



Covid-19 Survey of Pupils

March 2021

This survey, conducted amongst pupils (trainee barristers) was carried out to help us better understand the future sustainability of the profession, as well as the quality of the training and supervision being experienced by current pupils. The response rate was 221 (57% of all current pupils).

Summary Findings

Pupillage opportunities decreased by 35% in 2020 compared to 2019.¹ A total of 386 pupillages were registered in 2020, compared to 592 in 2019.²

Many chambers and pupil supervisors have gone to great lengths to give pupils the best training and supervision possible under the circumstances, and many pupils are very satisfied with their experience.

- Half of pupil respondents (50%) have been speaking with their pupil supervisor at least once a day, and most of the rest (27%) 2-3 times a week.
- 83% of pupils felt supported by their chambers.
- Only 11% of pupils were unhappy with their supervision.

The biggest challenges pupils told us they were currently facing included:

- Lack of networking opportunities (cited by 82%)
- Interruption to court work (cited by 55%)
- Lack of contact with pupil supervisors (cited by 51%)
- 23% of pupils are experiencing some financial hardship at present.

Respondents flagged up best practice in terms of their training and supervision:

- Daily contact with pupil supervisors, particularly when talking through cases.

¹ Bar Standards Board (February 2021) *Impact of Covid-19 on pupillage*
<https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/uploads/assets/3330b2d0-5190-434b-900a893947c33522/Pupillage-Covid19-impact-report-Feb-2021.pdf>

² Bar Standards Board (February 2021) *Impact of Covid-19 on pupillage*
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- Regular diarised work and social contact with other members of chambers including clerks or other barristers. Initiatives such as tea/coffee mornings, being included in chambers events and weekly meetings with junior members of chambers were helpful.
- As much exposure to court attendance/remote hearings as possible under the circumstances, and the opportunity to talk through cases/hearings afterwards.
- Participatory decision-making about their pupillage, including on issues such as remote working and court attendance.

Those pupils who did not feel a career at the Bar might be viable for them mainly cited reasons unrelated to the pandemic.

- **28%** said the work/life balance at the Bar might lead them to look elsewhere for work.
- **26%** said the remuneration was insufficient.
- However, **45%** of pupils felt that the pandemic was presenting a significant challenge to their wellbeing.

Significant differences between areas of practice and personal circumstances

- Perceived career viability between pupils varied depending on practice area; **100%** of those in family sets feel a career at the Bar is viable for them; compared to **96%** of pupils in commercial or chancery sets; **87%** of those in criminal sets; and **88%** of those in civil sets.
- There were also differences in the biggest challenges for pupils depending on practice area.
- While lack of networking opportunities was a common theme throughout all practice areas, **71%** of commercial pupils, **61%** of chancery pupils, and **60%** of general civil pupils said that a lack of contact with pupil supervisor(s) was also a challenge, compared to **41%** of those in crime sets, **39%** of mixed practice pupils, and **36%** of those in family sets.
- Many pupils are also juggling caring responsibilities and financial commitments. Some are trying to home educate. Most of our respondents (**73%**) were aged **25-34**. **6%** were primary carers for child(ren) under 18. Organising childcare was extremely difficult for a significant minority (**11%**) of respondents.