

BRINGING TALENT BACK

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After a period of draught, trainee intake at Iberia's leading firms is on the up once again as workloads increase

Growing workloads in Spain and Portugal resulted in an increase in the intake of trainees at leading Iberian law firms in 2015. Data supplied by the major firms in the two countries showed that trainee intake grew by up to 86 per cent in Spain, while some of the leading firms in Portugal almost tripled their trainee intake in the last 12 months.

Uría Menéndez attributed the growth in trainee intake to the "increase in activity" since 2014. Similarly, Baker & McKenzie said it upped its number of trainees in the last year due to the improvement in Spain's economy and the subsequent "notable increase in office workload". Though Pérez-Llorca took fewer trainees in 2015, it says its intake in 2014 was particularly high due to an increase in work volume.

Master's deterring candidates?

Trainee intake has grown at most of the major firms in Spain during the last 12 months despite the fact that the requirements for achieving the status of "abogado" recently changed. It used to be the case that law graduates were able to practice as lawyers upon finishing their degree, but under the new system, trainees must complete an internship at a law firm for at least four months as part of a master's degree (Master de Acceso a la Abogacía).



“ There has been an increasing number of international applicants [for trainee positions]. ”
Susana Almeida Lopes,
Vieira de Almeida

Baker & McKenzie says the new requirement to complete a master's degree to become a lawyer could explain why – despite their own increase in trainee intake in 2015 – the longer term trend is more likely to be declining trainee numbers. “The number of trainees has decreased substantially compared with the old graduates in law,” says a firm spokeswoman. She adds that this could be for a number of reasons, including the possibility that not all law students choose to do the legal profession access master's, or the fact that there are fewer places available on the master's course than there are on law degree courses.

More women applying

Law firms in Portugal also upped their intake of trainees in 2015 due to increases in work volume. Vieira de Almeida (VdA) took on more than twice as many trainees last year as it did in 2014. The firm's corporate services director, Susana Almeida Lopes, says this was due to the fact that the firm integrated 30 lawyers from Lisbon firm Miranda: “VdA added oil and gas as a practice area and expanded the firm's reach to nine new jurisdictions.”

Portuguese law firms report that they are receiving a growing number of applications for trainee positions, and also an increasing amount of female applicants. A spokesman for Cuatrecasas, Gonçalves Pereira says: “In Portugal, we have seen a substantial increase in the number of female internship applicants consistent with the greater number of female students in Portuguese universities.”

Profile-raising

Other trends observed by law firms in relation to applications include an increase in applications from foreign students, as well as an increase in applications due to law firms' profile-raising activities.

Almeida Lopes says: "Every year we receive more applications, which are not restricted to Portuguese graduate students, but also students attending graduate studies abroad – we don't notice any difference regarding the gender of the applicants but rather their nationality, with an increasing number of international applicants."

Other firms attribute the increase in the number of applications they receive to having a higher profile in the market. A Linklaters spokesman says the firm has more applications because it is "more well-known to law students in Spain".

Similarly, another law firm has sought to offset what it sees as the possible decline in applicants due to the new requirements for entrance to the legal profession by ensuring a "greater presence" at target universities.

Portuguese law firm FCB Advogados says it is receiving more applications from graduates attending universities where it has sent representatives to attend job fairs, conferences or workshops.

Paying the bill

Before the reforms in Spain, there were concerns of rising costs if law firms paid for the new masters' programme. Most top firms are sponsoring some recruits.

Baker & McKenzie, for example, provides funding to students through a number of initiatives. Through its "Baker Alumni UC3M" scheme, the firm finances the studies of law students with "excellent academic results, but low income", while it also provides a scholarship of €6,000 to a Master of ICADE (Universidad Pontificia de Comillas) student with excellent academic results who has gone through a selection process. In addition, the law firm awards scholarships to students at public universities where it participates as a member of the advisory board, namely Universidad Carlos III de Madrid and Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

Meanwhile, Uría Menéndez is prepared "in exceptional cases, to sponsor excellent students who need financial assistance to carry out their law studies", a firm spokesperson says.

Linklaters says it provides six 'Master de Acceso a la Abogacía' grants to outstanding students from "underprivileged" backgrounds, while Pérez-Llorca offers two types of sponsorship related to the master's: business sponsorships whereby the firm donates money to universities to support the master's and excellence sponsorships where the firm selects top students and sponsors their studies (the student completes their internship at Pérez-Llorca).

With the majority of leading law firms in Spain and Portugal increasing their intake of trainees in the last year, the signs are that increasing workloads are creating more opportunities for younger law graduates who want to embark on a career in a law firm. This is welcome news for law firms and students alike as "the battle for talent" appears to be starting again. IL

Trainee recruitment at leading Spanish and Portuguese law firms in the period 2014-15

Spanish Firm	Trainees hired in 2015	Trainees hired in 2014	Increase/decrease year-on-year
Uría Menéndez	58	32	+ 81%
Cuatrecasas	76	69	+ 10%
Baker & McKenzie	46	25	+ 84%
Gómez Acebo & Pombo	80*	104*	- 23%
Linklaters	11	8	+ 38%
Hogan Lovells	13	7	+ 86%
Pérez-Llorca	24	30	- 20%

*Figure includes summer interns

Portuguese Firm	Trainees hired in 2015	Trainees hired in 2014	Increase/decrease year-on-year
PLMJ	21	24	- 13%
Abreu Advogados	13	16	- 19%
VdA	20	8	+ 150%
Cuatrecasas	8	6	+ 33%
MLGTS	16	14	+ 14%
Uría Menéndez	12	16	- 25%
Calado Guerreiro	16	14	+ 14%
SRS Advogados	17	6	+ 183%
FCB Advogados	14	10	+ 40%