

TRAINEE INSIGHTS

London Director Of Human Resources | Beverley Sorsby



Yasmin Anwar



Will Allen



Beverley Sorsby

Yasmin Anwar: Hi, my name's Yasmin Anwar.

Will Allen: Hello, my name's Will Allen.

Yasmin Anwar: Welcome to the *Trainee Insights* podcast. We had a break over the summer, but now we are back to bring you discussions about life as a trainee or junior lawyer at Ropes & Gray in London.

Will Allen: You may notice something different about today's podcast. Yasmin and I, rather than Emilio and Kwasi, will be your hosts for this podcast as the inevitable cycle of being a trainee has resulted in Kwasi and Emilio qualifying as associates in our asset management practice and our private equity practice, respectively. By way of instruction about me: I'm a fourth-seat trainee in our London office, currently sitting in our data, privacy and cybersecurity team. I've previously sat in our firm's tax, leveraged finance and private equity group.

Yasmin Anwar: I'm a third-seat trainee currently sitting in our private equity group. My first and second seats were in the firm's antitrust and asset management team. In this podcast series, we seek to provide you with insights into the culture of the firm and practical advice about how to excel as a trainee or make an application to the firm.

Will Allen: And welcome to this episode of *Trainee Insights*, the podcast about life as a trainee at Ropes & Gray's London office.

Yasmin Anwar: This podcast is for everybody who has an interest in applying for a training contract in the firm's London office.

Will Allen: In today's episode, we're joined by Beverley Sorsby, director of human resources in our London office.

Yasmin Anwar: Beverley heads our London HR team overseeing the firm's recruitment strategy, business support needs, rewards and incentives program and the London office's associate talent functions. Beverley's been at the firm for nine years, having previously worked in HR across a range of other leading international law firms in London.

Will Allen: How's everyone doing today?

Yasmin Anwar: I'm doing very well, thanks. Beverley, how are you?

Beverley Sorsby: I'm very well, thank you.

Yasmin Anwar: Excellent—glad to know it. So, let's get into what is coming up on this episode. We'll be speaking to Beverley about the nature of the firm's trainee recruitment process.

Will Allen: Beverley will also be offering some insights into the upcoming recruitment campaign and what we in Ropes & Gray look for in prospective applicants.

Yasmin Anwar: Great—so without further ado, let's get into the questions. Beverley, can you tell us a bit about the trainee recruitment strategy at the London office, please?

Beverley Sorsby: Trainee recruitment strategy's a resourcing strategy, and it's designed to help us attract and select exceptionally talented students who we go on to train, mentor and develop into trainees, which creates a pipeline of our associate resources and who ultimately, hopefully, one day become leaders of the firm. So, the London office is 12 years old now—it's still relatively young compared to our U.S. peers. We're still in growth mode, which is reflected in the recent increase of trainee headcount: we've gone from seven to 12 a year. We've also recently moved from two intakes a year (in March and September) to an annual September intake, because we thought that one entry route (one point each year) and a larger intake will help not only provide support to the office (trainee support to the office) but, most importantly, it creates a solid pipeline of newly

qualified junior resources for our transactional practice group. I'd also say with our selection strategy, we've decided to recruit solely from vacation schemes because we believe it's really important to have one consistent route to entry, which allows us to rigorously assess our future trainees. Final thing I'd say about our strategy is that we've also made a deliberate decision to separate the assessment from the vacation scheme. So, we've got one dedicated assessment day which allows us to assess the candidates, and then allows the vacation scheme to provide a real-life example of what it's like to be a trainee at the firm.

Will Allen: Obviously, from first-hand experience, I can say that getting the assessment day out of the way before you get on the vac scheme allows you to concentrate on your work, and actually enjoy the scheme and get loads out of it. The SQE is quite a hot topic at the moment. Would you mind saying a few words about how the firm's recruitment process has altered (if at all) with the introduction of the SQE?

Beverley Sorsby: I would start by saying the SQE's a significant change for the entry into the legal profession. It went through considerable consultation with both the law firms themselves and academic providers in the London office. We put together an SQE committee consisting of people from HR and our training colleagues and key partners across the office to look at the new requirements and how we might apply those to the firm. We actually haven't needed to alter the recruitment process, per se, but we have decided to transition straight to the SQE regime. So, from the 2023 intake for next year, all students joining will have taken the SQE examinations. And certainly, all students who are going to be applying for next year's vac schemes will need to have been committed to the SQE route.

Yasmin Anwar: It'll be interesting to see how that develops. So, what is the firm looking for when assessing applications from prospective applicants? Are there any tips that you can give our listeners?

Beverley Sorsby: We've actually tried to simplify our form over the last few years. So, you're now only asked to provide academic results alongside the answer to just one question. And the question is designed to assess your commercial awareness as well as your knowledge of the firm. My top tip is to research the firm thoroughly. I would also tailor your application to the firm so you can demonstrate that you under-

stand our firm specifically and its culture. I would also say that we want to see your individual personality and certainly your motivation, too, for a career in law. So, please don't feel shy about bringing a different perspective to the application form, within reason, of course. On the point of applications, you might like to know because it's a question we get asked a lot: Do we review on a rolling basis? We actually don't. We just have one annual window, so that means you have until the deadline of the 31st of January to complete your form.

Will Allen: Thanks very much. So, the London office operates a blind approach to trainee recruitment. Could you give our listeners some detail on what this means for applicants, and how the firm approaches a blind review of an applicant's application?

Beverley Sorsby: In practice, a blind assessment approach means that the applicant's name, personal details and school are redacted or not shared with the screeners or the assessors. Specifically, the application form stage—that's CV-blind, and all of the names, personal details and schools are all redacted. So, the assessors are just reviewing the form based on the content of the application for the answer to the question and the academic results. And then during the assessment process, no candidate information is shared with the assessors beforehand. So, just like the screeners screening the application forms, the interviewers and the assessors are not going to have any pre-information about the candidates. This is a deliberate strategy to reduce any unconscious bias or affinity bias that might occur at those various stages in the process.

Yasmin Anwar: I think this blind approach really feeds into the diverse group of people at Ropes & Gray—people have such different backgrounds and hobbies. I know we've got ex-hockey players. We've got ex-actors...

Beverley Sorsby: Ex-teachers. Yes—lots and lots of different career backgrounds, as well.

Yasmin Anwar: All there by the assessment process. Beverley was actually one of my interviewers on my assessment center. So, Beverley, what can an applicant expect to encounter during the assessment process or vacation scheme placed in the London office?

Beverley Sorsby: Our assessment day is intentionally rigorous—it's a full-on, one-day assessment center. It comprises an interview that's with partners, members of the

HR teams and counsel. There's then a written exercise, a negotiation exercise and a presentation. And assessments are designed to assess the attributes that we're looking for—namely, people that are motivated and interested in pursuing a career in corporate law, people who are collaborative and enjoy working as part of a team, and people who are entrepreneurial. We also look for people who are intellectual, who are curious and who are detail-focused. I think the student should prepare for the assessment day by researching the firm—think of perhaps obvious questions that we might ask at the interview. The other thing that I'd also say about the assessment center is I know that there are lots of opportunities to practice some of the skills that we're assessing you on. For example, some career services might run mock interviews on negotiation exercises, so I'd recommend you taking advantage of those.

Yasmin Anwar: Can you tell us a little bit about the vacation scheme itself?

Beverley Sorsby: As we mentioned earlier, we've intentionally separated the assessment day from the vac scheme, so the vac scheme could then be used as an experience so that trainees can get an understanding of what it's like to work at the firm. And so, it really gives people and candidates an opportunity to do real, proper trainee work, experience the culture of the firm, and the dynamic and the vibrancy of the office. I totally appreciate that this is, obviously, an interview, so it's very daunting and overwhelming for students and candidates. But we really want to give them the opportunity to try and relax and really enjoy the experience, and this helps us to then see your true personality whilst doing your time with us.

Will Allen: I completely agree. I saw during my vac scheme that having less pressure on an assessment day at the end of the scheme, for example, put less pressure on me and allowed me to enjoy the experience way more than, say, for example, other vac schemes I did. So, moving on, Beverley, what steps does the firm take to promote diversity in trainee recruitments?

Beverley Sorsby: We've got several interventions to help us promote diversity within our campaigns so we get diverse students applying to us. So, we've got a number of targeted events for female students, LGBTQ+ students and, this year, our first Black student event. We have the blind assessment

process that we've just mentioned earlier. We've also used (and some of you may be familiar with it) the Rare Contextual Recruitment System, and that's a tool that's added to the application process and the application form. So, it enables us as screeners to understand the context in which an applicant's experience might have been gained, and it helps us basically identify perhaps out-performers that we may have otherwise missed. We work with SEO—they introduced some really talented students from diverse backgrounds. And we've also recently introduced a new social mobility program—it's called [BRidge To The City](#)—in partnership with SEO and with Bloomberg, one of our key clients, so we were really excited to introduce this program this year. I think it's actually the first program, certainly within U.S. law firms, that's collaborated with clients in this way, so we're really proud of that. And the scheme is there to provide students from underprivileged backgrounds the opportunity to explore career options in both the legal at Ropes & Gray and then the compliance settings at Bloomberg. I think it's really important that we have these types of social mobility programs because they're designed to give access to the profession for those people that absolutely have the ability to join the firm in the future and do well, but don't currently have the means or the networks to get there. And I think it's very important that this law firm has a responsibility to that sort of talent pool—we're basically providing them with more of a level playing field. The program that we designed is that they'd spend one week at Ropes & Gray and one week at Bloomberg. They got involved in lots of different master classes, whether that be around negotiation, learning how to draft, lots of different panel events around diversity and inclusion, and CSR, and then there was lots of social networking opportunities as well. And then at the end of the scheme, we had two students that each received a scholarship—there was a £20,000 bursary and a guaranteed vac scheme place for next year, and then a long-term mentoring arrangement with one of our lawyers.

Yasmin Anwar: From a trainee perspective, it was actually really great to be a part of this BRidge To The City scheme—great to meet such bright students. And obviously, they've got amazing futures ahead of them. So, that was really enjoyable.

Beverley Sorsby: I'm hopeful that we'll do it next year.

Yasmin Anwar: Just moving on slightly, Beverley, what work does the London office do specifically?

Beverley Sorsby: We are one of London's leading private capital law firms. We also advise some of the world's largest companies on their most challenging issues. So, we act for sophisticated private capital investors and providers and give them all the legal services they need, whether that's fundraising, transactional dealmaking and financing, or antitrust, data protection, restructuring, real estate, financial regulation and tax. And then we act for leading European, U.S. and Asia clients. Our London office regularly advises clients on global deals as well as transactions across the EMEA market, and then often working alongside our colleagues in other parts of the network. I'd also say that whilst we have our private capital focus, we don't restrict ourselves, so there's lots of individual practice areas that are successful in their own right, often outside of the private capital market. And in fact, I know that they work for some of the most well-known companies in the world, particularly in life sciences and health care, and then technology and the financial services sector. For example, our litigation & enforcement team, which specializes in financial crime, global regulation and risk, has been involved in some of the most high-profile and complex, cross-border regulation investigations in recent years. I know that our privacy and data protection and cybersecurity team, which you're in Will, has helped clients deal with the legal aspects in some of the most recent, biggest data breaches and cyber incidents. And then, last but not least, I know our antitrust team regularly advises on very complex cases in every major European forum.

Will Allen: Beverley, how would you say Ropes is distinct from other U.S. firms in the city that also have strength in private equity and leveraged finance? So, I suppose we're thinking of the Weils, Kirklands and Lathams of the world.

Beverley Sorsby: I don't think there's any such thing as a typical Ropes & Gray person, but we all have some things in common. So, we value individualism, we really work well as a team, and we work great together. I know this can be backed up with what our clients are telling us because our marketing team recently conducted a client survey to ask our clients what they thought made us distinct. And they said they valued our entrepreneurial spirit, our innovative approach and our emotional intelligence, which is not a term that's commonly used with lawyers, but that's what our clients said. I think they also liked the fact that our solutions are tailored to exactly meet their problems—and they're not always necessarily the answer that they had initially expected. I think they just really like our strong sense of teamwork. I think they like

working with us. They like how diverse our teams are. So, I think that's what would distinguish us from the other firms that you mentioned.

Yasmin Anwar: Yes, I definitely agree. And I guess another differentiating factor is that Ropes & Gray hasn't opened up as many offices globally compared to its competitors—instead, it uses a network of trusted local counsel. Can you give us a bit more information on why that is?

Beverley Sorsby: Yes, so that's right. We see the London office as the hub of our European operation. We have lawyers that come from more than 15 different countries and speak more than 29 languages between them. We work across borders seamlessly. We have the experience and skill set to advise clients anywhere in the world. And we regularly advise our clients on cross-border, European matters. We know the markets. We understand the political, cultural and economic environment that our clients operate in to get the best deals done. And so, whilst we're based in London, we're equally at home in other legal markets across Europe and Asia. So, what we do is we have a network of relationship law firms across Europe, the Middle East and Asia, which allows us to draw on local expertise/local counsel when we're working on those cross-border deals. The preferred law firm strategy, as we call it, means that we can then choose and work with the very best law firms within those jurisdictions, and therefore, can provide our clients with the highest level of commitment, service and quality with the people that have got the experience and expertise in that jurisdiction, in our client's area of business. And we've invested significant resources into building, monitoring and maintaining the quality of those European firms within that preferred law firm network.

Will Allen: One aspect of the job that I really like is when local counsel are over in London, they always reach out to go for a drink or dinner, and it's a really nice opportunity to meet people from other backgrounds and countries.

Beverley Sorsby: Yes, and I think that's really important because as we know, our industry is all about relationships, and it's great to have and build those networks and relationships well.

Will Allen: Yes, I really agree. This is all absolutely excellent intel, Beverley. So, would you mind telling us where we'll be seeing Ropes & Gray during the upcoming recruitment season?

Beverley Sorsby: I am very excited that we're going to be back on campus. I think we're going to be attending about 13 career fairs this year. Then we're going to be going back on campus, returning to those universities for a specific presentation about Ropes & Gray and the career paths that we've got available. And we're going to be available to speak to students about the culture of the firm and life as a trainee, and the students will be able to network with the Ropes & Gray representatives that will be in attendance. The first thing we've done this year is hold several skill sessions. So, people that are interested—they've attended the presentations—can then come along to one of the skill sessions that we're holding in our offices in early December. And then we've been collaborating (as we have now for a few years) with the likes of Legal Cheek and LawCareersNetLIVE and collaborating with the various events that they host to students. So, I would suggest that you keep an eye out on the website and our social media platforms for updates on our schedule—and for the presentations, you sign up with your local office IT.

Yasmin Anwar: Talking about social media, we've also noticed that there's a lot more activity on social media platforms.

Beverley Sorsby: That's absolutely right. I'm very pleased that you have noticed that there's more activity there. So, we've done a lot over the last year to improve our social media. We revamped our recruitment website back in 2020, so it's now a global site, and it's separated into regions. There's plenty of specific information about the London office there—it's www.ropesgrayrecruiting/UKcareers. Now that we're back on campus, we've also got some newsstands and merchandise in keeping with our new brand, so look out for that. You'll see obviously the brand on the recruitment website—there's lots of great profiles of all of our trainees, and you just get to know a little bit more about them and they talk about their experiences with the firm. And then we've also been doing loads of great work to create content for our Instagram account—of course, these great podcasts that you're listening to now.

We've got a legal lingo directory. We've got lots of stuff that talks about what's going on in the office. Again, you get an understanding and appreciation of what the experience and the culture's like. And then there's lots of other things about application deadlines and other key information. So, please do check us out—our handle is [@ropesgraygrads](https://twitter.com/ropesgraygrads).

Will Allen: Thanks so much, Beverley. You've shared some absolutely fantastic insights today—hugely helpful. I'm sure our listeners will absolutely love them. And before we let you go, we often like to round off the interview section of the podcast with something a little more left field, if you like. Would you mind telling us something about you that people may not know, such as a favorite holiday destination or interesting hobbies—anything along those lines?

Beverley Sorsby: If you listened to I think it was our very [first podcast with Ruchit Patel](#), you would've heard him telling you that he likes '90s hip-hop. In a similar vein (but a different genre), I love '90s house and garage music.

Yasmin Anwar: We're really representing the '90s music scene at Ropes.

Beverley Sorsby: We certainly are.

Yasmin Anwar: Thank you so much for your time today, Beverley.

Beverley Sorsby: You are very welcome. Thank you for having me.

Yasmin Anwar: We hope you enjoyed today's discussion. This podcast will be ongoing—we really want your support.

Will Allen: One of the ways in which you can do this is by following us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and obviously the [Instagram](#) page that Beverley just mentioned. This podcast episode will be available on [Spotify](#) and [Apple Podcasts](#). If you can give us a five-star review by tweeting us, that'd be great. And anyone that leaves a review will have it read out on our next episode.