

MAIN FEATURES

The BIALL Salary Survey 2023

Abstract: For the vast majority of us salary is one of the key reasons we work. With bills to pay and mouths to feed we want to know we are being fairly compensated for the jobs we do. One way to check this is to use the BIALL Annual Salary Survey which considers not only salaries but also working conditions and benefits, offering a comparison to similar organisations and roles. In this article **Julie Christmas, Claire Mazer** and the team from **CB Resourcing** highlight some of the findings from the 2023 survey and consider the reasons behind these.

Keywords: surveys; BIALL; legal information profession

INTRODUCTION

The first BIALL salary survey was conducted in 1984 in response to concerns over the salaries offered in some organisations. Now in its 40th year, the BIALL salary survey enables members in all sectors within the legal information profession to compare their salaries and benefits with their peers in other organisations. Overhauled in 2018 the survey contains a set of core questions around reimbursement and working practices to allow meaningful comparisons to past years, but also allows for additional questions to gather more data on particular themes, for example remote and flexible working arrangements. The 2023 survey was the fifth running of the revised format as it did not run in 2022.

As in previous years the survey ran in Survey Monkey with links posted to the BIALL and LIS-LAW email lists to attract both members and non-members. Open throughout May, the 2023 survey saw a total of 271 responses, up 13% on the previous survey (2021). Over two thirds of respondents work in the commercial sector, mostly in law firms, followed by the academic sector and then other non-commercial. In comparison to the make-up of our working members the responses do skew the results a little more towards the commercial sector but not so much that the survey is not valuable to all.

Sector	% of employed members	% survey respondents
Academic	25%	17%
Commercial	61%	69%
Other non-commercial	14%	15%

In this article we have taken some of the findings from the survey and looked at possible reasons and then added some personal perspectives based on our own organisations – a law firm, university and recruitment agency.

SALARIES

The overall median salary for a librarian is £44,100 for full time (FT) and £41,713 for part time (PT), both seeing

an increase on 2021. Encouragingly 92% of respondents received a salary increase, the highest level recorded since the relaunch of the salary survey in 2018, and a significant bump on 2021 (67%). This is reflective of the return to a more stable financial position for organisations, allowing the commitment to a regular salary increase, rather than the Covid-related bonus payments we saw in 2021.

The gap between the commercial and academic sectors has continued to widen, currently standing at £7000, although the lowest FT salary in the academic sector is higher than in other sectors at £28,111. This may, however, be due to the way the academic sector is structured, with no dedicated law roles at lower levels and therefore fewer respondents to the survey.

Claire Mazer (CM): Universities have struggled post pandemic with costs, not able to bounce back as quickly as other sectors due to historic underfunding and erosion of educational budgets, reduced research opportunities with the UK leaving the EU and difficulties finding other income streams. This combined with lower student numbers due to Brexit, changing demographics, the impact of Covid and now the cost of living crisis has resulted in less income and the inevitable knock-on effect on budgets for salaries.

Julie Christmas (JC): As with many firms any salary increase we get is determined by a range of factors such as firm or individual performance and inflation. Outside of that, though, we have also benefited over time from the introduction of more specialist business and financial researchers into our team. When we started recruiting for more of those roles, we needed to look outside the traditional law sector for those skills to banking and consultancy and found we needed to offer higher salaries to attract the right candidates. Over time, as those

researchers have shared knowledge across the team, developing some legal research skills in return, we have been able to argue for those higher salaries for all the researchers.

A really positive sign is the increase in salaries at the more junior end of the market, particularly for Library Assistants with the median salaries at £29,000 (FT) and £27,635 (PT), the highest we have seen since 2018.

CB Resourcing (CB): Often long overdue, not only is this a good thing for those currently in post helping the sector retain staff, but it is key if we are going to attract new entrants to the legal information world.

Differences across regions and jurisdictions are notable with the highest salaries seen in the Republic of Ireland (ROI). Across the UK increases are seen not just in London but in other regions like the Midlands and the north of England where in the law firm sector salaries now more regularly hit £40,000 or more, having been topping out at around £35,000 for a long time.

CB: The ROI has a very resilient economy, coupled with a higher cost of living than in the UK which has resulted in the higher salaries. Across the UK regions, salaries are increasing, predominantly as a result of law firms allowing roles to be located in any of their offices when filling vacancies, rather than focusing on one specific office. This has introduced more competition for talent in locations where historically there may have only been one or two firms hiring.

WORKING CONDITIONS

There are lots of positives to be seen when considering responses about working conditions, such as hours worked, redundancies, responsibilities and flexibility in work location.

Overall, there has been a 4% decrease in the number of people working additional hours, which is encouraging as the vast majority receive no compensation for the extra hours. One possible explanation of this may be people being more aware of their work / life balance once it was thrown into the spotlight post-pandemic, re-assessing priorities and protecting the time clawed back through less commuting. The biggest fall was seen in the academic sector, which is good to see as this sector has seen the biggest squeeze on resources.

CM: A return to more time spent on campus has encouraged more regular hours, removing the tendency to keep working into the night when fully working from home.

JC: In our team people often tend to do something close to their contracted hours on days when they are in the office, being more conscious now of the time spent commuting and leaving promptly.

When looking at those doing extra, the higher the job level the more likely it is that additional hours will be worked, and the higher the level, the greater the number of additional hours. Whilst the specific hours are largely uncompensated directly there is often financial compensation elsewhere, for example a higher % bonus and / or % salary increase.

JC: As I have taken on more senior roles I have probably tended to do more extra hours, but a lot of it is dependent upon what tasks or projects I am involved with. On working from home days it is easy to find yourself still online later than you should be. For me, it's often because of the nature of the work I do at home, which tends to be things like usage or budget analysis or writing business cases or proposals. If I'm in the zone of what I'm doing then I can easily lose track of the time, or sometimes make a conscious decision to stay working as I'm making real progress.

The fall may also be indicative of some organisations being in a stronger financial position and thus able to properly resource their legal information services. The fall in the reports of redundancies to an average of just 6% (down from 44% in 2021 and 22% in 2018 and 2019), coupled with a 12% increase in full time equivalent (FTE) headcount, would also seem to support the idea of more stability across organisations. The difference between the sectors is evident in this area, though, with the academic sector reporting a greater number of redundancies and falls in FTE headcount.

A rise in the number of extra hours worked by PT employees and increasing responsibilities within roles may run counter to the idea of organisations having adequate resourcing, however. Organisations looking to make savings may have cut hours but not responsibilities from previously FT posts.

CM: In my experience more is definitely being packed into job roles in terms of responsibilities. With PT roles there is often not enough time to fit everything in without doing those additional hours. Have we just become used to working additional hours without being compensated?

CB: We've not seen a particular increase in the responsibilities in job descriptions as

much still depends upon the size of organisation. In the law firm sector smaller firms tend to want a wide range of skills supporting a similarly wide range of responsibilities, whereas larger firms often allow for a greater degree of specialisation in roles. That said, business research is becoming more prevalent on job descriptions and we're seeing law librarians moving into strategic research roles.

JC: Whilst I have not really seen an increase in responsibilities in roles within our team, the type of skills we expect the team to have has definitely changed over time, with a greater emphasis on business and financial research.

One of the good things to come out of the pandemic for many was the continuation of regular working from home, allowing people to adjust their work / life balance. Only 6% of respondents work from their organisation's premises all the time whilst most people have the option to work remotely for at least some of the week as part of an organisational policy. These policies vary between organisations but on average those working in a hybrid fashion do so for almost half their working week. Overall, though, working from home is less prevalent in the academic sector. Whilst, as with other sectors, more and more resources are available online needing less physical management, most universities still have significant print collections and library premises which require staffing, so this is a significant factor in forming hybrid working policies.

CM: In the academic sector there has been a drive to create a 'lived university atmosphere' for students in university buildings, on campus and in university towns. There is therefore more pressure or requirement to work on campus, particularly at certain times of the year, for example, in the autumn where there are lots of student activities and teaching commitments. Outside of those peak times working from home is more acceptable.

CB: On the whole working patterns have been totally revolutionised since the pandemic. Even very conservative firms which did not allow any working from home previously will often now have a flexible policy. The most prevalent model is a 60 / 40 office / home split, but there are a wide range of approaches. This has been really positive in keeping people in the workforce who might otherwise have left due to personal commitments such as caring responsibilities.

We are seeing some push back on that now, with firms trying to bring people in more, with varying degrees of success.

JC: We have the 60 / 40 model, but you can choose to spend more time in the office if it suits you better. Whilst we try to stick to the same days each week, including a core day, we're able to switch around to accommodate business or personal needs. For me and many members of my team it has meant a change in the way we plan our weeks, like grouping meetings on days we are in the office or blocking time on WFH days to do analysis tasks, but on the whole it works well.

BENEFITS

Most respondents report some employment benefits with the top five being:

	Payment of BIALL subscription	Private medical insurance	Travel season ticket loan	Payment of other professional subs	Holiday trading
Academic	68%	20%	48%	34%	16%
Commercial	91%	89%	67%	64%	67%
Other non- commercial	71%	34%	53%	64%	26%

Whilst most percentages show little change there was a notable fall of 10% in those offered a travel season ticket loan. This may be due to the increase in hybrid working and people no longer facing a single expensive payment for an annual ticket. It could also be a reflection of requirements to travel to regional offices or libraries more often, rather than to a single location where a season ticket made financial sense.

The other notable change was an increase in those offered study leave as a benefit, up 6% to 28%.

CM: Staff training budgets in the academic sector, like salaries, have been significantly impacted by the increased costs and reduced incomes faced by many universities. Bonuses and other forms of financial compensation are rare in the academic sector, although we may get subsidies or co-pay options for private medical insurance or introductory offers to products and services.

CB: The most important benefits our candidates are looking for are good holiday entitlement and flexibility in working pattern / location. A good pension and healthcare benefit also feature heavily, but these are quite standard in the law firm

sector. The payment of professional membership subscriptions is also common and although we haven't seen anything specifically around study leave, we're not surprised. The market is much more competitive for the best talent and candidates like to see organisations investing in staff development and valuing commitment to the profession.

JOB TITLES

This year we asked respondents to record their specific job titles for the first time. Primarily this was with a view to make sure we are categorising roles correctly, but it is an interesting snapshot of the different words used to try and capture the scope or way roles are approached. See Figure 1.

Removing the words describing the role levels, like 'manager', 'head' or 'assistant', to focus on the scope, we see 'information' and 'knowledge' vie for equal status, but 'library' and 'librarian' still feature heavily. Other terms speak more to how we carry out the role or the kind of relationship we want with our users – 'specialist', 'advisor', and 'analyst'.

It can be difficult to reconcile the need for a job title to mean something to your users as well as to those outside your organisation, particularly when recruiting. Whilst we want to ensure that we can attract applicants from different backgrounds and experiences, perhaps moving away from stereotypical views of libraries and librarians, we still need our sometimes more traditional organisations to recognise who we are and the services we provide.

JC: I've seen changes within our team over the years. Some of this was due to restructuring responsibilities, but recently we renamed our role of Research Librarian to Research Analyst. We felt this was more representative of the work that they do both to our internal clients (analyst roles now appear across many of our support teams), but also to the market when we come to benchmark those roles for salary reviews, and when recruiting.

Job titles are also varied in academia and mean different things in different institutions. In many places there



Figure 1: This word cloud gives a snapshot of the specific job titles in use in 2023

has been a move away from the traditional Subject Librarian role to a more functional approach, specialising in a particular activity with post holders now often looking after multiple and sometimes disparate subjects. This has resulted in titles including terms like Academic Liaison (work exclusively with academic colleagues), and Student Engagement (doing all the student enquiries and teaching).

CM: My role has functional elements which are not subject related. For example, I do a lot of admin and logistical work for my team and act as a contact for local schools. But my primary focus now is academic liaison, hence the change from Subject Librarian to Academic Liaison Librarian.

CB: We always advise candidates to look beyond a job title, as there is no one way that organisations operate and each role is different.

COMPARISON TO OTHER SECTORS

Whilst it is useful to gauge how salaries, benefits and working conditions compare to others within the legal information profession, there is also value in looking outside it. The 2019 Knowledge & Information Management (KIM) Salary survey¹ conducted by Sue Hill Recruitment and TFPL looked across multiple sectors including financial services, local government and public libraries, third sector and not-for-profit, and healthcare and NHS. In this survey the average legal sector salaries were the highest across most role levels. It should, however, be noted that those working in academic institutions, the public sector and local government may have been counted under those categories.

Sector	Average salary 2019
Legal	£50,817
Financial services	£48,125
Academic	£41,945
Local authorities and Public libraries	£40,117
Third sector and Not-for-profit	£40,006
Healthcare and NHS	£39,633
Public sector	£39,046

Looking at our own survey data we see the same order if we take Public sector and Local authorities to be our 'Other non-commercial' grouping and Legal to be the equivalent of 'Commercial', an order which continues through to 2023. News stories and reports about public sector spending, local authority funding cuts and pay rises over the last five years lead to the conclusion that there will have been little change in the order, even if some salaries have increased.

CB: In terms of other comparisons, many of the trends around flexibility expectations are absolutely widespread. We're also seeing candidates move between sectors as things have become more fluid. Salaries, too, have increased across most industries apart from academia and the public sector.

There is also a value in comparing ourselves to other departments or teams within our own organisations. Closer working with functions such as IT and business development (BD) has led to a cross-over of skills and roles. Legal tech roles, for example, may sit within library and knowledge functions, or within IT, business researchers can be in BD or library and knowledge teams, so asking about pay scales in those teams may prove beneficial, benchmarking your skills to other types of roles.

CONCLUSIONS

There are lots of positives to take from the survey – 92% of respondents reported a salary increase, there was a 4% decrease in additional hours worked, most people have access to benefits and 94% of us work flexibly in terms of location. There is, however, still work to be done to close the gap between the commercial and other sectors. BIALL has been looking to the future and thinking about how we attract people into the profession and one of the barriers is salary, particularly in the larger centres like London, Dublin and Manchester. Another one, like it or not, is connected to job and team titles – library and librarian come with a stereotypical image which can be hard for us to break away from, despite all the different skills and roles that we have. Sadly, there are no easy solutions, but we are committed to keep working at it.

Footnote

¹ Sue Hill Recruitment & TFPL, '2019 Knowledge & Information Management (KIM) Salary survey' (2019) <<https://oliver-dev.s3.amazonaws.com/2019/06/13/12/36/45/852/Sue%20Hill%20Recruitment%20&%20TFPL%20Salary%20Survey%202019.pdf>> Accessed 6 February 2024

Biographies

Julie Christmas is BIALl President for 2023 / 2024 having previously been Chair of the Conference Committee from 2019–2021. She is a Senior Manager at global law firm Allen & Overy LLP (soon to be A&O Shearman), having come to law firms via academic, public and health libraries.

Claire Mazer is the BIALl President Elect for 2023 / 2024. Claire undertook various roles, including Chair, on the BIALl Awards and Bursaries Committee between 2017 and 2022. She works as an Academic Liaison Librarian at Brunel University London, with a particular focus on Law. She has held this position for over 20 years.

CB Resourcing provides recruitment and consulting services specialising in assignments across the information sector – this includes positions in knowledge management, information, research, analysis, data science, libraries, insight, as well as related technology positions. It is based in the City of London in the UK, however, its networks extend across the global information industry. Its team has worked extensively in London as well as with clients with hubs in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Bristol, Newcastle, Belfast, Glasgow and Edinburgh.