

2023/24

MARKET UPDATE & SALARY GUIDE

IN-HOUSE LEGAL & PRIVATE PRACTICE LAW FIRMS IN AUSTRALIA



2023/24

Our Insights

The salary wave has been bumpy and unpredictable since 2020 and staff retention challenges will continue to plague employers for the foreseeable future, leading to continued unpredictability in salaries.

During 2021, after watching the overseas market (especially London and the US) and concerned with “the great resignation”, we started to see salary rises driven by Private Practice firms. After a stagnant growth period throughout peak COVID-19, the salary rises were initially aimed at staff retention, but this then inevitably led to salary rises across the board as firms started competing for talent amidst increased salary bandings plus a shortage of Australian candidates coming back from overseas. On top of this we found the overseas legal market (typically UK and New York) were particularly active luring top level junior Australian talent with big salaries and opportunities to fulfill their life experience bucket after two years of COVID-19. Ongoing border controls also did nothing to entice international lawyers and/or Australian lawyers to return home.

We also found that specifically in Victoria, senior lawyers in both in-house and Private Practice seemed fatigued due to work from home and staff pressures throughout COVID-19. This led to them requesting additional resources to ease workloads and they were willing to pay top dollar to relieve the pressure.

Another factor pulling talent away from firms was a resurgence in top tier lawyers moving in-house. Companies have seen greater benefit in building their in-house legal teams and the move away from a traditional private practice role has been very attractive to some lawyers, especially after the pressure of previous years in client-facing roles. This has meant in-house salaries have also risen while they compete with the firms for talent. Other driving factors in specific industries also must be taken into account, such as the infrastructure boom in Victoria (“Victoria’s Big Build”) leading to a shortage of procurement/projects and construction lawyers, and an increase in renewable energy project activity.

In terms of the future, we are seeing that salaries have somewhat steadied over the last 6 months as the market evens out, however staff retention issues will continue to be prevalent and therefore will continue to unsettle the market and produce more random salary offers.

Strap in and stay tuned!

PRIVATE PRACTICE

MAJORS / TOP TIER

YEAR LEVEL	MELBOURNE		SYDNEY	
	RANGE	MODE	RANGE	MODE
Graduate	\$85-95,000	\$90,000	\$90-110,000	\$100,000
1-2 PQE	\$90-110,000	\$95,000	\$95-120,000	\$110,000
2-3 PQE	\$105-125,000	\$105,000	\$110-135,000	\$120,000
3-4 PQE	\$125-145,000	\$130,000	\$135-150,000	\$135,000
4-5 PQE	\$140-165,000	\$155,000	\$140-170,000	\$160,000
SA L1-L2	\$150-175,000	\$160,000	\$160-185,000	\$170,000
SA L2-L3	\$170-200,000	\$175,000	\$175-200,000	\$190,000
SA L3-L4	\$185-220,000	\$200,000	\$190-235,000	\$220,000
SA L4 - (SC)	\$210-330,000	\$260,000	\$230-340,000	\$280,000

MEDIUM / MID TIER

YEAR LEVEL	MELBOURNE		SYDNEY	
	RANGE	MODE	RANGE	MODE
Graduate	\$75-90,000	\$85,000	\$80-100,000	\$90,000
1-2 PQE	\$85-100,000	\$100,000	\$90-110,000	\$110,000
2-3 PQE	\$100-120,000	\$110,000	\$105-135,000	\$115,000
3-4 PQE	\$120-135,000	\$130,000	\$125-145,000	\$130,000
4-5 PQE	\$135-150,000	\$145,000	\$130-160,000	\$140,000
SA L1-L2	\$145-160,000	\$150,000	\$150-165,000	\$155,000
SA L2-L3	\$165-185,000	\$175,000	\$170-205,000	\$190,000
SA L3-L4	\$175-210,000	\$200,000	\$185-215,000	\$200,000
SA L4 - (SC)	\$190-260,000	\$215,000	\$200-290,000	\$245,000

BOUTIQUE / SMALL

YEAR LEVEL	MELBOURNE	SYDNEY
Graduate	\$65-85,000	\$70-90,000
1-2 PQE	\$75-95,000	\$80-100,000
2-3 PQE	\$85-105,000	\$90-115,000
3-4 PQE	\$90-125,000	\$100-135,000
4-5 PQE	\$105-140,000	\$110-155,000
SA L1-L2	\$125-160,000	\$140-175,000
SA L2-L3	\$140-180,000	\$150-195,000
SA L3-L4	\$150-190,000	\$160-200,000
SA L4 - (SC)	\$180-250,000	\$190-280,000

IN HOUSE

MELBOURNE

TITLE	0-2 years	3-5 years	6-10 years	10+ years	DGC	GC
FMCG	\$90-120,000	\$120-165,000	\$160-240,000	\$230,000+	\$265+	\$300+
IT / TELCO	\$100-130,000	\$125-175,000	\$165-260,000	\$240,000+	\$285+	\$320+
Media & Entertainment	\$85-115,000	\$115-170,000	\$160-225,000	\$225,000+	\$265+	\$300+
Property & Construction	\$100-125,000	\$135-175,000	\$175-275,000	\$250,000+	\$280+	\$320+
Energy & Resources	\$95-135,000	\$135-175,000	\$175-275,000	\$250,000+	\$280+	\$320+
Trade & Transport	\$90-120,000	\$120-165,000	\$160-240,000	\$230,000+	\$265+	\$300+
Manufacturing	\$90-120,000	\$120-165,000	\$160-240,000	\$230,000+	\$265+	\$300+
B&F	\$100-130,000	\$125-175,000	\$165-260,000	\$240,000+	\$285+	\$320+

SYDNEY

TITLE	0-2 years	3-5 years	6-10 years	10+ years	DGC	GC
FMCG	\$100-135,000	\$130-175,000	\$170-250,000	\$240,000+	\$275+	\$310+
IT / TELCO	\$110-140,000	\$135-185,000	\$175-270,000	\$250,000+	\$295+	\$330+
Media & Entertainment	\$95-125,000	\$125-180,000	\$170-235,000	\$235,000+	\$275+	\$310+
Property & Construction	\$110-135,000	\$145-185,000	\$185-285,000	\$260,000+	\$290+	\$330+
Energy & Resources	\$105-145,000	\$145-185,000	\$185-285,000	\$260,000+	\$290+	\$330+
Trade & Transport	\$100-130,000	\$130-175,000	\$170-250,000	\$240,000+	\$275+	\$310+
Manufacturing	\$100-130,000	\$130-175,000	\$170-250,000	\$240,000+	\$275+	\$310+
B&F	\$115-145,000	\$145-190,000	\$185-275,000	\$255,000+	\$295+	\$320+

FOOTNOTES

(1) The defining criteria of what is a boutique, mid tier or top tier firm includes a combination of size, location, reputation, client list, quality of advice and expectations of the employer. Size is not determinative on its own and all other factors must be taken into account however, a rough guide is:- Major/Top Tier: approximately 300 plus staff in local office Medium/Mid Tier: approximately 50 -300+ staff in local office. Small/Boutique: approximately 0-50 in local office.

(2) Firms take into account a range of factors when determining individual salary amounts and an employee's position within a band will vary from firm to firm based on experience, speciality, background and performance. There can be significant elasticity across the bands and lawyers paid at the upper end of the bands are usually top performers within their internal peer group, in high-demand areas and often have additional skills over and above usual requirements for the role. For individual advice tailored to your circumstances, please call one of our consultants.

(3) As of June 2023, salary ranges and modes for the 2023/24 period are based on information provided to Ablethorpe Recruitment clients, candidates and other sources and are approximate guides only. They relate to salary packages (base plus superannuation) but do not include elements such as bonus/incentive schemes and stock options.

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