



# Interview with Trainee Solicitor – Grace Long

We talk to Grace Long, a second-year trainee solicitor at Lester Aldridge. Grace shares her career path so far, why she chose to complete her training contract at Lester Aldridge, interview advice and tips for trainees just starting their training contracts.

## Please share with us your journey into law

Unlike many of my peers, I did not decide to pursue a career as a solicitor until relatively late. I studied a range of different A-level subjects and chose to study an undergraduate degree in Law at Nottingham Law School on the basis that it was a well-rounded degree that would open multiple avenues with regard to future career opportunities both in and outside of the law.

Whilst at university, I spent a few weeks during each of my holiday breaks doing work experience in multiple areas of law with high street firms, barristers and judges. It was during this time that I developed my passion for the sector and settled on the idea of becoming a solicitor. I had always had an interest in problem solving and working with people and the career offered me the opportunity to do just that.

Following my undergraduate degree, I went on to study the LPC alongside a Masters in Law, which concluded just four days before I began my training contract at LA in September 2022.

## Tell us about your career/seats so far at LA

I was offered a training contract at LA in the summer of 2022 that was due to commence in March 2024. In the interim, I was offered a role as a paralegal within the Lender Services team to commence in September 2022.

A few weeks later, I was lucky enough to have my training contract brought forward, allowing me to start my training in September 2022, far in advance of when I had anticipated.

I am now a third-seat trainee with the firm. I have undertaken seats in Real Estate Development, Litigation and Recoveries, and Personal Injury/Clinical Negligence. I did not begin my training contract with a particular interest in any specific practice area, and therefore, I was keen to gain a range of experience in varied practice areas. I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunities I have been given in a wide array of legal work and can attest to the fact that each seat has broadened my skillset and enabled me to determine where my interests lie.

## How does the seat system work at LA?

Trainees at LA undertake four seats on a six-month rotation to cover their two-year training contract.

Prior to seat change every six months, trainees are sent around a list of departments that are looking to take on a trainee for the next rotation. Trainees are asked to rank each of the available seats in order of preference and explain (briefly) their reasons for doing so. Having the opportunity to voice their preferences enables the trainees the opportunity to have some control over the direction of their training contract and the experience they are exposed to.

Once all of the trainees have returned their preferences, the lists are then reviewed by the firm's Training Principal, who has the final say in the allocation of the seats. Trainees are then notified of their next seat around a month before the seat change.

## What attracted you to the Lester Aldridge trainee scheme?

When I was looking for training contracts, I was unsure what specific areas of law I wanted to qualify into, and therefore, I knew that I was looking for a multi-service law firm that could offer me a wide variety of experience, including some niche areas of interest.

One of the reasons I was drawn to the training programme at LA was because the seats didn't appear to be fixed at the outset of the training contract like many other firms. It, therefore, allowed me the opportunity to tailor my training and pursue areas of interest as they came to light.

When I was researching training contracts, it was clear that LA also enabled me the opportunity to work with a variety of clients, from national finance companies and property developers to lower net-worth individuals who would otherwise not have easy access to justice.

## How did you prepare for your trainee solicitor interview?

I found the LA website to be a really useful place to start in terms of understanding who the firm was and what it stood for. Understanding the firm's values and practice areas enabled me to understand what the firm expected from its trainees and the type of people it was looking to recruit.

Reading through the news articles and blogs uploaded onto the LA Hub also provided a great background for establishing the firm's client base and how they seek to get involved in the community – this allowed me the opportunity to establish where my own interests were aligned. The blogs and articles also offered key discussion points for the interview itself.

The practice Watson Glaser tests proved invaluable to me on a personal level, and I also found it useful to review my own experience so that I could call on this in the interview.

## **What's the best thing about training at LA?**

Throughout my training contract, I have become increasingly aware of how LA promotes individuality. Across the firm, trainees are encouraged to pursue their interests and tailor their training contracts to their own goals. At the beginning and mid-point of each seat, trainees are encouraged by their line managers to identify and pursue key areas of interest in the department to develop their skills.

## **How would you describe the culture at LA?**

A focus on collaborative working is something that you will see continually throughout the firm, both inside individual teams and cross-departmentally. There is a wonderful awareness of the range of specialities across the firm and how people/teams can work together to provide the best holistic service for a client.

## **What are the development opportunities like at LA?**

The sheer volume of LA partners that began as trainees in the firm is a testament to the investment the firm puts into its training programme and the long-term development of trainees.

Aside from promotions, there is a clear focus on personal development within the firm, with frequent training sessions on all aspects of the career, which are readily available and accessible through the Learning and Development team.

## **Do you have tips for trainees just starting their training contracts?**

Take advantage of the opportunities you are presented with. For the first few weeks of your training contract (and every time you change seats), it can feel very overwhelming beginning a new practice area and joining a new team with its own existing culture. It is helpful to remember that you are never expected to know everything, but taking advantage of opportunities to get involved in new work and training sessions (both internally and externally) can often make you feel more capable in your role.

Additionally, taking opportunities to get to know your team either by assisting on cases or attending events together also enables you to build a support network and ensures you have a lifeline for when the inevitable moments of confusion or difficulty with a piece of work crop up.

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