From Andrew Nealon
Partner, ETP
Training Principal
and ETP Talent Lead

As one of the oldest U.S. law firms in London, V&E has seen its London office grow from its roots in the early 1970s. V&E’s London office opened in the 1970s as an international energy outpost for its Texas headquarters, serving U.S. clients operating in the North Sea oil and gas industry. Today, the Firm’s London office’s work is significantly broader, handling a huge spectrum of sophisticated matters for clients around the globe across a range of industries relating to transactions, projects and disputes in often challenging jurisdictions.

The firm’s entrepreneurial drive is a core component of how it advances growth across all practice areas and we are immensely proud of the expansion of our highly successful Private Equity and Arbitration practices in London, a welcome complement to our market leading energy nucleus. With our experience in managing complex multi-billion dollar deals in the energy industry, the firm’s lateral extension into M&A, high-yield debt, leveraged finance, and private equity in other sectors has been a natural evolution but it is important to note that the concentrated effort to expand in London is based on our desire as a Partnership to deliver a greater service to our clients – not just an ambition to grow for growth’s sake.

There is a warm, Texan sensibility to the culture of the London office. From the start of your experience at V&E you will have opportunities to work on high-profile matters, from a variety of practice areas, in a friendly and inclusive environment where the lawyers want to help you learn and succeed. It is a culture that houses extremely high performers who have a very down-to-earth way of getting things done, which I believe is rare to find in a top tier Firm.

Through our graduate recruitment process we actively seek prospective trainees who exhibit both collegiate and entrepreneurial behaviours. We are looking to identify candidates with an ambition to work for V&E and to get their hands on challenging and meaningful work, substantiated in their application forms and interviews not only with evidence of academic excellence but also of the work experience and extra-curricular activities they have sought out to date.

Our future trainees are almost always selected from the pool of participants who complete a vacation scheme with us. It is important to us that you, and we, have the opportunity to trial working together. The week with us is a genuine insight into what you could expect to experience during your two years training here. From client led tasks such as research projects, drafting documents, participating in internal strategy discussions with lawyers working on deals and cases, joining calls with clients and opposing counsel and attending meetings with clients in person, to the insights you will be given on the mentoring, support and infrastructure the firm provides its lawyers to ensure they thrive, you will walk away from a week with us confident as to whether this is the right fit for you, and we will have a pretty good idea if you are a good fit for us too!

Our strategy for your success is simple, right from day one you will be challenged to reach your potential, supported to develop your skills and to build strong relationships with colleagues and clients, and we will reward you for your commitment to excellence. There is an genuine opportunity here for you to take ownership of your career and that is what we expect. To integrate with V&E’s entrepreneurial culture, you should crave to be in the driving seat whilst remaining perpetually inquisitive and eager to absorb the navigation offered by the Firm.

If what you have read here resonates and you are excited about the prospect of becoming a V&E trainee, with a good story to tell us as to why that is the case, I very much look forward to receiving your application.
Practice Groups

Our London office advises on matters in the following practice areas. There is a strong focus on work originated in the London office, albeit with a frequent need for cross office engagement given the cross border nature of almost everything we do.

M&A transactions, Including Private Equity and Special Situations

Our London M&A team advise private equity funds, special situations investors and other alternative capital investors in their cross border equity investments across a range of industries. Recent experience has involved financial asset and NPL acquisitions and investments in the renewable energy and infrastructure industries, with a particular focus on telecommunications. The team has considerable expertise in relation to investments across continental Europe, and includes lawyers who are qualified in France and Spain, as well as lawyers who speak Spanish, German, Italian and French.

Capital Markets

The capital markets team advise both banks and sponsors/corporates on a wide range of capital market’s issuance. They operate across a range of sectors, with a market leading position in relation to oil and gas high-yield offerings and other offerings in the natural resources and infrastructure sectors. Our London team has represented both the issuers and underwriters in high-yield debt offerings since the inception of the high-yield market, with more than 135 high-yield debt offerings (with a total transactional value exceeding US$70.3 billion) completed in the last five years.

Energy Transactions and Projects

Our London energy team has a global practice, with particular experience in advising on energy transactions and projects across Africa, the middle East, Latin America and central Asia. The practice advises on the construction, development and financing of major projects around the world, many such projects are in the energy sector, and in particular the downstream and petrochemicals sector. This area of the practice has a particular specialism advising state-owned companies including State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic and Uzbekneftegaz, and has a market-leading position in the CIS region. The team also has a market-leading position advising on energy M&A activity across the globe. The majority of the team’s M&A work relates to upstream projects, but they also have experience in relation to power, downstream, midstream and oilfield services transactions. Globally, V&E has advised on more energy M&A transactions (by deal count and value) than any other law firm since 2005, according to Mergermarket®.

Finance

Our London finance practice advises private equity funds, special situations investors and other alternative capital providers on a wide range of cross border finance transactions. We have particular experience in real estate finance, asset-backed lending and receivables finance, leverage finance products (across a range of industries) and alternative capital investments. Our team is accustomed to working on transactions spanning a range of jurisdictions and working on highly negotiated, bespoke finance instruments.

Restructuring

Our Restructuring and Reorganisation practice regularly represents debtors, creditors, equity-sponsors, and investors in all aspects of complex corporate restructurings, as well as advising on insolvency-related risks that may affect prospective investments, divestitures, and purchases. We represent clients across multiple industries, including energy, infrastructure, shipping, retail, and healthcare.

Tax

V&E’s London tax team advises on both contentious and non-contentious tax matters, with a particular specialism in advising private equity sponsors on their investments in a range of industries and on investments by PE, corporates and state owned companies into energy investments across the globe. Our tax team regularly advises on cross-border transactions, involving jurisdictions across Europe, central Asia and Africa.

Dispute Resolution, Including International Arbitration and Construction

Our disputes team advises a range of clients on complex arbitration proceedings, including investment treaty arbitration, commercial litigation and construction matters (both contentious and non-contentious). Consistently recognized by Global Arbitration Review’s GAR 100 (2008-2018) as a leading international arbitration firm, V&E’s International Dispute Resolution & Arbitration (IDR) practice is distinguished by a depth and breadth of experience that few firms can match. In addition, the team are renowned for its experience in the construction and energy industries, and has a dedicated construction and engineering team, unlike many of its peer firms. The construction practice is particularly well-known for its representation of the Panama Canal Authority in their multi-billion dollar arbitrations concerning the Expansion of the Panama Canal.

Employment

Vinson & Elkins’ London office has an employment practice that advises clients from around the world on UK, U.S. and international employment matters. We assist businesses with cross-border transactions, managing legal issues at all stages of the employment relationship from hiring to termination, providing advice on compliance with local laws and handling employment disputes.

Where Energy Is Just the Beginning
Eligibility

Open Day 2021: our 2021 Open Day is tailored for students who plan to apply for a vacation scheme in 2022; which typically means we invite first year law students and penultimate year non-law students. Beyond this, to be eligible for the Open Day we require that you have at least AAB at A-Level (or equivalent).

Vacation Scheme 2021: to be eligible for the 2021 Vacation Scheme, you would need to be ready to commence a training contract in September 2023 (having completed all required studies) and otherwise be eligible for a training contract. An application for a vacation scheme in 2021, creates an automatic application for a training contract commencing in 2023.

Training Contract 2023: in applying for training contracts, please be aware that we give preference to those candidates who have carried out a vacation placement with us. In addition, we require students to achieve at least a 2:1 degree and hold at least AAB at A-Level (or equivalent). We are looking for trainees with sound commercial awareness, rounded personalities and with the ability to think creatively. A need for common sense and a willingness to take the initiative is essential for trainees at V&E.

Compensation

V&E provides funding for the GDL and LPC courses. In addition, we offer:

- Maintenance grant of £8,000 p.a. for each of the LPC and GDL, commenced after the date of any training contract offer.
- First year trainee salary: £50,000 (2020)
- Second year trainee salary: £55,000 (2020)
- NQ salary: £147,500 (2020)
- Benefits: other benefits include: medical insurance, dental insurance, travel insurance, life insurance, Simply Health cash plan, subsidised gym membership, access to private GPs, employee assistance programme, pension, cycle scheme and interest-free season ticket loan.
Key Dates

2021 Vacation placement applications open:

1 October 2020 –
15 January 2021

2021 Open Day
(for first year law students or penultimate year non-law students):
Spring 2021

2021 Open Day applications open:

1 November 2020 –
5 February 2021

2023 Training Contract applications open:

18 January 2021 –
30 June 2021

Vacation placements:

June – August 2021
(1 week placements)
Meet the Team

Grace Oyegbile
Vacation Scheme Summer 2018, Training Contract 2020 - 2022

In the final year of my law degree, I struggled to find a firm which I felt would not only offer me the high quality of training I desired, but also reflect the values that are important to me. I chose to apply to Vinson & Elkins because of their approach to training and the size of their trainee intake. I also met the firm’s trainees prior to applying and received an excellent endorsement on the culture of the firm.

The structure of the vacation scheme at V&E provides students with a real insight into the life of a trainee solicitor at the firm. It consists of a number of one-week placements with 2-4 students per week. I really enjoyed this structure because I was able to gain greater exposure to the firm and build personal relationships. At the start of the week, I was assigned a trainee buddy, who introduced me to everyone around the office and helped me understand the day-to-day role of a trainee. Having a familiar face around the office was great as I felt I could ask all the questions I might not want to ask an associate/partner.

The V&E vacation scheme stood out to me for several reasons. Firstly, I was able to participate in real client work, including conducting research for a client, drafting memos and amending documents. I also sat with a partner in Energy Transactions and Projects. I observed how knowledgeable the partner was about their client’s business and the close attention to detail when I sat in on various of his client calls. The non-rotational structure of the firm’s scheme meant that, to get work, I was encouraged to interact with other lawyers, knocking on doors and offering my help. This gave me the opportunity to complete work for different departments across the firm.

Secondly, as a student from a black ethnic background, it was important to me that the firm I trained at not only had a diverse culture but also an inclusive one. During my placement at V&E I felt at ease and was able to be myself. Everyone was approachable, making time to explain things to me and offered their support. Although there was no formal social or networking event, I found that during the week I got to know everyone rather quickly, having been invited to several coffee breaks and lunches!

Freddie Wright,
Associate, M&A
Vacation Scheme Summer 2016, Training Contract 2018 - 2020

Looking back over my two year training contract at V&E, I cannot overstate how well it has prepared me for life as a newly qualified lawyer at the firm. Structurally, the training contract is unique in being arranged as a fixed seat “rotational” contract in its first year and a floating seat “non-rotational” contract in its second year. To explain by way of example, I sat in the M&A and capital markets (MACM) group in my first six months and the complex commercial litigation (CCL) group in my second six
months at the firm. During these seats I would primarily work for the group in which I was sitting, which allowed me to immerse myself fully in the group’s work and to really get to know my colleagues. Throughout this time, I improved my work product and thought processes through both formal feedback at bi-annual reviews and an initial informal review after three months at the firm. I then moved into my third seat in the finance group. As this seat took place during the non-rotational part of the training contract, I was able to work closely with the finance group while seeking out additional work from the MACM group. I built up a solid grounding in finance knowledge learning from Emilie Stewart, with whom I shared an office (and who also trained at the firm), while being part of a MACM team acting for a leading private equity firm as it exited one of its most significant and successful infrastructure investments in Europe. I continued to be involved in deals for the MACM group as I moved into my fourth seat, in the energy, transactions and projects (ETP) team. The experience I had gained during the previous eighteen months was put to good use in assisting the ETP team with their M&A transactions.

Due to the size of the trainee intake (now 6) and the size of the London office, responsibility finds you very quickly at V&E. In particular, during the second year of my training contract, I had to manage the expectations of working with different deal teams within the same group and working across different groups. As with most of the training at V&E, I learned to manage the sharp increase in responsibility that comes with learning “on the job”. Whilst challenging at first, I found it vastly more rewarding to go through difficult periods of hard work, managing competing expectations and “plate spinning”, as the experience has prepared me for the step up to junior associate. In reality, if you are up to the task, you will be given the same level of work and responsibility as a junior associate while still being a trainee.

The culture in the London office of V&E is friendly and collegiate, which is reflective of the culture of the firm globally. I have witnessed the benefits of this positive culture first hand during the current working from home policy implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic. Deal teams regularly check on my progress and virtual Friday drinks and quizzes have been a welcome break in these uncertain times. It has been a pleasure to be a trainee at V&E, and I very much look forward to seeing what life as a junior associate at the firm has in store.

Francesca Gray, Associate, M&A
Vacation Scheme Summer 2015
Training Contract 2017 - 2019

I applied to V&E because I wanted to train at a firm with a strong global presence and an international book of deals. As a trainee and as an associate, the international nature of my work has certainly lived up to expectations. To date, I have not worked on a single deal that does not have a foreign element to it. In fact, it is very common to be part of a deal team that is comprised of V&E lawyers from V&E offices around the world. I have also worked on a number of deals where we have teamed up with local expert counsel (in Gabon, Thailand and Puerto Rico for example) – so this should give you a flavour for the type of interesting markets we do work in! One particular deal of note involved a transfer of businesses, real estate sites and employees across 72 jurisdictions.

For me, another selling point for V&E was the opportunity to spend time working abroad. I spent 6 months of my training contract in the Houston office, and there was no formal application process for my secondment. International secondments are definitely encouraged at V&E so once I made it known that this was something I wanted to do, the training partner worked closely with the team in Houston to make it happen. My secondment to Houston was an invaluable experience (not least because my secondment coincided with the Houston rodeo!) I was able to meet and build relationships with a number of lawyers in our Houston office, many of whom I continue to work with today. Working from the Houston office exposed me to different types of deals and markets that I would not have encountered in the London office. One example is an M&A transaction concerning oil and gas assets in Alaska.

The smaller intake of trainees at V&E means that you are not just a cog in a wheel. Trainees are afforded a great deal of responsibility and are a genuine part of any deal team. This has been a steep learning curve, but ultimately has been key to my successful transition to practicing as a qualified junior lawyer.
At V&E, our inclusion commitment starts with our Chairman, Mark Kelly and Managing Partner, Scott Wolfe, who oversee our firm-wide diversity and inclusion initiatives. I am one of the Partners who hold an office lead role for a number of the firm’s diversity initiatives to ensure participation and progress in London, as I believe strongly in the work we are doing in the effort to achieve equality — inclusive of diverse interests, backgrounds, perspectives, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, religion, and physical ability.

We recognise that being a more diverse firm with a truly inclusive culture will help drive our long-term success, both in retaining our top talent and in serving our clients’ needs. We have made most progress in London with our entry level trainee recruitment over recent years, and we want our partnership to one day look like our incoming trainee cohorts, but that is not achievable overnight. We are committed to sustaining our focus on diversity and, in particular, the retention of our diverse lawyers and to do so we must ensure our initiatives permeate our structure, policies, and programmes.

As a trainee in London you have access to, and the opportunity to be involved in, the majority of our programming. We have an active Diversity Council you could join who are responsible for the running of our annual diversity focused events, our Schools outreach mentoring programme (launching in the autumn of 2020) and our book club which is focused on thought provoking texts designed to educate and promote frank and honest discussions with colleagues. I also co-chair the Women’s Initiative in London which works to create and sustain a variety of programmes that support the recruitment and retention of our women lawyers, nurture their development, and promote their advancement to all levels of leadership within the Firm. The initiative benefits all of our lawyers as the programming includes business development training, mentoring programs, and family-friendly initiatives. Other V&E diversity initiatives include our LGBTQ+ alliance and our new parent mentoring programme which have both seen a rise in members in our London office.

We are determined to continue our efforts with our entry level recruitment. Our participation in diversity-focused career fairs and recruiting programmes allows us to identify top notch legal talent. We hope you too will make the time in your schedules to attend and look forward to meeting you, even if only in a virtual forum this year!
Pro bono initiatives are a tangible way to connect with the human side of the practice of law and to apply our experience in supporting our communities. At V&E, our lawyers are guided by the principle that pro bono clients — like all of our clients — should be fully and effectively represented. As a result, we devote significant time and resource to the legal needs of individuals and organisations that cannot afford representation.

Our pro bono work is sourced by lawyers interested in specific issues. From senior partners through to trainees, we donate our guidance, skills and time to these projects. The long tradition of pro bono service at V&E has become a broad and diverse practice area with, on average, 30,000 hours plus of pro bono legal service being provided each year by our lawyers.

Lawyers in the London office get involved in a wide variety of initiatives including (among other things) projects for Trust Law, working with NGOs and charities on (often cross-jurisdictional) matters and representing litigants in person in Court of Appeal proceedings, through the RCJ Advice centre, and have recently been:

- representing a charitable foundation for the promotion of history, language and culture in a force majeure dispute with a hospitality venue related to Covid-19;
- working with 10x10 Philanthropy (a live crowdfunding charity which matches young philanthropists and volunteers with grassroots charities) to formally establish its UK operations, including assisting them with incorporation of a UK company limited by guarantee, registration with the Charity Commission and registration for gift aid with HMRC;
- assisting World Medical Fund, a UK charity which brings healthcare and health education to children and the wider rural communities of Malawi, with certain employment and contractual matters; and
- working with Working Families, a UK charity which supports individuals by providing advice on a variety of employment issues (and more specifically, in 2020, on the impact of COVID-19 on employment rights).

Visit Our Firm Initiatives Pages

https://www.velaw.com/about-us/womens-initiative/
https://www.velaw.com/about-us/diversity-inclusion/
Given our U.S. heritage, we aim to treat our trainees as simply the most junior members of client and deal teams, giving them direct experience of international quality work while providing a safe environment in which to learn.

- Alex Msimang,
  Partner ETP and London office Managing Partner
The Graduate Recruitment Team

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Graduate Recruitment Website:
https://www.velaw.com/careers/london-graduate-recruitment/