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CUTTING THROUGH

THE QM BAR SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



QUEEN MARY
BAR SOCIETY

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WELCOME

Welcome to the 11th edition of Cutting Through. We hope you will enjoy our festive issue, and from all of us at QMBS, Happy Holidays!

- Asteropi

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Tim Kasser and Kennon Sheldon, 'What makes for a Merry Christmas?' (2002) 3 Journal of Happiness Studies 313.

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AARON MAYERS

Pupil Barrister and Co-Chair at Bridging the Bar

How should students make their mini-pupillage applications stand out, and what are the most common mistakes to avoid?

There is no one size fits all approach to mini-pupillage applications and, like any other work experience application, there is an element of subjectivity on the part of the person marking the application. There are, however, some things within your control which can sway the reader to assess your application favourably. Of course, no advice I can provide will change your grades, prior work experience, or the stories that make you who you are. I can however offer some useful tips which worked for both myself and some of my colleagues and allowed me to secure 9 mini-pupillages (this number is excessive and shouldn't be taken as a benchmark – you probably only need to do a few!).

First, it is important to think about what purpose the mini-pupillage itself will serve. You may be forgiven for thinking that a mini-pupillage is just a form of work experience, but it offers a lot more than that. The purpose your mini-pupillage will serve will depend on what stage of your legal career you are at and to what extent you are ready to apply for pupillage. This should be at the forefront of your mind when you are drafting the application.

For example, if you are at the very beginning of your legal career and you are about to embark on the journey of finding out what exactly a barrister does on a day-to-day basis, a mini-pupillage will likely serve

the purpose of informing you about what to expect from a career at the Bar and whether this is actually something you want to do.

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Alternatively, if you already have some work experience and a clear intention to pursue a career at the Bar, a mini-pupillage will likely help you to identify exactly which practice area or chambers you would like to work with. It's also a good insight into chambers' culture and can help you decide whether they are a good fit for you.

With that in mind, here are my four top tips for an effective and persuasive mini-pupillage application:

1. Research

Chambers like to know that you have taken the time to find out exactly who they are, what they do, and how they do it. A generic mini-pupillage application is easy to spot, so your research should be both thorough and evident in your application answers. Copy and paste the 10 questions below for future reference. If you can answer most (if not all) of these questions, you have probably done your research reasonably thoroughly:

- i. What do you know about your chosen set which the other 500 applicants likely do not?
- ii. Who have you spoken to in chambers, and what impression did they give you?
- iii. What have you discovered about chambers' practice areas, clients, recent cases, business development, culture, and recent triumphs which align with your future career aspirations?
- iv. What is a recent well-known case that chambers have been involved with which you find interesting? Why?
- v. Who are chambers' typical clients?
- vi. Who in chambers has developed a practice that you would like to learn from and possibly emulate? How did they do it?
- vii. What have recent pupils been able to achieve which you envisage could be beneficial for your development?
- viii. What do mini pupils get to do and see during mini-pupillages?
- ix. Is there anything unique in the way that barristers at your chosen set work with their clerks?
- x. How would you describe chambers' business model?

'If you can answer most of these questions, you have probably done your research reasonably thoroughly'

2. Persuasion

When answering questions about your skills or competency, always put yourself in the mind of the reader and consider how persuasively you have depicted your capabilities. A good way of illustrating your qualities effectively is by way of a real-life example or anecdote.

A useful anecdote is one which:

- i) identifies the relevant skill or characteristic;
- ii) clearly (briefly) sets out how and why the skill was utilised effectively; and
- iii) ties i) and ii) back in with why you have the potential to be a great barrister and your understanding of the role.

When using anecdotes, make sure you say what you actually did or contributed to the situation. Describing only what your team or your colleagues did is unlikely to persuade a reader of your qualities. Pupillage panels want to be told how good you are in a way that is clear and supported with evidence. They do not want to have to read between the lines or extrapolate conclusions for themselves.

3. Brevity

Sometimes less is more. Word limits are a restriction, not a target. Make your point succinctly, and where appropriate, make the structure of your answers aesthetically pleasing for the reader. Your application may be read by a barrister on a screen or a physical sheet of paper. Either way, make it look easy to read. A simple way of doing this is to use 1.5 or double line spacing, justified text, bullet points, numbered lists, or shortened paragraphs where appropriate.

4. Character

Do not fall into the trap of muting your unique characteristics so as to fit in with what you think a barrister 'should be'. Whether through your interests or the use of anecdotes, there should be evidence in the application of who you are as a person, and what characteristics you have which put you in good stead for a career at the Bar.

Many chambers publicise their mini-pupillage selection criteria, and sometimes this includes the kind of characteristics they want to see in their mini pupils. Evidence of integrity, determination and a good moral compass should certainly be included. However, if you have a unique experience or perspective which you think could assist you in your career at the Bar, which is not necessarily on chambers criteria, add that too.

The more of yourself (within the parameters of professionalism) you put into your application, the more likely you are to find a set that accepts you for who you are rather than your diluted, artificial doppelganger. I recently wrote an article on how to write a good pupillage application, and the same principles apply to mini-pupillages. This can be found [here](#).

'The more of yourself you put into your application, the more likely you are to find a set that accepts you for who you are'

How significant is academic achievement, and which are the extracurricular activities that could distinguish your profile?

Extracurricular activities are a great opportunity for character building, investing your time and energy into causes you care about, or a great excuse to develop your social life! Some of the most valuable experiences you are likely to have during your time at university derive from unexpected scenarios that unfold during these activities and can serve as a great reference point for any application.

However, in my view, whilst you are still at university, academic achievement should be your number one priority. That is because when it comes to mini-pupillage and pupillage applications, most chambers use an objective points-based system to determine how much credit is given to academic performance. Some chambers give more weight to academic achievement than others but when you are still at university it's unlikely you'll have years of astonishing work experience to offset any academic underperformance. Put yourself in a position to win by prioritising your time and energy accordingly.

Notwithstanding the above, if for whatever reason you conclude your time at university without the grades you hoped for, there is still a lot you can do to remedy this scenario. There are barristers, past and present, who were in this position and managed to keep ascending. Seek them out. Nevertheless, whilst you are still at university, focus on what is in your control.

If you conclude university with a degree which reflects your full potential (2:1 or First Class Honours), some mooting and debating experience under your belt, a responsible role in a student society, and perhaps one or two mini-pupillages and/or vac schemes, you can be content that you have had a successful few years! (For the purposes of context and clarity, I did not complete my first mini-pupillage until just after I had graduated! There is no set route.)

The takeaway point is this: if you are still in a position to write your university story, prioritise your degree and do as much as you can without burning yourself out. Put in the work now, and your future self will thank you later.

To what extent could non-legal experience be an asset to your application?

Non-legal experience can be extremely valuable and can often be used to compliment what might otherwise be the standard legal work experience seen in every mini-pupillage application. By way of an example, in my applications, I often recounted the story of how I played football for Wycombe Wanderers FC for a couple of years and narrowly missed out on the opportunity to sign a professional contract due to an injury. Through this story, I have been able to draw upon qualities such as working within a team, discipline, and how I deal with adversity.

The extent to which non-legal work experience is a useful addition to your application comes down to how well you can persuasively extract relevant skills, qualities, and real-life experiences and relate them to the role of a barrister.

I recently wrote a blog on how to get the most out of your work experience, be it legal or non-legal. This is available [here](#).

'Non-legal experience can be extremely valuable and can often be used to compliment what might otherwise be the standard legal work experience seen in every mini-pupillage application'

How did your experience as a paralegal contribute to securing a pupillage?

Paralegal work experience helped me to achieve three key things:

1. Seeing law in practice

My paralegal work experience shifted my perspective of the law from being purely academic to appreciating how the law really works in practice. This allowed me to shed any misconceptions (no, not every paralegal role is as glamorous as Meghan Markle made it seem!) and for the first time, I had the opportunity to see first-hand how the work that lawyers do has real ramifications for real people and organisations. I learnt to appreciate that there is a huge responsibility that comes with our work.

2. Understanding how to provide a good service for clients

My paralegal experience also taught me the value of going the extra mile and delivering a high quality and pragmatic service for solicitors and lay clients. I have seen what it is like to work with solicitors and clients who are appreciative of the extra thought and care their barrister has put into their work. Equally, I have seen what it is like to work with an annoyed solicitor who has had to read through a 60-page opinion which really ought to have been condensed into 12 pages! Both experiences are valuable, and I know which reaction is most likely to encourage repeat instructions!

3. Understanding the litigation process

As a paralegal, I was able to observe and contribute to the entire litigation process, from the moment the firm first receives an enquiry from a client right through to judgment, enforcement, and any subsequent ramifications. This insight allows me to appreciate what may have occurred in the process leading up to a case being on my desk. This can, in turn, lead to better collaboration with solicitors when it comes to preparing a case for trial or gathering relevant evidence.

Is there any other advice you would like to share with aspiring barristers at Queen Mary that you wish you knew when you were a law student?

Here are three pieces of advice I would give to my 20-year-old self:

1. You have so much time! Focus on one thing at a time and do that one thing well. Do not put yourself under the pressure of having to do a million things before you graduate.

2. When seeking work experience, do not get caught up in what your CV looks like. Focus on building the practical skills and the knowledge. The big shiny names and the city firms will find their way to you later, once you have built up your competence.

3. If you want to unlock more opportunities, ask more people who hold the keys. You might fear rejection, but you'll either get numb to it after a while, or you'll get a yes. So, it's a win-win!

'You have so much time! Focus on one thing at a time and do that one thing well'

#Christmas

ARTICLES

'Evidence of a Christmas spirit network in the brain: functional MRI study'

A fascinating study on... the Christmas spirit!

Objective? 'To detect and localise the Christmas spirit in the human brain.'

Main outcome measures? 'Brain activation unique to the group with Christmas traditions during visual stimulation with images with a Christmas theme.'

Could all the warm and fuzzy feelings associated with years and years of Christmas pudding, joyful music, and decorations reside in our bodies? This article summarises the findings of a study attempting to localise the Christmas spirit in the human brain! Would you be in the 'Christmas group' or the 'non-Christmas group'? Would you be affected by the 'bah humbug' syndrome? [Find out](#) for yourself!

'What makes for a Merry Christmas?'

What is the secret to holiday well-being? The authors begin with a brief review of the evolution of the Christmas holiday, the family reunions, the festive transformation of the cities, and the key role of holiday spending in the economy. But recalling that originally Christmas (only) celebrated the birth of a religious figure, which was later replaced by Santa Claus (a 'secular version of Christ'), what makes for a Merry Christmas in the end? Religious activities with family, gifts, volunteering, or food?

DOCUMENTARIES

Dreams of a Life, Prime

Seventeen years ago, on a cold December day like today, Joyce Vincent (38 at the time) died in her flat in Wood Green surrounded by Christmas wrappings and with the TV on. Two Decembers later, nobody had noticed her missing. With a past of domestic abuse, Joyce had resigned from her job and reduced contact with family and friends. The question still lingers, was she ashamed to be a victim of domestic abuse, or was she hiding from her abuser? *Dreams of a Life* (2011) tells Joyce's story.

Christmas Under Fire, BFI

Many of us have wondered how we will celebrate Christmas under the gloom of Covid-19. You may find an unusual consolation in Harry Watt's *Christmas Under Fire*. The 9-minute extract shows how Christmas was celebrated in 1941 during the Second World War under German firepower. With the battle against Covid proving to be war as well, it is inspiring to see the resilience of the people who made Christmas day happen, despite the odds.

The Story of Fairytale of New York, BBC iPlayer

On a more cheery note, follow the making of the Christmas classic *Fairytale of New York*. After 18 years, all eight members of The Pogues return to the studio they recorded their biggest hit. Don't forget the debate on the lyrics of the song with BBC changing and muting words that could be offensive. What do you think, Irish slang or homophobic slur? You can read more [here](#) and [here](#).



Iced! King's Cross @FI 2018

Are you a member of QMBS? Do you have a picture of your favourite winter location you would like to share? Let us know! It could be in our January issue 2021!

PODCASTS

BBC Law in Action, Good Advice

Listen to the inspiring story of North Kensington Law Centre founded 50 years ago by Peter Kandler in an old butcher's shop. See more [here](#).

Do you want to keep with the law during Christmas? Marcus Cleaver presents short summaries of significant judgments at **UK Law Weekly**. Listen to the [SoS for Health v. Servier Laboratories Ltd](#) [2020] UKSC 44 about the health authorities in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland claiming that Servier Laboratories breached the European Competition laws under both Articles 101 and 102 TFEU. Find more case summaries [here](#).

The **Linkubator** is a fascinating podcast series on legal technology. From legal tech investment to data analysis, AI, and fintech, this is an unmissable trainee-led podcast to excite and inform you about the future digital shaping of the law.

More minis?

Have a look at the Chambers|Student fantastic list [here](#)!

New Writers

Want to write for Cutting Through?
Get in touch at info@queenmarybarsoociety.org!

#Christmas

FILMS

Make a cup of cocoa and enjoy two of Tim Burton's most marvellous creations: Jack Skellington (**The Nightmare Before Christmas**, 1993) and **Edward Scissorhands** (1990). Burton is a master of weaving the most moving stories led by unimaginable characters who cannot disappoint you. Unfitting heroes in an unforgiving world, and set on Danny Elfman's magnificent score, both films are bittersweet fairytales signed by Burton's unique macabre style. The ultimate Christmas treats.

Miracle on 34th Street (1994) is a classic family Christmas film led by the bright Susan Walker (Mara Wilson), who is skeptical about Christmas. Apart from the glorious New York scenery and the beautiful Christmas decorations, the film is more than a 'believe in Santa Claus' cheer. There is an interesting case to consider: Who can prove that there is no Santa Claus? When Kris Kringle (Richard Attenborough) is framed and prosecuted, defence lawyer Bryan Bedford (Dylan McDermott) must prove that in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, Kris Kringle may well be the real Santa Claus.

Find more about Bridging the Bar

Find more about Bridging the Bar and its mission [here](#).
Have a look at the mini-pupillage programme and work experience opportunities [here](#).

Your 2020 Review

What did 2020 teach you? What are your reflections on the year passed, and how will they take you forward? If you have a pitch about a unique '2020 Review' story, it could be published in the first Cutting Through of the new year!

CALENDAR

DEADLINES

Plan your 2021 applications!

1 Hare Court
31 January

Fountain Court Chambers
26 February

One Essex Court
28 February

Landmark Chambers
28 February

7 King's Bench Walk
1 March

Keating Chambers
1 March

Maitland Chambers
31 March

EVENTS

Inclusivity Week: BLM
25 January

Inclusivity Week: LGBTQI+
27 January

Inclusivity Week:
Disability at the Bar
28 January

Multi-jurisdictional law panel
1 February

Inclusion Networking Event
4 February

