



## **Pupillage applications – five tips to make it through**

If you're reading this article, it's highly likely that you know just how difficult obtaining pupillage can be. The application and interview process can often feel like a daunting task and it can be demoralising when you do not succeed.

This article is intended to provide some simple tips to those considering and actively applying for pupillage.

### **Tip #1: Start your preparations early**

Good preparation is generally the key to ensuring you present yourself in the best way, both in pupillage applications and at interview. One of the reasons I think I didn't secure pupillage until a couple of years after completing the Bar course is that I didn't have sufficient focus on gaining relevant experience, either whilst at university or even in the first year of the Bar course.

Universities are increasingly able to offer opportunities that are focused on particular careers, so make sure you look into what your university can offer you in terms of Bar-related experience and/or training. It may be that the careers office has links with the local Bar and can help facilitate mini-pupillages. Most universities will also have debating and/or mooting societies, participation in which can demonstrate an early commitment to the Bar as a profession.

Similarly, when you progress onto the Bar course, your university or law school will have many links to the profession, which it is essential for you to utilise in order to make the most of your time studying and maximise your prospects of securing pupillage. Most institutions will hold Bar 'meet and greet' events or Q&A sessions with practising barristers. Attending these sessions not only gives

you the chance to speak with practising barristers and ask them questions about the job and about your own position, but it may also mean that when you attend an interview, there is a familiar face on the panel, which might just settle your nerves and aid your performance.

If you are already enrolled in the Bar course and haven't done much pupillage preparation yet, don't panic. However, do start to take steps to gain relevant experience and skills to put on your application as soon as possible, as you don't want to get left behind. If you don't know where to start, speak to your law school's careers advisor or even one of your tutors.

The same principles of preparation apply to your application and interviews. Don't leave it until the last minute and end up submitting your applications five minutes before the deadline. If you are in that position, you likely won't have been able to undertake the careful review that is required to present yourself in the best possible way. Make sure to utilise application review and mock interview sessions offered by your university and law school.

Also, research the chambers you are applying to in advance. Look into their practice areas and see where these fit with your particular career interests. Also, consider other ways in which you may be a good fit for a particular chambers; look into what initiatives their members are part of and any areas in which they host talks or seminar.

Most chambers should also provide their pupillage selection criteria to you on request and some even hold them on their website (see below for how to request details of New Park Court's selection criteria).

## **Tip #2: Stand out**

This may sound like a somewhat obvious piece of advice but it is not always easy to know what will make you stand out. A significant majority of pupillage applicants have strong A-level, degree and Bar course grades. A majority have also undertaken relevant mini-pupillages and some form of legal work experience, often as a paralegal or legal assistant. Those elements should be considered to be the basics; standing out requires more than that.

Seek out opportunities that are a little different. Think of organisations (other than barristers' chambers or solicitors' firms) that operate in your preferred area(s) of practice and see if you can arrange to spend some time with them to gain relevant experience. If there are opportunities to study or work abroad and your means allow you to, take them. If you currently have or have previously had an interesting or unusual job, whether in law or otherwise, include that in your application. However, don't just take every piece of experience on offer. Your time will be increasingly stretched as you progress through your studies so always analyse what you think a particular opportunity can offer you, in terms of experience of relevance to a career at the Bar, and where it may help plug gaps in your existing CV.

If your educational and/or employment achievements will not make you stand out, think about aspects of your personal life and/or interests that could. If you have an interest in cave-exploring, put that down. If you are an avid butterfly collector, say so. If you have sailed around the world, again, write that. It may not always be immediately apparent but there will usually be a way in which you can translate your interests into some form of skill or other benefit in practice at the Bar.

### **Tip #3: Proof-read, then proof-read again. And again.**

This is one of the most basic lessons we are all taught from a very young age and appears in almost every publication on pupillage application tips. You may therefore think that no applicant could possibly overlook spelling or grammatical mistakes in their application. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Sifting pupillage applications is a difficult task as the standard is always exceptionally high. This means that, when considering who to invite to interview, the difference between the 'yes' pile and the 'no' pile can come down to very fine margins. Poor spelling and/or grammar provides an application sifter with a reason to doubt the applicant's suitability and commitment to the job. Don't therefore, give the sifter an easy way to cast your application aside.

Proof-reading, more than once, is essential. Don't rely entirely on spell-check functions and think that no red or blue underlining means your spelling and grammar are perfect. Check for repeated words, misplaced commas and American spellings (utilize, colour, organization etc.). Reading your application aloud can often help you spot errors you have otherwise missed. Similarly, if time allows

when you have completed your application, put it to one side until the next day, then re-read it again before submitting it. You could also ask a friend or family member to proof-read it for you. All these steps will help you identify any mistakes.

#### **Tip #4: Be yourself**

This is another basic tip but it is amazing how often applicants feel the need to try and be something they are not when applying for pupillage. This is understandable to a certain extent – the profession itself, and those in it, can sometimes be elevated by society to a level that many applicants feel they do not belong at.

However, social mobility is improving at the Bar, as is the number of barristers from under-represented groups and ethnicities and ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds. If you are from such a group or background, don’t think of this as a disadvantage; rather, think how you can turn it to your advantage in practise at the Bar.

In a similar way, make sure you represent yourself honestly, both in your application and at interview. Most barristers spend large parts of their days observing people answering questions and therefore become quite adept at spotting when someone is not being entirely sincere or is overstating things somewhat. Be confident in the qualities and skills you have but also recognise where you may need to develop. Nobody who applies for pupillage is the finished article.

If you can be yourself and present your skills and experience in a balanced way, your interviews will feel much more comfortable and will flow more naturally. Remember, panel members are as much looking at how you will fit into chambers on a personal level and whether you are the type of person that they would like to work with, as they are your academic abilities and relevant experience.

#### **Tip #5: Demonstrate ongoing improvement**

This is particularly relevant if you have previously applied for pupillage but haven’t been successful. This isn’t anything to worry about – many successful people at the Bar didn’t secure pupillage first time around. However, if you stand still and don’t improve your skills and experience between the unsuccessful application round and the next, the chances are you’ll be unsuccessful again.

If you are invited to interview but aren't selected for pupillage one year, the same chambers will likely remember your name the next time around and will be interested to see what you have done to improve. If you can come back the following year and say "I recognised that I wasn't quite ready last year but look at what I have done since", that demonstrates not only a commitment to the Bar but also a level of self-analysis that will stand you in good stead throughout your career.

If you are struggling to secure interviews at all, scrutinise your application closely to see where you might be coming up short. Seek the advice of others (barristers, lecturers, mentors, online resources etc.) to help you figure out what other experience and skills may strengthen your applications. If they are available, visit chambers' websites and look at the profiles of their recent pupils to see what experience they had when they were successful.

And most of all, don't give up! Tenacity and determination are two attributes that are vital in a career at the Bar. To keep coming back in successive years with an improved application, despite previous rejection(s), will demonstrate to chambers that you have the type of attitude they are looking for.

Good luck!

### **New Park Court pupillage applications**

The application process for pupillage at New Park Court is now open, via the Pupillage Gateway.

We are offering a pupillage to begin in September 2023 to two outstanding candidates. The pupillage will guarantee a comprehensive well-supported common law education, which will include an introduction and grounding in serious crime and regulatory enforcement, an education which has proved successful in our recent recruitment, development and expansion.

We are a supportive set, keen to develop the individual and promote diversity.

For a copy of chambers' pupillage selection criteria, please email [clerks@newparkcourt.co.uk](mailto:clerks@newparkcourt.co.uk).

## The author

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Profile: <https://www.newparkcourt.co.uk/barristers/ryan-donoghue/>