

Gaby McGrath – Diary Entry Month 1

WOW, what a journey it has been!

I was 21 when I first interviewed at Exchange Chambers, 24 when I received my offer of pupillage, and 26 when I finally started. I have only recently finished the first month of my Common Law pupillage and I can certainly say it was worth the wait!

Prior to Pupillage

By way of background, I followed the traditional academic route to the Bar, studying Law at Queen's University Belfast, before completing the BPC LLM at Manchester's University of Law. Prior to gaining pupillage, I worked as both a Commercial Litigation Paralegal and as an Employment Tribunal advocate.

I interviewed at a fair number of chambers throughout my application rounds, but Exchange always stood out to me, one of the main reasons being its atmosphere. I remember feeling energised each time I left an interview with Exchange and excited about what the future had to offer – I still feel the same every time I step out of the door, over one month into pupillage.

Before I turn to pupillage itself, I want to tell you about the period between receiving the offer and starting. As I am sure everyone will tell you, there is nothing quite like the feeling of receiving that offer letter from Chambers! I remember being so overwhelmed with relief and excitement to have finally achieved it.

Although there was a 20-month wait until I started pupillage, Chambers made sure to include me in events and gave me the opportunity to meet my soon-to-be co-pupils, colleagues, and supervisor beforehand. I was able to chat to Neil Wright (Head of Liverpool Chambers), attend a Pizza & Wine evening with junior members of chambers, and join the Chambers Christmas Party. All of this helped to take away some of those first day nerves and make the prospect of starting a lot less daunting!

Being a January starter, I was also given the opportunity to undertake the Northern Circuit Advocacy Training prior to pupillage, which meant I was able to meet a lot of my new colleagues on Circuit and complete one portion of the compulsory training early.

Pupillage

Despite all the action before pupillage, nothing prepares you for the feeling the night before heading into Chambers as a new pupil! It is incredibly surreal.

On my first day, I met my supervisor, Alex Williams, in Chambers. He made sure I settled in nicely and that I knew where everyone, and everything, was. As well as getting to know Alex, I spent the morning reading the papers and catching up with the White Book for that afternoon's Disposal Hearing in Birkenhead County Court.

Over the next two weeks I focused on Personal Injury (PI) work as part of my Common Law pupillage. I spent time with my supervisor, observing many different types of hearings and advocacy including, Costs and Case Management Hearings, Allocation Hearings, and

Conferences. I was also able to shadow other members of the Personal Injury team where I saw more of what PI has to offer, including a Small Claims Trial and a Multi-Track Trial at the High Court, and Quantum Hearings. It was a great couple of weeks getting to meet and learn from many of my colleagues in Personal Injury across Liverpool and Manchester.

In addition to observing advocacy, my supervisor has given me the opportunities to complete several papers in PI over the past month and receive feedback, allowing me to put my learning into action. So

far this has included a defence, advice on liability, quantification of different claims, skeleton arguments, and particulars of claim.

However, as a Common Law pupil, my experience has not stopped there! Having expressed an interest in both Crime and Personal Injury, I have been able to engage in a large degree with the Criminal team in Chambers over the last two weeks.

Several members of the Criminal team have allowed me to join them over at Liverpool Crown Court. In just a short period of time, I have been able to observe a number of trials - with both junior and senior members of Chambers, Sentencings, Breach Hearings, Mentions, Pre-Trial Reviews, Pre Trial-Preparation Hearings, and Conferences with both with Defendants & the CPS. On each occasion, members of Chambers have been keen to assist my learning and development, to ensure I get the most I can out of the next 6-12 months.

I have to say, the past month has re-affirmed exactly why I chose Exchange, and I am very excited to see what follows for the rest of first six!

Conclusion

To conclude, if I were to provide one piece of advice to prospective pupils it would be to make the most of your time. Whether that be before pupillage or during.

Everyone's journey to the bar is unique and every life experience brings you different skills that will help you along the way.

In terms of before pupillage, use the time to your advantage. It does not matter if it takes you one year, three, or more, to obtain that offer letter. One of the key things I did each year was to identify any gaps in my application and seek out an opportunity to help fill it. This helped me utilise the time between applications to develop my skills and ultimately give me more to discuss at interview. Now I am here, I can confirm it has made me better prepared for pupillage itself.

Similarly, during pupillage, I am finding every day to be such a learning curve! It is important to soak up as much knowledge and experience from your colleagues as you can. Ask questions, challenge yourself, and fully immerse yourself in the experience!