

Challenges, expectations and career prospects

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Introduction

This report presents findings on law student expectations of study and their careers, based on survey work undertaken in November and December 2018. The survey asked about the expectations and concerns of law students with respect to their careers, how their courses fulfilled their skill requirements and how they approach the job application process.

Executive summary

Respondents to this survey are excited by a career that challenges and offers variety; that will fulfill their personal aspirations and offer them career development, tempered by concerns about poor work-life balance and heavy workloads.

They see technology having a structural impact on the profession and changing the nature of job roles. However, they face some challenges acquiring technology related skills and at interview stage, questions about technology are the ones they feel most uncomfortable answering.

When it comes to the job application process, as well as looking for an employer that meets their personal requirements, an employer's ethos, culture and reputation are factored into student preferences. Prospective employers need to ensure that these intangible factors are conveyed to students while being physically remote from students. This may offer challenges for resourcing irrespective of a firm's size. There is a core group of students who have indicated that they wish to work in the region they are from, but may not necessarily be studying at an institution in that area. 60% of students in this survey indicate that they expect to work in London. The challenge for prospective employers is how they leverage digital channels, build relationships across institutions and ensure they reach these students.

Methodology and responses

We invited law students to participate in a quantitative online survey; 130 responded including 22 partial responses. The insights gained from this survey must be viewed with caution when drawing conclusions about the wider group.

Most respondents are aged 24 or below and studying for their first degree.

Respondent detail

Figure 1: Responses by age (#)

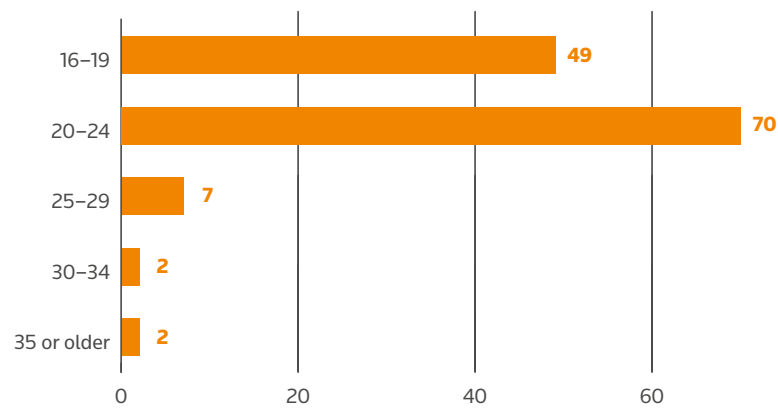


Figure 2: Responses by gender (#)

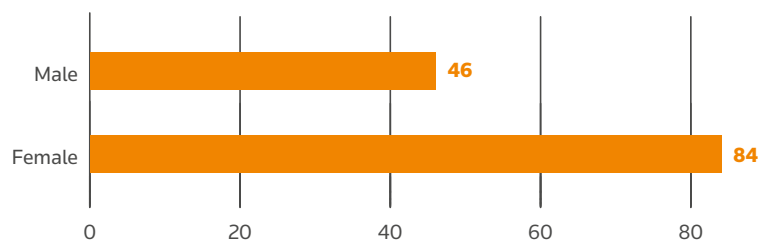


Figure 3: Responses by type of studying and gender (#)

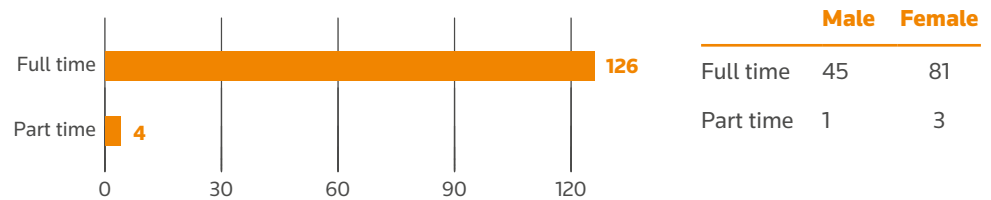
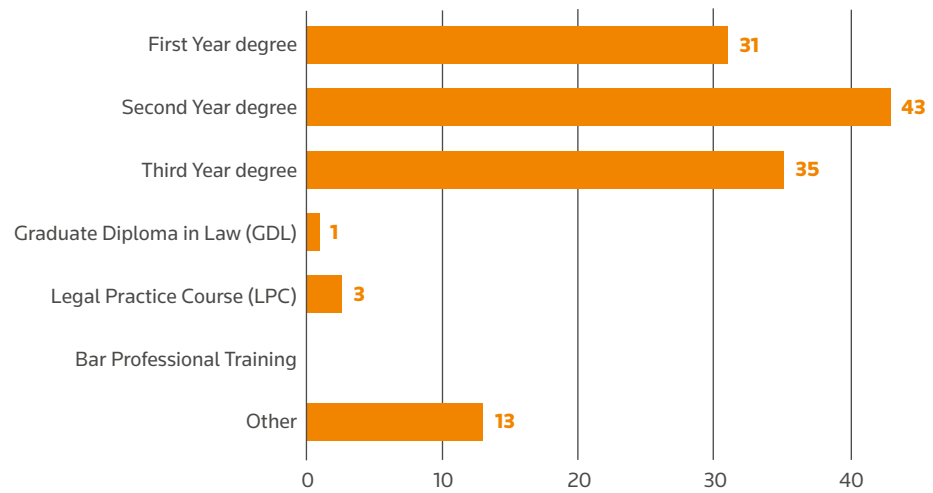


Figure 4: Responses by stage of study (#)**Figure 5: Responses by stage of study with other detail (#)**

Stage of study	Count
First Year degree	31
Second Year degree	43
Third Year degree	38
Fourth Year degree	1
Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL)	1
Legal Practice Course (LPC)	3
Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC)	0
Masters	5
PhD	3
Cilex	2
Post-graduate/Year abroad	2

First degree subjects being studied are mainly Law, and a few joint degrees; Law with French, International Relations and Law, Law with European Law, Law with German and German Law. Amongst those have obtained a first degree there is a mix of subjects studied, including degrees in Chemistry, Politics and Economics.

Career expectations

Preferred location

Respondents were asked about the region they were from and where they planned to work. In terms of the institution they had chosen to study at, only 11% of respondents had chosen to study in the region they are from, and the geographic location did not seem to play a role where they intended to get work, with only 6% choosing to study in the region where they intended to look for work.

Of those who had decided where they want to work 34% of respondents wish to have a career in the area they grew up in (23% when London is excluded). Overall 60% of respondents who have decided where they want to work, see their future career in London.

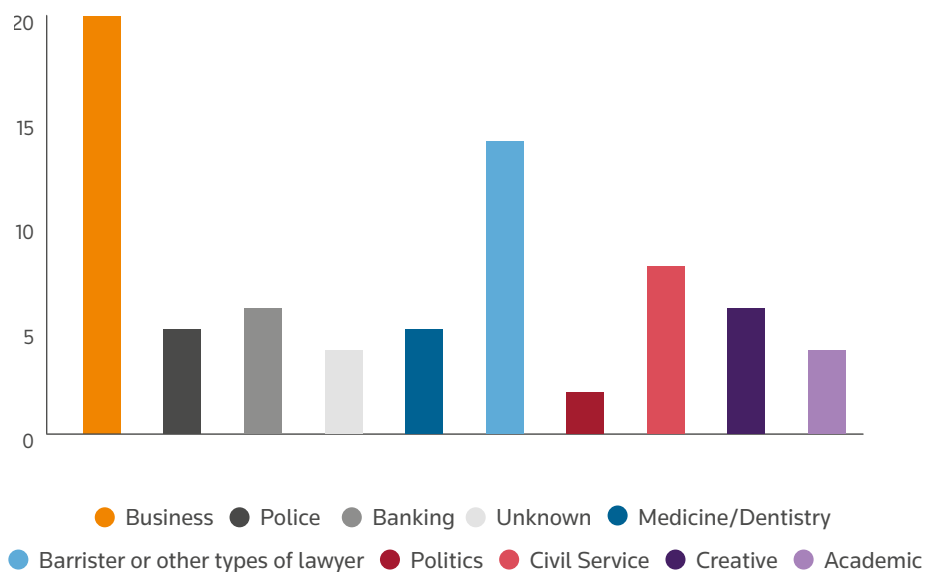
Alternative careers considered

76 respondents who were asked, indicated that they had considered working in other fields, ranging from roles in business, the police force as well as more creative areas.

Figure 6: Respondents who considered working in any other field (%)



Figure 7: Alternative career areas considered (#)

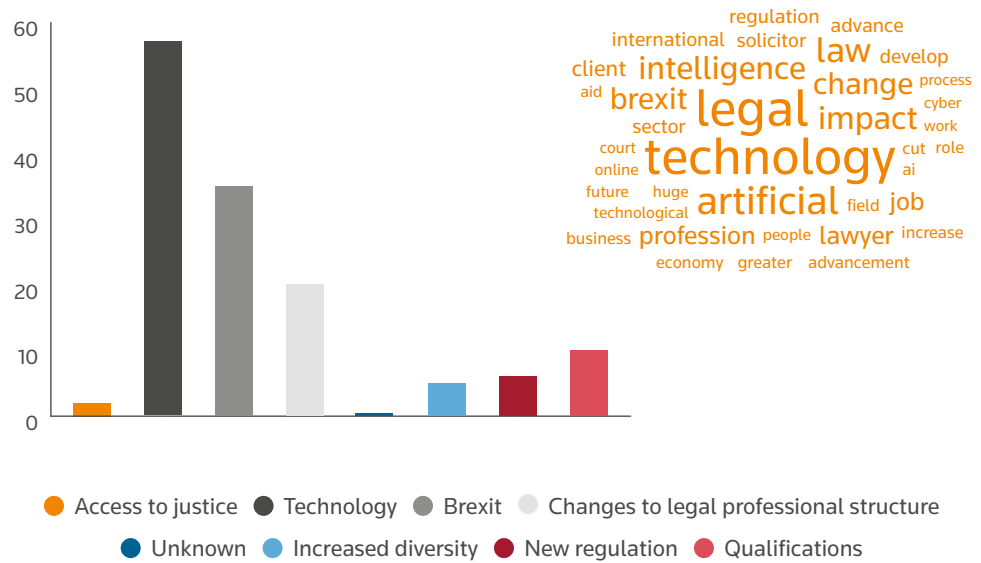


¹ Based on 100 responses

Expectations for the profession

Respondents were asked about changes they expected to see impacting the legal profession in the next 5–10 years. Changes in technology were the most cited, followed by Brexit, with respondents expecting changes in the structure of the market as well as to processes because of technology implementation.

Figure 8: Topic areas – expected changes impacting the legal profession in the next 5–10 years (#)



“ BREXIT! Tech, and the rise to keep pace with its evolving needs. ”

“ Blockchain. Mergers of firms resulting in a structure similar to the accountancy firm economy. ”

“ Most prevalent is the changes in Artificial Intelligence and the impact on the daily running of the legal industry, perhaps the redundancy of jobs due to technology being able to complete tasks such as scanning or reading through documents, jobs which may previously have been for lawyers to perform. ”

Preferred roles

Respondents were asked where they saw themselves following completion of their studies. The majority indicated they are intending to become solicitors with nearly a fifth still undecided.

Figure 9: What respondents plan to be (#)

What career do you see yourself in once your studies are completed?	Count
Solicitor	76
Barrister	10
Neither a solicitor or a barrister, but working within the legal profession:	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paralegal or legal aid worker • NGO • Legal scholar • University lecturer in Law • Chartered Legal Executive • Working in the legal department of a bank • At an international organisation 	
Working outside the legal profession in a legal capacity:	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Researcher • Legal adviser at Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Brunei • Legal adviser in NGO/IGO • Junior Lecturer 	
Working outside the legal profession in a non-legal capacity:	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplomat • Risk Management • Analyst • HR • Civil Service/Diplomacy • Supporting families with medical negligence claims 	
I haven't decided yet	24

Preferred practice areas

Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents who were asked, are interested in working in Commercial Transactions and Contracts, followed by Litigation/Dispute Resolution (22%) and Commercial Property (21%).

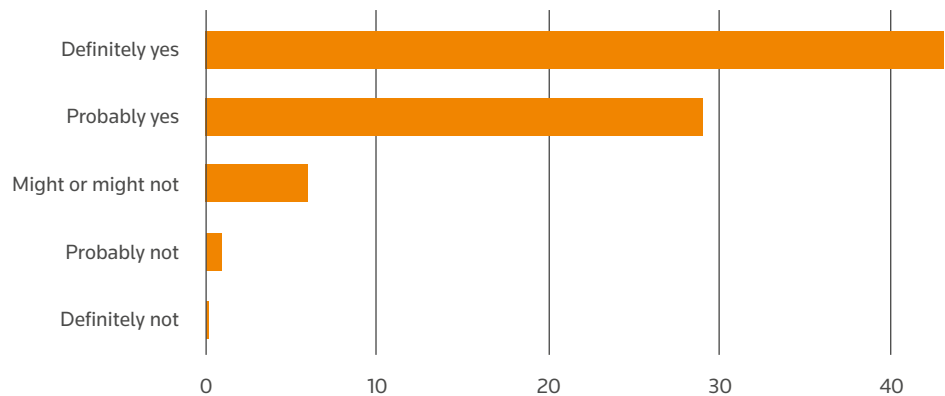
Figure 10: Areas respondents want to practice in (#, %)

	Count	Percentage of Respondents
Commercial Transactions & Contracts	26	24%
Litigation/Dispute Resolution	24	22%
Commercial Property	23	21%
Corporate/M&A	23	21%
Intellectual Property	18	17%
Banking & Finance	15	14%
Employment	14	13%
Family	14	13%
Personal Injury	9	8%
Private Client/Wills and Probate	9	8%
Projects, Energy and Natural Resources	8	7%
Public Law	8	7%
Crime	7	6%
Residential Property	7	6%
Other	7	6%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White collar crime • Sport • International Human Rights and Globalisation • Welfare • International Law • Cyber Security and Data Protection • Education 		
Restructuring & Insolvency	5	5%
Tax	5	5%
Immigration	4	4%
Competition	2	2%

Personal expectations

Of the respondents who are intending to have a career in the legal profession, 54% definitely expect and 33% probably expect a long-term future in it.

Figure 11: Do respondents expect a long term career within the legal profession (#)



Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements about their career, with respondents indicating that they expect to get a strong sense of personal achievement from their roles with work that is meaningful and will give them good opportunities for career development. The top 3 expectations are the same irrespective of whether the students were expecting a role as a barrister, solicitor, within the legal profession or outside it.

Expectations for job security and work life balance are not as high, and these concerns are reflected in their comments (see figure 15).

Figure 12: What Law students expect from a career (#)

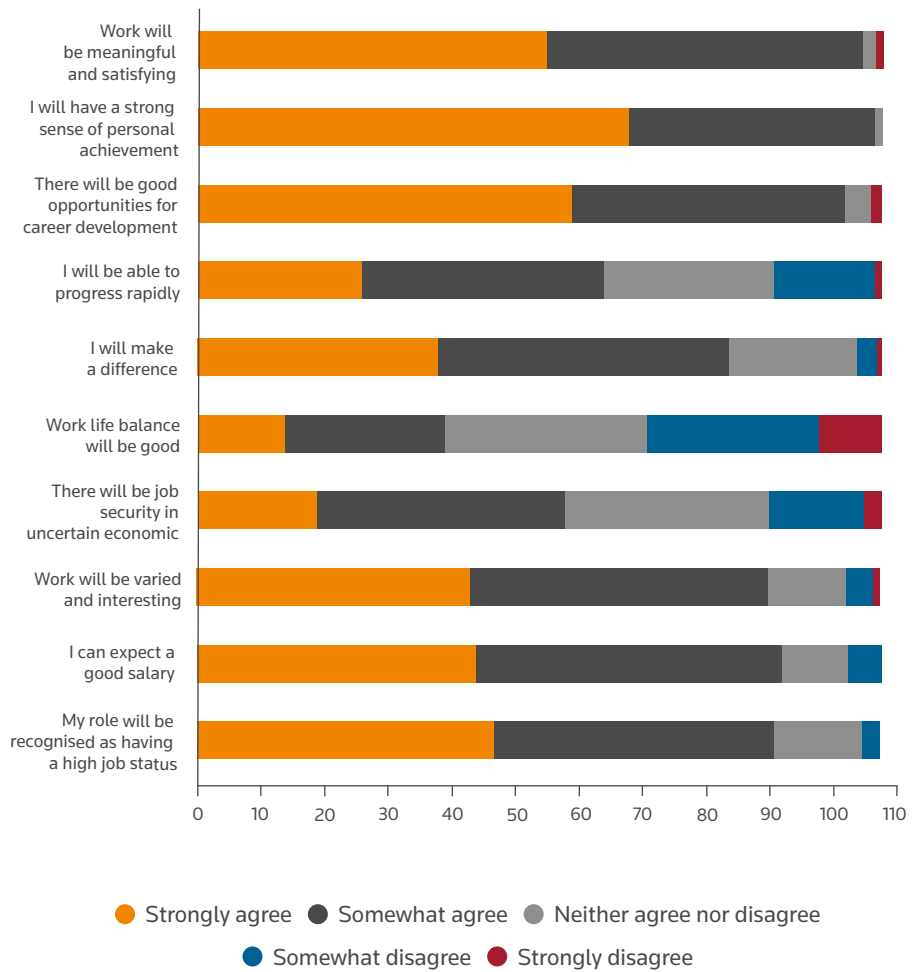
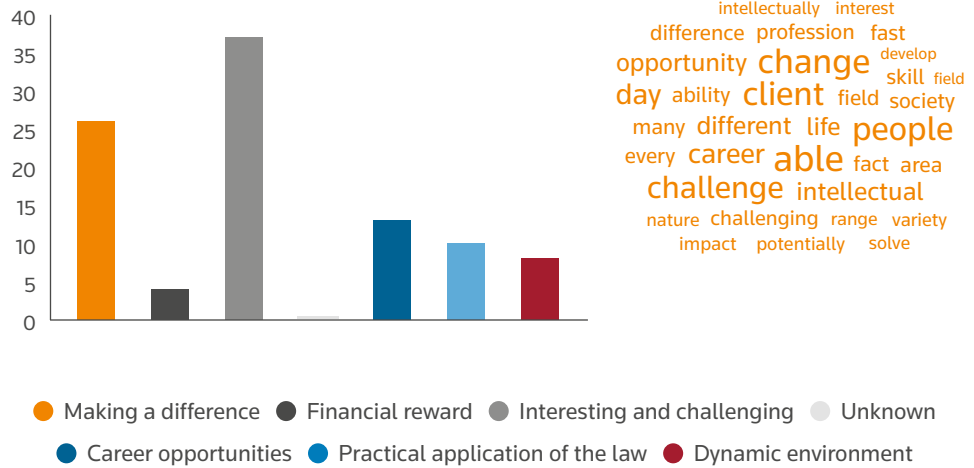


Figure 13: What Law students expect from a career – ranking

	Rank
I will have a strong sense of personal achievement	1
Work will be meaningful and satisfying	2
There will be good opportunities for career development	3
My role will be recognised as having a high job status	4
I can expect a good salary	5
Work will be varied and interesting	6
I will make a difference	7
I will be able to progress rapidly	8
There will be job security in uncertain economic times	9
Work life balance will be good	10

When asked about what excites them about a career in law, respondents expected that work would be interesting and varied and despite their lower expectations about whether their careers would offer them the ability to make a difference, a lot of comments were about this.

Figure 14: What excites students about pursuing a career in law? (#)



“

The challenging nature of the work, through the intense attention to detail it requires, the diverse range of clients it can attract, and the constantly shifting nature of the legal field.

”

“

Rapid changes within the legal profession through technology and AI, the profession is continuously adapting to the 21st century. This excited me because there will be challenges facing me every day not the same repetitive tasks.

”

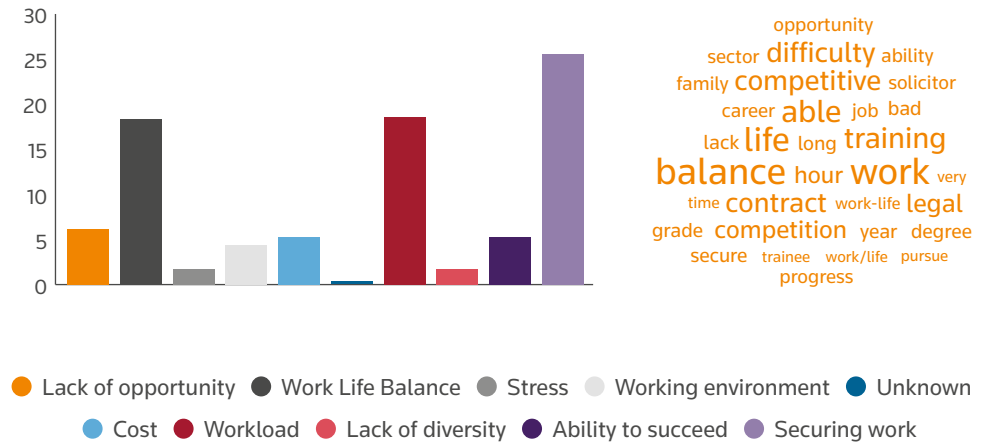
“

What excites me most is that, once qualified, I will have the ability to make such a change in people’s lives. Those that cannot help themselves or even those that want a guiding hand through what is potentially a monumentally difficult time in their lives, I will be able to help.

”

When asked about their main concerns, comments were about (the more immediate concern of) securing work in a competitive market place and heavy workloads and work life balance.

Figure 15: What are the main concerns about pursuing a career in law? (#)



“ I worry about, if working hard as a solicitor for a few years, the work-life balance does not improve. I absolutely love law and currently live, eat and breathe it but once I start working as a solicitor I want to know that I can pursue other interests at the same time. ”

“ Very competitive; very hard to get a training contract ”

Summary

While most students may have flirted with the idea of pursuing other professions, now they have settled into their studies and are developing their career aspirations, most of them see their long-term future in the legal profession.

They are excited by a career that offers them challenge and variety, that will fulfill their personal aspirations and offer them career development. For many, this means pursuing a career in London and the draw of the capital seems to be more about the reputations of the firms there than higher salaries.

Although many are keen on the idea of making a difference, their expectations are more limited on whether their jobs will afford them this opportunity. They see technology having a structural impact on the profession and changing the nature of job roles.

Aside from the more immediate challenges of finding a job in a competitive environment, they are concerned about a working life characterised with heavy workloads and a poor work-life balance.

Study challenges

Developing skills required

Respondents were asked about the skills on offer on their course, with analytical and reasoning skills being felt to be more widely offered. Despite students' expectations about the impact of technology on the legal profession, only 30% of students felt that technology skills training were fully offered by their course with a further 30% feeling that their course did not offer any technology skills training.

Figure 16: Skills offered by course (%)

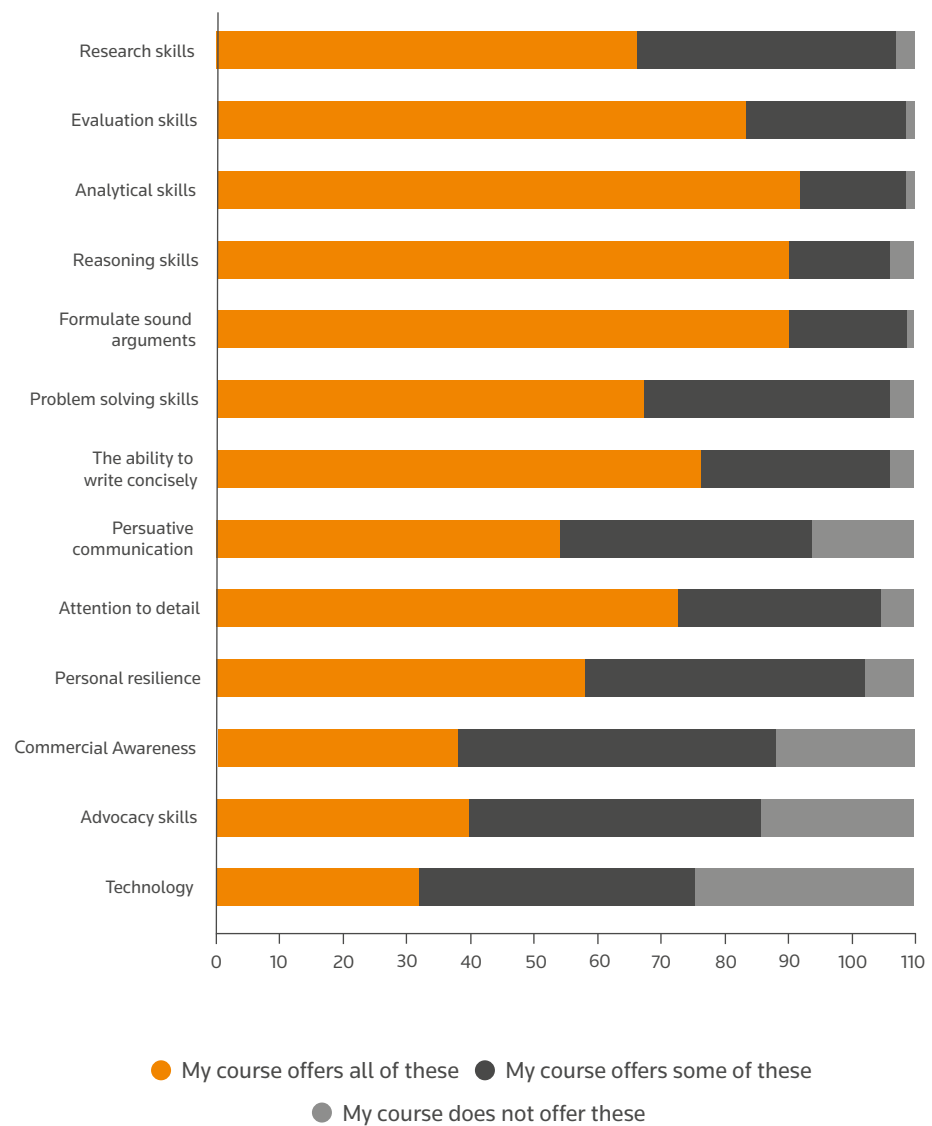
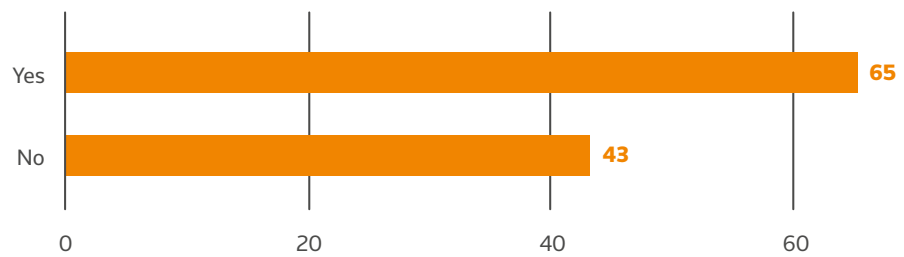


Figure 17: Skills offered by course – ranking

	Rank
Analytical skills	1
The ability to formulate sound arguments	2
Reasoning and critical judgment skills	3
Evaluation skills and the ability to interpret and explain complex information clearly	4
The ability to write concisely	5
Attention to detail and the ability to draft formal documents with precision	6
Research skills using a range of sources, including verbal questioning	7
Lateral thinking and problem-solving skills	8
Personal resilience – confidence, enthusiasm and determination	9
Confident and persuasive oral communication skills	10
Commercial Awareness – research and assess current legal trends and issues	11
Advocacy skills	12
Technology – software/MS Office skills	13

Figure 18: Opportunities to work in a law clinic or legal advice centre (#)

Does your current course give you the opportunity to work in a law clinic or legal advice centre?



	First year degree	Second year degree	Third year degree	GDL	LPC	Other
Yes	62%	48%	65%	100%	100%	67%
No	38%	52%	35%			33%

The importance of this form of work experience is indicated in figure 19, which details the types of skills students feel they can develop from extra-curricular activities. The respondents believe work experience, including law clinic work, helps develop a wide variety of skills that they feel they need and are not provided purely by their academic studies. Interestingly, they did not identify work experience as a way to acquire commercial awareness.

Respondents were asked what skills they further required and how they went about sourcing these. Although technology skills were not as widely supported by course studies as other skill sets, respondents have not indicated that this is a key requirement. It is uncertain from this response whether respondents already feel knowledgeable about legal technology or whether it is uncertainty about sourcing this skill set or the type of technology skills required by law firms, which is driving this answer. A further insight from later in the study around interview questions would suggest that technology skills and knowledge is something that students need to develop further.

Figure 19: Ways in which students source additional skills.²

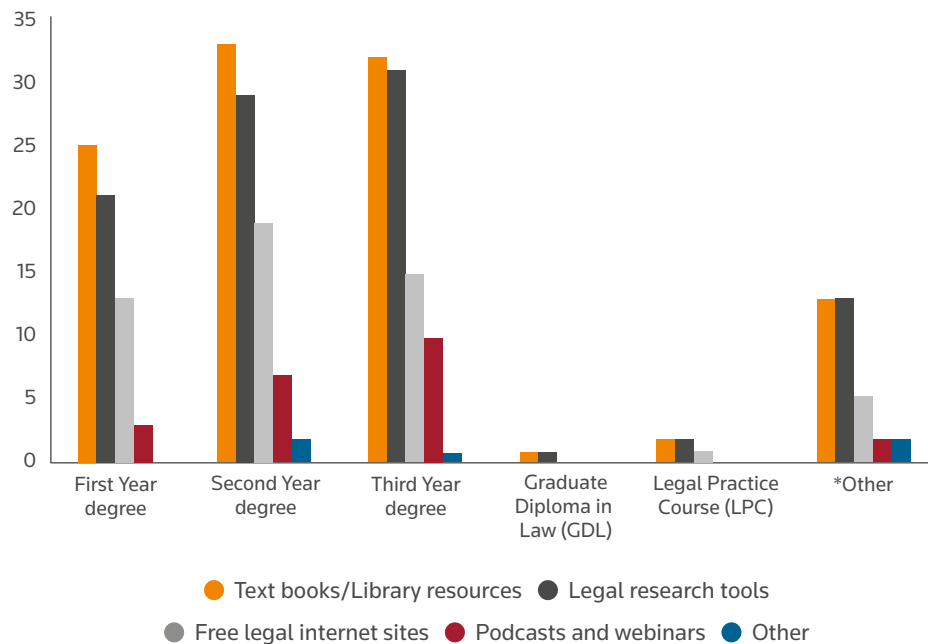
	Clubs and societies	Competitions	Events	Self-led study	Volunteering activities	Work experience
Commercial Awareness	✓			✓		
Public speaking	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Communication - written					✓	
Confidence			✓	✓	✓	✓
Critical thinking/ Problem solving				✓	✓	✓
Interpersonal skills	✓				✓	✓
Language skills	✓					
Leadership					✓	✓
Life experience					✓	
Litigation skills	✓			✓		
Networking			✓			
Organisational skills	✓			✓	✓	✓
Personal resilience				✓		✓
Practical application				✓		✓
Team working	✓				✓	✓
Technology				✓		

² Based on feedback about what skills they need to develop and how they go about developing these.

Methods of study

Traditional methods of study are most popular amongst students with use of legal know how tools growing in importance as studies progress.

Figure 20: Methods of study (#)



*Other includes lecture notes

Laptops are the most frequently used devices for daily study; however 75% of respondents use smartphones for study; 28% on a daily basis. 95% of users used their smartphones on a daily basis for lifestyle activities.

Figure 21: How devices are used – study (#)

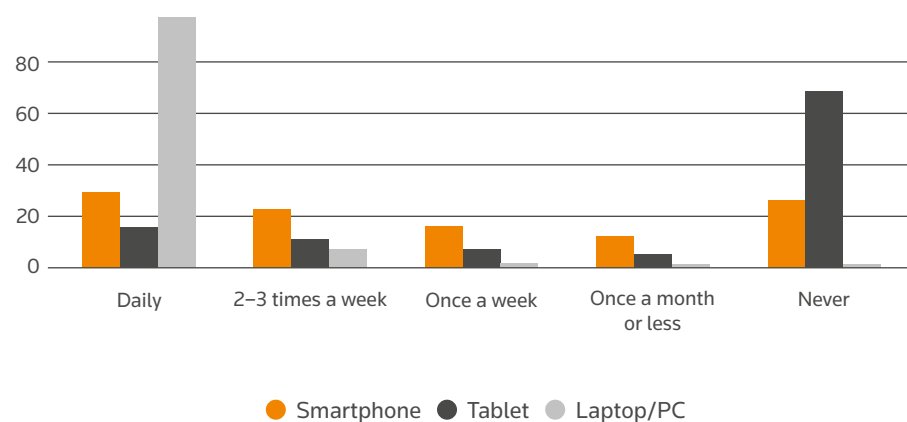


Figure 22: How devices are used – lifestyle (#)

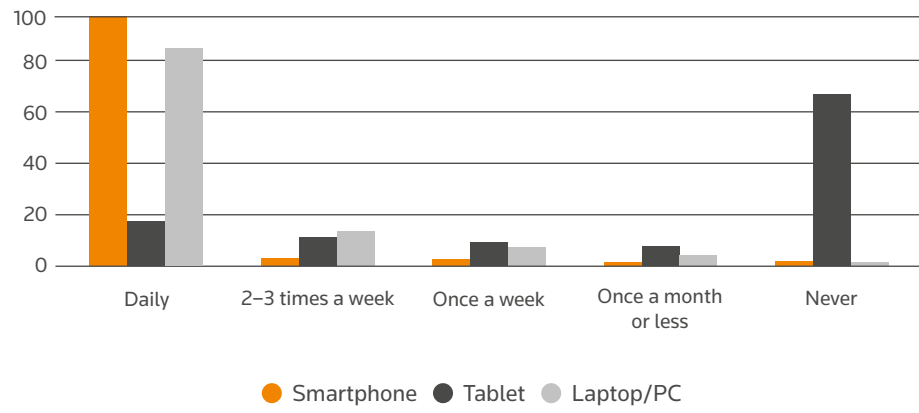
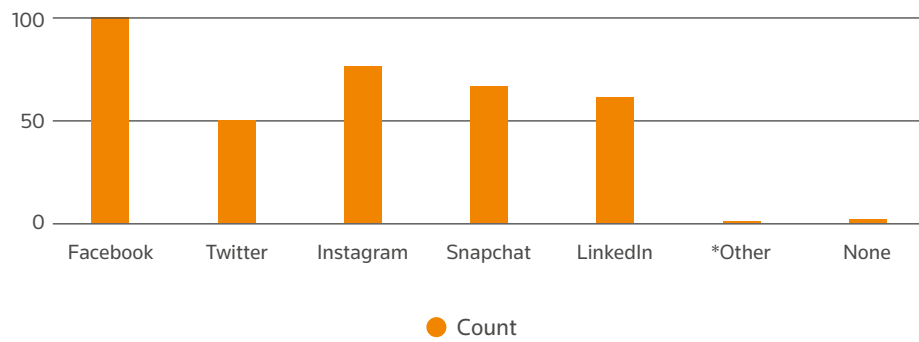
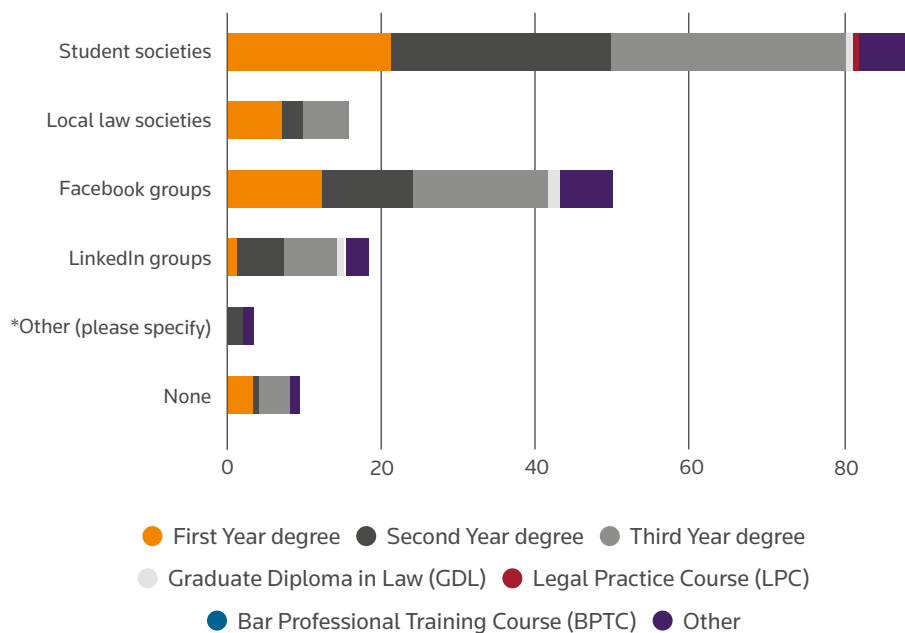


Figure 23: Use of Social Media (#)



*Other includes WhatsApp

Figure 24: Participation in formal/informal law networks (#)



*Other includes: Bright Network, Post Grad Law Societies and Aspiring Solicitors

Summary

Respondents indicate that they are proactive in sourcing skills they believe they require to succeed and are not on offer with their course, by using a variety of extra-curricular activities to help them develop a mix of technical and softer skills. They are comfortable with mixing traditional networking (student law societies) with digital methods, although a small percentage don't do any form of networking.

Despite the belief that technology will have an important impact on the future of the legal profession, it is unclear where students source their information from, as only 30% believe all required technology skills are provided by their courses. Universities and especially law schools are grappling with the question of what technology they can or should incorporate into courses and how they do this. Currently skills are acquired incrementally during the training contract, sometimes to the frustration of law firms. Whether legal educators can go some way to shouldering this task to continue to appeal to students and sponsoring firms following the introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Exam (SQE) remains to be seen.

The Law School Resource Centre on Practical Law is a good source of information on the use of technology in law firms and its wider impact on the business and political context relevant to the legal market. Thomson Reuters supports events and discussions about the future of legal technology tailored for this audience. Further dissemination of this content through its digital networks and via Facebook and LinkedIn will signpost ways students can improve their technology knowledge and skills.

Applying for jobs

Over a quarter of respondents (26%) are currently applying for jobs either as a solicitor, barrister or within the legal profession, or outside in a legal capacity. They were asked about what they consider when choosing a prospective employer.

Figure 25: Reasons for selecting a prospective employer (#)

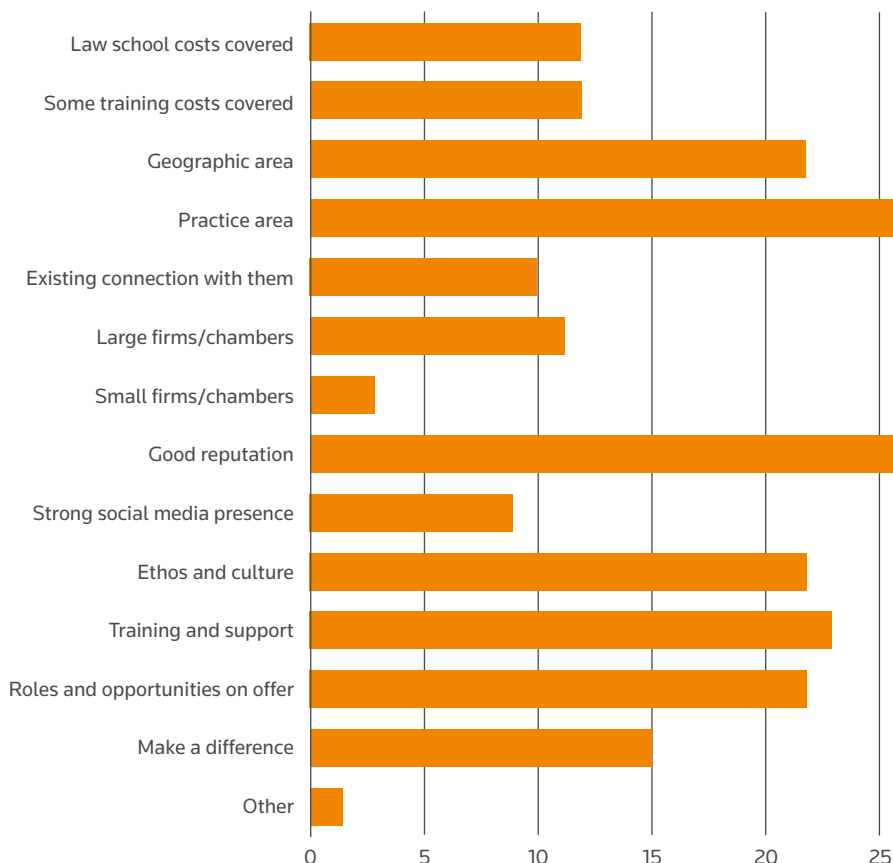


Figure 26: All Reasons for selecting a prospective employer (#)

	Solicitor	Barrister	Working in a legal capacity
They operate in the practice area I would like to work in	22	1	3
They have a good reputation	22	1	3
They offer a good training and support programme	22	1	1
They are in the geographic area I would like to work in	20		2

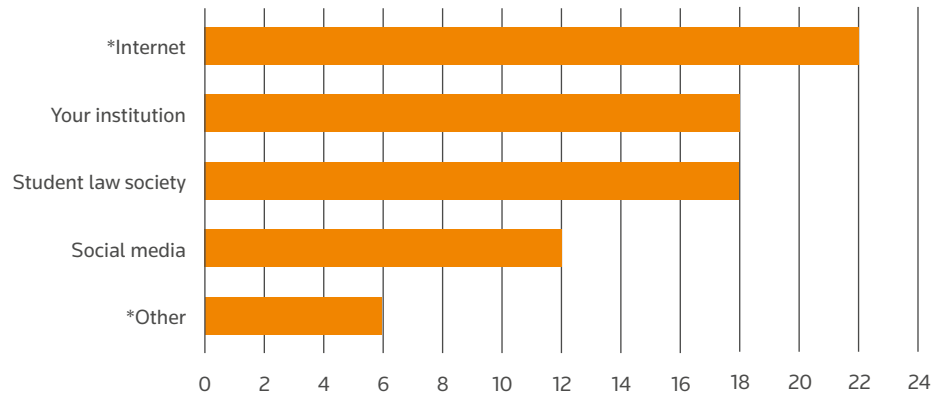
	Solicitor	Barrister	Working in a legal capacity
Their ethos and culture appeal to me	19	1	3
They offer roles and opportunities that meet my career aspirations	18	2	3
There will be opportunities to make a difference	11	1	3
They offer to cover law school costs	10		2
They offer to cover some training costs	10	1	1
I have a connection with them e.g. work experience, through networking	10		
I have chosen law firms/chambers that are large	8	2	1
They have a strong website/social media presence	8		1
I have chosen law firms/chambers that are small	3		

Figure 27: Top 3 reasons for selecting a prospective employer

	Solicitor	Barrister	Working in a legal capacity
They operate in the practice area I would like to work in	1st	1st	2nd
Their ethos and culture appeal to me	2nd	1st	1st
They offer roles and opportunities that meet my career aspirations	3rd	1st	3rd

Consideration must be given to how are students making an assessment of a firm's ethos and culture. Figure 26 indicates that information on prospective employers is largely sourced via internet or the student's institution or student law society. A firm's website presence must therefore play an important role in articulating its ethos. Firms also appear to need an established relationship with the institution. This may pose a challenge for smaller and localised law firms who may not have the resources to develop these relationships across a spread of institutions.

Figure 28: Sources of information about prospective employers (#)

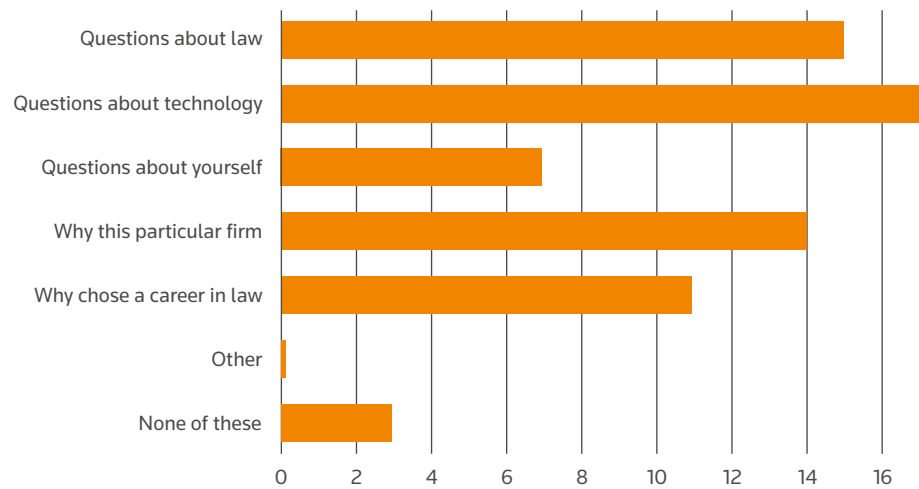


When asked what questions they found difficult to answer, questions about technology came top.

*Internet includes Chambers Student, Legal 500, Lex 100, Law Society Gazette, All About Law, Legal Cheek, Law Careers, Totally Legal, LinkedIn and Reed.

*Other includes networking, parents, independent research and other jobs.

Figure 29: Interview or application questions you find difficult to answer (#)³



³ "Questions about law" refers to questions about the business of law

Figure 30: Interview or application questions you find difficult to answer by role (#)

	Solicitor	Barrister	Working
Questions about technology	13	1	3
Questions about the business of law	11	1	3
Why you have chosen to apply for a particular firm	10	2	2
Why have you chosen a career in law	10		1
Questions about yourself and your skills and experiences	6		1
None of these	3		

Summary

As well as looking for an employer that practices the area of law that most appeals, an employer's ethos, culture and reputation are factored into student preferences. This gives employers a challenge of conveying these intangible factors using digital channels. Resource for developing a relationship across the institutions where it wishes to recruit is also necessary, as local law student societies and the institutions themselves influence student choices. This is particularly important with 23% (excluding London) of students indicating that they wish to work in the region they are from, but may not necessarily be studying at an institution in that area. 60% of respondents indicated that they expect to work in London, which means London based employers must ensure a relationship with a wide number of institutions.

The requirement to build knowledge and confidence around the theme of technology during studies becomes more apparent at interview stage, with this being the interview question that job applicants find most difficult to answer. Thomson Reuters provides much of this content through its blogs and on the Law School Resource Centre on Practical Law, which can help prospective trainees prepare for these questions.

Summary and recommendations

The feedback in this survey indicates that respondents seem consistent in their views and expectations of a career in the legal profession, and organised in their approach to skills development and job application. The results support our wider customer insight that trainees lack the skills and knowledge around using technology in a business context, as well as wider understanding of the business of law. These skills gaps provide an opportunity for new products and services from existing legal educators, and new entrants. There is also a role to play for suppliers to the legal market, such as Thomson Reuters, to offer thought leadership and guidance.

For law firms, some key questions arise:

- How will they support their trainees to develop the business and technological skills they need following the introduction of the SQE? To what extent do they expect legal educators to address this need?
- Are perceptions and concerns about work-life balance realistic? How can employers reassure future lawyers that they can balance a full and satisfying career with a home life?
- As clients increasingly research firms online, so do students. Students choose firms based on reputation but to what extent are they equating reputation with size? What can small firms do to leverage their online presence more effectively to appeal to students?
- 60% of our respondents assume they will be working in London. However, they are less drawn by the prospect of a large salary than by the opportunity to do meaningful work. How can law firms offer these aspiring lawyers the sense of meaning they are seeking to ensure they attract and retain the best people?

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