

# Anthony Gold Solicitors

## The facts

**Location:** London

**Number of UK partners/solicitors:** 18/22

**Total number of trainees:** 12

**Seats:** Flexible

**Alternative seats:** None

**Extras:** Pro bono – Association for the Victims of Medical Accidents, Families Need Fathers advice clinics, Grandparents Association, CABs

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Equally at home on the gritty streets of South London or among the skyscrapers of the City, Anthony Gold acts for rich and poor without discrimination.

## Good as gold

Most firms out there don't actually put down on their website in black and white the phrase 'we're not just in it for the money', but then Anthony Gold isn't most firms. True, it has a thriving commercial practice and produces reams of tax, trusts and wills advice for wealthy individuals, but it also has particular expertise in acting for the socially excluded, and is well known to the tired, poor and huddled masses of South London for its legal aid work. This duality is reflected in its offices. 'Plush' new headquarters in London Bridge will house the firm's main money-spinners: commercial dispute resolution, family, PI and clin neg, while two satellite offices in Streatham and Walworth are 'high street' in both location and outlook. Geared towards community work, they offer social housing and property litigation services, along with wills, probates and conveyancing. It's also worth noting that the firm claims particular experience in advising gay and lesbian clients and has actively pursued the pink pound in recent years.

Given the nature of the majority of its work, it should come as no surprise to find that the type of people who are attracted to Anthony Gold are those who like their law up close and personal, 'dealing with real people's lives' and helping clients sort out problems that cause them real distress. Most of our interviewees came to the firm knowing of its reputation and hoping to gain experience in one of its star departments. They know that their salary will never be on a par with their friends at the big commercial

firms (£21,200 for a first-year at last check, rising to £23,200 and then £30,400 on qualification), but 'the benefits we get make it a good trade-off.' The hours are acknowledged as 'brilliant' – 9.30am to 5.30pm is standard – and trainees feel their varied and interesting caseload beats the kind of mundane tasks allotted to their contemporaries in the City.

The structure of the training contract is somewhat out of the ordinary. Operating a three-seat system, the firm asks what area each trainee has a particular interest in and gives them a year there along with two other shorter seats, the nature of which are often dictated by business needs. In practice we found that while most trainees did indeed expect to visit three departments, the length of time they spent in each varied hugely. Some had a first seat lasting five months, while for others it was eight or nine. The shortest amount of time we heard of in any one department was three months, the longest over a year. The arrangement seems to work, however, and we heard no grumbles about seat allocation. The majority of the dozen or so trainees are based at London Bridge, although there will usually be two or three out in the Streatham and Walworth offices at any one time.

## Fares fair

Everyone knows that 'personal injury lawyers get a bad rep as ambulance chasers,' and indeed, one PI trainee attempted to bring a tear to our eyes by telling us stories

of being mocked in bars for revealing what her job was. Never afraid to pose the difficult questions, we hardened our hearts and asked her why we should sympathise. Her response was difficult to argue with – ‘Settling cases for kids that have been brain-damaged at birth is really quite important stuff to be doing.’ Anthony Gold has a great track record in ‘intricate’ cases such as these. In 2007 it secured £7.5m, one of the highest ever lump sum settlements of a birth injury claim, for an eight-year-old boy who suffered cerebral palsy caused by negligence on the part of the consultant who was delivering him. The department handles everything from high-value cases like this right down to simple slip-and-trip claims. ‘At the moment we have a trial for a young lady who fell off the back of a Routemaster bus when it went over a hole in the road too fast.’ Perhaps Boris Johnson should think twice about reintroducing them: the firm won nearly £600,000 for another client who fell from the back of a bus after drinking. Tasks for trainees ‘vary quite significantly. You are not just doing the same things over and over again.’ Fielding new enquiries and keeping existing clients up to speed on what’s going on are two of the most common responsibilities, along with research, drafting and taking witness statements. ‘The aim of the game is to settle before it goes to trial,’ so trainees will often sit in on round-table negotiations. When things do go all the way to trial they will be involved there too. Supervisors provide ‘a balance between giving responsibility, breathing space and regular support.’ For example, one trainee informed us: ‘If they know I’ve done something like a schedule of special damages before, it won’t be checked in any great detail.’ While a seat in PI isn’t compulsory, it’s the largest team and the firm recommends trainees take the relevant elective on the LPC.

The family crew ‘are very much resolution lawyers.’ Kim Beatson, a well-known name in family law circles, heads the department and ‘is not interested in clients who want to pick at each other.’ She was one of the first solicitors in the country to qualify as a family mediator and has chaired Resolution, an organisation that promotes a non-confrontational approach to family problems. Of course there are ‘hugely rich clients who can afford to argue,’ and another senior partner has handled many high-value cases, working in the past for City professionals and celebrity clients, including several Chelsea footballers. Trainees work on all sorts of cases, including divorce settlements, pre-nups and, since ‘one solicitor here is up on international law,’ even a child abduction case that stretched across two jurisdictions. A commercial dispute resolution seat also brings a variety of files to a trainee’s desk. ‘You start off dealing with new client calls and graduate up to dealing with clients... taking on a small caseload of your own.’ Among other things the department covers are domain name disputes, insolvency, debt collection, employment law and disputes between company directors.

## Chambers UK rankings

Clinical Negligence • Family/Matrimonial • Personal Injury • Social Housing

### Where there’s a will there’s affray

We mentioned interesting and varied work: let’s explore that in a bit more detail. Here are a couple of case studies from the traditionally dry area of law that is wills, trusts and probate. Example 1: Anthony Gold challenged a will drawn up by a reclusive Norfolk farmer who had died bedridden, having just made a series of wills to various people. Records showed that he thought he had a non-existent nephew; that he believed his neighbours had poisoned his cat (which he claimed was 36 years old); that he did not appreciate the extent of his estate; and that he had fired his shotgun at trick-or-treaters. Despite a rebuttal by the solicitors who drew up the will, and a lack of medical records due to the farmer not having seen a doctor for 40 years, the firm was able to establish a strong enough case to take the matter to ongoing mediation. Example 2: advising on the validity of a will where the executor had fraudulently removed money from the estate and the deceased had five wives and 38 children in Africa. Yep, that’s varied all right.

Things are just as interesting in the social housing and property litigation seat, although here it can be shocking to see how the other half live. Dealing with disrepair of council properties – ‘leaks, cracks, subsidence, infestations’ – is a large portion of the work. ‘One client came in and offered to show me the jar of bed bugs he had collected,’ winced a trainee. Another represented a tenant whose flat was frequently flooded by sewage, resulting in mushrooms sprouting up everywhere. ‘We got an injunction to stop that and compensation to help her.’ The firm also appeals for individuals in homelessness cases when the council has refused accommodation, for example, or when they have been unlawfully evicted. ‘We got a young single mum back into her house within a week recently,’ said one trainee. ‘It’s quite rewarding though you need to be that way inclined.’ It’s a ‘very busy’ team and responsibility comes from day one. Trainees are allocated days when they are in charge of taking new enquiries, ‘maybe 15 or 20 a day,’ and other tasks include completing legal aid forms, going to court for hearings, drafting witness statements, preparing claim forms and, especially for elderly or sick clients, the occasional property visit.

The sad fact is that it’s getting harder to obtain funding for this sort of work due to changes in the way legal aid is provided (see page 18 for details). Anthony Gold is ‘one of the fewer and fewer firms that do housing.’ Trainees are well aware of the changes being made and do notice an increasing focus by the department on the type of cases

for which they are more likely to get funding. Nevertheless, while other departments will always be more profitable, Anthony Gold's high street operation remains an important area of practice for the firm.

## Writ large

The firm's impending move to an office with '50% more space' leads us to draw the obvious conclusion: it intends to hire more (or maybe just bigger) staff. Beyond that, our interviewees remained hazy on future plans. 'Do what we do, better', was the gist of their comments. Anthony Gold will certainly continue to hire trainees that fit its 'people firm' ethos. Asked if there were any other trends among trainees, one said: 'I would have said that we are all a couple of years older,' before adding, 'but we have a new starter who's come straight through from university and law school so that defeats my theory.' Undoubtedly a few months' work experience in the area of law you are most interested in would help you impress at interview here.

Some felt the social scene 'has been a bit disjointed in the past,' but trainees seem to have got their act together and Friday night drinks in the bars of the South Bank are now

a regular fixture. Girls dominate the current cohort, so perhaps it's no surprise the most recent outing was to the Take That musical *Never Forget*. 'Someone was trying to organise a netball team,' one of the ladies told us; apparently the gents make 'sporadic attempts at five-a-side.' It should be said that staff don't shirk when it comes to good causes and are involved with charity events – in recent months moonwalking through London for breast cancer and abseiling off The Gherkin.

## And finally...

Trainees commonly choose Anthony Gold for its ethical stance and its expertise in family law and personal injury, but its commercial work shouldn't be ignored. We see this as a very likeable firm and clearly qualifying trainees agree: in 2008 all five stayed on after their training.