



LEGAL

SALARY GUIDE 2026

**HENDERSON
SCOTT**

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About Henderson Scott

At Henderson Scott, we go beyond traditional hiring, bringing a personalised approach to the Accountancy & Finance, Legal, Sales & Marketing, and Technology sectors.

For clients, we deliver specialist expertise for immediate hiring needs and strategic insight for long-term growth. For candidates, we connect you with roles that match your skills, ambitions, and next career move.

Our consultants are true market specialists, using deep industry knowledge, proactive search methods, and a global network to deliver exceptional talent.

Partnering with Henderson Scott means working with a team committed to raising the bar, building long-term relationships, and helping businesses and professionals succeed in a competitive market.

For tailored and effective workforce planning, visit our [Recruitment Solutions](#) page to explore how we deliver adaptable, results-driven hiring strategies.

Introduction

This year's salary guide delivers the latest insights shaping the labour market. Whether you're planning to attract and retain talent or assessing your market value, this resource offers a clear and reliable view of hiring trends and salary expectations across key sectors.

Drawing on extensive market research, recruiter expertise, and survey responses from our network of employers and professionals, it reflects the realities of today's market, from evolving pay patterns to shifting priorities in career development, flexibility, and retention.

In this guide, you'll find:

Market insights – Explore the latest trends, motivations, and challenges influencing professionals and employers today.

Salary benchmarks – Access up-to-date salary data for key roles, supporting confident, informed decisions on compensation and career planning.

METHODOLOGY

This guide is built on extensive market research and insights from our specialist recruiters who work directly within these markets. Salary data has been carefully compiled using information gathered throughout 2025 from job board partners, our own survey results, and our extensive network of clients and candidates. It reflects current job listings, hiring trends, and the real-time insights of consultants across the Henderson Scott offices nationwide. Together, these inputs provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of salary benchmarks and market sentiment across the UK.

**All salaries are a guideline, and there are several factors including industry, working pattern, and wider cash/non-cash benefits that will influence the basic salary on offer.*



RICHARD VICKERS

CEO

“In today's hiring climate, the right data can make the difference between attracting talent and losing it. Salary and market insight has become a strategic tool for leaders who want to act decisively and stay ahead of the curve.”

Our research combines real-time market intelligence with the experience of specialist recruiters, giving organisations the clarity to benchmark effectively and professionals the confidence to understand their true worth.”

Market overview

Different hiring strategies across firm types defined the legal market in 2025, revealing a widening gap between US and UK models.

US firms continued to set the pace on pay, inflating salaries to secure top talent, while City firms took a more selective approach, focusing on targeted lateral hires. Boutique firms leaned into culture, flexibility, and progression as differentiators, while regional firms maintained steady but cautious hiring.

At partner level, activity was exceptional, particularly within disputes, arbitration, and employment. The first half of the year marked a record number of partner moves, led by US firms, followed by national and smaller City-based firms. Demand at associate level was more uneven. Junior roles (0–2 PQE) remained muted, while mid-level associates saw the strongest appetite. Senior associate hiring largely reflected replacement rather than expansion.

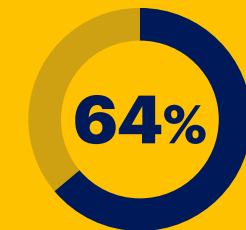
Although overall hiring slowed slightly, US firms remained among the most active recruiters. Boutiques and regionals gained traction by offering balance and clearer career progression. Salary growth plateaued, with US firms maintaining aggressive bonus structures, City firms applying precision to reward models, and boutiques and regionals placing greater emphasis on non-financial benefits. Equity participation for partners remained broadly consistent.

In practice area terms, Corporate/M&A, Private Equity, Funds, and Finance led demand among US and major City firms, while Disputes also remained resilient. Boutiques were busiest in IP, Privacy, White Collar, and general litigation, reflecting client demand for specialist expertise.

2.2
YEARS
MEDIAN TENURE



AVERAGE
ATTRITION RATE



of legal professionals say **LIFESTYLE** and **COST OF LIVING** would be the biggest factor influencing a move outside of London

Salaries

LONDON

LEVEL	ELITE US	TOP-TIER US	MAGIC CIRCLE	SILVER CIRCLE	UK NATIONAL
NQ	£180,000 - £185,000	£160,000 - £180,000	£150,000	£140,000	£85,000 - £105,000
1 - 2 PQE	£185,000 - £195,000	£175,000 - £185,000	£155,000 - £160,000	£145,000 - £150,000	£88,000 - £92,000
3 - 5 PQE	£195,000 - £340,000	£185,000 - £200,000	£160,000 - £190,000	£155,000 - £170,000	£95,000 - £105,000
Senior Associate	£300,000 - £420,000	£200,000 - £230,000	£190,000 - £230,000	£180,000 +	£110,000 +
Partner	£400,000 +	£300,000 +	£300,000 +	£250,000 +	£160,000 - £275,000 +

Salaries

REGIONS

LEVEL	SOUTH WEST	SOUTH EAST	MIDLANDS	NORTH
NQ	£44,000 - £74,000	£46,000 - £76,000	£41,000 - £85,000	£40,000 - £72,000
1 - 2 PQE	£50,000 - £85,000	£52,000 - £88,000	£48,000 - £80,000	£45,000 - £75,000
3 - 5 PQE	£58,000 - £95,000	£60,000 - £98,000	£55,000 - £88,000	£50,000 - £82,000
Senior Associate	£55,000 - £95,000	£50,000 - £95,000	£60,000 - £95,000	£55,000 - £95,000
Partner	£90,000 +	£80,000 +	£90,000 +	£80,000 +

Retention & hiring insights

Retention challenges persisted, driven by a familiar equation. US-level salaries and the opportunity to work alongside market-leading partners continued to tempt City lawyers.

Yet for many, the cost in hours and pressure proved too high. Work-life balance became a defining factor, particularly among senior associates (6–7 PQE and above) who moved to smaller firms seeking flexibility without sacrificing quality.

Boutique and regional firms capitalised by offering what larger firms often cannot. Faster partnership tracks, genuine flexibility, and greater client exposure have become powerful differentiators. Many senior lawyers, particularly those navigating congested partnership pipelines, are now prioritising these trade-offs over headline pay.

Counteroffers remain a short-term fix with long-term consequences. Around 83 percent of lawyers who stay following a counteroffer return to the market within nine months. They are more common at associate level, while partners tend to make more deliberate, long-term moves after extensive consideration.

Most firms have already evolved their attraction and retention strategies, from salary increases and flexibility to record-level bonuses. However, two factors still define competitiveness: clarity of progression and genuine work-life balance. Associates continue to base their long-term decisions on those terms.



DAVID HOLDEN

DIRECTOR

“Short-term attraction strategies like counteroffers or record bonuses might plug gaps, but they don’t solve the root challenge. The most forward-thinking firms are taking a longer view, focusing on career clarity, balanced workloads, and a culture of trust.”

In today’s market, retention isn’t about outbidding competitors, it’s about outthinking them.”

How candidates can stand out

For lawyers exploring new opportunities in 2026, self-awareness will be key.



40%

of lawyers cite compensation misalignment as the primary reason for rejecting an offer.



Career clarity

Understanding what matters most allows you to make career moves that align with your long-term goals.

Each associate values different things, such as salary, progression, culture, or flexibility, so clarity on personal priorities is essential. The trade-offs are clear. Higher pay typically comes with higher expectations, while progression and balance often sit outside the top-paying firms.

When assessing long-term prospects, City and larger national firms tend to offer structured progression due to team scale, while US firms deliver short-term earning power. Boutiques often provide faster routes to partnership, and regional firms offer enviable stability and balance.

Transactional practices continue to see strong demand, but contentious teams maintain steady pipelines and clear partnership potential. The most common candidate mistake is following money over opportunity, overlooking firms that provide equal quality of work, stronger platforms, and better alignment with personal goals.

In short, know your value, define your goals, and evaluate every offer against both the lifestyle and the long-term path it supports.

The road ahead

While interview stages typically move efficiently, many firms still experience delays caused by prolonged shortlisting and internal approvals.

Hiring processes remain largely consistent year on year. Those who move decisively continue to secure the best talent, while slower processes risk losing candidates to more agile competitors.

Throughout 2026, steady demand is expected across established practice areas, with particular interest in Technology, Regulatory, and Tax as markets evolve. Although caution persists, many firms are positioning themselves to act quickly when the right lawyers become available.

The message for both clients and candidates is to stay proactive. For firms, maintaining visibility in the market and engaging early with potential hires will ensure readiness when opportunities arise. For candidates, being clear on priorities and open to conversations year-round can make all the difference when the ideal role appears.



Clients

Engage early and move decisively to secure top talent ahead of competitors.



Candidates

Staying proactive and open to conversations will put you ahead when the right role appears.



Contact us

To discuss the insights from our Salary Guide 2026 in more detail, please contact us at contact.legal@hendersonscott.co.uk

If you would like to explore salaries and hiring trends across our key specialist areas, including Accountancy & Finance, Sales & Marketing, Legal, and Technology, [access the full Salary Guide 2026](#).

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