

# BURGES SALMON LLP

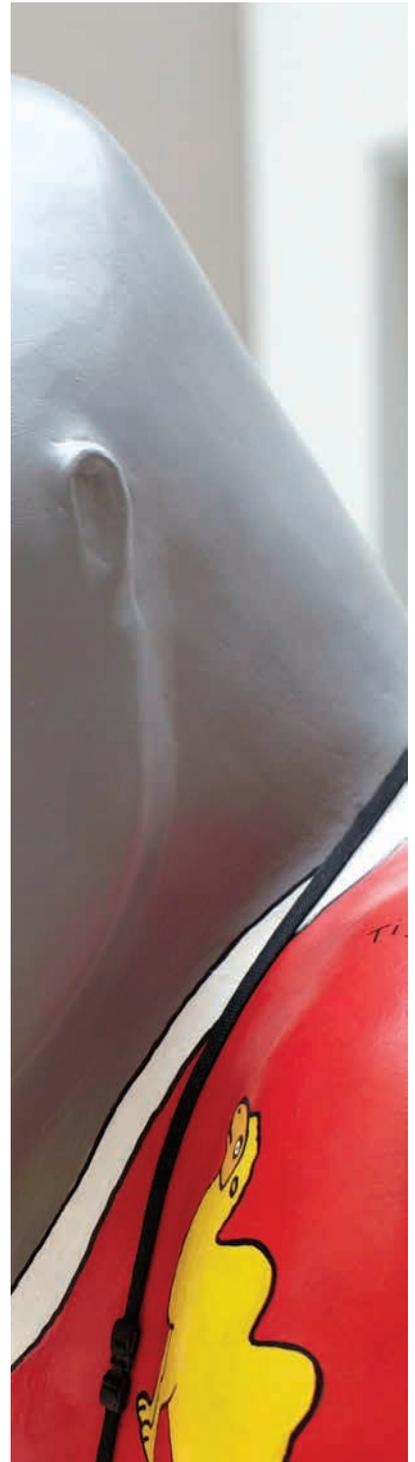
## LC.N AWARD WINNER 2013 BEST RECRUITER – NATIONAL/LARGE REGIONAL FIRM



What price independence? In an age of instant gratification, the notion seems to have grown increasingly irrelevant, as exemplified by the *Simpsons* episode in which Homer trades his soul with the devil for one of his beloved doughnuts. Both Homer's insatiable hunger and his incessantly expanding waistline have parallels in the legal profession (yes, really) – specifically, the widespread trend among firms of pursuing multiple mergers in order to expand as quickly as possible. The lure of increased revenue and international presence has in many cases been deemed worth the potential instability and loss of individuality.

Yet independence is still important to some, not least Burges Salmon. Since it was established in Bristol in 1841, the firm has grown organically into a major force on the legal scene, while consistently rejecting the merger approach. It works in all major European and international jurisdictions, thanks to close relationships with a network of similarly independent firms around the world. All this means that, as of 2013, the firm is in a very strong position, both domestically and internationally. "Looking at the current landscape, we benchmark ourselves against City firms such as Slaughter and May and Macfarlanes, which have a similarly independent approach," says Camilla Usher-Clark, corporate partner and one of Burges Salmon's recruitment partners. "We have strength and depth of experience in a wide range of practice areas, a strength which is reflected in the number of awards that we have won in recent years."

Indeed, when it comes to awards, Burges Salmon is in the form of its life, having scooped the gong for Best Recruiter – National Firm for an amazing eight years (nine in total) on the bounce. The firm's justified reputation as one of the best recruiters in the land is down to its dedicated approach to unearthing talent.





“Successful recruitment begins with a strong presence on campus,” explains Frances Lambton, Burges Salmon’s trainee recruitment adviser. “We usually attend around 10 to 12 law fairs each year and also run sponsorship events at various universities, so there is always an opportunity for prospective trainees to meet us face to face at an early stage.” From there, the firm provides two ways for aspiring lawyers to learn more about it and ultimately apply for a training contract. Candidates can attend one of four summer vacation schemes, each of which ends with an interview, or apply directly to be put through their paces at one of the firm’s assessment days, which take place during August.

Burges Salmon’s recruitment model is designed to identify the essential skills needed for commercial law – academic ability and an understanding of how business works. The latter is particularly important these days, as law firms increasingly serve as commercial advisers to their clients. “We’re looking for people who have a bit of entrepreneurial business edge,” says Frances. “This means that we value candidates who have experience of other industries very highly.”

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*Our strategy is to consolidate our position as a leading UK law firm with global reach*

The firm is also looking for people who will thrive on its distinctive culture and ethos. “We look very hard for people who can demonstrate independent thinking,” explains Camilla. “It’s great to speak to candidates who have researched the firm, understand our structure and can talk about our recent deals. However, it’s even more impressive when candidates express an opinion or ask a thoughtful question about the firm. There is so much information available to candidates these days, which means that there are good opportunities for applicants to demonstrate that they have really thought about the kind of firm at which they want to end up.”

New recruits are immediately brought into the fold. “We keep in regular touch with soon-to-be trainees in between them accepting training contract offers and starting at the firm, inviting them to all firm-wide events and encouraging them to get to know their colleagues before the training contract gets underway,” explains Frances.

When the recruitment cycle ends, the HR team works with the firm’s trainees and partners to identify





any fine tuning that could be done for next time. “We take feedback from all candidates who attend our assessment centres or come on our vacation schemes,” says Frances. “We are always working to improve and remain up to date with best practice in the legal recruitment market.” This includes any concrete conclusions that may be drawn from the recently published Legal Education and Training Review. “We’re keeping a very close eye on how the debate is developing,” says Camilla. “We are certainly open to adopting any recommendations that may result from the review.”

One person with recent first-hand experience of the whole recruitment process is third-seat trainee Peter Alford, a career changer with extensive experience of property and construction through his time as a chartered surveyor and project manager. When Peter was going through his career options, Burges Salmon sprang to his attention almost immediately. “I had always enjoyed the legal elements of my previous roles,” he explains. “When the recession began to directly impact me in 2008, I started to consider my options and what I could achieve long term. Burges Salmon places real emphasis on being a firm that welcomes and values career changers, so the fit seemed right.”

And Peter can’t fault the recruitment experience. “It was enjoyable, but very thorough,” he says. “Law wasn’t actually the main focus of my training contract interview; it was much more geared towards commercial matters. My two interviewers put a series of business scenarios in front of me and asked me what I would do in those situations. It was all about testing whether I had the skills to approach an issue independently and work through solutions, which I appreciated.”

Successful candidates can look forward to a training contract that is structured over six seats instead

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of the usual four, with the final seat spent in the department into which the trainee has chosen to qualify. “There is a comprehensive two-week induction programme, which encompasses basic orientation around the office, IT systems, introductions from key personnel within the business and an element of the PSC,” Peter explains. “This caps off the process of familiarisation that the firm initiates during the vacation scheme and assessment centres. Once you have settled in, you still get a lot of attention to aid your development as you complete each seat. I’m in the banking department at the moment, which is my third seat following placements in the construction and real estate departments, and I have sat with a partner for eight months of that time, which has meant daily partner contact as I have gone about my work.”

The six seat system also helps trainees to build the broadest possible skillset. “Different departments require slightly different skillsets,” explains Camilla. “Practising in a contentious department is different from practising as a transactional lawyer, for example. We help trainees to develop these skills as they begin to form an idea of where they would like to qualify. We also provide a lot of support to improve softer skills such as negotiation, as well as other things like IT training.”

Independence and original thinking are key values at Burges Salmon, reflected in its recruitment policy, six-seat training model and wider business plan. “Our strategy is to consolidate our position as a leading UK law firm with global reach,” says Camilla. “We are not opening offices overseas and have a very strong network of preferred firms which have a similar culture and ethos to us. Stability and maintaining our Bristol headquarters is very important to us and this differentiates us from many other UK firms and the strategies that they are pursuing. Our approach is reviewed frequently by the entire partnership, so we are all democratically involved

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**Method of application**

Online application form

**Application deadline**

Apply by 14 January 2014 for

Summer 2014 vacation schemes and

apply by 31 July 2014 for training

contracts commencing in 2016

**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**

"I thought that the attitude to the recruitment process at the firm was professional and personal. Although it was clear that they took the role very seriously and were dealing with large numbers of applicants, I felt like the entire process was

geared towards getting to know each candidate personally – an experience I definitely didn't receive when interviewing at other firms."

"Something that really impressed me was the contact that the firm had with me post-training contract offer before joining the firm. They kept in touch with copies of the firm's internal newsletter, New Year's lunches and birthday cards. I also received champagne when I got my First. It helped me continue to feel welcome and valued."

"I have been through and assisted in the recruitment process here at Burges Salmon and it is a very fair and transparent process. They really do read every application and consider each candidate on their merits. Unlike other firms, they also actively involve the trainees in the recruitment process."

"Extremely well managed, efficient and focused on getting the best out of candidates."

"The attention to detail and regular contact of the recruitment team was what set this firm apart from the rest during the recruitment process."

"The recruitment team went out of their way to stay in touch between getting the contract and starting the job. You feel like a member of the firm before you've even started. They are honest and upfront about all aspects of life at Burges Salmon, and can honestly say that life at the firm has exceeded any expectations that I had."

"The recruitment process was fantastic. Having applied with other firms too, the process at Burges Salmon was just so much more friendly and approachable, and helps candidates perform to their best abilities by putting them at ease."

in the firm's direction. We also recognise the importance of our strong regional presence in being able to deliver excellent client service and it is interesting to see some of the big City firms now starting to open offices out in the regions."

Peter is very pleased that life at the firm has lived up to his expectations. "I did a lot of research on the firm when I was applying and am very pleased that the reality has matched the literature," he says. "It is challenging work and expectations are quite high on account of the autonomy that you are afforded, but this is in the context of a very friendly and down-to-earth working environment."

All this adds up to a truly great firm at which to train and qualify. "We understand that it is a two-way relationship," says Camilla. "Trainees need to benefit from what we provide as much as we benefit from the work that they do. I like to think that whether people are looking for a long-term career with us or just want the best training platform, we are a great option and offer excellent career opportunities."

*By Josh Richman*



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