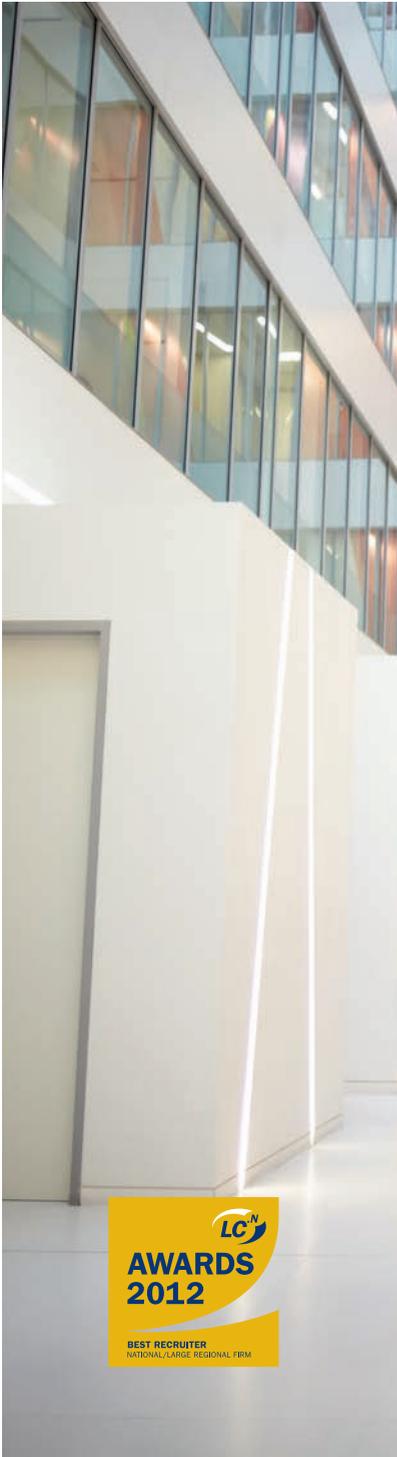


# BURGES SALMON

## LC.N AWARD WINNER 2012 BEST RECRUITER – NATIONAL/LARGE REGIONAL FIRM



As Olympics fever gripped the nation this summer, there was a lot of fuss about certain British sports stars. Chris Hoy, Bradley Wiggins and Ben Ainslie were cheered for their admittedly impressive track records, while Steve Redgrave was constantly reminded of his own successes. But what did they actually achieve? Chris Hoy celebrated his sixth gold medal; Redgrave garnered five in his day; Wiggins and Ainslie have four apiece – not bad at all. However, for a truly Olympian feat, look no further than Burges Salmon, which claimed its place on the podium at the LC.N Training & Recruitment Awards (TARAs) for the seventh successive year and the eighth occasion in total. This is a firm that can teach us all about winning ways.

As great champions know, it takes at least as much hard work to maintain success as it does to attain it in the first place. That is why, as soon as one round of recruitment is over, the team at Burges Salmon looks back over the process to discover what, if anything, it could have done better.

While some firms might try to wrap up the review in a single meeting, at Burges Salmon this is a rigorous procedure, honed over years of continued success. The starting point is the feedback received from candidates. All participants in the firm's vacation scheme have a one-to-one discussion with the recruitment team about what they enjoyed, what they didn't and what could be improved. Open-day visitors are encouraged to complete questionnaires and the trainees and associates who helped to run the scheme are quizzed for their opinions.

The team then look further afield, not only assessing what other law firms are doing, but also consulting with the Association of Graduate Recruiters about the latest trends outside the legal industry. At this point, they sit down with the recruitment partners to discuss their findings and decide what might be done differently in future.



“After that, we don’t redesign the process,” says Holly Fey, the trainee solicitor resourcing advisor at the firm. “But we make any amendments that we think necessary in preparation for the application process opening again on 1 October. This year, for example, we found that a number of other firms were moving forward the deadline for vacation scheme applications by two weeks or so, and likewise with the dates for the open days. We discussed this with the recruitment partners and we have done the same.”

Once applications come in for vacation schemes or training contracts, Holly and her team have the difficult task of deciding who will move on to the next stage. For vac schemes, around 100 applicants are divided between the two open days that the firm runs in February. While this is the first chance for Burges Salmon to run the rule over prospective recruits in person, Holly is quick to point out that the days are designed as much for the applicants’ benefit as for the firm’s. “While there is an assessment element to it, it is also an opportunity for them to get to know the firm,” she explains. “So we’ll have talks given by trainees and partners about what life is like at the firm. We’ll have a tour of the building, as well as a lunch where they can chat a bit more with trainees and HR and ask any questions. Then, after lunch, there are some group exercises in teamwork and negotiation skills, and a 20-minute partner interview.”

Holly’s keenness for visitors to see their potential employer in its true colours is backed up by Mark Thompson, a former vacation scheme student and a current trainee. “On the open day, it was about more than just the firm assessing me – it really felt like a two-way process for me to find out about the firm as well,” he recalls. “In comparison to similar days at other firms, I felt I was treated much more as an individual, rather than a number on an application form.”

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Another 40 candidates are invited to one of the four vacation schemes that run during the summer holidays. Like the open days, the two weeks which candidates spend at Burges Salmon are regarded as a golden opportunity for both sides to work out whether the fit is the right one.

“It’s really important to us that we replicate as closely as possible what

it is like to be a trainee here,” says Ann Metherall, one of nine dedicated recruitment partners, who works in the dispute resolution unit. “We try to give them not only a sense of the sort of work they will be doing as a trainee, but also a sense of what the firm does – that is, what they might be doing after those first two years.”

In practice, vac schemers often find themselves accompanying lawyers to court, being taken to client meetings and trying their hand at some of the first tasks that a trainee might be given. Mark explains that he now understands how much effort goes into making people feel welcome and comfortable while on the scheme.

“I could see how much effort was put into giving us an insightful experience of the firm and how much they seem to value recruiting us,” he says. “I’m now involved in helping with the vacation schemes and, being on the other side, I can see how much effort goes into that process – it doesn’t just happen by accident. It’s lots of little things, like the information that is sent round before the vac schemers’ arrival; we are given details of their hobbies and interests, and trainees are paired up with them on that basis. It’s clear





that they go to some lengths to find out who they are as people, as well as their potential as lawyers.”

At the end of the programme, all applicants who want a training contract interview will get one. These last approximately one hour and are conducted by a partner and a member of human resources. The aim is to find out more about the candidate’s aims and motivations. However, the emphasis is on putting interviewees at their ease – in the hope of seeing them at their best.

“I don’t want to say that it is relaxed, because obviously it is a formal interview,” says Holly. “But we try to get to know the person and we realise that although interviews can be quite intimidating, the best ones happen when people realise that we are not out to get them. There are no trick questions or anything like that. We are simply trying to find out if they are a good match for Burges Salmon, so that is what we do.”

But what makes a good match? And what are the partners hoping to spot that will make a candidate stand out? “I guess what I’m looking for is something beyond a perfect education,” explains Ann. “There are so many good A-level grades that you can’t just select based on academics. I’m looking for somebody who’s got something else, something more than just good qualifications. Some entrepreneurial spirit, somebody who has made some of their success happen themselves, rather than just taking up opportunities that have been laid on a plate for them.”

Once all of the placements have finished, attention shifts to the direct applications for training contracts. Although, like many firms, Burges Salmon recruits a high percentage of its intake through vac schemes, both Holly and Ann still consider direct applications an important part of the recruitment process. As Ann emphasises: “I wouldn’t like people to think that just because they haven’t done a vacation scheme here, then

they have no chance, because that is really not the case. It’s important to remember that not everyone can do a vacation scheme; people have work and other commitments.”

Direct applications close at the end of July and, once again, Holly and her team narrow down the applicants to about 100 hopefuls, who are invited for assessment in August. The process is similar to the training contract open day, but lasts only half a day and comprises a psychometric test, a group exercise and an introductory talk about the firm. Those who impress are invited back for training contract interviews at the end of August.

Not until all interviews are completed will the recruitment partners sit down and draw up a final

shortlist of candidates who will be offered training contracts. However, even once the choices are made, the work continues. “One of the members of the recruitment team is in charge of keeping in touch with our future trainees once they have accepted a training contract,” says Holly. “It’s really important, because there are not many processes in the

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## Burges Salmon

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### Method of application

Online application form

### Application deadline

Apply by 14 January 2013 for vacation placements and by 31 July 2013 for training contracts commencing in 2015

### Method of selection

Assessment centre and interview

### Work areas

- Advertising & marketing
- Agriculture
- Aviation/aerospace
- Banking & finance
- Charities
- Commercial property/real estate
- Company & commercial
- Competition & EU
- Construction & engineering
- Corporate finance
- Corporate tax/mergers & acquisitions
- Defamation/reputation management
- Dispute resolution
- Employment
- Energy
- Environment
- Family
- Insolvency
- Insurance/reinsurance
- Intellectual property
- Islamic finance
- Media & entertainment
- Multimedia
- Private client
- Professional negligence
- Shipping & trade
- Sports & leisure
- Technology, media & telecommunications

### Offices

Bristol and London

### What trainees said

"Excellent recruitment process with really friendly staff. The open days and vacation schemes gave me a good feel for what it would be like to work at Burges Salmon."

"Very friendly and open recruitment process."



BEST RECRUITER – NATIONAL /LARGE REGIONAL FIRM



"Excellent communication throughout the process, very quick responses to all queries, no complaints at all. The recruitment team and personnel department are extremely hardworking and efficient."

"The firm takes a lot of pride in having a very thorough recruitment process and candidates are given opportunity to demonstrate their ability in different contexts."

"The recruitment process is excellent and the emphasis is very much on getting 'face time' with candidates. As a result there are plenty of opportunities to meet people across the firm so you get an excellent feel for the firm's ethos, as well as its pride in and commitment to recruiting good quality candidates."

recruitment market where you are hired, but don't actually start the job for two years."

This regular contact is a hallmark of the friendly, welcoming environment for which Burges Salmon is well known. It is clearly fundamental to the firm's continued achievements, both at award ceremonies and in the recruitment of top talent. This success has helped it to grow and compete in the highest echelons of the national legal scene.

Crucially, from a recruitment perspective, it seems that everyone at the firm understands that in order for this winning streak to continue, they have to keep on attracting the star lawyers of tomorrow. "I think one of the big reasons for our success is the support that we get across the firm," acknowledges Holly. "This includes the partnership, which is incredibly supportive; the trainees, who help us throughout the process; and all the business services staff who help out – the IT guys, the HR guys who make sure the payroll is processed. The whole firm is involved and I really think everybody enjoys it."

By Rowan McIntyre



**BURGES  
SALMON**