

MAKE IT HAPPEN



Make it happen Glyn Mon Hughes talks to Hugh James' Senior Partner Gareth Williams

Hugh James is Wales' largest indigenous law firm. Its roots are firmly based in Wales with headquarters in Cardiff city centre. But it is by no means inward looking. Sometime ago it opened an office in Canary Wharf, London, and that office clearly plays a major part in the firm's strategy.

We recognise that, as a regional firm, we can offer clients real advantages," said Gareth Williams, the firm's senior partner who has been with Hugh James for some 32 years. "We pride ourselves on giving an excellent service which offers real value for money. What has given me particular pleasure has been our success in recruiting high quality lawyers, many of whom have worked not just in Wales but in the City, in Hong Kong, Europe and the United States. As a result, we are often able to offer our clients in London and beyond the same level of service as they would expect from a top City firm, but at far more competitive rates because that work is being done in Cardiff.

"But, we also recognise that clients should have to pay for the service of highly trained lawyers only where necessary. That's why we look at what we can provide on a 'volume' basis," he explained. "These are many areas of traditional legal work which can be provided as a simple process and which do not require the services of a skilled lawyer. These are everyday matters which crop up regularly. And that's why we have invested so heavily in technology. We are always looking at how we can use technology to provide these volume services, thereby releasing lawyers to concentrate on complex cases which require real expertise."

Hugh James' investment in technology has helped the firm acquire and retain major national and international clients who benefit not just from the competitive rates at which such work is done but also the access to management information which the technology provides.

"We've also been able to offer our clients our Integrated Contracts Manager system which is a particular attraction to multinational corporations who outsource key functions. The system enables them to keep a close eye on how suppliers are performing their contractual arrangements.

"So we have a fairly simple philosophy: where specialist services are appropriate we believe that our lawyers are supremely well equipped to provide them, but where the work is routine or capable of being processed then we have the systems in place to ensure that the work is done efficiently and at a considerable cost saving."

While the firm operates for some highly significant national and international bodies in both the public and private sectors, they also offer some of the perhaps more traditional personal services, having carved out a significant niche in health-related matters. They are experts, for instance, in neurolaw, advising people who have suffered brain or spinal cord injuries how to gain compensation. The firm also has a major clinical negligence unit, specialising in securing compensation for those who have suffered as a result of medical mistreatment. But perhaps the fastest growing area for the firm has been its nursing care unit, which advises those families who may have wrongly been charged for care which should have been provided free by the NHS.

"We retain a strong litigation base which does not appear to have been affected by the recession to the same degree as transactions," added Williams, "but in many ways the most satisfying aspect for me of the last few years has been the extraordinary growth of our commercial and corporate departments who have been undertaking high profile work across the UK both in the public and private sectors.

"We're certainly moving forward with considerable confidence. And while we are often working nationally and internationally, we are still very much a Welsh company. We're working for the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Rugby Union, Welsh Water and we are lead solicitors for Cardiff County Council. And we are proud of our Welsh roots."

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Local and global

Glyn Mon Hughes

Hugh James is a law firm to be reckoned with, whilst the headquarters are in Cardiff city centre, it also has offices at Canary Wharf, London. The company has 47 partners and 500 staff – and this includes 28 Welsh-speaking fee earners.



Clients include a wide range of different businesses and organisations, such as the Welsh Rugby Union, Aviva, Welsh Water, Royal Mail, the Environment Agency, Treasury Solicitors and a range of SMEs and start-up companies which have spun out of local universities. The firm is a highly significant player when it comes to working with the Welsh social housing sector, acting for 38 of the Welsh housing associations and advising major developers such as Persimmon Homes, Taylor Wimpey and Barratt Homes as they continue their phased redevelopment of Barry Waterfront.

The company operates UK-wide, for example advising Welsh builder Watkin Jones as it continues to develop student accommodation in cities across England and Wales. The London office also works with significant players on the world business stage as it advises companies such as Citigroup and Wells Fargo Bank, two US companies with a significant presence in Europe.

A major achievement for the company in the last few years has been its appointment to the panel for the Welsh Assembly Government, advising on areas of property and commercial, corporate finance and litigation. The firm also works closely with local authorities, regulatory bodies and major sports organisations such as the Welsh Rugby Union.

However, while much of the firm's growth comes from its traditional strengths it is certainly not standing still. Key to Hugh James' success has been its approach to innovative methods of working, particularly in the digital age as demands for instant reactions to many situations grow ever more pressing. The firm has invested heavily in technology over recent years, forming strong working relationships with leading software suppliers and thus creating a competitive advantage over other firms and giving clients added value.

An example of this innovative approach is the company's online legal

services website – www.hughjamesonline.co.uk – which offers private individuals and SMEs a range of legal services at a fraction of the cost of the perhaps rather more traditional method of working.

The firm's bespoke software product brings significant cost savings to major international companies and those operating in the public sector while, on a personal basis, the firm even offers an online will writing service.

Despite powering ahead in recent years and securing prime position amongst Welsh law firms, the firm is conscious that quality comes above all and that, in difficult times, it must strive to provide the best service for the most competitive prices. Strength comes from the wide range of activities in which the firm is involved and the considerable expertise it can offer, whether transactional business or in the fields of litigation or advisory work, all highly significant areas for these challenging economic times.



London

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