

TRAINING CONTRACTS

Hot seats: Two years, four locations

How do you learn to be a lawyer at a global firm? **Mayer Brown** recruits tell *The Gateway* how the seat system allows them to sample different areas of law and build their confidence

All law school graduates who want to become solicitors must spend two years training on the job before they can call themselves qualified lawyers. Trainees in the London office of global firm Mayer Brown, like recruits at other law firms in the City, typically spend six months in four different locations. Three of these are different departments in the firm's London office, and the fourth is either a secondment to one of the firm's clients, or a six-month posting to the Mayer Brown base in Hong Kong, New York or São Paulo.

But how does seat allocation work? How do departments vary? What's it like being on secondment, or in an overseas office? And how do you decide what department to join as a qualified lawyer? *The Gateway* found out.

Greg Joynson

4th seat trainee, qualifying into Corporate in March 2011

Seats: Finance, Corporate, client secondment to a major music publishing company, Insurance & Reinsurance

My training contract

My first seat was Finance. The practice is diverse and as a trainee you get exposure to a large variety of deals: real estate finance, derivatives, project finance, securitisation. Some of the work was supporting Corporate – I worked on the acquisition of Portsmouth Football Club, advising the purchasers on their financing package. I then went to Corporate for my second seat, which is a broad department too – you might get to try M&A, private equity, IPOs and funds. Insurance & Reinsurance has also been great – there's been a wide variety of work, from advising insurers to arbitrations.

The Corporate and Finance departments feel very similar because they're such big groups and everybody's very sociable – which you need to be in order to get maximum exposure to all the different kinds of work on offer. The team in Insurance & Reinsurance is very close-knit, which is also nice as everybody knows each other very well.

I've had a great training contract and have really enjoyed the two years. I'm qualifying into Corporate because I like the work – big deals come into the department, like the sale of the National Lottery last year. I also like the fact that I won't need to specialise straight away because newly-qualified lawyers there get the same exposure to different kinds of work that trainees do. But further down the line I could decide to focus on, say, M&A or funds.

My highlight: My client secondment to a major music publishing company

I wanted to do this secondment because I thought it would support my application to qualify into Corporate. Being able to see how a big, successful business is run was fantastic. I got to see what kind of advice clients need and how they make decisions. I had a lot of responsibility and felt that I played a role in managing the relationship between Mayer Brown and the client.

I did some IP work, for example, on copyright infringements, artists' agreements and synchronisation deals, where a song is used on a film soundtrack. I also dealt with litigation and, in particular, corporate issues – for example, to do with the company's subsidiaries, dividends or board formalities. New legal issues often came up – with music, there's no legislation for many situations so I couldn't just go to a textbook but had to take a view myself – or contact someone back at Mayer Brown for advice. I had a lot of support from the firm during the six months and got to know some departments that I hadn't sat in.

I saw a lot of musicians in the office. If a new act had been signed, they'd have a showcase in reception and invite all the staff! You get gig tickets, and some people went to award ceremonies. But music publishing is very business-orientated, which I liked.

It's all about how to make the most money out of the music while acting in the artists' best interests.



Amanda Plowden

4th seat trainee, qualifying into Commercial Dispute Resolution in March 2011

Seats: Real Estate, Finance, secondment to the Hong Kong office, Commercial Dispute Resolution

My training contract

My first seat was in Real Estate. I was given smaller files to run by myself, which was great as it gave me lots of responsibility and experience of corresponding with clients directly. From there I moved into Finance where by contrast I was responsible for particular aspects of large deals, for example, collecting all the documents required by a bank before a financing could be put in place. Here in Commercial Dispute Resolution, I've attended witness interviews and then drafted their statements to be used in court. I've also been involved in research, disclosure and document reviews. I've even gone to the Court of Appeal on a few occasions! The seats I chose to do were related to areas I enjoyed at law school. Because I liked civil litigation, I knew I wanted my contentious seat to be in Commercial Dispute Resolution and that I would be keen to qualify there. The HR team always encourage us to talk to them about our training contract and the route we'd like it to take.

I think the training programme at Mayer Brown is very well-constructed, and I feel that I've been trained well. I've had exposure to various kinds of work, improved my drafting skills, and had plenty of direct client contact. I've also attended lots of training sessions during the two years, both departmental and ones for all trainees. So I feel confident now that qualifying won't seem too daunting a step!

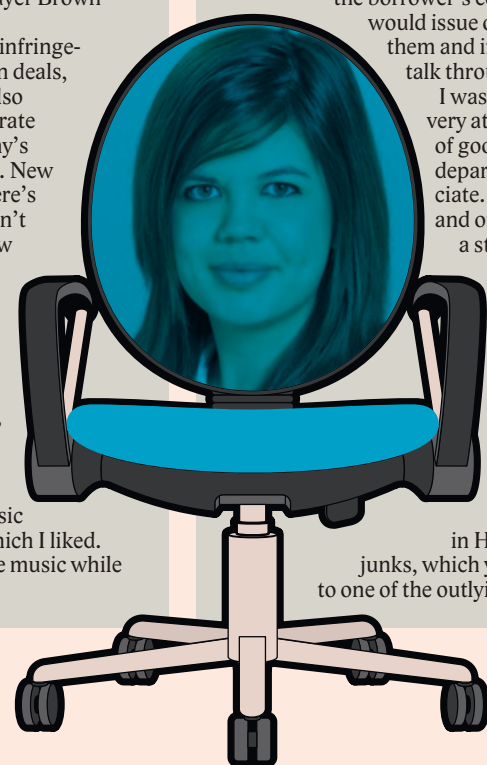
My highlight: My secondment to the Hong Kong office

My third seat was in Hong Kong, in the shipping finance department. The bulk of my work was drafting financing documents – loan agreements, the contracts relating to the borrower's assets backing the loan, and also the borrower's corporate resolutions and the legal opinions we would issue on the transaction. My supervisor would review them and if there were any issues, we would sit down and talk through them.

I was consistently busy out there – my supervisor was very attentive and made sure that I was given plenty of good work. Because I was the only trainee in my department, I found that people viewed me as an associate. I got to work directly with partners and clients and often was even given my own files to run. It was a steep learning curve, but I enjoyed the challenge and got up to speed quickly.

Living in Hong Kong is very different to living in London. You can go from standing in between giant skyscrapers to being up in the mountains or on a beach in 15 minutes. There are many other law firm secondees there so I made lots of friends. At the weekends we'd go on hikes to secret beaches that you can't get to by road, head to bars and restaurants or visit the markets in Kowloon. We also went to China, Malaysia and Macau. Many law firms in Hong Kong have their own Chinese yachts, called

junks, which you can hire out to sail in the harbour at night or to one of the outlying islands – doing so was very popular!



Jamie Coomber

1st seat trainee

Seats (so far): Construction & Engineering

My training contract

I've picked up a lot of technical knowledge since I started my training contract. From law school you get a good idea of how litigation works, but by actually getting involved in real matters you learn new things very rapidly. I've also learnt how to deal with clients. I recently worked on a case where I was the co-ordinating person from our end so was liaising with the client directly nearly every day. By doing so, I've got to know what sort of information you need to give a client to keep them informed. But I've been surprised by the different attitudes of clients. For example, one client might want to be heavily involved in driving a dispute forwards, whereas another may be look to be led by its lawyers.

We handed in our seat preference forms last week – I'm hoping to go to Corporate next. Much of my legal experience so far has involved litigation so I'm keen to see how transactional law works. Also, I'm hoping to do an international secondment later on and, as they're all transactional, it would be invaluable to get some experience in that area beforehand.

I think it'll be very interesting to start a new seat, particularly moving from contentious to transactional work – lots of aspects of the job will change. I'm a little nervous about changing departments, but at the same time it's exciting!

My highlight (so far): My seat in Construction & Engineering

My seat is contentious, which means it involves litigation work, but one of the nice things about Construction is you get to see a lot of alternative dispute resolution as well – I've worked on arbitration, mediation and adjudication, as well as court matters.

Lots of my work has involved international disputes, involving companies from countries including Germany, India and Oman. I've also worked on a domestic case to do with a defective boiler at a chemical plant and a professional negligence claim against a group of planning consultants, which has actually gone all the way to trial so I'm going to get some proper courtroom experience!

In terms of tasks, there's a fair amount of research. Contentious cases involve a lot of documentation work – helping out with disclosure, creating a trial bundle, and so on, which is something you can really get involved in as a trainee. I've also done some drafting – witness statements, advice letters to clients, instructions to barristers and funding agreements.

I've always felt that there's a good network around me – when I'm unsure of something, there are people here that I can ask.



Devora Kirk

3rd seat trainee

Seats: Finance, Employment, Commercial Dispute Resolution/client secondment to a global bank

My training contract

I did my first seat in Finance, sitting with our head of derivatives and working in this area, which was interesting. Then I sat in Employment, and my third seat's been split into two sections – I spent the first three months in Commercial Dispute Resolution, doing mainly insolvency work, and I'm now on secondment at one of our banking clients. It's unusual to have split seats – it happened because of client demand, but I'm really enjoying my time here.

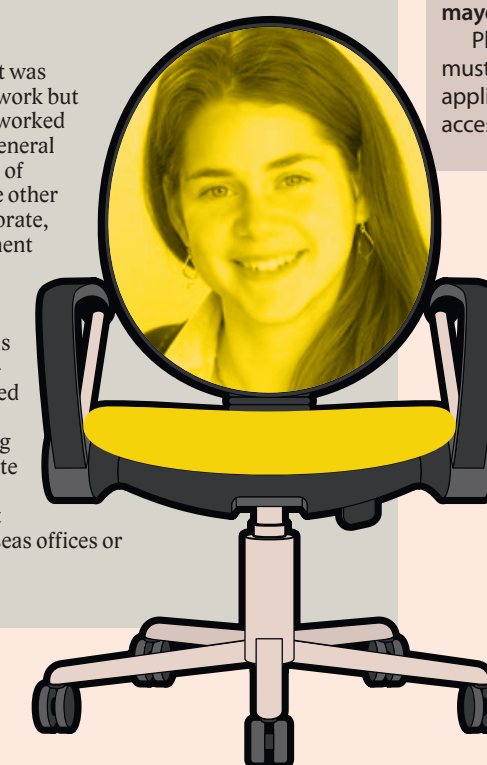
There are some differences between departments at the firm, particularly in terms of hours. In transactional departments they can be quite erratic – sometimes you'll have a week where you leave at 6.30pm, and other weeks you'll be there until 3am every night. Hours in Commercial Dispute Resolution and Employment are far more consistent. But I've found that all the departments are really friendly. Also, they all try to give you a good spread of work and useful experience as well. In Employment, I often went to court, and in Commercial Dispute Resolution I even got to do some advocacy myself.

Seat allocation is a fairly transparent process. There are certain requirements. You have to do a seat in a transactional department, such as Finance and Corporate. You have to do a litigation seat, which could be either Commercial Dispute Resolution, Construction, Insolvency, Employment or Insurance & Reinsurance. And then you have to do a secondment, either to a client or an overseas office. Each time you fill in a form stating what your preferences are and why – and with luck you get what you want. HR are very approachable if you need to talk things through. I'm hoping to sit in Pensions for my fourth seat, which would tie in well with the derivatives and employment work that I've done.

My highlight: My seat in Employment

About half of the work in Employment was litigation, which was mainly tribunal work but I also did some High Court matters. I worked on unfair dismissal, discrimination, general contract claims – the whole spectrum of contentious employment matters. The other half of the work was supporting Corporate, for example, advising on the employment aspects of M&A deals.

In terms of contentious work, I did a lot of research into the Equality Act 2010 because it was passed while I was sitting in the department. On the non-contentious side, I reviewed and drafted documents relating to the transfer of employees when takeovers were taking place. A lot of Mayer Brown's corporate work is cross-border, so I often had to look at employment law in different jurisdictions, working with our overseas offices or foreign law firms.



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Mayer Brown are currently recruiting for training contracts for 2013 and 2014.

Further details, including a copy of the firm's brochure, details of available opportunities and how to apply, can be found at mayerbrown.com/careers/gradrec. Please note that all applications must be made via the firm's online application system, which can be accessed from the website.