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Private Practice Legal Salary & Hiring Guide London & South East

2026-27



While salary remains an important factor, it is rarely the sole reason a legal professional changes firms. The conversations we're having every day suggest candidates are placing greater value on career progression, quality of work, leadership and flexibility than ever before. The firms that understand this are the firms winning the talent battle."

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At a Glance.

The private practice legal market across London and the South East remains highly competitive, particularly for experienced fee earners, legal support professionals and specialist lawyers in candidate-short practice areas.

Created by Gerrard White, this guide provides salary benchmarks, hiring insights and market intelligence for both law firms and legal professionals.

Covering roles from legal secretaries and paralegals through to senior associates, legal directors and partners, the guide offers a comprehensive overview of salary expectations, recruitment trends and candidate priorities across private practice.

While hiring activity remains strong, the market continues to evolve. Employers are becoming more selective, salary growth has become more measured and competition for experienced legal talent remains significant in key practice areas including residential conveyancing, commercial property, private client, family, employment, litigation, corporate/commercial, insurance litigation and legal support.

For employers, attracting and retaining the best legal talent remains a challenge, with speed of hiring, salary competitiveness, flexibility and career development all playing a critical role.

For legal professionals, career progression, quality of work, firm culture, work-life balance and hybrid working arrangements continue to be the primary drivers behind career moves.

Whether you are looking to benchmark salaries, plan future hiring or assess your own market value, this guide provides a snapshot of the trends shaping the private practice legal market across London and the South East.



Top 10 Private Practice Hiring Trends.

1

Hybrid working remains a major candidate expectation

Most legal professionals now expect some level of flexibility. Firms offering two to three days working from home are typically more attractive than those requiring full-time office attendance.

2

Legal support talent is back in demand

Experienced legal secretaries, legal PAs and practice assistants remain difficult to secure, particularly where firms require strong document production, diary management and client care experience.

3

Conveyancing remains candidate-short

Residential conveyancers continue to be among the hardest professionals to recruit, especially those with strong caseload management experience.

4

Private Client remains highly competitive

Demand continues for solicitors with experience in wills, probate, trusts, tax and estate administration.

5

Family law demand is rising

New family law vacancies have historically been rare, but demand has picked up recently, especially in the regions. Firms are mostly after 2+ years' PQE, ideally with a specialism alongside the ability to handle a broad caseload.



Speed wins talent

The strongest candidates are often involved in multiple processes. Firms that delay interviews or decision-making risk losing candidates to competitors.

6

Salary is important, but not everything

Candidates are increasingly weighing up flexibility, progression, culture, leadership and workload alongside salary.

7

Counteroffers remain common

Firms are using counteroffers to retain key people, particularly senior associates, legal directors and experienced fee earners.

8

Progression is driving candidate movement

Many candidates are not actively looking for a new role, but will move for clearer progression, better quality work or a stronger long-term career path.

9

Employer brand matters

Candidates are researching firms before applying. Reputation, leadership, culture, staff retention and online presence all influence candidate decisions.

10

Private Practice Legal Market Dashboard.

This dashboard summarises Gerrard White's view of hiring demand, candidate availability, time-to-hire and movement risk across the London and South East private practice legal market.

Hiring demand by practice area

Practice area	London	South East
Residential Conveyancing	🔥 🔥 🔥	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥
Commercial Property	🔥 🔥 🔥	🔥 🔥 🔥
Private client	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥	🔥 🔥 🔥
Family	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥
Employment	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥
Litigation	🔥 🔥	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥
Corporate / Commercial	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥	🔥 🔥 🔥
PSL Lawyers	🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥	n/a

Based on vacancy volume, client demand and recruitment activity.

Candidate availability

Practice area	London	South East
Residential conveyancing	Moderate	Moderate
Commercial property	Moderate	Low
Private client	Low	Low
Family	Low	Low
Employment/Pensions	Low	Low
Litigation	High	Moderate
Corporate/Commercial	Moderate	Low
Legal Support	High	Moderate



Average time-to-hire

From requisition to offer

Role	Average time to fill
Legal Secretary	6-8 weeks
Paralegal	4-6 weeks
Conveyancer	8-12 weeks
Private Client Solicitor	8-12 weeks
Commercial Property Solicitor	10-14 weeks
Senior Associate	12-16 weeks
Partner	4-9 months

Candidate movement risk

Practice Area	Risk of candidate moving
Conveyancing	● High
Commercial Property	● High
Private Client	● High
Litigation	● Medium
Employment/Pensions	● Medium
Family	● Lower
Corporate	● Lower

Key takeaway

The private practice legal market remains candidate-led across all areas of law and employers will need to move quickly, benchmark salaries regularly and offer clear progression and flexibility to retain and attract high calibre employees. Legal professionals with strong technical expertise, especially those with a genuine following remain well positioned to secure competitive opportunities.

Salary benchmarks for Legal Support Roles.

Legal Support Salaries

Legal support professionals remain essential to the performance of private practice law firms. Demand is particularly strong for experienced legal secretaries and legal PAs who can support busy fee earners, manage client communication and improve operational efficiency.

Role	London	South East
Legal Secretary	£30,000 – £45,000 p/a	£25,000 – £38,000 p/a
Senior Legal Secretary	£40,000 – £55,000 p/a	£35,000 – £45,000 p/a
Legal PA	£40,000 – £65,000 p/a	£35,000 – £50,000 p/a
Senior Legal PA	£55,000 – £75,000 p/a	£45,000 – £60,000 p/a
Practice Assistant	£35,000 – £55,000 p/a	£28,000 – £42,000 p/a
Legal Cashier	£32,000 – £55,000 p/a	£28,000 – £45,000 p/a
Practice Manager	£50,000 – £90,000 p/a	£45,000 – £75,000 p/a

Gerrard White Market Insight

Legal support hiring is becoming increasingly competitive. Firms looking for experienced legal secretaries and PAs need to move quickly and offer flexibility where possible.

Paralegal & Legal Executive Salaries

Paralegals and legal executives are increasingly important within private practice teams, particularly in high-volume or specialist departments.

Role	London	South East
Junior Paralegal	£25,000 – £35,000 p/a	£23,000 – £25,000 p/a
Paralegal	£30,000 – £45,000 p/a	£28,000 – £40,000 p/a
Senior Paralegal	£40,000 – £60,000 p/a	£35,000 – £40,000 p/a
Conveyancing Paralegal	£30,000 – £50,000 p/a	£28,000 – £45,000 p/a
Litigation Paralegal	£32,000 – £50,000 p/a	£28,000 – £45,000 p/a
Chartered Legal Executive	£45,000 – £75,000 p/a	£40,000 – £65,000 p/a

Gerrard White Market Insight

Experienced paralegals are increasingly valued as fee-earning contributors, not simply support staff. Firms that offer clear progression routes are more likely to retain strong junior talent.

Legal support roles should not be underestimated. Strong secretarial and PA support can have a direct impact on fee-earner performance and client service.

Salary Benchmarks by PQE.

Solicitor Salaries by PQE

Role	London	South East
NQ Solicitor	£55,000 – £95,000 p/a	£40,000 – £55,000 p/a
1-3 PQE	£65,000 – £110,000 p/a	£50,000 – £65,000 p/a
4-6 PQE	£85,000 – £140,000 p/a	£65,000 – £90,000 p/a
7+ PQE	£100,000 – £180,000 p/a	£80,000 – £110,000 p/a
Senior Associate	£120,000 – £220,000 p/a	£90,000 – £120,000 p/a
Legal Director	£140,000 – £300,000+ p/a	£110,000 – £120,000 p/a
Salary Partner	£180,000 – £500,000+ p/a	£100,000 – £200,000+ p/a



"PQE remains a key salary benchmark across private practice, but progression isn't driven by years qualified alone. Technical expertise, commercial awareness and client relationship skills continue to influence where lawyers sit within each salary band."

Managing Partner, UK Legal 500 firm

Note - Partner remuneration, whatever area of law, varies significantly depending on client following, billings, equity status, management responsibility and firm profitability. Salary brackets reflect typical salaried partner and fixed-share partner ranges; full equity partner earnings may sit above these benchmarks.

Advice for Legal Firms.

In order to attract the best Legal talent, legal firms need to:

- Review salaries annually
- Benchmark against local competitors
- Offer hybrid working where possible
- Move quickly through interview stages
- Communicate clearly with candidates
- Invest in junior talent
- Build visible progression pathways
- Strengthen retention strategies
- Promote firm culture and leadership
- Review benefits beyond salary



The best legal candidates are not always actively looking. Employers need to give them a strong reason to move.

"The UK legal market is built on relationships, reputation and timing. Working with a specialist legal recruiter like Gerrard White gives both firms like us and candidates access to market insight, opportunities and talent that may never reach the open market."

Managing Partner, South East Law Firm

Advice for Legal Professionals.

Candidates considering their next legal career move should assess more than salary alone.

Key questions to ask potential future employers could include:

- Is there a clear progression route?
- What quality of work will I be doing?
- What support will I receive?
- What is the firm's approach to hybrid working?
- How stable is the team?
- What are the billing expectations?
- How does the firm support development?
- What additional benefits do the company offer?



"I would move for a clearer route to senior associate or partnership, even if the salary increase was modest."

**Legal professional working in a
Regional Legal Firm**

"I want good quality work, and of course, a good salary and benefits package, but most of all I want to work for a firm where people stay and feel valued."

**Legal professional working in a
Regional Legal Firm**

Specialist Legal Recruitment.

Gerrard White specialises in legal recruitment across private practice, supporting law firms and legal professionals across London and the South East.

We work with firms and candidates across legal support, paralegal, fee-earner, associate, senior associate, legal director and partner-level appointments.

Our approach combines market knowledge, honest advice and long-term relationship building to help firms hire effectively and candidates make confident career moves.

Speak to us

Whether you are benchmarking salaries, planning future hires or considering your next career move, Gerrard White can provide tailored market insight and recruitment support.

Contact the Gerrard White Legal Team for a confidential conversation.

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This guide has been developed using a combination of:

- Publicly available salary benchmarking data
- Legal market research and industry reports
- Live vacancy and advertised salary analysis
- Candidate and employer insights
- Private practice recruitment trends across London and the South East
- Gerrard White market intelligence and placement data

Salary ranges are intended as market benchmarks and may vary depending on firm size, location, practice area, experience level, client base and overall benefits package.



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