

Entry three

After one month in chambers, the rhythm of pupillage is setting in. At this point, I feel more confident of my role as a pupil and what is expected of me in chambers. I will discuss this further in this entry as it is a crucial factor to consider. Importantly, this is my experience at Exchange Chambers; it may be different at other chambers and in different practice areas, such as the excitement of the Bar.

In brief, this is where your interpersonal skills and any experience you may have had in the workplace will be valuable. It is also where you need to have a healthy, productive relationship with criticism and mistakes.

A pupil's place in chambers is distinct from those of its members. For those who might not be aware, a pupil is not strictly an employee of chambers, however you are not a member either. Your place as a pupil does not automatically mean you will become a member in due course, far from it. Pupils must earn their place through a tenancy vote.

As a pupil in my first six, I have spent time with my pupil supervisor, Chloe, to observe her managing her practice. I also watch her manage professional relationships with other barristers, court staff, solicitors and clerks, and learn from her when I complete tasks and receive feedback.

Regarding questions - don't worry about asking them. It is expected that you will not understand certain things and it is assumed that you do not know the practicalities of managing a successful practice at the Bar. When questions arise however, it might not always be a convenient time to ask them! It is a good idea to have somewhere to jot down questions that come up through the day and pick a good moment to ask them. This is not, to give some examples, when your supervisor is in conference, or speaking to opposition counsel before a trial starts, or when they are clearly under time pressure to prepare legal argument with a Judge waiting.

You may even find that some careful thought or a quick look at Archbold or Blackstone's might give you the answer. Use your judgment and pick your moment – you are likely to get a better answer as a result.

As well as being with my supervisor, I have also spent days with other members of chambers. This is to get exposure to a broad array of work from various levels of seniority and to experience different styles of advocacy.

During Week Four, I had the opportunity to shadow Helena Williams who was prosecuting in a 3-day trial in Manchester. The defendant was charged with three counts on the indictment: strangulation, assault by beating and threatening a person with a bladed article.

The evidence in this case was limited. 999 calls, statements from the police who attended the scene and body worn footage (BWF) were all adduced, however it was only the accounts of the two main characters, the complainant and the defendant, that covered the time of the alleged offences. The character and credibility of these two people, therefore, became a focus for the court to consider.

An application under s.100 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (to adduce non-defendant bad character) was made early in the trial by defence counsel to put into evidence proof of the complainant's previous convictions. This was initially refused by the court. Later, under cross-examination, the complainant offered evidence in such a way as to give a misleading impression of her character. The application was reopened, and the previous convictions were admitted.

The matter did not stop there. As the complainant's character had been attacked, this triggered the admission of further evidence of the defendant's bad character under s.101(1)(g) CJA 2003 and then counsel needed to consider how this evidence should be best admitted.

Importantly, I could appreciate the need to constantly evaluate where and how evidence might be admitted into a case. A route for admission that seems sensible and viable at one point in a trial, might quickly become unavailable further along due to a change in circumstances. I saw how counsel dealt with these changes calmly and with a proactive attitude to achieving resolutions with opposition counsel and the judge.

For this entry I would like to emphasise the following point about first six: you are there as an active learner. First six is not an experience for a passive observer. This is your chance to be an effective self-learner, as well as maximising all the learning opportunities offered by your supervisor.