

PUPILLAGE: HOW TO APPLY



WHEN TO APPLY?

The system for applying for pupillage has recently changed and has become more streamlined. Whereas previously chambers had discretion to advertise their pupillages in whatever way they wanted, they now have to follow a central timetable. This makes it easier for applicants. From 1 November 2020 all pupillages have to be advertised on the pupillage gateway. This is a central system whereby you can filter pupillages by practise area and location and you will be able to see a comprehensive list of pupillages advertised with key information.

The exact dates change each year, however the timetable for the 2019/20 pupillage applications was as follows:

- 7 January: Applications open;
- 7 February: Applications close;
- 12 February – 6 May: Chambers paper sift the applications and invite successful candidates for interview; and
- 7 May: Pupillage offers are made.

Pupillages are generally offered almost 18 months in advance of their start dates. Occasionally, some chambers will offer pupillages to start in that year. When you want to apply for pupillage you need to factor in where you are in your studies and what other requirements you have to fulfil before you can start a pupillage. For example, if you are studying a law degree at university, in your final year you can apply for pupillage. This means that if you are successful in obtaining pupillage, you can then study for your Bar Course upon graduating and you will be ready to start. If you are studying a non-law degree, you can not apply in your final year of university as you still have two more years of study to complete (the GDL and Bar Course). You can apply for pupillage once you are on the GDL.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Top Tip: Plan ahead and proofread! You will do many drafts of your application so the earlier you start, the better your applications will be. One of the most off-putting things to those reading your applications is spelling/grammar errors which could be easily avoided.

Once you have decided that you are going to apply, you should start browsing pupillages before the application window opens. This is because, even though all chambers now have to advertise their pupillages on the gateway, they do not all need

to use the gateway system for applications. This means that chambers may have different application forms. Therefore, you should be prepared to have to complete a number of different lengthy pupillage forms. On the gateway, a sample form is made available ahead of the gateway opening so you can start drafting some of your answers to those questions ahead of time.

There are some universal questions that you need to be prepared to answer in most application forms, for example ‘Why do you want to be a barrister?’ and ‘Why this chambers?’ When answering the ‘Why this chambers?’ question, make sure you research the chambers you are applying for – do not just copy and paste your answer in each application form. It will be obvious to chambers that you have not put much thought into why you are applying to them specifically.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Top Tip: The more interviews you complete, the better you will become. Take advantage of opportunities for formal mock interviews with your careers department/mentor during the Bar Course and any informal opportunities with family members or peers.

FIRST ROUND INTERVIEWS

Once you have handed your application form in, the waiting starts. Most chambers have two rounds of interviews. You will start hearing from chambers around March. If you have obtained an interview, preparation is key.

Firstly, you need to know what you wrote in your application form inside out as you could be asked about anything within it. If you wrote about a mini-pupillage you completed 3 years before, be prepared to tell chambers about it! You should also make sure you can answer the general questions such as why you are interested in that set of chambers or why you want to become a barrister. You should also keep up to date with current affairs. At most chambers you will be asked to argue for or against a proposition as part of your interview and having no knowledge of the topic makes it more difficult to construct and argue your point.

You should arrive at least 15 minutes before your interview (earlier is even better!) You do not know what will happen on the day and the last thing you want is to be rushing and arrive at your interview late and stressed. Note that chambers will often ask you to arrive early anyway as they may give you an advocacy exercise or ask you to prepare an answer to a debate question before going into the interview. You should arrive in advance of this time to allow yourself to get settled and use the bathroom. You do not want to cut into your preparation time.

When preparing for advocacy or debate exercises you will often feel like you do not have enough time – that is the point! Stay calm, read through everything carefully and make notes on your key points.

Most first round interviews include 3 questions and a debate question. Sometimes, you will be asked to complete an advocacy exercise in your first-round interview.

In interviews you will inevitably be nervous, and chambers expect this, however it is important to try and not let your nerves hamper your performance. The most important thing to remember is that chambers want you to do well! They liked your application form and invited you to an interview in the hope that you would impress them. Expect that they will challenge you when you answer questions, particularly in the debate questions. Be prepared to stand up for your argument; do not crumble as soon as it is challenged. This is part of the process and they want to see how you construct and argue a point.

The most important thing to remember is that chambers want to get to know you in an interview. Be yourself and do not try to act how you think a barrister acts!

SECOND ROUND INTERVIEWS

If you have done well in your first-round interview you will be invited back for a second round. Second round interviews are not that different to first-round interviews, save for the fact that they will almost always include an advocacy exercise. Some chambers might send you the brief in advance and ask you to draft a skeleton argument, but most chambers will give you a plea in mitigation or bail application on the day. If you are studying the Bar Course, you will have done these types of exercises before; if you are a law student or GDL student, you may not have done. Chambers take into account the stage you are at in your career so do not worry if you are not as familiar with the process as other candidates. You should, however, read some guides online so you have a basic understanding of the processes.

Read your exercise carefully, prepare a few notes and stay calm!

CONTACTING CHAMBERS INFORMALLY

You should not informally contact members of chambers before or during the application process. Chambers have a system for applications which they have to follow. Once applications go live they will provide contact details of someone within chambers who all pupillage-related questions should be directed to. There will be few instances in which you need to contact this person (for example if something is unclear or if there is a technical error with their application form). Before contacting chambers, make sure you are absolutely certain that you cannot find this information elsewhere. Ensure you have read all of the material provided by chambers on their

pupillage and pupillage application process. Speak to your peers or even a tutor to see if you can find the answer elsewhere.

Once you submit your application, you should not be ringing chambers every week asking them whether you have an interview. It is a waiting game and most chambers will eventually let you know about the outcome of your application, regardless of whether you are successful. Again, speak to your peers, read online forums such as the student room and be patient before contacting chambers.

Once you have heard from chambers, if you are unsuccessful (whether it be after first or second round interview) always ask for feedback. Most chambers will provide it and it is invaluable in helping you improve. Chambers do not tend to give feedback after the written application round however.

Always Remember: When applying for pupillage prepare to have setbacks and prepare to have bad interviews. You will often feel like you have good interviews and still not be invited back for a second round. Try not to take this to heart. Hundreds of people apply for 2 or 3 pupillages so there will be an element of luck in the process. Persevere and you will get there!

PUPILLAGE GATEWAY & LEGAL 500

Legal 500

[The Legal 500 United Kingdom](#)

Pupillage Gateway

<https://www.pupillagegateway.com>

USEFUL LINKS: BLOGS

Chambers Student – pupillage interviews

<https://www.chambersstudent.co.uk/where-to-start/newsletter/pupillage-interviews>

The Secret Barrister – An idiot’s guide to pupillage interviews

<https://thesecretbarrister.com/2018/02/15/an-idiots-guide-to-pupillage-interviews/>

The Lawyer Portal – Pupillage interview sample questions (these are NOT exhaustive and may not come up)

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

Target Jobs – Pupillage interview tips

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/career-sectors/law-barristers/291565-how-to-ace-your-pupillage-interview-tips-from-qualified-barristers>

The Inner Temple – Pupillage interview sample questions (these are NOT exhaustive and may not come up)

<https://www.innertemple.org.uk/news/upcoming-pupillage-interview/>

Pupillage & How to get it website

[Pupillage and how to get it | Does what it says on the tin - 2nd Edition](#)

Pupillage Gateway

<https://www.pupillagegateway.com/applicant-home/how-to-apply/>

Chambers Student – applying for pupillage

<https://www.chambersstudent.co.uk/where-to-start/newsletter/applying-for-pupillages>

All About Law – applying for pupillage

<https://www.allaboutlaw.co.uk/law-careers/barristers-chambers/applying-for-pupillage>

Legal Cheek – 12 tips on how to secure pupillage

<https://www.legalcheek.com/lc-careers-posts/12-tips-on-how-to-secure-pupillage/>

USEFUL WEBINARS, PODCASTS & VIDEOS

Bar Council Pupillage Fair Dos & Don'ts

[Pupillage Application Dos and Don'ts - YouTube](#)

Radcliffe Chambers: 10 top tips on pupillage applications *NB this is not a criminal set but much of the advice is relevant*

[Pupillage Q&A: What are your top tips for writing pupillage applications? - YouTube](#)

Middle Temple Students' Association: pupillage applications

[Pupillage Panel | Middle Temple - YouTube](#)

Lincoln's Inn: pupillage applications

[Pupillage Advice Panel - YouTube](#)

USEFUL TWITTER THREADS

Paralegal work & the Bar, @Imfeelingmad (Emma Fielding)

<https://twitter.com/imfeelingmad/status/1424293562737377281?s=21>

Pupillage application tips, @Imfeelingmad (Emma Fielding)

<https://twitter.com/imfeelingmad/status/1463806108213125121?s=21>

Pupillage application tips, @pupillageB (Pupillage Bot)

<https://twitter.com/pupillageb/status/1355801108942381059?s=21>

Pupillage application tips, @joanna_hardy (Joanna Hardy-Suskind)

https://twitter.com/joanna_hardy/status/1212744943061655553?s=21