

CPLED, Principal and Firm Contact Meetings

September 13, 2021

Introduction

To gather information to support CPLED's continuous improvement initiative, CPLED surveyed its students and external contractors throughout the [Practice Readiness Education Program \(PREP\)](#) June 2020 intake, asking for feedback. To complement this, CPLED invited Principals and firm contacts with students enrolled in the June 2020 PREP intake to engage in collaborative conversations with the CPLED management team. Four one-hour sessions took place during the summer of 2021 with 34 firm representatives across all four CPLED jurisdictions and law society representatives who attended as observers.

Below are the key areas of concern brought forward during the collaborative conversations and the initiatives CPLED is taking to address them.

I. Assessors¹ and Assessment Feedback

- Inconsistent feedback was delivered during the Virtual Law Firm phase², causing confusion and stress among students as they prepared for the Capstone.
- Lack of interaction between students and Assessors.

CPLED Initiative

CPLED applied student feedback to refine the Assessor feedback process as students progressed through the Virtual Law Firm. Assessors attended mandatory training sessions, which included a review and calibration of assignments. Feedback received from students regarding their assessment feedback from the first Virtual Law Firm rotation was delivered to Assessors in advance of the second rotation. Improvements were made to the feedback as requested by the students. Additional input received from students before the third rotation resulted in CPLED developing a set of assessment guidelines for Assessors. It resulted in improved consistency in the quality and quantity of feedback students received.

CPLED will continue to improve Assessor training and calibration sessions. They will also articulate more clearly to Assessors how students and Practice Managers use the feedback. Finally, CPLED will provide assessment guidelines to Assessors and students to clearly outline feedback expectations to be delivered and received in future intakes.

The Assessor's role is to provide students with objective and unbiased assessment feedback in preparation for the Capstone. Pedagogical principles regarding assessment indicate that to ensure an impartial assessment is delivered, the individual assessing cannot develop a relationship with the person they are evaluating. Therefore to abide by this principle and provide objective and unbiased assessments, Assessors must not build relationships with the students

¹ Assessors are external contractors who assess student assignments, and they receive an honorarium for this work. They are lawyers with a minimum of five years of practice experiences and are in good standing with their law society.

² The Virtual Law Firm is the third phase of PREP and consists of three online rotations in Business Law, Criminal Law and Family Law/Real Estate.

they are assessing. To fill this gap, students meet with their Practice Manager for coaching and mentorship after each rotation of the Virtual Law Firm.

2. Demanding Program

- PREP is a demanding program, taking more time to complete than the legacy program.
- Students experienced stress throughout the program trying to balance their articling requirements with their PREP studies.
- Principals and firm contacts found it challenging to schedule student assignments at their firm, especially during the Virtual Law Firm phase.

CPLED Initiative

CPLED recently hosted focus groups with Virtual Law Firm Assessors to consider a different approach to the assessment schedule. The Assessors supported the presented revised schedule, which provides students with additional time to complete their assignments while still providing Assessors with adequate time to meet their requirements. The schedule change was implemented for the PREP December 2020 intake.

CPLED shares the PREP schedule and a phase description with all Principals before the start of each phase.

As PREP is a new program with a different structure than the legacy program, CPLED recognizes it will take some time for firms to adjust. CPLED understands this is a big adjustment for firms and commits to continued communication with them and other stakeholders. Over time this concern will lessen as all stakeholders become more familiar with the PREP structure.

3. Perceived Lack of Customer Service

- CPLED responses to student inquiries were perceived at times as non-helpful.

CPLED Initiative

Frequently student inquiries were asking for specific direction on how to complete an assignment. Throughout PREP, students begin exercising their professional judgment and put this into practice more as they progress through the program. Therefore the students perceived lack of answers was instead a learning opportunity to practice professional judgement on their simulated client file in a safe environment. Messaging to students regarding the exercise of professional judgement has improved to better explain why CPLED cannot answer questions posed by students on how to complete their assignments specifically.

CPLED staff conducted a review of the D2L Discussion Boards and other student communication channels. The following changes were implemented for the December 2020 intake to allow students to find the answers they need quickly and easily:

- Enabled the D2L Frequently Asked Questions and Announcements widgets.
- Student questions are emailed to admin@cpled.ca, where they are triaged to the appropriate staff member to address within one business day.
- Reduced usage of the Discussion Board.

CPLED has hired additional staff to support the team and ensure inquires are addressed promptly; this includes two lawyers acting as Educational Counsel and four Program Assistants.

CPLED has also mandated customer service training and equity, diversity, and inclusion training for all CPLED staff.

4. Issues Finding Program Content

- Students struggled to locate program content in D2L.

CPLED Initiative

CPLED has reviewed D2L navigation, the Foundation Workshops and Virtual Law Firm materials, improving organization from the student's perspective and clarifying assignment instructions. CPLED completed these improvements for the PREP December 2020 intake.

5. Communicating with Other Students and Principals About PREP

- Students were under the impression they could not speak to fellow PREP students, their Principal, or other lawyers about PREP or their assignments in the program.

CPLED Initiative

CPLED will update the PREP Orientation and student handbooks to explain, communication with fellow PREP students, a Principal or colleagues is permitted. Students must, however, ensure all submitted assignments are of their own work.

Below are concerns identified that CPLED can not address alone. These concerns require a collaborative effort among the law societies, Principals, firms and CPLED to address.

1. Economics of Hiring an Articling Student

- Firms hire articling students to perform a function at their firm and expect a return on investment.

CPLED Response

The articling period is a time of learning and development for the student before they enter the practice of law. CPLED cannot address the specifics regarding the economics of a firm hiring an articling student as this is individual to each firm. However, CPLED commits to contributing to collaborative conversations with the law societies, Principals, and firms to improve the student experience in PREP whenever possible while ensuring students receive the training needed to be called to the Bar.

To further help address this issue, CPLED piloted a new delivery model of PREP during the summer of 2021. [Accelerated PREP](#) will offer students and firms another option when selecting the Bar admission program schedule that best suits their needs.

2. Substantive Law

- PREP is not educating students on important substantive law.

CPLED Response

PREP was built as a competency-based skills program. Students entering the program have already concentrated on Canadian substantive law during their Canadian common law degree or while obtaining their Certificate of Qualification from the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. At this time, there are no plans to include substantive law components in PREP.

However, if the law societies determine substantive legal knowledge is needed in PREP, CPLED will work with their law society partners to identify the areas and include them in a future program iteration.

Conclusion

CPLED commits to continued engagement with Principals and firm contacts in collaborative conversations about the student experience in PREP.