

on the right track

Never mind the Magic Circle...

Trainees looking only at London firms offering training contracts should not ignore the successful regional firms. For Daisy Eshelby, who has tried both, the choice is clear

To hardened City lawyers, working in the provinces may conjure images of Stephen Fry in *Kingdom*: kindly solicitors pottering around the shires in tweed suits, dispensing advice to eccentric old ladies before returning to their Georgian offices for tea and scones. The reality is a little less romantic, but extremely enjoyable nonetheless.

Until 2008, I lived in south London. I really enjoyed my job at a medium-sized firm in the heart of Westminster. I trained there and spent a year post-qualification in their private client department, but I grew weary of the night-time police sirens, the rubbish-strewn streets and having to fight through the heaving crowds on the Northern Line. At weekends, I would escape to the country, the only downside being the M4 traffic every Sunday night on my return trip to the Tooting badlands.

"I'm not retiring!"

I came to the decision that London life was not for me and decided to head West, swapping my flat in London for a cottage on the outskirts of a tiny Wiltshire village. Most of my London friends assumed I was suffering from a late 20's crisis. To their mind, far from beginning an exciting new chapter in life, I was basically retiring. However, I had done quite a bit of research into firms outside

London and realised that there were a few that offered a great diversity of work of the quality that you could expect in London.

I joined the offshore tax and trusts team at Wilsons this time last year. Even though Salisbury is surrounded by green fields and there is a resident dog called 'Gentry' in the office, working life is not all that different from being at a London practice. If you get a job at a reputable regional firm, you'll find there is no compromise in terms of the quality of work. While my firm has a strong regional client base, the majority of clients do not live locally, with many based in London and internationally and with assets around the globe. In addition to Hong Kong and Singapore, there are lawyers who spend time in Jersey and other offshore centres. London is a regular commute for many of the lawyers, and a focus for the practice now that the firm has a London office.

Plenty of regional firms take on a number of trainees each year, and a prospective trainee could expect a very 'hands on' training contract with plenty of responsibility. For me, as well as a high level of interaction with experienced partners, I have had a lot of client contact. I've travelled around the country visiting clients, regularly gone to London for meetings, conferences with counsel and hearings in court.

As a trainee, time is rarely spent stranded at the photocopier and, overall, I would think the training is as good as at any London firm. Of course, if you have your heart set on the Magic Circle, the provinces may not be the place for you, but if you are interested in private client law, charity law, litigation (including contentious trusts, family and employment), commercial work, property (residential, commercial or agricultural),

to name a few, a training contract at a leading regional firm could be extremely varied and rewarding.

Not the Six O'Clock News

A common misconception is that working outside London is not terribly demanding, that there is an easy pace and you'll be home in time for the six o'clock news. Sadly, this is not quite the case. However, I think you are unlikely to hear too many all-night horror stories (if any), office sleepovers, and/or colleagues working alternate weekends. Certainly, my work/life balance is healthier than it used to be, and I get home in good time to walk my dog in the evening. I doubt he would be as impressed by Tooting Bec or Clapham Common.

I would urge anyone looking to London for a training contract not to ignore the opportunities with a strong regional firm. In the current climate the regional firms are looking to improve their market share while the major City firms struggle on, potentially leaving the post-recession legal landscape looking quite different to the one we have long known. This fact, coupled with changing perceptions among clients that a London lawyer is not necessarily the be-all-and-end-all, leaves the regional firms in a very strong position.

For me, living in the country and working for a leading regional firm with a strong London presence, you get the best of both worlds. You have the client exposure and the work you want, without having to deal with the stresses of the 'Big Smoke'. I have a garden instead of a window box, a very happy dog and, as well as avoiding the Underground, I have peaceful Sunday evenings without having to endure the M4.



Daisy Eshelby is a solicitor in the offshore tax and trusts team at Wilsons (www.wilsonslaw.com)