

PUPILLAGE: WHAT TO EXPECT

WHAT IS IT?

Pupillage is the Work-based Learning Component of becoming a barrister. It is a 12-18 month practical training period which follows completion of the Bar Course. It is akin to an apprenticeship, in which you put into practise everything you have learned in your vocational studies whilst under the supervision of an experienced barrister.

Almost all pupillages are found in sets of barristers' chambers. However, there are a handful of pupillages at the 'employed bar', which involves being employed and working as a barrister in-house for a company, firm, charity or public agency, such as the Crown Prosecution Service.

STRUCTURE

Regardless of where you undertake your pupillage, the training is typically broken down into two (sometimes three) distinct parts or 'sixes'.

First Six

First six is the informal name given to the first six months of pupillage. It is often referred to as the non-practising stage as you are not yet practising as a barrister in your own right. The majority of your time in first six will be spent attending court and conferences with your pupil supervisor, who will be an experienced barrister from your chambers. In a busy criminal set, you will be in court almost every day (unlike your peers in commercial chambers). In addition to attending court, you will assist your supervisor with preparation for court which may include conducting legal research and drafting documents such as advices, applications or skeleton arguments (a written document provided to the court in advance of a hearing).

During first six you will be required to attend a compulsory advocacy training course with your Inn of Court. Most sets of chambers also offer an in-house advocacy training course, which enables pupils to further practise their advocacy skills with experienced members of chambers on a weekly or biweekly basis.

Second Six

Second six is the informal name given to the second six months of pupillage. It is often referred to as the practising stage as you are able to practise as a barrister in your own right once you have received a provisional practising certificate. As a second six pupil,

you will have more independence and are able to take on your own cases and appear in court.

Some chambers offer 18 month pupillages, which require pupils to undertake a further six months or 'third six' before completing their pupillage.

ROLE OF THE PUPIL SUPERVISOR

Your pupil supervisor will be a specially-trained, experienced member of chambers. Their role is to provide an insight into life in full-time practice at the Bar. During first six, you will spend the majority of your time with your pupil supervisor and the majority of work you prepare will be for their cases. Your supervisor will support you in developing the procedural knowledge and practical skills required at the Bar.

Your supervisor will also provide continual feedback and guidance during pupillage and they will be the first port of call where you have any concerns or queries. At some chambers, you will only have one supervisor for the entirety of your pupillage. At other sets, you may rotate between 2 or 3 different supervisors during pupillage.

TOP TIPS & USEFUL LINKS

- Remember that your pupil supervisor is supporting you alongside their busy practice; save up all of your questions and ask them at a convenient moment, when your supervisor is not too busy;
- Take a detailed note of the hearings you attend with your supervisor. Not only will they find it enormously helpful, it will help you remember what you have learned: the stages of a certain procedure or an impressive line of questioning;
- Put yourself out there. Approach other members of chambers and ask if you can assist them with their work – it gives you the opportunity to learn something new and make a positive impression;
- When you do complete a piece of work, politely request feedback. It will aid your development in the long run;
- Pupillage is a steep learning curve and feedback will often contain constructive criticism; accept it with grace and apply what you have learned going forward;
- Some sets of chambers take on several pupils at once. Your pupillage will be much more enjoyable if you get along with your co-pupil. Once you start practice in second six, they will be an invaluable source of shared knowledge;
- Never be afraid to ask for help or a second opinion. Chambers is full of experienced barristers who are well-equipped to assist with your queries.

Law careers has a useful guide on pupillage

<https://www.lawcareers.net/Barristers/Pupillage>

The Lawyer Portal has a useful guide on pupillage

<https://www.thelawyerportal.com/free-guides/pupillage/>

Further Reading: ‘Pupillage Inside Out: How to Succeed as a Pupil Barrister’ by Daniel K. Sokol and Isabel McArdle (available on Amazon)

Further Listening: Middle Temple has produced a useful podcast series called ‘The Pupillage Podcast’ <https://www.middletemple.org.uk/members/inn-initiatives-and-events/pupillage-podcast>