

# The Impact of PBL Training on Legal Professions

Antoni Font <sup>a\*</sup>, Gisela Cebrián <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Professor of Law, University of Barcelona, Barcelona 08034, Spain*

<sup>b</sup>*PhD student, University of Southampton, Southampton SO17 1BJ, United Kingdom*

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## Abstract

This paper presents a research conducted with law graduates that took part in problem based learning (PBL) courses during their university education, their university mentors and employers. The research focused on identifying the aspects of PBL training that contributed to the adaptation of graduates to the workplace. The analysis concludes that the use of PBL enhanced graduates' methodological approach to work, the development of autonomy and the experience gained in dealing with situations closed to the professional reality. PBL contributed to the development of skills that are seen as necessary for the professional practice such as teamwork and communication, and removed cultural barriers that inhibit the professional development of graduates in the initial stages of their professional practice.

*Keywords:* competences, problem-based learning, vocational training, professional practice

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## 1. A new framework of relations: 'the knowledge economy'

Changes in economic and social models have taken place over the last decades. These changes have led to the creation of educational frameworks that focus on identifying the competences that individuals need to develop at a personal and professional level. The concept of the knowledge society was introduced by sociology. It calls for the transformation of educational frameworks, claiming for a paradigm shift (Castells, 2004). This paradigm shift involves new challenges and requirements. The current globalised world presents a context where knowledge generation increases exponentially and spreads rapidly and widely (Isusi, 2003). In this context university students and graduates are required to think more deeply (Cowan, 2006) and to develop professional skills, which operate as prerequisites for employability (Nixon, 2006). Therefore university education needs to deal with the challenge of developing high order skills amongst students that can be transferred to the workplace (Rué, 2008).

The new educational paradigm of competences is the result of adjusting professional training frameworks to the requirements of current society, based on the idea of the knowledge economy (Isusi, 2003). Changes in the socioeconomic models have led to a lack of qualified workforce. New patterns of employment and the organisation of work have led to an increasing demand of high order skills. Current employees need to be able to rapidly adapt to changes, be flexible, deploy a wide range of skills and manage their personal and professional development effectively. Hence higher education institutions need to create collaborative schemes with business to generate knowledge and learning in the workplace. For law education, the paradigm of competences points also to teaching and learning at a higher cognitive level. Higher education role is to help students become independent learners and develop critical thinking, but without forgetting the need to develop other type of skills such as instrumental and interpersonal. The model of collaboration between universities and business should be orientated towards a clinical and preclinical training, where universities, the administration, business, student bodies and professional official bodies participate in the elaboration and implementation of training programmes equally. This would make the process more comprehensive and ensure that students acquire a set of skills and professional competences relevant to the workplace.

## 2. The discourse on competences

The main aim of this study was to research the ability of higher education institutions to facilitate the transition from formal education to the workplace in the context of law studies. The premise of this study was that competence-based education involves a cultural change. This cultural change cannot be reached without an inclusive rationale (Bruner, 1990, 2002) and a coherent methodological approach. The introduction of the concept of competence in higher education needs to overcome certain barriers such as its rationale, as its origins are rooted in the industrial vocational training. Initially the discourse of competences emerged from behavioural approaches to training. This discourse focused on the actions that employees have to take in their workplace, but without paying attention to their understanding of these actions (Rue, 2007). The recent call for high order skills in the context of the 'knowledge economy' faces the risk of moving back to uncritical behaviourist training frameworks. However this can be overcome by redefining the concept of competence (Rue, 2007). According to Winterton *et al.* (2006) the concept of competence involves: knowledge; skills; intellectual and attitudinal abilities; and the reflective thinking of individuals.

The concept of competence is complex and it is often seen as difficult to deal with. It integrates different elements that operate independently but are closely related. All these elements - knowledge, skills, attitudes and emotions - affect the behaviour of people in action. Therefore, competences are developed and learned in formal and informal settings. Competences

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\* Antoni Font. Tel.: +34 93 4029055  
E-mail address: afont@ub.edu

tend to be developed in long lapses of time, becoming a dynamic concept, which changes and evolves with the activity and in context (Eraut, 1994). From the perspective of the workplace, competences are related to higher levels of performance and according to Winterton (2006) are potentially transferable to other situations. The fusion between both learning contexts, formal and informal, allows the incorporation and recognition of all the skills that an individual has developed in formal and informal learning environments. Learning outcomes can be defined based on functional alignment (Biggs, 2003). This enables to establish a better relation between training and employment. It also allows exploring the synergy between formal and experiential learning to foster professional competences. Therefore this leads to meeting the demands of the new ‘knowledge economy’ and professional development. However the competence-based framework and therefore the idea of a paradigm shift in education mean challenging current and deeply ingrained teaching routines that are socially shared. A more holistic approach to teaching and learning is needed that enables moving from transmission of knowledge to more student-centred approaches and learning-in-action.

### 3. Problem based learning in legal education

Problem based learning (PBL) is seen as a philosophy and a teaching and learning method (Rue *et. al.*, 2011). According to Engel (1997) current students will be active professionals in the coming years. They will need to practice in an era characterised by uncertainty and rapid and constant change (Schön, 1995). Therefore self-directed and lifelong learning throughout their life will be crucial in order to deal with rapid changing situations and uncertainty in the workplace. A set of competences and specific skills such as flexibility and dealing with uncertainty ought to be developed. Recent research (Rue *et al.*, 2010) shows that students involved in PBL models performed better on self-regulation and linking theory to practice than students involved in traditional teaching and learning styles. For legal education, PBL methodology is considered key in the acquisition of competences and the development of skills. This has been evidenced by several studies, since PBL aims match with those of legal education (Cruikshank, 1996). For Pérez Lledó (2006) it is necessary to train first-class law professionals, technically competent lawyers that have the skills to use law knowledge skilfully and are able to juridically argue a range of possible solutions. However this law professional, besides being ‘technically competent’ needs to take moral responsibility in the usage and application of law for social purposes. Considering the aims of legal education, Pérez Lledó (2006) suggests three different levels of training: the cognitive level, which refers to knowledge acquisition; the methodological level, which refers to skills and techniques required for argumentation; and a higher level related to political and moral legal education, which allows the fulfilment of critical and constructive ends. However a certain consensus exists on the ends of training programmes, no consensus exists on the exact meaning of both a lawyer and being competent. As a starting point it is necessary to define a framework of professional competences of lawyers. This is a difficult task especially in relation to the specific competences, because the law profession offers many shades and contrasts. However it could be argued that the central activity of the lawyer is counselling, mediating conflicts and represent outsiders’ interests. To establish the professional competences of a lawyer rigorously (Eraut, 1994) a set of the most influential normative and official documents have been reviewed and analysed. A comparison of the competences contained in these documents (MacCrate Report, 1992; Proyecto Tuning America Latina, 2004-2008; Decreto de acceso a la Abogacía, 2011) and other relevant publications that consider the conditions of employment and the workplace (Esteves, 2011; Prospects, 2012; TARGETjobs, 2012; Kane, 2012) is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Competences reported in official documents and publications

Competences reported in the documents analysed	Documents analysed							Total
	Esteves	Prospects	Kane top ten	TARGETjobs	Decreto acceso	MacCrate Report	Proyecto Tuning América Latina	
1. Knowledge	5	3	7	0	10	5	4	34
2. Representation of outsiders’ interests	6	0	5	0	7	7	8	33
3. Management	6	0	9	6	3	2	0	26
4. Communication	2	3	10	3	2	3	1	24
5. Teamwork	5	0	5	5	2	1	2	20
6. Factual and legal research	0	1	3	0	1	9	1	15
7. Decision-making	5	0	1	0	1	6	2	15
8. Analysis	0	1	4	1	3	2	3	14
9. Information technologies	2	0	8	0	1	0	1	12
10. Planning	0	0	5	4	0	3	0	12
11. Ethics	0	0	2	0	3	5	1	11
12. Argumentation	0	2	2	1	1	1	4	11
13. Application of law and	0	1	2	0	1	1	5	10

knowledge								
14. Advice	2	0	0	0	2	5	0	9
15. Evaluation	0	1	1	0	2	3	1	8
16. Problem-solving	0	1	1	2	2	1	1	8
17. Second language	5	0	0	0	1	0	1	7
18. Creativity	1	2	0	1	0	2	1	7
19. Negotiation	0	0	0	2	0	4	0	6
20. Leadership	1	0	0	3	1	0	1	6
21. Business orientation	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	6
22. Critical thinking	0	1	1	0	2	1	1	6
23. Motivation	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	5
24. Professional improvement	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	5
25. Writing of documents	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	5
26. Diagnosis	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	5
27. Ability to relate and synthesise	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	5
28. Interpretation	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	5
29. Social state of law	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	4
30. Alternative resolution of conflicts	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
31. Autonomy	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
32. Justice	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
33. Loyalty	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
34. Confidence	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
35. Attention to diversity	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
36. Flexibility	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
37. Work under pressure	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>350</b>

Values = number of detected occurrences for each of the documents in the header

Table 1 shows the competences of a legal professional required by different official documents. Table 1 also shows the number of times that these competences are reported in each document. The total number of occurrences in the documents analysed allows drawing a quantitative comparison of the importance assigned to different competences. Knowledge of the standards and principles that compose the legal system is the most cited competence. Representation of outsiders' interest, management, communication and teamwork are the following most cited competences in the documents. The other ten more cited competences are those that refer to organisational, instrumental and interpersonal aspects of the profession. The only purely cognitive competence that appears in the first half of the list is the ability to analyse. The rest of the cognitive skills appear in the second half of the list, which also includes skills that are purely professional. Loyalty, confidence, attention to diversity, flexibility and work under pressure are the less cited competences in the documents.

The lawyer profession can be defined according to two variables. A fixed variable characterised by the development of cognitive skills and an independent variable related to specific activities. The lawyer is in charge of generating solutions placed within legislative frameworks. This requires the construction of a discourse based on facts and often conflicting interests. Nevertheless lawyers need to articulate juridical arguments with consistent narratives.

For the former positivist mentality, dominant in legal thought in Spain, it can be seen as surprising that law learning can take place in an inductive way. This is because deductive reasoning from the general rule is a more common approach to the lawyer practice. This methodological approach is characterised by the extraction of concepts through the analysis of linguistics of legal statements and their logical relationships. This allows building a neutral argument that often excludes empirical, sociological and moral considerations (Pérez Lledó, 2006). However it should be noted that the professional work of the lawyer is more complex and involves both deduction and induction. PBL has the advantage of connecting these processes with the professional reality, thereby facilitating the development of different types of reasoning. This in turn increases the motivation to learn and fosters long-term acquisition of knowledge and skills.

#### 4. Analysis of the impact of PBL education in legal education

A document analysis of official documents and reports on professional competences of lawyers has been conducted and presented in the previous section. Documents from USA and UK have been analysed due to the lack of sources of this type. In 2011 in Spain, a regulatory decree to the lawyer profession was published. This document develops a list of the competences that

graduates ought to develop during law studies. Previously (2004-2008) the Tuning project for Latin America produced a similar list. In the USA, the *MacCrata Report* (1992) represented one of the first attempts to define a set of competences for law graduates.

The research presented in this paper is based on the study of a group of twelve law graduates that finished their studies between 2005 and 2010, a group of five human resources managers - employers and a group of five university mentors. The data collected is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with graduates (10), mentors (5) and employers (5), and two life stories of graduates. The semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2010 and 2012. Four focus-groups were also conducted, two with legal practitioners (judges and lawyers) and two with graduates that took part in PBL courses. The interviews conducted with employers seek to identify the type of professional, with what professional competences, they are seeking to employ.

This sample was selected because these three groups are directly involved in the initial training of law professionals. The aim of this research was to identify the views of these three different groups on professional competences and the role of PBL in fostering these amongst law students. Employers and graduates working in different firms with different legal focuses and forms of professional practice were selected to have a heterogeneous sample.

The data analysis has allowed the exploration of how PBL training influences graduates in their adaptation to the professional practice and the workplace. The data analysis explored common difficulties identified by graduates in their initial stages of the professional practice and the skills and competences developed through their engagement in PBL courses.

Table 2. Sample law graduates

<u>Table</u>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Graduate</b>	<b>Membership professional body</b>	<b>Sector level</b>	<b>Studies father</b>	<b>Studies mother</b>	<b>Grade entry</b>	<b>Graduate grade</b>	<b>Work experience</b>
	Z.A.	1978	Male	2007	2011	High	University	University	5,58	7	Internship no legal
	X.B.	1981	Male	2006	2010	Medium	University	Primary level	5,75	7,4	Internship no legal
	M.M.	1980	Female	2009	2009	Medium	Primary level	Primary level	5,34	7	Internship no legal
	R.G.	1982	Female	2005	2005	Medium-high	University	Primary level	8,3	8,4	Internship no legal
	S.T.	1982	Male	2005	2007	Medium	Secondary	Primary level	7,92	8,2	Internship
	P.A.	1979	Male	2008	2009	Medium	University	Secondary	6,71	6,5	No legal
	M.P.	1985	Female	2010	2010	High	University	University	8,1	8	Internship no legal
	Y.M.	1984	Female	2007	2011	Medium	University	University	8,16	8,6	Internship no legal
	B.Q.	1986	Female	2009	2009	Medium-high	University	University	7,32	7,7	Internship no legal
	A.S.	1984	Male	2010	2010	Medium-high	Professional training	Secondary	5,48	7,2	Internship no legal
	J.K.	1985	Male	2008	2010	Medium-high	University	Primary	6,9	8,6	Internship no legal
	R.S.	1984	Male	2009	2010	Medium	Secondary	Secondary	6,7	7,2	Official

3.

Sample employers

<b>Name</b>	<b>Membership professional body</b>
M.M.M.	2000
B.B.B.	1998
R.R.R.	1987
Q.Q.Q.	1976
Z.Z.Z.	1962
A.A.A.	1962
S.S.S.	1989
P.P.P.	2007
X.X.X.	2001
Y.Y.Y.	1995

The interviews and focus groups were transcribed into word files and analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. The application TAMS Analyzer was used as a support tool for this task. A set of categories emerged from the data, these categories, which corresponded to skills and competences, were named similarly to the competences reported in the documents analysed as part of this study. All transcripts were validated by the interviewees. The information obtained was broken down into units of information that make sense for themselves and that anyone can understand and interpret in a similar way. Each unit of information was codified, codes were then grouped into categories, and categories. The information obtained in the interviews with graduates was contrasted with the views of mentors and the framework of a lawyer that emerged from the interviews with

employers, those responsible for human resources. A questionnaire was also distributed amongst twenty-five graduates between 2005 and 2010. This has helped identify the benefits and deficits of the university training, and also the difficulties faced by graduates in their initial stages of professional practice and adaptation to the workplace.

*1.1. The working conditions in the legal office*

A legal office can be understood as the work environment in which the professional activity of the lawyer is developed. The legal office is an organisation where materials and human resources execute a task through the development of a professional activity. This office is placed in the services sector. Human capital and trust between people are key features of the legal office. Law firms are often hierarchical organisations with a large delegation of functions. The hierarchy, autonomy and interpersonal relationships amongst members of the organisation, and between them and the audience are intrinsic elements of the development of a novel lawyer. The framework described influences the exercise of the professional activity. The agenda of a law firm is also influenced by two other important factors: customer dependence and time constraints i.e. pressure to meet certain deadlines.

In the interviews conducted with employers and graduates the problems and difficulties faced by new professionals in their adaptation to the workplace were identified. Human resources managers stressed that one of the main issues was related to graduates difficulties to adapt to this new working environment. Many of these attitudes could be rooted to a paternalistic approach of university studies in Spain. This presents difficulties in becoming independent learners, both in terms of the way ‘to go’ in the resolution of cases, and how to work on them to anticipate possible consequences. The dominance of the university approach in the workplace determines that some graduates that recently joined a legal office are not aware of the risk they take in their work; they do not distinguish between the effort invested and the result obtained. Consequently they have difficulties to understand and accept their own failures as part of their own learning process and adaptation to the workplace. This creates frustration and problems of adaptation that are clearly reflected in the views of both employers and graduates.

With regards to the development of the professional task, participants stressed that one of the most important difficulty is teamwork, including interpersonal communication. It results difficult to share information, as colleagues tend to be defensive and show awe at their senior peers and the Administration of Justice. They have panic to make any involuntary mistakes, as error is interpreted as punishment. For this reason graduates tend to wait to receive orders from their superiors. This issue is also reflected in job advertisements, law firms when defining the profile of the job candidate ask for ‘pro-active’ or ‘independent’ professionals. This research also showed a strong embarrassment of new graduates to ask questions or express doubts or ignorance, because of their fear in showing their weaknesses and emotions. The aspects related to the management of their own work are also emphasised by employers as a significant difficulty, which graduates tend to agree.

Table 4. Key challenges identified by graduates

At the beginning of my career ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I was not used to have a schedule.</li> <li>▪ I was not used to prioritise tasks.</li> <li>▪ I was not used to have orders from superiors.</li> <li>▪ I was not used to work under pressure.</li> <li>▪ I didn't know the starting point of a case.</li> <li>▪ I didn't dare to ask to colleagues for doubts or fear to avoid showing ignorance.</li> </ul>
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In reference to the key characteristics of a professional that is 'technically competent' (Pérez Lledó, 2006) according to the employers interviewed a law professional has to meet three criteria: specialised knowledge; strategic thinking and an ethical commitment. Regarding knowledge, employers stressed that professional work requires specialisation and teamwork with leadership capabilities, a functional division and a great personal interdependence. Conversely, employers emphasised that broad general knowledge of law and the general principles that govern both domestic and international legislation need to be emphasised as part of university education. However most of employers' discussion was focused on strategic thinking. This involves the use of cognitive skills but also involves the deployment of interpersonal skills, where communication plays an important role. Negotiation, empathy and flexibility are competences highlighted as crucial to establish positive relationships with colleagues, customers and the judicial or administrative authorities. The orientation towards the customer becomes one of the key features of the lawyer professional work. Instrumental skills such as mastery of a second language, ability to search for information or the use of information technologies are highly valued by employers.

Finally, it should be noted that the legal profession has become industrialised, the demand for legal services has increased exponentially and the customer increasingly focuses its attention on ex-ante action to prevent disputes (Van Bemmelen van Gent, 2012). This implies cooperation amongst lawyers and customers to try to reach a solution. Therefore, some employers highlighted commitment as a significant attitude of the lawyer. This attitude connects with an axiological component, which can be assessed in accordance with ethical standards.

### *1.2. The difficulties of graduates in adapting to the workplace*

Graduates considered that the difficulties they faced to adapt to the workplace had two main origins: deficits in their training and cultural aspects. Deficits in their training do not refer to theoretical knowledge, they refer to a lack of training in applied knowledge and further opportunities to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired. This was also identified in a study undertaken by AQU (2003), where the students surveyed considered the theoretical knowledge they had acquired through their higher education degrees exceeded its practical utility (AQU, 2003).

Table 5. Cross-tabulation of the competences identified by graduates and employers

Competences identified by graduates																											
	Analysis	Application	Argumentation	Advice	Evaluation	Communication	Self-confidence	Creativity	Diagnosis	Flexibility	Management	Interpretation	Research	Leadership	Motivation	Negotiation	Critical thinking	Work schedule	Decision making	Writing of text	Represent the interests	Problem-solving	Synthesis	ADR	Technology	Teamwork	TOTAL
Analysis		1	3	1	1			1	3		1						2	1	2		1	2	3				22
Decision-making	2		2	2							1		1	1	2	1					4				1		17
Argumentation	3	1			1												2		2		1	2	3				15
Application	1		1	1	1	1		1				3					2				2		2				15
Evaluation	1	1	1					1	1	1			1								1	2			3		13
Critical thinking	2	2	2	2																	1	2	1				12
Motivation						1					2			1					2		3					3	12
Problem-solving	2		1		1			2	1								2							2			11
Communication		1					1				1				1					3	3					1	11
Diagnosis	3	1		1	1								1					1				2					10
Synthesis	2	2	3														1					1					9
Research					1				2		1							2	1		1				1		9
Creativity	1	1			1					1													3				7
Interpretation		3																									3
																											144
<b>TOTAL</b>	17	13	13	7	7	2	1	5	7	2	6	3	3	2	3	1	9	4	7	3	17	14	9	5	2	4	166

Values = Number of occurrences detected in the data analysed

Table 5 is a cross-tabulation of the competences identified by graduates (first column) and the competences identified by employers (first row). The values in Table 5 express the number of occurrences that one competence had with another in a unit of information.

Employers made reference to communication skills. On the other hand graduates expressed fears of being ridiculed. This issue prevents them to naturally interact within other colleagues and working groups, participate in public speeches or structured debates. This is a negative factor because it reduces their autonomy and inhibits their learning from and with others. In this sense, it is apparent the existence of a significant deficit in law education in the university context: the lack of orientation and guidance on know-how. However it should be noted that one of the main difficulties identified by interviewees is about the methodology and the organisation of work. Different levels of difficulty can be distinguished in this arena. A first level of difficulty is presented by those aspects that relate to the conditions and the organisation of work. A second level of difficulty is related to the relationship established with the customer, which embraces oral and writing communication skills and the management of emotions. The third level makes reference to strategic thinking, which comprises the whole reasoning process. Finally the ethics of the profession was also emphasised by employers and graduates. This does not correspond to a difficulty but mirrors the complexity of certain situations and actions undertaken in legal offices.

## **5. The contribution of PBL to the workplace adaptation**

The results obtained can be classified into two major groups. One group refers to the development of cognitive skills that contribute to smooth the transition from university education to the workplace and the other group refers more specifically to the deployment of skills to do with the professional practice, which have been gained through higher education.

### *1.3. Cognitive skills*

From a cognitive perspective employers emphasised the importance of strategic thinking. Moreover the graduates interviewed considered that PBL provided them with the opportunity to apply knowledge to solve real problems. Graduates explicitly identified gaining insights into tools to link theory and practice as a methodological aim of PBL. Graduates also emphasised the importance of the functionality of these tools, both in learning and in the professional practice. This refers to the ability to transfer knowledge from a sector to another. Therefore the development of high order skills was seen as a priority by graduates. PBL was stressed by graduates as a teaching and learning methodology that contributed to foster high order skills and the ability to work autonomously.

Referring to the process leading to the resolution of problems, interviewees highlighted several aspects that are worthy of consideration. Most of the graduates interviewed emphasised the role of PBL in assisting the diagnosis phase of the problem. PBL was seen also as an intrinsic contributor to learning to search for solutions and the solving process in itself. According to the graduates PBL provided tools to foster reasoning based on analysis, argumentation and interpretation. PBL also facilitated learning about decision-making on the basis of a range of possible solutions. PBL approach encouraged critical and divergent thinking. Graduates considered that PBL was useful to their further professional work.

### *1.4. Practical or specific professional skills*

The graduates interviewed considered that PBL helped them develop a methodological understanding of legal processes that was very useful to their professional life. Graduates when asked about what were their memories of the major impacts of PBL had emphasised the approach and focus on real professional practice. Interviewees' responses differed when specifying the skills related to the approach to work. Some of them emphasised skills such as searching and managing information, with the search and analysis of jurisprudence as a predominant feature. Another feature highlighted by interviewees was the contribution that PBL had to the organisation of work. Having to execute different individual and group tasks such as the search of information, the elaboration of conceptual maps and reflective practice contributed to the organisation of work. Some of the graduates considered that they were organised in their work. Graduates stated that the ability to organise their work and tasks was enhanced because of their engagement in PBL courses.

Another key competence that emerged during the interviews was teamwork. The work of the lawyer is developed within teams, which are often interdisciplinary. By contrast, teamwork is uncommon in the context of higher education and students tend to refuse it because of previous negative experiences. Teamwork is a key feature of PBL, which represents an ideal space for future graduates to learn to work together and manage and resolve possible teamwork conflicts. These were aspects highlighted by all the graduates interviewed. In reference to teamwork it is necessary to emphasise two further aspects that emerged from the interviews with graduates. The first refers to the communicative competence and management of emotions, and the second refers to the coordination and leadership capabilities. Graduates interviewed recognised that they learned how to communicate within groups and to general public through PBL courses. In terms of communication and writing skills most of the interviewees stated that they had little opportunities to gain these skills through their university education, however PBL courses enabled them to gain communicative skills. To sum up Table 6 shows the results obtained in the questionnaire distributed amongst graduates. Table 6 presents the benefits that graduates emphasised they obtained through their engagement in PBL courses.



Table 6. Benefits obtained through engagement in PBL courses

	1	2	3	4
<b>My engagement and experience through participating in PBL courses initially:</b>				
It helped me plan the problem-solving approach and identify possible solutions for a professional case-study	0	0	6	18
It facilitated the task of teamwork with peers in a joint project	0	3	6	16
It gave me criteria and tools to know how to search for information	0	2	8	15
It allowed me to overcome difficulties of communication with peers, bosses and/or authorities	0	4	10	11
It taught me to think about different things/factors before making a decision	3	0	11	11
It helped me realise about my strengths and weaknesses	0	6	8	9
It made me realise about the importance of being independent	2	1	14	8
Number of students. Values: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Agree; 4 = Strongly agree.				

Table 6 shows the high value that graduates assign to PBL in the development of professional competences such as the ability to solve problems, communication, overcome difficulties, decision-making and teamwork. Therefore PBL has contributed to soften the transition from university to the workplace. PBL facilitates intellectual processes that are intrinsic of the professional practice of the lawyer.

## 6. Conclusions

From the analysis of the data obtained it can be concluded that PBL training has had a noticeable impact in three different arenas:

- In the approach to work
- In the personal autonomy
- In the approximation to the professional practice

In reference to the approach to work the graduates interviewed emphasised the methodological approach to the professional practice. The intellectual process that students follow when engaging in PBL processes is identical to the process used by practitioners in their professional duties. Thus it can be concluded that PBL is a methodological choice that favours and softens the transition from academia to the professional reality. Furthermore PBL offers them a reference model that students can apply to their professional practice afterwards.

Referring to personal autonomy graduates that had been involved in PBL acknowledged the need to take initiative and be autonomous in making decisions and judgements. They also acknowledged the need to be reflective and act according to their own judgement and the learning aims established. This fosters a more strategic way of working, which includes establishing aims, elaborating a work plan and evaluating the results obtained. Although respondents showed a high level of satisfaction in gaining professional competences through PBL, this strategy alone does not cover the diverse needs of training graduates. It should be noted that an explicit demand for training in this area currently exist.

PBL contributes to bridge the gap between theory and practice, approximating students to the professional reality. From the data analysed in this research four aspects can be identified where the incidence of PBL has been relevant and plausible. The first aspect refers to organisational aspects: the need for planning and having a shared agenda; prioritising; time management; and work under pressure amongst others. These are issues that have been experienced at some point by all students in PBL. A second aspect is based on reproducing the intellectual process involved in working as a lawyer through PBL groups. Bring a problematical situation to the students, in which students learn inductively forces them to engage in a strategic process of analysis, diagnosis, argumentation and decision making. This process in turn involves the development of critical and divergent thinking. This provides the case for a situation very closed to the real professional practice. It fosters reflective practice and learning on what are the strategies used and how professionals deal with challenging situations in practice. A third aspect is the development of instrumental skills such as the search, management and selection of information, especially jurisprudence, which some university graduates only have had the opportunity to do this practice in PBL courses. Finally, work in small groups has become the environment where students have had the opportunity to learn to manage their emotions, develop shared leadership, interpersonal and conflict resolution competences.

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