



# HONG KONG LEGAL | PRIVATE PRACTICE

Industry Trends & Salary Guide

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2025



# PRIVATE PRACTICE IN HONG KONG

## 2025 INDUSTRY TRENDS & SALARY GUIDE

### | FEE EARNER

Hong Kong's private practice legal market in 2024 navigated a complex landscape of economic challenges, geopolitical tensions, and structural shifts, emerging with a cautious resilience that tested the adaptability of law firms and legal professionals. The year was characterised by reduced deal activity, selective hiring, and firm restructurings, compounded by market exits with the withdrawal of U.S. firms from Hong Kong and Mainland China. Despite these headwinds, opportunities emerged from recovering capital markets and the growing presence of PRC firms within the city.

#### Strategic Realignment

The most notable developments of 2024 were the merger of Allen & Overy and Shearman & Sterling, forming A&O Shearman, and the separation of Johnson Stokes & Master (JSM) from Mayer Brown. U.S. firms, including Dechert and Winston & Strawn, closed their Hong Kong offices, contributing to a broader trend of over 10 U.S. firm closures in mainland China since mid-2023. Beyond these market exits, several law firms underwent multiple rounds of restructuring, refining strategies and streamlining operations to adapt to prevailing conditions.

Simultaneously, these departures created openings for other firms to capitalise on, both in terms of client engagement and talent acquisition. Numerous UK and PRC law firms seized the opportunity to make substantial investments and hire lateral partners and teams, particularly in corporate, dispute resolution, and investment funds practices.

#### PRC Firms Rise & Talent Shifts

The ascendance of PRC law firms in Hong Kong marked a transformative trend in 2024, significantly shaping recruitment dynamics. Both leading Red Circle firms and established regional players in Mainland China expanded their presence in the city, absorbing lawyers from international firms by offering stronger deal pipelines and work referrals from mainland counterparts, and attractive partnership prospects. Partners transitioning to PRC firms were drawn by their flexible fee structures, which facilitated competitive client offerings and enhanced autonomy. According to the Law List from the Hong Kong Law Society, over 20 partners moved from international law firms to PRC firms since the start of 2024.

#### Selective Hiring

Hiring in Hong Kong's private practice sector in 2024 was notably selective. Demand for dispute lawyers held steady, with mid-level professionals capable of handling commercial litigation, regulatory matters, and arbitration being highly sought after. Transactional practices, such as M&A, capital markets, and banking and finance, experienced an uptick from the final quarter of 2024. Firms favoured mid-level lawyers with two to five years of post-qualification experience (PQE) over newly qualified or senior laterals, reflecting leaner team structures. The surplus of candidates, fuelled by U.S. firm exits, intensified competition with firms seeking bilingual, versatile lawyers through rigorous interview processes to identify suitable talent.

## Technology & Lawyer Priority Shifts

Lawyer priorities evolved significantly in recent years, with traditional high salaries losing prominence relative to work-life balance and career development. Lawyers increasingly sought in-house roles at earlier career stages than previously observed, driven by a preference for reduced billing pressures.

Technology, particularly generative AI, emerged as a big topic. International law firms began adopting AI tools to streamline drafting, due diligence, and research, addressing client demands for efficiency in a cost-conscious market. This shift prompted streamlining of teams and upskilling initiatives to ensure lawyers adapted to AI integration.

## | SALARY TRENDS

Salary trends in 2024 reflected the market's uneven trajectory. U.S. big law firms maintained their salary scales following an upward adjustment in early 2024 and several U.S. firms cancelling cost of living allowances (COLA) for their local lawyers at the beginning of 2025. Magic Circle law firms reviewed their global pay structures and implemented an overall upward adjustment; however, coupled with Hong Kong's market conditions, the need for consistency in global pay scales prompted headcount reductions in several Hong Kong offices. This adjustment was a contributing factor to the retention rates of trainee solicitors upon completion of their training contracts. PRC firms offered slightly lower base salaries for partners and associates but supplemented these with substantial performance bonuses and accelerated partner tracks.

## | SUMMARY & OUTLOOK FOR 2025

Hong Kong's private practice legal market in 2024 demonstrated resilience amid a period of recalibration. Firm restructurings reshaped hiring strategies, while PRC firms gained prominence, absorbing lawyers from international practices. Lawyer priorities increasingly shifted toward achieving balance, fuelling transitions to in-house roles. Looking ahead to 2025, cautious optimism prevails. As capital markets and regional transactional work show improvement, hiring will remain competitive, prioritising adaptable, bilingual lawyers, with firms placing greater emphasis on portable client books for senior laterals.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

HK Lawyer	Local	International	Magic Circle
NQ	\$35,000 - 75,000	\$75,000 - 101,000	\$98,000 - 103,000
1 PQE	\$38,000 - 80,000	\$80,000 - 110,000	\$98,000 - 115,000
2 PQE	\$40,000 - 85,000	\$85,000 - 120,000	\$105,000 - 130,000
3 PQE	\$45,000 - 90,000	\$90,000 - 130,000	\$115,000 - 140,000
4 PQE	\$50,000 - 95,000	\$95,000 - 140,000	\$125,000 - 155,000
5-6 PQE	\$55,000 - 100,000	\$100,000 - 155,000	\$135,000 - 170,000
7-8 PQE	\$60,000 - 110,000	\$110,000 - 170,000	\$150,000 - 185,000
9+ PQE up to counsel level	\$70,000+	\$120,000 - 175,000+	\$180,000+

US Scale (As of January 2025)	Annual USD	HKD
1st year - Class of 2024	\$225,000	\$146,250
2nd year - Class of 2023	\$235,000	\$152,750
3rd year - Class of 2022	\$260,000	\$169,000
4th year - Class of 2021	\$310,000	\$201,500
5th year - Class of 2020	\$365,000	\$237,250
6th year - Class of 2019	\$390,000	\$253,500
7th year - Class of 2018	\$420,000	\$273,000
8th year - Class of 2017 & before	\$435,000	\$282,750

## BUSINESS SUPPORT

### Paralegal

The demand for paralegals in Hong Kong has grown significantly in 2024, spanning corporate, dispute resolution, investment funds, and banking and finance practice areas. Law firms increasingly replace departed associates with paralegals to optimise costs, while some qualified candidates, including newly qualified Hong Kong lawyers, now consider paralegal roles as entry points, with certain opportunities offering pathways to legal manager or associate positions. Fluency in Mandarin remains a critical requirement for corporate paralegal roles, particularly those tied to capital markets, reflecting ongoing client needs. In dispute resolution, international firms value candidates with court experience from local Hong Kong firms. However, visa sponsorship remains rare, giving an edge to candidates with existing IANG visas or those secured through the Top Talent Pass Scheme. The candidate pool has expanded, yet employers maintain high standards for experience and skills, balancing availability with quality.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

Experience	Local Firms	International Firms	Magic Circle Firms	US Firms
0-2 years	\$17,000 - 22,000	\$22,000 - 30,000	\$24,000 - 32,000	\$25,000 - 35,000
3-5 years	\$22,000 - 28,000	\$30,000 - 40,000	\$32,000 - 42,000	\$35,000 - 60,000
6+ years	\$28,000+	\$35,000+	\$42,000+	\$50,000+

## Legal Secretary

Demand for legal secretaries in Hong Kong has declined in 2024, driven by fewer fee earners and an increased ratio of fee earners per secretary, reflecting restructurings and layoffs at some international law firms. Fee earners' growing self-sufficiency, aided by technology, has reduced reliance on secretarial support, with secretaries now supporting larger teams. Most openings target candidates with 5-10 years of experience, offering budgets of HK\$30,000-HK\$35,000 monthly, while very few roles supporting partners or senior lawyers exceed HK\$40,000, indicating a conservative approach. Firms prioritise candidates with strong computer and tech skills to enhance efficiency, adapting to a market where lawyers handle more tasks independently.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

Experience	Local Firms	International Firms	Magic Circle Firms	US Firms
0-2 years	\$17,000 - 21,000	\$19,000 - 23,000	\$25,000 - 30,000	\$25,000 - 30,000
2-4 years	\$19,000 - 25,000	\$25,000 - 30,000	\$28,000 - 35,000	\$30,000 - 35,000
4-6 years	\$21,000 - 29,000	\$28,000 - 35,000	\$35,000 - 39,000	\$35,000 - 43,000
6+ years	\$25,000+	\$32,000+	\$35,000+	\$38,000+

## Human Resources & Office Operation

In 2024, human resources (HR) roles in Hong Kong law firms have seen notable movement, particularly from officer to manager levels, resembling a game of musical chairs as professionals shift between firms. Law society compliance experience remains a prized asset for junior to mid-level positions. As firms almost fully return to on-site operations, demand for office assistants, receptionists, and office managers have risen. International firms continue to welcome candidates from large professional services or financial institutions for administrative roles, valuing transferable skills in a competitive market.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

Title	Experience	Salary Range
Administrative Assistant	0-3 years	\$18,000 - 29,000
HR Assistant/Coordinator	0-3 years	\$21,000 - 38,000
Administrative Officer	2-5 years	\$26,000 - 36,000
HR Officer/Advisor	2-5 years	\$30,000 - 40,000
Senior HR Officer/Advisor	5+ years	\$40,000 - 60,000
Graduate Recruitment Manager	8+ years	\$52,000 - 90,000
Facility Supervisor/Office Manager	8+ years	\$52,000 - 90,000
Talent Acquisition Manager	8+ years	\$60,000 - 120,000
HR Manager	8+ years	\$65,000 - 90,000+
Senior HR Manager	12+ years	\$82,000 - 120,000+

## Business Development & Marketing

Demand for business development (BD) and marketing professionals in Hong Kong's legal sector has remained stable in 2024. International law firms sustain active recruitment across all levels, from assistants to heads, though most openings are replacements rather than new headcounts, with team sizes largely unchanged from prior years. Executive-level roles dominate, with a few senior movements noted in 2024. Fluency in written and spoken Chinese is highly prized for crafting pitchbooks and legal directory submissions, allowing professionals with these skills to gain a competitive edge. Junior roles attract fresh graduates with degrees in law, journalism, or related fields, especially those with prior internships in law firms or professional services.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

Title	Experience	Salary Range
BD/Marketing Assistant	0-2 years	\$21,000 - 30,000
BD/Marketing Executive	3-5 years	\$30,000 - 42,000
Senior BD/Marketing Executive	5-8 years	\$40,000 - 57,000
BD/Marketing Manager	8+ years	\$50,000 - 90,000+

## Risk & Compliance (KYC/AML/Conflicts)

The demand for risk and compliance professionals in Hong Kong's private practice has surged in recent years, driven by a complex regulatory landscape necessitating expertise in AML, conflicts, and sanctions. This growth spans both lawyer and non-qualified roles, from junior matters-intake positions to senior AML and risk management posts. Mid-level roles face a local talent shortage, particularly for those with AML advisory and conflict analysis experience, extending search times. Junior opportunities abound, drawing paralegals and compliance professionals from outside law firms eager to build careers in this field. Firms increasingly consider candidates with financial services backgrounds, broadening the talent pool amid heightened compliance needs.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

Title	Experience	Salary Range
Compliance Analyst	0-3 years	\$21,000 - 31,000
Senior Compliance Analyst	3-6 years	\$32,000 - 45,000
Compliance Officer	3-8 years	\$40,000 - 65,000
Compliance Manager	8+ years	\$60,000+
Conflict Lawyer	0-4 years	\$70,000 - 90,000
Senior Conflict Lawyer	4-8+ years	\$90,000 - 125,000

## Accounting & Finance

Accounting and finance roles in Hong Kong law firms have seen constant demand in 2024, with several head of finance openings alongside manager and assistant manager positions. Employers prioritise candidates with prior law firm experience for most roles except junior positions. The market reflects steady activity, with new hires supporting financial reporting and analysis needs, ensuring firms maintain robust financial operations.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

Title	Experience	Salary Range
Accounts Assistant	0-2 years	\$19,000 - 24,000
Accounts Officer	2-5 years	\$24,000 - 39,000
Financial Analyst	2-5 years	\$29,000 - 41,000
Credit Control	2-6 years	\$29,000 - 55,000
Accountant	4-6 years	\$40,000 - 55,000
Assistant Finance Manager	4-6 years	\$40,000 - 55,000
Finance Manager	6-8 years	\$60,000 - 82,000
Senior Finance Manager	8+ years	\$72,000 - 102,000
Financial Controller	10+ years	\$74,000 - 110,000
Finance Director/CFO	12+ years	\$100,000 - 185,000

## Company Secretary

The company secretarial function in Hong Kong's onshore law firms has remained stable in 2024, with only a few openings from administrator to manager levels, mostly replacements amid a cautious candidate approach. Offshore law firms and their fiduciary teams show stronger demand, managing offshore portfolios. HKGCI associate membership is a prerequisite for officer-level roles and above, reflecting the need for formal qualifications in this small but steady sector.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

Title	Experience	Salary Range
Company Secretarial Assistant	0-2 years	\$19,000 - 23,000
Company Secretarial Officer	2-5 years	\$23,000 - 35,000
Senior Company Secretarial Officer	5-8 years	\$32,000 - 50,000
Company Secretarial Manager	8+ years	\$50,000 - 80,000

## Knowledge Management & Professional Support Lawyer (PSL)

Knowledge management (KM) and Professional Support Lawyer (PSL) roles have been quiet in 2024, with very few openings, primarily at international firms like the Magic Circle. These positions appeal to lawyers and paralegals seeking non-fee-earning roles within private practice, offering a shift in work dynamics while leveraging legal expertise.

*All salaries are per month and in HKD unless otherwise specified.*

Title	Experience	Salary Range
KM Specialist/PSL	0-4 years	\$26,000 - 40,000
KM Specialist/PSL	4-8+ years	\$40,000 - 60,000
KM Lawyer/PSL	0-4 years	\$70,000 - 90,000
KM Lawyer/PSL	4-8+ years	\$90,000 - 140,000+

## OUR LEGAL & GOVERNANCE DESK

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