



Applying for Mini-Pupillages? Some Brief Advice

A mini-pupillage is something of a misnomer. It is the Bar's term for a short period (usually a few days to a week) of work experience offered to aspiring barristers to see the life of a barrister. The mini-pupil is not there to learn as much as to observe the day-to-day work of a barrister. They will usually go to court a few times (hopefully for different types of cases and across different divisions) and will usually be given the opportunity to have a detailed look at some papers. They will thus hopefully be given some insight into the range of work a barrister will do: both as advocates in court and as specialist litigation lawyers and advisors.

It is no exaggeration to state that it is all-but mandatory for applicants applying for pupillage to have undertaken a number (but not an excessive number) of mini-pupillages. These preferably should be undertaken with chambers specialising in similar areas of law to that being applied to. However it is likely to be of assistance if mini-pupillages in different types of sets were also undertaken, thus evidentially underpinning the informed decision as to the choice of set by such an applicant.

Getting a mini-pupillage is increasingly very likely to be competitive. Many sets, including 1 Chancery Lane, have an open formal application process whereby a set number of applicants are offered a mini-pupillage over a determined period of the year. Most applications are by way of a curriculum vitae and a covering letter. However, procedures and closing dates for applications vary. Details are usually obtainable from chambers' websites.

This short guide is intended to assist applicants for mini-pupillages both at 1 Chancery Lane and for other chambers with two areas they should think about.

CVs and Covering Letters: stylistic tips

CVs and covering letter should be short, pithy and carefully constructed. Applicants would do well to bear in mind that someone considering applications

is likely to have a lot of them to look at in his or her precious free time. Ones which are difficult to read, unnecessarily verbose or unclear are unlikely to be given as much charitable consideration as one which is concise, well and clearly set out.

As a general rule CVs should not be over two pages and covering letters should be restricted to one. The question of layout is for the individual, however assuming a high level of academic achievement as a pre-requisite for consideration of a career at the Bar, the former should not be dominated by descriptions of solely educational qualifications.

It sounds patronising, but spelling errors are likely to be considered to be either a lack of attention to detail (something barristers are particularly sensitive to) or a lack of seriousness, diligence and care (something which will not lead the reader to consider the applicant would get the most out of the experience). It is as well to get another person to check over applications to ensure that the wood is seen for the trees.

Finally, the best covering letters are likely to be those which set out why the mini-pupillage would be most helpful to the applicant. A mini-pupil is unlikely to be of any practical benefit to the chambers of individual barristers shadowed (they probably won't even be asked to make coffee or to photocopy anything!). Thus, unlike for an application for pupillage, applicants should focus on not what they can bring to the work experience, but how it would assist them in the formulation of their career.

Know your Set... and show it

It is easy to spot those applicants who use the 'scatter gun' approach to applications. Sometimes they forget to alter (at least) all the references to the chambers in the covering letter. Sometimes it is the neutrality of the application which gives the game away that the same letter has been sent to every set.

The applications may be time consuming. But it ought to be time well spent. The reward in terms of an applicant's CV is considerable.

The thing which is likely to impress most is the exhibition of particular knowledge of the set being applied to. This may relate to the areas of specialism the chambers professes on its website, or better still, be some appropriate reference to a particular case a member of the set is or was involved in.

Applicants should do their homework and cogently show why they are genuinely attracted to a particular chambers and/or its specialism, area of work, or law practised. These applicants, who can clearly explain why they would obtain the most useful experiences from a particular mini-pupillage, are the ones most likely to prove successful in the applications process.

Good luck!

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