

London's International Arbitration Market

12 Month Review



Jonny Fort, Partner
jfort@fortstratford.com
+44 (0)7876 746114
+44 (0)208 129 7491

For many years, London has enjoyed its position as one of the true global hubs for international arbitration, attracting top-tier talent and high-stakes cross-border disputes. The mid to late 2000s witnessed a real boom in international arbitration, with top US firms like Skadden, Gibson Dunn, and White & Case making significant investments in the practice. The same period also saw the disruptive arrival of Quinn Emanuel and soon after, the birth of Three Crowns. The impact of all this was probably hardest felt by Allen & Overy and Freshfields. However, these firms have retained their status as leading players in international arbitration.

Fast forward to 2025 and the landscape has shifted. While the City remains a leading arbitration centre, the lateral hiring market for international arbitration partners has cooled.

A notable trend has been the diminishing appetite among the most profitable US firms to invest in this practice area. Unlike other high-margin transactional or disputes practices, international arbitration, because of over lawyering and intense competition, amongst other things, often struggles to command the premium rates that drive US firms' profitability. This has meant firms who once made substantial investments in arbitration are now reassessing their strategies and prioritising more lucrative disputes practices, such as competition litigation, class actions, contentious restructuring and so on. There are exceptions, with firms like Akin Gump and Vinson & Elkins both making marquee hires in international arbitration over the last twelve months.

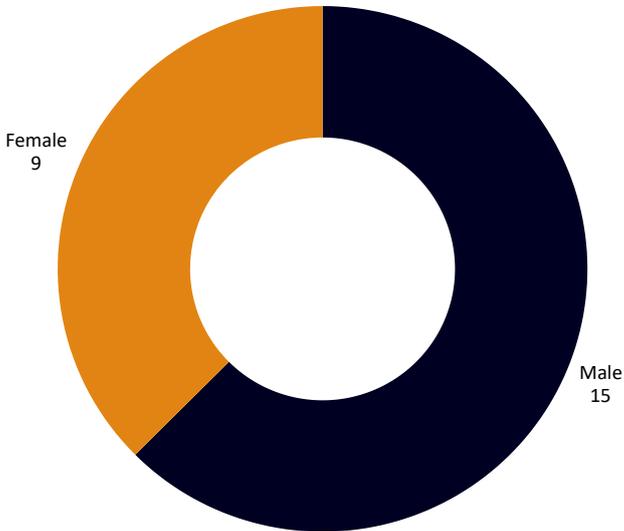
The mid-market UK / International firms stand to benefit. In general, these organisations have large international footprints, are set up in such a way that they can be flexible with their rates and creative with their fee agreements and often have complementary practice groups that make having some international arbitration capability a necessity.

The other beneficiaries of market conditions are the boutiques. These organisations, in contrast to the large mid-market international firms, are much leaner and operate on far higher profit margins, which also enables them to be flexible and creative on rates.

While it feels like there has been a cooling, there is cause for optimism in what is an ever more uncertain world. Global infrastructure spending is high, traditional energy has seen a resurgence and global trade wars may all contribute to an uptick in demand. That in turn should see arbitration practitioners recapture the attention of the top firms. Let's see...

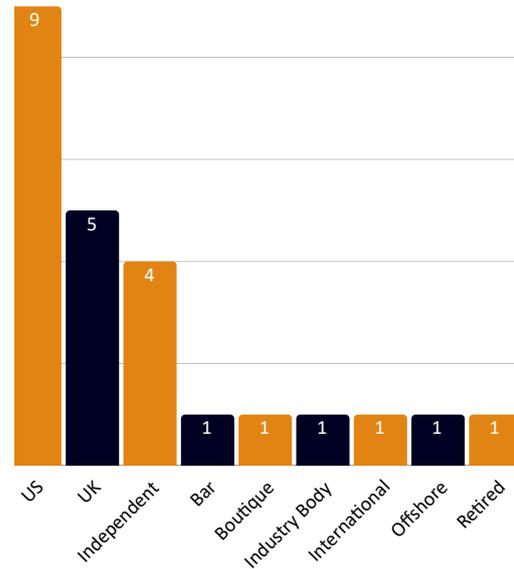
This report documents the last 12 months' hiring activity in London's international arbitration market. Note that several of the partners are not international arbitration purists and cover high court litigation, but are included as a result of their significant international arbitration activity.

Moves by Gender



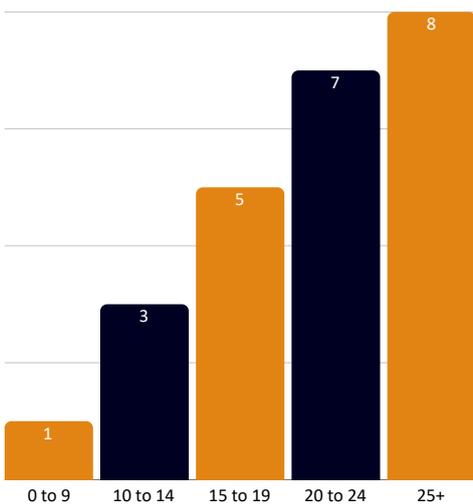
Out of 24 total moves, 62% were Male and 38% were Female. This is broadly in line with London partnership across all sectors.

Moves by Type of Hiring Firm*



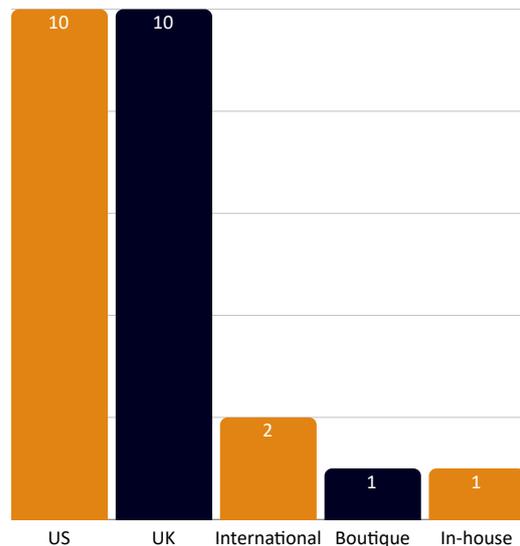
US firms dominate the hiring landscape, accounting for nearly 40% of moves. Over a third of moves were to somewhere other than firms in the Global 200.

Moves by PQE Level



Moves in this sector have been predominantly in those with 20 years or more PQE, with a third in those with 25 years or more PQE.

Moves by Type of Outbound Firm*



Moves are overwhelmingly from US and UK headquartered firms.

Notable Moves

Apr 2024

James Glaysher
Candey > Kingsley Napley

May 2024

Belinda Paisley
Reed Smith > Retired

Nick Peacock
Bird & Bird > Independent

Suzie Savage
Reed Smith > Independent

Jul 2024

James Barratt
Fried Frank > Vinson & Elkins

Shivani Sanghi
Fieldfisher > BCLP

Joaquin Terceño
Freshfields > Eversheds

Sep 2024

Clea Bigelow-Nuttall
Jason Hambury
Gurmukh Riyat
Pinsent Masons > Greenberg Traurig

Nora Fredstie
White & Case > DAC Beachcroft

Louis Flannery KC
Mishcon > Littleton Chambers

James Kitching
Fried Frank > Proskauer

Oct 2024

Edward Shaw

DLA Piper > Pinsent Masons



Rebecca Shorter

White & Case > Society of
Construction Law



Heidi Walsh

Mishcon > Howard Kennedy



Nov 2024

David Kavanagh KC

Skadden > Independent



Jan 2025

Arif Ali

Dechert > Independent



Jeremy Andrews

DLA Piper > Faegre Drinker



Chris Bailey

Stephenson Harwood > Candey



Mark Clarke

Proman > Akin



Neema Dowson-Collins

Fried Frank > Kirkland & Ellis



Milo Molfa

Curtis > McDermott



Feb 2025

Claire Morel de Westgaver

BCLP > Ontier

