
Rewarding Leadership: Salary & bonuses



Chief and Director salary and bonus

Regardless of uncertainty and disruption in the market, one constant remains true: the recruitment of the most senior roles in business services functions can have a transformative effect on a firm.

Increasingly, firms are embracing leadership expertise from diverse industries to drive strategy, operational efficiency, structural reform and commercial growth. Business services professionals operating at C-suite and Director level have powerful voices at board-level and are instrumental in building new teams that have lasting impact.

As such, Totum's executive search offering for Director and Chief level roles continues to grow rapidly. To help firms recruiting for senior roles, we wanted to offer a timely reminder of how salaries and bonuses are awarded at executive level.

We hope this edition will offer firms a useful insight into compensation practices across all types of firm, steering better decision-making on remuneration in the future.

Compared to other industries, law firms continue to offer particularly competitive salaries at senior levels. So how are remuneration packages at Director and Chief level awarded?

Salaries at Chief level

As with last year, Chief People Officer and Chief Financial Officer roles report the two highest median salaries. At a median salary of £285,000, the CFO rank offers the highest salary among Chief level roles. Second is the CPO position, with a median salary of £276,028, rising to £330,000 for 75th percentile.

Salaries for the Chief Technology Officer role, which some firms may now refer to as Chief Information Officer, are on the rise. The median salary stands at £215,000, with the 75th percentile reaching £300,000. Firms are increasingly prioritising technology and innovation, leading to a year-on-year increase in salaries at the 75th percentile from £285,000 to £300,000. Additionally, firms with a larger technology remit are witnessing even higher salary increases.

The number of roles and influence of General Operations positions continues to grow, with the Chief Operating Officer role becoming an essential component of law firm management. Our most recent survey of Chief Operating Officers found that 62% of Top 50 UK firms currently have a Chief Operating Officer, with a third (32%) being female.

The role of the COO is uniquely tailored to each firm, resulting in a wide range of salaries. While the median salary is £250,000, at Totum, we have observed significantly higher figures. At the highest level, many Chief Operating Officers work alongside Chief Financial Officers to drive innovation, manage change, enhance efficiency and streamline processes. These roles are often designed to align with the firm's unique structures, culture, and personality.

In 2024/25, over a third of our leadership hires were at Chief level, with 62% at Director level.

Salaries at Director level

Director level salaries across all professional services functions remain competitive, with median salaries ranging from £157,500-£182,537 across Finance, General Operations, Business Development and Marketing, Knowledge Management, Legal Operations, People, Responsible Business, and Technology roles. The Finance function offers the highest median salaries at senior levels, with Director level finance professionals receiving a median of £182,357, with Technology sitting at the lower end. However, firms are seeing huge growth in senior technology roles so we are expecting this to change with more senior hires and commensurate salaries.

Last year, we highlighted that salaries for Directors in knowledge management had increased by 20% to £167,260. While Director levels remain the same level this year, there has been another jump in median salaries at Head of. This reflects a rapid digital transformation, moving away from being a library style service to one that underpins the information needs of a firm through technology, while also delivering superior value to clients.

Another function that has seen investment over the past few years is Responsible Business. Firms are building out teams to deal with increased complexity in compliance and regulation. Consequently, median Director salaries of £170,000 compare favourably with other functions, as firms hire at a senior level and embed policies before building their teams in the future. In Totum's Reward Survey research, 70% of firms have at least one Responsible Business professional.

We expected Legal Operations Director level salaries to rise as firms focused on the strategic remit of Innovation & Transformation. This year's survey confirms this: with salaries rising to £165,000 from £157,500 in the previous year.

Bonuses

Business services roles qualify for either a discretionary or contractual bonus in almost all firms, regardless of level. Unsurprisingly, contractual bonuses are more common the higher the level.

Firms are increasingly focusing on the bonus component for Director and Chief level positions. There are two main reasons for this shift. First, individuals at these levels seek accountability for their achievements and now expect bonuses tied to their successes. Second, many professionals entering the sector from outside the legal industry are accustomed to different, often substantial, bonus systems. Our own leadership placements indicates that 30% of these roles are being filled by individuals from outside the sector. To remain competitive, firms must continue to offer attractive bonuses in addition to competitive salaries to secure these roles. Consequently, the structure of bonus provisions and remuneration packages will continue to evolve.

At the higher end of seniority, median bonus figures typically range from 10-20% of salaries, with even higher percentages for more senior Chief roles. The range does differ across departments, with Finance, People/HR and General Operations averaging bonuses of 17% or more, while other areas such as Risk & Compliance, Knowledge Management and Responsible Business receiving lower bonuses as a proportion of salary. At the higher end we see bonuses exceeding 35% and more.

“So many people are now coming into the sector from outside law where they are used to very different – often very large – bonus systems. If the trend towards attracting people from outside the sector continues, firms will have to offer better bonuses”.

Salary Increases

Our 2025 Survey data indicates that although salaries have not seen significant increases, they have remained stable across all levels of seniority. However, law firms continue to offer competitive salaries, especially at the Director and Chief levels. Across the UK, the average percentage increase for business services salaries was 5%, with City firms giving the biggest average increase of 5.8%.



Average business service salaries across the UK increased by 5% (5.8% previous year)



Average business service salaries in city firms increased by 5.8% (6.7% previous year)



London salaries are 13% higher than the national average



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