



LEGAL SUPPORT SALARY SURVEY

2019

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LEGAL SUPPORT MARKET OVERVIEW

2019 has seen a continued move towards firms streamlining their support services models, especially within our largest firms. Ashurst Australia and DLA Piper are already operating with their own customised variations of a HUB structure, with various other firms scheduled to roll out revised models.

These revised structures are designed to streamline workflow and reduce headcount cost. The result of these new structures has created a two-band structure in most firms that are operating with it. The roles have increased the need for junior secretaries to manage the volume of data processing and routine tasks, while the role of senior secretaries has seen the following changes; a growth in ratios to their authors and an expanded remit that can include team productivity reporting, detailed client reporting and business development. These expanded roles have also increased the banding for the senior level to \$90,000 (inclusive), up from \$85,000 in 2018. However, this new model has removed the need for intermediate secretaries, which is contrary to the direction that the rest of the market is moving.

For firms with the traditional support model, intermediate level secretaries continue to be the band in the highest level of demand. The salary banding at this level has increased yet again in 2019. In Sydney this banding has moved from a maximum package of \$65,000 in 2018 for a secretary with up to four years' experience, to a maximum package of \$73,000 for a secretary of equivalent experience in 2019.

The demand for traditionally trained secretaries is not isolated to specific practice areas; however, we have seen spikes in the following markets: Property, Building & Construction, Environment & Planning, Commercial Litigation and Insurance.

Firms at all levels are also much more open to considering 'non-traditional' support staff, with success stories in administrators either hired with industry specific experience to the practice or from other professional services bodies. We have also seen a continued move away from teams only recruiting secretaries that come to market with previous relevant practice experience. Teams are much more open to developing talented candidates who display the capability to retrain in a new practice group.

The 2019 increases for existing staff are predicted to align with the Australian Consumer Price Index (CPI), 2.5%. Bonus payments for existing staff are becoming increasingly rare due to the increased salary base rates across the board. When they are paid, support staff bonuses are commonly calculated on either individual performance or a combination of both individual performance and team performance versus budget.

Support ratios have also expanded, with junior lawyers and paralegals now more technology-savvy and self-sufficient. Legal technology has continued to support workflow optimisation across the market, and firms have continued to invest in their in-house training and Learning & Development programmes to support secretarial staff with these expanded ratios.

SALARY DATA

PERMANENT SALARIES

Many Australian residents have voted in both state and Federal elections, so there has been some expected uncertainty in the market leading into the 2019 salary review period. As seen in 2018, the salary bandings have continued to standardise across the tiers. Boutique firms have raised salaries in the support market to compete with Mid-Tier and Top-Tier firms, while the Mid-Tier and Top-Tier firms have focused on promoting their non-monetary staff benefits packages. International firms continue to pay at the higher end of the band market as they continue a focus on attracting talent away from the local firms.

A detailed breakdown of the 2019 permanent salary bandings for both Sydney and Melbourne can be found on pages 4 and 5.

TEMPORARY SALARIES

Temporary candidates have enjoyed an increase in wages over the last few years, but particularly since the 2018 review period. As firms have moved to internal solutions such as float secretaries, the number of career temps has reduced. As a result, the temporary market becomes increasingly competitive and temporary staff are able to demand higher rates to align closer to the banding of their permanent counterparts.

DEFINITIONS

Boutique Firms: We categorise Boutique firms by the number of practice areas they offer to clients and the total staff headcount within a firm. This category can sometimes include specialist firms, though the key characteristic for this band is still related to headcount.

Mid-Tier Firms: The Australian Mid-Tier is the broadest banding. This band is also the most rapidly changing in 2019. After multiple mergers in 2017& 2018, many of these firms will continue to consolidate in 2019.

Top-Tier Firms: For the purpose of this survey we are using the classic definition of an Australian Top-Tier firm. They are the largest six firms in Australia based on total headcount and revenue.

International Firms: For the purpose of this survey we are referencing internationally headquartered firms with a smaller Australian presence. These firms have generally entered the Australian market over the last five years.

SYDNEY SALARIES

Junior Legal Secretary (0 - 2 years)	\$43,000 - \$60,000
Intermediate Legal Secretary (2 - 4 years)	\$60,000 - \$73,000
Senior Legal Secretary (5 years+ Traditional model)	\$75,000 - \$90,000
Senior Legal Secretary (5 years+ Restructured model)	\$85,000 - \$95,000
EA to Managing Partner / EA to General Counsel	\$85,000 - \$95,000
WP Operator	\$72,000 - \$83,000
Discovery Paralegal	\$55,000 - \$75,000
Paralegal (Practice Specific)	\$65,000 - \$95,000
Conveyancer	\$85,000 - \$120,000
Practice Manager	\$90,000 - \$130,000
Office Assistant (0 - 1 year)	\$43,000 - \$45,000
Mail Room / Shared Services Assistant	\$43,000 - \$50,000
Legal Receptionist	\$55,000 - \$75,000

**Salaries include base and superannuation only*

MELBOURNE SALARIES

Junior Legal Secretary (0 - 2 years)	\$43,000 - \$55,000
Intermediate Legal Secretary (2 - 4 years)	\$55,000 - \$65,000
Senior Legal Secretary (5 years +)	\$65,000 - \$75,000
Senior Legal Secretary (5 years+ Restructured model)	\$75,000 - \$85,000
EA to Managing Partner / General Counsel	\$80,000 - \$90,000
WP Operator	\$70,000 - \$80,000
Discovery Paralegal	\$55,000 - \$70,000
Paralegal (Practice Specific)	\$65,000 - \$85,000
Conveyancer	\$85,000 - \$110,000
Practice Manager	\$90,000 - \$120,000
Office Assistant (0 - 1 year)	\$43,000 - \$48,000
Mail Room / Shared Services Assistant	\$43,000 - \$52,000
Legal Receptionist	\$55,000 - \$70,000

**Salaries include base and superannuation only*

DRIVERS

WHAT KEEPS ME HERE

SOURCE: CHARTERHOUSE 2019 SALARY SURVEY



wellbeing

Wellbeing initiatives continue as one of the a top three retention drivers for legal support staff in 2019. This includes team-based activities such as yoga, pilates, and group personal training sessions; coupled with discounted health insurance, free breakfast and fruit at work, flu vaccinations and health checks.



flexible working

With the introduction of new technology, flexible work arrangements have become more accessible for support staff in recent years. Flexible work for some firms means flexible start and finish times, while for others it could also encompass work from home and job sharing options.



culture & environment

There is no surprise that company culture and environment round out the top three retention drivers. The firms with strong employee engagement strategies will continue to retain their top performers, even in such a competitive market.

WHAT WOULD TEMPT ME TO LEAVE

SOURCE: CHARTERHOUSE 2019 SALARY SURVEY



new challenge or practice area



salary increase



quality of management

Now that firms have expanded their legal support recruitment criteria to include staff from alternate practice areas, we are seeing more and more staff changing teams internally, and moving firms to embark on new challenges in those alternate practice areas.

While the majority of firms do a great job at rewarding their staff, the attraction of a salary increase is still a key driver for movement amongst legal support staff in 2019. Progression for junior and intermediate levels remains strong, while seniors that have traditionally been capped in the market now have the opportunity to earn slightly more in firms that have adopted new operating models.

As the market becomes more competitive, teams with strong people leaders continue to win the war on talent. As the old saying goes, *“people leave managers, not businesses”*.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The data used to create this document was sourced using the following sources:

- Charterhouse Partnership 2019 Legal Support Client Survey
- Charterhouse Partnership 2019 Legal Support Candidate Survey
- Salary data recorded from placements made since the 2018 review period

ABOUT THE TEAM

The Charterhouse Legal Support team have over 30 years combined recruitment experience in the market. We specialise in the recruitment of both temporary and permanent staffing solutions for both Private Practice firms and In-house Legal teams. The majority of roles we recruit are Legal Secretarial and Paralegal roles, however we also recruit Legal EAs, Reception, WPOs, Mailroom, Library, Catering, Business Development, Marketing and HR roles at all levels. The Charterhouse Partnership team also recruit for other Business Services functions such as IT and Accounting/Finance.

If you would like to discuss any of the information presented this document, please contact:
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