

## Welcome

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## **DIVERSITY**

### 1. Value yourself

- a. A diverse profession representative of those who use the Bar's services is a virtue
- b. Bring your personal and family life experiences to interview and into your future career. If and when the opportunity arises do not feel inhibited about detailing personal challenges which may not appear glamorous but do highlight, for example, your resilience, determination and ability to manage responsibilities
- c. Do not feel need to conform to traditional perceptions of a Barrister. Minority identities and culture enrich the experience of the Bar and can bring much valued experiences and perspectives to practice
- d. Do your best to relax and display your personality where you can

## Questions

## **PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION**

### 2. Style of interview. First thing to do: Think about format for first and second round interviews. Then prepare for each accordingly.

#### First round interviews:

- a. First round interviews are generally shorter (20 -25 mins) and very standardised.
- b. Most first- round interviews involve a 3-person panel – sometimes more.
- c. They usually involve a short advocacy exercise (*often a quick bail application or plea in mitigation and/or sometimes a topical legal question to argue for or against*).
- d. Advocacy exercises are commonly provided about 20-30 mins before the interview.

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- e. Usually there are few brief questions about yourself or experience. Most of the questions are about general legal topics related to your practice area, ethical dilemmas and then perhaps one or two questions based on application/cv (*ie about work experience, mini pupillages and marshalling and extracurricular activities*).

### **Second round interviews:**

- a. Second round interviews are understandably more in depth and longer therefore (30-45 mins average).
- b. These interviews are also standardised but often feel more tailored/ personal. Average panel of about 5-6 interviewees (sometimes more) – sometimes told who the members would be beforehand.
- c. In the vast majority of second round interviews you are asked to complete a pre-interview advocacy exercise. For some chambers, this exercise is provided a day or two in advance. For others, exercises would be provided about half an hour before the interview. For some interviews you may have a pre-interview presentation task provided days before the interview AND a plea in mitigation provided 25 mins before the interview.
- d. The advocacy exercises vary greatly. They range from bail applications, plea in mitigations, choice of a legal topical question to make an argument for or against, to read a judgment and prepare and present submissions in answer to a question about this.
- e. For bail applications/plea in mitigations– ensure familiarity with the Bail Act & SGC guidelines, specific and overarching.
- f. Note, for both types of interviews prepare for intervention, especially when it comes to advocacy exercises. Often, interviewees will warn you of this beforehand.
- g. Often asked to present advocacy first and you are usually given about 5-7 mins to do this. Would then be asked questions about your answer. (*ie why you answered the question in that particular way*). Often asked to argue the other side or challenged with opposing/ intervening questions.
- h. Frequently asked questions about yourself and your interests– (*ie why interested in your chosen practice interest area, why the Bar, how you prepared myself etc.*)
- i. You will often be asked in depth about your work and voluntary experience, mini pupillages and employment and how this has prepared you for the Bar.

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- j. Also often asked about challenges facing the profession – questions to test your practical experience.
- k. You are usually asked an ethical question, even if this was asked in a first round interview. This ethical question is trickier/ more detailed.
- l. Often asked more legal topical questions.
- m. You are given time to answer a question to the panel at the end of the interview – good time to ask a question genuinely curious about.  
(*ie how Covid has impacted practice and pupillage structure*).

### **3. Keep up to date with current affairs and create brainstorms for different legal topics.**

- a. Read legal sections in newspapers (*ie Guardian Law*), legal blogs (*ie Secret Barrister blog/tweets*), barrister/legal twitter pages, chambers news blogs and articles, pupillage and legal podcast/s etc. anything to ensure up to date with topics you will likely be asked questions about.
- b. Try to cover a wide range of topics where possible – for example, if crime is your interest, focus on criminal as well as crime adjacent topics that could be asked about.  
(*ie protest rights, immigration issues etc*).
- c. Write down the most prominent topics in a notebook on different pages. Summarise topic/discussion and come up with for/against points where applicable.  
(*examples of topics - Coronavirus Act and human rights violations, extending prison sentences, deporting those with criminal record, protest rights re extinction rebellion*).
- d. Add to this bank of legal topics anytime something new comes up in the news.
- e. Before interviews, have a flick through these topics to remind yourself about the discussion and arguments. Good to have a knowledge base from which to develop thoughtful answers for interviews if the topic comes up.

### **4. Conduct research on Chambers, members and recent/notable cases they are involved in.**

- a. Really important to have a deep understanding about Chambers work, its members, cases and also about its pupillage structure.
- b. Build on the knowledge you have about chambers when you made your applications. Therefore conduct more in-depth research/ refresh knowledge and jot this down in notebook.

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- c. If time, read recent judgments in cases members are involved in.
- d. Make sure you look at Chambers news and blog pages.
- e. Really think hard about why you want to join that Chambers – make sure you have an informed answer to this. (*Worth jotting down notes as often hard to articulate why you are drawn to a Chambers, especially if you have followed their work for a long time.*)
- f. Do not forget to focus on the structure of the pupillage itself also – find out as much info as you can about this.
- g. Important to focus on the profile and work of recent pupils/juniors as is more realistically the type of work you will be doing.

### **5. Read over your application! Make sure you know it back to front and also develop and add to answers in your original application.**

- a. Think about questions regarding your interests and experiences and how this can be linked to building a successful practice.
- b. Think about MARKETABILITY 📢 How you can be an asset to that Chambers – *what is your USP and why are you different?*
- c. Think about how your work experience has informed your practice area and will ensure you have a successful practice – make sure you have developed a clear link!
- d. Think about your experience about working with clients/real people and providing advice.
- e. Think about advocacy experience - *such as particular moots/ debates you were involved in and what feedback you received/ how you improved.*
- f. Think about your practical knowledge about the profession itself and what you observed and learnt during mini pupillages and marshalling.

### **6. Practice your advocacy!**

- a. Practice bail applications, plea in mitigations and presentations with friends, family and mentors etc. Get feedback.
- b. For advocacy exercises you receive days before the interview, set aside time for timed or recorded practice.
- c. You can practice interview answers but want to be natural – so don't overdo this.

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- d. Always think about the other side of the argument you are making - anticipate!

### **7. Go back over core ethical principles (Code of Conduct) and dilemmas.**

- a. Important to read practice ethics questions as it makes it easier to identify when being asked ethics question in an interview (if panel don't say).
- b. Reading ethics questions will help you draw out particular ethical dilemmas within a question you are asked at an interview and prepare you to give a structured answer.
- c. On Bar Council website – look at the common ethical dilemmas page <https://www.barcouncilethics.co.uk/subject/common-dilemmas/>.

### **8. Don't be afraid of taking considered risks where you can (*applies for Pre- interview tasks and during interview*)**

- a. (*Katrina experience*) I was set a pre-interview advocacy task – I had to read a judgement and create a skeleton argument in answer to a set question.
- b. I first thought of opting for the more pro defence/human rights argument.
- c. This argument came more naturally to me because of my background in human rights and because of the ethos of the Chambers I was applying to.
- d. However, I read the case again very carefully and reconsidered which argument was more convincing.
- e. I found I could develop good arguments for either side. I therefore opted for the pro prosecution/more anti human rights argument. I knew it would be harder to convince the panel of this point of view. I nonetheless thought I would stand out if I went for it and presented my submissions well.
- f. This was a high risk and high reward option. However, I caveat - my choice was not simply about being different for difference sake but being brave enough to argue a point which I *genuinely* found convincing and could impress a panel by persuading them.

### **9. Immediate pre-interview advocacy tasks**

- a. Read through the question and/or bundle VERY CAREFULLY on the day. Try not rush an answer – best to make sure you have firm grasp on question before answering.
- b. Read every page of exercise! Do not want to miss something!
- c. Structure your answer as much as possible beforehand and practice this before the interview if you have time.
- d. Think about possible intervention questions/ arguments against yours – jot these down if you can.

### **10. Buy a pupillage notebook.**

- a. Extremely helpful - idea from Ruth Reid (@legallyruthie).

- b. Means that all your interview preparation notes are in one place – easy to read through and add to in lead up to interview.

**11. Try not to prep into the night before the interview. Take the evening off and get as much sleep as possible!**

## Questions

### **DURING INTERVIEW**

#### **12. Virtual interview tips (pre-interview)**

- a. Helpful to have earphones with microphone – no distraction by background noise.
- b. Practice by filming yourself – can adjust how you present yourself on screen. Test how loud your voice is etc.

#### **13. Give structured answers to interview questions**

- a. Always want to demonstrate barrister-like qualities when answering questions.
- b. Structural tip – ‘I argue X for 3 reasons. Firstly...’ and use of ‘for example,...’  
Can use *point, example, explanation* structure.
- c. Use structures above when it feels most necessary and natural to do so.  
I personally did not use this structure when answering more personal questions (*ie difficulties I have faces, spare time questions etc*)

#### **14. Take your time.**

- a. Want to engage the panel at all times – try not to speak too quickly. Structuring answers helps with this.

#### **15. For virtual interviews – look directly into camera where possible.**

- a. Mimics eye contact.

#### **16. Don't spend too long answering a question.**

- a. Do not feel the need to stretch out an answer if you feel you have already adequately answered it.

#### **17. Related point (mentioned previously) - think about BOTH sides of the argument for a question you are being asked.**

- a. You need to anticipate that you will be asked to make opposite arguments – have this in your mind, especially if this relates to a pre-interview task.

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- b. It also helps to think this way as it can settle your nerves – if you can prepare or predict what the panel intervention will be it will give you some time to think about your answer and will not throw you off.

### **18. Give yourself a moment to think about your answer before responding.**

- a. You are allowed to pause to think – you will perform much better in interviews when giving yourself time to think through response.
- b. It also gives you time to structure your response properly – for example, time to present points with ‘there are three reasons I think X. firstly...’.

### **19. Ask for a question to be repeated if you haven’t heard it properly.**

- a. This includes asking for clarification or, when appropriate, asking the interviewer to provide some background/ context for the question.
- b. Try to refrain from answering the question if you really don’t understand it or have not heard it – the panel appreciates it when you ask for question to be repeated.

### **20. Have faith in your answer**

- a. If they ask you if you want to change your mind after presenting your answer - say no if you really liked your answer!

### **21. For ethical questions: try to give structured answer and point to the core ethical principles.**

- a. Want to also demonstrate your common sense and the fact that you are dealing with a real-life situation not just a problem question. Therefore, give a realistic but ethical/well-structured answer.

### **22. Don’t be afraid to mention what makes you ‘different’ when given the opportunity.**

- a. As mentioned previously - value yourself!

### **23. Be confident always – only you can advocate for yourself!**

- a. For example, ‘I have vast experience...’, ‘I am excellent at...’, ‘I have exceptional skills in...’

## **Questions**

### **POST INTERVIEW**

1. Write down the questions you were asked (and your answers to these if you remember).

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- a. This works as your personal bank of questions which you can look back on to help prepare yourself for future interviews.
- b. Also helpful for second round interviews – can look back on format of first interview to prepare you for what second round interview will be like.  
*(For instance, if not asked ‘why our chambers’ question, can expect this will be asked in second round interview and will be time provided for a more in-depth answer. prepare accordingly)*

### **2. Forget about it!**

- a. As soon as you complete step above - forget about it!
- b. Easier said than done, but try not to ruminate about the interview and your answers – this will not make you feel better!
- c. Okay to reflect on what you can improve on, what requires further research and, if you must, find out the correct answer to a question you think you got wrong.  
*But try to do this only immediately after the interview– then forget about it, especially if you have another interview coming up.*

### **3. Feedback**

- a. If you are unsuccessful please do not feel disheartened. The market place for pupillage is very competitive. It is common for the margin between successful and unsuccessful applicants to be very tight
- b. Some Chambers offer feedback where the opportunity exists take it and ask for feedback

## **GENERAL QUESTIONS**



**Commonly asked questions:**

- 1) *Why did you want to become a defence barrister specifically? Why not prosecute?*
- 2) *What experience has/ how has your work experience best prepared you for a career at the Criminal Bar?*
- 3) *Why do you want to work at X chambers?*
- 4) *Why the Bar? Why did you want to become a barrister and not a solicitor?*
- 5) *Considering the issues facing the Criminal Bar, how can you ensure you will have a successful practice?*
- 6) *Name the most important characteristics of a criminal barrister*
- 7) *More specifically, how would I ensure I have a successful criminal practice considering the scarcity of legal aid?*
- 8) *Demonstration of commitment to human rights and access to justice.*
- 9) *Between now and pupillage, what will you do to prepare yourself and make yourself more marketable (for practice)?*
- 10) *What do you expect a typical day as a pupil to look like?*
- 11) *What do you see your practice being like in 5 years' time?*
- 12) *If you could be anything other than a barrister, what would it be?*
- 13) *What do you do for fun?*
- 14) *How do you manage stressful situations?*
- 15) *If you didn't want to be a barrister what you have chosen and why*
- 16) *Please provide an example that demonstrates your ability to work effectively when under pressure.*
- 17) *Please provide us with an example of an achievement which best demonstrates your drive and commitment towards a career at the bar, and towards civil liberties?*

**Ethical questions**

- 1) *What would you do if hearing is about to start and your client arrives to court visibly intoxicated?*
- 2) *Your client threatens complainant after he's been granted bail. This seems like a credible threat. What would you do?*

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- 3) *You are representing the defendant in a criminal trial in a week's time. Your solicitor tells you that the lay client is worried about being cross-examined by the prosecutor and wants you to tell them what to say. You learn that your solicitor has booked a conference in chambers through your clerks. What do you do?*