

Leeds & Yorkshire Lawyer

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What have you found to be the most rewarding aspect of working here?



Personally, as a matrimonial/family lawyer, the best thing about working here is the other solicitors dealing in the same area of work. This is probably quite an unusual thing to say, but, when dealing with family cases, it is important to be able to work constructively with the opposing legal team.

Justine Osmotherley, Partner, Clarion



Yorkshire has everything: glorious countryside, a beautiful coastline, fine historic centres and exciting, forward-thinking cities. I am even getting to rather like Yorkshiremen, which is never an easy admission for a Lancastrian!

Paul Jackson, Partner, Russell Jones & Walker



The quality and variety of work without the rat race of the capital!

Robert Goldstone, Associate, Walker Morris



Quality clients, the lack of any significant commute, very pretty surroundings and committed colleagues who work hard, are very supportive and, when appropriate, are great fun.

Christopher Newton, Solicitor, Newtons Solicitors



It's a place where you work hard but can also relax and enjoy life. Being able to drive to work through the spectacular scenery of the Yorkshire countryside really lifts my spirits before work begins. It also soothes me after a stressful day at work.

Marilyn Stowe, Senior Partner, Stowe Family Law



The people without question. There is far less politics from what I have seen and generally people are keen to work with each other to share in the common goal.

David Eade, Head of Personal Injury, Keeble Hawson



Aside from the quality of the work and clients, you have the advantages of working in a great region that boasts major commercial centres as well as beautiful countryside and a dynamic rural economy. Where else could you work and be in the centre of a major metropolitan area and then, 15 minutes later (well, when it's the school holidays at least), be out enjoying some of the most attractive views this country has to offer?

Richard Watkinson, Pinsent Masons



I'm local as I grew up here and a lot of my clients are the same. We do a lot of work with trade unions, like Community for the steel workers, as well as the Police Federation based in Yorkshire. Working nearby means plenty of face-to-face interaction, which is one of the best ways of developing a professional relationship.

Sara Heppenstall, Solicitor, Russell Jones & Walker



I'd say it's the attitude of the people. Leeds is wonderfully diverse and, I feel, a very vibrant and positive place to live and work.

Victoria Lungu, Family Law Solicitor, Blacks Solicitors



Nigel McClea

is the former Head of Pinsent Masons LLP and now acts as a consultant to the firm

Speaking from the perspective of a large commercial law firm, what has happened is that those operating in Leeds have given themselves a much wider vision for the provision of legal services than existed 10 years ago.

It is true to say that, back then, the vast majority of commercial work done by lawyers here was for clients who were based within a 50-mile radius, but that has now changed dramatically and, today, there are lawyers working in Leeds on behalf of national and international firms.

Another sharp trend has been the elimination of private client work from most major law firms. They have realised that their bread and butter is in the corporate legal sphere and that dealing with issues like wills, probate and traffic offences for you and me is not actually what they are about.

That's not to say that these issues aren't necessary or valuable, but they have tended to pass down the line to the smaller, family-related firms; indeed most of the big firms have detached their previous family sections out to what are excellent specialists.

There has also been an increasing trend towards commoditisation. At one stage lawyers were regarded as witch doctors – whom clients should fall in front of in awe and pay in guineas. Now, increasingly savvy clients are seeing lawyers as a vaguely necessarily evil and if they can find a way to drive prices down they will try and do so.

The present day scene

We already know the local legal scene has changed since 2001, but are these changes for the better?

Do you believe your career can flourish here?



I have been practising here for over 20 years and my career progression in that period shows this is true. Leeds is a very competitive market so you have to work hard to stand out but there are so many opportunities that it really comes down to how much you want it.

Barbara Rollin, Head of Commercial Property, Gordons



The region is strong despite the current difficulties and the resilience will feed through into stronger future performance.

Richard Wadkin, Partner and Head of Commercial Dispute Resolution, Shulmans



Very much so. Growth in the north is a strong ambition of Mills & Reeve, which will undoubtedly present opportunities for both internal and external candidates.

Jonathan Watmough, Senior Solicitor, Mills & Reeve



With modern technology and attitudes, location is less important for commercial work at least. Many of my clients are in the home counties who want a good service without paying London prices.

Malcolm Jones, Solicitor, Newtons Solicitors



Absolutely, the opportunities are out there. If you have the drive and determination to be a success and offer a quality service then there is every reason for confidence.

Matthew Howarth, Head of Commercial Litigation, Gordons



Leeds is still a relatively thriving area and, with all the business that is still going on (despite the recent tough times), I believe there will

always be a strong demand for lawyers in the region.

Nick Rhodes, Associate, Blacks Solicitors



It self-evidently has. I joined a regional law firm with aspirations above its station. Within three years it could claim to be national and now it can, on certain measures, claim to be the largest law firm in the world. Yet it still has aspirations to grow further.

Paul Stone, Litigation Partner, DLA Piper



I see huge potential for the firm to become an even bigger player in the regional and national market so I certainly feel there is more I can achieve here in Leeds.

Simon Jackson, Partner and Head of Commercial Property, Shulmans



I have a growing national client base offering diverse and varied instructions which I am able to service from our York offices. As a result

I see no reason why my career cannot progress here.

Tom Watkins, Employment Lawyer, Dickinson Dees



My practice area is probate and estate planning and there is nothing more certain than death and taxes.

Elizabeth Webb, Solicitor, Newtons Solicitors



James Haddleton is a Partner at DWF in Leeds and is President of Leeds Law Society

Demands from clients in a straitened economy have seen processes and efficiencies improved within law firms. There is also now greater focus on sectors in the economy as clients expect more from their lawyers than the traditional internal divisions between corporate lawyers, litigators and similar.

The traditional financial sector on which many Leeds professional services have relied has been shaken up and we wait with interest to see how this will ultimately play out as influence moves away from the region.

For smaller firms, increased costs and the political desire to squeeze legal aid have seen some firms go out of business, while others have merged.

There is little doubt that increased competition in some parts of the profession from third parties such as will-writers, coupled with the reduction of law firms on bank panels for conveyancing, has put added pressure on smaller firms and sole practitioners, who must also keep up with constantly evolving regulation.

There are always people who benefit from change and those who don't. Where change has happened, new opportunities have arisen. However, the reduction in legal aid and increased costs of litigation through the implementation of court fees designed to make courts pay for themselves, will have a detrimental impact on access to justice.