

SHOOSMITHS

LC.N AWARD WINNER 2013 BEST TRAINER – NATIONAL/LARGE REGIONAL FIRM

Likeability – not just an essential quality to win viewer votes on TV talent shows, but also a key factor when trying to attract potential recruits to your firm. And there's an awful lot to like about Shoosmiths. The firm is well known for its unstuffy, progressive approach to lawyering, and places a huge emphasis on fostering a close-knit, collegiate environment. Examples include the "Above and Beyond" scheme, which encourages employees to nominate colleagues for doing good works, and the fact that everyone gets the day off on their birthday, plus vouchers. Shoosmiths, you had us at the vouchers...

Unsurprisingly, this national firm – with offices in Manchester, Birmingham, Nottingham, Milton Keynes, Reading and Solent – has cemented a reputation for being a great place to work. Louise Hadland, director of HR, has been with Shoosmiths for 14 years and is perfectly placed to comment on the ethos of a firm that she knows inside out: "Our culture and values are at the heart of everything we do, so we're not just layering good training on top of a dreadful cultural environment – rather, it sits on strong foundations. Trainees are well looked after by the business; we are good to each other and to our clients. We value people consistently, as evidenced by our Investor in People Gold award and the fact that we have been top of the Legal Week satisfaction survey for six years, winning both the national and regional survey this year. Every new person gets a three-hour session with me on how important our values are to the business."

Jessica Cleminson, first-year trainee, got that message loud and clear from her very first interactions with the firm: "The people I met from Shoosmiths at law fairs sold it to me – they all seemed genuinely enthusiastic about the firm and what they do. I was also impressed that it had grown so much in a short space of time, though not at the expense of





its values, in such difficult economic times. It showed it to be an ambitious firm and I wanted to be part of that.”

On-campus visibility is just one part of a broader recruitment strategy that is extremely well supported by senior figures. “We get a lot of backing from the top,” explains Louise, “and that is because our recruitment is a brand differentiator – the way we do it makes us different from other firms. It makes it easier for me, as I’m asking partners to support a strategically sound idea.”

Graduate recruitment manager Samantha Hope’s experiences in the 2013 recruitment cycle accord with Louise’s view. “I require 20 assessors per day for four days,” explains Samantha. “I had interest from more than 100 partners and associates! That is unprecedented – at other firms, I know that it is often difficult to get partner involvement for assessment days. The business puts real emphasis on recruiting talent and the firm is behind what we’re trying to do, all the way.”

Jessica was a participant at one of those assessment days and loved the experience: “I felt very settled straightaway and it wasn’t scary. I know now that is what the firm is like as a whole. The interview was very relaxed and I was able to show my personality. I thought that the way they ran it was great – interviewers have a template so that each candidate is asked the exact same questions. In addition, the interviewers don’t have access to your application, so you are assessed purely on how you perform on the day. There are no preconceptions.”

Louise backs this up: “We use an online system to get people through to the assessment centres, after which no recruiting partner has sight of the CVs. This means that there is no subjective judgement in relation to age, education, type of degree – we take those factors out of the equation. Everyone is judged on an equal footing. And not one partner has complained about it.”

The firm also places great emphasis on diversity, as Louise explains: “We were number one in the first ever Black Solicitors Network Diversity League Table and we’ve been top the last two years running. We take a diverse approach to all our recruitment; if we can encourage people from different backgrounds into the profession, and provided that they meet the legal, social and technical requirements of being a competent solicitor, then that’s great for our clients.”

Dan Bennett came to the role of trainee in a slightly different way, working for the firm as a paralegal for a couple of years beforehand: “I knew that I liked the people and I felt certain that it was the right firm for me. I went through the same recruitment process as everyone else and started as a trainee in September 2011.” He has since become a poster child for travel opportunities: “My first seat was in the regulatory and compliance team in the Northampton office. It was a broad seat and there was plenty to keep me interested, including going to court. I then moved to the Milton Keynes office for my corporate seat.”

Another shift followed, this time down to London for his third seat on secondment to a leading national bank: “It was great to see how things are done in-house.” Currently in Birmingham for his fourth seat in commercial (finance and regulation), this is where he will qualify: “I actually worked in this team as a paralegal, so I’ve gone full circle! Although I’m being supervised, I’m doing the same work as someone two or three years’ qualified, which is brilliant.”

That heightened responsibility is a given, from the outset. “I have been given a lot of responsibility, although I’m always fully supported,” Jessica explains. “As a trainee, you’re encouraged to give your opinion and bring in clients if possible – you’re seen as part of the team, not just a trainee. In my first seat I was taken to a property managers’ lunch and trusted to network on my own.” Dan agrees: “You are given as much responsibility as you can handle; if you want to go away and work independently, that’s fine. You have the freedom to decide.”

Helping trainees to make those crucial career decisions is a key part of Samantha’s role as one-woman graduate recruitment team. “There are benefits to the fact that it’s just me,” she muses, “because it means that from the law fairs through to the vac schemes and assessment days, I am the single point of contact. I have known some of these trainees for years now. I think that’s better than being constantly handed from one person to the next. Also, once they become trainees, my role



encompasses both their professional progression and pastoral care.”

Louise agrees: “Samantha is a superb communicator, which means that we know early if there are problems or issues. It’s at the heart of our training and Samantha does it particularly well. She’s also very good with social media – that’s key for our engagement with the graduate population.” Dan adds that he hears from Samantha often, in addition to getting excellent feedback from all his supervisors. In fact, communication flows easily across all strata of the firm, according to Jessica: “From day one, it seemed that everyone was on an equal footing. You can ask a question of anyone, which is a great way to learn. Initially you would go to your direct supervisor, normally a senior associate, but you can also go to the training principal or Samantha. Everyone is mega-approachable. When you are choosing your seats, you have a meeting with the training principal, where you can be very frank and discuss the best way ahead.”

That feedback is a two-way street is a given – there is an employee forum, and Samantha and the HR team are constantly fielding opinions, never more so than since they got to grips with Survey Monkey. “We love it!” enthuses Samantha. “It’s better than paper feedback, as it allows you to analyse data and act on it. We ask for feedback from anyone we’ve come into contact with – trainees, NQs, students at law fairs and presentations.” Still on the technology front, Shoosmiths has been an early adopter among law firms of Twitter as a means of reaching out to students, as Samantha

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describes: “The ability to embrace change is one of the things that makes us different – we do try and keep up with what’s happening online. In fact, I have a dedicated team of trainee tweeters! We want to give something back to the students, so we’ve gone down the advice route rather than just self-promotion, and offer tips on applications and vac schemes. We’ve also just joined Google+. There are so many social platforms to get involved with and it comes naturally to me – I love that side of things.”

The firm’s core values – “pulling together, talking business sense, being within reach and responsive, and taking initiative” – are what the firm wants to see exemplified in its recruits, as Louise explains: “A proven academic track record and legal skills are taken as read. After that, we want people who understand that the firm is in the business of collaborating internally for the benefit of our clients. So we attract and employ people who are sociable, prepared to work in a team environment, great at relationship building and, of course, who understand the concept of what clients really want.” And what do the trainees get in return? “They are valued, treated as adults and given genuine work to do by supervisors who are passionate about giving great training,” sums up Louise.

Personal impressions carry a lot of weight – Jessica concludes by saying: “It has certainly exceeded my expectations; it is a lovely firm to work for. I feel very valued. And although everyone works hard, they

Shoosmiths

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Method of application

Online application form

Application deadline

Apply by 31 July 2014 for training contracts commencing in 2016

Method of selection

Assessment centre, including interview

Work areas

Shoosmiths is a full-service commercial law firm with a broad range of practice areas:

- Banking & finance
- Charities
- Clinical law
- Commercial property/real estate
- Company & commercial
- Competition & EU law
- Construction & engineering
- Corporate finance/mergers & acquisitions
- Corporate tax
- Dispute resolution
- Employment, pensions & incentives
- Environment
- Insolvency/restructuring
- Insurance/reinsurance
- Intellectual property
- Media & entertainment
- Personal injury
- Private client
- Professional negligence
- Shipping & trade
- Sports
- Technology, media & telecommunications

Offices

Basingstoke*, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Milton Keynes, Manchester, Northampton, Nottingham, Reading, Solent

*Office not available for training contract

What the trainees said:

"The firm is incredibly friendly and welcoming and the work has been challenging, interesting and varied."

"My training at Shoosmiths has exceeded my expectations. I have been provided with high-quality work throughout my seats and have been given much more responsibility than I would have previously imagined."



BEST TRAINER – NATIONAL/LARGE REGIONAL FIRM



"Shoosmiths are brilliant at accommodating trainees' preferences when assigning seats. I particularly wanted to do a tax seat and Shoosmiths created a seat for me!"

"As a second year you get your first choice for your seat move."

"Trainees are offered 'developing lawyer' training, which is very useful."

"The opportunity to go on secondment is invaluable."

have a laugh too." For Dan, it's about striking the right balance between being part of an ambitious firm while still maintaining a life outside it: "I met secondees from other firms when I was on secondment, and although I expected there to be differences as they were from London firms, they certainly didn't have the work-life balance we get here. Since I started as a paralegal, the firm has come a long way, increasing in size and profile. I'm very happy to be qualifying here."

With both her professional and employee hats on, Samantha reflects on life at Shoosmiths: "The feedback we get from our vac scheme students is that we are truly friendly and approachable – it's not just marketing blurb! You need to have a good relationship with the people you work with, so you feel that you can pick up the phone to anybody and as a question. For me personally, I have never woken up and felt like I couldn't be bothered to come in. I want to be here, interacting with the trainees and getting stuck in to my work. I'm sure that's how the trainees feel too." What's not to like about that?

By Isla Grant

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