


Routes to a training contract – direct application v vacation scheme

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To help you navigate the quagmire of battling to a training contract [Daisy May Coster-Hollis](#) (second year employment trainee), who secured her training contract through the direct application route, and [Dan Thomas](#) (second year corporate trainee), who secured his training contract via the vacation scheme, summarise below the main considerations they think will help decide what is best for you.

Direct training contract route

A vacation scheme has its advantages however it is not the only route into a firm. I obtained my training contract with Browne Jacobson by applying for it directly and skipping the vacation scheme.

The most important question to ask yourself when deciding which route to apply for is what will you achieve with a vacation scheme rather than applying directly for a training contract? If you have plenty of legal work experience already or have done a vacation scheme elsewhere then it may not add much more to your application to help you stand out.

Although many firms use vacation schemes to get to know the candidate better over a period of time, the direct training contract application process and assessment centres are designed so that the assessors can get to know you, and bring out your best qualities quickly on the day. Rather than taking a blanket approach, consider the firm you are applying to. Many firms indicate how strongly they rely on vacation schemes and you can find statistics online which show the percentage of intake from the vacation scheme for a range of firms.

You must also remember that there are only a finite number of spaces on vacation schemes and not everyone will get one. Other practical considerations to be taken in to account are how many vacation schemes you can realistically attend in one summer? Are you able to meet your university deadlines along with other commitments to work and study? These, and many other personal considerations, factor in to how realistic it is that you have time complete the applications, let alone finding two weeks to attend the vacation schemes so you need to prioritise your time accordingly.

There is a reason most firms, including Browne Jacobson, do not recruit exclusively from vacation schemes (although some do). Firms want a diverse mixture of talent and will be alive to the fact that this will only come from a broad application market. Try to focus on maximising what you can offer. What experience have you got? What skills set you out from the rest? Do you have any unusual or interesting achievements? Whilst this is likely not new advice for most of you, it really should be the centre of everything you do during an application process.

Vacation scheme route

In answer to the question of what the vacation scheme can offer, here are a few examples. As mentioned above vacation schemes are a great way to gain experience that you can then talk about in future vacation schemes, direct training contract applications, assessment centres, job applications and interviews. You will get two weeks working in a team carrying out work that is around the same standard that a first seat trainee would. This gives you an excellent understanding of what to expect within the training contract.

You also have the opportunity to impress the firm over a two week period. This gives you a lot more scope to display everything you have to offer than what you might be able to fit in during the average assessment centre (no matter how well run the assessment centre is). Again the question to ask is, would this experience be invaluable to me or do I have other experience that is the same or even better?

Whilst the vacation scheme gives the firm that you have applied for the ability to assess you, the vacation scheme also allows you to assess the firm. You will get to see first-hand what it is like to work there, the culture and whether the firm is the correct fit for you. You have an opportunity to experience the type of work, clients, culture and social life that the firm can offer you in a way that only paralegal and legal assistant roles would be able to provide otherwise. Whilst it is true that you can learn a lot about the firm by doing online research you are very unlikely to be able to find out what the people are actually like at the firm, what the office layout is and what the interaction between more senior members of the firm is like. However, firms do tailor their direct training contract application route so that not only can they assess you in the best way possible, but also to give you the opportunity to meet as many people at the firm as possible and to get a good snapshot of what the firm is like.

There are also a number of other ways to get this type of knowledge even if they might not be as in-depth as the vacation scheme might be:

- Firm open days/events
- Informal legal work experience
- Working in a key sectors the firm operate in
- Conversations with friends who are already working within the firm/sector.

Summary

Overall the answer to the question for which route is better will ultimately come down to you as an individual. We have summarised below what factors might suggest that it is more suitable to apply directly for a training contract, or whether you should consider applying for a vacation scheme first. Though please bear in mind that this is just a guide so you need to consider all of your options individually.

The final point is that you do not have to simply limit yourself to only the vacation scheme or only the direct training contract route. In a number of instances you are able to do both. At Browne Jacobson if you apply for the vacation scheme but are unsuccessful then your application gets placed automatically into the direct training contract application route. Other firms may require you to apply separately and some may not allow you to do so but this is something that should come up in your research about those firms.

Training Contract	Vacation Scheme
You have a lot of experience in the legal market.	You are still at university or have recently graduated with little or no legal work experience
You know the firm that you want to apply to fairly well and are sure it is the right firm for you.	You don't have other commitments which might prevent you from taking 2 weeks to attend the vacation scheme.
It is difficult to find two weeks to take part in a vacation scheme.	You are new to law (i.e. you didn't study law at university and are looking to do the GDL but want to know that law is for you)
	You are not sure whether the firm is right for you.

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