

Tips for Aspiring Barristers.

Mini-pupillage: This is essential work experience for anyone who wants to be a Barrister. 'Mini-pupillages' range from between 3 days to 1 week and provide an excellent insight into life at the Bar. Students should aim to do at least 3 before applying for the Bar Vocational Course (BVC).

BVC: This is a one year vocational course which must be completed by students who wish to be called to the Bar. This is all set to change after the 2009 intake, and will involve sitting an LNAT type aptitude test to ensure that only those with a good chance of gaining pupillage afterwards take the course.

Pupillage: This is the final stage of training as a barrister and is usually spent in chambers. A pupillage is a year during which you learn the practicalities of working as a barrister. It is divided into two six-month sections. The first six: you will spend your time shadowing an experienced barrister – your 'pupil supervisor'. You will be assigned preparatory tasks such as research and paperwork and watch your supervisor during advocacy. Some sets will let you 'rotate' around several pupil supervisors so you experience a range of practice areas. The second six: you are officially able to take on your own cases and present them in court. Pupils in a criminal or common law set are likely to be put in charge of smaller cases, while in other specialisms, such as commercial law, you're likely to continue to assist your supervisor.¹ Pupillage doesn't guarantee you a permanent place in chambers (tenancy) upon completion, although many sets, particularly in the provinces will take on pupils with 'a view to tenancy.'

Chambers: This is where Barristers work. They get together in sets to share the costs of clerks and the running of a building. They do however remain self-employed whilst working out of chambers, although a Barrister can choose to work at the employed Bar.

Inns of Court: A barrister must be a member of one of the Inns of Court, of which there are four: The Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, The Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple. The Inns provide support for barristers and student barristers through a range of educational activities, lunching and dining facilities, access to common rooms and gardens, and provision of various grants and scholarships. One of the key functions of the Inns is their responsibility for calling barristers to the Bar. Anyone wishing to train for the Bar must join one of the Inns and it is the Inns alone which have the power to call a student to the Bar. Alongside this responsibility, the Inns also have a role in administering disciplinary tribunals to deal with more serious complaints against barristers.²

TOP TIPS.

1. Work Hard. Grades really count! This includes first year grades, as this may be all you have when you begin to apply for mini-pupillages. At the moment you can still undertake the BVC with a 2:2 but your chances of obtaining pupillage at the end of it are less than 5%.
2. Get Work Experiences: Mini-pupillages are essential work experience and applicants for scholarship from an Inn or for pupillage are unlikely to get very far without having done at least a couple. They show a commitment to the Bar and help you learn more about the profession. Work experience in solicitors firms may also be useful as it will help you to decide if the Bar is really for you, and may enable you to explain

¹ http://targetjobs.co.uk/law-barristers/articleview-38s_19a_2014.aspx

² <http://www.barcouncil.org.uk/about/innsforcourt/>

more fully why you want to become a Barrister. Some mini-p's are assessed – others aren't. Be sure you know which yours is before you start!!

3. Get involved in Mooting and/or Debating. The more experience you have of standing on your feet the better. You are going into a profession where advocacy is a fundamental part of your work, and you will need to have evidence of your ability in this area. Oral presentation may form also form part of your pupillage interview and so you will have to be a good speaker. If you fail to take part in some kind of public speaking during your degree, you won't be doing yourself any favours.
4. Do something different. It doesn't really matter what you do as long as it makes you stand out. This could be a gap year programme, a year abroad on your degree, or just being an active member of a society/team. Volunteering is a great way to get involved in a variety of interesting activities and looks really good on the CV. If you are a mature student this may not be so easy, but the fact that you may have faced different challenges during your degree, or have family commitments that perhaps your average student doesn't, will go in your favour just as much as teaching English to orphans in some far-flung destination. Chambers want well-rounded individuals with enough confidence to hold their own in the courtroom and the social skills to be able to communicate effectively with colleagues and clients.
5. Choose your Inn. The Inn's do more than just provide scholarships. Choose wisely; You will be required to undertake a number of qualifying sessions at your Inn (12) in order to be called to the Bar, and so you will spend a lot of time there during your BVC year. Many people say they are all alike, but a visit to each or even two will show you that *a*)they are in fact all very different with differing compositions of members and atmospheres, and *b*) there will definitely be one or two that are more suited to you than the others.
6. Choose your Law! This isn't as important for first years, but second and third years should really know what area of law they want to practice, or at least have an idea of what they don't. This will help you when selecting your module choices, and choosing which Chambers to apply to. Alternatively, you may have a number of areas that you are interested in and apply to a set which practices a broader range of law with a view to deciding later on. Just remember that the sets that specialise are going to want you to show evidence of your interest in the areas of law they practice; the best way to do this is generally with a good mark in the equivalent module on your degree.
7. Network. Whenever you can talk to the Barristers you come into contact with. The best time is usually on mini-pupillage, not just accosting counsel as they leave court for the day. If a Barrister supervisor invites you to keep in touch with them, then do so – but don't harass them. Be confident and polite, and you should meet a few 'contacts' along the way. Dining at the Inns, and talks at University are other ways of meeting Barristers.
8. Proof read - ALWAYS. A friend of mine applied for pupillage last year, and when she rang one set to ask for feedback the first thing they commented on were the errors in spelling and grammar on her application. This is a sure-fire way to get your application thrown in the Bin. Chambers are looking for applicants who can write and speak to a very high standard, so make sure that your abilities are reflected in your applications – even if it is in an email requesting mini-pupillage.
9. Keep up-to-date. Both scholarship and pupillage interviewers may want to know your opinions on current legal issues, so form some! You will need to be able to argue intelligibly about different areas of law, but don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer if asked a question on a topic you know nothing about –this will always look better than struggling through an answer. However, if you say you are interested in something, or apply to a specialist set, then there may be no excuse for not knowing about developments in those areas of law. I have always found the Student Law Review to be a particularly useful tool for keeping me informed on current legal issues.

10. Be realistic. The Bar is super competitive, and you will be up against the best. If you aren't going to enjoy the slog then don't start – its tough, long and rejection at some stage should be expected. You need to be sure that you have an impressive academic record; that you really love advocacy, and you have enough energy and drive to begin on the journey to the Bar, or the expense and effort won't be worth it. However, for those of you that do have those qualities and determination, I'm sure life at the Bar will provide a wonderful and varied career that will be well worth the effort.