

# ALLEN & OVERY

*Start at the top*

## *Any Questions*

A Career in Law

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### **Something playing on your mind? Need an answer straight from the top?**

**Applying for a training contract or vacation placement in the Legal Sector can seem nerve-wracking. Allen & Overy would like to help you find the essential information that every potential applicant needs. We offered you the chance to put your 'need to know' question directly to our graduate recruitment partner and manager. Richard Hough and Caroline Lindner have compiled the answers you can't find anywhere else.**

#### **Does working with Allen & Overy give opportunities to work and live abroad?**

Yes, approximately 70% of our trainees will complete an international secondment at an A&O office outside London in their final six months of training. Some of our associates and partners also spend time working overseas during their careers, so the opportunities are real.

#### **Whilst completing my application form, I thought it would be appropriate to mention a couple of deals the firm has advised on as part of my answers. Is this something which is recommended or advised against?**

If you decide to mention any A&O deals on your application form, these are likely to be picked up at interview, so do make sure that you have some knowledge of the key issues and the role played by A&O. Whilst we are not expecting you to know the technical details of the deal(s), you will be expected to discuss why you are interested in them and engage in discussion with your interviewer.

#### **For all of the promotional rhetoric, what good does a trainee's extra-curricular experience and rounded abilities do for a client? Is a client not better served by the most able lawyers provided they have a basic level of business acumen?**

We believe that it is important for our lawyers to have interests outside of the office in order to achieve a work/life balance. When applying for open days, vacation placements and training contracts, extra curricular activities also provide evidence of the following skills: time management, team working, communication, working under pressure/to a deadline and dealing with complex challenges. Whilst our clients expect our lawyers to be technically and commercially excellent, they also want to work with people they can get on with. And, increasingly, lawyers are required to market and sell the firm in order to win work.

#### **How important is academic record in securing a Training Contract? Does the team take extenuating circumstances (such as health issues) into account when reviewing training contract applications?**

We are looking for consistent academics – from school to degree and beyond – and look for AAB at A-level (or equivalent) and a strong 2.1 degree (or equivalent). Of course, we recognise that some individuals experience personal difficulties during their academic studies so it is important to provide us with some detail so that we can take circumstances into account. If candidates prefer to discuss their individual situation in confidence, they should contact Caroline Lindner, Graduate Recruitment Manager direct.

#### **The A&O Graduate Recruitment website specifies a need for minimum UCAS points as well as a minimum degree qualification, often saying that this cannot be waived, even in light of exceptional performance elsewhere. Some people however may underperform when younger, or have other reasons not to have obtained the required qualifications, and have shined later on in life – for example, I entered higher education in my mid twenties, achieved a first class undergraduate degree, am on track for a distinction in my MA, and have previous career experience. Does the application process account for the commitment many people put into achieving in later life?**

We do take previous careers and work experience into account when reviewing application forms. Whilst academic results are important, we recognise that some candidates will also offer valuable skills (e.g. commercial awareness and people management) which will be useful to A&O as a business. However, in addition to academic results, we are also looking at the quality of the application form answers – specifically, why they want to apply for a position at A&O, their knowledge of the legal sector and the firm, and their interest in the work we do.





*“All A&O employees are encouraged to contribute to the firm’s pro bono and community affairs programme.”*

**What opportunities are there to engage in pro bono activities both as an intern and an employee at Allen & Overy?**

Many of our vacation students are exposed to pro bono work during their placements, often assisting their Trainer with cases they are working on. In addition, some of our students will visit Battersea Legal Advice Centre to sit in on consultations which are conducted by trainee, associate and partner volunteers.

All A&O employees are encouraged to contribute to the firm’s pro bono and community affairs programme. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved in a wide variety of projects and we believe that many provide trainees with excellent opportunities to develop key business skills. However, it is important for anyone interested in a legal career to note that their day job does come first, so pro bono activities are an additional commitment.

**Just how huge is the workload for a graduate starting at A&O? Would I completely lose my social life to my career?**

Each trainee will experience different levels of busyness during their training contract and working hours, often dependent upon the department you sit in. For example, if you are in the Corporate team working on a transaction, the hours can often be long leading up to the deal closing. However, the whole team will also be working the same hours (trainees, associates and partners alike). At other times, your working hours will be more regular. At A&O we do not expect our employees to be in the office unless they have work to do, so an active social life is still encouraged.

As with all professions in the City, the working hours will be long at times so you should bear this in mind when conducting your research into career options.

**As a 2nd year on a 4 year non-law course, is it worth pursuing an application for the summer internship, or would I be better advised to build up some more experience before applying next year?**

You should definitely be applying in your 2nd year if you are spending your 3rd year abroad. Otherwise, you should apply in your penultimate year. If you are interested in pursuing a legal career, some general work experience at a local law firm would be useful to demonstrate your ongoing commitment. You may have to offer your services for free, but perseverance pays off when looking for work experience. Most importantly, it will also help you to decide whether or not law is for you, and what skills are required.

If you apply for a vacation placement in your 2nd year and are not successful, don’t let this put you off reapplying in your 3rd year. It sometimes takes people more than one attempt to secure an interview.

**How much are potential trainees/vacation schemers expected to know about the LSA 2007 and is a question about the firm’s potential changes in business structure a good one to ask at interview?**

It is a good idea to read up on the Legal Services Act 2007 but you will not be expected to answer specific questions on it. Any questions which demonstrate your interest in the firm’s long-term strategy will look impressive at interview.

**What kind of work experience should I look to complete to support my application for a vacation scheme or work placements?**

We are looking for a range of skills – communication, team work, leadership, problem solving, dealing with challenges – and do not specify what type of non-legal work experience candidates should have on their application forms. However, many applicants include examples of retail and leisure roles. It is also helpful if candidates also secure some form of legal work experience which may include open days, work shadowing, marshalling or mini-pupillages.

**Can you please give me some information on the job application process at the end of the training contract – what percentage of trainees are kept on at the firm and are some practice areas more competitive than others?**

Over the past 5 years, our retention rate has been – on average – 83%.

**I’m particularly passionate about working in IP and am eager to gain experience in this area. Would I have any choice as to which practice area I worked at on an A&O vacation scheme?**

Yes, we offer all of our vacation students the opportunity to choose their departments and we will accommodate their requests where possible. If you have a specific interest, it is better to let us know at an early stage.

**What proportion of the A&O trainee intake are accepted after completing a vacation scheme or work shop, and which proportion are accepted through the training contract application process?**

We make training contract offers to approximately 75% of our vacation students and a high proportion accept. However, we still recruit people who have not been on an A&O vacation scheme as we believe that it is very important for us to consider candidates with alternative work experience.

**I do not wish to live in London – does Allen & Overy provide opportunities to work in other regions of the UK, as well as overseas?**

We only have an office in London in the UK. If individuals are considering pursuing a legal career in a different jurisdiction, they should thoroughly research what they need to do (e.g. specific degrees, postgraduate study or work experience). Some of our international offices do offer formal work experience schemes which are advertised on our main website.



*“If you spend time at a client, you will sit in the in-house legal team and learn more about the industry and how the particular client likes to operate.”*

**Does every trainee get a chance to take part in an overseas secondment? Do I need a foreign language to take part in an overseas secondment?**

Not every trainee will have the opportunity to complete an international secondment. However, we also offer pro bono and client secondments which are popular with our trainees.

If you need a foreign language for a secondment – and are successfully selected – the firm would provide you with language training.

**I know that A&O is very supportive of female employees who want to step back from their career temporarily to start a family, but does A&O allow for career breaks for further study or travel?**

Yes, some of our associates do take career breaks to pursue different interests.

**Can you give me some information on the interview process – what happens on the day of interviews, how can I best prepare?**

Each candidate (for training contracts and vacation placements) will have two one-to-one interviews with partners and/or senior associates. Sometimes interviews are conducted by HR and Recruitment Managers.

The first interview is competency-based and lasts for an hour (roughly 45 minutes for questioning, 15 minutes for you to ask questions). It is focused on your application form, specifically the skills you have developed from your degree, work experience and extracurricular activities. We are also interested in why you are considering a career in law, your research about A&O and your understanding of commercial issues.

The second interview is always conducted by a partner. You will be given time to prepare a business case study and presentation, followed by your interview which will last for 45 minutes. You cannot really prepare for this interview in advance – we are deliberately taking you out of your comfort zone to see how you cope with unseen material and deal with time pressure. The case study is aimed at law and non-law students.

**I am a second year student and would like to pursue an MA upon completion of my undergraduate degree. I would prefer to complete a vacation scheme this year, along with my peers, and hopefully obtain a training contract, and then focus on graduate study applications next year. Does A&O accept vacation scheme / training contract applications from students who wish to defer the start of their professional study?**

Yes, we do accept applications from candidates who wish to apply for a deferred training contract start date. Each year, a number of our future trainees embark on further study before commencing their law school studies.

**If I apply closer to the start of the application period, is my application more likely to be successful?**

We screen applications on a rolling basis. However, we don't fill all of our interview slots up in the first few weeks of the application forms opening. Candidates may run the risk of interview slots being full if they apply on the deadline.

**Do trainees choose between a client secondment and an overseas secondment and which would you say is the most useful?**

Trainees can apply for a client or an international secondment and both are useful for developing legal and business skills. If you spend time at a client, you will sit in the in-house legal team and learn more about the industry and how the particular client likes to operate. If you spend time overseas, you will be in a smaller A&O office and working in a different jurisdiction and culture. Associates also go on secondment, typically to clients, so this continues throughout your career.

**Should I apply this year or build up more relevant experience and apply next year? Does a rejected application this year make my application less likely to be accepted next year?**

Candidates who are rejected should not be put off from reapplying next year. However, you should critically review your form and update the content. All candidates who are serious about a career in law should continually seek relevant work experience and develop their skill set through their extra curricular activities.

**Do vacation schemers get the opportunity to visit and work in overseas offices?**

Yes, each year we offer 12 of our summer vacation students the opportunity to apply for an additional week in one of four A&O offices. If successful, the students will spend three weeks in London followed by an additional week in Dubai, Frankfurt, Hong Kong or New York.

**Does A&O accept applications from GDL/LPC students who are currently funding their own studies, with the intention of reimbursing the student's investment? If so, how many of these applications do you tend to accept in a given year?**

If candidates are in the process of completing the GDL and/or LPC when we recruit them, or if they have already completed either or both courses, we would reimburse their course fees. For candidates in the process of completing the courses, we would provide a maintenance grant towards living costs as well. Please note that this will be pro rated if you have already started the course when you accept our offer.

**Would completing an academic Masters course (though not necessarily relevant to law) at a respected university make my application for a training contract at Allen & Overy more likely to be successful?**

Many of our future trainees and applicants decide to pursue Masters courses. However, this would not put you to the top of the pile when we are selecting for interviews. We would expect you to have achieved to a high level in your undergraduate degree and in your Masters, and the quality of your application form answers will need to be good. If you want to pursue additional study, we would encourage you to do this before you commence your training contract. It is harder to take time out to pursue extra study early on in your career.

**I did not complete a vacation scheme last summer – is there any other work experience that I could complete to demonstrate my commitment to a career in corporate law?**

Candidates should consider applying for open days at law firms and also general commercial work placements (e.g. at a bank, accountancy firm or an insurance company).