



The Bar Council

Evaluation of The Bar Council Balint Reflective Pilot Executive Summary

Reflective practice involves intentionally and analytically reflecting on a professional experience, and examining your performance, actions, skills, decisions, behaviour, and emotions. The focus is on learning opportunities.

Reflective practice has also been described as a process that “allows lawyers to develop their understanding of themselves in relation to others, their boundaries and legal professional skills, and ... can contribute to the best interests of the client, and to a lawyer’s career sustainability and wellbeing.”¹.

In 2025, the Bar Council created a three-year programme to promote reflective practice at the Bar, specifically to pilot different delivery models. We wanted to test different ways of delivering reflective practice to establish what works at the Bar particularly with respect to:

- a) delivering value to those participating (by supporting professional development and wellbeing);
- b) affordability (would barristers be willing/able to cover the costs);
- c) accessibility (would barristers be able to participate); and
- d) scalability (could a programme be scaled up to deliver across the Bar)

For our first pilot, we partnered with Balint Legal², founded by Balint-trained former lawyers, to deliver two reflective practice groups – one in London and one on the Western Circuit. The purpose of Balint Legal groups is to help support practitioners, by providing a purposeful forum in which to discuss, confidentially, the impact of work and the relationships at the core of that work.

¹ Mason, M (2025): [From psychology to legal practice: the use of clinical supervision by lawyers in England and Wales](#)

² www.balintlegal.co.uk

Findings from this pilot suggest that structured group reflective practice can be delivered safely and meaningfully at the Bar, with real potential to support wellbeing and professional development. Given our original interest in reflective practice was rooted in barrister wellbeing, the positive findings on wellbeing in particular are very encouraging. While there were clearly some different views across the group of barristers participating, a significant majority reported that their participation helped their professional development and wellbeing. The more sessions they attended the more helpful they found them, suggesting that reflective practice skills deepen with continued engagement. Notably, every respondent in the Crime and Family group said the sessions fully met their expectations, and every respondent across both groups said they were comfortable with confidentiality within the group setting. Even those who found it less helpful, still expressed a positive view of their experience.

- All (**100%**) of survey respondents said that with respect to confidentiality, they were comfortable in a group setting.
- **95%** of respondents said that working in a group was helpful for learning from each other's experiences, and **95%** said that mixed seniority in the groups worked well.
- **84%** of respondents found that the sessions either fully or partially met their expectations. Of these, **68%** said the sessions fully met their expectations. All (**100%**) of Crime and Family respondents said the sessions fully met their expectations....
- **84%** found the sessions helpful for their wellbeing, and **84%** said they would either continue with Balint group sessions in the future or were open to doing so.
- **84%** of respondents found that sessions were either very helpful or somewhat helpful in respect to their interactions with professional clients and lay clients.
- **79%** found the sessions helpful for their day-to-day legal practice.
- **74%** said they would recommend the programme to others at the Bar.

Some feedback worthy of note includes:

Crime & Family | 6 sessions: "It's really been life-changing in terms of work and challenged my internal monologue that this is just the way things are and I need to just put up with it/work harder/do better.

Chancery & Commercial | 4 sessions: "The sessions were exactly what I needed after a very difficult year. The Bar needs something like this to address the ongoing issues with wellbeing and the difficulties that come with private practice."

Chancery & Commercial | 6 sessions: "I took real comfort in having them as a monthly release valve. The group was a safe space... a comforting reminder that colleagues across various Call brackets experience similar issues, and are generous in discussing them."

Although the pilot was limited in terms of its size and length, and should be seen in that context, the findings indicate genuine potential for supporting wellbeing. We still need to test whether and how much barristers and/or their chambers and employers would be willing to pay to participate. On this basis, additional Balint group pilots and continuing evaluation may be beneficial. These groups should be either fully funded or part funded by participating barristers or their chambers/employer.

Recommendations

Based on our evaluation of this pilot programme, we recommend:

1. Expanding this pilot further – to run further Balint Group(s) to test findings from the 2025 programme. We would also like to run a Group at the Employed Bar.
2. Ensuring members of the working group sponsoring this programme, the Wellbeing Panel and Bar Council staff participate in a taster Balint Group to better understand how they work.
3. As part of any pilot expansion, to look at participants making a financial contribution.
4. To seek feedback from any individual chambers working with Balint Legal sponsoring their own Balint groups, in order to help us build further evidence

against our four criteria (value to participants, affordability, accessibility and scalability). We understand that a number of groups (including in a leading commercial and a leading family set) are currently underway.

In addition, and specifically in relation to delivery of Balint groups at the Bar, we recommend:

5. Recruiting 14 - 15 people for each session in anticipation of at least two/three people dropping out (ideal number per session is 8-12).
6. Offering an online introductory session to explain Balint purpose and process before participants commit to attending a group.
7. Offering in-person sessions (but potentially with an option of a couple of remote sessions in any course).
8. Continuing to offer mixed seniority groups.
9. Continuing to allow flexibility in framing issues/covering all professional relationships to encourage richer participation.
10. Continuing to monitor for any difference in experience (value added) by different practice areas.

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³ www.lucindason.com