

Legal services

Linklaters to expand remote working as pandemic changes legal culture

Law firm will allow more working from home after Covid-19 crisis showed it is possible



Employees will be able to work outside their offices between 20 per cent and 50 per cent of the time, said Linklaters © Bloomberg

Kate Beioley 2 HOURS AGO

International law firm Linklaters will allow its more than 5,000 staff to work half the time remotely, the strongest sign yet that changes ushered in by the pandemic are beginning to take root in a legal industry that has long valued tight-knit office culture.

Employees will be able to work outside their offices between 20 per cent and 50 per cent of the time, the firm said on Tuesday.

The decision by Linklaters, where partners were paid an average of £1.7m last year, follows the embrace of a permanent shift towards more remote working by competitors including DLA Piper and US firm Baker McKenzie.

Until the government lockdown forced people from their offices, corporate law firms had largely resisted remote working because of the nature of an occupation that can require close collaboration, handling sensitive documents and tight deadlines.

But Andrea Arosio, a partner at Linklaters and member of its people committee, said: “Our recent experience has demonstrated that, whilst we are a people-focused business and collaboration is key, remote working has worked remarkably well and we can deliver high-quality work whilst working remotely.”

Last year, Linklaters introduced more flexible start and finish times at its UK offices as part of a package of new working practices.

Law firms are not the only City institutions wrestling with the future of their offices. In recent weeks, major employers including NatWest Group and Standard Life Aberdeen [have told staff](#) they will not return to the office until the start of next year. Asset manager Schroders went a step further, telling employees they can work from home indefinitely.

While law firms are starting to embrace remote working, they are also reopening their offices.

Baker McKenzie opened its London base this month, letting a maximum of 20 staff work in its building on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Clifford Chance and fellow “magic circle” firm Allen & Overy said staff would be able to return on a voluntary basis from dates in September. Both firms are operating a rota system to limit numbers.

Those firms such as Fieldfisher that are allowing more remote working, admit that a shared office still holds considerable value.

“We have accepted that going back to five days in the office will not happen. But we firmly believe there is a role for the office,” said Michael Chissick, managing partner. “We don’t want to lose the serendipitous moments by the infamous water cooler.”

And working outside the office has raised concerns over data protection and cyber security, the professional development of more junior staff and how to dispose of highly confidential documents.

James Davies, an employment partner at Lewis Silkin, said: “There are issues with generating paper and printing things out securely, as well as concerns around the security of some communications platforms.”

Working from home also “brings confidentiality risks such as a shared flat where calls can be overheard and screens seen by others”, he added.

Some firms have previously experimented with more flexible working. Six years ago, City stalwart Mishcon de Reya said lawyers could work three days a week and take unlimited holidays. The same year, litigation specialist Quinn Emanuel told lawyers they could work anywhere in the world for one week a year, as long as they kept their usual office hours.

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