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Inside In-House 2025 Legal Talent Outlook

Exploring the shifting demands facing in-house legal leaders and their teams

Contents

- 5 [SECTION ONE](#) | **Introduction**
- 6 [SECTION TWO](#) | **About the Research**
- 7 [SECTION THREE](#) | **Top Talent Challenges for In-House Teams**
- 9 [SECTION FOUR](#) | **Workforce Priorities: What In-House Teams Want**
- 13 [SECTION FIVE](#) | **Skills Gaps in Legal Teams & The Expanding Role of the GC**
- 16 [SECTION SIX](#) | **Learning & Development Landscape**
- 21 [SECTION SEVEN](#) | **Flexible Resourcing Strategies**
- 24 [SECTION EIGHT](#) | **Routes to Qualification**
- 26 [SECTION NINE](#) | **DE&I: Progress & Potential**
- 28 [SECTION TEN](#) | **2025/26 Talent Priorities**
- 30 [SECTION ELEVEN](#) | **Conclusion & Key Takeaways**

Foreword

Traditionally focused on legal delivery, in-house legal teams are now expected to operate as strategic partners to the business. They are being asked to advise not only on law, but on risk, leadership, technology, team development and more. These expectations are reshaping how teams attract talent, how they build skills and how they prepare for the future.

At BARBRI, we believe that long-term success in legal teams depends on long-term thinking – it's not just about development, but about how to attract, retain and support the right talent at every stage. As legal roles evolve, teams will need to think creatively about how to meet changing expectations and build sustainable capability. Helping legal professionals qualify is important, but so is what happens after. Whether it's

through the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE), flexible professional development or leadership training, we're committed to helping legal teams build the skills they need for whatever comes next.

We recognise that no two people learn the same way and our learning model is built around individual needs – offering flexibility, wellbeing support and access to future-facing skills like digital capability and communication. We've seen first-hand how this personalised approach can improve performance, reduce burnout and increase retention.

This report provides a practical and honest view of what in-house teams are experiencing in 2025, and where attention is most needed. The insights come from across industries and roles, but the message is clear: development needs structure, and legal capability now extends far beyond the law itself.

We hope this report helps you reflect on your own team's priorities, sparks useful conversations and enables more sustainable planning for the years ahead.



Lucie Allen

Chief Growth Officer, BARBRI

Foreword

Flexibility has always been at the heart of how Flex Legal operates – but it’s also at the heart of what in-house legal teams now need.

When we founded [Flex Legal](#), it was to fill a very tangible gap: legal teams needed agile support, and aspiring lawyers needed a way into the sector. Our belief that legal work can be more inclusive, more human and more responsive, continues to shape everything we do.

This report highlights the same shift we’ve seen day-to-day with clients. General Counsel are under more pressure than ever. They’re expected to manage growing workloads, lead their teams and think strategically – often with limited headcount and tight budgets. At the same time, early-career lawyers are looking for development, clarity and opportunity.

That’s not an easy balance, especially with limited resources. There is also a huge shift with technology and the future skills of a junior lawyer will look very different to how we practise today.

We believe flexible support is a key part of the solution – not just for capacity, but for inclusion and progression too.

Whether through short-term resourcing, long-term partnerships or programmes like Flex Trainee, we’re proud to help legal teams with what they need, when they need it.

Our hope is that this report not only reflects the challenges in-house teams are facing, but also points to some of the practical ways we can start doing things differently – more sustainably, more inclusively and with the flexibility that today’s legal industry demands.



Mary Bonsor
Founder, Flex Legal

Introduction

In-house legal teams are facing a defining moment. The demands on their time, judgment and people have increased sharply, but the resources have not kept up the pace. General Counsel are being asked to provide strategic advice, manage business risk, contribute to commercial conversations and organisational change, all while maintaining core legal delivery and compliance.

This has significant implications for legal talent. How do you build a legal team that can think commercially, lead confidently and work sustainably? How do you support your lawyers' development without formal Learning and Development (L&D) frameworks or clear routes to progression? How do you retain good people when you can't always compete on pay?

At the same time, expectations from within teams are shifting. Newer generations of legal professionals bring different priorities – they want flexibility, purpose, wellbeing and meaningful development. They expect clarity on what comes next, not just a job title.

These themes can be seen clearly throughout this report.

Commissioned by [BARBRI](#) in partnership with [Flex Legal](#), this research explores the current landscape of in-house legal teams in the UK and beyond. It brings together the views of more than 120 professionals, from General Counsel and Legal Operations leads to junior team members, trainees and paralegals. Across sectors, the same pressures emerge: stretched capacity, gaps in future-facing skills and a growing risk of attrition.

This report is designed to provide clarity and practical value. It combines data, commentary and lived experience from in-house teams to help legal leaders benchmark their challenges and explore new strategies for development, retention and resourcing.

“There’s a growing tension between what legal teams are expected to deliver and the resources they actually have. That’s not just a workload issue, it’s a leadership issue.”

● LUCIE ALLEN, CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER, BARBRI

“In-house roles are demanding. You’re accountable to boards, the C-suite, and often teams across time zones. You have to be responsive, entrepreneurial, and ready to do a lot with less.”

● SPENCER DAVIS, CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER, LIFEZONE METALS

About the Research

This report is based on data from the 2025 In-House Legal Talent Survey, commissioned by BARBRI in partnership with Flex Legal. The survey ran from March to May 2025 and explored the full talent lifecycle within in-house legal teams, from attraction and development to retention, qualification and resourcing.

The aim was to go beyond surface challenges and understand the actions General Counsel and senior legal leaders are taking to build more sustainable, high-performing teams.

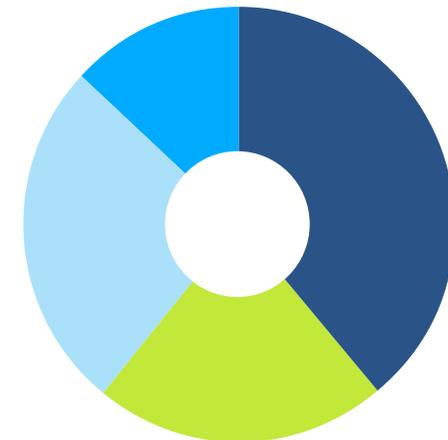
“We wanted to go beyond data points. The goal was to build a clearer picture of how in-house legal teams are evolving and what support they need most.”

● MARY BONSOR, FOUNDER, FLEX LEGAL

A total of 127 respondents from across 12 different sectors completed the survey. Key demographics include:



- 46% were General Counsel or Heads of Legal
- 35% were Senior or Legal Counsel
- 19% worked in Legal Operations or were trainees and other legal professionals



- 39% worked in teams of 1–5 people
- 26% teams of 6–15 members
- 13% teams of 16–30 members
- 22% were from teams of 31 or more

All responses were submitted in confidence and alongside the survey data, this report includes commentary from BARBRI and Flex Legal, plus additional insight from follow-up interviews with in-house legal professionals.

Top Talent Challenges for In-House Teams

In-house legal teams are facing mounting pressure from all sides. The most common concern reported in 2025 is capacity. More than 70% of survey respondents cited managing workload with limited resources as their top talent-related challenge, ahead of both hiring and retention. That finding reflects wider changes in the in-house function where teams are being asked to deliver more, with no corresponding increase in people or budget.

That said, hiring remains difficult. Half of respondents said they struggle to find candidates with the right skills and even where there is interest, salary expectations of candidates often exceed what in-house teams can offer.

Spencer Davis, Chief Legal Officer at Lifezone Metals, summed up the tension between expectations and reality:

“The market’s gone a bit crazy in terms of what individuals, coming from excellent law firms to in-house, expect to receive. Compensation is definitely an issue.”

Retention is just as urgent. One Head of Legal in financial services explained:

“As people become more experienced, their CVs start to look very strong and then they get offered £20k–£30k more elsewhere. That’s a big challenge when you’re a small team with great people and a limited budget.”

Teams are also reporting high levels of disengagement, attrition and burnout – with junior lawyers in particular expecting more clarity on their development, support with wellbeing and opportunities to progress.

Kim Perry, General Counsel at Findex Group Limited, highlighted how legal teams are experiencing this pressure:

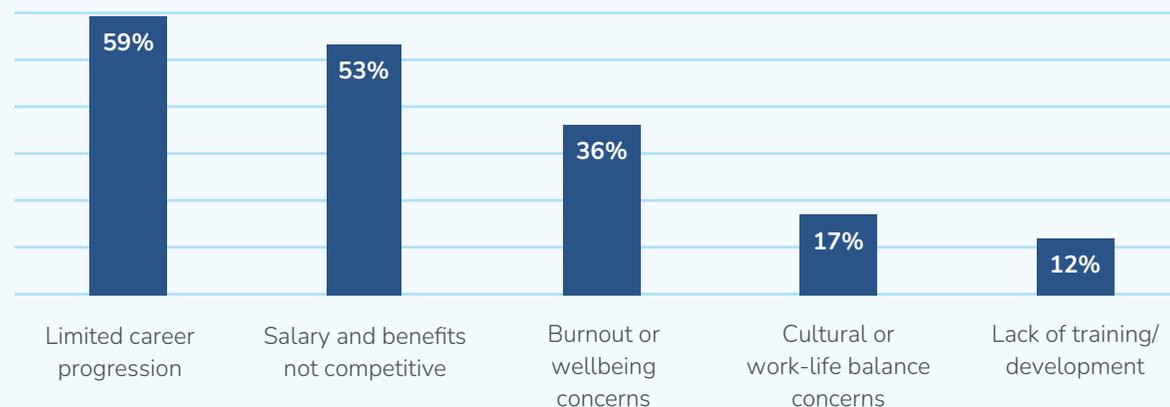
“The biggest shift is the pace. We’re expected to deliver strategic advice, fast, and without a bigger team to do it. That adds pressure not just to deliver, but to retain people who can keep up.”



What is Making Hiring Difficult?



What's Causing People to Leave?



These issues are particularly acute in smaller or leaner teams, which made up a significant portion of respondents. **39% of teams reported having five or fewer members – with roles often broader and time for structured development often limited.**

General Counsel, who accounted for nearly half of all respondents, are often balancing delivery pressures with the need to mentor, manage and retain their teams. Yet without additional resources or a dedicated HR function, many are left to find their own solutions. See [page 15](#) for more on the expanding role of the General Counsel.

In response, some are exploring new team structures or resourcing models, including secondments and Alternative Legal Service Providers (ALSPs). Others are reviewing their development pathways, asking whether current strategies can meet the expectations of a new generation of in-house lawyers.

Workforce Priorities:

What In-House Teams Want

What legal professionals expect from their working environment is changing. While salary and seniority still matter, as we've seen, today's in-house lawyers are increasingly looking for flexibility, progression, and alignment with their personal values.

These expectations are having a direct impact on retention, particularly in teams where salaries can't compete with larger employers.

For many teams, it's very much a matter of how to meet those expectations now with limited time, structure or resources.

This is most apparent in early-career talent. General Counsel report that junior team members are asking more questions about **long-term development, mentoring and workplace culture** and are more willing to leave if those answers aren't clear.

But it's not only Gen Z – across experience

levels, legal professionals are seeking a workplace that integrates **wellbeing, enables learning and creates space for growth.**

As teams adapt to shifting expectations, one challenge that's become particularly acute is how early-career legal professionals build the **skills** they need in the new online working environment.

With less time physically spent in the office, the traditional model of learning through daily exposure to senior colleagues has become harder to replicate.

As Natalie Hunt, Assistant General Counsel at Johnson Matthey, explained:

“The pace of work has changed so dramatically, even in the last five years, but especially in the last ten, with the increase in demand and

use of technology. It's a completely different way of working now.

“I remember when I was starting out, you learned by osmosis – you were sitting next to someone, hearing what they said, how they worked. That doesn't happen in the same way anymore, especially post-Covid. We've had conversations internally about how we support juniors now, because it is different and it needs to be.”

This evolving context makes structured development and mentoring even more important – especially for new joiners or those transitioning from private practice into in-house roles.

And yet, only 16% of respondents reported having a comprehensive learning and development (L&D) framework.

Flexibility is a top priority for many legal professionals, and at some organisations, flexibility has evolved beyond policy – it’s embedded in culture.

Kim Perry described their company’s approach:

“We mainly work remotely. For example, I work from home four days a week and go in one. However, we do want there to be some connection time in person.”

The reality of global operations can complicate what that flexibility looks like in practice. Spencer Davis explained:

“We are very flexible here and we have a hybrid approach to working. We enable people to work set hours that ensure they’ll get their tasks done, rather than saying you have to work between 8:00 and 6:00, but when your chairman is in Australia and your CEO is in the U.S., you’re working across time zones and you need to be responsive.”

But he also warned that flexibility doesn’t mean low pressure:

“It’s a very demanding role and because it’s demanding, people expect to be paid a huge amount. You don’t get paid as much in-house as you do in private practice and so we end up in this sort of semi-virtual circle of compensation, talent, geography connectivity, know-how and experience.”

Delivering flexibility well takes more than policy, it requires structure – things like regular online check-ins, agreed office days, and clarity around expectations. But for many in-house teams, that kind of consistent support is still missing.



Yet fewer than 1 in 5 in-house teams currently offer structured internships (**19%**), apprenticeships (**18%**) or graduate programmes (**8%**) to engage early-career legal talent.

With limited internal HR support, resourcing constraints and inconsistent internal expectations, these workforce priorities often remain aspirational.

Kim Perry also pointed to the changing priorities among younger lawyers:

“Gen Z expect a lot – flexibility, purpose, feedback. That’s not unreasonable, but it means you need to give structure and clarity earlier, or they’ll look elsewhere.”

For General Counsel, the challenge is not just meeting them where they are – but doing so in a way that is practical, fair and sustainable over time.



The Top Workforce Priorities Emerging From the Research:

Work-life balance and capacity management

Development and progression clarity

Support for mental health and wellbeing

Visible DE&I commitments and action

Alignment with values and purpose

Access to flexible working arrangements

Understanding Gen Z in Legal Teams

Today's early-career legal professionals bring different expectations:

They want feedback, structure and coaching

Many expect flexibility as standard, not a perk

Over 70% review environmental and DE&I policies before joining a firm*

Wellbeing and mental health are priorities – not afterthoughts

“Gen Z want flexibility. They want experience. And they want to know their next step. If you can't show that clearly, they'll go somewhere else.”

● HEAD OF LEGAL, FINANCIAL SERVICES

*<https://www.deloitte.com/content/dam/assets-shared/docs/campaigns/2024/deloitte-2024-genz-millennial-survey.pdf?dlva=3>

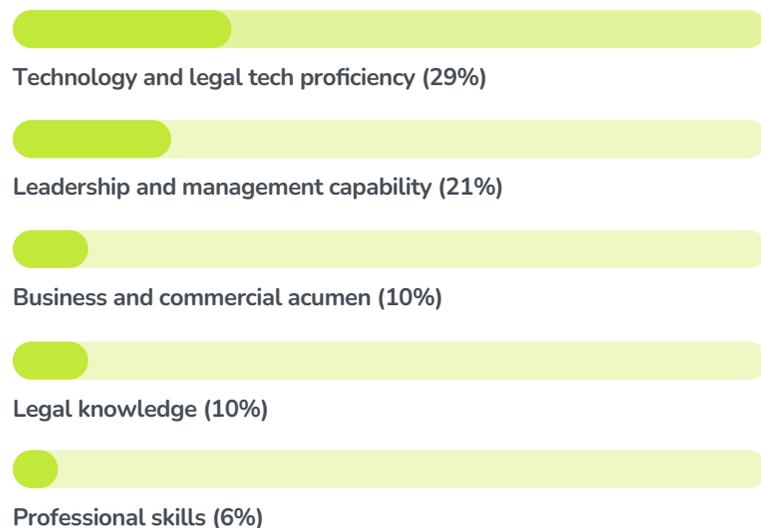


Skills Gaps in Legal Teams

Most in-house legal teams are confident in their legal capability, but many report growing gaps in the wider skillsets needed to meet business expectations.

While 54% cited a minor gap (and 10% a major gap) in legal knowledge and expertise, the pressure also clearly exists where legal professionals operate beyond law. These gaps include how lawyers engage with commercial strategy, adopt legal technology, manage risk across functions and lead others effectively.

When asked where their team had the major skills gaps, respondents pointed to:



Engaging with commercial teams, communicating with non-legal stakeholders and managing change has always been critical to the role – but many teams say they lack the confidence or time to build those skills.

Interviewees also pointed out that business and stakeholder engagement skills often take longer to develop, especially without formal training support.



This can be particularly true for lawyers transitioning from private practice into in-house roles, where understanding how to operate within internal structures, priorities and politics becomes just as important as legal expertise.

While only a minority reported significant issues in each area, the combined figures tell a broader story.

Nearly 80% of teams reported at least some gap in legal tech capability, with similar numbers across leadership or management skills (69%) and professional skills (51%).

These gaps are not always critical, but they create friction – slowing decision-making, reducing impact and limiting the team’s influence across the business.

As legal teams evolve, new roles are also emerging that didn’t exist a decade ago, creating the need for new skills training.

Where the Skills Gaps Are and Why They Matter

Technology (78% reported some gap)

Effect:

- Slower workflows
- Missed opportunities for automation
- Reliance on external tools and resources without internal capability
- Less confidence adopting or managing legal tech

Leadership and Management (69%)

Effect:

- Mid-level lawyers plateau without structured growth
- GCs shoulder delivery and people responsibilities alone
- No clear succession planning for future leaders

Business & Commercial Acumen (56%)

Effect:

- Advice seen as legally sound but commercially detached
- Reduced influence with exec teams
- Legal perceived as a blocker, not an enabler

Professional Skills (51%)

Effect:

- Gaps in communication, negotiation or influencing
- Harder to embed legal in cross-functional decision-making

Whether through legal operations, tech enablement or innovation leadership, these new roles are reshaping how in-house teams deliver value and they bring new development and progression needs that legal leaders must plan for.

“It’s not always legal knowledge that’s the gap – it’s the commercial context and the soft skills, like how to read a room, or how to frame something for a senior stakeholder.”

● HEAD OF LEGAL, FINANCIAL SERVICES

The Expanding Role of the General Counsel

The modern General Counsel operate as business leaders, shaping strategy, managing risk and leading legal teams that can respond quickly to shifting demands. As team size, scope and complexity grow, GCs are increasingly responsible for functions within their own teams that were once fully managed by HR, operations or finance. That includes leading development conversations, guiding technology decisions and retaining key talent in-house.

While company-wide initiatives still sit with HR or other departments, GCs are often left to lead these efforts independently within their legal teams.

Natalie Hunt captured the sentiment shared by many in-house leaders in our conversation:

“I do think the demands on in-house lawyers are now matching those of private practice – but the support structure, the salaries, the benefits, etc., don’t necessarily meet that.”

It’s as if we need to be as good, if not better than a law firm – yet most of us are not resourced in that way. You book your own meetings, manage your own diary, do your own admin... all things you forget you didn’t have to do in private practice.”

It’s a perspective that echoes throughout our research and conversations with legal leaders – underscoring just how broad the role of General Counsel has become.

As Hunt put it, in-house teams are expected to do everything from **advising, managing, hiring and teaching to delivering**, often without the infrastructure private practice lawyers rely on. In this context, future-facing skills for both GCs and their teams are no longer optional.

They’re essential to maintaining relevance, credibility and impact – especially when they are expected to deliver more, with less.

Key Areas Where GCs are now Expected to Lead:

Commercial alignment

Translating legal advice into business impact

Leadership and team management

Supporting growth, engagement and succession

Technology adoption

Overseeing legal tech decisions and capability

ESG and ethics

Advising on brand, risk and social responsibility

Process and delivery

Streamlining legal operations for consistency and scale

Risk and resilience

Advising on regulation, ethics and how technology is used across the business

Learning and Development Landscape

Learning and development (L&D) is a priority in principle, but not yet in practice.

Just 16% of in-house legal teams say they have a structured L&D framework that is consistently applied. Nearly half (49%) report having no framework at all.

Most rely on informal learning, ad hoc mentoring or external providers, often without long-term planning or visibility.

Kim Perry echoed this:

“We’ve tried to formalise development, but it’s hard without resource. Most of our growth still happens on the job.”

Having a framework matters, because many of the skill areas under pressure – such as technology, leadership and commercial acumen – require **ongoing development**. Without a coordinated approach, even well-intentioned efforts risk falling short.

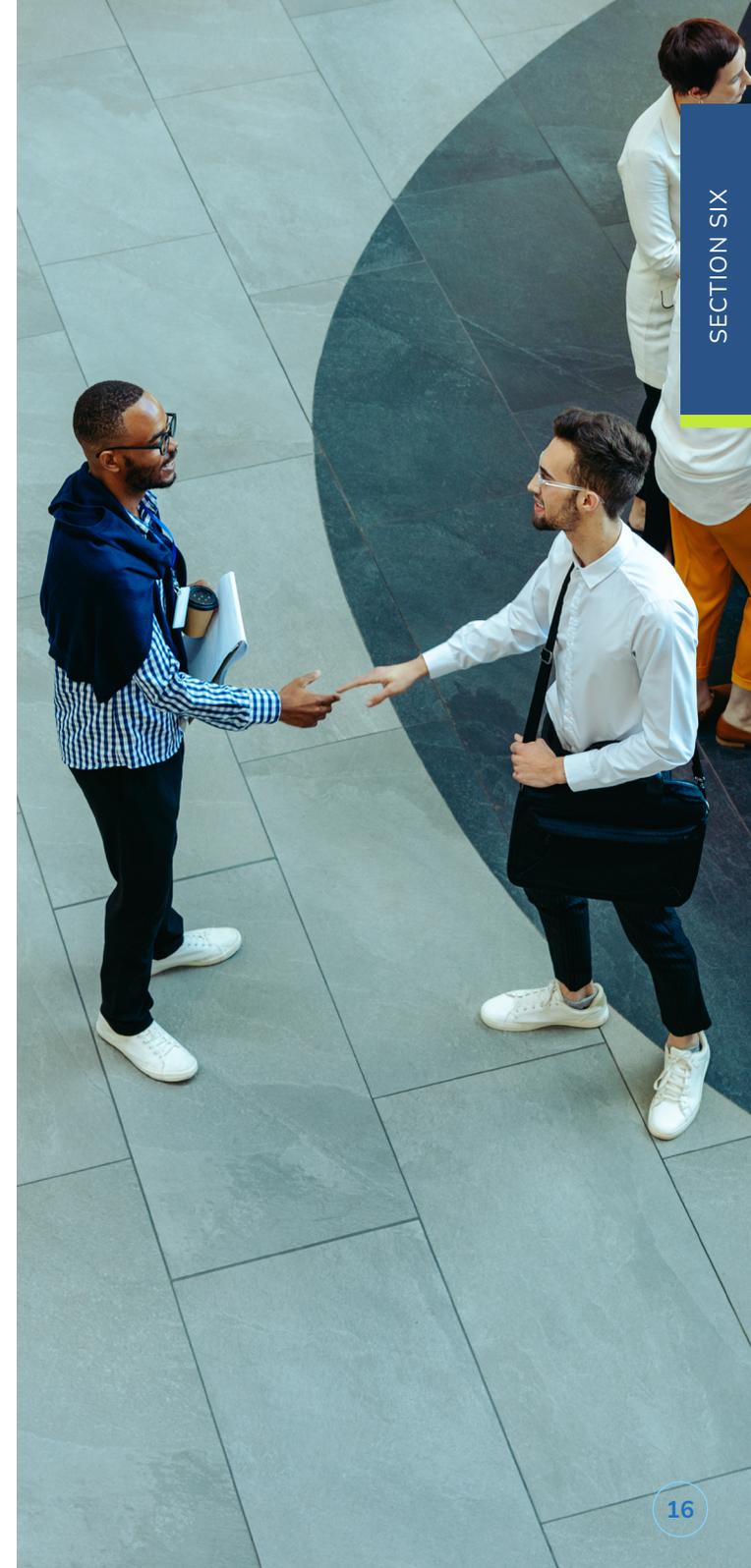
Part of the challenge is that there’s no single solution.

A Head of Legal explained:

“Every business is different – values, objectives, pace. That’s what makes a one-size-fits-all L&D framework so hard in-house.”

He added that while learning opportunities do exist, they don’t always translate into daily practice:

“We do have learning opportunities – our external panel firms run know-how sessions and recently spoke to us about AI. But that doesn’t mean we’re using those tools yet. Tech budgets and implementation barriers are real.”



How Teams are Developing Talent Today

On-the-job learning and informal mentoring (77%)

Internal training programmes (53%)

External training courses or certifications (53%)

Complimentary sessions from panel law firms (47%)

No formal approach (29%)

But that doesn't mean a framework is impossible or unnecessary. As many GCs are recognising, the key is not uniformity, but clarity. **A practical approach is to distinguish between three layers of capability:**

- Skills common across roles, such as stakeholder communication, commercial awareness and legal tech literacy;
- Skills specific to the organisation, like internal processes or sector context;
- And skills tied to individual goals, including leadership or subject matter expertise.

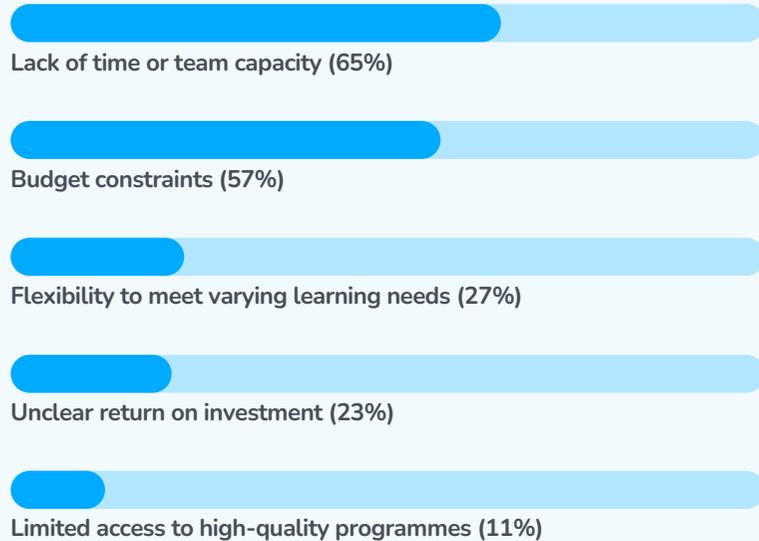
This layered model enables teams to offer a consistent baseline while still tailoring development to both business needs and personal progression, striking a balance between structure and flexibility. In most teams, learning happens reactively: when time allows, when there's budget left or when an issue arises. Without a named owner, dedicated time, or clear tracking, development becomes difficult to sustain – especially when day-to-day delivery takes priority.

Technology is forcing a mindset shift too, and not everyone starts from the same place, as Natalie Hunt explained:

“If we can be smart with tech, then why not? But you need a different way of thinking. When I use ChatGPT in a personal capacity just to get started on something, or internally we're trialling Microsoft Co-Pilot, it's a completely different approach.”



Top Barriers to Effective Development



Natalie Hunt warned that relying on individuals to ‘figure it out’ when it comes to AI and new technology risks inconsistency across the team:

“You do get a really mismatched level of skill across a team, because not everyone has the time or appetite to experiment. If you want a consistent base level of capability, especially in tech and innovation, you need a structured approach.”

This is something her team is actively tackling:

“We’re part of an AI Council looking at how to support AI literacy. It takes time, and you have to balance it with day-to-day work, but it’s necessary.”

Some teams are addressing L&D with a structured and consistent approach to learning, even in the absence of large budgets.

Spencer Davis explained:

“We have half-yearly reviews and every person in my team has a clear career path. If someone’s missing a skill, whether it’s management or legal tech, we find a way to build that into their development.”

However, structured development remains a challenge for many legal teams, particularly in-house where formal frameworks often fall short.

As Natalie Hunt explained:

“In-house is traditionally not that structured and it depends on what company you work for. We’ve been working on this for the last few years internally – training the legal function and helping people understand how to develop, whether within their role or into others across the function.”

For many teams, especially those without HR ownership of legal development, that support needs to be built intentionally and consistently with tailored development models, like **modular learning paths, structured feedback loops or SQE-linked training** that can help bridge any gaps.

The Resource Gap Behind L&D Inaction

Even where legal leaders value learning and development, most say they're held back by three main things:

Time

No capacity to plan or deliver structured programmes

Budget

Training is often deprioritised in lean environments

Infrastructure

No internal team to coordinate or monitor development

Engagement with newer qualification routes also remains limited.

Only 36% of legal teams said they provide support for the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE), and just 18% are offering apprenticeships.

Those not yet engaged with these routes cite familiar blockers: funding, internal resourcing and uncertainty about the time commitment involved.

Yet as recruitment pressures persist and in-house teams continue to compete with private practice for talent, there's a growing need for scalable, cost-effective ways to build internal capability. Keeping skills up to date is no longer just about compliance, it's how teams stay useful to the business as its needs change. Structured development, whether through early talent programmes, apprenticeships, or targeted professional skills training, will prove increasingly essential to long-term team performance and retention.

“I think mentoring is really important. I didn't get as much of that as I'd have liked, so I've had to learn a lot myself. You can't just sit there and say, well, where's my mentor? You've got to go find them and ask the questions.”

● KIM PERRY, GENERAL COUNSEL AT FINDEX



Checklist: Building A Stronger L&D Foundation

Use this checklist to assess whether your team has the right framework in place and to identify where small changes could have a big impact.

- ✓ A clearly defined L&D approach
- ✓ A named person responsible for development planning
- ✓ Time allocated for training and skills development
- ✓ A clear pathway for early talent (e.g. SQE, apprenticeships)
- ✓ Access to high-quality external training or coaching
- ✓ Visibility over who is developing and who might be at risk
- ✓ Feedback mechanisms to understand what's working
- ✓ Development support aligned to strategic team and business goals
- ✓ Clear funding policies and expectations for training investment
- ✓ Options that reflect individual learning styles and wellbeing needs



Flexible Resourcing Strategies

As in-house teams grow in scope but not always in headcount, legal leaders are exploring new ways to deliver work efficiently. Flexible resourcing is emerging as a practical tool, not only to manage peaks in workload, but to access specialist skills, trial new delivery models and relieve pressure on permanent staff.

While many teams reported using some form of flexible resourcing, mainly through temporary legal professionals (70%) or flexible working arrangements (53%), the approach is rarely formalised.

The data shows that usage is widespread, but driven primarily by short-term needs with 57% citing managing peak periods as their main reason, while only 17% say it allows internal staff to focus on core legal work.

There is little to suggest that flexible support is embedded as part of a long-term talent strategy and in most cases, it appears to be deployed reactively as a solution to manage immediate pressure points or peak periods, rather than a planned or repeatable model.

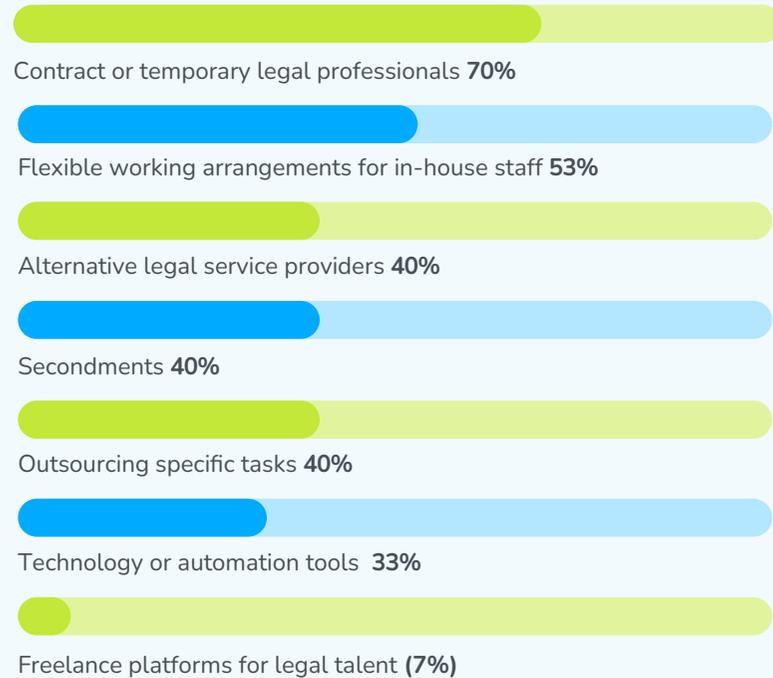
Others pointed out the need to be realistic about the limits of short-term support – especially with more senior hires.

As Spencer Davis said:

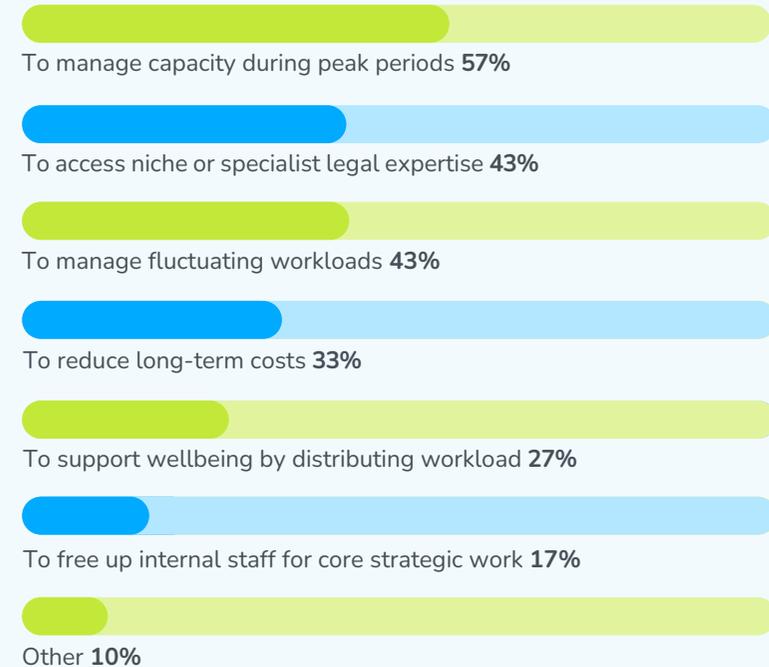
“Four months in, interim lawyers are thinking – where’s my next role? The focus can shift and that’s why those with a true portfolio mindset often work better – they know how to deliver right through.”



How In-House Teams are Using Flexible Resourcing



Why Teams Use Flexible Support



Embedding Flexible Resourcing

Many legal teams are using flexible support, but often on an informal, short-term basis. To get real value, flexible resourcing needs to be part of a clear plan, not just a quick fix.

Teams that use it most effectively tend to:

Define clear triggers

for when flexible support will be used, such as peak workloads, specialist projects, or short-term gaps

Identify trusted providers or platforms

ahead of time to reduce lead time and disruption

Build flexible support into budget planning

so it becomes a resourcing option, not an exception

Clarify expectations and responsibilities

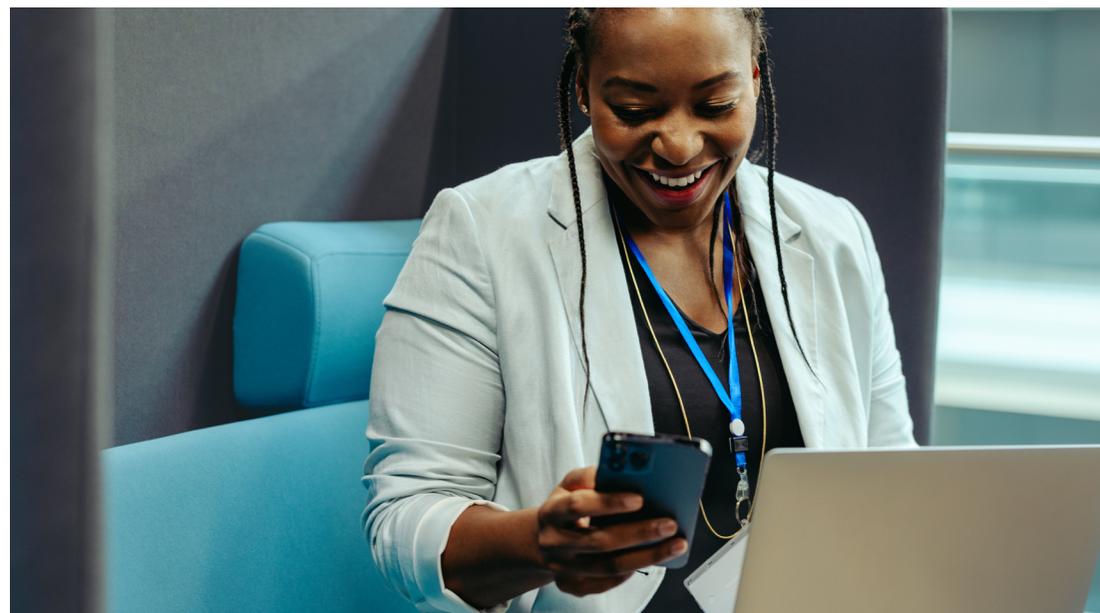
across the team before work begins

Track usage and outcomes

so decisions are guided by evidence rather than urgency

Flexible resourcing also helps avoid some of the hidden costs associated with direct hiring, including recruitment time, onboarding delays and long-term commitments. Planning ahead gives you more control, allowing teams to adapt quickly without over-reliance on permanent headcount.

Embedding flexible models doesn't require a full restructure but it requires intention. Well-thought-out use of flexible support allows legal teams to stay agile, protect internal capacity and meet changing business needs more confidently.



Routes to Qualification

Many in-house legal teams continue to follow traditional qualification routes. While the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) and legal apprenticeships have been positioned as more flexible, inclusive and cost-effective alternatives, take-up remains limited across the sector.

Only 37% of survey respondents said their organisation provides any form of SQE support. Just 18% are currently using legal apprenticeships as part of their early talent strategy.

These figures point to a disconnect between the profession's goals to broaden access and the practical realities many in-house teams are navigating.

Uncertainty around funding, supervision capacity and programme structure appears to be slowing down adoption, despite growing interest.

Challenges to Adopting SQE + Apprenticeships

Limited budget for training or additional headcount **56%**

Insufficient internal capacity to supervise or support learners **42%**

Lack of awareness of what's involved **26%**

Difficulty balancing study with day-to-day delivery **23%**

Uncertainty about the structure or outcomes of these programmes **18%**

Concern or resistance around non-traditional qualification pathways **9%**

Some of these reflect structural issues. Others suggest a lack of visibility into how alternative routes can work in practice. Several legal leaders indicated that while they see the potential benefits, they feel unsure how to build these programmes into the team without further support.

“We had a trainee who started as a cashier, became a legal admin, and is now qualifying with us. She recently spoke in front of 200 people – a year ago, she’d never have believed she could.”

● HEAD OF LEGAL, FINANCIAL SERVICES

From Barrier to Benefit

Teams that have adopted apprenticeships or the SQE cite several long-term benefits:

- More control over training quality and cultural fit
- Lower recruitment costs and stronger long-term retention
- A wider, more inclusive talent pipeline
- Greater alignment between development and business needs

Some early adopters including Metro Bank, Rolls-Royce, LexisNexis, Lawyers on Demand, GWI and Perkbox Vivup are starting to reframe qualification through the SQE as a strategic investment.

Thinking About a New Qualification Pathway?

If your team is exploring alternative routes like the SQE or apprenticeships, it can help to:

Pilot

Start with a small group before scaling further

Clarify Internal Responsibilities:

Who supervises and guides how study time is managed?

Define Your Investment Model

Will you fund exam prep, cover fees or offer paid study time?

Align With Your Wider Goals

Is this about growing future leaders, improving retention, widening access or all of the above?

Seek Advice Early

Speak to peers or providers to learn what the best options for you and your organisation are before you commit



DE&I: Progress and Potential

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) remains a strategic priority for many in-house teams, but survey results suggest that action is still inconsistent and formalised initiatives remain limited.

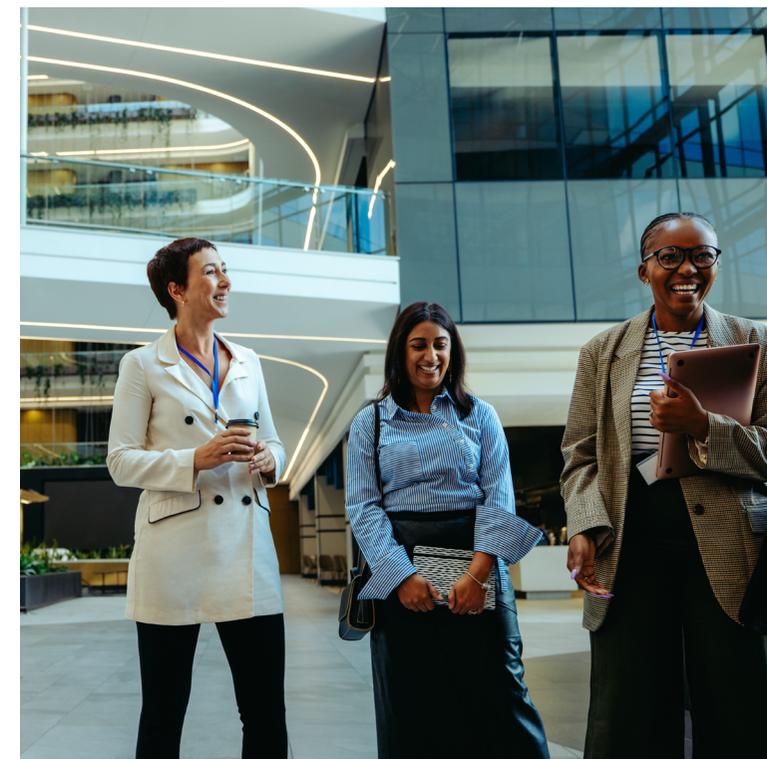
While some teams have introduced targeted recruitment or flexible working to improve inclusion, others admit they are still at the early stages, or haven't yet developed a plan at all. 1 in 5 teams (20%) reported no DE&I initiatives in place – and only 12% use targeted recruitment programmes to increase diversity.

Most activity is centred around unconscious bias training, flexible working policies, and employee networks – all valuable starting points, but often delivered without long-term accountability, measurement or clear goals.

DE&I Initiatives Currently in Place:



These numbers suggest that while awareness is growing, the operational framework to support DE&I is lagging behind. In smaller or stretched teams, DE&I efforts may depend heavily on personal commitment – not formal process or resourcing.



What Would Help In-House Teams Improve DE&I?

Survey respondents highlighted five key areas of need:

Access to diverse talent pools

Training on inclusive leadership

Tools to track and report DE&I data

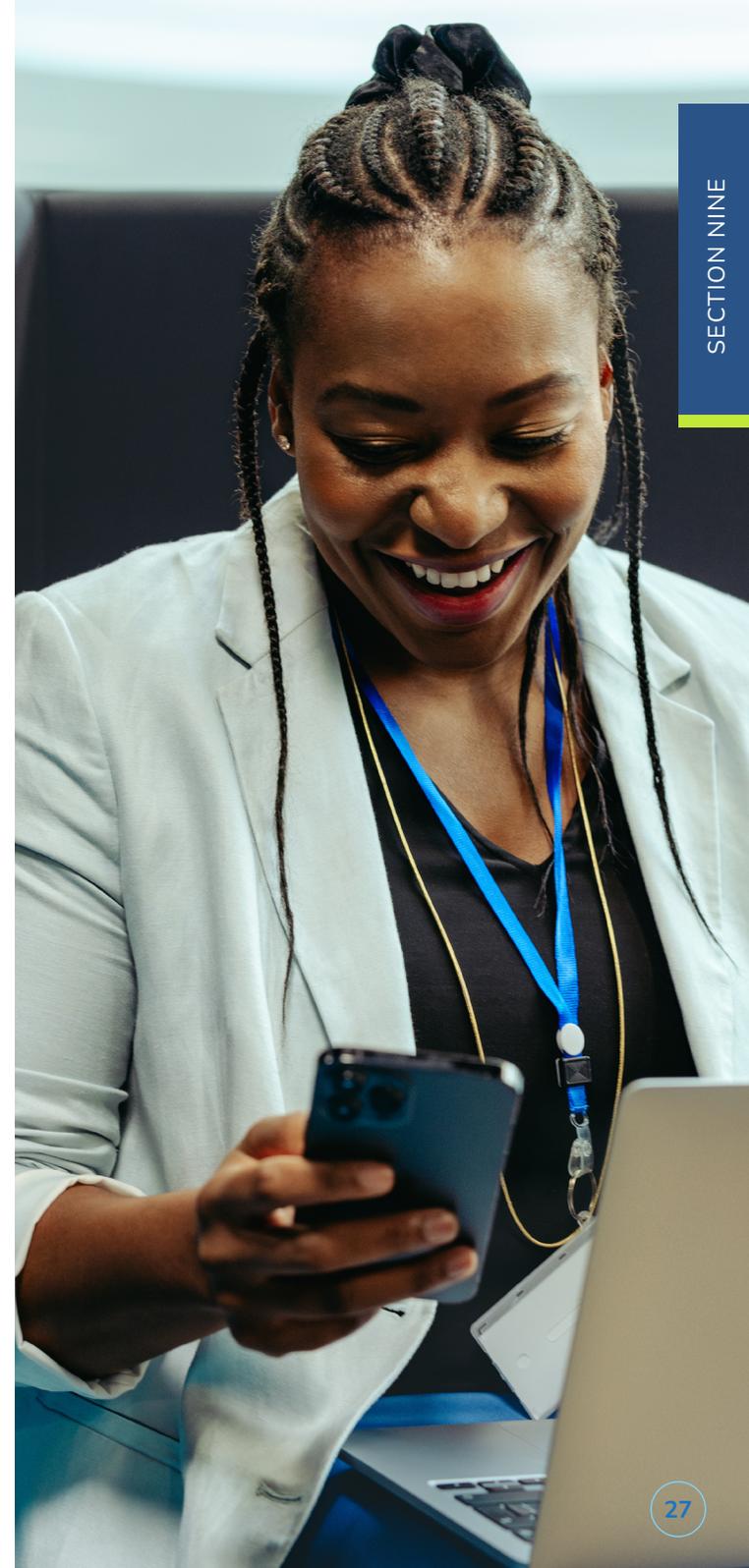
Clear DE&I goals with accountability

Networking opportunities for diverse candidates and junior lawyers

These are practical steps, but many teams say they lack either the internal buy-in or external support to put them in place. As legal teams look to build talent pipelines and improve retention, DE&I will need to become more than a values statement – it must be embedded in the way teams hire, develop, promote and lead. Without a clear plan, even well-intentioned teams risk falling short of the inclusion goals they aim to uphold.

“Every company worth its salt will have a policy on diversity. The real issue is how do you live and breathe it?”

● KIM PERRY, GENERAL COUNSEL AT FINDEX



2025/26 Talent Priorities

When asked where their legal team's priorities lie over the next 12 to 24 months, the majority of respondents pointed inward, focusing not on recruitment, but on developing the people already in post.

The top priority for 40% of survey participants was retaining and developing existing talent. Another 30% highlighted upskilling their current team to meet emerging demands. By contrast, just 9% said attracting new hires was their main goal for the year ahead.

This trend reflects a practical reality – hiring remains difficult and in many cases, unaffordable. With constrained budgets, rising salary expectations and limited candidate availability, teams are re-evaluating where growth and improvement can realistically come from.

They're also thinking ahead about what kind of legal function they want to build, not just how to get through the next six months. For many, that means focusing on internal capability rather than external recruitment.

“You have to do more with what you've got,” said Kim Perry. “For us, that means making sure our people grow, stay curious and stay engaged – that's where we're investing.”

This signals a clear change in focus. With permanent hiring still difficult and budgets under pressure, many GCs are putting greater emphasis on improving internal capability, from **structured learning** to **smarter use of flexible support**.

Top Talent Priorities for In-house Legal Teams:



To retain and develop talent in a sustainable way, legal leaders will need to act on what their teams are telling them. That means putting in place **structured learning and development pathways that enable progression, tackle workload challenges and offer more visible and effective support for wellbeing and growth.**

The data suggests that informal support alone is no longer enough and that without clearer plans for development, even high-potential team members are at risk of disengaging or moving on.

Alongside this, 22% of respondents said their priority for the coming year was to reduce cost while maintaining performance. The lessons from this report suggest these aims can align. With more development,

targeted use of flexible support and better planning around internal capability, many teams may be able to strengthen delivery and improve retention without increasing headcount.

This creates a loop of challenges for in-house leaders – where expectations, budget, flexibility, and global operations all collide.

Spencer Davis explained:

“People often expect in-house roles to come with less pressure and more balance. But the reality is, you’re accountable to boards, C-suite and often teams across multiple time zones. You have to be responsive, entrepreneurial and ready to do a lot with less.”



Conclusion + Key Takeaways

In-house legal teams are entering a period of recalibration. The pressures they face – tighter budgets, rising expectations and leaner teams – are well understood. But this research reveals something more significant: a turning point in how legal capability is built and sustained.

Rather than looking at headcount alone, many legal leaders are investing in what sits beneath it – their team structure, professional development, qualification strategy, technology and more flexible delivery models. They're building strength from within, not because it's easy, but because it's essential.

Throughout the findings, three connected themes emerged:

Capacity needs a smarter solution

With hiring still difficult, teams are looking for flexible support, clearer structure and better planning to manage workload sustainably.

Capability must evolve

Skills in leadership, technology and commercial strategy are now just as important as legal knowledge (and often harder to grow).

Retention requires action

Talented lawyers want to see what's next. Without visible support for learning, wellbeing and progression, they may not stay to find out.

What This Means for General Counsel

This report shows just how central the role of the GC has become – not only as a legal advisor, but as a people leader, talent strategist and operational anchor.

GCs today are making decisions that affect:

- How teams grow and retain knowledge
- How wellbeing is supported under pressure
- How qualification pathways reflect business needs
- And how new skills are developed with purpose and pace

Those who lead with intent – even without perfect resources – will be better placed to build teams that deliver consistently, adapt quickly and stay engaged over time.

Where to Focus Next: Checklist for Legal Leaders

Use these prompts to reflect on where your team stands and where the greatest gains may lie.

GCs today are making decisions that affect:

- ✓ Are our biggest skills gaps understood and being addressed?

- ✓ Is development structured and tracked, or still mostly reactive?

- ✓ Do we have the tools and time to ensure wellbeing, especially during peak delivery?

- ✓ Are we using flexible resourcing strategically, or just to plug gaps?

- ✓ Do we offer accessible, supported routes to qualification, including apprenticeships and SQE?

- ✓ Are our DE&I aims backed by action, in recruitment, development and progression?

- ✓ Do team members know what good performance looks like and how to move forward?

- ✓ Are we investing in leadership and future skills, or hoping experience alone will fill the gap?

You don't need a perfect plan – but clear priorities, honest conversations and the right partners can make all the difference.

“People do their best work when they're supported. Flexible resourcing gives teams the breathing space they need to focus, to grow and to stick around. That's what this is really about.”

– Mary Bonsor, Founder, Flex Legal

“Strong legal teams aren't built overnight. They're built with care and a plan.”

– Lucie Allen, Chief Growth Officer, BARBRI

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