

Legal Recruitment News - 16th September 2020

Contents

- * [Legal Job Market Report](#)
- * [Hourly Rate Guide for Locums - updated](#)
- * [Locum Hourly Rates when Remote Working - what should they be?](#)
- * [Buying a Will Bank - Query re Writing to Testators](#)
- * [CV & Careers Resources](#)
- * [Law Firms for Sale](#)
- * [Need a Locum?](#)
- * [Recruiting Staff?](#)

Legal Job Market Report - September 16th 2020

Good morning. Here is our summary of the current state of the legal job market:

Permanent Recruitment - Quiet

We seem to be back to the up/down situation last observed during Brexit. One week we see a number of vacancies and candidates coming through and the next week the market goes quiet again. We anticipate it being an extremely slow run up to Christmas - the rule of 6, the end of the furlough scheme and the increased infection rates are all going to contribute to the quiet times we think. Although redundancies keep being anticipated, we have not seen this yet in practice. It is true that some firms have taken the opportunity to reduce their fee earners in certain departments, but others are recruiting into the same areas of law so at the moment there are no large numbers of unemployed solicitors in any part of the country.

Locum Recruitment - Quiet

The same impact is being felt on the locum side. Traditionally the market winds down in September, with a slight spurt around October half term. We do not anticipate the market being busy now until next April when the summer season (hopefully) starts. Some firms are taking on locums to cover departing permanent staff because they are unsure of caseloads in the run up to Christmas. Hourly rates for these types of assignments can be very competitive.

Law Firms for Sale - Reasonably Busy

We have seen a few deals going through, a few in advanced stages of talks and a number of enquiries. The market remains active across the UK. Some enquiries coming through from potential investors looking for distressed firm sales which at the moment are not cropping up as far as we can see. [For details of current law firms for sale please click here to view our list](#)

Permanent Jobs - Candidate Advice

Our advice to candidates looking for new permanent roles is to register and apply for jobs wherever you see them as you would normally, but don't expect a response from law firms or agencies. You never know who may be in need of staff and when the market reactivates itself so it is still worth going through the motions.

Locum Jobs - Candidate Advice

Be prepared to compete for work, which means drop your prices, and if you want long term assignments you will need to drop them substantially. Instead of getting 1-2 locums expressing an interest in covering each assignment we are getting up to 40 each time. Make sure we have all your documents on file as we will always go with our Tier 1 locums (fully checked) for roles where possible - and we usually have at least 2-4 available for each post.

KPMG & REC Job Report (we are members of the panel contributing to this report)

Permanent placements and temp billings return to growth

Substantial increase in candidate supply amid redundancies

Starting salaries and wages continue to decline

Comment from KPMG:

"It's positive to see an uptick in hiring activity, particularly for temporary staff, which could mark a turning point with businesses appearing more willing and able to hire as more parts of the UK economy reopen. But with total candidate availability rising at a near-record pace, strong and sustained rises are needed to move the UK jobs market back to levels seen pre-COVID – and with concerns around a possible second wave of infections, the winding down of the furlough scheme and a Brexit deal outcome, there are still many challenges ahead.

Comment from the REC:

"A return to growth on permanent placements and temporary billings is good news – though it is also expected, given we are comparing activity now with the lockdown. Temporary work is critical in any recovery - businesses turn to temps to help them ramp up and meet demand while the future looks uncertain. At the same time, it enables people to find work quickly. Past recessions show that temporary work bounces back more quickly – it is one of our jobs market's biggest strengths and that's really showing now. Slower growth in permanent staff appointments is concerning. It reflects the uncertainty businesses face about what will happen over coming months with the pandemic and Brexit."

CIPS UK Services Sector Report (we are members of the panel contributing to this report)

Key findings:

Business activity expands for the second month in a row.

Rising domestic demand leads to faster growth of new work.

Rate of job shedding accelerates in August.

Statistics

General Statistics for August 2020 (comparison is with August 2019)

New permanent vacancies added: 16 (33)

New locum vacancies added: 26 (25)

New candidates registering: 75 (84)



Hourly Rates of Pay for Locum Solicitors and Legal Executives

September 2020 Locum Hourly Rates - Solicitors and Legal Executives

NB: please note our article on remote working rates below.

Child Care - £35-45 per hour.

Civil Litigation – £28-35 per hour.
Commercial Contract - £35-75 per hour
Commercial Litigation – £35-75 per hour.
Company Commercial – £45-85 per hour.
Construction (non-contentious) £60-75, (contentious) £45-60 per hour
Conveyancing – £25-£35 per hour.
Commercial Property – £35-50 per hour
Employment Solicitors – £30-50 per hour.
Family Solicitors – £30-35 per hour.
In House Counsel: 0-3 years PQE – £25-40 per hour,
In House Counsel: 3+ years PQE – £45-105 per hour
In House Interim Advisors (SME) - £55-65 per hour
Insolvency - £30-60 per hour.
IP - £50-85 per hour
Local authority rates: variable.
Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence – 3+ years PQE – £25-£40 per hour.
Professional Negligence - £45-55 per hour.
Wills & Probate – £35-50 per hour.

NB all rates exclude agency fees. The rates are for self-employed locums billing firms directly on a weekly basis.

Locum Hourly Rates When Working Remotely - Are They Lower?

This query is coming up quite regularly at the moment, because so many firms are working on a remote basis still even after offices have opened and the opportunities for finding staff to assist are starting to become wider as firms become more accepting of the capabilities for working remotely.

Locums have been wary of pitching at lower levels but some firms seem to expect it.

Pre-March 2020 - Mistrust of Remote Workers

Before Covid-19 it was quite hard to get a lot of firms to accept locum or permanent staff who were able and willing to work remotely but not be based in the office. There seemed to be a general level of mistrust that the work would get done, or that the files worked on would remain secure when someone was based remotely. This has been particularly so for locums, mainly because if a locum is based remotely it is rare to meet them face to face at any time.

This trust can be earned with the use of references and in recent times we have got particularly cautious when it comes to introducing locums who do not have references or have not bothered sending them to us despite numerous requests (you know who you are!).

Post-March 2020 - Remote Working Expands

We have seen an explosion in the numbers of firms willing to accept remote working locums, mainly because they are all working remotely and realise that this is now the new norm for a lot of staff in a lot of firms.

The query that arises more often than not though is what rate should a locum be charging if they are working the majority of the time on a remote basis.

What Should the Discount be for Remote Working?

We think that locums need to consider discounting their rates by up to 25-30% if they were staying away from home to cover and around 10-15% if commuting from home.

The Costs

Firstly, when a locum accepts an office based assignment, the hourly rate should be factoring in travel to and from the office. Most locum assignments are undertaken by professional locums who are prepared to stop over during the week in order to get the assignment and to drive a long way on the first and last days to and from their home.

In view of the fact that a typical Premier Inn or Travel Lodge is going to cost in the region of about £40-£60 a night, the cost of accommodation for the four nights is likely to be somewhere in the region of about £200-£250. Travel to and from the firm is going to cost in the region of about £30-£40 in petrol. There is also the travel to and from the hotel and the cost of food whilst there, which will probably add an additional £100 a week. So working on the basis of £200 for accommodation, £100 for food and costs, plus £35 for the petrol to and from the area, you are looking at a figure of somewhere around £350 on each assignment in costs if you stay over locally.

These figures do not of course include all the travel time costs you spend getting around.

£35 to £25

To put that into perspective on an hourly rate - if you are working at the current residential conveyancing locum average of £35 an hour then if you are doing a 35 hour week you will be earning £1,225. Once the costs have been taken off (assuming £350) you are looking at a profit for the week from your hourly labour of £875. If you put that into an hourly rate figure the cost is £25 an hour.

Same Profit (Possibly)

Therefore, when a locum is considering pitching for remote working, it is possible to compete at a substantially lower hourly rate and still get the same level of profit as if you were based at the office. Furthermore, you have increased capacity if anything else arises where you can take on a couple of things at once, because your seven hours a day working for a firm frees you up quite dramatically because there will be no commuting time there and back, and so your capacity to undertake work during that week can actually increase to 12 hours a day quite easily without needing to impact on anything else.

In a normal market the remote issue would probably not be so important, because there is normally not much competition for most locum roles other than residential conveyancing in easily accessible areas like Greater London.

High Competition Levels

In the current situation where there are large numbers of locums going after most assignments, and it is perfectly possible to get a good quality locum working for an hourly rate substantially lower than the market rate was last year, it is important to factor in costs when it comes to working remotely. It has opened up a wide range of opportunities for a lot of locums, because all of a sudden they do not need to plan travel to the furthest flung part of the UK in order to take an assignment, but at the same time locums need to be very conscious of the requirement to carefully consider the hourly rate.

We recommend all locums look at our hourly rate guidance sheets that are done on a monthly

basis, because these very often give you an extremely good idea as to what your rate needs to be based at in order to be competitive. Whilst a lot of firms do go for quality and also based on recommendation (which is why references are so important), the sheer amount of quality that is available at the moment across the UK in terms of locum cover means that you cannot rely on your experience alone. You must also be competitive on your hourly rate, particularly when working remotely.

Buying a Will Bank - Do I Need to Get Permission from the Testators?

If you buy a will bank, do you need to write to all the testators to advise them of the change in location and ownership?

This has arisen recently following the purchase of a will bank (not one of our clients but a general query). Both the seller and the buyer had been concerned that the buyer should write to the many thousands of testators in the will bank to advise them that the potential ownership and location of their wills has changed and to get their consent to the transfer of location. This has obviously raised issues as to whether or not it is possible or practical to purchase a will bank if you have to do this when a sale occurs.

Any Ideas?

We would welcome any thoughts on this issue as we have, in the past, heard conflicting advice from the regulators. The following information is not intended as advice, but rather simply anecdotal experiences we have had, and should not be relied upon to take a particular course of action.

Anecdotal Information

We were involved some time ago in the sale of a law firm somewhere in the UK, where the seller discovered a will bank in the cellar and was very concerned as to what they ought to do with it when it came to the transfer of the business. In fact they were so concerned they contacted the SRA and received advice that permission was needed for the wills to be transferred to a buyer. They relayed this information to the buyer, who promptly put the whole thing on hold and eventually pulled out. The same firm managed to sell a year later to a buyer who wasn't the slightest bit interested in contacting all the testators in the wills and simply took over the practice.

Similarly, many years ago family members had wills drawn up by a law firm in West Yorkshire who subsequently closed down due to fraud by one of the partners. The family members in question were not aware of this until I alerted them to the fact that the firm had closed down some years later. We discovered the practice had been taken over by another firm and their wills had been moved to their premises. At no time had the practice taking over the will bank contacted the family members in the intervening period. Presumably, the practice taking over had decided that it was either not practical or required for them to contact all the testators in the wills.

Prohibitive Costs

Presumably the cost of contacting every testator to get permission to transfer their will (or at least notify them) would be so prohibitive it would make any sale of any law firm or will bank impossible. If there was a will bank of 10,000 you would have to send out 10,000 letters, and then follow these up, because chances are in 80 to 90% of cases you would not get a response, so a 10,000 will bank would suddenly turn into a 1,000 will bank and completely remove any value at all.

If anyone has experience of this issue or can point us in the direction of regulations or practice

guidelines that confirm the position one way or the other, we would be most grateful. We can either post a link to your site or relay the information anonymously.

Career Coaching & CV Review Services - free and paid

Ten Percent Legal has been coaching lawyers and reviewing CVs for over 20 years. We have worked on CVs at all levels of experience, from law students through to senior partners.

This is a guide to our services, both free of charge and paid. [Testimonials for our careers services can be found here.](#)

CV Reviews

We review CVs as a paid service (£64.99). We will review your CV, provide full feedback and suggestions on how to improve it as well as any additional follow up advice needed. [Details here.](#)

Career Coaching

We are offering a career coaching session with one of our consultants for a fixed price. One hour consultation by Zoom, usually on a Monday morning. We are always happy to answer any questions by email at no cost (we post our answers on our blog). [To request a session please click here.](#) Feedback on our legal career coaching service (established in 2001) [can be found here.](#)

CV Guides - no charge

CV Guides - [take a look at our CV guides](#) - all available at no cost online. <https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/cv-advice/>

Articles include: CV Myth - fitting a CV onto two pages, 20 second guide to writing a CV, Adding Extra Value, CV Writing Tips for Senior Solicitors (if you don't bother reading this it basically says write a lot more!), CV Writing for NQ Solicitors, Skills Sections, 5 Common Mistakes to Avoid, CV Writing for Locum Work, Avoiding Waffly Nonsense, Lying on CVs, Applying for Jobs after 25 years in the same role and many, many more. We have been writing CV guides for almost 20 years so there are quite a few! Full index here - <https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/cv-advice/>

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Recruit as many staff as you like over a set period of time (3 or 5 years) for a low monthly fee starting at just £65 plus VAT. We offer this service to law firms and accountancy practices. There are no restrictions on numbers and no other similar services exist in the recruitment industry. You can save £000s on your ongoing recruitment. Includes unlimited job posting on www.chancerylane.co.uk. Interested? Call Clare Fagan on 0207 127 4343 or email clare.fagan@ten-percent.co.uk. www.tenpercentunlimited.co.uk.

How to be a Locum - pdf guide

We have produced a guide on how to be a locum. This includes sections on getting work, realistic expectations, hourly rates, popular fields of law, payment, insurance, umbrella companies and much more. Available for download or to read online from www.interimlawyers.co.uk.

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About Ten-Percent Legal Recruitment

We are a specialist legal recruiter, covering both permanent and locum roles across the whole of the UK. Over 11,000 lawyers are registered with us and we have access to a range of external and internal job boards and websites where we do not have candidates available ourselves. We also assist with recruitment advice and assistance, regularly advising partners and practice managers on suitable salary and package levels.

Our company is unique for a number of reasons, including the fact that we are not shy to publish our fee structure and also donate a chunk of our profits to charity each year. We offer unlimited permanent and locum recruitment for a fixed monthly fee or one-off fees depending on the job. We also buy and sell law firms. We donate 10% of our profits annually to charity, hence our name.

We have three recruitment consultants, Jonathan Fagan, Clare Fagan and Peter Gresty. As a team we have over 40 years of experience in the legal profession.

Ten-Percent Legal Recruitment also owns Interim Lawyers, a specialist locum service. We operate an outsourced UK based typing service as well – www.tptranscription.co.uk and are preferred suppliers to a number of institutional clients and law firms across the UK and overseas.

The Ten-Percent Group of Legal Recruitment websites gives 10% of annual profits to charity. We have maintained this tradition since we formed the company 19 years ago. So far over £100k has been donated to charities in the UK and Africa including LawCare, Unlock and Reprieve.

We hope you have enjoyed reading our newsletter and look forward to hearing from you if we can assist further.

Warm regards

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