



Complete Guide to Pupillage

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What is Pupillage

A person who intends to practise as a barrister is required to train as a pupil for a period of not less than twelve months, and complete such further training as may be required by the Bar Council. Pupillage begins after completion of your BVC and is the final stage of qualification for a career at the Bar.

A pupillage involves a 12-month period of practical supervision under an experienced barrister and can be in chambers or at an authorised Pupillage Training Organisation (see Employed Practice).

The first six months is non-practising with pupils shadowing their pupil master. The next six months is spent practising with pupils undertaking their own cases.

The Non Practising (First) Six Months

This must be undertaken in a continuous period of six months in England and Wales, in a chambers or authorised Pupillage Training Organisation. During the first six months pupils may not accept any instructions, except for noting briefs, where they have the permission of their pupil supervisor or head of chambers.

The second six months can be spent at the same Chambers but it can be beneficial for you to spend this at another set.

The Practising Six Months

The practising six must commence no later than 12 months after the completion of the non practising six months and be undertaken in a continuous period of six months or with only such intervals (each not exceeding one month) as to ensure that the practising six months is completed within an overall period of nine months.

All of the practising six must be undertaken after call. The practising six can be undertaken in any EU member state, provided that it is undertaken with a registered pupil supervisor in chambers or an authorised Pupillage Training Organisation.

A pupil is entitled to supply legal services and exercise rights of audience as a barrister during the practising six months provided that he or she has the permission of his or her pupil supervisor or head of chambers.

All or part of the practising six months may be satisfied by any, or a combination of, various forms of external training, provided Bar Council approval is obtained beforehand. As this is based on individual assessment we strongly advise applicants to contact the Bar Council prior to undertaking any work experience with a view to counting time off their pupillage.

External Training can include:

- 6 months with a qualified lawyer (employed in private practice in an EU member state)
- 5 month 'stage' with European Commission (in Brussels, Luxembourg or London).
- 6 weeks marshalling with a judge of the high court or with a circuit judge.
- 4 weeks with solicitor / professional person whose work relevant to that of your pupillage supervisor
- 4 weeks with organisation that supplies free of charge legal services to the public such as a law centre, any pro bono clinic or Free Representation Unit.

Further details and details of other experience can be found on: www.legaleducation.org.uk

The State of Pupillage

You will no doubt understand that competition for places for pupillage is strong. The popular sets can find themselves with around 300 applications for pupillage; other sets can receive around 50. It is dangerous to apply to only the biggest and most popular sets, spread your applications to maximise your chances of success.

You have no doubt read recent articles about the downturn in the number of pupillages available.

"Almost 30% fewer pupillages are available to young barristers this year than were on offer just three years ago, leaving an increasing number of Bar Vocational Course (BVC) graduates chasing an evershrinking pool of training positions at the UK Bar"
Legal Week (01/05)

The reason for the decrease is widely believed to be as a result of the introduction of minimum funding regulations brought in by the Bar Council in 2001 (see Funding). Prior to 2001, as pupillage was not funded, chambers could offer more pupillages than they had

tenancy available for. Now chambers are believed to be selecting pupils with a view to offering them tenancy – essentially trying to ensure that they make or at least have the potential to make a return on their investment. This has also seen the number of six month pupillages decline as chambers compete for pupils and ultimately tenants.

We have placed these statistics in this leaflet not to put you off before you have even started applying for pupillage but to give you a true picture of the competitive nature of applying for and gaining pupillage. They are here in order to impress upon you the determination and experience needed to achieve your goal of practicing at the Bar. You will have to also allow yourself plenty of time to do your applications to the best of your ability. Do not wait for OLPAS to open, start constructing your answers as soon as possible.

According to latest projections the number of pupillages for 2003-04 dropped to a record low of 600, compared with a figure of 853 in 2000-01. At the same time the number of places available on the BVC, has increased in the same period from 1,403 in 2000-01, to 1,594 in 2004-05. Competition regulations have so far prevented the Bar Council from taking any action to limit the number of places available on the BVC – so the competition is getting even fiercer.

A Statistical Snap Shot of the Bar 2002 – 03

BVC students:	1121
Pupillages:	711
Female	51.5%
Declared Ethnic Minority	18%
Oxbridge	23%
2.1 degree	60.7%
GDL Commendation	53.9%
BVC Very Competent	75.2%

A full breakdown of statistics and what these mean can be found on the Bar Council's Legal Education website: www.legaleducation.org.uk

Funding

Under Bar Council regulations, which took effect in January 2003, chambers must guarantee payment of £10,000 per annum to each pupil.

First six: Unless exempted from the requirements, chambers must pay each pupil a minimum of £833.33 per month during the 1st six (ie £5000 total).

Second Six: Unless exempted from the requirements, chambers must pay each pupil a minimum of £833.33 per month (ie £5000 during the 2nd six months), either by way of an award or guaranteed receipts.

Pupillage Timetable

The process of looking for a pupillage should begin as soon as you decide that the Bar is for you, applications to some chambers and authorised pupillage training organisations (see the Employed Bar) can be up to two years in advance.

If you commenced the vocational stage of training (i.e. GDL) on or after 1 September 1998, you must start pupillage within five years of passing the BVC (the time-limit can be extended by the Bar Council in individual cases).

All Pupillage Providers should abide by a common timetable:

- No offers can be made in the period 1 May to 31 July.
- No offers can be made before midnight on 31 July in an applicant's penultimate undergraduate year.
- All offers must remain open for at least 14 days

Applications through OLPAS

All pupillage providers advertise their schemes on the OLPAS (On-line Pupillage Application System) website. OLPAS is a free online application system that allows you to search and apply for pupillage.

OLPAS operates two application deadlines (seasons) a year: April (Summer) and September (Autumn). Using this system you are able to choose up to 24 pupillage providers each year just using one application. It is essential that you apply through the Summer season, as many chambers do not take part in the Autumn season.

To fill out the OLPAS form you need to register your details at www.pupillages.com. Here you need to provide a password, which can be used to access your form at any time. OLPAS allows you to update your contact details and qualifications after you have submitted your form.

The OLPAS Summer season opens in March to coincide with the National Pupillage Fair which this year is being held on Saturday 5 March (see last page of this guide for more information).

The OLPAS website also includes the latest edition of the Pupillages and Awards Handbook which contains listings of all pupillages available in the UK. You are able to browse the handbook by using an A-Z menu or by using the search tool. You should use this handbook to research providers and draw up your short list of those you want to apply to (see careers section of the intranet for other useful websites and tips). You can also get a free copy of the handbook at the National Pupillage Fair.

The OLPAS Form

In your OLPAS application you should convince the pupillage provider that you: have a strong interest in the work and pupillage provider; possess the key skills that they require and have a good insight into the nature of the job and the legal profession.

Work Experience

There is really no need to put down on the OLPAS form something like:

'On this mini-pupillage, I shadowed a barrister. I went to court, read the papers and sat in on conferences. This was a very interesting insight into the workings of a set of chambers'.

It is commonly understood that in mini-pupillage you shadow barristers, attend court, read the papers etc. You are not advancing your application at all in merely listing activities in which you were engaged.

The real value of talking about your mini-pupillages or related legal experience is in telling chambers about how you responded to any number of particular events to which you were party. Your reaction to a situation (be it legal, evidential, procedural, ethical) helps chambers to see what sort of barrister you would become.

Let us say hypothetically, you were sent to observe a prosecution of human rights protester. It would be very interesting for chambers to know how reacted to that scenario ethically and morally. Or lets say you were sent to defend a racist. Maybe you went on a case where the judgment surprised you. How did you feel about that? Has that led to any internal dialogue in which you have come to a better understanding of the sort of barrister you want to be?

The great advantage of mini-pupillage is that you have the chance to see real cases with real clients and real barristers. You can take a very clear and tangible scenario and show to chambers how that event on the mini-pupillage informed you, deterred you, inspired you, or whatever. Whatever your reaction was, it is a part of your character as a lawyer, and, as such,

it could be very interesting and revealing to chambers.

You should also relate this to non-legal experience. Think about what your experience has taught you about your skills and strengths; how would these lend themselves to a career at the bar? In affect everything you have done has taught you something and ultimately culminated in your decision to practice at the bar. As a mature student or for those considering a career change, your previous experience is extremely useful for pupillage applications as it provides concrete evidence of your skills and also demonstrates that you have made an informed decision to move in to practice.

Explain in no more than 150 words, why want to become a barrister?

This question tries to determine your commitment to a career in law: the thinking and research you have done about the profession and what you want from a career as a barrister. Can you demonstrate enough commitment and interest in law to persuade the pupillage provider to invest money and time in you?

Everybody dreads the question. But really, you should be able to answer this if you want to go to the Bar. The reason most people dread the question is that they actually dread hearing their own answer because it sounds vague and platitudinous. The great majority of all first draft answers to this question end up saying something like:

'I am attracted to the Bar because of the unique blend of intellectual rigour and the chance to meet people and think on your feet.'

If your answer is based around the combination of practical advocacy skill and intellectual challenge, you have done little more than uncover the very most simple and basic truth about life the Bar. It's not wrong – it's just not exactly a blinding revelation.

The real challenge is to find something more tangible to say. Most people have a more personal reason for coming to the Bar. It is useful to think about what initially

inspired you to become a barrister and about what made you continue pursuing this career. Undertaking mini-pupillages and taking part in activities such as mooting, is perhaps the best way to demonstrate this but you should also mention any placements in a solicitor's firm to show that you have thought about the different options open to you with in a law career.

In this answer you could mention whether you have had any relevant work experience that has helped you to see first hand what a barrister actually does or any personal experience of the work of a barrister – perhaps through family or friends? Has your law course (PGDL, BVC or degree), work experience or voluntary experience furthered your interest and commitment to a career in law? You have to show evidence of commitment to the Bar, and that you have really thought about why you want to be a barrister.

Maybe you saw something in mini-pupillage that really made you think 'this is the life for me', or maybe you have had some personal involvement with the law and you are motivated by concepts of justice, maybe you hate the idea of working in an office everyday, maybe you like the idea of spending time in prison cells consorting with the criminal underworld.

There are MANY very good reasons for coming to the Bar. You just need to be direct and clear about what it is that you want from this profession and to express this clearly and tangibly and try and avoid big general bland sweeping statements.

Which practice areas particularly interest you? (Choose up to a maximum of four).

You can choose a range of specialisms but think carefully about what specialism you are interested in i.e. is it worth choosing criminal if you really do not have any demonstrable experience in this field. Also consider your combination of practice areas and choose related areas to demonstrate you have targeted your application.

Explain in no more than 150 words, why you have chosen (these) specialism(s).

Again this question is trying to determine your commitment to a career and specifically your commitment to a particular specialism. Chambers look for motivation, commitment and enthusiasm.

Some people are clear about the areas in which they want to work – some are not. If you are not so sure, try putting the actual law out of your mind for a moment and think about what you will enjoy about being at the Bar. If it is advocacy, then you need to think about advocacy based areas of law (most obviously crime). If you like the notion of defending the rights of individuals against institutions (even the government) then think about Employment, Immigration etc. Don't be exclusively concerned about how you found the subjects on an academic level because the practical reality of an area of law can be quite different to the textbook on the subject.

Recent trends have been away from the general practitioner. The view is that to compete with solicitors who have rights of audience, then the barrister needs to be a specialist advocate AND a specialist in an area of law. It is hard to disagree that there is logic to this position. Even in sets of chambers that cover a wide range of areas, the individual practitioners are specialist and work in teams – with the practice area teams having a dedicated clerk.

Whilst there are increasingly few generalist practitioners, there is nothing wrong in seeking to do pupillage at sets with a broad base of work and seeing how you like the different areas in practice. The only pitfall to avoid is sounding as if you have not bothered to really research life at the Bar hard enough, and your lack of specialisation is forced upon you because you are naïve. As long as you can counter this impression, then there is nothing wrong in opting for a broad training – indeed many sets will encourage this.

If you have a particular specialism in mind talk to barristers and get a sense of what gives them professional fulfilment from the areas in which they practice. Be specific about what you have done that has ignited your interest in the work. Have you

researched the work and found a specific case / area interesting? Do you have relevant industrial / voluntary experience or a mini-pupillage in this area that you can draw on to demonstrate your interest?

Show that you have done your research and that you are genuinely interested in the work in this field. You should also think about what skills are particularly required in your chosen field. As a criminal barrister, for example, you will need to demonstrate that you can think on your feet and are a good public speaker; for family that you have good interpersonal skills and for civil that you have good written work.

Please detail any additional information relating to your academic / professional achievements that should be considered in your application – for example first and second year exam results, prizes, professional qualifications etc.

In this section you can detail anything that you feel may have been missed in the education section such as scholarships received at university, dissertation titles and grades, BVC coursework / tests grades, foreign language examinations, Inn's scholarships, essay competitions etc. It may be in this section here that you address any poor marks and also for mature students where you add in work related qualifications and memberships.

Please detail any additional information relating to your extra curricular achievements that should be considered in your application – for example mooting, debating experience, society membership etc.

This question is trying to assess how you manage your time. What have you been or are doing whilst studying at university or Law School; or even whilst working? If you are involved with any sporting or charity work tell them all about it – be specific. Working in chambers can be pressurised and they do not want people who cannot manage their time and 'burn out' - it is not all work and no play. Talk about what you have done, what contribution that has made to the school or

others and what you gained from your involvement such as mooting, debating competitions, pro bono / voluntary work, travel, society membership, organisation of events, charity work, other awards not covered in previous question such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards etc.

When you apply to each individual Provider you will be required to give an explanation (of no more than 150 words) of your reason for applying to that Pupillage Provider. The individual chambers cannot see the other 11 choices nor read what you have written about other sets.

Again this question is trying to determine your commitment to a career and specifically your commitment to their chambers. The obvious sources of information about sets of chambers are books such as 'The Bar Directory' and 'Chambers and Partners'. The OLPAS website (www.pupillages.com) has links to all the chambers' websites. This will tell you quite a lot about the set. More tips and websites to research chambers can be found on the careers intranet. In addition, keep networking and asking people that you may know or meet about the sets you are considering.

Solicitors will generally have some insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the sets that they instruct. The clerks are also useful barometers of what other sets are like. They will know better than anyone, which sets are busy and which are not. Remember that almost all barristers will describe their own set in wildly glowing terms and will be loathe to pay too many compliments to other sets, so be careful about basing an opinion of a set on a single source.

Also look out for 'Bar Mark'. This is a quality assurance award granted to Chambers that comply with some reasonably stringent rules and tests. If a set has Bar Mark, then this is generally a good sign that their administration is in good order and that it is running on sound principles and practices.

Try and speak to current pupils at a set of chambers to which you are applying. This can be very revealing about the realities of

life at that set. Some chambers will have open days for pupillage applicants and some will attend law fairs. These events give you the chance to meet people from chambers. It would be worth calling chambers and asking if and when they are attending any events at which you might be able to meet members of chambers.

Also keep an eye on notice boards (for example at the Inns) or adverts in Counsel magazine etc for lectures and seminars. If a set of chambers is trying to show off that it has particular expertise in an area, then one of the first things that chambers will do will be to ensure members of their chambers speak at events. If you know how a set of chambers is trying to promote and market itself, you will sure learn quite a lot about them.

Show that you have done your research about the chambers and that you are genuinely interested in them – not just that you want a pupillage with any old chambers!

General Tips

- Take a photocopy of the form and spend time drafting your answers
- Assemble supporting information e.g. exam results before you start
- Avoid jargon, waffle and clichés
- Check for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors
- Get a friend or Careers Adviser to proof read your answers
- Always keep a copy to re-read before the interview
- Do not leave sending the form until the last minute. The system has crashed the last two years running
- Always check the details on the website with the handbook – the book has been wrong a number of times in the past
- Take your time over applications, make sure you have considered all answers and reviewed your applications before you press 'send'.

Do not forget the Careers Service can review your applications by email.
Leeds: leedscareers@bppls.com
London: lawcareers@bppls.com

Alternative Pupillage Providers

The majority of solicitors and barristers are employed in private practice but this is changing. Between 1992 - 2002 the numbers of employed solicitors grew from 9,778 to 18,474.

The reform of rules governing pupillage under the Access to Justice Act 1999, removed the requirement that all pupillages must be undertaken in chambers.

For more information and presentation downloads about the Employed Bar, please see Employed Practice section of the careers intranet.

Industry

There are currently about 6,000 lawyers employed in commerce and industry in the UK. They offer in-house specialist legal knowledge to large organisations such as utilities, finance and industrial companies. Industry can offer more responsibility, more careers support and more regular working hours as well as financial stability.

Some companies offer pupillages although there is no definitive list at present, Chambers and Partners Guide to the Legal Profession lists contact details of in-house lawyers for your initial research.

On the Bar Council's list of authorised pupillage training organisations (www.legaleducation.org.uk) at the moment: Abbey National, GlaxoSmithKline, Axa Sun Life. It is much more common to move in to industry after pupillage. Opportunities are advertised additionally on the OLPAS website (www.pupillages.com)

Solicitors Firms

Pupillage at solicitors firms is still quite rare, Kathryn Hayes recently became the first barrister in England to qualify within a firm of solicitors at Hammonds Suddards Edge.

Currently only two firms are listed on the Bar Council's list of authorised pupillage training organisations but it may be worthwhile contacting the larger firms direct (or those with an in-house advocacy department) to enquire about their plans to offer pupillage.

It is much more common to move in to industry after pupillage. Opportunities are advertised on the OLPAS website (www.pupillages.com) when they arise.

If you are interested in working with a firm, another option may be to apply for a training contract and become a solicitor. Many firms are keen to receive applications from BVC students wishing to convert to becoming a solicitor.

You will follow the same training as any other trainee although if you are converting after completing a pupillage you will also have to sit the QLTT.

To enable you to gain a thorough understanding of our practice, we ask you to enter into a two-year quasi-training contract.
Slaughter and May Graduate Recruitment Website, 2005

The Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT) is a conversion test which enables lawyers qualified in certain countries outside England and Wales, as well as UK barristers, to qualify as solicitors. For further information visit: www.bpp.com/law/London/QLTT/QLtt.htm

Many of the larger commercial law firms will require at least a couple of years post qualification experience as a barrister if you intend to convert to become a solicitor after qualification - you will need to have a lot to offer them especially as solicitors now may be able to obtain higher rights of audience.

For details of training contracts and applications see the relevant sections on the careers intranet.

Crown Prosecution Service

The CPS (www.cps.gov.uk) has opportunities for Caseworkers and Prosecutors responsible for reviewing and prosecuting criminal cases and advising the police. In addition the CPS also offers pupillages to students who have completed the BVC.

Pupillages usually start in November with closing dates in September of each year and are advertised on their website as well as the OLPAS website (www.pupillages.com)

If you are already working at the CPS, The Law Scholarship Scheme for employees provides a comprehensive education and training framework for those interested in qualifying as a lawyer - ask your supervisor for more information.

Government Legal Service

The GLS (www.gls.gov.uk) consists of around 1600 qualified lawyers and legal trainees employed in 40 government organisations. The GLS take a small number of trainee solicitors and barristers each year and can offer sponsorship. Trainees may be trained in more than one government department and pupil barristers are able to spend some of their pupillage in chambers. There is also a vacation work placement scheme aimed at giving students an insight into the GLS' unique perspective of the law.

The placements are targeted at penultimate year law students and final year non-law students and are usually for a two or three week period. Applications for the vacation scheme should be made a year in advance and two years in advance for trainee positions. Pupillages are advertised on the GLS website as well as on the OLPAS website (www.pupillages.com)

Local Government Opportunities

All councils (www.lgcareers.com) have legal departments staffed by solicitors - and some barristers - to advise on a wide range of topics from employment to land purchase, through to prosecution of rogue traders and suppliers. Approximately 3,500 solicitors are employed in local authorities throughout the UK.

There is no national recruitment scheme or a list of local authority training contract vacancies as each local authority is a separate employer and will advertise and recruit according to their own policy. Pupillages are advertised on local authorities websites as well as the OLPAS website (www.pupillages.com)

CVs and Covering Letters

Whilst most pupillages are advertised on OLPAS not all pupillage providers require applications through this system and application deadlines are dependent on individual providers. You should use in conjunction with the Pupillages and Awards Handbook other directories such as the Bar Directory (available in the library) to research pupillage providers.

You will be asked to fill in either an application form, online form or send a CV and covering letter. Immediate vacancies are advertised on the newsflash section of the OLPAS website. BPP Law School also receives vacancies from chambers and these are emailed direct to you and available on the careers section of the student intranet.

Make sure that you recognise the person you are selling in your CV and covering letter as YOURSELF, (as opposed to some unreal and created ideal of yourself). Barristers are generally shrewd judges of when people are not being quite honest, and there is nothing worse than setting yourself out as person A when really you are person B. You may get away with it on paper, but the chances are that in interview you won't. Even if you do keep the act up convincingly in interview, then you will be found out in the pupillage itself.

Your CV and covering letter must be persuasive and indicate that you have something that will stand you in good stead. The Bar is still reasonably conservative, and the American style 'power selling' is not really appropriate. For this reason 'Career Profiles', 'Career Objectives' and 'Skills Profiles' are definitely not needed.

Do not engage in hyperbole or make claims that you cannot support. Try to support any assertions that you make about yourself with some sort of evidence that that assertion is true. If, for example, you say that you are good at communicating with a wide range of people, then try to provide an example of you having done just that. Similarly, you may be arguing that you can work under pressure, or think on your feet. These assertions come two a penny in written applications to chambers, and they are generally pretty worthless without proof. Proof often takes up space, but it is generally better to make one assertion and prove it, rather than make five assertions all of which are completely unsubstantiated.

Keep the CV to 2 sides and the covering letter to one. Few chambers are interested in GCSE grades, and there is little point wasting space on your CV for this. Similarly, the dates of mini-pupillages are rarely of much importance and might be dispensed with if space is tight.

Write all your applications in a clear and direct manner. The people who read it will usually be more impressed with precision and clarity rather than flourishing prose. Keep the sentences simple, direct and properly constructed. Poor grammar and bad spelling will lead to your application going in the bin.

On the other hand don't fill space just for the sake of it. If you have a good point then make it. If you don't, avoid making the situation worse by filling the space with rubbish.

For more detailed information on CVs and covering letters and what to include please see careers intranet, and do not forget the Careers Service can review by email or in person any applications that you do.

Interviews

Some general tips for interviews

Be natural. Read what we have said above in terms of presenting an honest application.

Almost every set of chambers is composed of people who are really quite different from each other. There are some broad principles that might be shared (eg the set is generally pro defence and very few like to prosecute) but otherwise there is something of a 'live and let live' attitude. What they want to see from pupils is determination and a good sense of direction, a good brain and an articulate manner, and some sense of passion for the job. To communicate these to chambers, you will need to be speaking honestly and naturally, and not putting up a front.

Chambers pay pupils, and so they are investing in you. It leaves a very bad taste in the mouth if chambers feel duped in any way into paying a pupil who deceived them in interview.

Avoid trying to impress the interview panel with your knowledge of the law. If they want to know how much law you know, they will ask. It is very rare for chambers to ask factual questions to elicit how much you know. It is much more important to chambers to know whether you think clearly and logically i.e. the way in which your mind works is much more important than what information happens to be in it at any given moment! Chambers will routinely ask questions which are complex – NOT to simply see if you know the answer, but to see whether you could be sensible about the method and logic you employ in trying to make sensible decisions.

The other word to keep in mind is BALANCE. The most important context for you to show a balanced application is in terms of the highs and lows of professional life at the Bar. Most applicants are fulsome in identifying and extolling the attractions of life at the Bar. This is quite right. It would be absurd to come to the Bar if there were not some very serious incentives! BUT, the danger of being over-eager is great. Remember your place in the grand scheme of things. Pupils can be

good for chambers, but their capacity to make chambers any better or richer than they were is pretty limited. The capacity for pupils to harm a set of chambers is generally greater than the capacity to enhance it.

Life at the Bar can be tough and some pupils can crack under the pressure and leave chambers to pick up the pieces. If you are a pupil and you pick up a piece of work from a tenant who has been working hard over 5 years to woo this client and this firm of solicitors, then the tenant will want the pupil to a safe job and not rock the boat. The tenant will certainly not want the pupil to have any sort of collapse or breakdown!

It is generally encouraging to chambers to hear applicants demonstrate that they are equipped to deal with the WORST days as well as to enjoy the best. Qualities such as grit and determination, perseverance and tolerance are vital balancing attributes to the more glamorous ones such as eloquence and charm which are more routinely promoted to chambers by applicants.

For further information on interviews including frequently asked interview and feedback from specific chambers interviews see careers section of the intranet. You can also book a mock interview, check intranet for details.