

Annex 8

Evidence of the ‘training contract bottleneck’

The problem that some people experience in finding a training contract or period of recognised training has long been a feature of the existing qualification system. But it has always been difficult to quantify the exact extent of the problem.

We know that LPC numbers have increased in recent years. Between 2013 and 2016, enrolments on the LPC increased from 8372 to 10690. Numbers passing the LPC during that period were 5993 (2013/14), 6126 (2014/15) and 6961 (2015/16)¹. At the same time, the number of periods of recognised training registered with us increased from 5468 to 5992.

But comparing the number of LPC graduates in any year against the number of training contracts registered the following year does not give an accurate picture of the extent of the problem. We do not know, for example, how many people take a law degree with the intention of becoming a lawyer but decide not to continue on to the LPC because of the difficulty with finding a training contract. We do not know how many of the people who secure training contracts in any given year actually completed their LPC the year before.

A number of studies have attempted to quantify the problems with securing a training contract. But the conclusions from these studies vary. In 2006, the Law Society interrogated data now jointly owned by the SRA and the Law Society and conducted a survey of LPC graduates who had not completed the LPC. This study was over 10 years ago and was never published. But it showed that there were 12,221 LPC graduates who had completed the LPC since the course began in 1993 and up to September 2005 who had never had a training contract registered. A subsequent survey showed, however, that 23% of respondents to the survey had in fact secured a training contract.

The data also revealed that students from certain BME groups and older students found it more difficult to secure a training contract and took longer to secure a training contract. Over 65% of the survey respondents also indicated that they were in the process of looking for a training contract and over 84% had at some point made such efforts.

The research demonstrated that the disparity between the number of LPC graduates and the number of training contract places was a real problem.

In 2008, Brian Read from the Association of Graduate Recruiters published research on the numbers passing the LPC. He concluded that around 2,000 LPC graduates each year are unable to find training contracts.

In 2012, the Law Society published further research which suggested that the disparity in numbers between LPC graduates and training contracts was not as large as was previously thought. A key finding of the research was that “it has not proved possible to find comprehensive and consistent data to calculate precisely how large is this oversupply [of LPC graduates compared to training contract places].”

In 2016, we published research by Nottingham Law School into pre-qualification work experience. In responses to the research, the most frequently cited reason for having

¹ Note that the students who do not successfully pass may be referred or deferred to future years and may therefore eventually go on to successfully complete the LPC

changed opinion about qualifying as a solicitor were the financial costs of qualification and the difficulty in securing a training contract. A range of respondents commented during the course of the research on the difficulties in finding a training contract. The report highlighted “the persistence and complexity of the range of challenges to securing training contacts and the necessary work experience that is on many cases a precursor to obtaining a training contract”.