



TEN PERCENT LEGAL RECRUITMENT • INTERIM LAWYERS

Legal Recruitment News

October 2026

Welcome to our October newsletter for law firms and legal employers. After the ABS webinar details for 21 October, we look at the legal job market, salary and locum rates, how to assess a candidate's employment history and the practicalities of umbrella companies.

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ABS webinar: 21 October 2026

Legal job market report

October salary and locum hourly rates

Assessing a candidate's employment history

Five reasons to think twice about umbrella companies

Our charity donation

ABS webinar: Should Your Law Firm Become an ABS?

Applications, ownership and your future exit

Wednesday 21 October 2026 | 1-2pm UK time | Online webinar

Would an Alternative Business Structure suit your law firm? If you are considering bringing a non-lawyer into ownership, exploring outside investment or planning your eventual exit, there are practical questions to work through before making an application.

What does the process involve? How much time and money should you allow? Should you apply now, or wait until your plans are further developed?

ABS webinar details and registration

Complete the registration form on the linked page to receive access details.

The panel

Jonathon Bray and Ed Marshall, JBL Compliance, will discuss the application and compliance questions, drawing on their work supporting firms with SRA and ABS applications.

Jonathan Fagan and Taillte Mallon, Jonathan Fagan Business Brokers, will cover the commercial considerations, including investment, succession and the sale or purchase of a law firm.

What we will cover

- What an ABS is and when it may be relevant to your firm.
- Bringing non-lawyers into ownership or management, and the questions to ask first.
- The application process, preparation, supporting information and SRA scrutiny.
- Costs, timescales and what can cause delays.
- Common application pitfalls and how to prepare.
- How ABS status fits with investment, succession or a sale.
- Whether to apply before approaching buyers or investors.
- Responsibilities once an application is approved.

There will also be an opportunity to put your questions to the panel.

Who should attend?

Law firm owners and partners considering ownership changes, investment, succession or a sale; solicitors and non-lawyer colleagues considering ownership together; and owners who want to understand their options before committing to an application.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Attendance is confidential. Attendee cameras and microphones will be disabled, and attendees will not be visible to one another. You can submit questions privately and join using initials or a preferred name.

Registration is required for access details. There is no obligation and no sales follow-up. If you would like a private discussion afterwards, you can request a separate conversation with the relevant panel members.

Webinar details: Wednesday 21 October 2026, 1-2pm

Legal Job Market Report - September 2026

Here is our summary of the current state of the UK legal job market.

Locum Recruitment - Quiet

Locum assignments are lower than we would expect for September and it has been a quiet summer. Even though there is limited work out there quite a few locums have not adjusted their hourly rates. This means that at times we are putting forward candidates knowing that there are going to be cheaper alternative comparable options. Hourly rates for residential conveyancing and commercial property solicitors remain high and above the budget of a number of SME law firms; we are in a fairly unique position to know this because we undertake a significant number of law firm valuations, which gives us full access to accounts and salary levels for a wide range of different firms. Locum rates for October 2026 are below.

Locum assignment [updates here](#).

Permanent Recruitment - Steady

Permanent recruitment is busy – this year we have had 24 new vacancies in September (50% increase on the previous year) with some roles more fillable than others. Candidates are still hesitant about moving unless there is significant professional or monetary benefit. Looking at the September list, there was quite a mix of work, including less of a property emphasis.

Permanent vacancies can be viewed here: <https://www.ten-percent.co.uk/vacancies/>

Law Firms for Sale - Busy

Law firm M&A activity is now high as we move into the winter period. A number of shell law firms are coming to market and there is the usual level of interest after PII renewal dates at the end of September. Deals are progressing albeit as slowly as is often the case with law firms. One of our directors is about to take a sabbatical travelling in Australia, so the remainder of us are hoping forlornly for a quiet few months!

Full details of firms currently for sale on our website available here - list updated daily. For valuations, exit planning or a confidential discussion about a potential sale or acquisition generally please call 0800 246 5016 or email jf@jonathanfagan.co.uk. You can also download our free detailed guides on **Buying a Law Firm** and **Selling a Law Firm**.

Ten Percent Group statistics for September 2026 (2025 figures in brackets)

New locum roles added - 16 (16)

New permanent roles added - 24 (16)

New candidates added - 51 (41)

New law firms listed for sale: 3

Law firms for sale: 48

Deals going through (heads of terms signed): 6

KPMG & REC Job Market Report October 2026

Jon Holt, Group Chief Executive and UK Senior Partner at KPMG: “..this remains a fragile recovery”.

Maxine Bligh, Interim Chief Executive at the REC: “the permanent jobs market is revving its engine”.

Hiring improved slightly in September 2026. Permanent placements rose for the second consecutive month, recording their strongest growth in four years, although the increase remained marginal. Temporary billings also edged upwards.

Vacancies continued to fall, but the decline slowed. Overall demand for staff contracted at its weakest rate in over two years. Private-sector permanent vacancies increased for the first time in more than two years, while public-sector demand remained weak.

Candidate availability continued to increase. Recruiters linked this to redundancies and limited job opportunities, although the overall rise in available candidates was the slowest in three years.

Pay growth eased. Starting salaries and temporary pay rates continued to rise, but employers' cost concerns and a larger pool of candidates moderated increases.

Performance varied considerably between sectors. IT and engineering led growth in permanent vacancies, while retail and hospitality recorded the sharpest declines.

Legal skills shortages remained selective. Recruiters reported shortages in corporate commercial & IP.

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Salary and locum hourly rates guides October 2026

Legal salary guide October 2026

Annual salary indications for solicitors and lawyers with around three years' PQE or more. Separate London figures appear where available. Actual salaries depend on location, experience, specialism, billing, responsibilities and working pattern.

Practice area or role	Annual salary
Commercial in-house solicitor (general)	£80,000–£120,000; London £85,000–£140,000
Commercial litigation	£45,000–£70,000; London £50,000–£95,000
Corporate and commercial	£50,000–£150,000; London £65,000–£175,000
Construction	£65,000–£95,000
Commercial property	£55,000–£100,000
Insolvency	£60,000–£75,000
Intellectual property	£55,000–£90,000
Professional negligence	£55,000–£75,000
Crime	£40,000–£50,000
Civil litigation	£45,000–£60,000
Conveyancing	£45,000–£75,000; London around £70,000
Employment	£45,000–£55,000
Family	£37,000–£50,000
Immigration	£37,000–£75,000
Personal injury and clinical negligence	£40,000–£60,000
Property litigation	£50,000–£70,000
Wills and probate	£45,000–£65,000

Legal support staff salaries

Practice area or role	Annual salary
Office manager	£40,000–£60,000
Legal cashier	£30,000–£40,000
Senior legal accounts professional	£40,000–£50,000
Legal secretary	£23,000–£28,000
Paralegal	£22,000–£27,000

When setting a recruitment budget, compare roles with similar responsibilities, firm size and location. Allow for agency fees when costing locum cover. [View the full salary guide.](#)

Locum hourly rates guide October 2026

Rates are per hour unless stated otherwise and exclude agency fees. They relate to self-employed locums invoicing firms directly each week. Remote-working rates are approximately 10% lower.

Practice area or role	Hourly rate
Civil litigation	£50–£70
COLP/COFA (temporary)	£50–£150 per hour or £2,000–£3,000 monthly retainer
Commercial contract	£35–£75
Commercial litigation	£55–£125
Company commercial	£60–£120
Construction (non-contentious)	£80–£110
Construction (contentious)	£60–£90
Conveyancing	£40–£55
Commercial property	£50–£70
Employment solicitors	£50–£65
Family solicitors (legal aid)	£40
Family solicitors (private)	£45–£55
Family (child care LA)	£40–£45
Immigration lawyers	£35–£70
In-house counsel, 0–3 years' PQE	£40–£50
In-house counsel, 3+ years' PQE	£50–£125
In-house interim lawyers (SMEs)	£60–£85
Insolvency	£50–£55

Practice area or role	Hourly rate
IP	£55–£80
Personal injury and clinical negligence, 3+ years' PQE	£40–£50
Professional negligence	£45–£60
Property litigation	£45–£75
Wills and probate	£45–£70
Locum legal cashiers	£25–£35
Locum paralegals, all areas	£20–£30

[View the source locum rates guide.](#)

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How long should a candidate have stayed at a law firm?

A candidate moves too often and firms worry that they will leave just as quickly. This is a particular problem for anyone with locum assignments on their CV applying for permanent work. However, we sometimes see the opposite. We recently had a firm query a candidate who had spent ten years with the same employer. This is not the first time this has happened!

Why frequent moves cause concern

Recruiting a lawyer involves more than paying a recruitment fee. You need to be confident they will build a good rapport with clients, and you will spend time and money setting them up, explaining your systems and transferring files. A firm wants a reasonable prospect that this investment will pay off.

A succession of short permanent appointments raises an obvious question: will we be recruiting again in twelve months? Partners may also wonder whether each move reflects an unsuitable role, unrealistic expectations or difficulties that are likely to recur. These are reasonable questions. The important thing is to ask them before deciding that you already know the answers.

Redundancy, relocation, caring responsibilities, an unhealthy working environment or a role that bears little resemblance to the one offered can all explain an early departure. Ask for a brief explanation of the moves that concern you. You do not need a candidate's entire personal history to understand whether there is a sensible reason.

Locum assignments need a different approach. Five assignments over a summer do not mean someone has walked out of five permanent jobs. Check whether the work was temporary and whether the assignments finished as planned. If they now want a permanent role, ask why, and what they want from it.

Is there a sensible minimum stay?

There is no magic number. As a practical recruitment rule of thumb, a few years in a suitable permanent role usually gives some assurance of commitment. Three to twelve months in more than one permanent role makes employers very nervous. It should prompt a discussion, rather than an automatic rejection.

Ask what the candidate wanted to change. Was it a lack of supervision, a poor quality caseload, a low salary or no route to promotion? Or was the problem more about the field of law and the type of firm? Then ask yourself whether your vacancy will actually resolve it. A salary increase may get someone through the door, but it will not keep them there if the underlying problem remains.

There is little point recruiting a lawyer who wants close supervision into a role where they will be left on their own from day one. Equally, do not promise a route to partnership merely because it sounds good at

interview. Candidates tend to remember these things!

Can someone stay too long?

Ten years with one firm can demonstrate loyalty, strong client relationships and considerable value to the business. It is not, by itself, a reason to reject someone.

The question behind the question is often about adaptability. Has the candidate developed during those ten years? Can they work with different partners, systems and expectations? Are they choosing your opportunity positively, or hoping to reproduce their existing job somewhere else?

Look for the changes within that time. Promotions, more complex work, supervision, billing growth, clients introduced and improvements to the way a department operates all tell you more than the date someone joined. A single employer on the CV can conceal several quite different roles.

At interview, ask for examples of learning something new and adapting to a change. Find out why this particular vacancy makes sense now. Ten years of progression is a very different proposition from ten years of simply accepting the status quo.

Our advice

Look at the pattern, ask sensible questions and judge the answers against the role you are offering. Frequent moves can be a warning sign, but completed locum contracts are not failed permanent appointments. Long service can be a strength, provided the candidate can show development and adaptability.

It is also worth looking inwards. If your own firm struggles to keep people for more than a year, the CVs arriving in your inbox may not be the only employment histories worth examining!

If you are recruiting and would like an honest view of a candidate's experience or suitability, email cv@ten-percent.co.uk.

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Five reasons to think twice before using an umbrella company

If you are bringing in a locum, it is worth agreeing how they will be engaged and paid before the first file lands on their desk. An umbrella company can provide an employment and payroll service, but that does not automatically make it the best arrangement for your firm. Here are five reasons to consider the alternatives where they are available.

1. Another layer of administration has a cost

Umbrella companies charge a margin for processing pay. Ask how that fits into the quoted rate and what the arrangement provides. Compare the full cost with any suitable direct employment, agency PAYE or genuinely self-employed arrangement. A longer chain does not necessarily give your firm a better service.

2. The headline rate can cause misunderstandings

The amount paid to an umbrella company is not the same as the locum's gross salary or take-home pay. Employer costs and the umbrella margin can come out of the assignment rate before gross pay is calculated. Agree which rate everyone is discussing. Otherwise, the locum may discover after starting that the payment they expected is quite different from the amount they receive.

3. Holiday arrangements still need attention

Umbrella employees have employment rights, including paid holiday. Establish how leave will be arranged during the assignment and how the costs fit into the quote. From the firm's perspective, the practical question is simple: who will cover the work when the locum is away? Payroll arrangements do not answer that for you.

4. A whole lot of hassle

The law firm, agency and umbrella company may all have a role in the arrangement. That can mean more requests for timesheets, invoices, information and approvals. For a small practice looking for someone to cover a caseload, it can feel as though the paperwork has acquired a caseload of its own.

Some checks are necessary. The point is to establish who needs what, who authorises hours and who resolves payment queries before the assignment starts. Your accounts team should not have to work it out after the first invoice arrives.

5. Tax responsibility does not necessarily stop at the umbrella

HMRC does not approve umbrella companies. An impressive sales pitch or a promise of unusually high take-home pay is not a substitute for checking the arrangement. Ask who is employing the locum, who operates PAYE and what evidence supports the provider's compliance.

What has changed in 2026?

For payments from 6 April 2026, the umbrella PAYE rules place responsibility on the agency contracting with the end client to supply the worker, or on the end client where there is no agency involved. HMRC can recover PAYE underpayments from the relevant agency or end client. The umbrella retains its own responsibilities.

For law firms, the practical point is to understand the actual contractual chain. Do not assume that everyone describing themselves as an agency is supplying the worker under the same arrangement. Check who contracts with whom and where responsibility sits.

Our view

For SME law firms, who make up the bulk of our clients, umbrella companies have traditionally been seen as a bit of a nuisance because of the paperwork and detail they require. Where genuine self-employment is appropriate, a locum invoicing the firm weekly can be a simpler arrangement.

However, registering as self-employed or issuing an invoice does not settle employment status or tax treatment. The contract and working arrangements must support it, and any applicable agency or off-payroll rules still need to be considered. Choose the simplest arrangement that is right for the assignment, rather than assuming one payment method will suit every locum.

Further reading: HMRC on [working through an umbrella company](#), [checking payslips](#) and the [PAYE rules from April 2026](#). General information, not individual tax advice.

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Our recent donation to Pie Factory Music

Read about the Ten Percent Foundation's £1,000 donation to Pie Factory Music in Ramsgate, Kent.

[Read the full donation article on the Ten Percent Foundation website](#)

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Recruiting or arranging locum cover?

Tell us the practice area, level of experience, location, working pattern and salary or hourly budget. For locum cover, please include the start date and expected duration. We can give you a practical view of the options and the candidates likely to be available.

For permanent recruitment, email cv@ten-percent.co.uk or call 0207 127 4343. For locum cover, email jobs@interimlawyers.co.uk or call 0800 246 5001.

Ten Percent Legal Recruitment and Interim Lawyers

Permanent recruitment and locum support for law firms and legal employers.

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About the editor

Jonathan Fagan LLM FIRP is Managing Director of Ten-Percent Legal Recruitment. A non-practising solicitor on the Roll since 2000, he has recruited solicitors and legal support staff for more than 25 years and also advises on law firm sales, mergers and valuations.

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