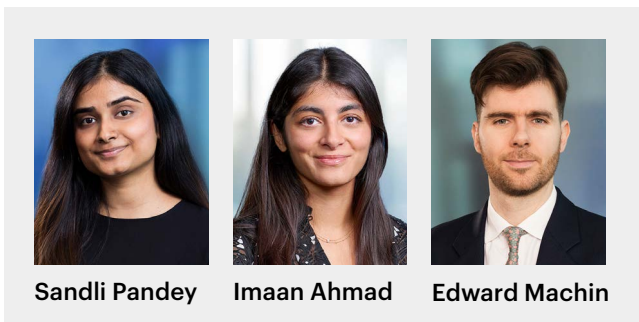


Trainee Insights: London Data, Privacy & Cybersecurity Counsel Edward Machin



Sandli Pandey: Hi, my name is Sandli Pandey.

Imaan Ahmad: And my name is Imaan Ahmad.

Sandli Pandey: Welcome to the Ropes & Gray *Trainee Insights* podcast. We're your hosts today, and we have with us Edward Machin. Edward is a counsel in the data, privacy & cybersecurity group. Welcome, Edward, and thank you very much for joining us today. How are you?

Edward Machin: I'm good, thank you. Thank you very much for having me—I'm very excited.

Imaan Ahmad: Thank you. Let's get straight into some of the questions, then. Firstly, as an introduction, would you be able to take us through your journey so far? How did you end up becoming a counsel in the data, privacy & cybersecurity practice at Ropes? We hear you had a career as an award-winning journalist before entering law, so we'd love to hear more about that as well.

Edward Machin: Sure. I've had quite an unusual journey up to this point. I left school when I was 16. I moved to Los Angeles to be a musician. After a few years in Los Angeles, I came back and studied law. I really liked the analytical and the writing aspect of law, and less so what I saw—that may be a failing of imagination on my part—was the practical application. And so, I became a journalist, as you said, for six years, writing about law and business. Towards the end, I was writing a lot about arbitration and investor state disputes. The more I did that and the more I became familiar with what lawyers did in that practice area, I became really interested in it. I slowly started pivoting to thinking more

about actually the skills that I was using then—writing and research—and written advocacy could be a really good fit for that practice.

After six years as a journalist, I accepted a training contract at another American firm, like I said, dead set on becoming an international arbitration lawyer. Between the time that I accepted the training contract and joined the firm, the arbitration team left, so I then was looking around as to the other kind of seats that were on offer, and one of them at this firm was tech and media. I did that in 2016, and that was just at the point that one of the multiple transatlantic privacy frameworks had been invalidated. It was a very interesting and exciting time in data protection land, and within a couple of weeks, I knew that's what I wanted to do—I knew that I'd found the thing for me. And so, I did the rest of the training contract—really enjoyed that. Towards the end, I had to make the decision: Did I want to do white collar crime ('LEPG' as we call it here) or data protection? I chose the latter and I've been at Ropes since 2018 now, nearly six years.

Sandli Pandey: Wow, that's a really interesting story—I never knew that. Would you actually mind telling us a little bit about your time in Los Angeles and what that was like?

Edward Machin: It was a long time ago—it feels like a different lifetime ago. It was also when America was a very different place—it was pre-9/11 and just post-9/11. It seemed like a much different and slightly more harmonious country than it is when I go back now. I met somebody in LA when I was playing music—they were a media lawyer—and they encouraged me to think about going to law school. I looked up how much it cost to go to law school in America and then came back home, but it was a really interesting experience for me. I'm part of the team that looks at or reviews training contract applications, and it's really interesting to see the breadth of experience that people have. When I was applying, because I didn't have A-levels—I had really bad GCSEs—I would call up law firms to say, "This is my background. I have a really good university degree but everything else is rubbish. What do you think?" And a large percentage of them would say, "Don't even bother. We're not going to look at your application." I feel like as law firms have become more diverse generally, there's a kind

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of understanding, actually, that career changes and people who had slightly different life experiences bring a different set of skills to the table. I think in most years, Ropes has one or two career changes in the intake, so to anybody who's listening who has that experience, do apply—I think things have changed and people will be receptive to those skills.

Sandli Pandey: Thank you for sharing that—I'm sure that will be helpful for people to know. Coming back to the law, then, could you tell us more about the data, privacy & cybersecurity group at Ropes and the type of work it entails? Are there any areas within that practice that you tend to focus on in particular?

Edward Machin: It's a smallish group compared to some of the others at the firm. We have about eight people in London and then another eight in the US. Although we have the banner 'data, privacy & cybersecurity', we are slightly wider than that—we also do intellectual property, IT, and general commercial work. My practice and just the nature of my experience at other firms has led me to be more to the data side of things. Increasingly, now we can come onto the digital regulation side of things, so GDPR plus all these other laws. But we have a really broad practice, so it's counseling, advisory work—the 'good times', as it were—then, the 'bad times', where you have data breaches, you might have litigation, you might have complaints, which are very common occurrences now as individuals are making subject access requests and those can become quite contentious for employees and other businesses, so we deal with those. Then, we help the private equity teams, the litigation teams, the funds teams with all kinds of different aspects of their work. So, it's a really broad practice, and it's only becoming broader because there were so many new laws coming down from the EU and the UK that make it a really interesting and fascinating area.

Imaan Ahmad: That is the perfect segue into the next question: how have you seen it develop, and how do you think it will continue to grow as an area of interest for clients and especially the new legislation that you briefly mentioned?

Edward Machin: It's changed so significantly. When I started, it was just the run-up to GDPR, which was really the first law that had global attention for data protection, and that's still the case. What we're starting to see now is GDPR being the bedrock. Most companies understand what that requires—data protection is fairly well understood in their industries or amongst their businesses. What we're now starting to see is some sector-specific laws and some industry- and company-specific laws—big tech, for example—that go over and above GDPR. In some ways, they complement GDPR and in some ways they go further than GDPR, and so, depending on the sector and the geography in which your company's based, you may have to comply with a multiple number of these laws going forward. I think over the next five to 10 years, we're just going to see more and more of that. Even when I started, I think data protection was starting to rise up the agenda in terms of

importance. The people that I trained with who were my supervisors at the time, who were there at the beginning, reported it being a real backwater at the time—really nobody was interested in it. Fast forward 15-20 years, and they're the most important people in the room.

Every company is a data company—our whole lives are on our phones or our computers—and so, even if you are only processing employee personal data or relatively benign business data, that's still a core aspect of what you're doing. For companies that want to use data in interesting or new ways, that's going to be really front and center for them, particularly with AI, which is obviously the buzzword for all companies at the moment. Seeing how that develops, I think, is one of the things that keeps us so interested that every day is new. There is a constant stream of both public news but also regulatory developments, case law, and so on, that feels like you're not there at the very beginning, but you're as close to the beginning as you can be for an area of law. So, it's really interesting to be there and help that grow in a small way.

Imaan Ahmad: For sure—that's so interesting. Leading on from that, how do you think the Ropes data team differs from competitors? If I could also add on to that, do you think that the data teams manage to build good links with the other practice groups in the field? For example, I know there's a bit of a link between antitrust tech regulation and data—do you think that's something that sets you apart?

Edward Machin: Yes, one of the things that clients tell us over and over again is that we have a really practical and business-focused approach to practicing law. Data protection is one of those areas where you can get very academic and technical in a way that is really interesting for you, but is not what the client is after, and so, the thing that I think we excel at, both with our internal clients but also the external piece, is breaking down these concepts into really easy-to-understand and actionable takeaways. In terms of how we work closely with the firm, I think one of the really good things about Ropes & Gray that perhaps I didn't understand before I came here—and actually I think before I was a lawyer—is that I had the view that you would be in a big law firm, it would be very siloed, and it would be very slow moving, whereas, Ropes is much more collaborative, really entrepreneurial, actually, and so, folks in other practice groups are always really receptive to working and hearing about the issues that we're facing that might affect their clients. That includes antitrust. We have a really good relationship with the litigation teams. When they conduct investigations and collect mobile devices and so on, they rely on us closely and other teams across the firm. So, I've been really pleasantly surprised, and one of the reasons that I've stayed here is that there's a really good collaboration and community amongst the practice groups.

Sandli Pandey: In terms of you becoming counsel, how do you think your day-to-day work changed? Maybe you could give us some insight into if there were different expectations, the workload, and business development activities.

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Edward Machin: I can only speak from my own experience, but I think it's probably accurate that when you get a promotion, be that to counsel or to partner, maybe for the previous year or so you have been almost dressing for the job you want—so, acting a little bit like you would in that role. It wasn't a situation, at least for me, where on day one I was counsel and there was a whole range of things that I hadn't done before. I had been doing the team management, the business development, and things like that previously, but it just becomes slightly more focused. You get copied on more emails. It's more of a management role. One of the things that we have been told is that what got you to this place is not necessarily going to get you to the next place. And so, particularly as a trainee and a junior lawyer, the key focus is doing great work, being really reliable, having that kind of pure skill set and not worrying so much about the wider piece. Whereas, particularly as counsel, and I'm sure it's the case even more so as partner, you start moving somewhat away from that into how the team is being managed. Is the team busy? It's slightly away from the thing that maybe you loved doing in the first place into a slightly different, but obviously really important role. The workloads increase because of that—you have all your billable hours, targets, and so on. But then, you have to do all the other side of it—the BD and the management side of things. So, it's a step up, but it's a nice step up, I think.

Imaan Ahmad: Sounds really great. With that increase in workload, can we ask how you manage the demands of the job with your personal and family time? It seems like there wouldn't be enough hours in the day to do it all.

Edward Machin: It's hard—that's the honest answer. I tend to have quite a regimented approach, so I will come in early and I will leave fairly early, go home, see my kids, and then work more in the evening. Part of the answer is I work on the weekends. I try to fit it around taking my kids to stuff and doing work while they're skateboarding, playing netball, or whatever. I have a really understanding wife and children who realize that this is something I love doing and, ultimately, I think, it benefits the family as a wider entity. But yes, it's really tricky—it's a constant balancing act.

Sandli Pandey: Thank you—that's very helpful to hear. Thinking about your career in law so far, what would you say has been the most memorable moment?

Edward Machin: Getting my training contract was a huge thing for me. I was a career changer. I ultimately got a training contract at the firm that I really wanted. I had a child at that point. I remember I was writing my training contract applications, sleeping in the front room so I could stay up and do it and not disturb my wife and my son. It just felt like everything I had worked for came together, and that was really exciting. The same with the counsel promotion. I was on holiday, and I had got a call to tell me that it had happened. Again, it just felt like all the things you work for, and you hope that will happen have happened. So, those are really memorable. I think some of the most memorable

things, particularly in the data protection practice, are hard to talk about because it's things like containing a data breach and not making that public—so, memorable in the sense that we and clients can celebrate that privately.

Imaan Ahmad: As you've become more senior on the team, what career advice do you now impart to junior members of the team? And perhaps on the other side of that, what lessons do you continue to learn from them?

Edward Machin: I think in terms of what I try to impart is to be curious and interested in what you're doing, one because it makes it easier, and two because it makes you a better lawyer. I think people naturally gravitate towards you if you seem like you're interested in what you're doing, so I try to impart that to them. I think one of the biggest things that somebody told me—at Ropes actually—was if somebody asks you whether you can do something, within reason, say 'yes', and then you will be able to figure out how to do it. There are certain sliding-doors moments or forks in the road where you have an opportunity to do something or not, and people here are really supportive in that they're asking you to do it probably because they think you can do it. And so, don't doubt yourself—give it a go, and however it goes will be a learning experience. I think that's what I've tried to do—I always try to say 'yes'.

In terms of what I learned from them, I think one of the harder things about being a more senior lawyer to junior lawyers is thinking that your way is the only way to do something and letting people develop their own style, their own voice, and their own way of doing things. I think it's always good to see how other people approach things that you wouldn't, so I've constantly learned from them in that respect. One of the things that I was saying earlier is so interesting about our area is that it's constantly evolving, and so, we ask juniors in our team to be the person for a particular subject matter—you can be coming to them because they're the person on AI or they're the person on a specific law that's coming into effect. I think you want to be learning from them in that way rather than always dictating down, if for no other reason than you're too busy to constantly be trying to figure it out yourself. I know it's sometimes hard to see that as a trainee or as a junior, but even if people don't say it, I think they are learning from each other.

Sandli Pandey: That makes sense. I think something I found really interesting throughout my training contract moving between four different teams was seeing how different people work, even in terms of the way they draft emails or how they give instructions. That's been quite useful to adapt and see what you might like about someone's approach, and what you might maybe not like so much.

Edward Machin: I think that's a really good soft skill as a trainee, to figure out early what it is your supervisor wants. You could even ask them, "How do you want this done?" My trainee and I were talking today, and I said, "If I'm writing for a US partner, I will use American spelling." And so, it's

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just little things like that that make their job easier—try to think about what they would want. And then, like you said, you can take the best of those for your own practice. I think it's a good idea to come into your training contract being as open-minded as you can, try out everything, see if you like it, and then go from there. I think the same applies for supervisors—some of what they do, I think, you might really enjoy, some not, but you can pick and choose that for your own practice.

Sandli Pandey: Was there anything from when you were a junior that either your supervisors or anyone else said to you, that perhaps they did for you or with you that has stuck with you and maybe changed your perspective?

Edward Machin: I was really lucky—I had really good supervisors at my firm. Each of them taught me something different. The first of them, there was a mistake that was made on the transaction that we were doing, and we were kind of worried—I was on the first day of training. She said—and maybe this is not always the case and maybe she just said it to relax us—‘The mistake has been made on a piece of paper and we can fix it with another piece of paper.’ I thought it was quite reassuring at the time. I had another supervisor—this was on a secondment, actually. He was the GC of a large pharma business and he said, ‘If you want to, and it makes you feel good, you can write your legal memo, but what I need is a “yes” or “no” answer.’ That was really instructive in that whilst it might make you feel great to write an incredibly detailed, well-researched memo—and I love doing that—you actually need to think about what it is that the client wants. He or she is incredibly busy—sometimes, they just want to know the answer. And so, I found that really helpful. The other thing that I took away, and this was my supervisor from my data protection seat, was that he said he judged trainees and juniors on whether they could appear calm under pressure. Under the surface, you're paddling like mad and you're anxious, but can you present as if you've got it under control? Because that then gives confidence to the person above you and then to the person above them. I try to do that, at least personally, for my superiors, and I think it's really reassuring. So, those are the three things that I think I still go back to.

Imaan Ahmad: That was such good advice.

Sandli Pandey: For sure. Thank you so much for speaking to us today, Edward. We have one final and random question which I think is my favorite question that we love to ask people: What is your favorite spot in London and why?

Edward Machin: I grew up in London. I'm from Clapham. I think as a generalized spot, that's my favorite place. When I go back there, I still feel like that's home and I still really like it. I met my wife at The Black Heart in Camden, so that's a sentimental spot. My kids were born at the Whittington Hospital in Archway, which is not the most scenic spot, but is also sentimental to me. Then, the thing that I like doing most outside of work is going to gigs, music, shows, and so, my two favorite venues in London are the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm and the Forum in Kentish Town. Those are my happy places.

Sandli Pandey: Definitely places that I think we can check out. I think I'm just going to go hang out in Camden after this in hopes of meeting someone.

We hope you enjoyed listening to this episode as much as we enjoyed recording it. For more information about Ropes & Gray in London, including career opportunities, please visit the Ropes & Gray website as well as the social media pages on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), both @ropesgraygrads. Feel free to get in touch with us via those social media handles if you have any questions or thoughts for future episodes. You can also subscribe to this series wherever you typically listen to podcasts, including on [Apple Podcasts](#) and [Spotify](#).

Imaan Ahmad: We hope you can join us on our next episode where we'll be talking to other inspiring figures at Ropes & Gray and providing you with insight into the firm's culture and how you can succeed as a trainee or junior lawyer. In the meantime, take care and thanks again for listening.



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