

# PUPILLAGE RECRUITMENT GUIDE

## 2023



# INTRODUCTION

This guide is written to assist those who are considering applying or re-applying for pupillage at 25 Bedford Row. We recognise that it can be a daunting prospect to go through the selection process and so hopefully this document will assist you in preparing your application and for the rounds of interview.

We are very proud of our pupillage programme at 25 Bedford Row and are very keen for our pupils to succeed at the Criminal Bar. Our Pupillage Committee runs all aspects of our in-house education and training, with events taking place every other week. A majority of tenants in chambers were once pupils at 25 and so have an understanding of and an insight into the life of a pupil, and it is these people who mark applications and the interviews.

If you are considering applying to our chambers, we encourage you to attend our Induction Evening (details on our website) as this will give you the chance to hear more about what 25 Bedford Row can offer, and to meet tenants, members of the Pupillage Committee as well as some of our current pupils.

We very much look forward to meeting the next generation of aspiring pupils at our interviews in 2024.

**Sebastian Gardiner**  
**Head of the Pupillage Committee**



# THE HEADLINES

During this year's recruitment round, we were privileged to meet many talented and ambitious lawyers who were either at the start of their career, or who were seeking to change careers. We were impressed by the dedication and passion many have shown towards a career at the Criminal Bar.

We understand the majority of applicants will have been disappointed not to have received pupillage from us or from another set this year. We hope you will find this document useful in preparing you for any future rounds.

In this guide, we have tried to outline what successful candidates have done well, as well as what could be improved upon by candidates.

While this guide explores, in some detail, each of the stage of the recruitment process at 25 Bedford Row, we have noted four areas which candidates may wish to consider before the 2024 application rounds:

a) Structure – one key problem identified across the different stages was a lack of structure. A good structure can really lift whatever piece of advocacy you are doing to the next level (whether that is written or oral). A good structure helps the

tribunal (or marker) to follow your argument. Without a solid structure, good points can become lost or obscured.

- b) Analysis – make sure you take the time to consider properly the factual basis of whatever scenario is thrown at you. We appreciate that this is difficult under the pressure of time, and particularly difficult in an interview scenario. However, proper analysis and consideration of the facts provides the bedrock for your submissions.
- c) Commitment – our panels are consistently looking for evidence of commitment to a career as a barrister, and to the practice of criminal law. Candidates who did well in this area were generally able to demonstrate this by (i) showing a commitment to advocacy (whether through participation through mooting, public speaking, or voluntary work including FRU / schools exclusion projects / community projects), and (ii) by being able to point to something concrete which demonstrated a real interest in criminal law or the criminal justice system.
- d) Knowledge – we understand that candidates come to pupillage interviews with differing levels of knowledge. We make allowances for the fact that many applicants apply to us without first having taken the Bar Vocational Studies Course. However, many candidates of all levels this year clearly had not revised some basic concepts. We would suggest that candidates in 2024 revise how to conduct pleas in mitigation, and bail applications.

# APPROACH TO RECRUITMENT

25 Bedford Row is committed to the recruitment of exceptional pupils. In order to do that, our recruitment process involves almost all of chambers – from the most junior, to the most senior.

At the first stage of our recruitment process this year, a paper sift was completed by 66 of our members to identify those candidates with the greatest potential.

Following the paper sift, there were three rounds of interviews which this year were conducted almost entirely face to face. As ever, 25 Bedford Row is committed to interviewing as many candidates as possible. This year, we interviewed 77 candidates in our first round and 33 candidates in our second round. A final ten candidates were invited for a third round.

At each round, we have looked to progress as many applicants as possible.

# PAPER SIFT

All applications received through the Advocates' Gateway were considered by two members of chambers and moderated by the Chair of the Pupillage Committee. This year, we convened 33 panels.

Application forms were anonymised prior to being sent to markers. Marks were pooled between markers. Where there was striking disagreement between panel members, the Chair of the Pupillage Committee completed a third mark of the application form in addition to their role as moderator.

Unfortunately, the panels saw a number of basic errors being made by candidates. Grammatical or spelling errors persisted in a number of application forms.

Candidates were assigned marks against the following four criteria, each of which carried equal weight. Consequently, in order to secure an interview, candidates had to score sufficiently across each of the criteria:

- a) Education;
- b) Experience;
- c) Commitment;

- d) Chambers' questions.

## Education

Chambers continues to welcome applicants from all educational backgrounds. We do not exclude those with 2:2s or their equivalent, and candidates are assessed according to all the educational information placed on their form.

Where candidates feel that their grades are not as they should be, we would encourage them to be as open and honest with us as possible as to the reasons for this. This should be clearly noted in the 'extenuating circumstances' section of the form.

## Experience & Commitment

As noted above, Candidates who did well in this area were generally able to demonstrate this by (i) showing a commitment to advocacy (whether through participation through mooting, public speaking, or voluntary work including FRU / schools exclusion projects / community projects), and (ii) by being able to point to something concrete which demonstrated a real interest in criminal law or the criminal justice system. It was rarely sufficient to simply profess an interest in criminal law without more.

A number of candidates failed to capitalise on the mini-pupillages they had completed – as ever, the best candidates were able to tell us what they had learned during these experiences and how that

informed their decision to apply for a criminal pupillage / career at the Criminal Bar.

### **Chambers' Questions**

Candidates were required to answer five chambers specific questions. The first three of those questions were designed to provide candidates with an opportunity to set out their understanding of what is required for a successful career at the Criminal Bar, and to explain their motivation for applying to 25 Bedford Row.

The final two questions required candidates to engage with two propositions and to argue in favour or against them. This was an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their written advocacy skills and understanding of important current issues in the criminal justice system. The best answers were well structured and direct, while some candidates struggled by failing to engage with what was being asked of them. We were most interested in candidates' ability to construct a persuasive and coherent argument. Whilst the best responses were underpinned and informed by thorough research on the topic in question, it was not necessary to quote extensively from relevant statutes, authorities or other sources. Our view is that doing so will rarely enhance the force of the argument being advanced.

## **FIRST INTERVIEWS**

First round interviews took place on 22nd and 23rd March 2023. Whereas recent years have required use of Zoom to facilitate interviews during the pandemic, this year saw a return to the vast majority of panels taking place face to face.

77 candidates were interviewed by 13 panels. The panels were comprised of no fewer than two members of chambers. Panels were drawn from across chambers, from the most senior to the most junior.

Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and were based on:

- a) An advocacy exercise;
- b) A legal question.

The advocacy exercise was a plea in mitigation in respect of an allegation of aggravated vehicle taking. The exercise was provided to candidates 20 minutes before their interview was due to begin.

Candidates were also asked to consider three topical legal questions in advance of the interview and to answer one question of their choice.

## The Advocacy Exercise

This was a serious allegation of aggravated vehicle taking involving some particularly poor driving. In summary, the defendant stole a vehicle and drove it, despite not having a licence or any previous driving experience. On realising that he was being followed by the owner of the vehicle in another car, the defendant reverse rammed the other vehicle twice at speed, causing the stolen car to end up on the bonnet of the other car with the two occupants trapped inside. Significant damage was caused and the defendant attempted to run away from the scene.

The best candidates:

- a) Followed a clear structure;
- b) Demonstrated an appropriate understanding of the underlying facts;
- c) Made their points succinctly and forcefully before moving on;
- d) Addressed us on aggravating / mitigating features appropriately;
- e) Made appropriate reference to personal mitigation factors;
- f) Were realistic about the seriousness of the offending.

Many candidates struggled with:

- a) Credit for plea – many candidates did not appreciate that a plea at the PTPH entitled the defendant to a ¼ discount on his sentence;
- b) A realistic assessment of the seriousness of the offending - this led some candidates to invite the court to impose types of sentences which were not realistic or credible in the light of the sentencing guidance provided;
- c) The facts – a number of panels observed that candidates had not properly considered the factual basis upon which the defendant was to be sentenced.

## Legal Question

As with the advocacy exercise, the best answers were well structured by the candidates and demonstrated a genuine engagement with the issues raised by the questions provided.

Panels were encouraged to challenge candidates on their responses to questions, and were generally impressed with candidates' ability to think on their feet.

## SECOND INTERVIEWS

Second interviews took place on 19th and 20th April 2023. 33 candidates were interviewed at second round by six panels made up of three members of chambers each.

Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and comprised two parts:

- a) An advocacy exercise;
- b) A three-minute presentation on a non-legal topic.

Candidates were asked in advance to prepare their three-minute presentation. The advocacy exercise was sent to candidates 25 minutes before their interview was due to begin. Reasonable adjustments were made where needed.

### Advocacy Exercise

Candidates were allowed five minutes to make an application for bail in respect of an 18-year old client charged with offences of stalking, harassment and threats to kill. The defendant was initially arrested after the complaint (aged 16) alleged that he had sent her a series of persistent messages and followed her home. He was released on police bail with conditions not to contact her, but was

then arrested two days later outside her home address, where he is alleged to have made threats to kill her.

On any realistic view, the grant of bail was going to be challenging, given the apparent breach of police bail and strength of the evidence.

The best candidates:

- a) Followed a clear structure;
- b) Demonstrated an understanding of relevant considerations under the Bail Act;
- c) Were realistic about the strength of the case against the defendant;
- d) Focussed on aspects that drew upon the defendant's age, and vulnerabilities.

Many candidates struggled with:

- a) A lack of structure, or a structure that stuck too rigidly to the objections to bail;
- b) Poor timing;



- c) Selecting and focussing on the strongest points that could be made.

### **Three-Minute Presentation**

Candidates were provided with a list of four non-legal questions in advance of the interview, and were asked to prepare a three-minute presentation on a question of their choice.

The three-minute presentation is always a highlight of the interview process as we find that it allows candidates to relax and speak on topics with which they are more familiar. It is an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their skills of persuasion and description.

The best candidates:

- a) Followed a clear structure;
- b) Had thoroughly researched the topic of the question they chose to answer;
- c) Demonstrated an engaging advocacy style, delivered from notes, rather than read.

## **THIRD INTERVIEWS**

Ten applicants were interviewed at third round by a panel comprising of Sebastian Gardiner, Paul Keleher KC, Emma Akuwudike and Kerrie Rowan.

This interview focussed on questions relating to a candidate's application form. In general, these questions were aimed at better understanding a candidate's motivation for applying to 25 Bedford Row, or the Criminal Bar of England and Wales. Candidates generally gave thoughtful and persuasive answers to these questions.

## **PUPILLAGE OFFERS**

Acknowledging that the calibre of applicants was extremely high this year, we made three offers of pupillage and three reserve offers.



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