

# Check the fine print

by Linda Whitney

**Y**OU can't take a franchise back if you think you've made a mistake, so make sure you know what's involved before investing. Your rights as franchisee are set out in the franchise contract that you sign with the franchisor.

'You are investing a lot of money in what is usually a long-term arrangement, so it pays to get legal advice before you sign up,' says lawyer Denise Nurse from Halebury Law, who regularly advises on franchise law.

The franchise agreement is a civil contract, signed by you and the franchisor, and, once signed, you are bound by it. If you are seriously considering a franchise, ask for a copy of the contract well before you sign and take it to a franchise lawyer.

A family solicitor unfamiliar with franchising might not provide the best service. Many franchise lawyers will check contracts and explain the implications for a fixed fee, typically around £400 to 700, though expect to pay more if you want an in-depth analysis and if anything needs to be changed to suit your particular circumstances.

Many franchisors actively encourage you to check their contracts.

Steve Calvert runs the Dent Wizard, Wheel Wizard and Flying Colours franchises, all mobile vehicle services offering minor repairs and refurbishment, with the

cost of a franchise ranging from £12,500 to £16,950 (01675 471 150).

Steve says: 'We try to eliminate risk, and that includes giving all potential franchisees an example of the franchise contract.'

'We advise them to take it to a franchise lawyer, and direct them to the British Franchise Association website, where there is a list of

solicitors specialising in franchise law. Before we accept them as franchisees, we expect them to have done this.'

Franchisees with lettings agency Martin & Co (01202 292 829) work from High Street premises, so you will need a partner or an employee from day one.

'Lettings is currently strong — it's



Picture: ROB HOWARTH

**T**HE lettings business is thriving and franchisees are profiting from it. 'In the current climate, new properties that had been built for sale are coming on to the lettings market, while lots of people unable to buy are looking to rent instead,' says Gareth Jones, 47, pictured, with wife Nikki.

The couple are the Medics On The Move franchisees for Norwich, providing lettings, home-search and relocation services to medical and other professionals.

'We have corporate clients such as Lotus cars and Norwich City Football Club, for whom we have handled relocations for players on loan from other clubs. We also manage around 60 properties, which bring in a regular income,' says Gareth, former head of finance at a large insurer.

'We chose Medics On The Move because of the support from the franchisor,' he says. 'It provides training and ongoing support, such as updates about regulatory changes and a legal helpline you can call for advice.'

He adds: 'There is lots of variety in the business, but you have to be willing to make yourself available when clients need you, so that might mean working evenings or at the weekend.'

Carole Stubbs, of Medics On The Move, says: 'We are looking for more franchisees who are passionate about people and property, and willing to take a BTEC in letting and management as part of their training.'

The franchise costs £25,995 and you can work from home.

■ [www.medicsonthemove.co.uk](http://www.medicsonthemove.co.uk), 0844 335 6955.

no longer just the poor man's option,' says Martin & Co's Mark Burdge, who is looking for franchisees with skills in sales, customer services and communication, ideally with corporate management experience. Investment is £25,000, plus borrowings.

'Letting is a buoyant market, but there is a lot of competition and it's not a get-rich-quick option,' says David Shimwell from High Street lettings franchise Belvoir (01476 570 000).

There are two elements to the service, Mark explains. 'Usually, one person goes out doing viewings and marketing the

service, so they need sales flair, while the other works in the back office organising paperwork and details such as meter readings, so they need analytical ability.'

The company provides training and back-up services, and all franchisees are expected to become members of the National Approved Letting Scheme, an accreditation scheme for lettings and management agents that sets service and insurance standards. Investment is £22,500.

■ **FOR a list of British Franchise Association-affiliated legal specialists, see [www.thebfa.org](http://www.thebfa.org).**