

An aerial photograph of Manchester, UK, showing a mix of modern glass skyscrapers and older brick buildings. A railway line with tracks and a yellow train is visible in the lower center. The sky is clear and blue.

Thornton Legal Salary Guide 2025 Manchester

thornton legal

The background of the slide is a low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a grand, classical-style building. The building features a series of tall, white, fluted columns that recede into the distance, creating a strong sense of perspective. The architecture includes ornate capitals and a pediment. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall tone is professional and authoritative.

Thornton Legal is pleased to share our latest salary guide for the Manchester legal market.

This guide covers commercial private practice across Corporate, Banking & Finance, Real Estate, Litigation, Employment, Insolvency & Restructuring, and Commercial Contracts, broken down by:

- Large Corporate (international/national firms)**
- Regional Commercial (UK regionals with Manchester presence)**
- Boutique / Independents (smaller Legal 500 niche firms)**

Salary data is drawn from live mandates, candidate offers and firm announcements during 2025. Figures represent base salary only (excluding bonuses and benefits).

This report reflects what we see in the Manchester market today.

Firm Examples (Tier Definitions)

Large Corporate (International / National)

International and national firms with Manchester offices, handling premium work for global and FTSE-listed clients.

Examples: Addleshaw Goddard, CMS, Eversheds Sutherland, Pinsent Masons, Shoosmiths, Squire Patton Boggs

Regional Commercial (UK Regionals with Manchester Presence)

UK regional firms with a strong Manchester base, combining quality work with greater accessibility and balance than the largest corporates.

Examples: Brabners, Mills & Reeve, TLT, Freeths, Ward Hadaway, Knights

Boutique / Independents (smaller Legal 500)

Smaller Legal 500-ranked practices, often specialist or Manchester-only, offering high-quality work in a more close-knit environment.

Examples: Beyond Corporate, Pannone Corporate, Kuits



Large Corporate

PQE	Corporate / M&A	Banking & Finance	Litigation	Real Estate	Employment	Insolvency	Commercial Contracts
NQ	£65-70k	£65-70k	£65-70k	£65-70k	£65-70k	£65-70k	£65-70k
1 PQE	£70-76k	£70-77k	£68-74k	£67-73k	£67-73k	£68-74k	£68-75k
2 PQE	£72-82k	£73-83k	£70-80k	£68-78k	£68-78k	£70-80k	£71-81k
3-4 PQE	£78-90k	£80-92k	£74-85k	£72-82k	£72-82k	£74-85k	£76-86k
5-6 PQE	£85-100k	£87-102k	£80-95k	£75-88k	£75-88k	£80-95k	£82-97k
SA 7+	£100-125k	£102-128k	£95-115k	£90-110k	£90-110k	£95-115k	£98-118k
Partner / LD	£130-220k+	£135-225k+	£125-200k+	£115-170k+	£115-170k+	£120-180k+	£125-190k+

Regional Commercial

PQE	Corporate / M&A	Banking & Finance	Litigation	Real Estate	Employment	Insolvency	Commercial Contracts
NQ	£55-60k	£55-60k	£55-60k	£55-60k	£55-60k	£55-60k	£55-60k
1 PQE	£58-64k	£59-65k	£57-63k	£56-62k	£56-62k	£57-63k	£57-64k
2 PQE	£60-68k	£62-70k	£59-67k	£58-65k	£58-65k	£59-67k	£60-68k
3-4 PQE	£65-75k	£67-78k	£63-72k	£62-70k	£62-70k	£63-72k	£65-75k
5-6 PQE	£70-85k	£72-88k	£68-80k	£65-75k	£65-75k	£68-80k	£70-82k
SA 7+	£78-92k	£80-95k	£75-90k	£72-88k	£72-88k	£75-90k	£76-92k
Partner / LD	£95-140k+	£100-145k+	£95-135k+	£90-130k+	£90-130k+	£95-135k+	£95-140k+



Boutique / Independents

PQE	Corporate / M&A	Banking & Finance	Litigation	Real Estate	Employment	Insolvency	Commercial Contracts
NQ	£48-55k	£48-55k	£48-55k	£48-55k	£48-55k	£48-55k	£48-55k
1 PQE	£50-58k	£51-59k	£50-56k	£50-56k	£50-56k	£50-56k	£50-57k
2 PQE	£52-62k	£54-64k	£52-60k	£52-60k	£52-60k	£52-60k	£52-62k
3-4 PQE	£58-70k	£60-72k	£55-65k	£55-65k	£55-65k	£55-65k	£57-67k
5-6 PQE	£62-75k	£65-78k	£60-70k	£60-70k	£60-70k	£60-70k	£62-72k
SA 7+	£68-80k	£70-82k	£65-75k	£65-75k	£65-75k	£65-75k	£67-77k
Partner / LD	£75-120k+	£80-125k+	£75-115k+	£75-115k+	£75-115k+	£75-115k+	£75-120k+



Market

Included: Legal 500 ranked regional, national and international firms with a Manchester presence.

Excluded: High street and general practice firms, along with non-commercial disciplines.

Outliers: DLA Piper's £82,000 NQ package is excluded as it represents a London-style outlier and is not reflective of the broader Manchester market.



Bonuses & Extras

The figures above reflect base pay only. In practice, most firms also offer extras including:

- Annual or performance-related bonuses
- Enhanced pension contributions
- Private healthcare and wellbeing benefits
- Flexible or hybrid working arrangements



Thornton Legal Insights

- **NQ Benchmarks:** At large corporates, top NQ salaries sit between £65,000–£70,000. Regional commercial firms typically pay £55,000–£60,000, while boutique independents are generally in the £48,000–£55,000 range.
- **Market Position:** Manchester remains the strongest legal centre in the North, with the broadest range of international and national firm opportunities. However, there is a clear spread between the large corporates at the top of the market and the boutique independents.
- **Leeds Comparison:** Salary levels are broadly aligned with Leeds, particularly at large corporates where pay bands are almost identical.
- **Liverpool Comparison:** Manchester consistently commands a premium of around £5,000–£10,000 at NQ level.



Challenges for Lawyers

- Intense competition for roles at large corporates, where firms can be highly selective.
- Bottlenecks at Senior Associate and Legal Director levels, limiting upward mobility.
- Need to balance salary uplift with hybrid working and lifestyle considerations.
- Wider pay gap between corporates and boutiques makes cross-tier moves more complex.



Challenges for Law Firms

- Talent retention is increasingly difficult as associates are tempted by London or international opportunities.
- Salary inflation at the top end makes it harder for regional firms to remain competitive.
- Growing expectations around hybrid working and wellbeing mean firms must offer more than just salary.
- Competition between Manchester firms for strong NQs and mid-level lawyers is pushing up recruitment costs and time-to-hire.



About Thornton Legal

Thornton Legal is a specialist legal recruitment consultancy with deep roots in the North of England. We partner with law firms across Leeds, Yorkshire, the North West and beyond, placing lawyers from NQ through to Partner level.

- **Trusted by leading firms:** We work with international, national, regional and independent Leeds firms, giving us unrivalled market visibility.
- **Proven track record:** Our salary data is drawn from real offers and mandates, not competitor guides.
- **Personal approach:** Candidates and clients value our straightforward, confidential advice
- **Specialist knowledge:** Whether you're a lawyer benchmarking your worth or a firm designing competitive packages, we provide clarity and insight.

 For tailored benchmarking or confidential career advice, get in touch with Thornton Legal today.

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