

# Law Student Survey 2023



aspirations



wellbeing



recruitment





Law Society  
of Scotland

# Results of the 2023 Student Survey

In April 2023, the Law Society of Scotland launched a survey to get to know LLB and Diploma students better, with a focus on careers, wellbeing, and reflections on the process of becoming a solicitor.

# Background and methodology

Our Careers and Outreach Team provides support to the group we call “new lawyers”, which includes students, trainees, and newly qualified solicitors. The team is aware that the student experience has changed over the last few years and wanted to learn more about the future of the legal profession.

As several law students may join our membership, getting to know them helps us represent their interests and provide resources to support them. In our survey, we focused on three topics that will help us better understand their requirements and enable us to provide specific support and activities.

The career focus surveyed the aspirations of students, which has given us insight into the direction of the next generation of lawyers. The survey has allowed us to gain awareness of some emerging themes that we can share with legal employers, university career advisers, and others.

So far in our wellbeing practice, we have not necessarily focused our attention on students, and the survey has given us an opportunity to understand their needs. Mental health and wellbeing are key areas where LSS is committed to striving towards best practice and helping our members and future members to do the same.

# Background and methodology

Finally, the survey covers aspects of how people view the route to becoming a solicitor, particularly in relation to their perception of the process and the support available to those undertaking it. The survey covered work experience, getting a traineeship, and the diploma application process.

We were encouraged by the level of response to the survey, which had 393 unique responses.

The commentary contained in this document is aimed at helping readers understand some of the reasoning for the survey results and the societal context. It is not intended to explain away or dismiss any of the specific survey results.

## *Methodology*

This online survey was delivered by Survey Monkey from 20 April to 23 May 2023. The survey consisted of 40 questions, and people had the option to skip questions.

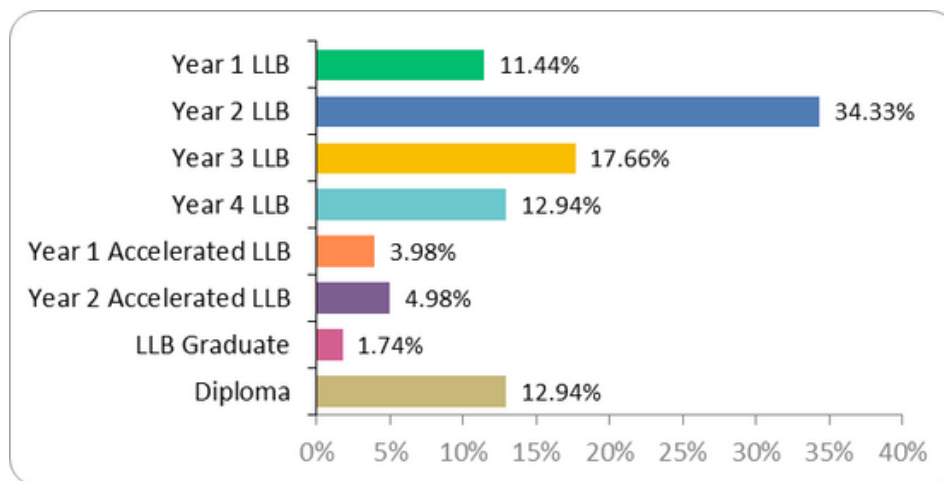
The survey sought to gather data from LLB students (Years 1, 2, 3, and 4) as well as Accelerated LLB students (Years 1 and 2), LLB graduates, and students undertaking the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice.

# Profile of Respondents

Undergraduate study (4-year LLB route) is by far the most represented group of students in the survey.

Year 2 LLB students were the most active responders, being significantly higher than any other category (Graph 1).

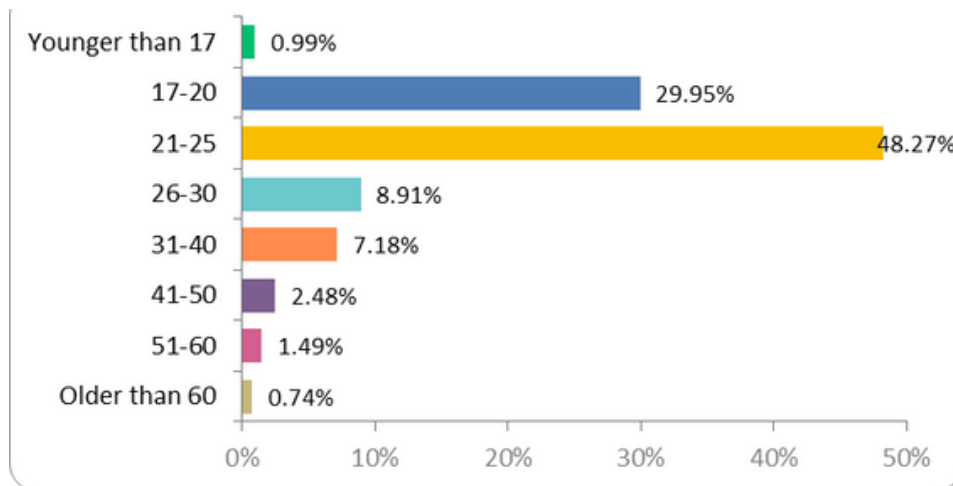
Graph 1 – Stage of study



Diploma in Professional Legal Practice (DPLP) students are fairly represented, as this is a smaller group of students and delivered through six rather than 10 universities. In the analysis of the respondents, the University of Dundee, the University of Glasgow, and Robert Gordon University were underrepresented in comparison to other institutions.

It should be noted that the most prominent age group of the respondents is 21-25 at 48%, meaning that this group is more significantly represented than others (Graph 2). We expected responses from this age group along with the 17-20 age group (which was the next largest responding group), as this is reflective of the majority age groups studying at university.

Graph 2 – age of respondents

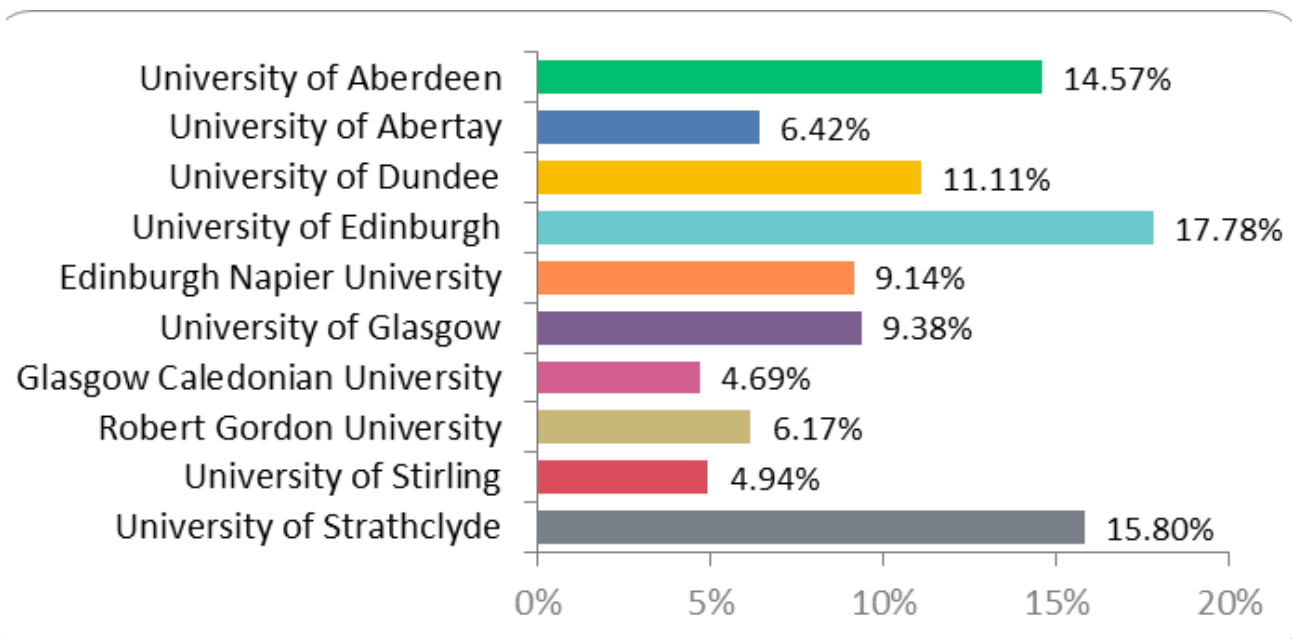


We feel that it is important to note that the 17–25-year-old age group (in particular those between 17 and 22 years old) will have had their academic lives significantly affected by the COVID pandemic at both school, college, and university.

All respondents will have had their studies impacted by the COVID pandemic and will also have been impacted by the strikes. There is potential that the lack of social interaction may have impacted mental wellbeing, learning by osmosis, and opportunities to reflect with peers. All students will also have been impacted by strikes by academic staff at universities.

The respondents were overwhelming full-time study students, and all universities offering the LLB and DPLP are represented by the results (Graph 3).

Graph 3 – University Engagement



We also profiled whether the respondents had caring responsibilities, with nearly 20% of the respondents having caring responsibilities.

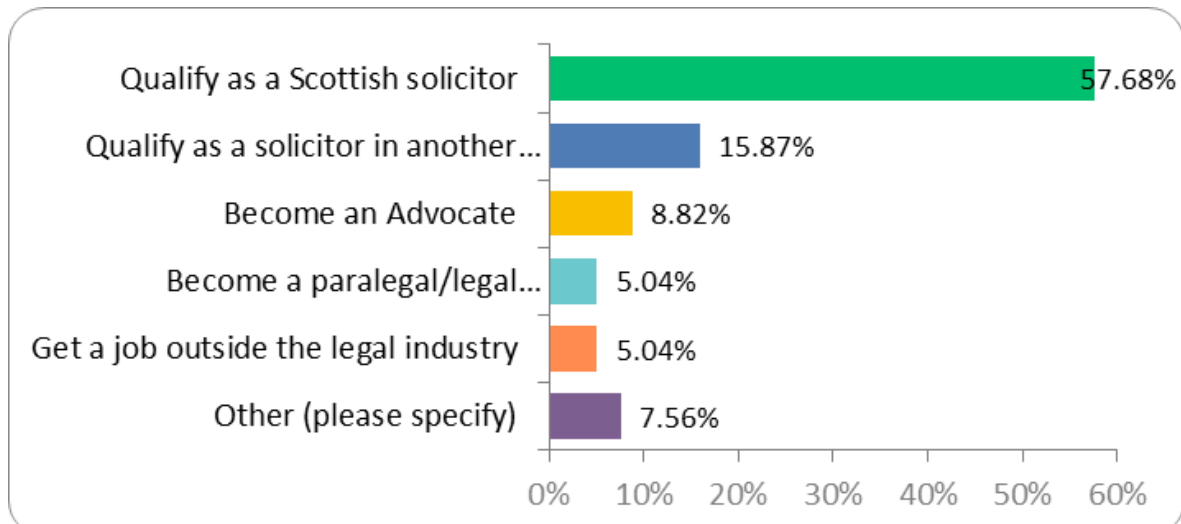
We asked them to specify whether they were caring for children or caring for other family members, the 20% were evenly split between the two categories.

For those looking after a family member, the spread of caring responsibilities is across all levels of study. Whereas those with responsibility for a child are mainly year 2 LLB students but within the age range of 31-40.

# Career Aspirations and Interests

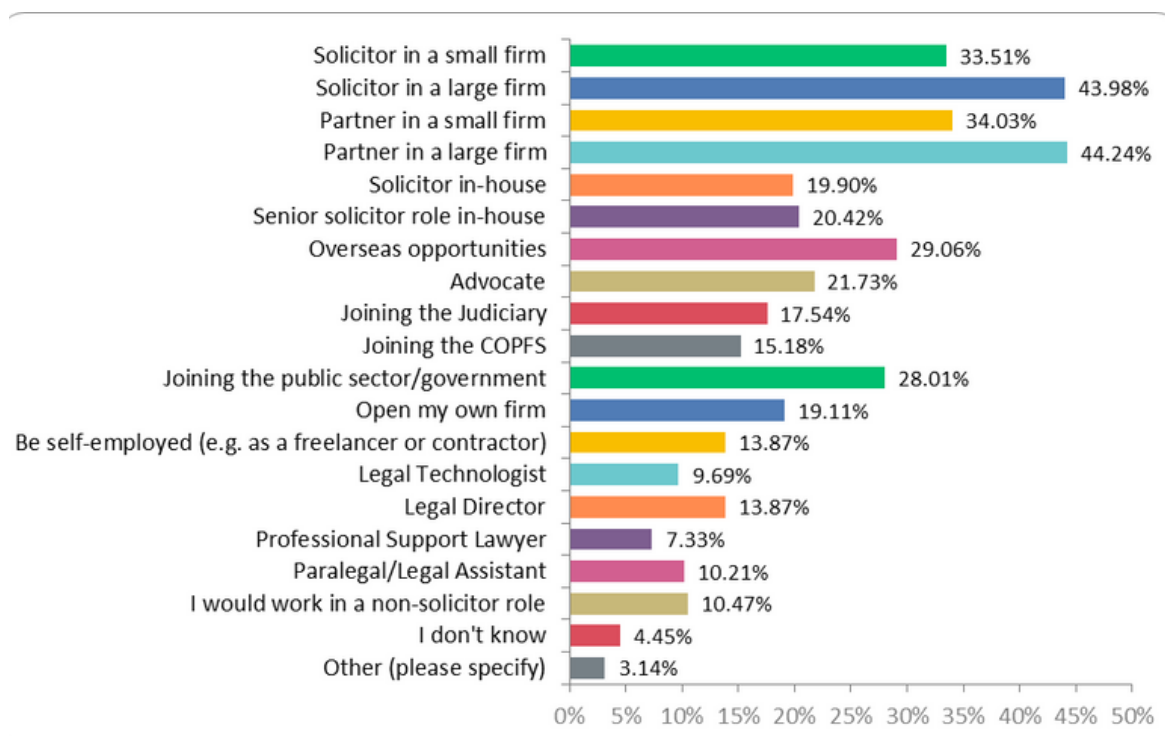
The survey considered aspects of career aspirations and interests within the cohort. The main career aim of 58% of the respondents is to qualify as a Scottish solicitor; this highlights that people want to stay within the profession and within Scotland (Graph 4).

Graph 4 – main career aim



Some respondents suggested other careers, including Academic, Barrister, dual qualifying for another jurisdiction, and they also expressed some uncertainty as to their career direction.

Graph 5 - long term occupational interest

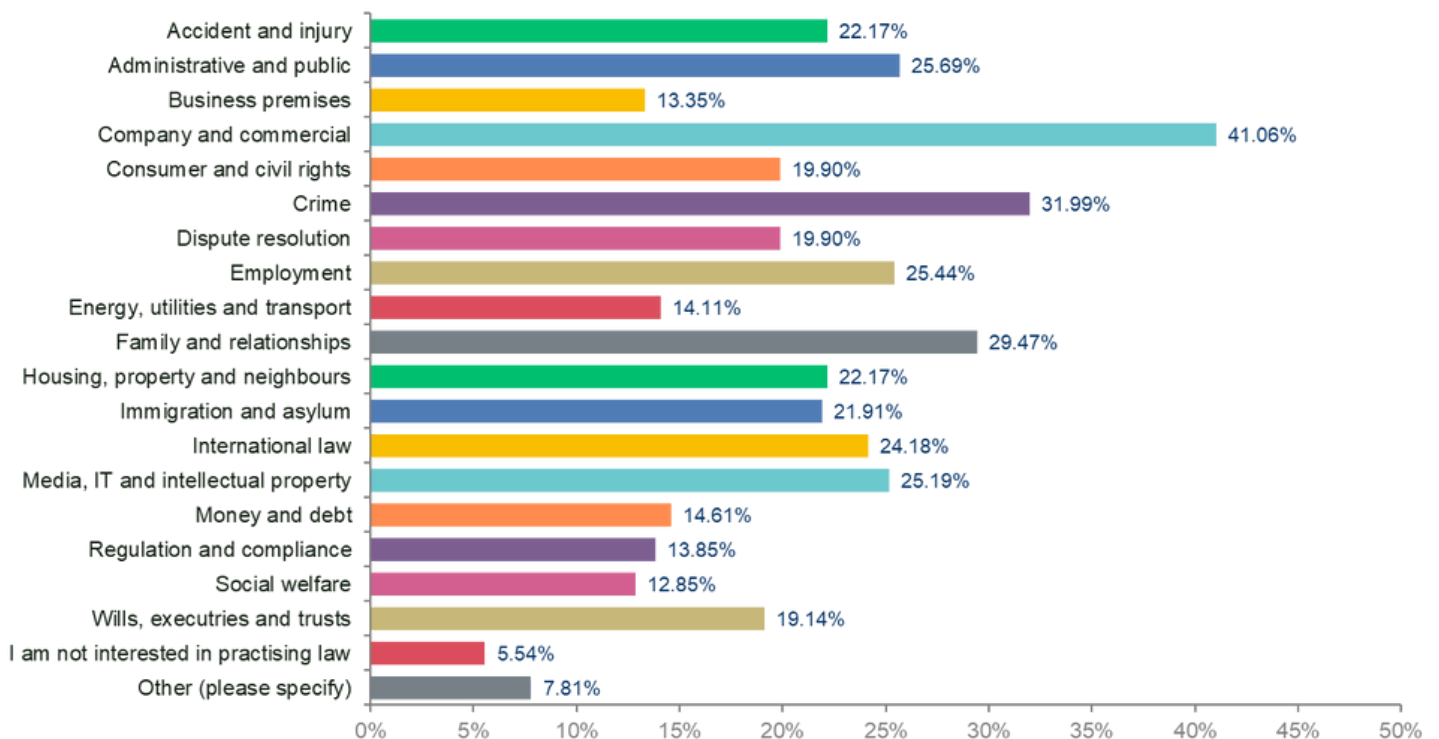




Company and commercial and criminal law are the most popular areas of practice. It is worth noting that the respondents were able to ‘select all that apply’ so areas of law like social welfare, business premises, and regulation and compliance were of less interest to those surveyed.

In terms of future areas of practice, company and commercial and criminal law are by far the most popular areas of law. With ‘other subjects’ like human rights and environmental law being mentioned as potential areas of interest (Graph 6).

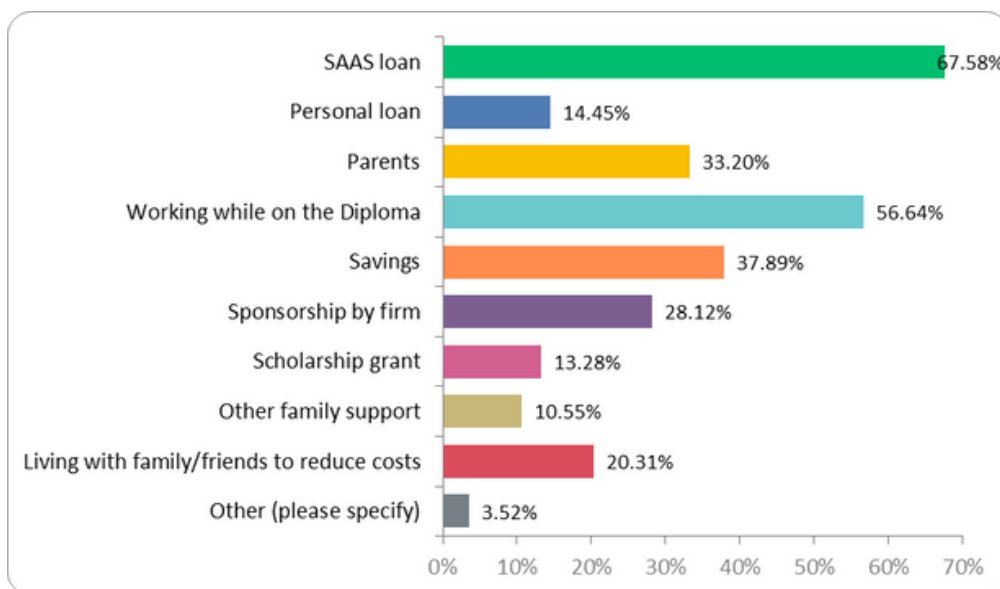
Graph 6 – area of law



# Diploma in Professional Legal Practice

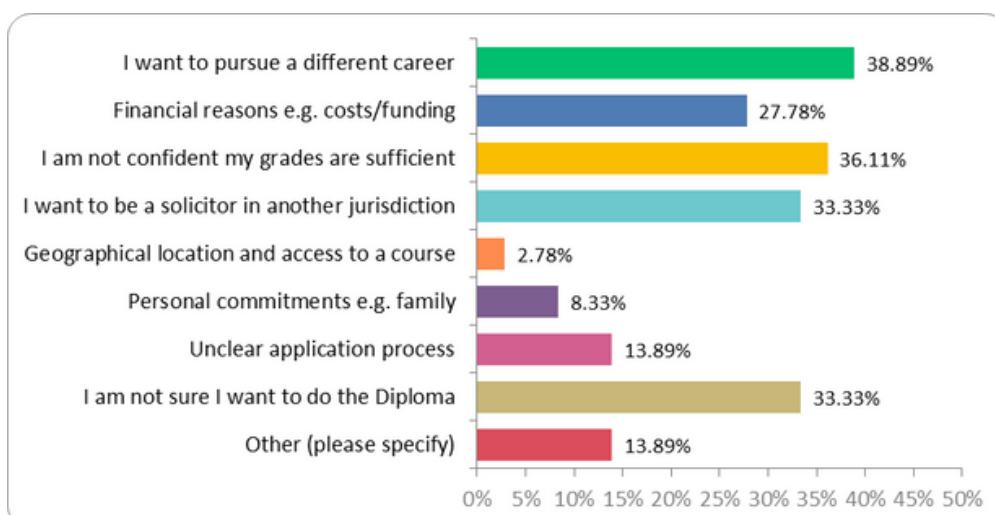
For many students, the next step in their career journey, after the LLB, will be undertaking the Diploma in Professional Legal Practice (DPLP). We currently find ourselves in a cost-of-living crisis and financial constraints may be an issue for some respondents. We wanted to know how they were going to fund their DPLP, and it was overwhelmingly clear that a SAAS loan was essential for many of the respondents. It is also clear that a significant number would also need to obtain employment to undertake further study (Graph 7)

Graph 7 – selected funding types for the DPLP



Out of those surveyed 5% suggested they were not going to apply for the DPLP and 8% selected that they were “unsure of whether I will apply in the future.” It is important to note that respondents selected all that apply. Graph 8 details the spread of reasons.

Grade 8 – why respondents are not applying for the DPLP.



# Traineeship

Out of the respondents to this question, 97 have secured a traineeship, which is 25% of those surveyed. There are 120 students actively applying at a rate of 30% with the highest numbers being Year 2, 3 and 4 of the LLB. Respondents who suggested they didn't want to apply for a traineeship are at 5%. Data around reasons why people would not want to go for the traineeship route has not been sought.

Looking at those who have not currently secured a traineeship and are actively applying, many responses were from Years 1 and 2 of the LLB.

Table 1 – secured a traineeship by stage.

Stage of studies	Number of responses			
	Yes	No, and not active	No, but active	No, and not intending to
Year 1 LLB	1	41	1	1
Year 1 Accelerated LLB	5	8	2	0
Year 2 LLB	31	64	36	5
Year 2 Accelerated LLB	4	6	6	1
Year 3 LLB	9	25	32	4
Year 4 LLB	14	10	24	4
LLB Graduate	2	1	3	0
Diploma	31	3	16	0

The survey asked the respondents to consider their ideal types of employers for their traineeship. A significant amount suggested that they would prefer to work for a 'large Scottish firm'. In the commentary six respondents noted they would like to work for 'multi-national or international firms.' Graph 9 details the breakdown of responses, respondents were only allowed to select one option.

Graph 9 – respondents’ ideal types of employers for their traineeship



Gathering feedback on what was the key motivator or most important factor when considering a traineeship, respondents were asked to select whether something was very important, fairly important, neither important/unimportant, slightly important, not important at all, or to leave the question blank. Respondents were able to skip this question, the percentage of non-respondents to this element of the survey was 9.20%.

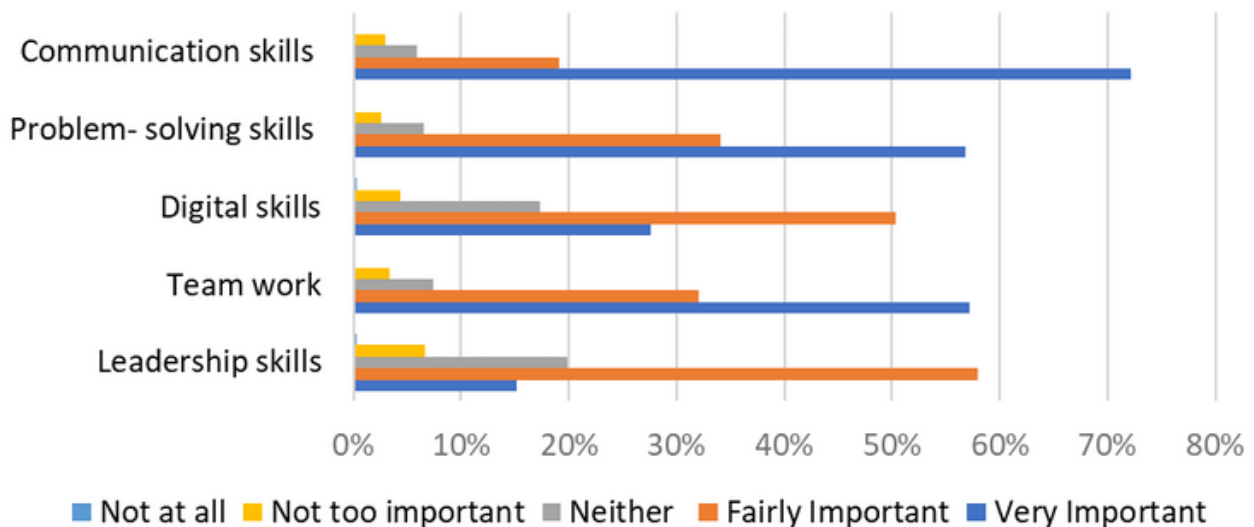
Salary, work-life balance, and the feeling of helping others were all priorities. Aspects such as the prestige of an employer name, employers’ commitment to sustainability and the environment or a widening access initiatives were lower down the list in terms of importance.

# Employability and strengths awareness

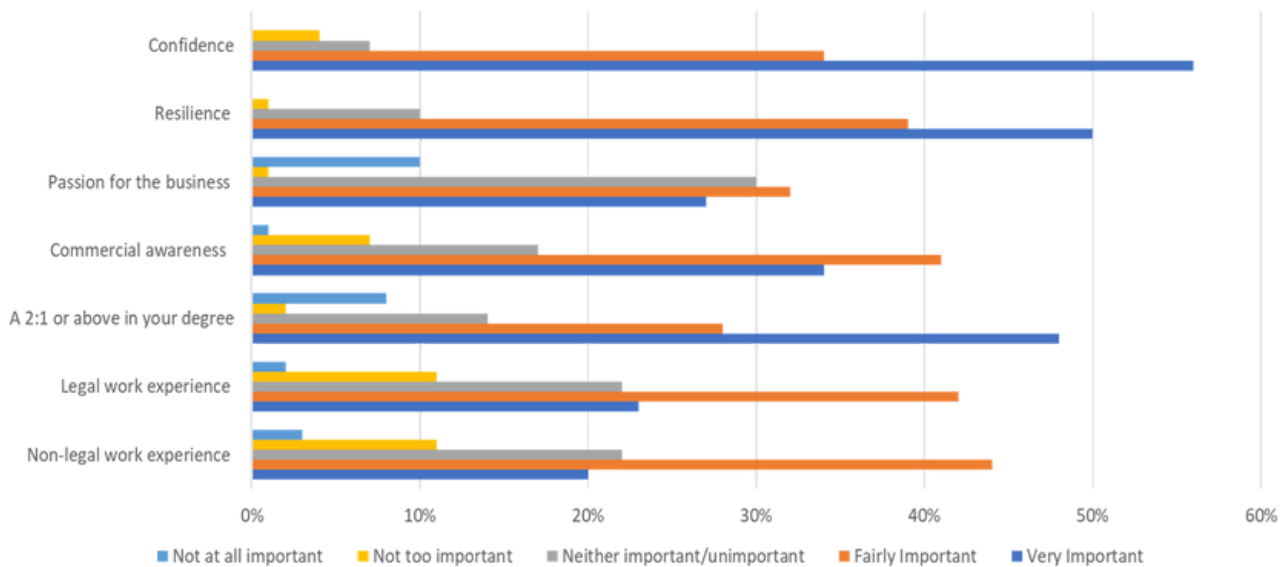
The needs of the profession have changed over the years, and what is required to be a solicitor is different. We asked the respondents to tell us what skills and other requirements they thought were needed when undertaking a traineeship. Details of what students felt was most important are in Graph 10 and Graph 11.

In terms of skills, communication, problem solving, and teamwork were both deemed very important. While personal qualities like confidence and resilience were also deemed to be very important, it is clear that the students feel there is value to legal and non-legal work experience, but the results suggest that they feel a 2:1 or above is more important (Graph 11).

Graph 10 – Understanding of skills requirements for the traineeship.



Graph 11 – Understanding of other requirements for the traineeship.



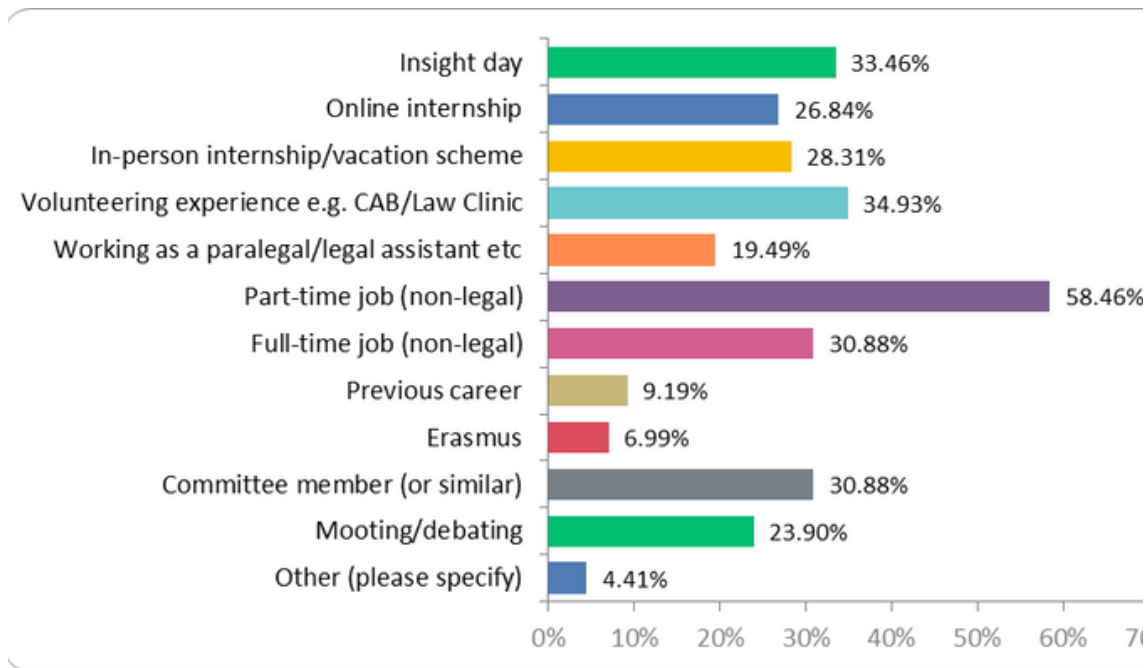
The survey asked respondents to rate their confidence levels in relation to the recruitment process for the traineeship. Overall, the students indicated that the traineeship was onerous and stressful. Our guidance groups have suggested that when they consider their own journey into the profession, they can relate to the gaps.

Table 2 – Gaps and Strengths in confidence levels

Gaps	Strengths
Where to look for a traineeship	Application forms
Psychometric testing	Interviews
Speculative applications	Commercial Awareness
	Networking skills

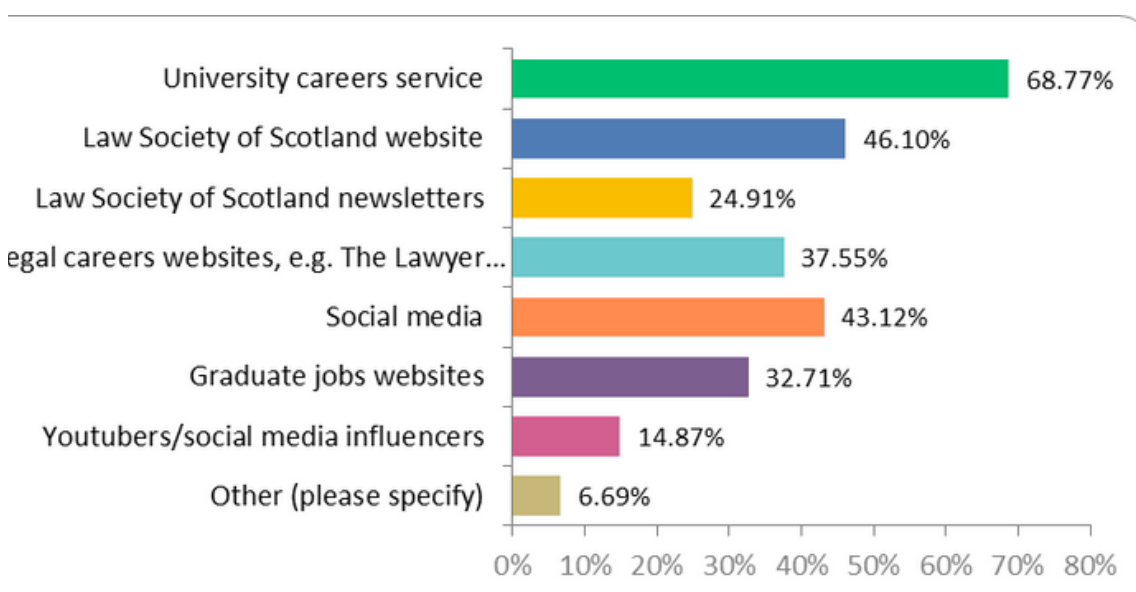
Over the last few years, it has been more difficult for people to gain experience and volunteering opportunities. That being said, it is clear from the results in Graph 13 that many have been able to access a variety of opportunities.

Graph 12 – experience gained by respondents.



How people access information is key to the work of the Careers and Outreach team. Graph 13 highlights how the respondents engage with support for their career journey. The value of our links with the University Careers Service is already clear to us, and these results indicate that strengthening these relationships will be helpful in continuing to support the profession.

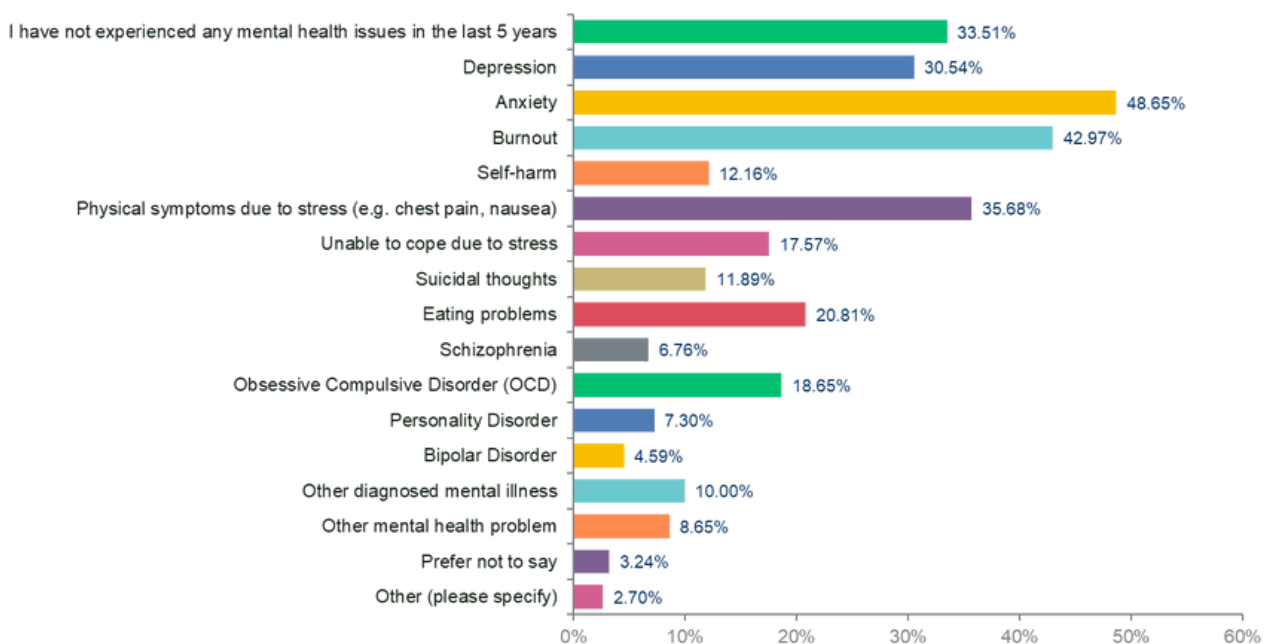
Graph 13 – where respondents access careers support



# Mental health and wellbeing

In the last five years, over 65% of respondents had experienced a mental health issue. Anxiety was by far the biggest issue with burnout, physical symptoms of stress, and depression all having a significant impact on the cohort. Considering the raw data, it should be noted that those who select 'yes' also selected more than one option. There is a clear indication that conditions that are often co-morbid were prevalent within this cohort. Graph 13 highlights the breakdown; however, please note that those surveyed were allowed to select all that applied.

Graph 14 – types of mental wellbeing experienced by respondents.



For those who have suffered from a mental health issue in the last 5 years, it is clear from the results that a lot of respondents have experienced a number of conditions, most of which are known comorbidities. Anxiety was by far the biggest issue, with burnout, physical symptoms of stress, and depression all having a significant impact on respondents.



Suicidal thoughts and self-harm thoughts are indications of mental distress. Out of the people surveyed, 40 had experienced suicidal thoughts, which is 10% of the total population surveyed and 12% of those who had experienced mental health issues.

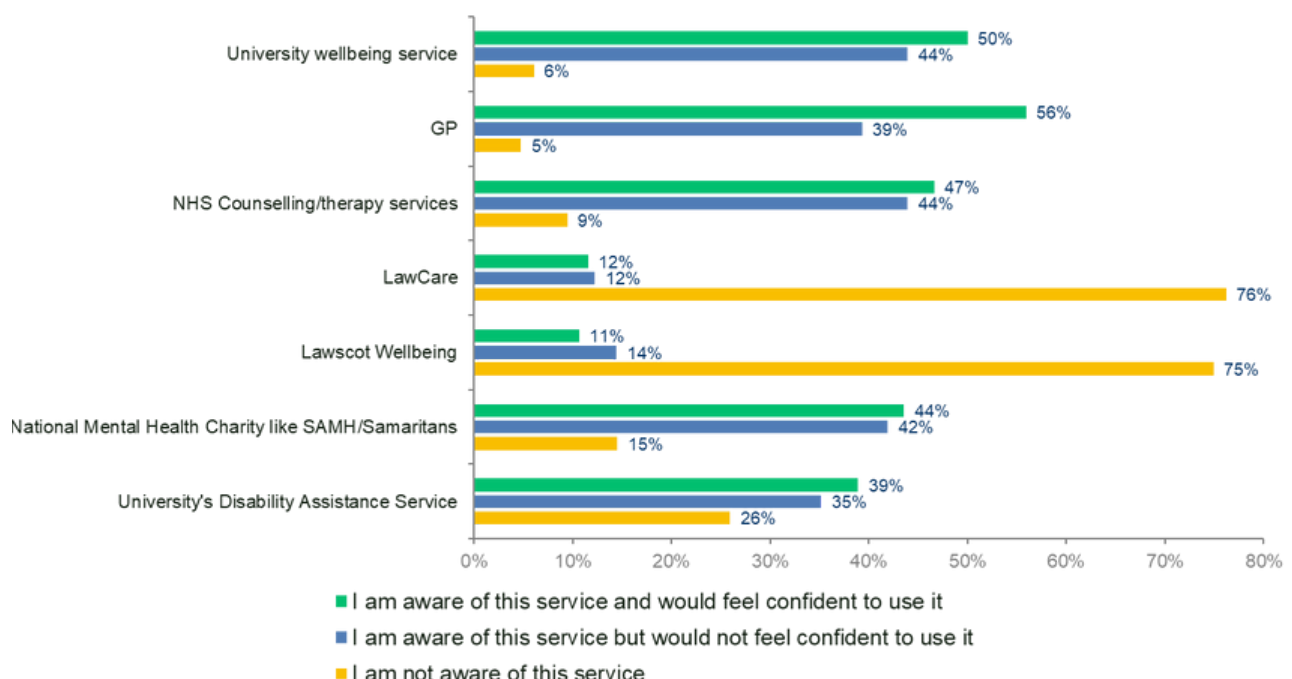
The sheer volume of people experiencing mental health issues is concerning. In the general population, it is estimated that 1.2% of the population has Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Our survey indicates that 18% of the respondents suggested they have OCD.

For context, 61% of respondents reported experience of mental health problems in our 2019 wellbeing survey among legal professionals, so it's broadly in line with that.

The most concerning statistic is that 48% of people with a wellbeing issue have not received professional support for their mental health.

We asked the respondents about their awareness of the services available to them. It highlighted the need for Lawscot Wellbeing to engage with students to ensure they are aware of the resources available when they enter the profession.

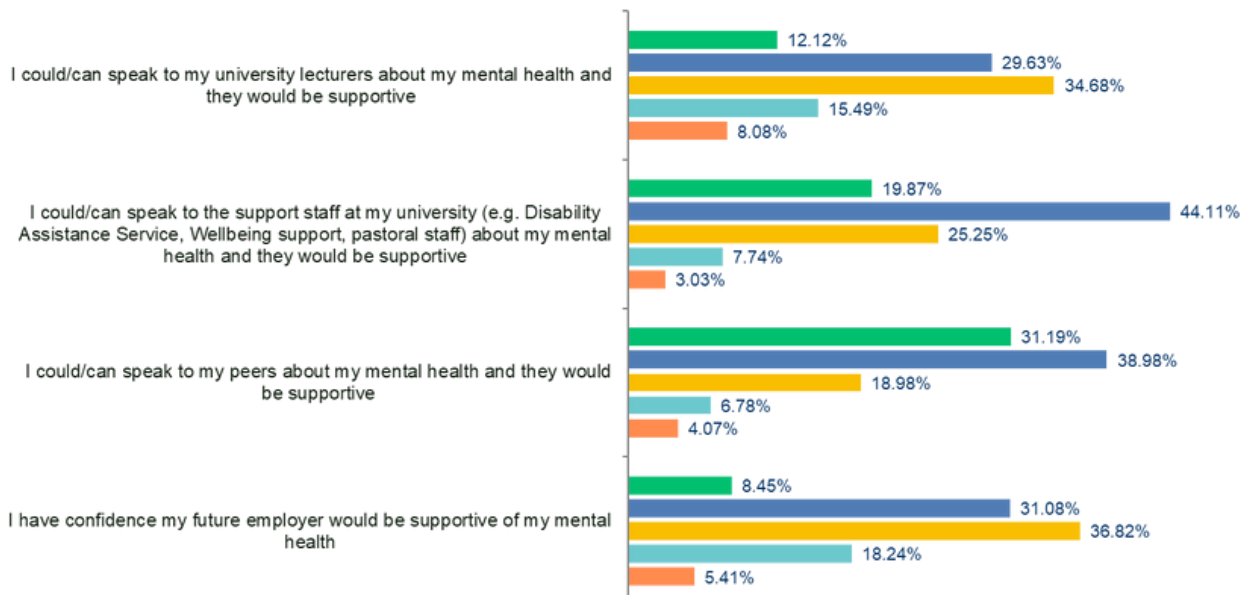
Graph 15 – awareness and confidence in accessing mental health services.



The statistics around being aware of the relevant services but not feeling confident enough to use the service are extremely high.

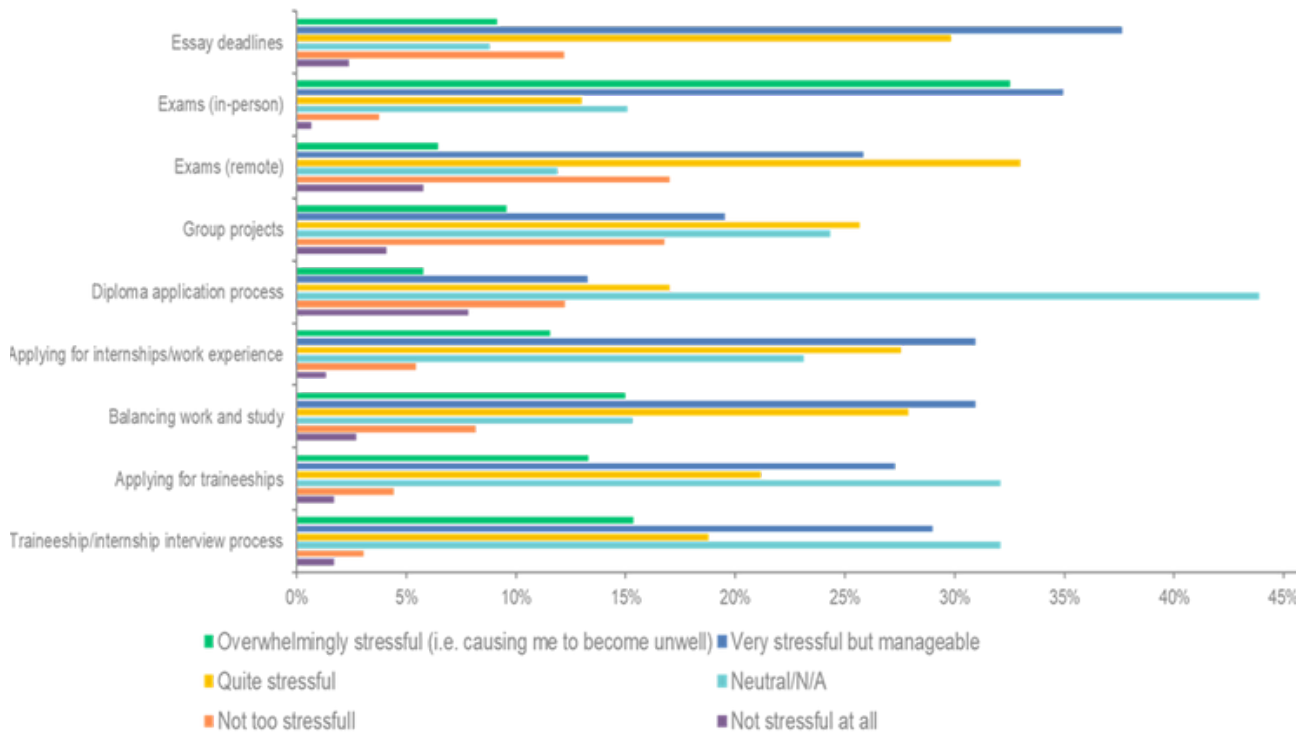
We posed a series of questions to those surveyed to ask about their perceptions of who will be supportive of the respondent's mental health. It is interesting that there is significant uncertainty as to whether lecturers, support staff, and especially future employers would be supportive. Graph 16 highlights the overarching details, with peers and specialist services clearly acknowledged as supportive people.

Graph 16 – perceptions of support.



We then asked what the source of the stress was, and in-person exams were the most stressful aspect of their legal journey so far.

Graph 17 - Reasons for stress



Many of the respondents felt that in-person exams in particular are so “overwhelmingly stressful”, it causes them to become unwell. In comments on the survey, people feel it’s a memory test if it’s an in-person exam, and this adds to their feelings of stress. The respondents also indicated that applying for internships and traineeships is a manageable but stressful part of the process.

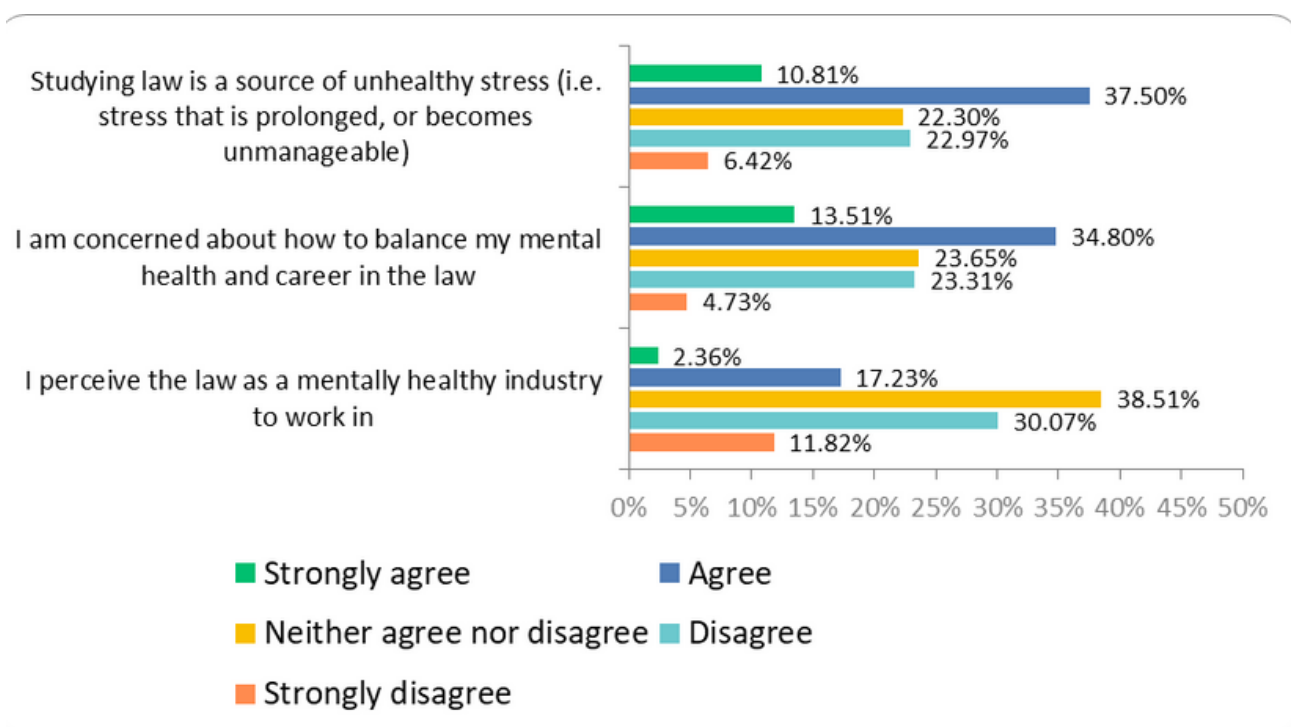
# Perceptions of law

The perception of law, especially the study of law (which is the stage the respondents are at), is quite negative. Close to 50% of those surveyed feel that studying law is a source of unhealthy stress, suggesting the stress is prolonged or unmanageable.

There are a considerable number of respondents suggesting that they are concerned about how to manage their mental health while undertaking a career in law. This comment should be considered alongside the results suggesting 65% of respondents have had a mental health issue in the last five years.

The responses around whether they perceive law as a mentally healthy industry are interesting, with nearly 40% indicating they neither agree nor disagree (Graph 10). This potentially indicates to us that during these stages, their awareness of what the industry is like (from a wellbeing perspective) is limited, and there could be an opportunity to humanise the profession and show its progress away from previous industry stereotypes.

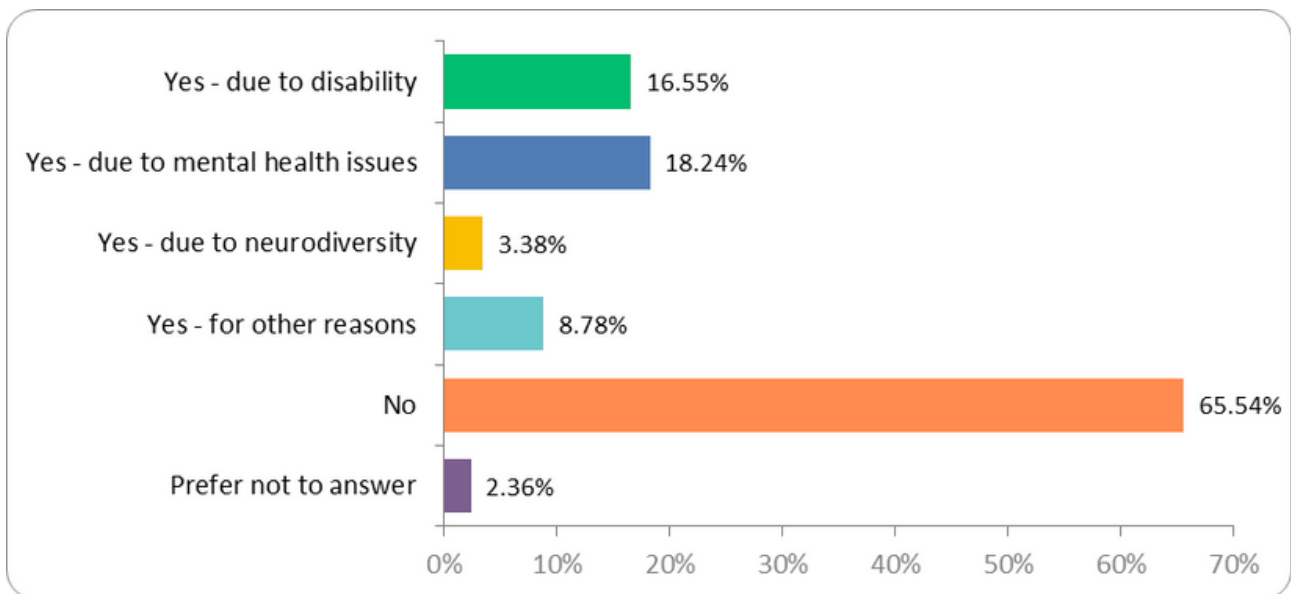
Graph 18 – Perceptions of law



# Reasonable adjustments

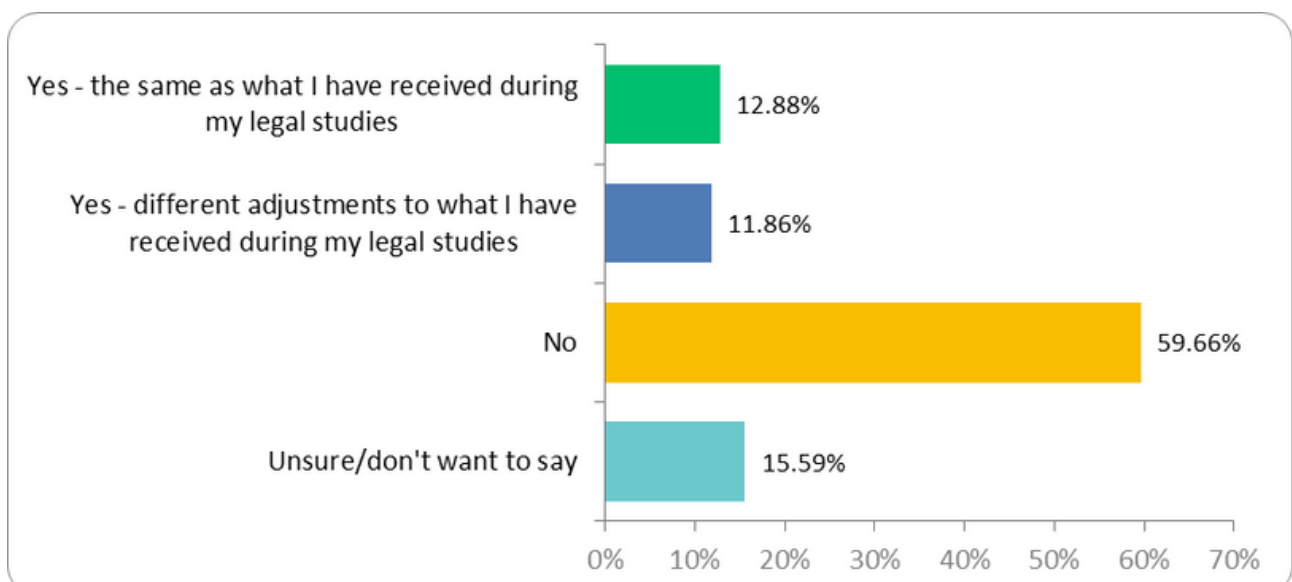
32% of the respondents clearly indicated that they required a reasonable adjustment. Those surveyed were asked if it was due to disability, mental health issues, neurodiversity or other reasons. Graph 19 shows the breakdown of the responses.

Graph 19 – reasons for reasonable adjustments at university



When asked if they required adjustments from a potential employer during the recruitment process, it was noted that 13% required the same adjustments they had during their studies and 12% required different provisions. It should also be noted that 16% do not know what adjustments they would need for an interview.

Graph 20 – reasonable adjustments for interview



# Conclusion

The Careers and Outreach team and Lawscot Wellbeing will be working closely with our teams and partners to identify and address concerns. We will be aiming to develop our student engagement strategy to meet the needs of the New Lawyers group and to support the sustainability of the legal profession.