



Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge UK LLP

EAPD guarantees summer fun with its small but perfectly formed scheme.

"We're different because the work we do is generally high value and complex, usually with an international aspect – magic circle work, but in a much smaller, established City practice". So says Helen Clark, trainee principal and head of trainee recruitment at Edwards Angell Palmer & Dodge (EAPD). This view of itself informs the summer placement scheme it runs and is part of the reason said scheme has recently been feted as the best of its kind in the City.

Today the firm is basking in the glow of a successful merger that saw London player Kendall Freeman team up with US insurance specialists EAPD. But despite this yankee-doodle-union, the intimate working environment for which Kendall Freeman was renowned has been retained and it's business as usual for the summer scheme, which plays a crucial part in the overall graduate recruitment strategy. Helen explains why the scheme is something of a showcase for all involved: "It allows us to see how potential candidates perform, but we're also looking to sell ourselves: to show the work we do and the way we treat our trainees, and what the culture is like." Sarah Warnes, trainee recruiter, suggests that it's an especially useful way for students to get a sense of the difference between academic and practical law, while for non-law students it's "an opportunity to see how law fits into the world and whether they've got the necessary skills to cut it as a solicitor".

First impressions count – so say two EAPD

trainees who took part in the firm's scheme a couple of years ago. First year trainee Emma Richardson, who did her law degree at Queens University Belfast, says: "From the moment I walked into reception for the summer scheme interview, I was greeted by smiling faces. I even had an enjoyable interview and that sealed the deal. They made a real effort to get to know me and make me feel welcome." The firm interviews about 30 people for 10 places on two fortnight-long schemes.

Henry Stewart, now in his final seat and on secondment in the firm's New York office, did an ancient history degree at the University of Exeter, converting to law thereafter. He was attracted to the firm by its size and the emphasis on the relationships within the firm: "It seemed like a tight unit, where you wouldn't get lost among thousands of employees. I didn't want to be just 'vac scheme student 25!'" His first impressions were that "everyone was really friendly. We went on a tour of the office and bumped into the managing partner in the library, and he was very chatty and approachable".

Before the scheme even begins, the students have been briefed on the programme of events, who their trainee buddies will be and where they'll be sitting (two different departments, one each week). Equally, the entire firm has been apprised of who's coming and everyone is primed to make them feel welcome and provide them with meaningful



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work. Sarah says: “I put together profiles of each student and send them around to the whole firm a week before they start so that people already know a bit about them.”

Also in the interests of starting off on the best foot, Helen explains that the students are given pointers on day one about what is expected and how to get the most out of the experience: “We really encourage them to get out on the floor, knock on doors and introduce themselves. Some are only brave enough to do so halfway through the second week, at which point it’s a bit late.”

After a full day of breakfasting, ice-breaker exercises and an IT and information centre induction – not to mention a chat with managing partner Laurence Harris, who was a summer student himself at the firm some years ago – Sarah and Helen have learnt that it’s sensible to let the students catch their breath on day two. But throughout the rest of the two weeks, it’s all go, including skills sessions (including advocacy, negotiation and effective business writing), a trip to the Lloyd’s building and a legal London walking tour. The firm also runs a session with the director of business development and marketing, explaining “how the firm gets business through the door”, says Sarah. Henry notes that he treated the skills sessions as “being part the interview process. I tried to impress and stand out”.

Day-to-day work depends on the department in which a student sits, but is likely to include drafting and research. Helen

acknowledges that what students really want is exposure to the cut and thrust of legal wrangling: “They want to live and breathe the interesting bits, like sitting in on meetings and calls, and going to hearings. We’ve definitely got the associates and partners to buy into that; they look at their week and work out how to take a student to each of their appointments. In fact, if you go to any court appearances over the summer, you’ll notice the ranks are swelled by a number of fresh-faced, eager young people!”

Henry and Emma’s recollections of the sort of work they did during their schemes chime perfectly with this description. Henry says: “Among other things, I did some drafting and research for the managing partner. I went and introduced myself – I thought I’d be proactive! I also got a lot of work from the associate I was sitting with and my trainee buddy was always nearby for hands-on help.” Emma worked on marketing and research projects, went to court and to meetings, and helped collate bundles for court: “Much of the work flowed from our trainee buddies. That was another great thing – we were doing trainee-level work, rather than work that had just been made up for us to do, as is the case in some other firms.”

Fear not, however – EAPD’s winning scheme is also chock-full of social activities. Off the top of her head, Sarah lists bowling, squash, a Duck Tour, a summer party and a comedy club as just some of the organised events. Elsewhere, informal gatherings pop



up all over the place, and this is where the existing EAPD trainees really come into their own. “We had several nights out with the trainees,” say Henry. “They were great and took it on themselves to look after us. Because there are only 16 of them, everyone’s very close and they welcomed us into their group.” Emma adds: “Because I’d come from Northern Ireland and didn’t know anyone in London, they made a huge effort to make me feel at home. Nearly every night people took us out for drinks and on the last day all the trainees took us out for lunch. I’m still in contact with lots of people I met on the scheme.”

On the last day there are feedback sessions for each individual, so that Sarah and Helen can find out how things have gone and to make sure that the students are getting good work. And the feedback isn’t just one way – the recruitment team uses the students’ input to tailor the scheme differently each year, using “the sensible ideas that students come up with”, says Helen.

In Helen’s view, the success of the scheme is down to the fact that it is a truly firm-wide effort: “Partners, associates and trainees are committed to ensuring that the summer students have a really rewarding experience.”

And for both Henry and Emma, their experiences on the scheme have been reflected in their new incarnation as trainees. Emma explains: “I had high expectations of the firm because of the scheme, but the impression I got remains true. And I hope

that I give that impression to the summer students now.” Henry concurs: “Life at the firm has definitely lived up to my expectations. The scheme gives you a realistic picture of the way the firm operates and the way people work so well together.” In fact, the scheme was the deciding factor for Emma when it came to accepting her training contract: “The firm managed to engender loyalty in me very quickly.”

So small is beautiful in all respects when it comes to the firm and its scheme. Sarah points out: “For the five people on each scheme, similar to our small group of trainees, the level of exposure they get is potentially much greater than if they were at a larger firm.” But, as Emma warns, in a small group there’s nowhere to hide: “Your name is known, so if you’re good, you’re noticed. But equally, you’re noticed if you’re bad! But there are huge advantages – you’re not just a number and there is a real personal touch from the firm.” Helen confirms that the small intake allows the firm to put the students under a microscope: “We always ask for feedback from partners, associates and trainees, so students must be conscious that we’re checking them out. They’re on show at all times, so they have to make sure their timekeeping is great and their enthusiasm is high, and that they’re showing the attributes that we’re looking for in our trainees. We want them to be asking questions, showing they’re engaged with the process and the firm, and giving it their best shot.” It seems that in this instance, it really is the size that counts.

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By **Isla Grant**