

CANADIAN Lawyer 4STUDENTS

Ontario licensing fees nearly double to almost \$5000

Quoting Sherrard Kuzz LLP

February 17, 2014

Ontario common law students taking on an articling position or participating in the new law practice program have been served a \$4,860 bill to get licensed to practise law.

Last year, the fee came to about \$2,600.

Chris Rudnicki, a third-year University of Windsor law student, was in class when he received the invoice from the Law Society of Upper Canada.

“My eyes sort of glazed over, I stopped paying attention to what was going on and started thinking, ‘OK, how is this going to affect my finances?’” he says. “Those of us who had been following this issue for a while knew something was coming, but a lot of students had no idea that this was going to be slammed down on them. They were shocked.”

The fee is paid to the LSUC, which regulates lawyers in Ontario. The money will pay for two examinations and related materials, as well as administration costs for articles and the LPP — a new alternative to articling. The increased fee is largely due to funding the new LPP.

“The need for change, and the need for an alternative pathway to licensing, has been the subject of discussion and consultation since 2011,” says Roy Thomas, LSUC communications director. “[The LSUC] has from the beginning noted that a fee increase would be necessary to cover the costs of enhancements to the articling program, as well as the introduction of the Law Practice Program.”

For Rudnicki, it means increased debt.

“I have no savings — I’m in law school,” says Rudnicki, who will be articling at a small Toronto-based criminal defence law firm later this year. “I’m on my line of credit right now and — I don’t know if lucky is the right word — but I guess I’m lucky I have some room left for the \$5,000. So I’m just going to dig myself ever deeper into debt.”

Most larger firms have traditionally covered this cost for their articling students, but Rudnicki’s firm won’t be paying his fee.

“I think only the Bay Street corporate commercial firms can afford to pay their students’ articling fees. I don’t think many firms can afford to pay them,” he says.

Cambridge LLP normally takes on one or two articling students each year and the firm pays its students’ fees. Jon-David Giacomelli, a Cambridge partner, says the increased fee won’t change the number of students they take on and the firm will continue to pay the fee.

“We look to articling students to be our incoming associates, so it’s important to us and I can tell you it wouldn’t impact us to the point where we would make a decision on not hiring an articling student,” he says. “I think it will discourage smaller boutique firms or people will cut back from three to two [articling students].”

Sherrard Kuzz LLP, an employment law firm in Toronto, says it will also continue to pay articling students’ fees.

“It’s the cost of doing business,” Erin Kuzz says. “When you look the grand scheme of the expense associated with having an articling student — and, frankly, I’d say the investment associated with having an articling student — this is a small part of it.”

In fact, Sherrard Kuzz is bringing the number of articling students it supports up to four from three.

“For us, having people that we’ve had with us from day one of their articles, we have trained and educated the way we want to train and educate our lawyer, it’s a no-brainer investment for us,” she says. “It certainly wouldn’t impact on the number of students we would have.”

One of the largest law firms in Toronto, Blakes Cassels & Graydon LLP, will be bringing on 26 articling students this year and will continue to pay their fees. That many law students would have cost \$67,600 last year — this year, it will pay nearly \$126,360.

In 2013, the firm welcomed 31 articling students, but Blakes communication manager Celia Bobkin says the fee didn’t play a part in determining the number of positions they could hold in 2014.

Sherif Rizk, president of the University of Ottawa’s Common Law Student Society, says students entering the articling phase of law school don’t really have a choice but to pay the fee because they’ve already invested so much time and money into their career. His concern lies with students just embarking on their career.

“A lot can change in two or three years, so if you’re in first year now, you’re probably sitting there thinking, ‘Well, what else is going to happen by the time I graduate?’” Rizk says. “It’s a major financial decision for students, especially if you already have debt going into law school or if you have other financial commitments you have to make while in law school.”

Students at Ottawa U are looking at what type of action they can take to bring awareness to this issue, including working with other law student societies within the province.

The Law Union at the University of Windsor has started an [online petition](#) that already has more than 900 signatures.

Rudnicki encourages all Ontario law students, lawyers, and professors to sign it:

“Given the general recognition of how unfair this thing is, we’re hopeful that the law society will do what’s right and make a more equitable way of funding the [LPP].”

Sherrard Kuzz LLP Toronto-based employment and labour law firm representing the interests of employers. Our lawyers can be reached at 416.603.0700 (Main), 416.420.0738 (24 Hour) or by visiting www.sherrardkuzz.com.

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