



Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge UK LLP

Triple the triumph: EAPD scores hat trick with small but perfectly formed scheme

Scooping the award for best work placement scheme in the City for the third time in a row, UK/US commercial firm Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge (EAPD) is proof of the maxim that small is beautiful – and, indeed, that less is more. As a firm, EAPD is known for combining an intimate feel with big-ticket work. Its summer scheme mirrors these elements – taking only eight to 10 students each year, the scheme exposes participants to interesting and high-level work.

Still basking in the glow from its 2008 merger with UK insurance specialist Kendall Freeman, EAPD continues to build on its strength in commercial litigation, insurance and international law, while also establishing a fine reputation in some newer areas such as private equity/venture capital. This year the firm moved to bigger premises right in the heart of the City, giving it lots of room to expand and reflecting the upward trajectory on which EAPD finds itself.

Paolo Cerroni is just about to qualify into the firm's IP department – another new practice, which is already winning attention for its excellent work and big-name clients, including Elizabeth Arden and Mastercard. Some years ago Paolo did the firm's vacation scheme, attracted by "the small size – it was only the London office at the time – and the fact that despite their size, they did a lot of good work". Frances Wachter, now a second-year trainee, also found the idea of intimate training appealing: "I liked that it wasn't too big, with only eight

trainees. I imagined that would mean that you got more exposure and that your training would be paid more attention than in an intake of 80-plus. I had also read that it had a very good vacation scheme!"

And so it proved to be. Sarah Warnes, trainee recruitment manager, lays the groundwork before each intake arrives, briefing the entire firm on who'll be attending. This means that from the moment they arrive, they're made to feel at home. And at the first breakfast briefing, Sarah and Helen Clark, trainee principal and head of trainee recruitment, try to impress upon the students the importance of putting themselves out there. "They've got to go and knock on doors, introduce themselves, and ask for work or if they can attend meetings – that's the best way to get the most out of the experience," urges Helen. "If someone has an engaging personality, they make an impression very quickly. You want to show that side of yourself to as many people as possible." Sarah agrees: "People should definitely grasp opportunities and treat everything with enthusiasm. You may need to be a bit more out there and visibly keen than feels totally natural, but you only have a limited amount of time to impress. People who take on tasks in a proactive way will get noticed. You should try to fit as much into the two weeks as possible and you are welcome to get involved with whatever's happening."

Fitting everything in could be a problem with so much going on. First, of course, the



scheme offers students real experience of real work – just like a real trainee. Frances explains: “Rather than just having you shadow someone, you are given actual work to do. I felt that I was being useful, not a burden. My work included helping out with bundles and paginating – small, non-technical things, but work that was actually going to be used.” Frances was taken to court one day and she has reciprocated this year, taking all the students on the 2010 scheme to a trial she’s involved with.

Ajita Shah, a second-year trainee who also spent two weeks on the firm’s vacation scheme, recalls how she spent her time: “I spent the first week in insurance litigation with a trainee and the second with a commercial litigation partner. As for the work, I wrote articles, did some research, and attended and wrote up notes for meetings.” She says that people made the effort to explain why they were asking for a particular piece of work, “putting it into context, so you really felt like you were contributing”. Sarah North, another second-year trainee and former summer schemer, says she was taken by surprise at the level of involvement: “In addition to being brought to an arbitration hearing, I had three days in a contract negotiation, which was fantastic. I didn’t think I’d get that level of exposure. That was the real highlight – I’d never experienced anything like that before.”

Interesting work and new experiences continue during the training contract at

EAPD. Frances felt lucky to appear in front of a master twice, “on purely administrative matters, but the level of exposure was great and I had a real sense of satisfaction”. Sarah N participated in a week-long arbitration, where she was “thrown in at the deep end, with my own discrete tasks. It was a fantastic opportunity!” She says that whenever trainees can be involved, they are.

Back on the summer scheme, students will find themselves sitting with fee earners of all levels. Sarah W explains the thinking behind this: “It needs to be someone they can learn from through osmosis – listening to conversations with colleagues, and to how they deal with clients on the phone and in person. These are the important abilities that can’t necessarily be taught in a structured programme.”

Then there are a number of skills sessions – on conflict resolution, advocacy, marketing and business writing – all of which have an emphasis on working as a team, rather than just on pure law. Partners, of whom there are 23 in the London office, are deeply involved in these sessions, says Helen, “willingly taking time out of their busy diaries”. The partner who runs the advocacy session is particularly popular for his willingness to share “both his wins and his losses, and giving the students some good nuggets of advice to take away”. Sarah N says that as someone with a non-law background, the sessions were challenging: “I did an exercise involving an application for

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summary judgment, which was like nothing I'd ever come across before. But it was all very well explained and I was encouraged to ask questions.” Sarah W confirms that the skill sessions are aimed at both law and non-law students: “We introduce the softer side of the law, so it's not overwhelmingly technical for two solid weeks. They get to see how much of being a lawyer is down to personality and innate skills.”

EAPD's winning scheme is also chock-full of social activities. Frances enjoyed a comedy night and several impromptu trips to the pub: “The social side is not neglected at all!” If ‘sporty’ is your middle name, you can also exercise those particular muscles – Sarah N put her running shoes on and did the Standard Chartered Great City Race, while Paolo played football in the (as it then was) Kendall Freeman World Cup. But while students are encouraged to throw themselves into all the activities they can, it's perhaps not advisable to take this literally, advises Helen: “One student played football on the first Monday of the scheme and broke his arm. We were rather accusatory of the captain, reminding him he wasn't supposed to actually break the students!” Jokes aside, it is those participants who get involved and get to know lots of people at the firm that do best. “The more you expose yourself to a range of activities – not just work – the more you will extract from the scheme,” says Sarah W.

Frances confirms that you need to be more

‘yes’ than ‘no’ to make a good impression. “Never refuse if someone asks you to do something,” she advises. “It's about showing willing, being enthusiastic, appearing interested, and getting involved. You should get stuck into everything that's on offer.” Sarah N agrees: “I was very enthusiastic, but that was because I was enjoying it and wanted to be there. I didn't feel I had to force it.” Paolo adds that while you are aware of being constantly assessed, “it's not in the sense that someone is standing next to you with a clipboard, ticking boxes”.

The scheme plays an essential part in helping EAPD to determine whom to interview for a training contract, as well as helping each participant to get a clearer view of the firm. “I came away knowing that I really liked the firm,” says Paolo, “and I knew I'd accept an offer if I got one. It gives you a taste of the training contract and it certainly helps knowing some of the people when you start. You feel much more relaxed.” Frances agrees: “I felt I had a slight headstart having done the scheme; people know your face and who you are. The scheme also helps you to work out whether it's the sort of firm you want to join.” Helen's advice chimes with Frances and Paolo's comments: “While not all training contracts go to those who've done a summer scheme, if someone has made a strong impression on a number of people, that person will naturally perform better at the assessment centre and will be more confident. It will also help at interview, when you should

be able to talk coherently about EAPD in a positive and natural way, and explain why you want to join." And here's a couple of facts worth noting: around 70% of the firm's associates in London trained there and London's managing partner, Laurence Harris, started with the firm as a summer student.

Given that the firm is now part of a 500-lawyer, 13-office, three-country firm, did trainees who originally did the scheme at Kendall Freeman experience a difference starting their training contracts at EAPD? Paolo thinks if there was any change, it was only for the better, with opportunities for overseas and client secondments opening up. Sarah N concurs: "The firm has retained its small feel, but there are more opportunities because it's part of a larger firm. There are new departments – intellectual property, private equity, competition – so you feel that you're getting broader training, in addition to the great characteristics of Kendall Freeman. You get a tremendous amount of responsibility and you feel that you're an important part of the team."

So what makes EAPD's scheme such a winning formula? In Helen's view, it's the firm-wide involvement that seals the deal. "I think there is a real commitment from all levels of the firm to making it work for students. That means bringing them to meetings, finding good work for them to do and taking the time to find out about them beforehand. It's a small scheme that mirrors the training contract, so students don't get lost in a huge office." Sarah W adds: "Coming on the scheme gives students a more realistic picture of what to expect and a greater awareness of the part that trainees can play in the work we do."

And what do the beneficiaries of the scheme think? Sarah N sums up the sentiments of all three trainees: "People sought me out on the scheme and I was never without enough to do. I definitely felt that my work was valued. And everyone was incredibly friendly and made a real effort, given that we were just summer students." No such thing as 'just' a summer student at EAPD, where size really does count.

By **Isla Grant**



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Method of application: Online application form

Application deadline: Apply by 31 July 2011 for training contracts commencing in 2013

Work placement scheme deadline: Apply by 25 February 2011 for summer placements in 2011

Method of selection: Assessment session and interview

Work areas

- Arbitration, ADR
- Commercial litigation
- Company & commercial
- Corporate finance
- Defamation
- Employment
- Energy
- Insolvency/restructuring
- Insurance & reinsurance
- Intellectual property
- International law
- Life sciences
- Mergers & acquisitions
- Private equity & venture capital
- Trademarks & brand protection

Offices

Boston, Fort Lauderdale, Hartford, Hong Kong, London, Madison, New York, Newport Beach, Providence, Stamford, Washington, West Palm Beach, Wilmington

What trainees said:

"Everyone at the firm clearly put a lot of time and effort into the scheme and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I was desperate to work at the firm after completing it."

"I was immediately made to feel very welcome and several people made a point of coming to find me later in the week to see how I was finding the work."

"I was given a huge degree of autonomy and it was good to feel like I was making a concrete contribution to the work of the firm."

"The two weeks absolutely flew by. I had a lot of fun but also felt like I learned a great deal. I gained a lot of practical experience of the work in a variety of departments and was able to talk to people at all levels of the firm to find out their experiences."

"As a vac schemer you are given a lot of responsibility at an early stage, but it is here that EAPD's reputation for outstanding training becomes tenable."