The Bar Council

Gross earnings by sex and practice area at the self-employed Bar 2026

November 2026



Contents

Executive summary 3

Key findings **3**

Recommendations **3**

Introduction and methodology **4**

Earnings by sex at the self-employed Bar **7**

Earnings by sex and PQE **8**

Earnings by sex and practice area **19**

Crime **19**

Family **21**

Commercial and Chancery **23**

General civil **25**

Annexes **28**

Executive summary

The data in this report is the most comprehensive overview of information we have on barrister earnings at the self-employed Bar.

Key findings

Based on the 2025 earnings data:

1. Women continue to earn less than men across all experience levels at the self-employed Bar. Junior women's median earnings were 74% of what junior men earn. Women silks' median earnings were 69% of their male colleagues' median gross earnings.
2. Earnings gaps persist across every post-qualification experience (PQE) band. The highest earning men were consistently earning more than the highest earning women.
3. There were earnings gaps in every area of practice. The widest gaps were in general civil practice, where women at 21-25 years PQE were earning 60% of their male colleagues' median fee income.
4. During the previous 5 years (2021-2025), median earnings at the Bar increased for both men and women. However, women's earnings increased by less than men's. This means the gap is still increasing.

Recommendations

1. We will continue to monitor earnings across the Bar, refining our methodology to ensure we provide baseline data for comparison.
2. We must increase activity and focus on clients of the Bar and chambers to encourage the ongoing monitoring of opportunities, promote fair distribution of work and equitable briefing.
3. Chambers must ensure they understand the underlying causes of any disparities they find and put in place effective measures to ensure members (barristers) get fair access to work, are able to charge effectively for the work they do, and get the support they need to build and sustain their practice.
4. Support and advice for barristers and chambers is available from the Bar Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team via **equality@barcouncil.org.uk** and you can find out more about our earnings work on our campaign page.

Introduction and methodology

This is the Bar Council's 7th report analysing barrister earnings by sex. The report uses data on earnings from the previous calendar year shared by barristers when they renew their practising certificate during the authorisation to practise (AtP) process each Spring.

The Bar Standards Board (BSB) and the Bar Council have both been working on analysis around barrister earnings since 2020. While we use the same underlying dataset, our approaches to, and presentation of, the data differ. The BSB's three analyses (2020, 2022, 2025) include the employed and the self-employed Bar and focus mainly on overall median and mean income by sex and ethnicity.[1] Supplementary variables examined include region (London/out of London), practice area and time elapsed since Call.

Post-qualification experience (PQE)

We continue to use post-qualification experience (PQE) rather than number of years' Call as the time metric to bracket barristers based on experience. PQE is a more direct measurement of professional activity as it simply refers to the number of years spent working/earning money after the completion of pupillage/training.

Annual earnings

Data is presented for the financial year covered by a barrister's practising certificate for earnings during the previous calendar year. For example, barristers renewing their practising certificate during the annual authorisation to practise (AtP) process for the financial year 2026/27 are declaring their earnings for the calendar year 2025.

Barristers not renewing their practising certificate are not required to declare their earnings, so are missing from the data.

[1] Bar Standards Board, Income at the Bar – by gender and ethnicity: 2020 report, 2022 report, 2025 report

Gross earnings

This report uses gross earnings data which are self-reported to the General Council of the Bar by self-employed barristers each year when they renew their practising certificate.

For self-employed barristers 'gross earnings' is the total gross fee generated (excluding VAT) before they pay rent, expenses, professional insurance, and the other costs/expenses associated with being self-employed.

Gross earnings should not be confused with income, which is the taxable amount barristers earn, and is considerably less than the figures discussed in this report. It is also important to remember that self-employed barristers need to make their own provision for pension contributions and sick leave or parental leave.

In this report we use the terms 'gross earnings', 'gross fee income' and 'earnings' interchangeably to refer to the amount of money barristers are generating in fees before any expenses, tax, national insurance or other costs are deducted.

Expenses

The direct expenses that barristers pay before reaching their income threshold typically amount to 20%-40% of gross earnings.

Median

Throughout this report we use median rather than mean as the standard average for gross earnings. The median average is the middle value in the series, with 50% of barristers earning less than this, and 50% earning more.

The mean is easily skewed by barristers with very high gross earnings, and this happens for almost every data split we look at in this report; the mean figure is above the median and does not reflect what a typical barrister could expect to earn.

Earnings 'gap'

We define the gender earnings gap as the difference between the median earnings of men and women, expressed as a proportion of men's median earnings.

Rounding

All earnings amounts in this report have been rounded to the nearest 100.

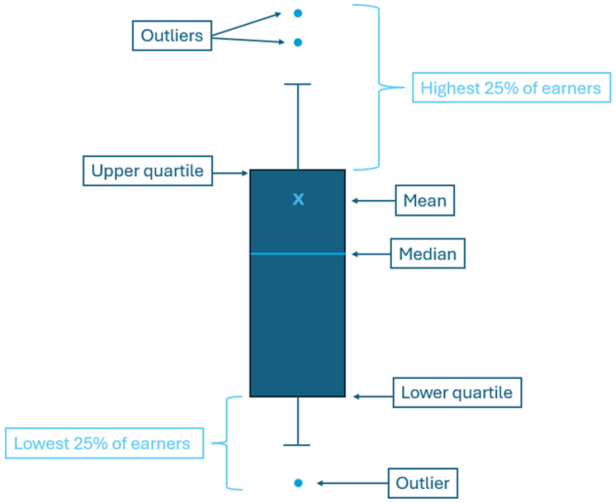
Practice area

Barristers are grouped by practice area according to earnings. Those barristers considered in any one area (eg crime, family, commercial and Chancery) are those who self-declared that 80% or more of their gross fee income was in that area of practice in the preceding calendar year.

Many barristers have a mixed practice and do not specialise in any one area to this extent.

Box and whisker charts

Throughout this report we have used 'box and whisker' charts to represent how the data is distributed.



In a box and whisker chart, the box represents the range of gross earnings excluding the top 25% and bottom 25% of earners. The highest and lowest earners are represented by a line (whisker) extending above and below the box.

The mean is represented by an '**X**' and the median is the **line** in the box.

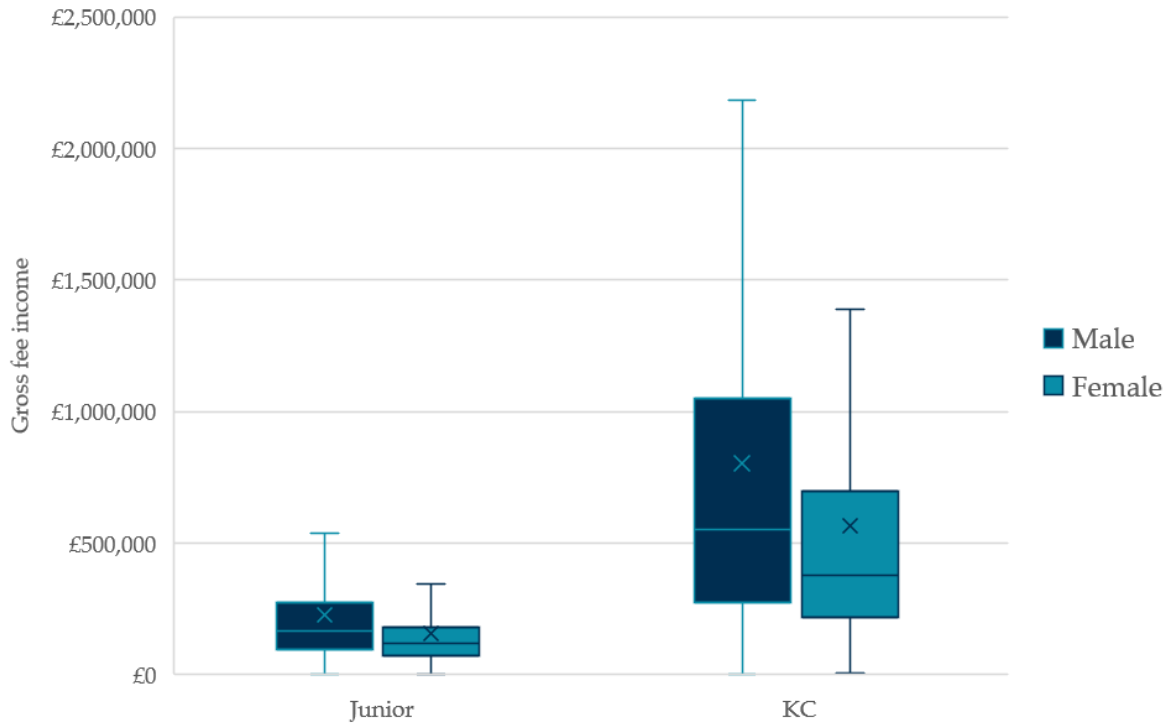
Outliers are datapoints beyond 1.5 times the interquartile range. Outliers' data are included in the analysis but not shown on the charts.

Using this method ensures most barristers are counted and focuses attention on the typical range of gross earnings for a particular group.

Earnings by sex at the self-employed Bar

Women are earning less than men at junior and silk (ie King's Counsel, or KC) level at the self-employed Bar.

Figure 1: Earnings of self-employed barristers by sex, 2025[2]



At the junior level, men's median earnings are £164,300, while women's are £121,200. Women are earning 74% of men's earnings on average – over a quarter less.

The earnings of junior women in the top quartile (the highest earning 25%) are significantly (33%) less, by a third, than those of men in the top quartile.

At KC level, men's median earnings are £553,800, while women's are lower at £380,300. Women silks are earnings on average 69% of their male colleagues' median gross earnings.

There is a 20% gap between the earnings of the lower earning (25th percentile) male and female silks. However, the top range of earnings for male silks extends

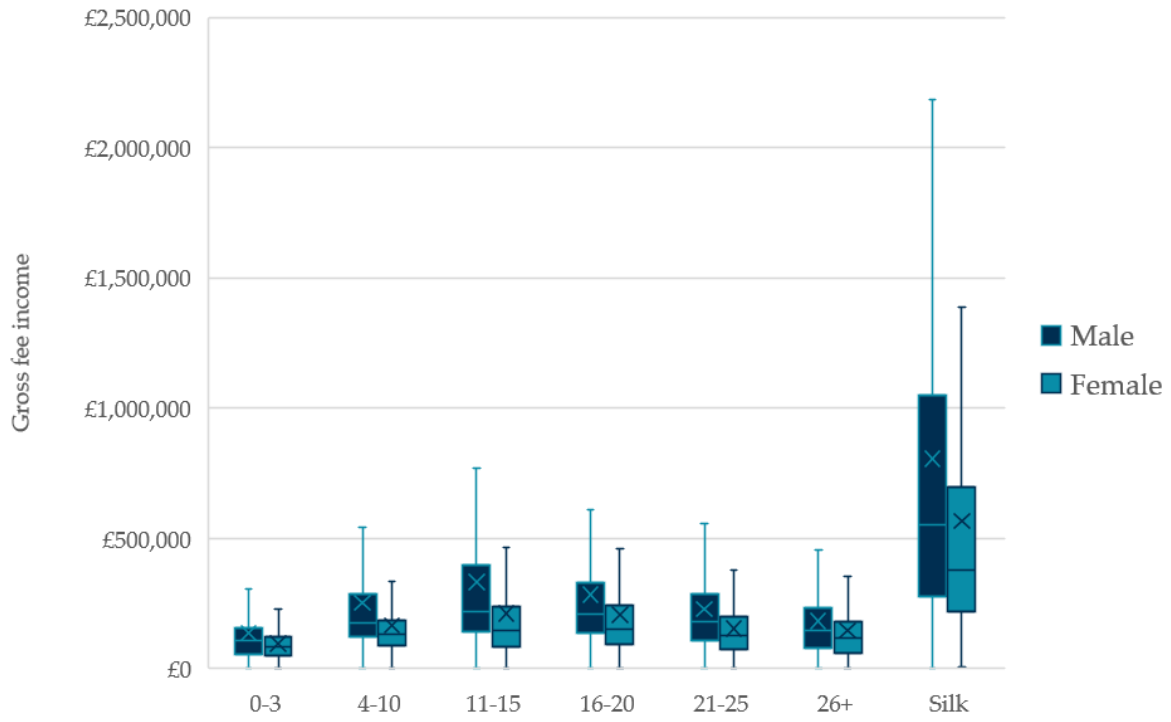
[2] See also Annex 1

considerably higher. The highest 25% of male KC earners are earning over £1,050,400, while the highest earning 25% of women silks are earning over £698,500. This represents a 34% gap.

Earnings by sex and PQE

In every PQE band, men's median earnings are higher than women's.

Figure 2: Earnings of self-employed barristers by sex and PQE, 2025



At the beginning of a barrister's career, women are earning around 19% less than men. Put another way, women are earning around 81% of men's median earnings in the 0–3 PQE band.

The gap widens as careers progress. In the 4-10 PQE band, women's median earnings are around 25% lower than men's, rising to a gap of around 34% at 11–15 PQE. The gap then narrows slightly to 28% at 16–20 PQE and is 29% at 21–25 PQE. Among the most senior juniors, at 26+ PQE, women's median earnings are around 18% lower than men's.

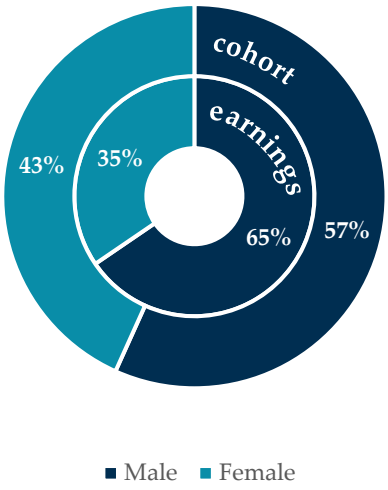
If a barrister reaches silk, both men and women see a significant increase in earnings, but the gender gap widens again. Female silks have median earnings around 31% lower than male silks, earning around 69% of the male median.

In every PQE band, including silk, the highest earning men earn more than the highest earning women.

In the doughnut charts, the **outer ring** represents the total number of barristers, the **inner ring** is total gross earnings.

In the last 5-year period (2021-2025) median earnings at the Bar increased for men and women. However, women's earnings increased by less than men's. This means the earnings gap will increase over time if this trend continues.

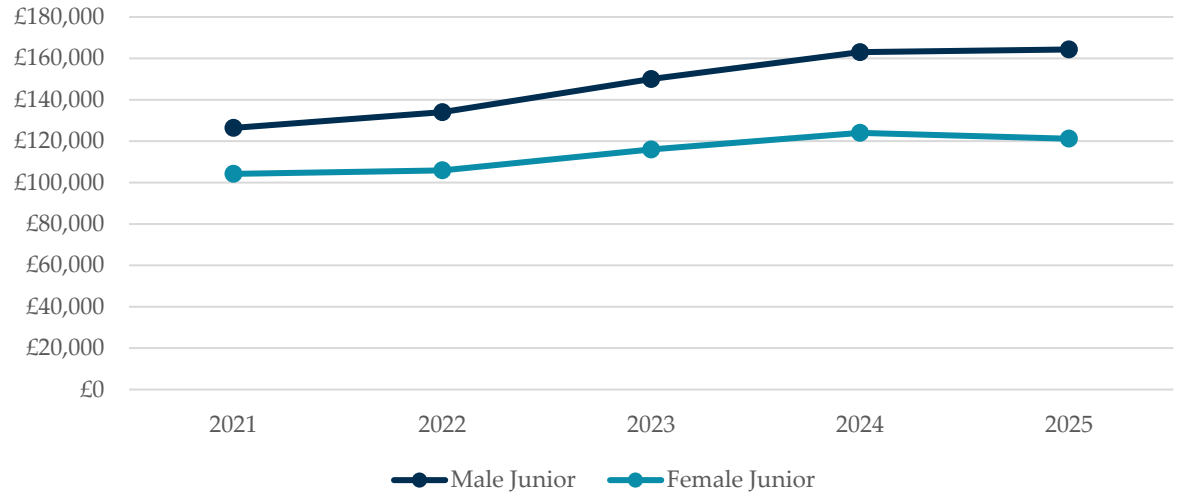
Figure 3: Self-employed barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings (inner ring) by sex, junior



43% of junior barristers are women. They account for 35% of the gross earnings.

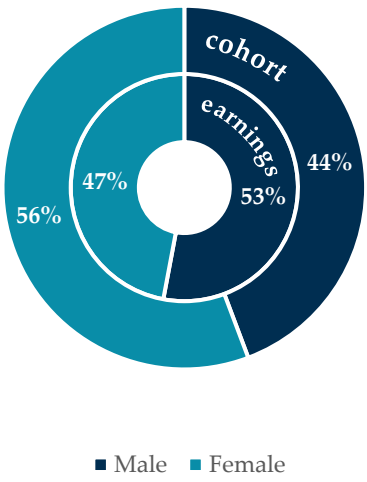
The gap between male and female junior barristers' median gross earnings is 26% (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Median earnings trend of self-employed juniors, 2021-2025[3]



Over the last 5 years, junior men's median earnings increased by 30% (from £126,400 to £164,300) and junior women's by 16% (from £104,200 to £121,200).

Figure 5: Self-employed barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings (inner ring) by sex, 0-3 PQE

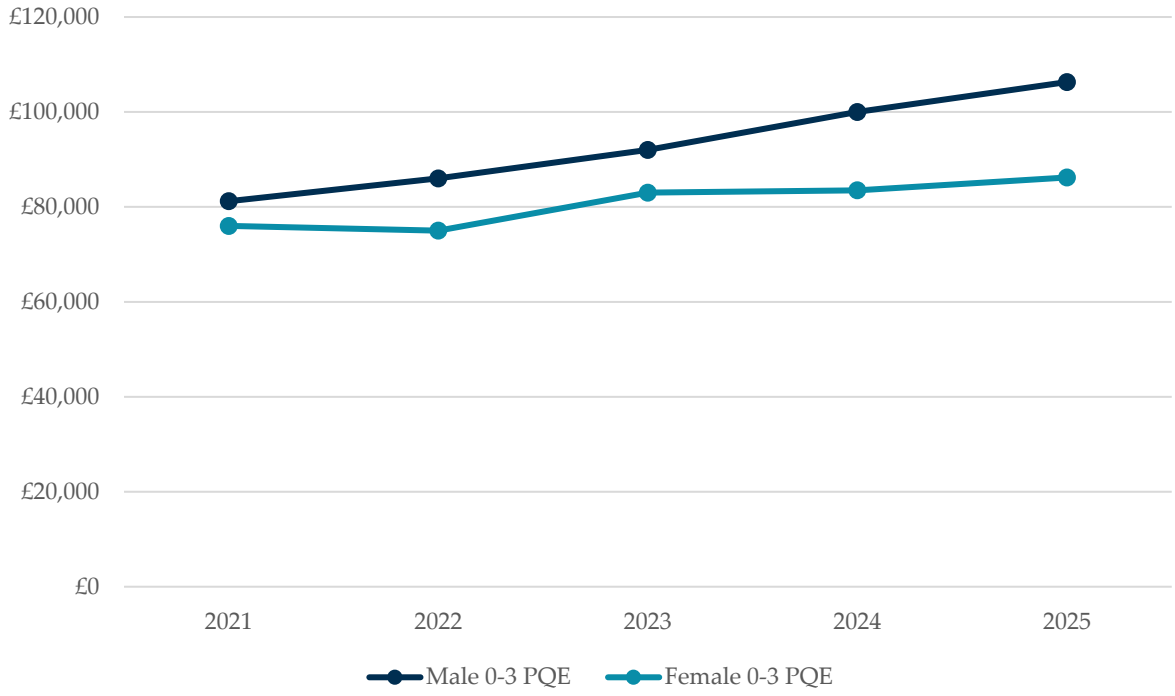


56% of barristers in the 0-3 years PQE band are women. They account for 47% of the gross earnings.

The gap between men's and women's median gross earnings in this PQE band is 19% (see figure 6).

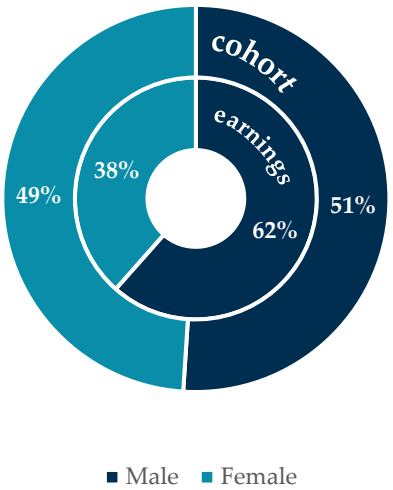
[3] Also see Annex 7

Figure 6: Median earnings trend of self-employed barristers with 0-3 PQE, 2021-2025



In the last 5 years, median earnings of male barristers with 0-3 PQE increased by 31% (from £81,200 to £106,300) and female barristers with 0-3 PQE by 13% (from £76,000 to £86,200).

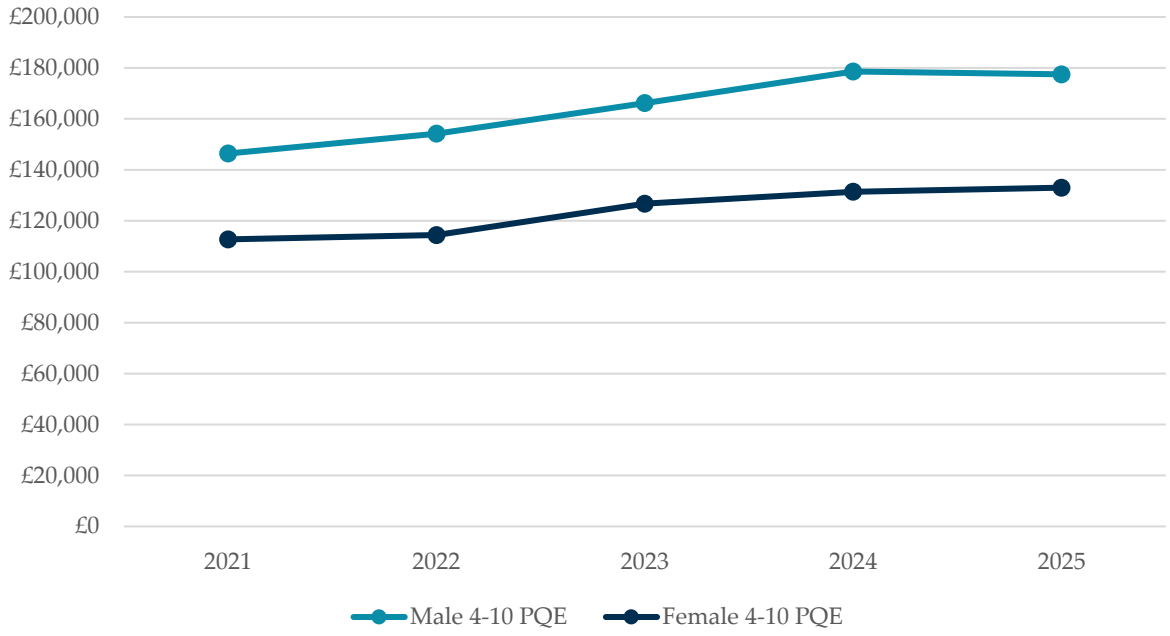
Figure 7: Self-employed barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings (inner ring) by sex, 4-10 PQE



49% of barristers in the 4-10 PQE band are women. They account for 38% of the gross earnings.

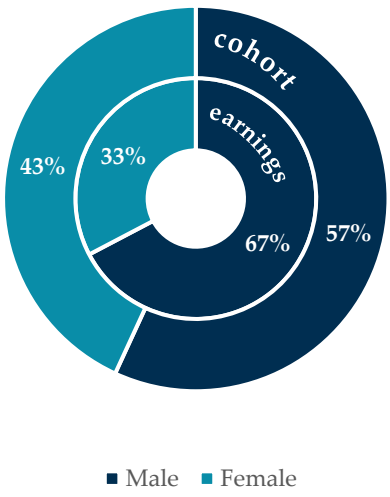
The gap between men's and women's median gross earnings in this PQE band is 25% (see figure 8).

Figure 8: Median earnings trend of self-employed barristers with 4-10 PQE, 2021-2025



In the last 5 years, median earnings of male barristers with 4-10 PQE increased by 21% (from £146,400 to £177,500) and female barristers with 4-10 PQE by 18% (from £112,700 to £133,000).

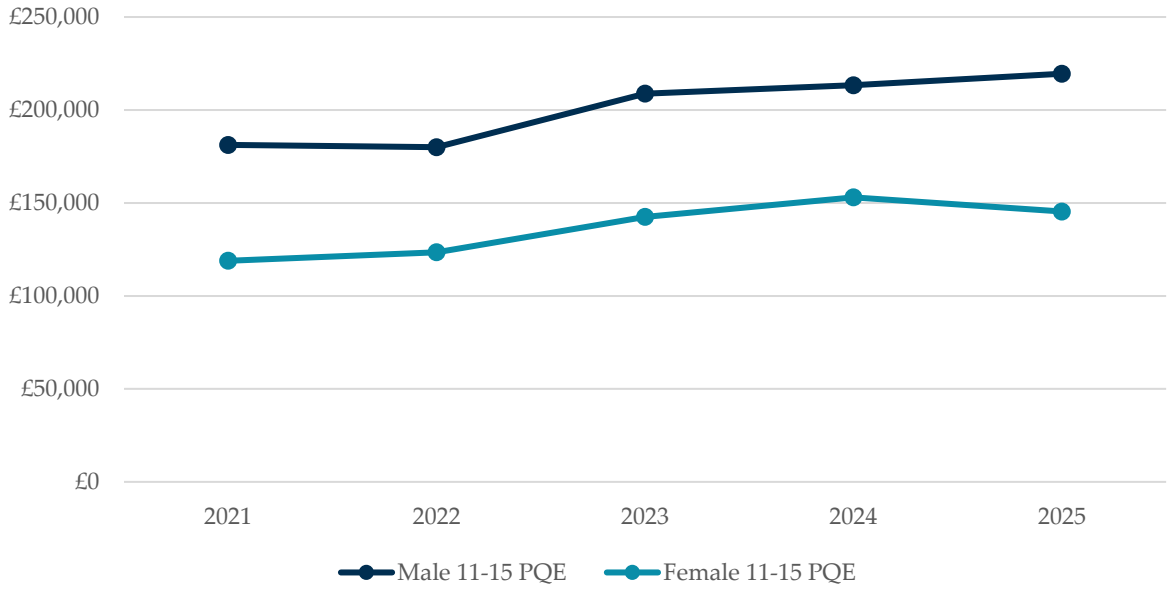
Figure 9: Self-employed barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings (inner ring) by sex, 11-15 PQE



43% of barristers in the 11-15 PQE band are women. They account for 33% of the gross earnings.

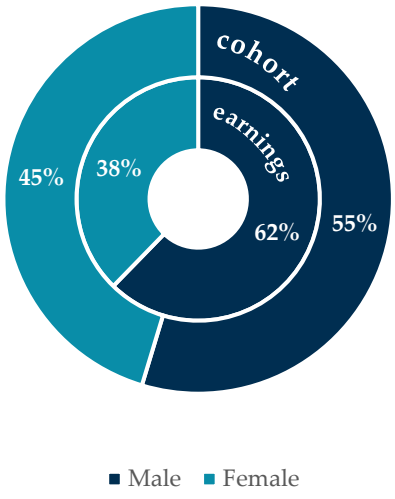
The gap between men's and women's median gross earnings in this PQE band is 34% (see figure 10).

Figure 10: Median earnings trend of self-employed barristers with 11-15 PQE, 2021-2025



In the last 5 years, median earnings of male barristers with 11-15 PQE increased by 21% (from £181,200 to £219,500) and female barristers with 11-15 PQE by 22% (from £118,900 to £145,400).

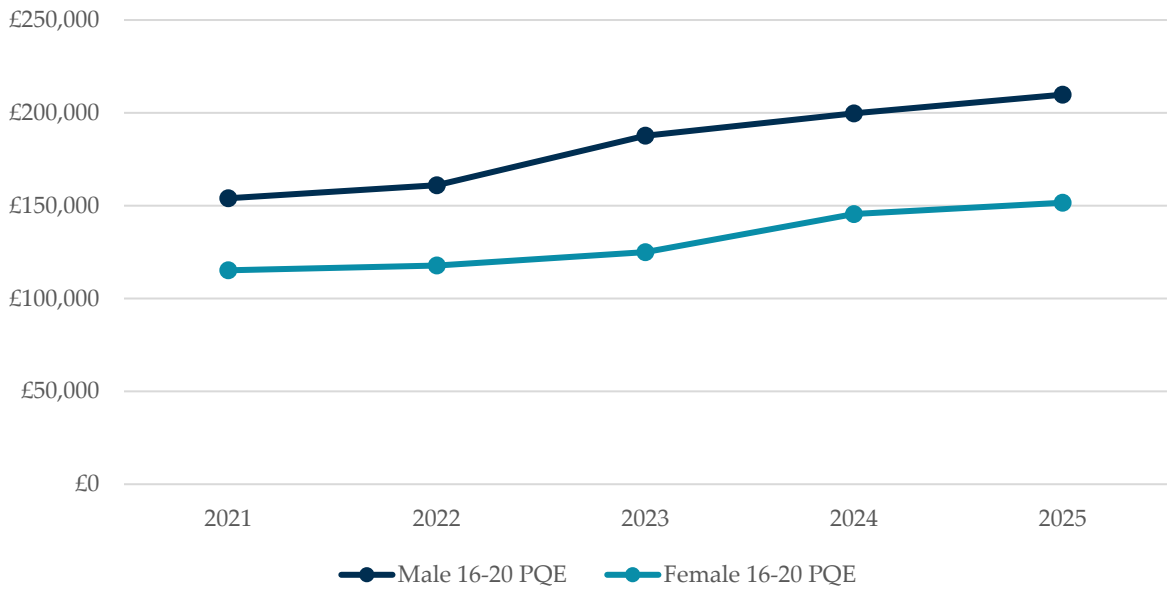
Figure 11: Self-employed barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings (inner ring) by sex, 16-20 PQE



45% of barristers in the 16-20 PQE band are women. They account for 38% of the gross earnings.

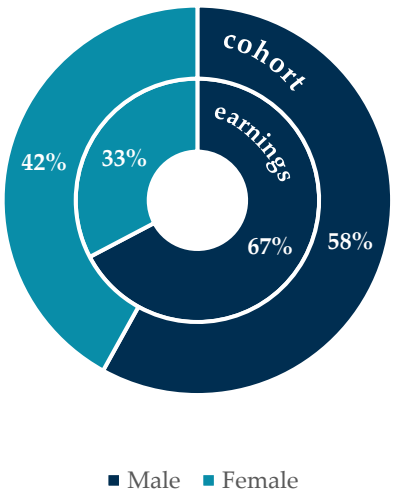
The gap between men's and women's median gross earnings in this PQE band is 28% (see figure 12).

Figure 12: Median earnings trend of self-employed barristers with 16-20 PQE, 2021-2025



In the last 5 years, median earnings of male barristers with 16-20 PQE increased by 36% (from £154,000 to £209,800) and female barristers with 16-20 PQE by 32% (from £115,200 to £151,600).

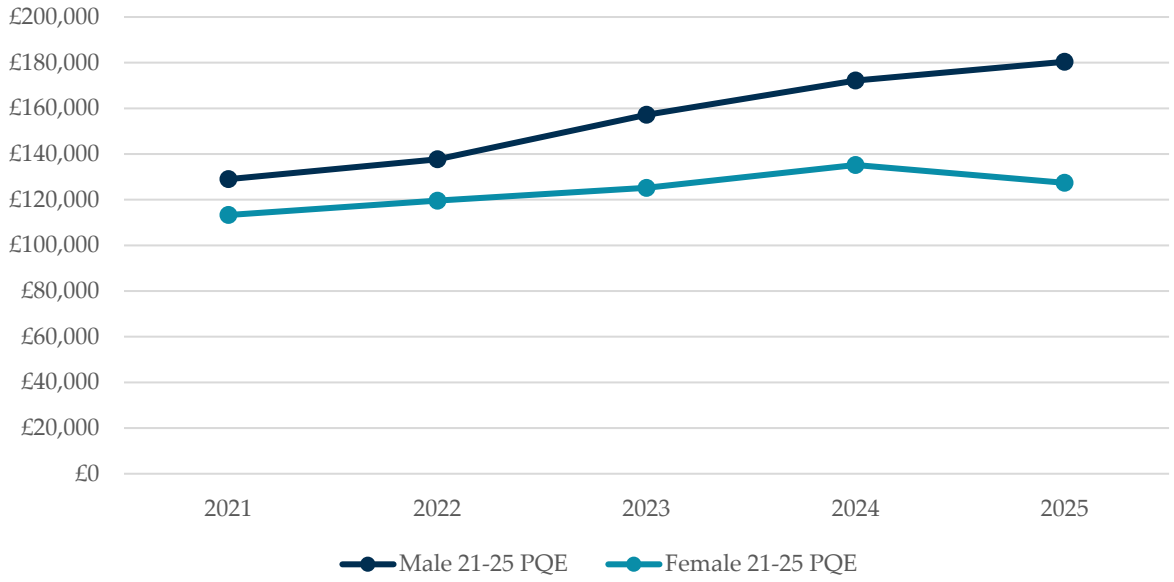
Figure 13: Self-employed barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings (inner ring) by sex, 21-25 PQE



42% of barristers in the 21-25 PQE band are women. They account for 33% of the gross earnings.

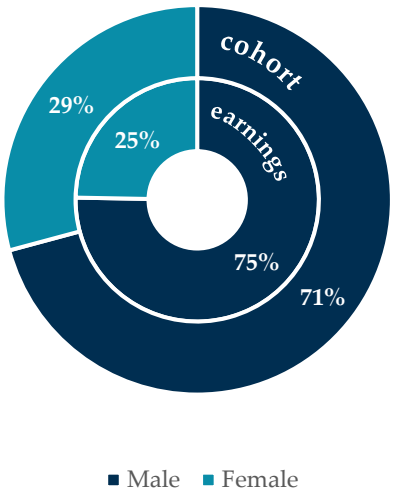
The gap between men's and women's median gross earnings in this PQE band is 29% (see figure 14).

Figure 14: Median earnings trend of self-employed barristers with 21-25 PQE, 2021-2025



In the last 5 years median earnings of male barristers with 21-25 PQE increased by 40% (from £129,000 to £180,400) and female barristers with 21-25 PQE by 12% (from £113,300 to £127,400).

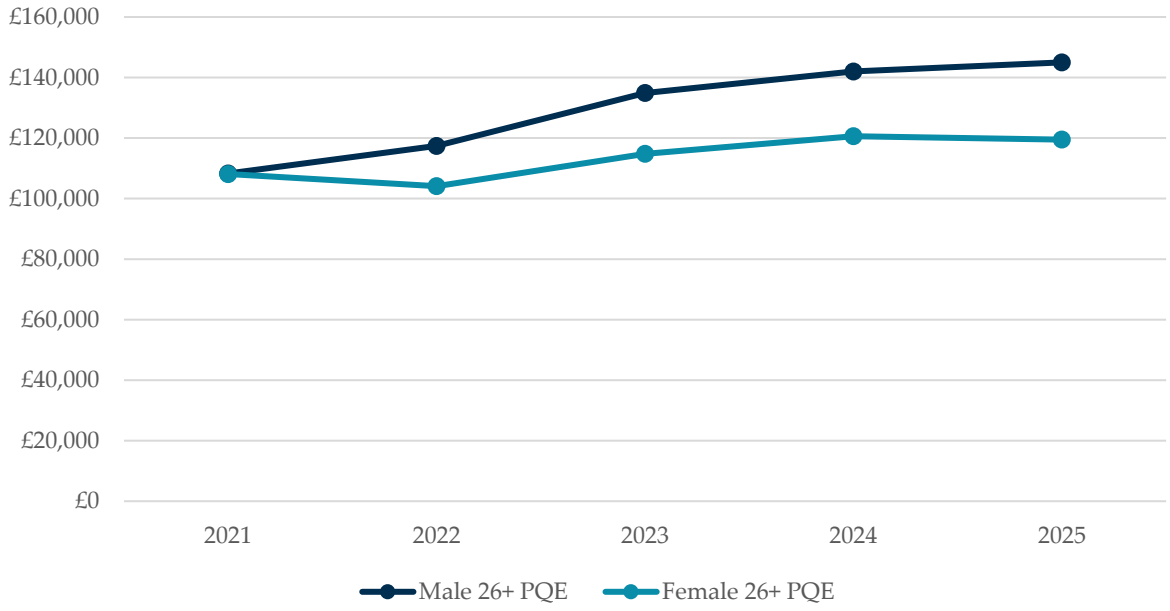
Figure 15: Self-employed barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earning (inner ring) by sex, 26+ PQE



29% of barristers in the 26+ PQE band are women. They account for 25% of the gross earnings.

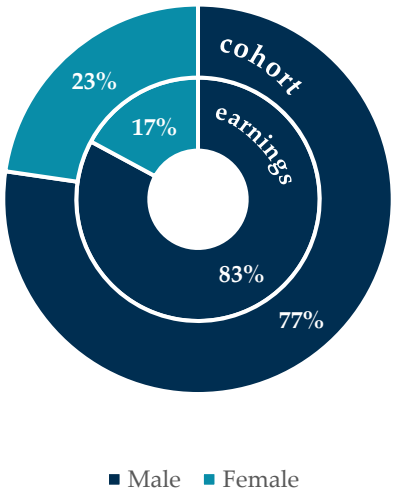
The gap between men's and women's median gross earnings in this PQE band is 18% (see figure 16).

Figure 16: Median earnings trend of self-employed barristers with 26+ PQE, 2021-2025



In the last 5 years median earnings of male barristers with 26+ PQE increased by 34% (from £108,300 to £145,000) and female barristers with 26+ PQE by 11% (from £108,100 to £119,500).

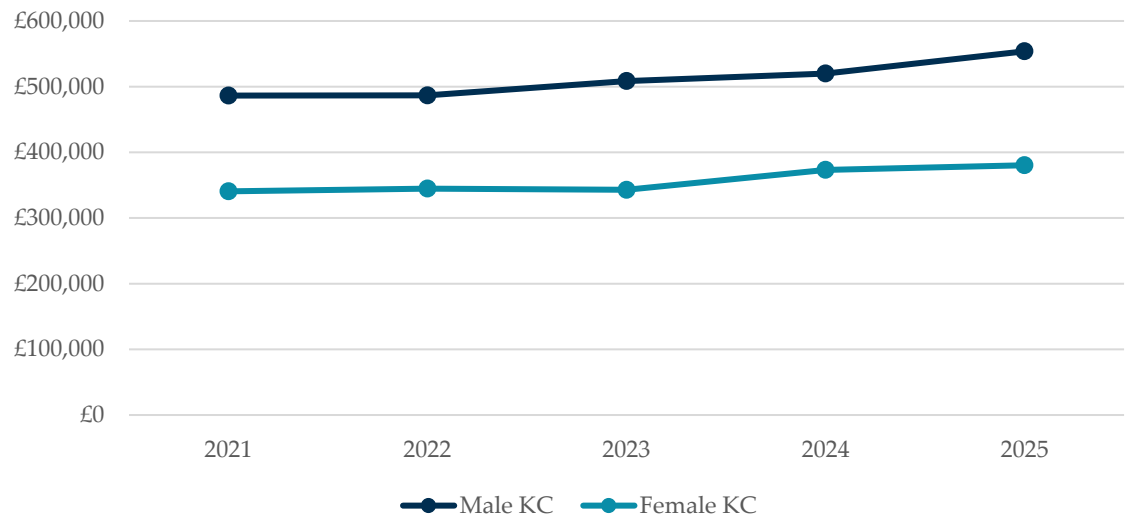
Figure 17: Self-employed barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings (inner ring) by sex, KC



23% of KCs are women. They account for 17% of the gross earnings.

The gap between male and female KCs' median gross earnings is 31% (see figure 18).

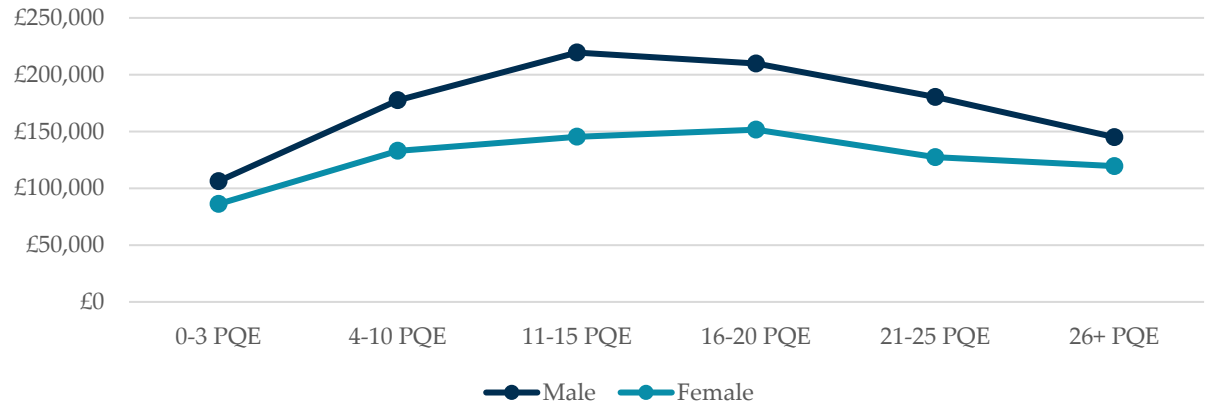
Figure 18: Median earnings trend of self-employed KCs, 2021-2025[4]



In the last 5 years male KCs' median earnings increased by 14% (from £486,400 to £553,800) and women KCs by 12% (from £340,600 to £380,300).

Figure 19 shows the pattern in median earnings of men and women across the PQE bands. It shows the gap is present right at the start of a barrister's career, widens in mid-career and narrows again amongst senior juniors.

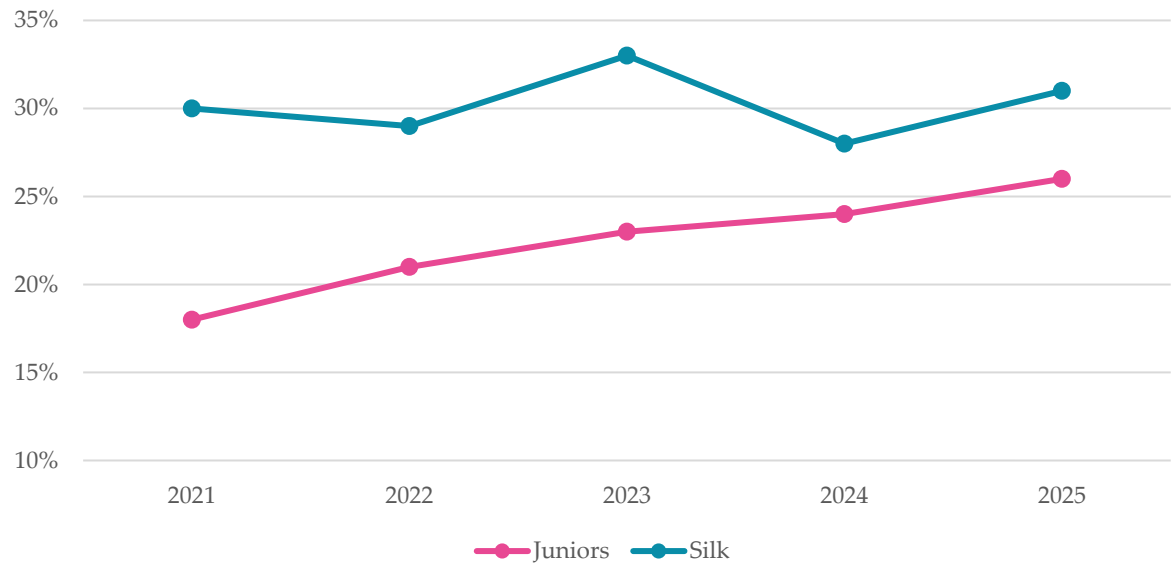
Figure 19: Median earnings of self-employed junior barristers by PQE band, 2025[5]



[4] See also Annex 8
[5] See also Annex 2

Figure 20 shows the trend in earnings gap at the self-employed Bar from 2021 to 2025. As we see in the trend for juniors (pink line), any disparity in earnings growth will result in the earnings gap continuing to widen over time. For barristers who take silk (the blue line), the gap is wider at 31%, an increase of 1% since 2021.

Figure 20: Earnings gap trend at the self-employed Bar, 2021-2025[6]



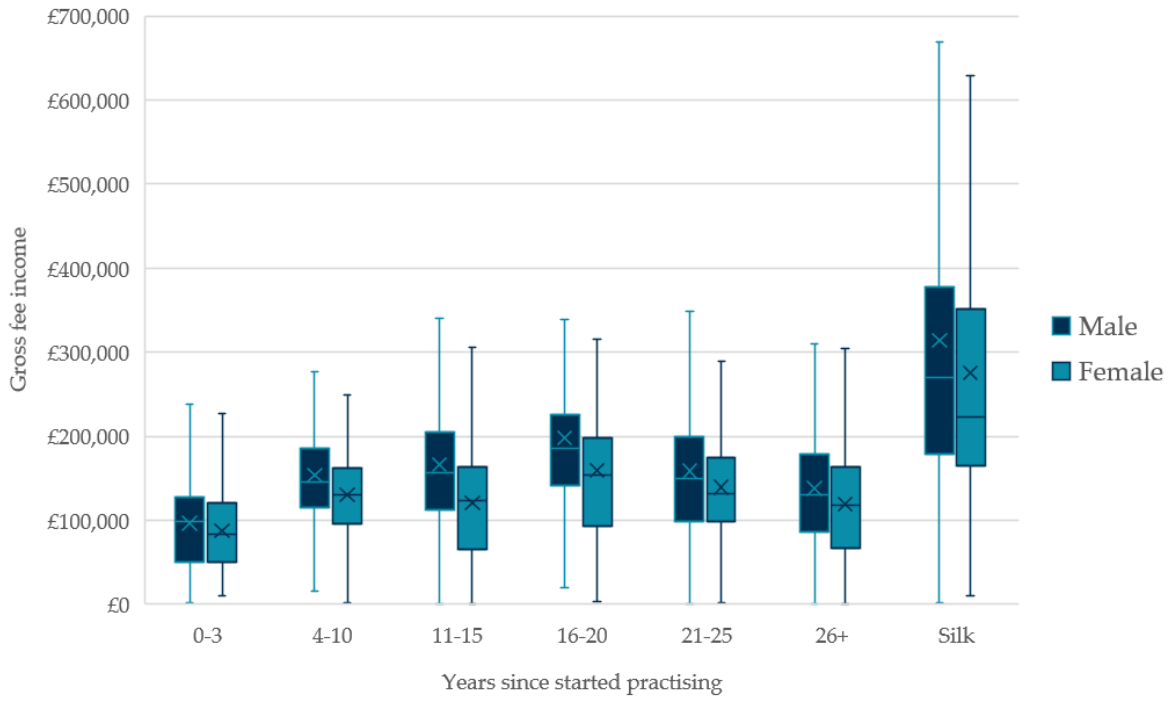
[6] See also Annex 7 and 8

Earnings by sex and practice area

Crime

This group covers 3,271 barristers declaring 80% or more of their gross income from criminal law.

Figure 22: Earnings of self-employed criminal barristers by PQE and sex, 2025[7]



Women's median earnings are below men's at all experience levels in criminal practice.

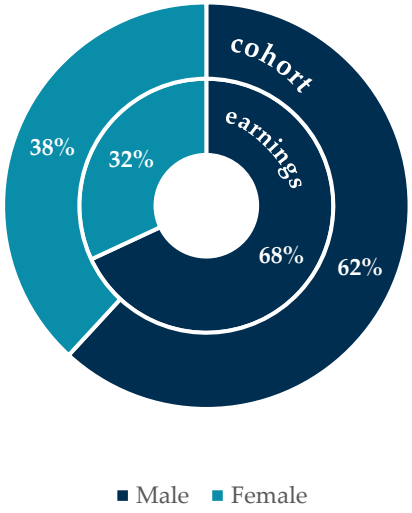
The gap is present at the start of a barrister's career, at 0-3 PQE. Women barristers in this experience level are earning 86% of those of their male colleagues (earnings gap at 14%).

The earnings gap then drops to 10% at 4-10 PQE and increases again to 21% at 11-15 PQE. Female silks are earning a median average of 17% less than their male colleagues.

[7] See also Annex 3

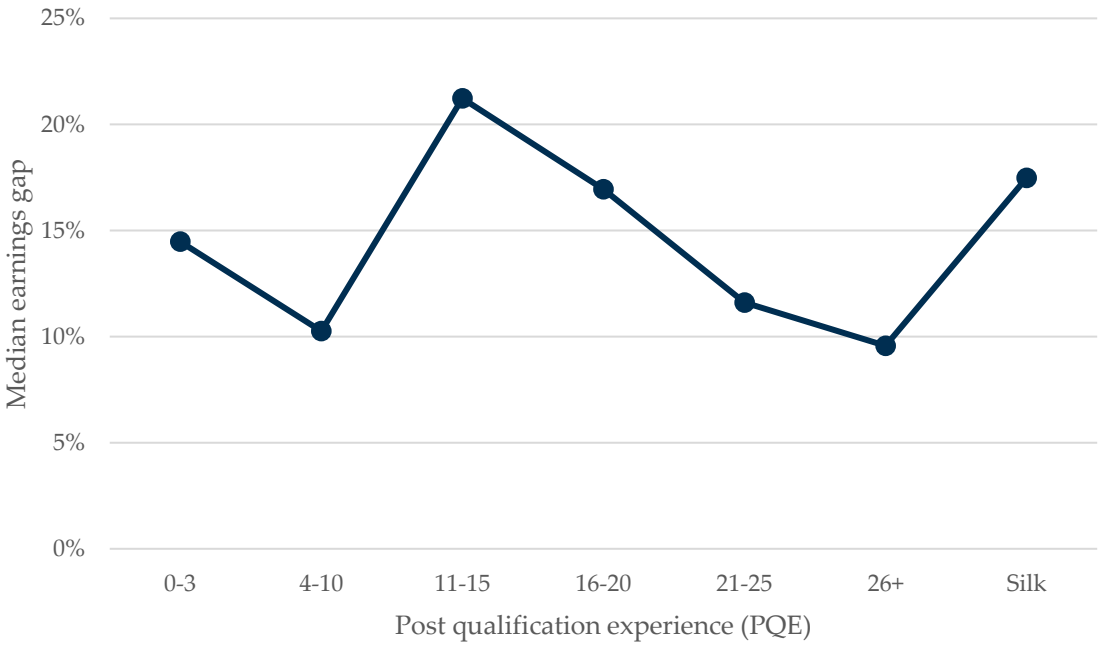
The higher earning quartile of male silks has a gross fee income of over £377,600, while women in the higher quartile earn over £351,200. This represents a 7% gap.

Figure 23: Self-employed criminal barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings by sex (inner ring), 2025



Overall, women make up 38% of barristers with 80%+ of their practice in crime and earn 32% of the earnings in that practice area.

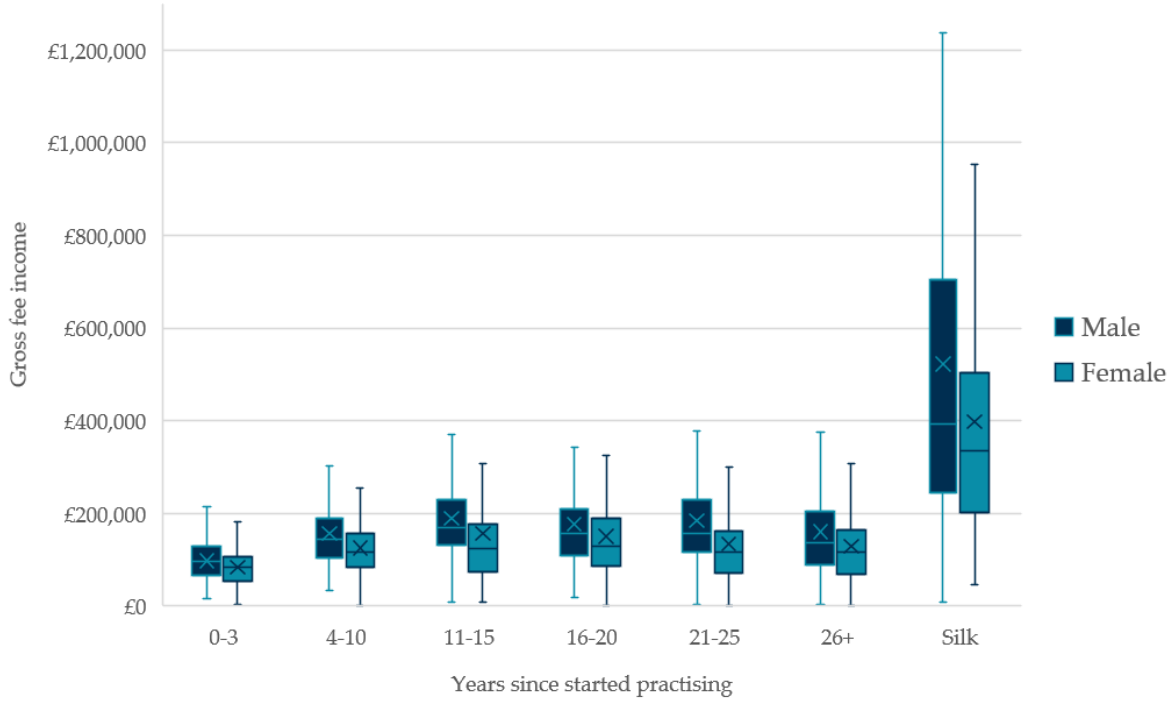
Figure 24: Earnings gap – criminal barristers by PQE band, 2025



Family

This group covers 2,407 barristers declaring 80% or more of their gross fee income from family law.

Figure 25: Earnings of self-employed family barristers by PQE and sex, 2025[8]



66% of family barristers are women. Family is the only area of practice at the Bar where there are more women than men. Yet across all PQE bands, men's median gross fee income is higher than women's.

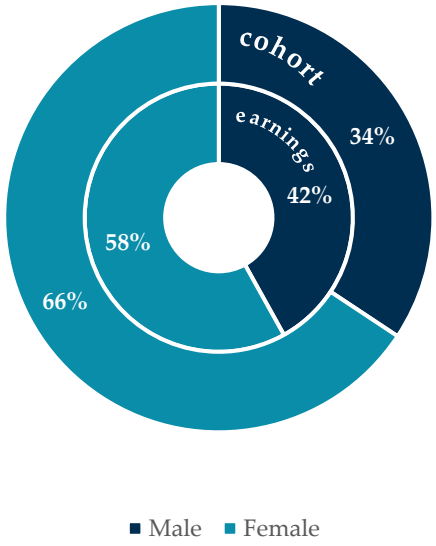
This earnings gap can be seen at every stage of a barrister's career. At the start of a family barrister's career in the 0-3 years PQE band, on average women are earning 15% less than those of men and the highest earning men are earning 17% more than the highest earning women. The lower earning men are also earning more (19%) than the lower earning women.

The gap peaks at 11-15 PQE (27%) and again at 21-25 PQE (26%).

[8] See also Annex 4

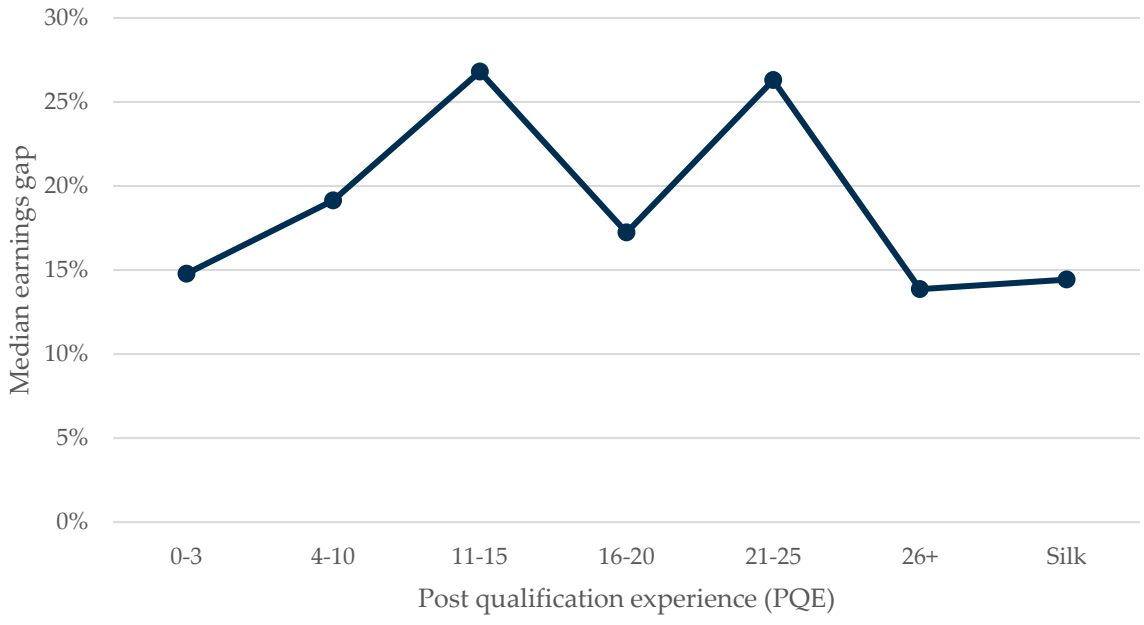
At KC level, there is a 14% gap in the median earnings between men and women in family law. The highest earning women are earning 29% less than the highest earning men.

Figure 26: Self-employed family barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings by sex (inner ring), 2025



Overall, women make up 66% of barristers with 80%+ of their practice in family and earn 58% of the earnings in that practice area.

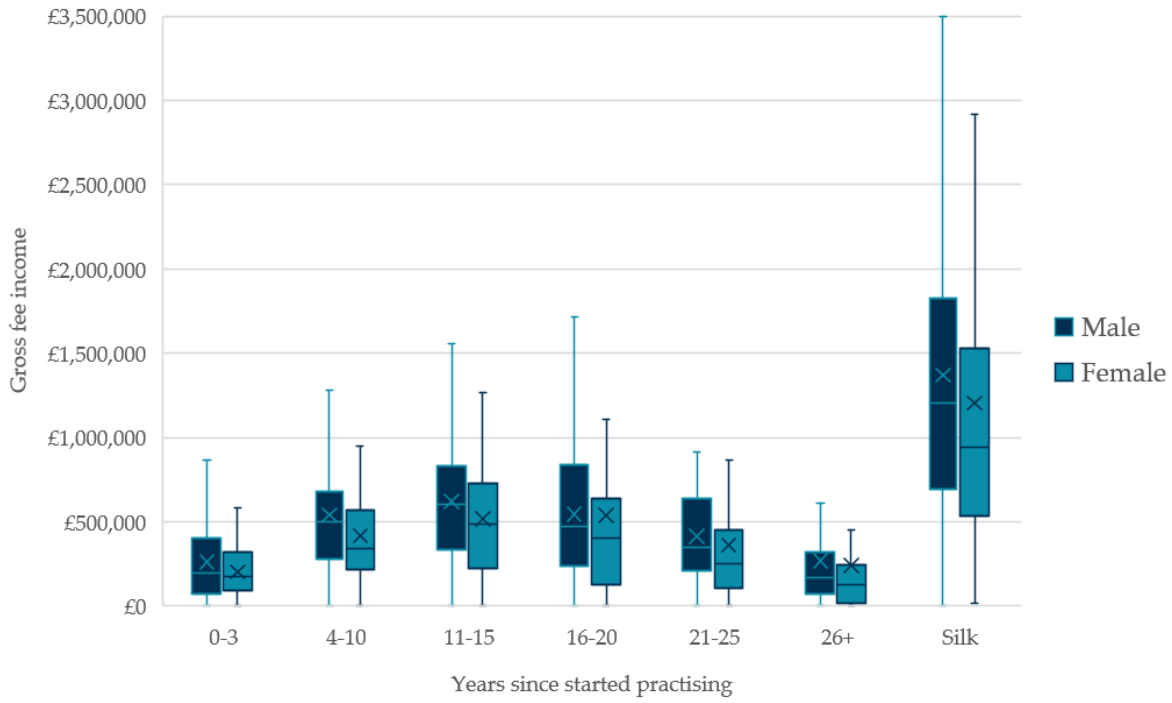
Figure 27: Earnings gap – family barristers by PQE band, 2025



Commercial and Chancery

This group covers 1,224 barristers declaring 80% or more of their gross fee income from commercial and Chancery law.

Figure 28: Earnings of self-employed commercial and Chancery barristers by PQE and sex, 2025[9]



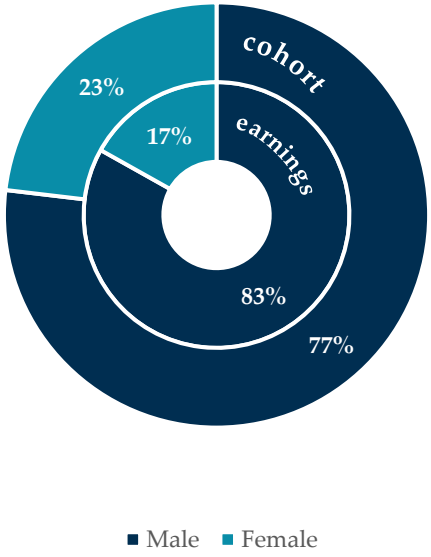
At 23%, there is a lower representation of women in commercial and Chancery than in any other of the main areas of practice considered in this report. We also see the highest overall earning and some of the widest earnings gaps.

During the early years of practice (0-3 years PQE), women's median gross fee earnings are 9% less than men's. The top quartile of women's earnings at this experience level starts at 21% lower than the top quartile of men's earnings. However, the lower earning women at this experience level earn more (29%) than the lower earning men.

The median earnings gap peaks at 4-10 PQE (32%). The earnings gap at KC level is 21%.

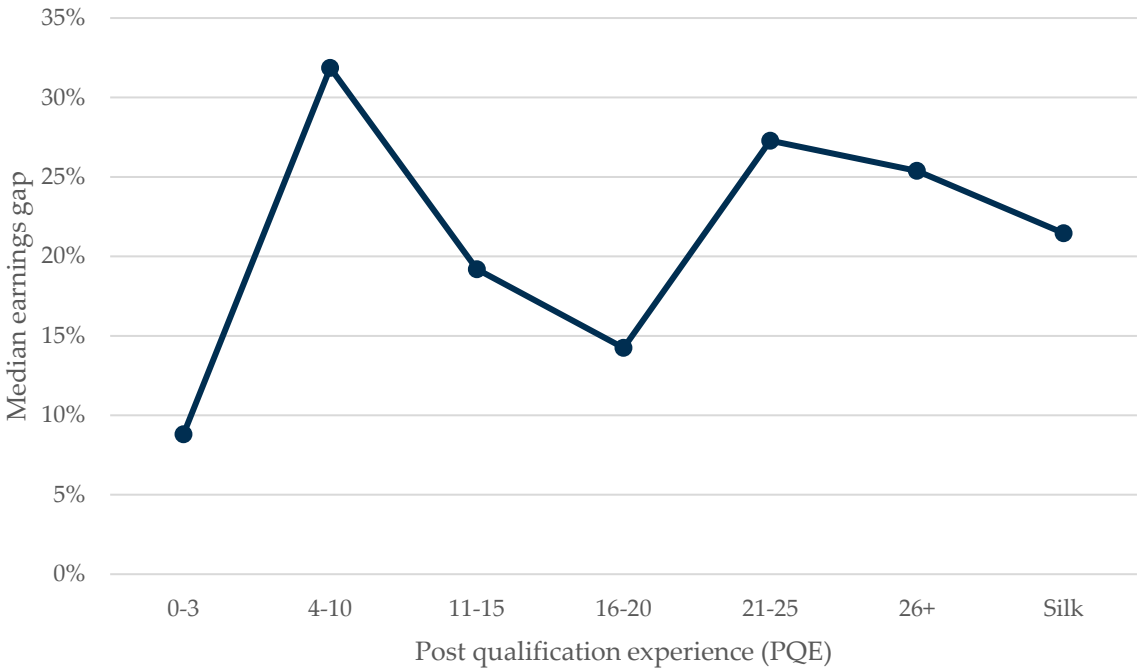
[9] See also Annex 5

Figure 29: Self-employed commercial and Chancery barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings by sex (inner ring), 2025



Overall, women make up 23% of barristers with 80%+ of their practice in commercial and Chancery and earn 17% of the earnings in that practice area.

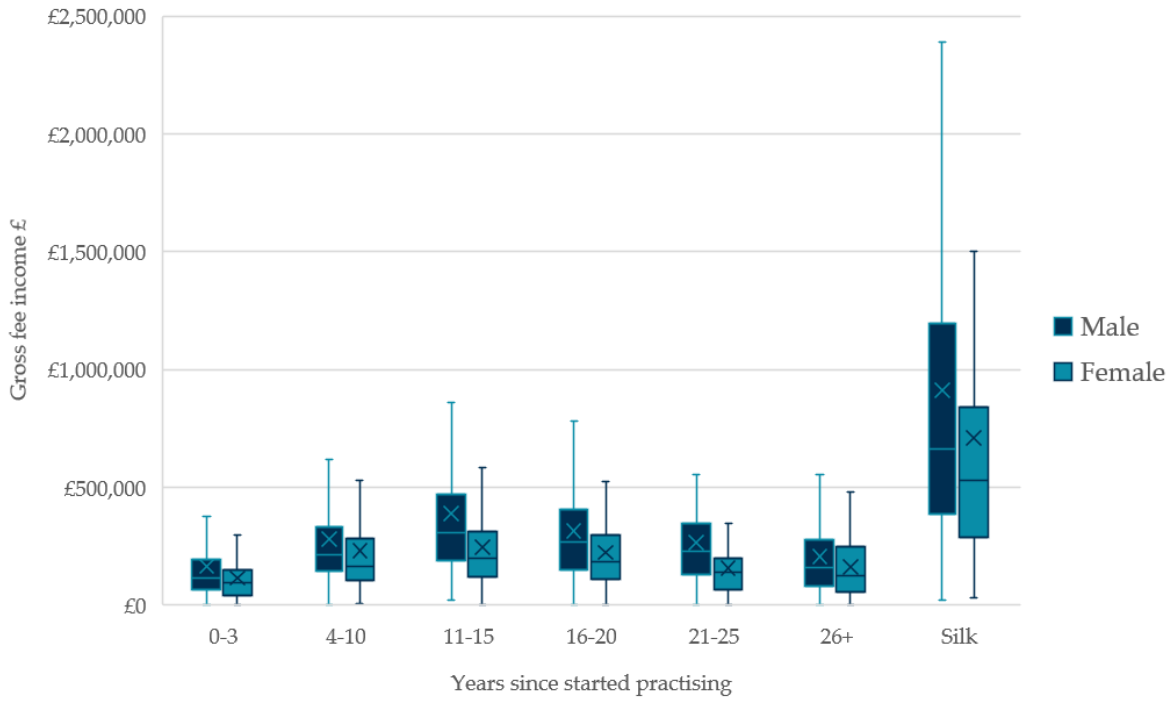
Figure 30: Earnings gap – commercial and Chancery barristers by PQE band, 2025



General civil

This group covers 2,532 barristers with no specific civil specialism (ie those who do not declare over 80% of their gross fee income in any one civil area).

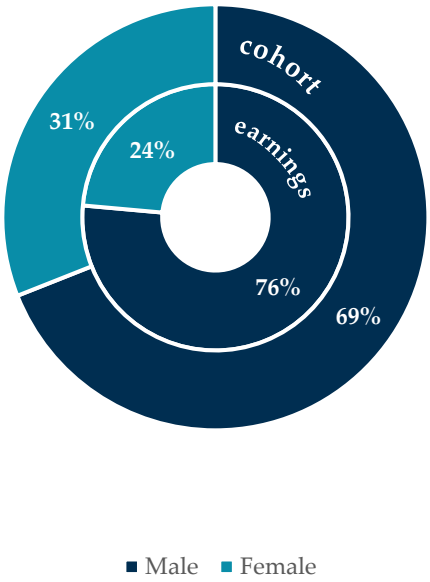
Figure 31: Median earnings of self-employed general civil barristers by PQE and sex, 2025[10]



Women new practitioners (0-3 years PQE) are earning 82% of their male colleagues' earnings (18% gap). At 21-25 PQE, the gap sharply reaches its peak at 40%. At this experience level, women earn 60% of their male colleagues. At KC level, men on average earn 21% more than women.

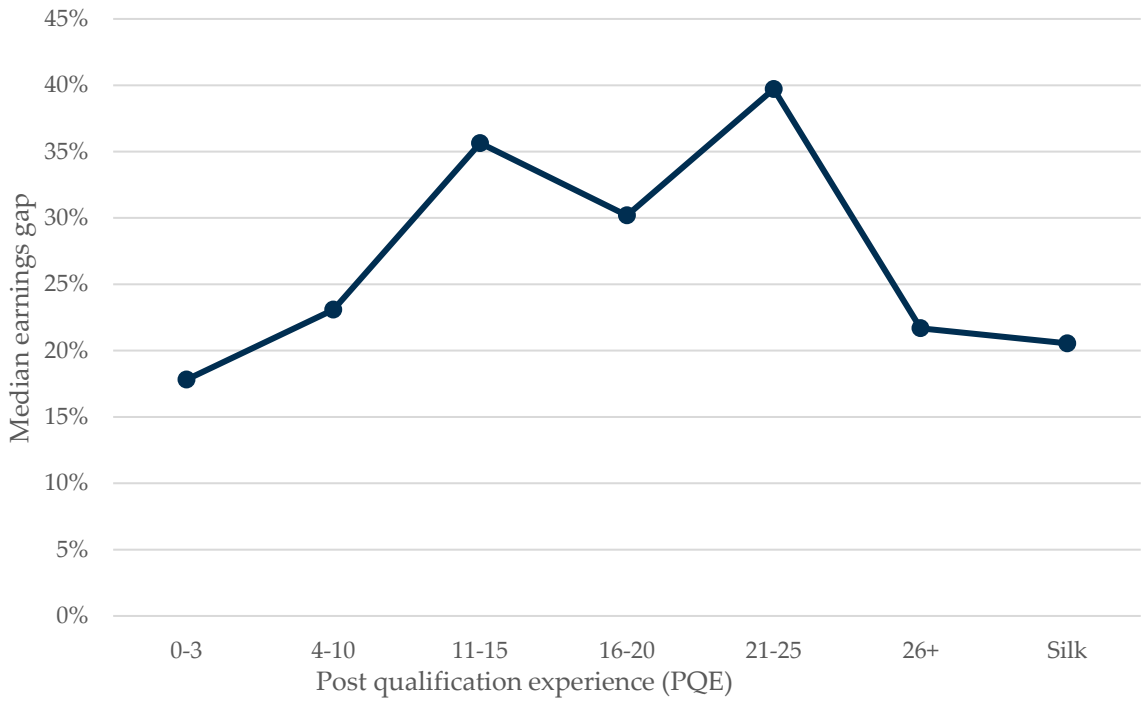
[10] See also Annex 6

Figure 32: Self-employed general civil barristers by sex (outer ring – 'cohort') and gross earnings by sex (inner ring), 2025



Overall, women make up 31% of barristers with 80%+ of their practice in general civil and earn 24% of the earnings in that practice area.

Figure 33: Earnings gap – general civil barristers by PQE band, 2025



For more information about the data, to see more detailed data specific to practice areas, or to learn more about the work the Bar Council is doing in this area, please contact equality@barcouncil.org.uk

Annexes

Annex 1: Median earnings of self-employed barristers by sex, 2025

Experience level	Male	Male median	Female	Female median	Gap
Junior	6,345	£164,300	4,837	£121,200	26%
KC	1,485	£553,800	436	£380,300	31%

Annex 2: Median earnings of self-employed barristers by PQE and sex, 2025

PQE band	Male	Male median	Female	Female median	Gap
0-3	797	£106,300	1,003	£86,200	19%
4-10	1,392	£177,500	1,335	£133,000	25%
11-15	819	£219,500	621	£145,400	34%
16-20	696	£209,800	577	£151,600	28%
21-25	685	£180,400	495	£127,400	29%
26+	1,956	£145,000	806	£119,500	18%
KC	1,485	£553,800	436	£380,300	31%

Annex 3: Median earnings of self-employed criminal barristers by PQE and sex, 2025

PQE band	Male	Male median	Female	Female median	Gap
0-3	198	£98,400	313	£84,200	14%
4-10	297	£145,800	312	£130,800	10%
11-15	141	£157,000	100	£123,600	21%
16-20	170	£185,200	101	£153,800	17%
21-25	226	£149,500	140	£132,100	12%
26+	672	£130,400	185	£117,900	10%
KC	319	£270,000	97	£222,800	17%

Annex 4: Median earnings of self-employed family barristers by PQE and sex, 2025

PQE band	Male	Male median	Female	Female median	Gap
0-3	89	£97,700	234	£83,200	15%
4-10	167	£144,100	403	£116,500	19%
11-15	89	£168,800	175	£123,500	27%
16-20	93	£156,900	200	£129,900	17%
21-25	91	£158,000	154	£116,400	26%
26+	229	£135,700	355	£116,900	14%
KC	68	£393,000	60	£336,300	14%

Annex 5: Median earnings of self-employed commercial and Chancery barristers by PQE and sex, 2025

PQE band	Male	Male median	Female	Female median	Gap
0-3	71	£196,300	40	£179,000	9%
4-10	172	£500,200	68	£340,800	32%
11-15	132	£605,500	51	£489,300	19%
16-20	76	£470,000	35	£403,100	14%
21-25	45	£350,000	19	£254,500	27%
26+	131	£169,600	28	£126,500	25%
KC	314	£1,203,400	42	£945,200	21%

Annex 6: Median earnings of self-employed general civil barristers by PQE and sex, 2025

PQE band	Male	Male median	Female	Female median	Gap
0-3	242	£118,000	178	£97,000	18%
4-10	381	£214,600	213	£165,100	23%
11-15	193	£306,600	102	£197,300	36%
16-20	137	£267,000	81	£186,400	30%
21-25	130	£228,900	49	£138,000	40%
26+	340	£161,900	55	£126,800	22%
KC	324	£664,400	107	£527,900	21%

Annex 7: Median earnings of self-employed juniors trend

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Male junior	£126,400	£134,000	£150,200	£162,800	£164,300
Female junior	£104,200	£105,900	£116,200	£124,000	£121,200
Gap	18%	21%	23%	24%	26%

Annex 8: Median earnings of self-employed KCs trend

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Male KCs	£486,400	£486,700	£508,800	£520,100	£553,800
Female KCs	£340,600	£344,100	£342,200	£374,500	£380,300
Gap	30%	29%	33%	28%	31%

Annex 9: Earnings gap – self-employed barristers trend by PQE and sex

PQE band	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
0-3	6%	13%	9%	17%	19%
4-10	23%	26%	24%	26%	25%
11-15	34%	31%	32%	28%	34%
16-20	25%	27%	34%	28%	28%
21-25	12%	13%	20%	22%	29%
26+	0%	11%	15%	15%	18%
KC	30%	29%	33%	28%	31%