InterLaw Diversity Forum

Career Progression in the Legal Sector 2025: What leaders need to know

Ambition is equal. Experience is not.

Three factors best predict whether a lawyer is satisfied at work: ***an inclusive culture, a promotion process they trust, and fair work allocation.*** On all three, experience differs by identity, and most sharply where identities meet.



1 Promotion

4.28 v 2.94

Desire for promotion against belief that the process is transparent. All respondents on a scale of 1 to 5.

Ambition is high in every group. Confidence in the process is not.

- Ambition is highest among Lesbian women[1] **(4.83)** and Bi respondents **(4.67)**. Their confidence that promotion is fair **(3.11 and 3.32)** is close to the overall average.

Question for leaders: Could every lawyer in your firm say what promotion requires, and who decides?

	Wants promotion	Believes promotion is fair
SEX		
Men	4.21	3.34
Women	4.30	3.03
ETHNICITY		
White British	4.15	3.42
Black	4.35	2.75
South Asian	4.40	2.48
SEXUAL ORIENTATION		
Straight men	4.26	3.39
Gay men	4.12	3.33
Straight women	4.23	3.00
Lesbian women[1]	4.83	3.11
Bi respondents	4.67	3.32
DISABILITY		
With a disability	4.44	2.81
Without a disability	4.23	3.21

2 Sponsorship

40% v 18%

Women with a mentor inside their organisation, compared to women with a sponsor.

Mentored and networked, but rarely sponsored.

- Sponsorship varies widely between groups of women. Black women **(24%)** and White British women **(21%)** are the most likely to have an internal sponsor. South Asian women **(7%)** are the least likely.
- **71%** of Bi respondents belong to a workplace diversity network, but only **9%** have a sponsor.

Question for leaders: Who in your pipeline has an advocate in the room where decisions are made, and who has only a mentor?

Men	Has an internal sponsor	Women	Has an internal sponsor
All men	22%	All women	18%
Straight men	23%	Straight women	19%
Gay men	21%	Lesbian women[1]	11%
White British men	18%	White British women	21%
Black men	Sample too small	Black women	24%
South Asian men[1]	17%	South Asian women	7%
Men with a disability[1]	22%	Women with a disability	8%

NB Bi respondents are reported as one group in the survey, and as such are not included in this chart.

3 Work and Pay

£100k v £175k

Half of women respondents earn £100k or less. For men the midline is £175k. In 2020 the two lines matched.

The pay gap opens at the midpoint and widens at the top.

- In a sector that still rewards based on billable hours, compensation is influenced by work allocation. How is fair allocation of work rated? Men **3.47**, women **3.10**. White British **3.50**, Black/ Black British **2.80**.
- In relation to compensation, the **top 10%** starts at **£425k** for lawyers from independent schools and **£275k** for those from non-selective state schools.

Question for leaders: Do you track who gets access to career-enhancing opportunities? Do you review compensation and promotion outcomes to ensure consistency and fairness?

Group	Half earn up to	Top 10% starts at	Top 10% reaches
SEX			
Men	£175,000	£425,000	£1,375,000
Women	£100,000	£250,000	£1,050,000
ETHNICITY			
White British men	£150,000	£400,000	£1,025,000
White British women	£100,000	£275,000	£1,200,000
South Asian men[1]	£200,000	£400,000	£425,000
South Asian women	£100,000	£175,000	£550,000
Black women	£75,000	£150,000	£350,000
DISABILITY			
Men with a disability[1]	£100,000	£425,000	£550,000
Women with a disability	£75,000	£125,000	£250,000
SEXUAL ORIENTATION			
Straight men	£175,000	£450,000	£1,400,000
Gay men	£175,000	£400,000	£775,000
Straight women	£100,000	£250,000	£1,025,000
Lesbian women[1]	£100,000	£250,000	£275,000
Bi respondents	£75,000	£150,000	£325,000

4 Flexibility and Care

3.4 v 17.1

The decrease (in percentage points) in women working flexibly versus men working flexibly from 2020 to 2025.

A growing gender gap in flexible working.

- Although starting at the same levels, the percentage of women working flexibly dropped by just **3 percentage points** between 2020 and 2025. In the same timeframe, the percentage of men working flexibly fell by **17 percentage points**. During the same period, the percentage of women with caring responsibilities increased.

Question for leaders: Do colleagues who work flexibly have the same access to work, sponsors, and promotion?

	2020	2025
Women working flexibly	56%	53%
Men working flexibly	54%	37%
Women with caring responsibilities	30%	40%
Men with caring responsibilities	27%	20%

5 Disability

1 in 6

respondents report a disability.

Disability shows the widest gap in experience.

- **62%** have asked for adjustments. Satisfaction with the result: **2.96** out of **5.0**.
- About seven in ten respondents with a disability are women. Only 8% of women with a disability have an internal sponsor, against 18% of women overall.

Question for leaders: How confident are you that colleagues requesting reasonable adjustments are satisfied with the outcome?

	With a disability	Without a disability
Job satisfaction	3.18	3.87
Job security	3.23	3.78
Promotion is fair	2.81	3.21
Work is allocated fairly	2.90	3.37
Workplace is free from discrimination	2.89	3.49

6 Culture

3.79 v 3.20

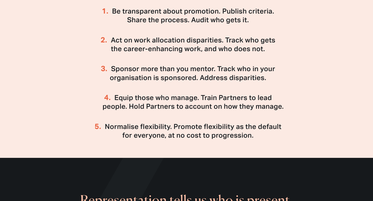
"My workplace is free from discrimination." Men versus women on a scale of 1 to 5.

Where the workplace feels less inclusive, job satisfaction is lower too.

- A culture of respect, measured here as freedom from discrimination, is one of the three factors that best predict job satisfaction. The groups that rate it lowest also report the lowest satisfaction and the least confidence that public commitments to inclusion are being met.
- On workplaces free from discrimination, the groups reporting the lowest scores are Black **(2.77)**, with a disability **(2.89)**, South Asian **(2.93)**, women **(3.20)**, and Bi respondents **(3.26)**.

Question for leaders: How confident are you that your external commitments to inclusion match the realities experienced by your people?

Group	Workplace is free from discrimination	Job satisfaction	Organisation lives up to its public inclusion commitments
GENDER			
Men	3.79	3.97	3.71
Women	3.20	3.66	3.22
ETHNICITY			
White British	3.60	3.94	3.68
South Asian	2.93	3.34	2.84
Black	2.77	3.35	2.81
SEXUAL ORIENTATION			
Straight men	3.86	3.96	3.77
Gay men	3.77	3.98	3.67
Straight women	3.19	3.71	3.22
Lesbian women[1]	3.47	3.44	3.28
Bi respondents	3.26	3.38	3.24
DISABILITY			
With a disability	2.89	3.18	2.90
Without a disability	3.49	3.87	3.47



Five practical steps for leaders

Two areas score below the midpoint across all respondents: transparent promotion **(2.94)** and adequately trained managers **(2.95)**.

1. **Be transparent about promotion. Publish criteria. Share the process. Audit who gets it.**
2. **Act on work allocation disparities. Track who gets the career-enhancing work, and who does not.**
3. **Sponsor more than you mentor. Track who in your organisation is sponsored. Address disparities.**
4. **Equip those who manage. Train Partners to lead people. Hold Partners to account on how they manage.**
5. **Normalise flexibility. Promote flexibility as the default for everyone, at no cost to progression.**

Representation tells us who is present. Career progression data shows who feels rewarded, secure, supported, and able to advance.

To build the full picture and create targeted recommendations for your organisation, the InterLaw Diversity Forum can conduct career progression analysis at an organisational level.

To find out how to get involved, contact **Jonathan.Leonhart@interlawdiversityforum.org**

InterLaw Diversity Forum

Source: *InterLaw Diversity Forum, Career Progression in the Legal Sector 2025, 889 responses (1,066 in 2020).*

Group sizes are small in places (eighty-813 respondents) and gave demographic information. Respondents chose to take part in the survey and are not a representative sample of the profession. Pay is self-reported in bands and is not adjusted for seniority, role, or hours. Bi respondents are reported as one group, of whom about nine in ten are women. [1]Groups of 10 to 29 respondents: data less reliable. Scores are the averages from 1 (low) to 5 (high) with 3 as the midpoint.