



Wragge & Co LLP

From the Midlands to beyond! Brummie stalwart Wragge & Co has burst out of its regional roots to explode onto the international legal scene

What connects Bill Oddie, Black Sabbath and international law firm Wragge & Co? They all have their origins in Britain's second city, the land of Brum. While twitcher Oddie initially found fame with irreverent sketch show *The Goodies*, and bat-bothering Ozzy with his anarchic stage antics, Wragge likewise made its name by tearing up the rulebook and redrawing the legal landscape, offering City-quality legal work at provincial firm prices. Having started life back in 1834 as a two-partner practice in Birmingham, Wragge expanded to London in 2000 after merging with a niche IP boutique and has since gone global, recently opening a string of offices in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Guangzhou, Paris and Munich.

But international work and exotic travel opportunities aren't the only attractions for future Wragge trainees: the firm is a UK Top 50 Best Workplace (according to global research and management consultancy Great Place to Work), famed for its genuinely unstuffy working culture. Across all echelons of the firm, everyone enthusiastically confirms that the friendly and open office vibe promised is delivered with aplomb. As graduate recruiter Chloe Lloyd explains: "People who come to Wragge having worked in other firms and organisations are surprised to find that our culture is genuinely different – people here really do think this is a great place to work. One of our NQs

recently remarked that 'There is no firm quite like Wragge'; I think that's a spot-on description of us and of the working environment we operate in."

Fabian Bonavia, one of the current batch of trainees, attributes this distinctive feel to Wragge's people: "There's a good atmosphere here because everyone is so genuine – that's more than just a PR thing, they really are. You can have a chat with anyone in the office about work or anything else; it's very easy to build relationships with people at all levels." Recruitment is, of course, key to maintaining this culture, but the firm also works hard to nurture it by instilling a 'single team' ethos in its staff, working open plan and being refreshingly frank about decisions that will affect its workforce.

Wragge's consistently high retention rates also make trainees feel like an investment in the firm's future. "We take on a smaller number of trainees to try to ensure that when they come to qualification, we will have sufficient NQ jobs available," explains Chloe. "That allows them to relax and focus on becoming the best lawyers they can be. Having worked so hard to get a training contract, we don't want them to then feel that in two years' time they've got to be in competition with everyone around them to get a job. It makes them feel more secure during their time here, and without that



competitive element there's a more positive environment for them and their peers."

This inclusive, non-hierarchical atmosphere in part explains the firm's recent Best Trainer award; but so too does its commitment to made-to-measure training. As training principal Baljit Chohan explains: "Our aim is to provide everyone we recruit with the best experience that they, as an individual, could have. We don't take a generic approach - we tailor our training contract to fit each person so they end up with training that's very specific to them as an individual, focusing on particular strengths they might have, such as language skills or technical expertise."

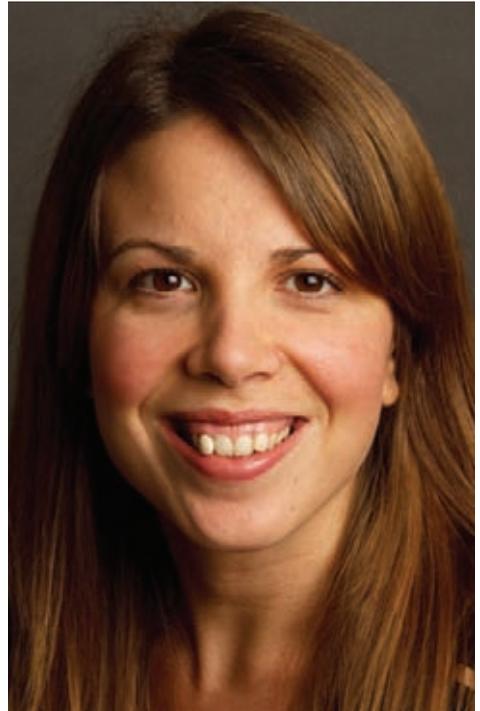
This demands considerable time and attention, which is another reason why the firm deliberately keeps numbers low, recruiting around 25 individuals each year, split 20:5 between Birmingham and London. Fewer trainees means more time to develop close relationships and provide high-quality work and supervision, explains Chloe. "Because we don't have many trainees, it's easier to ensure that they get interesting work from day one. We give our trainees 'real' work - they get responsibility for running their own files and meeting clients, because we see that that's what they thrive on." As Fabian explains, trainees get stuck in from the off: "I was a valued member of the team from the very start of my training, helping out with whatever matters my supervisor was working on."

Practical experience is a great way to learn, but a sturdy support network is essential to ensure that, with all this responsibility, trainees don't feel out of their depth. Help comes from all angles: department colleagues, supervisors and HR are always on hand to guide and advise, and each trainee is allocated a training principal who acts as a personal mentor throughout the two years. In Fabian's view, the system works perfectly. "There's absolutely nothing more that the firm could have done in terms of supporting me," he concludes. "I've had plenty of support throughout my training, with lots focused at the beginning and end when I needed it most. I've found my training principal an invaluable source of help, especially in the run-up to qualification, because apart from yourself, that person has the best view of the work you're doing and how you're developing."

Indeed, this is another crucial role that the training principals fulfil, as Baljit elaborates: "It allows us to build up an accurate picture of how the trainee is progressing. Seat supervisors only see trainees in the isolation of each seat, so they aren't best placed to monitor their overall development; principals, on the other hand, are, because they sit in on all of the trainees' reviews and therefore develop a much clearer picture of how they are functioning."

And it's not just the trainees themselves under scrutiny - the whole process is

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monitored closely by the training principals and HR, who are constantly on the look-out for ways to improve. Direct feedback is one of the most useful indicators of training quality, says Baljit: “We conduct very open reviews in which trainees share their experiences in each seat - the quality of the work they were given and the adequacy of their supervision. We also get requests from trainees going into new departments - based on chats they’ve had with each other - for things to be done differently. These suggestions are invaluable for us, so we encourage trainees to talk to each other as much as possible before moving into a new seat.”

The acid test for overall quality, though, is the fact that trainees inevitably sign up for a career at the firm when their two years are up - in September 2010, for example, 21 of the 22 newly qualifieds offered a place at the firm chose to stay. Fabian explains why he is one of them: “What I wanted when I started out as a trainee was to get good training, and that desire has certainly been fulfilled. There’s nothing more I could have asked for from Wragge, which perhaps explains why we won this award.”

With the firm now fulfilling its global aspirations, Wragge’s award-winning training will have an increasingly international flavour in the future, explains Chloe: “Even before we expanded, we were doing a substantial amount of overseas work, but a new presence in key strategic locations has only

served to increase the amount we are doing back in the United Kingdom. We hope our trainees will soon have the opportunity to do international seats which is a really exciting development.” As Wragge takes its place among the pantheon of UK legal greats performing on a truly international stage, there’s never been a better time to join.

By Claire Butler



Wragge & Co LLP

55 Colmore Row
Birmingham

B3 2AS

T 0800 096 9610

E chloe_loyd@wragge.com

W www.wragge.com

Method of application: Online application form

Application deadline: Apply by 31 January 2012 for vacation schemes in 2012. Apply by 31 July 2012 for training contracts commencing in 2014

Method of selection: Application form, online testing and assessment day

Work areas

- Advertising and marketing
- Antitrust
- Arbitration, ADR
- Aviation, aerospace
- Banking
- Charities
- Commercial litigation
- Commercial property
- Company & commercial
- Computer & IT
- Construction
- Corporate finance
- Corporate tax
- Defamation
- Employment
- Energy
- Environment
- Insolvency
- Insurance/reinsurance
- Intellectual property
- Media & entertainment
- Mergers & acquisitions
- Multimedia
- Sports and leisure
- Telecommunications

Offices

Abu Dhabi, Birmingham, Brussels, Dubai,
Guangzhou, Munich, Paris

What trainees said:

“The level of experience of work is excellent. As a trainee I am given a lot of responsibility and I am able to get involved from the start of my seat with dealing with clients, attending client meetings and conference calls, and I am faced with very little administrative work.”

“There are numerous additional training opportunities and I have been encouraged to make the most of them.”

“I feel well equipped to do my job, and well supported from all levels and individuals within the firm.”