

C L I F F O R D
C H A N C E

‘The Real Contract’

Laura Yeates is the Head of Early Talent at Clifford Chance and has been with the firm since 2006. She is also Co-Chair of the Clifford Chance UK Inclusion Committee.

‘The Real Contract’ arose out of a conversation about what the Clifford Chance Training Contract is really like. It’s easy to imagine life as a lawyer in a very idyllic, glossy way – but the real truth is, whilst it’s a career that’s highly fulfilling, it’s also one that is deeply challenging.

We had to ask ourselves: how could we prepare future trainees for both the rewards and the rigours of a Training Contract? What if we asked our people about the frank, unfiltered reality – how are they able to consistently perform to the highest standards throughout their Training Contract and also thrive and flourish? What motivates them? What is it that inspires them to keep pushing when they encounter new challenges? What do they reflect upon in their moments of triumph?

And so ‘The Real Contract’ was born. ‘The Real Contract’ stands for the commitments and promises a trainee makes, not to others, but to themselves. It is the ethos that they hold themselves to, and the motivation that drives them to become exceptional – no matter how difficult the journey.

Across the many people we spoke to in the making of this project, late nights, fast-paced work, and self-doubt all made their appearances; but even more so did the little wins, with

everyone remembering significant moments that make the hard work worth it. A word of praise in an email; a nod of recognition from a supervisor; building trust with a client; these were the things that stood tall in our subjects’ memories, even more so than deals won or contracts signed.

But most of all, one key theme stood out among the rest: that of community. Every single person highlighted the support network at Clifford Chance as one of the key factors in their success, providing strength, solidarity, and kinship throughout their careers. It is a humbling and touching realisation – to understand the power we all hold to give someone the strength to exceed even their own expectations and reach their full potential.

Throughout this project, we’ve been extremely lucky to speak to a variety of colleagues ranging from Partners to trainees who granted us an unfiltered glimpse into their innermost thoughts and experiences, for which we are exceptionally grateful. Without their honesty and trust, we wouldn’t have been able to create this project, which we hope will make a real difference to the next generations of trainees stepping into the profession. So, to those people – thank you.

And, to those reading this now, welcome. Whether you are a prospective applicant considering Clifford Chance, a young lawyer about to start your Training Contract, or even an established member of our team – we hope this film, booklet, and all the stories contained within give you a glimpse into life during the Training Contract. Just as pressure can be leveraged as a positive tool to create diamonds, the Clifford Chance Training Contract will provide you with the foundation to become a truly exceptional world-class lawyer.





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‘The Real Contract’

“You are about to start your Training Contract at Clifford Chance. And although you know it will be tough... the real contract that you experience will be full of doubt and uncertainty ”

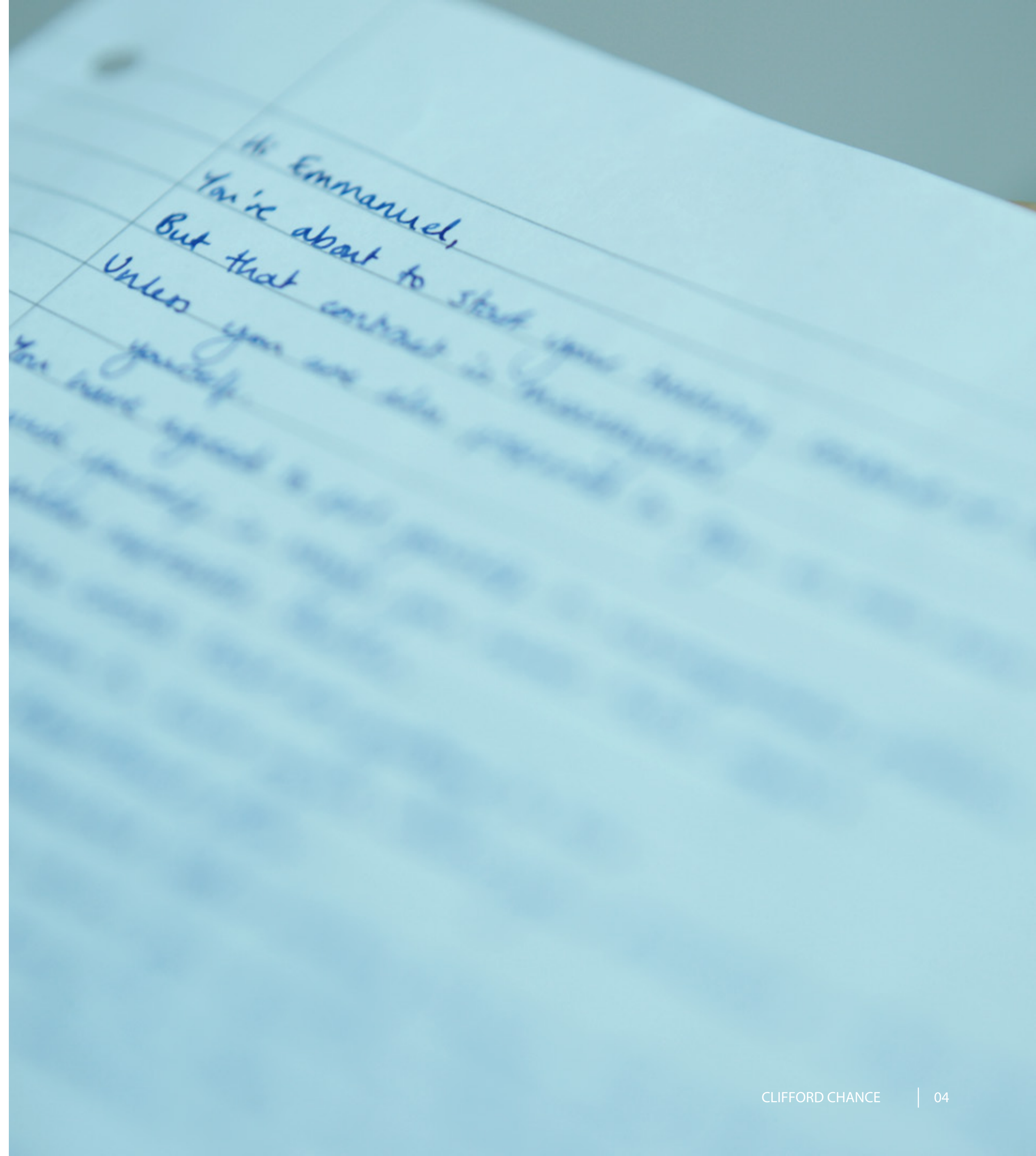
— Maggie

The Clifford Chance Training Contract is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for aspiring lawyers, opening a door to countless opportunities that will allow you to flourish.

But signing your contract is only the beginning. It takes commitment, dedication, and perseverance to complete.

That’s why the ‘real contract’ is not something you sign. The ‘real contract’ is the one you enter into with yourself – the commitment you make at the start of your journey to see it through to the end, and the promises you keep to yourself along the way that drive you to your true potential.

‘The Real Contract’ celebrates what it’s really like to be a lawyer at Clifford Chance. Discover seven real stories from lawyers at different stages of their career as they write a letter to their younger selves reflecting on the start of their legal journey and what ‘The Real Contract’ means to them.





Watch 'The Real Contract'



A portrait of John MacLennan, a man with dark curly hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue V-neck sweater over a white collared shirt. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is dark with faint, handwritten-style text in a light grey color.

John MacLennan

John is a Partner in the Restructuring and Insolvency Group, and has been with Clifford Chance since 1998.

Dear John,

You're about to start your first day at Clifford Chance.

The road to this point has involved rejection and disappointment in equal measure.

It has also required perseverance and a strong belief in yourself to overcome that rejection and disappointment.

But this is just the start. For the next steps you will need to dig deeper still to find new levels of grit and self-belief.

You've entered a world of confidence, polish and fierce intellect. You'll question whether you belong, whether you can do it.

There will be times you'll feel isolated and see no end, no way through the work.

You'll compare yourself to others and experience failure.

At times you'll feel as though you are being pushed beyond your limits. And at those times you will be reached with self-doubt.

But you are absolutely not alone.

Clifford Chance is about its people. You are in it together with those you start with on day one.

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And at those times you will be racked with self-doubt.

But you are absolutely not alone.

Clifford Chance is about its people.

You are in it together with those who you start with on day one.

You are in it together with your team and colleagues from around the firm, around the world who will become your friends.

Even in the hardest moments, they will be there for you. Every step of the way.

To provide you with support and advice and to give you confidence.

With perseverance you will realise that you can do it, that you do belong here.

I promise, it will all be worth it. With this confidence you will succeed.

You'll become a leader clients trust and respect.

You'll work on cases with real world implications, which help people, which save jobs and livelihoods. You'll have opportunities beyond the law to meet and work with people in spheres that you've never imagined.

You'll also be able to return this confidence to others. To give them the self-belief they might need and certainly deserve.

Remember you're surrounded by people that understand what you're going through. Build your network. Make connections. And give back.

It's not easy.

But that's why you'll love it so much.

And you will, perhaps most importantly of all, enjoy it.

Best,
John

“This is just the start. For the next step, you will need to dig deeper still to find new levels of grit and self-belief.”

John’s Story

WATCH NOW ▶

My journey at Clifford Chance began with a slightly different experience of the Training Contract, as I had already been practicing as a barrister in Crime and Contract law. However, it had always been my ambition to work in a commercial legal environment in a world-leading firm. Due to my prior legal experience, when I joined Clifford Chance, I undertook a one-year Training Contract in two different seats.

Even though I already had experience in the industry, beginning the Training Contract was still daunting. Much of what I was doing was new to me, and very different to what I had done before. There have certainly been a number of times I found myself confronted with tasks that were really challenging, especially when Partners pushed me to take the lead for the first time and take on the responsibility of making decisions.

“At times you’ll feel as though you are being pushed beyond your limits. And at those times you’ll be racked with self-doubt.”

There was one Partner in particular who really felt like a mentor to me, who would push me further or expect more of me than perhaps the other people around me did. It felt overwhelming – all-consuming, even – at the time, but looking back now, I can see with hindsight that they wanted me to take the next step so I could grow and develop into the role. Now I’m grateful for that, because you can’t progress without taking on and learning from those challenges.

Now that I’m in a position where I can be that mentor to the new generation of lawyers, I really find joy in giving them those same opportunities to take on new responsibilities and rise to new challenges. I feel incredibly lucky to be able to work with so many bright and engaged young lawyers – one of the things that definitely stands out about the new generation is just how enthusiastic and knowledgeable they are. I certainly wasn’t as sophisticated or savvy when I was in their position! But their enthusiasm really is infectious, and I feel truly privileged to be part of their journey.

“You’ll also be able to return this confidence to others. To give them the self-belief they might need, and certainly deserve.”

One of the things I try to pass on to my mentees is that it’s okay to fail. What really matters is how you deal with that failure – showing that you know how to handle it is so much more valuable than trying to be perfect and to fixate on not making any mistakes at all. The more challenges you face and the more risks you take, the better quipped you become. And I learn a lot from them in return as well; younger lawyers can bring new perspectives and different ways of doing things that feel really fresh and innovative.

Ultimately, the reason I came to Clifford Chance is because I wanted to work in a team. I enjoyed being a barrister, but it was a solitary role. Clifford Chance is defined by its people, and I think one of the hallmarks of that is the way the team are there for one another. There have been times the job has felt all-consuming and I’ve thought, “there’s no way through this, there’s not enough time, there’s

too much to do” – but every time we’ve gotten through it, and we’ve done it as a team. It can really be quite overwhelming just how special that is – in big ways and small, the people around me have really stepped up when I’ve needed them to, and that’s what marks this firm out as something quite special.

“It’s not easy. But that’s why you’ll love it so much.”

Writing my ‘Real Contract’ was, in a funny way, quite a difficult experience. I genuinely love what I do – I love the challenge, the people, and I find it interesting and exciting – so looking back over the last 20 years and being honest with myself about what I did find difficult was actually quite challenging. There is definitely the temptation to look back at it with rose-tinted glasses! But it was nice to remember the greatest moments and the times I succeeded.

That’s why I urge any new trainee reading this to enjoy it! Get involved, meet as many people as you can, say yes to every opportunity, because it enables you to become the best lawyer you can be, and you’ll have some real fun along the way.



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succeed.
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people around you and believe in yourself.
find ways to carve out moments of peace amongst
the chaos.
In time, you'll realise it's normal to feel this
overwhelmed. Everyone feels this way initially
and they're all just doing their best. You don't have to
be perfect, just remember every challenge is an
opportunity.
You might not even realise how far you've come
but all of a sudden you will be the chairperson of
the trainee committee, representing the entire trainees
cohort and speaking in front of partners regularly,
and about to go on international secondment to
the Sydney office for 6 months. You will learn to have
faith in yourself and your abilities. Take every opportunity
that comes your way as a chance to grow even more.

Lucy Johnson

Lucy is a 3rd seat trainee at the Global Financial Markets Practice and has been at the firm since 2021. As well as being the Chair of the Trainee Committee, she is preparing to complete her 4th seat in the Sydney office.



Hi Lucy,

Not long until your training contract at Clifford Chance begins.

Despite all of the hard work you have already put in, it's not time to ease up yet. The next two years will be all about proving to the firm, and to yourself, that you have what it takes to succeed in this industry.

There are going to be months of late nights and cancelled plans.

Sometimes you will sit at your desk and feel as though there is no way that you can complete all the tasks or meet all of the competing expectations.

At times, you will feel completely out of your depth.

You'll feel like your life is being totally consumed.

You're going to feel lonely at the beginning.

You might even ask yourself if you were ever cut out for the job in the first place, or if Clifford Chance have made a complete mistake hiring you.

But they haven't.

The truth is, you're not alone. They want you to succeed.

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In time, you'll realise it's normal to feel this overwhelmed. Everyone feels this way initially and they're all just doing their best. You don't have to be perfect, just remember every challenge is an opportunity.

You might not even realise how far you've come but all of a sudden you will be the chairperson of the trainee committee, representing the entire trainees cohort and speaking in front of partners regularly, and about to go on international secondment to the Sydney office for 6 months. You will learn to have faith in yourself and your abilities. Take every opportunity that comes your way as a chance to grow even more.

Hi Lucy,

Not long until your Training Contract at Clifford Chance begins.

Despite all of the hard work you have already put in, it's not time to ease up yet. The next two years will be all about proving to the firm, and to yourself, that you have what it takes to succeed in this industry.

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Lean on the support networks, learn to trust the people around you and believe in yourself.

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You might not even realise how far you have come but all of a sudden you will be the chairperson of the Trainee Committee, representing the entire trainee cohort and speaking in front of Partners regularly, and about to go on international secondment to the Sydney office for 6 months. You will learn to have faith in yourself and your abilities. Take every opportunity that comes your way as a chance to grow even more as a lawyer and as an individual.

The Training Contract is about to be your biggest challenge yet. But it's going to give you friends, experiences and professional skills that are going to shape you and progress you more than you ever thought. Make the most of it!

Yours,
Lucy

“Lean on the support networks, learn to trust the people around you and believe in yourself.”

Lucy's Story

WATCH NOW ▶

I began my Training Contract during the pandemic, so I spent the first six months working from home. That was really my first obstacle to overcome because I felt very out of my depth; this was my first corporate job and I was doing it at home, by myself, not knowing a single person in my cohort. It was scary! At the time I didn't realise how common that feeling was, and it was probably shared by everyone in my cohort with me.

Looking back at my first few weeks and months, I wish someone had told me I didn't have to be perfect. I put so much pressure on myself – I would think, “how could Clifford Chance want someone like me?” I felt like I had to prove I was worth it, and there was definitely an element of feeling like I was in a two-year-long job interview, constantly being judged. With hindsight, I know that they don't need you to prove anything to them because they've already seen what they need to see. They wouldn't have given you the Training Contract if they didn't see potential in you.

“You might even ask yourself if you were ever even cut out for the job in the first place, or if Clifford Chance have made a complete mistake by hiring you... but they haven't.”

Imposter syndrome was definitely a huge barrier I had to learn to overcome. At Clifford Chance you're working with people who are experts in their field so when you come in as a graduate with little to no experience, you can easily feel like you have nothing to add, but your unique perspective can be really valuable.

It sounds cliché, but the people really are what sets Clifford Chance apart – I have made some of my best friends here, and there's an extensive support network for every new trainee. Because everyone here has been through the same experience and knows what it's like, everyone understands how important it is that the support network is there, because the reality of this job is that it can be lonely sometimes.

Lucy Johnson

There are long nights in the office, and you will have to cancel a lot of plans. Things come in at the last minute and you'll have to let your friends down. I remember there was one week I was closing a synthetic securitisation, and I was in the office until the early hours every day for a week.

“The Training Contract is about to be your biggest challenge yet. But it’s going to give you friends, experiences, and professional skills that are going to shape you and progress you more than you ever thought.”

But strangely enough, I find that the jobs that have been the most stressful or demanded the longest hours are the ones that have brought me the closest friends. When you're working in a team, you're united in the late nights and the tiredness. We all help each other out; co-workers have brought me food, collected parcels for me, and even the smallest gesture like a message checking in can go a long way. Even though you might feel lonely, you're never actually on your own.

I think that's why chairing the Trainee Committee has been a role so close to my heart. It definitely feels like coming full circle, and I'm really grateful to have the opportunity to be the person for others I wish I could have had when I first started.

The advice I give to future trainees is to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Make connections every chance you get, because they will be what gets you through. Take on difficult work, because it will help you grow. And finally, see every challenge as an opportunity!



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Emmanuel Goriola

Emmanuel is a 3rd seat trainee, and has been with Clifford Chance since 2021, including six months with the Madrid office.

Hi Emmanuel

You're about to start your training contract at Clifford Chance.

But that contract is meaningless,

Unless you are also prepared to sign an even more important one with yourself.

You have agreed to put yourself in uncomfortable positions.

To push yourselves in ways you never have before.

To make impossible choices

To sacrifice events that are devastating to miss.

You have chosen to have nights where you are left as the only sign of life on the department floor,

To head home exhausted after working through cold dark nights.

There will be moments where you question everything.

But if you keep pushing through the tough moments and take it day by day

If you force yourself to be consistent. Up at 6am, every morning. No excuses.

Set the necessary boundaries and make use of the support around you,

You will continue to see the fruits of your labour, you will get there.

And you will accomplish things that you didn't even know you were capable of.

In your short career, you've met great people from all over the world,

Ran and managed transactions in Spain,

And helped large commercial deals successfully cross the line.

Be ready for the insane journey you are about to commence,

Because this is only the beginning

Yours sincerely
Emmanuel

Hi Emmanuel,

You're about to start your Training Contract at Clifford Chance.

But that contract is meaningless,

Unless you are also prepared to sign an even more important one with yourself.

You have agreed to put yourself in uncomfortable positions.

To push yourself in ways you never have before.

You'll make impossible choices and sacrifice events that are gutting to miss.

You have chosen to have nights where your presence is the only sign of life on the department floor,

To head home exhausted after working through cold dark nights.

There will be moments where you question everything.

But if you keep pushing through the tough moments and take it day by day.

If you force yourself to be consistent. Up at 6am, every morning. No excuses.

Set the necessary boundaries and make use of the support around you,

You will continue to see the fruits of your labour, you will get there.

And you will accomplish things that you didn't even know you were capable of.

In your short career, you've met great people from all over the world,

Ran and managed transactions in Spanish, and helped large commercial deals successfully cross the line. That's why you chose to be at Clifford Chance. The rewards of working in a team that supports and inspires you each and every day.

Be ready for the insane journey you are about to commence,

Because this is only the beginning...

Yours sincerely

Emmanuel

“You have chosen to have nights where your presence is the only sign of life on the department floor... there will be moments where you question everything.”

Emmanuel’s Story

WATCH NOW ▶

Writing this letter to my past self really made me realise how far I have come since I first started as a trainee. When you first start out, you think you have to please everyone and do every task immediately, but that’s just not humanly possible. As you get more experience and you get more confidence you start to learn what you are capable of, but you also learn your limits. It can be daunting to tell your supervisors that you need more time or support on something, but ultimately, they understand you’re human and they know what you’re going through, so it’s really important to have those honest, frank conversations.

I think that’s what sets Clifford Chance apart – it’s such a strong support network, and people always take the time to chat to me about my weekend and my interests. I think clients can sense that, too – there are a lot of good lawyers in the city, but people come back to Clifford Chance time and time again because they enjoy working with us. I remember after one call, the client asked me what I had planned over the weekend. I told him I was going to a football match, and we actually ended up spending more time talking about football than we did talking about the deal! That was when I realised that no matter how intimidating or important a person seems, they are human too. That was a big turning point for me.

“In your short career, you’ve met great people from all over the world, you’ve run and managed transactions in Spanish, and helped large commercial deals successfully cross the line”

The most important part of my letter is the line about my time in Madrid, and the deals I have helped get across the line. At the end of the day, that’s why I chose Clifford Chance, and managing transactions in Spanish is something I’ve always wanted to do.

I remember there was one particularly hectic week while I was in Madrid during the Christmas period that had me starting early and working late every night. I was the only trainee in that situation, so it was quite a lot of pressure not to let the team down. But we got through it, and at the end of the week, the Partner I was working with mentioned me by name in an email sent out to the entire team commending me on my work – that really meant the world to me. It’s the small things, conversations with friends or a moment of recognition, that make all the hard work worth it.

Emmanuel Goriola

“You will have to make sacrifices, but if you take it one step at a time, those little moments of success and achievement you get at the end make it all worth it.”

But ultimately, the hardest part is all the important things I have had to miss because of work. To start with, my friends and family couldn’t understand why work had to take priority over plans, why I was checking my work phone at 6pm on a Saturday. There have been some events that were really gutting to miss, and I have had to let friends and family down. It’s a tough decision to make – you never want to have to make that phone call or send that text. But I knew what I signed up for, and I knew it would be worth it.

Taking part in ‘The Real Contract’ was a great opportunity to look back and see how much I have changed in the past 15 months. I’ve moved to a new country, learnt entirely new areas of law, and have the confidence to build rapport with clients and senior members of the team. While I know I still have a lot to learn, I’m looking forward to what the future holds.

If I were to give advice to someone about to start at Clifford Chance I would say: first of all, congratulations! Secondly, enjoy it – there are lots of challenges coming your way but also lots of opportunities, so be eager, explore different things, and push yourself. You will have to make sacrifices, but if you take it one step at a time, those little moments of success and achievement you get at the end make it all worth it.



Maggie Zhao

Maggie is a Partner in the Securitisation department, having worked in the Beijing office for two years before moving to London to begin her Training Contract in 2001. She is also part of the Clifford Chance Partnership Council.

Dear Maggie

You are about to start your training Contract at Clifford Chance London.

And although you know it will be tough ...

The real contracts that you experience will be full of doubt and uncertainty.

While you have worked with the firm in China for two years, you have no idea whether being a more 'mature' trainee gives you a better starting point.

You don't know whether you are expected to work at a much higher level than your peers who are mostly fresh out of university and, if so, what that "higher level" means.

You don't know whether you would fit in an all-English environment, being one of a handful of first-generation Chinese trainees, and you are uncertain about where your training Contract will ultimately take you ...

But you should know this contract is more than just a job - your horizon will be expanded beyond what you could ever have imagined.

Yes, your limits will be tested and you are excited, but also apprehensive, about breaking the "bamboo ceiling".

You are leaving your friends and family in

... pays off - and the challenges you faced at the

Dear Maggie,

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The real contract that you experience will be full of doubt and uncertainty.

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You don't know whether you are expected to work at a much higher level than your peers who are mostly fresh out of university and, if so, what that 'higher level' means.

You don't know whether you would fit in an all-English environment, being one of a handful of first-generation Chinese trainees, and you're uncertain about where your Training Contract will ultimately take you...

But you should know this contract is more than just a job – your horizon will be expanded beyond what you could ever have imagined.

Yes, your limits will be tested and you are excited, but also apprehensive, about breaking the 'bamboo ceiling'.

You're leaving your friends and family in China behind, and embarking on a journey, with a one way ticket.

You won't be expecting to close a transaction in your second week, having only a faint idea of what securitisation is.

You won't be expecting the exhaustion that hits you after four consecutive nights working late. You won't be expecting all those visits to the 'slumber room' to become part of your normal routine.

You will realise there is so much more that you don't know, and at times you feel helpless.

You will feel as though you have to work harder than everyone else.

But you will make it through. You are so much more resilient than you realise.

You will not have to do it alone. You will work with amazingly talented and supportive people. And every day your self-belief will grow.

You will experience the exhilaration of pulling together as a team. Together you will make the seemingly impossible possible and see deals you've been a part of make headlines around the world. You will feel invincible after every difficult closing.

You will come to learn that the hard work pays off, and the challenges you faced at the beginning will lay the foundation for you to become a better lawyer and a more rounded, stronger person.

When you're in a tight place that you don't know how to get out of, you'll learn that's ok and you will be able to find the fix.

You will make friends and family for life here. With their support, you will be made a Partner in a global team that you feel privileged to be part of, and to lead.

So hang in there!

Look at what has got you to where you are now, and know you deserve to be here.

You should understand there will be times when you question your choices, when you don't think you can do it, but learning from those hard times, you will excel ultimately.

Love
Maggie

“You will experience the exhilaration of pulling together as a team. Together you will make the seemingly impossible possible, and see deals you’ve been a part of make headlines around the world.”

Maggie’s Story

WATCH NOW ▶

Beginning my Training Contract in London definitely brought mixed feelings. I was excited, but I was also apprehensive – not only was I entering an entirely new legal department, but I was moving to a different country, with a very different culture, and a different language! It was daunting – but I knew I could do well, I knew I was a hard worker, and I had faith in myself.

Because of my experience in the Beijing office, I already had a pretty good idea of what being a trainee would look like. What I hadn’t quite appreciated was the sheer amount or the complexity of the work. I got the impression that, because of my experience in China, people had higher expectations of me than they would have of a typical trainee – and that, coupled with my own very high standards, meant I probably put too much pressure on myself to over-deliver. On top of that, I was one of just a small handful of first-generation Chinese students to enter a firm like Clifford Chance, so I felt like I had to work especially hard to stand out from the crowd.

There is one moment I can remember particularly well. It was during my second week, when I was asked to close a transaction

“You will feel as though you have to work harder than everyone else... but you will make it through. You are so much more resilient than you realise.”

by myself. I had read about securitisation before, but doing the deal is very different from reading the theory! I felt out of my depth at the time, but looking back, I think my supervisor knew my capabilities better than I knew myself – and I did successfully close that transaction, so she was right. And after that moment, I had so much more self-confidence when tackling challenges in the future, because I had a better idea of what I was capable of.

That moment has definitely influenced the way I mentor my trainees now. I tend to give them a lot of responsibility and try to bring them out of their comfort zone. I love seeing their expressions once they’ve found their way through the challenge and come out the other side having realised what they are capable of – it’s very rewarding.

“You will come to learn that the hard work pays off, and the challenges you faced at the beginning will lay the foundation for you to become a better lawyer and a more rounded, stronger person.”

I think it’s important for the Training Contract to be challenging. It’s probably the most formative stage for a young lawyer, and the time in which their personality really flourishes. My trainees often feel that they don’t want to make any mistakes – but I encourage them to make as many mistakes as they can! You can afford to as a trainee; it’s all part of learning and becoming a good lawyer. Honestly, I made so many mistakes when I was doing my Training Contract, I couldn’t even count them all. But I learnt from them, and in all honesty, I can’t remember a single one of them now – even though I’m sure at the time it felt like the end of the world!

Writing this letter to myself was a really interesting process, because it’s been more than twenty years now since I was a trainee, and I’ve never really looked back on that time since. I found it a bit of a challenge to think about those gruelling moments – I don’t really dwell on moments like that, I just learn from them and let them go. It was nice to see how much experience I have gained, though, and how I grew from it. The thing about the Training Contract is that it really does form you into a well-rounded, solution-oriented person – not just in law, but in life.

If I were to give any one piece of advice to my past self, I would say: be brave. Trust yourself, have confidence, and take advantage of every opportunity you can. I really don’t believe that there is any other firm out there that will give you as many opportunities and support as Clifford Chance. The Training Contract will allow you to progress, but it also does so much more than that. You will come out of this process feeling capable of anything.





Kikun Aio

Kikun is a Senior Associate in the Global Financial Markets group, having completed her Training Contract in 2009.

Dear Kikun

You're about to begin your training contract at Clifford Chance. You've been impatient to arrive at this point for quite a while.

But the real contract isn't the one that you sign with the firm, it's the contract that you enter into with yourself, right now.

You're undaunted about leaving your home town, finding new opportunities and making new friends in a new city.

But be mindful that it is the principles and values that were so lovingly instilled in you by your family, and friends that became family, that have propelled you this far.

These two years will demand your full commitment.

You will see friends struggling.

Look out for those who are overwhelmed. Let it be known that you are a good listener.

You're in a place where your view of the world will be challenged.

You will be challenged.

If you witness something that doesn't seem right, speak up and be heard.

If you work hard, what you put in will always come back to you.

Remember that at the heart of every matter is people.

Take time to get to know your colleagues and clients, their concerns and motivations - form connections. Work hard to get the job done, and even harder to always recognise their humanity. Be quick to issue praise and even quicker to forgive mistakes.

Make sure that you create space to pursue the things that you are passionate about.

And find others that are passionate about them too. They will become more than colleagues to you - they will become dear friends.

You'll be given the opportunity to achieve great things, grab it with both hands. But never forget who you are and what you stand for. Lead by example.

Those principles and values will be your greatest asset, and retaining them will be your greatest achievement.

Yours Sincerely

Kikun

Dear Kikun,

You're about to begin your Training Contract at Clifford Chance.
You've been impatient to arrive at this point for quite a while.

But the real contract isn't the one that you sign with the firm, it's the contract you enter into with yourself, right now.

You're undaunted about leaving your home town, finding new opportunities and making new friends in a new city.

But be mindful that it is the principles and values that were so lovingly instilled in you by your family, and friends that became family, that have propelled you this far.

These two years will demand your full commitment.

You will see friends struggling.

Look out for those who are overwhelmed. Let it be known that you are a good listener.

You're in a place where your view of the world will be challenged.
You, will be challenged.

If you witness something that doesn't seem right, do not assume that it will all work out somehow.

Always remember, you have a voice to push back, speak up and be heard.

If you work hard, what you put in will always come back to you.

Remember that at the heart of every matter is people.

Take time to get to know your colleagues and clients, their concerns and motivations – form connections. Work hard to get the job done, and even harder to always recognise their humanity. Be quick to issue praise and even quicker to forgive mistakes.

Make sure that you create space to pursue the things that you are passionate about. And find others that are passionate about them too. They will become more than colleagues to you – they will become dear friends.

You'll be given the opportunity to achieve great things, grab it with both hands. But never forget who you are and what you stand for.
Lead by example.

Those principles and values will be your greatest asset, and retaining them will be your greatest achievement.

Yours sincerely,
Kikun

“You’ll be given the opportunity to achieve great things – grab it with both hands. But never forget who you are and what you stand for.”

Kikun’s Story

I wouldn’t say that I was nervous when I first started my Training Contract. It felt like something I had been waiting a long time for – I had been imagining this moment since I was 15. It was more like anticipation and excitement at the new chapter I was about to begin. I remember walking into the Clifford Chance building for the first time and feeling quite confident – I think the building inspires that. It’s huge and imposing, but something about that makes you walk slightly taller, hold your head up higher.

I settled quite quickly into the work. That’s not to say that it wasn’t hard, or I didn’t face challenges, but I had been working various jobs throughout the school holidays for a long time already, so I was accustomed to being in a working environment and understood the nature of hard work and long hours. The thing that was difficult, though, was having to see my friends struggling, which is one of the more challenging aspects of most professional careers.

When I would see a friend going through a difficult time, I would do my best to be a listening ear – just a person people could turn to, really. I would take them out of the office for a coffee to take their mind off it, and I have many memories of sitting in the canteen with a friend talking about anything and everything except work!

“I remember walking into the Clifford Chance building for the first time and feeling quite confident – I think the building inspires that.”

That kind of environment definitely brings you closer together with the people around you, and I formed so many strong bonds during my Training Contract – many of whom would go on to become some of my closest friends.

Now I’m a Senior Associate, I do everything in my power to make sure that the more junior colleagues always feel supported. There is an extensive support network in place and society as a whole is placing greater importance on the health and wellbeing of the individual. Of course, you will be challenged and pushed out of your comfort zone – but it will always be to help you achieve your full potential.

Kikun Alo

My experience of the Training Contract really challenged my view of the world. It’s demanding – you have to rise to the challenge, and you have to have a strong sense of self and character to get through it.

The thing about Clifford Chance – and life in general – is that what you put in will always come back to you. Yes, the Training Contract will demand a lot of you, but it will also open many doors. Through work, I have been able to get involved with causes that are important to me, like advocacy for education for children with special needs. I also run a ‘civil surgery’, giving civil advice to litigants. Being able to use the opportunities available to me here to give back to others in the community is a really special feeling.

“The thing about Clifford Chance – and life in general – is that what you put in will always come back to you.”

If I were to pass on some advice to a trainee about to start their contract, I would tell them not to be afraid to speak up for the things you believe in, and not to let the job change you. Ultimately, who you are is more important than what you do.

It can be very easy to lose yourself and get pulled along by the demands of the job in the moment. People don’t always realise that time away from work is just as important as time at work. Make sure that you identify the things that you want to continue doing outside of work and then organise your working day so that you can still make those commitments. Above all, take care of yourself, and stay true to who you are.



Christopher Sullivan

Christopher is a Partner and Head of the London Private Equity team, having completed his Training Contract in 2008.

Dear Chris,

Done with education – welcome to the real world: fun’s over
Opportunity abounds but challenges lie ahead
You’ve seen them off before and you will do it again

There’s so much to learn; so much to do
But so little time
So many people and an impression to make

You’ll work through sunset to sunrise
And do it all over again the next day

You will have to commit to it every day.

You want to succeed: but how?
You’ll question: how can I make an impact, how can i contribute,
how can I do this?

Look around you.
These seats are filled with people that have your back.
It is like having an army behind you when you listen to it – think of all
those who support you every day
They want to see you to succeed and grow

Your colleagues, your clients, the ‘other side’ – they are people too,
we are all human. Be yourself and be a person first and foremost,
you’re a person before you’re a lawyer and always be true to that.

Lean on your experience, and your instincts.
You’re here for a reason, you’ve been given responsibility for
a reason.

Be inquisitive.

Don’t fear hard work: there are no shortcuts to gaining experience –
Be resilient, dig in and the rewards will come.

With these ingredients you will succeed to become the best lawyer
you can be

Developing your career from trainee to Associate, to Senior
Associate and Partner.

Becoming head of the PE team at 37 – your career is a process, take
one step at a time and commit to excellence.

Getting multi-billion pound deals over the line, over and over again

Building and training a team, who can do the same and share that
success with people you know and trust.

Help clients, help family, help yourself to grow and develop – it’s
what we do each and every day

Be authentic, be true to yourself.
Don’t let fear cloud your view of what’s possible.

Never feel undermined: you are always as good them, and you might
even be better

These two years are an investment into yourself and those around
you that you will enjoy for years ahead.

Yours sincerely,
Chris

“Be inquisitive. Don’t fear hard work; there are no shortcuts to gaining experience. If you are resilient and dig in, the rewards will come.”

Christopher’s Story

When I was invited to be part of ‘The Real Contract’, my first thought was that this was a project the firm has been waiting for. It’s easy to present a very polished, gilded version of life in a law firm – but realistically, it can be challenging. At the same time, those challenges can be opportunities that bring out the best in you – even if the journey there can sometimes be long and difficult.

The firm is embodied – in London, at least – by an enormous thirty-storey skyscraper. On your first day you’re standing there, in your ill-fitting suit and new (slightly uncomfortable) shoes, and you think... “where do I fit into this?” But you build a community very quickly, and it’s that community that provides you with great strength, confidence, and encouragement. Through that process, you find that the building – and, by extension, the tasks you face – no longer feel so daunting. Now, they represent opportunity.

“Look around you. These seats are filled with people who have your back.”

It really can’t be overstated how important the people around you are – I always say that the Training Contract will throw you in the deep end, but they will be your life ring. There have been times I would sit at my desk and picture my list of things to do as a thicket of vines I have to find my way through. In those times you just have to trust that you will get there, and my colleagues have definitely helped me find my way.

One memory really stuck with me throughout my years here – I was an Associate and had to negotiate a deal between myself and two Partners from another organisation. Not only was I in a lower position, but I was on my own – two against one! I remember standing outside trying to gather my thoughts before going in and having the voice of a senior lawyer echoing through my mind telling me, “you’ve got to land your best point early, because if you start with a weaker one, then you’ll be on the back foot for the rest of the meeting.” It was knowing that they believed in me that gave me the strength to push through, and I walked into that room with my head held high, trying to look confident (even though I didn’t feel it!). The times like that throughout my career – when I’ve looked at myself and wondered if I’m up to the task – were daunting and overwhelming at the time, but with hindsight, I can see that they were formative moments for the person I would eventually become.

Christopher Sullivan

“Be yourself and be a person first and foremost. You’re a person before you’re a lawyer... always be true to that.”

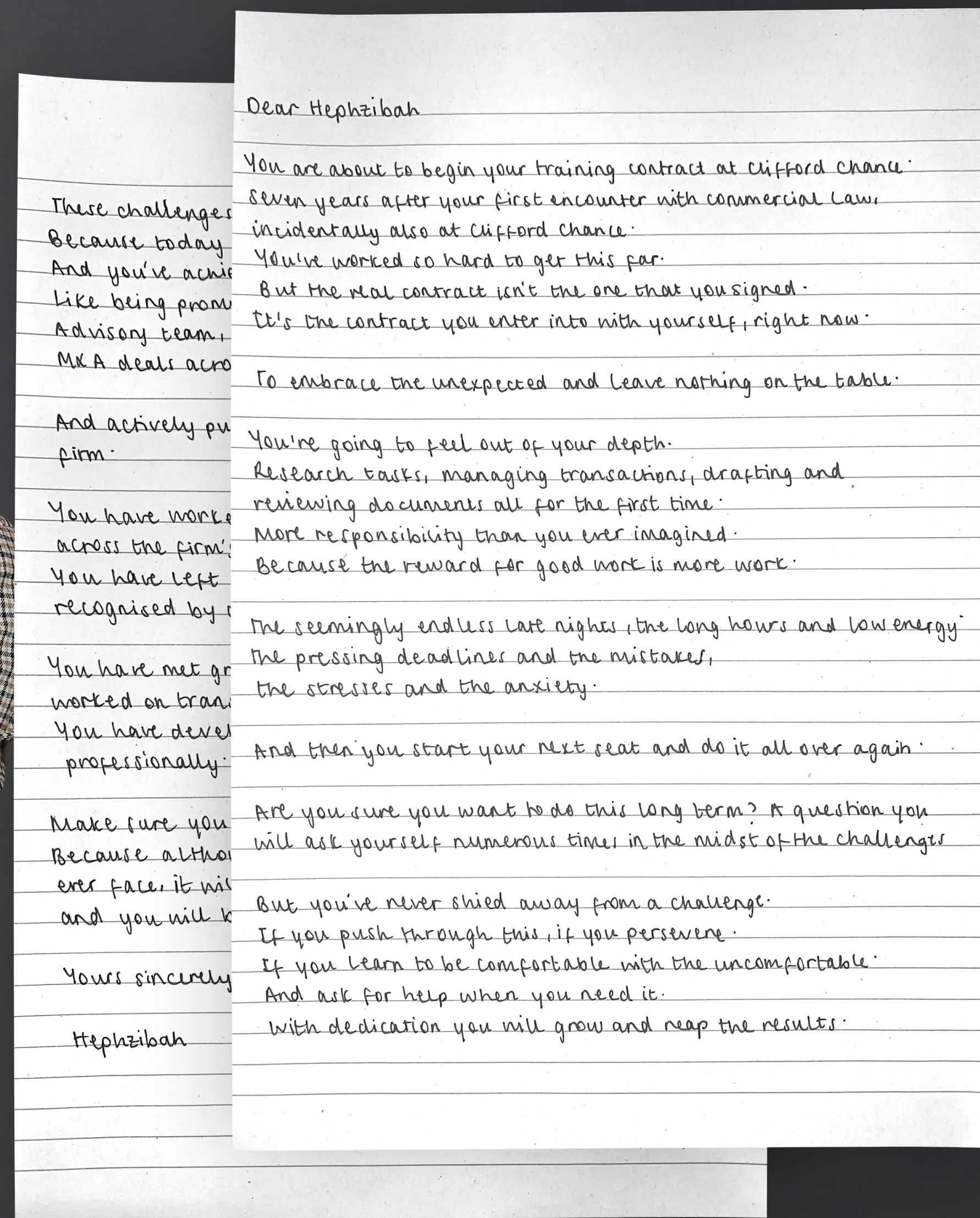
Writing this letter definitely led me to reflect on the sacrifices I have made for this role – the long nights, the back-to-back calls, the endless to-do lists. But you find little moments of peace. When I used to work late, I would turn off the strip lighting in the office and work with just a desk lamp and my headphones on. It made the office feel warmer, cosy even, and I would become absorbed in the work as the sun came up around me. That lamp was actually given to me as a gift by a retired Partner, so I would sit in this little corner of that enormous building and feel like I had his support, and the support of all the people that came before me.

Those little tokens of encouragement give you the strength to persevere. Once when I was working in New York, I was getting into a taxi to leave the office just as the sun was rising, and all I could think of was my mother’s voice saying, “you’re going to be alright. Go home, take a shower, and do it again. You can do this.” The people, experiences and qualities that make you who you are will motivate you and make you the best lawyer you can be.



Hephzibah Adeosun

Hephzibah is a newly qualified Associate in the Corporate Transactions and Advisory Group. She joined the firm after participating in both the First Year and Vacation schemes, beginning her Training Contract in 2019.



Dear Hephzibah

You are about to begin your training contract at Clifford Chance. Seven years after your first encounter with commercial law, incidentally also at Clifford Chance. You've worked so hard to get this far. But the real contract isn't the one that you signed. It's the contract you enter into with yourself, right now.

To embrace the unexpected and leave nothing on the table.

You're going to feel out of your depth. Research tasks, managing transactions, drafting and reviewing documents all for the first time. More responsibility than you ever imagined. Because the reward for good work is more work.

The seemingly endless late nights, the long hours and low energy. The pressing deadlines and the mistakes, the stresses and the anxiety.

And then you start your next seat and do it all over again.

Are you sure you want to do this long term? A question you will ask yourself numerous times in the midst of the challenges.

But you've never shied away from a challenge. If you push through this, if you persevere. If you learn to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. And ask for help when you need it. With dedication you will grow and reap the results.

These challenges. Because today. And you've achieved. Like being promoted to an advisory team. M&A deals across

And actively pushing the firm.

You have worked across the firm. You have left a recognised by

You have met great people. You have worked on transactions. You have developed professionally.

Make sure you. Because although you will ever face, it will and you will know

Yours sincerely

Hephzibah

Dear Hephzibah,

You are about to begin your Training Contract at Clifford Chance

Seven years after your first encounter with commercial law, incidentally also at Clifford Chance

You've worked so hard to get this far

But the real contract isn't the one that you signed. It's the contract you enter into with yourself, right now

To embrace the unexpected and leave nothing on the table

You're going to feel out of your depth.

Researching, managing transactions, drafting and reviewing documents all for the first time. More responsibility than you ever imagined.

Because the reward for good work is more work.

The seemingly endless late nights, the long hours and low energy

The pressing deadlines and the mistakes, the stresses and the anxiety

And then you start your next seat and do it all over again.

Are you sure you want to do this long term? A question you will ask yourself numerous times in the midst of the challenges

But you've never shied away from a challenge

If you push through this, if you persevere

If you learn to be comfortable with the uncomfortable

And ask for help when you need it

With dedication you will grow and reap the results

These challenges will shape the person you become

Because today you're unrecognisable to who you were

And you've achieved amazing things

Like being promoted to an Associate in the Corporate Transactions & Advisory team, helping to get one of the firm's biggest M&A deals across the line

And actively push for social equality in and beyond the firm.

You have worked in different practice areas, networking across the firm's international offices. You have left your mark, made an impression, and been recognised by clients and colleagues.

You have met great people, made lifelong friendships and worked on transformational projects across the world. You have developed as a person, both personally and professionally

Make sure you understand this commitment.

Because although this is one of the biggest challenges you'll ever face

It will turn you into somebody exceptional and you will be proud of how far you've come.

Yours sincerely
Hephzibah

“You shouldn’t carry your mistakes like a backpack. If you make a mistake, deal with it in the moment, and then move on. Don’t dwell on it, because they’re inevitable. We’re all human.”

Hephzibah’s Story

WATCH NOW ▶

My first memory of the Training Contract was probably one of excitement and nerves. I remember showing up to the Clifford Chance building on my first day with the rest of my cohort and just thinking, “wow, this is finally happening.” It was such a surreal moment. It definitely felt like it had been a long time coming – I had completed the first year scheme in 2015, so it had been a long path to get to that moment, and standing in front of that enormous building was suddenly very overwhelming!

Looking back, I think the thing that stands out to me throughout my Training Contract was the vast array of people I have been able to work with and learn from. Every single supervisor I have had has been amazing. My fourth seat supervisor was Nigerian too, and it was great to work beneath someone who looks like me – he actually got promoted to Partner recently, and that was a really inspirational and powerful moment. It meant a lot to see someone who has put their heart and soul into their work getting their due, and made me feel that if I had that same attitude, I could trust that I’d see results too.

“The reward for good work is more work.”

Of course, the pandemic was a huge factor in my experience of the Training Contract. I found working from home particularly difficult because I thought I had to be in the office in order to make a good impression, so not being able to meet any of my colleagues was really hard to come to terms with. I kept thinking, “this is the department I want to qualify into, but nobody knows who I am!” I found myself over-compensating by being online constantly so I could reply to emails immediately. I would also read way too much into messages – if someone used a lot of full stops in an email, I would panic and think they were angry with me. Fortunately I can laugh about it now!

Looking back, it’s really nice to see how far I have come. There were definitely a lot of times I doubted myself and thought I couldn’t do it. I suppose I got over that when I realised that the more time I spend stressing, the less time I have to get the task done. One piece of advice that really stuck with me was from a Partner: she said that you shouldn’t carry your mistakes like a backpack. If you make a mistake, deal with it in the moment, and then move on. Don’t dwell on it, because they’re inevitable. We’re all human.

Hephzibah Adeosun

When I was in my fourth seat, I was asked to do the first draft of a facility agreement. We were working with a bank in Nigeria and there were over thirty lenders, so it was a big transaction with a lot of moving parts. I remember thinking that it was a lot more responsibility than a trainee would normally have. I was nervous, but I also knew that my supervisor wouldn't have given me the task if I didn't have the ability to do it, so I just decided to give it my best shot. While it was a challenge, I really enjoyed having that level of responsibility and being outside of my comfort zone. As it turned out, there weren't too many comments on it – so it can't have been that bad!

I think that's what sets Clifford Chance apart – there's definitely a mutual trust between trainees and supervisors, and they'll push you hard, but it will help you reach your full potential. They genuinely care about you, and they want to see you succeed, so you know you can ask for support whenever you need it.


That's why I wrote the line in my 'Real Contract' about asking for help. Realising that it's okay to ask for help and the people around you are on your side was a big breakthrough for me.

“If you learn to be comfortable with the uncomfortable, and ask for help when you need it, with dedication you will grow and reap the results.”

When I first started, I felt that my self-worth was dependent on my performance at work, but now I know that's not the case, and if there's something I don't know then it's just an opportunity to improve. That's definitely one of the hardest things about being a trainee: feeling like you don't know anything! But as I've spent more time here and I've got more experience, I'm realising that I know more than I give myself credit for.

My advice to future trainees would be to embrace the unexpected. I didn't think I was going to spend eighteen months of my Training Contract in my bedroom, but even though it didn't look the way I expected it to, I still learnt so much. I connected with people I might not have met otherwise, built great relationships, and, most importantly, learnt a lot about myself. Every challenge is an opportunity – make the most of it, because time flies!





The Clifford Chance Training Contract
is one of the greatest challenges a
young lawyer can take on.

That's why they apply.

VISIT [CLIFFORDCHANCE.COM/CAREERS](https://cliffordchance.com/careers) —————>

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C H A N C E

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‘The Real Contract’