



Sellick Partnership  
Recruitment Specialists

# Survey results:

## What are public sector legal candidates looking for in a job?

Public sector legal recruitment has changed considerably over the last few years, as evolving market conditions and professional norms have led to a major shift in what candidates are looking for in a role. As such, employers in the public sector are keen to gain insights into what is most important to candidates, in order to better tailor their employment offering.

To explore these trends, Sellick Partnership has carried out a **survey of 172 solicitors, lawyers and legal executives working in the public sector**, in order to find out exactly what today's legal professionals are looking for when weighing up their career options.

Our research findings highlight some of the key areas that employers should be looking to meet the expectations of prospective candidates.

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# Our key findings

We received responses from public sector legal professionals with a wide-range of experience, including legal executives, newly-qualified solicitors as well as those with many years of experience. Therefore, the feedback we received is indicative of the changing priorities seen across the sector as a whole.

Here are some of the key findings from our survey:



**45%**

of those polled feel they are **unable** to progress in their current position



**70%**

said the prospect of **better career progression** would be a motivator to move jobs

**47%**

said they would be unlikely or **very unlikely to move jobs** for a role at the same level, compared to

**32%**

who would be likely or **very likely** to do so

**5%**

would want to look for a role that involves **working in the office** five days a week



**28%**

look for at least **three days** working from home

**19%**

want **four days** working from home

**20%**

want to **work remotely**

When asked about factors that put them off applying for a role



**76%**

cited **salary banding** not being included in the job advert

When asked about perks and benefits that would appeal when looking for a new role



**76%**

chose **enhanced flexi-time** that would allow them to control their own working hours



**59%**

**free parking**



**52%**

**more annual leave**



**37%**

cited roles that are looking for **too many specialist areas**

**74%**

would be encouraged to move roles that offer **more training, additional qualifications** or the opportunity for **career development**



**35%**

cited job descriptions that are **too generic**

# What motivates public sector legal candidates?

## Breaking down the figures

The findings from our survey demonstrate a number of key insights, highlighting the factors that are motivating today's public sector legal professionals to change careers. It also serves as an indicator of what employers need to focus on when creating a compelling offer for top talent.

### Flexible and remote working are top priorities for candidates

In the wake of the pandemic, public sector legal candidates are more likely than ever to place strong emphasis on home working and flexi-time as key factors when choosing a new role:



**67%**

are looking to **work at least three days from home** in their next role, compared to only 5% who want to be in the office full-time



**76%**

would consider **enhanced flexi-time** (working hours to fit an individual's needs) as an important appealing factor in choosing a new role

Since the easing of pandemic restrictions, some public sector employers have been making an effort to move back to office-based work, but our survey shows that this is largely not something that candidates are looking for.

Professionals wish to be able to create a positive work-life balance, giving them more control over their hours and helping them to create a happy medium when it comes to professional and family commitments.

As a result, they will be looking for these options when reviewing job adverts.

### Better career progression options can persuade staff to change roles

Many areas of the public legal sector have been hampered by a lack of career progression in recent years, with many mid-level roles being phased out or becoming redundant due to consolidations and cost-cutting. This is leaving many professionals feeling that their careers are stagnating, and that they are unable to take on more responsibility or learn new skills without moving jobs:



**45%**

feel they are **unable to progress** in their current roles



**70%**

would **change roles** for a better chance at advancement and career progression



**30%**

would be unlikely to move jobs for a similar-level role, and **16%** would be **very unlikely** to do so



**39%**

are looking for **additional training** opportunities in their next role



**35%**

want opportunities for **more qualifications** that are paid for by their employers, or compensated for in time given

Legal professionals in the public sector are clearly keen to upskill themselves, diversify their experiences in different areas of law, and cultivate crossover opportunities that will provide them with more career options in future. Employers need to provide these opportunities or risk losing top talent to the private sector.



## Employers need to offer more perks and benefits beyond salary

The public sector has rarely been able to compete equally with the private sector in terms of salaries, making it crucial that employers are doing all they can to offer other perks and benefits that will attract attention from candidates.

When we asked legal professionals what appeals to them when looking for a new role, they listed:



**59%**

free parking



**52%**

more annual leave



**22%**

benefits such as gym memberships



**36%**

private healthcare options



**18%**

option to buy additional annual leave



**17%**

sabbatical opportunities

In the current climate, it is unlikely that many public sector organisations will have much scope to offer meaningful salary increases.

At a time when many private sector firms are providing better workplace flexibility and becoming more generous than ever before, public sector employers need to be creative with their offering to remain competitive.

## Candidates still want clarity and transparency on what they will be paid

Salaries are still a vital consideration for most legal professionals when looking for a new role, and public sector employers need to recognise this as well as offer full clarity on what applicants can expect to earn.



**76%**

said that a **lack of information about salary banding** in a job advert puts them off applying



**Salary**

was ranked as the **top motivator** when looking for a new role, ahead of **flexible hours, remote working** and **career progression** options

In the past, many job adverts would usually keep the salary information private, and candidates would need to request this specifically. In the modern marketplace, most applicants will simply choose to ignore these adverts and opt for ones that offer greater transparency.

## Effective targeting of job adverts is essential

Across the board, job adverts will be more effective if they are properly targeted at applicants with the right skills, and emphasise the aspects of the role that will appeal to the best candidates. In addition to the lack of salary information, many legal professionals are being put off by job listings for various reasons:



**37%**

too many specialist skill requirements listed



**35%**

the job description is too generic



**30%**

the listing does not provide enough detail

These findings highlight a number of potential pitfalls. Adverts that are too generic are usually criticised for offering too little detail on what the role will actually involve, focusing entirely on what the employer expects from the candidate in terms of credentials, rather than presenting a picture of what the job will look like day-to-day.

Additionally, many employers are creating adverts that require an unrealistic level of cross-disciplinary experience from legal professionals, who typically specialise in one area of law, with limited crossover.

Candidates are much more attracted to roles that emphasise the skills in their specialist area and offer opportunities to train and develop in other specialisms, rather than expecting them to already be able to do everything on day one.

## A good working environment can make the difference

The pandemic has led to a general shift in many people's relationships with work, and legal professionals are now intrigued to know more about an organisation's working environment before they make the decision to join.

Here is a sample of some of the responses from our survey on what is important to them when looking for a new role:



Manageable workload; the ability to actually take the leave (including flexi-leave) accrued, which the workload doesn't easily allow for.



Subsidised team activities or opportunities for team building.



An assurance that the work-life balance is the priority. My colleagues and I work many hours over our contracted hours.



A supportive team environment, training opportunities, focus on stress management and wellbeing.

These comments demonstrate that many job applicants have become increasingly cautious of issues relating to manageable caseloads, wellbeing at work and the dangers of excessive hours. Instead, they are actively looking for employers that can provide them with a supportive and stable working environment.

By offering compelling benefits in terms of work-life balance and a positive, supportive culture, public sector organisations can maintain their edge over the more commercially-driven private sector, and ensure they are still able to compete for the very best legal talent.

## Salary guide 2022

Job title	Salary band
University Secretary	£70,000 +
Director of Legal	£70,000 +
Deputy Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer	£60,000 - £70,000 +
Assistant City Solicitor	£55,000 - £70,000 +
Head of Legal	£60,000 - £70,000 +
Legal Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer	£50,000 - £70,000
Senior Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer	£50,000 - £55,000
Head of Law	£60,000 - £70,000 +
Team leader	£40,000 - £70,000
Principal Solicitor	£45,000 - £60,000
Senior Solicitor	£35,000 - £50,000
Barrister	£50,000 - £55,000
Solicitor	£30,000 - £50,000
Legal Executive	£25,000 - £30,000
Trainee Solicitor	£20,000 - £25,000
Principal Paralegal	£30,000 - £35,000
Senior Legal Officer	£20,000 - £30,000
Paralegal	£20,000 - £30,000
Senior Legal Assistant	£25,000 - £35,000
Legal Assistant	£20,000 - £25,000

## Contact and further information

If you have any comments or insights you would like to share, please speak to one of our experienced Legal Recruitment Consultants or email [marketing@sellickpartnership.co.uk](mailto:marketing@sellickpartnership.co.uk).

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