

After two years of waiting, the day was finally here: the start of pupillage. I was fortunate to obtain pupillage in the 2020/21 cycle whilst still studying on the Bar course, at my dream set (Exchange Chambers, if the location of this post didn't give it away...), so the preceding two-year wait felt like a lifetime.

Of course, after spending the last few days before pupillage ensuring I was fully re-charged and raring to go on Monday, the anticipation of starting a new job meant I had a broken and restless night's sleep on the Sunday and all the re-charging seemed like a distant memory. But a combination of strong coffee and excitement for the day ahead put me back on the right track.

I had met my supervisor – [Charlotte Rimmer](#) – the week earlier, and she had given me an insight into the first case I would be observing: one relating to historic child abuse. Prior to starting pupillage I worked for many years in law reform, focusing specifically on child abuse and sexual exploitation-related laws, so this was – rather morbidly – an area of work I was excited to work within once more.

I arrived at Minshull Street Crown Court at 9:30am, and upon meeting my supervisor we jumped right in. The trial she was defending in had already been ongoing for a week, and was just about to move into the defence portion of proceedings, so the timing could not have been better for me to see exactly how my supervisor worked.

We started the day with a client conference with the defendant, discussing elements of the case and clarifying any questions and queries. Of course, there is a “Client Conference” module at Bar school, but this fails to give a true impression of the weight of importance attached to the discussions that go on in a *real* conference, particularly when matters of liberty are at stake, as they so often are in criminal cases.

Following this, and for the next few days, I watched as my supervisor worked from the ground up to build the defence's case, working through examination-in-chief with the defendant, as well as cross examination of a police officer. These were lessons in meticulous preparation and planning, as my supervisor laid the foundations for the grand finale: closing speeches.

Closing speeches to the jury aren't taught at Bar school, and this is, frankly, a shame. This is the part of the case where Counsel for each side summarise their case to the jury, and why they say members of said jury should either convict or acquit. It is also the part of proceedings featuring the most obvious crystallisation of the “persuasive advocacy” you are so regularly reminded to focus on in those salad days as a bright-eyed law student.

Amongst all the excitement of being *in* the court room, there is also the excitement “behind the curtain”. The robing room – where barristers get ready for the day, exchange war stories, and seek some respite from the demands of life at the Bar – is an unknown quantity for most people: What does it look like? What are other members of the Bar actually *like*? Will the people there be welcoming to a *mere pupil barrister*?

EXCHANGE

CHAMBERS

On the first point...well, perhaps the excitement immediately preceding one's entry into the robing room about its appearance might be slightly tempered upon seeing it, as ultimately, it is just a large room with tables and chairs. But within that room are an often-rotating cast of colleagues, all of whom have been incredibly welcoming, warm, and generous with their time. From discussions regarding points of law, to the ups and downs of days in court, everybody is collegiate, engaging, and friendly with each other. Yes, even to a *mere pupil barrister*.

My first week went by in a blur, and before I knew it, my second week had arrived. This time, I was observing the prosecution of a different historic sex abuse case, with another member of Chambers, [Alaric Bassano](#). This afforded me the opportunity to see the first half of a criminal case that I hadn't been able to see the previous week.

Seeing the jury being empanelled; watching their interest being piqued as they realise the case they were due to watch was one of the utmost gravity; the prosecution opening speech; and the first complainant providing evidence via a Section 28 pre-recorded video. All individual parts of the trial process, fitting together slowly like puzzle pieces to reveal to the jury the picture that they would ultimately have to consider.

The second week flew by as quickly as the first – covering more Section 28 videos, cross examination of the complainants, and the back and forth between Counsel refining the “agreed facts” of the case – and before I knew it, it was time for the long bank holiday weekend.

My first two weeks at Exchange Chambers have been nothing short of fantastic. It has flown by – always the sign of a good time – and I'm very excited to see what the coming weeks bring. If the first two have been anything to go by, I'll be “on my feet” before I know it.