

Recruiters zoom in on LLM degrees

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As business becomes more global, so too does the demand for lawyers who specialise in international contract law, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, or intellectual property.

With this in mind, the inaugural Financial Times listing of masters law degrees focuses on those programmes that give a leg up to lawyers who want to practice global business.

LLM degrees are proving increasingly fashionable among those who want to practise across legal jurisdictions and in English. At the London School of Economics, for example, applications for the LLM programme have risen over the past three years - with a particular increase in applicants from China, Pakistan, India and Russia, says Catherine Baldwin, head of recruitment and admissions at LSE.

Subjects particularly popular with applicants include international business law, public international law, banking law and financial regulation, she says.

With so many of the top international law firms located in New York and London, it is not surprising that these two countries dominate the listing of programmes, with 32 US law schools and seven UK schools listed. Australian law schools are also well-represented, with four listed in the table.

The 49 law schools in the listing offer 197 different LLM degrees between them, both full-time and part-time. Many offer a raft of specialised degrees - Queen Mary University of London, for example, runs 19 different LLM degrees - while others run one general degree with many specialisations under that umbrella.

Harvard Law School, for example, has concentrations in human rights, taxation, corporate law and governance and international finance, so trains the brightest legal minds for careers in business as well as human rights or criminal law.

This kind of masters degree is becoming increasingly attractive to law firms, says Lene Malthasen, corporate partner in charge of recruiting at the London office of Latham & Watkins, one of the big six law firms, with offices in 28 cities around the globe. In particular, those with LLM degrees who have then gone on to qualify for the US bar are in particular demand.

She also points out that the LLM degree enables newly-minted lawyers to differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack. "The CVs that people have these days are phenomenal."

The law schools included in the FT LLM listing are those recommended by the world's top law firms as the one from which they prefer to recruit. In order to participate in the listing, law schools were required to complete an online questionnaire relating to the types of courses they run, the number of students enrolled and so on.

In line with the business school rankings and listings run by the Financial Times, the law schools were asked to supply data on how many of their students were employed three months after graduation. Only five of the 49 - Northwestern, American University Washington College of Law, the University of Connecticut and Wake Forest University in the US, and IE Law School in Spain, were able to supply that information.

And just as law schools are following in the footsteps of business schools in becoming more global, so, too, they are increasingly forging international partnerships and setting up overseas campuses. Last month Georgetown, the law school at the heart of Washington DC, set up a Centre for Transnational Legal Studies in the heart of London's legal quarter. The centre brings together faculty and students from 10 countries to study international, transnational and comparative law.

The other schools involved in the project are the Free University of Berlin, the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, King's College in London, the University of Melbourne,

the National University of Singapore, the University of Sao Paulo, the University of Torino in Italy and the University of Toronto in Canada.

The logic of the move is simple, according to Alexander Aleinikoff, dean of Georgetown University Law Centre. "Legal practice is increasingly global, and today's law school graduates need to understand other cultures and legal systems."

As an increasing number of lawyers accept the logic of his arguments, the LLM may well grow in popularity as the degree of choice for business lawyers.

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