

HFW

Cc:

ALUMNINETWORK

Catching Up

Cc: speaks to Adnan Mohammed, Head of Project Finance at UK Export Finance

Meet the newest members of our HFW Community

Lateral hires

Heads & Tales

Meet our new Chief Operating Officer, Aravinda Subasinghe



HFW Community: you're invited...

From our alumni to our clients, our current staff to our suppliers, each person in our global network – past and present – makes up an important part of the HFW Community.

HFW's Alumni Network is a place where current and former colleagues can stay in touch with each other, and with the firm.

At HFW, we're incredibly proud of our alumni. From boardrooms of the world's leading organisations to startups driving innovation across our sectors, our alumni make waves. They're not just part of our history; they're shaping the future.

As a member of our alumni network, you gain access to a wide range of benefits, including free use of office or meeting space in any HFW location; referral bonuses for introducing candidates to the firm; and invitations to alumni events across our global network. We'll also keep you updated on the latest news from HFW and your fellow alumni.

The HFW Alumni Network is open to all current and former lawyers and business services professionals. Thank you for being part of our community.

[Join our HFW Alumni LinkedIn Group](#)

Introduction from our Global Senior Partner



Welcome to the July 2025 edition of our Alumni Magazine.

In this issue, we catch up with Adnan Mohammed, Head of Project Finance at UK Export Finance, who shares his fascinating career journey from aspiring cricketer to prominent finance professional.

We also introduce our new Chief Operating Officer, Aravinda Subasinghe, who brings a wealth of experience and a unique background to our team.

Our Diversity & Inclusion Networks have been busy with various initiatives, including gender equality projects, mental health awareness webinars, and social mobility discussions. We also highlight the activities of our Thrive network, focusing on disability and neurodiversity, and our Pride network's vibrant events during Pride Month.

Additionally, we celebrate the achievements of our colleagues with a section on lateral hires and promotions, showcasing the new talent and expertise joining our firm.

Finally, don't miss our job board, featuring exciting opportunities across our international offices.

We hope you enjoy this edition and find inspiration in the stories and updates shared by our HFW community. Happy reading!

GILES KAVANAGH
Global Senior Partner
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CONTENTS



4. Catching Up

We caught up with Adnan Mohammed on life since leaving HFW

6. News from our HFW Community

Corporate Responsibility updates

8. Lateral Hires

Meet our lateral hires

10. Promotions

Meet our seven new Partners and five new Legal Directors

12. Heads & Tales

Meet our new Chief Operating Officer, Aravinda Subasinghe

14. Job Board

Refer a friend or someone from your network to come work for us, and you could be eligible for a £500 award!



ADNAN MOHAMMED

We caught up with Adnan Mohammed, Head of Project Finance at UK Export Finance. Adnan was a trainee based in the London office from 2003-2006.



As a child, I had aspirations of becoming a professional cricketer; I played representative cricket for my county up to the age of 19 and participated in second eleven games. However, my interest in law was sparked by conversations with my cousin, a lawyer in the city, which led me to study law at university while continuing to play cricket.

After completing my law degree, I interned at the Attorney General's office in New York in 1998. I spent five months there gaining valuable experience, as well as spending two weeks interning at the UN. I then faced a career choice between qualifying as a UK solicitor or becoming a New York State attorney. Missing England and the cricket environment, I decided to return to the UK.

Upon returning to the UK, I pursued postgraduate studies, including a master's in philosophy and a master's in international law, before attending law school. I then applied for a training contract and started my legal career at HFW in 2003 as a trainee.

I trained at HFW for two years, I was in the same intake as current partners: Dominic Johnson, Matt Gore, and Geoffrey Conlin. I gained valuable insights into the commercial world as an in-house lawyer during my six-month secondment to an oil

company based in Canary Wharf, UK. After completing my training contract, I was uncertain about my career path and decided to take a few months off. I did not apply to stay on at HFW and travelled during my break. Later, I was offered a position at HFW Dubai. During my time in Dubai, I had a chance encounter with the CEO of a bank, who offered me a position as his Chief of Staff. This role involved learning about banking operations, assisting the CEO with speeches, meetings, communications with senior management, preparing presentations, and working on special projects. I effectively became the CEO's right-hand man during this period.

I faced three career options: staying in Dubai with HFW, joining another law firm with the option to work in London or the Middle East, or working for the CEO of the bank in Holland. I chose the banking job, seeing it as a unique and less-trodden path compared to the more defined career paths in law firms.

After some time, the CEO of the bank said it was time for me to move on within the bank. I had learnt everything there was to under him, and it was time for my next career jump. He told me to pick any division in the bank to work in. I said that I was interested in private equity. I'd helped set up the business in New York and was heavily involved with a lot of their initiatives in

terms of putting forward their business plans to our Supervisory Board. He said that I wasn't quite ready for that yet. He advised me to go and do some senior debt lending in project finance and infrastructure. The best person we had was an MD based in Norway. This MD was a genius with a double master's degree from M.I.T in mathematics and physics. I left the Netherlands and went to Norway.

Unlike law, working in an international bank exposes you to a very diverse group of people, from various backgrounds, disciplines, and teams. We had bankers who were chemical engineers, historians, economists, philosophers, etc. This very creative pool of people were always thinking about new products and new ways of enhancing shareholder value.

My banking career took me to various countries, including the Netherlands, Norway, Japan, Singapore, and Greece. My time in New York as an intern really put me in good stead for all those different countries where I ended up working for periods of time. When you are in your late 20s, early 30s, you are far more inclined to be outgoing and perhaps adventurous. In the early 2000s, without the help of apps to connect you to people, you had to just get out and meet people to build up your network organically, to explore and learn how to live like a local in each city.

In 2008, I returned to London as Vice President in the Investment Management business of the bank. I continued in this role until 2012.

I got involved in local politics in 2013 and was elected as a Westminster City Councillor in 2014. I balanced this part-time role with my banking career. I served as Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Planning. In 2017, during my time at the Council, I was put on the approved list for Parliamentary Candidates and was earmarked for several seats. However, by 2018, I decided to step down from politics, anticipating changes in the political landscape. Right now, politics is not on my radar but never say never!

I served on the Supervisory Board of the bank, gaining valuable insights into the management of financial institutions and participating in key strategic decisions. I was the youngest member of the bank's Supervisory Board, serving on the Board for six years. I participated in key strategic decisions, audits with the European Central Bank, and shareholder meetings. This experience has been the highlight of my career thus far.

In 2019, I left the bank to become a full-time Non-Executive Director, sitting on the board of various companies. This allowed me to take a break from the intense banking environment. The pandemic posed challenges for the companies that I was involved with, particularly in the transportation sector. Helping those companies come up with solutions to survive that period was interesting.

I was approached by a recruiter in early 2023 for a role at UK Export Finance as Head of Project Finance. I joined the Civil Service as it was a gentler integration back into the corporate environment, whilst contributing to the public sector. I have been working on some very interesting global transactions that are cutting edge in the market, driving a lot of new technologies forward in the green space. My team has done, over the last two years, \$2.4B of transactions from offshore wind farms, solar farms, EV gigafactories, and port infrastructure.

Being part of the Civil Service has also let me give something back, which has been a common theme throughout my career. I am proud of the volume of work achieved and the lasting legacy. Being part of the transition energy movement is also exciting because it is a major shift from the "old world". This is the most exciting time, in my view, in the last 30+ years to be involved in Project Finance, Infrastructure, and Transportation. We all have to change our way of thinking in these transactions. The challenges of new technology, credit risk, structures, and sponsor groups make it all the more interesting.

Outside of work, I still enjoy playing cricket (I have retired from Premier League Cricket) but still play in a league for my North London club and for the MCC. I also practise martial arts, which I started as a teenager. I hold a black belt 3rd Dan in Aikido and train regularly in the UK and across Europe. I go to Japan twice a year to train and do all my examinations. I haven't sustained too many injuries, thankfully.

I resigned from my position at UKEF in May and will finish my role in early August. I have not yet lined up my next role and I have not "job hunted" for 20 years! I will take a few months to enjoy the great summer we are having and enjoy this new experience and plenty of time for long coffees and catching up with ex-colleagues. So, a new uncertain chapter. I don't know what the next 15-20 years will hold, but what I do know is my career has been very unconventional so far. I've not planned any of it apart from my training contract. I don't know whether that's been wise or not? I have gone with the flow and tried to make decisions which felt right at the time — instinct and intuition are so important. Some of those decisions were perhaps quite scary to take, such as moving in the mid-90s as a 19-year-old to New York City with no accommodation lined up and being in the city for the first time, or leaving a profession I spent years studying to work in to go into a very unfamiliar profession. No regrets so far!

I have appreciated my time at HFW, which provided the foundations for my career. What stands out to me the most is that I worked with some very good people at HFW (both technically and professionally). Over the years, I have had a lot of interaction with HFW on a professional level, because as a bank we did transportation finance, infrastructure, shipping, aircraft, and oil and gas. I valued the professionalism and ethics that I learned at HFW and have applied these principles in my subsequent roles. The environment there wasn't the sort of cutthroat environment that you would hear about going on in other law firms. Integrity was really drilled into me by my senior colleagues. As a junior lawyer, I was always treated fairly and with respect. There was a good tradition of values, and whilst you were there, you felt like a keeper of those values, following a long history and tradition of a firm that has always had strong values, ethics, and professionalism. I look back at my time at HFW and do miss those days and that environment.

I always keep an eye on what HFW is doing and the transactions that it is involved in. I am always rooting for you. I am sure our paths will cross again in the future!

Click [here](#) to connect with Adnan



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Did you enjoy your time with us?

Click [here](#) to leave us a review on



Diversity & Inclusion Network Round-up

Here's a look at some of the latest initiatives and milestones from across our global D&I networks.

Gender

We are pleased to welcome Claire Womersley, Partner in London's Shipping team, as the new Chair of the Gender Equality Network, and Suzanne Meiklejohn from the Commodities team in Singapore as Deputy Chair. Their leadership marks a new chapter for the network, which recently concluded the London Gender Project. This year-long initiative, launched in September 2023, focused on identifying and addressing barriers to gender equity in the workplace.

Key initiatives included a coffee-tasting networking event to foster informal mentorship and increase the visibility of female role models; a peer support and coaching programme for women returning from maternity leave; and a storytelling campaign that highlighted the achievements of women across HFW, with nominations from the Gender Equality Network, Operations Board, and Management Board.

Healthy Minds

In April, our APAC offices hosted a regional session on the Mindful Business Charter, led by founder Richard Martin. The session explored practical ways to reduce avoidable stress and promote healthier working practices.

For Mental Health Awareness Week in May, Healthy Minds co-chairs Lynne Jones and Paul Dean led a series of candid webinars where they shared their personal mental health journeys. These sessions encouraged open dialogue and highlighted the importance of self-care, resilience, and support systems in the workplace. The network also shared resources to help colleagues manage stress and maintain balance.

Social Mobility

To mark Social Mobility Awareness Week, the Social Mobility Network hosted a panel discussion featuring speakers from HFW, the Brokerage, the Social Mobility Foundation, and the 93 Percent Club. The conversation explored the challenges and opportunities for individuals from less advantaged backgrounds entering the legal profession, and how firms like HFW can help level the playing field.

The network has also been working with the corporate responsibility team to prepare HFW's submission to the Social Mobility Index. This process includes reviewing recruitment, outreach, and progression practices to identify areas for improvement and celebrate progress.

Thrive

Our newest network, Thrive, focuses on disability and neurodiversity inclusion. To launch the network, we hosted a three-part webinar series in collaboration with psychotherapist Gwen Jones from Educating Matters. Chaired by employment partner Michelle Chance, the sessions covered neurodiversity in adults, children, and the workplace.

Each webinar was accompanied by a detailed handbook offering practical guidance and further reading. The series aimed to raise awareness, challenge misconceptions, and equip colleagues with tools to better support neurodivergent individuals. Thrive has already sparked meaningful conversations and will continue to build on this momentum.

Race & Ethnicity

To commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, our APAC offices hosted a webinar with Evolve Communities. The session explored the concept of family ties in Indigenous Australian cultures and how these values can inform inclusive workplace practices.

Colleagues also contributed reflections on a range of cultural and religious observances, including Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Easter, and others. These contributions have helped foster greater cultural understanding and appreciation across our global community.

Pride

Pride Month was celebrated with a vibrant calendar of events across regions. In London, we hosted a Pride Cabaret at 8 Bishopsgate. In Australia, a Drag Queen Trivia night was held, with virtual participation from APAC offices, creating a fun and inclusive atmosphere.

We also hosted a webinar led by Allie Loweth in the London office, focusing on the importance of allyship and visibility. Additionally, HFW proudly joined as a corporate sponsor of Pride in Law, the national representative body for LGBTQIA+ legal professionals in Australia. This reflects our ongoing commitment to inclusion and advocacy.

Lateral hires

We continue to broaden and strengthen our offering to clients by adding leading talent across our sectors and international network.



SHAUN LEONG
Partner, Perth
Banking and Finance

Shaun is an international arbitration specialist with more than 15 years of experience advising on a diverse range of complex international disputes, investor state treaty arbitration, investigations, and mediation. His expertise includes advising on disputes relating to AI, blockchain, and cryptocurrency, as well as energy, climate change, and sustainability. Shaun is a recognised leader in emerging technology disputes. He was the first lawyer in the world to successfully obtain a worldwide proprietary injunction to freeze a non-fungible token (NFT) on the blockchain in a commercial dispute. Shaun's energy sector experience includes advising clients on matters relating to carbon credits, clean power purchase agreements, and advising on disputes relating to green activism.



EMMA THOMAS
Legal Director, London
Competition

Emma has 20 years' experience of competition law matters, and joins HFW's London office from Direct Line Group, where she was Head of

Competition and Anti-Bribery. She was previously Senior Legal Counsel at Barclays and also held roles at Clifford Chance and on secondment at Shell.

Emma advises clients on a wide range of contentious and non-contentious matters relating to competition, anti-bribery and corruption, and financial crime. She also advises clients on compliance training and managing teams.



SINYEE ONG
Legal Director, Singapore
Insurance

Sinyee, who joins HFW from Chua and Partners, has more than a decade of experience advising clients on insurance, construction and commercial disputes across a wide spectrum of industries, including hospitality, energy/power, pharmaceuticals, real estate and trading. Her expertise includes acting on international commercial arbitration proceedings under various arbitration rules – including ICC, SIAC and UNCITRAL. She has worked throughout Asia Pacific, the Middle East and North America, and is qualified in New York, Singapore, England & Wales and Western Australia.



MIKE BUNTON
Master Mariner, London
Shipping

Mike has almost 20 years' shipping experience and joins HFW in London from the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency, where he was Head of Navigation. He previously held a variety of roles at TechnipFMC, including Vessel Master and Senior Chief Officer, and also worked at WightLink Isle of Wight Ferries.

HFW now has 14 Mariners and Master Mariners across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia Pacific, working alongside more than 40 lawyers in the largest specialist marine casualty practice of any law firm.



CHRISTIAN TAYLOR
Consultant, London
Real Estate

Christian has been a law firm partner for 20 years and has experience across several of HFW's core sectors, including ports & terminals, aviation, insurance, and logistics, advising clients on a wide range of issues from landlord and tenant matters to financing and development.

He also advises on the real estate aspects of corporate transactions, and acts for investors in commercial and

high-end residential real estate, and for developers of residential, commercial, and mixed-use schemes, where he will work closely with HFW's corporate, yachts, and business aviation teams.

Christian joins HFW as a Consultant, having previously spent more than five years as a partner at the firm in London and Dubai.



GRAEME GAMBLE
Partner, Perth
Commodities

Graeme, who joined HFW from Herbert Smith Freehills, has more than 25 years' experience advising clients in the energy sector. He is admitted in Australia and England and Wales and has practiced in London and Perth.

Graeme specialises in energy related M&A and project development, including Carbon Capture and Storage, LNG liquefaction and import and offshore wind projects and operations. In addition, he has advised on numerous significant LNG trades between Australia, Asia, the US, and Europe.

Earlier in his career, Graeme spent several years as Senior Legal Counsel at Centrica Energy in the UK where he was responsible for Centrica's LNG import capacity position at the Isle of Grain LNG import terminal, North Sea M&A and field development and

Centrica's offshore wind portfolio development and operations in the North and east Irish Seas.

He is a member of the Australian Mining and Petroleum Law Association and the Association of International Petroleum Negotiators.



JOHN CANNING
Special Counsel, Sydney
Aviation & Asset Finance

John is an aviation and asset finance specialist with more than 30 years' experience working in Sydney, London, and Hong Kong. He practices Australian and Hong Kong law and is also admitted to practice law in England and Wales. John and spent more than 23 years as a partner at King & Wood Mallesons before joining HFW.

John primarily advises on front end transactions, but also has significant experience on major insolvency matters – including as the lead lawyer for all aviation creditors on the Virgin Australia administration.



ANNA FOMINA
Partner, London
Commodities

Anna specialises in physical commodities disputes, with a particular focus on the oil, gas, petroleum, chemical products, and metals sectors. She joins HFW as a partner from Clyde & Co.

Anna has more than 15 years' experience advising on a wide range of commodities and international trade-related disputes in the UK, Europe and the Middle East, having spent almost a decade based in Dubai until 2019.

She also advises commodities clients on a wide range of commercial disputes and on non-contentious matters such as sale and purchase contracts, general terms and conditions and charterparties.

Promotions

This financial year, we have promoted seven new Partners and four new Legal Directors. The promotions reflect our continued growth across our international network and core sectors.

New Partners



ALIX D'ARJUZON
(Aerospace, Brussels)

Alix advises and represents different clients in the transport sector, such as major airlines, insurers and other aerospace entities on a wide range of legal matters, including the drafting and negotiation of leases and financing contracts and on regulatory matters such as environmental and European regulations. Alix has also extensive expertise in litigation and arbitration. She assists clients in multi-jurisdiction major losses matters in the construction, insurance, distribution, and transport sectors. She pleads regularly before the commercial and civil courts in France as well as arbitration courts. Alix is fluent in French and English. She is qualified in Paris and a member of the Brussels bar.



ALEX SAYEGH
(Shipping, London)

Alex specialises in the transactional aspects of the commercial shipping and yachting industries; advising owners, shipyards and financiers on the construction, refit, repair, sale and purchase of various types of vessels. He has a particular focus on construction contracts for new builds and has extensive experience of negotiating with shipyards and

yacht builders throughout the world. Alex also regularly lectures on the subjects of shipbuilding and sale and purchase contracts.



ANAS AL-TARAWNEH
(Shipping, Kuwait)

Anas specialises in litigation in the Middle East. He handles a wide range of civil and commercial disputes focusing on litigation in the shipping, logistics and transport sectors. Anas' experience extends to representing local and international clients in banking disputes, civil and commercial agency disputes and construction disputes. He also manages enforcement of foreign judgments and arbitration awards, as well as criminal claims arising out of corporate fraud, breach of trust, casualties and work-related injuries. Anas holds a Bachelor of Law degree from the University of Jordan and then gained his Masters in International Commercial and Business Law from the University of East Anglia, UK. Prior to joining HFW, Anas worked at leading law firms in Jordan and the UAE. Anas is qualified in Jordan.



FRANCESCO FIORILLI
(Aerospace, Riyadh)

Francesco brings a wealth of experience in advising aviation stakeholders on a wide array of contentious and non-

contentious matters across multiple jurisdictions, with a primary focus on liability, regulatory, and commercial issues. He has been based in the Middle East for over 10 years and before joining HFW, served as legal counsel for a major airline based in the region, managing the airline's litigation and regulatory portfolio. His career also includes roles in the Milan offices of a US-headquartered law firm and a prominent Italian law firm. Francesco is qualified as an Avvocato in Italy and as a Solicitor in England and Wales. He holds an LL.M. (Adv.) in Air and Space Law from Leiden University in The Netherlands.



JASON MARETT
(Commodities, Geneva)

Jason specialises in trade finance, advising commodity traders, producers, funds, banks, and financial institutions on a broad range of financing transactions in the commodities markets. He has extensive experience in structured trade finance, derivatives, and receivables financing, as well as syndicated financings, including borrowing base, revolving credit, and letters of credit facilities. Recognised as an expert in sustainable finance, Jason advises on green and sustainability-linked loans, social impact bonds, and sustainable bond issuances. Dual-qualified in New York and England, Jason was named a Rising Star by Legal 500 EMEA 2024 and has worked at leading global law firms across London, Milan, Munich, and Geneva.



SAMMY BEEDAN
(Aerospace, Hong Kong)

Sammy's practice is focused on dispute resolution and crisis management in the aviation sector. Sammy has extensive experience advising airlines, airports, ground handlers, MROs and manufacturers on commercial and liability matters, as well as dispute resolution and crisis management. He has advised clients in multiple jurisdictions in Asia and Europe on the wording and negotiation of contracts, as well as on disputes arising from commercial contracts, across many service lines and products in the

aviation sphere (including, but not limited to, airline T&Cs, and ground handling, fuel, catering, leasing and finance contracts). He is qualified as a Solicitor in England and Wales and has previously worked in London, Piraeus, Beijing and Ulaanbaatar. In addition to English, he also speaks German, Mandarin and Mongolian.



THILO JAHN
(Shipping, Shanghai)

Thilo specialises in commercial shipping, shipbuilding, and commodity dispute resolution, particularly disputes arising under charterparties, bills of lading, as well as offshore and shipbuilding contracts. He moved to China in 2016 and has extensive experience advising international clients based in China and overseas, including shipbuilders, shipowners, and trading houses. Before moving to Asia, Thilo practiced as a solicitor in London, gaining substantial expertise in international arbitration, acting for shipping companies and trading houses. Thilo handles cases in all of his areas of expertise in the High Court, as well as major arbitration forums such as the LMAA, HKIAC, LCIA, and SIAC. He is a qualified lawyer in England and Wales and in the British Virgin Islands, and a native German speaker.

Legal Directors



JONATHAN GOULDING
(Shipping, London)

Jonathan is a solicitor and mariner in the Admiralty and Crisis Management team of the firm's Shipping Group. He advises on high profile complex litigation arising from marine and offshore energy casualties, including collisions, groundings, salvage/wreck removal, fires, total loss, and limitation and jurisdiction issues. He also has significant marine and energy insurance experience. He has extensive arbitration, High Court and Court of Appeal experience. In addition to being a solicitor he is one of the Firm's casualty investigators and has attended

numerous casualties in the immediate aftermath of incidents to collect evidence and provide logistical support.



JOSHUA COLEMAN-PECHA
(Construction, Riyadh)*

Joshua Coleman-Pecha is a senior international construction, infrastructure, and technology dispute specialist working in the MENA region. He advises on construction and technology projects from inception to completion. Joshua advises on all aspects of complex dispute avoidance and resolution. He has represented several clients in billion-dollar disputes before a variety of arbitral institutions including ICC, LCIA, UNCITRAL, DIAC, and SCCA. He has experience handling disputes under the governing laws of England & Wales, the UAE, Saudi, and Qatar. Joshua has experience of projects across the region having handled disputes in, for example, the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Turkey. His clients include international oil & gas companies, refining and petrochemical companies, EPC contractors, oil & gas service companies, EPC employers, and international technology providers.



THOMAS NEIGHBOUR
(Re/Insurance, Dubai)

Thomas acts for clients in claims and defence work before the DIFC and ADGM Courts, in international/local arbitration and before the English High Court, as well as managing local court litigation, in relation to a variety of construction, property, energy, marine and liability claims, along with reinsurance disputes. Thomas also advises on coverage issues. Thomas is a qualified lawyer in England and Wales.



WHITNEY CHAN
(Aerospace, Hong Kong)

Whitney is qualified in Hong Kong, England and Wales and the British Virgin Islands, and has experience in assisting aircraft leasing companies, airlines and financial institutions

in a variety of commercial aviation matters. Her key specialties include financing, leasing and trading for commercial aircraft. She has worked on new or used aircraft acquisitions for airlines, aircraft sale and lease back transactions and portfolio asset sales and novation. On the financing side, she has advised clients on complex transactions including warehouse facilities, Japanese operating lease with call option (JOLCOs), and aircraft portfolio financing transactions. She has also worked on aircraft operating leases, lease restructurings and P2F cargo leases. In addition to her broad commercial aircraft experience, she also works on the sale and purchase and financing of corporate jets.

*promotion effective 1 September to coincide with relocation to Riyadh office

Senior Associates

This financial year, we have promoted 14 new Senior Associates.

Aoife Mulford
(Aerospace, London)

Charlie Gribble
(Commodities, Perth)

Edward Smith-Suarez
(Aerospace, London)

Jack Metherell
(Shipping, London)

Julie Hanoun
(Aerospace, Paris)

Konstantinos Kofopoulos
(Shipping, Piraeus)

Lauren Cogley
(Shipping, Piraeus)

Max Hui
(Corporate & Commercial, Hong Kong)

Nadia Sanchez
(Aerospace, Brussels)

Neil Chauhan
(Commodities, London)

Ryan Craft
(Construction, Perth)

Sheree Luo
(Corporate & Commercial, Sydney)

Stephanie Park
(Commodities, Melbourne)

Thomas Lawler
(Insurance/Reinsurance, Sydney)



HEADS&TALES

Aravinda Subasinghe joined the firm in February 2025 as our new Chief Operating Officer.

My family left my home country aged three due to war. I was born in Sri Lanka during the civil war. Most of the conflict was in the north of Sri Lanka, but the prospects across the country weren't good for anyone, so my parents took the difficult decision to leave their family for a better life.

We ended up in Australia almost by chance. My Mum is a food microbiologist – she had spent some time studying in the UK and got a food science degree – so her work gave us some options to move. My parents were looking across the world including the UK and Canada, but Australia approved our visa request the quickest, so we went there only knowing one other family. She still works at the University of Melbourne – she must have been there for 30 years now.

I spent most of my early years just doing two things: school and sport. I've always loved cricket and played for the school team and also my local club. I was a pretty decent opening batsmen and leg-spin bowler. I even tried out for the district team [the level below state competition] but had an absolute shocker at the try-outs. I decided there and then I was never going to bowl again, so switched to being a wicket keeper from then on.

I started my first business aged 15. My grandfather was a photographer and so I grew up surrounded by cameras and photographs. I really wanted to buy a DSLR camera, but they were so expensive back then. I convinced my parents to loan me the money on the basis that I would get a job to pay them back. I somehow got my school to hire me as the official photographer of the end-of-year formal [what in the US and some other countries would be called a 'prom']. My photos were terrible, but for some reason the school hired me to do a few other jobs. One thing led to another, and before I knew it, I was photographing weddings, concerts, and major sports events, and having to turn down work because I was so busy. The more work I got, the more equipment I needed, which meant I needed more money and had to take on more work. It was a bit of a slippery

slope – at one point I probably had about AUD\$30k-worth of equipment, which is pretty ridiculous. Most of that is long gone now – my wife made me sell it.

My photography almost ruined someone's wedding. Photographing weddings taught me how to handle stress. There's nothing more stressful than a wedding you are capturing one of the most important days of someone's life and I absolutely cannot mess it up. I once nearly did. I'd been shooting indoors, then stepped outside for the big formal group shots. What I forgot was to adjust the exposure for the bright outdoor sun. I spent an hour shooting everyone—relaxed, focused, confident. Until I glanced at the screen. Every photo was bleached out. Completely unusable. My heart dropped. I forced a calm smile for the couple, adjusted the settings, took a few last-minute shots, and tried to buy myself time. My solution? Take a clean photo of the empty garden, then spend the rest of the day quietly snapping individual portraits of every guest. When I got home, I opened Photoshop—and began the excruciating process of cutting and pasting everyone into one big fake group photo. It took six weeks of near-daily work. When I finally delivered the photo book, I was terrified. I handed it over in person, waiting to be found out. The bride and groom opened it, stared, and burst into tears. Tears of joy. They loved the photos. I smiled, nodded—and left as quickly as I could. It was the worst moment of my professional life. And one of the most important.

My parents, being Sri Lankan did the typical thing of giving me three career choices: doctor, lawyer, or accountant. I don't like blood or hospitals, and being a lawyer involved way too much reading, so that was that. I got a training contract at BDO straight after leaving school, and worked that full-time while studying for my degree at night school. I was also still doing photography at weekends – I was actually earning more doing that than I was at BDO – so those were long and tiring years, but look back on those years fondly.

People think accountancy is boring, but it gives you so many opportunities. Numbers are borderless and don't really require translation, so you can work in pretty much any country. It also gave me the opportunity to work with clients in a broad array of industries. I did stuff with mining companies, insurers, shipping, airports, toll roads, supermarkets...even sewers and nuclear submarines. I got to meet some really interesting people as a result. And the beauty with accountancy is that you never know how the story is going to end.

I moved to London on a whim. My then girlfriend (now wife) Pauline and I were looking to go on a holiday, so we went to a local travel exhibition. We got chatting to a travel agent and they suggested London. While the agent was looking up prices, Pauline made a throwaway comment about having always wanted to live in London. I said "we should" and the course of our lives changed forever. Eight weeks later, we were on a plane with a one-way ticket. The idea was to stay for our two-year visa and mainly spend that time travelling while doing some contract work to pay the bills. We had one year where we visited 20 different countries, and last year I think we each spent 150 days outside the UK, including work trips. But I ended up getting a job at KPMG working in their strategy team and then got headhunted by Deloitte, before finally moving to HFW. My parents have thankfully stopped asking when we're coming back to Australia, but I think we're here for the long haul now!

I always assess any job opportunity by three criteria. First, am I going to be working with incredibly smart people who I can learn from and who will challenge me to develop. Second, does the company want to do something ambitious and challenging. I don't want to go somewhere that is just trying to do the same thing as everyone else, or that isn't striving to improve. And finally, will I be working with good people who I can have some fun with along the way. That's how I've always looked at things and it's served me well. HFW ticked every box and it's been a really positive move for me so far. One thing that struck me very early on is the quality of our people and our practice, and the significant potential that we have as a business. Combined with our exciting growth plans, I feel that I've joined the firm at an exciting time.



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