

## HR chiefs are hot property as tribunal culture takes hold

**JONATHAN RUSSELL**

FEELING underpaid and underrated at work? Perhaps it's time to consider a career in human resources.

Traditionally seen as little more than pencil-pushers tasked with firing their co-workers when needed, HR directors are today among the most sought after by some of Britain's leading companies. Top recruiters say the sector is enjoying an unprecedented boom, with positions for FTSE100 HR directors commanding annual salaries of up to £250,000.

The jump in pay for HR executives – 25 per cent last year and up to 15 per cent so far in 2007, according to

employment agency Robert Walters – has been driven by an increased focus on employment disputes.

According to Nick Lakeland, an employment lawyer at Silverman Sherliker, the complexity and cost of employment disputes have increased dramatically over the past few years. He said: "There is tons of legislation coming from the UK and Europe every year, making the sector more and more complicated. Also, people are far more aware of the possibility for bringing legal cases against employers."

Susan Major, the managing director of human resources at Robert Walters, said: "Human resource people at a senior

level have become far more credible. People at the top are becoming more a right-hand man for the chief executive or finance director."

Although figures from the Employment Tribunal Service suggest that there has been little increase in the number of cases that go to court, anecdotal evidence suggests more and more cases are being settled early.

Lakeland said: "The introduction of a lot of new grievance and disciplinary procedures has put off a lot of employers from going to tribunal. A lot of this is done below the radar through tools such as compromise agreements."

Although overall the

number of cases brought to tribunal has remained fairly static in the recent past, at around 115,000 a year, certain sectors have seen huge increases. Since 2004 the number of equal pay cases has shot up from 4,400 to 17,300, while the average settlement for disability discrimination cases has nearly doubled, from £10,200 to £19,360, since 2002.

According to Major, "human resource business partners" are also now seen as key individuals who can grow the bottom line through focusing on areas such as improving management, introducing a performance culture and succession planning.