

5 Essex Court 2012 pupillage application round

Selection for first interview

1. All members of the Pupillage Committee took part in the selection of applicants for interview.
2. Each application was considered by reference to four criteria. These were academic ability, experience, presentation and other factors. An overall score was allocated to each applicant by each member of the committee considering an application, and the applications were then ranked. There followed extensive discussion of individual applications before reaching a final selection for first interview.
3. Academic ability: The committee took account of A level, degree and post-graduate qualifications, together with any other evidence of academic ability. Very limited weight was given to GCSE results. All those selected for interview had gained a 2:1 or first in their degree(s). There were a few applicants with 2:2 degrees and/or poor A level results (or no A levels) who had shown academic ability in other ways. As it happens none were selected for interview. But some of them had very strong applications, demonstrating the skills to succeed at the Bar in what they had done since leaving school, and came very close to being selected for interview. It continues to be our approach to require a 2:1 or higher as evidence of academic ability. But this is not inflexible, and where there is compelling alternative evidence of academic ability a 2:2 will not necessarily rule out a candidate.
4. Overall, whilst there were several candidates with exceptional academic backgrounds, and a few with less distinguished records, the vast majority had a similar academic profile. This criterion did not therefore significantly differentiate between many different candidates.
5. Experience: In contrast with academic ability there was a much greater spectrum of experience. The committee took particular account of advocacy experience, mini-pupillages, work for NGOs and other legal and non-legal experience. Undertaking FRU training (with no evidence of cases) or limited letter writing for Liberty was given little or no weight. Evidence of actual advocacy experience in courts or tribunals (particularly where it was based on more than 2 or 3 cases) was given considerable weight. Mooting and debating were taken into account, but success in national and international competition was naturally more favourably regarded than an individual University moot. Mini-pupillages were taken into account, particularly where they showed relevant experience and an interest in and aptitude for the type of work undertaken in Chambers. Some applicants had extensive mini-pupillage experience in chambers that undertook similar work to 5 Essex Court, but which acted exclusively (or almost exclusively) for claimants. These tended to score highly for experience, showing, as they did, an interest in and experience of the type of work undertaken by 5 Essex Court. Although much (but not all) of Chambers' work is defendant-based, as more than one applicant observed, it is necessary to be able to see and argue a case from both sides. Non-legal

experience was taken into account, particularly where the applicant explained why it demonstrated the skills required for success at the Bar.

6. Presentation: The committee gave the same weight to the presentation of the application form as it gave to academic ability and experience. Those applications which were well-written and presented scored highly. Those with basic mistakes (spelling, punctuation errors or ill-judged turns of phrase) scored poorly. This resulted in applicants that were otherwise very strong not being selected for first interview, sometimes on the basis of mistakes that might (in other contexts) be thought trivial. However, the committee considered that basic errors in an important document that was not (or should not have been) completed under time pressure reflected poorly on the applicant's care and attention to detail.
7. Other factors: Some (but limited) weight was given to other factors which demonstrated the applicant's potential as a pupil and, in due course, a member of chambers. These included, for example, sporting or musical achievements which demonstrated the skills required for success at the Bar, or an understanding of the ethos and atmosphere of 5 Essex Court.

Selection for second interview

8. First interviews took place on 15th and 16th May 2012. They each lasted 20 minutes.
9. Each first round interview candidate was assessed by reference to four criteria: legal knowledge, presentation, motivation and communication and interpersonal skills.
10. At the start of the interview each applicant was asked a few questions arising out of their application form. Each candidate was given 15 minutes prior to the interview to prepare two topics for discussion, one based on an employment law scenario, the other based on a public law scenario. At the interview candidates were asked to provide a legal analysis of one of the scenarios and to respond to questions from the interview panel about their analysis.
11. Candidates were also asked (without prior notice) to give their short assessment of a police/public/human rights issue, and were then asked to argue the opposite point of view. Candidates were also asked a question that was designed to demonstrate general knowledge of and interest in current police law issues.

12. The Committee considered that whilst some candidates found the latter question to be particularly challenging, overall the form, structure and content of the interviews provided a sound basis for distinguishing between the most able candidates in what was a very competitive and high quality field. The interviewing panel considered that all of those who were offered second round interviews (and the overwhelming majority of those who were not) were candidates who had the attributes necessary to complete pupillage in Chambers and to pursue a successful career at the Bar.
13. Ten candidates were selected for second round interview.

Second Round interviews

14. Second round interviews took place on 4th and 6th July 2012. They each lasted 25 minutes.
15. Each candidate was assessed by reference to four criteria: legal knowledge, presentation, motivation and communication and interpersonal skills.
16. Candidates were informed several days in advance of the interviews that they would be asked to undertake a short advocacy exercise, which would involve an application for an interim injunction. They were referred to the *American Cyanamid* principles (partly in order to mitigate the advantage that would otherwise be enjoyed by those who had completed the BPTC). Immediately prior to the interview each candidate was provided with written instructions to apply for an injunction and was given 20 minutes to prepare.
17. At the interview candidates were asked brief questions on their application. They were then asked to undertake the advocacy exercise.
18. Candidates were asked a question that was designed to demonstrate general knowledge of and interest in current police law issues. They were also asked questions that were designed to elicit their understanding of the qualities required to succeed at the Bar (which they could use as an opportunity to explain why they possessed those qualities).
19. The Committee considered that whilst all candidates found aspects of the interview challenging, overall the form, structure and content of the interviews provided a sound basis for distinguishing between some very able candidates. In hindsight we think that the interview may have been a little too police-law centric – and we will take this into account next year.

Feedback

20. We asked all candidates invited to first round interview to fill in (anonymously) a questionnaire giving their reasons for applying to Chambers. The responses suggested that the primary reasons were Chambers' reputation, its areas of practice and specialism, the structure of pupillage and the advocacy training programme for pupils. Other factors that were volunteered

included “friendliness”, “involvement in high-profile / familiar cases”, and a good record of retaining pupils (in recent years every pupil has been offered a tenancy).

21. We also received the following unsolicited feedback from candidates:

I have been incredibly impressed with the 5 Essex Court pupillage recruitment process. It has been by far the best that I have gone through in terms of transparency, quick response and the degree of effort given to providing candidates with feedback. If only the rest of the Bar were to follow your example!

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with members of chambers at drinks and also felt that the approach in the interviews was both professional and friendly. I was left with an excellent impression of chambers, something I cannot say for some of the others to which I applied.

I thoroughly enjoyed my mini pupillage at 5 Essex and found the people I met in Chambers to be among the most down to earth and supportive barristers I have encountered at the Bar.

Your interviewing process was one of the most friendly, well-organised and positive experiences that I had during my pupillage search.

Diversity

22. Chambers is committed to ensuring that all applicants are treated fairly, irrespective of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability and age. Names and addresses were removed from applications before they were considered. We have carefully monitored the diversity of the field of applicants, and how that correlates with those selected for each round. We remain committed to encouraging applications from all minority groups.

JEREMY JOHNSON QC
For the Pupillage Committee
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