



The Bar Council

# Pupil survey report

## June 2025



# Introduction

The Bar Council is the voice of the barrister profession in England and Wales. We lead, represent and support the Bar in the public interest, championing the rule of law and access to justice. Our nearly 18,000 members – self-employed and employed barristers – make up a united Bar that aims to be strong, inclusive, independent and influential.

As the General Council of the Bar, we're the approved regulator for all practising barristers in England and Wales. We delegate our statutory regulatory functions to the operationally independent Bar Standards Board (BSB) as required by the Legal Services Act 2007.

We use this survey to inform our work supporting pupils, pupil supervisors, chambers and employers. Outcomes specifically influence our policy positions, our guidance for the profession and pupils, as well as our training.

## Key findings

- 90% of respondents reported a positive experience of pupillage (up 4% from 2024) with 8 in 10 feeling well supported by chambers/their employer (this is the same as last year)
- Most found the pupillage recruitment process challenging - 39% secured pupillage in the first round compared to 14% in 4 or more rounds
- 20% disclosed a disability:
  - 14% were neurodivergent (including being autistic and difficulties learning concentrating and remembering) - representing 71% of those disclosing a disability
  - Disabled pupils are most likely to be unsatisfied with their supervision and their pupillage
  - Just 45% of disabled pupils see their career as viable, compared to 65% of non-disabled pupils
- Median working hours were 41-50 hours per week (38%), down from 44% in 2024
- 88% reported stress levels as 'moderate' or 'high' (up from 82% in 2024)
- The median pupillage award was £30,000-39,999, the same as reported in 2024
- The median anticipated debt level is also unchanged at £50,000-59,999 but up from £40,000-49,999 in 2022
- As in 2024, men (25%) are twice as likely as women (13%) to have pupillage awards of £60,000 or more
- 17% reported personal experience of bullying, harassment, or discrimination, down from 18% in 2024 and 19% in 2022. Including 'observation' of bullying harassment and discrimination this figure rises to 28% (26% in 2024)
- A third of pupils would recommend the profession as a career path. This is down against 2024
- The Bar Standards Board's (BSB) Ethics Exam was widely criticised as unfair and stressful. Pupils said it was poorly administered and unnecessary as it duplicates prior training from the Bar course

- Common complaints were excessive last-minute workloads, poor scheduling, and lack of work-life boundaries. Pupils said health concerns and caring responsibilities were made harder by inflexible working conditions and unclear sick leave policies
- Numerous pupils expressed confusion or lack of support regarding interim practice certificates; travel reimbursements; tax, insurance, and VAT (with requests for clearer onboarding information and consistent regulatory guidance)

## Recommendations

Our findings suggest that more work needs to be done to:

1. Remind chambers to respond/provide **feedback to those making pupillage applications**
2. Encourage Authorised Education and Training Organisations (AETOs) to adopt better practice in relation to pupil wellbeing and increase support for those with caring responsibilities
3. Ensure pupils have access to **clear and early guidance with practice administration**
4. Improve the **BSB Ethics Exam**

We have produced [on-demand pupil supervisor training](#) which supports good practice in supervision as well as in respect to flexible working/wellbeing/making reasonable adjustments. It complements training provided by the Inns and on the circuits. We will encourage all supervisors to undertake this refresher training.

Over the coming weeks, based on findings in this report, we will also:

1. Write to AETOs to remind them of good practice in providing feedback to applicants during any recruitment process
2. Consider developing standard guidance covering practice administration which should be incorporated into pupil onboarding by chambers
3. Write to the BSB to share pupils' feedback on the Ethics Exam

We are currently working on enhanced guidance for neurodiverse applicants, pupils and barristers, including in making reasonable adjustments.

## Methodology

This report is generated from our annual survey of pupils. This year's survey opened on 3 March and closed in early April 2025. The survey was sent to all pupils – employed and self-employed – and generated 170 complete responses (11% of were from employed pupils) from a population of 609 pupils. That is a response rate of 28%, similar to the 2024 response rate of 173. This is a good response rate for a survey of this type. All responses were anonymous.

# Pupil profile

## Demographics

The survey respondents were representative of the pupil population as of February 2025<sup>1</sup>:

- 62% of respondents were female, almost the same as recorded in the population (60%), and the same as last year
- 20% were from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds - a slightly lower proportion than recorded in 2024 (28%) but again roughly the same as across the population (23%)
- One in 5 (19%, 33 respondents) were recorded as LGBTQ+. This figure is significantly higher than across the general population<sup>2</sup>
- Just two per cent have childcare responsibilities. This figure is significantly lower than in 2024 when 10% said they had childcare responsibilities
- 9% have a caring responsibility for others compared to 4% across the population of pupils
- One in 5 (20%) indicated they have a disability<sup>3</sup> (compared with 23% of the population of working age adults<sup>4</sup> and 22% in the 2024 survey)

This year we included a follow up question to explore the nature of the disability reported by pupils. Of those reporting a disability (n=31):

- 4 in 10 (39%) said they had a mental health disability
- Two thirds (65%) said they were neurodiverse, citing conditions including but not limited to attention deficit disorder, dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia
- 16% reported having difficulties learning, concentrating or remembering
- 13% said they have mobility issues such as impaired use of arms or legs and use of crutches (but there were no wheelchair users)
- Fewer than one in 10 reported being autistic, or having a vision or hearing impairment

## Disabilities

To enable some, albeit minimal, analysis by type of disability and to try and ensure the survey does not breach confidentiality, we have grouped the above categories into 4 broad areas:

- **Neurodivergent:** including those who are autistic and those who have difficulties learning, concentrating and remembering - 14% of all pupils (22 cases) and 71% of disabled pupils

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<sup>1</sup> The main monitoring data on all barristers is collected in the General Council of the Bar's database when a pupil registers or a barrister renews their practising certificate each year.

<sup>2</sup> [Sexual orientation, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> Disability is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities

<sup>4</sup> [UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences - House of Commons Library](#)

- **Mental health conditions:** 8% of all pupils (12 cases) and 39% of those with a disability. Of those with a mental health condition, 6 in 10 (58%) were neurodiverse
- **Mobility conditions:** 3% of all pupils (4 cases) and 13% of disabled pupils
- **Other physical disability conditions:** such as hearing, vision, or stamina - 3% of all pupils (5 cases) and 16% of disabled pupils

It's worth noting that of those disclosing neurodiversity, a third also reported a mental health condition.

### Practising period and area of work

Two thirds of respondents (69%) were in their non-practicing period (first six) and the remainder were in their practising period (second six).

- 69% reported being in their first six, fewer than last year (90%)
- 9 in 10 (89%) were at the self-employed Bar, the remainder were employed
- Two thirds (65%) were registered on the South Eastern Circuit with the remainder distributed fairly evenly across the other circuits
- Pupils were members of all 4 Inns: Lincoln's (24%), Inner Temple (34%), Middle Temple (25%) and Gray's (17%)

Just over a third (38%, 35% in 2024) worked primarily in crime and 70% worked in broadly public funded practice (crime, civil and family), this is the same figure reported in 2024.

19 respondents (11%) were employed pupils.

Although there are one or two differences between the respondents to this survey and centrally held statistics on the whole pupil population, in particular in practising status, findings from the survey can be assumed to be highly representative of the whole population of pupils.

## Findings

### Pupillage application process

Four in 10 (39%) secured pupillage after one application round (in 2024 this figure was 31%). 29% said it took two rounds (34% in 2024), 18% said three rounds (same as in 2024) and 14% said 4 or more rounds (17% in 2024).

Half of all pupils surveyed (50%) said the process of applying for pupillage was 'very challenging' (44% in 2024). 40% said it was 'quite challenging' (47% in 2024), just 8% said it was 'not very challenging'.

Respondents said the application process would be improved by 'better feedback on failed applications' (79%, 77% in 2024), and 'chambers replying to applications' (47%, 43% in 2024).

A third of pupils (35%) indicated that 'access to more financial resource' would be helpful, a slightly higher figure than reported in 2024 (30%) and more pupils said the 'Pupillage



Gateway platform could be improved' (44% compared to 38% in 2024). 21% said more support from their Bar course provider would be helpful (compared to 26% in 2024), and 21% wanted more support from the Bar Council (compared to 26% in 2024).

Pupil feedback on the recruitment and application process:

- Pupils value **short-essay interview formats** and **topical discussions** to allow them to express their opinions
- Several pupils reported **frustration with inconsistent communication** from chambers during recruitment (eg rejection by silence, differing timelines)

## Supervision

Pupils were overall very satisfied with the supervision they were experiencing, both in person and online.

Nearly three quarters (72%) of pupils said they had in-person or remote supervision with their pupil supervisor at least once daily. This represents an increase in daily supervision. In 2024, it was 67% and in 2022 it was 65%.

Most (71%, similar to the 72% reported in 2024) said the supervision was mainly in person. In 2024, disabled pupils were more likely to indicate that their supervision was 'mostly' or 'all remote' but this year there was no difference between disabled and non-disabled pupils.

There has been a small increase pupils' satisfaction levels:

- Three quarters of pupils (72%, 67% in 2024) were 'very happy' with their in-person supervision
- 18% (21% in 2024) were 'broadly happy'
- Just 5% were 'unhappy' (6% in 2024)

Pupils were only slightly less positive about remote supervision with 59% (57% in 2024) being 'very happy' and 20% (19% in 2024) 'broadly happy'.

Looking more closely at the pupils who indicated that they were 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy' with their in-person supervision, pupils working in crime make up three quarters (75%) of the responses, with the remaining quarter split evenly between pupils working in general civil and family.

In 2024, disabled pupils were much more likely to report that they were unhappy with their in-person and remote supervision than non-disabled pupils. This year, there was little or no difference between them. There was also no correlation between type of disability and satisfaction with supervision. Generally, there was little to separate the views of different groups of pupils in their views on the quality of their supervision.

## Pupils' feedback on supervision

### Quality and consistency of supervision

A recurring theme was the variation in the quality of supervision. While many pupils described a high level of support from supervisors, others reported inconsistent supervision, including lack of feedback, absentee supervisors, or unclear expectations. Some suggested more structured oversight and fallback mechanisms when supervisors are unavailable.

### Feedback and assessment

Many pupils valued regular, detailed feedback, particularly on written work and advocacy exercises. However, others highlighted gaps in feedback or unclear assessment procedures. Some called for a more transparent assessment structure, including clearly communicated criteria and timelines.

## Satisfaction with pupillage overall

Again, similar to 2024 (86%), 90% of respondents said that their overall experience of pupillage had been positive (48% said 'very positive'). Last year, those working in crime were more positive than other pupils, but this year there was no difference.

However, there was a big difference between disabled and non-disabled pupils. 94% of non-disabled pupils said they were happy with their pupillage experience compared to 76% of disabled pupils. Furthermore, 71% of those who are neurodivergent, and fewer still, 64% of those with a mental health condition gave a positive response about their pupillage experience.

The results from the pupillage surveys repeatedly highlight lower satisfaction levels in several areas among disabled pupils. This is not unique to the profession, with graduates in their early careers often more likely to report poorer employment experiences, taking lower-level employment opportunities and were 'less likely than graduates with no known disabilities to take a job because it fitted into their career plan'<sup>5</sup> and this is especially the case among autistic graduates and those with mental health conditions.

### Advocacy and ethics training

Views on advocacy and ethics training were mixed:

- **Advocacy training** (especially in-house and Inns-led) was generally well-regarded
- **The BSB Ethics Exam** was widely criticised for its unfairness, being stressful, and for its inconsistent administration. Some also saw it as redundant, especially as it duplicates prior training from the Bar course
- Many felt that **graded assignments during second six** added undue stress and disrupted their ability to focus on live cases

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<sup>5</sup> See [WhatHappensNextinChallengingTimes-revisedreport.pdf](#) or [New AGCAS research evaluates impact of ethnicity and gender on the employment outcomes of disabled graduates](#)

## Pupils' feedback on support from chambers and Inns

**For those who were self-employed, chambers support** was mostly seen as positive, particularly in chambers with structured training, accessible senior members, and proactive clerks.

Concerns were raised about a perceived reduction **in the Inns' support post-Bar course**, especially for those based outside London.

Financial support from Inns was seen as crucial for some pupils.

More consistent **logistical and regulatory guidance** was requested.

Numerous pupils expressed confusion or lack of support regarding:

- Interim practice certificates
- Travel reimbursements
- Tax, insurance, and VAT

There were a number of requests for **clearer onboarding information** and consistent regulatory guidance.

## Allocation of work

Chambers are required to review how they allocated unassigned work, which includes investigating the reasons for any disparities based on protected characteristics. Pupils should regularly get the opportunity to do quality work that is appropriate for their level of experience. When we asked if pupils had any concern about the fair allocation of work, 8% said they did, and a further 28% did not know.

## Pupils' views on the courts

When asked to comment on any issues with the courts they had experienced during pupillage, nearly 4 in 10 (37%) said they had not experienced any problems to date. The most frequently mentioned issues/problems out of the 15 options listed for those who had observed or experienced them were reported as:

- The backlog of cases (29%)
- Technical problems with the video platform (26%)
- Lack of time to prepare the client (20%)
- Courts not feeling safe or clean (17%)
- Unavailability of judges (14%)
- Other parties not being represented which led to other issues/problems (11%)

Female pupils were much more likely to report problems than their male counterparts (69% compared to 52%). Technical issues with the video platform was where the difference between men and women was greatest (14% of men compared to 32% of women).



Disabled pupils were also more likely to report issues/problems (81% compared to 58% of non-disabled pupils). Here the main issues were courts not having the capability for remote hearings and limitations on the types of hearings courts permitted.

Those working in crime were also much more likely to report problems (79% compared to 54% of those working in other practice areas). The biggest issues were in the backlog of cases, scheduling, technical problems with video platform, video platforms not meeting needs of vulnerable clients, lack of time to prepare clients and unavailability of counsel.

A similar difference was apparent across all areas of publicly funded work (72%) including family and crime when compared to other areas (43%). In particular, the backlog of cases (36%), technical problems with the video platform (31%), lack of time to prepare the client (24%) and courts not feeling safe or clean (21%) were the most frequently cited issues by those working at the publicly funded Bar.

## Early career thinking

Just under two thirds (62%; 65% last year and 61% in 2022) said that a career at the Bar was 'viable' going forward, while 35% (33% in 2024) said that it was 'somewhat viable' (same as in 2022). Pupils mainly working in crime (48%, 53% in 2024) were less likely to say that a career at the Bar was viable but still only a handful said it was 'not viable', most saying it was 'somewhat viable'. However, again, the views of disabled pupils are not so positive (45% indicating a career to be viable compared to 65% of non-disabled pupils), although almost all see a career as at least 'somewhat viable' (97%).

## Work-life balance

Work-life balance, or rather lack thereof (34%, 26% in 2024) was again the main reason given as to why a career at the Bar was seen to be potentially not viable. This represents a significant increase in the proportion of pupils citing this reason as an obstacle to them pursuing their careers. The gap between men and women in reporting this factor reduced in 2025 with 35% of women (32% in 2024) citing work-life balance compared to 27% of men (16% in 2024). The increase in reporting of this factor was almost entirely accounted for by changes in the responses from men.

Pupils working in crime and publicly funded practice areas were more likely to cite work-life balance issues than pupils in other areas, and this was not the case last year. For example, this year 45% of those working in crime cited work-life balance issues compared to 28% last year. A similar change was also apparent in other publicly funded areas of practice.

Similar to 2024, disabled pupils were much more likely to mention work-life balance (48% compared to 28% of non-disabled pupils). Additionally, disabled pupils were 4 times more likely to mention the culture at the Bar (13% compared to 3% of non-disabled pupils). Disabled pupils were also more concerned about work-life balance with 48% mentioning this aspect of the work compared to 28% of non-disabled pupils. Stress was also cited more frequently by disabled pupils (29% compared to 11% of non-disabled pupils).

## Pupils' views on wellbeing and work-life balance

Pupils reported challenges in balancing the demands of pupillage with personal wellbeing. Specifically:

- **Excessive last-minute workloads**, poor scheduling, and a **lack of work-life boundaries**
- **Health concerns and caring responsibilities** were made harder by inflexible working conditions and unclear sick leave policies
- Pupils suggested the need for a **greater emphasis on wellbeing**, flexibility, and proactive check-ins

## Other identified issues

The next most frequently cited issue was 'insufficient remuneration' (26%). This represented a significant increase from the proportion citing this as a factor in 2024 (14%). There was a similar increase in the proportion citing concerns about the viability of their chosen career (15%, up from 10% in 2024).

Pupils mainly working in crime were significantly more likely to mention remuneration than all other pupils (35%, 26% in 2024) compared to 20% (7% in 2024).

Pupils working in crime were three times more likely to be worried about the sustainability of their preferred area of practice (26%, 21% in 2024) compared to 8% (4% in 2024) of all other pupils.

## Career satisfaction

A third (32%) said they would 'definitely' recommend the Bar as a career path to others and a further 45% said they 'possibly' would. This represents a significant decline in numbers recommending the Bar to others from equivalent figures in 2024 of 42% 'definitely' recommending and 52% 'possibly' recommending the Bar to others.

Once again, disabled pupils have a less positive view (17% said they 'probably would not' recommend a career at the Bar compared to just 3% of non-disabled pupils), a similar difference to that recorded in 2024. There is little difference by practice area although more pupils in crime and publicly funded practice areas say they 'probably' would not recommend the Bar (11% and 9% respectively compared to 3% and 0% in other practice areas). In 2024, there was no difference by practice area and the rate of those saying they would probably not recommend the Bar was 5%.

## Legal aid and pro bono work

More than half (57%, 60% in 2024) 'definitely' envisage doing legal aid work, and a further 14% said they 'possibly' would (same as in 2024). In response to the same question about pro bono work, just under half (46%, 49% in 2024) said they 'definitely' intend to do it and 38% 'possibly' will (43% in 2024).

Those working in crime (79%, 88% in 2024) and publicly funded areas of the Bar (64%, 70% in 2024) are most likely to say they 'definitely' intend to do it.

## **Awards, debt and financial hardship**

The median pupillage award this year was £30,000-39,999, the same as reported in 2024 and higher than the median of £20,000-29,999 in 2022. The median anticipated debt level is also unchanged at £50,000-59,999 but again up from £40,000-49,999 in 2022.

Again, men (25%) are twice as likely as women (13%) to have pupillage awards of £60,000 or more. And again, the same as in 2024, pupils mainly working in crime are nearly twice as likely as those working in other areas to have awards of under £30,000 (54% compared to 29%). Furthermore, in the broadly publicly funded areas of work (crime, civil, and family) just 8% held awards of £60,000 or more compared to 41% of those not in publicly funded areas of practice. Where pupils were first generation university attendees, 17% had awards of £50,000 or more compared to 36% of pupils from families where a previous generation(s) had been to university.

A third (33%) of men had no debt compared to just 15% of women. And a third (33%) of pupils who were educated in selective/overseas/private schools had no debt compared to just 2% of those who went to non-selective UK state schools. This gap between state and privately educated pupils has widened since 2024 (where the equivalent figures were 25% and 6%). Similarly, 6% of pupils who were the first generation in their family to attend university had no debt this year compared to 28% of pupils who were from families where a previous generation(s) had attended university.

Four in 10 pupils (45%, 39% in 2024) said that they were in some degree of financial hardship at present. This is more or less unchanged since 2022 (42%). 12% (9% in 2024) said they were in a lot of financial hardship. This year there was little difference between men and women in the likelihood of them reporting being in financial hardship. State/non-selective educated pupils were more likely to report financial hardship (58% compared to 39% of those who were not educated in non-selective state schools – compared to 49% and 32% respectively in 2024).

Pupils working in crime are more likely to report financial hardship issues (19% reporting a lot of hardship compared to 8% among other pupils) and 45% say they have no financial hardship compared to 61% of those working in other areas of practice.

## **Working conditions**

The median working hours for pupils remains at 41-50 hours per week, the same as reported in 2024 and 2022. Four in 10 (38% slightly fewer than the 44% reported in 2024 and 48% reported in 2022) said they work 41-50 hours per week. Just 21% (15% in 2024) work fewer than 41 hours and 41% work more than 50 hours per week, the same figure as reported in 2024. There were no differences between groups of pupils or areas of work.

Nine in 10 (88%, 82% in 2024 and 79% in 2022) of pupils characterised their work-related stress levels as 'moderate' or 'high'. This represents a significant increase in work-related stress levels reported by pupils. For stress, there was little or no difference between demographic subgroups or areas of practice.

Eight in 10 pupils said that they felt 'well supported' by their chambers/employer (43% 'very' well supported and 40% 'quite' well supported. More or less the same response as reported last year.

## **Bullying, harassment and discrimination**

Reports of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination are lower among pupils than they are across the Bar in general, but they are, nevertheless, relatively high. This reflects findings in previous surveys.

One in 6 (17%, 18% in 2024 and 19% in 2022) pupils indicated that they have 'personally experienced' bullying, harassment and/or discrimination, either in person or online. Including 'observation' of bullying, harassment and discrimination this figure rises to 28% (26% in 2024). 47 respondents out of 170 indicated in this way. As in the previous surveys, pupils are much more likely to report that the incident took place in-person than online.

One in 8 (12%, 8% in 2024) indicated 'personal experience' of bullying and harassment and 10% (15% in 2024) indicated they had 'personally experienced' discrimination.

In 2024, personal experience of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination was considerably higher among women (28%) than among men (3%). This year, there was no significant difference between men and women.

However, there remains a big difference in relation to disability. Disabled pupils were more likely to report bullying, harassment or discrimination (36% compared to just 12% of non-disabled pupils). Importantly in this context, although the overall responses were very positive, disabled pupils were also less likely to feel 'quite well supported' (29%) or 'very well supported' (36%) by their chambers/employers than non-disabled pupils (44% and 45% respectively).

Although there was no significant difference this year between men and women reporting experience of bullying, harassment or discrimination, gender was the most common type of bullying, harassment or discrimination reported (57%) and this figure is higher than reported in 2024 (39%).

Of the remainder, 32% of respondents cited race (30% in 2024), 14% cited disability (25% in 2024), 18% said it was to do with 'feedback or work' (16% in 2024) and 18% said it was sexual harassment, a much larger figure than reported in 2024 (7%).

In most cases, another barrister was responsible for the bullying, harassing or discriminating behaviour (61% of those who had experience of bullying harassment or discrimination cited another barrister as responsible). One in 5 (18%, 21% in 2024) said it was their pupil supervisor, and 18% said it was either their head of chambers or a practice manager.