-qualification salary: £65,000
Holiday entitlement: 25 days

Sponsorship
LPC fees: Yes
GDL fees: Yes
Maintenance grant: £7,000

International and regional
Offices with training contracts: Cheltenham, London, Brussels
Overseas seats: Brussels
Client secondments: yes
In the pleasant city of Salisbury, trainees get hands-on experience in private wealth, property, charity, agribusiness, and much more...

The Firm

In the whole nature-or-nurture debate, we acknowledge that people are (in part) a product of their environment. Law firms are too. Put a law firm among glass towers full of highly-strung bankers, and they will do a lot of stressful banking work. Put a law firm in the charming city of Salisbury, sitting pretty in its historic, rolling countryside, and you get a pleasant law firm specialising in charity, private wealth and agriculture and rural affairs.

This resilient firm has been plying its trade in this city for an astonishing 300 years, making it even older than Freshfields. Wilsons is a living example of the value of choosing a career outside the capital: the reward you get is to see the impact of your work on local businesses, individuals and charities, watching them grow, and thinking “I did that.” And the more you progress the more your become a figurehead of that economy. The firm isn’t entirely locally-oriented, though. It has a smaller London office, as many of the matters, in private wealth especially, involve court appearances and dealings on a grander scale.

This all results in several Chambers and Partners accolades. Wilsons' knowledge in rural and agricultural affairs earns it a top Chambers UK ranking, while its work in the charity sector is also applauded. “It’s always a bonus to be working for charities, it’s one of the main attractions here,” one trainee felt. In Chambers High Net Worth, Wilsons comes out on top as a national leader for private wealth law, particularly for its work on the likes of landed estates matters, as well as cross-border issues spanning various jurisdictions. All of this proved to be an enticing combination for our trainee sources, who also noted Salisbury’s “London sensibility: it has that level of client service and professionalism, but with a more sociable set of hours and a friendlier atmosphere.”

Contentious trusts and probate is the largest litigation seat on offer at Wilson’s. “That team’s very strong,” said one proud trainee who’d sat here. The work almost exclusively centres on charities and covers two main strands. The first covers situations where relatives of the deceased contest wills that leave assets to charity. “Some

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

Get hired by Wilsons

More on the firm’s trusts & probate practice

The Seats

Trainees get allocated their first seat at random and state their preferences for subsequent seats at their mid-seat reviews. A trainee underlined that the private client team is “in a sense, the core of Wilsons – it’s what the firm grew out of.” The group has three sub-teams: Court of Protection, tax and trusts, and trusts and probate. The Court of Protection sub-team handles lasting power of attorney matters for clients who, for example, have suffered brain injuries as a result of a traffic collision. Trainees, we were told, field calls from clients who can have a whole host of requests and questions, which “makes every day different and keeps you on your toes.” Tax and trusts (unsurprisingly) deals with all the tax aspects of trusts. Trainees are responsible for drafting “every type of trust deed” and conducting research, as well as working out tax calculations. “There’s a fair bit of problem solving – it can get quite technical!” one source shared, but in an encouraging and satisfied way. Read about the third sub-team, trusts and probate, on our website.

“Sending something on solicitor-headed paper usually does the trick...”

Seat options: contentious trust & probate; trust & tax; trust & probate; Court of Protection; employment and education; company commercial; commercial property; property estates; litigation; family
have estates that are worth millions, and family members dispute it being given to charity,” explained one source. On these matters, trainees typically gather bundles for court, prepare for hearings and attend “meetings with the siblings or children contesting, which can be intense at times.” Lawyers here recently defended a leading UK charity during a dispute over a £1.9 million gift left to the charity in the will of the deceased (who had gifted the assets to prevent any of their estate going to their surviving spouse and stepchildren). Other clients include Help for Heroes, Macmillan Cancer Support and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

The second strand revolves around legacy recoveries, and it was here that trainees felt they got more responsibility. So what does it involve? “It’s when the executor in the will has spent the money that was supposed to be left to charity, and the charity instructs us to get that money,” As these tend to be relatively small claims of £5k or under, trainees “pretty much run the legacy recovery – it’s good to get used to running a file and having that responsibility.” This can involve calling will executors, though “sending a letter on solicitor-headed paper usually does the trick” of getting their attention. Overall, interviewees liked how this seat gave them exposure to trusts work in a way that’s “less emotionally draining. You feel better chasing these executors on behalf of a charity because even if it’s tough, it’s easier to justify.”

The property team is split into housing, commercial and farm matters, with a lot of crossover occurring between the latter two. Trainees can be based in one area but usually “get the opportunity to see all sides of it.” Commercial and farm work covers the buying and selling of freeholds and leaseholds on “anything from warehouses to shops, and any kind of farming building.” The team recently advised the Royal Marines Association (a charity) during the building of an £8 million facility to house Marines and their families. Residential work tends to be conducted for high net worth individuals: “We’ve got some lords and no-bility as clients – we work on singular £4 million properties, but also with landlords who have 50 small flats.” Trainees typically draft Land Registry documents, leases, licences to assign and letters to clients.

Trainee Life
The smaller size of the firm means that trainees “can just go up to the head of the team and get guidance when you need it” (in a polite way of course – not by just barging in on senior management, which we wouldn’t recommend...). Interviewees felt that partners “take a real interest in your development” and also praised managing partner Mike Parker for welcoming trainees: “He knows where I went to uni, the sports I play, my hobbies etc... and he could say similar things about anyone in the firm. You really feel he’s listening and is interested in what you have to say.” A mentor scheme pairs each trainee up with an associate who's five years or less post-qualified. “You can ask them any questions and they’ll give you tips because, if you’re in a situation, they’ve likely been there not so long ago too,” reported one insider.

“IT's nice to go for a walk at lunch and imagine you're time-travelling!”

Trainees generally credited Salisbury as a good city to work in. One commented: “It’s got an old-school vibe and almost feels like a medieval town architecturally. It’s nice to go for a walk at lunch and imagine you’re time-traveling!” Some championed Salisbury as a “busy, buzzing place,” while others felt it could be “a little boring for a 20-something. There’s not tons going on.” Those in the latter camp tended to commute in from nearby cities that are “a little livelier.” On the firm socials front, we heard that there isn’t much in the way of “big organised firm events, but people will casually go out for drinks if they feel like it.”

Mental health is “taken very seriously here,” said one trainee. “I feel completely comfortable and confident talking about mental health with my supervisor and HR.” The firm also got praise for its promotion of female partners, though interviewees noted: “We struggle with racial diversity – but that might be because we’re in the South West.” On the work/life balance front, most of the people we spoke to were adamant that they have the best hours in the legal industry: “You can do 9am to 5pm and people won’t give you a second look when you leave. In most seats, people get up at 5pm and leave.” No one we spoke to had left any later than 7pm, nor had they worked from home on the weekends or in the evenings.

We heard that the qualification process “isn’t particularly transparent – you only become aware of how the process works right towards the end of the second year.” By May, Wilsons sends around a list of job vacancies, which trainees then apply for. Despite the reportedly “sit and wait scenario” that follows applications, most of our interviewees had enjoyed their time at the firm and wanted to stay. One was very honest and admitted: “I thought I’d end up leaving Wilsons because of the location, but having worked in Salisbury I now never want to leave!” In 2020, three out of four qualifiers were kept on.
Where there’s a will, they’re away:

While there is a small London office in gorgeous Lincoln’s Inn Fields, trainees tend to just visit when needed for court cases and meetings in the capital. There’s also the chance for one trainee per rotation to spend a seat there.
Wilsons Solicitors LLP

Alexandra House, St Johns Street, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 2SB
Tel: 01722 412 412 Fax: 01722 427 610
Email: jo.ratcliffe@wilsonsllp.com
Website: www.wilsonsllp.com

**Firm profile**

Ranked as one of the top private client and charity law firms in the country, our almost 300-year heritage, combined with lawyers who are recognised leaders in their fields, enables Wilsons to provide a unique combination of skills and experience to our clients. Our lawyers are dedicated to ensuring a detailed understanding of their clients’ interests and a seamless working relationship across the different specialities of the practice.

**Main areas of work**

**Private Client:** We act for clients with business interests, landed and inherited wealth, foreign domiciliaries, UK and offshore trustees and non-resident individuals with links to the UK. Services including tax planning, estate and succession planning, asset structuring, UK and offshore trust formation and advice, wills and trusts and estate administration and probates and intestacies valued at up to £50m.

**Family:** The team’s expertise ranges from pre-nuptial agreements and civil partnerships to divorce, children’s arrangements and surrogacy law.

**Charity:** Wilsons has one of the most highly ranked teams in the UK. We advise on the complete range of legal needs and have a particular specialism in contentious and non-contentious legacy work. The constitutional and governance team has considerable expertise in advising military charities and the charitable care sector.

**Agriculture:** Wilsons’ rural team has developed a practice centred on the needs of rural business and landowners. These include complex sales and purchases, development options for landowners, grants and diversification advice and property litigation, including landlord and tenant, partnership matters, boundary, title and rights of way disputes.

**Commercial:** The commercial team specialises in employment, commercial property and corporate work. Corporate work focuses on commercial tax and asset planning, transactions and refinancing. The team deals with an unusual breadth of work requiring high-quality, bespoke commercial advice.

**Property:** Our clients have substantial commercial, agricultural and residential property interests and the firm advises on purchasing, letting and sales, and has a reputation for gaining excellent results in the options over and sales of development land.

**Litigation & Dispute Resolution:** Wilsons has one of the largest teams outside London. We advise clients on a wide range of contentious matters to provide an efficient and effective means of dispute resolution. In addition to its expertise in agricultural and probate disputes, the firm has specialists who can advise on all aspects of commercial dispute claims and reputation management.

**Training opportunities**

4x6 months

**Vacation scheme**

Each year in June/early July we run a work placement scheme at our offices in Salisbury for second year law students or third year non-law students onwards. There are five places available on our placement and we make a contribution towards travel costs/accommodation. The closing date for applications for a placement in 2021 is 31st March 2021.

**Other benefits**

Pension, life assurance, choice of optional benefits and private medical insurance.
Winckworth Sherwood

The facts
Locations: London, Manchester and Oxford
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 64/100/16
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £36,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed

Winckworth offers some interesting niche practice areas like charity, Parliamentary and ecclesiastical law, together with core commercial. The broad training experience, genuine achievements in diversity, and reasonable workload make this is an attractive proposition.

The Firm
“What I wanted,” said one trainee, “was a London-based firm that did high-quality, varied work that wasn’t going to consume my life.” Some people have unrealistic dreams. And some work at Winckworth Sherwood. The firm, though known for its ecclesiastical and Parliamentary work, is something of a property-pro, and regularly provides expert advice on employment and family law matters. A significant chunk of the firm’s business is related to charities work in some way. It sits top of the pile in Chambers UK for its Parliamentary, rail transport, and social housing work, with UK-wide nods for its education, charities, partnership, and local government work. In London, the firm receives recognition for its construction, employment, planning, mid-market real estate and real estate litigation work.

With offices in London, Manchester and Oxford, Winckworth is very much UK-based: “The firm has always been quite open that it’s not trying to expand rapidly. It’s always going for slow and steady growth.” That said, training partner Eleanor Kilminster reveals the firm’s Oxford office has recently been expanding: “Over the last two years we have recruited a number of charities, private client and commercial property specialists in order to bolster that office.” She adds that as the office grows, “it is possible we will offer a future trainee role in Oxford, and it’s close enough to allow future trainees there to do a seat in London.” It sounds ideal, so what’s the catch? Well, it’s less of a ‘catch’ perse, but it’s worth flagging that the firm is on the small side of mid-sized, meaning it only takes on eight trainees a year from a pool of around 300 applications. Currently, all trainees are recruited into the London base.

The Seats
The select few complete four six-month seats. “You don’t choose your first one, it’s random,” trainees said, “but then you choose your following seats, and they try to give you what you want.” Trainees will do at least one property seat, which can be achieved by sitting in real estate, property litigation, planning, construction, or housing and local government. The contentious requirement, meanwhile, can be met in “commercial or property litigation, construction, family or employment.” Parliamentary “always gets a trainee – it’s quite sought after,” as are seats in real estate, and corporate and commercial. Some departments like tax “don’t traditionally take on a trainee,” but interviewees added that “they can make it work around you” if you had a burning desire to sit there. Similarly, trainees noted: “If you want to do an ecclesiastical seat you can ask for one, though there’s sometimes some overlap with that team in other seats.”

“Mad things happen in this department.”
In its real estate group, Winckworth represents clients such as: Canary Wharf Group; Silvertown Homes; Aviva Investors; and the Cote Restaurant Group. As the calibre of client suggests, some of the deals are huge: the firm advised Redrow on the £1 billion development for the design and building of 2,900 homes in north London; Peel

Seat options: corporate; commercial litigation; property litigation; family; private client; housing and local government; employment; Parliamentary; ecclesiastical; institutional property; real estate; construction; planning; commercial real estate and licensing; charities and social enterprises; banking
Chambers UK rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice Area</th>
<th>Chambers Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charities</td>
<td>Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Real Estate Litigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>Social Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary &amp; Public Affairs</td>
<td>Transport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Land and Property on the £5.5 billion regeneration of a section of former docks along the Mersey in Liverpool; and London & Quadrant Housing Trust on the £1 billion regeneration of Beam Park. But not all the matters are that high-value and trainees said: “You can get your own matters straight away, which was quite scary, but you learn really quickly.” Sources recalled “negotiating contracts and transfers and bringing those to completion” alongside more traditional trainee tasks like “due diligence, proof-reading, researching and drafting.” Overall, our sources were happy. “There have been a fair few times when you see your work being sent almost verbatim to the client,” one contented trainee recounted. “You feel like you’re actually lawyering a bit.”

By contrast, the employment seat is “semi-contentious” and there’s “a lot riding on it and so it’s a lot more supervised.” The firm has several big names on its books including BNP Paribas Real Estate; Mountview Estates; the Financial Conduct Authority; Reliance Bank; Vistra Group; and AEG Europe. The firm does both employer and employee side work, but our trainee interviewees saw more of the latter. Due to its nature, most of the firm’s work in this area is confidential, but one insider revealed “mad things happen in this department.” A typical case might go like this: “The common situation, if you’re representing an employee, is you take a narrative down from them and figure out your strategy.” After that “you send a letter to the employer and work out what the appropriate settlement should be.” On bigger cases trainees were more likely to do “a fair bit of bundling work.”

“You get a piece of research and you think it’ll take you 20 minutes, then two days later...”

Parliamentary, with its focus on “drafting legislature for big infrastructure projects,” was described as “very technical at times, quite hard, and really interesting.” Sources said they weren’t “sure what it was about,” before going into the seat, but “having worked in it, it’s infrastructure planning: ports, trains that sort of thing. We’re doing HS2, and the legislation goes in front of MPs in Parliament.” Unsurprisingly, this often means “quite a lot of negotiation with objectors and reaching settlements.” The team also advised the City of London Corporation with regards to the Open Spaces Bill. Trainees in the seat could expect to do a lot of research: “You get a piece of research and you think it’ll take you 20 minutes, then two days later... But when you get an answer it’s very satisfying.” Perhaps that’s to be expected when you need to look at “pieces of legislation from the 1700s and work out what’s happened with them.”

Charities typically falls under the housing and local government practice. The firm advises several high-profile charities in matters worth millions of pounds, examining issues like governance, sponsorship, and researching best practice. Trainees in the department, could expect to be “involved with setting up charities, negotiating and drafting contracts with local councils, and providing charity management and advice.” The team has been involved in the restructuring of The Burlington Magazine after a governance review, and also represents multiple former Oxfam executives and trustees (including Dame Barbara Stocking) who were involved in the Charity Commission’s Statutory Inquiry into Oxfam’s handling of events in Haiti in 2011. Among others, the firm also represents The Hepworth Wakefield Garden Trust, and the Imperial War Museum.

Trainee life

“If people who trained here go elsewhere, they tend to come back...”

Whichever seat you end up in, the chances are good you will not be burning the midnight oil. “If you stay until 7.30pm, that’s an all-nighter for us,” one source quipped. And while that might sound slightly hyperbolic, the fact remains that we heard a trainee staying was “9.30pm. If you work late, people ask why you’re still here.” Alongside reasonable hours we heard “everyone prides themselves on being very friendly and respectful.” One source noticed “if people who trained here go elsewhere, they tend to come back, and if they trained elsewhere they come here because they want a friendlier environment.” On the whole, this exceeded most people’s expectations: “I thought everyone would be serious and shouting at each other, but it turned out I’d watched too much American TV! It’s not like that. Everyone is serious and gets the work done, but no one’s ever been rude.” Some reckoned that “there’s maybe the odd partner who isn’t so nice, but it’s a fairly ego-less environment.” On top of firm-wide niceness, sources mentioned “a huge social aspect.” Interviewees listed various sporting clubs alongside “departmental dos, the summer and Christmas do and going down the pub once or twice a week.”

It is perhaps because of this friendly and inclusive culture that Winckworth’s gender diversity is particularly impressive. With women making up nearly half of all partners at the firm, Winckworth is streets ahead of the national
average of around 29%. “As someone who trained at the firm, my view is that the firm offers the same opportunities for males and females,” says Kilminster. Trainee reflected that other contributing factors might include that there’s “no face time culture at all” and that “flexible working is a big thing.” Additionally, trainees spoke positively of supervision, which involved a partner, who they normally sat with in each seat. “There are no silly questions,” one source enthused. And if there were, “you could always ask an NQ.” It is perhaps for these reasons that Winckworth maintains a strong retention record. Come qualification, the firm releases a jobs list and qualifiers can apply for up to two roles. A round of interviews usually follows. “In the past there hasn’t been that much competition, so I think it’s fairly informal,” sources reflected. In 2020, the firm followed its usual trend and retained seven out of eight qualifiers.

And finally...

For a wink worth its weight in gold, sources warned that “the so-called ‘open day’ is actually an assessment day.”
Winckworth Sherwood

Minerva House, 5 Montague Close, London SE1 9BB
Tel: 020 7593 5000   Fax: 020 7593 5099
Email: trainees@wslaw.co.uk
Website: traineehub.wslaw.co.uk

Firm profile
The firm has a long established pedigree. It is a full service firm and is particularly recognised for its specialist practices.

Main areas of practice
**Corporate & Commercial:** We advise on corporate, mergers and acquisitions, partnerships and JVs, commercial arrangements, outsourcing and procurement, corporate finance and capital markets, funds and IP, IT contracts and data protection.

**Employment & Partnership:** We provide contentious and non-contentious advice covering financial, insurance, retail, hotel, media, publishing, real estate and educational establishments. We also advise senior executives and on partnership disputes, as well as specialist non-contentious partnership advice.

**Infrastructure Projects:** We specialise in private legislation promoting projects of major strategic importance. We also advise central and local government bodies, developers and operators on infrastructure planning, development, construction, procurement, structuring and finance.

**Not for Profit:** We advise a large number of educational and affordable housing operators, charitable and religious organisations and cultural and leisure services providers, delivering a full range of legal expertise.

**Private Wealth & Tax:** We advise high net worth individuals, families, senior executives, private trustees and executors on a full range of private legal matters, including complex residential property solutions, immigration, tax and succession issues, pre-marital advice, divorce and family.

**Real Estate & Planning:** We work for many of the leading national residential and commercial developers, national house builders, investors and fund managers. This includes commercial real estate and regeneration, planning, development, corporate finance, funds, tax, construction, asset management and property litigation capability.

Training opportunities
Trainees will be placed in four departments in six month placements. We encourage early responsibility and substantial client interaction. You will usually sit with a partner or associate and may be given the opportunity to manage your own files, subject to suitable supervision.

We have a well developed in-house development programme which draws upon the expertise of partners, associates and guest professionals. As well as legal training, we also provide business skills training such as presentation skills, project management, networking and client development.

Vacation scheme
We hold a two week vacation scheme in July 2021. The scheme is open to law and non-law students who have already completed their first year of study and can start a training contract with us in 2023.

We provide each successful applicant with £150 per week to assist with expenses and travel costs.

Other benefits
We have a flexible benefits package which includes core benefits such as: pension, life assurance, income protection and private medical insurance. Optional benefits such as: dental cover, health cash plan, gym memberships, cycle to work scheme and childcare vouchers.

Open days
We hold an open day in July 2021 for law and non-law students who have already completed their first year of study. This is part of the 2023 training contract process.

University law careers fairs 2020
BBP Law Fair, London Law Fair and others – please see our website.
Winston & Strawn London LLP

The facts
Location: London
Overseas offices: 15
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 15/19/5
Seats: 4x6 months
First-year salary: £48,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed

The Firm
How good are you at remembering names? For trainees joining megafirms with hundreds of colleagues, it’s an essential skill. There is an alternative – firms like US-born Winston & Strawn, with an international practice but a small enough UK headcount that Dory the fish could probably get by. “Having a small intake and familial culture” in the London office is exactly what attracted interviewees to complete a vacation scheme with Winston and make their way in. Trainees advised that “applicants need to understand they won’t be joining a massive firm. You’ll be a big fish in a small pond and it’s essential to make waves earlier on in your career to then help you progress.”

Winston’s London office may be on the petite side, but its global operation is anything but: the firm boasts 15 offices worldwide including nine in the US alone. The Chinese arm of Winston had a shakeup recently: the firm closed its Shanghai office and began a partnership with local firm YuanDa. Here in Britain, W&S is perhaps best known for its aviation finance department, the sole practice to score a ranking from Chambers UK – it’s important enough to get its own dedicated seat available to trainees. Winston London is small but growing, thanks to lateral hires like the recruitment of tax partner Ed Denny in April 2019 from US rival Orrick.

“You will be a big fish in a small pond and so it’s essential to make waves earlier on.”

The Seats
Trainees described starting Winston’s signature aviation finance seat as “jumping into the fire. This seat is so intense because deals are being churned out every week.” The quick deal flow results in a higher level of client contact and responsibility for trainees: “We just have to get on with it and quickly reach out to clients to get all the signature pages and chase up any missing items before closing. Day-to-day tasks would also include drafting documents, monitoring conditions, connecting signature pages and putting together bibles.” The nature of the department’s work – funding international travel – means “each aviation deal has a cross-border element” to it. BNP Paribas, Deutsche Bank and the Development Bank of Japan are on the client list; Winston recently advised the Aviation Capital Group on the recovery of aircraft and engines that were on lease to Thomas Cook, following its insolvency. Trainees said aviation finance is a good first seat as it may not be the most academic in terms of content, but it’s a seat which teaches all the necessary skills you need as a trainee to then do well in other seats. It’s heavy on project management and you have to be methodical in your approach.”

Seat options: corporate; competition; finance; tax; aviation; litigation/arbitration

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Winston

Spreading its wings from the Windy City, W&S lifts a select flock of fledgling lawyers into its practice mixing aviation with core corporate and litigation.
Trainee Life

“We speak with the US offices on pretty much every single deal we do,” insiders explained. “Some departments like litigation are also very well connected to the firm’s European offices.” The London office culture “definitely isn’t Americanised, it’s its own place,” they suggested, even if the firm hosts a big Thanksgiving lunch and cupcakes on 4 July. Sources argued that “if there’s an opportunity to celebrate something and feed people, then it will happen!” More ‘British’ social events include breaks for strawberries and cream during Wimbledon, and bingo and darts evenings. One source recalled a minor culture clash when colleagues from the US came to deliver a training session: “Let’s just say they realised that elevator pitches just wouldn’t work with a British person. That was very amusing.”

One very positive influence that’s survived the trip over the Atlantic is a dedication to pro bono. All partners, associates and trainees have a minimum target of 35 hours to meet each year and “the uptake is generally pretty regular.” We’re told that one of the trainees is typically in charge of sending out weekly emails listing pro bono opportunities for everyone to ‘bid on’. These range from providing free legal advice at the Royal Courts of Justice Advice Bureau and Battersea Legal Connect to volunteering at soup kitchens and charity drives.

“Because the work is so international, there’s never a moment in the day when someone isn’t online.”

If that makes you think trainees have plenty of spare time on their hands, we’re afraid you’re quite wrong. An average day for our interviewees ran from 9am to 7pm; aviation finance seaters worked the “most late nights. Because the work is so international, there’s never a moment in the day when someone isn’t online – the email traffic is always coming in.” Despite having to commit to 3am closings, sources appreciated that “partners always acknowledge the late nights and thank us. Everyone is really good with not worrying about face-time and they’ve made it clear that if there is no work to do, we can leave.”

As a Winston trainee, “you pretty much just get on with it. We had around two hours of IT training on the first day and a brief chat with the training principal and that was it.” Although this style suited trainees, we did hear some suggestions for the firm to introduce “refresher sessions on the fundamental concepts of the seats.” The firm recently hosted an aviation-focused session following the Thomas Cook administration – more may be needed in the wake of Covid-19, which has devastated the industry.

Chambers UK rankings

Asset Finance

A disputes seat covers litigation, regulatory, white-collar investigations and international arbitration. Trainees tend to be “mainly involved on arbitration matters as well as some general commercial litigation.” Winston’s international arbitration work includes a mix of investor-state disputes and commercial matters for clients like real estate investment firm Century Bridge Capital and breast implant manufacturer Sientra. Trainees must keep abreast of research and “standard” admin tasks; those we spoke to noted that “trainees are expected to get fully on board, whether that’s drafting a memorandum or researching entire areas of law for partners who need to draft their particulars. We’ve been given to our opinion on client calls and send direct emails on the smaller arbitration matters.” Winston’s commercial litigation practice often takes on an international flavour; here too you’ll find “standard trainee tasks including drafting holding letters and responses, filing court applications and researching discrete legal issues,” according to our interviewees.

“This seat is so intense that deals are being churned out every week.”

The competition department in London may be small, but it works for big names like Hitachi Metals and Sberbank, a Russian retail bank that required advice for an application to the General Court to remove EU capital market access sanctions. “Alongside competition, the team also does general regulatory matters and data protection,” insiders revealed. The trainee role here is “much more research-based. We’re investigating points of EU or antitrust law, putting together case summaries and helping to draft filings and answers to relevant competition authorities.”

Winston’s corporate team focuses on mid-market M&A deals for listed and international companies, with a specific focus on US-based clients investing in the UK. On the books you’ll find Groupon, Mind Gym and financial data company Morningstar, which the firm advised on its $669 million acquisition of credit rating agency DBRS. The team also works on UK deals like the Blenheim Estate and owners’ acquisition of Pye Homes. Trainees may also get to see IPOs and bond issuances. Their role on deals starts with “obvious admin tasks such as drafting corporate summaries and filings to corporate houses, editing documents, researching client enquiries and responses, and drafting corporate finance documents such as letters of relief.” Despite having to start at the bottom of the ladder, our sources “thoroughly enjoyed” working with the partner-heavy corporate team as they had the opportunity “to see the full corporate spectrum and gain exposure to multiple different transaction types.”
Grab a cup of covfefe:
If you make it to the Winston vacation scheme, be prepared to explain to an alien “how Donald Trump became president” – it was a question when our sources completed interviews.
Winston & Strawn LLP

CityPoint, One Ropemaker Street, London EC2Y 9AW
Tel: 020 7011 8700
Email: trainingapplication@winston.com
Website: winston.com/en/who-we-are/careers/
Twitter: @winstonlaw
Facebook: winstonstrawnllp
Instagram: @winstonstrawnllp

Firm profile
For more than 160 years, Winston & Strawn LLP has served as a trusted adviser and advocate for clients across virtually every industry. In that time, the firm has built a law practice with tremendous breadth and global reach.

We are proud of the many accolades we have received over the years — a tribute to our lawyers’ creativity, flexibility, depth of experience, and commitment.

Winston’s London office advises high-profile, multinational clients on their cross-border and international needs. When it comes to our employees, our goal is to maximise individual potential with professional development opportunities, while emphasising the firm’s culture and contributing positively to the community.

Main areas of work
Winston has approximately 1,000 lawyers across its 16 offices. Winston’s London office provides high-quality legal services in a diverse range of areas including cross-border corporate and finance, project and transportation finance, private equity and venture capital, litigation, international arbitration, contentious regulatory, and EU antitrust/competition services.

Training opportunities
● 4x6 months

Vacation scheme
You can get to know us through our two-week vacation scheme, designed for students who wish to apply for a training contract with the firm. It is intended to provide you with hands-on experience across our various practices, while exposing you to how our London office functions. On top of training, you will also enjoy attending our office social events. The two-week vacation scheme takes place annually in July.

We use our vacation scheme to identify and recruit future trainees, and we accept vacation scheme applications from:
● Penultimate-year and final-year law students (law students on a four-year course should apply in their third year of study)
● Final-year non-law students
● Postgraduates
● Any other graduate wishing to commence a training contract in two to three years’ time

We use our vacation scheme to identify and recruit future trainees.

Remuneration £400/week

Other benefits
Private medical, dental, cash plan, life assurance, income protection, season ticket loan, gym loan, employer pension contribution, ten days of paid sick leave per 12 months, up to 20 weeks of fully paid parental leave.
Withers LLP

The facts
Location: London, Cambridge
Overseas offices: 15
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 163/258/25
Seats: 4x6 months; overseas seats
First-year salary: £38,000
Qualification salary: £68,000

A premium private wealth practice is the jewel in the crown of this international outfit.

The Firm
Private client law’s appeal lies in “helping individuals and practising with a more personal angle,” according to trainees at Withers. For those looking to kick-start their practice at “the very highest level,” this firm is well worth a look. The Chambers High Net Worth guide has long ranked Withers among the top firms for private wealth advisory and disputes; this is also one of very few firms to earn a top spot from Chambers Global for its private client work on an international level. Appropriately enough, the firm markets itself as WithersWorldwide: you’ll find 15 of its offices overseas in New York, Singapore, the British Virgin Islands and other exotic destinations, complementing the London HQ.

This global identity is a rarity in the private client world and tells us this is a firm with a more dynamic client base. Interviewees were quick to extol the benefits of this net-work: “As the world becomes more globalised, people are increasingly moving themselves and their assets across multiple jurisdictions, especially if they’re wealthy. It’s vital to have an international footprint.” Conscious of a few unsavoury stereotypes attached to the secretive world of private wealth management, our sources were keen to state that “it’s absolutely not just about helping stuffy, old, rich men push their wealth into offshore trusts to avoid tax. For example, you might be assisting entrepreneurs fulfil philanthropic goals with their millions.”

“It’s absolutely not just about helping stuffy, old, rich men push their wealth into offshore trusts to avoid tax.”

What’s more, there’s more to Withers than private client work. As one source summarised: “You have a huge breadth of seat options for the training contract.” The corporate side of the business has “continued to expand rapidly” following Withers’ acquisition of boutique JAG Shaw Baker in 2018, “brining a lot of IP, tech and start-up work into the firm.” Sources noticed this had kick-started a “revolving door of business” between the firm’s corporate and private client arms, with “constant cross-referrals going both ways. After all, when someone trusts you to manage their affairs on a personal level, why wouldn’t they trust you to help run their business as well? It’s a natural progression.” In 2018/19 the firm’s revenue increased past the £190 million mark (although profits per partner decreased due to a growing global headcount).

Looking at the firm’s commercial side, Chambers UK ranks Withers highly for family, employment, art and cultural property law, charities, Court of Protection work, fraud, tax and defamation. Highlighting the pace of the firm’s growth, one insider pointed out that “the international arbitration team didn’t even exist a few years ago, but in the time that I’ve been here it’s become massively successful, representing states and large financial institutions.” Our sources unanimously reasoned that the firm has made great progress “moving away from its image as a private client giant towards being a full-service outfit,” adding that “it’s significantly broadened the pool of candidates that Withers can appeal to.”

The Seats
Before each rotation, trainees submit three preferences for the next seat. “If you put down employment or IP, HR typically asks you to submit a fourth because they don’t always take on a trainee at every rotation,” trainees shared.

Seat options: wealth planning; family; commercial; real estate

On chambersstudent.co.uk...
How to get into Withers
As well as being required to complete at least one contentious seat, a source reasoned that “statistically you’re also likely to complete a seat in private wealth and in one of the real estate groups.” An assortment of international secondments are available, which in recent years has included spots in Singapore and Hong Kong. Some felt the Milan seat was particularly sought after, with “opportunities to work with high-profile fashion brands” and Italy’s uber wealthy. As one way of smoothing the process, trainees can rely on partner mentors “who help walk you through how to best build your training contract – not just in terms of what you enjoy, but what is best for your development.”

“A dispute may arise if someone dies and leaves their estate to their cats and dogs instead of the family…”

More than 200 lawyers make up Withers’ private wealth team globally; nearly half of the firm’s fee earners are dedicated exclusively to this area of law. Matters run the gamut of the private client spectrum including landed estates, immigration, probate, international trusts, tax, pensions and philanthropy issues. “A typical case might be a probate issue where a collection of valuable artworks or multiple properties spans four different jurisdictions; or perhaps helping a client set up a complex family limited partnership... something a regional firm couldn't handle,” one source explained. The specifics of clients and cases are confidential, but the firm claims to have worked for “one huge transaction,” one trainee explained. “A dispute may arise if someone dies and leaves their estate to their cats and dogs instead of the family, for example. It can be frustrating because the main witness you need to question is dead!” Perhaps you could call on a medium? Trainees here had a range of responsibilities from preparing papers for High Court claims to drafting applications for the removal of a trustee. One source added: “A lot of the time we’re required to consult barristers for advice on various issues, which is great exposure for us trainees.” Withers also acts on cases with historical slants, such as representing the Nizam of Hyderabad (an Indian state that hasn’t existed since 1948) in a claim to £35 million that was held by banks since its dissolution.

If there’s anything more stressful than inheritance claims, it might be divorce proceedings – especially when they involve millions of pounds of assets spread over multiple jurisdictions. Step forward, the family team. “It’s a great seat and the one thing that stood out for me was the level of client contact,” a trainee told us. “There wasn’t a week that went by that I didn’t have face-to-face contact with the client, in court or in a meeting.” Another added that “partners are aware there’s a risk of you ending up in bundling hell, and they make efforts to include you on cases. I’ve drawn up attendance notes, asset schedules, costs and witness statements.” Though the majority of work is divorce-related, it’s certainly not all the team tackles: interviewees also spoke of opportunities to work on immigration, children’s and sometimes even rare domestic violence cases. In all the different matter types, sources emphasised the importance of “showing empathy and some emotional awareness when you’re in the room with a client.” We can’t disclose any names – the wealthy do like to keep their privacy.

“There wasn’t a week that went by that I didn’t have face-to-face contact with the client, in court or in a meeting.”

Withers’ corporate team advises a mix of fashion, sports, luxury brands and tech clients on public and private M&A, joint ventures, financings and more besides. Trainees pointed out that “you’re often still working with individual clients as owners of the business rather than the business itself. It means you still have that personal angle.” Insiders also described opportunities to work “on huge deals with publicly listed companies,” including the likes of Racing Point UK and Evolve IP. The team recently acted for the selling shareholders of tech consultants Symphony Ventures during the company’s £52 million sale to Sykes Enterprises. While some found their time in team corporate dominated by “one huge transaction,” others spent their seat engaging with more start-up and early-stage business work. One such source explained that “you deal with a lot of the foundational corporate law including the direc-
tors’ duties and articles of association you learn about at law school.”

The litigation and arbitration departments are “functionally separate,” but both fall under Withers’ disputes umbrella. “If one team is particularly busy you might get pulled in to help, but generally you only work within one of the teams,” sources explained. Here’s one trainee’s experience of the arbitration practice: “It’s a lean team so it feels like you can really sink your teeth into the cases. We’ve recently been representing a company suing a sovereign state: I’ve helped draft memos, interpret the enforcement of an award in a country, and prepare research.”

The firm has recently represented 79 Russian private individuals suing for over $27 million after a bank’s collapse; and Juventus footballer Paulo Dybala in arbitration brought against him by Maltese company Star Image over the player’s image rights. Reputation management and data protection cases also find their way into this department.

Trainee Life

Keen to thoroughly address any preconceptions of what working in the private client sector entails, our interviewees described their firm as “made up of a younger partnership than you might expect,” complete with a “modern office and modern approach to working.” Withers’ office space on 20 Old Bailey is open-plan and encourages hot-desking. Looking back to their beginnings at the firm, one source recalled: “In both my interviews, there was much more of a calm, conversational feel. I get the sense that good humour goes a long way when applying.”

Our insiders explained that “Withers is not a firm with a culture of going out every night.” That said, there are plenty of sports teams for trainees to sign up to and several departments run fairly regular drinks events. More sober activities include “a competitive chocolate-making class between two trainee cohorts” (everyone’s a winner!) and a mid-lockdown “virtual breakfast club.” Ultimately, sources characterised Withers as a firm that “respects the fact that people have lives outside of work and that sometimes you do just want to go home and see other people that aren’t your colleagues.”

“In my opinion, if you can’t survive – or even thrive – on a £68,000 NQ salary, something is wrong with you.”

With most trainees finishing their work day between 6.30 and 7pm, there’s plenty of time left for out-of-office galivanting. One trainee provided a frank assessment of the working culture: “For me to be consistently billing ten chargeable hours a day, I’d have to work 14 hours – I don’t do that. The firm is very clear at the beginning of the training contract that they don’t expect us to work all hours under the sun because they don’t pay us enough to justify doing so.” Another source had a similar perspective, suggesting that “if you want to join a firm that will provide you with a sky-high bank balance and have you working until 11pm every night, look at other firms. In my opinion, if you can’t survive – or even thrive – on a £68,000 NQ salary, something is wrong with you.” That told us. Withers trainees aren’t wholly exempt from busy periods, with some logging finishes close to midnight. We did hear that “if you’re consistently working past 8pm, partners will often approach you and ask why you are working so late.” The message – don’t try too hard.

During their final seat, trainees roll through a series of meetings with training principals and HR before listing up to three departments as qualification options. Everybody then gets to interview with their departments of choice, as long as there’s potential space for them. Withers doesn’t provide a general list of jobs, “which isn’t fun,” one of our sources deadpanned. The firm tells us it opts for a flexible approach in order to accommodate qualifiers’ preferences. Trainees were reassured by the idea that “the firm definitely tries to keep on as many people as it can.” And in 2020, Withers retained all eight qualifiers.

Private wealth to public wealth:

Withers is one of a handful of law firms that helps fund the Law Society’s Diversity Access Scheme, aiming to help candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds into the legal industry.
Withers LLP

20 Old Bailey, London EC4M 7EG
Tel: 020 7597 6000  Fax: 020 7329 2534
Email: recruitment@withersworldwide.com
Website: www.withersworldwide.com
Linkedin: withers-llp

Firm profile
Withers is a leading international law firm dedicated to the business, personal and philanthropic interests of successful people, their families, their businesses and their advisers.

The firm’s mission is to offer a truly integrated legal service to people with sophisticated global wealth, management and business needs. Withers' reputation in commercial transactions and litigation, along with its status as the largest private client team in Europe and leading family and trust disputes teams, sets it apart from other city firms. The firm is consistently ranked amongst the top international law firms in its major practice areas.

Main areas of work
The wealth of today’s private client has increased considerably and many are institutions in their own right. We have responded to these changing legal needs by broadening our international base and strengthening our range of legal services to offer comprehensive advice to its clients. The firm has unparalleled expertise in commercial and tax law, trusts, estate planning, litigation, charities, employment, family law, immigration and other legal issues facing high net worth individuals. Work is often international due to the complexity of our client base which includes some of the wealthiest global citizens. We have acted for 70% of the UK Sunday Times 'Rich List' and a significant number from the US and Hong Kong 'Forbes' rich lists. Trainees who speak a relevant language may have the opportunity to complete a seat in one of our offices abroad.

Training opportunities
Each year the firm looks for a diverse mix of trainees who are excited by the prospect of working with leaders in their field. Trainees must have an excellent academic background and great attention to detail. Team players with leadership potential are of interest to the firm, as is an international outlook and foreign language skills.

Trainees spend six months in four different departments. Working in a team with a partner and an assistant solicitor provides autonomy, responsibility and fast development. Buddy and mentor systems as well as on the job training ensure trainees are fully supported from the outset.

Vacation scheme
The firm runs two-week long placements at Easter and over the summer in London. Apply online by 31st January 2021 for places in 2021. Interviews take place between January and March.

Open days and first-year opportunities
The firm runs an open day for first-year law students in April. Apply online by 28th February 2021 for a place in 2021.

Other benefits
The firm offers a wide range of benefits including: flexible gym membership, private medical, season ticket loan, lifestyle discount etc.
The Firm

Womble Bond Dickinson combines transatlantic reach with a “fantastic reputation” in the regions. 

We’re proud to be the biggest firm operating in the area.

The origins of the firm’s eclectic geographical mix can be traced back to 2017, when the then UK-national outfit Bond Dickinson merged with American giant Womble Carlyle. “The merger has brought many positive benefits,” one of our interviewees reasoned. “For example, in my first seat we received a referral from the US for a client looking to do an acquisition in the UK. It provided an interesting contrast to the national and local work we typically do.” Down in London, “the office has doubled in size since I have been here,” a trainee told us. “That’s been stimulated by our US connection. There’s lots of people from the US walking round the office and it feels like we are the focal point of growth.”

But our interviewees were also keen to emphasise that “though the big transatlantic merger might give the impression that the attention is shifting away from the regions, that isn’t the case.” Those in Newcastle maintained:

“we’re proud to be the biggest firm operating in the area,” while sources in Southampton were similarly assured of the firm’s “fantastic reputation.” For one trainee in a regional office, “it’s the only firm in the area that I considered applying to.” Ultimately, our interviewees agreed that “though the firm is always looking to secure more cross-border work,” regional and national-level work makes up the lion’s share of most trainees’ workloads.

Further proof of WBD’s stellar reputation throughout the country can be found in its Chambers UK rankings. As well as having a ton of top regional rankings, particularly in the North East and the South (go to chambers.com to see the full list), the firm is considered a national leader outside of London in no fewer than ten different practice areas, including top accolades in banking and finance, employment, litigation, planning, and real estate.

WBD recruits around 25 trainees a year. The group is split fairly evenly between the northern and southern offices, with Newcastle and Bristol tending to take in the largest chunks. Moving between offices over the course of the training contract “isn’t unheard of,” trainees indicated, but neither is it common.

On chambersstudent.co.uk...

How to get into WBD

Womble Bond Dickinson UK LLP

The facts

Overseas offices: 19
UK partners/solicitors/trainees: 125/522/49
Seats: 4x6 months; client secondments
First-year salary: £22,000-£38,000
Qualification salary: undisclosed
There's a broad spectrum of work under WBD's disputes umbrella including IP litigation, antitrust and commercial disputes. A number of trainees we spoke to had also sat in the insurance litigation and professional liability teams. “In London, it’s been a huge growth story,” one insider told us, adding: “When I started with the firm, the team was just a few fee earners, but it’s now a team of 15 lawyers. We do everything from accountant negligence to issues relating to architecture and construction.” Trainees appreciated that “there are a number of small claims that you are able to run with oversight from an associate and partner. It means you’re able to do the first draft of the liability report that goes to insurers.” One source estimated their time was split “60% drafting and 40% research.” While there are a number of clients specific to the firm’s regional bases on the firm’s books, such as Plymouth University and local councils, cases are often staffed cross-office. For example, lawyers from across the firm’s UK network recently defended the Post Office against a group action by over 500 claimants based on a claim that the Post Office’s IT accounting system was defective.

“I did a lot of GDPR and mediation work for companies ranging from multinational organisations all the way down to high-street retailers.”

WBD’s commercial team comprises five sub-teams: commercial contracts, competition, data and privacy, IP, and technology. Like litigation, the team works together as a national unit with representatives in most of the UK offices. There’s an eclectic mix of clients including New Look, TSB, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Transport, which the firm recently supported with a variety of Brexit-related commercial issues regarding the roads, rail, aviation and maritime sectors. The firm also recently advised Network Rail on the £150 million redevelopment of Gatwick Airport Station. One trainee told us that “it’s a team with a lot of support staff and paralegals,” freeing up time for trainees to engage in tasks such as drafting contract amendments, enjoying direct client contact, and conducting research. Another told us: “I did a lot of GDPR and mediation work for companies ranging from multinational organisations all the way down to high-street retailers.”

Our London interviewees identified banking and finance as another “big growth story.” One source mentioned their recent involvement “representing a syndicate of banks on a huge real estate finance deal worth hundreds of millions of pounds – that was a real game-changer in terms of value for us.” The team recently advised Adventure Forest (which owns Go Ape) on a refinancing. In Leeds, the firm represented Homes England in connection with a £150 million development facility for the development of 660 new homes and an 11,000-seater...
stadium on the former Wimbledon dog track. One insider explained that “a lot of the time it was just me and a partner working on a deal. I was charged with running the entire conditions precedent checklist and coordinating with four different banks on one deal.”

A seat in restructuring offers trainees a blend of contentious and non-contentious work. The firm has a number of well-known financial institutions on its books including Deloitte, KPMG, Lloyds and Santander. The firm recently advised Byland UK on its acquisition of fashion brand LK Bennett from administration. “At the start of my seat I was assisting an associate on various contentious matters,” said one, “but by the end I was running the files myself.” Others we spoke to reported working closely with partners “to produce first drafts of witness statements and letters before action.” The firm has also represented the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in winding up companies in the UK and overseas on the grounds of public interest after investigations conducted by the department’s insolvency service.

Trainee Life
WBD may be part American, but it certainly doesn’t adhere to the late-night working culture associated with US firms. As one trainee in London told us, “many people in the office, including the most senior partners, have kids and families so the office tends to empty out by 7pm.” That doesn’t mean trainees don’t roll their sleeves up when there’s work to do – we spoke to trainees in Bristol who had the odd finish approaching midnight, for example. But for the most part, trainees can expect to be clocking out between 5.30pm and 6.30pm.

There’s no denying the UK’s regions have different identities and idiosyncrasies, but interviewees across WBD’s offices made it clear that the firm bridges geography with a shared culture. For starters, they said there’s no strict hierarchy between different levels, and “people don’t take themselves too seriously.” In other words, “you can have fun and a more causal relationship with partners.” This meant that trainees had “no reservations picking up the phone to a partner when you don’t understand something.” Another told us: “If I made a mistake, they are happy to explain how to deal with it.” Even in London, where working cultures can often be more intense, trainees insisted that “it’s a fun office to work in.” For example, “we have a pop-up pub in the office once a month and when the notification email goes out, there are always funny photoshopped photos of the partners who host the drinks.”

“We had a day out in the forest throwing axes and trying out some archery before heading to the pub.” Trainees indicated the offices were fairly sociable, although some felt that there could be more going on. “A lot of the socialising is on us as trainees,” a Leeds source said. On the plus side, trainees do “make efforts to arrange a drink whenever we have PSC training,” which takes place in Newcastle for northern trainees and in Bristol for those down south. There are also annual team days that bring all office departments together. For example, the commercial team recently reconnected with nature (sort of). “We had a day out in the forest throwing axes and trying out some archery before heading to the pub for lunch,” a novice archer explained. “I think we all needed to blow off some steam after GDPR!” Elsewhere, there’s plenty for trainees to throw themselves into, whether it’s joining one of the sports teams (football, netball, rugby or running) or helping with charity fundraising events. Each office partners with a chosen charity, which it assists with fund-raising, mentoring, volunteering and pro bono work. In Bristol, the firm partners with local charity SARSAS, which provides support to survivors of rape and sexual assault.

In normal times, WBD’s qualification process is fairly standard: trainees can apply for two jobs in any of the firm’s offices. However, in response to the pandemic the firm has taken the decision to delay the entire NQ process until March 2021 and is requiring all its trainees to complete a fifth seat. Though many of our interviewees initially reacted a little frostily to the news, most ultimately agreed that “it’s better to have a job in March than be out of a job in September.”

And finally...
The law firm of the future... Go to Spotify, Apple Podcasts or our website to listen to our podcast with WBD on how tech is transforming the legal industry.
Womble Bond Dickinson

4 More London Riverside, London, SE1 2AU
Tel: 0845 415 0000  Fax: 0845 415 6900
Email: joanne.smallwood@wbd-uk.com
Website: www.womblebonddickinson.com
Facebook: Womble Bond Dickinson (UK) Careers

Firm profile
Womble Bond Dickinson’s regional heritage and local knowledge, combined with a transatlantic reach, gives us the insights capable of unlocking more opportunities for our clients and our people.

With locations on both sides of the Atlantic, we provide the breadth of legal experience and services to meet our clients’ needs without losing connections within our different communities. These strong local and regional ties enable us to remain close to the issues our clients and our people. A UK Top 20 and Global Top 100, all service commercial law firm, Womble Bond Dickinson has more than 420 partners and 1,000 lawyers based across 19 US cities and eight UK cities. The firm’s reach also extends to Europe where it has strategic partnerships with other law firms in Germany and France.

We take our commitment to being a Responsible Business very seriously and care about the impact of our actions on our people, our local community and the environment. Building sustainable relationships through partnerships with charities, community projects and our own initiatives and networks, we are determined to play a strong role in creating better places to live, work and do business. We want our actions to have real social value impact, and so focus our activity on social mobility, BAME and LGBTQ+ communities. Hoping to give empowerment and unlock potential with Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship.

Main areas of work
In the UK, Womble Bond Dickinson advises in excess of 40 FTSE 350 companies, many of the largest businesses in the country, government organisations and wealthy individuals. With a focus on twelve key sectors (public, government and third sector; technology, healthcare; insurance, manufacturing; real estate; retail and consumer; transport, logistics and infrastructure; pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and life sciences; technology and private wealth).

Training opportunities
At Womble Bond Dickinson we look for intellectually able, motivated and enthusiastic graduates from any discipline or background. Successful applicants will understand the need to provide practical, commercial advice, show diversity of thought and share the firm’s commitment to self-development, teamwork and its desire to provide clients with services that match their highest expectations.

Our training contract forms part of our early talent pipeline. Trainees at Womble Bond Dickinson will have an opportunity to spend six months in four Business Groups, gaining a real breadth of experience. This is your training contract and it’s up to you to make the most of it, but along the way we offer fantastic opportunities to develop your legal career in a growing firm. Our supervisors are trained and fully supported on an ongoing basis. You’ll have access to high quality work and senior client contact. We regularly second trainees to our most high profile clients.

We’re looking for people across seven of our UK offices. There is no typical Womble Bond Dickinson trainee - our trainees come from varied backgrounds and bring a range of different experience, and that’s very important to us. What all of our people do share is an enthusiasm for law and a passion for our business. Beyond that we look for our trainees to have a strong academic background, although this is not the only criteria we use when shortlisting applications. It’s as important to us that candidates can demonstrate honesty, drive and motivation, good communication skills, resilience, adaptability, diversity of thought and commercial sense.

Vacation scheme
We run one-week long summer work placements which form part of the recruitment process. You’ll need to take part in our work placement scheme to apply for a training contract. During the week you’ll get involved with the business as a whole as well as learn more about the firm’s culture, the people who work in the business and get a feel for the work of a junior lawyer. Applications open on 1st October 2020 and we encourage early applications. For more information and to apply please visit our website.
Here they are.

20 life-changing opportunities. 20 spaces for future partners. 20 chances to start your career with an ambitious, international firm.

At Stephenson Harwood, we’re looking for the most inquisitive, driven people to join us.

Have you got what it takes? To find out more, visit shlegal.com/futuretalent

Stephenson Harwood. We welcome the best.
SEEKING EXCELLENCE

Vacation schemes
Apply by 8 January 2021

Training contracts
Apply by 9 July 2021 for 2023 start

See our website for open day details
uktrainee.wfw.com