

Finding & Applying for Pupillage



BPP CAREERS SERVICE

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What is Pupillage?

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 in industry or with organisations such as the Government Legal Service. The first six months is non-practising with pupils shadowing their pupil sponsor. The next six months is spent practising with pupils undertaking their own cases. This second six months can be spent at the same Chambers but this is often spent at another set. There are also opportunities to use other external training such as marshalling to satisfy, with the prior approval of the Bar Council, all or part of the practising six months of pupillage.

According to latest projections the number of pupillages as at December 2006 dropped to a low of 552, compared with a figure of 853 in 2000-01. At the same time the number of places available on the BVC, has increased from 1,403 in 2000-01, to 1,745 in 2005-06. 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. In relation to pupillage, a full breakdown of statistics can be found on the Bar Council's website: www.barcouncil.org.uk

How to Apply

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 can be up to two years in advance.

All pupillage providers advertise their schemes on the OLPAS (On-line Pupillage Application System) website www.pupillages.com. 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 12 sets of chambers / pupillage providers per season. It is essential that you apply through the summer season, as many chambers do not take part in the autumn season. Whilst all pupillages must be advertised on OLPAS not all chambers require applications through this system and application deadlines are dependent on individual chambers. You will be asked to fill in either an application form, online form or send a CV and covering letter. Immediate vacancies are also advertised on the newsflash section of the OLPAS website.

Selection Process

You should spread your net as widely as possible in terms of where you apply.

This doesn't mean you should adopt a 'scattergun approach', given that a particular area of law/ specialism may well dictate broadly which Chambers you apply to. But having made the initial decision about what type of law you wish to do, don't just focus on what you perceive to be the "star sets". Be realistic and think about other sets which meet your criteria and may be more flexible in terms of academic requirements, etc.

Think about location as part of this wide approach. Would you consider working outside of London? If so, you may want to apply to non-London sets. However, if you do this, make sure you can demonstrate a commitment to that location/ genuine motivation for your decision, (rather than mistakenly assuming that this would be an easier option for you).

Where to find Vacancies

The Careers Service at BPP maintains a database of vacancies including some pupillage opportunities. Other places to look are:

OLPAS www.pupillage.com - full listings of chambers offering pupillage, includes non-OLPAS providers.

www.lawcareers.net Information on law careers including training contract and pupillage vacancies, online brochures, case studies of recent trainees and pupils and courses.

Chambers & Partners www.chambersandpartners.com Excellent background reading on the qualifying process and information on applications for vacation work, training contracts and pupillages. Plus a database of solicitors' firms, barristers' chambers and individual practices.

Crown Prosecution Service www.cps.gov.uk Opportunities for Caseworkers and Prosecutors responsible for reviewing and prosecuting criminal cases and advising the police.

Government Legal Service www.gls.gov.uk Opportunities for lawyers and an alternative to the private sector. All posts are open to both solicitors and barristers in a wide variety of departments.

Lex on the Net www.lex100.com. The website for lawyers of the future publish a termly magazine for students interested in a UK legal career. Website includes Training Contract and pupillage search, course listing, working life, recruitment news for Barristers, Solicitors and Paralegals.

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Local Government Opportunities www.lgcareers.com
www.jobsgopublic.co.uk

All councils 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.

The OLPAS Form

Career Motivation

In this section of 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.

What have you learnt from work experience?

The most effective way to demonstrate commitment to a career at the Bar is by having done some mini-pupillages. This section is to find out about what you have gained from any mini-pupillages or other related work experience. A common response to this question goes something like this: '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'.

There is really no need to list the activities that you were involved in during your work experience in this way. This isn't what chambers are looking for. 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 other 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.

Whilst it's useful to do a range of mini-pupillages within different types of sets in order to get a feel for the type of law that suits you, you will ideally need to demonstrate work experience within the specialism you are applying for, e.g if you wish to do commercial law, you may have done mini-pupillages within commercial sets. In addition/ alternatively, you may have commercial work experience which in itself was not "legal" but through which you can show transferable skills.

In terms of how many mini-pupillages you should have done, there is no hard and fast rule but you should have completed more than one. There is no need to complete more than about five unless you feel this would be of particular benefit. The average is about three or four.

Check whether you're applying for a set which requires you to have done a mini-pupillage with them previously. Some do, some don't; obviously you don't want to waste your time or theirs by applying to such a set when you haven't completed a mini-pupillage with them.

FRU (Free Representation Unit) is very highly regarded by chambers, so if you have volunteered for FRU you should include this in your form - even if you have not actually conducted a case yet. Include any voluntary legal work in your application, as well as mooted or debating experience.

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Explain in no more than 150 words, why do you 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? This may seem an obvious question but do you really know why you want to be a barrister – think hard about it, this will almost certainly be asked at interview.

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, are 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 within 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. What skills have you developed which display your career motivation, e.g. mooting, debating, advising, etc?

Try to avoid saying what you think you ought to say, and avoid making clever points which do not accurately represent your career motivation. Be genuine in what you say. It's far easier to write a form when you are being yourself and it gives the set a clear picture of who you are. It will also be easier to talk about the content of your form at interview if you have been completely honest.

Which practice areas have particularly interested 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. So, why have you chosen this specialism? 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.

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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? If you are involved with any sporting or charity work tell them all about it – be specific.

Working in a 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.

Again this question is trying to determine your commitment to a career at the Bar and specifically your commitment to their chambers.

So, why have you chosen them? You should avoid generic applications which make it appear to the set that you have put a pin in the pupillage handbook and picked them on that basis!

Inevitably, there will be some overlaps and some cutting and pasting. Having said that, research is the key. Make sure you are clear on the location/size/type of work done by the chambers, as well as, for example, their record for retaining their pupils as tenants at the end of pupillage. Look back over a few years to research this, rather than looking back only at the previous year.

Have you applied because you have spoken to pupils and like the sound of the chambers' working environment?

Have you thoroughly perused the website/literature produced by the set?

Have you researched their work and found a specific case/area interesting? Do you have relevant industrial/voluntary experience?

How did your research fire your interest to work with the chambers? Show that you have done your research 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 Consultant 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 in previous years
- 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'