

Supporting clients in the *Middle East*

Introducing our International Employment team

Leading *cross-practice expertise*

Employment regulations and workplace cultures are something that varies considerably across jurisdictions worldwide and has been affected by recent technological and cultural shifts.

For global businesses, it is crucial that you understand these variations and adapt your employment practices to suit these changes and trends.

You need an international legal partner able to support you in both remaining compliant, and ensuring your business is structured to attract the best global talent.

Our firm's expertise covers both UAE Federal Law and Free Zone regulations. We have a particular focus on the DIFC and ADGM legal systems, where we serve a diverse range of clients across various industry sectors including all types of financial services, technology, consumer businesses and those backed by private capital. We also represent and advise executives across the lifecycle of their employment in the region, including where relationships breakdown and litigation ensues.

We have been involved in some of the seminal cases in business protection (testing the enforceability of post-termination covenants dealing with misuse of confidential information and IP and obtaining an interim injunction) and advised on the first discrimination claim to reach judgment in the DIFC CFI (Mahmood v Standard Chartered Bank CFI 2024). Our pedigree is unmatched, and we are able to draw on the expertise of our wider group of employment lawyers across the globe where cases are cross jurisdictional and multi-faceted.

Our advice is holistic across the employment relationship: we also offer tailored support to high-net-worth individuals seeking UAE relocation options or advising local businesses on global immigration law options.



Spotlight on the *Middle East*

Our International Employment law team combine on-the-ground and broader global regional expertise to deliver extensive advice to employers and senior executives operating within the Middle East across the full range of strategic advisory and contentious employment matters.

This synergy positions us to address complex employment issues with a coordinated, commercial approach, both regionally and internationally.

Our team can support you across:

- Employment documents – drafting policies, best practice guidance, employment contracts and consultancy agreements (including bespoke terms).
- Internal processes – advising on and facilitating disciplinaries, grievances, redundancies and restructuring processes.
- Contentious matters – representing both employers/employees in a wide array of disputes in both the DIFC and the ADGM, including restraint of trade and discrimination;
- Investigations – in a world where there has been an increasing focus on issues such as bullying, harassment and non-financial misconduct, we have deep experience in undertaking and advising on large scale internal investigations ensuring that Legal Professional Privilege is engaged where appropriate and dealing with highly contentious issues with sensitivity and discretion.
- Audits - auditing employers to ensure compliance with legislation and best practice.
- Training – offering tailored training sessions to address specific workplace risks, needs and concerns. These can be sector specific where necessary.
- Immigration matters - assisting with global mobility enquiries and applications, providing project management services for all UAE visa categories, advising on all aspects of UK Immigration for high-net-worth individuals and international businesses.



Our *Employment* Team



Michael Powner

Partner

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Based in our Dubai office, Michael leads the firm's Middle East Employment team, covering the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar, and continues to act for his existing and established UK client base.

Michael's practice is grounded in providing responsive and commercial advice.

He recognises that employers with international operations face unique challenges and now based in Dubai, Michael is accustomed to advising companies how to manage risk and maximise opportunities in their people strategies while ensuring compliance across multiple jurisdictions. His approach is tailored to navigate these complexities effectively.

His areas of specialism include redundancies and restructuring and resolving employment related disputes across the employment relationship. More widely, Michael understands the critical importance of diversity and inclusion, and the recruitment and retention of key personnel.

Recognised for his expertise in employment law, Michael is highly ranked as a Partner in both Chambers & Partners and Legal 500 and has written and been in the national media including a recent UK ITV news interview regarding his employment law expertise.

Michael is admitted to practise in England and Wales as well as DIFC and ADGM.

Clients quote "He is a vital partner to our business, with a fantastic legal mind, and is always up to date. Mike Powner is a brilliant lawyer".



Nick Hurley

Partner, Head of Employment

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Nick's practice is in respect of both contentious and non-contentious employment law issues. Nick is Head of the Employment Group at Charles Russell Speechlys. He has broad experience both in the Employment Tribunals and in the Civil Courts and has conducted cases involving discrimination, whistle blowing and TUPE to name but a few. Nick led the CRS team on Mahmood v Standard Chartered Bank CFI 2024 and has been involved in a number of high-profile business protection cases in the DIFC including obtaining one of the first interim injunctions in the DIFC. Nick's non-contentious experience covers a wide spectrum of work ranging from advising on complex employment documentation, giving strategic advice on reorganisations and all sorts of business transfers.

Nick is a prolific contributor to newspapers and journals, regularly lectures on employment law issues, has appeared on radio and TV and has contributed chapters to a number of books. He is a non-executive Director of the City HR Association and is recognised as a world leading practitioner in Who's Who Legal. Nick is recognised as leading individual for Employment in The Legal 500 and in Chambers & Partners for Employment.

Nick is admitted to practise in England and Wales and in the DIFC Court.

"He's extremely responsive, highly practical and commercial in his outlook. He uses his wealth of experience to bring high-quality technical and commercially practical solutions to the issues." Chamber UK, Employment: Employer

Our *Employment* Team



Kelvin Tanner
Partner

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Kelvin is Head of the Immigration team and an expert in both private client and business immigration. He assists clients with the full range of immigration applications, with a particular focus on complex immigration matters for high net worth individuals and businesses. Kelvin regularly assists family offices to set up their UK operations and provides corporate immigration support to the family office, personal immigration support to the UHNW family members and coordinating the related tax, employment and corporate legal advice. This has included working for several high profile UHNW international families.

In addition to the UK, Kelvin manages the process for clients seeking alternative residence and citizenship options. He works closely with colleagues in our Milan, Swiss and Middle East offices and effectively utilises the firm's extensive network of contacts and trusted international partners to facilitate bespoke global mobility solutions for clients.

Kelvin maintains excellent relationships with private banks and wealth managers and works closely with our private client tax team and his client's tax accountants to ensure a joined-up service between his immigration advice and their pre-arrival tax planning.

Kelvin is a regular speaker on immigration matters at seminars and conferences and is often invited to provide training to clients and intermediaries.

Clients quote: "Kelvin Tanner is very knowledgeable on immigration and is also very personable and attentive. Every client I've dealt with really appreciates and speaks highly of the quality of his work."

Kelvin is based in our London office and is admitted to practise in England and Wales.



Peter Smith
Legal Director

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Peter is a barrister with experience of dispute resolution in a wide range of sectors and industries including banking and finance, corporate, construction, employment, insolvency, insurance, media, professional negligence, real estate, and technology. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitration with experience of arbitrations under a variety of institutional rules and sits as an arbitrator.

Peter is admitted to practise in England and Wales (barrister), DIFC (Part 2 registered), and the Emirate of Dubai, and has rights of audience at the Astana International Financial Centre Court. He has appeared before the DIFC and ADGM Courts of First Instance and the DIFC Court of Appeal and frequently acts as an advocate in arbitration and in the English courts and tribunals.

In the Legal 500 (UAE Dispute Resolution: Arbitration and International Litigation) Peter was recommended as a 'Leading Associate' in 2025 and a 'Rising Star' in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, and was described as "notable" in 2019. He was included in the Legal 500 Arbitration Powerlist Middle East in 2022 and 2023.

Our *Employment* Team



Tilly Whittingham
Associate

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Tilly is an experienced Employment Associate and is currently on secondment to the Dubai office advising both employers and individuals.

Tilly provides advice across all stages of the employment relationship, from recruitment to termination. This includes advising on disciplinary and grievance processes, restructuring and redundancies and the enforceability of post-termination restrictions. She has extensive experience of managing disputes, in both the Employment Tribunal and the DIFC.

Tilly also regularly advises on the employment aspects of corporate transactions. She is admitted to practise in England & Wales and in the DIFC.

'Tilly Whittingham is really efficient and super capable. A great associate.' Legal 500 - 2025



James Colautti
Associate

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James is an international dispute resolution lawyer based in our Dubai office.

James advises both corporates and individuals on a broad range of commercial litigation and contentious employment matters across multiple jurisdictions, including the Dubai International Financial Centre, the Abu Dhabi Global Market Courts, and the English courts.

James also has experience of conducting internal investigations and advising individuals who are subject to internal investigations.

James is admitted to practice in England & Wales and in the DIFC.



Hana Bibi
Associate

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Hana is a UK-qualified immigration solicitor, specialising in advising high-net-worth individuals and businesses on a wide range of immigration matters and strategies. Having grown up in the Middle East and speaking fluent Arabic, Hana is familiar with the cultural, social and business dynamics of the region. Her bicultural experience enables her to connect with clients from GCC and broad Middle Eastern markets – helping them navigate immigration pathways with confidence. Hana has also featured on the UK's Pro Bono Recognition List for the past two years, for her significant commitment to the firm's pro bono work.

Hana was seconded to the firm's Dubai office, where she worked on cross-border matters and strengthened her on-the-ground regional expertise. She continues to act for high-net-worth individuals, entrepreneurs and families who are relocating or maintaining business ties between the UK and the Middle East.

Hana is admitted to practise in England and Wales.

As a full-service international law firm, we are equipped to support clients through the *challenges of a rapidly evolving marketplace*, ensuring they not only survive but thrive.



We have a global reach covering nearly **200** jurisdictions



Operating in the Middle East **+15 years**



114 lawyers are listed as leading individuals



+1,200 staff



185 partners



Regionally qualified lawyers



Arabic speaking lawyers across our Middle East offices



Services we provide:

- Banking & Finance
- Commercial
- Construction, Engineering & Projects
- Corporate and M&A
- Corporate Tax
- Employment
- Family
- Financial Services, Regulation & Funds
- Immigration
- Intellectual Property
- Litigation & Dispute Resolution
- Private Client
- Real Estate

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