

## Training Contract Applications – tips and tricks

**DISCLAIMER:** *This document was produced solely from my own personal experience of the training contract application process and is not gospel. All suggestions and comments should be treated as guidance only. This document should only be shared at the permission of the author.*

*If you have any questions or would like your application to be proofed or would like further advice and guidance for video interviews, psychometric tests, partner interviews, case studies and assessment days, , please send either to my email address found in the footer of this document.*

### **Research:**

Research is the biggest part of an application form. Recruiters see hundreds, if not, thousands of applications each year, therefore, they can instantly tell when you haven't done your research or if you have just copied and pasted the website. In order to make an impact, you will have to illustrate on your application that you understand the firms' culture, its vision, its competitors and the work in which it conducts.

To start with, I use the following resources to conduct my research:

- Legal 500;
- Chambers and Partners;
- Chambers Student Guide;
- The firm's website;
- The Lawyer;
- The Financial Times; and
- Legal Cheek

*Tip #1: use a variety of resources*

Once you have used these resources, you should be able to conduct the application with some ease. I usually spend 1-2 hours researching a firm before starting an application because (I say very strongly) there is absolutely no point wasting your time filling out an application if the firm is not the right fit for you. It is very clear that recruiters are looking for a specific type of person and if you aren't passionately interested in applying, they will see straight through your application.

*Tip #2: DO YOUR RESEARCH!*

### **Work Experience**

- It is really important to cover all of your work experience in chronological order starting with the newest first.
- Each experience that you put down needs to demonstrate how you have used specific skills and what you have learnt from working at the particular place.

- Be careful not to use the same adjectives or phrases.
- If the work is legal, make sure to describe how you have developed time management, working under pressure, managing expectations, resourcing, supporting senior members of staff and how they all fit together to further your ability to work comprehensively within a legal environment Here, the recruiter will want to understand that you understand what it takes to work within the legal industry and you have the necessary skills for a successful trainee solicitor.
- If the work experience is not legally based, be sure to explain what other skills and lessons this work has taught you i.e. if it was the banking industry then you would link it back to working in a fast paced and dynamic environment likened to the legal industry. This is because the recruiter will want to see a breadth of experience but will want to understand that you are committed to the legal industry and you aren't a flight risk.
- If there is not another section on the application which asks you to list positions of responsibility, you should use this space to talk about this too.

*Tip #3: use the full word count for each work experience*

#### EXAMPLE 1:

##### Work Experience from Mishcon de Reya LLP

Whilst working in the Litigation department, I have learnt a multitude of legal practices and processes. These include drafting witness statements, making applications to the Supreme Court and working on challenging landmark cases.

While acting for the Appellant on urgent applications, I have demonstrated time management skills by adhering to deadlines and unpredictable time constraints under extreme pressure. This has furthered my ability to work comprehensively in a legal environment.

I have also demonstrated that I can prioritise by working effectively on large disclosure exercises while meeting the expectations of the rest of my team. Using my initiative, working proactively and being incredibly organised has been imperative to ensure all client objectives are met.

One of my main roles at Mishcon de Reya is to complete complex research tasks on current and impacting issues. Here, I learnt to explain complicated legalese and summarise multi-faceted issues clearly. This has helped me to explain substantive information to clients in a concise and digestible manner.

I have also significantly increased my communication skills. This has been partly due to liaising with a variety of high-profile clientele, as well as, taking precise attendance notes and creating great rapports with my team

#### EXAMPLE 2:

##### Work experience from Nando's UK

During my 5 years at Nando's, I quickly gained promotion from role-to-role on the basis of positive feedback regarding upselling products and exceeding targets. I was delegated large amounts of responsibility to train teams in various restaurants across the country and to focus on key objectives of the business.

Here, my preliminary interest for strong cultures in business developed. Nando's has entrenched core values such as; Pride, Passion, Integrity, Courage and Family. These principles were carried through day-to-day objectives and were pivotal for the success of their business model, which is to create ever-lasting happiness. Nando's also works extensively in creating awareness for LGBTQ communities. This is something I particularly enjoyed getting involved with.

Working here ensured that I learnt the importance of building strong personal relationships with customers. Customers ultimately are what makes the business triumphant, therefore, making sure they continue to be delivered with the same quality service every time was crucial.

This experience was a key influence in shaping my work ethic now. I learnt how to tailor my approach to different working styles, think strategically, take on board constructive criticism whilst following through with the fundamental principles of the company culture.

## Questions

Questions vary from application to application but here are a list of recurring questions:

- Who are our main competitors and specifically demonstrate how we differentiate from the firms you name?
- What makes you particularly suited to a career at [insert law firm] compared to other applicants?
- Describe a recent news article you've read (except for Brexit) and explain how it relates to us?
- Why do you want to be a solicitor and which areas of law are of particular interest to you?
- Describe the market perception of [insert law firm] in your own words?
- What personal achievements are you particularly proud of and why?
- Why do you want to be a commercial solicitor?
- Outline the qualities which you think you possess to be a successful lawyer at [insert law firm]?
- Give details of your main extra-curricular activities and leisure interests
- Identify a current commercial issue which has attracted your attention recently. Please explain why you have identified this issue and why you consider it to be significant to the stakeholders involved.

When writing your questions out, you need to think about exactly why the recruiter is asking this question and what you want to demonstrate. It is a good idea to have three examples of work/experience to back up your answers and always relate your answer back to the law firm to which you are applying. This is where you will get across most of your research into the firm but also why you are a good fit for the firm.

*Tip #4: make sure you always link your answers back to the firm but also to why you are a good suit for the firm*

Make your answers short and succinct. Do not use flowery language and do not talk about anything that you do not know about the firm. Therefore, if you have not been on an open day or vacation scheme at the chosen firm you are unlikely to be able to talk about its culture, other than what it states on the website so be cautious with your statements.

Furthermore, make sure your answers are quantifiable. If the question is about describing your greatest achievement and your answer then make sure you set out the results you achieved and why. This can be, for example, how you increased participation at your events by 50% or how you received 10 five star reviews for customer service or how you raised £15,000 for charity. This will make your answers stand out!

Make sure you include:

- awards that the firm has won;
- cases that you have found particularly interested;
- leaders in their fields;
- tier 1 rankings;
- revenue growth (if this backs up their ambition or vision);
- extra's that the firm is pushing i.e. agile working, artificial intelligence etc.;
- how it stays competitive;
- who are its clients;

Recruiters have heard every answer under the sun, therefore, to make your answers stand out from other candidates you are going to have to think outside the box. When it comes to answering "why law" your answer has to be as true to yourself as you possibly can otherwise you will be cast under the same light as everyone else. Being genuine will come through in your answers and also links back to why you must not apply to the firm if you don't feel like it is the right fit for you.

Remember do not repeat yourself!

*Tip #5: be genuine, make your reasons for wanting to work in law unique and original*

Key achievements/extracurricular activities include (not exclusive):

- Public recognition;
- Musical accomplishments;
- Awards at school;
- Successes at work;
- Business successes;
- Scholarships;
- Academic achievements;
- Sporting achievements;
- Overcoming personal difficulties;
- Voluntary work;
- Reading interests;
- Film/movies;

- Gym classes; and
- Martial arts etc.

## Examples

Below I set out some of the answers I provided on various successful applications. This is in no way meant to be the only way to answer questions but I hope it is helpful in providing some guidance on what has worked for me:

### EXAMPLE 1:

#### **Who are our main competitors and specifically demonstrate how we differentiate from the firms you name.**

Trowers & Hamblins (Trowers) main competitors are: Devonshire Solicitors LLP (Devonshires) and Winckworth Sherwood LLP (WS). These are competitors because they have a strong focus on Real Estate (which makes up to 45% of Trowers' turnover), but specifically Social Housing. This is demonstrated by receiving Tier 1 accolades from Legal 500. Both firms also have ranked leading individuals in Social Housing. However, ahead of the game is Eleanor James from Trowers who has been recognised for being a next generation lawyer.

Both Devonshires and WS have a national presence. However, Trowers differs because of its international presence, particularly its "Middle-Eastern Prowess". In addition, Trowers was the first foreign law firm to be granted a license to practice in Malaysia. This significantly puts the firm at a bigger competitive advantage.

Trowers also combines unique practice areas i.e. it is unique for a firm to be at the forefront of both public sector and M & A work. For example, Trowers, over the last 12 months has advised on M&A deals in excess of £3 billion but it has also been recognised by Chambers UK 2018 for notable practitioners in real estate (Sara Bailey).

Finally, Trowers is genuinely committed to diversity. This attractive culture can be commemorated by the fact that Theresa Mohammed has been awarded Best Woman in Construction Law at the European Women in Construction & Engineering Awards 2017, making Trowers a firm that is tackling tomorrow's challenges within the industry. This is also reflected by its inclusive working environment.

### EXAMPLE 2:

#### **Why is Addleshaw Goddard your chosen firm?**

AG is pro-active, diversity-driven and has a modern approach to its strong identity and high-profile clientele. This is highlighted by its extremely welcoming ethos. The culture of AG also greatly appeals to me, as I want to be part of a firm that understands its pathways to success in a dynamic and cohesive manner.

AG is a prestigious international firm, therefore staying competitive and exceeding client expectations is crucial, matching my 'customers come-first' ideology. AG's attractive professional approach can be demonstrated by being awarded 40 Tier 1 rankings across your UK offices. Furthermore, examples of its quality of work can be commemorated through being named by the Legal 500 as Dispute Resolution Firm of the Year by the Legal 500

Awards 2019. Furthermore, I want to work for a firm that is constantly striving for expansion and ambition and this can be demonstrated by its increase in revenue of 23% to £242m in the 2017/18 financial year.

AG also has many successful women at senior level, which is something I greatly admire. For example, AG have been named within The Times Top 50 Employers for Women two years running. Further to this, Kerry Westland (Partner for Innovation and Legal Technology team) has been listed in The Lawyers Hot 100 and Michelle de Kluyver (Regulatory Investigations and Corporate Crime) has been recognised as a Next Generation Lawyer. This demonstrates to me that this is a firm that is pushing equality and fostering a culture that is inclusive and powerful.

I am certain that with the extensive training AG offers I can combine my analytical mind, a platform to learn from the best lawyers in the industry, and the chance to work closely with diverse clients in an innovative, sophisticated and collaborative culture. This is will go hand-in-hand with my drive to be an incredibly successful lawyer and I therefore feel especially suited to a career at AG.

### **EXAMPLE 3 (RPC):**

**Identify a current commercial issue which has attracted your attention recently. Please explain why you have identified this issue and why you consider it to be significant to the stakeholders involved.**

Data breaches and cyber-crime is a commercial issue that has attracted my attention recently. Last year, the number of data breaches reported by UK financial services firms to the FCA increased 480%, with the retail banking sector seeing the largest increase. The National Cyber Security Centre also reported a 20% rise in cyber-attacks on law firms. Furthermore, The Lawyer states that hackers took £11 million from law firms' in 2018. Therefore, law firms need to be actively thinking about the best strategies to protect themselves and be responsive in reducing any foreseeable damage.

One of the main reasons for an increase in attacks is due to law firms implementing the use of technology such as e-discovery softwares, which store vast amounts of client and personal data. Therefore, it is highly critical for stakeholders to stay vigilant and reduce the ways in which they could be a potential victim. This is especially because being named a victim of cyber-crime can significantly reduce the trust and respect clients have in a law firm.

However, it is not just law firms that are targets and therefore a law firm must be able to offer advice to its clients in other industries, specifically, the banking sector. As a result, RPC is likely to see an increase in demand from clients such as AIG and Liberty wanting insurance providers and RPC will be able to meet these demands effectively through its own additional service "ReSecure", which helps to protect the data and reputation of companies.

### **EXAMPLE 4:**

**Describe a recent news article you've read (except for Brexit) and explain how it relates to us?**

I have read: "UAE banks' international reserves hit record high of \$110bn" by Arabian Business on 31 December 2018. This article explains that reserves for the past year rose as

much as 23.1%, according to the Central Bank of UAE. The increase was mainly driven by a rise in net international reserves held by UAE-based banks.

This links with Trowers & Hamlins because of its continued strategy of advising in the niche market of Islamic Finance, which can be demonstrated by Trowers and Hamlins' work in capital market issuances and leveraged property funds.

Islamic Finance has been focused on by Trowers & Hamlins since its inception within the UK banking industry. Having such a large increase in reserves means this sector is gaining confidence and that institutes are recognising the potential demand, therefore, encouraging Middle Eastern and Malaysian clients to invest more. This long-term growth was commented on by Partner, Salman Ahmed, in CNBC. Here, Mr Ahmed correctly predicted back in 2013 that this growth will be "fuelled by increasing investor appetite for Islamic banking assets".

These collective factors go hand in hand with the fact that Trowers & Hamlins has been recognised for the first time in the Top Tier of Islamic Finance firms by Legal 500. This acknowledgement underscores the monumental work Trowers & Hamlins has done over the years and makes Trowers & Hamlins much more competitive by ensuring that they continue to be one of the only law firms with a "Middle and Far East Prowess".

#### **EXAMPLE 4:**

**Do you have any other qualities or experiences that you think we should take into account when considering your application, including any extenuating or mitigating circumstances?**

This past year, I have taken part in Tough Mudder UK, which was to raise money for Charity Research UK. Tough Mudder is an endurance event in which participants attempt 10-12 milelong obstacle courses, which are designed to test mental and physical strength. This event is also based on teamwork. The obstacles are designed so that an individual cannot tackle them alone. You must work quickly and efficiently in order to help your teammates, as well as motivate them.

To raise money for charity, I came up with organising a "Cheese and Wine" night whereby each attendee pays £10. I organised caterers to supply the event, negotiated fair prices, created flyers to advertise the event, as well as, finding willing participants to act as waiters for the evening. I also did a raffle to raise a little bit extra on the evening. This took many weeks of planning alongside completing my LPC and working part-time but the event was a huge success. There were a total of 50 attendees and I raised £850 after disbursements.

I regard completing this, as one of my greatest accomplishments. Not only was the training for this event incredibly intense but the adrenaline rush and sheer sense of self-belief after crossing the finish line is something I will never forget. I intend to do this event again this year and raise even more money for Cancer Research UK.

I have received the following awards:

In my first year, I received two Best Student Awards. The 'Best Student Award' is the University of Lincoln's award scheme for students that achieve the highest marks. The first was for the 'Best Performance in Tort Law', which is sponsored by a local Lincoln law firm:

Bridge McFarland. The second award was for 'Best Overall Performance at Level 1 in Law', which is sponsored by another local Lincoln law firm: Ringrose Law. I received two further Best Student Awards in my final year for Best Performance in Succession Law and Best

### **EXAMPLE 5:**

**Give us as wide an insight into you as possible without referring to anything you have already mentioned in this application.**

#### Hobbies and Interests

I am an avid food lover. Dining out in London with friends is my go to activity on any free evening. I have a particular interest in dining in unusual places such as; on a London tube in the Basement Gallery or Dans Le Noir, where you eat in pitch blackness.

I have a passion for spinning and taking classes at the gym. I am currently training to take part in the 'No Excuses Sportive' in March, which is to raise money and awareness for Alzheimers Research UK. This past year, I have also taken part in other events such as: Tough Mudder UK, which was to raise money for Cancer Research UK.

#### Awards

The 'Best Student Award' is the University of Lincoln's award scheme for students that achieve either the highest marks or best performance in certain topics at each level of their degree. In my first year, I received two Best Student Awards. The first was for the 'Best Performance in Tort Law', which is sponsored by a local Lincoln law firm: Bridge McFarland. The second award was for 'Best Overall Performance at Level 1 in Law', which is sponsored by another local Lincoln law firm: Ringrose Law.

I received two further Best Student Awards in year three of my degree. The first award was for 'Best Performance in Succession Law' and the second for 'Best Overall Performance in Land Law and Equity Law (Level 2 and 3)'.

### **Cover letter**

The cover letter (if the application has one) is usually the first thing that they read. The cover letter should be no longer than a page and should focus solely on why you want to be a commercial lawyer.

Using the usual format for a cover letter is required i.e. Dear Sirs/Madam and Yours faithfully to conclude. If you know who the letter should be addressed to (i.e. Mrs Hulme), you must use yours sincerely at the end.

Format should be as follows:

- Introductory paragraph;
- Key experience;
- Why you;
- Why the law firm;

- Skills you intend to bring to the firm;
- Concluding paragraph; and
- Signatory

It is often useful to talk about a case or deal that the firm has worked on recently in this section. However, you must demonstrate that you really understand the specific case and explain why it has interested you.

If you have any mitigating circumstances, you should take about them in the cover letter (if there is not another area on the application that is specifically allocated for this).

*\*\*Remember this guidance is only meant to help in assisting you understand what has worked for me. These are my own personal opinions so please do external research of your own before relying on this document!*

**GOOD LUCK.**