

# EXCHANGE

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## CHAMBERS

January is the time of year when resolutions are made for the year ahead, and when the focus turns to self-reflection and self-improvement. For pupils on the Northern Circuit, myself included, January began with a period of training to hone our advocacy skills and to sharpen our ethical awareness.

All pupils must pass a course in advocacy during the course of their pupillage. On circuit, all pupils gather together to undertake the course which is delivered by experienced barristers who all give up their time to help the “next generation”. Over the course of two Fridays at the start of January, we ran through advocacy exercises in civil and criminal scenarios and received detailed, tailored feedback on our performance.

The feedback is delivered using the “Hampel method”, in which the tutor identifies one aspect of the performance which could be improved: a question which was inappropriately leading, an aspect of intonation or body language which was distracting, and so on. The pupil sees a demonstration from the tutor and then tries again, focusing on the specific point of feedback. This emphasis on continuous improvement and “marginal gains” (to plagiarise Dave Brailsford) is essential, not only for pupils but also for seasoned practitioners. Every barrister needs to cultivate a self-reflective practice and constantly think about improving their performance.

For me, the course was a great opportunity to practise my advocacy skills ahead of second six, but also to socialise with fellow pupils. The atmosphere on all of the events I have attended on circuit has been collegial and friendly. I am particularly looking forward to being elected to the Northern Circuit later this term, which requires attendance at Mess in Manchester. More about that in a future diary entry.

Also in early January, and unfortunately very soon after Christmas, was another element of pupillage set down by the regulator: the BSB’s ethics exam. This tests pupils’ ability to recognise the ethical issues in a range of scenarios and to apply the rules in the BSB Handbook. Unlike the ethics assessment on the Bar Course, this 3-hour exam was in depth and required written answers to 12 questions, covering everything from misconduct to the scope of practice rules. Revising for the exam was a helpful reminder of the fundamental principles upon which the profession is founded: to pursue the best interests of every client, independently, without fear or favour, subject always to our duty to the court and to the rule of law.

For much of the rest of January, I have been shadowing a senior member of chambers on an Article 2 inquest relating to a death in complex circumstances involving the police and other emergency services. It has been instructive to observe an inquest in which the coroner sits with a jury. Following the evidence over the course of two weeks has reminded me how important it is to have a grasp of the forensic detail in any case, particularly where the tribunal’s conclusions might turn on relatively small details.

Looking ahead, I will be spending most of the remaining period of my first six shadowing junior counsel in the County Court, to help prepare me for getting “on my feet” in April. I hope to share some insights into the realities of County Court work at the junior end of the Bar in due course.