



*In-house*

**I-r:** Mirza Ahmad, Birmingham City Council, Elizabeth Lee, Lehman Brothers, Nick Grant, Sainsbury's Supermarkets, Carol Hui, Amey, Colin Armstrong, Merlin Entertainments Group

**Maya Abu Deeb, Bloomsbury**

Abu Deeb was so impressive as a media senior associate at Reynolds Porter Chamberlain that Harry Potter publisher Bloomsbury snapped her up as general counsel in February 2008. And no wonder: Abu Deeb had been instrumental in assisting Bloomsbury in stopping stolen extracts of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* from appearing on the internet before the book's official publication.

**Mirza Ahmad, Birmingham City Council**

The local government sector is undergoing a period of dramatic change in the face of ever-increasing pressure to reduce costs. Birmingham City Council's Ahmad, who runs the legal function at the UK's largest local council, is at the heart of this revolution. Ahmad began a panel review in September and, in a bid to drive down fees, has invited 17 other local authorities to use the list once it is completed. The result will be better access to legal expertise for councils and more instructions for the law firms on the panel.

**Colin Armstrong, Merlin Entertainments Group**

As the first and only lawyer at Merlin Entertainments Group, Armstrong finds himself in the hot seat at one of the country's fastest-growing companies. Since being bought by private equity house Blackstone in 2005, Merlin has increased 20 times in size and now owns more than 60 attractions across Europe and the US – including Alton Towers, Madame Tussauds and the London Eye in the UK. Appointed in 2007, Armstrong was brought in to deal with the theme park operator's raft of acquisitions and new openings, which are currently averaging five a year. And with plenty of funds to draw on, another three years' growth may see Merlin overtake Disney as the world's largest visitor attraction operator. Armstrong, meanwhile, attends every negotiation and sits on £7m worth of annual legal spend, making him a vital part of the company's rollercoaster expansion and a friend of private practice.

**Caroline Barnett, Royal Shakespeare Company**

One of the most enthusiastic in-house lawyers in the business, Barnett describes her position as general counsel at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) as a "dream job". As the only member of the legal department, the ex-Slaughter and May lawyer gets involved in a huge variety of work, including the recent redevelopment of the group's theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, negotiation agreements with the Writers' Guild of Great Britain and lobbying the Government. Barnett says the £30m-a-year "cottage industry" at the RSC also allows her to sink her teeth into IP, a special practice area for the Equity card-carrying lawyer. In this vein, Barnett is overseeing the IP for a new invention made by a member of the RSC lighting team. She also set up the Arts Law Forum, a 16-strong informal group of lawyers, producers and business developers (including workers from the Royal Opera House and Southbank Centre), which holds seminars with law firms, encouraging pro bono work for cultural organisations and fostering camaraderie between in-housers working in the arts.