

WINDMILL FAMILY OFFICE



In Calm Judgement, Strength

Family-Office-Friendly Law Firms in the UK, EU and US: An Evidence Review

Which Law Firms Serve Family Offices Well?

What the Public Evidence Can and Cannot Establish

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Executive Summary

The evidence on law firms is materially stronger than the evidence on banks, but it still stops short of an independent, comparative assessment by family offices themselves. Legal directories run a dedicated family office category and build their rankings partly on client interviews. That makes them the best available signal. It does not make them a ranking of client experience.

Purpose. This review establishes what public research identifies law firms in the UK, EU, Switzerland and the US as particularly suited to family offices, how reliable that research is, and how a principal should use it when appointing or reviewing legal advisers.

Method. A structured desk review of three evidence classes: (1) legal directory rankings, principally Chambers High Net Worth and The Legal 500; (2) private wealth industry awards with legal categories; and (3) family office surveys that address external advisers. Each source was coded for publisher, basis of assessment, independence and comparability.

Findings.

- Chambers High Net Worth ranks firms in a dedicated *Family Offices & Funds Structuring* category for the UK and the US. The UK top band comprises seven firms: Boodle Hatfield, Charles Russell Speechlys, Farrer & Co, Macfarlanes, Stephenson Harwood, Taylor Wessing and Withers [1]. McDermott Will & Schulte holds the sole US top-band position [6][7].
- In continental Europe and Switzerland, no family-office-specific table was identified. Top-band private wealth firms that explicitly cite family office work include Bär & Karrer, Lenz & Staehelin and Walder Wyss (Switzerland) [11], Flick Gocke Schaumburg and POELLATH (Germany) [13], and Arendt & Medernach and Loyens & Loeff (Luxembourg) [14].
- Farrer & Co is the most consistently recognised UK firm across independent programmes in 2026: Chambers top band for family offices [2], two Chambers High Net Worth Awards [24], and STEP Private Client Legal Team of the Year (Large Firm) [19].
- Chambers states that its rankings draw on interviews with referees, including clients, and on client satisfaction data [9]. The Legal 500 reports over 31,000 London referee responses in its 2026 cycle [16].
- Family office surveys confirm that legal work is typically outsourced early and that satisfaction with external estate-planning professionals is high [26]. None rates named law firms.

Interpretation. Directory rankings are the strongest public evidence available in professional services. Their weakness is that firms nominate their own referees and submit their own work highlights [9]. Awards add little independent signal beyond the directories. The evidence

identifies capability for the largest, most complex families; it is thinner for mid-sized offices and for specific asset classes or jurisdictions.

Recommendations. Shortlist from the Chambers Family Offices & Funds Structuring tables and the top private wealth bands in each relevant jurisdiction. Then qualify against the family office's own needs: the named partner, conflicts, cross-border reach, fee model and the firm's corporate and disputes depth. Confirm through peer references and a scoped first instruction before committing the family's core work.

1. Introduction

This section sets out why the choice of legal adviser carries particular weight for a family office, why the question is distinct from private client law in general, and the three questions the review addresses.

1.1 Background

A family office is a legal architecture before it is an investment operation. Holding structures, trusts and foundations, governance documents, employment contracts, regulatory status, tax residence and succession arrangements all rest on legal advice. Errors in that architecture compound across generations and are expensive to unwind.

Family office legal work also cuts across practice boundaries. A single matter may combine trust and tax planning, corporate transactions in an operating business, fund formation for co-investment vehicles, immigration and relocation, and contentious trust or family disputes. The firm that drafts a family constitution may not be the firm best placed to run a cross-border acquisition or defend a challenge to a trust.

1.2 Rationale

Many firms describe themselves as advisers to family offices. Directories rank hundreds of private client practices. The principal's problem is not a shortage of options but a shortage of evidence that separates genuine family office capability from private client capability with family office marketing attached.

This review is the companion to the author's evidence review on banks. It applies the same method to the legal market and asks whether the evidence base is any stronger.

1.3 Research questions

1. **RQ1.** What published rankings, awards or research identify UK, EU, Swiss and US law firms as particularly suited to family offices?
2. **RQ2.** How independent and comparable is that evidence, and how does it compare with the evidence on banks?
3. **RQ3.** What can a principal reliably conclude from it, and what must be established by other means?

1.4 Terms

Family-office-friendly is used operationally: a firm with dedicated capability in family office formation, structuring and governance, recognised for it by an independent third party. *Private wealth law* refers to the broader field of trusts, estates, tax and succession for individuals and

families. Switzerland is included because, although outside the EU, it is a principal jurisdiction for European family wealth.

2. Literature Survey and Background

The published material on law firms and family offices falls into three bodies of work. Unlike banking, the legal market has a mature, research-led directory industry with a family office category of its own. That is the decisive difference between the two evidence bases.

2.1 Legal directories

Chambers High Net Worth. Published by Chambers and Partners and now in its eleventh year [8], the guide covers private wealth work in key jurisdictions worldwide. Alongside Private Wealth Law and Private Wealth Disputes, it runs a *Family Offices & Funds Structuring* category in selected markets, including UK-wide, USA Nationwide, Singapore and Australia [1][6]. Chambers states that its rankings combine firm submissions with interviews of nominated referees, client satisfaction indices, market reputation and peer knowledge [9]. Its published criteria include legal ability, client service, depth of team, commercial awareness, diligence and cost-effectiveness [9]. Ranked firms report that the research involves interviews with family offices, bankers, accountants and other advisers [10].

The Legal 500. The Legal 500 ranks UK firms by tier across practice areas, including private client categories such as personal tax, trusts and probate, and contentious trusts and probate. Its 2026 UK cycle recorded more than 31,000 London referee responses, a record, across around 10,000 practice rankings [16]. Ranked firms describe client feedback and interviews as integral to its research [17]. It has no dedicated family office table in the UK guide.

2.2 Private wealth awards

STEP Private Client Awards. Run by STEP, the global professional body for trust and estate practitioners, now in their 21st year. The 2026 programme received 374 submissions from 26 countries and shortlisted 71 firms and 23 individuals [18]. Categories are open to law firms, accountants, trust companies and multi-family offices.

Citywealth Magic Circle Awards. A London-based private wealth programme covering law firms by geography: London, UK-wide, Switzerland, USA, international and boutique [21]. Entries are judged by a panel of private wealth advisers; one ranked firm reports that the process has also included online voting [22].

Chambers High Net Worth Awards and the **Family Wealth Report Awards** also include legal categories [23][24].

A wider tail of commercial award programmes exists. Firms cite them on their own sites, and their selection methods vary in transparency. They were not analysed.

2.3 Family office surveys touching on advisers

Bank- and asset-manager-published family office surveys occasionally address the use of external advisers. Citi's 2025 report covered 346 family offices in 45 countries [25]. BlackRock's 2025 survey covered 175 single family offices [27]. A 2025 study by BNY Wealth covered 146 family offices [26]. These address how family offices use advisers in general. None rates named law firms.

2.4 The gap

The legal literature goes further than the banking literature: it contains a family-office-specific ranking that draws on client interviews. It still lacks a study in which family offices rate multiple firms on a common basis, with referees selected independently of the firms assessed.

3. Methods

The review was a structured desk study of publicly available sources, conducted on 1 October 2026. It mirrors the method of the companion banking review so that the two evidence bases can be compared directly.

3.1 Search procedure

1. **Directory search.** Retrieval of Chambers High Net Worth ranking tables for *Family Offices & Funds Structuring* (UK-wide, USA Nationwide) and for *Private Wealth Law* in Switzerland, Germany and Luxembourg [1][6][11][13][14]. Department profiles were retrieved where they carried client commentary or confirmed the 2026 position [4][5][7].
2. **Directory methodology.** Retrieval of the Chambers methodology statement [9] and reporting on the Legal 500 2026 UK research cycle [16].
3. **Award search.** Web searches for 2026 private wealth awards with legal categories: STEP, Citywealth, Chambers High Net Worth Awards and Family Wealth Report [18][21][23][24].
4. **Corroboration.** Firm-published announcements were used to confirm 2026 positions where ranking pages displayed the prior cycle, and are marked as firm-published in the references [2][3][8][12][15][17][19][20].
5. **Survey search.** Web searches for 2025 family office surveys addressing external advisers [25][26][27].

3.2 Inclusion criteria

- Identifiable publisher with a stated cycle or date.
- Coverage of firms advising in the UK, EU, Switzerland or US.
- For directories: a family office category, or a private wealth top band whose published firm descriptions cite family office work.
- For awards: a legal or private client legal category, with a stated judging process.

Excluded: general law firm awards without a private wealth dimension; matrimonial rankings, except where they bear on the same institutions; and commercial award programmes whose selection method is not published.

3.3 Coding

Dimension	Question asked	Scale
Publisher	Who produced it, and how is it funded?	Directory · award organiser · firm · financial institution
Basis	What evidence underpins the assessment?	Submissions · referee interviews · judging panel · survey
Independence	Is the assessor independent of the firms assessed, and who selects the evidence?	High · partial · low
Comparability	Does it allow firms to be compared on a common basis?	Yes · within category only · no

Coding is the author's judgement, applied consistently with the banking review. It is recorded in Appendix B.

3.4 Limitations of method

Some Chambers tables visible without subscription show the 2025 cycle; 2026 positions were confirmed from firm announcements where available. Legal 500 tables were not retrieved in full. Directory editorial and client quotations were taken from public profile pages, not full research files. No firms or family offices were interviewed.

4. Results

The search identified one directory category dedicated to family offices, top private wealth bands in three continental European jurisdictions, five award programmes with legal categories and three surveys touching on advisers. No independent, multi-firm study of family office client experience was found. Results are reported without interpretation.

4.1 United Kingdom: Chambers High Net Worth, Family Offices & Funds Structuring

Firm	Position	Chambers description (paraphrased)
Boodle Hatfield	Band 1, three years ranked [1]	Long history advising wealthy families and their family offices
Charles Russell Speechlys	Band 1, three years ranked [1]	Works with family offices globally
Farrer & Co	Band 1, three years ranked [1]; confirmed Band 1 in 2026 [2]	Advises family offices and entrepreneurs on wealth management
Macfarlanes	Band 1, three years ranked [1]	Internationally recognised in family office and funds structuring
Stephenson Harwood	Band 1, three years ranked [1]	Advises business owners and family offices on structuring and governance
Taylor Wessing	Band 1, three years ranked [1]	Combines private client and corporate expertise
Withers	Band 1, three years ranked [1]	Global advice on tax-efficient investment and trust restructuring
Baker McKenzie	Ranked UK-wide in 2026; Band 2 on department profile [3][4]	Multi-jurisdictional coordination across offices

The Band 1 list is the latest publicly displayed table. Client commentary on department profiles includes praise for Macfarlanes' ability to "bring the full firm" [5], and for Baker McKenzie's responsiveness, practicality and cross-office coordination [4].

4.2 United States: Chambers High Net Worth, Family Offices & Funds Structuring

Firm	Position	Chambers description (paraphrased)
McDermott Will & Schulte	Band 1, sole firm in Family office band [6][7]	formation and restructuring, compensation structuring, partnership tax

Jackson Walker	Band 2 [6]	Texas-based; family office investment, restructuring and succession
Loeb & Loeb	Ranked, 2026 [8]	Firm-reported ranking in the nationwide category

Chambers also notes Kirkland & Ellis's private investment and family office group, which handles fund formation for family office clients [6]. One McDermott client described its lead partner as the best family office lawyer in the United States [7].

4.3 Switzerland and the EU: Chambers High Net Worth, Private Wealth Law top band

No dedicated family office table was identified for these jurisdictions. Top-band firms whose Chambers descriptions cite family office work:

Jurisdiction	Band 1 firms	Family office reference in Chambers text
Switzerland	Baker McKenzie, Bär & Karrer, Bär & Karrer, Lenz & Staehelin and Walder Wyss each cited for family office matters [11]	confirmed Band 1 in 2026 [12]
Germany	Flick Gocke Schaumburg, POELLATH [13]	Flick Gocke Schaumburg cited for advising family offices and family-held businesses [13]
Luxembourg	Arendt & Medernach, Loyens & Loeff [14]	Loyens & Loeff reports top ranking in 2026 and family office work across its offices [15]

4.4 United Kingdom: The Legal 500, 2026

The Legal 500 has no family office table. In its 2026 UK guide, Charles Russell Speechlys, Farrer & Co and Payne Hicks Beach took top-tier positions in both new London family law tables [16]. Payne Hicks Beach reported top-tier positions in five areas, including personal tax, trusts and probate, and contentious trusts and probate [17].

4.5 Private wealth awards, 2026 cycle

Programme	Category	Winner
STEP Private Client Awards [19]	Private Client Legal Team of the Year (Large Firm)	Farrer & Co
Chambers High Net Worth Awards [24]	Private Client Team of the Year; Family Law Team of the Year	Farrer & Co
Citywealth Magic Circle Awards [21]	Law Firm of the Year – London	Mishcon de Reya (runner-up Taylor Wessing)

Citywealth Awards [21]	Magic Circle	Law Firm of the Year – UK-wide	Brodies (runner-up Irwin Mitchell)
Citywealth Awards [21]	Magic Circle	Law Firm of the Year – Switzerland	Bär & Karrer (runner-up Lenz & Staehelin)
Citywealth Awards [21]	Magic Circle	Law Firm of the Year – USA	Katten (runner-up Sullivan & Cromwell)
Citywealth Awards [21]	Magic Circle	International Law Firm of the Year	Baker McKenzie (runner-up Addleshaw Goddard)
Family Wealth Awards [23]	Report	Legal Team of the Year	Dentons

Boodle Hatfield reported four STEP 2026 shortlistings and at least one shortlisting in every year of the past decade [20].

4.6 Family office surveys addressing external advisers

Survey	Respondents	Relevant finding
BNY Wealth family office study, 2025 [26]	146	Accounting and legal services are typically set up early; satisfaction with external estate-planning professionals exceeds 90%
Citi Wealth Global Family Office Report 2025 [25]	346	Many family offices are considering external suppliers, while keeping decision-making authority in-house
BlackRock Global Family Office Survey 2025 [27]	175	Family offices seek external partners to complement in-house talent, especially in private markets

None of the three surveys reports ratings of named law firms.

5. Discussion

The results answer RQ1 clearly and RQ2 more favourably than for banks. A dedicated, research-led family office ranking exists for the UK and US, and it draws on client interviews. But the referees are nominated by the firms, and no source lets family offices rate firms against each other. This section explains what the evidence supports, where it fails, and how it compares with banking.

5.1 What the evidence shows

United Kingdom. The UK has the deepest evidence base. Seven firms hold the top band for family office work [1], each for three consecutive years. That stability matters: a three-year run of client and peer interviews is harder to manufacture than a single award. Farrer & Co is the most consistently recognised firm across independent programmes in 2026, combining the Chambers top band [2] with Chambers and STEP awards [19][24]. Charles Russell Speechlys and Farrer & Co also appear at the top of the Legal 500's new family tables [16], which matters because family office disputes frequently originate in family breakdown.

United States. The US evidence is concentrated. McDermott Will & Schulte stands alone in the top band [6]. The US market is otherwise organised by state and region for private wealth work, so a family office with assets or family members across several states should read the regional Private Wealth Law tables alongside the nationwide family office category.

Switzerland and the EU. No family-office-specific table exists for these markets in the sources reviewed. The private wealth top bands are small and stable: four firms in Switzerland, two in Germany, two in Luxembourg [11][13][14]. The Chambers descriptions of most of these firms cite family office work explicitly. In practice, these firms are the starting point for any European family office structure.

International coordination. Baker McKenzie appears across the UK family office table [4], the Swiss top band [11], the Citywealth international award [21] and, per its own report, 15 practice rankings worldwide [3]. For a family office spread across many jurisdictions, coordination across offices may matter more than depth in any one market.

5.2 Why the legal evidence is stronger than the banking evidence

Three features distinguish the directories from bank awards.

A dedicated category. Chambers ranks family office work directly in the UK and US. Bank awards rank family office *services*, but rely mainly on the bank's own submission.

Client voice. Chambers states that rankings draw on interviews with referees, including clients, together with client satisfaction indices and market reputation [9]. The Legal 500's 2026 London cycle drew over 31,000 referee responses [16]. Bank awards in the companion review showed no comparable client interview process.

Scale and persistence. Chambers reports 350,000 interviews and surveys a year across 9,000 firms [9]. Repeated annual research produces a time series of positions, which reveals stable leaders.

5.3 Why the directories still cannot be read as client-experience rankings

Firm-selected referees. Firms nominate the referees Chambers interviews [9]. Dissatisfied clients are unlikely to be nominated. Researchers supplement referees with other market sources, but the core client voice is curated by the firm being assessed.

Submission-led scope. Firms choose which categories to enter and which matters to highlight [9]. Absence from a table may reflect a decision not to submit.

Bands, not scores. Firms within a band are listed alphabetically. The directories do not distinguish between Band 1 firms, and the reader cannot see how close a Band 2 firm is to promotion.

Scale calibration. In its Singapore family office table, for example, Chambers states that ranked firms show dedication to large family offices and UHNW-owned companies [28]. A mid-sized family office may receive a different level of partner attention at a top-band firm than the referees describe.

Partner dependency. Directory reputations often attach to individual partners. A firm's position can rest heavily on one or two people, and moves between firms are common.

5.4 What awards add

Awards add limited independent signal. STEP and Citywealth use judging panels assessing submissions [18][22], and Citywealth has incorporated online voting [22]. Their main value is corroboration: where an award winner also holds a top directory position, as Farrer & Co does, the two signals reinforce each other. Where they diverge, the directory position carries more weight. Firms also cite a long tail of commercial awards whose selection methods are not published; these should carry no weight.

5.5 Counterparty incentives

Actor	Defines success as	Effect on the evidence
Law firms	Top-band positions that win UHNW and family office mandates	Referees and work highlights selected to show the firm at its best
Legal directories	A credible guide that firms keep submitting to	Research rigour is the product, but the submission model depends on firm participation

Award organisers	A prestigious, well-attended programme	Wide category spread; winners distributed across firms and regions
Financial institutions publishing surveys	Thought leadership and client engagement	Questions focus on investment behaviour, not adviser quality
Family offices	Sound structures, discretion, continuity of the advising partner	Their direct ratings of firms are not published

5.6 Limitations of this review

- Several Chambers tables displayed the 2025 cycle publicly; 2026 positions were confirmed only where firms announced them.
- Legal 500 private client tables were not retrieved in full.
- Continental coverage was limited to Switzerland, Germany and Luxembourg; France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Ireland and the Channel Islands were not examined.
- No primary data was collected.

5.7 Broader meaning

The legal market shows what better evidence looks like: dedicated categories, client interviews and annual persistence. It also shows the remaining limit. As long as firms select the clients who speak about them, no directory can fully measure the experience of the client who would not be nominated. As with banks, the decisive information sits with peer family offices, and it circulates privately.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This review asked whether public research identifies which UK, EU, Swiss and US law firms are particularly well suited to family offices. It has established four things.

1. **A family-office-specific ranking exists.** Chambers High Net Worth ranks family office work directly in the UK and US. Seven firms share the UK top band [1]; McDermott Will & Schulte holds the US top band alone [6].
2. **Continental Europe and Switzerland are covered indirectly.** Small, stable top bands in private wealth law identify the leading firms, most of which cite family office work [11][13][14].
3. **The legal evidence is stronger than the banking evidence.** It rests partly on client interviews and annual research persistence [9][16]. It remains limited by firm-nominated referees and submission-led coverage.
4. **Corroboration is the best available test.** Farrer & Co is the clearest UK example of a firm recognised across directory and award programmes in the same year [2][19][24].

The practical implication: the directories are a credible basis for a shortlist, not for an appointment.

6.2 Recommendations for family office principals

1. **Shortlist from the right tables.** Start with Chambers *Family Offices & Funds Structuring* in the UK and US. In Switzerland and the EU, use the Private Wealth Law top band for each jurisdiction where the family holds assets, structures or residence.
2. **Appoint the partner, not the firm.** Directory reputations attach to individuals. Identify the named lead, their ranking, their succession within the firm and the depth of the team beneath them.
3. **Test cross-practice depth.** Family office matters combine private wealth, corporate, funds, tax and disputes. Ask each firm which of these it would staff in-house and which it would refer.
4. **Map conflicts and independence.** Large firms may act for banks, trustees or counterparties. Confirm conflict positions before sharing family information.
5. **Agree the commercial model.** Seek a fee structure that fits the family office's cadence: retainer, capped project fees or blended rates, with clear scoping.

6. **Use peer references and a scoped first instruction.** Speak to principals of comparable family offices. Then instruct the firm on a defined matter before moving the family's core structuring work.
7. **Avoid single-firm dependency for contentious risk.** Keep a separate, credible disputes adviser in view, so that a conflict or a challenge to the structure does not leave the family without independent counsel.

6.3 Recommendations for further research

- An independent survey of family offices rating their legal advisers, with respondents selected independently of the firms, would close the gap the directories leave.
- A family office category for continental Europe and Switzerland would materially improve the evidence base for European families.
- A study segmented by family office size would test whether top-band firms serve mid-sized offices as well as the largest.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Recognition by firm, UK and US, 2026 cycle

Firms holding a top-band family office position, or recognised in two or more independent programmes reviewed. Firm-published confirmations are marked in the references.

Firm	Chambers family office category	Other directory	Awards, 2026	Programmes
Farrer & Co	UK Band 1 [1][2]	Legal 500 top tier, London family tables [16]	STEP Private Client Legal Team (Large) [19]; Chambers HNW Private Client and Family Law Teams [24]	4
Charles Russell Speechlys	UK Band 1 [1]	Legal 500 top tier, London family tables [16]	—	2
Baker McKenzie	UK ranked, Band 2 [3][4]	Chambers Band 1, Swiss private wealth [11]	Citywealth International Law Firm [21]	3
Taylor Wessing	UK Band 1 [1]	—	Citywealth London runner-up [21]	2
Boodle Hatfield	UK Band 1 [1]	—	STEP four shortlistings [20]	1 (plus shortlistings)
Macfarlanes	UK Band 1 [1]	—	—	1
Stephenson Harwood	UK Band 1 [1]	—	—	1
Withers	UK Band 1 [1]	—	—	1
McDermott Will & Schulte	US Band 1 [6][7]	—	—	1

Jackson Walker	US Band 2 [6]	—	—	1
Loeb & Loeb	US ranked [8]	—	—	1
Katten	—	—	Citywealth Law Firm of the Year – USA [21]	1

The programme count is a corroboration measure, not a quality score. It is sensitive to which programmes a firm enters.

Appendix B. Source coding

Ref	Source	Publisher type	Basis	Independence	Comparability
[1], [4]–[7], [11], [13], [14], [28]	Chambers Net Worth rankings	High Worth Directory	Submissions, referee interviews, market research	Partial (independent research; nominated referees)	Within category, by band
[9]	Chambers methodology	Directory	Published process	Not applicable	Not applicable
[16]	Legal 500 UK Trade press 2026 (reported)	on directory	Submissions, referee feedback	Partial	Within category, by tier
[18]–[20]	STEP Client Awards	Private Professional body	Judged submissions	Partial	Within category only
[21], [22]	Citywealth Magic Award Circle Awards	Award organiser	Judging panel; online voting reported	Partial to low	Within category only
[23], [24]	Family Wealth Report; Chambers HNW Awards	Award organisers	Judged submissions	Partial	Within category only
[2], [3], [8], [10], [12], [15],	Firm announcements	Law firm	Self-reported	Low	No

[17],
[19],
[20],
[22],
[24]

[25]–	Family	office	Financial			
[27]	surveys		institutions	Client surveys	Low	No

Appendix C. Law firm qualification checklist

For converting the shortlist into an appointment.

- Named lead partner, their directory ranking, and who succeeds them within the firm
- Team depth below partner level, and continuity commitments
- In-house capability across private wealth, corporate, funds, tax, regulatory and disputes, and what would be referred out
- Jurisdictional coverage for the family's assets, structures and residences, and how foreign counsel is coordinated
- Conflict position with the family's banks, trustees, counterparties and other family members
- Fee model, scoping discipline and reporting cadence
- Peer references from principals of comparable family offices
- Information security and confidentiality protocols for family data
- A scoped first instruction before the core structuring mandate is moved