

Legal Recruitment News - September 2019

Contents

- * [Legal Job Market Report](#)
- * [Hourly Rate Guide for Locums - updated](#)
- * [Interview Model Answers and the return of Ten Percent CV Reviews](#)
- * [Negotiating for the sake of negotiating - haggling on salary and the risks](#)
- * [Google Adwords - dump it if unprofitable - advice from a marketing consultant](#)
- * [The Case of the Unsuitable Candidate](#)
- * [Bold Legal Group - for conveyancers](#)
- * [Need a Locum?](#)
- * [Recruiting Staff?](#)
- * [Law Firms for Sale](#)
- * [Search Our Vacancies](#)

Legal Job Market Report

Legal Recruitment - still an uncertain market

Each month we run a comparison between the last calendar month and the same time period in 2018 to see if there has been any noticeable difference in view of the extreme political uncertainty. In June 2019 we saw a huge increase of 77% in new permanent vacancies compared with the previous year. April and May had seen large movement in the opposite direction, which indicates an extremely volatile market, something we have not seen for many years.

How did July and August 2019 compare with 2018?

This year we saw a 38% fall in the number of new permanent vacancies posted over the summer. We also saw a 23% fall in the number of new locum roles posted with us. We would expect to see these numbers over a summer involving the Olympic Games or the World Cup but not otherwise. The market is still extremely volatile - lots of uncertainty - but still plenty of recruitment as the earth continues to turn despite the gathering storm clouds of the 31st October deadline. We are still hearing about redundancies, but not in large numbers and some look to be the annual clean out of higher salaried staff as firms conduct cost-cutting exercises during quieter times in the year.

KPMG and REC Report on Jobs

The KPMG and REC, UK Report on Jobs is compiled by IHS Markit from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 UK recruitment and employment consultancies (including the Ten Percent Group).

Key Findings

Hiring activity wanes due to heightened uncertainty

Demand for staff increases at slowest rate since January 2012

Pay pressures soften

KPMG Comment: ““Brexit uncertainty continues to take its toll on the jobs market, evident by the quickest drop in permanent placements in over three years as employers delay hiring staff. “Given the current climate, it’s not a surprise but is still a concern to see that the demand for staff increased at the slowest rate since 2012 – and that people are reluctant to seek new roles. On the plus side however, the latest decline in staff supply was the least marked for over two and a half years amid greater competition, softening the pressures on pay. Looking ahead and with investment also contracting, businesses desperately need clarity on Brexit outcomes in order to re-build confidence in the jobs market and be able to make more informed decisions on their long-term hiring plans.””

Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) Comment: ““Today’s figures are a sobering reminder to politicians of all parties that national prosperity relies on businesses creating jobs and growing careers. Britain’s record on jobs is world-leading. It’s a key part of our economic success, with recruiters at the forefront of it. And there are still great opportunities out there for those looking for a new job and a boost in earnings. But all this rests on business confidence – the confidence to invest, to hire someone, to try something new – and it’s clear that things are getting harder. Permanent placements have now dropped for six months in a row and vacancy growth is slowing. While we continue to benefit from the flexibility of our jobs market as demand for temps holds steady, today’s survey emphasises the real world impacts of the political and economic uncertainty businesses are facing. The first priority should be avoiding a damaging no-deal Brexit and giving some stability back to British businesses, so they can drive the prosperity of the whole country.”

Statistics

General Statistics for July-August 2019 (comparison is with July-August 2018)

Current live vacancies: 1046

New permanent vacancies added: 68 (109)

New locum vacancies added: 48 (62)

New candidates registering: 169 (169)

August 2019 – Live Jobs (comparison with June 2019 in brackets):

London vacancies: 194 (174) (+11.5%)

South East: 445 (427) (+4%)

South West: 96 (88) (+9%)

Midlands: 75 (74) (+1.5%)

North West: 112 (109) (+2.75%)

North East: 75 (74) (+1%)

Wales: 41 (33) (+10%)

We have 41 law firms for sale at the moment with a couple more coming to market in the next week - [for details of law firms for sale please click here to view our list.](#)

Hourly Rates of Pay for Locum Solicitors and Legal Executives

Rates now well into the summer levels - firms need to be aware that locums get booked up at this time of year and even take holidays themselves!

September 2019 Locum Solicitor Rates

Residential Conveyancing Locum Solicitors – 1-5 years PQE, £30-35 per hour (no variation for central London).

Conveyancing Locum Solicitors & ILEX – 5-35 years PQE, handling all levels of conveyancing including managing a department – £30-42 per hour, including central London.

Commercial Property Solicitors – 1-40 years PQE – £35-56 per hour - average is £40-44 per hour.

Wills & Probate Solicitors and Legal Executives – 3-35 years PQE – £35-50 per hour, going up to £55 per hour. Average currently around £45.

Family Solicitors – 4-40 years PQE – £35 per hour+. NB: huge shortage of family locums and still difficult to source.

Civil Litigation Solicitors and ILEX– 1-35 years PQE. £28-35 per hour. These rates cover mainstream litigation.

Commercial Litigation Solicitors – 3+ years PQE – £35-50 per hour.

Company Commercial & General Commercial Solicitors – 3+ years PQE – £35-75 per hour.

Employment Solicitors – 3+ years PQE – £30-65 per hour.

Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence – 3+ years PQE – £25-£35 per hour.

In House Legal Department Rates: 0-3 years PQE – £25-40 per hour, 3+ years PQE – £40-90 per hour (very wide range due to the nature of in house work).

Local authority rates: think of a number, double it, times it by three and then divide it by 8. That figure is probably more accurate than anything I can include here.. Local authority (often unfounded) worries about IR35 have had a huge effect on this sector as umbrella companies and intermediaries cream off huge profits, courtesy of local government HR department decisions 10 years ago to outsource their own jobs!

NB all rates exclude agency fees. The rates are for self-employed locums billing firms directly on a weekly basis.

Negotiating for the sake of negotiating - the risks of haggling on salary during the job offer process

A couple of job offers recently have ended up in a stalemate situation between the employers and the employees. The employees have asked for a higher salary and the employers have taken umbrage at the fact the employees have asked the question.

Here are our top 10 pieces of advice when considering negotiating on salary during the job offer process:

Never assume that holding out for more money is risk free. Offers can be withdrawn.

Do not attempt to negotiate from a position of weakness, particularly if the employer is aware of your weaknesses.

If you tell the employer a piece of information during interview, make sure you stick to this during negotiations. An example would be where you informed the employer you were looking for a salary level of £50k, but then when they offer you this you ask for more. It does happen.

If you are not particularly bothered about a job offer, but would take it at the right level, haggle to your heart's content. You have nothing to lose.

If you are extremely interested in a job offer and would not want to lose the opportunity for the sake of a few £000, be very, very wary indeed of haggling on job offers.

Consider a conciliatory approach. This can include not negotiating on the base salary, but rather to indicate interest in a bonus scheme or a salary review after 6 months. Sometimes employers factor in agency fees for the first few months (fees can be based on salary) and then the salary can be ratcheted up once the agency is out of the equation.

Do not tell the employer that a figure is your bottom line if this is untrue. So many times over the years candidates have been forced into a corner and been unable to recover - pride often kicks in unnecessarily..

Think about your approach from the employer's perspective. Have they pushed the boat out to get you on board? Are they spending more than they planned to in the recruitment process? Are they likely to be offended if you ask for £10k more?

When considering negotiating, think about what you have to offer. If you are unemployed, currently get a low wage, looking to relocate to an area where there are traditionally very few opportunities or undertake a particular type of work that only this firm covers, do you really want to lose the opportunity in return for an additional £3k?

Stay focussed from the outset. If you want £50k and this is your absolute bottom line - specify this from the start. Never change the goal posts.

And our tips for employers when considering making job offers and negotiating:

Do not see your rear end just because a candidate asks you for more money. Its human nature to ask for more.

Always offer the candidate more than the salary they are currently receiving unless there are clear cost saving benefits to them of joining you. Candidates do not make moves for the same money they currently get unless they are desperate, there are clear financial benefits (eg commuting) or they hate their current firm.

Try to negotiate incentives - once candidates start haggling they are going to want to see some movement so they can be satisfied with the result. Bonuses, reviews, future promotion prospects can all be agreed to and don't necessarily cost anything..

Never withdraw an offer simply because a candidate asks for more money. It makes you look petty and very awkward.

Do not withdraw the first offer and come back with a lower offer to penalise the candidate for daring to ask for more money. We are not living in Victorian times and eating gruel.

Do not go all Alpha Male/Female and start aggressively demanding candidates make decisions by specific dates for no apparent reason. Only introduce dates into the process if the candidate is quite clearly prevaricating. Some do and deadlines can have their place. It has been known for candidates to have a narcissistic personality and go to interviews to collect job offers.

Keep calm and think about the longer term goals of the recruitment. Take a deep breath before you get offended by a request for an extra £1,000. Give clear reasons for any refusals.

Take note of the employee's negotiation skills. Are they any good?

Try and be as conciliatory as possible. Salary reviews in 6 months never harmed anyone..

Be prepared to move on your offer. Lets face it - an extra £2k per year is only going to cost you £166.66 per month plus employers NI.

Both sides tend to get very hot under the collar at times and start hating each other for no apparent reason. When negotiations break down we very often get one of the parties mentioning to us some time later that it was a shame that the offer from X didn't work out. We refrain from pointing out that it could easily have worked out if only the parties had been a bit more flexible... Some jobs do not grow on trees - and neither do good candidates.

Interview Questions & Answers Series and our CV Review Service returns

Each month we include 2 interview questions and model answers for popular (or unpopular) interview questions, with advice from our Managing Director. If you would like an ebook with over 50+ of these questions and model answers, please email Jonathan Fagan at jbfagan@ten-

percent.co.uk and we'll send it over to you - no charge.

We have recently reintroduced our popular CV review service. We review CVs free of charge if you consent to us posting your CV and our comments live onto the website as a blog article (we remove your contact details of course). You can also pay for the service - details here:

<https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/cv-advice-and-reviews/>

You can also view our free online legal job interview training videos on our website -

<https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/interview-advice/>. 100 minutes of advice on technique, interview styles, dealing with technical questions, etc.. Some of the footage is a bit grainy, but the advice is good!

Interview Question 25 – Describe a situation in which you have led a team.

Advice

Although this question is a fairly open one leaving you with the possibility of simply describing a time when you lead a team, so for example when you were manager in a department, it is an ideal opportunity to give a specific example and a positive outcome, for example if you lead a team as a manager but also were manager for a specific incident. Use the STAR technique as this is a competency based interview question, so give a Situation, your Task within that situation, the Action you took and the Result.

If you have not led a team or are at a very early stage in your career try to think of something from a sporting or academic angle as an alternative.

Examples of Answers

“For four years I was manager of the warehouse, which gave me overall responsibility for a team of thirty people. I was responsible for the day to day management of the warehouse, together with any employment issues, budgetary requirements, supplies, stock control and all other tasks associated with the operation of a busy warehouse supplying chemical goods to the pharmaceutical industry. I was in charge when the warehouse went through a complete overhaul which resulted in the additional creation of 40 extra positions, all of which came under my control. My management team and myself managed this transition carefully to ensure that the expansion was seamless and resulted in the continuing operation of the existing warehouse services and the additional work now being undertaken by the extra employees. The outcome was that this move went very smoothly indeed with no negative effects and senior management awarded me a substantial bonus for that year.”

Or:

“At university I was the year representative during the second year of my degree and this coincided with a number of cuts that took place in the university which led to a decision by the students to organise a protest. I set up a committee for my year with four team members and we organised a series of protests against the cuts that were being planned. The protest took place and we managed to get seventy percent of the students from our year group involved with the outcome being that the demonstrations were very well attended.”

Interview Question 26 – Describe a situation where you had a disagreement or an argument with a superior – how did you handle it?

Advice

A very difficult question indeed. Firstly because if you have ever had a disagreement with your superior it clearly indicates that you are someone who maybe a little awkward at work. Not only that but you are introducing a negative into the interview process which is not recommended. However if you don't answer the question it could be construed that you can't think of anything quickly enough as everyone surely must have had a disagreement at some stage or another with their superior.

However thinking back through my own career I have to confess that during my time as a professional I am not sure I ever had a disagreement with any superior. I may at times have considered the actions I had taken to be perfectly valid and the superior may have considered that they were not but not to the extent that I would disagree with them as I would always accept their decision as the more senior member of staff. I suspect that this question is more suitable for someone who is a member of senior management themselves and responsible for making a considerable number of decisions on a daily basis that at times may conflict with another member of senior management who would be more senior to you. Junior members of staff are probably better keeping away from this question and using the sample answer below or something similar.

Examples of Answers

"During my career to date I have not experienced a disagreement with my superiors. Very often if I have completed a task and this is reviewed by one of my managers, they will give me advice and encouragement on particular points that they may feel are not strictly correct or the best course of action. As my superiors with considerably more experience than I have, I accept their guidance and advice gratefully as I feel that this is the best way to learn."

Or:

"As a member of the management team we very often have meetings where decisions are made and senior managers do not necessarily agree with some of the actions that the middle-management team including myself have made. Our management structure is set up so that the middle-managers are able to voice their opinions on any decisions made or reversed by senior management. There have been numerous incidents when a constructive and healthy debate has occurred during meetings concerning decisions I have made that a senior manager may not have agreed with and very often both parties will present their own points of view on the issue and the other managers will provide their feedback on this discussion. It is always done in a very amicable way as usually the decisions have two or three courses of action and they are just as valid as each other."

The Case of the Unsuitable Candidate

We recently sent out a vacancy to the paralegals on our database. Ten Percent Legal Recruitment maintains a database of about 11,000 solicitors and legal executives, together with a good number of experienced paralegals. The vacancy was for a business immigration paralegal who had completed the LPC, had a minimum of 12 months business immigration experience, spoke Cantonese or Mandarin and was able to deal specifically with a specialist area of immigration usually linked to companies. It was clearly going to be quite a hard vacancy to fill but we were particularly interested by the response from one of the candidates.

The interesting candidate emailed us as follows:

"Dear Ten Percent Legal, I am not sure whether I should apply for this vacancy or not. I have not finished the LPC, I do not have a year's business experience, I don't speak Cantonese or

Mandarin and I have never worked in the specialist area you refer to. Should I apply?"

You can imagine our surprise at receiving this application. The only qualifying feature of this particular candidate was that he lived in the UK and had got prior paralegal experience (without this he would not be on our database).

It is very common for recruitment agencies to receive lots of utterly irrelevant applications for vacancies we advertise. This is particularly so at paralegal level and legal support level including secretary roles. For example we only have to use the word "cashier" and you can just about guarantee that for a legal cashier role we will see an army of Tesco checkout operatives suddenly wanting to enter the legal profession. Similarly for a role in a specified geographical location such as Norwich, we can virtually guarantee that for every application that is relevant to the role we will see at least five coming from bar staff, hairdressers and social workers, all looking specifically for jobs in a geographical area and going for the scattergun approach with their job applications.

I often hear people complaining that they have applied for 100s of jobs but got no interviews and find this frustrating. I suspect that for the majority of time the scenario above applies. If you apply for a job that you are clearly utterly unsuitable for you can hardly expect a fairly small company to go to the trouble of emailing back to point out why you are unsuitable for it, when it should be clear to anyone that this is the case. I once worked out in a normal working day that if I replied to all the people who had been in touch to send a wholly unsuitable CV, I would probably spend most of my day simply typing out 'sorry you are not suitable' emails.

It is one thing to apply for a job when you might well just about fit, so for example if somebody puts out an advert for a conveyancing paralegal with 12 months experience and you only have 3 months, it is possible that in some cases they may consider you for the role if they don't get enough applications from the actual level of experienced fee earners they are seeking. However, if you apply for a job where the firm want 12 months conveyancing experience and your only link to the job is that you worked in a pub in the same town for 6 months, then there is absolutely no point at all in you making an application to that job. Firstly, you have wasted your own time because it is unlikely you will get a response, secondly you will annoy the employer or agency you are applying to, and thirdly you would be much better off looking around for jobs that you can actually work in and are suitable for.

In the case of the unsuitable candidate we all had a look, decided to keep the email because it would make a good blog article, and here it is.

Google Adwords - switch it off if getting poor returns

As most people are, we are on mailing lists for a number of companies. One interesting sales advice emails we sometimes take note of is Nick Jervis of Business Salt. I understand that Nick mainly specialises in marketing for solicitors and I should say that we do not endorse his business in any way and have no link to his company - this is simply a good piece of advice that we want to share.

"If Google Ads don't add up, stop doing them, is the advice I have given to several people recently. I adore Google Ads because they are a fantastic form of attraction marketing – meaning that it gets your services placed in front of your ideal clients at the precise moment in time that they are ready to buy your services. What is not to love about that? Quite simply, sometimes the numbers just do not stack up. The people I have spoken with recently could never make Google Ads work financially for them. Being someone that only advises my clients to spend money when doing so provides a return on investment of at least 3 to 1, if the numbers don't add up, I simply do not want

people to waste their money, their time or their energy.

Let me give you an example.

If it costs you an average of £2 per click for your Google Ads traffic, it means that you are going to spend £200 for each one hundred visitors. Let's imagine that your monthly budget with Google is £1,000. You have £1,000 a month to spend with Google Ads to produce new clients for you. At £2 per click, this spend is going to generate 500 clicks through to your website. That sounds good, doesn't it? 500 new people find your website who otherwise would not have done had you not been using Google Ads when looking for your services. What is not to like about that? Well, to see why I would advise you to stop doing this, we have to dive deeper into these numbers. For 500 people, if your website converts at an average number (conversion meaning turning the visitors into new enquiries for your services) then only 1% of those visitors will get in touch with you. This means that on an average month you will generate 5 new client enquiries for your £1,000 Google Ads spend.

If you convert new enquiries into new clients at a rate of just under 50% (which is quite common) that means you will receive two new clients each month. If you only charge £100 for the services that you are selling using Google ads, it means you will generate an income of only £200 per month from your £1,000 Google Ads spend. If you know that these new customers will go on to buy from you again, because the majority of your customers do, then if each client is £100 in fees every month, then by month five you will get into profit. If you can afford to bank roll these ads for a few months, it could still work.

However, if the £100 sale is all that you will get from these clients, a spend of £1,000 on marketing for £200 simply cannot be justified.

Is your marketing spend putting more into your bank account than it takes out? If not, improve it or stop it, whatever that marketing is. If it isn't proper, grown up marketing, stop spending money on it, full stop!"

Nick's website is www.nickjervis.com

The Bold Legal Group for Conveyancers

We don't carry advertising at the moment in the Legal Recruitment email we send out every month and receive no incentives to mention any companies or services. However we do sometimes add a note re any services we see that may be of interest to law firms. We regularly receive the Bold Legal Group update and suspect that most conveyancing practices will find their emails very useful indeed - a couple of our clients have mentioned them to us in recent times. A blurb follows about them. www.boldgroup.co.uk

"Rob Hailstone, an ex-residential property conveyancer with over 40 years' experience, formed the Bold Legal Group (BLG) in 2010. The BLG now has approximately 700 member firms of all different shapes and sizes throughout England and Wales (all of which carry out a number of residential conveyancing transaction annually) and is widely respected by all stakeholders including legal regulators, lenders and the MHCLG. As well as having a Q & A forum, BLG members have been given a voice and are kept informed about all relevant conveyancing issues, including SRA Fraud Alerts, Law Society Practice Notes, GDPR, the IDD, Dreamvar, SDLT changes, VAT on Disbursements, Pricing and Transparency, the Governments current attempt at Improving the Home Buying and Selling Process and the new Code for Completion by Post."

Low Cost Recruitment for Solicitors - Ten Percent Unlimited

Ten-Percent Unlimited is a service offering unlimited recruitment for a set monthly fee. It was set up by us back in 2011 with the aim of making the use of a recruitment agency cost-effective for smaller sized high street law firms. It is still going strong - we have had over 110 clients signed up to date - most of whom have been sole practitioners or smaller sized law firms. We also offer the service to accountancy practices using our sister site, www.tenpercentfinancial.co.uk

The Unlimited Recruitment service offers law firms the chance to recruit as many permanent or locum candidates as needed over a period of 3-5 years in return for a monthly payment. There are no restrictions on numbers (although vacancies have to exist and we do operate a fair usage policy - so far never used) and no other costs. No other similar services exist in the recruitment industry.

For example you may recruit a few locums for cover each year, a replacement conveyancing solicitor, a couple of legal secretaries, possibly a paralegal or two and have a look to expand the firm into a new area of law with an additional fee earner. All of this would cost considerable amounts in advertising and/or recruitment agency fees. However with Ten Percent Unlimited you simply pay a monthly fee.

One of our recruitment consultants works full time on our Ten Percent Unlimited member firms' recruitment needs and is always happy to talk about the service. If you would like a chat with Clare Fagan, please give her a ring 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.

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 three recruitment consultants, Jonathan Fagan, Clare Fagan and Pete Gresty. 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 carried on with this tradition since we formed the company 18 years ago. So far over £100k

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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Legal Recruitment News is produced by TP Legal Recruitment - you can view all versions of the e-newsletter at www.legal-recruitment.co.uk.

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