

HGF Limited
Annual Report & Accounts
Year ended 30 April 2018

2017
–18

hgf.com

 HGF Limited
 @hgf_IP

- 02 Welcome
- 05 Our Values
- 06 Our Business at a Glance
- 08 2017–18 Growth Charts
- 10 Management Board
- 12 HGF in the Netherlands
- 16 UPC Ready or Not?
- 17 Brexit Means... Business as Usual
- 18 Oppositions and Appeals
- 20 Building Careers at HGF
- 22 Business Services

HGF Limited

Annual Report & Accounts

Year ended 30 April 2018

The term ‘Partner’ denotes
a Shareholder in HGF Limited
and/or member of HGF Law LLP,
as the case may be.





Jason Lumber
Chair and Partner

Paul Sanderson
Chief Executive and Partner

“Our business plays an integral role in the global innovation infrastructure.”

Welcome

Welcome to HGF’s first published annual report. The HGF group’s principal activity is the provision of patent, trade mark and IP attorney-services to a global client base.

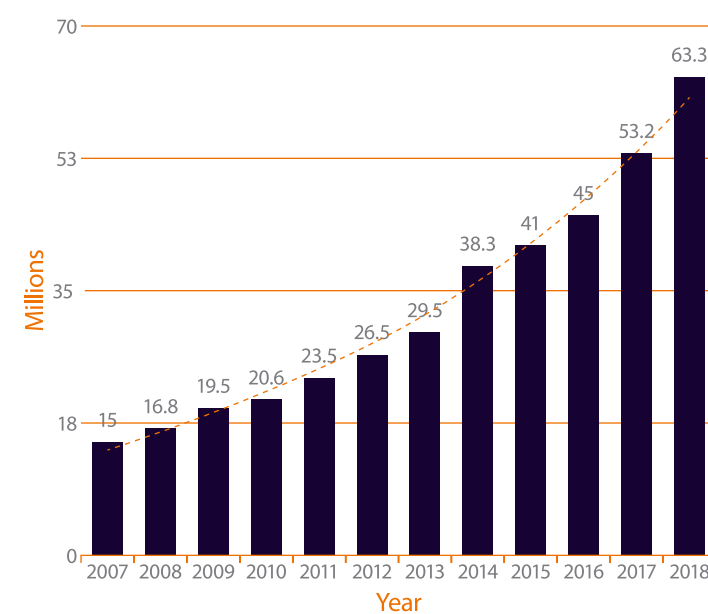
We are one of the largest, dedicated, professional intellectual property groups in Europe, having grown from a small regional firm in the heartlands of Yorkshire to a 17-office business in five countries: Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK. This multi-office, multi-country strategy allows us to provide our clients with country-specific legal expertise from the finest IP attorneys in Europe.

We have achieved this growth by constantly reviewing the needs of our clients and adapting to them, and by reviewing our services and pricing. The group continues in its ability to adapt to a changing market by listening to our clients and delivering their various needs by the pursuit of excellence. We work with our clients to protect their interests.

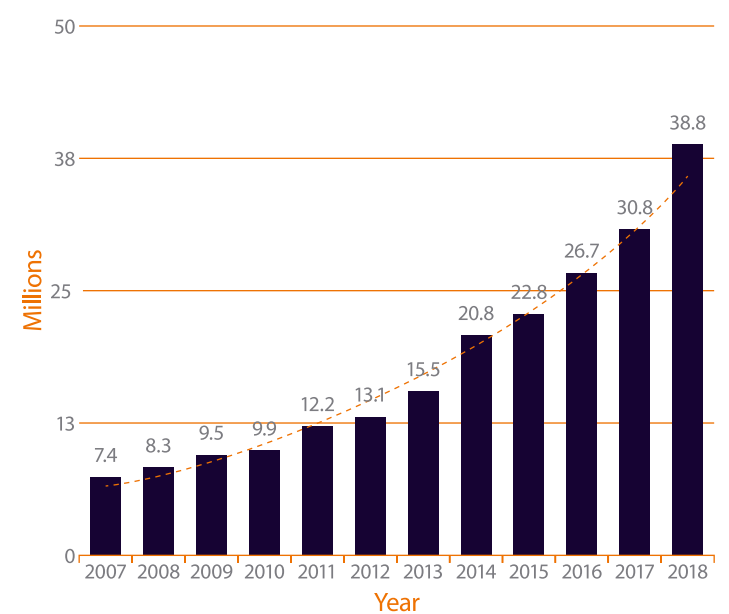
As one of the most innovative groups of patent, trade mark and IP attorneys in Europe, we regularly review strategy and client provisions. We constantly improve our IT function through understanding, creativity and investment to improve our efficiency (enabling us to price competitively) as well as improving the way our clients interact with us.

As a client-focused business with attorneys who have close personal relationships with our clients, the HGF group operates with a traditional ‘partnership’ ethos but using the best of corporate practices within the confines of a corporate structure and company law. The group’s shareholders (“partners”) are widely consulted and have a vote on all significant decisions, especially those that impact client relationships, thereby ensuring that client service remains paramount.

Turnover



Fee Income (Excluding disbursements)



During 2017–18, after a group-wide consultation with our shareholders and colleagues, we crystallised the very best aspects of our culture into a clear set of group-wide agreed values:

- ▶ People – people matter;
- ▶ Excellence – we strive to be the best;
- ▶ Teamwork – we stand together;
- ▶ Progressive – we innovate.

We believe that these simple, cultural behaviours result in increased performance and efficiency, with growth evident from existing clients as well as attracting new clients across the globe.

Complementary to our values, the Group is a founding member of IP Inclusive (www.ipinclusive.org.uk), which is committed to making the IP professions more inclusive. In 2017–18, we adopted the IP Inclusive ethos:

“We believe that there is value, not only to the professions and their individual members, but also to the IP system as a whole and its users, in ensuring that the IP professionals of the future encourage, embrace and sustain a more diverse workforce. We will work together to ensure that for all those who have the necessary aptitude, regardless of their age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, wealth or background, the IP professions are:

- ▶ welcoming
- ▶ accessible
- ▶ respectful
- ▶ supportive

We encourage the IP professionals within our organisations to adopt best practices for securing increased diversity and inclusion.”

“Since 2015, the group has built a robust and sustainable strategy for each of these issues. The message is simple, it is ‘business as usual’.”

As a backdrop to our continued success, 2017–18 has been a year of continued uncertainty not only with the UP (“Unitary Patent”) and UPC (“Unified Patent Court”) but also with Brexit. Since 2015, the group has built a robust and sustainable strategy for each of these issues. The message is simple, it is “business as usual”. Our network of European offices, as well as having many shareholders and attorneys with multiple country-specific and European qualifications, ensure that we can continue to advise clients on how they secure, maintain and defend their European intellectual property interests. Whilst there are challenges ahead, we are optimistic and relish the opportunity for further growth in Europe.

Europe has not been our only focus; the group continues to be committed to the USA and Asia. Our Asian strategy has been a success in the last 12 months, led by a set of nine attorneys, forming a multi-disciplinary team of the highest calibre.

HGF has continued to invest in the support functions of the business, whilst investment in marketing and business development has been strong. New innovations within our intellectual property portfolio management and client information system, OCIS, continue to set us apart from our competitors.

In short, we expect the group’s business to continue to thrive in 2018–19 as the latest office openings grow rapidly, as revenues from our more established offices increase, as we open new offices in Europe, and as we continue to recruit, retain and develop the highest quality attorneys in all the countries in which we operate.

Jason Lumber
Chair and Partner

Paul Sanderson
Chief Executive and Partner

Our Values

People

▶ People matter. We treat people fairly, with respect and compassion. We foster a friendly, inclusive and enjoyable culture for everyone to prosper in. We invest in our people and offer appropriate coaching and training to assist with development and learning. We promote a healthy work-life balance. Progression is based on merit.

Excellence

▶ We strive to be the best. We pursue excellence in all our individual roles resulting in outstanding legal and technical advice for our clients. Our people are pragmatic, responsive and commercially minded. We do not presume, but listen to understand so we can engage proactively and appropriately.

Teamwork

▶ We stand together. We work with our clients to protect their interests, and with each other as a mutually supporting firm. We value, appreciate and listen to others, regardless of role, recognising each individual’s particular blend of talent, skill and experience. We are individually and jointly accountable, and take responsibility for our actions and decisions.

Progressive

▶ We innovate. We continually improve our services and processes through understanding, creativity, and investment. We evolve by taking opportunities and adopting new business procedures, unencumbered by historical structures or out-of-date attitudes. As a firm, we have an entrepreneurial spirit, and encourage new thinking in our people.



52 Partners
315+ Employees
(Including Partners)

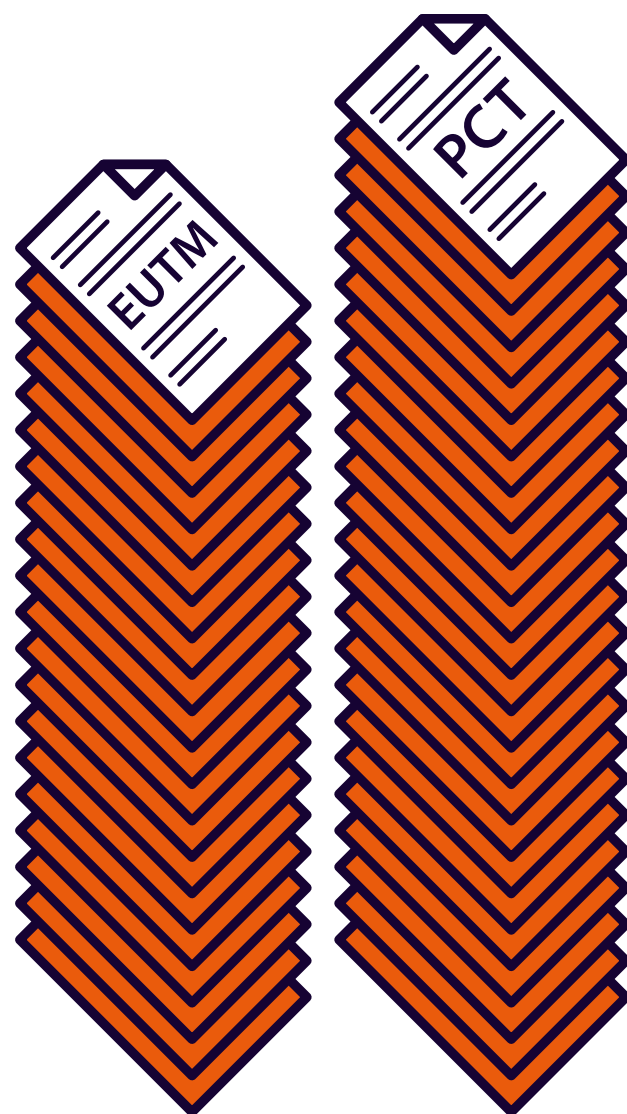


17 Offices
 ▶ United Kingdom
 ▶ Ireland
 ▶ Germany
 ▶ Switzerland
 ▶ The Netherlands

(**TM**)

1,953
Trade Marks Filed
(filed in 2017–18 financial year)

34,586
Live Trade Mark Cases
(pending and registered with
HGF renewal responsibility)



(**P**)

4,336
Patents Filed
(filed in 2017–18 financial year)

23,900
Live Patent Cases
(pending and granted with
HGF renewal responsibility)

* Date range 2017 – 2018

2017–18 Our Business at a Glance *

171
Country Networks
(countries in which we have
Foreign Associate contacts)



Fastest

Financial Times top 1000 fastest
growing companies in 2017



Recommended in:



IAM Patent 1000: 10 Attorneys



MIP STARS: 13 Attorneys



WTR 1000: 10 Attorneys

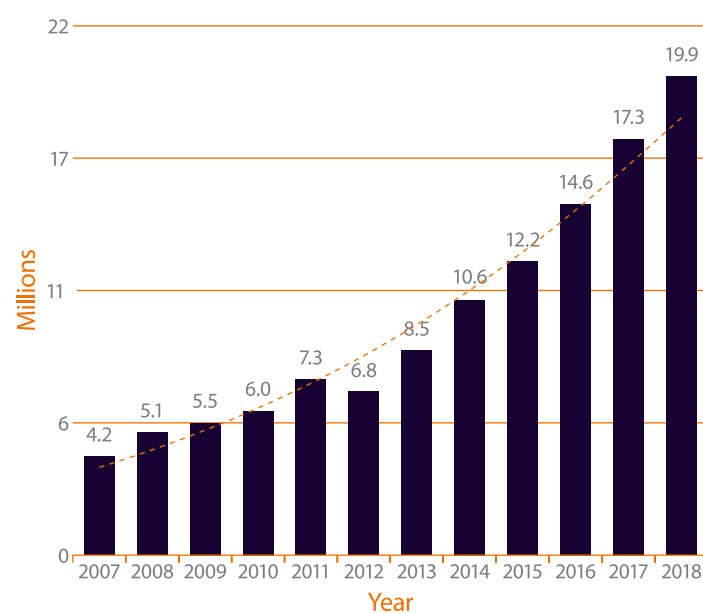


2017–2018 Growth Charts

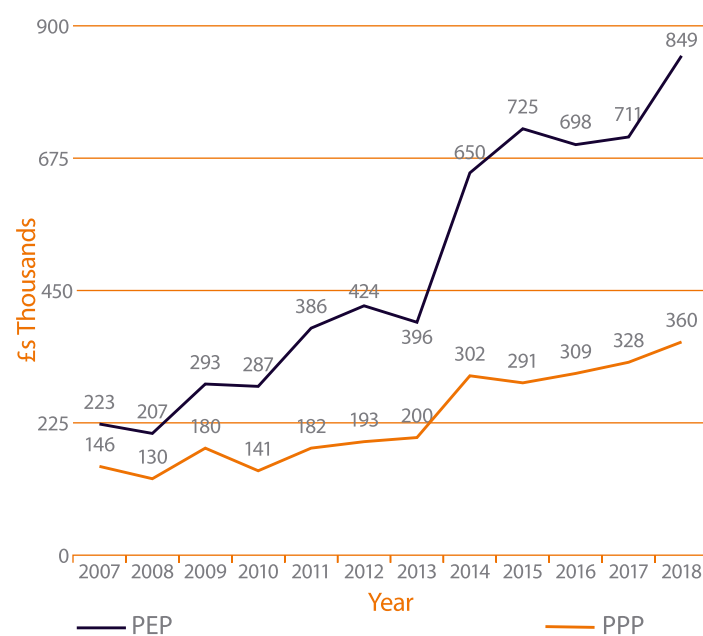
2017/18 was the third year of trade for HGF Limited. The group opened new offices in Nottingham in the UK and Westport in the Republic of Ireland. The new offices have been founded through the recruitment of high calibre Partners. We expect the new offices to be successful and contribute significantly to the continued growth of the group.

We are delighted with the group's growth in revenue, which has been in line with high expectations. The offices that opened during the year ended 30 April 2017 had a stellar first full year with both offices expanding and winning high quality new clients.

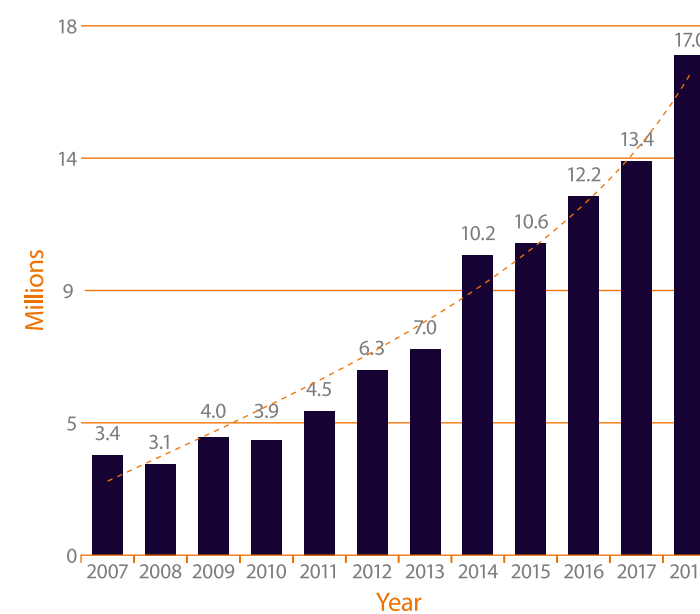
Annual Costs



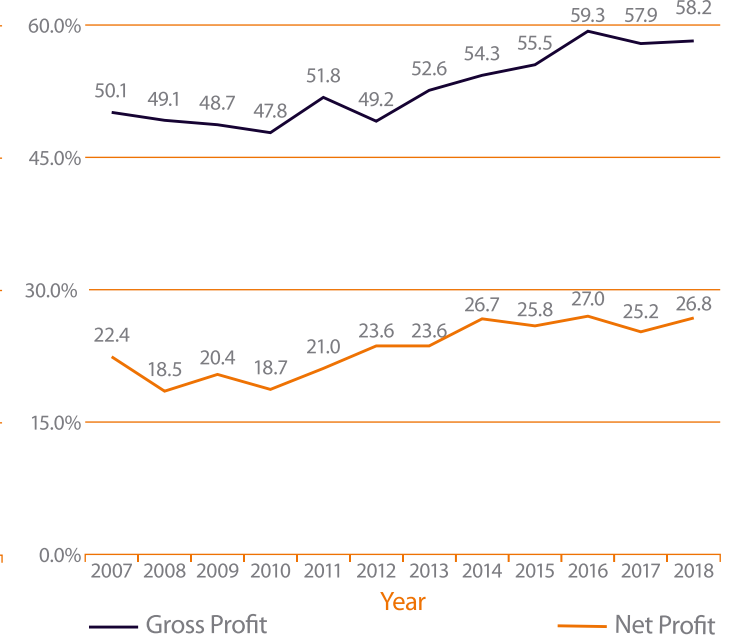
PEP & PPP



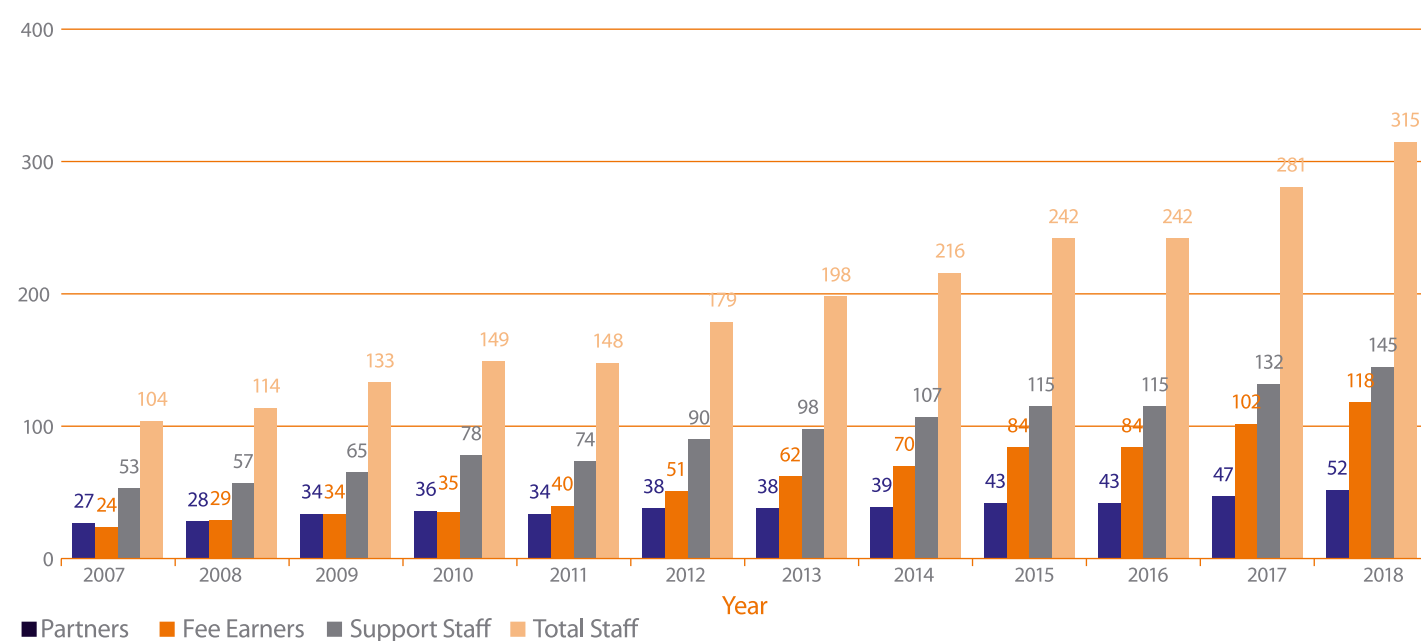
Profits



Gross and Net Profit Margin



Growth in Personnel



"We are delighted with the group's growth in revenue, which has been in line with high expectations."



Robert Harrison
Property and Partner

Paul Sanderson
Chief Executive and Partner

Jason Lumber
Chair and Partner



Dr Jonathan Atkinson
Partner

Hsu Min Chung
Partner

Dr Richard Jenkins
Partner



Management Board

HGF's Management Board provides direction and leadership to the Firm ensuring that its clients receive nothing less than a world class service.

The Board members retire by rotation and are subject to re-election by a vote of all HGF Partners.

Board members are responsible for ensuring key management and strategic issues are raised and discussed on behalf of the partnership.

The Management Board includes:

- ▶ Paul Sanderson
– Chief Executive and Partner
- ▶ Jason Lumber
– Chair and Partner
- ▶ Robert Harrison
– Property and Partner
- ▶ Mark Lunt
– Standards and Regulatory Director and Partner
- ▶ Hsu Min Chung
– Partner
- ▶ Dr Richard Jenkins
– Partner
- ▶ Dr Jonathan Atkinson
(retired 27 November 2017)
– Partner
- ▶ Gary Wilson
(from 27 November 2018)
– Partner



Mark Lunt
Standards and Regulatory
Director and Partner

"The sky's the limit... HGF is entrepreneurial and disruptive, and the market in the Netherlands is ripe for change."

HGF in the Netherlands

In January 2017, HGF continued its expansion into continental Europe when it opened for business in Amsterdam. The strategic move added trade mark capability to its established practice in The Hague giving local and international clients access to a wider range of specialists in key locations.

Kasper Radstake
Partner, Amsterdam

Alexander Hagen
Partner, Amsterdam

Dr Achim Krebs
Partner, The Hague

Pieter de Ruijter
Partner, Amsterdam



HGF CEO Paul Sanderson says, “The Netherlands is a strategically important location for growth in Europe. With Achim in The Hague, and Alexander, Pieter and Kasper in Amsterdam, we saw opportunities to create something distinctive for clients and support our ambitious growth plans.”

In one year, the original Amsterdam team of Alexander Hagen, Pieter de Ruijter and Kasper Radstake have surpassed expectations. Pieter says, “It has been an incredible year. It was a leap into the unknown, but it felt like a natural fit. That has proven to be true and we are all enjoying being part of the HGF team.”

Crediting HGF’s support, Kasper adds, “On day one, we finished working at our old firm and the next we were open for business as HGF. Since then, we haven’t looked back! Clients have followed us and we are winning new ones too. People are knocking on our door.”

With nine people working in new offices in Gedempt Hamerkanaal, HGF in Amsterdam is challenging the local market in more ways than one. “The IP world can be very old-fashioned and risk averse, so HGF’s dynamic and ambitious culture appealed to us. Our office isn’t in the traditional location. We wanted to stand out”, comments Alexander.

Talking about the move to HGF, Kasper says, “There’s just a different kind of energy at HGF. People are professional and great at their jobs, but they are also striving to do more for their clients and to help HGF to become better as well as bigger.”

He explains that working as one team is already bringing benefits. “Having Achim in The Hague and the HGF team in the UK gives us a great opportunity to refer patent work and for them to send trade mark queries back to us. We are part of a bigger team, with experts in different disciplines and sectors. Clients like that.”



Pieter de Ruijter
Partner, Amsterdam

“There’s just a different kind of energy at HGF. People are professional and great at their jobs, but they are also striving to do more for their clients and to help HGF to become better as well as bigger.”



Alexander Hagen
Partner, Amsterdam

Kasper Radstake
Partner, Amsterdam

In The Hague, the team is also growing with new clients including leading universities, biotech and chemicals companies, and two new patent attorneys.

Achim says, “Our offices in the Netherlands are complementary. The Amsterdam partners have fantastic individual reputations and being able to provide their trade mark experience as well as our patent expertise is an attractive message to clients. We also work well with UK colleagues, with cross-firm teams working together on client accounts.”

“The sky’s the limit. We’re targeting corporates coming from Japan, China and the US as well as in Europe. HGF is entrepreneurial and disruptive, and the market in the Netherlands is ripe for change,” says Alexander. Pieter adds, “Clients like that we bring a commercial approach to their intellectual property, taking care of their portfolios in a smart way.”

One year on from opening in Amsterdam and there is much to celebrate. “Life is good! We are making our mark and are excited about the future,” says Alexander. But, there is more to do and, for HGF, eyes are on a bigger European prize.

“We took the decision to expand in Europe well ahead of the European referendum. It is the natural next step for us and we are actively looking at opportunities to take HGF into new markets. While Britain’s departure from the European Union will undoubtedly bring challenges, we see opportunities and are well positioned to capitalise on them” concludes Paul.

UPC Ready or Not?

The unitary patent and Unified Patent Court have been on the IP agenda since 2013, and once in force, have the potential to change the way patent applicants and owners manage their European patent portfolios.

Unitary patents will result in a single patent, applied for at the EPO, having unitary patent protection in up to 25 EU member states. A new court, the Unified Patent Court (UPC) will deal with infringement and validity of both existing European patents and the new unitary patents.

When the UPC opens for business granted European patents will be subject to the UPC's jurisdiction as well as the relevant national courts, unless they are opted-out of the UPC system by patent proprietors. Because this is a fundamental change to European patent litigation, patentees will be able to exercise the opt-out for their European patents for a transitional period of at least seven years. Rules around the opt-out are complex, as will be the decision process itself.

The path for the unitary patent and UPC has not been a straightforward one. With issues over Brexit, and legal challenges in Germany, whether the unitary patent and UPC start in 2019, or even at all, remains to be seen.

The unitary patent and Unified Patent Court have been on the IP agenda since 2013, and once in force, have the potential to change the way patent applicants and owners manage their European patent portfolios.

On 26 April 2018 the UK Minister for Intellectual Property confirmed that the UK had ratified the UPC Agreement; simultaneously the UK also deposited its formal instrument of ratification, making 16 countries in total having ratified the UPCA at the time of writing. However, a legal challenge to the system before the German courts is still causing delays for German ratification. Brexit may present a further challenge to the start date of the system, albeit, the UK Government has stated in its White Paper on The Future Relationship Between the United Kingdom and the European Union, that the UK "intends to explore staying in the [Unified Patent] Court and unitary patent system after the UK leaves the EU."

So, there is still a possibility that these challenges could be overcome and the unitary patent system and UPC could be up and running at short notice. This short notice means IP firms and patentees need to be constantly reviewing the status of the unitary patent and UPC. HGF has its own UPC working group and specific attorneys and lawyers appointed to keep up to date with developments. HGF has prepared for the start of the unitary patent and UPC by creating resources for clients and fee earners and providing training sessions. When the unitary patent and UPC is ready to start, HGF will be too.

"Our message to clients is simple: review your portfolio and get organised now. Whether clients will choose to validate their European applications as unitary patents, or opt in or out of the UPC depends on their circumstances. Some want certainty now and are looking to retain the status quo and avoid the new system altogether. Others want to have early experience of the new system and believe being part of it will be advantageous." says Martyn Fish, who leads the litigation practice at HGF.

Martyn says, "We are ready to go: we understand the rules and subtleties around the UP and UPC, and our attorneys are fully trained. Our blend of patent attorneys and solicitors puts us in a great position to provide a comprehensive and complementary service. We've been working with clients to determine the best approach for their particular situation."

Information correct at time of going to print – October 2018.



Brexit Means... Business as Usual

With the UK's upcoming departure from the European Union, the precise nature of what will happen remains uncertain. What is certain, is that HGF will continue to advise clients on all aspects of patents, trade marks and designs across Europe.

David Potter, Head of the Trade Mark Team, says, "We have undertaken considerable scenario planning so that we are fully prepared and can devise a strategy for Brexit. As far as we're concerned, Brexit means business as usual: providing our clients with the best advice to manage their IP."

It is already clear that:

- ▶ UK national IP rights will not be affected by the UK's exit from the EU
- ▶ Patents obtained via the EPO will not be affected by the UK's exit from the EU
- ▶ EU registered trade marks and registered designs, which currently cover the UK, will remain in place and enforceable in the UK until new provisions are put in place to give them continuing, or corresponding, effect in the UK

It will be business as usual for some time. In addition to helping clients to address the changing landscape in Europe, HGF and the wider IP community are lobbying in both the UK and EU to ensure that disruption is kept to a minimum.

With over 30 trade mark attorneys in the UK and mainland Europe, HGF secures IP rights both in the UK and overseas on behalf of its clients, creating an IP protection strategy to support clients' brands.

"Our trade mark attorneys will continue to advise on all aspects of EUTM and design registrations, and through our network of offices we will be able to continue to represent clients before the EUIPO. There will be no break in service or representation at any point in time. Our office portfolio is growing, and we have further plans for expansion throughout Europe," adds David.

In addition to offices in mainland Europe, in May 2018 HGF opened its first office in Westport, Ireland, and has Irish qualified solicitors and trade mark agents.

Transitional provisions which are currently under discussion between the UK government and EU authorities, will almost certainly enable the cost effective conversion of existing EUTM registrations and pending EUTM applications into UK national registrations and applications, with no loss of priority, filing or seniority claim dates, resulting in no loss of rights.

"Clients are asking us what will happen post-Brexit and whether they should do anything now. IP represents assets worth billions, so we are confident that the UK government and EU authorities will reach a sensible conclusion," says David.

"UK registrations have increased, so some businesses appear to be taking a belt and braces approach and filing in the UK as well as the EU. Of course, it depends on each client, but we can provide individual recommendations based on up to date information we have from the government and UKIPO about the Brexit process."

There are currently 500,000 million UK registrations, compared to one million EU registrations. When the UK leaves the EU, UK registrations will increase dramatically, making it the fourth largest trade mark register, behind China, the US and Japan.

Patents

The grant of European Patents or UK national patents will be unaffected by Brexit. The European Patent Convention is an international treaty, so Brexit will have no impact on the granting of European patents and the validation of EPs in the UK.

The European Patent Office is not an EU institution, so patentees will be able to obtain patent protection for the UK in the same way as they do today. UK-based European patent attorneys will continue to be able to file, prosecute, validate and oppose European patents for clients before the EPO.

Information correct at time of going to print – October 2018.



Oppositions and Appeals

In many Patent Offices around the world it is possible for third parties to object to the grant of patents granted by the respective office.

At the European Patent Office (EPO), it is possible for any person to oppose the grant of a patent. To do so they must file a reasoned request with substantiated grounds at the EPO. The Opponent and the Proprietor then engage in a quasi-judicial process, at the end of which the patent is either maintained, amended or revoked by a decision of the Opposition Division. The decision is open to Appeal to the Technical Boards of Appeal of the EPO (which also hear ex parte appeals from the examining divisions of the EPO).



In 2017, patent applications at the European Patent Office increased by 3.9% to 165,590, with around 47% originating from EPO contracting states, 26% from the US and 13% from Japan. In 2017 over 105,000 patents were granted (a year-on-year increase of 10.1%).

Over the years, the rate of patents being opposed at the EPO has remained at around 4%. However, with a steady rate, as the number of patents being granted increases, the absolute number of oppositions being filed will tend to increase.

Last year was no exception with 3,647 patents opposed (3.7% of patents granted) – an increase of almost 25% on the previous year's figure of 2,938.

The EPO issued 4,070 opposition decisions in 2017, which was broadly the same as the number of decisions issued in 2016. In 73% of the cases the patents were upheld either as granted or in an amended form. The rate at which patents are being revoked by the Opposition Division may be decreasing, perhaps implying a pro-patentee bias at the Opposition Division.

Of course, as the number of Oppositions increases so too will the number of Appeals from those Oppositions. The numbers bear out that upward trend with the Technical Boards of Appeal (TBA) receiving 2,798 new cases in 2017. In 2016, the TBA dealt with 2,748 new cases compared with 2,387 in 2015 and 2,353 in 2014.

Of course, the patents which are opposed, and those oppositions which are appealed, typically represent the most valuable patent assets a proprietor has. An Opposition at the EPO is an interested party's one chance to eradicate the patent across all of the contracting states and so is a very powerful tool.

Dr Chris Moore leads HGF's Oppositions & Appeals (O&A) practice
He says, "Innovative businesses in a knowledge-based economy recognise the value of IP. At HGF we use all opportunities to protect clients' positions and help them to gain competitive advantage. Opposing patents is part of a sophisticated IP strategy."



For Chris, between 30% and 40% of his practice is currently spent on O&A matters. At other times, that figure rises to 60%, with the rest of the O&A team experiencing similar demand.

"The trend is towards more O&A work," he adds. "Our aim is to become the go-to firm for O&A work in Europe. We have the quality of people and our reputation is growing because clients like our approach: the best people for a particular issue driving the best outcomes for clients."

HGF's core O&A group is an experienced team of patent attorneys handling complex and high-value Oppositions. As well as Chris, it comprises at least two members from each technical group and includes some recognised 'heavy hitters' such as Dr Jonathan Atkinson and Matthew Dixon.

Chris explains their approach, "The group represents a centre of excellence for the rest of the business to draw upon. It includes our most experienced O&A experts from chemistry, engineering, life sciences and electronics. We collaborate and share best practice from our different experiences and technical backgrounds."

The key to running a successful Opposition and Appeal is bringing together an understanding of the Oppositions and Appeals process, the commercial market in which the client operates, technical know-how and advocacy skills. In this way, it is possible to ensure that the case-specific strategy is appropriate for achieving the commercial objectives of the client.

"We work with companies vying for dominance in a particular market, or disruptors, using Oppositions and Appeals to assert or defend their position. Deciding whether to prosecute or defend an Opposition or Appeal, and how to manage the process, is not simply a matter of whether you will win or lose, but whether the likely outcome will fulfil your commercial aims," explains Chris. "Our clients like our approach and we are increasingly called upon to help with their most difficult and valuable cases."

Others in the firm also handle O&A work, augmented by the group's specialists when they need additional advice or support. Trainees gain a high degree of exposure to O&A work, giving clients value for money and helping trainees to develop a broad range of skills and experience.

As the EPO numbers show, these skills and experience are much in demand. Patent applications, Oppositions and Appeals are a dynamic and growing area. This increase puts pressure on the EPO, which has responded by introducing the concept of 'early certainty'.

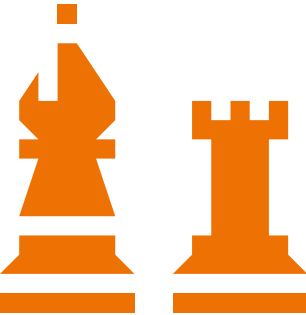
Early Certainty
The early certainty in Oppositions program at the EPO has been running for about two years. The process seeks to limit the time between grant of the patent and a decision of the Opposition Division to 24 months.

Chris says, "As the number of patents granted increases and the number of Oppositions is going up, the number of people at the EPO processing these Oppositions has remained the same."

"Early certainty means that the process should take two years, which puts pressure on the people managing that process. Any backlog will be shifted into the Appeals process. Ironically, final certainty could actually be delayed by the early certainty process," adds Chris.

While the EPO has its own challenges to contend with, Britain leaving the European Union shouldn't be one of them, as the EPO is not an EU institution. "Outside of O&A, we have put the necessary steps in place to advise UK and global clients from the UK or via our European offices. From our perspective, it's business as usual," says Chris.

See p.17 for further details of HGF's approach to Brexit.



Source:
Annual Report of the Boards of Appeal 2017
Annual Report of the EPO 2017
Annual Report of the EPO 2016
Annual Report of the EPO 2015

Building Careers at HGF

HGF was one of the Financial Times’ fastest growing companies in 2017. This is a firm which doesn’t stand still. Nor do its people.

“We’re an ambitious business, so we attract people who also want to excel, do their utmost for clients, and progress their careers,” says HR Director and Partner Carol Watkiss.

Carol occupies a unique position in the IP world, as HGF is the only IP firm in the UK to have a qualified HR Director who is also an equity Partner. This is just one way in which HGF demonstrates its commitment to people and their development.



“We’re an ambitious business, so we attract people who also want to excel, do their utmost for clients, and progress their careers...”

HGF launched in 1995, since then its dynamic approach to the market has led to rapid growth: since 2004, the firm has opened 12 offices and promoted or taken on 48 new partners.

“People are central to the business and culture at HGF. We have a reputation for looking after our staff, offering a great workspace and a wealth of opportunities to ensure that everybody can develop and improve their industry skills as the firm grows,” says Carol.

“People are given a mix of autonomy and support so that they can develop their skills and careers,” says Andy Camenisch. Andy came to HGF for work experience and never left. Both UK and European qualified, he has developed a thriving practice and, in 2017, became a Partner.

He says, “The bar is set high at HGF and being an excellent professional isn’t enough. We have to be at the top of our game in terms of technical skills, but our attorneys add value by bringing a client-focused commercial perspective to their work.”

HGF’s approach ‘reinvented the client relationship’ by offering a fully integrated service of patents, trade marks, designs, IP litigation and transactional work. The onus, therefore, is very much on team work.

Andy Camenisch
Partner

Dr Nienke Lubben
Patent Director

Carol Watkiss
HR Director and Partner



“It doesn’t matter what office you are in, you are part of the HGF family.”

Rebecca Grant
Trainee Trade Mark Attorney

Tom Nener
Legal Director

“We’re all working to achieve the same ends, bringing our individual experience and expertise together to help clients make the most of their IP assets and investment,” explains Legal Director Tom Nener.

Birmingham-based Tom is a qualified Solicitor and part of HGF’s growing legal practice. According to Tom, HGF provides a welcome break from the “more traditional” law firm environment. Describing HGF colleagues as “collegiate”, he enjoys being part of an IP-focused business.

Rebecca Grant is at an earlier stage in her career. Having completed a law degree, Rebecca joined HGF as a Trade Mark Formalities Officer in York. She has subsequently moved to Leeds where she is training to become a Trade Mark Attorney.

“I already have my own work and clients. I’m learning as much about dealing with clients and managing a file as I am about trade marks,” says Rebecca.

Training to become a qualified Trade Mark or Patent Attorney is a long and challenging road, with plenty of hard work along the way. Every trainee has a supervising partner to mentor and guide them through the qualification process.

Practical support and time to study give those qualifying the best chance of success. This results in HGF’s high qualification rate.

Rebecca says, “It doesn’t matter what office you are in, you are part of the HGF ‘family’. From my first interview, through conversations about career potential, to moving to Leeds and starting my training, I have always been encouraged to stretch myself.”

Each year, HGF holds a continuing professional development (CPD) conference, giving professionals the opportunity to update their technical knowledge, meet colleagues from other offices and share ideas about the industry.

Fun and engaging, the conference features speakers from in-house and guest experts, and covers both technical training and practical sessions to help improve a range of business skills such as negotiation or networking.

HGF also assigns individual training budgets, which can be used to support training and studying for professional qualifications. It trusts staff to make their own decisions about the most appropriate learning methods for them.

In York, Rebecca worked with Senior Patent Attorney and life sciences specialist Nienke Lubben. “There’s a culture of trust here. We’re here for our clients, building rapport with them so that they trust us. You are trusted to make the right decisions; trusted to continue learning; and trusted by your colleagues,” she explains.

“Any team needs trust. I know that if I want anything from one of my colleagues – a second opinion, some sector insight, a sounding board – then they are happy to help,” adds Nienke.

Trust, transparency and sharing knowledge is part and parcel of life at HGF. Tom says, “The CEO and Chairman get round to every office, speaking to colleagues about company news and future plans. Management are really open and will answer any question.”

HGF has found its recipe for success and people are the key ingredient.



Business Services

While Partners, Lawyers and Attorneys are busy advising their clients, business services professionals are dedicated to providing the IT, HR, marketing and administrative support they need to do a great job.

We speak to three people to find out how they spend their time and the contribution they make to the HGF team.

(P)



Rebecca Cole
Patent Formalities Officer, London

Rebecca is one of five formalities officers in London, an office of around 52 people. She manages the patent process – what needs doing in relation to registration, updates, communication, actions, taking instructions and liaising with the Patent Attorneys and clients.

How long have you worked at HGF? Fourteen years. I joined as a junior, before becoming a Legal Secretary and then Formalities Officer. There is always something new to try or extra responsibility available if you are looking to develop your skills, interests or confidence.

What has surprised you about HGF? HGF is one of the fastest growing companies in Europe. I thought the family feel would change as the firm grows, but that hasn't been the case. It feels like people really care about you.

How would you describe a typical HGF employee? HGF employees are all different, but everyone has huge level of expertise and is happy to share it. They are helpful, open, warm, knowledgeable, welcoming and family-focused.

How does HGF bring its different offices and employees together? There is lots of interaction with other offices and, in London, we always see people from other offices. The Christmas party is an annual event that people look forward to. You get put on a table and might have the CEO sitting next to you. Everyone is down to earth. They are a friendly bunch who will have a joke with you.

What are you most proud of? I didn't go to university, but started as a junior and have worked my way up. It is a challenging job but when you have cleared your diary and got everything done, you feel like you have accomplished something. 'Thank you' makes everything worthwhile.

In patents, you see companies or products that we have been involved in. Whenever someone asks what I do, I talk about Dragon's Den; people pitching to take their ideas to market, and the intellectual property behind those ideas.



Lee Goodwill
IT Infrastructure

Seventeen years ago, Lee joined HGF's fledgling IT team. At that time, it consisted of just one person: IT Director Rob Harrison. As IT systems, capability and infrastructure become increasingly central to the success of HGF, Lee's role, and his team, are constantly evolving.

Tell us a bit about the IT team The HGF IT team is now up to eight and counting. We've gone from reacting to issues, like broken computers, to helping to drive the business by identifying needs and creating solutions. If we have an idea that is feasible and will benefit the business, we have the autonomy to try it. We have successfully developed all the portfolio management systems we use.

What do you look for when recruiting to the team? Of course, I'm interested in the skills potential recruits have now, but I am more interested in the skills they can acquire. Cultural fit and the desire to develop is important if you're going to join the team. We are looking for people who want to solve problems and create solutions.

What keeps you at HGF? The big thing is being happy in what I do. I love working with Rob; we have a really good working and personal relationship. I've had opportunities to take on more responsibility, and I want to see what I have started through. There's more for us to do!

How does IT support client relationships? One example is our Online Client Information System (OCIS), which provides clients with a portal to keep them up to date with their matters. It also acts as a repository for all their documents, filings, invoices – management information that they might need.

What is the best thing about working at HGF? I love the social side of working here. People start as colleagues and become friends. It's a testament to the company that people stick around. We give them a lot of responsibility and don't micro manage them. We want people who are looking to take ownership; looking for responsibility.

(iT)

How has HGF changed? When I first joined we didn't have a HR department and the IT team was Rob. The business functions have evolved with the firm's continued growth. But, the personality hasn't changed. We are all – business services, attorneys, partners – treated with the same amount of respect. We're professional in our dealings with clients and one another, but with a fun and friendly culture.

Sum up HGF in three words

Ambitious, expansive and cutting-edge



Lauren Richardson
Trade Mark Formalities, Leeds

Lauren is a Trade Mark Formalities Officer who works with David Potter, Head of Trade Marks and Katie Goulding, Trade Mark Attorney. It's a broad role, more akin to that of a paralegal, encompassing filing trade mark applications, daily client contact and liaising with attorneys and advisers in other jurisdictions.

How long have you worked at HGF?
I've worked at HGF for about four and a half years, having previously spent 12 years at two other IP businesses.

What is the best thing about working at HGF?
It's definitely the people. They're down to earth. I enjoy working here and the relationships I have with colleagues. The CEO, the Partners, everybody is equally approachable, which I think says a lot about the company as a whole. We're encouraged to perform and develop, with the right mix of informality and friendliness, and support and structure.

How would you describe trade mark work?
It is a diverse area and, even after years of experience, I still come across issues that I don't know the answer to, which is a great challenge. In terms of volume, I deal with a huge number of trade marks as we have lots of different clients all registering trade marks in different countries. There are a lot of deadlines!

HGF has grown quickly, how has that changed the company?
Since I've been here, it seems that we have new starters or new offices almost every day. It's a good place to be, knowing that we're working for a business that is expanding and doing well, while retaining its culture.

When recruiting, we take time and effort to make sure that people who join will enhance the culture. We have end of month drinks, a big Christmas party, and other social events. We're a friendly and sociable company, working hard to ensure that people know one another – regardless of where they are based.

How do you see your career progressing at HGF?
The opportunities are here for me to make the most of. I've just completed a law degree with the Open University and am delighted to say that from October 1st 2018 I will be a Trainee Trade Mark Attorney here at HGF.

Tell us about a work highlight
When we opened our Amsterdam office, everything was new for the team there: systems, how HGF worked and how to get things done. I went over regularly to provide training and a connection to the UK so they felt part of the team. This helped them to get up and running more quickly. Working in a different country, on my own, was both daunting and exciting.




HGF Limited

1 City Walk
Leeds
LS11 9DX
United Kingdom

 +44(0) 113 233 0100

 @hgf_ip

 HGF Limited

 hgf.com