



# UK Law Careers 2017

Retention and Performance

# WELCOME

Legal careers are changing. The pace and nature of client work, the impact of new technology, global markets, diversity targets and changing career aspirations are leading to changes both in opportunity and expectation for lawyers.

Our survey of law careers in the UK draws upon the experiences of lawyers at different stages in their careers. It assesses their career needs, aspirations and expectations. It is intended to provide valuable insights to employers and firms to inform their approach to job structures, career development, job satisfaction, well-being and retention efforts.

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*84% of lawyers indicated that changes to job content or structure would encourage them to stay longer in their firm*

*59% of lawyers experiencing negative stress consider that they do not receive the support they need*

*50% of those describing their role as "not challenging" planned to leave their firm within one year*

*87% of those describing their role as "challenging" planned to stay with their firm for 10+ years*

*22% of men and 50% of women lawyers feel poorly valued by their firm*

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## IN SUMMARY

We asked our lawyers a comprehensive range of questions regarding their career aspirations, work experience, needs and preferences. Their responses provided valuable insights into retention, development and job structures.

### What is currently going well?

- **Job satisfaction for partners:** 75% of partners report being "extremely" or "comfortably" satisfied and fulfilled in the role
- **Positive challenge:** 100% of partners and 64% of non-partners described themselves as being "extremely" or "comfortably" challenged in the role.
- **Understanding of the firm's values and direction:** 100% of partners and 89% of non-partners described this as "quite well" or "very well".
- **Expression of aligned behaviours in partners:** 87% considered that they expressed the firm's values "extremely" or "quite" well.
- **Career support:** Over 70% of our lawyers considered that their firm encouraged them to think about their career path, with 78% feeling that they were supported by the firm in their career goals.
- **Fair promotion process:** 73% considered that the process within their firm was "completely" or "mostly" fair and transparent.
- **Support for well-being:** 86% considered that their firm was supportive of their well-being.
- **Support for work-life balance:** 74% considered that work-life balance was "quite well" supported in their firm.
- **Support for professional development:** 78% of our lawyers agreed that their professional

development was actively supported by their firm.

### What could be better?

- **Retention initiatives:** 84% of lawyers indicated that changes to job content or structure would encourage them to stay longer with their current firm.
- **Job satisfaction for non-partners:** Just 14% described themselves as being "extremely" satisfied and fulfilled. 11% (i.e. just over one in ten) were either "not at all" or "poorly" satisfied and fulfilled in the role.
- **Value and recognition:** A quarter of the sample considered themselves to be "poorly" valued by their firm and a further 36% only "moderately" valued. 40% of respondents felt that their further and future potential was only partially or not recognised by their firm. 38% of senior associates and one-third of associates consider that they are "poorly" valued by their firm. 67% of female lawyers consider that their potential is only "partially" or not recognised by their firm.
- **Understanding of the firm's strategic direction:** This was described as "very well" understood by only 36% of non partners with 7% of them saying they did not understand it at all. 37% of partners reported understanding the strategic direction only "quite" or "not very" well.
- **Support for stress:** Whilst the sample indicated broad comfort or at least acceptance and coping of long hours, 15% reported that they often experienced detrimental/negative stress. (Of these, 15% of men and 25% of women report experiencing negative stress "often"). In those affected, most (59%) reported not receiving the support they required within the firm. Overwhelmingly this

support was preferred to come from colleagues and managers.

- **Self-confidence:** Whilst broadly high, nearly one-third (29%) of lawyers reported not having the confidence required to achieve their career or professional goals.
- **Mentoring:** Whilst the notion of mentoring was valued by our sample, only 38% had a mentor and of those without one, nearly half indicated that they would benefit from one.

## WHO TOOK PART?

Our 336 participants were drawn from a variety of UK based/head officed law firms. The gender split in respondents was approximately 50:50.

The full working age range was represented, with the majority of respondents aged between 26 and 44 years.



FIGURE 1 AGE PROFILE

All were employed in dedicated law firms which ranged in size from small (fewer than 100 lawyers employed) to large (more than 1000 lawyers employed):

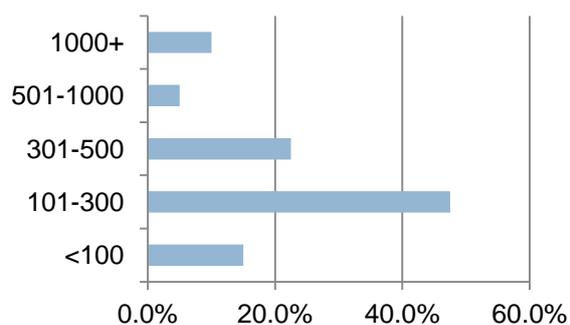


FIGURE 2 SIZE OF LAW FIRM: NO. OF EMPLOYEES

The full range of level and grade was represented with just over half of the respondents employed as associates or senior associates.

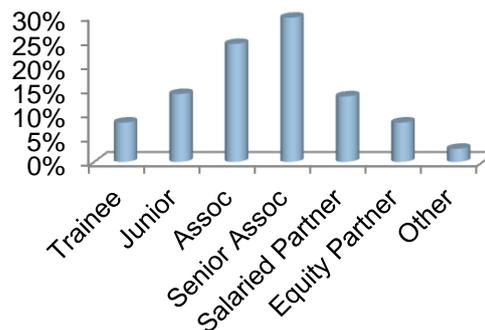


FIGURE 3 SURVEYED GROUP BY GRADE

Length of employment at the *current firm* ranged from 6 months to over 10 years

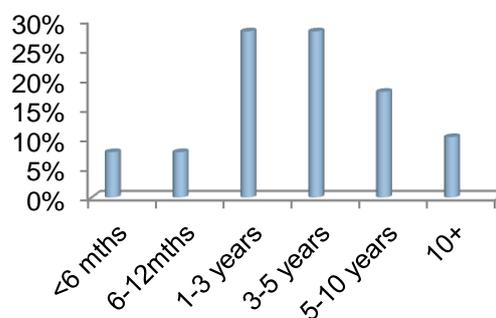


FIGURE 4 LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT

## CAREER SATISFACTION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

Law firms widely experience difficulties in retaining lawyers particularly at the associate and senior associate level where a two-three year average tenure, following promotion, is common. HR professionals frequently indicate a need to find retention solutions for expensively trained or recruited lawyers other than via premature promotion or salary increase. A feature of our survey included measures of career satisfaction and needs, and their association with the intention to stay or move on.

We asked all respondents to state how long they intended staying in their current firm.

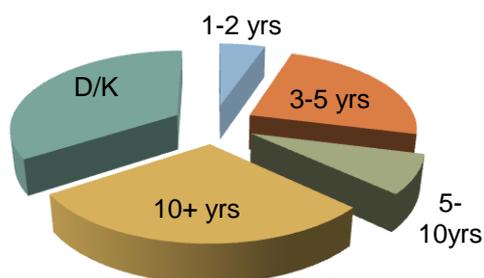


FIGURE 5 INTENTION TO STAY WITH CURRENT FIRM

Nearly a quarter (23%) indicated a 3-5 year period, with a further 36% indicating an intention to stay between 5 and 10+ years. Around one-third were unsure.

Adjusting for level of seniority, unsurprisingly, the more senior the lawyer the longer they intended to stay. The majority of partners indicating that they intended to stay with their current firm for 10+ years. Those at associate level were the most varied with their intentions fairly evenly split over the period from less than one year to more than 10 years. 67% of

paralegals intended to stay for 3-5 years with the remainder unsure. 36% of senior associates reported an intention to stay for 3-5 years and a further 36% indicated 10+ years. This fits previously reported and expected patterns of younger, less experienced lawyers being more likely to move around for a period of time.

### What would encourage lawyers to stay longer?

We asked the lawyers in our survey to indicate what would encourage them to stay longer in their current firms. Perhaps unsurprisingly, increased income was the single, most common response with just over 16% indicating that this would be likely to make them stay. 84% however indicated that other factors would lead them to stay longer:

- Receiving more recognition for my work (the most important feature for 14% of respondents)
- Having more challenging work to do (12%)
- More opportunities for business development (10%)
- More autonomy over my time and workload (10%)
- Greater variety in my work (8%)
- Better work/life balance (8%)
- More opportunities for flexible working (8%)
- Opportunities to raise my profile (6%)
- Doing less business development (4%)
- Work for a more prestigious firm (4%)

These responses support previous management studies which indicate that factors around recognition, meaning and purpose, (i.e. the intrinsic rewards that people derive from working) usually

outweigh extrinsic ones such as income and bonus.

## Aspirations for Partnership

Our sample from the non-partner population were a reasonably ambitious group. 57% indicated that they aspired to make partner in the future. Nearly a third indicated that they were unsure. Of those with partner aspirations, slightly fewer were men (54%) than women (57%). 15% of men said they did not aspire to become partner compared with just 7% of women (around one-third of men and women were unsure).

## What about Job Satisfaction?

We asked respondents to indicate how satisfied and fulfilled they were in their current role. Within the non-partner population 14% considered themselves to be "extremely" satisfied and fulfilled, 43% "comfortably" and 32% "moderately" so. Just 11% were either "not at all" or "poorly" satisfied and fulfilled. In the partner sample, satisfaction levels were higher with 75% describing themselves as being "extremely" or "comfortably" so, and 25% "moderately". None considered that they were "poorly" or "not at all" satisfied or fulfilled in the role.

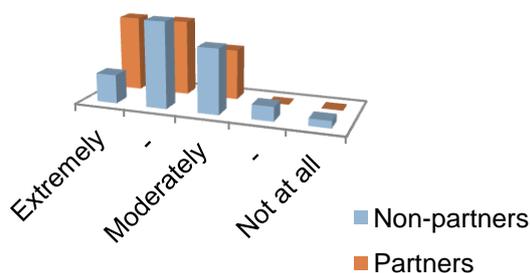


FIGURE 6 HOW SATISFIED AND FULFILLED?

Effective intrinsic motivators generally include opportunities to do challenging and

meaningful work. We asked our lawyers to consider how *desirably* challenging they considered their role to be.

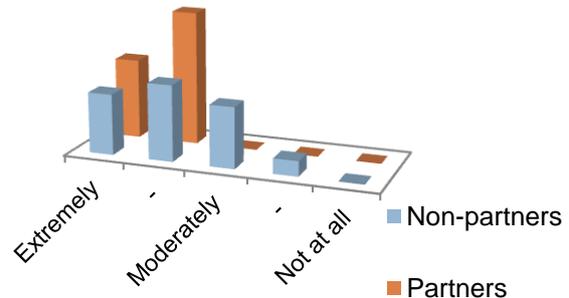


FIGURE 7 HOW DESIRABLY CHALLENGED?

Again, partners consistently reported higher levels of satisfaction with the degree of *desirable* challenge present in the role than non-partners with 100% describing this as "extremely" (38%) or "comfortably" (62%) challenging. Non-partners responses were more varied. 64% considered their role to be "extremely" or "comfortably" challenging with 27% indicating this was moderately so.

We looked at how these responses related to intention to stay or leave. 50% of those non-partners describing their role as "not very" challenging indicated an intention to stay at their firm for less than one year. Conversely, 87% of non-partners describing their work as "comfortably" or "extremely" challenging indicated an intention to stay with their current firm for 10+ years.

An important requirement from our lawyers was for recognition and this is consistent with other findings among professionals working in the knowledge industries. How well recognised did our lawyers consider themselves to be and how valued by their firms? Here responses were fairly spread with 39% considering that they were "strongly valued" by their firm, 36% saying "moderately" and 25% saying "poorly". We

analysed these results further based upon gender and grade.

Just over one-third of both men and women in our sample considered that they were strongly valued by their firms. The picture diverges from this point however with 44% of men and just 17% of women considering that they were "moderately" valued and 22% of men and 50% of women considering that they were "poorly" valued.

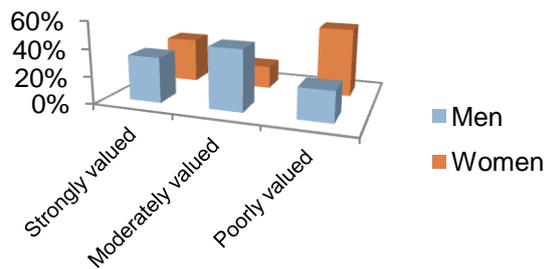


FIGURE 8 PERCEIVED VALUE BY GENDER

Perceptions of how valued lawyers considered themselves to be by their firm also differed widely across grade boundaries. Whilst 100% of paralegals considered that they were "strongly" valued, only 14% of associates and 38% of senior associates agreed. 29% of associates and 38% of senior associates considered that they were "poorly" valued by their firms.

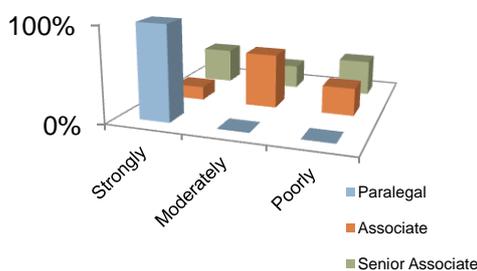


FIGURE 9 PERCEIVED VALUE BY GRADE

A similar broad spread was seen when we asked how well they considered that their potential was recognised within their firm.

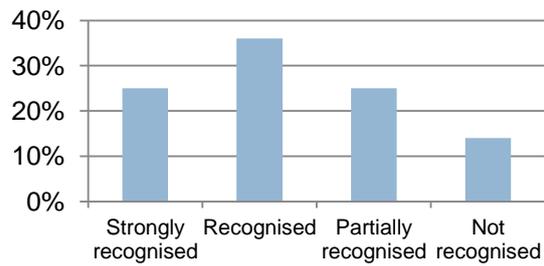


FIGURE 10 HOW WELL IS POTENTIAL RECOGNISED?

Nearly 40% of respondents considered that their potential was only "partially" or "not recognised" within their firm.

In our survey men were broadly more likely to consider that their potential was recognised by their firm than women. 22% of men considered their potential was "strongly" recognised and 44% "recognised". One-third of male lawyers considered that their potential was only "partially" recognised or not recognised at all. In contrast, 67% of female lawyers considered that their potential was only "partially" recognised or not recognised at all.

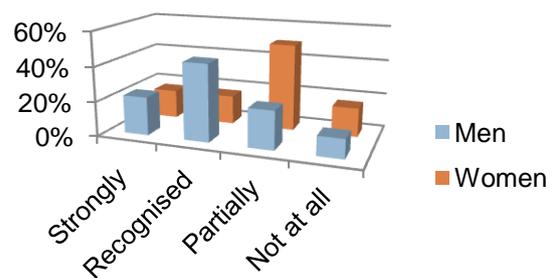


FIGURE 11 EXTENT TO WHICH LAWYERS FELT THEIR POTENTIAL WAS RECOGNISED BY THEIR FIRM

In line with perceived value, 100% of the paralegals in our sample considered that their potential was "strongly" recognised by

their firm. For the other levels however this was more varied. Just 14% of the associates surveyed considered that their potential was "strongly" recognised by their firm with 29% considering that their potential was not recognised at all. For senior associates the picture was similar. Just 13% considered that their potential was "strongly" recognised and 50% considered this was only "partially" recognised.

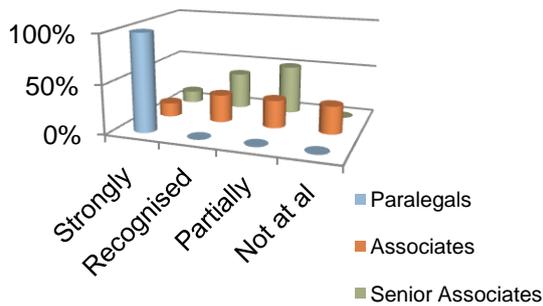


FIGURE 12 EXTENT TO WHICH POTENTIAL IS PERCEIVED AS RECOGNISED BY FIRM ACCORDING TO LEVEL

### Engagement/Alignment with the firm

We consider that effective retention and high performance indicators are linked with the degree to which people are focused on the firm's values and strategic direction and the way in which these are expressed by partners and non-partners.

36% of non-partners and 63% of partners considered that they understood their firm's strategic direction "very well". A quarter of partners considered they understood this "quite well" and just over 12% reported a concerning "not very well". Perhaps less surprisingly among non-partners the spread of responses was more even. 39% considered they understood the firm's strategic direction "quite well", while 18% said "not very well" and 7% said "not at all".

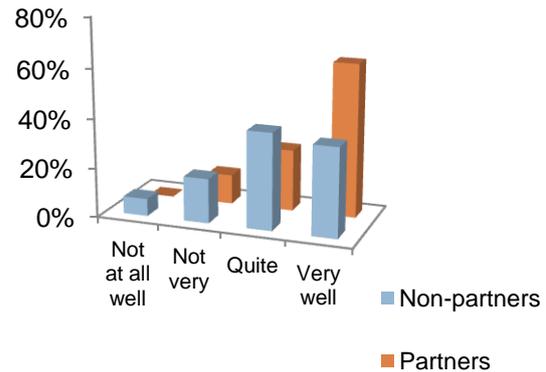


FIGURE 13 HOW WELL IS THE FIRM'S STRATEGIC DIRECTION UNDERSTOOD?

Interestingly, our lawyers were rather more confident in their understanding of their firm's values and aspirations. 89% of non-partners and 100% of partners considered that they understood these "quite well" or "very well".

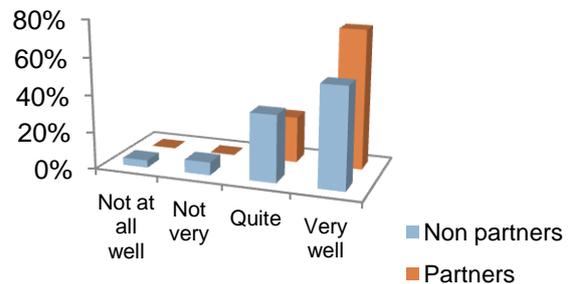


FIGURE 14 HOW WELL ARE THE FIRM'S VALUES AND ASPIRATIONS UNDERSTOOD?

We asked non-partners how well they considered that the behaviour and actions of partners and management reflected their firm's values.

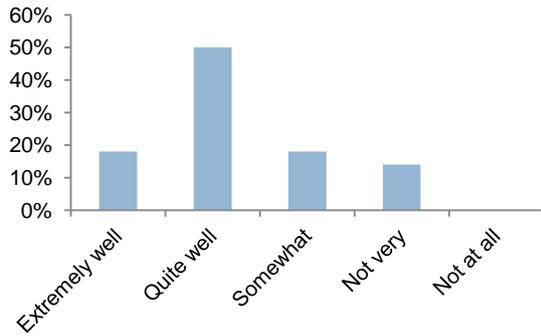


FIGURE 15 HOW WELL DOES MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR REFLECT THE FIRM'S VALUES?

We then asked partners to rate how well they considered their own behaviour and actions reflected their firm's values.

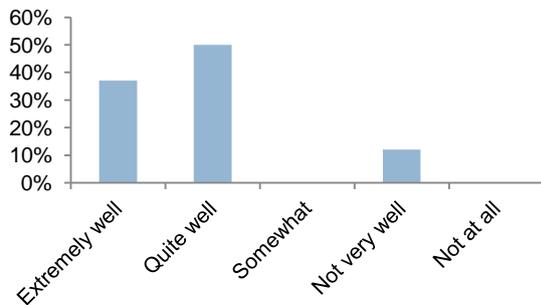


FIGURE 16 HOW WELL DO PARTNERS THINK THEY REFLECT FIRM'S VALUES?

Whilst over 87% considered that their behaviour expressed the firm's values "extremely" or "quite" well, 12% felt that they were not doing this very well.

### Career Support

Just over 70% of our lawyers considered that their firms encourage them to think about their career paths (the other one-third disagreed that their firm encouraged this). In a related question we asked lawyers the extent to which they felt their firm provided support for their career goals. The picture here was a little more varied with a strong 78% reporting that they did feel supported

and nearly 20% disagreeing (2% were not sure).

Most respondents considered that the promotions process within their firms was fair and transparent. 73% considered that it was "completely" or "mostly" fair and transparent. 21% said "not really" and 7% "not at all".

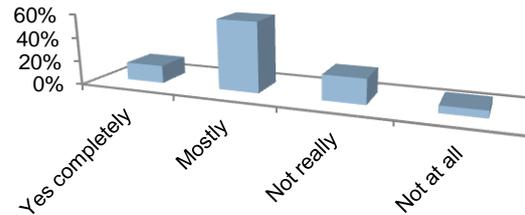


FIGURE 17 HOW FAIR AND TRANSPARENT IS YOUR FIRM'S PROMOTIONS PROCESS?

## WELL-BEING

Our survey asked lawyers for their experiences and views on well-being and stress.

A healthy 86% of respondents considered that their firm was supportive of their well-being.

Drilling down into areas of work-life balance, hours worked and other common potential stressors, nearly a third said that they consistently worked very long hours with just over 40% saying they sometimes do.

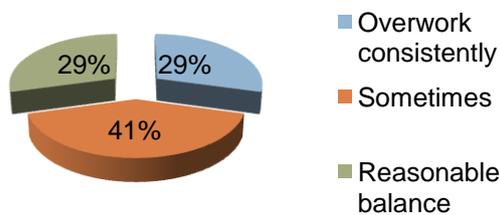


FIGURE 18 EXTENT TO WHICH LAWYERS WORKED LONG HOURS

## Hours Worked

Nearly 60% (58.3%) were content with the hours they were working with a third reporting that they were not always content working long hours.

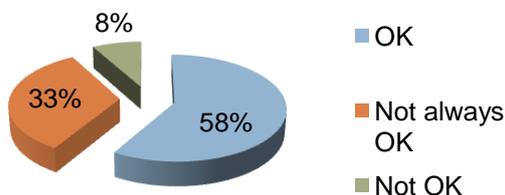


FIGURE 19 LEVEL OF CONTENTMENT WITH WORKING HOURS

## Stress

This would suggest - as previous studies have - that lawyers expect to work long hours and are largely accepting of them. These hours don't seem to be detrimental to well-being *per se*. When asked how frequently, if at all, they expressed detrimental (or negative) stress 15% reported that they often did, with over a third saying they sometimes did. 47% said they rarely or never experienced detrimental stress.

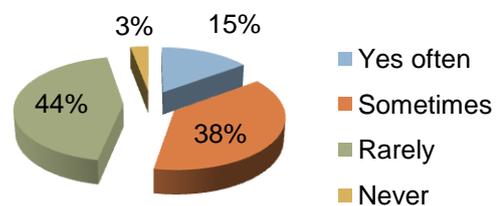


FIGURE 20 EXTENT TO WHICH LAWYERS EXPERIENCED DETRIMENTAL STRESS

Analysing these responses further and taking into consideration grade, gender and age reveals a rather different picture. One-third of lawyers aged between 35 and 44 years reported experiencing detrimental stress "often" compared with 14% of those aged 26-34 years and none of those aged 45 and above.

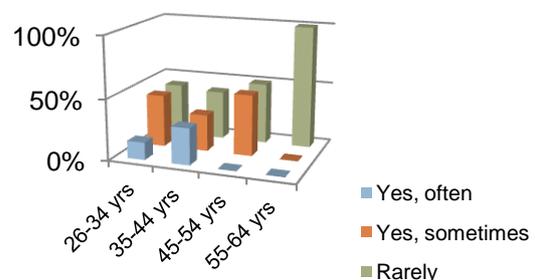


FIGURE 21 DETRIMENTAL STRESS EXPERIENCED ACCORDING TO AGE

Broadly speaking, the more senior the lawyer the less likely they were to report that they "often" experienced detrimental stress. All equity partners reported that they "rarely" experienced detrimental stress and this peaked at senior associate level with one-quarter often experiencing this.

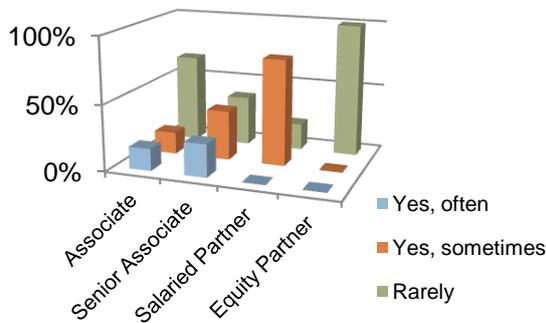


FIGURE 22 DETRIMENTAL STRESS EXPERIENCED ACCORDING TO LEVEL

Overall, women reported greater susceptibility to negative stress than men. One-third of women and just over one-half of men reported "rarely" experiencing detrimental stress while 15% of men and nearly one-quarter of women reported that they "often" experienced detrimental stress.

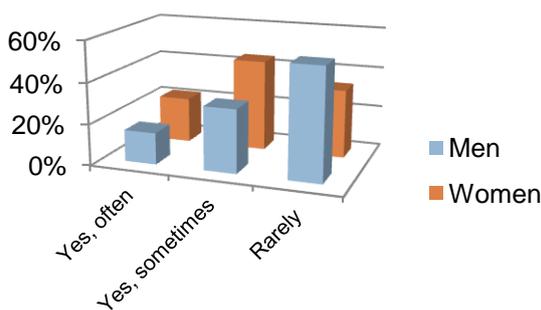


FIGURE 23 DETRIMENTAL STRESS EXPERIENCED ACCORDING TO GENDER

Of those who did report negative stress, 59% said that they did not receive the support they needed from the workplace. Support when required was preferred to come from the team leader/senior or team/other colleagues. Just 7% reported that they would like support from HR when stressed.

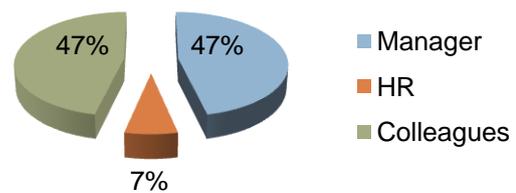


FIGURE 24 PREFERRED SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR STRESS

### Work-Life Balance

Lawyers were asked their views on work-life balance at their current firm and how well this was satisfactorily supported or enabled. Nearly three-quarters considered that this was handled "quite well" in their firm with 15% saying "very well".

How did this impact upon their perceived work-life balance? Nearly three-quarters of our sample reported that work-life balance was enabled well.

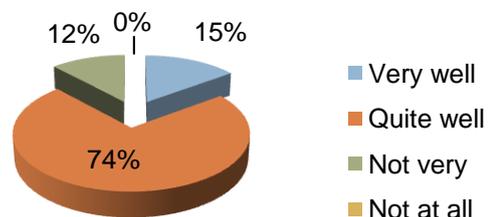


FIGURE 25 EXTENT TO WHICH WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS ENABLED AND SUPPORTED

We asked lawyers for their views as to what their firms could do to support a better work-life balance. A number were fairly sanguine about the nature of their practice and what they considered reasonable:

*The digitalisation of the criminal justice system will help to some extent but the nature of criminal defence work is such that you can be called upon 24/7/365; it's part and parcel.*

Comments from others reflected frustrations regarding workload and resourcing:

*My work/life balance is purely dictated by the amount of work that comes in from clients. As all members of my team work at or close to capacity, additional team resource would better support work/life balance.*

*In reality my work life balance is predominantly affected by having too much work to do, so the only answer to addressing that is having more resource to help me to deliver it, which is not realistic at our scale.*

This reflects the position faced by many firms today in needing to hold fee levels and salaries but can be seen to be having a potential impact on well-being.

Process or structural changes were indicated, with a number of lawyers suggesting that greater flexibility in their firms would enhance their work-life balance and improve their well-being. [See the section on Flexible Working]. Where these had been enabled these had been found to be beneficial, for example,

*I work a four-day week and so far it has worked brilliantly.*

## Gender Diversity

Within most UK law firms, women and men are fairly evenly represented in lawyer roles

(SRA figures from 2015 indicate 47% of lawyers are women). In larger law firms this figure is lower (c. 27%) and there are further differences in the type of work practiced. In criminal law for example women make up 39% of lawyers, while in private client work they make up 57%. By the time they reach partnership level, across the UK women comprise around a third of the partner population (and this is lower in the largest firms).

In our survey, 57% of lawyers indicated that they aspired to become partner, with a further 32% reporting that they were unsure (11% did not aspire to partnership). Interestingly, slightly more women (57%) than men (54%) aspired to partnership with more men (15%) indicating that they didn't want partnership compared with just 7% of women. Among this group, the women therefore appear to be more aspirational. How these aspirations translate into reality in the future will be interesting.

Most of those surveyed (59%) agreed that the profession would benefit from having more female partners, with 35% strongly agreeing (61% of men agreed or agreed strongly and 56% of women agreed or agreed strongly). 41% indicated that they had no preference.

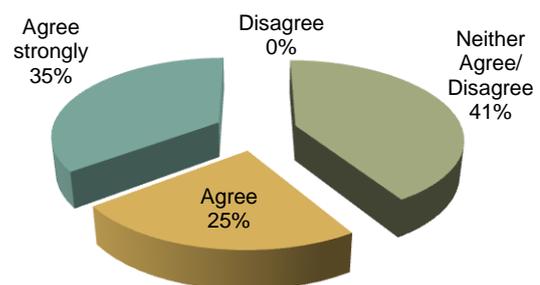


FIGURE 26 WOULD THE PROFESSION BENEFIT FROM HAVING MORE FEMALE PARTNERS?

## Support for Gender Diversity Targets?

Did the sample support gender diversity targets? Only 42% felt diversity targets for women at partnership level were a good thing and of those, 54% were women and 46% were men suggesting, perhaps as might be expected, that women have a more direct interest in such intervention. Notwithstanding this, only 29% of men and women think there is no need for any intervention to promote female representation at partnership level.

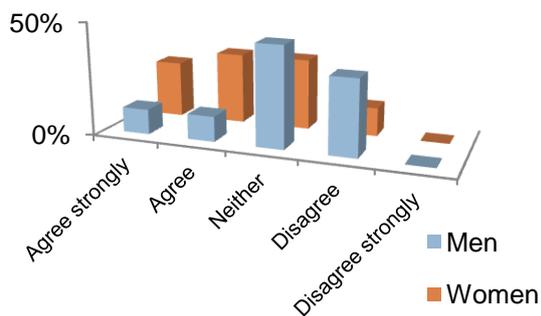


FIGURE 27 DO YOU AGREE WITH SETTING GENDER DIVERSITY TARGETS?

Interestingly, 38% considered that clients would prefer to see more female lawyers in senior positions.

## PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Providing effective professional development opportunities not only enhances the value of the lawyer to the firm it also encourages their retention. Providing appropriately challenging and rewarding learning and development opportunities satisfies the intrinsic motivations of people and also signifies recognition and investment.

### How well Supported?

We asked the lawyers in our sample a series of questions concerning their professional development experiences.

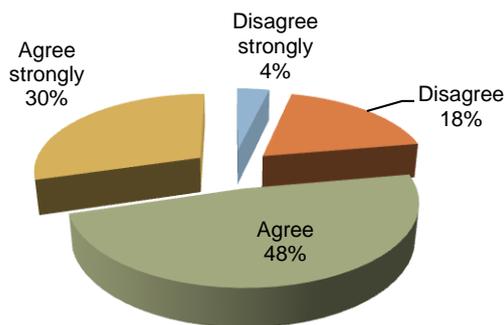


FIGURE 28 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE THAT YOUR FIRM SUPPORTS YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

78% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "my firm supports me to develop my professional, management and business development skills". Nearly a quarter disagreed with the statement and of these 4% strongly disagreed.

### Development Areas

We asked our lawyers to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement "I have the personal confidence to reach as high within my firm as I want to". 72% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. 29% disagreed with the

statement and indicated a need to develop competence and confidence:

- to work at a more senior level and balance that with family life (25%)
- to be successful in developing new business (19%)
- to assert myself more effectively with senior colleagues and/or clients (19%)
- to put myself forward for promotion (19%)
- to deal effectively with difficult people and/or conflict situations (12%)
- to manage a team effectively (6%)

We asked partners how well they considered they were continuing to develop their skills, knowledge and capabilities. 63% considered that they were continuing to develop and 38% considered they were "to some extent". We asked partners what desirable opportunities they felt there were in their current firm:

- expand the current practice (23%)
- mentor and develop junior colleagues (20%)
- carry out more business development (13%)
- increase leadership responsibilities (13%)
- innovations with new technology (10%)

Around 6% in each category also valued opportunities to support a portfolio career or alternative working structure, further develop technical expertise, and develop new practice areas.

### Mentoring

38% of our whole sample (partners and non partners) indicated that they had a mentor and of the 62% who did not have a mentor, 46% said that they would like to have one.

## FLEXIBLE WORKING AND PARENTAL LEAVE

The extent to which firms offer their lawyers opportunities to work flexible hours and the way in which they support parental leave varies considerably.

### Parental Leave

We asked our lawyers whether they had taken any parental leave during their time at their current firm. 19% of lawyers had taken parental leave and this was mainly in maternity leave. Of that group, most (63%) had taken three months or less as leave, 25% had taken 6-12 months as leave with the remaining 12% taking between 3 and 6 months of leave.

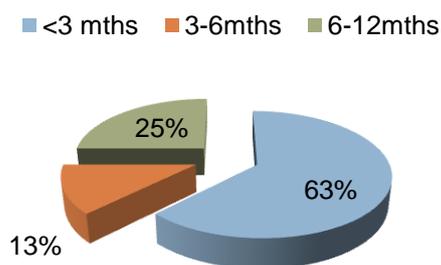


FIGURE 29 LENGTH OF PARENTAL LEAVE TAKEN

Nearly one-third had received a specific back-to-work support package from their firms. Despite two-thirds of firms not providing specific support, all of this group reported that their firm had supported them "very well" (25%) or "quite well" (75%).

### Advice for Other Parents

We asked the group what advice, if any, they would give others about to take parental leave. Their feedback is consistent with other comments we have collected from

our parental leave programmes. In the main most new parents wish they'd taken more time:

*I'd make a conscious effort to save in the years leading up to having a baby to enable you to take more time off, with less financial pressures, to enjoy those very special few months, and not to panic about losing work or being less desirable post your return because it's really not the case. I've never been so busy with work.*

*Take longer. I was a Trainee at the time and worried about being out of the office.*

### Part-time Working

Of the whole sample, just 9% were working part-time hours and there were no job sharers. Part-time workers were largely critical of the support received from their firms with 67% saying they had not been well supported in working in this way. The remaining third however reported that they felt they had been "very well" supported.

We asked part-time workers whether they considered that part time working had impacted their career aspirations. Two-thirds reported that their career aspirations were the same as before with a third reporting that they had now lowered their ambitions.

### Flexible Working

A quarter of all respondents reported that flexible hours were not available to them in their firm with another quarter reporting that they currently do work flexibly. Those 50% of respondents who either already worked flexibly or knew that this was available to them in their firm, considered that they were very well supported (60%) or quite well supported (40%) by their firm.

We asked our lawyers for their experiences and desires regarding part-time and flexible working:

*I work part-time - but putting in greater hours than some of my full-time colleagues. No recognition for this contribution.*

*More flexibility in working hours and the ability to work at home. Employees should be trusted to be able to hit targets and complete work outside of normal office hours if it enables the employee to have a better work/life balance.*

*Not be difficult about working from home when it is necessary. Introduce the concept of a "mental health day".*

*Flexible working could be more "acceptable" and accessible.*

*Increased social budget/more frequent socials*

*Encourage more flexible working hours to address issues like traffic when travelling longer distances to work. eg. travelling in to start work at 10 and leave later would mean a saving of 1-2 hours travel per day where working at home for an hour in the morning first would be preferable.*

*Perhaps discussing options to potentially work at home on occasion.*

*More communication as to what is expected of you.*

### Career Breaks

Only 3% of our survey had taken a career break of 2 years or more. Their reported return to work was considered to be 'extremely easy' with all respondents reporting being "welcomed back on the same/equivalent level with similar opportunities". This group considered that their return would have been facilitated by structured support from the firm to ease the transition back, and acceptance from their

team/team leader that they were still a credible and valued contributor.

### Positive Role Models for Working Parents

We asked our lawyers whether there were positive role models within their firm for working parents. Half of the sample considered that there were. 39% considered that there were some but not enough, whilst another 11% considered that there were none at all.

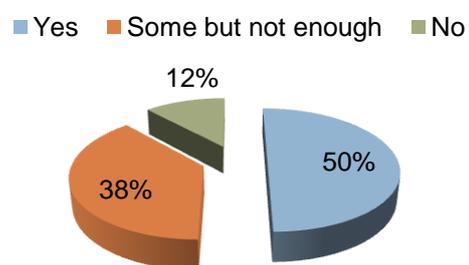


FIGURE 30 ARE THERE POSITIVE ROLE MODELS FOR PARENTS IN YOUR FIRM?

## COMMENTARY AND OBSERVATIONS

Just over 23% of lawyers in our survey indicated that they expected to remain within their current firm for between 3 and 5 years. This included nearly 40% of senior associates with a further 10% of them intending to leave within the next 1 to 2 years. A further 33% of lawyers indicated that they didn't know how long they intended to stay.

Most law firms experience this retention problem at this stage in their lawyers' careers. This creates a constant need to replace lawyers at this level of experience and often requires inducements to attract them. In turn this circle often ends with the new senior associate recruited on better terms than the person he or she replaced. As firms face a near-universal need to cap salaries and bonuses (at least to some extent) and increase utilisation and fee income, this creates tensions in the market with some firms struggling to recruit suitable people. Once newly joined, each new lawyer quite reasonably then needs time to get up to speed to achieve an appropriate level of performance. Alternative approaches that focus on increasing retention seem preferable.

Optimising retention does not simply mean retaining people for as long as possible. It is about identifying those who are high potential/high performing and targeting the retention of those. A degree of turnover is not only inevitable but desirable in order to keep firms energised.

In order to achieve a *desirable* level of retention, three areas of provision require focus:

1. Opportunity

2. Environment
3. Management

### Opportunity

In order to perform optimally, all lawyers require the opportunity to reach their potential. This will require different features for each of them. In other words what each person requires to achieve maximum performance and fulfilment will differ between them, but all should have the same opportunity to reach this.

Traditionally, equality of opportunity in the workplace has focused on so-called "minority lines" such as gender and race. Whilst our survey indicates some significant gender differences, to some extent it might be that these dissatisfactions are generated by a 'one way to suit all' approach which is now increasingly outdated. This is revealed for example, in our finding that 67% of female lawyers consider that their potential is only partially recognised or not recognised at all, in contrast with one-third of male lawyers. Similarly around half of the women and just over one-fifth of the men felt poorly valued by their firm. These are concerning results in themselves, and the gap between them is further troubling. Providing all lawyers with the opportunity to thrive involves equivalent access to development, optimal work structures and effective management and communication. These are encompassed in the next two focus areas.

### Environment

Environment in this context refers to the provision of an optimum working environment that allows each person in it to perform at their best. In 2017 most physical working environments are broadly supportive of this. The psychological

working environment however is often not. This involves the way the job, and work more broadly, is structured, the extent of control and autonomy the individual has over it, how well supported they are in terms of other people, processes and tools, and how flexibly the environment can respond to the differing needs of each person. Flexible working practices, including the ability to work from home on occasion or to flex the hours worked, are a commonly recorded desire among lawyers and many firms do accommodate this. However there are still a number of firms who operate quite rigid policies in these matters, irrespective of whether it would impact client work.

Social connection, a sense of belonging, and communication underpin these aspects and all are associated with the establishment of an environment in which people may perform well.

## Management

Effective team management addresses many of the dissatisfactions identified in our survey and is responsible for many of the strengths. Good, local team management can, to an extent, make up for many wider firm-based limitations.

In terms of working hours, we are seeing a fairly consistent picture of lawyers regularly working long hours and, in the main, finding this acceptable and not unduly stressful. The majority considered that matters of work-life balance were supported in their firm. There were however some signs of dissatisfaction with the long hours expected and of these, those aged between 26-34 years were the most accepting of the hours; one-quarter reported that the hours were "ok" and were fully accepted as part of the job. A further 67% in this age group reported that the hours were largely "ok" but that they were occasionally dissatisfied with them.

Responses from lawyers aged between 35-44 years were the most varied. Of those reporting that they were "dissatisfied" with the hours worked, all were in this age range. Broadly however 50% in this age range were "ok" and accepting of the need to work long hours.

Our survey indicates that lawyers significantly prefer, and seek, support from their team colleagues and managers during times of difficulty and stress. This is consistent with what we would expect from previous research showing that 'social connection' and related support is a key need in order to be happy in the workplace. This indicates a need for people and managers to connect and share more effectively.

Effective management ensures that communication is clear and carried out well. It ensures that lawyers are aware of:

- the firm's strategy and vision
- what is expected of them
- what they do well - i.e. that their value and recognition needs are met
- their development needs
- their career opportunities

A feature of high performance organisations is the extent to which performance is aligned with, and informed by, the firm's strategic direction. Only 36% of non-partners in our survey reported that they understood the firm's strategic direction "very well". It is not clear whether this is due to there not being a clear direction at the firms in question, or whether it is simply not well communicated; both probably apply to varying degrees. At the same time, the results indicate a need for lawyers to develop greater personal accountability and responsibility to be asking these questions. At more junior levels this is also likely to reveal some deficiency in the communication effectiveness of team leaders/managers.

Effective management conversations ensure that managers understand the *specific* needs, motivators and aspirations of *each* lawyer. Where these conversations take place effectively and result in personalised approaches, differences concerning gender, age and seniority cease to be important factors.

Finally, effective management ensures that the team environment and culture is conducive to high performance, well-being and job satisfaction.

In turn, effective firms develop and enable managers *consistently across all teams and operate as a cohesive unit with shared values and behaviours*.

### What do lawyers want?

As a group, the lawyers in our survey did not differ particularly from other professional knowledge workers in their career needs and preferences. On the whole they share the desire to be equitably financially rewarded, to be valued and recognised for their contribution, to have challenging work to do and the ability to exercise a degree of autonomy and control over its execution and hours worked.

The majority of non-partners in our sample aspired to partnership. It is not clear to what extent this is known about or how well this is supported and enabled in individual firms. We can see that during 2016/17 57% of the women in our sample reported an aspiration to partnership, compared with 54% of their male peers. Wider industry figures (SRA) from 2015 suggest that just c. 33% of partners are women so it is likely that this aspiration may not be being carried through to reality.

Finally the lawyers in our sample wanted professional development opportunities and greater flexibility over working hours.

Providing appropriate *personalised* interventions which develop and foster these intrinsic rewards positively impacts retention rates. To be appropriate they should not only be effective (i.e. lead to retention) but also cost beneficial. That is, the amount of the turnover saving should be greater than the cost of the retention effort.

Where lawyers are happy and thriving they tend to be involved in appropriately challenging work, feel valued and recognised by their firm and are practically supported in the structure of the role. At key career and life stages, this often begins to involve a greater requirement for flexibility over what they do and when. *To what extent does the firm make that possible?*

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey was conducted during 2016 to 2017 among lawyers working in the UK. 336 lawyers responded to the survey.

The survey was designed and carried out by Annabel Purves and Sarah Jagers. For more information or to discuss the survey, email Annabel or Sarah.

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