



Law Society
of Scotland

Traineeship Survey Analysis

Trainee solicitor survey

November 2022



Overview

In spring 2022 we launched two surveys to better understand the experience of those involved in traineeships – both trainee solicitors and those involved in training. The responses to both surveys provide telling insight. This overview report relates to the trainee solicitor survey.

We are grateful to the 384 trainee solicitors who completed the survey. The number of trainee solicitors in Scotland at any one time changes, as a traineeship can commence at any time during the calendar year. It is anticipated that there were around 1,000 trainee solicitors when the survey launched. Based on 1,000 trainee solicitors, the response rate was 38%. This is a good response rate and provides a strong evidence base.

This is an overview report. We have aimed to ensure that any amendments we have made to responses (eg removing details of a specific issue that might identify a trainer, trainee solicitor or other person, including information which may lead to guessing as to who an individual may be) or redaction (eg where an individual was named or alluded to) do not obscure the intent of the response. We have been particularly sensitive with any matters where health, wellbeing or disability were mentioned.

We have already taken steps in response to the survey. These have included:

- Increasing the level of trainee remuneration by 5%.
- Organising a session on how to train trainee solicitors with a specialist employment and discrimination lawyer. This was well-attended and well-received with over 40 training managers attending.
- Publishing detailed advice and information on supporting trainee solicitors in the early stages of appearing in court.

The results of the surveys will continue to shape the Society's thinking – not just in Education & Training and Admissions but in policy, legal aid and beyond.

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Executive summary

- 383 respondents completed the survey
- 87% of respondents worked in private practice
- Almost one-third of respondents mainly practised in Lothian and Borders and almost one-third of respondents mainly practised in Glasgow and Strathkelvin
- 6% of respondents who answered the question on whether their traineeship was funded by the Scottish Government Legal Aid Traineeship Fund confirmed that it was (19 respondents) while 94% or 326 respondents indicated that it was not
- 91% of respondents (310) who answered the question on to what extent they thought the work they were undertaking was appropriate for a trainee solicitor said it was either always appropriate (33%) or mostly appropriate (58%)
- 9% of respondents (29) said that the work they were undertaking as a trainee solicitor was mostly inappropriate or never appropriate
- One-third of respondents who answered a follow-up question on the work they were allocated stated that between 10% and 30% of the work they undertook should not be undertaken by a trainee solicitor
- One in four respondents who answered the same follow up question said that at least 30% of their work should not be undertaken by a trainee solicitor
- Three out of ten respondents who answered a question on early admission to the roll of solicitors stated that they were admitted early and now hold a restricted practising certificate
- Four out of ten respondents who answered a question on early admission to the roll of solicitors stated that they had not been admitted but they are eligible for early admission

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How far into your traineeship are you?

383 respondents answered this question, while one respondent skipped it.

The large number of respondents who indicated that they were in the second six months of their traineeship corresponds with information held by the Society. A significant number of individuals started their traineeship in 2021, with some of these individuals having been deferred because of the pandemic.

Answer options	Responses	
First six months	14.62%	56
Second six months	44.91%	172
Third six months	11.23%	43
Fourth six months	28.72%	110
Prefer not to say	0.52%	2

As most traineeships commence in July/August/September, and as the survey ran from 8 April until 3 May it makes sense that the majority of trainee solicitors were either in their second six months or fourth six months.

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What sector do you work in?

382 respondents answered this question, while two respondents skipped it.

87% of respondents worked in private practice. It appears that there was a relatively low response rate from in-house public sector trainee solicitors. The answers provided to the 'other (please specify)' option included law centre and a charity.

	Responses		Latest trainee statistics
Sole practitioner	8.64%	33	9%
Private practice (2-10 partners)	35.34%	135	32%
Private practice (11-30 partners)	12.83%	49	15%
Private practice (31+ partners)	30.10%	115	31%
In-house public sector	6.28%	24	12%
In-house private sector	3.66%	14	
Prefer not to answer	1.83%	7	N/A
Other (please specify)	1.31%	5	N/A

For interest we have compared with the 2020/21 trainee statistics. Whilst the analysis won't match perfectly – as the cohort will include some trainees from 2019/2020 and some from 2021/22 – the response suggests that respondents were broadly representative of the trainee solicitor population.

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In which sheriffdom do you mostly practise?

380 trainee solicitor respondents answered this question, while four respondents skipped it.

Almost one-third of respondents mainly practised in Lothian and Borders and almost one-third of respondents mainly practised in Glasgow and Strathkelvin. This appears to be broadly representative of the information held by the Society on where trainee solicitors appear to be based.

Answer options	Responses	
Lothian and Borders	31.84%	121
Glasgow and Strathkelvin	31.58%	120
Grampian, Highland and Islands	12.63%	48
Tayside, Central and Fife	10.79%	41
South Strathclyde, Dumfries, and Galloway	4.47%	17
Prefer not to answer	3.42%	13
North Strathclyde	3.16%	12
Other jurisdiction	2.11%	8

The Society calculates the trainee solicitor statistics slightly differently, so cannot compare directly. However, 38% of traineeships started in Edinburgh and the Lothians last year and 33% started in Greater Glasgow which – again – suggests a broadly representative sample.

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Which practice areas have you gained most experience in during your traineeship?

Respondents were asked to provide information on the practice areas that they gained experience in during their traineeship. 383 respondents answered this question, while one respondent skipped it. Respondents were able to select all of the answer options that applied.

Company and commercial received the highest percentage of responses at 37%, with private client and residential property both receiving 31% of responses. Immigration and asylum; media, IT and intellectual property; and social welfare each accounted for fewer than 5% of all responses. The results to this question correspond with the significant percentage of respondents who worked in private practice.

The answers given to the 'other (please specify)' option included professional indemnity, land and rural, oil and gas, mental health, client secondment, construction law and commercial property. (Table on next page).

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Which practice areas have you gained most experience in during your traineeship?

Answer options	Responses	
	Percentage	Count
Company and commercial	37.34%	143
Private client	31.33%	120
Residential property	31.07%	119
Dispute resolution	24.02%	92
Family law	21.67%	83
Accident and injury	15.93%	61
Criminal law	15.67%	60
Other (please specify)	15.14%	58
Employment and pensions	12.01%	46
Money and debt	10.44%	40
Regulation and compliance	10.44%	40
Business premises	9.14%	35
Administrative and public	7.83%	30
Energy, utilities and transport	7.31%	28
Consumer and civil rights	7.05%	27
Media, IT and intellectual property	4.70%	18
Immigration and asylum	4.44%	17
Social welfare	4.44%	17

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Have you been keeping a log of activities that you have undertaken, either via the Society's PEAT 2, a system your organisation uses or some other method during your traineeship?

Respondents were asked if they had been keeping a log of activities they had undertaken, either via the Society's PEAT 2 record; a system their organisation used or another method.

345 respondents answered this question, while 39 respondents skipped it. 81% of respondents who answered this question indicated that they were keeping a log of activities.

Answer Options	Responses	
Yes	81.45%	281
No	13.91%	48
Prefer not to answer	4.64%	16

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To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with eight statements. 344 respondents answered this question, while 40 respondents skipped it.

Overview of responses

- 79% of respondents agreed that their supervisor(s) has or have allocated work and tasks at an appropriate level, gradually increasing the level and complexity of work over time, with 51% of respondents agreeing to a great extent.
- 79% of respondents agreed that their supervisor(s) set realistic timescales for work to be completed and answer questions as they arose, with 53% of respondents agreeing to a great extent.
- 78% of respondents agreed that they worked within a supportive environment that does not deter them from asking questions, admitting mistakes, or acknowledging uncertainty, with 60% of respondents agreeing to a great extent.
- 61% of respondents agreed that their supervisor(s) monitor(s) their workload to ensure that they have sufficient but not an excessive workload, with 32% agreeing to a great extent. 29% of respondents disagreed with this statement.
- 82% of respondents agreed that their supervisor(s) provide(s) them with a range of tasks that, as a whole, demand the use of a broad range of skills, with 53% of respondents agreeing to a great extent.
- 88% of respondents agreed that their supervisor(s) provided an environment that encouraged them to take responsibility for their own development, with 63% agreeing to a great extent.
- 72% of respondents agreed that their supervisor(s) provided clear instructions and ensured that they are understood, 39% agreeing to a great extent.
- 60% of respondents agreed that their supervisor(s) gave regular feedback, outwith the normal review structure, regarding their performance, recognising achievements and improvements and constructively addressing areas that require further effort, with 34% agreeing to a great extent. 28% of respondents disagreed with this statement.

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	Disagree – not at all	Disagree to some extent	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree to some extent	Agree to a great extent	PNTA
My supervisor(s) has/have allocated work and tasks at an appropriate level, gradually increasing the level and complexity of work over time	4.36%	13.37%	2.62%	28.49%	50.87%	0.29%
	15	46	9	98	175	1
My supervisor(s) set realistic timescales for work to be completed and answer questions as they arise	6.40%	9.88%	4.65%	26.16%	52.91%	0.00%
	22	34	16	90	182	0
I work within a supportive environment that does not deter me from asking questions, admitting mistakes, or acknowledging uncertainty	5.81%	9.01%	6.10%	18.02%	60.17%	0.87%
	20	31	21	62	207	3
My supervisor(s) monitor(s) my workload to ensure that I have sufficient but not an excessive workload	11.92%	17.15%	8.72%	28.78%	32.27%	1.16%
	41	59	30	99	111	4
My supervisor(s) provide(s) me with a range of tasks that, as a whole, demand the use of a broad range of skills	2.33%	8.14%	6.40%	28.78%	52.91%	1.45%
	8	28	22	99	182	5
My supervisor(s) provide(s) an environment that encourages me to take responsibility for my own development	1.16%	3.49%	4.65%	25.87%	62.50%	2.33%
	4	12	16	89	215	8
My supervisor(s) provide(s) clear instructions and ensure that they are understood	4.94%	13.95%	8.14%	34.01%	38.37%	0.58%
	17	48	28	117	132	2
My supervisor(s) give(s) me regular feedback, outwith the normal review structure, regarding my performance, recognising achievements and improvements and constructively addressing areas that require further effort	11.34%	17.15%	10.47%	26.16%	34.01%	0.87%
	39	59	36	90	117	3

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Approximately how often between quarterly reviews do you discuss development with your supervisor(s)?

346 respondents answered this question, while 38 respondents skipped it. Almost one-half of respondents (47%) indicated that they waited until their reviews to discuss development with their supervisor.

Answer Options	Responses	
At least once a week	18.21%	63
Fortnightly	13.87%	48
Monthly	17.05%	59
We tend to wait until reviews	47.11%	163
Prefer not to answer	3.76%	13

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TRAINEESHIPS FUNDED BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT TRAINEESHIP FUND

All respondents were asked if their traineeship was funded by the Scottish Government Legal Aid Traineeship Fund. 345 respondents answered this question, while 39 respondents skipped it¹.

6% of respondents who answered this question indicated that their traineeship was funded by the Scottish Government Legal Aid Traineeship Fund (19 respondents) while 94% or 326 respondents indicated that it was not.

As not all traineeships funded by this Fund had commenced at the launch of the survey, it is estimated that the response rate from Scottish Government Legal Aid Traineeship Fund trainees was about 50%. This is a good response rate and will provide a solid basis for understanding and evaluating the experience of these trainee solicitors.

Answer Options	Responses	
	Yes	5.51%
No	94.49%	326
Prefer not to answer	0.00%	0

¹ If answered, this question was a filter for the following questions relating to traineeships funded by the Scottish Government Legal Aid Traineeship Fund. If a respondent skipped this question, they would be asked the following questions as the routing in the survey could not take effect.

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Do you have any thoughts on the application process for the traineeships?

Nine respondents answered this question. Three respondents answered 'no'.

A selection of the comments made by respondents is included below.

Five respondents made positive comments such as:

- *'the application process was 'fair' and*
- *'It was helpful having it as the one application form for each firm. It ensured that the applications could be streamlined and you knew how long each one would take.'*

One respondent suggested that there should be more checks of practice units who apply for funding *'in terms of their workload, staff members and facilities they have for ensuring they meet the law society standards'*.

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If the traineeship were to be repeated, is there anything that the Society and the Scottish Government could do to improve the process?

Nine respondents answered this question. A selection of the survey responses has been included to protect the identify of respondents. For ease we have removed 'No', 'N/A' and 'nothing comes to mind' type responses.

Positive about the scheme

- *I think it was a fair application process*

Negative about the scheme

- *Increase the minimum pay to reflect the education/ education debts/ the pressurised environment and future low earnings*
- *Do not give award it to firms who are in a bad financial position. This "scheme" has opened the flood gates for exploitation and abuse of power of those who are starting their career. There should be a serious vetting process and established rules of trainees doing more than one person's job, unsupervised and in terrible working conditions.*
- *Have stricter support mechanisms in place to make sure the firm is supporting the development of the successful applicant and this is not an opportunity for free labour that is funded the Scottish government. I receive next to no support in the firm I'm in.*
- *Not advertise us as cheap labour*

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Are you getting exposure to legal aid work?

18 respondents answered this question, while 366 respondents skipped it. Respondents were able to select all answer options that applied.

67% of responses were for criminal legal aid, with 44% for civil legal aid and 33% for children's legal aid. One respondent advised that they had no exposure to legal aid work.

Answer Options	Responses	
	Yes – criminal legal aid	66.67%
Yes – civil legal aid	44.44%	8
Yes – children's legal aid	33.33%	6

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Approximately, what percentage of your work overall is legally aided?

16 respondents answered this question, while 368 respondents skipped it. Three-quarters of respondents who answered this question advised that at least 80% of their work overall is legally aided. All the respondents advised that at least 60% of their work was legally aided.

Answer options	Responses	
80% to 100%	75.00%	12
60% to 80%	25.00%	4
40% to 60%	0.00%	0
20% to 40%	0.00%	0
Lower than 20%	0.00%	0
Unsure	0.00%	0

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Is there a plan for you to gain exposure to legal aid work in the near future?

The survey responses suggest that anyone who has not yet been exposed to legal aid work has a plan to gain that exposure in the near future. As the numbers relating to this question were low, further details have not been provided to protect the identity of any respondents who answered this question.

Which other areas of law are you getting exposure to (if any)?

10 respondents answered this question, while 374 respondents skipped it.

The following answers were given:

- Civil, criminal and employment
- Civil
- Mental health, capacity, medical law,
- Criminal, civil, family, children's, mental health, executry
- Children's Hearings, some Civil law and private practice
- Criminal and Public Law
- Immigration and asylum
- None
- Criminal and Children's

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To what extent do you think you are undertaking work that is appropriate for a trainee solicitor?

All respondents were asked to what extent they think the work they were undertaking was appropriate for a trainee solicitor. 341 respondents answered this question, while 43 respondents skipped it².

91% of respondents (310) who answered this question said that the work they were undertaking was either always appropriate (33%) or mostly appropriate (58%).

9% of respondents (29) said that the work they were undertaking was mostly inappropriate or never appropriate. 12 respondents selected the 'unsure' answer option, and two respondents selected the 'prefer not to answer' option.

We do not have any detail on why a respondent believed that some or all elements of the work were inappropriate, only that they were.

Answer Options	Responses	
	Always appropriate	33.14%
Mostly appropriate	57.77%	197
Mostly inappropriate	7.92%	27
Never appropriate	0.59%	2
Unsure	3.52%	12
Prefer not to answer	0.59%	2

² If answered, this question was a filter for the next question. Respondents who selected 'mostly appropriate', 'mostly inappropriate', or 'never appropriate' were asked what percentage of the work should not be undertaken by a trainee solicitor. If a respondent skipped this question, they would be asked the next question as the routing in the survey could not take effect.

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Approximately what percentage of your work do you feel is work that should not be undertaken by a trainee solicitor?

217 respondents answered this question, while 167 respondents skipped it. 37% of respondents who answered this question said that less than 10% of their work should not be undertaken by a trainee solicitor.

One-third of respondents said that between 10% and 30% of their work should not be undertaken by a trainee solicitor.

One in four respondents who answered this question said that at least 30% of their work should not be undertaken by a trainee solicitor (56 respondents/26%).

Answer options	Responses	
	Less than 10%	37.33%
10% to 30%	32.72%	71
30% to 50%	12.90%	28
More than 50%	12.90%	28
Unsure	4.15%	9
Prefer not to answer	0.59%	2

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EARLY ADMISSION

A trainee solicitor is eligible to be admitted after three months of a traineeship, subject to certain requirements. Have you been admitted and now hold a restricted practising certificate?

Early admission to the roll of solicitors for trainee solicitors after three months of a training contract was introduced by the Society via regulations which came into force on 1 November 2019. Therefore, all trainee solicitors were potentially able to apply for early admission if they met the requirements.

338 respondents answered this question, while 46 respondents skipped it.³

Three out of ten respondents answered that they were admitted early and now hold a restricted practising certificate. Four out of ten respondents answered that they had not been admitted but they are eligible for early admission.

Answer Options	Responses	
Yes	30.47%	103
No, but I am eligible to be admitted	40.24%	136
No as I am not yet eligible to be admitted	29.29%	99

³ If answered, this question was a filter for the following questions. If a respondent skipped this question, they would be asked the following questions as the routing in the survey could not take effect.

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When were you admitted?

This question follows the previous question on early admission. 103 respondents answered this question, while 281 respondents skipped it. One-half of respondents who answered this question said that they were admitted after 12 months or later. The next most popular answer option was 'after 3 months' which 18% of respondents selected.

Answer options	Responses	
After 3 months	18.45%	19
After 4 months	6.80%	7
After 5 months	7.77%	8
After 6 months	5.83%	6
After 7 months	1.94%	2
After 8 months	1.94%	2
After 9 months	3.88%	4
After 10 months	1.94%	2
After 11 months	1.94%	2
After 12 months or later	49.51%	51

For reference:

- In calendar year 2020, there were 44 early admissions and 408 after 12 months (9.7% early)
- In calendar year 2021, there were 84 early admissions and 522 after 12 months (13.8% early)
- In calendar year 2022 to end of October, there were 95 early admissions and 483 after 12 months (19.6% early)

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Have you appeared in a court where you were required to hold a restricted practising certificate?

This question follows the previous question on early admission. 104 respondents answered this question, while 280 respondents skipped it.⁴

72% of respondents who answered this question advised that they have appeared in court where they were required to hold a restricted practising certificate.

Answer options	Responses	
Yes	72.12%	75
No	26.92%	28
Prefer not to say	0.96%	1

This suggests that there are a significant minority of trainees who have been admitted and hold a restricted practising certificate who had not, at the time of the survey, appeared in a court where a practising certificate is required.

⁴ The number of respondents who answered this question (104) is higher than the number of respondents who answered 'yes' to the question on whether they have been admitted and now hold a restricted practising certificate (103). The additional respondent did not answer the filter question and therefore was asked this question by default as the routing could not take effect.

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When during the traineeship did you first appear in court where you were required to hold a restricted practising certificate?

75 respondents answered this question, while 309 respondents skipped it.

43% of respondents who answered this question advised that they first appeared in court where they required to hold a restricted practising certificate after 12 months or later in their traineeship. 19% of respondents said that they first appeared in court where they required to hold a restricted practising certificate after three months.

Answer options	Responses	
After 3 months	18.67%	14
After 4 months	13.33%	10
After 5 months	9.33%	7
After 6 months	6.67%	5
After 7 months	1.33%	1
After 8 months	1.33%	1
After 9 months	1.33%	1
After 10 months	1.33%	1
After 11 months	4.00%	3
After 12 months	42.67%	32

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Since beginning to undertake court work where you need to hold a restricted practising certificate, to what extent do you agree with the following statement?

My supervising solicitor(s) has/have supported me well in my court appearance

75 respondents answered this question, while 309 respondents skipped it. 75% of respondents who answered this question agreed either to some extent or agreed to a great extent that their supervising solicitor(s) had supported them well in their court appearance. However, 21% of respondents disagreed either to some extent or to a great extent that their supervising solicitor(s) had supported them well in their court appearance.

Disagree – not at all	Disagree to some extent	Neither agree or disagree	Agree to some extent	Agree – to a great extent	Prefer not to answer
8.00%	13.33%	4.00%	29.33%	45.33%	0.00%
6	10	3	22	34	0

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Have you represented clients in courts or tribunals that do not require admission or a restricted practising certificate to appear?

308 respondents answered this question, while 76 respondents skipped it. 82% of respondents who answered this question noted that they had not represented clients in courts or tribunals where they did not require admission or a restricted practising certificate to appear.

Answer Options	Responses	
Yes	17.53%	54
No	82.47%	254
Prefer not to answer	0%	0

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Noting that the traineeship requires trainee solicitors to take on new tasks and that some of these will naturally be challenging, to what extent do you agree with the following statement?

My supervising solicitor(s) has/have only allocated me court work that I am ready and competent to undertake

296 respondents answered this question, while 88 respondents skipped it. 45% of respondents who answered this question agreed that their supervising solicitor(s) has or have only allocated work to them that they were ready and competent to undertake.

15% of respondents disagreed that their supervising solicitor(s) has or have only allocated work to them that they were ready and competent to undertake.

Disagree – not at all	Disagree to some extent	Neither agree or disagree	Agree to some extent	Agree – to a great extent	Prefer not to answer
8.78%	6.42%	19.26%	13.18%	32.09%	20.27%
26	19	57	39	95	60

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The training manager guidance states that it is of fundamental importance that trainee solicitors – particularly those admitted early – are only allocated work that they are ready and competent to undertake.

Please use the free text box below to outline your thoughts on the work and/or court appearances that you have been asked to undertake, how prepared you felt, what (if anything) would have helped you feel more prepared, what support (if any) might have been useful and any thoughts you have on the appropriate level of the work allocated to you etc.

We received 106 comments in response to this question. We reviewed the responses by theme and have included a selection of those responses below to show the breadth of what we were told. We have taken care to ensure that the anonymity of respondents and others is protected and therefore we may have only included part of a comment provided. Respondents' typographical errors have also been corrected.

23 respondents answered with 'N/A' or noted that they have not 'undertaken any court work.'

Positive responses

34 respondents answered this question broadly positively. Many of the responses were similar but some examples included praising their supervisor:

- *'My supervisor has provided me with a wide-range of work and is very supportive' and*
- *'I have been thoroughly supported in the court work I have been allocated, only when I felt I was ready did I appear in court.'*

Other responses noted good practice:

- *'clear explanations of work. Clear feedback after completing work to develop' and*
- *'my boss has ensured that I have full instructions for any court work, always provides me with feedback from other solicitors and is always able to answer any questions I have.'*

One respondent noted *'I have not yet appeared in court as my supervisors wants to ensure I had adequate training before doing so.'*

Another respondent who has been in court noted: *'I increasingly been given more complex court work as time progresses. My training manager has supported me throughout and has provided adequate training for the level of hearings.'*

Another respondent noted that the *'use of technology is good to save time and money travelling. I think it should be utilised more for non-evidential hearings.'*

Mixed responses

12 responses were mixed:

- *'an appropriate level of work allocated to me and my supervising solicitor never tries to throw me under the bus by giving me work I am not prepared for.'*

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- *'I am very happy with my court work and appearances. However, there have been times when I have felt unprepared as my supervisor has given me a client on the same day and I am not aware of the case at all.'*
- *'I have felt prepared; however, I feel that mock court training would have assisted me in feeling more prepared.'*

Negative responses

There were 37 responses which were negative with references to substandard preparation, including lack of preparation, or being given too much responsibility too soon. Some respondents noted that they had been given high-level or complex work relatively early:

- *'I have been allocated files in my own name since I started my traineeship. I had very little guidance from my supervisor. I had to learn whilst acting for clients and my work was rarely supervised.'*
- *'Since my first day I have been given appointments with clients and asked to take them on etc, provide advice and make-up files with no guidance except when I specifically ask. When I do ask, for fear of making a mistake with what is important work, I am often given short shrift.'*
- *'I have been asked to undertake complex work with zero experience.'*

Another respondent raised the issue of supervision: *'there is no question of competency, things are passed over with very minimal supervision or feedback.'*

Other respondents raised concerns about the style of training:

- *'my training has taken the form of learning on the job and learning from mistakes rather than being shown how to carry out a task.'*
- *'I feel my traineeship lacks structure and has not been addressed when I have discussed it with colleagues.'*

Another noted they were not *'supported before or after'* court appearances.

Two respondents raised the issue of early admission:

- *'trainees should not be allowed to appear in court after 3 months. Frequently appeared in hearings at the start of court appearance without a full understanding of court procedure and options available for next steps.'*
- One respondent suggested greater levels of regulation: *'I do not feel 20 hours of sitting in and an online non-interactive advocacy course prepares you for court work.'*
- Another respondent suggested that there should be *'advocacy training from the Law Society'*.

Another respondent commented that *'It's unfortunate that in person hearings are still impacted. It ruins the training process.'*

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Please use this final free text box to outline any other thoughts, comments or concerns you have; to outline anything you think your training manager or supervising solicitor(s) could improve; or anything the Society could do to improve the overall training experience.

We received 119 comments in response to this question. We reviewed the responses by theme and have included a selection of those responses below to show the breadth of what we were told. We have taken care to ensure that the anonymity of respondents and others is protected and therefore we may have only included part of a comment provided. Where possible, we have given an indication of the number of respondents who commented on a particular topic. Some respondents commented on more than one topic in their answers. Respondents' typographical errors have been corrected.

Positive (7 comments)

Some respondents highlighted positive experiences:

- *'I have had a really positive and supportive traineeship so far. I have weekly check-ins with my supervisor where we discuss my workload and any priorities I have for my career development'*
- *'I feel very supported and comfortable in my work environment'*
- *'I am given the freedom to complete tasks on my own, but I always have the safety net of someone to speak to should I be stuck, and the confidence that all of my work is reviewed thoroughly before being actioned.'*

Some of the respondents noted challenges:

- *'the cost of living far exceeds the amount given by the Law Society recommended rate... My training experience would be improved if I could attend in person more often, but I cannot afford the transport to do so or to live in the city.'*
- *'with the rising cost of living...I think traineeship salaries should be increased to reflect the current economic situation and to support us whilst we train...I worry about money a lot due to rising costs of heating and energy. I think the Law Society should do more to encourage law firms to pay their trainees more to reflect the responsibilities and the work that we carry out in the firm.'*

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Training managers (44 comments)

A large number of comments related to training managers. These broadly split into three main topics: greater support for training managers; issues with training managers; and calls for greater regulation of training managers. Some of these themes have been raised in other comments focused on other areas.

Greater support for training managers

There were a number of comments calling for additional support including:

- *'I believe there should also be training on how to mentor a trainee as I do not feel my manager has any idea or actually wishes to be the supervising solicitor.'*
- *'There needs to be an industry set standard by the Law Society as to what is expected and for training managers to follow this.'*
- *'More guidance given to training managers about what to do with a trainee... particularly...firms that have never had a trainee before would especially benefit from being told how to manage a trainee, how to give good/constructive feedback.'*

Significant issues with training managers

Some respondents provided additional details about the issues they thought they faced with training:

- *'Every day it's been negative feedback and general belittling comments without constructive feedback...Support in the firm is a clear issue... I am seriously considering leaving the profession' if this continues.*
- *'I have not been supported at all throughout my traineeship... I have been left to my own workload throughout with limited or no supervision.'*
- *'Work coming from multiple partners and senior associates, no overview of my workload.'*
- *'My supervisor generally ignores me. They have never provided feedback or checked my work.'*
- One respondent noted they had assigned their traineeship due to the *'bullying [behaviour] by a senior figure.'* They noted that others were *'terrified to the extent we fear the person coming into the office. Every other senior figure was fine and supportive. My life was made a misery and the traineeship unsustainable.'*
- This issue of differing approaches was raised by another respondent who commented that *'other solicitors ... have given me challenging and engaging work that has stimulated my development, my training supervisor has given me no guidance or work that has helped me to develop.'*
- One respondent commented the criteria for the traineeship fund should be changed to ensure more focus on training plans and management: *'firms who apply for the traineeship fund should be checked in terms of their workload, staff members and facilities. It should be made very clear what the firm is to fund...I was left for over eight hours a day with no supervision. This had caused me significant stress.'*

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- *'I have really enjoyed and felt supported in three out of four of my seats. In [one] seat I felt that communication was very poor, which led to me being overburdened with work and not being checked in on.'*

Concerns about fitness to practise of supervising solicitors were raised, with comments including:

- *'I don't think my supervising solicitor is fit to be a solicitor...I only got to learn about ...lack of fitness for practice once training started... I'm trying to find another firm, but in the meantime I am exposed to a lot of risk and suffering from poor mental health... I think the profession as a whole needs to have a discussion about how it wants to manage training in the best way for everyone involved.'*

Greater regulation of training managers

A common theme raised by respondents was that greater regulation is necessary, with comments including:

- *'the Society should be more active in its monitoring of supervising solicitors, ensuring that they have a plan in place for the training and that there is regular monitoring of the implementation of that plan.'*
- *'the Society should monitor supervising solicitors regularly, to ensure they are suitable to be in that role.'*
- *'the Society could do more to regulate the traineeship and provide a more structured learning experience rather than leaving it to law firms'*
- *'supervision of training managers by the Law Society is absolutely necessary.'*
- One respondent linked this topic to remuneration and noted that *'the Law Society could certainly improve by not advertising us as cheap labour. As trainees we are carrying out exactly the same amount of work as solicitors...The Law Society should be making regular checks on trainees and how they are being "trained"...The Law Society must take responsibility for the poor mental health many trainees are suffering.'*
- *'The Law Society should carry out an audit of the training carried out by training managers in smaller firms.'*
- *'The Law Society should be doing more to ensure support is provided to those people actually doing the training in the firm and provide some sort of timeline for attainment. Additionally, I believe the Law Society should do more to ensure training managers are fit in their appointed role'*

How training managers can improve

As well as the comments noted elsewhere in this report relating to how training managers can improve, specific comments focused on several key suggestions:

Many respondents focused on the need for more feedback:

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- *'Training managers should be encouraged to give feedback and spend time with their trainees'*
- *'More feedback on tasks carried out'*
- *'Progress reports every so often would be helpful'*

Another common theme raised by respondents was a greater understanding and supervision of workloads:

- *'More structure and involvement around what I am doing and not doing on a daily basis – regular discussions about work load... Most importantly - communication as there's not a lot.'*
- *I 'would like more regular feedback and supervision of my workload'*
- *'I would have really benefitted from having more increased communication with my supervising solicitors as sometimes I did feel like I was forgotten about.'*
- *'My training manager is a bit too hands off. I also feel that I am left to my own devices a lot without clear workplans.'*

Other respondents noted that supervisors could *'have more involvement in training trainees and encourage training and development'*.

As well as feedback and supervision, several respondents commented that access to opportunities was key:

- *'Because of the ease of online court appearances, other solicitors are less inclined to ask me to attend to observe them'*
- *'More support and shadowing!'*

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Remuneration (22 comments)

Many responses related to the topic of remuneration.

Some respondents commented on this topic alongside other themes noted elsewhere in this section of the report. Other respondents focused on this matter, with comments including:

- *'Every single graduate of other disciplines I know pays several thousand pounds more than the recommended trainee rates. Trainee solicitors going to larger corporate firms are paid higher than the recommended rate and this is disheartening to those of us who want to work in fields like criminal legal aid.'*
- *The 'recommended rates of trainee pay are ridiculously low' and that after 'five years of university and the bare minimum wage is not fair or reasonable.'*
- *'The Law Society recommended salary for trainees is alarmingly low'*
- *'I do not think the minimum trainee salary reflects the amount of work undertaken.'*
- *'the salary does not begin to meet the cost of living and the stress of the job added to the financial debt I am increasingly incurring has forced me to consider whether I can continue in my current role.'*
- One respondent commented that the first year recommended salary at the time of the survey of *'£19,500 not liveable...Trainees from a background without financial support from family have no chance. The diploma is grossly overpriced and the Law Society continue to allow the tuition to rise.'* This respondent noted they were applying for second jobs to try to match the cost of living.
- *'Underpaid and overworked...I believe the Society should review the recommended salary for trainees as more and more of us are working longer hours for less pay due to inflation.'*

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Being allocated work that is too complex or being allocated too much work (15 comments)

Work allocation was commented upon by respondents. Some respondents noted their workload was too high and too complex and there is a requirement to work long hours, with comments including:

- *'I have been asked to conduct a proof and I do not feel ready.'*
- *'the Society should give very clear guidance to firms/supervising solicitors about the workload appropriate for a trainee.'* The respondent commented that each trainee is different but noted *'I do not believe that any trainee should be given the amount and type of work that I am'*.
- *'Trainee working hours in large commercial firms are very extreme. Often trainees work 12-14 hour days and weekends as required.'*
- *'Though things come up, you should be able to squeeze in exercise each day, take your weekends to rest, and feel comfortable switching off completely during annual leave.'*
- *'I have found younger solicitors ... feel pressured to stay late or have their work emails on personal phones due to what their supervisor does or the general work environment.'*
- *'I feel like I can't tell them that I sometimes feel like I am drowning. Even if I did, I feel like my supervisor would just keep piling more on top anyway, or make me feel like I'm crap at my job for saying I'm struggling.'*

One respondent considered the difference between *'the role of a trainee vs a qualified solicitor. Right now, we work to the same standard and with the same quantity of work as the solicitors who are qualified at our firm. Also there has been an expectation that we will apply for the RPC, and no question about whether we are ready to have it and feel capable of the additional work and responsibilities it brings.'*

Being allocated too low a level of work (11 comments)

A number of respondents commented that the level of work that was being allocated to them was, in their view, not at the level of a trainee solicitor, with comments including:

- *'I have found that a lot of the work allocated to me is administrative.'*
- *'A significant proportion of my job as a trainee solicitor is administration, which I do not think prepares me for the role of a solicitor.'* They did note that *'small amounts'* of administration were *'necessary'*.

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- *'The AML burden is very heavy and often falls to trainees. This is very off-putting and not what I wanted to do as a trainee.'*
- *'More legal work and less financial work.'*
- Concerns were raised that this type of work *'doesn't set you up for progressing to an NQ role'*
- *'This results in a lack of practical legal experience due to time being taken up by work which is not beneficial and often not related to legal activities.'*

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Commentary on Society processes (11 Responses)

There were numerous comments about the Society's processes. These have been broken down to aid focus and understanding.

Duplication of effort

Three trainees raised issues with duplication of effort:

- *'In my opinion, [the PQPR system] creates an unnecessary burden when a trainee is busy and is viewed as an administrative tick box exercise.'*
- *'In larger law firms, there is significant duplication of training monitoring between internal records and Law Society records.'*
- *'More clarity on PEAT 2 submissions which have no bearing on some sectors of work, or a tailored PEAT 2 interface would be preferable.'*

PQPRs

Some respondents made comments that related to the above section but were specifically about the PQPRs:

- *'The trainee section for logging activities on the Law Society website could be improved and would probably mean more people would be able to take the time to do so.'*
- *'More examples of PEAT 2 could be provided as a guide by the LSS, or they could be accepted as a lower word count. Most people have an extended workload and an application level wordcount every three months can be difficult to fit in if workload is unforgiving.'*
- *'The current PQPR system, generally, has a good and solid base... but I fear is hopelessly unable to keep up with the realities of the traineeship quarter to quarter.'* This respondent noted that over time it *'becomes a box ticking exercise'* and that *'this part of the review process should be reconsidered'*

TCPD

Some respondents raised concerns about TCPD including:

- *'I struggle to organise attendance at the required CPD hours. I feel there should be either fewer hours or more onus on training managers to ensure trainees get time for CPD.'*
- Another respondent noted that, in related to TCPD, there is *'not enough of it, too expensive. A lack of free authorised areas available. 60 hours seems excessive. To the extent that it has disrupted my traineeship.'*
- *'the Law Society could do more in the way of preparing trainees for Court appearances. Many law firms require their trainees to pay for CPD themselves, which on the minimum recommended salary is very difficult. Perhaps the Law Society could run specific CPD for trainees on areas such as Options Hearings and Case Management Discussions at a price which is low enough for self-funding trainees to pay.'*
- *'I strongly believe the Society should do more by way of free events for trainees to meet and discuss their experiences.'*
- *'I found knowing what counted as Authorised TPCD and what did not was not well explained.'*

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Other Society, including communications (8 comments)

Some respondents focused on other topics relating to the Society, including communications:

- *'more guidance in reminder emails as to what the next steps are for trainees to be properly registered with the Law Society'*
- *'a clearer process on applying for admission as a solicitor once the traineeship is complete.'*
- *'Due to the pandemic our year group missed out on some vital information about applying for [an] entrance certificate. I found this to be most confusing part and was actually quite stressful.'*
- One respondent suggested that the Society could develop *'forum pages or help where we could ask anonymous questions to other trainees, NQs or even solicitors which monitor and provide professional answers could assist'*. This respondent also noted that *'training managers require more guidance and perhaps someone to regulate this. I understand this could be difficult. But trainees well-being should also be of importance. There should be more regular check ins from the Law Society to trainees.'*

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Issues relating to physical health, mental health and wellbeing (11 responses)

Some respondents noted the impact on their physical health, mental health and wellbeing and the stresses and pressures of traineeships:

- An individual was previously employed by a firm which *'was essentially a puppy training mill for trainees'*. They noted significant concerns about various practices within the firm, including allegations of bullying. The respondent also noted *'I was forced to apply for my early practising certificate exactly on 3 months, so that I could increase my fees. I felt totally not ready and pressured...I genuinely feared a professional complaint.'*
- *'the first few months of the traineeship were extremely isolating and stressful. It had an impact on my life outside of work and I was becoming physically unwell.'*
- *'My supervising solicitor gives me no support whatsoever and prefers to see me under pressure. I have ... referred for counselling by my GP as a result of the stress I am under at work.'*
- *'Overall I feel like I am being challenged and stimulated but I feel a lot of pressure. When I feel pressured or stressed I often tell myself I need to toughen up and that this is simply what is being a lawyer is but I'm not sure that is right or sustainable.'*
- One respondent noted that a return to the office had been *'infinitely better'* but commented that remote working was *'stressful and the lack of contact other people in a similar situation was really difficult for me'*.
- One respondent suggested a need for an improved focus on disability from training managers *'I think training managers could be encouraged to be a point of contact for disabled trainees so they only have to tell one person (if they want to) and the training manager could then pass on to supervisors if time needs to be taken for medical appointments.'*
- *'training managers require more guidance and perhaps someone to regulate this. I understand this could be difficult. But trainees well-being should also be of importance. There should be more regular check ins from the Law Society to trainees.'*

Wider sectoral issues (11 comments)

A number of respondents focused on wider structural issues within the profession. The comments received included:

- *'I work in a small criminal legal aid firm, a lot of the stress of my work comes from the pressure of business and low legal aid rates.'*
- *'Most of what I am describing is more likely attributed to the legal aid crisis and court backlog than anything else... I do not really feel that the law society represents my interests as a trainee criminal defence solicitor.'*

Respondents also noted concerns around the level of support they have received during their traineeships, including:

- *'the firm I work in has been going through a difficult time but I have felt unsupported, overworked and overwhelmed [throughout].'*
- *'I don't think there is much effective or useful support for trainees especially those working under sole practitioners. My own traineeship has been nothing short of what I feel is exploitation.'*

In this context, several respondents also commented on early admission. Differing views were put forward on this topic:

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- *'I think it early admission is great and I think 3 months is better than 1 year as you learn most by doing, however it should be emphasised that it is about learning and development rather than increasing profits.'*
- *The Society should 'not allow firms to admit trainees after 3 months. They are pressuring and forcing us into doing so for full legal aid rates.'*

The pressure in legal aid in particular led to suggestions going forward such as *'restrict the case load level trainees should be able to take on.'* Another suggestion, which was referred to in previous questions, noted that *'traineeship providers should be reviewed in the same way firms are reviewed regarding compliance'*.

Whilst commenting on wider issues, another respondent noted that *'I think the law society could assist by regulating traineeships and ensuring training managers are actually doing their job'*.

Several respondents commented on what more they would like the Society to do, including that they would *'like to see the law society speaking up more for the stress that those issues cause practitioners and the fact that young talent is driven out of some practice areas entirely'*.

Criticism of the DPLP (1 comment)

A respondent noted that *'the DPLP is not a useful development year... and it creates another barrier to entry to a profession which already suffers from significant barriers'*. The comment went on to note that the *'skills learnt during the Diploma could easily be integrated into 4 year honours curriculum'*.

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