

# Grad hiring dips amid recession fear

ELLIE DUDLEY  
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Graduate hiring figures have taken a plunge for the first time in years after legal firms took precautionary measures to resist a potential recession and a subsequent slowdown in deals, offsetting a strong recruitment drive for freshly minted talent pre-pandemic.

The Australian's Legal Partnerships Survey on Tuesday revealed graduate hiring numbers are down 6 per cent over the past

six months, with 1459 graduates hired by the 50 firms polled. Top tier firm Allens hired three fewer than last year (117), Clayton Utz hired 10 fewer (68), MinterEllison hired 19 fewer (86) and Gilbert + Tobin hired 15 fewer (40).

Industry insiders have told The Australian some of the bigger legal firms chose to hold off on hiring large numbers of graduates because of stern warnings about strong inflation which would cause the deal pool to dry up.

Eaton Strategy + Search adviser Shaaron Dalton agreed, adding that it was likely firms were easing off after strong recruitment

of new lawyers over a few years.

"They have been hiring a lot more graduates over the last few years to make up for the situation we've had where there has been such a shortage of good quality mid-level lawyers, so a lot of firms upped their grad programs pre-pandemic and continued that throughout the pandemic," Ms Dalton said. "We've come off the back of quite a high grad recruitment period, so many firms may be making the adjustment back."

King & Wood Mallesons was one of few firms that increased its hiring of graduates, jumping from 20 to 90 over the past six months.

## 'We've come off the back of quite a high grad recruitment period'

SHAARON DALTON  
EATON STRATEGY + SEARCH  
ADVISER

HWL Ebsworth hired 134 graduates after hiring 128 last year, and Corrs Chambers Westgarth hired 77, which was 10 more than its previous intake.

Maddocks CEO David Newman, whose firm consistently hires about 30 graduates per in-

take, told The Australian practices had an "obligation" to train the next generation of lawyers.

"We invest a lot of time and money and effort in our graduates, so to be able to bring a good number through that we can train and retain a lot of them is really valuable to us," he said.

"We want to make sure they get a good experience."

Mr Newman was adamant the firm did not flex the graduate hiring numbers up or down depending on work demand, because it was important to the firm to create a pipeline of lawyers for the future. Asked what he looked for when

hiring a graduate, Mr Newman said he wanted people who had a "genuine interest in the firm, care about what we do and are well rounded."

"We want people who have shown in their schooling or university careers that they're able to engage in activities and community beyond their studies," he said.

"Whether they're worked in certain roles, or participated in team sports, or been genuinely involved in volunteer activities for the community."

"Having a great academic background is great, but at the end of the day, as a lawyer you're deal-

ing with people, and you have to have skills from a broader experience."

Graduate Jemima Stratton, who is in her second of three rotations at Maddocks, encouraged all law students to apply for a clerkship and a subsequent post-university role because "the best way to learn is to be thrown in the deep end."

"You get to experience a few areas of law, and I'm a big believer that you don't really know whether you like an area of law until you give it a try," she said. "Studying a subject at university is very different to actually doing it."

## Free dinners, pilates and coffee: the best perks for employees

ELLIE DUDLEY

In 2023, it's simply not enough for law firms to just offer employees competitive salaries and four weeks of annual leave.

Amid one of the tightest labour markets the industry has seen, companies are going above and beyond with employee perks to ensure workers are happy, fulfilled – and willing to hang around for the long run.

Even more so, industry leaders say offering workers benefits will help to reduce the burgeoning mental health issues among lawyers, who are expected to work long hours and experience high levels of stress.

"We understand the industry's frustration with bureaucratic management structures and pressures to deliver short-term profits at the expense of employee development," Hamilton Locke managing partner Nick Humphrey told The Australian, as part of this year's Legal Partnerships Survey.

"We continually work to create a culture that attracts, retains and develops the best talent with aligned interests and goals. We work to develop and scale a work environment based on learning, development, collaboration, innovation and agile leadership."

And so how does a business create a culture such as this?

Here are the employee benefits for Australia's major legal firms.

### Gilbert + Tobin

Along with top-of-market remuneration and an additional bonus structure, Gilbert + Tobin offers 26 weeks of paid parental leave, and access to personal/carer's leave. Employees can also "purchase" up to 10 days of leave in addition to annual leave, and take up to 20 days off for volunteering or emergency services.

"We have exceptional people stepping out of the lift every day – because we know if we get this right, the rest looks after itself," founder Danny Gilbert said.

### 'We know if we get this right, the rest looks after itself'

DANNY GILBERT  
GILBERT + TOBIN FOUNDER

### The firm also offers:

- Public holiday swaps, allowing people to swap existing weekday Australian public holidays to celebrate a cultural or religious day more aligned to their beliefs and traditions;
- Retail discounts;
- Discounted gym memberships;
- Fruit baskets, afternoon snacks, free evening meals, one free coffee per day;
- A subsidised cafe;
- Annual G+T awards where winners get a \$500 Prezzy voucher;
- \$10,000 scholarships;
- Flat structure: Employees at G+T are simply "lawyer" or "partner";
- Up to \$10,000 given for employee referrals; and
- A \$20,000 "bounty" for recommending use cases for AI.

### Lander & Rogers

Australian-borne firm Lander & Rogers prioritises hybrid working with no days mandated in the office, to ensure employees can manage their work and outside responsibilities.

The firm holds a gender-neutral parental leave policy with up to 26 weeks paid, superannuation paid on unpaid parental leave, and paid leave available within 18 months of birth/adoption of a child to "encourage access by secondary carers".

"People want to feel genuinely



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supported and respected in the workplace, and to benefit from initiatives that support work-life integration and reflect our responsibilities in the wider community," chief executive partner Genevieve Collins said.

### The firm also offers:

- "Dress for your day" policy;
- Public holiday swaps;
- Annual remote work allowance;
- Group fitness classes; and
- An annual day off for "wellness".

### Clayton Utz

Top-tier firm Clayton Utz offers employees up to 26 weeks of paid parental leave that can be taken at any time over a two-year period. One of lawyers' greatest gripes, the billable hour, does not apply to newly minted parents, who are given the flexibility to ease back into work without logging a timesheet. The firm has also established a diversity and inclusion interest group, to grow representation among employees.

### The firm also offers:

- Paid study leave;
- An annual bonus scheme that rewards high performers;
- Discounted gym memberships;
- Flexible working for all; and
- Free health checks and sleep programs.

### Addisons

For Addisons managing partner Kieren Parker, superficial "work perks" aren't what will retain employees. Instead, he believes workers will remain with a company if they feel fulfilled by the work they are doing.

"We have built a unique culture which fosters meaningful career paths and a balance between work, life and family responsibilities," he said. "At Addisons, it is the bespoke supportive, collaborative environment, across small teams which ultimately enables our lawyers to thrive."

### The firm also offers:

- Flexible work options;
- Career breaks;
- Study leave;
- Recruitment referral bonuses;
- In-house pilates sessions;
- Solicitors lunches;
- Monthly cake days; and
- Friday night drinks.

### MinterEllison

Employees at MinterEllison can access free gym memberships, emergency childcare assistance and are given annual free flu vaccinations.

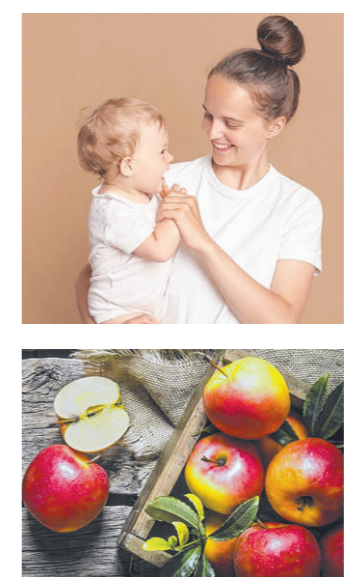
The firm values flexible and hybrid working, allowing workers to select when, where and how they work. "We explore benefits to cater for individual needs and preferences to foster the inclusive workplace we support so that everyone can bring their best to work, and they feel welcome and valued," chief talent officer Alissa Anderson said.

### The firm also offers:

- A "Gender Affirmation" policy that offers five days of paid leave;
- \$1200 wardrobe allowance;
- Financial support for home offices;
- Parenting support through external partner Karitane; and
- Additional leave to fit around a staff member's study or learning requirements.



Free pilates classes, gender-neutral parental leave and emergency childcare assistance, free coffee, subsidised cafe, free health checks and sleep programs are just some of the perks top law firms offer to attract and keep their staff



Collins

### PARTNERS ON THE MOVE

2023	NAME	FROM	TO	CITY	
JAN	George Austin	Corrs Chambers Westgarth	Wotton + Kearney	Melbourne	
	Richard Leder	Corrs Chambers Westgarth	Wotton + Kearney	Melbourne	
	Justin Fox	Corrs Chambers Westgarth	Hamilton Locke	Melbourne	
	Seema Sandhu	Clayton Utz	Hamilton Locke	Sydney	
	Cheryl Phillips	MinterEllison	Wotton + Kearney	Adelaide	
	Susan Taylor	Amber Electric	Clayton Utz	Melbourne	
	Naomi Philp	HWL Ebsworth	K&L Gates	Sydney	
	Stephen Iu	Norton Rose Fulbright	McCullough Robertson	Sydney	
	Andrew Fiskin	DLA Piper	Pinsent Masons	Melbourne	
	Marcus Best	MinterEllison	Piper Alderman	Melbourne	
Rebecca Hegarty	Coleman Greig	Bartier Perry	Sydney		
Andrew Grima	Coleman Greig	Bartier Perry	Sydney		
Shawn Skyring	Coleman Greig	Bartier Perry	Sydney		
Nick Kallipolitis	Coleman Greig	Bartier Perry	Sydney		
Annamarie Rooding	Tabcorp	King & Wood Mallesons	Melbourne		
Colin Little	Deloitte	Ashurst	Sydney		
Vanja Podinic	Deloitte	Ashurst	Sydney		
Tony Bidder	Norton Rose Fulbright	Barry Nilsson	Sydney		
Jonathon Turner	Norton Rose Fulbright	Lander & Rogers	Sydney		
Paul Harley	HopgoodGanim Lawyers	Thomson Geer	Perth		
Sarah O'Brien-Smith	HopgoodGanim Lawyers	Thomson Geer	Perth		
McLane Edinger	Summers Legal	Hall & Wilcox	Perth		
Meredith Riley	Ashurst	MinterEllison	Sydney		
David Cooper	Baker McKenzie	Hall & Wilcox	Perth		
MAR	Scarlet Reid	Ashurst	McCullough Robertson	Sydney	
	Jennifer McCosker	Arnold Bloch Leibler	K&L Gates	Sydney	
	Jack Brumpton	Sun Cable (inhouse)	DLA Piper	Brisbane	
	Karen Fairbairn	Self employed (previously at Piper Alderman)	Keypoint Law	Sydney	
	Lisa Quilty	KWM	Mills Oakley	Canberra	
	Brent van Staden	Colin Biggers & Paisley	Mills Oakley	Brisbane	
	Greg Lee	ClarkeKann	Mills Oakley	Sydney	
	Sarah Roettgers	Corrs Chambers Westgarth	Hamilton Locke	Brisbane	
	Stuart Broadfoot	KWM	K&L Gates	Sydney	
	James Durnall	Bird and Bird	K&L Gates	Sydney	
MAY	Liam Hennessy	Gadens	Clyde & Co	Brisbane	
	Patricia Paton	Hamilton Locke	Ashurst	Sydney	
	Jo En Low	Bracewell	Ashurst	Sydney	
	Tim Sacker	Clayton Utz	White & Case	Sydney	
	JUN	Steven Mattiussi	Watson Mangioni	Addisons	Sydney
		Elizabeth Richmond	Clayton Utz	Clifford Chance	Sydney
		Warren Scott	Holding Redlich	Dentons	Melbourne
		Jane Hider	Corrs Chambers Westgarth	King & Wood Mallesons	Sydney
		Tony Rutherford	Holding Redlich	DLA Piper	Melbourne
		Tim Macmillan	Mills Oakley	Bird and Bird	Sydney
Neil Pathak		Gilbert + Tobin	Ashurst	Melbourne	
Susannah Macknay		Gilbert + Tobin	Ashurst	Melbourne	
Brianna Quinn		Lévy Kaufmann-Kohler	Bird & Bird	Sydney	
Emanuel Confos		Norton Rose Fulbright	Baker McKenzie	Sydney	
Harriet Oldmeadow	Norton Rose Fulbright	Baker McKenzie	Sydney		
Nick Foulkes	Alaris	Piper Alderman	Perth		
Angelina Kozary	Piper Alderman	Holman Webb	Sydney		
Greg Conomos	Piper Alderman	Holman Webb	Sydney		
Vahini Chetty	Piper Alderman	Wotton + Kearney	Melbourne		
JUL	Neil Pragnell	Case Law	Keypoint Law	Sydney	
	Andrew Gorman	McCabes	Meridian Lawyers	Sydney	
	Scott Kennedy	McCabes	Meridian Lawyers	Sydney	
	Chris Clarke	Watson Mangioni	Bird & Bird	Sydney	
	Lucas Wilk	Jones Day	JWS	Perth	
	Kylie Wilson	Holding Redlich	Sparke Helmore	Brisbane	
	Leith Ayres	HopgoodGanim	Lavan	Perth	
	Clementyne Rawlyk	Corrs	Hamilton Locke	Melbourne	
	Drina Govic	Litigi	Meridian Lawyers	Melbourne	
	Peter Nugent	Piper Alderman	Holding Redlich	Brisbane	
Lisa-Marie McKechnie	EY	Piper Alderman	Sydney		
Kathy Neilson	EY	Piper Alderman	Sydney		
Orla McCoy	Clayton Utz Clayton Utz	Gilbert + Tobin	Sydney		
James Pettigrew	Deloitte	HSF	Sydney		
Paul Devlin	Perkins Coie (US)	Norton Rose Fulbright	Perth		
Nicole Clayton	Gilbert + Tobin	Lander & Rogers	Sydney		

Source: Eaton Strategy + Search

## Poaching dives as firms take more targeted approach

DOMINIC PEACOCK

The last six months have seen a consolidation of sorts and gradual slowdown in lateral hires by law firms.

The number of partners switching firms or being poached has fallen to 69 in the past half year, from about 76 in the previous six months, The Australian's Legal Partnership Survey reveals.

Firms are being more targeted, hiring partners to fill specific gaps in practice groups.

That's not to say they won't be opportunistic if the conditions are right – for example if a high profile/elite partner with a significant reputation and practice "comes on the market".

Both partners and the firms themselves are also being more deliberate and circumspect about the hiring process.

Reasons for moves generally surround dissatisfaction with management, coupled with financial motivations (the two are often linked).

Partner moves in the past six months show us that the practice areas in demand are M&A/corporate (including private equity), restructuring & insolvency, and energy (particularly transition and renewables). Other areas such as projects and construction continue to hold up.

When examining broad trends in the lateral market, it is always worth looking at historical cycles.

One recurring theme is that when there is a downturn from an economic perspective, this creates volatility, which in turn creates opportunity.

This means that where times are turbulent, certain firms use this as an opportunity to use their balance sheet to hire partners that

they might not have access to in more positive circumstances.

There has certainly been a slowdown in revenue and growth/capture of market share, which has resulted in a reduction of law firm profits.

### Where times are turbulent, certain firms use this as an opportunity to hire partners

While this might sound dramatic, the boom time of recent years which gave rise to record profits for firms was always going to be unsustainable.

What this does mean is that there are potentially certain partners that might be "available" where they see the financial pos-

ition of their firm as concerning in the current climate, with one eye on the short to mid-term outlook.

The downturn in profits has given firms the grounds to reduce partners' equity or have difficult conversations about certain individuals' futures at firms, mainly based on poor performance.

Perhaps cynics might argue these firms are not altogether unhappy that the perfect storm of market conditions, slowdown in profits, general uncertainty around the financial markets and pessimistic economic outlook have given them the excuse to carry out this exercise.

There are also a number of firms going through internal restructures and succession planning, which also creates these types of opportunities.

One trend that is not going away is the requirement, and indeed, desire to fulfil diversity quo-

tas, primarily at partner level from a female perspective, which can only be a good thing.

However, this is an increasing challenge for those firms that aspire to attain certain levels of female partners above the 40 per cent mark.

This is something that will continue to be a challenge for law firms based on the general demographics of lawyers, and something that continues to keep law firm management awake at night.

While the movement of laterals has been slower than in the previous six months, it appears firms will continue to hire partners with solid profiles and books of business, especially where circumstances give rise to gaps in practice groups, as a result of strategic or succession planning.

Dominic Peacock is a partner at Eaton Search + Strategy.

## Surprise sectors sustain practices

ELLIE DUDLEY

Unexpected areas of law have risen to prominence and experienced high demand over the past six months, sustaining firms through a difficult economic period as inflationary pressures have strangled typically booming corners of practice.

Areas such as cyber security, construction, energy transition and family law are key sectors repeatedly highlighted in The Australian's Legal Partnerships survey as having experienced an unexpected uptick in business over the past six months, as the cost of living skyrocketed and business eased off in other sectors.

Lander & Rogers chief executive partner Genevieve Collins cited cyber security as a huge growth driver within the firm, which had established a dedicated cyber security, privacy and data governance team.

Following hacking scandals at Optus, Medibank and more recently law firm HWL Ebsworth, companies were feeling nervous about protection and employing lawyers to help, she said.

"High-profile privacy breaches and ongoing discussions about privacy and data reforms are driving demand for legal advice in responding to and mitigating the risk of cyber attacks and data breaches," Ms Collins said.

Ms Collins added that with the advent of artificial intelligence, the firm had experienced an uptick in demand for technology and innovation services.

"Clients are increasingly seeking assistance with automation of legal processes and contracts," she said.

"(They also require) specific tools and platforms that address particular risks such as complex privacy regulations and ESG best practice."

Baker McKenzie, Pinsent Masons and Herbert Smith Freehills all experienced growth in energy law, which leaders say is due to predictions of energy transition across the country.

"We continue to be ambitious and remain focused on our clients and our long-term growth, building on our strong performance in recent years," Herbert Smith Freehills executive partner Kristin Stammer said.

Speaking to the firm's "strong capabilities" in the energy transition sector, she added: "Our teams are continuing to deliver great outcomes on the largest transformational deals and matters in the market."

Addisons boss Kieren Parker told The Australian the firm was experiencing an unexpected uptick in demand for construction services following an industry boom. There has been discussion of gambling reform across NSW, and Mr Parker indicated that had also been an area of growth for the firm.

"We are well positioned to do well in all weather," Ms Parker said. "There has been particularly solid activity in the construction, property and gambling teams."

DLA Piper managing partner Amber Matthews admitted that while the corporate and litigation practices had experienced a slowdown, the organisation had seen greater demand in insolvencies as businesses buckled under inflationary pressure.

"Within the context of a more challenging macro-environment, it is more important than ever that we continue to operate as a values-led, strategically aligned firm and manage the business responsibly," she said.

"DLA Piper is very well hedged as a firm, both geographically and in terms of our practice areas and sectors. Our corporate and litigation practices are countercyclical, which means when the corporate environment is slower, often we see greater demand around insolvencies and restructurings."