

University of Chester

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University of
Chester

Law School



“Responding to Expectation”
Dr Kathryn Dutton and Philip Hunter

The Study

'Responding to Expectation' was a 12 month (empirical) research project funded by the Learning and Teaching Institute

The principal aim is twofold:

- (i) to further contemporary understandings of student expectations of, and motivation(s) for, undergraduate law study; AND,
- (ii) to examine the extent to which contemporary student experiences of undergraduate law study meet both their expectations and motivations

The 'Inspiration'

- ▶ The 'Law Experiential' evaluation: linking theory and practice or 'learning to be a lawyer'?

"[The main reason I chose to study law was]...to be a solicitor and live a comfortable life from an early age I was interested in this"

- ▶ Theory and research surrounding 'expectation' and 'motivation'

- ▶ The particular pertinence of the 'expectation - reality' gap in the context of the LLB:

- The long-standing 'clash of ideologies' and continuing debate surrounding the true 'purpose' of the QLD (eg. Cownie, 2004)
- The 'vocational' culture of law students (eg. Twining, 1994)
- The need to provide a positive student experience whilst avoiding commodification and corporatization (eg Arthurs 2001)

Methodology

- ▶ An exploratory study, concentrated on gathering rich and detailed data
- ▶ A longitudinal, multi-layered, multi-site 'case study' design
- ▶ The principal 'layers' of data collection included:
 - Gathering qualitative and quantitative data from LLB and 'combined' degree students at the University of Chester
 - Gathering qualitative and quantitative data from A-2 students at three sixth-form colleges and one 'access to law' course in the North-West region
 - Examining the design and delivery of the LLB degree programme at the University of Chester

A2 students

- ▶ Data collected from 5 separate cohorts of students
- ▶ 3 different schools/colleges received questionnaires and 111 completed – at UCAS Form filling stage.
- ▶ 2 focus groups of different cohorts of students – 1 at end of year 12; the other just after A2 results day!

Degree subject choices

- ▶ Arts and Humanities ▶ 21 or 20.79%
- ▶ Law ▶ 20 or 19.90%
- ▶ Health, Teaching and Social care ▶ 13 or 12.87%
- ▶ Maths, Science and Engineering ▶ 13 or 12.87%
- ▶ Business, Accounting and IT ▶ 13 or 12.87%
- ▶ Social Science ▶ 10 or 9.90%
- ▶ Languages ▶ 2 or 1.98%
- ▶ Other ▶ 4 or 3.96%
- ▶ Unsure ▶ 2 or 1.98%
- ▶ No response ▶ 3 or 2.97%
- ▶ Not going into HE ▶ 9

Factors influencing A2 student programme choice

Influencing Factor	No. Respondents	% Respondents
Interest in the subject	91	90.10
Subject helpfulness in future career	88	87.13
Enjoyment of Subject at A2	64	63.37
Other	7	6.93
Parental/ Family Opinion	5	4.95
Total	255	

Main Influence upon A2 Programme choice

Main Influence on Choice of Programme	No. Respondents	% Respondents
Subject helpfulness in future career	55	55
Interest in subject	35	35
Enjoyment of subject at A Level	8	8
Other	2	2
Total	100	100

Factors influencing choice amongst Law Identified and Non Law Identified

Influencing Factor	Non Law Identified	% of NLI respondents	Law identified	% of LI respondents
Interest in the Subject	73	90.12	18	90
Subject helpfulness in future career	69	85.19	19	95
Enjoyment of subject at A2	54	66.67	10	50
Other	4	4.94	3	15
Parental/Family opinion	3	3.70	2	10
	203		52	

Main Influence on Choice of Programme	% of NLI Respondents	% Respondents
Subject helpfulness in future career	30	55
Interest in subject	57.5	45
Enjoyment of subject at A Level	10	0
Other	2.5	0
Total	100	100

Factors influencing UG1 Programme choice

Influencing Factor	No. Respondents	% Respondents
Interest in the subject	51	27.27
Subject helpfulness in future career	47	25.13
Develop a financially lucrative career	30	16.04
Enjoyment of Subject at A2	25	13.37
To gain a qualification useful in a career other than law	20	10.70
Other	7	3.74
Parental/ Family Opinion	7	3.74
Total	187	100

UG1 Cohort: What is the 'main' reason you chose to study Law at University?

1. 54% = wished to pursue a career in the legal profession
2. 16% = were interested in the subject
3. 10% = enjoyed the subject at A-level
4. 10% = wanted to develop a financially lucrative career
5. 8% = wanted to gain a qualification useful in another career
6. 2% = Another reason

Information Sources consulted by A2 students regarding UG study

Information Sources Consulted	General University Study		University Law Study	
	No.	% Respondents	No.	% Respondents
University websites	14	70	13	65
Friends/Relatives who studied at university	11	55	12	60
University Prospectus	10	50	10	50
School/College Careers Service	9	45	9	45
University Open Days	7	35	6	30
UCAS	6	30	5	25

Information Sources consulted by new UG Law students

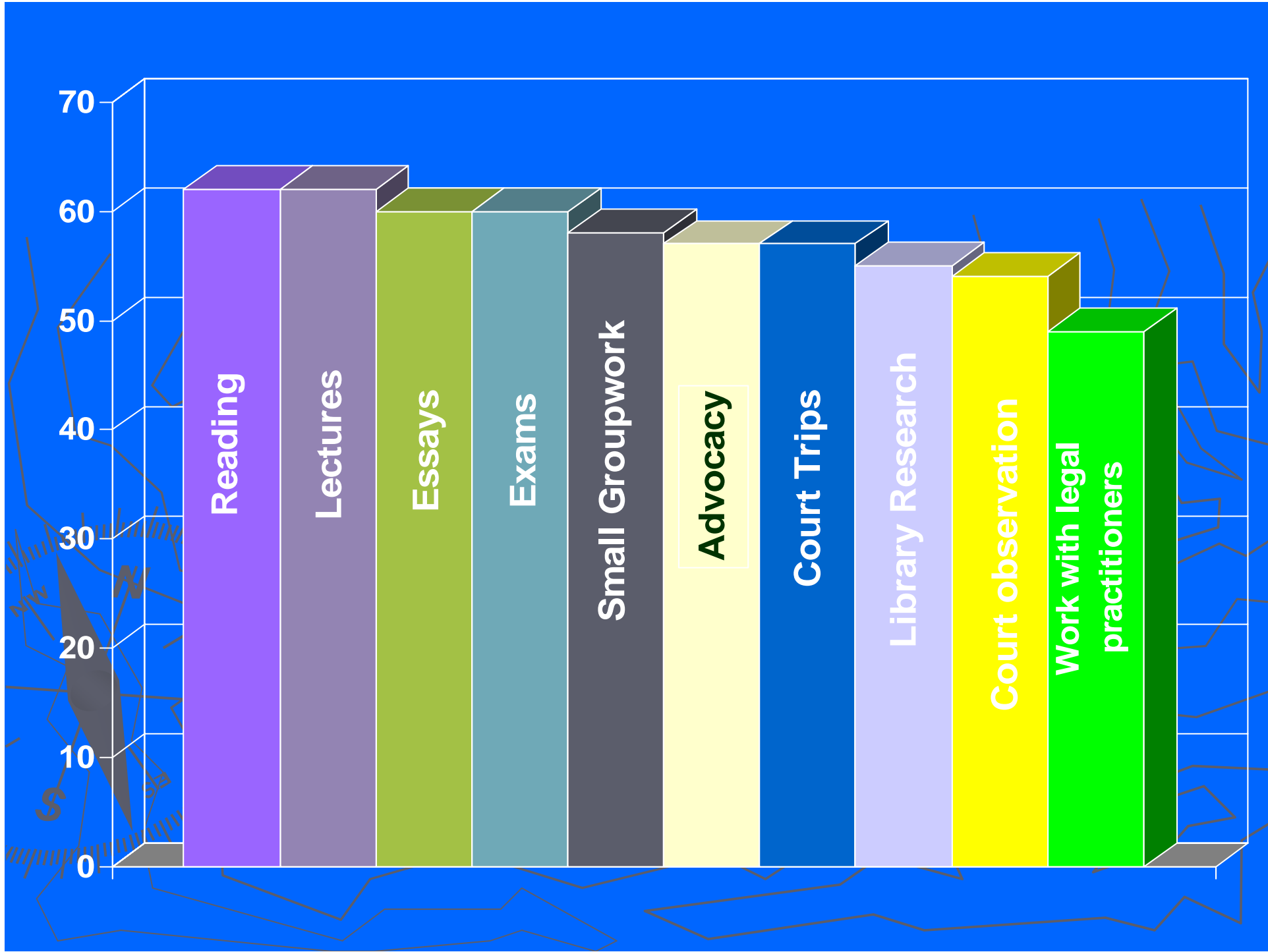
Sources of Information	No.	%
University Prospectus	54	87.10
University Website	42	67.74
School/College Careers Service	37	59.68
University Open Days	33	53.23
UCAS	27	43.55
Friends/Relatives who have studied law	19	30.65
Other sources	11	17.74
Law Society/Bar Council	7	11.29
Post/Telephone contact with Law Society/Bar Council	2	3.23

Activity engagement A2 students

Activity	Mean Hrs Per Week
Socialising	18
Attending Lectures	11
Writing essays and reports	10
Reading	10
Participating in seminars/tutorials	7
Undertaking work experience	7
Conducting Internet Research	5
Conducting Library based research	5
Debating	4
Giving Presentations	4
Total	81

UG1: What kinds of work do you think that you will be undertaking at University to study law?

1. ALL students thought they would be reading and attending lectures (!)
2. The overwhelming majority of students (over 90% in all cases) thought they would be:
 - Writing essays
 - Undertaking examinations
 - Undertaking small group work
 - Partaking in some form of mooting or advocacy
 - Undertaking visits to courts
3. The majority of students (over 75% in all cases) thought they would be:
 - Undertaking library based research
 - Working with legal practitioners
 - Observing cases in court
4. Only 1 of 62 students thought that the programme would *NOT* involve any of the 'practice' based variables suggested



In an average week on the programme, how many hours do you think you will be spending the different activities (eg. lectures, reading)?

- ▶ Students thought they would be spending 41 hours a week on activity relating to their studies
- ▶ The *average* number of hours students thought they would spend on particular activities can be broken down as follows:

1. Lectures = 8 hours

2. Reading = 7 hours

3. Seminars = 6 hours

4. Writing = 5 hours

5. Library research = 4 hours

6. Internet research = 4 hours

7. Debating = 2 hours

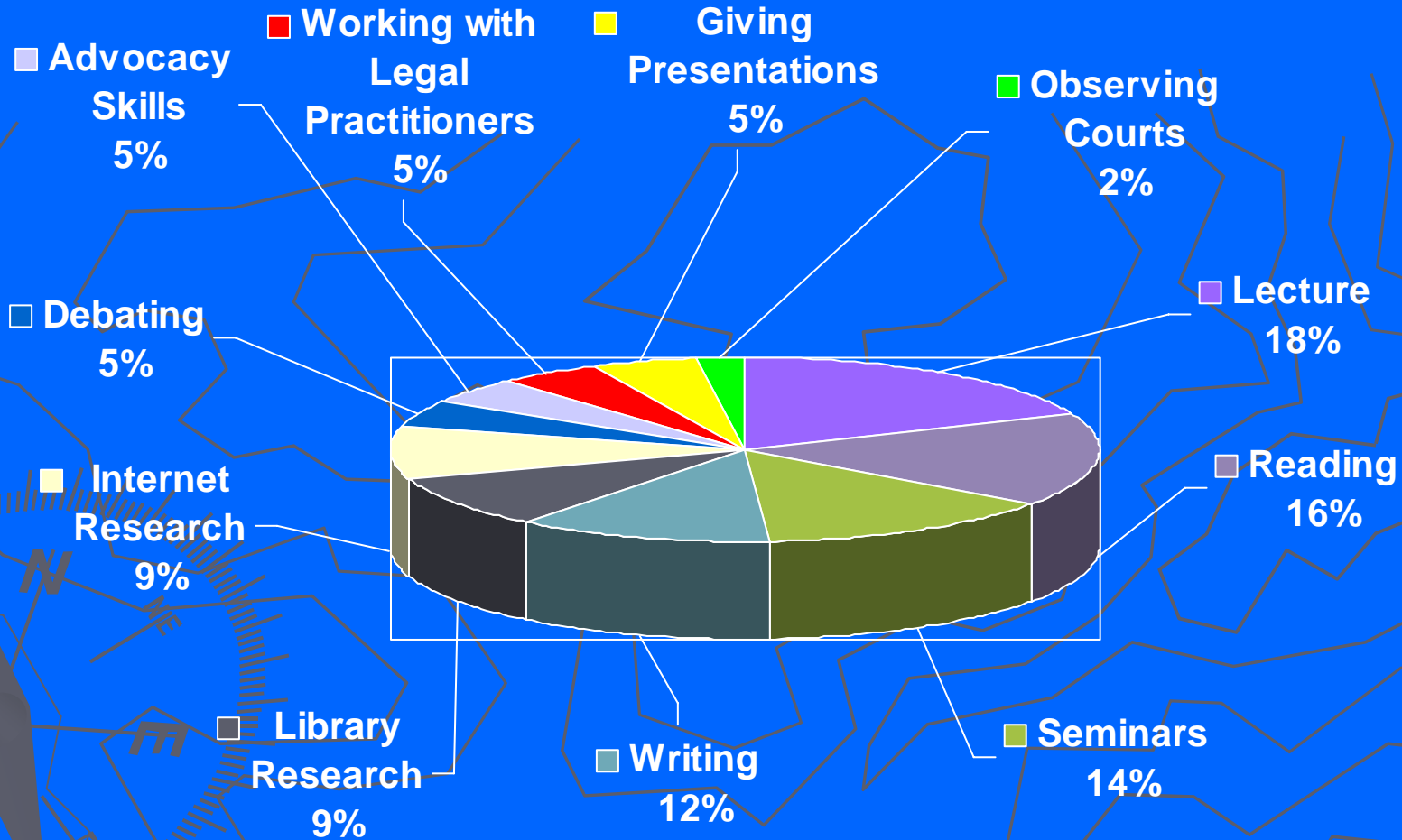
8. Advocacy Skills = 2 hours

9. Working with legal practitioners = 2 hours

10. Giving presentations = 2 hours

11. Observing courts = 1 hour

Student Activity Breakdown



Number, in order of importance, the skills you hope to develop through the study of law

- 
1. Knowledge of the UK Legal System
- For 28%, most important
 2. Reading
- For 13%, most important
 3. Writing
- For 4%, most important
 4. Knowledge of UK Statutes and Cases
- For 11%, most important
 5. Debating
- For 4%, most important
 6. Critical Thinking
- For 9%, most important
 7. Advocacy
- For 4%, most important
 8. Legal Practice
- For 4%, most important
 9. Presentation
 10. Library Research
- For 4%, most important
 11. Internet Research

a final thought?

- ▶ Despite applicant's confident self assessment of 'knowledge' of undergraduate study ACTUAL understandings limited and partial
- ▶ In particular pre-UG applicants well informed on benefits of HE and processes of application but had little knowledge of the actual realities of the processes and practices of HE...