Legal Recruitment News from Ten Percent Legal

Welcome to the July 2026 edition of Legal Recruitment News from the Ten Percent Group. It includes our Legal Job Market Report, locum hourly rates & solicitor salary guide, using AI effectively for job applications, the SRA consultation on M&A notifications, CV writing & legal careers articles and our charity work. You can read the entire content below, or access the newsletter in PDF format at **www.legal-recruitment.co.uk**.

Legal Job Market Report - July 2026

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

Locum Recruitment - Busy

Locum assignments are busy again for this time of year, with a good number of assignments now going unfilled as locums go on holiday themselves! Hourly rates for conveyancing solicitors remain higher than we anticipate are affordable for a number of smaller law firms, but the time of year is going to mean they remain high for the next few months.

Locum assignment **updates here**.

Permanent Recruitment - Quiet

Permanent recruitment is steady, with a good number of new roles into us over the last few weeks. We think a number of these are efforts by some firms to avoid paying locum rates, so will inevitably end up as locum assignments - its much, much harder to recruit permanently at present - candidates are still hesitant about moving unless there is significant professional or monetary benefit.

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

Law Firms for Sale - Steady

Law firm M&A activity always drops down in the summer and this year is no exception. We expect it to pick up again in September as usual, when partners return from their holidays refreshed and either with plans to take a lot more holidays and retire, or to conquer the world and expand their businesses through acquisition! Valuation and Exit Strategy services remain busy with no sign of dropping off just yet (unfortunately for our staff team looking for a quiet few weeks this summer).

Full details of firms currently for sale on our website available here - 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 June 2026 (2025 figures in brackets)

- New locum roles added - 19 (24)
- New permanent roles added - 15 (23)
- New candidates added - 57 (60)
- New law firms listed for sale: 3
- Law firms for sale: 44
- Deals going through (heads of terms signed): 6

KPMG & REC Report on Jobs UK - July 2026

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

- Temp billings growth hits highest for over three years
- Downturn in permanent staff appointments eases notably
- Pay trends improve, but redundancies continue to push up labour supply

Commentary from Lisa Fernihough, KPMG UK

"It's encouraging to see some of the hiring data improve in June. Although permanent placements are still falling, the pace of decline is easing and back to a rate we were seeing before the Iran conflict put a pause on active recruitment for many companies. But the story of the past few months has been the pivot to temporary work. With chief execs still facing into global uncertainty, this preference for a flexible approach to hiring means they have been able to progress shorter term projects and investments without longer term commitments. With oil prices steadying, business leaders will be hoping that the coming months bring a period of stability and improved economic conditions where they can start to build momentum again."

Commentary from Neil Carberry, REC CEO

"After a long recruitment winter, these figures show truly hopeful signs. Temporary and contract work once again leads the way, as firms react to demand without yet feeling confident enough to commit to larger scale permanent hiring. Though that too looks like it may change."

Interim Lawyers - Hourly Rates of Pay for Locum Solicitors and Legal Executives July 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 – £50-£60 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 – £35-£70 per hour
- In House Counsel: 0-3 years PQE – £40-£50 per hour
- In House Counsel: 3+ years PQE – £50-£125 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-£60 per hour
- Property Litigation – £45-£75 per hour
- Wills & Probate – £45-£65 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 - July 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.

Using AI for Job Applications - What to Avoid

Be under no illusions, AI has changed the recruitment world significantly. We are getting bombarded with emails from companies who have set up automated AI systems for a) finding candidates, b) contacting candidates (by phone and email), c) headhunting candidates, d) preparing applications for candidates, e) collating, reviewing, interviewing and rejecting candidates and f) sending CVs to firms and liasing with them. We have had a call in the last few weeks from an AI bot with an Irish accent asking if we would like to go into partnership with her to source candidates for a large UK law firm. We know it was an AI bot because I asked her if she was an AI bot 2 minutes into the call (sounded very realistic and asked perfectly valid questions). She admitted that she was, but was not allowed to tell me which very impressive AI model she was working in.

None of this replaces the human element of recruitment - selling a candidate to a firm and selling a firm to a candidate. Its possible that significant elements of the process will be replaced, but as yet, there is no replacement for this key part of recruiting.

This series will look at the use of AI in different parts of the recruitment process, and the first article is on job applications.

AI can be incredibly useful when candidates apply for legal jobs.

Firstly, it is only as good as the instructions it receives, but secondly it can make applications as good as they can be, save candidates considerable amounts of time and thirdly it can save recruiters large amounts of time as well. So all good - or is it?

Use AI as an editor, not an author

Your instructions to AI are key to ensuring that it works effectively. Start with your own accurate information. Give AI details about your employment history, qualifications, areas of law, caseload and responsibilities. You can then ask it to generate a new CV, correct errors, improve the structure, remove repetition or make the wording clearer.

A useful instruction would be: "Please improve the clarity of this CV, produce a Word document version, check for errors, make improvements to content, do not use unnecessary text, keep the content factual, use the uploaded job description to tailor the CV to the role, concentrate on my specific experience in residential conveyancing and new build, but do not add any experience, qualifications, responsibilities or achievements that I have not provided."

The last section is essential - we have seen AI-generated CVs containing all kinds of fictitious nonsense. In the last week we have spotted a candidate claiming to work for a company that never traded according to Companies House. We regularly see law graduates who describe a two week internship as if they were head of department.

Ask your AI model to critically evaluate your CV and application, even if you have used it to prepare both. Its always interesting to see what it comes up with. Incidentally we have found ChatGPT Plus and Co-Pilot to be the two most useful AI models to use (and the safest - NB for ChatGPT Plus you need to click the option off to agree to share your data to help learning - its in settings).

Avoid bland, generic wording

One of the most common problems with AI-generated CVs is that they all sound the same. For example: "Highly motivated legal professional with a proven track record of delivering exceptional client-focused solutions." What a load of old waffle. Employers usually want specific information. What type of work do you handle? What does your caseload look like? Do you conduct advocacy, supervise staff or manage files from instruction to completion?

For example, a better sentence at the top of your CV would be: "Residential conveyancing solicitor with 5 years PQE, supervising a team of four fee earners and personally managing approximately 80 files, including freehold & leasehold sales and purchases."

Remove the waffle

AI often uses far more words than necessary, particularly in personal profiles and descriptions of employment. Legal CVs benefit from clarity. Employers do not need every responsibility dressed up as a major achievement.

"Successfully facilitated communication between multiple key stakeholders to ensure the efficient progression and timely resolution of complex legal matters." This was taken from a legal secretary CV. Do we really need to see this, and do we get anything out of reading it, other than a desire to have a snooze?

Ask yourself whether each sentence provides useful information, could be said more simply and sounds like something you would naturally say. Don't include something just because AI thinks you should. Think of it like a dog - it wants to please you, but it doesn't necessarily know how to!

Keep covering emails brief

Covering emails are another area where AI regularly causes problems. We often see extremely lengthy emails that repeat the whole CV and include several paragraphs about the candidate's values, ambitions and professional journey. A covering email is not a second CV. In most cases, it should briefly state: the role being applied for, your current position and relevant experience, any important practical information, such as notice period or location, why the role interests you, your availability for interview (recommended) and that your CV is attached. Two or three short paragraphs are normally enough.

Watch for recognisable AI language

Certain words and phrases now appear so frequently in AI-generated applications that they immediately stand out. "Align" is a common example: "My experience aligns perfectly with your firm's values and strategic objectives." Other warning signs include "delve", "leverage", "dynamic environment", "unique opportunity", "esteemed firm" and "I am particularly drawn to". Use ordinary language instead: "I am interested in the role because I would like to develop my private client experience within a smaller firm." Check for repetition - a recent read through a covering email spotted the use of "tends" 4 times in one sentence and 3 times in the next sentence!

Check the formatting

AI-produced documents sometimes arrive with unusual (and regularly used AI) fonts, inconsistent headings, excessive bold text or formatting that changes halfway through the CV. These can make the use of AI instantly recognisable. Use a simple professional font such as Arial or Calibri. Keep formatting consistent and avoid complicated templates, graphics, skill charts and multiple columns.

The final test

Before sending an AI-assisted application, ask yourself: Is every statement accurate? Does it sound like me? Does each word/sentence help the reader understand why I am suitable? AI can save time and improve an application, but you must remain in control. Use it to sharpen your writing, remove repetition and improve presentation. Do not let it invent your career history or bury your experience beneath polished but meaningless language.

Recruiter Note

Using AI has changed our work patterns as well. When it is used effectively we find applications are much easier for us to handle. Gone are the days of needing to chase up a candidate to see if they are looking for full or part time, remote or office, salary levels and notice periods. Instead we get a lot more detailed emails with CVs containing everything we need. Similarly we also get a load of useless CVs and application emails that contain nothing of any interest, even if the candidate has interesting things to tell us. AI really is more about the user than the actual model itself.

NB: we are planning to run our CV check article series again - if you would like us to impartially review your CV as part of a blog article (with personal details removed), please contact us via the website with a copy of your CV and written confirmation that you are happy for us to review it with your personal details removed and most recent firm.

SRA Proposals for Notifying Sales & Mergers

https://form.sra.org.uk/s3/consultation-clientmoney-2026

The SRA are currently consulting on changing the rules so that any firm thinking about a merger or acquisition needs to notify them. This is quite similar to the current requirements in quite a few PII policies of asking law firms to notify insurers of any thoughts they may have in this area.

The first two proposed “notifiable events” are: a proposed merger or acquisition once it reaches Heads of Terms, or an equivalent stage; and a firm starting to receive or hold client money, having previously told the SRA that it did not do so.

What do firms have to do now?

Concentrating on the merger side of the proposal, firms already have a general obligation under the SRA Code of Conduct for Firms to notify the regulator promptly of material changes to information previously supplied about the firm, its managers, owners or compliance officers. They must also report matters such as serious financial difficulty, insolvency events, changes to information held on the register and an intention to cease operating as a legal business. However, the current rules do not expressly require a firm to tell the SRA that it is considering a merger or acquisition.

In reality the regulator will almost always become aware of a transaction because very often at least one of the two parties involved notifies them of a change - eg new owners, managers or compliance officers requiring approval, or when a firm reports that it has closed following a merger. In many cases, though, that information is supplied towards the end of the process or after the transaction has taken place.

What is being proposed?

The SRA proposes adding a broad requirement to the Code of Conduct for Firms requiring practices to report any event that it classifies as notifiable. For mergers and acquisitions, the duty would arise when the transaction reaches Heads of Terms or an equivalent stage. The firm would be expected to provide information including: the identities and turnover of the firms involved, the amount of client money held, their areas of legal practice, the anticipated completion date, acquisitions completed in the previous 24 months and the proposed structure of the resulting business.

The SRA suggests that receiving notification around 30 days before completion would be helpful, although it acknowledges that transaction timetables are not always predictable. It says notification would not amount to a formal approval process, but the information could lead to further enquiries.

The SRA also proposes bringing failures to notify within its fixed financial penalty regime. Firms would normally be given an opportunity to correct the breach before a penalty was imposed.

Is the mergers and acquisitions request reasonable?

The reasoning behind earlier notification is understandable when you consider that the SRA have managed to miss a number of dodgy deals in recent times! The difficulty we have with the proposal is that it is very similar to some of the contractual obligations in PII policies of a requirement to notify when firms are simply thinking about things. “Heads of Terms or equivalent” may sound clear, but most heads of terms are simply non-binding understandings of next steps, and a significant proportion do not lead to a transaction taking place. The SRA already hold up a significant amount of transactions through appallingly long response times on communications (90 days seems fairly standard even for a simple email reply), so we hope that this notification does not need to be confirmed before anyone continues. It simply adds an additional regulatory hurdle to overcome.

Commercial confidentiality is another concern. Merger discussions are highly sensitive, and firms will want clear assurances about how the information will be handled and who will have access to it. Although the SRA says the process will not amount to approval, further enquiries could have a similar practical effect. Buyers, sellers, lenders and insurers may be reluctant to proceed while regulatory questions remain unresolved.

A wider point

A fairly important part of the proposal may be the broad power allowing the SRA to introduce further notifiable events in future. The regulator says it would provide advance notice and engage with affected firms. However, engagement is not necessarily the same as a full public consultation. Any new event should be clearly defined, connected to an identifiable regulatory risk and introduced only after proper scrutiny. Firms should not face penalties for failing to report events described in vague or subjective terms.

Our view

We are aware already anecdotally that the SRA seem to give out advice to firms looking to acquire or sell that essentially tries to put the firm off doing either. In the SRA staff minds, its a lot safer for everyone (and particularly in relation to the reputation of the SRA) if no law firm sales or mergers actually take place at all.

More information does not automatically mean better regulation and particularly where the regulator becomes or is already part of the problem of achieving a successful transaction.

https://form.sra.org.uk/s3/consultation-clientmoney-2026

Ten Percent Foundation £1000 Donation to Blood Bikes

SERV Ox Bucks Berks N'hants Blood Bikes has been nominated for a £1,000 donation from the Ten Percent Foundation by Rebecca Hughes.

SERV OBN is a volunteer-run charity supporting NHS hospitals across Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Northamptonshire. Its volunteers provide a rapid-response courier service, using a dedicated fleet of motorcycles and 4x4 vehicles to transport blood products and other urgent medical items to where they are needed.

The service operates outside normal working hours, helping hospitals avoid the cost of taxis and commercial couriers while ensuring essential supplies can continue to move quickly between NHS sites. The charity also supports neonatal units by collecting and delivering donated human milk.

SERV OBN's work is carried out by trained volunteers. Riders and drivers are given specialist instruction, including guidance on the correct handling of blood products and familiarisation visits to key hospital collection and delivery points.

The organisation has over 100 volunteers and provides its rapid-response motorcycle courier service to the NHS free of charge, relying on charitable support to maintain its vehicles, equipment, insurance and operational work.

SERV OBN is an excellent example of volunteers using their time and skills to provide a practical service with a direct benefit to patients and local NHS teams. Every journey helps medical professionals access important supplies promptly, often during evenings, nights and weekends. We are very grateful to Rebecca Hughes for nominating SERV Ox Bucks Berks N'hants Blood Bikes and bringing its valuable work to the attention of the Ten Percent Foundation.

For further information about the work of the charity, please visit their website here: https://serv-obn.org.uk/

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. We have just completed the 2026 round of donations, and a list will shortly be published on our website. 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 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

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 Reprieve.

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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