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UK law firms missing mark on team resourcing and pricing

By Karry Lai June 18 2025



Lawyers who can help in-house counsel manage costs and budget stand out, but few meet client expectations in the UK, IFLR data reveals

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Law firms in the UK have much room to improve when it comes to helping in-house counsel manage costs and budget, exclusive data and analysis reveals.

IFR research surveys indicate that clients are dissatisfied with how firms manage costs and budget despite that attribute's importance to client advocacy, underlining the opportunity to do better (more

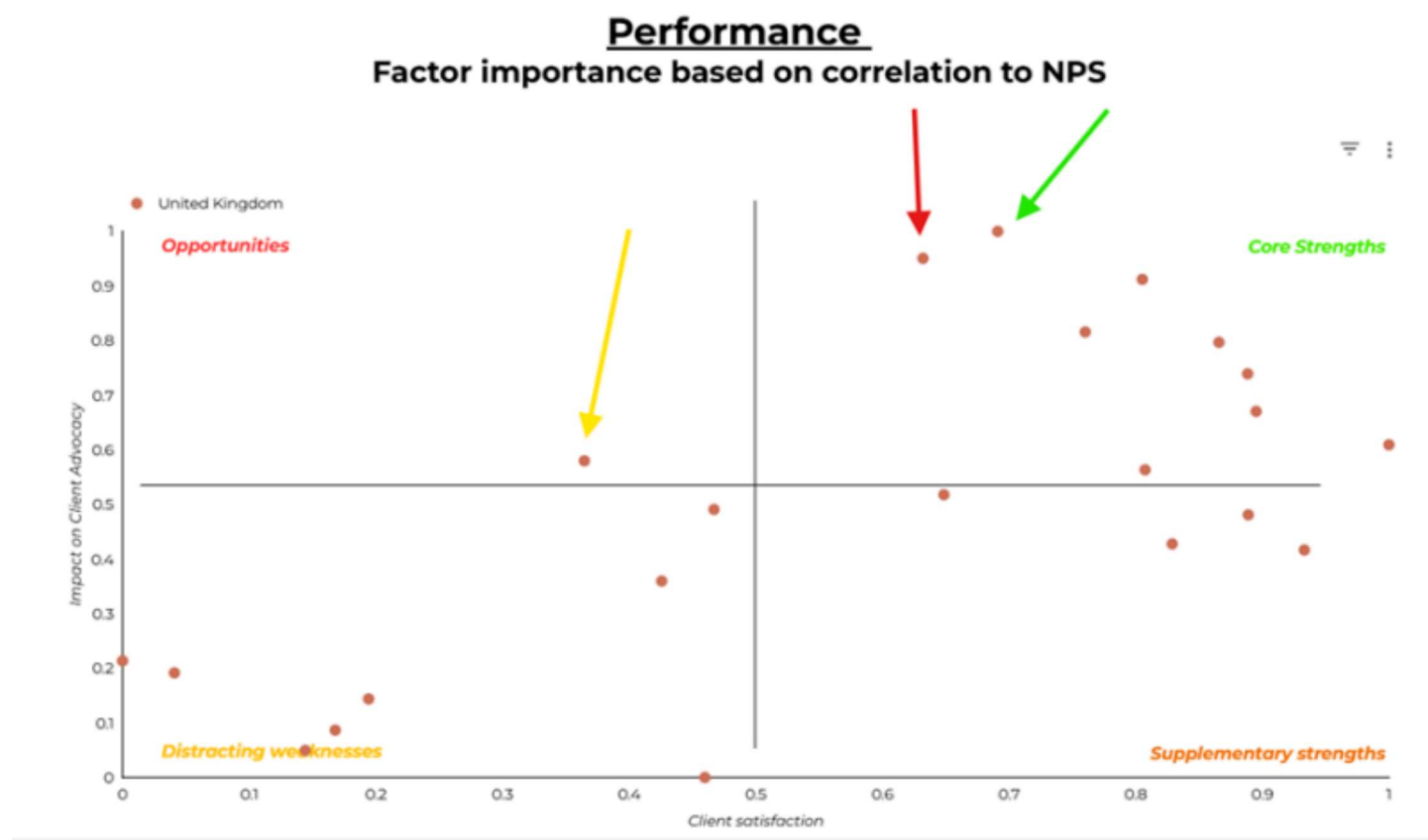
detailed data can be found below).

Other areas that external counsel can improve on are providing innovative solutions and advising on risk management, the data shows.

Room to improve

A total of 31,179 corporate counsel responded to the surveys we conducted. Participants were asked to rate a range of attributes as well as their importance in decision-making when selecting outside counsel.

These two ratings – for client satisfaction and impact on client advocacy – were rated on a scale from 0 to 100, with 0 being the least important and 100 being the most important.



As the table above shows, the sub-factor of managing costs and budget had a score of 58/100 (yellow arrow) for client advocacy (see y-axis) and an even lower rating of 36/100 for client satisfaction (x-axis).

Of all the surveyed attributes that had a score of 50/100 or above for client advocacy, this attribute had the lowest result for client satisfaction, underscoring the opportunity for improvement.

Under pressure

Some sources indicate that the low rating for client satisfaction (36/100) can be attributed to the high costs of legal services, especially due to the over-staffing of UK firms compared to those in other countries.

Konstantinos Adamos, group head of legal for cryptoassets at Revolut in London, says US firms are “very lean at all levels”, adding: “It’s not uncommon to see one partner, one associate and a couple of juniors supporting large deals.”

UK in-house counsel operate in one of the most demanding legal environments in the world – not just technically, but economically and reputationally.

Aymen Mahmoud, London office managing partner at [McDermott Will & Emery](#), says: “They are under relentless pressure to deliver top-tier legal outcomes while justifying every pound spent.”

Flexi pricing

Given that in-house counsel prize cost-effectiveness, law firms that can meet this brief have an advantage.

“Providing discounted rates for repeat work or volume is important, especially considering the fact that hourly rates have been steadily increasing over the years,” says Adamos.

He adds that in the US, it is more common to see alternative fee arrangements such as fixed or capped fees.

Adamos also suggests that teams with the right balance of junior and senior lawyers are doing the best, as they can deliver effective advice in a timely and economical way.

“More senior members of the team will necessarily have an important role to play in providing innovative solutions, giving advice on risk management and taking views on the interpretation of the law,” he says.

At the same time, their time will be significantly more expensive than that of more junior team members, who would be better placed doing research or other time-consuming tasks.

“An overwhelming majority of firms have also started exploring ways in which technology can help them maintain consistency, quality and efficiency, leading to a reduction in time and therefore cost,” he adds.

Compared to their US rivals, UK firms have been slower to embrace innovation such as AI that can help reduce cost by automating repetitive and administrative tasks, according to Adamos.

Lir Laughlin, managing partner of [Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer](#)’s Belfast office, adds that clic expect more than legal advice – they want predictability, efficiency and measurable value.

“Law firms must offer creative fee structures, embed legal project management and rethink delivery models to meet these expectations,” she says.

At Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer, for example, the firm focuses on resourcing in an agile way, says McLaughlin. It combines lawyers from specialist practice teams with specific digital and project management skills to ensure that budgets are controlled and tasks are done efficiently.

For McDermott, Will & Emery, Mahmoud says, the firm has invested heavily in scoping tools, project management and predictive pricing models that make budgeting accurate, not aspirational.

“We hire the best pricing team in the business and we incentivise our legal teams to treat scope management and financial discipline as critical to client satisfaction, not distractions from it,” he explains.

Strategic approach

Beyond managing costs and budget, sources in the UK point to the importance of innovative solutions and risk management. Both attributes rated very highly for client advocacy (100/100 for innovative solutions and 95/100 for risk management) in our research.

“Our business clients are entrepreneurial and, more often than not, the questions they ask do not have a black or white answer,” says Adamos of Revolut.

When assessing legal risks such as litigation or regulatory enforcement, Adamos says that in-house counsel often turn to external lawyers.

“This often involves drawing from their broader knowledge on similar matters with other clients and the market and providing us with a strategic view as to how to manage a particular risk,” he says.

From a legal operations perspective, this means building teams with deep experience, knowledge and skills that they can draw on in different scenarios.

“Training should focus on commercial acumen and innovation literacy,” says McLaughlin.

She adds that resourcing must include multidisciplinary teams, flexible staffing models, and legal operations experts to co-design and optimise solutions.

From a management perspective, this will involve using performance metrics that can foster a culture of innovation and investing strategically in technology and knowledge platforms.

Delivering on innovation and risk requires operational rigour and cultural realignment, says Mahmoud.

“Training begins with how we train lawyers to think about the business of law,” he explains. “It’s not enough to be right; you have to be relevant and add value. You have to deliver solutions in a way that

reflects how clients measure that value.”

Methodology

This is now the ninth instalment of our second *What Corporates Want* series of reports.

Through our primary research with in-house counsel representatives, we asked them to rate a range of attributes and their importance in decision-making when selecting outside counsel.

We have aggregated the responses from our IFLR1000 surveys from 2022 to 2024 and analysed the results in this report series. The data highlights the extent to which in-house counsel’s views on these attributes differ between industries, regions, revenue sizes and practice areas.

To read the previous instalment of *What Corporates Want*, click [here](#).

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Karry is managing editor of IFLR. She manages the team and is responsible for IFLR's content. She also sits on the editorial judging panels of IFLR's global awards and the Women in Business Law Awards. Before joining the legal media industry, she was project manager at a startup focused on sustainable lifestyle media and events.