



NQ SOLICITOR'S HANDBOOK 2025

From qualification to real
world success

Unlocking your legal career

WWW.BCLLEGAL.COM

Our experts



Mark Levine

heads up BCL Legal's In-house department, which proudly boasts the largest in-house legal recruitment team based outside of London.



Mary Nowell

is the Managing Director of our Private Practice team. She focuses on London, assisted by our divisional leads:



Angharad Warren

Midlands
Private Practice



Nic Fear

Midlands, South East and
South West Private Practice



Charlotte Newton

North West
Private Practice



Rozie Hunter

North East
Private Practice



Juliet Lawson

Yorkshire
Private Practice



Joanna Marklove

Insurance and Residential
Conveyancing



Alex Carpenter

Scotland
Private Practice



Sean Cully

Ireland
Private Practice



Iain Garfield

USA
Private Practice

A detailed breakdown of our team, their specialisms, and prior experience, along with links to their LinkedIn profiles, can be found here: [Meet the Team](#).



The BCL Legal NQ Solicitor's Handbook is released annually to provide you with a comprehensive guide in the lead up to qualification.

Partnering with BCL Legal gives you access to a full range of opportunities enabling you to make informed decisions now and in the future.

Congratulations on getting this far! May we take this opportunity to wish you well in your future career.

Index

Table of Content

03 - 04 | Introduction to BCL Legal

05 - 06 | Navigating your Options

07 - 10 | Planning your Legal Career

11 - 17 | CV & Interview Advice

18 - 46 | Location, Location, Location

Hello, we are...



**We've placed over 13,000+
Lawyers since 2003**

We're a specialist legal consultancy and pride ourselves in thoroughly understanding the markets you may want to work in as an NQ.

We have teams of consultants covering the whole of the UK & Ireland. We also work with offshore law firms, those in the Middle East and USA. We're committed to providing the highest possible service to you and our clients.

We work in partnership with private practice firms, large blue chip organisations and the public sector to help you find your ideal post qualification opportunity.

We have over 20 years' of experience and a leading reputation for quality: placing the right person into the right role.

If you would like to benefit on a one-to-one chat or you'd like to meet us in person, please contact us...



BCL Legal represents lawyers at all levels of their career: from Paralegal to Partner. Our work goes far beyond filling a job role; our approach respects the bigger picture, carefully considering our candidates' personal motivations and career aspirations and our client's organisational culture and business goals.

Over 60% of our consultant team are from a legal background. Our team of consultants work in one specific lateral market and geographical patch, allowing them to become true market specialists.

They will be able to offer you tailored market & job search advice, insights and up-to-date NQ salary survey information.

Email: info@bcllegal.com



What lawyers say about us...



“ I registered with a couple of agents before I was recommended to speak to BCL Legal. I met with three consultants at BCL Legal as I was keen to keep my options open and within a week they had arranged interviews for me at four firms and a week later I received a job offer. The consultants have been very approachable and are always willing to help. I have found the preparation they provide before an interview to be excellent. They have given me the information I need to pitch myself at the right level at each interview. I feel confident and trust that the consultants at BCL Legal are going the extra mile to secure what will be the best position for me on qualification.

- **BCL placed NQ**

“ BCL Legal is made up of an extremely proactive team. They proved they genuinely cared about my journey, which I valued a great deal. Their market coverage is excellent and the consultants I dealt with offered comprehensive advice before every interview. Thanks a million!

- **BCL placed NQ**

“ BCL Legal found me my current NQ position and was excellent in preparing me for what my firm was looking for at interview. I was conscious of finding a role well before I qualified in September and an offer was agreed by early April. Generally, BCL was ahead of the curve in sourcing vacancies for me compared with other recruiters I contacted; BCL Legal seems to take things further by getting a good sense of who you are and what drives you, and matching these with a prospective employer.

- **BCL placed NQ**



Navigating your options

Ahead of qualification, you're likely to fall into one of the following categories:



01. Staying at your firm

You've been offered the ideal role with your current employer.

02. Keeping your options open

You're competing with your colleagues for one or more vacancies with your current employer, or you simply haven't been told if you'll have a job on qualification.

03. Get job hunting

The job you want isn't available with your current employer, or you wish to leave your current firm.

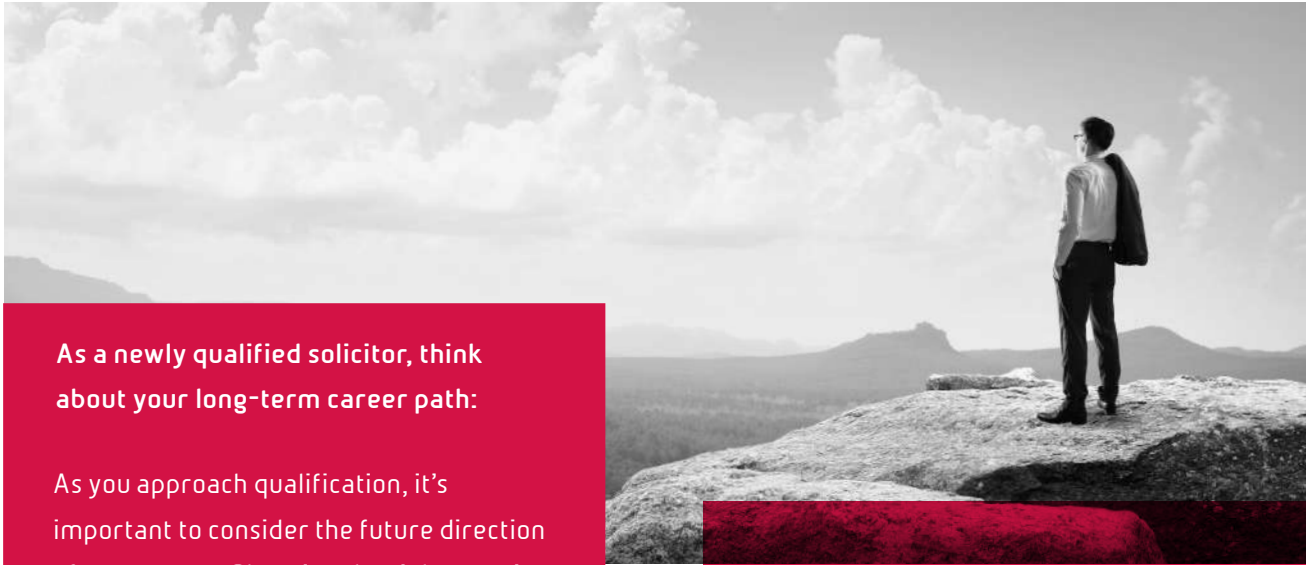
04. Something different

You're hoping to go abroad, work inhouse, or as a locum.

05. Something completely different

You want to leave the legal profession.

What are your long term career goals?



As a newly qualified solicitor, think about your long-term career path:

As you approach qualification, it's important to consider the future direction of your career. Choosing the right practice area for your qualification is crucial for your longterm happiness and success. While colleagues and team dynamics matter, your interest in the work itself will be the only constant in your career. Your team will inevitably change over time.

Take time to think about the following:

- In-house or overseas?

Many solicitors choose in-house roles after a few years to achieve better work-life balance or to focus on commercial legal work. Moving abroad can offer valuable experience, and international roles are highly sought after.

- Aspiring to partnership?

If partnership is your ultimate goal, ensure you qualify into a practice area and firm with a clear route to partnership

- Work flexibility

Consider whether you want more flexibility in the future. Some practice areas or employers offer more flexibility in terms of hours and remote working.

- Non-fee-earning roles

If you prefer a non-fee-earning role, areas like Professional Support Lawyer (PSL), knowledge management, or business development may appeal. These positions typically offer a great balance and rewarding work without the pressure of billable hours.

Planning now will help you set your sights on a fulfilling, long-term career.

Navigating your options

Staying at your firm

If you've been offered your ideal role with your current employer, congratulations! This is an excellent outcome, especially if the role aligns with your long-term goals. However, if you're still uncertain, it's important to communicate openly with your firm to ensure you're on track for qualification in the right area. Consider reaching out to BCL Legal for the latest salary data, market trends, and advice.

If the role offered at your current firm doesn't align with your aspirations, carefully consider whether to accept it. The work you do as a newly qualified solicitor will shape your career, so choose a position that excites you. Don't hesitate to explore other options if you're unsure.

Keeping your options open

If you're still waiting to hear back about a qualified role at your firm/employer, don't panic. BCL Legal is here to help, with access to hundreds of legal job opportunities in private practice, and commerce and industry.



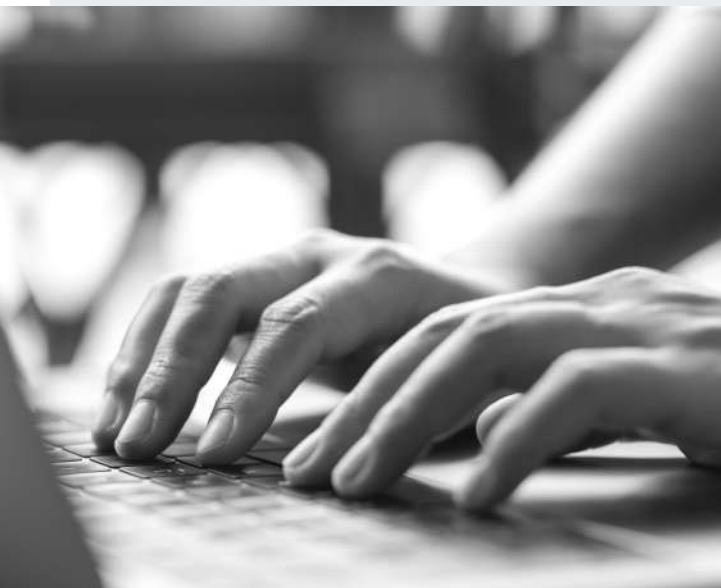
Get in touch with one of our specialist legal recruitment consultants for a confidential chat about your situation, and they will provide you with tailored advice and guidance on how to manage the NQ job search.

You can also check BCL Legal's job board, which is updated daily with new opportunities.

Additionally, you can sign up for job alerts via our 'job streamer' to receive real-time updates on roles that match your preferences. Keep in mind that many firms prefer to hire their own trainees, which can limit external vacancies until after their internal recruitment process concludes. If you rely on your firm to retain you when you qualify, you're at risk of 'missing the boat' as some firms won't make offers until as late as August.

However, you can position yourself for success by staying proactive, getting registered with us at least six months before qualification, and searching for opportunities in areas you're passionate about.

Navigating your options



Something different?

If you're thinking about roles outside of traditional private practice, inhouse positions or locum roles may be attractive alternatives. In-house work offers a unique career trajectory, often focusing on strategic, non-contentious legal work such as contracts, risk management, and corporate governance. Many inhouse roles require at least a year of PQE, but there are opportunities for NQs, especially in large companies with established legal teams.

Locum work offers flexibility, exposure to different practice areas, and often the chance to work with prestigious clients or on high-profile matters. Locum roles may be temporary, but they can provide the variety and experience that can boost your career.

Get job hunting...

If you decide to look for opportunities outside of your current firm, BCL Legal can support you throughout your job search. With one of the largest legal job boards in the UK, we provide direct access to hundreds of jobs across all legal sectors. You can sign up for job alerts that match your criteria to stay informed about new opportunities.

We also offer valuable resources in our Knowledge Base, including CV templates, the latest Salary Survey results, and general advice to help you secure the right job.



Navigating your options



The law isn't for you after all

For some, the legal profession may not feel like the right fit. If you've decided to pivot away from law, there are plenty of options available. Many solicitors transition into business development, legal education, legal recruitment, or compliance. Non-fee-earning roles such as Professional Support Lawyer (PSL), knowledge management, or even teaching law at universities can offer rewarding career paths with a good work-life balance but tend to require a few years of time in practice first.

BCL Legal can also assist in career transitions, providing insights into alternative career options for solicitors who choose to leave private practice.

Staying in the loop

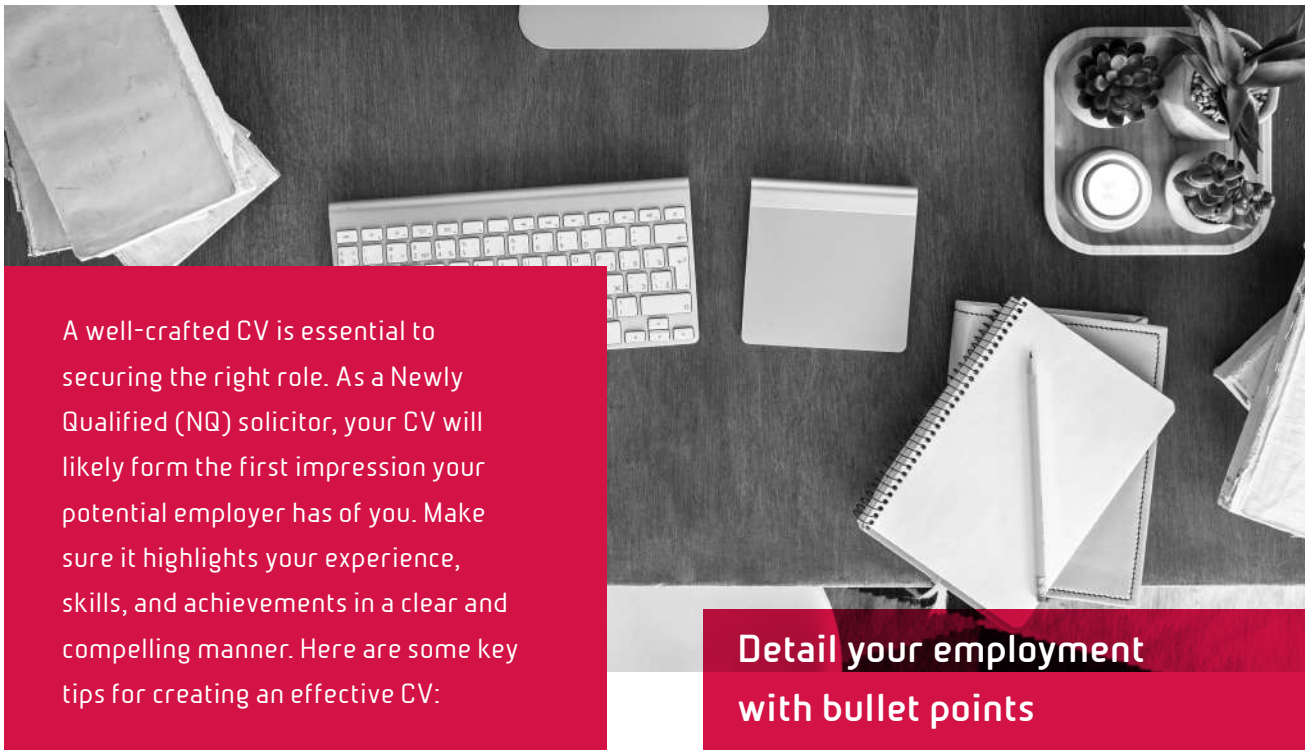


BCLLegal.com is one of the largest legal **jobs boards** in the UK and we update it with new opportunities on a daily basis. At any one time, we have hundreds of legal jobs in each region within private practice, public sector organisations and commerce and industry.

You can sign up to legal job alerts via our '**Job Streamer**', where you'll receive job information that matches your selected criteria. This way, you're regularly informed of jobs in real-time – as and when we receive instructions from our law firm and company clients.

You'll also find CV templates, the latest Salary Survey results, and general and useful information to assist you in securing the perfect job in our '**Knowledge Base**'.

CV advice



A well-crafted CV is essential to securing the right role. As a Newly Qualified (NQ) solicitor, your CV will likely form the first impression your potential employer has of you. Make sure it highlights your experience, skills, and achievements in a clear and compelling manner. Here are some key tips for creating an effective CV:

Detail your employment with bullet points

Structure your CV clearly

Your CV should have a clear and concise structure, making it easy for potential employers to navigate. Stick to a simple format and ensure that the most relevant information is presented upfront. The sections of your CV should typically include:

- Contact Information
- Personal Statement (optional but useful for highlighting your career ambitions and key skills)
- Professional Experience (detailing your seats and the work you've done)
- Education and Qualifications
- Skills (technical and soft skills)
- Interests and Personal Activities
- References (optional)

Under each role or seat, detail your experience in bullet points. This will help break down your responsibilities and achievements in an easily digestible format. Focus on your tasks, the clients you worked with, and the specific legal issues you handled. Ensure your experience is relevant to the position you're applying for.

For example:

Corporate seat:

Assisted with multi-million-pound mergers and acquisitions for blue-chip companies, providing due diligence and drafting shareholder agreements.

Dispute resolution seat:

Managed client relationships and drafted pleadings for commercial litigation cases, including a high-value breach of contract claim.

CV advice

Highlight your preferred practice area

It's important to demonstrate your interest and expertise in the area you wish to qualify into. Be sure to describe the work you've done in that area in more detail, even if it's just a portion of your training contract.

- Spend more time describing the work done during the seat that aligns with your desired qualification. For instance, if you want to qualify into the corporate department, focus on the M&A transactions or the corporate advisory work you've been involved in.
- Don't hesitate to mention specific cases or transactions that are significant, especially those you were actively involved in. Employers will often focus on these during interviews.

Be honest and accurate

It's essential to be honest and accurate when describing your experience. Over-exaggerating your responsibilities or involvement can lead to awkward questions in interviews if you're caught out. Instead, focus on what you have contributed to the work, and don't be afraid to mention any achievements, even if they were part of a team effort. Employers are looking for genuine enthusiasm and integrity.



- For example, if you assisted in a high-profile merger, make sure to mention the deal's value, the client's name (if confidentiality allows), and your role in the process.

Don't worry about length, but be concise

While it's generally recommended that CVs should be no longer than two or three pages, if your experience requires more space, it's acceptable for your CV to run over. What's important is that the content remains relevant, factual, and clear. Ensure that every line adds value to your application and that the format is easy to read.

CV advice



Use a professional CV template

While it's important to make your CV personal and unique, using a wellorganised, professional CV template is a good idea, especially if you're unsure how to structure your CV. You can find a suitable template on our website.

[Click here to view our NQ CV template.](#)

Incorporate business development and marketing

If you've been involved in any business development or marketing activities, be sure to highlight them. Firms increasingly value these skills, especially for those seeking to progress into senior roles. This could include tasks like preparing pitch documents, client meetings, or contributing to marketing campaigns

- For example, you could say, **"Assisted in the development of marketing materials for a successful pitch to a leading international client."**

Personal interests matter

Including a section on your interests is an important part of the CV process, particularly as an NQ. Not only does it give interviewers insight into your personality, but it also offers an opportunity to build rapport during interviews. Make sure you're prepared to talk about these interests, especially if they demonstrate skills relevant to the role you're applying for.

- For example, interests like **"Leading a volunteer legal clinic"** could highlight organisational or leadership skills, while **"Running a personal blog on corporate law developments"** could indicate your interest in the legal sector.

Interview advice



Once your CV gets you through the door, the interview is your chance to demonstrate your suitability for the role and fit within the firm. Proper preparation is key to making a great impression and securing the job. Here are some tips to ensure you're fully prepared:

First impressions matter:

It may sound obvious, but making a great first impression is essential. It's important to look professional, polished, and confident. Wear a wellfitted suit, polished shoes, and ensure your personal grooming is neat. Even for a virtual interview, make sure your appearance is professional and your environment is tidy. Good lighting and clear sound are also crucial for a virtual setting.

Research the firm

Before your interview, make sure you've done your homework on the firm. This will allow you to ask informed questions and demonstrate your genuine interest in the role. Key things to research include:

- The firm's practice areas and the types of clients they serve.
- Any recent deals or cases the firm has been involved in.
- The firm's values and culture, which you can often find on their website or social media pages.
- Legal rankings in The Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners, as well as recent publications in legal trade press.

Know your CV inside and out:

Your CV forms the basis of any interview. Review it thoroughly beforehand so you can discuss every part with ease. Be ready to talk in detail about the cases or transactions you have worked on, as these are likely to be the focus of the interview. Take a copy of your CV to the interview or have it open in front of you during a virtual meeting. This will help you refer to specifics, if needed.



Interview questions

Prepare your answers to the questions below. Ensure you don't waffle your answers, try to give real examples whilst being brief and to the point. The questions will often be (deliberately) open-ended to make sure your answer isn't a simple yes or no. Below is a non-exhaustive list of some of the questions you may be asked.



- Why are you not being retained on qualification? Why do you want to leave the firm you've trained with?
- What do you enjoy about your current role? What do you not enjoy?
- Why have you applied for this job? What do you know about the vacancy?
- Why are you looking to join us? How much do you know about us?
- What have been the key achievements in your professional and non-professional life?
- Where does your initial interest in law stem from?
- What successes have you enjoyed in your current role? How did you achieve these?
- How would your boss/team describe you?
- What do you want to achieve over the next 2/3/5 years?
- What are your strengths and areas for development?
- How good are you at: time recording, dealing with targets; organising your day; prioritising?
- When have you ever worked under pressure?
- What is your ideal job?
- What do you like to do outside of work?
- What motivates you?
- Give an example of how you've worked as part of a team?
- What difficulties have you encountered in your current job and how have you overcome them?

Questions to ask at interview

In addition, you'll need to prepare some questions to ask the interviewer(s).

A good interviewer may have already answered most of your questions. Ideally, you will have developed a good rapport with them and asked questions throughout the interview rather than save them all to the end.

Here are some suggestions.



- How has this position become available? (i.e. growth or replacement?)
- How would you describe the culture of the organisation? Team spirited? Open door policy?
- What are the future plans of the business/department?
- How would you describe the individuals in the department currently?
- How do you appraise the performance of your staff?
- What type of work would I handle in this role?
- Which clients would I act for?
- How many files on average does each fee earner handle?
- Does the organisation encourage marketing by younger members of staff?
- How many chargeable hours are staff expected to bill per month?
- How much does the firm invest in technology?
- How would you describe the values of the firm?
- How has the firm/team changed over the last few years?
- How much training, support and development opportunity will there be?
- What are the long term prospects for the person who gets this job?
- When am I likely to hear if I have been successful at this stage of the process?
- What is the next stage of the recruitment process?
- Do you have any reservations about me?

Final thoughts ...



Your CV and interview performance are vital to securing your ideal role as an NQ solicitor. By focusing on your relevant experience, conducting thorough research, and practising your interview technique, you can set yourself up for success.

Good luck with your job search, and remember that with the right preparation, confidence, and enthusiasm, qualification is often the turning point where you can elevate your legal career to exciting new heights.

Whether you're staying at your training firm or looking to move elsewhere, our specialist legal recruitment consultants here at BCL Legal are here to support you every step of the way!



**Our specialist team
discuss benefits of
key legal hubs across
the UK, Ireland and
international markets**

Manchester & The North West

The Manchester team is dedicated to recruiting in private practice and in-house for both permanent and temporary job seekers. The North West region includes the beautiful Lake District of Cumbria in the north, down to Cheshire in the south.

Ever since Manchester's regeneration effort began in earnest during the mid-1990s, the city has developed into a fantastic place to live, boasting all the benefits of the Capital while maintaining a community feel. Manchester has a diverse range of law firms, from top tier firms including CMS, Pinsent Masons, DLA Piper, Eversheds Sutherland and Addleshaw Goddard, to national heavyweights including JMW, Shoosmiths, Gateley, Mills & Reeve and TLT who all provide healthy competition to the top tier. Regional firms continue to prosper, with the likes of Brabners and Pannone Corporate offering excellent quality work and a fantastic alternative to the national firms, often having smaller teams and a greater ability for lawyers to make their mark and progress.

The variety of options available to lawyers is greater than ever with firms such as Latham & Watkins and Freshfields increasing their headcount and market profile in Manchester. Law firms still continue to choose the city as the best place to open new offices; national law firm Foot Anstey recently opened an office in Manchester city centre. Deloitte also launched their legal team in

Manchester in 2019, joining KPMG, PWC and EY in offering a real alternative to the traditional law firm model; a unique offering for transactional lawyers looking for a breadth of corporate and commercial work.

With the quality of work being as good as the City, but without the same demands that come with working in the Capital, the North West is very much open for business. With a thriving legal community, cosmopolitan music scene and home to four Premiership Football Clubs across Manchester and Liverpool, it really can offer everything the City can and more. Speak to a BCL Legal consultant who can advise on where to live, what life is really like, and which of the many firms best match your ambitions.

Towards the end of 2024 the North West inhouse legal market was looking positive with good levels of investment, M&A activity and falling interest rates contributing to confidence for 2025. The Autumn budget then brought increases to the living wage and employer national insurance contributions which has meant that businesses are dealing with rising costs, and in some cases this has led to announcements about redundancies.

In-house legal teams tend to be lean, which means that to some extent they sit outside of the usual

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

Manchester & The North West

economic and business fluctuations that can affect law firms, however it is possible that recruitment in 2025 may occur more for replacement than growth. Retail and hospitality are hardest hit but there are still many success stories in the North West, with Manchester and its outlying areas remaining the busiest area in the region.

Commercial lawyers remain in demand, and increasingly we're also seeing lawyers from areas outside of general commercial contract law making successful moves in-house. This includes those working in corporate, construction, banking, commercial litigation, employment and real estate law. Newly qualified solicitors are increasingly making the move in-house on qualification and often they are joining established, flexible, well-structured and supportive in-house legal teams rather than waiting to gain post-qualified experience in practice. In addition, since the introduction of the SQE route, we're increasingly seeing junior lawyers training and qualifying in-house.

BCL Legal's portfolio in this region includes many local, national and international companies, such as; BAE Systems, JD Sports, NCC Group, Castore, MoneySuperMarket, Liverpool Football Club, PZ Cussons, ASM Global, British Telecom and Manchester Airport Group.



Liverpool

Since Liverpool was named European Capital of Culture in 2008, the City has seen its economy and legal market continue to grow at a rapid pace. In 2024, the Liverpool legal landscape rivalled that of neighbouring Manchester.

The landscape and the famous skyline have been transformed, while the city centre has been modernised radically – as has the legal marketplace.

In addition, Liverpool's legal market is incredibly diverse with a range of firms from the high street all the way up to top-tier international practice making it an exciting time to be a lawyer here. The traditional Top 5 firms, many of which were founded in Liverpool have been joined by a host of new entrants into the Liverpool market:

- DLA: a global law firm with longstanding Liverpool office;
- Hill Dickinson: a leading commercial law firm founded in Liverpool in 1810 based in the heart of the commercial district;
- Weightmans: a top 45 national law firm which houses 700 people in Liverpool;
- DWF: an International law firm founded in Liverpool and was the first law firm to float on the London Stock Exchange's main market in March;

- Brabners: a large regional firm. Although there are offices in Manchester and Preston, Liverpool remains a stronghold.
- Taylor Wessing: a transatlantic firm top 20 firm with an award winning office space on the Royal Albert Dock.
- CMS: a Top 10 international law firm has expanded its presence in Liverpool with a new, larger permanent home in The Plaza, Old Hall Street.

In summary, if you're a lawyer looking to do excellent work in a vibrant city, Liverpool is certainly worth considering.

Top-rated tech practice Taylor Wessing has continued its exciting growth in Liverpool, global giant CMS has expanded its presence in the city and is joined by Top 50 law firm Freeths in moving to larger offices. National law firm Irwin Mitchell have also opened their latest office in Liverpool. Leading regional firm, Napthens also recently invested in a ten year lease for bigger premises at the heart of Liverpool's commercial business district.

There's now a wide variety of law firms to choose from in Liverpool. This includes international firms like DLA, CMS, Hill Dickinson and DWF, nationals

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...](#)

Liverpool

like Irwin Mitchell, Freeths, Weightmans and JMW along with thriving regional firms like Brabners, Napthens and boutique firms such as In-House Legal Solutions with its founders originating from London / Magic Circle firms.

The addition of new firms has led Liverpool to become a really good place for junior lawyers to start their career. There is a thriving social scene for junior lawyers with The Merseyside Junior Lawyers Division being one of the biggest junior lawyer associations in the country.

The increasing financial investment in the city, bigger legal market and increased workflow means Liverpool is a worthy option for lawyers at any stage in their careers.

Why not also consider Chester?

Chester in itself has also recently emerged as quite the hub for legal activity. With easy access to Manchester, Liverpool, Cheshire, and the relatively untapped region of North Wales, Chester firms have managed to attract a range of clients across all different areas of law. There is now a range of strong regional firms with offices in the area, including the Legal 500 ranked, Knights, Aaron & Partners, DTM Legal and SAS Daniels. Cheshire based lawyers now have an alternative option to commuting into the big cities.



Leeds

As Yorkshire's largest city, it comes as no surprise that Leeds is one of the fastest-growing legal markets in the UK. The 'Big Six' firms: Addleshaw Goddard, DLA Piper, Eversheds, Pinsent Masons, Squire Patton Boggs and Walker Morris continue to dominate the top tiers of Chambers UK and Legal 500 rankings, but with a number of other key players in the region such as DAC Beachcroft, Bevan Brittan, Shoosmiths and Clarion picking up some top rankings in some areas.

Leeds is a legal market that has changed significantly over the last 15 years, from a market dominated by the big six, and supported primarily by a range of regional firms, to one where the overwhelming majority of the other second tier national and international firms have moved in, built up full service offices and found their place in the market.

Firms with a strong presence in Leeds include Hill Dickinson, Freeths, Shoosmiths, Ward Hadaway, Mills & Reeve, DWF, Bevan Brittan, Womble Bond Dickinson, Gateley, Capsticks, Knights and Brabners. Some of these firms have seen significant growth over the last few years which is set to continue, bringing an abundance of opportunities.

Regional players such as Clarion, Gordons, Schofield Sweeney, Lupton Fawcett, Gordons and Wrigleys and more recent entrants, Square One

and Tyr continue to be great options for aspiring lawyers in the region, with excellent training and development on offer and deep sector knowledge.

Lawyers in Leeds also have a range of other high-quality options to consider, including a number of boutique corporate, construction, planning, pensions, employment and property litigation firms. Some of the world's leading accountancy firms such as PwC, KPMG and Deloitte also continue to build their presence in Leeds.

Leeds JLD continues to be a really active group with a large membership, hosting a broad range of networking and social events in the region.



Sheffield

Sheffield is continuing to emerge as a key legal hub in the UK, with BCL Legal firmly embedded within the city's vibrant landscape. As Yorkshire's second-largest legal hub, Sheffield is home to a wide spectrum of firms, ranging from high-street practices to prestigious international players. Many of these firms hold top-tier rankings in The Legal 500 and Chambers UK, including global names like DLA Piper and CMS, national powerhouses such as Freeths, Shoosmiths, Irwin Mitchell, Knights, and Kennedys, as well as respected mid-tier regional firms like Taylor & Emmet and Lupton Fawcett. Additionally, boutique firms like Tapestry Compliance, with many of its lawyers hailing from London's Magic Circle, provide city-level expertise at exceptional value.

Sheffield's legal market, like most, has been moving at a modest pace over the past couple of years, however hiring activity is picking up as we move into the year. Thanks to strong relationships with local clients, we anticipate a steady increase in recruitment as the market continues to expand.

But Sheffield isn't just an exciting place to work—it offers an incredible lifestyle too. The city boasts a thriving business community that adds real depth to our work, providing ample networking opportunities and avenues to connect with new clients. The city is constantly evolving, with a palpable buzz and a host of exciting developments on the horizon.

BCL Legal is thrilled to be part of this thriving scene, actively engaging with the local legal community. We are particularly excited about our involvement with Sheffield JLD, who continue to host a range of vibrant networking events and social gatherings throughout 2025. It's a fantastic time to be in Sheffield, both professionally and socially!



Newcastle & The North East

The financial strength and confidence of the Newcastle market are evident by continued growth within the legal sector. International firms Womble Bond Dickinson, DWF, DAC Beachcroft and Eversheds Sutherland all have offices in the city with home grown firms like Muckle, Ward Hadaway and Sintons maintaining impressive positions in the Legal 500 and Chambers Rankings, not to mention numerous awards across most disciplines.

We have seen a number of smaller and medium-sized firms undergo complete rebranding exercises in recent years, as well as some firms relocating to newer, more modern offices both in the city centre and on the outskirts. The arrival of the Helix site have prompted moves from Womble Bond Dickinson, Clifford Chance, Hay & Kilner and Savage Silk into various swish new premises in the Heart of the City Centre. DAC Beachcroft, Knights and Burnetts have all been on the move. Both Sintons and Ward Hadaway have recently undergone mass refurbishments at their St. James' Park and Quayside offices respectively.

Well known national practices including Hill Dickinson, Kennedys and Gateley now have small compact offices in the City, offering an insight into their developing workstreams and specialisms, attracting top talent from across the region.

Further afield in the North East, we continue to see a lot of movement across the full-service commercials, as well as the smaller regional and more high street practices. The likes of The Endeavour Partnership, Jacksons, Tilly Bailey and Irvine and Hewitts remain leaders of the pack in Teesside, with Knights thoroughly settling into life in Teesside. Swinburne Maddison and EMG Solicitors maintain fantastic reputations in Durham, with EMG recently opening new offices closer to Newcastle as they continue to demonstrate fantastic growth and an enviable reputation.



Birmingham

BCL Legal has a dedicated team of legal recruiters in Birmingham and the wider Midlands area. We work with all of the major national, international, and regional firms in the city and are on the preferred supplier list (PSL) for all firms. BCL Legal also has strong relationships with Birmingham's leading defendant insurance litigation and claimant litigation heavyweights.

We also work closely with regional practices throughout the West Midlands, which places us in a unique position to advise on market trends and help NQ lawyers navigate their options. Whether you're considering Birmingham city centre or the surrounding areas, we can offer guidance on how to position yourself for success.

The Birmingham legal market has continued to recover from the challenges posed by political and economic instability over the past couple of years. The market remains at a slower pace than we'd like, largely due to macroeconomic factors like high inflation, rising interest rates, and the ongoing cost of living crisis. However, there is still a strong appetite from most firms to grow and recruit. The beginning of 2025 has shown renewed momentum, with firms anticipating a stronger year compared to 2024 as market confidence continues to grow.

One factor contributing to the current market dynamics is the significant salary increases seen a

few years ago. Newly qualified solicitors in Birmingham now command salaries upwards of £75k at a couple of firms, with several others offering £65k+. While this has created a competitive environment, it has also led to higher expectations around performance, with more stringent chargeable hour targets and tighter business cases for new hires.

Retention rates remain a focus for firms in 2025, with all firms aiming to retain as many of their own trainees as possible. However, the number of NQ vacancies coming to market is expected to be relatively modest, particularly in corporate, commercial, IP, employment, and commercial litigation. As a result, it's wise to consider a few different practice areas and locations at qualification. It's also essential to start early so that you don't miss any opportunities and to remain flexible. Having a clear Plan A and Plan B will be critical as opportunities in the external market may be fewer.

Transport links, including the ongoing development of HS2, continue to make the city a strong alternative for both lawyers and clients. Coupled with competitive salaries, Birmingham now offers a comparable range of work and high-quality legal experience, making it a compelling location for ambitious legal professionals.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

Birmingham

Noteworthy developments in the Birmingham legal market in 2024 include the opening of several new law firms and the expansion of existing players. A couple of notable arrivals last year were Hill Dickinson and TLT, both of which opened new offices in the city, strengthening their presence in the Midlands region. These moves position the firms as significant players in Birmingham.

Additionally, several established firms relocated or upgraded their offices in 2024. Browne Jacobson and Shoosmiths both moved to 103 Colmore Row, one of the city's premier office addresses, further enhancing their regional presence. Mills & Reeve also relocated to the Paradise development, a flagship location in Birmingham that reflects the firm's growing business and commitment to the city.

In terms of acquisitions, Thursfields Solicitors was acquired by Knights in 2024, expanding Knights' footprint in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands. This acquisition further consolidates the growing trend of regional firms being absorbed by larger national players, as firms look to enhance their geographical reach and service offerings.

BCL Legal is also a preferred supplier for various professional services firms. These organisations often offer exciting opportunities for those interested in alternative career paths beyond

traditional law firms.

The regeneration of Birmingham over the past decade has transformed the city, driving significant investment and making it an even more attractive place to build a long-term legal career.



East Midlands

The East Midlands legal market offers a wealth of opportunities for legal professionals at all levels. Whether you're drawn to a prestigious global firm, a nationally recognised practice, or a respected local boutique, the East Midlands has something to cater for everyone. This vibrant market is also poised for continued growth after a slightly quieter couple of years.

Nottinghamshire stands out as a powerhouse in the region, with heavyweights like Eversheds Sutherland, Browne Jacobson, Shoosmiths, Shakespeare Martineau, Gateley, and Freeths leading the way from their Nottingham offices. These firms serve a broad spectrum of national and international clients, cementing their position at the forefront of the legal landscape. Alongside them, regional leaders like Geldards, Nelsons, Flint Bishop, and Smith Partnership are also making their mark, ensuring the East Midlands remains a competitive and diverse market for legal services.

The East Midlands legal sector is dynamic and ever-evolving. Factors such as economic shifts, legislative changes, and the growing demands of clients continue to shape the landscape. In recent years, we've seen an exciting shift towards specialisation. Firms are narrowing their focus to niche practice areas, which not only differentiates them but also enables them to meet the increasingly specific needs of their clients. This trend is driving

innovation and creating opportunities for legal professionals to carve out unique and impactful careers.

The outlook for 2025 is promising, particularly within the region's rapidly growing tech sector, which has created a wealth of opportunities for solicitors specialising in commercial contracts and corporate law. As the tech scene continues to expand, legal professionals will be crucial in advising start-ups, safeguarding intellectual property, and supporting mergers and acquisitions. This is an exciting time for those looking to make a real impact in one of the UK's most dynamic and fast-evolving industries.

The volume of deals and transactions handled by firms in the East Midlands is significant for the size of its legal market. This, combined with salary increases over the past few years, makes the region an increasingly attractive destination for legal professionals. Additionally, with excellent transport links and a cost of living that's significantly lower than in larger cities, relocating to the East Midlands offers both career and lifestyle advantages.

One of the latest developments in the region is Nelsons' acquisition of Burton upon Trent-based Else Solicitors earlier this year, a move that further

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

East Midlands

strengthens their reputation and footprint across the East Midlands. This acquisition, alongside other exciting changes, signals the ongoing growth and evolution of the legal market here.

In short, the East Midlands offers an exciting, diverse, and forward-thinking legal market. With strong prospects, a thriving business environment, and an ever-expanding tech sector. It's an ideal place for ambitious legal professionals to build their careers and make a real impact.



East Anglia

Covering Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk, East Anglia serves as a hub for legal and commercial activities, often overlooked by newly qualified candidates. However, all cities within the region boast vibrant legal sectors, mirroring East Anglia's pivotal role in agriculture, transportation, shipping, technology, biotech, and telecommunications industries.

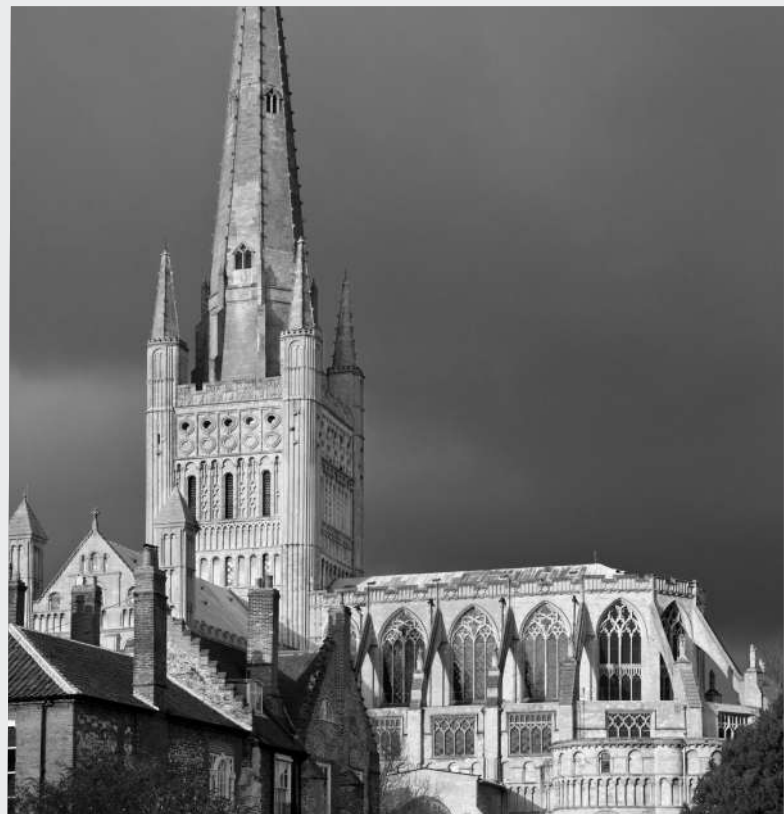
Cambridge stands out as the largest legal market in the region, benefiting from the global prestige of The University of Cambridge and a multitude of spin-off businesses. It forms part of the renowned "Golden Triangle," acclaimed for its expertise in the life sciences sector. The city's technological prowess has positioned it as a top destination for venture capital investment globally, second only to the United States.

Key law firms in Cambridge include international giants like Eversheds Sutherland, Pennington Manches, Mishcon de Reya, Taylor Wessing, and the esteemed US firm Goodwin Procter. National firms such as Mills & Reeve and Birketts also contribute to the city's legal landscape, alongside smaller yet prestigious commercial firms like Greenwoods and HCR Hewitsons, boasting impressive clienteles, including education and charity sectors.

Norwich, the historical capital of East Anglia, hosts

a diverse legal market dominated by firms like Mills & Reeve, Howes Percival, and Birketts in the corporate and commercial sphere. Birketts particularly engages in corporate work with a substantial international component.

East Anglia excels in private client and agricultural law within the UK, with Mills & Reeve, HCR, and Howes Percival leading the charge. Larger firms retain significant private client teams, while specialist firms like Roythornes, Ashtons Legal, and Greenwoods further enhance the region's reputation. Suffolk emerges as a prominent center for bloodstock and horse-racing related legal matters.



Thames Valley

A lesser-known location for lawyers and arguably the profession's best-kept secret, the Thames Valley and Oxfordshire region has much more to offer newly qualified lawyers than you might first think. A plethora of leading law firms and multinational businesses have offices and/or their headquarters in the region; taking advantage of the close proximity to London and access to graduates from top universities.

The strength of the legal community in the region is demonstrated by international law firms such as Clyde & Co, Charles Russell Speechlys, Osborne Clarke and Penningtons Manches Cooper maintaining a presence in the region. Established national firms such as Shoosmiths, Gateley and Freeths have been bolstering their offerings, while ambitious firms such as Knights, Harrison Clark Rickerbys and IBB have also entered the market in recent years. Several more local firms also boast impressive national reputations, including Stevens & Bolton, Field Seymour Parkes and BoyesTurner.

Oxford firms such as Mills & Reeve are capitalizing on the city's reputation as a global center for life sciences, technology, and education. Several more local firms also boast impressive national reputations, including Stevens & Bolton, Field Seymour Parkes and BoyesTurner.

Geographically, the area provides easy access to

outstanding natural beauty and popular attractions such as Legoland and Windsor.



Bristol

Bristol has long been recognised as a hub for a wide array of legal services and to this day is an increasingly popular destination for lawyers at all stages of their career.

Here at BCL, we work with a mix of boutique, regional, national and international firms and have longstanding relationships with the key players in the market.

The market in 2024 did feel slightly slower than in other years, however as we enter a new year there is a lot of appetite from firms to grow and recruit. We have seen a number of firms launch Bristol based offices as part of their expansion plans in recent years and 2024 was no different, with the likes of Birketts LLP being the latest firm to feel the draw of the South West. A number of leading firms also continue to drive their Bristol growth strategies with the likes of RWK Goodman and Shakespeare Martineau adding to their Bristol headcount significantly. Many established firms have also continued to expand and subsequently move into bigger offices – Knights moved into their new office in a landmark Bristol city centre development, with DACB, Michelmores and Freeths also launching new offices spaces to facilitate the firms' growth trajectory. The likes of Burges Salmon and TLT have also invested heavily in expanding and modernising their current Bristol offices, therefore allowing a significant opportunity for future

growth.

Along with growth and expansion plans, retention rates also remain a focus for firms in 2025 with all firms aiming to retain as many of their own trainees as possible. The number of NQ vacancies that came to market in 2024 was very low and the market is expected to be the same this coming year. NQ's are advised to consider a few different practice areas and locations on qualification and to be as flexible as possible to keep their options open.

There have also been some significant developments in the Bristol legal market over the last 12 months, with a number of firms showing a real sign of intent as we move into 2025. This was epitomised by London centric firm Simmons & Simmons who set a new regional record in recent weeks when they announced they are increasing their NQ salary to £96,000. This sets them apart from their closest rivals Osborne Clarke and Burges Salmon and shows their commitment to attracting top talent in the South West.

Bristol is now widely recognised as an established and highly regarded legal market with the city itself being voted the best place to live in the UK on numerous occasions. With Bristol salaries now being highly competitive and often higher than

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

Bristol

other legal hubs throughout the UK it is no surprise that it is often the 2nd choice for many lawyers after London. Not only is it a more affordable city than London, Bristol is known for its culture and a more relaxed approach – this is why many people find the excellent work-life balance a real draw. Many firms offer a 60/40 split in terms of home and office working with some firms giving their lawyers complete control of their own working week.

It is clear to see that Bristol has very much so developed its own legal brand which is only going to continue to attract talent to what is already a vibrant and thriving city! We here at BCL are excited to support that growth and work with such talent as we move into another year!



Essex

For newly qualified solicitors, Essex offers a compelling range of opportunities, particularly in commuter cities like Colchester and Chelmsford. These areas are ideal for those looking to transition out of London's fast pace but still work with high-quality clients and complex matters. Firms such as Birketts, a Top 100 UK practice, are particularly attractive to NQs, providing an opportunity to work on Citylevel projects while offering a more balanced lifestyle. The firm's strong reputation across various sectors makes it a great choice for NQs looking for both career development and a healthier work-life balance.

Other well-regarded firms such as Birkett Long LLP, with its focus on commercial property, corporate, and private client work, continue to be popular among NQs looking for exposure to a diverse range of practice areas. Thompson Smith and Puxon is a standout in agricultural law, offering niche but significant opportunities for NQs interested in this sector. Fisher Jones Greenwood LLP's expansion in real estate provides additional opportunities, while Tees Law's continued focus on family and employment law makes it a prime choice for NQs interested in these fields, particularly after their merger with Wortley Byers LLP in Brentwood.

For NQs in Essex, regional firms like Palmers, Pinney Talfourd LLP (highly recommended for

employment and family matters), and Mullis & Peake LLP, an up-and-coming firm in Romford, provide additional options for career growth in a supportive regional setting.



Beds, Bucks & Herts

The legal market across Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, and Bedfordshire continues to offer promising prospects for NQ solicitors. With a blend of global law firms and dynamic regional practices, the Northern Home Counties present a diverse array of opportunities for NQs starting out in their legal careers.

Northampton, with firms like Howes Percival and Harrison Clark Rickberys, offers a growing legal market for NQs looking to gain experience in general practice or specialist sectors. Both firms have strong reputations in providing services to SME's and high net-worth individuals, giving NQs a broad range of practice areas to explore. National firms such as Shoosmiths LLP also offer opportunities for NQs, providing exposure to a wider range of commercial clients across multiple industries.

Milton Keynes remains a significant hub, with Dentons leading the way as a global player. NQs at Dentons will have access to top-tier cross-border transactional work, particularly in real estate and commercial law. For those interested in regional firms, EMW Law LLP and Woodfines Solicitors provide excellent opportunities, particularly for NQs with an interest in commercial property, as well as offering a more balanced work-life dynamic.

As we look toward 2025, firms across these

counties are embracing new technologies and work models, making it an exciting time for NQs to join firms that are focused on innovation and future-proofing their services.



London

Working in the City ...

London is one of the world's leading legal centres and its reputation has coined it 'the lawyer of the world.' It's one of the most prominent centres in international law and has also merited its reputation as a leading world city for professional services. London employs 40% of all solicitors in private practice and is home to 25% of all private practice firms in the UK. Regarded as the top law firms in the UK are the Magic Circle, consisting of Clifford Chance, Linklaters, Freshfield, Slaughter and May and A&O Shearman. To those for whom bigger is better (bigger deals, bigger money, bigger staff numbers), this is the place to be.

Across 2024 there was a large shift in growth throughout the market, particularly within the Employment space, no doubt as a result of the newly-implemented Employment Rights Bill; as a result, demand for employment lawyers took off, as firms looked to bolster their ranks across the board, from NQ level upwards, with leading boutique firms such as GQ Littler, Doyle Clayton, and BDBF, all growing in size, having added extensively. International firms such as Pinsents, DAC Beachcroft, and Withers also added to their Legal 500-ranked employment teams, at all levels, but with a focus on Associates, and Magic Circle heavyweights, A&O Shearman, Clifford Chance, and Slaughter and May, all added junior Associates to their prestigious Employment teams.

Divided into City, West End and High Street, London has the most diverse range of legal practice to be found anywhere and this continues to make it the most popular choice for legal careers. In addition to the Magic and Silver circle there is also a rich array of commercial firms from large to small; smaller commercial firms may well be a great choice for those looking to exchange a more modest payslip in exchange for better hours. In the mid-market, firms such as Harbottle & Lewis, Fladgate, Wedlake Bell, and Farrer & Co, looked to continue their growth from 2023, into 2024, recruiting heavily across all practice areas, with a particular focus on Private Client, and Family law, matching the respective ethos' of the firms.

Whilst retention rates have been lower in the city over the past few year and there has been significant competition for the limited roles on the market, however 2025 is looking to be a more typical NQ market with NQ roles for March 2025 already being filled, and instructions received from the more ambitious firms, for September! We're expecting to see a good number of external roles across most practice areas, but it will continue to be more competitive than last year, with more candidates in the market and firms beginning their processes much earlier. With this more typical NQ season in view, it's crucial that you are well prepared so that you can enter the market with confidence.

London

Magic Circle, Silver Circle & US Firms with a London office

Whilst retention rates have been lower in the city over the past few years, 2025 is looking to be a more typical NQ market. 2023 and 2024 have seen significant senior and partner hires across US firms in London: Paul Weiss launched their UK capabilities taking their London office from a small satellite office to one of London's biggest US names; Perkins Coie launched their London office with the legendary Ian Bagshaw; Sidley Austin began growing out their Leveraged Finance offering with the introduction of 8 Lathams partners and a view to grow a 40 strong team; and Milbank expanded its Structured Finance team with 6 from Lathams. But what does this mean for NQs?

Whilst the Magic Circle and Silver Circle prefer to keep hold of their home grown associates with rarely any need to look externally, the US firms have a smaller number in their trainee intake and often require additional headcount from their competitors. As these partners settle in and build their pipeline, the firms get ahead of the game for NQ season, with many already on the hunt for September qualifiers. Most of these requirements are within transactional teams such as Structured Finance, Leveraged Finance, Funds and Private Equity, with some Competition and M&A needs.

These US firms offer unparalleled exposure to some of the most interesting transactions at the

junior end and NQ salaries of £170k+ so the competition is fierce.



Scotland

Scotland has again shown considerable growth in the Legal Sector, with increasingly promising signs for the future.

Whilst Edinburgh and Glasgow are the main legal hubs, the cities further North such as Aberdeen (which has a key focus on Energy related work) and Inverness are home to many of the top Scottish and International firms, such as Brodies, Burness Paull, CMS and Addleshaw Goddard.

We've seen continuous development in and expansion into the Scottish market over the last few years through big merger news with Morton Fraser/Macroberts and Wright Johnson & Mackenzie/Irwin Mitchell – Along with Brodies' expansion into the Middle East, Freeths launching in Scotland and continued investment from the National and International firms.

The international firms are performing as highly as ever with CMS, Addleshaw Goddard, Pinsent Masons, Eversheds, Dentons and Clyde & Co just some of the global firms who are deeply rooted in the Scotland market along with top National firms such as Shoosmiths, TLT and Burges Salmon – Silver Circle firms Ashursts are also also in the market, based in Glasgow.

We continue to see the diversification of English personal injury specialists (both pursuer and

defender) into the Scottish market. Most notably we have seen the continued expansion of the insurance defender personal injury teams across the central belt, but most recently we have seen a steep uptick in the number of roles/firms in the pursuer sphere opening new offices and recruiting across Glasgow and Edinburgh – Winn Solicitors (Scotland), Minster Law (Scotland) and Irwin Mitchell to name a few.

Interestingly we are seeing more of the top Scottish firms investing in English focused work and continuing to grow and develop specific English teams, which is a testament to how those firms are performing and developing.

Many of the Scottish firms are continuing to excel and regularly appear at the top of the Legal 500, with Brodies and Burness Paull being an almost permanent feature across the top Tiers of the

Legal 500, they are recognised as part of the top Scottish firms along with Shepherd & Wedderburn. Other well recognised Scottish firms such as Anderson Strathern, Harper Macleod, MFMac, Lindsays, Gillespie Macadrew, Davidson Chalmers Stewart, BTO, WJM and Thorntons to name a few, all regularly feature on the Legal 500.

Scotland has seen unprecedented levels when it
CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

Scotland

comes to salary increases – Whilst the market as a whole across the UK has seen huge increases over the last few years, the gap between Scotland and the other legal hubs has well and truly closed. International and National firms for the most part now share the same NQ salaries across the UK, which further proves how the market is performing.

Culture remains one of the driving forces of the Scottish legal market – The collaborative nature runs throughout the legal firms in Scotland, more so than any other location, featuring at the firms you could be forgiven for thinking might not promote it quite so much. That strong culture is of course true of Scotland as a whole, with the major cities also offering a strong social scene as well as beautiful surroundings.

Whilst we're expecting certain areas to be quieter than usual this year, such as Corporate Commercial NQ positions, opportunities will appear. We're seeing that the contentious market is particularly active at the moment for those looking to qualify into disputes related roles – There's a huge variety of law firms to choose from and with the legal market continuing to thrive, it's safe to say the legal market in Scotland offers brilliant opportunities tools for a successful legal career.



Dublin

BCL Legal work with all of the domestic ‘Big 6’, the mid-tiers, niche commercial practices as well as the international practices setting up in the city. We also work closely with professional services firms PwC, EY Legal and KPMG.

The Dublin legal market is buoyant to say the least and has seen unprecedented growth over the last 12 months with a record number of moves as well as with a number of new firms entering the market. As an NQ Solicitor qualifying in Dublin, returning or relocating to the city upon qualification, there has never been a better time, with NQ solicitors now having a greater choice of firms than ever before.

Many international law firms opened offices in Dublin over the past few years, possibly due to the fact that the City was ranked the second most attractive European financial centre after London, according to PwC, which will undoubtedly help the City attract post-Brexit investment by positioning itself as an alternative hub to London.

The last few years have seen the international “new comers” develop their practices and widen their remit to become full service. Taylor Wessing for example, initially focused on only Corporate, however in 2023 welcomed both Real Estate and Banking teams in the Dublin office, headed up by Partners who had moved across from domestic

firms.

Both DLA and Dentons have increased their headcount to well over 100 lawyers with further growth planned over the next 12 months. US firms also continue to move into Ireland, with Squire Patton Boggs, K&L Gates and Dechert already established with more expected to follow suit. This demonstrates the increasing recognition of the important role Ireland’s globally-connected economy plays in Europe.

Looking ahead, it is anticipated that further consolidation will take place among the mid-tier firms in order to remain competitive in a market increasingly dominated by the Big 6 and international firms.

This follows the merger of L.K Shields and ByrneWallace with rumours of a merger between William Fry and Eversheds taking place later in 2025.

Despite all the change, the key players in the market continue to be the Big 6 full-service domestic firms - A&L Goodbody LLP, Arthur Cox, McCann FitzGerald, Matheson, Mason Hayes & Curran LLP and William Fry. These firms have an excellent reputation both in Ireland and being able to work in well-established teams with support

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

Dublin

from colleagues at all levels.

While the legal news is often dominated by the big names arriving on the scene, candidates should not discount some of the fantastic opportunities among the well-established midtier commercial firms such as Philip Lee, ByrneWallace, Dillon Eustace and Beauchamps which offer top quality work, excellent opportunities for progression and a better work life balance than many of the larger firms.

Over the past 12-18 months, the majority of the commercial firms in Dublin have cited a shortage of top quality candidates as a major problem. This is particularly felt in the areas of Banking, Commercial Technology/Privacy, Corporate M&A, Construction and Funds. Experience gained in Top law firms in the UK and overseas is highly regarded in Irish Law Firms.

The Dublin market has seen a noticeable increase in NQ salaries over the past 12 months as the competition between firms' increases to attract candidates, as well as candidates having a greater number of firms to choose from. NQ salaries at the Top 6 are now around €75,000 - €80,000.

When it comes to the quality of living, Dublin ranks higher than most cities. Dublin is better than London in many ways. This is according to an

international survey. The Mercer's Quality of Life survey ranked Dublin in 34th place. This makes the city the highest-ranking city in Ireland and the UK. Of course, the housing issues cannot be ignored, with rents some of the highest in Europe.



Belfast

The legal market in Belfast is vibrant and internationally focused. It has grown significantly over the last ten years, with the arrival of globally recognized law firms. BCL Legal works with all of the major domestic NI firms, national UK firms, international firms as well as the 'Big 4' accountancy practices.

To quote the actor Liam Neeson, "Northern Ireland is the world's best kept secret, both in the character of its people and its scenery." The country is home to some world-famous golf courses, filming locations and scenery. As a capital city Belfast is resilient and has grown to attract significant investment. Unique in terms of its dual market access, leading levels of renewable electricity and affordability, the city currently has 1,100 international companies operating within it.

BCL has strong relationships with the key law firms in Belfast, which means we are very well placed to advise you on the market and how best to position yourself in the small and highly competitive NQ market in the city. The Belfast legal market has evolved in recent years, with a number of the UK national firms entering the market, the most recent of these being Shoosmiths, Gateley and Lewis Silkin who join TLT, DACB, Pinsent Masons, Eversheds and DWF. More are set to follow over the next few years and it is anticipated that Northern Ireland may be able to carve out a niche as firms will be operating

in both the UK and the EU.

The domestic Northern Irish firms such as Tughans, Carson McDowell and Cleaver Fulton Rankin continue to dominate the Legal 500 in Northern Ireland, however with new entrants to the market and competition for both lawyers as well as work increasing, we may well see more consolidation on the horizon.



Offshore

The Channel Islands are a fantastic location for NQ solicitors to develop their careers with the Islands firms offering superb work, early responsibility, excellent working environments and genuine work life balance. It is no surprise therefore that both Jersey and Guernsey remains a choice destination for newly qualified relocators at the beginning of their career. Likewise, the leading Offshore firms across both islands have maintained the same, healthy demand for relocating Junior Associates throughout the beginning of 2025.

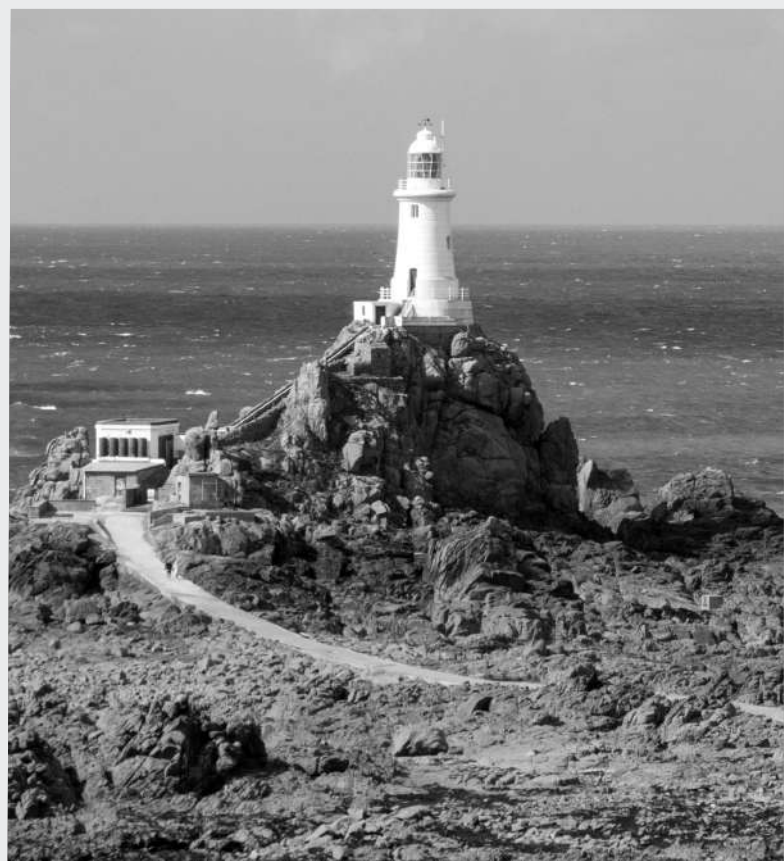
There are a fascinating array of firms available on both Islands, ranging from exceptionally well known global entities to more boutique style offerings.

Historically Offshore firms heavily favoured applicants with Magic Circle backgrounds and stellar academics, there has been a noticeable focus shift towards candidates that possess the right personal attributes to fit in with the friendly, collaborative culture that infuses Offshore teams. Successful applicants will often find that the teams they join are smaller than the equivalents in London and as such there is a greater opportunity to get involved in a broader array of international work, take more responsibility and progress more quickly.

Whilst the career progression opportunities are plentiful in both Jersey and Guernsey, the Channel

Islands also serve as a fantastic stepping stone for those who have their sights set on Cayman, BVI and Bermuda. Generally firms in Cayman, BVI and Bermuda prefer to recruit candidates with higher levels of PQE and as such those with existing Offshore experience are generally at the front of the queue.

Many lawyers who move Offshore, remain Offshore for their entire career, however, in those instances where people do wish to move back to the mainland they generally find that the experience they have gained is regarded as both relevant and useful.



Dubai

The UAE is a leading global centre for the legal profession and a key market for UK, US and global law firms of all shapes and sizes. There is an active market for UK qualified solicitors in the UAE – as such there is no need to requalify or take any further qualifications in order to practice. Much of the work is governed by UK law.

The UAE is an attractive place for junior lawyers to begin their careers as they can typically expect to experience higher levels of responsibility, more diverse caseloads and greater client contact than in comparable firms in the UK. Smaller team sizes also mean that Associates can generally expect greater contact with Partners and other senior members of the team.

The region boasts some of the world's most interesting infrastructure and construction projects, corporate deal teams are generally busy and there is varied litigation work in plenty.

In addition the UAE offers an exceptional quality of life. It is widely considered to be one of the safest countries in the world. Additionally there is superb medical care, fantastic housing, superb schools and a modern infrastructure. Salaries are generally very high and living in a tax-free jurisdiction also has its perks.

For junior lawyers considering working in the UAE

it is worth bearing in mind that some cultural adjustment will need to be made to fit in with the laws and norms of the country. Business etiquette and working hours can differ to the UK.



USA

The largest and most sophisticated legal market in the world, the US legal sector is often seen as a potential destination for aspirational lawyers from the UK and elsewhere. New York is the largest legal hub in the US, and by way of context, there are more attorneys in the 5 boroughs of NY than there are barristers and solicitors in the entire UK!

BCL have a specialist team that focus on the US market, and NY in particular, and are always open to conversations with UK-qualified lawyers who have a hankering for experiencing this legal behemoth.

However, this is not a move for the fainthearted as it is a difficult leap to make from the UK, requiring as a minimum an H1-B Visa (which can take up to a year, and is genuinely based on a lottery system) and passing of the New York Bar exam.

If you add to these hurdles that the firms' preference is generally to take someone with substantive US experience, you can see the natural barriers for a UK-qualified NQ.

However, it is feasible after 2-3yrs experience within the UK, or if you were to take up the option to study for a 12mth LLM at a US Law School. This latter option is very viable, but be aware it comes at some considerable expense.

