

Legal Recruitment News - 10th November 2021

Contents

- * [Legal Job Market Report](#)
- * [Hourly Rate Guide for Locums - Updated](#)
- * [Rewards and Benefits - What's the Point?](#)
- * [Interview Question & Model Answer - Situation or project with a positive outcome.](#)
- * [My PII has shot up this year - is my law firm worth anything still?](#)
- * [I have bad A levels but a 2.1 law degree - what should I do?](#)
- * [CV & Careers Resources](#)
- * [Law Firms for Sale](#)
- * [Recruiting a Locum or Consultant?](#)
- * [Recruiting Staff?](#)

Good morning and welcome to the October 2021 edition of Legal Recruitment News. It includes our legal job market report, locum hourly rates, careers advice and suggested interview answers.

Legal Job Market Report - November 10th 2021

Here is our summary of the current state of the legal job market:

Locum Recruitment - Busy

The locum market remains busier for this time of year than ever before, although it has quietened down now that we are into November. We still have the problem of office based assignments - a number of locums still want to avoid travelling to work and some have got very used to remote work during lockdown and don't want to go back... However we are usually getting at least one locum available for each assignment sent through to us, which is a huge improvement on the summer season.

Conveyancing locums are available in most areas now. Other fields of law are generally not too bad at all, although family locums are a little scarce at the moment. Most corporate and commercial areas still attract a lot of interest, whether in private practice or in house. We are over 100% up on locum assignments for the same time last year (see figures below).

Locum assignment updates here: <https://www.interimlawyers.co.uk/category/locum-solicitor-updates/>

Permanent Recruitment - Busy

For some firms locum and permanent roles are now becoming more blurred - with firms seeking to take either on to cover busy workloads as fee earners start to realise there is value in the market at the moment and it is a good time to move to obtain a pay rise.. We have also seen a bit of hesitancy still about moving as work levels start to drop back down to more normal levels and firms reassess their recruitment needs if roles were expansion positions. As we approach Christmas and work slows down the market will hopefully get back to a bit more normality.. We have seen a 100% increase on vacancy numbers for October 2021 compared with October 2020. At the same time we

have seen a 100% decrease in the numbers of candidates registering.

Vacancies can be viewed here:<https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/vacancies/>

Law Firms for Sale - Busy

A lot of enquiries are coming through at the moment and in the last month we have had a couple of new large buyers register looking to take over multiple firms. This doesn't always happen - some of the supposed larger buyers can turn into terrible timewasters (possibly fishing around for good areas to open a branch office!?) - but generally it is busy and busier than we would expect.

Full list at <https://www.jonathanfagan.co.uk/law-accountancy-firms-for-sale/>. For a confidential discussion please ring 01824 780937 and speak to Jonathan Fagan or email jbfagan@ten-percent.co.uk.

Ten Percent Legal Recruitment Statistics

General Statistics for October 2021 (bracketed number is for October 2020)

New permanent vacancies added: 36 (17)

New locum vacancies added: 41 (16)

New candidates registering: 40 (88)

REC/KPMG UK Job Market Report

(we are members of the panel contributing to this report)

Key Findings

Recruitment activity slows slightly, hampered by candidate shortages

Starting salaries and temp pay both increase at record rates

Vacancy growth remains robust, but softens since September

Comment from KPMG:

"While it's encouraging to see hiring activity increase in October, the recovery was at the softest rate recorded in six months due to the ongoing deterioration of candidate availability. Employees are hesitant to switch roles and sectors, which could impact the bounce-back recruiters have experienced since the easing of pandemic restrictions. Unsurprisingly, with the ongoing pressures on our health and care services, demand for temporary nursing and care staff tops this month's rankings. More broadly, companies are still offering higher salaries to attract and secure talent - with starting pay inflation reaching another record high this month - but we know this isn't the answer to boosting productivity."



Hourly Rates of Pay for Locum Solicitors and Legal Executives

November 2021 Locum Hourly Rates - Solicitors and Legal Executives

NB: Remote Working Role rates are about 10-20% lower.

Child Care - £35-£45 per hour.

Civil Litigation – £30-£35 per hour.

Commercial Contract - £35-£75 per hour

Commercial Litigation – £35-£75 per hour.

Company Commercial – £45-£90 per hour.

Construction (non-contentious) £60-£75, (contentious) £45-£60 per hour

Conveyancing - £30 per hour and upwards (£35 the usual base rate).

Commercial Property – £37-£55 per hour

Employment Solicitors – £30-£42 per hour.

Family Solicitors – £30-£40 per hour.

In House Counsel: 0-3 years PQE – £35-£50 per hour,

In House Counsel: 3+ years PQE – £50-£95 per hour

In House Interim Lawyers (SMEs) - £50-£70 per hour

Insolvency - £35-£55 per hour.

IP - £50-80 per hour

Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence – 3+ years PQE – £25-£40 per hour.

Professional Negligence - £45-£55 per hour.

Wills & Probate – £35-£55 per hour.

We have an online calculator to convert hourly rates to salary equivalents -[click here](#).

NB all rates exclude agency fees. The rates are for self-employed locums billing firms directly on a weekly basis. These are the ranges we have seen over the last 30 days from assignments.

Rewards and Benefits to Employees in the Legal Sector

I was asked by Glyndwr University last week to give a talk based on my own experiences (as a business owner and a recruiter) of providing rewards and benefits to our employees in the current job market and also to discuss the way remote working has impacted any changes in rewards and benefits offered or provided or managed.

Rewards

Rewards are essentially performance related bonuses or motivations given to employees or contractors in order to provide them with an increase on any basic payments for any outstanding work or achievements.

Benefits

These are essentially additions to basic pay which can include things like pension contributions, season ticket loans, golf club membership, gym club membership, life insurance, death in service, health insurance and much more besides.

Our Business

There is a whole cottage industry around benefits and rewards, as well as academic qualifications etc.. and we often get contacted by organisations providing schemes to enable employees to purchase discount vouchers for high street stores or to join larger corporate membership schemes such as golf clubs etc.

However, working in a small business where cash flow is not always the strongest and there is a small team of workers essentially providing services for a small profit to the owners, it can be hard to offer too much in the way of rewards and benefits. As an example our company offers:

Unlimited Annual Leave

Flexible Working

100% Remote Working

Company Electric Cars

'Unlimited annual leave' created a stir amongst the HR professionals I was giving a talk to at

Glyndwr Uni - they simply couldn't see how this would work in practice! More on this in a future article..

The Legal Sector

As recruiters working in the legal sector with mostly smaller sized employers, it is fairly typical to see no benefits or rewards at all offered in addition to a salary. In fact very often the conversation with the employer when making a job offer will be along the lines of, "We would like to offer this candidate a salary of £45,000, statutory annual leave plus 25 days, and that's it - take it or leave it." No rewards, no benefits, because the owner of that business has determined that the reward and benefit to the employee is a job in itself.

The Psychology of Rewards & Benefits in SME Businesses

In our own business I have found over the time I have had a team working with me that everybody is motivated by different things. If you were to offer the same rewards and benefits package to everybody then it would be considerably varied in terms of the responses we would get.

So for example, we pay one recruitment consultant commission on every single placement completed and a fairly low basic salary on top. This means that the recruitment consultant is constantly dependent on the market in order to boost their wages, but that particular recruitment consultant really likes working for commission and does not want to switch to a salaried role with salary reviews being the only way to get an increase.

Similarly, we have a recruitment consultant who most certainly does not want any commission at all because they require certainty every month and a consistent income. They have very little motivation to receive commission and instead work for us because a) we are nice, b) we provide unlimited annual leave, c) we offer totally flexible hours of work, and d) we are an extremely ethical company which fits with that particular person's own values. We don't seek to exploit this at all, but instead review the salary every six months to make sure that it is at a level that is fair to both parties (i.e. us and the employee).

We have also had an employee join us to run one of our companies and after a few weeks it was pretty obvious that the best way of maximising that person's potential was to offer them equity in the business. This is a decision that we have not regretted in the least, as the turnover on that particular business has rocketed to levels we could not possibly have imagined five years ago. This particular way of rewarding or benefiting would not be of interest to a lot of people – that particular person was offered a job with us with three different options as to the way that we could remunerate them, and they opted specifically for the equity option coupled with low income. I suspect if I had asked one hundred people which option they would have gone for to run that particular business, only about two or three would have opted for the more risky equity choice.

I suspect that generally in business the rewards and benefits packages in most small businesses are to all extents and purposes a bit irrelevant in terms of retaining staff, recruiting and encouraging performance. The only real way of doing these things is to increase the base salary, because this is why everybody works and be flexible on working conditions and hours. It is true that things like company cars can be a huge benefit and having things on top of salary that save in tax can benefit both the employer and the employee, but the reality is that most people simply want hard cash when it comes to work, and for smaller businesses this is really the only way of rewarding employees fairly for the work that they do unless they are specifically interested in bonus schemes or commission.

Cash is King

I'll finish this article with a bit of an anecdote from a large law firm we were recruiting for (or at least

trying to recruit for but failing miserably!) last year and it centres around a Zoom call we had with their HR director. The HR director of this client spent about 30 minutes on the call with us telling us all about the benefits a potential new recruit would have if they were to join this particular company (which incidentally has a £50,000,000 turnover, very plush offices, lots of employees but a seemingly high turnover of staff). We found out all about their prosecco and pizza days, their collegiate mentality, their wear casual clothes to work, cycle to work schemes, company clubs and activities, Christmas events, charity fundraising events, games room and slightly flexible working options which all sounded absolutely great. Both me and my colleague who were on the call were very impressed with what we were hearing, until we got down to the base salary that they were looking to pay for this particular role - a finance manager. Our expectation as recruiters for this role in terms of salary would be something around the £50-75,000 mark plus benefits. We discovered that this firm were looking to pay £30,000 tops and perhaps the reason the HR director had spent so long telling us about all the benefits was to counteract the fact that they were unbelievably miserly when it came to paying proper real world salaries to their staff!

Benefits v Salary

Which is the right approach? I suspect that it is a mix of the two in that you cannot simply push all the benefits and rewards to a potential employee without there actually being a good base salary there in the first place to motivate someone to leave another job and join their business. Similarly, in order to retain staff you do have to have a good working environment. However, not paying a decent base salary is almost akin to saying that you are not particularly a very good employer at all, because good employers reward their staff financially as well as with the conditions they work in.

Interview Question 51 – Give an example of how a situation or project that had a positive outcome depended on the work of people from a wide range of backgrounds and ideas.

Advice

This question can be answered by just about anyone who has attended university, been a member of a sports club or held down a job. Thinking of a project or a situation involving people with a wide range of background and ideas is hinting at a project where implementation has involved the full workforce and not just at management level. Similarly in an academic situation this would be a project involving students from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities. Do not forget to use the STAR approach with this particular question because of its complexity. Think of the Situation first, consider what the Task was arising out of the situation, state what Action you took and what the Result was. In this case the answer needs to be geared towards team work as this is the aim of the question.

Example Answer

“When I was teaching at John Smith’s Infants School in Durham the Government set us a new target in relation to school attendance in the under eight category. In order to achieve this target we had to get cooperation from the full membership of staff as well as the parents. The Head Teacher set up a task force for which I was the Chair and we identified four key principles that needed to be applied across the school with the cooperation of the parents and the rest of the staff. My work was to involve the parents in the decision making process and by doing this we achieved a 20% reduction in absences from school”.

My PII has shot up this year – is my law firm worth anything still?

In 2021 we have seen a common pattern starting to emerge of law firms dealing with conveyancing of a smaller size finding that their professional indemnity insurance has shot up to astronomical levels out of the blue.

Quite often with a bit of digging it becomes clear that the firms that have the largest increases tend to be those that have had a claim or notification in the last couple of years that has been resolved, but claims that they thought had long gone seem to be suddenly affecting new indemnity insurance proposals.

The question that we get asked increasingly from these firms where there has been a large increase in their premiums, is whether or not their practice still has any value.

Do Large PII Premium Hikes Affect Value?

It is very difficult to say at the moment because earlier in the year there seemed to be quite a demand for conveyancing firms with CQS accreditation and membership of lender panels. At the time I was composing articles saying that a rough rule of thumb for most valuations and practices of a smaller size (i.e. less than £1,000,000) would be to take last year's turnover and halve it, and you probably would not be far off a sale price.

With the sudden hike in PII premiums at some of these firms, it is highly unlikely that they are the same attractive target for any buyers. One of the main issues is that the high PII premiums seem to spark questions and concerns from potential buyers that there is a reason for the high PII premiums, when in fact the reality is that most of these firms don't seem to have done anything to warrant the sudden increase.

We've also heard anecdotally (and this could be right or wrong) that some deals have been scuppered by insurance companies themselves stepping in to refuse to allow one practice to merge or take over another, and to instead insist that the practice being taken over or the junior partner in the merger arranges for runoff cover to be taken out so that the new firm does not become the successor practice.

We have only heard of this in passing and it may or may not be true, but if it is true it is simply astonishing that there is a professional body in the UK who are under what seem to be restraints of trade with their practice completely controlled by a handful of insurance companies.

After all, there cannot be many trades in the UK where you actually have to ask for permission to purchase another business or get consent from your insurance broker in order to close your business down! I do wonder where things are going to go in future – are we going to see very large organisations practising law and smaller individual companies simply being squeezed out of areas where insurers believe that the work is too high risk?

It seems to be that whenever conveyancing is involved in an insurance quote and more than 25% of the business of a law firm is dealing with it the insurance premiums are turning into something of nightmares for most partners. Some of the most shocking premium hikes we have seen have been companies with turnover of £150,000 paying out just over 70% of their turnover in professional indemnity insurance.

Value

So the answer to the question as to whether there is any value if you have suddenly seen a huge

hike in your premiums, is possibly yes depending on the circumstances, but the large hike will affect the chances of a successful sale or merger.

I suspect you have a couple of options which will be firstly to ride out the market and hope the premiums drop again or secondly to look to merge your practice with another firm but not to expect a cash premium for it in the hope they are prepared to take it over and save you the run off cover. The most extreme option would be to shut down your conveyancing department in the hope of reducing your professional indemnity insurance (and exposure to future hikes) down to a level that makes your practice a potential target for someone else.

I have bad A levels and just about to get a 2:1 degree. What should I do about it?

We have had a careers enquiry in from a third year law student asking us what he should do about his A levels. He has C C D at A level and is currently in his third year at university and expects to graduate with a 2:1 degree. He has been looking at job applications and noticing that a lot of law firms require very high A levels in order to apply. He has asked the question whether he should return to college and complete his A levels again in order to get the grades, or just apply anyway.

Advice

Our advice is to do neither. I think it is simply a case that this particular student needs to accept that because he has not got the A level grades required for specific firms it is unfortunately going to be their loss and his gain if he ends up somewhere else.

This of course does not help the particularly candidate in question, so looking at practicalities we think the best option for him would be to aim simply to qualify as a solicitor, and the route probably available to him is to look at high street law firms, local authorities and NGOs. These very often have more flexibility when it comes to grades and look at other issues rather than just high A level grades in order to determine whether to take someone on a training contract. It is highly possible that this particular student is going to spend a considerable part of his early career in paralegal work (if he can get it) and then use that to move himself into a training contract and later qualification.

We do not think there is any point in applying for firms where there is a minimum requirement at A level because they are going to get so many applications from students who do have the minimum required A levels that it would be a bit of a waste of time filling out the form on the whole. That is assuming there is nothing particularly outstanding that this student has done as well as their A levels, but in most cases this is simply not the case. Similarly going back to college to retake A levels for a year is a bit extreme when the student could be out gaining valuable practical experience and moving their career along that way.

As we say time and time again to both qualified and non-qualified lawyers that in most parts of the profession it is not your qualifications that will get you places, it is your experience. Whilst it is true that there is a higher tier of solicitors who earn huge amounts of money and work very long hours in order to do this, the vast majority earn less than £45,000 and work in smaller practices. They do not generally have particularly outstanding academic achievements or extensive qualifications.

Bear this in mind when applying for jobs. Do not get a chip on your shoulder about the fact that everyone else has better A levels than you and life is unfair, but instead deal with it. You sat the A levels, you got the grades and that is just the way it is.

So in summary, get work experience, concentrate on smaller practices and paralegal work

potentially, consider not taking the LPC (or the new equivalent) until you have some work experience so you know that this is the career for you. We hope you enjoy a long and prosperous career in whatever you end up doing!.

Career Coaching & CV Review Services - free and paid

Ten Percent Legal has been coaching lawyers and reviewing CVs for over 20 years. We have worked on CVs at all levels of experience, from law students through to senior partners.

This is a guide to our services, both free of charge and paid. [Testimonials for our careers services can be found here.](#)

CV Reviews

We provide free CV reviews, providing you are willing for us to post our review live on our website - example of a recent one is here: <https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/cv-review-commercial-paraegal-with-experience/>

We review CVs as a paid service (£64.99) and application forms for all kinds of legal work (£75). We will review your CV or form, provide full feedback and suggestions on how to improve it as well as any additional follow up advice needed. [Details here.](#)

Career Coaching

We are offering a career coaching session with one of our consultants for a fixed price. One hour consultation by Zoom, usually on a Monday morning. We are always happy to answer any questions by email at no cost (we post our answers on our blog). [To request a session please click here.](#) Feedback on our legal career coaching service (established in 2001) [can be found here.](#)

CV Guides - no charge

CV Guides - [take a look at our CV guides](#) - all available at no cost online. <https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/cv-advice/>

Articles include: CV Myth - fitting a CV onto two pages, 20 second guide to writing a CV, Adding Extra Value, CV Writing Tips for Senior Solicitors (if you don't bother reading this it basically says write a lot more!), CV Writing for NQ Solicitors, Skills Sections, 5 Common Mistakes to Avoid, CV Writing for Locum Work, Avoiding Waffly Nonsense, Lying on CVs, Applying for Jobs after 25 years in the same role and many, many more. We have been writing CV guides for almost 20 years so there are quite a few.. Full index here - <https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/cv-advice/>

Low Cost Recruitment for Solicitors - Ten Percent Unlimited

Recruit as many staff as you like over a set period of time (3 or 5 years) for a low monthly fee starting at just £65 plus VAT. We offer this service to law firms and accountancy practices. There are no restrictions on numbers and no other similar services exist in the recruitment industry. You can save £000s on your ongoing recruitment. Includes unlimited job posting on www.chancerylane.co.uk. Interested? Call Clare Fagan on 0207 127 4343 or email clare.fagan@ten-percent.co.uk. www.tenpercentunlimited.co.uk.

How to be a Locum - pdf guide

We have produced a guide on how to be a locum. This includes sections on getting work, realistic expectations, hourly rates, popular fields of law, payment, insurance, umbrella companies and much more. Available for download or to read online from www.interimlawyers.co.uk.

Outsourcing Translation & Typing

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About Ten-Percent Legal Recruitment

We are a specialist legal recruiter, covering both permanent and locum roles across the whole of the UK. Over 11,000 lawyers are registered with us and we have access to a range of external and internal job boards and websites where we do not have candidates available ourselves. We also assist with recruitment advice and assistance, regularly advising partners and practice managers on suitable salary and package levels.

Our company is unique for a number of reasons, including the fact that we are not shy to publish our fee structure and also donate a chunk of our profits to charity each year. We offer unlimited permanent and locum recruitment for a fixed monthly fee or one-off fees depending on the job. We also buy and sell law firms. We donate 10% of our profits annually to charity, hence our name.

We have four recruitment consultants, Jonathan Fagan, Clare Fagan, Peter Gresty and Emma Ireland. Jonathan is a non-practising solicitor and Emma is a law graduate. As a team we have over 40 years of experience in the legal profession.

Ten-Percent Legal Recruitment also owns Interim Lawyers, a specialist locum service. We operate an outsourced UK based typing service as well – www.tptranscription.co.uk and are preferred suppliers to a number of institutional clients and law firms across the UK and overseas.

The Ten-Percent Group of Legal Recruitment websites gives 10% of annual profits to charity. We have maintained this tradition since we formed the company 20 years ago. So far over £125k has been donated to charities in the UK and Africa including LawCare, Unlock and Reprieve.

We hope you have enjoyed reading our newsletter and look forward to hearing from you if we can assist further.

Warm regards

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