



Legal Recruitment News from Ten Percent Legal

Welcome to the February 2026 edition of Legal Recruitment News. It includes our Legal Job Market Report, locum hourly rates & solicitor salary guide, a guest article from Herrington Carmichael Solicitors on mastering due diligence, red flags to spot in interviews, CV writing & legal careers articles and our £500 charity donation to Human Rights Solidarity.

You can read the entire content below in an email, or read the newsletter in PDF format at www.legal-recruitment.co.uk.

Legal Job Market Report - February 2026

Here is our summary of the current state of the UK legal job market.

Locum Recruitment - Quiet

Locum assignments remain low; and much quieter than last year. We have seen increasing numbers of locums registering with us, which is really positive for when the market picks up, but for the time being there is not a lot happening. New assignment numbers are 45% lower this year than last. Booking annual leave cover now for later in the year is a very good idea, as its a lot easier to source locums in March than it is in July..

Locum assignment [updates here](#).

Permanent Recruitment - Busy

Permanent recruitment remains busy with new vacancies being posted. We are at least 25% up on last year in terms of new vacancies and there is activity from both candidates registering for work and firms looking for new staff. There remains a huge gap between interest in roles from candidates and vacancies being posted, together with a disparity between salary expectations and working arrangements of candidates and firms. No signs of any change here.

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

Law Firms for Sale - Busy

Lots of activity in the M&A sector - we have had 13 new listings in January and our numbers of firms for sale are back up to normal levels again. A few sales completed over the last month, but quieter than usual on that front. A lot of new enquiries are coming through, but we are at the start of the process on a lot of them.

We recently ran a webinar, attended by over 80 law firm owners, on selling a law firm and valuations. Our next webinar is on March 25th at 1-2pm and is about getting ready to sell a law firm and effective planning for retirement. See below for details and how to register.

[Full details of firms currently for sale on our website](#)

- list updated daily. For valuations, exit planning or a confidential discussion about a potential sale or acquisition generally please call 0800 246 5016 or email jf@jonathanfagan.co.uk. You can also download our free detailed guides on [Buying a Law Firm](#) and [Selling a Law Firm](#).

Ten Percent Group statistics for January 2026 (2025 figures in brackets)

- New locum roles added - 12 (20)
- New permanent roles added - 31 (38)
- New candidates added - 46 (49)
- New law firms listed for sale: 13
- Law firms for sale: 51
- Deals going through (heads of terms signed): 6

KPMG & REC Report on Jobs UK - February 2026

This is a monthly report prepared by KPMG following a questionnaire sent to over 400 UK recruitment consultancies, including ourselves.

- Temp billings expand slightly for the first time in three months
- Candidate availability increases at softest rate in a year
- Stronger rises in both starting salaries and temp wages

Commentary from Jon Holt, CEO of KPMG UK

“After a difficult end to last year, it’s encouraging to start this year with tentative signs that hiring appetites are beginning to improve as chief execs respond to signs of easing uncertainty by starting to push forward with their plans. Skills shortages in specialist areas continue to impact the market, particularly where competition for talent remains intense. There are parts of the economy poised for investment, and as skills needs align with greater market stability, we could start to see more consistent improvement in hiring as the year progresses.”

Commentary from Neil Carberry, REC CEO

"There have been increasing signs from businesses as we enter 2026 that uncertainty on hiring plans is giving way to action. That does not mean a general hiring upswing, but the “wait-and-see” period seems to be ending. Rising temp billings and a levelling off in the permanent market speak to these clearer plans. REC members across the country report a change in tone since the start of the year."

Interim Lawyers - Hourly Rates of Pay for Locum Solicitors and Legal Executives February 2026

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

- Civil Litigation – £50-£70 per hour
- COLP/COFA roles (temporary) - £50-£150 per hour/monthly retainer of £2-3k



- Commercial Contract – £35-£75 per hour
- Commercial Litigation – £55-£125 per hour
- Company Commercial – £60-£120 per hour
- Construction (non-contentious) £80-£110, (contentious) £60-90 per hour
- Conveyancing – £45-£55 per hour
- Commercial Property – £45-£65 per hour
- Employment Solicitors – £50-65 per hour
- Family Solicitors (Legal Aid) – £40 per hour
- Family Solicitors (Private) – £45-£55 per hour
- Family (Child Care LA) – £40-£45 per hour
- Immigration Lawyers – £30-£55 per hour
- In House Counsel: 0-3 years PQE – £35-£50 per hour
- In House Counsel: 3+ years PQE – £50-£110 per hour
- In House Interim Lawyers (SMEs) – £60-£85 per hour
- Insolvency – £50-£55 per hour IP – £55-80 per hour
- Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence – 3+ years PQE – £40-£50 per hour
- Professional Negligence – £45-£55 per hour
- Property Litigation – £45-£75 per hour
- Wills & Probate – £40-£60 per hour
- Locum Legal Cashiers - £25-£35 per hour
- Locum Paralegals - all areas - £20-£30 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 locum solicitors billing firms directly on a weekly basis. These are the ranges we have seen at www.interimlawyers.co.uk over the last 30 days from locum assignments posted with us, rates indicated by locums and rates agreed on new assignments started. For expert guidance on locum work please email Emma Ireland at emma.ireland@ten-percent.co.uk.

Ten Percent Legal Salary Guide - February 2026

Each month we publish a list of any salary levels we become aware of from employers in relation to jobs offered and salaries indicated via [Ten Percent Legal Recruitment](#). These are the salaries we have had indicated by law firms to us for 3 years PQE and upwards. London figures in brackets where relevant.

- Commercial In House Solicitor (General) - £80k - £120k (£85k-140k)
- Commercial Litigation - £45-£70k (£50k-£95k)
- Corporate Commercial - £50k-£150k (£65k-£175k)
- Construction - £65k-£95k
- Commercial Property - £55k-£100k
- Insolvency - £60k-£75k
- IP - £55k-£90k
- Professional Negligence - £55k-£75k
- Crime - £40-50k
- Civil Litigation - £45k-£60k

- Conveyancing £45k-£75k (£70k)
- Employment Solicitors - £45k-£55k
- Family Solicitors - £37k-£50k
- Immigration Lawyers - £37k-£75k
- Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence £40k-£60k
- Property Litigation - £50k-£70k
- Wills & Probate - £45k-£65k

Support Staff

- Office Manager - £40-60k
- Legal Cashier - £30-40k
- Senior legal accounts professional - £40k-50k
- Secretary - £23-28k
- Paralegal - £22-27k

Candidate Salary Expectations

Candidate salary expectations are very often higher than salaries being paid to existing staff within law firms with less than a £2 million turnover. We regularly view staff lists when valuing law firms via our business broker service, and the salaries being paid by law firms to existing staff are invariably lower than candidate salary expectations for similar roles. Similarly there is a disparity at the moment between expectations for remote working from candidates compared with firms' requirements - hybrid working is becoming the minimum requirement for a significant proportion of candidates. If you would like assistance with salary levels, please contact our specialist permanent recruiter, Peter Gresty FIRP. Email pete.gresty@ten-percent.co.uk.

Mastering Due Diligence in Law Firm M&A

*Guest article from **Harry Winkley, lead solicitor for SME law firm M&A at Herrington Carmichael.** Harry has worked on a number of our deals, and feedback on his services from clients is always very positive.*

While any M&A transaction involves a range of legal and commercial considerations, the acquisition or sale of a law firm brings with it a distinct set of regulatory and structural complexities. Whether you are an existing partner considering retirement or a buyer looking to grow through acquisition, it is essential to understand these sector-specific issues and to factor them into both your pre-transaction planning and your legal due diligence investigation.

Legal Due Diligence

Legal due diligence is the exercise undertaken by a prospective buyer to verify and validate the underlying legal “value” of a business. Across most sectors, this will involve a typical suite of risk areas, such as corporate history, employment, litigation, property and key contracts, among others. However, when buying or selling a law firm, there are a number of additional areas that the parties should build in a focus to.



Why is due diligence important for both parties?

For buyers the purpose is simply, legal due diligence ensures that a buyer enters into a transaction fully aware of any hidden risks / liabilities and works to validate the underlying value of a business. Importantly, if a risk area is not investigated, the long-established principle of buyer beware will usually apply. A robust due diligence exercise is therefore as much about protecting value as it is about identifying deal-breakers.

For sellers, if unknown risks or inadequacies are identified the due diligence process can be time-consuming and often can result in reductions in price, delays and/or increased risk under the purchase contract. For that reason, it is crucial for sellers to understand the “key” risk areas relating to their business pre-sale, so that you can identify and resolve any potential issues before the buyer’s solicitor does. In our experience, this almost certainly leads to sellers receiving a higher value for their business, as the price isn’t chipped away at during legal due diligence!

Unique considerations when acquiring a law firm:

Below are some of the areas that commonly require enhanced focus in M&A transactions in the legal sector:

(a) Professional indemnity insurance (PII)

PII is a critical area of due diligence in any law firm acquisition. Because of the regulatory framework governing legal services, any gaps in cover or historic non-compliance can create serious ongoing liabilities for a buyer as well as practical challenges for the seller. Particularly for a share purchase where existing PI cover is to be maintained:

- Buyers will want to understand the scope of the current policy including any exclusions.
- It is also important to confirm that the firm has only undertaken work within the scope of its cover, as any uninsured work may create exposure.
- A review of the adequacy of cover should include the level of insurance, excesses, endorsements, and whether the firm has maintained continuous qualifying insurance in line with SRA requirements.

Whether a share purchase or an asset purchase, buyers should assess the firm’s claims and notifications history, as this provides insight into both the firm’s risk culture and any potential future liabilities.

Finally, the buyer should consider how the transaction structure interacts with run-off and successor practice rules. If run-off cover is to be purchased, the cost and responsibility for funding it must be understood early. Alternatively, if the buyer intends to become a successor practice, it must ensure that it is comfortable inheriting that exposure as part of the agreed deal structure and liaise with its insurer as required.

(b) Regulatory Compliance / Successor Practice Status



Regulatory compliance is a uniquely sensitive area in law firm M&A because it is important to understand whether the buyer will be treated as a successor practice for PII purposes. If so, it will inherit responsibility for historic advice and related claims exposure that would otherwise remain with the seller. To manage this, targeted file reviews can help assess:

- the quality and accuracy of advice provided
- compliance with SRA requirements
- adherence to AML obligations

This helps identify any issues early and allows the parties to agree appropriate protections in the purchase agreement if required. Buyers should also review the firm's client engagement documentation. This includes checking that the firm's key client-care and regulatory information is presented clearly and meets SRA expectations. Any inconsistencies or outdated templates can create regulatory risk and may also affect the enforceability of fees. Sellers who proactively update their client care suite before going to market can reduce the scope of buyer queries and strengthen their position. Alongside this, any past or ongoing SRA investigations, disciplinary matters or compliance breaches should be fully disclosed. Whilst from a regulatory perspective these do not themselves transfer to the buyer under successor practice rules, they may crystallise into civil claims (which could transfer to the buyer as explained above), and in any event they can indicate underlying compliance concerns that both parties will need to address in the transaction.

(c) Work In Progress / Debtors:

For law firms, unbilled work in progress (WIP) often represents a significant unrealised asset. Sellers will typically expect to receive credit for WIP as part of the transaction with a mechanism included within the purchase contract for its reconciliation. It is important that a buyer analyses the target firms' WIP (and 90-day WIP) to understand the systems and policies in place. From a financial perspective, this will help ensure that the Buyer does not overprovide for WIP, but it will also work to identify wider operational risks associated within the business. For example, the procedures for client WIP approval, cash-flow / transaction cycles and fee-earner recovery rates. This analysis goes hand in hand with debtors. Buyers will want to understand how the target firm manages debtors. Debtor information is also useful to understanding the behaviours of long-term clients when it comes to paying invoices. This becomes especially relevant where the buyer expects to take on live matters post-completion as it informs:

- client attitudes to money on account; and
- the likelihood that further time incurred will ultimately be paid.

(d) Key Contracts:

Beyond standard supplier arrangements (IT, software, case-management systems etc), law firms often have more bespoke contracts and arrangements that are fundamental to the continuity of the business. For example, are there lender panels, accreditations or framework appointments in place that must be retained following the acquisition? If so, what consents or notifications are required? Similarly, where a firm's work is materially relationship-driven, buyers will want to understand the

arrangements governing any key referrers or introducers. Ensuring continuity of those relationships and understanding any change of control implications (formal or informal) can be critical the future performance of the business.

General Legal Due Diligence

Finally, while the sector-specific issues are important, the more “generic” areas of legal due diligence should not be overlooked and should be equally factored into a standard legal due diligence investigation. For example, the buyer will want to ensure that the employment contracts in place are sufficient from a legal perspective, particularly with respect of restrictive covenants, notice periods, incentive structures etc. It is also important to understand the progression metrics of the target firm so that these can be assessed against the buyer’s existing policies to assess cultural and operational alignment. Similarly, if Property forms part of the transaction, property due diligence on the lease and/or freehold title will be key to ensuring continuity and avoiding inheriting existing liabilities.

About the author

Harry Winkley is a corporate solicitor at Herrington Carmichael LLP (HC) and leads the M&A team that specialises in transactions within the legal sector. Co-author, Rhian Hazeldene works within HC’s Commercial & Regulatory team. Feel free to reach out to Harry or Rhian at www.herrington-carmichael.com. This article reflects the law and market position at the date of publication and is written as a general guide. It does not contain definitive legal advice, which should be sought in relation to a specific matter.

Selling Your SME Law Firm Webinar

Our second webinar of the year is on March 25th 2026 1-2pm - [click here to register](#). Our January webinar was attended by over 80 law firm owners from across the UK & Ireland.

Thinking about retirement from your practice? Planning your next chapter? After many years of building your practice, retirement can feel both welcome and uncertain. For many sole practitioners and small firm partners, the firm represents not just a business, but your reputation, relationships and a significant part of your retirement provision. Yet planning a sale or exit is often something that gets postponed.

This one-hour webinar “Retirement Ready: Planning and Selling Your SME Law Firm with Confidence” is designed specifically for owners of small UK and Irish SME law firms who are planning for the future.

We’ll cover:

- When to start planning (even if retirement feels a little way off)
- How to plan for a sale and/or retirement
- How firms are valued by buyers
- How to reduce stress and avoid rushed decisions

- Ensuring clients and staff are looked after

If you're thinking "perhaps it's time", this session will help you plan with clarity and confidence.

[Click here to register for a place - no charge.](#)

Red Flags to Watch for During a Law Firm Interview

Especially in the current job market, interviews are more about your chance to question a firm about their suitability for you personally, rather than proving your potential to the firm. Solicitors are in demand across the UK in most areas of law, and there is a huge disparity between

Here are a few red flags to watch for during the interview.

Vague Answers About Support - Administrative and Professional

If you ask who you will report to, how files are allocated, or what supervision looks like and receive vague answers, you can almost guarantee that when you start work at the practice the other fee earners will take the opportunity to give you anything they don't want to deal with, expect you to generate your own work, and not provide you with any administrative support. Ask specific questions - if the firm have secretarial support teams (not all do these days!) who will be your secretary?

More junior solicitors do not want to hear that a firm simply expect them to "just get on with it," or "we're very hands off in our approach to supervision". This can be particularly risky at junior and mid-level PQE. Don't forget to ask about training opportunities - and ask what training other fee earners have done at the practice recently..

Unrealistic Billing Targets

Ask about billing targets. We see a lot of different types of bonus schemes at law firms - some are a lot more generous than others! The answer to any question about billing targets can often be that the firm don't have details to hand, but bonus payments are very generous. Don't take this answer - pry further! What was the average billing across the team last year? How is billing monitored?

High Turnover in the Team

Easy to check these days- just take a look at LinkedIn and the Law Society Directory. If you notice a pattern of solicitors staying less than 18 months, it is worth considering carefully any potential reasons why. Ask about this during interview.

Disorganised Interview Process

Late-stage revisions or cancellations of interviews can reflect partners who care little for their future staff or are just completely disorganised! Cancelling or delaying an interview time & date is never a good start to a healthy working relationship without good reason.



Overemphasis on “Hitting the Ground Running”

"Hitting the ground running" is sometimes code for "we are going to overwhelm you with lots of really problematic files". If there is heavy emphasis on inheriting a large caseload immediately and little discussion of onboarding/easing you in to the role, this may suggest the role exists to plug a gap rather than develop into something more long-term.

Sense of Humour

"We have a great sense of humour, ha ha ha." Watch this one. Often the sense of humour also reflects how much the firm plan to pay you! I always think that if an employer has to actually tell you that they have a sense of humour, their staff will almost certainly not agree.

Reluctance to discuss future strategy

A well-run firm should be comfortable discussing growth plans, owner's future plans, any options to acquire equity, recent hires, and the direction of the practice area. If you are interested in equity, tell the firm. This really adds significant value to a hire - so many solicitors avoid offers of equity or even discussing it, and firms really value anyone interested.

Hybrid working

Get this nailed down during interview. We hear so many vague promises of "all our staff work from home for part of the week" or "after an initial period we would be happy to discuss remote working." It rarely seems to happen and causes a significant number of departures from firms every year at present. Law firm owners sometimes seem to have very different expectations about remote & hybrid working than employees..

Salary levels

Ask about salary levels. Don't fall for the "what do you currently earn" question. Instead play a straight bat and ask them what they are offering. Failing that, tell the firm what you want, and how you would be happy earning it. So for example if you want to earn £75k, but you appreciate this will require c£225k of billing to pay it (using the 1/3 rule of thumb), you could give an indication that as a base you would expect £60k and a bonus scheme on top if you bill over £180k say.

Ten Percent Foundation Donates £500 to the Human Rights Solidarity Organisation

Human Rights Solidarity (HRS) is focused on migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and vulnerable young people. Each year, the charity directly supports around 850 individuals and families, offering legal guidance, employability advice, cultural integration workshops and education programmes. More than 250 people annually benefit from its targeted training sessions designed to help newcomers navigate life in the UK with confidence.

“Rights only matter if people can actually access them, our role is to make sure they can.”



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The charity operates with 2 full-time and 3 part-time staff, backed by 30 volunteers. Its nine-member management committee — entirely from BAME backgrounds, with a near-even gender split — reflects the diversity of the communities it serves. The organisation has delivered the following projects: Empowering Immigrant Youth — supporting 80 young people with employability and cultural adaptability skills. Humanity Cartoons International Competition — attracting 768 artists worldwide to raise awareness of migration and refugee issues.

For further details about the HRS, please visit their website - <https://www.hrsolidarity.org/>

What is this all about?

Ten-Percent Legal, Interim Lawyers, and Jonathan Fagan Business Brokers donate 10% of annual net profits to charity via the Ten Percent Foundation, a charitable trust set up by our group of companies to distribute monies to charities in the UK and Africa. We have been doing this for over 25 years. The Foundation never incurs any administration costs other than bank charges, which are minimal. All monies donated are distributed to charities and community organisations.

www.tenpercentfoundation.org

Peaceful Spring Getaways in Shropshire



Ludlow Holiday Cottage - Sleeps 4

St Milburga Chapel in the Shropshire Hills is a cosy 4 person, Grade 2 listed holiday home in open countryside overlooking the Clee Hills. Renovated in 2022, it is approximately 10 minutes' drive from Ludlow with its highly regarded restaurants, cafes and independent shops. The chapel is perfectly located for family holidays, weekend breaks and walking holidays. 10% of profits are donated to the Ten Percent Foundation. 10% discount code for newsletter readers: NEWS10

<https://www.stmilburgachapel.co.uk>



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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 12,500 lawyers are registered with us on our own database and we have access to a range of external & 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 also buy, merge and sell law firms.

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 25 years ago. So far over £270k has been donated to charities in the UK and Africa including LawCare, Unlock and Reprive.

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

Warm regards

Jonathan Fagan, Director

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