
Legal services for Higher Education institutions



THE LAW FIRM WITH A PASSION FOR EDUCATION



Who we are

As an award-winning Top 50 UK law firm, we provide the full range of services that you would expect to organisations, business leaders and individuals. We are entrepreneurial in our outlook, so we’re flexible and responsive to the needs of our clients, delivering the best outcomes for them.

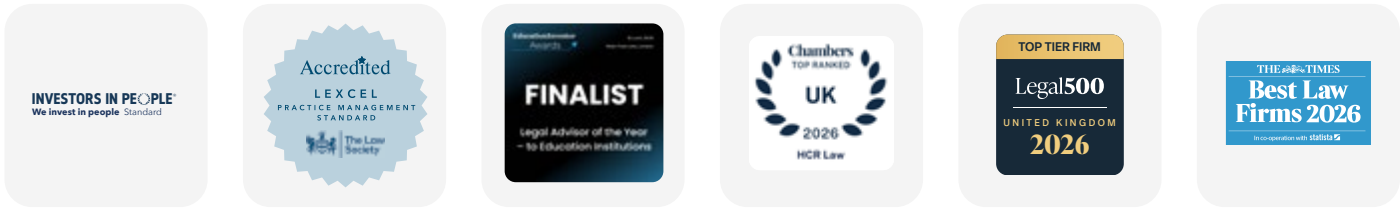
With 13 offices across England and Wales, we have more than 1,000 lawyers and support staff, including over 220 partners. Our growth has been in response to client demand, and our annual turnover is c.£115m.

Our dedicated Education sector team supports over 50 Higher Education institutions and research organisations. We are nationally recognised for providing practical, responsive and sector-specific legal advice, often acting as an extension of in-house teams. We have been shortlisted in the EdInvestor Awards for the last eight years, and won twice.



- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Birmingham | 8. London |
| 2. Cambridge | 9. Norwich |
| 3. Cardiff | 10. Shrewsbury |
| 4. Central England | 11. Thames Valley |
| 5. Cheltenham | 12. Worcester |
| 6. Hereford | 13. Wye Valley |
| 7. Leamington Spa | |

Our awards





Our Higher Education expertise

We offer comprehensive legal support to Higher Education institutions, providing full coverage across all practice areas, as well as a wide array of specialisms.

We have significant experience advising universities including the University of Greenwich, University of Northampton and University of Cambridge. We're members of several Higher Education frameworks, including the Crown Commercial Service, the London Universities Purchasing Consortium and Dukefield Procurement.

Our approach is integrated and budget-aware, combining dedicated project leadership, flexible fee arrangements and tailored resourcing through our HCR Flex for Higher Education and dedicated Data Protection Officer models. We take a transparent, committed approach to workflow, maintaining a tracker to give clients live updates on the status of their matters, upcoming deadlines and costs.

“”

HCR are the ‘go to’ experts for all education, employment, contract, commercial and international advice... They are highly responsive, pragmatic, appreciate the nuances of complex cases and provide us with excellent advice.

Higher Education client testimonial

Our services for Higher Education institutions

Commercial, procurement and partnerships

- IT contracts
- Outsourcing
- Collaborations (domestic and international)
- Funding and research
- Procurement and tender documentation
- JV-style arrangements

Compliance, governance and charity

- Governance documents and key policies and procedures
- Charity law compliance and trustee duties
- Office for Students and other regulatory advice
- Group structures, joint ventures and collaborations

Information compliance

- DSARs
- Breach response
- DPIAs
- FOIs
- International transfers

Corporate and structuring

- Mergers and acquisitions
- Group restructures and reorganisations
- Due diligence and transaction support

Employment, immigration and people risk

- Policies, procedures and training
- Grievance and disciplinary procedures
- Visas and immigration
- Employment tribunals
- HR investigations

Estates, construction and planning

- Campus projects
- Construction agreements
- Planning
- Redevelopment

Complaints, claims and investigations

- Student matters and claims
- Commercial disputes
- Crisis and reputation management
- Student conduct including Fitness to Practice claims

Specialist advisory areas

- AI
- Research governance
- IP commercialisation and spin outs
- Debt recovery (including international)
- Safeguarding
- Early stage investment

Our track record

- Advising an Oxford College on a complex, multi-phase agricultural property matter, advising on rural estate management in adherence with the charity law framework
- Advising a university facing substantial and complex claims amounting to multiple millions, relating to the termination of agreements. Our Education, Commercial and Dispute Resolution teams collaborated closely to review the evidence, the financial solvency of the claimants and the relevant regulatory frameworks
- Managing all aspects of a large-scale sensitive data breach for a university, including immediate containment, liaison with the ICO, triaging risk of harm to over 100 data subjects and drafting correspondence including injunction papers
- Appointed Interim Director of Governance for the university, providing strategic direction, advice and support to the Council, Executive team and wider stakeholders on a range of governance and regulatory matters
- Advising a Russell Group university on its rights and remedies under a JCT contract following the insolvency of a main contractor responsible for a flagship estate development
- Advising a university on transgender rights in relation to on-campus facilities, guiding on grievance procedures and reviewing their internal EDI policy and documents, in light of recent case law changes and health and safety legislation
- Advising multiple universities on handling student claims, including civil claims and judicial review proceedings, incorporating Equality Act considerations, with increased claim volumes driven by the growing use of AI.



Trusted advisers on international growth

We regularly advise universities and other institutions on international campuses, partnerships, recruitment, franchises and collaborative ventures.

We provide coordinated overseas legal advice for Higher Education clients through our trusted international networks. This includes LawExchange International (LEI), a global network of 34 independent law firms across five continents and 29 countries, of which HCR is the England and Wales member firm.

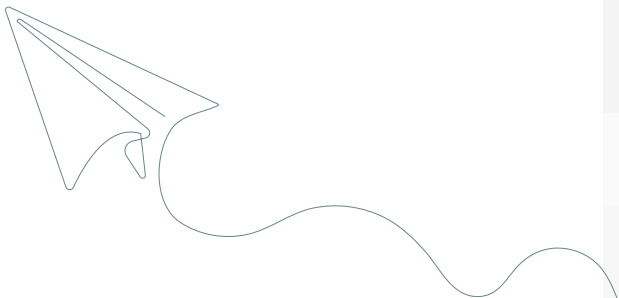
As of this year, members of our team are in the positions of Global Chair of LEI and Co-Chair of its IP committee. This network allows us to coordinate local legal advice for universities with overseas campuses, research collaborations, student placements and international partnerships.

We have a dedicated International team, with dual-qualified lawyers who have practiced in jurisdictions including the UK, US, Middle East, South Africa and Asia.

Our key services for universities already operating in or considering expansion overseas includes licensing and accreditation, governance and liability, overseas employment, visas, data transfers and IP protection.

Our overseas Higher Education experience includes:

1. Advising the University of Surrey on the establishment of a cooperative school in China
2. Supporting the University of Northampton with global academic partnerships
3. Advising on dual degrees and joint ventures with various international institutions including in the US, China and Egypt
4. Advising on IP protection in jurisdictions including South Korea, where filing is time critical.



HCR Flex for Higher Education

Now more than ever before, Higher Education leaders need access to specialist advice at excellent value for money. Whether your institution is growing fast or operating in a rapidly changing environment, you need advice from people who understand your institution and can move quickly to avert or manage issues before they escalate.

HCR Flex for Higher Education turns the traditional legal charging model on its head, with an entirely flexible set of options designed to respond to the unique needs of your institution. Flex can be used to supplement or complement in-house counsel, giving you access to the specialist legal expertise you need when you need it, all while managing costs.

Who benefits from HCR Flex?

The applications for HCR Flex are broad, but some of those we've helped include Higher Education leaders who:

- Have short- or long-term resource gaps and need support from lawyers who can hit the ground running to oversee legal compliance, contracts and negotiations and who can operate as "part of the team"
- Are concerned about unseen risks in their institutions which external eyes and ears can spot and manage effectively
- Value an external perspective, for example on their remuneration or risk committees and at board meetings
- Recognise their in-house counsel might benefit from additional capacity or support from a specialist
- Want to hire support to upskill their staff on specialist aspects of the law
- Are shoring up their institution for the next stage, such as international growth or partnerships, and want to be sure their frameworks and contracts are sufficiently robust.

Use cases

- We advised a university on a successful collaboration with a large corporation to establish new commercial income streams. We advised on key commercial terms, explaining the risks involved and proposing changes to the contract
- Working with a university for six months to help them streamline legal policies, procedures and processes to deliver efficient savings. Our advice included international collaboration agreements, procuring IT contracts, academic publications, defending defamation claims and more
- Advising a Midlands-based university on the applicable public procurement procedure relating to tendering a social care contract. The university had established close links with a number of community social care charitable organisations which were in receipt of public grants for relevant education and training
- Undertaking a fixed-term secondment for three days per week to help an in-house legal team at a university manage transitions following a merger
- Completed a long-term secondment with a university client, focusing on strategic data protection and information governance advice, including liaison with academics in relation to funded research projects, advising on applicable exemptions and supporting the management of DSARs
- Secondment with a London-based university, handling all elements of their commercial contracts. This includes applying a client-specific contract playbook, colour-coded for easy interpretation by stakeholders.



Working with us

Innovative, flexible pricing models

Our approach to pricing is underpinned by flexibility, transparency and understanding of the unique headwinds impacting the sector. When providing fee estimates, we adopt an evidence-based methodology designed to deliver clarity and certainty from the outset. We draw on comparable work undertaken for Higher Education clients, supported by historic data, to stress test assumptions and ensure estimates are realistic.

Where appropriate, work is unbundled into defined phases with fixed fees allocated to each stage, allowing the university to control commitment as a project progresses.

As well as our signature HCR Flex offering, we give universities and other Higher Education institutions a range of choices when it comes to working with us.

Bespoke HR consultancy

Clients benefit from integrated HR support through our in-house consultancy, which works alongside our Employment team to provide practical, fixed-fee HR support to universities and other institutions. Services can be delivered on a project basis, day rate or retainer, offering institutions the flexibility to address people related challenges with confidence and cost certainty.

DPO and DSAR support for Higher Education

We offer fixed-price support to universities receiving significant volumes of Data Subject Access Requests, which can be time-consuming and costly to manage. Our DPO and DSAR support includes document review, redaction, risk assessment and advice on the application of exemptions. We also provide pragmatic guidance on responding to 'fishing' DSARs, informed by current ICO enforcement trends and our experience supporting other institutions. This enables universities to manage volume and risk without unpredictable legal spend.

“““

Their response rate is exceptional, and they understand client pressures. They inspire confidence in their ability to come up with pragmatic solutions, understanding the need to balance risk with delivering solutions.

Legal 500 2026

Regulation, accreditation and governance

HCR Law is regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and holds Lexcel accreditation, reflecting our commitment to robust governance, quality management and client care. Our systems, processes and supervision frameworks are designed to support institutions operating in highly regulated environments, including compliance with charity law, Office for Students requirements and university governance standards.

Seamless onboarding and working style alignment

We place significant emphasis on onboarding, recognising that early alignment is critical to successful long term relationships. Our onboarding process is designed to be efficient and collaborative, with time taken to understand each institution's working practices, risk appetite and priorities. We integrate quickly with in house legal and professional services teams, establishing clear communication channels and agreed ways of working so that we can add value from day one. We find out what good looks like for our clients and deliver it.

Information security and data protection controls

We recognise the sensitivity and scale of the data handled by Higher Education institutions. Our approach to information security is underpinned by GDPR compliant systems, encrypted data storage, strict access controls and mandatory staff training. We maintain 24/7 monitoring and clear incident response protocols, enabling us to support universities through all aspects of data protection and information governance, including breach response, ICO engagement, data triage and complex data subject access requests.

Technology to enhance client service

We use technology to reduce friction, improve transparency and support closer collaboration with in house university teams. Tools are selected to enhance efficiency and responsiveness, not to replace sector insight or experience. We use Harvey AI to support legal research and drafting where appropriate, helping our lawyers work more efficiently on complex matters while operating within clear governance, supervision and quality control frameworks. For secure collaboration and document management, we use Firmex, particularly on matters involving sensitive information, large document sets or multiple stakeholders.

Transparent workflows and cost tracking

Clients benefit from real time visibility over matter status, deadlines and spend through clear reporting and tracker systems. This allows in house teams to plan effectively, manage internal stakeholders and respond quickly to emerging issues, without surprises on cost or scope. Matters are handled by the most appropriate lawyer for the task, balancing experience, specialism and cost. This approach ensures that institutions receive high quality advice without paying for unnecessary seniority, while still having access to senior oversight and specialist input where required.



Key contacts

Rebecca Quinn

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Higher Education Lead

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Rebecca has over 15 years' experience advising universities on complex commercial matters, including IP, IT, outsourcing and collaborative projects. She supports institutions on contracts, regulatory compliance and partnerships, with particular expertise in IP rights and commercialisation, and leads on HCR's Flex offering for higher education clients. Her experience spans major collaborations, data breach response and sensitive governance and student-related issues.



Rebecca's HE expertise has been invaluable, as has the expertise of her colleagues in other legal specialisms. We appreciate the commercial approach of 'our' HCR Flex for Higher Education team – their ability to see things from our perspective rather than from a purely legal standpoint has been very important.

I also appreciate the flexibility and responsiveness of the service. Our arrangement is for a set number of hours a week, but they aren't on a particular day. It means we can reach out at short notice and there are no bottlenecks in turning matters around.

Client quote



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HCR Law has excellent, detailed knowledge of the sector, as well as the prevailing legislation.

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Find out more



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