



Survey of Pupils March 2022

The Bar Council represents ~17,000 practising barristers in England and Wales and promotes the values they share. A strong and independent Bar exists to serve the public and is crucial to the administration of justice. As specialist, independent advocates, barristers enable people to uphold their legal rights, often acting on behalf of the most vulnerable members of society.

The Bar makes a vital contribution to the efficient and effective operation of criminal and civil courts. It provides a pool of talent, from increasingly diverse backgrounds, from which a significant proportion of the judiciary is drawn and on whose independence the rule of law and our democratic way of life depends.

The Bar Council is the Approved Regulator for the Bar of England and Wales: it discharges its regulatory functions through the operationally independent Bar Standards Board (BSB).

This summary survey report relates to the Bar Council's second annual survey of pupils.¹ The survey was sent by email link to all 411 practising pupils on 01 February 2022. 173 pupils responded before the survey was closed on 14 February 2022, giving a response rate of 42 per cent.² All survey responses were anonymous, and the survey data will be kept securely for research purposes.

Executive summary

- Many pupils report satisfaction with their supervision: 90 per cent of respondents were very happy or broadly happy with their supervision
- 65 per cent of respondents said that they had in-person or remote supervision with their pupil supervisor at least once daily, and 86 per cent of respondents said that they felt very well or quite well supported by their chambers

¹ The first survey was undertaken in 2021 specifically regarding the impact of Covid-19 on pupillage.

² The majority – 83 per cent of respondents – were in their non-practising period, which reflects that the majority of pupillages begin in Autumn.

- 42 per cent of respondents said that they were in some degree of financial hardship at present and the median anticipated level of debt is £40,000-£49,999
- There is evidence of long working hours and high stress levels among pupils: 48 per cent of pupils reported that their working pattern in the fortnight leading up to the response was 41-50 hours per week, while 79 per cent of respondents characterised their work-related stress levels as moderate or high
- 88 per cent of respondents found the experience of applying for and securing pupillage quite challenging or very challenging, and 73 per cent said that better feedback on applications would improve the process
- 19 per cent of pupils indicated that they have personally experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination either in person or online

Many pupils are very satisfied with their supervision and their experience of pupillage so far:

There was evidence of a high level of satisfaction among pupils with their experience.

- 90 per cent of respondents were very happy or broadly happy with their supervision. 5 per cent of respondents reported that they were unhappy or very unhappy with their supervision³
- 89 per cent of respondents had had a positive or very positive experience of pupillage so far
- Pupils in criminal practice were slightly more likely to report a negative or very negative experience, but the incidence of such reports is still low

61 per cent of respondents said that a career at the Bar was viable going forward, while 33 per cent said that it was somewhat viable.

- Pupils in criminal practice were more likely to report that a career at the Bar was not viable
- The main reasons cited for why a career at the Bar was not viable were work/life balance (44 per cent) and insufficient remuneration (29 per cent). In both instances, this represents an increase compared to the 2021 survey, where

³ In 2021, the [Covid-19 Survey of Pupils](#) reported that 11 per cent of pupils were unhappy with their supervision, so this represents a decrease since 2021.

work/life balance was cited by 28 per cent of respondents and insufficient remuneration was cited by 26 per cent⁴

- Perceived viability of a career at the Bar varied between practice areas but was similar for every practice area compared to the survey in 2021. 100 per cent of those in commercial or general civil practice feel a career at the Bar is viable or somewhat viable for them; compared to 92 per cent of pupils in Chancery or family practice; and 88 per cent in criminal pupillages⁵
- 73 per cent of respondents said that they would definitely or possibly recommend the Bar as a career path to a friend or younger sibling

There is evidence of high levels of engagement and support among AETOs and pupil supervisors, and most pupils reported daily contact with their pupil supervisors. However, there were mixed experiences of remote working:

- There is continuing evidence of good practice across Authorised Education and Training Organisations (AETOs)
- 65 per cent of respondents said that they had in-person or remote supervision with their pupil supervisor at least once daily⁶
- 86 per cent of respondents said that they felt very well or quite well supported by their chambers⁷

A number of respondents also gave comments about aspects of their training that they had found particularly useful or particularly challenging.

Many comments said that a highly structured approach to pupillage was useful. Informal checklists, ongoing assessments, and regular feedback were all cited as examples of good practice, whereas a lack of feedback in their pupillage hampered the learning experience for other respondents.

Contact with junior members of chambers helped many respondents to gain experience in the work they would likely be carrying out.

⁴ [Covid-19 Survey of Pupils](#) (March 2021)

⁵ [Covid-19 Survey of Pupils](#) (March 2021)

⁶ The [Covid-19 Survey of Pupils](#) said that 83 per cent of respondents felt supported by their chambers.

⁷ The [Covid-19 Survey of Pupils](#) reported that 50 per cent of respondents had been speaking to their pupil supervisor at least once a day, so the practice of daily contact between pupils and pupil supervisors appears to be more widespread.

There were mixed experiences of working remotely: 34 per cent of respondents said that it had somewhat or very negatively affected their pupillage; 27 per cent said that it had somewhat or very positively affected their pupillage; and 27 per cent said that it had not affected their pupillage. It is recommended that – where possible – AETOs should try to be flexible and offer options to their pupils as appropriate.

Some respondents commented that remote working had hampered their ability to meet others in chambers on a social basis, while others stated that it had limited their professional networking opportunities. In the 2021 survey of pupils, 82 per cent said that a lack of networking opportunities was a challenge for them. It seems likely that this theme will continue as widespread remote working remains the norm.⁸

There are high reported levels of debt among pupils and high reported levels of financial hardship.

- The median pupillage award among respondents is £20,000-£29,999 and the median anticipated level of debt is £40,000-£49,999. This is roughly comparable with the amount of debt for students graduating from English universities in 2020⁹
- 42 per cent of respondents said that they were in some degree of financial hardship at present.¹⁰ Worryingly, this has increased since the 2021 survey, where 23 per cent of pupils said they were experiencing some financial hardship at present¹¹
- Many comments referred to the low levels of their remuneration, particularly with rises in the cost of living. Some respondents said that they had had pressures due to childcare costs
- Some comments also said that payment in advance for expenses – or inclusion of expenses for, e.g., travel at all – would have helped them manage better
- Aged debt was also cited as a concern

Pupils are working relatively long hours and report high stress levels.

The median number of hours typically worked in a week was 41-50 hours. Almost half (48 per cent) of pupils reported that this was their working pattern in the fortnight leading up to the response. Approximately one in five pupils (20 per cent) reported

⁸ [Covid-19 Survey of Pupils](#) (March 2021)

⁹ [Student loan statistics](#), House of Commons Library (December 2021)

¹⁰ The [Barristers' Working Lives report 2021](#) reported that 28 per cent of barristers reported that they had experienced financial hardship as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

¹¹ [Covid-19 Survey of Pupils](#) (March 2021).

working fewer than 40 hours and one in three (32 per cent) reported working more than 50 hours.¹²

- A number of comments suggested that pupils were often asked to work in the evenings and on the weekends where late instructions were received. An example of good practice was where clear expectations of working hours were set out at the beginning of pupillage

79 per cent of respondents characterised their work-related stress levels as moderate or high. A number of pupils also reported loneliness where chambers had a high number of members and/or staff working from home on a regular basis.

75 per cent of respondents did not have any concerns about fair allocation of work within their chambers.¹³

Pupils found the application process for their pupillage challenging, and overwhelmingly identified better or clearer feedback mechanisms as being the factor that would have improved the process.

- 88 per cent of respondents found the experience of applying for and securing pupillage quite challenging or very challenging.
- The most commonly cited measures that could have improved the pupillage application process were better feedback on applications (73 per cent), chambers replying to applications (53 per cent) and access to advice from current barristers (41 per cent).

Overall rates of bullying and harassment are lower among pupils (compared to the Bar in general). As with the wider Bar, women report bullying, harassment and discrimination at higher rates than men.¹⁴

¹² The [Barristers' Working Lives report 2021](#) reported that "Barristers' typical working hours were between 41 and 50 hours a week, with one in three barristers (34%) reporting that this was the number of hours they worked in a typical week before the pandemic. Around one in four (23%) worked fewer than 40 hours, while 43 per cent typically worked more than 50 hours a week."

¹³ The [Barristers' Working Lives report 2021](#) reported that three fifths of barristers thought work was distributed fairly.

¹⁴ While there is a lower incidence of bullying and harassment reported among pupils compared to the wider population at the Bar, there are two points to note: The time period is shorter: 83 per cent of respondents were in their non-practising period, so were reporting from six months or fewer at the Bar, compared to over a period of two years which was asked in Barristers Working Lives 2021; pupils subject to bullying and harassment have an acute vulnerability, as they may feel that it will impact their ability to have a career at the Bar.

- 19 per cent of pupils indicated that they have *personally experienced* bullying, harassment and/or discrimination either in person or online¹⁵
- Where this behaviour exists, it is more likely to be in face-to-face interactions that online; 14 per cent of all pupils responding to the survey indicated that they had personally experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination *in person*.¹⁶ 5 per cent of all pupils indicated that they had personally experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination online¹⁷
- Nearly one in five pupils (20 per cent) who responded to the survey indicated that they had *observed* bullying, harassment, or discrimination at work or online.¹⁸ In *Barristers' Working Lives 2021 (BWL21)*, 15 per cent said that they have observed discrimination in person or online at work compared to the pupil survey where 12 per cent said they had observed it
- The most frequent mention of who was responsible is another barrister (13 per cent) and a member of the judiciary (9 per cent)¹⁹

Of the 173 survey respondents to the pupil survey, 66 pupils said that they had either personally experienced or observed bullying, harassment, or discrimination in person or online.

Of that 66, 51 are female, making up more than three quarters at 77 per cent. 10 per cent of those pupils who had experienced or observed bullying, discrimination, or harassment said that it was linked to gender and 7 per cent said it was linked to race – the two most cited factors.²⁰

¹⁵ This compares to three in ten at the Bar (30 per cent) of all barristers responding to the BWL21 survey.

¹⁶ This compares to one in five barristers (20 per cent) in BWL21.

¹⁷ This compares to 13 per cent of barristers in BWL21.

¹⁸ In BWL21, one in four (26 per cent) reported that they had observed BDH (in person or online) at work.

¹⁹ In BWL21, it was found that the most frequent mentions are also a member of the judiciary (45 per cent) and another barrister (48 per cent).

²⁰ Of the 10 per cent who said that it was linked to gender, nearly two in five also ticked that it was linked to race. Of the 7 per cent who said it was linked to race, nearly three in five (58 per cent) also ticked that it was linked to gender.