

Lawyer salaries in UAE up, now average \$22,000 a month

by James Exelby on Tuesday, 23 September 2008

Lawyer salaries in the UAE, especially in the banking and financial services sector, are on the rise, climbing to an average of 82,000 dirhams (\$22,330) a month for the Head of Legal, a survey published on Tuesday showed.

While last year's survey results showed the real estate sector paying some of the highest salaries at non-Head of Legal level, this year has seen a shift with some of the highest salaries been paid in the banking and financial services, IT and telecoms sectors, the survey conducted by Tessera Executive Search in partnership with the Dubai Corporate Counsel Group (DCCG) said.

According to the survey, completed by 194 in-house lawyers from a wide range of organizations in the UAE, salaries of 130,000 to 150,000 dirhams and more a month are becoming less unusual. Overall, 20 percent of heads of legal departments now being paid more than 100,000 dirhams a month.

The highest-paid lawyers qualified in North America, followed closely by England and Wales. At the Head of Legal level, however, an England and Wales qualification places one at the top of the pay scale, while lawyers who

qualified in the Indian subcontinent remain the lowest-paid on average.

"By and large, lawyers who qualified in US or Europe, including the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, are paid more than those from the MENA region or the subcontinent. This year, however, the pay gap is less marked than in 2007," said Elizabeth Williams, Senior Partner & Legal Practice Head at Tessera Executive Search.

"Western-qualified, bilingual Arabic/English lawyers are still the most sought after and command the highest salaries with packages in some cases reaching 244,000 dirhams per month."

UAE employers pay for experience, showing a direct correlation between salary and the number of years since qualifying as a lawyer, known as Post Qualification Experience (PQE).

The average salary for lawyers who qualified less than four years is 31,000 dirhams, with the highest salary reported in this range being 66,000 dirhams in the banking and financial services sector.

The highest salary reported for the five-to-seven years PQE range is 94,000 dirhams a month, again in the banking and finance sector.

In the eight-to-ten years PQE range, the highest salary reported, 115,000 dirhams a month, appeared in both the regional conglomerate and banking and finance sectors.

"The salary increases since last year are due in part to a significant shortage of qualified lawyers in the market and the high demand for in-house lawyers in the UAE as shown by the fact that more than 75 percent of Heads of Department plan to recruit and expand their departments, especially in Abu Dhabi with its dramatic expansion plans," said Justin A. Connor, the acting Chairman of the DCCG.

He added that other drivers of pay increases include the rising cost of living and the depreciation of the US dollar, which reduce the value of compensation packages. "We expect the war for talent to continue with salaries likely to rise even further, especially for those with applicable regional experience," he said.

Regarding job and salary satisfaction, the majority of respondents stated they are satisfied with their roles and compensation. However, 44 percent stated that they work more than ten hours a day, while 50 percent reported their role is stressful and 30 percent reported it as very stressful.