

Women in IP-Career Guidance 2025 Survey Results

Executive Summary

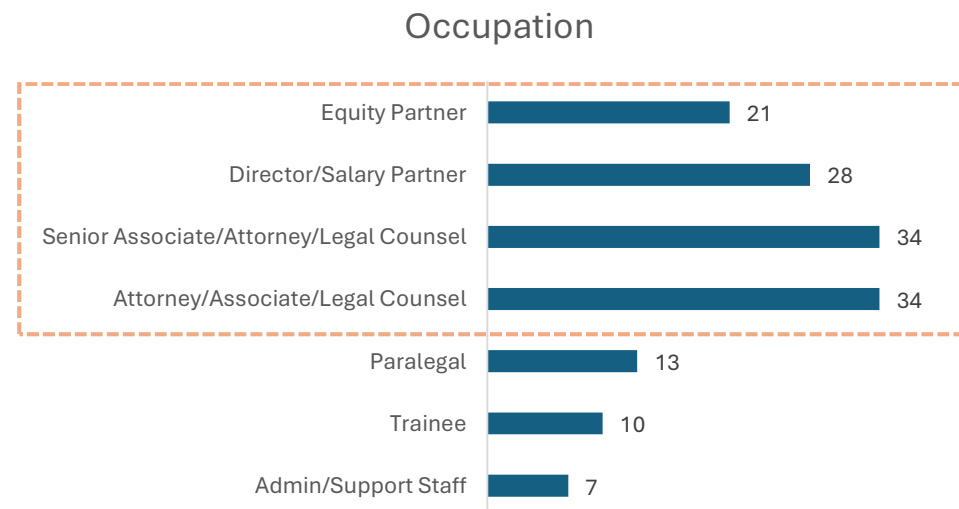
- In 2025, the Women in IP Career Guidance sub-Committee conducted a survey in relation to the requirements and barriers regarding career progression.
- Feedback was received from 147 respondents across all professional levels, predominantly from England and medium-to-large patent and trade-mark firms.
- The results highlight significant workplace barriers to promotion, with nearly half of respondents reporting no published criteria for advancement and limited access to sponsors or formal training.
- While mentoring schemes and sponsors are available in some firms, support is inconsistent, especially for alternative career paths and apprenticeships.
- Firms appear to provide options for extended leave and parental/care giver support, although the time period of leave and level of support is variable.
- The findings suggest a need for clearer frameworks and more equitable support structures to foster career progression for women in IP.

Main Outcomes

- **There is a common criteria given by a number of respondents for every level of promotion, which could be used as a foundation to build a suggested framework for firms that appear to have none.**
- Strong indication of **perceived workplace barriers to promotion...**
 - While 46% stated published criteria for promotion was readily accessible, a substantial 43% stated there was none at all
 - 46% respondents stated their firm does not nominate a sponsor to assist with promotion (vs. 18% Yes)
 - 63% stated their firm offered no IP apprenticeship
- However, **firms do offer some support** in certain areas...
 - 53% stated Yes, a mentoring scheme was available- albeit informally or conditionally (vs. 33% No)
 - Leave was given when needed, be it conditional sabbaticals (62% vs. 10% No) or personal circumstances such as parental/caregiving (51% vs. 22% No)

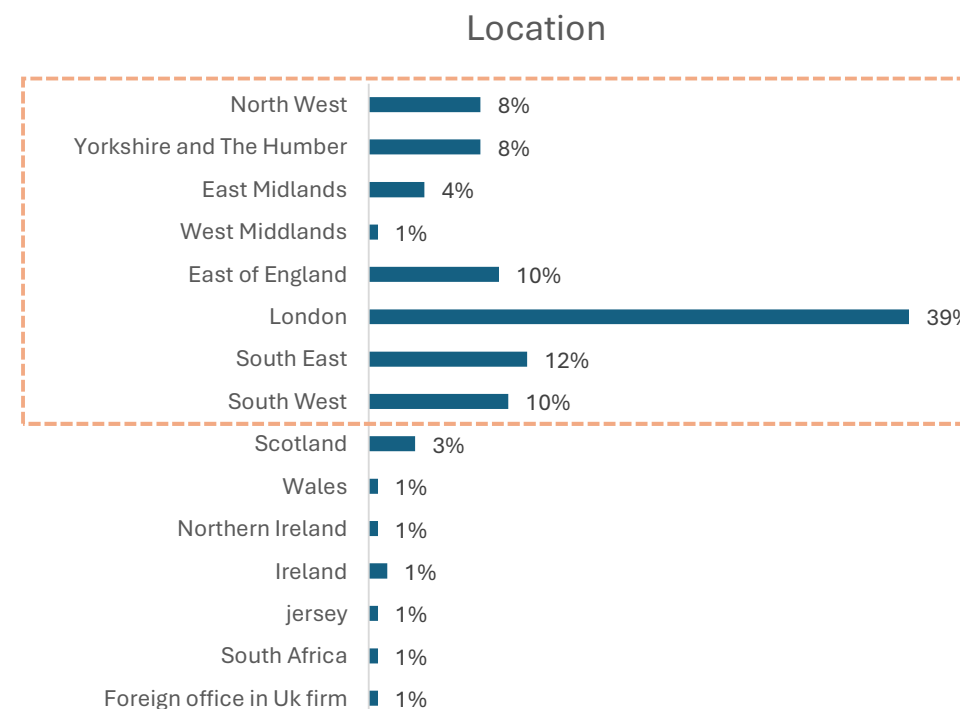
How many people responded?

- 147 respondents from around 700 sent survey- indicating **robust survey results**
- Good range of responses across all professional levels, especially Attorney and above



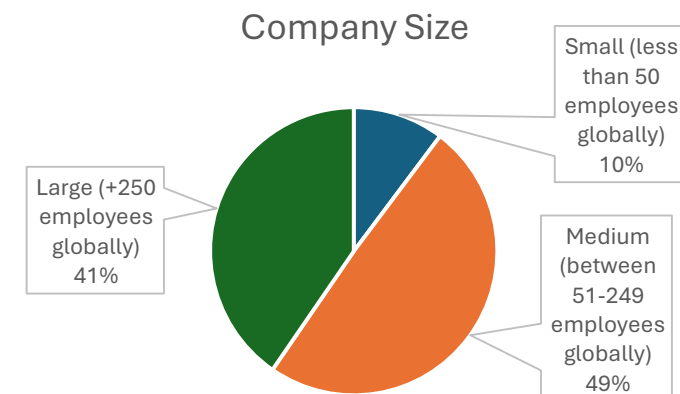
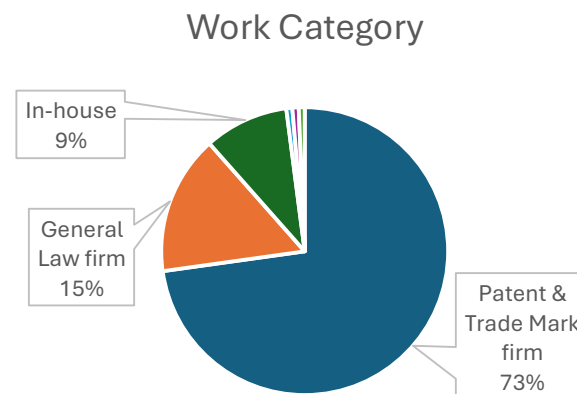
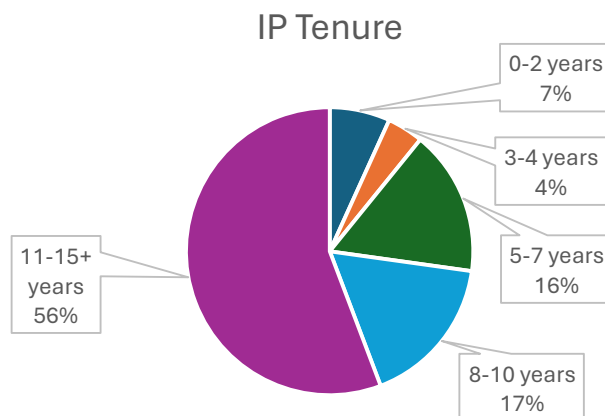
What was the profile of respondents?

- **Vast majority based in England (92%)**
- 39% based in London and by far the biggest region for respondents, as expected



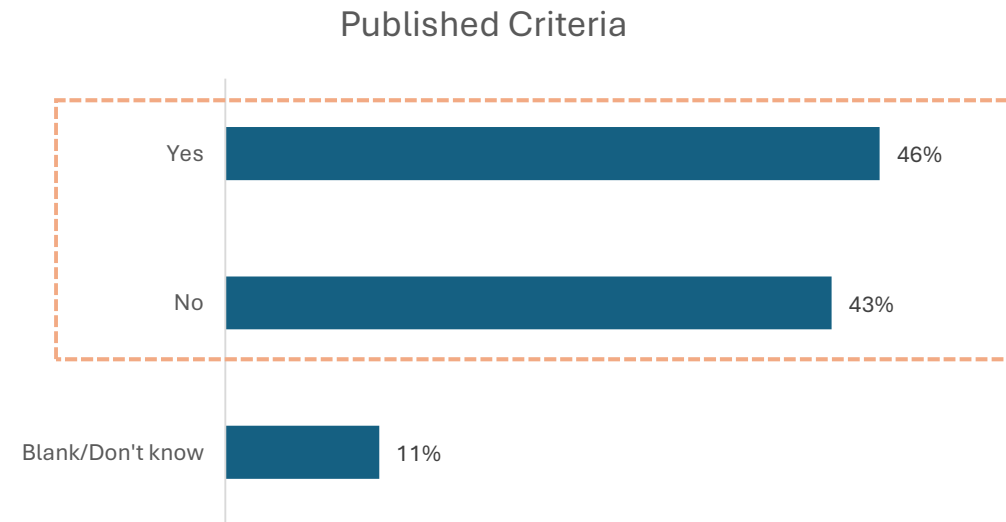
What was the profile of respondents?

- **Long IP Tenure:** Just over half have been in IP 11+ years
- **Majority Patent & Trade Mark Firms:** They make up almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents
- **Majority Medium & Large Firms:** Only 10% Small companies



Does your firm have readily accessible published criteria for promotion?

- **Fairly even split of respondents** saying published criteria exists (46%) versus none (43%)
- General Law firms were much more likely to have published criteria than Patent & Trade Mark firms (70% vs. 48%)
- Virtually all In-house respondents stated no published criteria



What are the key criteria for promotion from Administrator/support staff to Paralegal?

47 respondents (32% of total) detailed criteria, of which...

- Specialisation in **Technical Knowledge** was the biggest factor for all groups (70%) followed by **Training of Administrators** and **Independent Working** (both at 62%)
- 8% of respondents also detailed a CIPA or CITMA qualification

Key Promotion Criteria (47 Respondents)



And some said...

Some are hired straight into paralegal with no experience and trained on job

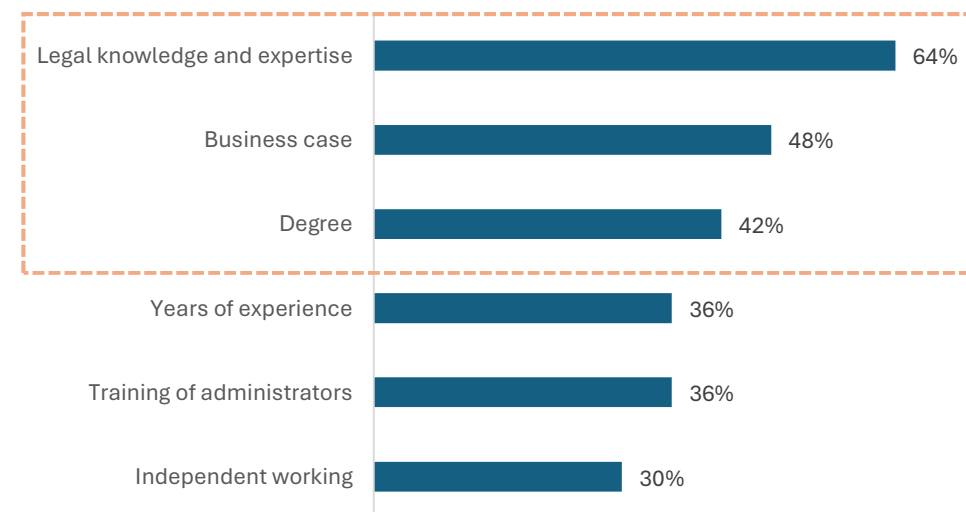
Paralegal, In-house (Large Firm)

What are the key criteria for promotion from Paralegal to Attorney/Associate?

33 respondents (22% of total) detailed criteria, as below...

- Along with **Legal Knowledge** (64%) and a **Business Case** (48%), a **Degree** was stated as key for 42% of respondents
- Anecdotally, a few responses stated this is not a route for promotion

Key Promotion Criteria (33 Respondents)



And some said...

A Paralegal wouldn't be put on these qualification exams as it's a totally different career path

Equity Partner, P&TM (Medium)

Same interview process as external candidates but existing support staff guaranteed a first interview

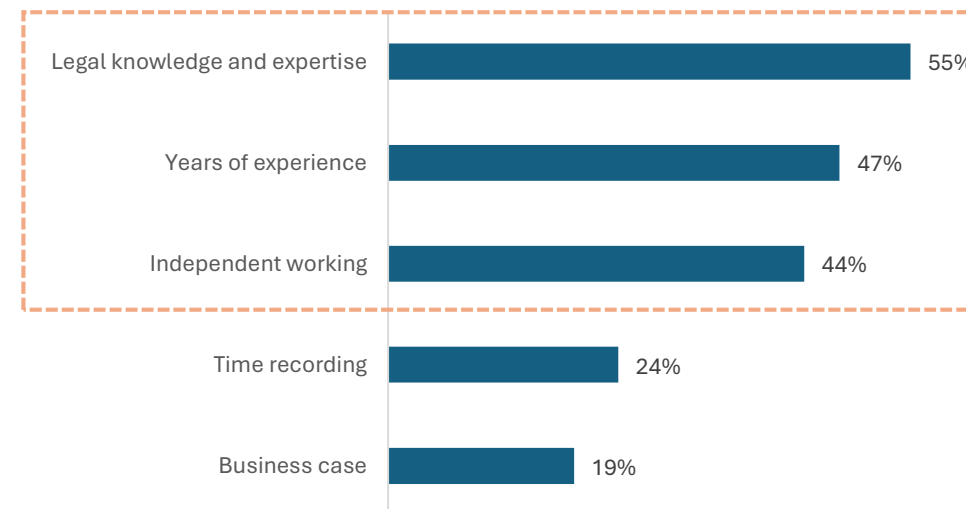
Equity Partner, P&TM (Large)

What are the key criteria for promotion from Newly Qualified to Attorney/Associate?

108 respondents (73% of total) detailed criteria, as below...

- As with path from Paralegal, for Newly Qualified, **Legal Knowledge** was top (55%), but **Tenure** (47%) and **Independent working** (44%) were much more relevant for Newly Qualified, as expected
- Many stated that all Newly Qualified are automatically at Associate level

Key Promotion Criteria (108 Respondents)



And some said...

Billings at least £285,000 annually

Associate, P&TM (Large)

4.5 hours per day recorded, 1000 hours per year billed (I think we need to meet 80% of this), also internal reputation and business development are taken into consideration

Trainee, P&TM, (Medium)

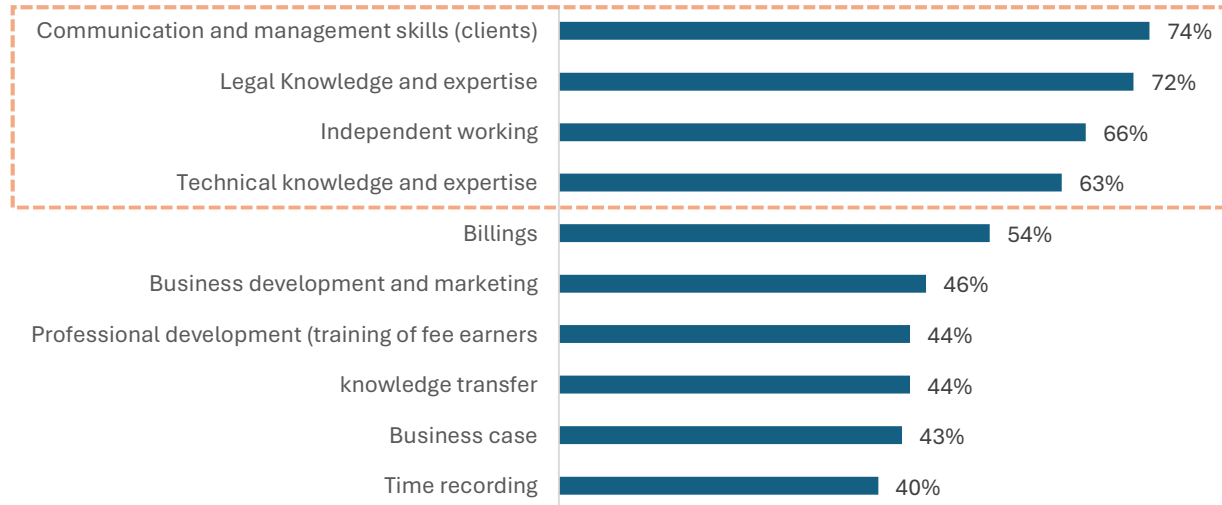
What are the key criteria for promotion from Associate/Legal Counsel to Senior Associate/Legal Counsel or equivalent?



100 respondents (68% of total) detailed criteria, as below...

Key Promotion Criteria (100 Respondents)

- Very aligned key criteria across respondents with **Client Management** and **Communication Skills**, as well as **Legal** and **Technical Knowledge** and **Independent Working** needing to be exhibited for **well over 60%** of responses to this question



And some said...

Bringing in work probably - but it hasn't happened in the last 12 years.

Senior Patent Attorney, P&TM (Small)

I have recently been promoted to senior associate and still unclear about what the criteria are!

Senior Associate, P&TM, (Medium)

Consistent meeting hours target of 1750 per year

Equity Partner, General Law Firm (Large)

What are the key criteria for promotion from Senior Associate/Senior Legal Counsel to Director/Salary Partner or equivalent?

91 respondents (62% of total) detailed criteria, as below...

- 75%+ of respondents stated **Business Development and Marketing, Communication and Client Management Skills** plus a **Business Case Relevant Team** were the required criteria- along with key criteria expected for previous roles in the hierarchy

Key Promotion Criteria (91 Respondents)



And some said...

I don't know what is "key" and whether, for example, excellence in one area can compensate for underperformance in another

Senior Associate, P&TM (Large)

It seems that, in practice, attorneys are considered for partnership at 4 years PQE, to come into effect 5 years PQE); (2) having made a decent impression on senior partners; and (3) billings (amount unclear, c.950+?)

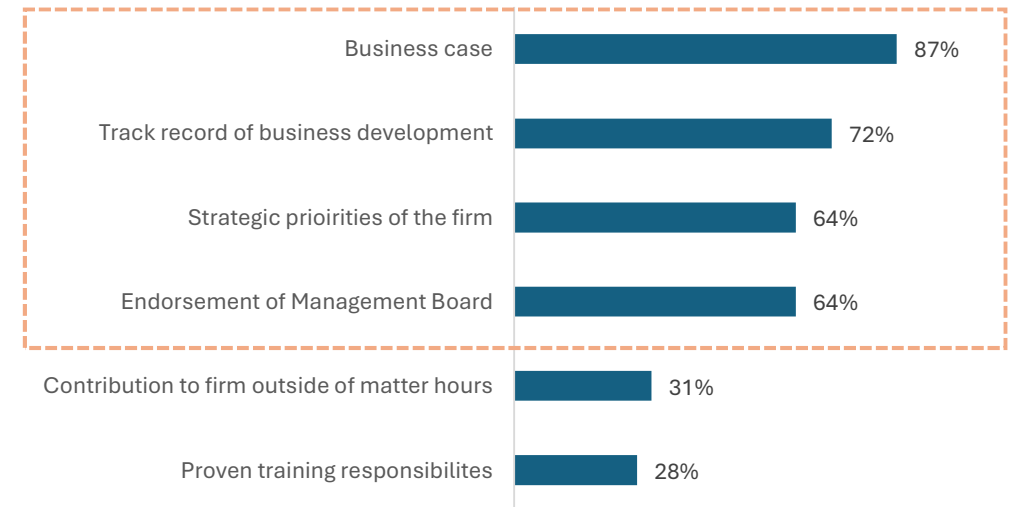
Senior Associate, P&TM (Medium)

What are the key criteria for promotion from Director/Salary Partner to Equity Partner or equivalent?

61 respondents (41% of total) detailed criteria, as below...

- Almost 90% of respondents stated that a **Business Case** was a key requirement
- As well as this, over 60% stated **Track Record to Grow Business, Strategic Priorities of the Firm** and **Endorsement of the Management Board**

Key Promotion Criteria (61 Respondents)



And some said...

All equity partnership, so question not relevant

Equity Partner, General Law Firm (Large)

Perception by the right people in Snr Management

Equity Partner, P&TM (Large)

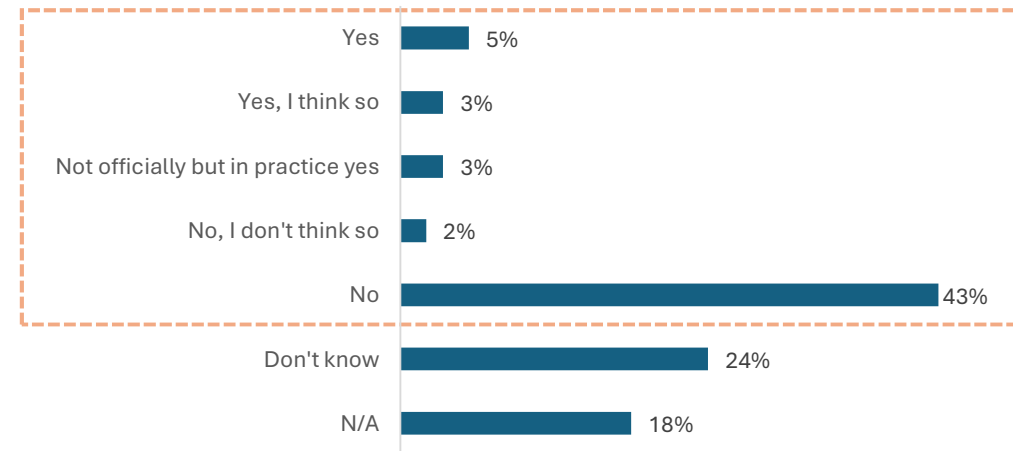
Responsible for a sizeable portfolio of work

Salary Partner, P&TM (Large)

Regarding progression to Equity Partner, is it compulsory to work full time?

- **Largest proportion of responses was for No, it is not compulsory (43%)**- so quite consistent across the industry
- Respondents stating Yes, for compulsory full time working to Equity Partner (5%) **ALL** came from P & TM firms

Equity Partner- Full Time Requirement



And some said...

No - we have a number of partners on reduced working hours.

Equity Partner, General Law Firm (Large)

No but observation suggests that PT is detrimental and will definitely slow progression

Equity Partner, P&TM Firm (Large)

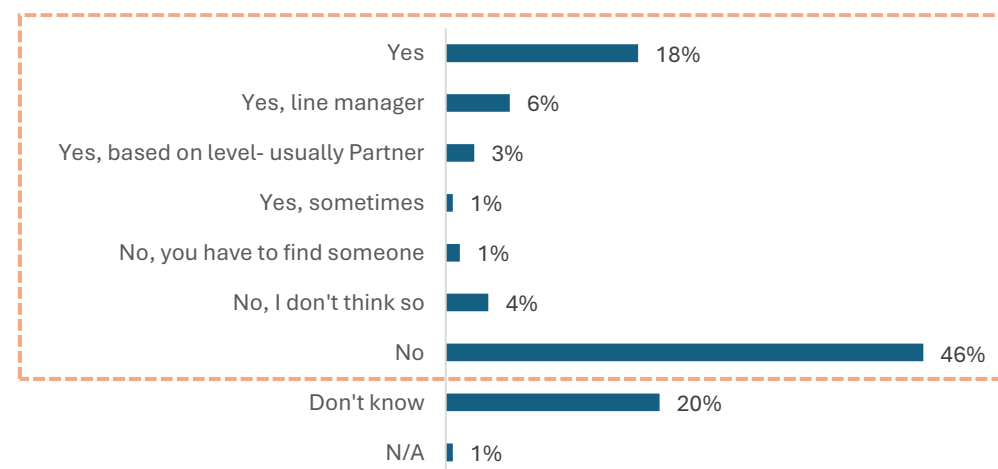
Yes. I am aware of an equity partner who left for that reason.

Senior Associate, P&TM Firm (Large)

Does your firm nominate a sponsor to assist you with promotion?

- **Vast majority No** (46%), although 18% of responses were Yes, for nominated sponsor- with additional 6% calling out Line Manager as equivalent to sponsor
- Respondents from General Law firms were more likely to have the firm nominate a sponsor (39% vs. 15% for all other work category types)

Promotion Sponsor Nominated by Firm



And some said...

You have to ask someone to be your sponsor

Salary Partner, P&TM Firm (Medium)

Sort of - it will generally be your line manager

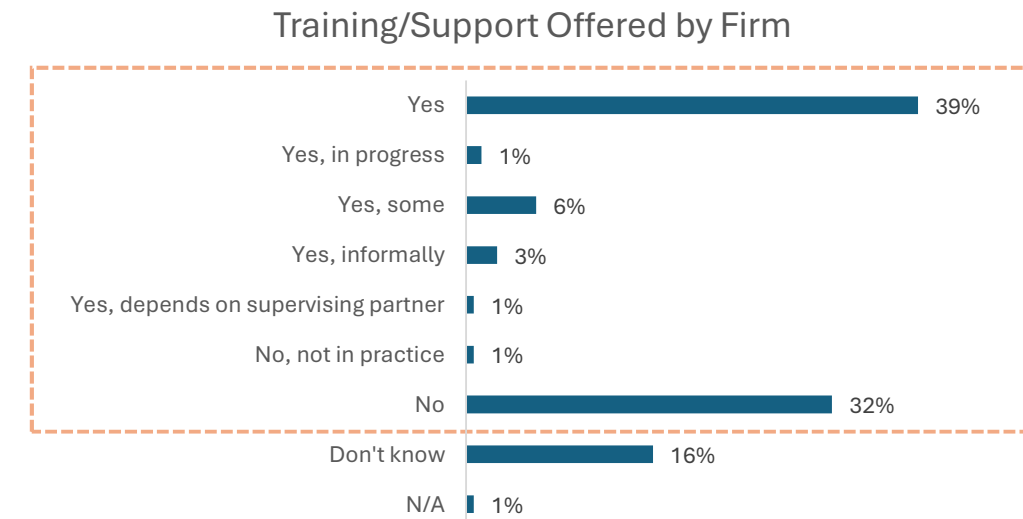
Director, General Law Firm (Large)

An internal coach is available. Most teams have a CDP (Career Development Partner) who helps with promotion.

Senior Associate, General Law Firm (Large)

Does your firm offer training and support to assist you in meeting the criteria for promotion?

- **39% responded Yes, training is offered, categorically vs. 32% saying No, none at all**
- Respondents from General Law firms much more likely to offer training (70% vs. 34% for all other work category types)
- Conversely, In-House were much more likely to have none (57% vs. 29% all others)



And some said...

It depends on the supervising partner.
Some people are lucky, some aren't.

Associate, P&TM Firm (Large)

There is an appraisal process, which I think should in theory assist with this, but in practice do not (as the criteria for promotion is not clear).

Senior Associate, P&TM Firm (Medium)

We have a partner development programme but outside of that no specific training

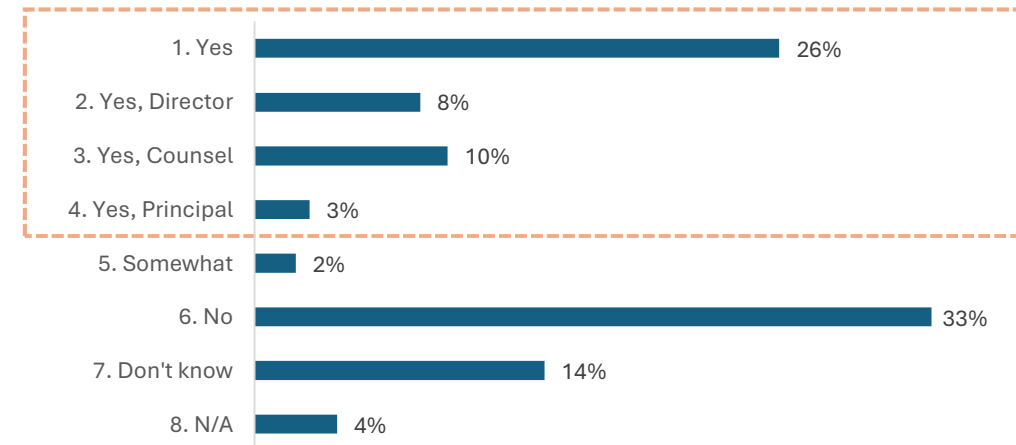
Director, General Law Firm (Large)

Does your firm offer an alternative career path, other than to partner? For example, Director or Counsel?



- **Just under half responded that an alternative career path is offered** (46% vs. 33% stating No)
- Respondents from General Law firms much more likely to state alternative career path offered (83% vs. 40% for all other work category types)
- 90% of respondents answering No, were from Patent & Trade Mark firms

Alternative Career Path Offered by Firm



And some said...

Legal Director, albeit not often used, more often people leave for other firms / in-house.

Salary Partner, General Law Firm (Large)

Yes - Counsel/Income Partner - but generally all just lengthening the path to Equity Partner. Not an independent path rather a longer route to partner and often taken up by females who had stints out for maternity/parental leave who should otherwise be promoted but lengths the track

Senior Associate, General Law Firm (Large)

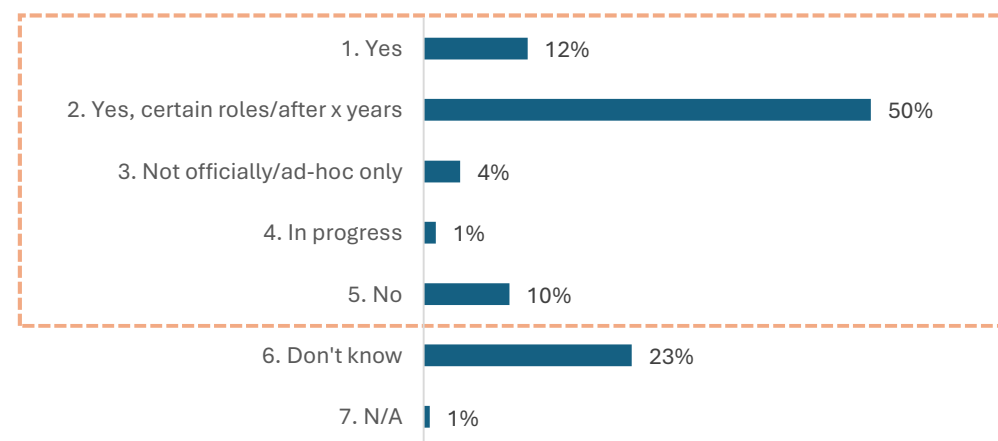
Yes, although not necessarily valued as equal contribution

Equity Partner, P&TM Firm (Large)

Does your firm offer sabbaticals/options for extended leave?

- **Just under 2/3 responses were for Yes, sabbaticals are offered (62%).** Of these, the majority stated these were only offered to certain roles after a certain amount of years
- Respondents from In-House firms were much more likely not to know about extended leave schemes (% vs. 19% for all other work category types)

Sabbatical Offered by Firm



And some said...

Only after certain years of service, There are long service (paid) sabbaticals of 1 month at 15 years and at 25 years (from joining the firm), and anyone can request up to 3 months unpaid leave but the latter is at the firm's discretion.

Salary Partner, P&TM Firm (Medium)

paid 4 week sabbatical after 25 years service no matter what the role, trainees and associates have been allowed sabbaticals as unpaid leave (i assume someone of any role can ask for this too)

Associate, P&TM Firm (Large)

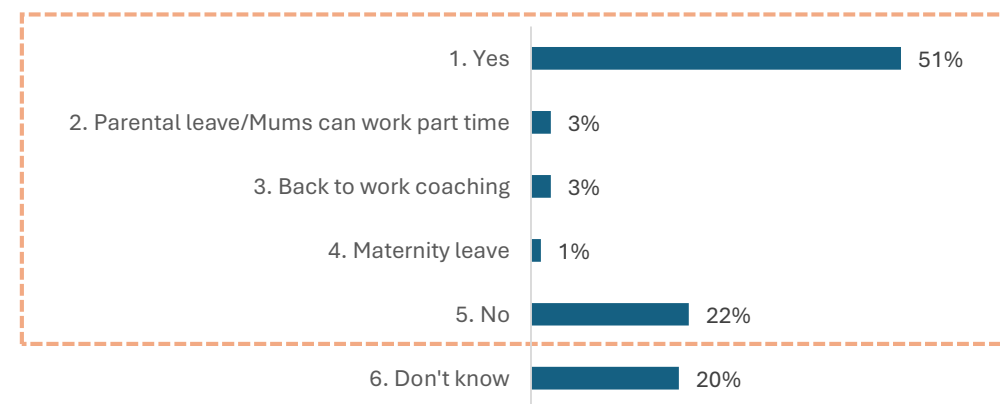
Yes, but I don't know the criteria. These only seem to be used by partners or directors

Trainee, P&TM Firm (Medium)

Does your firm offer pre/post-parental/caregivers leave support?

- **Half of respondents stated Yes, support for personal circumstances was given (51% vs. 22% No)**
- And further to this, General Law Firm respondents were even more likely to answer Yes (74% vs. 47% for all other work category types)

Pre/Post-Parental/Caregivers Support Offered by Firm



And some said...

We have additional 'carers' leave days but doesn't impact targets. not aware of other support

Director, General Law Firm (Large)

No - I've just returned from maternity leave and there was very little support offered.

Associate, P&TM Firm (Medium)

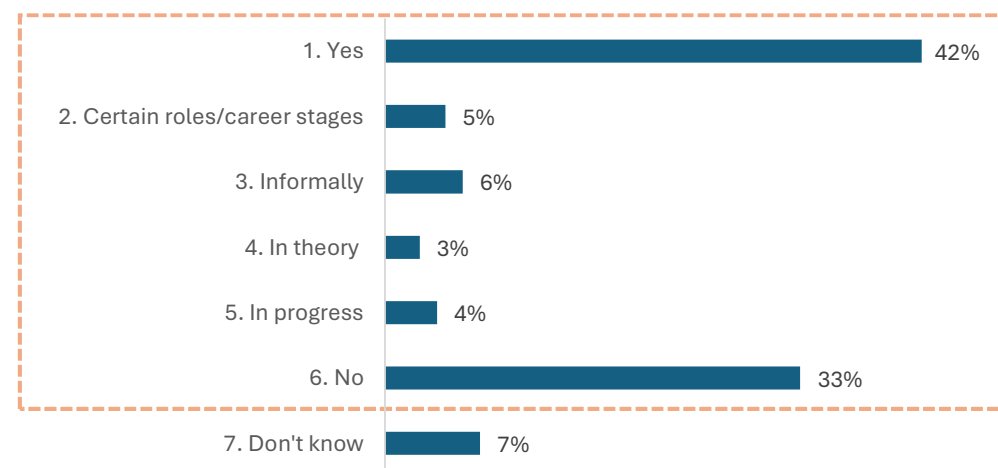
Yes, 6 months full pay (no salary cap with bonus and pension paid), with an additional 3 months at half pay, and a further 3 months unpaid. The company will only guarantee the position for 9 months of any maternity leave taken.

Head of Legal, In-House Firm (Large)

Does your firm have a mentoring scheme?

- **42% stated Yes, regarding mentoring schemes**- with a further 11% specifying this was only available conditionally or informally
- General Law firms were most likely to answer Yes (65% vs. 38% for all other work category types)
- Conversely, although 35% P&TM firms did answer Yes, they were the most likely of all groups to respond No (39% vs. 15% all others)

Mentoring Scheme Offered by Firm



And some said...

In theory- I have never met my mentor in 5 + years and he has never contacted me.

Associate, P&TM Firm (Medium)

yes, although you are just paired up with someone and there is no incentive for them to meet with you...

Senior Associate, P&TM Firm (Large)

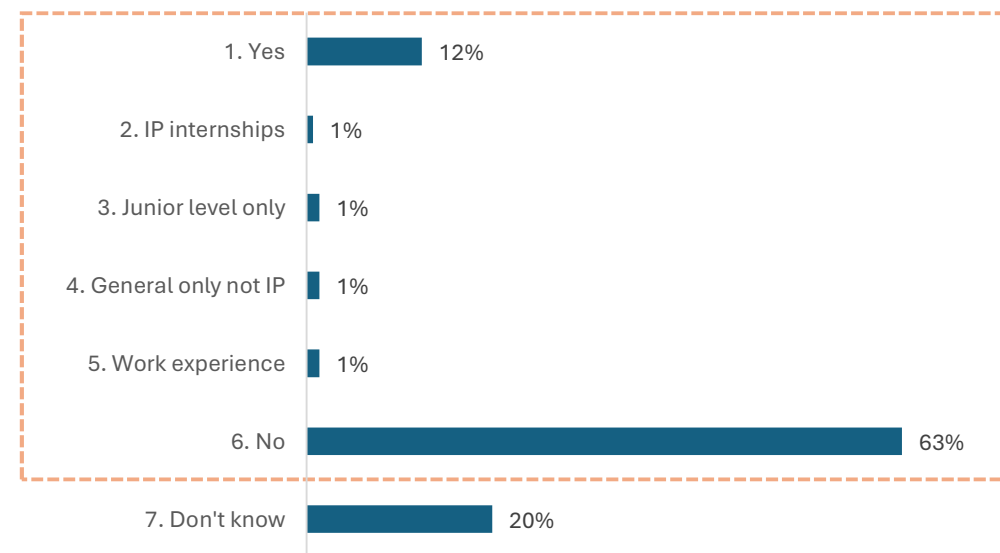
not one that is directed solely for promotion.

Senior Associate, General Law Firm (Large)

Does your firm/business offer IP apprenticeships?

- **Almost 2/3 responded No, there was no IP apprenticeship offered (63% vs. 12% Yes)**
- Of the In-House group, 100% respondents answered with No
- If the firm had published criteria for promotion they were also more likely to offer IP apprenticeships (approx. 20% vs. 5% for no published criteria)
- And also similar likelihood if the firm offered mentoring schemes

IP Apprenticeship Offered by Firm



And some said...

No, but it did, it was the requirements of the apprenticeships that changed and stopped us doing this.

Director, P&TM Firm (Small)

work experience programme (different length different years, from 2 days to 2 weeks)

Senior Associate, Mixed IP Firm (Large)

Only for junior level to patent paralegal

Administrator, P&TM Firm (Medium)

NEXT STEPS



- The Women in IP Career Guidance sub-Committee will be holding an event on **3 February 2026** (in-person and online). This event will facilitate discussion from all attendees and will then allow us to create a framework that can provide guidance in relation to career progression.
- **Save the date!**