

Moving in-house

A guide for newly qualified and junior lawyers

2023-2024



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Introduction

As specialists in the in-house legal market, we want to provide you with all the information you need to make an informed decision on whether an in-house position could be right for you.

Client demand for junior lawyers within in-house legal teams has increased considerably over the last few years. Similarly, we have seen a real surge in interest from junior lawyers looking to take an in-house career path. Despite this, there is still some fear amongst newly qualified lawyers that you can be 'too junior' to move in-house. With this guide, we hope to quell those fears and offer insight from individuals who have made that move. We also hope to shed some light on what junior lawyers can do to better their chances of securing an in-house role and highlight the differences between in-house and private practice.

The in-house market is broad, with industries and sectors to suit everyone's interests and passions. We recruit across most industry sectors with a wide variety of companies for lawyers to choose from. There is a role for everyone and with a little digging, (and help from specialist legal recruiters) your experience will be perfect for a great company.



Placed candidate into a tech company

"You will be given a lot of responsibility when working in-house, even at a junior level. You will work with all areas of the business, which means you get to delve into the detail of what the business does and how a business is run, from interacting with members of the Board to understanding the financials of the business. With all this responsibility and variety of work, no two days will be the same and you will continue to learn more each day."



When to make the move in house?

If you are interested in having ownership of your work, have an interest in a company's wider organisational objectives, and enjoy being consulted on a business's strategy, then moving in-house could be for you. There is a stigma that you must wait to gain a certain amount of PQE before moving in-house, however this is an outdated concept. If you see yourself ultimately progressing to a career in-house, moving sooner may be beneficial for progression and will allow you to reach a senior in-house position earlier in your career.

Historically, most lawyers have waited until gaining 2-4 years of PQE before making the move in-house. However, we are now seeing a large increase in the number of newly qualified lawyers (NQs) who want to move in-house on qualification and often find that NQ in-house roles can be highly competitive.

What's it like to work in-house

Benefits



The opportunity to see a project from start to finish and be part of a company you have a genuine interest in



For lawyers who enjoy the business side of law and would like to get involved in strategy, there is the opportunity to work with the wider company and help meet business objectives. We have even seen lawyers progress into a quasi-legal role where legal skills are put to the test more practically



Although moving in-house doesn't mean you will never have to work a late-night again, it does often mean friendlier and more consistent working hours



You can start climbing that ladder towards General Counsel from an early stage. This means early progression opportunities and real growth as an in-house lawyer

Challenges



Typically, private practice offers a more traditional progression structure from qualification to partnership. Moving in-house offers a merit-based progression system that isn't defined by PQE. Career progression can vary depending on the company. It is important to ask about your likely progression when you interview so you can make an informed decision on whether it is the right company for you



Stereotypically, in-house legal roles do tend to pay less, although it could be argued that you earn more for the fewer hours you work



In-house legal teams are often leaner than in practice, for a junior lawyer there can be a steeper learning curve as there is much more autonomy

Frequently asked questions



Does it matter which firm you trained at when moving in-house?

All experience you have had to date matters when moving in-house. The ranking/size/specialisms of the firm (or company) will add value to job applications. The specific value added heavily depends on the role you are applying for.

Some companies may seek magic/silver circle lawyers owing to the calibre of training or they may outsource work to these firms, so will seek candidates with the same experience. Others look for candidates who trained at regional firms due to their stellar reputation for specialist training in certain skillsets. Many clients like applications from junior lawyers with in-house experience whether that be as a paralegal or through a secondment – prior exposure to an in-house environment is helpful when trying to enter the industry. However, most clients will be completely open as long as the individual shows gravitas, the ability to learn and can draft well.



Does it matter what area of law you've qualified into/completed seats in?

Put simply, yes. When a company is looking to bring on a junior lawyer, they will need someone with some relevant experience. Most commonly, this will be commercial experience; therefore, a commercial seat or a commercial secondment is looked upon favourably.

However, lacking direct experience is not always a deal-breaker. For in-house, cultural fit and enthusiasm can be just as important as technical ability. If you have transferable skills, a good attitude and a real passion for a specific industry/ company, you still have a good chance of securing an in-house role.

Our advice would be to tailor your job search to your experience, and where you see a role that ticks every box, go for it! Remember, in-house jobs aren't always just commercial. At Taylor Root, we work on roles in a range of different areas including, but not limited to, employment, intellectual property, data protection, corporate and finance.



? Is pre-qualification experience relevant for in-house roles?

Yes! If the experience is relevant and showcases how you can add value, don't be afraid to mention it.

Companies who are looking for a junior lawyer will consider the wider elements at play (your existing skills, previous experience, ability to communicate, interests, the potential to grow and succeed).

Examples of relevant experience include:

- Paralegal experience in-house – you will have gained exposure to in-house life and an understanding of the softer skills needed to be a successful in-house lawyer
- Non-legal experience working in the industry within the sector of the company you are applying for or where you gained noteworthy experience working with senior stakeholders/working as a team e.g. if you worked as a media exec before the law and are now looking to practice in-house at a media company or you worked closely with a CFO in a work experience position
- Interests – what are your hobbies? Did you play football for your local club and now want to be an in-house lawyer at a sports agency?

For more CV advice, book a CV guidance appointment with one of our Consultants or have a look at our online [CV guide](#).

Once you make that move in-house, you may never want to make the move back into practice

? Does moving in-house stop you from moving back to private practice?

Moving in-house does not stop you from making a move back into private practice later on in your career.

Once you make that move in-house, you may never want to make the move back into practice. However, on the rare occasion people move in-house and decide it's not for them, it is possible to move back into practice. Ultimately, our advice for those concerned about this is to maintain relationships with partners and mentors once you have left private practice to ensure you have a strong relationship should you ever want to move back.


? What salary can I expect as a junior in-house lawyer?

We have recently seen an increase in in-house salaries as a result of the boom in private practice salaries combined with big tech brands expanding their legal teams and offering competitive packages and bonuses.

The salary ranges will vary depending on the PQE and the sector you are looking to move into. It is important to consider in-house salaries are often supplemented by bonuses as well as other benefits like car allowances or position allowances.

Our [2023 In-house market report and salary guide](#) has a detailed breakdown of salaries based on sector and PQE.




 **What does my future look like as an in-house lawyer?**

In practice, everyone is aware of the path to partnership. However, in-house progression can look different for each individual. You don't need to have everything planned out at the junior level, but it's reassuring to know the options in which you could take:

- Promotions from strong performance and proving yourself. Progression is less focused on PQE level in-house so high achievers could move up the career ladder quickly
- Commercially aware lawyers could move to a hybrid legal/commercial role or transition to a fully business-related opportunity. The ability to assess risk and think practically can often prove useful in business-related roles
- Internal moves across legal teams within the same company into a more senior role or to try a new area of law
- Internal moves to a company's parent/sister organisation
- External market changes may create demand for a specialist lawyer to create/head up a sub-legal team. (e.g. BREXIT, GDPR, COVID)
- As legal departments grow, the team could split into two smaller teams (e.g. commercial and corporate) creating two new head of legal opportunities.

For a brief overview of how you can go about building your in-house career, have a look at our interviews with [Victoria Davies](#) (Legal Director at Twitter UK) and [Kunaal Wharf](#) (General Counsel and Company Secretary at Leeds Bradford Airport).

[Key questions and answers for junior lawyers looking to build a career in-house](#)

 **What makes a junior lawyer stand out at an interview for an in-house role**

Questions reassure the interviewer that you have a genuine interest in the role and provide valuable information to help you understand whether the role is the right fit.

An in-house lawyer builds relationships across the business and helps legal add value to a company's objectives. The best in-house lawyers enjoy the interactive aspect of the role. Showing you have strong interpersonal skills is a key skill to demonstrate at an interview.

Work with your strengths/relevant experience and sell yourself. Have you worked with any relevant industry sector-specific clients or gained in-house experience in paralegal roles/secondments? Have you worked in non-legal positions which are relevant to the chosen company you are applying for?

Look into industry/company news, legal team, market positioning, products/services offering and key competitors before your interview.

For competency-based questions, be clear and detailed when providing examples. Look into the STAR technique (situation, task, action, results) which shares a simple format to follow.

Be yourself! Make it clear why you (and no one else) are right for this role. If it is a gaming company, and you're a gamer, let them know! If you're passionate about ethical retail, and you're interviewing at an ethical retailer, make it clear. These are the things that are going to make you stand out in a sea of applicants.

For some useful CV/Interview tips and example questions have a look at our [CV and Interview Guide](#).

Clients we have worked with

Anglo American	Easy Jet	Marriott
Arup	Ebay	NLA Media Access
Babylon	EDF	Paddy Power
Bauer Media Group	Harrods	Pepsi
Behringer Ingelheim	Informa	The Roald Dahl Story Company
Budweiser Brewing Group	ITV	Turner
CDW	Macquarie Bank	Warner Media

What our candidates say about Taylor Root

“Having used multiple recruiters, Georgie was by far the best. She was timely in her responses, easy to reach and transparent in how she operated. She made the process of moving in house at NQ stage easier than I had expected. Georgie continues to reach out and check in, which is something that I very much appreciate. I would not hesitate to recommend Georgie and would certainly use her again in future if I am looking for a new role.

Saif Jalali
Legal Counsel

Kourtney was exceptional in assisting me to find my new role. Personable and professional, she was excellent at guiding me through the process and always had answers on hand for any of my questions. Highly recommend!

Matt Lawson
Legal Counsel



For a more detailed discussion on the junior in-house market from industry renowned General Counsels/Legal Directors, take a look at our webinar on ‘The Growing Market for Junior In-House Lawyers’.

Get in touch

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About Taylor Root

We are a global legal, risk and compliance search and recruitment consultancy and have been a market leader for more than 30 years.

We help global law firms and businesses to build and expand their legal, risk, compliance and corporate governance functions. Whether you're hiring your first In-house Counsel, expanding your associate team in a certain practice area or expanding your risk department internationally, we partner with businesses at every step of your journey.

Our services include contingent and retained search, permanent, temporary and interim recruitment as well as consultancy solutions.

Wherever we operate we have made an impact, from Düsseldorf to Dubai, New York to Shanghai or Milan to Melbourne. From pioneering specialist recruitment in particular locations, to shaping how our clients have approached hiring, our influence is evident everywhere.

Today, we have 13 international offices – a truly global network of search and recruitment experts. Put simply, no one can match our global reach, or our history.

