

South East & East Anglia Law Firms

Market Overview

With such a broad geographical spread of counties, the term 'South East' or 'East Anglia' covers a huge swatch of the country. What one finds is a variety of legal and commercial communities which roughly illustrate the core local markets.

Many of the top regional firms in the South East and East Anglia are hoping to take advantage of the much slower recruitment market in the City, and to re-direct the flow of lawyers back out to the regions. With firms in this region dominating The Lawyer Rising 50, and a quarter of the Top 100 having a presence here, it remains an obvious alternative to the City. Continued media coverage on the time and sometimes need to evaluate options maintain high quality commercial work on offer and being within striking distance of London all combine to make firms in this area an attractive and feasible option for candidates.

Law firms of all sizes have felt the effects of the economy. There have been many well publicised redundancies across a variety of firms across the UK as law firms have had to react to the drop off in work levels. Initiatives to retain staff are plentiful ranging from reducing hours, reducing salaries and offering flexibility. Firms have also been reviewing trainee recruitment with the deferment of training contracts for this year.

Commercial property and residential conveyancing remain becalmed and from the latter part of 2008, corporate and banking teams felt the squeeze as funding all but dried up. Traditionally in times of economic hardship, litigation and insolvency work has risen and whilst these specialist areas have remained relatively busy, there has not as yet been the upsurge in work that many would have predicted.

Against this rather bleak picture there have been some practice areas that have acted as a real counterbalance and are busy. Employment departments report high utilisation rates as they deal with a raft of redundancy and restructuring matters. Similarly, those practices that have strong insurance litigation capabilities are finding business is brisk. There remains a genuine demand for high quality defendant personal indemnity lawyers, especially those in niche areas such as insurance fraud. Likewise, health and safety/regulatory is seen as a growing area and lawyers with this skills base have found that they are more marketable than most.

One part of the market stands in isolation and that relates to senior or lateral hires. Firms continue to invest in partners and/or senior associates who have proper business cases and work to bring. Some practices see this as a time to invest in quality that might not otherwise be in the market.

With firms protecting cashflow and their balance sheets until conditions improve, the message in respect of salaries is that there is little or no appetite to effect any form of increase. There may be small inflationary awards but the consensus is that salary levels in 2009 will remain pegged to the rates set in 2008.

East Anglia & Essex

Experience	Typical (£)	Range (£)
Newly qualified	£32,000	£27-37,000
1 year's PQE	£36,000	£31-41,000
2 years' PQE	£39,000	£34-44,000
3 years' PQE	£42,000	£36-47,000
4 years' PQE	£44,000	£39-51,000

Thames Valley

Experience	Typical (£)	Range (£)
Newly qualified	£37,000	£30-50,000
1 year's PQE	£40,000	£32-55,000
2 years' PQE	£43,000	£34-60,000
3 years' PQE	£47,000	£37-65,000
4 years' PQE	£50,000	£40-70,000

M1 Corridor

Experience	Typical (£)	Range (£)
Newly qualified	£36,000	£30-40,000
1 year's PQE	£39,000	£32-45,000
2 years' PQE	£42,000	£35-50,000
3 years' PQE	£46,000	£39-55,000
4 years' PQE	£49,000	£42-60,000

Surrey

Experience	Typical (£)	Range (£)
Newly qualified	£35,000	£30-55,000
1 year's PQE	£37,000	£32-58,000
2 years' PQE	£40,000	£34-61,000
3 years' PQE	£42,000	£37-65,000
4 years' PQE	£45,000	£39-70,000

Kent/Sussex

Experience	Typical (£)	Range (£)
Newly qualified	£34,000	£30-36,500
1 year's PQE	£35,000	£32-39,000
2 years' PQE	£38,000	£34-43,000
3 years' PQE	£40,000	£37-46,000
4 years' PQE	£42,000	£39-50,000

Benefits and Trends

Pensions are now very much the norm with contributions from firms ranging from 3-8%, with 5% being a typical contribution. Death in service benefit is usually linked to the pension scheme. In addition, private medical insurance is now often a standard benefit. Over the last couple of years bonus schemes paying between 10-20% of salary have become more prevalent at the larger national firms with the payment mechanisms linked to individual and/or team/firm performance. With so much emphasis placed on work/life balance, holidays are seen as being more important than ever. Standard holiday entitlement is 25 days, increasing with years' service. Over the last few years, flexible benefits schemes have become more commonplace enabling employees to choose the benefits that most suit them. Linked to these schemes is the ability to buy or sell holiday days.

Partner Remuneration

Partner remuneration varies greatly across firms. Much will depend on whether you are a salaried, fixed share or equity partner as well as the discipline in which you practice. The differentials cannot adequately be categorised in this survey. If you would like to discuss partner remuneration, please contact one of our consultants.