



Wellbeing at the Bar: Update (Spring 2016)

Wellbeing is about having the resilience and ability to carry out your professional duties in a healthy way.

The Wellbeing at the Bar programme is designed to:

- a) **Provide members of the profession with the information and skills they need to stay well;**
- b) **Support members of the profession as they deal with difficulties that arise in so far as they affect a barrister's professional life; and**
- c) **Provide assistance to those with responsibility (or taking on a supporting role) for those in difficulty or crisis.**

Wellbeing at the Bar aims to enable barristers to provide an "optimal professional service" by (i) staying "well" (ii) recognising the signs of becoming "unwell" so as to remedy them and/or (iii) returning from "unwellness" to "wellness". Here (i), (ii) and (iii) are a continuum.

The wellbeing of barristers can be affected by a very wide range of circumstances, although there are some commonly seen issues arising as a result of the high pressure, performance driven nature of much work at the Bar. These issues were identified in Wellbeing research¹ conducted across 2,500 barristers in late 2014.

This research found:

- 1 in 3 find it difficult to control/stop worrying
- 2 in 3 feel showing signs of stress equals weakness
- 1 in 6 feeling in low spirits most of the time
- 59% demonstrate unhealthy levels of perfectionism
- Psychological wellbeing within the profession is rarely spoken about

For a full copy of the research see:

http://www.barcouncil.org.uk/media/348371/wellbeing_at_the_bar_report_april_2015_final_.pdf

In seeking to promote wellbeing at the Bar, we consider: stress, overwork, anxiety, perfectionism and lack of self-confidence; as well as the interplay between personal and working lives, caring responsibilities, financial issues, mental illness, physical illness and addiction.

¹ Research funded by the four Inns of Court, the Bar Council and Charlie Waller Memorial Trust

The degree to which these, or other, factors affect the lives of practitioners varies – the promotion of wellbeing at the Bar involves encouraging appropriate coping and resilience strategies and offering means of support to those assisting colleagues with, or experiencing first-hand, these, and other, issues.

In July 2015 we created a working group made up of representatives of Bar Council, the four Inns of Court, the Specialist Bar Associations, the Circuits and the Institute of Barristers Clerks (See Appendix 2). This working group is responsible for programme delivery and meets monthly. It is chaired by Rachel Spearing. Sam Mercer (Bar Council) provides executive support.

In November 2015, we issued a further call for evidence across the Bar, supported by the Inns and SBAs. We asked members of the profession to identify:

- Any examples of wellbeing issues (such as stress, anxiety, mental health, etc.) which have had an impact on professional life (within chambers, with a client, in court, etc.);
- how those issues were handled and with what outcome; and
- whether they could have been better managed with access to resources from the Bar Council or from within chambers, and if so, what resources would be of particular value (e.g. a confidential helpline, online advice and resources, a formal confidential reporting structure within chambers, etc.).

Overall we received:

- 58 emails citing personal experience
- Data on 234 Calls to the LawCare helpline
- Responses from 5 Equality and Diversity Officers (EDOs)

Issues highlighted included:

- Too much work (work life balance) and associated stress
- Financial pressures and associated stress
- Fear/stigma associated with disclosing a wellbeing issue
- Secondary Stress – associated with dealing with evidence of e.g. child abuse and torture
- Bullying behaviour from judges and solicitors

Over 2016 the Wellbeing at the Bar programme will:

1. Deliver online resources for individuals (pupils/new practitioners/practising barristers) and those with a management/other responsibility for barristers (Heads of Chambers, Clerks/Practice Managers, Pupil Supervisors and EDOs). These will be accessed via a Bar Wellbeing portal (hosted by the Bar Council).
2. Expand and support any/all Bar mentoring programmes
3. Work with third parties supplying support for those in crisis (e.g. LawCare, MIND etc.)

4. Keep up a steady stream of articles and stories (lived experience) aimed at normalising wellbeing and encouraging members of the Bar to talk about wellbeing issues.

We will keep under review the need to offer training or to train members of the profession to deliver face to face workshops/training to reinforce and support online resources.

Online solutions enable us to offer: easy access, anytime/anywhere support mechanisms, confidentiality, privacy of use and a variety of learning channels (e.g. fact sheets, guides and podcasts).

Monitoring the use of online resources by the profession e.g. the number of hits/downloads will also enable us to evaluate use of wellbeing materials.

By the end of September 2016 we will develop 10 bespoke guides/podcasts which reflect the context of chambers or of practise as a barrister (based on existing wellbeing resources developed for others by others (including e.g. the NHS).

We have retained the services of a Wellbeing consultant Lucy Whitehall <http://transformandthrive.co.uk/> to support the Bar Council and Wellbeing at the Bar Working Group.

Resources commissioned to date include guidance on:

1. How to spot a wellbeing issue in yourself (for individuals) and in others (for chambers)
2. How to have a conversation about wellbeing (for individuals – who recognise they have an issue) with others (for chambers – when they see someone has a problem)
3. 'Ingredients' of wellbeing (infographic)
4. Interventions (infographic) also including how to choose/secure the best/most suitable support for yourself. And to try others if one doesn't work. How to spot poor quality advisors/trainers/courses etc. Specific reference to counselling and mindfulness
5. Rumination (faulty thinking)
6. Perfectionism (faulty thinking)
7. Bullying
8. Secondary Stress

Timescales

Online Resources: we hope to have the web portal and **first tranche** of web based resources (guides, fact sheets and podcasts) in place by the end of **September 2016**.

For Further information on the Wellbeing at the Bar Programme, please contact Sam Mercer SMercer@barcouncil.org.uk

Wellbeing at the Bar is funded by the Bar Council, the four Inns of Court and the Institute of Barristers' Clerks



Appendix 1: Background

The Wellbeing at the Bar programme provides Bar Council, the Inns of Court, the Specialist Bar Associations and Circuits with an opportunity to add value to the Profession. It also provides the IBC with an opportunity to support clerks (both in their work with barristers and in supporting the wellbeing of clerks and chambers' staff themselves).

Research identified significant numbers of the profession are in crisis, and in need of assistance and support; this need has been exacerbated by drastic challenges to the legal services market. Feedback and interest from the profession in the issue of Wellbeing has been demonstrated by participation levels in the 2014 survey and the positive response to survey findings (April 2015).

The WATB programme addresses an identified need within a profession and provides leaders from across the Bar with an opportunity to exercise a pastoral role and commitment to the profession we serve.

Appendix 2: Membership of the Wellbeing at the Bar Working Group

Criminal Bar Association	Richard Bentwood and Sarah Vine
Family Law Bar Association	Cyrus Larizadeh QC and Victoria Wilson
COMBAR	Leona Powell
Chancery Bar Association	Lyndsey De Mestre
The European Bar Group	Nina Caplin
Professional Negligence Bar Association	Nicholas Peacock
Technology & Construction Bar Association	Calum Lamont
IP Bar Association	Charlotte May QC
Employed Bar Champion	David Chrimes
LCLCBA	Alice Carse
Western Circuit	Rachel Spearing
South Eastern Circuit	Valerie Charbit
North Eastern Circuit	Jason Pitter QC
Midlands Circuit	Jenny Josephs
Employed Bar Committee Representative	Grant Warnsby
Young Bar Committee	Thea Wilson and Elisabeth Cooper
Equality, Diversity & Social Mobility Committee	Robin Allen QC
Ethics Committee	Andrew Walker QC
Institute for Barristers' Clerks	Nick Hill
Gray's Inn	Pushpinder Saini QC and Rachel James
Middle Temple	Louise McCullough and Colin Davidson
Inner Temple	Helen Davies QC and Jennie Collis
Lincoln's Inn	Stephen Murch and Chris Monckton