



**and lead the way to
a sustainable future**

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The research team for this project consists of Dr Emma Jones (University of Sheffield) and members of the LawCare team. The Research Assistant for this project is Jessie Sheppard.

Ethical approval was obtained for this project from the University of Sheffield (Reference Number 059298).

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Foreword

Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales

The Right Honourable the Baroness Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill



The delivery of justice, legal services and how we work in the legal sector are undergoing a profound transformation. Many in the sector now have flexible working patterns. Artificial intelligence is developing at pace. Client expectations are evolving. The regulatory landscape is changing.

Against this backdrop, there is a greater focus than ever before on mental health and wellbeing. This valuable research from LawCare offers a timely insight into the mental health of people across the legal sector at all levels and how organisations are responding. The recommendations present a clear opportunity for leaders across the profession to engage strategically with wellbeing, as a core part of building healthier, more forward-thinking workplaces.

The legal sector helps to uphold the rights and responsibilities that shape our communities. Its long-term sustainability relies not only on attracting and retaining people, but on fostering a culture where people can grow, contribute fully and choose to stay.

Prioritising mental health is essential if we are to build a sector that is inclusive, resilient and fit for the future.

Those in senior positions across legal education, regulation and practice can commit to actions to make meaningful change. The findings in this research challenge us to lead with empathy, to listen and to act with purpose. Our collective future depends on both innovation in how we deliver legal services and how we support the people who deliver them.

Introduction - What is Life in the Law like in 2025?

In 2021 LawCare released the first Life in the Law report, exploring mental health and wellbeing across the UK legal sector. The data for the report was collected in 2020, during the Covid-19 global pandemic. Five years later, there is a rapidly evolving post-pandemic legal landscape and the expectations of clients, colleagues and regulators are changing. To ensure life in the law is sustainable, we need to understand how these changes are impacting individuals' mental health and wellbeing and what steps workplaces are taking to address this.

Whilst working in the law can be stimulating, engaging and rewarding, the first Life in the Law report made sobering reading. It evidenced a sector where people were at high risk of burnout, with **69%** experiencing mental ill-health (whether medically or self-diagnosed) in the year prior to completing the survey. In the same year, a global survey of lawyer wellbeing conducted by the International Bar Association noted that one in three participants said their work had a negative, or extremely negative impact on their wellbeing.

Life in the Law 2025 surveys gathered results from both individuals in the legal sector (called 'people' throughout this report) and legal organisations (called 'organisations' throughout this report) tracing the broad journey through a legal career, from vocational training to managing people and future career intentions. Our research seeks to answer five key questions:

1. How do people feel about working in the legal sector?
2. What are the current levels of mental health and wellbeing of people in the legal sector?
3. What is undermining mental health and wellbeing in the legal workplace?
4. What could have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing in legal workplaces?
5. What evidence-based steps can organisations take to improve mental health and wellbeing in the legal workplace?

Healthy lawyers are essential to a healthy legal sector - a message echoed across both reports and the broader research. When mental health and wellbeing aren't prioritised, it doesn't just affect people - it can also lead to serious ethical, financial and reputational consequences.

These range from high rates of sick leave and staff turnover, to increased levels of error and compromised ethical judgements, to a loss of trust from clients and the public.

The aim of this report is to provide a clear foundation for evidence-based action to support and protect mental health in the workplace across the UK legal sector. In doing so, it seeks to ensure that the legal sector is sustainable and can continue to perform its crucial societal role for generations to come.

Research headlines and recommendations

The legal sector is at a turning point. Our research highlights that people in the sector are facing significant strain, raising urgent questions about its long-term sustainability. Unless decisive action is taken now, the profession risks losing people, further erosion of mental health and wellbeing and reduced public trust and confidence.

More than half of people surveyed told us they could see themselves leaving their current role within the next five years. This signals a profound risk to workforce stability at a time when the demand for legal services continues to grow. The factors driving this attrition are clear. Nearly sixty percent reported poor mental wellbeing. Long hours might, at least in part, cause the problem. Almost **79%** said they regularly work beyond their contracted hours. These statistics reflect unsustainable working practices that normalise overwork and undermine mental health.

There are simple evidence-based solutions. What's needed is strong leadership and the commitment to put them in place.

Equipping managers with the skills, confidence and resources to lead effectively is one of the most impactful changes organisations can make. When people are supported, recognised and valued, the workplace becomes more positive and productive - helping to protect mental health and wellbeing. This creates workplaces where the next generation can succeed, where people feel they belong, which they want to be part of and where they can meet the high standards expected of them.

Beyond the workplace, legal education must also evolve. Preparing new entrants with both technical expertise and essential human skills – including an acknowledgement of the importance of wellbeing – helps build positive client and workplace relationships. This foundation is key to long-term success for individuals and organisations alike.

There are clear, practical steps that can be taken right now to lead towards a healthier sector. These include actively managing workloads to prevent burnout, embedding flexible and hybrid working practices that recognise and support diverse needs and evaluating workplace mental health and wellbeing initiatives to ensure they deliver real impact. The case has been made; we don't need more evidence. It is time to move on from discussing the problems to implementing evidence-based sustainable solutions.

This report calls on every firm, every chambers, every in-house team, every courtroom, every professional body, every regulator, every educational organisation, every insurer, every individual and every manager and leader to step up and play their part in creating a more sustainable sector - one that inspires trust, reflects progressive values, is ready for the future and above all, recognises its people as its greatest strength.

The priority now is strong leadership and decisive action to seize the opportunity to embed mental health and wellbeing into everyday legal practice.



How do people feel about working in the legal sector?

- > A majority (**56.2%**) said that they could see themselves leaving their current workplace within the next five years.
- > Nearly a third (**32.1%**) could also see themselves leaving the legal sector within the next 5 years.
- > **32.3%** were 'Not likely' to recommend law as a career.

What are the current levels of mental health and wellbeing of people in the legal sector?

- > Low levels of mental wellbeing – nearly **60%** (**59.1%**) had poor mental wellbeing.
- > **43.4%** said that their mental health and wellbeing was very significantly influenced by work.
- > At high risk of burnout (where people feel emotionally exhausted by and disengaged in, their work).
- > **50.0%** said they had experienced anxiety, either often, very often or all of the time, over the last 12 months.

What is undermining mental health and wellbeing in the legal workplace?

- > Very high levels of work intensity - over three quarters (**78.7%**) are working over their contracted time, with nearly ten percent (**8.5%**) estimating they worked **21+** extra hours per week.
- > Levels of psychological safety (how safe people feel to raise concerns, questions and ideas) fall in the lower half of the scale.
- > Bullying, harassment and discrimination - nearly a fifth (**19.5%**) had experienced this at work in the preceding 12 months.

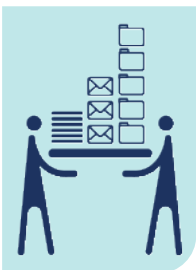
What could have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing in legal workplaces?

- > Training managers – only **54.6%** of those with managerial responsibilities had received training to support them in managing people.
- > Valuing people management - less than a third (**31.3%**) said that their targets or billable hours were adjusted to take into account the time they need to spend managing others or undertaking appropriate training.
- > Legal vocational education that better equips people with the skills and knowledge needed for a sustainable legal career.

Recommendations

What evidence-based steps can organisations take to improve mental health and wellbeing in the legal workplace?

Below are our recommendations for practices that protect, promote and enhance mental health and wellbeing at work:



1. Actively manage workloads – excessive work intensity harms wellbeing and mental health so leaders must tackle root causes by managing workloads, rethinking targets and incentives and challenging the culture of long hours.



2. Prioritise and value managing people - legal workplaces should give people managers enough time, targeted training and ongoing support and recognise management as a critical skill. Senior lawyers should not be assumed to be good managers without proper development.



3. Embed hybrid and flexible working options - these ways of working support wellbeing and inclusion. To work well they must be designed with care, balancing benefits with challenges (like isolation) and shaped through open dialogue and collaboration.



4. Evaluate programmes and activities that support mental health and wellbeing at work - legal workplaces should regularly assess whether their mental health and wellbeing programmes are working, analyse and learn from the results and make any necessary improvements and adjustments.



5. Legal education and training should equip people joining the sector with the skills and knowledge they need for a sustainable legal career.

Read more about the Life in the Law 2025 recommendations on page 34

How do people feel about working in the legal sector?

How do people feel about working in the legal sector?

This section looks at the perceptions of people about working in the sector post-Covid. It highlights the challenges the sector faces due to the significant numbers of people considering changing roles or leaving the profession entirely.

Intentions to stay or move on

For legal workplaces, recruiting people can be a costly and resource-intensive process. Failing to retain people can cause a damaging drop in productivity and the loss of valuable knowledge and experience. This in turn can lead to a fall in profitability, client dissatisfaction and low levels of workplace morale. If mirrored across the legal sector this could have very significant economic and reputational consequences. Therefore, there is a strong business incentive to support and keep people within legal workplaces as demonstrated by the Business Case for Wellbeing and the Mindful Business Charter.

In our survey we asked whether people were considering leaving their current workplace and the legal sector as a whole (other than due to retirement).



...there is a strong business incentive to support and keep people within legal workplaces

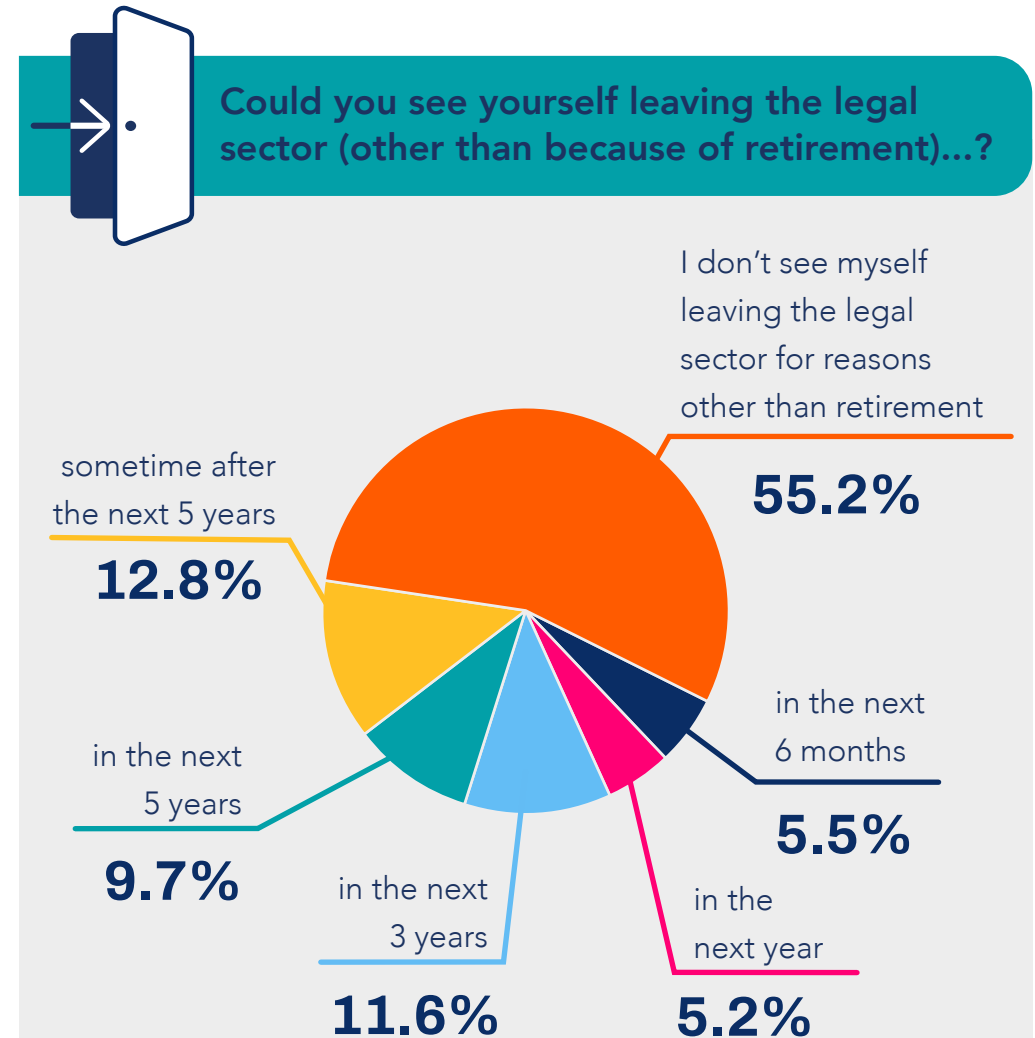
A majority (56.2%) said that they could see themselves leaving their current workplace within the next five years.

This included 14.5% potentially leaving within the next 6 months and another 14.3% in the next year. A further 9.9% could see themselves leaving sometime after the next five years.



Nearly a third (32.1%) could also see themselves leaving the legal sector within the next 5 years.

This included 5.5% potentially leaving within the next 6 months and another 5.2% in the next year.



Why are people questioning their career in the law?

People were asked to explain their reasons for these responses. A number referred to wellbeing-related reasons. There was an emphasis on the pressures of work, the lack of work-life balance and references to 'toxic' cultures and working environments.

The amount of stress and expectation outweigh any benefits of the job.

Junior Solicitor, Wales

**It is unsustainable.
My work is slowly killing me.**

Junior Barrister, England

Some people did refer to more positive reasons, for example, proactively choosing to pursue a different career path or challenge.

However, amongst those planning to stay in the legal sector (or who were 'Unsure'), this choice was sometimes framed negatively, with reference to a lack of options and financial constraints.

I would like to leave but couldn't afford to and don't know what else to do.

Licensed Conveyancer, England

Others said they might take on a different role within the sector or were seeking a change due to their personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities or nearing retirement.


Some people did emphasise their commitment to and enthusiasm for working in the law, alongside their lack of desire to leave the legal sector. This included highlighting the enjoyable and engaging work and the financial rewards.

Law is my life.

Senior Solicitor, England

Despite the stress, I do enjoy my job and I have never wanted to do anything else. The vast majority of my clients are great to deal with and I feel the benefits outweigh the negative aspects.

Partner, Scotland



32.3% were
'Not likely'
to recommend
law as a career

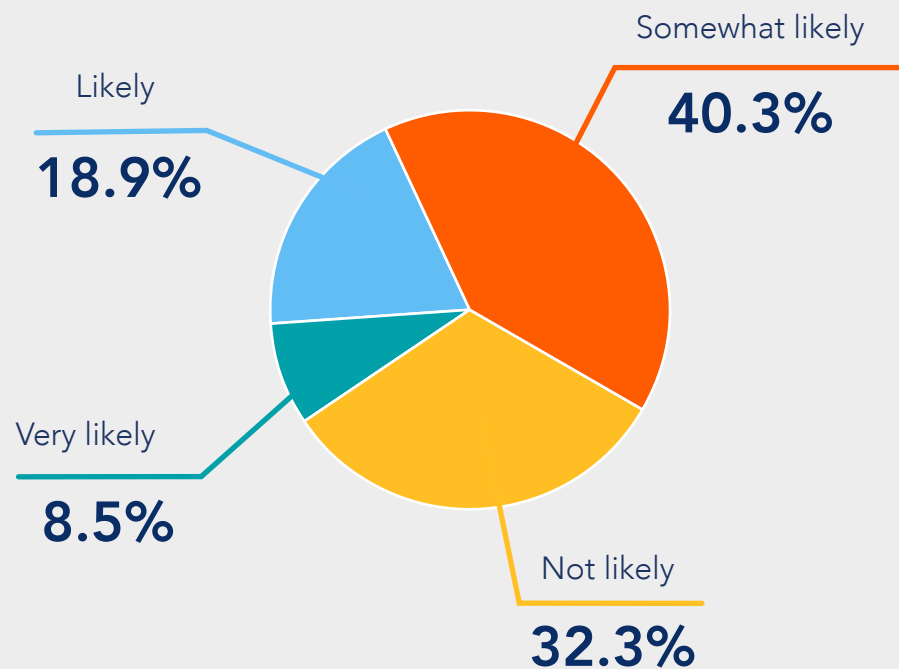
Recommending a legal career

There are current challenges with recruitment and retention of people in the sector but there is also the need to consider how best to attract and retain future generations. People were asked how likely they were to recommend a career in the legal sector to others.

32.3% were 'Not likely' to recommend law as a career.



How likely are you to recommend a career in the legal sector to others?



When asked to explain the reasons for their answer, people who had answered positively focused on the enjoyable, stimulating, interesting and emotionally and financially rewarding aspects of their work.

“ I enjoy being able to help others especially those in need or those who struggle to advocate for themselves.

Junior Solicitor, Scotland

“ It’s an interesting, vibrant and important sector.

Business Services, Northern Ireland

People who answered more negatively highlighted the levels of work intensity and pressure, the stressful working environment, high expectations of employers, clients and regulators and a lack of work-life balance.

“ I think there are better career options, and more ways to utilise a law degree than being a solicitor. Many solicitor roles are underpaid, with poor work-life balance, poor maternity/paternity leave and a sense of cliquiness.

Trainee Solicitor, Scotland

A number of people had mixed feelings about legal careers, highlighting both positive and negative aspects.

“ I love the law but the industry is bad for its people.

Chartered Legal Executive, England

“ It is an exciting and challenging career as a barrister but it is unpredictable and exhausting at times.

Junior Barrister, England

A significant number of people emphasised the need for aspiring legal professionals to have realistic expectations, emphasising that not everyone was suited to life in the law.

“ Certain types of people can take to the sector better than others.

Patent Attorney, England

“ It depends on the person - it isn’t for everyone and it depends what you want from your life and career. If you want good work life balance or low stress then it isn’t for you. But if you want challenging, meaningful and engaging work then it might be.

Junior Solicitor, Scotland

The changing legal workplace

It is important to understand the views discussed in the previous sections by taking into account how quickly working in the legal sector has changed since the pandemic. In our survey we asked how working in the sector had changed since January 2020 (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic). While **13%** of participants suggested that their experience had not changed, **39%** indicated it had changed somewhat and **48%** indicated it had changed significantly.

People who had experienced change were asked about the impact of this on their mental health and wellbeing. While **26.3%** suggested that the changes had been neutral, **25.1%** indicated that they had been somewhat or very negative but **48.6%** indicated they had been somewhat or very positive.

Key changes identified included:

Changes in perceptions of and approaches to mental health and wellbeing

In our survey of organisations, we asked whether the organisation had changed any aspects of its approach to mental health and wellbeing since January 2020 (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic). A majority **64.6%** said 'Yes' with **18.3%** 'Unsure' and **17.1%** indicated no change. Those participants who explained their answer focused on positive change, including increasing awareness and discussion, together with greater provision of training, resources and support.

A small number of those completing the survey for individuals noted positive shifts in both individual attitudes (including their own awareness of wellbeing) and those of legal workplaces.

“**Women are slowly being respected and treated with more equality. There is a long way to go, but things have improved.**

Senior Barrister, England

“**More openness to talking about mental health. More access to counselling, wellbeing coaching and therapy services. More senior people being open about their own mental ill-health.**

Business Services, England

The rise of hybrid and flexible working

There has been an increase in opportunities to work from home or in a hybrid fashion, including a growth in online court hearings. This was the most commonly identified change, with most references to it being positive. The flexibility this can provide and the opportunities for better work-life balance were highlighted.

“Working from home has been a game changer in terms of managing childcare and managing my disability. I love it and it gives me so much more work life balance. I feel like it has prolonged my career by 10 years.

Senior Solicitor, England

However, it is worth noting that some people also highlighted disadvantages, including a loss of social connectedness and collegiality. A growing expectation of 24/7 availability amongst clients was also observed.



“The key change is in no longer working with others in an office so losing the social interaction and the opportunity to discuss any issues, shared experiences etc.

Senior Solicitor, Scotland

Increased workloads, pressure and demands

These changes were highlighted by a number of people. Comments included both resource issues (for example, high staff turnover) and attitudinal changes. Changes in attitudes included increased expectations from clients and a lack of civility from colleagues, clients and other professionals. Several mentions were also made of high regulatory burdens.

“More work, shorter deadlines, fewer lawyers, higher pressure, more greed.

Senior Solicitor, England

The findings within this section show that overall, many people feel dissatisfied with their workplace and the legal sector as a whole. It is encouraging that positive change has been experienced in the post Covid-19 workplace, but this is not uniform and not all change has been beneficial.

What are the current levels of mental health and wellbeing of people in the legal sector?

This section explores mental wellbeing, mental ill health (and its disclosure at work) and burnout levels.

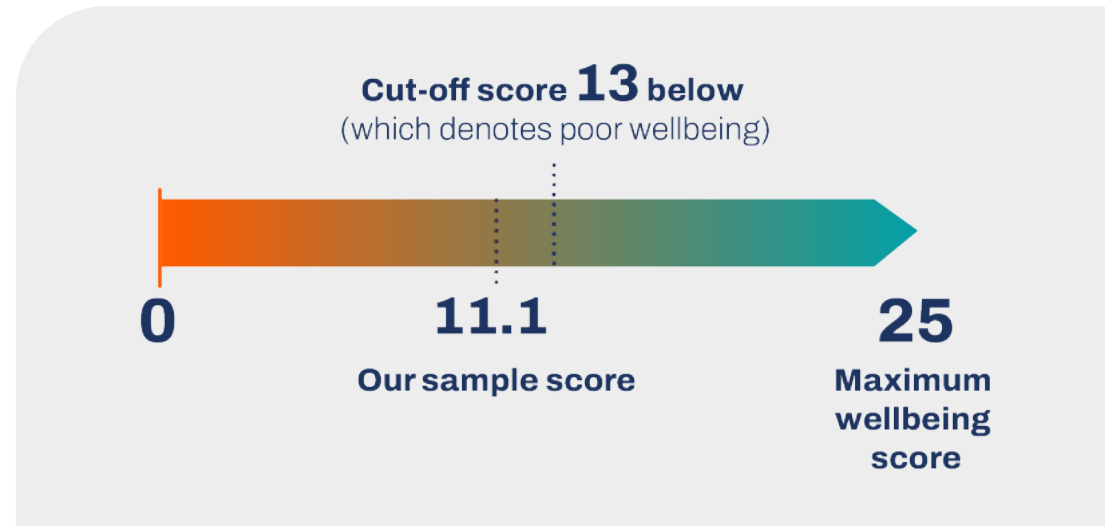
Mental wellbeing

We asked people to complete the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) - Five Well-Being Index \('WHO-5'\)](#). This is a commonly used measure of mental wellbeing. Reflecting on the preceding two weeks, people rank themselves from 0 ('At no time') to 5 ('All the time') in relation to five statements, which include, 'I have felt cheerful and in good spirits' and 'I woke up feeling fresh and rested'.

A person's WHO-5 score can range from 0 to 25, with 0 representing the worst possible mental wellbeing and 25 representing the best possible mental wellbeing.

In our survey, the overall average mental wellbeing score was 11.1 with **59.1%** scoring under 13. A score below 13 has been suggested as a cut-off for poor wellbeing and as an indication for further assessment for the possible presence of a mental health condition, such as depression.

The score can be converted to a percentage by multiplying it by 4. The average percentage score in our survey was **44%**, which is



significantly lower than the **59%** average wellbeing score of the UK's adult population ([European Quality of Life Survey, 2012](#)). It is also lower than the score of **51%** reported in the [International Bar Association's 2021 global survey of lawyers](#).

Many people (**43.4%**) said their mental health and wellbeing was very significantly influenced by work, especially due to its ongoing, high-pressure nature. Those who felt work had a major impact generally had lower wellbeing scores.

“ Monday to Friday my days are filled with work from getting up to going to bed after midnight, so there is no time for any other activity that might influence the answers I gave.

Junior Solicitor, England

Nearly half (**46.3%**) said work had a moderate impact, often alongside personal circumstances.

“ I have been stressed about things in my personal life but stress from work has recently compounded those issues and I have felt overwhelmed.

Junior Barrister, England

“ I have a busy work and home life with children, and a renovation, and try to fit in minimum exercise, it's a lot.

Senior Solicitor, Northern Ireland

Only **10.3%** indicated that their responses were not at all influenced by work. Reasons for this varied from recent personal experiences and challenges (such as illness) to a determination not to let work impact upon their personal lives.

Mental ill-health

The charity [Mind highlights](#) that approximately one in four people in England will experience a mental health condition each year. There is evidence that this figure may be higher in some [other parts of the UK](#).

In our survey, people were asked to identify how often in the preceding 12 months they had experienced various forms of mental ill-health (or consequences of mental ill-health) as a result of their work.

50.0% of people said they had experienced anxiety, either often, very often or all of the time, over the last 12 months; **39.2%** had experienced low mood; and **25.9%** had experienced depression.

50.0% of people said they had experienced anxiety, either often, very often or all of the time

Disclosure of mental ill-health

People were also asked whether they had talked to anyone at work about any mental ill-health they had experienced in the past 12 months. Of the **64.3%** of people who had experienced mental ill-health, **37.1%** had disclosed this to their peers at work, **26.6%** had disclosed it to their line manager or supervisor and **12.2%** to their Human Resources Department.

However, nearly a quarter (**24.1%**) had not disclosed their mental ill-health at work. Some people said that they had no one to disclose it to, for example, where they were self-employed. Others viewed it as unrelated to their work, insufficiently severe and/or something to deal with personally or with other forms of external help (for example, a therapist). A significant number highlighted a fear of negative consequences or felt that disclosure would not lead to action.

A significant number highlighted a fear of negative consequences or felt that disclosure would not lead to action



There will always be a stigma against people with mental health issues. I have never felt safe discussing it.

Paralegal, England



Work has the same answer: we have no resources to give you to allow your workload to become manageable, therefore get on with it.

Senior Solicitor, Northern Ireland

In our survey of organisations, less than half (**47.6%**) indicated that they had a policy or procedure in place in the event of a disclosure of mental ill health.

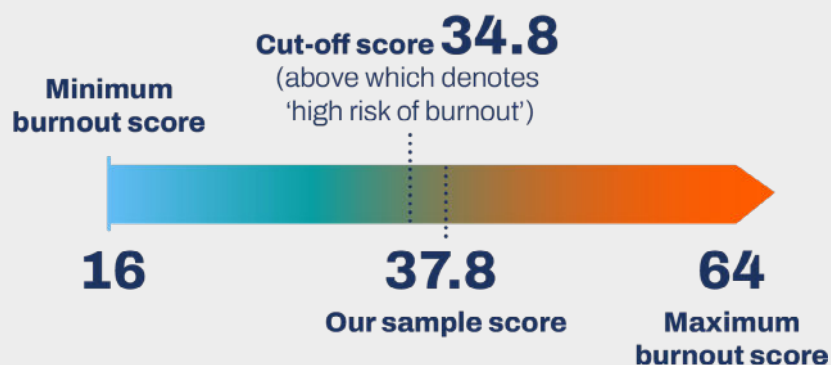
Burnout

Burnout is a negative mental state where people feel emotionally exhausted by and disengaged in, their work. We used the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory to measure levels of burnout. People rank themselves from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree' on 16 statements. Eight of the statements measure exhaustion levels, including 'There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work'. The other eight measure levels of disengagement, including 'I always find new and interesting aspects in my work'.

Following the methodology adopted in previous studies, including Life in the Law 2021, a score above 34.8 indicates a 'high risk of burnout' representing a cause for concern.

“The pressure of my role causes constant anxiety, stress and burnout symptoms.

Partner, England



In our survey the average score for burnout was 37.8 which suggests that people in our research showed a high risk of burnout

The results in this section make it clear that people working in law are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing and are at high risk of burnout. Despite this, nearly a quarter of people said they were unable or unwilling to disclose mental ill-health in their workplace.

What is undermining mental health and wellbeing in the legal workplace?

Our survey for individuals asked about work intensity, psychological safety and bullying, harassment and discrimination.

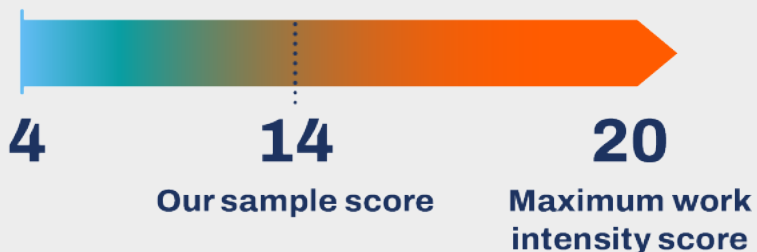
Work intensity

Work intensity looks at both the number of hours worked and how intense the effort is during the time worked.

We asked four questions to establish levels of work intensity, with potential total scores ranging from 4 to 20. People were asked to rate their agreement to statements, which included 'My workload is unpredictable' and 'My work requires me to be available to clients 24/7'.

The average score was 14.0 which indicates a high level of work intensity overall.

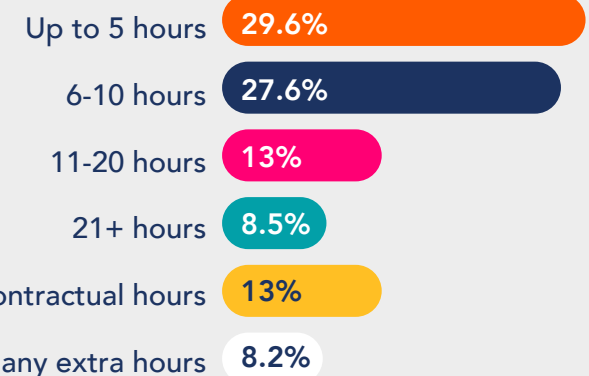
Minimum work intensity score



People were also asked how many extra hours (over their contracted time) they worked per week. **78.7%** worked over their contracted time with **8.5%** estimating they worked 21+ extra hours per week.



On average, regardless of what your usual contractual hours are, how many extra hours do you estimate you work per week?



Additionally, just under half (**45%**) said they 'Agreed' or 'Strongly agreed' with the statement 'I worry about meeting my chargeable hours or billing targets'.



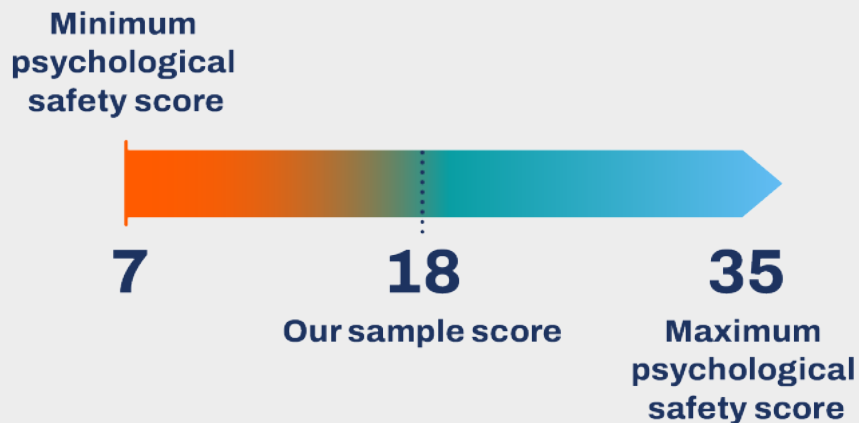
Work has nearly broken me - physically and mentally.

Partner, England

Psychological safety

The term 'psychological safety' refers to how safe people feel in a workplace to raise concerns, questions and ideas. Measuring psychological safety is an important way to assess workplace culture. Higher levels of psychological safety facilitate positive information sharing and learning behaviours. Lower levels can negatively affect employee turnover, levels of innovation and organisational performance.

We asked seven questions to establish levels of psychological safety, with potential overall scores ranging from 7 to 35 (with 7 being very low and 35 being very high levels). People were asked to rate their agreement to statements, which included 'If you make a mistake in my team, it is often held against you' and 'Working with members of my team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised'.



In our survey, the average score for psychological safety was 18.0 this falls within the lower half of the survey's range, indicating people did not always feel psychologically safe



Those experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing and those with higher risk of burnout and/or higher work intensity had lower levels of psychological safety.

Bullying, harassment and discrimination

Nearly a fifth of people (**19.5%**) said 'Yes' they felt they had been bullied, harassed, or discriminated against at work in the preceding 12 months.

The majority (**67%**) of those who answered 'Yes' said they had felt bullied, with **54%** feeling discriminated against and **38.7%** feeling harassed.

When asked who they felt had bullied, harassed, or discriminated against them, a wide range of answers were provided. However, a majority referred to line managers/supervisors (**65%**). Peers (**33.7%**), clients (**16%**), others (**13%**) and the judiciary (**8%**) were the next most frequent answers.

Those who said they felt they were being bullied, harassed or discriminated against were also asked if they felt this was due to one of the protected characteristics as contained in the Equality Act 2010. The most common characteristics indicated were 'Sex' (**29%**) followed by 'Age' (**26%**) and 'Disability' (**16.7%**).

They were also asked if the bullying, harassment or discrimination had been dealt with appropriately, **71.8%** said 'No'. This is despite our survey of organisations indicating that **81.9%** of them had a policy/ procedures in place in the event of a disclosure of workplace bullying, harassment or discrimination.



The results in this section show that many people feel their work is becoming more intense and they do not always feel safe to speak up or be themselves at work. Nearly one in five reported experiencing bullying, harassment, or discrimination.

Who is most impacted in the legal sector?



Further analyses were undertaken in relation to mental wellbeing, burnout, psychological safety and work intensity, to explore relationships with individual characteristics. In relation to the psychological safety analyses we noted some seeming statistical anomalies. These are not detailed here as they require further exploration before being formally reported.

A number of statistically significant differences were found against mental wellbeing, burnout and work intensity.

Age

The 26-35 age group had the lowest average WHO-5 score for mental wellbeing, with scores then gradually increasing up to the 56-65 age range. We saw a similar pattern in relation to burnout, with the 26-35 age range having the highest scores which then decreased slowly until 56-65. The average level of work intensity was highest in the age group 36-45, with a significant increase between 18-25 and 26-35.

Carers

Those who had caring responsibilities had a higher average work intensity level than those who did not. No statistically significant differences in mental wellbeing and burnout were found, although mental wellbeing levels were low and burnout levels high for all.

Disability

People who identified as disabled had a lower average WHO-5 score for mental wellbeing than those who did not. They also had higher burnout scores than people who did not identify as disabled. No statistically significant difference in work intensity was found, although work intensity levels overall were high for all.

Ethnicity

People who identified as belonging to a minority ethnic group and those of white origins showed no significant statistical differences in WHO-5 score for mental wellbeing, burnout and work intensity scores, although all groups experienced low levels of mental wellbeing, as well as high levels of burnout and work intensity.

Gender

People who identified as female had a lower average WHO-5 score for mental wellbeing and higher average level of burnout than those who identified as male. No statistically significant difference in work intensity was found, although the work intensity level was high for all.

Neurodivergence

The survey also asked if people identified as neurodivergent. Those who did had a lower average WHO-5 score for mental wellbeing than those who did not. No statistically significant differences in work intensity or burnout levels were found, although the work intensity levels and burnout levels were high for all.

These findings demonstrate the need for legal workplaces to acknowledge and address the links between wellbeing and diversity, equality and inclusion.

What could have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing at work?

Drawing on our stakeholder roundtable discussions to develop the survey questions, our survey focused on two factors that can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing in the workplace:



Managing people

training for managers and valuing managerial roles



Legal education

Managing people

Managers have a crucial role to play in the legal workplace, from allocating matters and providing feedback on work, to conducting supervisions and appraisals, to supporting colleagues and fostering a positive workplace culture.

While a number of roles in the legal sector do not involve managing people (for example, self-employed barrister or advocate), nearly half of people in our survey for individuals did manage others (**49.7%**).

Training for managers

In our survey for individuals, of the **49.7%** who said that they managed others in their role, just over half (**54.6%**) had received training to support them to do this. The type of training received varied widely,

including operational skills, wellbeing and mental health training and people skills. It was delivered both internally and by external providers, using a range of formats.

In our survey for organisations, **46.3%** said they offered training to everyone who managed others and **29.3%** provided it for some. Common topics included general management training, supervision of trainees and communication skills. Less than a quarter (**21%**) provided specific mental health and wellbeing training for everyone who managed others. Under half (**41.9%**) provided it for some.

66.8% of those who managed people said that there was additional training that would support them. Suggestions for this were diverse, ranging from general management training to specific areas such as conducting appraisals, performance management, communication skills, equality, diversity and inclusion and employment law and policies. The importance of regular updates was emphasised by several people.



Anything and everything: management is about constantly learning and adapting.

Partner, England

A number of people also emphasised the importance of peer learning for managers, for example, through coaching and mentoring.

Additionally, **93%** of people said they thought training should be mandatory for those who are managing people. When asked to explain their answer, those in favour of compulsory training emphasised that:

- > **In some workplaces**, taking on management responsibilities is a prerequisite for promotion as a lawyer. In others, it is a consequence of promotion.
- > **Despite this expectation**, individuals are commonly promoted because they are good lawyers not because they are necessarily good managers.
- > **Being a good manager** requires the development of a specific skill set which therefore needs to be taught and learnt. This is important for both the manager and the people being managed.
- > **The harmful consequences of poor management** are significant, such as low staff morale, low psychological safety, attrition, mistakes and poor ethical decision making which can be detrimental to both individuals and the wider sector.

93% of people said they thought training should be mandatory for those who are managing people

“People management is a special skill... It does not follow that because someone is a good lawyer, they are a good manager.”

Participant, Isle of Man

The small minority not in favour of compulsory training raised a range of concerns, including pressure on resources and a belief that good management was about experience or character rather than training.



Valuing managerial roles

Given the importance of managerial roles within the workplace, considerable time is required by managers to fulfil their responsibilities fully. However, less than a third (**31.3%**) of those with management responsibilities said that their targets or billable hours were adjusted to take into account the time they need to spend managing others or undertaking appropriate training. In our survey for organisations, less than half (**40.3%**) adjusted targets or billable hours accordingly.

Of the people who received an adjustment, only **31.7%** viewed it as adequate. Others said that the time allocated did not accurately reflect the workload and responsibilities involved in management. For those in fee-earning environments, it was felt that chargeable hours and billing were prioritised.

“ There is no adjustment made for this time. You are expected to meet your billable hours targets on top of your people management responsibilities. That unfortunately gives a clear signal as to what an organisation’s priorities are.

Senior Solicitor, England

“ Managerial tasks are completed during overtime.

Business Services, England

A similar picture emerged in relation to recognition of the time and effort spent managing others in performance measurements. Less than half of those in managerial roles (**43.7%**) said they received such recognition (in the survey for organisations this was **50%**). A range of reasons were given for this, such as management performance was not measured, management responsibilities were just expected or assumed, the management role was only raised when a problem had arisen or there was informal discussion but no formal measurement.

“ This is seen as an add on for which no adjustment to workload is made and there is no recognition of this additional role.

Junior Solicitor, Scotland

However, examples of good practice were highlighted by some.

“ I have a reduced time and billing target, we are asked to provide training and mentorship as part of our KPIs which ties in with my role.

Partner, England

“ Beyond the appraisal process, my line manager regularly checks in with me around this!

Business Services, England

Legal education

Most people joining the legal sector will undergo a period of vocational training before (or at the same time as) entering the workplace. This includes **87.2%** of the people who completed our survey for individuals.

They were asked how well they felt their vocational training equipped them for the realities of working in the legal sector. The majority (**54.8%**) felt it had prepared them 'Somewhat' with **15.8%** saying it had prepared them 'Very well'. However, **16.7%** answered 'Not at all' and **12.8%** did not undertake any vocational training.



When asked what (if anything) should be changed about vocational legal training, key themes included:

- > **The importance of focusing on wellbeing and resilience**, alongside the provision of appropriate support mechanisms for those undergoing training.
- > **The need to include leadership**, management, communication and inter-personal skills. These were identified as key skills for working with both colleagues and clients.
- > **The need to be highly practical** and reflect the realities of working in the legal sector. Suggested content included commercial awareness, understanding of business needs and expectations, business development and marketing and legal technology. The importance of 'hands-on' experience with mentorship from senior lawyers was also mentioned.
- > **The value of meaningful ongoing training** in legal workplaces was also highlighted.

“ Wellbeing and trauma informed approach is needed. As a barrister I deal with traumatic events daily & there is no supervision or support formally required by my governing body. It's astonishing that the legal profession in 2025 has not evolved to expect safe workplace practices.

Senior Barrister, England

What are workplaces already providing to support mental health and wellbeing?

We asked people and organisations about what their workplaces do to support mental health and wellbeing.

Individual perspectives

Our survey for individuals asked if their workplace had implemented any mental health and wellbeing initiatives, services, or support programmes that they had found helpful. **54.9%** of participants answered 'No' and **45.1%** answered 'Yes'.



When asked to explain what these measures were and why they had helped, the responses provided can be broadly grouped into four categories:

- 1. Provision of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) and other wellbeing-related benefits.** This includes access to counselling and/or therapy, helplines and private health insurance. Some limitations on this provision were noted, including content not necessarily being tailored to the individual workplace, a lack of resolution of underlying issues and a lack of time to use the benefits provided. Several people also referred to the provision of mental health or wellbeing days.

“ We have regular therapeutic 1-1 confidential supervision paid for by the firm. It is a safe space to offload and work through issues that arise with clients and colleagues.

Partner, England

- 2. Specific events and initiatives.** This includes workplace wellbeing committees and mental health champions and first aiders. It also encompasses wellbeing-related training and events, from educational webinars, to training on neurodiversity, to events on managing stress and imposter syndrome.

“ I enjoy our chambers wellbeing lunches as a way to connect.

Junior Barrister, England

- 3. Fostering a positive workplace and/or team culture.** This includes forms of recognition and reward, opportunities to socialise with colleagues, being provided with support by senior staff, having access to supervision, mentoring and/or coaching and having good practice modelled by senior staff.

“ Regular one-to-ones enable you to be able to discuss any issues, stresses etc before they become too big and also allow you to let managers know what pressures you are dealing with and if your mental health is being affected.

Business Services, Wales

- 4. Wider workplace policies and provision.** This includes flexible working and working from home, phased returns to work after absences, gym membership, support from Human Resources (or similar) and the provision of reasonable adjustments.



Organisational perspectives

In our survey for organisations, **87.8%** said that the mental health and wellbeing of employees/ members/ colleagues was a priority issue for them.

The survey showed:

1. Over three quarters (**75.6%**) said that they had a designated individual or team in the organisation with responsibility for employee/ member/ colleague mental health and wellbeing. Relatively few organisations had an individual or team solely dedicated to mental health and wellbeing as this was usually incorporated into a wider role.
2. **72.6%** of organisations who responded to the question said that this individual or team was provided with specific training relating to mental health and wellbeing.
3. Over two thirds (**68.3%**) had a policy or policies dealing with employee/ member/ colleague mental health and wellbeing whereas **23.2%** did not. The picture of who was involved in policy development and implementation was mixed, with only a quarter of organisations (**25%**) having a majority of senior individuals involved.
4. **43.9%** did not collect data relating to peoples' mental health and wellbeing, **36.6%** said that they did and **19.5%** were 'Unsure'. Where data was collected, this ranged from statistics relating to the use of Employee Assistance Programmes, staff surveys and rates of absence. Data was used to inform strategy/ policy, to identify gaps and check progress and to support individuals and/ or mental health and wellbeing at work.
5. Over half (**57.3%**) monitored working hours or capacity, over a quarter (**26.8%**) did not and **15.9%** were 'Unsure'. This was done through time recording, check ins/ reviews/ discussions and workload management tools.
6. Half (**50%**) evaluated the take-up and effectiveness of wellbeing initiatives, services or support programmes. **25%** did not and **25%** were 'Unsure'. Evaluation methods included take-up/ attendance and feedback on specific events or initiatives. Reasons for not evaluating included a lack of resources and capacity, together with concerns about individual privacy.



What's the one thing that you would like to see?

In our survey for individuals, we asked 'What is the one thing that you would ask your employer, supervisor, or manager to do to help improve your mental health and wellbeing? Or if self-employed what measure would help you in your role?'

It is worth noting that a number of people gave examples of existing good practices and/or said that no further changes were required. The responses of those who did suggest changes can be broadly grouped into three categories:

1. A greater focus on wellbeing and mental health support.

This includes additional training on wellbeing and mental health for everyone (including senior staff), providing easily accessible resources (for example, support services and groups and mental health champions) and responding appropriately to concerns and issues that arise. The importance of mental health and wellbeing being prioritised and this moving beyond a 'tick box' exercise to more meaningful implementation of appropriate strategies and support were also suggested.



Actions not words - my firm talk about wellness but they ultimately do not care about it.

Junior Solicitor, Scotland



- 2. Improvement in workplace culture.** This includes increased dialogue and discussions, regular check-ins and supervisions, ensuring expectations were realistic and focusing on recognition and respect. Issues with a lack of transparency and unequal treatment were highlighted as problematic.

“ **I would ask my employer to foster an open and supportive environment where mental health is normalized and employees feel safe to speak up without fear of judgment or negative consequences.**

Senior Solicitor, England

- 3. Changes in working practices.** This includes the provision of flexibility in when and where individuals work, better pay, recruitment of additional staff (both in terms of fee-earners and support staff), and better workload and target allocation and management. People also suggested the provision of suitable workspaces and technology and additional annual leave with the further option of mental health and wellbeing days. Ensuring appropriate time was allocated for management responsibilities and other non-billable activities was also raised. A sense of increased pressure from regulators was also noted by several people.

“ **Manage overwork and over performance as much as under performance.**

Partner, England



What evidence-based steps can organisations take to improve mental health and wellbeing in the legal workplace?

The findings of our research highlight high levels of dissatisfaction with legal workplaces and the legal sector as a whole. They demonstrate that people working in the sector are experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing, are at high risk of burnout, may not feel psychologically safe and have high levels of work intensity. In addition, nearly a fifth of people are still experiencing bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Although many organisations have taken positive steps to support mental health and wellbeing, most of these efforts focus on raising awareness or reacting to issues after they happen, rather than preventing them in the first place. If this approach becomes the dominant focus, there is a danger that the inherent risks to mental health from the impact of day-to-day culture and practice in the legal workplace are overlooked and we miss the chance to take steps to reduce that harm/risk.

Now is the time to take the next step and address the underlying practices in law that undermine mental health and wellbeing to mitigate these ongoing risks. The evidence from this report clearly shows that despite increased activity and growing awareness, which is encouraging to see, we're not seeing any real change. Our research demonstrates overall wellbeing levels across the sector remain low.

There is an urgent need for those who have leadership roles in organisations across the legal sector to take ownership of mental health and wellbeing. This applies to anyone who has influence in a team or organisation, whether responsible for one individual or hundreds, whether having overall organisational responsibility or a more limited area of responsibility. It is vital that all leaders use the influence and autonomy they have to address the underlying practices impacting upon the mental health and wellbeing of those within the organisation.

This means moving beyond reactive support to actively putting in place preventative measures and embedding workplace practices that protect mental health and wellbeing.

The legal sector must:

- > **Move from a reactive approach** to mental health and wellbeing to prevention,
- > **Implement practices that protect mental health** and wellbeing at work and
- > **Proactively identify and implement** ways to enhance mental health and wellbeing at work.

Recommendations - How to implement practices that protect, promote and enhance mental health and wellbeing in legal workplaces



1. Actively manage workloads

High levels of work intensity can lead to poor work-life balance, increased stress and poor levels of mental health and wellbeing.

Despite this, the findings of our surveys show that levels of work intensity across the sector are high, with people routinely working significantly over their contracted hours.

Legal workplaces need to proactively manage the workloads of individuals and teams so that work intensity is kept at a sustainable level. At the same time, workplaces need to identify what's driving high workloads and what action needs to be taken to address this. For example, this may include reviewing staffing levels and/or reassessing targets and key performance indicators.

Leaders need to identify ways to work with individuals, teams, clients and other stakeholders to set realistic and achievable expectations. Key performance indicators that measure more than achieving billing targets should be introduced. The common practice of linking bonuses to exceeding targets should be questioned, as it encourages people to work longer hours. This also means challenging the cultural norm that long hours and constant availability are the only ways to succeed in law.



2. Prioritise and value managing people

Leaders in legal workplaces need to recognise the value of managing others and ensure this is adequately resourced. Supportive managers are

consistently associated with better mental health outcomes in employees ([CIPD \(2023\) Health and Wellbeing at Work](#)). However, the findings of our surveys demonstrate that managing people is undervalued and under-resourced within the legal sector.

Workplaces need to question underlying assumptions which guide their current approach to managing people, acknowledging that a good lawyer does not automatically make a good manager. Consequently, a senior lawyer should not automatically be given management responsibilities.

Legal workplaces must ensure that they equip all those who manage people with appropriate ongoing training and support and that management responsibilities are fully acknowledged within workload allocations, key performance indicators, annual objectives and appraisals.



3. Embed hybrid and flexible working options

Offering hybrid and flexible working arrangements is beneficial in terms of both mental health and wellbeing and equality, diversity and

inclusion. Our findings show how much these are valued. However, they also demonstrate that there are challenges involved in implementing these arrangements successfully, including a potential loss of collegiality and increased isolation for some.

Legal workplaces need to avoid responding to these challenges by automatically reverting to pre-pandemic norms or simply replicating full time and in-person ways of working in hybrid and flexible environments. Instead, they need to put in place hybrid and flexible working arrangements in a way which recognises the opportunities and challenges involved. How this is approached may well look different between legal workplaces, but for leaders it is dialogue, consultation and collaboration that will be key.



4. Evaluate programmes and activities that support mental health and wellbeing at work

To understand what works and why, it is vital to evaluate existing mental health and

wellbeing programmes and activities. Learnings from these evaluations then need to be followed up with further development and where necessary, adjustments made to the programme or activity.

Our findings suggest that such evaluation is not routinely embedded into many legal workplaces. Leaders in legal workplaces need to ensure that this evaluation is prioritised, that they review it and take responsibility for appropriate follow up action. This does not have to be a case of 'reinventing the wheel' as there are already a range of workplaces (both within and external to the legal sector) where such evaluations are already well integrated.



5. Legal education and training should equip people joining the sector with the skills and knowledge they need for a sustainable legal career

Legal education and training have an important role to play

in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the sector. It should prepare aspiring lawyers for life in the law by equipping them with the tools to work in healthy ways, maintain their mental health and wellbeing and recognise when wider systemic issues are negatively impacting them.

The findings of our surveys suggest that there remains work to be done to ensure that this form of preparation is integrated into learning and teaching environments. For bodies that regulate and supervise education and training, there is a need to consider whether existing competency frameworks and educational requirements are achieving this, and if not, how this can be addressed.

Conclusion



The legal profession in the UK is recognised around the world for its excellence and high standards. But behind this strength lies an undeniable truth, the pressures of legal practice have a significant negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. If we are to build a sector that is sustainable and fit for the 21st century, leaders across firms, chambers, in house teams, law schools, insurers, regulators and professional bodies must take tangible action on mental health.

The recommendations in this report call on these leaders to take responsibility and make mental health and wellbeing a core part of the business of law. Mental health needs to be on their agenda.

The next generation of professionals are choosing careers where mental health and wellbeing are valued. Leaders need to be accountable for preventative and protective action to address the mental health and wellbeing challenges in our sector. By doing so, they will contribute to the sustainability not only of their own organisations, but also of the sector as a whole.

A sector that champions mental health and wellbeing is progressive, will inspire public trust and confidence, support ethical behaviour and ensure the law remains a career that a wide range of people aspire to join.

The challenge and opportunity before us is to act decisively now for a sustainable future.

Appendix 1 - Methodology

This part of our report contains a brief summary of methodology. Further information can be provided upon request.

Data collection and analysis

- > Survey questions were informed by the findings of a series of virtual roundtables including stakeholders from across the legal profession.
- > Our online surveys for individuals and organisations were open for responses from 15 January 2025 to 21 March 2025. Our survey for individuals received **1,541** responses. Our survey for organisations received **82** responses.
- > Quantitative responses were analysed using statistical software calculating the mean scores of the test items and conducting a series of statistical analyses. These included one-way ANOVA to assess group differences, Cronbach's alpha to test the internal reliability of the survey scales and correlation analysis to explore relationships between key variables.
- > Qualitative survey responses were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.
- > Nearly three quarters of participants worked mainly in England (**74.1%**) with the next largest grouping working mainly in Scotland (**15.6%**) and the smallest number working in the Isle of Man (**0.4%**). The length of time worked within the legal sector ranged from 0-5 years (**16.7%**) to 21+ years (**38.8%**). **8.6%** were currently in pre-qualification training.
- > Participants were asked to select which category best represented their role, with the largest being 'Senior Solicitor' (Senior Associate/ Senior Counsel or Equivalent) (**21.8%**), followed by 'Partner/ Director or Equivalent' (**21.7%**). A wide range of other roles were represented, including those in 'Business Services and Equivalent Roles' (**11.5%**). A majority of participants worked in a 'Law Firm/ Legal Services Provider' (**70.5%**) with **15.4%** working 'In-house for a Company/ Corporation/ Public Sector' and **8%** working in a 'Barristers Chambers/ Stables/ Library'. A wide range of other settings were represented. The size of organisations which individuals worked within varied from 0-10 people (**7.3%**) to 251+ people (**46.5%**).
- > A wide range of areas of law were also represented, with the largest being 'Property' (**15.4%**), 'Private Client' (**10.4%**) and 'Family and Children' (**9.3%**).

Participants – survey for individuals

Our survey for individuals was open to anyone who identified as working in the legal sector in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. Responses indicate that this included several individuals who were on a career break or had recently retired, legal academics and a work experience student.

Participants – survey for organisations

Our survey of organisations was open to any organisations in the legal sector in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

- > The largest category of organisations was 'Law Firm/ Legal Services Provider' (**63.4%**) followed by 'Company/ Corporation/ Public Sector' (**24.4%**) and 'Barristers Chambers/ Stable/ Library' (**4.9%**). The role of the individual completing the survey on behalf of the organisation varied widely, including (amongst others) those identifying as a 'Partner/ Director/ CEO' (**25.6%**), 'Human Resources Professionals' (**24.4%**), 'General Counsel/ Office of General Counsel' (**17.1%**) and 'Wellbeing Leads' (**13.4%**).
- > The largest number of participants had multiple office locations in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man (**41%**) while others had a single office location (**30.5%**) or international offices (**28%**). The size of organisations ranged from 1-10 people (**11%**) to 251+ people (**59.8%**).

Reporting of data

The following reporting conventions have been applied in this report:

- > Where results are provided in percentages they have been rounded to one decimal place. Where reported in other numerical formats, they have been rounded to two decimal places. This rounding-up does mean the figures stated may not always add up to an exact round figure.
- > Where reference is made to 'minority ethnic groupings', this refers to people who did not identify as 'White' or 'White British' in their survey response.
- > Where quotations from participants have been used, the first 'identifier' within a category has been used as a descriptor (for example, where a participant selected 'Partner/ Director or Equivalent)' they would be referred to as 'Partner'. Where there are concerns a participant may be potentially identifiable the term 'Participant' has been used instead.
- > Where a quotation contained an obvious typographical error, this has been corrected.



www.lawcare.org.uk

LawCare Ltd
PO Box 576,
Newton Abbot,
TQ12 9NN

Tel: 07939 010 739
Email: admin@lawcare.org.uk

Helpline: Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm
Tel: 0800 279 6888
Email: support@lawcare.org.uk

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