Legal Recruitment: How to Attract and Retain Top Legal Talent in 2025

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Law firm recruitment remains a top priority for many firms in the UK and Ireland at present. Legal recruitment is no longer about posting a job; it's about making your firm seem as desirable as possible for candidates by offering more than just a salary.

To give an insight into how law firms can recruit talented staff in a challenging market, Duane Cormell, co-founder and managing director at specialist legal recruitment firm Realm Recruit, speaks to us about Realm's latest research into what lawyers want. He also outlines how a law firm should refine its employer propositions and attract the best candidates.

When it comes to legal recruitment, the days when law firms could advertise a job on their website and expect a stream of applications from suitable candidates are gone. Nowadays, individuals are more likely to be passive in their approach to job changes and therefore, not actively seeking new opportunities.

In Realm's 2024 annual research, we found that just 5% of lawyers are actively seeking a new job role. However, the report also notes that many lawyers would consider moving if the right opportunity arose, and 21% of respondents had changed jobs within the past 12 months. Couple this with increasing competition for talent from Northshorers or larger national or international firms, then to pique the interest of the best talent (who are unlikely to be in the market for a move) and grow sustainably, it's essential that law firms review and refine their propositions as an employer and then take steps to ensure that their proposition is showcased in the best way throughout the legal recruitment process.

This guide outlines what law firms need to know to both **attract top legal talent** and **retain high-performing staff** in 2025 from a legal recruiter and should provide useful insights whether you are a law firm leader, HR professional or hiring manager.

The changing landscape of legal recruitment

Every law firm offers its lawyers something slightly different. Firms excel in certain areas but struggle in others. For some firms, their main selling point is the quality of work they deal with, whereas for others, the flexibility they offer sets them apart.

When it comes to legal recruitment, law firms need to understand who they are as a business and identify the strengths and weaknesses of their employer brand. Those firms that have a thorough understanding of what they do and take steps to strengthen

and effectively communicate their offering will be in a strong position to compete for talent, regardless of size or status. A good starting point is to speak to current employees to understand their priorities and perceptions of the firm as an employer.

Typically, if an individual decides to move beyond their current position, there will be one overriding reason, such as better pay, remote working, or improved career progression prospects. That will, in turn, become a priority when seeking a new role.

A strong employer proposition usually hinges upon two to three factors that will be a priority for some lawyers and will make your law firm stand out to those lawyers as a potential future employer. While gleaning feedback from current team members is undoubtedly helpful, it's also worth bearing in mind the state of the market more generally in terms of what lawyers are looking for from an employer.

Core strategies to improve legal recruitment

1. Define and communicate a strong employer position

If you want to start and attract the right legal talent for your law firm, start by thinking about what makes your firm a great and enjoyable place to work. Is it the type of cases worked on, the friendly team culture, or even the extra perks you offer? This is your starting point for defining a strong employer position.

Ask your employees what they enjoy most about working at the firm, and using this honest feedback to create your employer value proposition (EVP) is key. This is a first-hand insight into how your employees feel and can be used to shape your hiring processes.

2. Offer flexibility as a standard

Flexible working is no longer considered a bonus by job seekers; for most people, it's a necessity. In our research, we asked respondents to rate a range of factors based on their importance to them if they were to seek a new opportunity. For the very first time, flexibility has overtaken pay as the number one priority for lawyers, with 51% of people describing it as "very important" and 31% saying it is "fairly important."

Hybrid and remote working are now baseline expectations, not optional perks. The pandemic accelerated the shift in working habits and is still prevalent in 2025. According to recent research, 82% of lawyers consider flexibility an important factor when evaluating new roles. Interestingly, flexible working has overtaken pay as the top priority for lawyers during their job search.

Law firms that don't offer remote working options will have difficulty attracting and retaining staff. Offering more flexible options and home working could give smaller or lesser-known firms the edge in the recruitment process, particularly when competing

against larger national firms that still adhere to the traditional 9-to-5 workday and are unwilling to adapt when recruiting lawyers. The majority of BigLaw firms now offer some form of hybrid working, with 85% of AMLaw 200 firms providing arrangements that typically require associates to be in the office 3 to 4 days a week, while others offer more flexibility.

Deep dive: The Complete Guide to Working Remotely as a Lawyer

3. Stay competitive with compensation

After flexibility, the biggest single factor firms can meaningfully compete on is pay. A pay rise was the second most popular priority amongst the lawyers we spoke to: 41% said that achieving a salary increase would be very important to them if they were to make a move.

For law firms unwilling or unable to increase the level of flexibility they offer to their employees, paying people well will become the primary way in which these firms can compete for talent. Using market research and by speaking with a specialist recruiter, firms should assess how competitive their remuneration is to ensure they are in a strong enough position to secure the right candidates.

It's also worth noting that in the last 12 to 18 months, market rates in many practice areas have increased. This has been fuelled by a culture of counter-offers that has emerged as law firms offer significant pay increases in an attempt to persuade their lawyers to stay.

67% of law firms asked highlighted that balancing competitive salaries to keep pace with the rising cost of living, while also safeguarding profitability and preventing the loss of talent to rival firms, will be among their most pressing challenges in the coming year.

It goes beyond simply being paid a salary. Recognition and reward will continue to benefit your law firm's culture and ability to attract and retain the best legal talent in the UK. Going beyond billable hours and celebrating your team's creativity and teamwork is what sets your firm apart in a busy market. This could be achieved through quarterly bonuses, celebrating legal award nominations, and praising your team members on online media.

4. Prioritise culture, career progression and recognition

Other factors were also deemed important to the lawyers we spoke to, including an improved holiday allowance, a better culture fit/add and increased promotion prospects. A law firm can't appeal to every single lawyer. Instead, they should decide on two to three factors upon which to base their proposition, e.g. flexibility, progression opportunities, and quality of work, and invest time and resources to focus on these aspects and do them well.

In Realm's 2024 annual report, it identified that 60% of law firms consider their workplace culture to be a desirable feature that sets them apart as employers, yet many acknowledge that it's challenging to demonstrate this USP to potential hires clearly.

Your firm should also develop a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policy. It goes beyond simply creating a policy, though, the values from this policy should be exercised and prevalent within everyday working practice.

Promoting your offering

Once a firm has refined its employer proposition and cultivated a strong employer brand, it's crucial that it appropriately communicates its offering to prospective employees. Law firms should showcase what sets them apart in the careers section of their website, through PR activity (including in awards submissions) and on social media.

When working with a legal recruiter, firms should ensure that the recruiter is well-versed in their employer offering. This is essential so that the legal recruiter can effectively sell your offering to the candidates they speak with in the market on behalf of the law firm.

To conclude, when it comes to legal recruitment, law firms must invest time and effort in their employer offering. Doing so will ensure that they are best equipped to attract the talent they need.

The primary ways law firms can stand out to prospective employees are by offering greater flexibility and by ensuring they pay well. In the current market, firms that do one or both of these things will be well-positioned to attract passive or inactive candidates. Those who fail to embrace flexibility or pay their lawyers well enough risk missing out on the best talent.

Small and mid-sized firms, in particular, can stand out by offering tailored career growth plans, more hands-on experience and better exposure to leadership opportunities, which are often unavailable within Legal 200 and 500 firms.

Prioritising culture has become increasingly prevalent in recent years as a key driver and competitive advantage for attracting legal talent to your firm. Firms seeking to invest in creating a collaborative and supportive culture, which adopts open communication, respect, and diversity, are sought after. Employee loyalty is higher, leading to long-term staff retention, as they feel supported within a safe and inclusive environment.

How to retain talent in law firms

Retention starts at onboarding.

Retaining talent in law firms begins with a thoughtful, people-focused onboarding process. The first days and weeks at their new law firm set the tone for a new colleague's journey, so it's vital they feel welcomed by the team from day one. A structured induction with clear communication of expectations helps new hires settle in quickly and confidently.

According to BuildEmpire, around 4 in 5 employees believe onboarding programmes help them integrate and understand company culture. Whilst 49% of new hires said they were more engaged at work.

However, retention isn't just about a warm welcome. It's about creating an environment where people can grow and thrive. Encourage internal mobility by offering clear career pathways and regularly discussing professional goals. When staff see genuine development opportunities, they're more likely to stay and contribute to your firm's success.

As mentioned, it's essential to celebrate employee loyalty and recognise that this is beneficial. Encouraging employees by celebrating their wins will not only boost morale but also demonstrate that you value the legal talent you have.

Clio's cloud-based system enables seamless collaboration, shared calendars, and task assignments, making it easy for teams to stay connected and productive whether they're in the office or working remotely. Automated workflows and integrations with other tools help reduce admin, freeing up time for meaningful work and reducing the risk of burnout.

Ultimately, your firm should strive to cultivate a positive company culture. For those firms that cultivate an inclusive and transparent working culture, it is a real differentiator in attracting and retaining top legal talent. Using staff engagement tools, such as monthly team check-ins and anonymous feedback questionnaires, is highly beneficial in motivating staff and preventing employees from becoming stagnant in their roles.

With Clio's technology, you can create a supportive, agile workplace that helps retain talent and build a successful, future-ready law firm.

Using technology to support recruitment and retention

Attracting and retaining legal talent in 2025 demands a proactive, people-first approach. Firms that invest in robust recruitment and retention strategies, utilising technology more effectively, are better positioned to grow.

Technology is transforming the recruitment landscape by increasing efficiency, expanding outreach, and improving accuracy in finding and attracting top legal professionals.

As Austen Lloyd notes via The Lawyer Jobs, “Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms are being utilised to streamline candidate sourcing, resume screening, and predictive analytics for identifying candidates who are the best fit for specific roles.”

Tools such as video interviews, virtual assessment centres, and online skills tests are now standard, enabling recruiters to evaluate candidates remotely and speed up the hiring process.

Remember, if you’re looking to improve your recruitment processes or retain your best staff members, it’s important to balance competitive salaries and move them in line with the rising cost of living, offer flexibility, encourage progression opportunities and implement a good working culture.

Legal tech, like Clio’s legal practice management software, also enables hybrid work and supports employee productivity. By automating routine tasks, your firm can reduce administrative work, allowing your team to focus on meaningful legal work and, in turn, improving job satisfaction. Furthermore, providing modern tools that support remote collaboration, time tracking, and performance transparency will enable your firm to stay competitive and desirable to potential candidates, while also retaining talent.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio’s AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.