



# Wilson Nesbitt

## Audience questions | Trainee Solicitor Scheme Open Day Webinar

Wed 26 Jan 2022, 5.30pm

### **Drew, what would you say makes our firm unique?**

*We are very good at what we do. We know the work inside out- but every firm will tell you that! The bit that probably is more soft and woolly- and the element that you are probably looking for in a firm to join is - what's the team culture I'm joining? What's the relationship between the Trainees, your peer group, the group of friends you make as you progress through the firm. I hope you've heard from Izabela, Louise and Daniel that there's a strong group mentality, that you will get to meet, get to know, as you progress your career. In terms of the firm's culture we stand behind four main values; Excellence, Innovation, Collaboration and Respect. Innovation; ask a question, always find a way. Excellence; look at yourself and do the best you can. Respect & Collaboration; always think about the others in the group, work with the others. You can achieve one thing on your own, we can always achieve more in a group. So when you're looking for a firm, you're looking for one that's really offering the full experience. You're looking for one that has the right teams and working culture- and I think we are unique in that way.*

### **Daniel, Where do you see yourself in five years?**

*I always get that question. At the minute I see myself doing the same sort of work. I would see myself having gained a lot more experience in what I'm doing, and probably having completed further education courses, which I'm actively talking about With Lenore (Partner) the moment in terms of getting accredited and doing credit expert education courses in the area and practising it, as well as open five years old. gave my Advanced Advocacy as well. And for those who don't know, a solicitor only has rights of audience in the County Courts, not the Masters court, you can't speak in the high court, you have to have a barrister. Unless you're an Advanced Avocate, then you can speak in all the courts in Northern Ireland, which I hope to achieve in the long term.*

**Izabela, what should I include in my application to help make it stand out from the others?**

*That's a good question. I think as most of you probably have a degree, and maybe your grades will be pretty similar, so to really stand out, you have to tell us more about yourself and your past work experience. The first advice is to tell us about yourself- what your hobbies are, we want to know what you're going to be like as a person, how you're going to fit in the team, etc. And then talk about work experience. Do not leave out your part time jobs, because you think they have nothing to do law. And as Louise mentioned earlier, her past work experience was not legal at all, but it obviously stands out. It transferred all types of different skills. So if you're dealing with clients, let's say in retail, it's obviously going to help you deal with your clients in the legal sector, so do put that in. Bring these valuable life skills to the table, as this is what I think the Partners are going to be looking for. It's very important to include 'yourself' in your application and put forward your personality.*

**Louise, you are the most recent Trainee, how would you rate the hands-on experience you received in comparison to external peers' experience received?**

*I know from chatting to others at the Institute, who had training contracts with other firms that they certainly didn't appear to have the same hands on case management experience that I received during my training contract. I got to work alongside Senior Partners, Senior Associates, Senior Solicitors in handling the day-to-day cases, speaking to clients, and also attending court. I got to learn how the court operates because as somebody coming straight out of university or from a different background, it can be very daunting to suddenly find yourself before court. It's an invaluable experience that you gain at Wilson Nesbitt. They certainly listen to the experience that you want to gain. There is always the decision as to whether or not you want to go into what we call 'contentious' or 'non contentious' work. That's something to consider before you apply.*

**Drew, has Wilson Nesbitt recently rebranded?**

*We have, the previous images/ logos we had were from the 1990s! We are probably one of the best known firms in Northern Ireland- and maybe specifically known for that shade of blue logo!*

*Recently though, we wanted to update this as we felt it didn't really fit with the type of clients that we had. We felt that we needed to reflect the change- in their image and how we fit together. Hopefully this rebrand will last for the next 30 years.*

*We previously did lots of advertising between radio ads, and we have had advertisements at Ravenhill (Ulster Rugby). We just felt that we needed an image that reflected us, and it was clean, fresh and reflected our culture, who we are and who we want to be. I don't know what you think, but I hope it does cover all of those things.*

**Does Wilson Nesbitt offer remote training due to Covid?**

*Everyone's aware that the pandemic threw up many, many challenges for businesses and also universities. And there's two elements to the training contract that we've discussed, which is the in- office, part of the training contract and then also actually attending at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies at Queen's University. So just to clarify that point, Queen's University while I was completing my training contract, operated remotely as of March 2020, and that was due to Lockdown. Wilson Nesbitt, as I highlighted before, adapted very, very quickly to the pandemic and I was fortunate in that I did not miss out on any time in the office. I did come in and attend court remotely. The core services within Northern Ireland have changed due to the pandemic, but there's still the resources within Wilson Nesbitt to attend Court remotely and also consult with clients remotely via Zoom as many businesses are doing during the pandemic. So yes, you will be in the office gaining hands-on experience- that's very much still the case.*

**Daniel, would you say it is important to get experience as a paralegal with Wilson Nesbitt before applying for a training contract? And how competitive is the contract?**

*That's a good question. I suppose the answer is that any paralegal experience is going to be useful no matter what because, you know, it gives you that opportunity to prove your top performance, particularly in Wilson Nesbitt. You get so many opportunities, you get quite a lot of responsibility quite early on your career, in terms of client, contact, and have /take on quite complicated matters, obviously, with the assistance of a solicitor or a partner and that's really invaluable for gaining soft skills and client management, client care, being able to communicate well effectively with clients. So it's very, very useful to have paralegal experience. It's not entirely, you know, required. It certainly is competitive. You know, there's normally five contracts that are offered. There's normally more applicants than five. So it's definitely a competitive process.*

**Would you say that Wilson Nesbitt promotes a good life work balance?**

*Yes, it does. And there's certainly an element of 'you have to work hard' because this profession is competitive. It's challenging, but it's also very, very rewarding. But within the firm, we've had weeks where we've focused on wellbeing, and there's been Pilates classes, there's been team building exercises, so the firm places a great emphasis on team building and ensuring that staff are also taking time off to have that work life balance.*

*You do have to work hard to obviously make sure your clients are happy and you know, the deals go through and have to go through. But it's not a matter of working your Saturday, Sunday, and all the hours of the day. You do your job during the day and you're working office hours, and you do then have the time to obviously go home, go to the gym, go see your family. So I think that the balance is quite good. And as we said, we do have team Wellbeing Weeks, and the Partners do check in with you. Drew (Partner) quite often asks me how I am, you know, to make sure I'm not too busy to make sure I go home and see my family, I actually have some time off and it's not just all work. So definitely I would agree, I think the work life balance is great.*

*If I could just build on what Louise and Izabela said there as well, I completely agree. One thing that Louise really highlighted there is that this is a competitive profession and you know, it's not necessarily the firm that puts pressure on you, you get pressure from clients, and Louise would be aware of this as well, judges can put a lot of pressure on you too. So just bear that in mind as well, that the work life balance is great in the firm, but it's not the firm saying you need to stay here. There are times when the work just requires you to stay an extra hour or so to finish it off, to make sure that submission or report is in on time, or that a completion goes through the next day. But, you know, if you're getting all your hours down, that doesn't mean that you can't finish early one day, or you have to come in at the weekend. That's not a requirement.*

*There's a lot of trust. I mean, everyone in our organisation has worked incredibly hard, is incredibly diligent at what they do, knows their stuff and wants to do the best for their client. I think that it's a case of actually, okay, let's look at work we've got to do and let's balance that with home. One thing I've learned in 15 years is that it is a marathon not a sprint. You can work incredibly hard very quickly, and you can burn out very quickly, and that's not really what we're about. So yeah, we think a good work-life balance is very, very important.*

**In the litigation sector, is this plaintiff or defence litigation? Do you deal with civil, commercial or criminal litigation?**

*We don't do much defence litigation. Sorry, we do, I'm thinking more of PI there! We do a lot of plaintiff litigation, and PI obviously we act in terms of civil commercial litigation. We act for both claimants and defendants. We also do criminal litigation as well. So it's really, there's a broad base there, a broad base of clients from banks through to real estate companies, in terms of we do work on construction disputes. But we also act on the client's side, matrimonial disputes work, criminal disputes work with the likes of Daniel's work as well. So there's, I think that came through from Rachel, so if Rachel's interested, there's a broad base of work there for her to get experience of.*

**As a trainee solicitor what does your average day consist of and how long is a day within the office typically?**

*And generally, well, I'm actually an early bird, so I'd usually be in the office, probably just before eight o'clock in the morning, but that's not expected! And it's, it's a normal working day and nine to five and our office closes one to two for lunch which is pretty standard across the legal profession. Your average day is hard to describe because every day is different. It depends what cases are on your desk. It depends what client calls and what issue you need to tackle on that particular day. For me, it was certainly fast paced, the family departments, in particular children's order proceedings is very, very much a day to day job. You have to take your clients instructions, you will be contacting them via telephone, maybe via zoom, you'd be discussing their instructions with a barrister who's also on the case that you've instructed. And you could also then be drafting court pleadings. You could be attending court, and you and you could be practising your advocacy in that manner. So there's a lot of opportunity within the day to do various things. It's not a case of you are given one task, and that's your task. It is that you get the opportunity to do drafting, to attend court*

*if that's what your department does. So it's not, I would never describe it as an average day, or typical. It's just what this profession is all about, it's challenging, and it changes day to day.*

**What advice do you have for applicants who have struggled to secure legal experience opportunities as a result of the pandemic, mainly due to remote working and limited legal internship opportunities?**

*I think I would take that back to what Izabela said earlier about your application. Try and focus, you know, if you haven't had that opportunity to have as much legal experience as maybe some other applicants, try and make sure that you build up on what other things you have done. You know, you could have a hobby that has plenty of transferable skills that could help you be a good lawyer. You know, a good lawyer is all about being able to serve your clients effectively, being able to argue your clients facts point effectively and advocate for them. It's all about attention to detail. Also having some commercial awareness, you know, if you've had any sort of work in any other business, that's going to be helpful to you because at the end of the day, this is a business and you're there to help your clients but you're also there to work with the business and to help the business make money so it can invest in better services, to provide better work for your clients. So if you don't have a lot of legal experience, then just try to, you know, add in more information about the other things that you've done and highlight the skills that you have.*

**What are the key qualities Wilson Nesbitt looks for in their trainees?**

*Hard work, efficiency, cultural fit, commercial awareness. All of which radiate through from all of you (directed to the panel) who clearly have this in buckets. You've got to have that self start, you've got to be able to get out of bed. You've got to be able to drive for the client, you've got to be client focused. You've got to put the client first, it is about commercial awareness as Daniel said, so i'll be honest it's a high bar. We want the best trainees, we want everything an organisation is focused on being, on being as good as we can be. So you've a high bar to get over. It's that hard work, that ambition, that cultural fit, that commercial awareness, and that client focus. All of those things. Not to scare anyone!*

**Do you have to secure a training contract before embarking on an LPC?**

*Just to be clear, this is in relation to qualifying within Northern Ireland. So the LPC is in relation to qualifying in England and Wales, as far as I'm aware. To qualify in Northern Ireland and enter the Institute of Professional legal studies, you do need to obtain a training contract. Your position in the Institute will be conditional on and if you haven't graduated already, obviously, getting the correct mark or the mark needed to attend. And then it will also be conditional on that you have a training contract with a firm within Northern Ireland to complete your in- office training during the course of your training contract.*

**What advice would you give for the interview stage? How many panellists would there usually be?**

*I actually mentioned that a wee bit already on this when chatting about myself. Firstly, do your research about the company, to see what we are like. You know, what sectors we deal with, and sort of deals we're currently working on, just to see how you would fit in with the firm. And the question will always come up; 'Why Wilson Nesbitt?' so it'd be good for you to know what we're doing, and why you're applying here.*

*As far as I can remember, I had two panellists for my interview. So that might be different, maybe three this year, asking the questions. And they're usually the partners in the firm.*

### **How many trainee solicitors does Wilson Nesbitt take on each year?**

*That depends on how many applicants are successful, there are five training contracts available at Wilson Nesbitt.*

### **For a training contract do you have to achieve a 2:1?**

*I don't believe so. You need to secure a place within the Institute of Professional Legal Studies, and that's very, very much following on from the entrance exam that you need to take at Queen's University. And then once you secure that place, and you are successful in getting a training contract, that's when you would undertake and commence that.*

### **Last Tips, Advice and Guidance for your Application?**

*What are the next steps, tips and tricks that you should really be thinking about when you're going to apply? From our perspective, why apply to us? ;*

*We're serious about our work, and we really value our clients. We're very friendly and have a strong team culture. We collaborate, we work, we support each other. We're a leading, award-winning law firm. We're not afraid to offer experience to our trainees. We're not afraid to actually let people have real hands-on experience. If you're taking three top tips away from this session, I think those are probably my top three.*

*After this, we'll send out to everyone who's joined and attended, a copy of the Q & A's that we covered today, by email for your reference. We'll also send you a copy of our team culture so you can see what it's really like to be part of the Wilson Nesbitt team. And hopefully, these items will help you in your process because I know it can be quite daunting, but obviously anything we can do to help smooth this over, we will.*

*In terms of the process- deadlines; just take note the application closes at 10am on Monday 7th February. The shortlisting will commence the rest of that week. Then we'll be letting people know via the call for the interview will be from 14th or 15th of February.*

*At that stage, there'll be some technical testing, looking at who fits our culture. That's all about making sure we get the right people through into our organisation. The interviews will*

*happen week commencing the 21st Feb as the team said. They'll be at the process there, again, all designed to make sure that we get the correct people for the organisation. Hopefully that fits with what you expect.*

*What do some people do wrong? Go through your application for typos, watch your time. What's the deadline? Make sure you submit early, just so that you can't miss it. You don't want to be barred from actually being in the process because you've done a great application, but you haven't gotten there. Save as you go. If there's one thing you learn as a lawyer very quickly is when you are preparing a document, make sure you save as you go because doing it twice is a real, real pain.*

*When you get into the application form, there's a couple of key questions there that I'd like to point out; ones based on commercial awareness. 'Tell us at a time when you've been commercially aware'. Just to give everyone who's attended an inside tip, to me, Commercial Awareness is in terms of legal sector, is knowing you work for a business. Daniels touched on it. We put our clients first, we focus, we deliver, we're advising on a service, but it's a business. So you've got your budget, you've got your skill, you got your time recorded, all of those things. So make sure, when you're answering that question of commercial awareness, you're focusing on experiences around that.*

*The other question is the one on Team Culture and how you fit into this culture. We just mentioned before what we're looking for in terms of culture. How do we describe our culture?; Excellence, innovation, collaboration, and respect. When you are going through it, let us have an example of how you fit in line with that.*

*Hopefully you got a real feel for our organisation, what we do and what we strive to achieve. I'll wish you at this stage best of luck to all the applicants and thank you for joining today. If you have any questions going forward, feel free to send through questions and we'll come back to you. We look forward to receiving your application and seeing you at the interview. Thank you folks.*