



Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge UK LLP

A gem of a vacation scheme that allows candidates to sparkle

The business of insuring precious assets has long been at the heart of the work undertaken by Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge (EAPD) in London, so it comes as no surprise that the firm takes special care when it comes to selecting and nurturing what will soon become those most treasured of resources – its new recruits. Running a series of open days and a now double-award winning summer placement scheme, the firm is wholly committed to ensuring that students are offered a truly valuable experience that gives them the chance to shine and that showcases the practice at its bijou best.

Few would deny that summer schemes have become the gold star for would-be lawyers, and choosing the right firm for this crucial first peek into the legal world has never been more important. For the very best candidates the choice may be overwhelming, but opportunities to place themselves firmly at the forefront of major evolutionary change at an established City firm do not come along very often. However, the 15 or so fortunate candidates who make it onto the exclusive EAPD scheme will gain unique insight into an organisation in the midst of an exciting transition. Following the successful merger of City stalwart and insurance specialist Kendall Freeman with US heavyweight EAPD in January last year, the London office has been undergoing a dramatic period of diversification to exploit the firm's global expertise. With the additions of a significant IP practice and a private equity/venture

capital group, EAPD can now offer a fascinating and diverse training programme to the best potential young lawyers.

"Trainees now get the best of both worlds," explains Helen Clark, who splits her time equally between her duties as a partner in the firm's insurance litigation group and her role as trainee principal. "The office in London is still very much as it was before the merger; the personnel have stayed largely the same. As a result, we are able to offer a very personalised training contract that allows trainees to really make their mark. The summer scheme represents a distilled version of that."

Despite adding new practice areas, the London office has retained its character as a relatively small office by City standards. Helen is keen to make clear that although there is not an "EAPD type", the close-knit personality of the operation does inform the choice of candidates: "There is a common thread running through most of our trainees. We need people who are willing to take on responsibility and show a lot of initiative from day one. They also have to be very adaptable. We need to be confident both that they could hold their own on a long-haul flight with a client and that they would be ready to roll their sleeves up and help to unjam the photocopier in the middle of the night when a deal is closing."

Sascha Grimm is one such trainee. She undertook the vacation scheme in 2005 after graduating from Cambridge University with a



degree in history and the placement was her first taste of life in a law firm. She recalls the experience fondly: “As I didn’t have a legal background, I had no idea about which areas of the law would interest me and the vac scheme gave me a great overview. We did quite a lot of research, including research for a libel case which was very exciting. I also got to sit in meetings with the QCs – that was a whole new world to me.”

She used her time wisely, relishing both the intellectual challenge and the opportunity for networking: “Personally I felt that the most useful element was the chance it gave me to speak to people. Everyone was so willing to give up their time and answer questions. You got a real feeling that the whole team felt closely connected to the firm. In fact, I remember one of the other trainees saying to me, ‘If you are lucky enough to come here, they really look after you.’ That was very reassuring.”

Four years down the line, Sascha is preparing to qualify into the firm’s IP department, having been bitten by the trademark bug during a secondment to the firm’s New York office. “Since we merged, there are more opportunities to travel,” she explains. “There are 11 offices in the States, as well as Hong Kong. New York was such a fantastic experience and to work with such an established IP team and get an insight into American IP law was a real privilege.”

Now coming to the end of his first year as an EAPD trainee, Andrew Short is another

successful vacation scheme graduate. He too has taken full advantage of the extensive secondment opportunities available and is currently working with the Financial Services Authority. He flags up the additional responsibility given to trainees with the firm as a crucial advantage over other training contracts. “I think it is fair to say that as EAPD trainees, we are given more responsibility than at other firms with comparable reputations. In my first seat, I was sent out to oversee a client’s board meeting on my own. I was charged with ensuring that everybody understood the paperwork and signed in the right place. I just don’t think you would get that at a magic circle firm.”

Having trained with another major international firm before joining EAPD, Helen can confirm that this is very much the case: “You can only ever judge the level of work you are doing by who is acting for the other side, and more often than not we will be working opposite either the magic circle firms or firms that are specialist in the area in which we work. However, our teams are often much smaller and more intimate than those on the other side. That is terrific for trainees, as they will be operating at the equivalent level of a newly qualified or even first-year associate on the other side – they get the top-quality work, but with additional responsibility and recognition.”

Years of experience have taught the trainee recruitment team that what students really want on the summer scheme is

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exposure to genuine legal work. “The interesting aspects for them are going to meetings, going to hearings, sitting in on conference calls – doing all the things our trainees would do,” explains Helen. “We try to mirror as much as possible in two weeks what it is like to be a trainee with us. Ultimately, I always ask the student, ‘Do you look at our trainees and think that is what you would like to be doing in two years’ time?’ If the answer is yes, then the scheme has been a success.”

The firm puts a lot of effort into evaluating how this success is achieved and significant emphasis is placed on the feedback system. On the final day of the two-week scheme, students are provided with comments from all partners and associates with whom they have worked in a meeting with Helen and Sarah Warnes, the firm’s trainee recruitment manager. “We ensure that we can provide constructive feedback,” details Helen. “We like to give them something to take away, but these sessions are very much two-way. We want their feedback too, so that we can tweak the programme for the future.”

This commitment to interaction is key to the scheme’s achievements and has meant that over 50% of those on the vac scheme have continued their careers with the firm. Indeed, the current partner in charge, Laurence Harris, trained with the firm and undertook the vacation scheme himself. “As a former vac-schemer, Laurence remains very enthusiastic about the role that we have

in training new lawyers and I think that extends down through the firm,” explains Sarah. “It is a culture that is deeply embedded. We want to recruit the best people and we all have a part to play in that process. The flipside is that we want to give them an experience that will be enjoyable and inform their career choice. Ultimately it is up to the students to decide if they want to accept a place at the firm.”

Sarah recalls that during a recent feedback session, it was the firm as well as the candidate that won a favourable review: “The student in question commented that prior to the scheme, she was far from sure whether she could actually see herself as a solicitor. However, having completed the placement, her confidence had improved so much that she now had the image of herself as a lawyer firmly imprinted on her mind and felt that this was the career for her. It had been a chance for her to prove to herself that she had what it takes and was up to the challenge.”

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By **Tom Gillett**