

Becoming a barrister



The Bar Council





Introduction

Becoming a barrister means embarking on one of the most dynamic and challenging careers available.

This brochure will introduce you to life as a barrister. It will provide you with the information you need to help you decide whether a career at the Bar (as the profession is commonly known) would be the right choice for you.

It will explain the necessary steps towards this career path, how and when you need to take them, and where you can find support along the way.



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What is a barrister?

Barristers are specialist legal advisers and advocates who – providing they have undertaken the necessary training – can appear in all courts, including the High Court, Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. They play a central role in helping individuals and institutions understand, pursue and defend their legal rights.





Barristers are probably best known for wearing wigs and gowns and presenting legal arguments in court, with the criminal Bar arguably the most visible to the general public. But there is much more than that to a career as barrister. Some barristers will not appear in court regularly and, in many courts, wigs and gowns are no longer worn. Barristers may specialise in advising individuals, companies and a wide variety of institutions on legal documents, company structures and broader business issues relating to the law. Many barristers specialise in just one area of law, or a small number of areas. Others have more general practices and will provide advice and advocacy across a wide range of practice areas.

The Bar can offer one of the most stimulating, varied, challenging and exciting careers available. Whether delivering a closing speech to a silent courtroom, negotiating the terms of a new contract, cross-examining a witness, mediating a divorcing couple, arguing against the removal of a client's welfare benefits, or delivering complex legal arguments to a High Court judge, no two days as a barrister are the same.

The issues concerned may vary vastly between different areas of the law, but the core challenges are alike. A career at the Bar is focused primarily on solving problems and resolving disputes, so if you relish winning an argument, reaching logical and reasoned conclusions, and producing solutions to difficult issues, then you could thrive at the Bar.

Most barristers are self-employed, grouping together in offices known as 'chambers', to which they pay 'rent' to cover the cost of the building and

'My workload is mostly commercial litigation involving allegations of dishonesty. I do a lot of work for victims of fraud who are trying to recover money they have lost. The casework and advocacy are hard and sometimes stressful, but the cases themselves and the wide set of professional relationships I have with other lawyers in and outside the UK are really rewarding. And I still really enjoy learning the law.'

Ian Smith, 33 Chancery Lane

its staff. Chambers colleagues and staff can be a key source of professional support and friendship for barristers at all levels of their career. There are also approximately 3,000 employed barristers.

In England and Wales, the legal profession is split into two main groups: barristers and solicitors, with legal executives also making an increasingly important contribution. There are more than 17,000 practising barristers, but more than 136,000 solicitors. While there is some overlap between the work of barristers and solicitors, barristers still mainly undertake work which has been referred to them by solicitors.

Traditionally, barristers had to be instructed by solicitors, and most of the Bar's work still comes from this source. However, since 2004, members of the public have also been able to instruct barristers directly through the Public Access Scheme, which means a solicitor is not used and the relationship between barrister and the client they represent is direct.

'I have a very diverse practice across family, property, personal injury and employment law.

I find each area gives me something different. Getting parents to a point where they're able to resolve their disputes together is particularly rewarding, as is securing important improvements in the lives of the children in front of a judge.

'Black-letter law is rewarding for a whole different set of reasons, and I find it equally exhilarating – the complexity and fear of error is everything that I wanted the Bar to be.'

Andrew Carter,
42 Bedford Row





Joining the bar

Despite popular misconceptions and stereotypes, there is no such thing as a 'typical' barrister. Barristers come from a wide range of social, academic and professional backgrounds. There are, however, certain skills and abilities common to most of those who succeed at the Bar. Academic ability and strong communication skills are vital.





You don't necessarily need a first-class degree from Oxford or Cambridge to succeed at the Bar. There are many barristers who went to a variety of universities, and plenty who hold an upper second-class (2:1) honours degree.

If you are from a Black, Asian, or ethnic minority background, have a disability, identify as LGBTQ+, come from a low-income background and/or are a woman, there are many organisations, including the Bar Council, that are keen to support you in accessing the profession. You can find out more on our [equality, diversity and inclusion pages](#) on our website.

Furthermore, the Bar Council runs a campaign called '[I Am The Bar](#)', which profiles the experiences of those from non-traditional backgrounds who have had success at the Bar. [You can read our Social Mobility Advocates' profiles.](#)

To pursue a career at the Bar you must possess strong communication skills. Over the course of your studies, you should develop the ability to express arguments and ideas clearly in writing, with attention to detail. While many

barristers appear in court only rarely, you should feel confident about speaking in public. You should also be able to communicate effectively with a wide variety of people – from judges to members of the public. The Bar is looking for trustworthy, independent-minded and flexible problem-solvers who are always open to new challenges, ready to adapt to changing circumstances and who will maintain high standards of ethics and integrity.

'I am the first lawyer in my family, becoming a barrister after changing career.

'I feel like my background has prepared me for life at the Bar – intellect is necessary but also interpersonal skills and a strong work ethic, which cannot be taught easily.

'It is vital for clients and the public to see themselves and their experiences reflected in a diverse profession.'

Lucy Chapman,
Great James Street Chambers

The Inns of Court – the historic professional associations of which all barristers are members – offer opportunities to learn more about careers at the Bar, such as open days and attendance at law fairs.

Gray's Inn: The 'Griffin LAW' scheme promotes social mobility and access to the Bar. The Inn works with selected secondary school and sixth form students to introduce the legal profession, build knowledge of the rule of law and develop skills in advocacy and persuasion. Griffin students are identified by their schools as having aptitude and potential, but insufficient access to opportunity. The students take part in a bespoke eight-week skills workshops. For more information, visit www.graysinn.org.uk.

The Inner Temple: The 'Pegasus Access and Support Scheme (PASS)', aimed at high-achieving university students

and graduates from non-traditional backgrounds, provides work experience and skills development. In particular it provides access to and funding for mini pupillages. For more information, visit www.innertemple.org.uk.

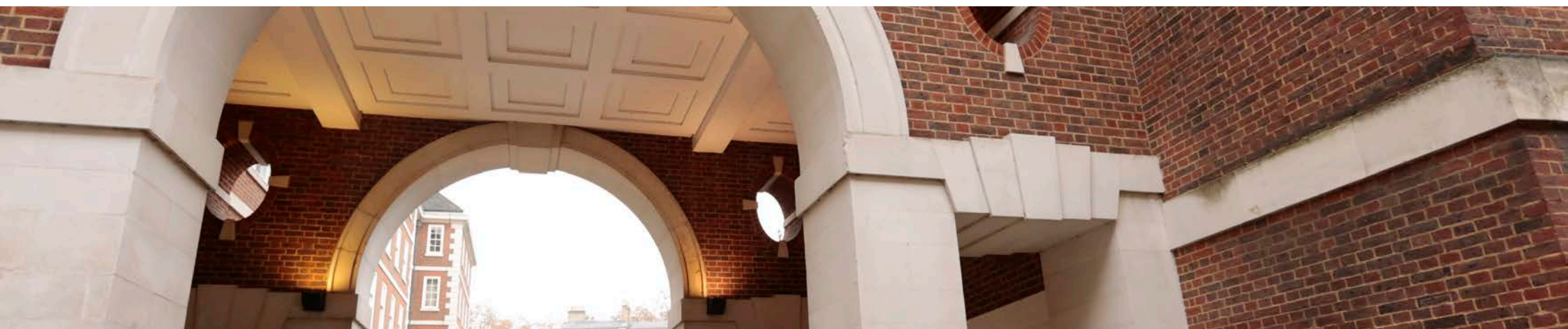
Lincoln's Inn: The annual Neuberger prize offers financial support and networking opportunities to up to eight exceptional students at non-Russell Group universities. The Mini-Pupillage Grant Scheme offers financial support to students wishing to undertake mini-pupillages who would otherwise not be able to do so. Grants are intended to assist with the costs of travel and accommodation as well as a clothing allowance if needed. For more information, please see www.lincolnsinn.org.uk/becoming-a-barrister/funding.

The Middle Temple: The 'Middle Temple Access to the Bar Awards' are aimed at

'Life at the Bar has exceeded my expectations. I am a self-employed barrister and I thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to manage my time. I have been able to work as a full-time barrister as well as continuing to be a full-time mother to my young children. The work-life balance suits me perfectly.'

**Yaa Dankwa Ampadu-Sackey,
Lamb Building**

students who are among the first in their families to go to university. They are typically from under-represented groups at the Bar. The scheme provides funded work shadowing placements in chambers and with judges. For more information, see www.middletemple.org.uk/becoming-barrister/access-bar-award



Qualifications, timeline and process

The Bar is a relatively small profession and there is very high competition for offers of training, known as pupillages. You must have at least a lower second-class (2:2) honours degree to be eligible for the Bar. However, good academic results are likely to be important to attain a pupillage: strong GCSEs, A-levels and an upper second-class (2:1) honours degree are all helpful.

There are three main components involved in becoming a barrister:

- i. **academic component** comprising an undergraduate degree in law or an undergraduate degree in a non-law subject with a conversion course, such as the Graduate Diploma in Law;
- ii. **vocational component** comprising study for the vocational qualification;
- iii. **work-based component** consisting of work-based learning/pupillage.





i. Academic component

GCSE

If you are considering becoming a barrister at school, this is the perfect time to learn as much about the profession as you can.

You could secure experience with local solicitors to understand more about a career in the law. You should focus on good grades and think about other skills that chambers might be looking for. You could also think about building impressive or unusual outside interests which may help you become a more rounded individual. You should read and listen to as much as you can: books, audio books, newspapers, articles, podcasts and blogs.

A-levels

You should study subjects you enjoy and are naturally interested in. It is usually better to study traditionally writing-based academic subjects, so that you can demonstrate your communication and analytical skills from an early stage. You may wish to look at university admission requirements and preferred A-level subjects for certain degree courses. There is no requirement to study law at A-level. It will be helpful to think about which subjects might equip you with some of the skills you would require at the Bar, such as arguing a point in a logical, reasoned and articulate manner.

A-levels are a great time to experience public speaking, debating and to start applying for mini pupillages

University

You do not have to study law at university to become a barrister. It is very common for barristers to complete degrees in other subjects and then 'convert' to law afterwards by doing a conversion course, such as a Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), which will incur extra costs and take at least a year. This can be a helpful step, allowing people to defer their decision on pursuing a career in the law while studying a subject they have a strong interest in, and through which they might choose to pursue a different career path. Some areas of practice, such as intellectual property (protecting trademarks and designs) and medical law, value undergraduate degrees in science, for example. Whatever subject you study, almost all pupils will have achieved either a first-class or upper second-class (2:1) degree.

ii. Vocational component

The second component of training is the vocational component, which trains you in the practical skills and knowledge to become a barrister. Different vocational courses have different names. You should consider all your options before you choose a vocational component provider. Bear in mind that course fees and accommodation outside London may be cheaper. You may already have given some thought to where you wish to undertake your pupillage and eventually practise geographically, which may inform your choice.

If, as is quite common, you are not successful in gaining pupillage during the final year of your law degree or during conversion course, you should use the learning gained from your vocational course to improve the quality of your applications by obtaining further relevant experience.

Twelve weeks before commencing the vocational component, you must become a member of an Inn of Court.

You should take this opportunity to ask your Inn for a 'sponsor' or 'mentor': a practising barrister who can provide

practical advice and can help to introduce you to life at the Bar. Most Inns will not allocate sponsors to students until they are enrolled on the conversion course or vocational component. Some Inns have programmes where you must have made at least one application for pupillage to be eligible for a mentor.

Post-vocational component

Because chambers recruit pupils in advance, if you apply successfully for a pupillage while undertaking the vocational component, you will likely have a significant gap before pupillage starts. There are still lots of useful things you can do with that year to harness your legal skills. If you are unsuccessful in your pupillage applications, you can still apply for up to five years following completion of the vocational component. If you wish to reapply again for pupillage, regardless of what you choose to do in the meantime, make sure that you continue to improve your CV and seek experience which will strengthen future applications.

There are different ways to satisfy the vocational component:

- a course taken full-time over a year or part-time over a longer period, similar to the old Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC);
- a course split into two parts, which may involve self-study in one part or face-to-face teaching for both parts;
- a longer course combining the vocational component with an undergraduate degree in law.

The vocational course may form part of an academic qualification, such as an LLM (usually at an extra cost).

See more at **The Bar Standards Board**.



iii. Work-based component

Pupillage

Pupillage is the practical stage of training to be a barrister, either completed in a set of chambers or with another approved organisation. You can think of a pupillage as a bit like an apprenticeship. You can commence pupillage up to five years after completing the vocational component. Pupillages usually start in September or October, one year after you have been accepted by the chambers under which you will train.

You will be assigned pupil supervisors – barristers in the same set of chambers or organisation – whom you will shadow, and for whom you will undertake supervised work. Pupillage lasts for 12 months (or 24 months if running part time) and is broken up into the non-practising months or ‘first six’, and the practising months or ‘second six’. In your practising period, you will be eligible to undertake cases on your own under supervision.

Chambers are required to fund your pupillage with a minimum award of £19,144 per annum for pupillages in

London and £17,152 per annum for pupillages outside London. Some chambers offer significantly more, particularly Chancery and commercial sets competing for applicants with the large commercial solicitors’ firms. Most chambers allow you to keep the money you earn in your practising period.

Recruitment methods vary between chambers, but decisions about tenancy (staying in chambers as a self-employed barrister after pupillage) are usually made about 10 months into pupillage. Competition for tenancy can be strong, with some chambers taking on several pupils but only retaining one or two as tenants. The review of your performance might be based on your pupil supervisor’s assessment of your abilities, or you might have to take part in a formal mock advocacy exercise. Some chambers take on every pupil, hoping to make them a tenant if they perform well. You will need to pass an assessed advocacy course taught by your Inn or Circuit. There are also compulsory negotiation skills courses and ethics exams.

Probationary tenancy

If you do not gain tenancy at the chambers at which you completed your pupillage, you can apply for a probationary tenancy at another set, formerly known as a 'third six'. This might allow you to gain exposure to other types of work and will give you another chance to apply for tenancy.

Probationary tenancy vacancies are advertised on the Bar Council website.

Tenancy

Once you are a tenant, your income comes entirely from the work you take on, either in your own right or when acting as the junior member of a team of barristers. With the support of the chambers' clerks (who are responsible for assigning work to the barristers in their chambers and generating new business), you will build up a reputation among potential clients and solicitors who will instruct you (paying you to provide specialist services) on a regular basis. Once you are a tenant, most chambers require you to pay a proportion of your earnings ('rent') to cover the costs of chambers employees and other shared overheads.

Professional conversion

In some cases, it might be possible to qualify as a barrister by an alternative manner to the conventional path. For example, qualified solicitors and foreign-qualified lawyers may be exempted from some of the usual training requirements by undertaking the Bar Transfer Test (BTT).

Exemptions are granted on an individual basis by the Bar Standards Board.



The image shows two barristers from behind, looking towards the Royal Courts of Justice. They are wearing traditional white wigs and black robes. The building's facade is light-colored stone, featuring a large coat of arms and the text 'The Royal Courts of Justice' in a serif font.

Call to the Bar

As you complete the vocational course, you will undertake training courses provided by your Inn in order to be 'Called to the Bar'.

The process of being 'Called to the Bar' culminates in the graduation-style ceremony at which you formally become a barrister (although you will not be permitted to practise until you have completed pupillage).

You need to have completed your Qualifying Sessions with your Inn, which might include residential training weekends, skills-based workshops, online seminars or attending lectures followed by formal dinners with barristers and judges. You must have passed the vocational component to be Called to the Bar by your Inn.

This ceremony takes place in March, July, October, or November. You can invite guests, and it is a highly memorable occasion for those taking part.



Employed Bar

There are around 3,000 employed barristers, who work for organisations rather than for themselves. Approximately 20 per cent of barristers are employed, with around 10 per cent of pupillages being offered at the employed Bar – primarily through the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Government Legal Department (GLD), but also at certain law firms and regulators.

Employed barristers may also have completed their pupillages at the self-employed Bar, and then later sought employment with organisations who employ barristers as permanent or contracted members of staff (or vice versa).

Employed barristers can also work in third-sector organisations, local authorities, law firms, financial services institutions, regulators, industry and commerce and the Armed Forces, where they act as in-house advocates or advisers.

Some barristers find that they enjoy greater job security at the employed Bar, while also getting access to paid sick leave, paid holiday and parental leave.

Like their counterparts in self-employed practice, employed barristers have access to varied and challenging work.

Barristers can move between the employed and self-employed Bars through secondments within chambers or via employers. The type of work employed barristers

‘Employed practice also brings with it advantages that are often a considerable anxiety and distraction in self-employed practice, such as a dependable monthly income and access to employment benefits such as paid holiday and sick and parental leave and a pension. To have that, whilst still being able to undertake equally diverse and challenging work like our colleagues in self-employed practice is a provision not to be undervalued.’

**Mike Jones KC, Crown
Prosecution Service**

undertake depends on their employer, but they are required to have the same standard of qualifications and abilities in specialist legal advice and advocacy as any other barrister.



Funding your training

Many aspiring barristers are concerned about the cost of entering the profession. It is important to understand what that cost might amount to, before making any long-term commitments. You should consider the tuition fees for your undergraduate degree, a conversion course, and the vocational component, as well as living costs. Costs for these courses will vary depending on where you study them.

The **Bar Standards Board** website provides information on the various vocational component providers. Providers of conversion courses and vocational courses list the cost of courses on their websites.

While funding your path to the Bar can be daunting, there is a range of support on offer from the Inns, banks, and other bursaries.

Between them, the four Inns of Court make scholarship awards of about £6 million every year, the majority of which is for the vocational component, but awards are also available for the conversion course and pupillage. Some of the Inns also make grants available for internships and for students or pupils who are affected by disability and can demonstrate financial need.

All the Inns award their scholarships and grants on merit, with financial need being considered. It is important to note that candidates may apply for a scholarship only to one Inn and must be a member of that Inn to take up any award that is offered. For further information on the scholarships and grants available from the Inns, on the criteria that are used to determine awards, and application procedures and deadlines, please visit their respective websites.

If you are successful in obtaining pupillage before undertaking your vocational training, some chambers will allow you to receive part of your pupillage award in advance, known as a draw down.

‘There were two main obstacles along my journey to becoming a barrister. The first was financial, which was fortunately not insurmountable with various loans and three part-time jobs whilst studying at City University. The financial difficulties continued into the early years of tenancy, exacerbated after I had children, and did not ease until much later on in my career. The second obstacle was more difficult to overcome and occasionally still plagues me to today at 17 years’ call: imposter syndrome.’

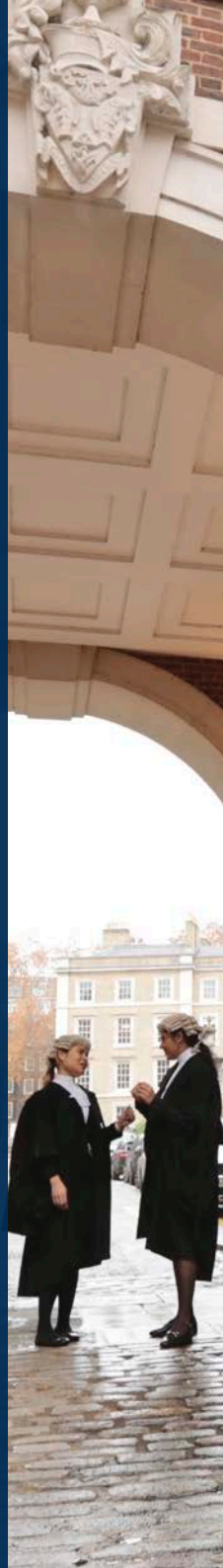
Rachel Chan,
42 Bedford Row

Where is the Bar?

There are four Inns of Courts:

- Gray's Inn
- Inner Temple
- Lincoln's Inn
- Middle Temple

Although the Inns are all located in London, they have strong links globally as many international students are also Called to the Bar in England and Wales.



Every barrister must join an Inn before they start the vocational component. During this process, you must undertake a 'fit and proper person' check (including a DBS check). More details are available on the Bar Standards Board website. Once you are Called by a particular Inn, you will have a relationship with that Inn for the rest of your career at the Bar or, if you become a judge, the judiciary.

The Inns are also one of the major sources of financial assistance to students who are training for the Bar. They are historic institutions which provide exemplary educational and training activities in a supportive and inclusive environment. They provide extensive library and IT facilities, support for barristers and student members and other forms of ongoing training, particularly extensive advocacy coaching.

Before you can formally become a barrister, alongside passing your vocational component, you need to complete twelve Qualifying Sessions, which are run by the Inns. They must cover five themes, which include all aspects of the skills and knowledge students need to learn as part of their training for the Bar:

- Ethics, Standards and Values
- Advocacy Skills
- Legal Knowledge, Justice and the Rule of Law
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Preparation for Pupillage, Career Development and Wellbeing

At least two sessions must be interactive and require preparation in advance. Your Inn of Court will publish information about qualifying sessions, including the cost.

'I primarily contribute via my Inn and chambers to support those pursuing the career or developing their advocacy skills. My experience and perspective help me empathise and connect with diverse groups of people. It is important for barristers – particularly the atypical ones – to contribute by paying things forward because you never know who you'll inspire. It's important to make sure the door that you snuck through is opened wider.'

Peter Eguae,
7 Bedford Row



The Bar Council and the Bar Standards Board

The Bar Council represents barristers in England and Wales, and comprises a council of barristers who meet regularly, supported by an executive of employed staff.

The Bar Council is responsible for promoting the Bar's high-quality specialist and advisory services, fair access to justice for all, the highest standards of ethics, equality and diversity across the profession, and the development of business opportunities at home and abroad. In order to practise, all barristers must be registered with the Bar Council and prove every year that they have developed professionally through training and other learning opportunities.

The Bar Council has several committees looking at issues affecting barristers. For example, the Young Barristers' Committee of the Bar Council represents the interests of barristers who completed their pupillage fewer than seven years ago.

The Bar Council is the approved regulator of the Bar, but it discharges these functions through the independent Bar Standards Board (BSB). The BSB is responsible for setting the educational and training requirements for

becoming a barrister, continuing training requirements and codes of conduct for barristers, monitoring the services provided by the Bar, handling complaints against barristers and taking disciplinary actions against them.

For further information on the Bar Council, please visit www.barcouncil.org.uk.

For the BSB, please visit www.barstandardsboard.org.uk.



Chambers

Most self-employed barristers group together in sets of chambers, sharing office space, staff costs and other overheads. Chambers will usually be headed by one or two experienced barristers. A large number of chambers are based around the four Inns of Court in London. About two-thirds of all self-employed barristers are members of London chambers, although they may also travel throughout England and Wales to conduct cases in regional courts. There are also many chambers based outside London, mostly clustered around the larger cities.

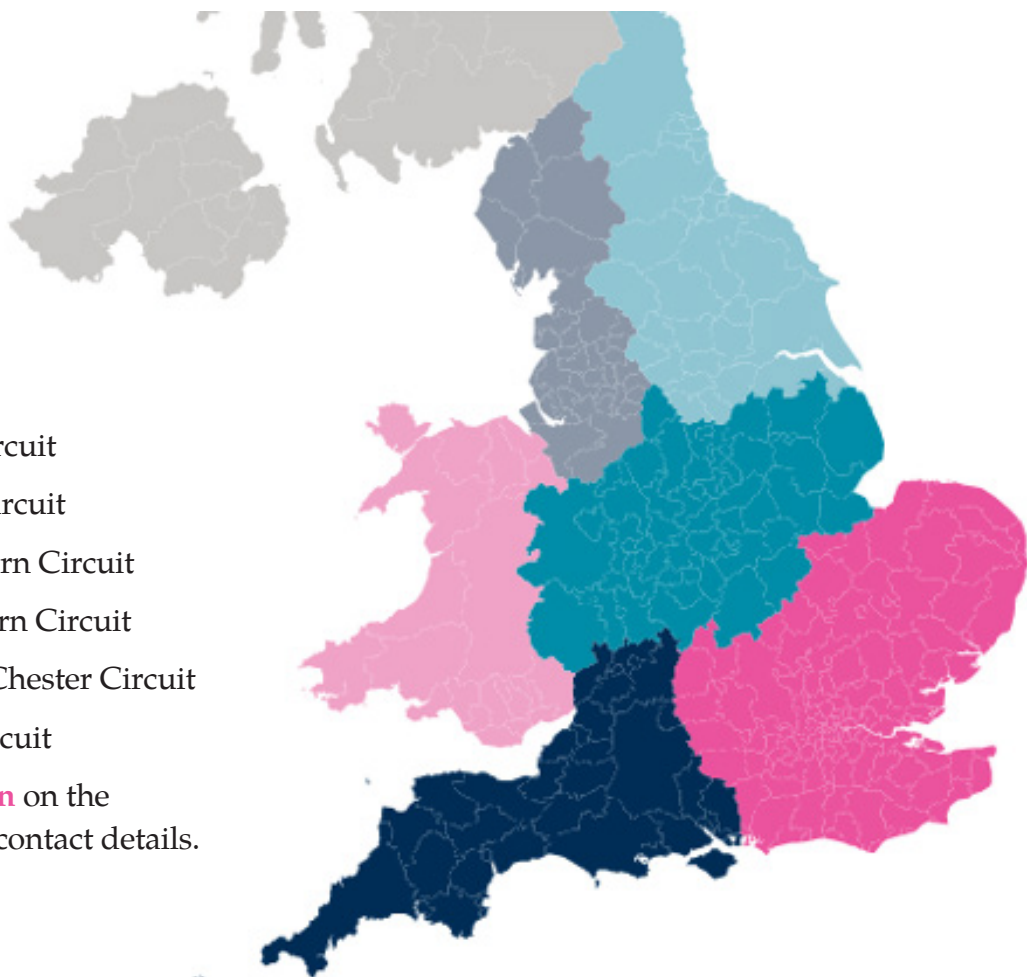
Circuits

England and Wales are divided into six regional Circuits, which act as local hubs for barristers outside London, running training and social events. The Circuit Leaders are practising barristers who act as communications channels between the Circuits and the Bar Council in London.

The Circuits are:

-  The Midland Circuit
-  The Northern Circuit
-  The North-Eastern Circuit
-  The South-Eastern Circuit
-  The Wales and Chester Circuit
-  The Western Circuit

Further information on the Circuits, including contact details.



'I'm based on the North Eastern Circuit, which covers a wide area including the court centres at Leeds, York, Newcastle, Hull and Sheffield. Working on circuit provides me with a wide variety of work, and I enjoy getting out to meet different people on my cases. The thing I most enjoy about being on circuit is appearing before different Judges and getting to know different groups of practitioners in the different areas. Circuit has a strong collegiate atmosphere and it's great to meet up with colleagues who I've come to know over the years in the different towns.'

Jacqueline Thomas KC,
Spire Barristers



Specialist Bar Associations

The Specialist Bar Associations (SBAs) are membership organisations for barristers, usually targeted at those practising in a specific area of law. They provide representative services to their members, run training and other events and often respond to government consultations where they affect their area of practice. Some of the biggest SBAs include the Chancery Bar Association (ChBA), the Commercial Bar Association (COMBAR), the Criminal Bar Association (CBA), the Employment Law Bar Association (ELBA), the Family Law Bar Association (FLBA), the Personal Injury Bar Association (PIBA) and the Technology and Construction Bar Association (TECBAR).

Find out more information on the 24 SBAs.



Online

Since the pandemic, the way that barristers work has changed greatly. Hearings are now often conducted either fully or partially remotely. There are therefore increasing opportunities for people who live outside London and the major cities to shadow barristers and conduct virtual work experience, through online seminars, lectures and hearings. Aspiring barristers should keep this in mind when seeking opportunities to learn more about a career at the Bar.



Key terms

Bar Council – the Bar Council represents barristers in England and Wales. It is also known as the General Council of the Bar and is the Approved Regulator of the Bar of England and Wales. It discharges its regulatory functions through the independent Bar Standards Board.

Bar School – the informal name for a provider of the vocational component.

Bar Standards Board – the Bar's independent regulator.

Bench – the judge/judges. Bencher – a senior member of an Inn of Court, also known as a Master of the Bench. Brief – the documents setting out case instructions for a barrister to argue a case in court.

Call to the Bar – the conferral of the

title of 'barrister' by an Inn of Court on those who have completed the necessary training requirements and have satisfied their Inn that they are fit and proper to be Called to the Bar. The title cannot be used in a professional capacity until pupillage has been completed.

Circuits – the six geographical areas into which the courts of England and Wales are divided: North Eastern, Northern, Midland, South Eastern, Western and Wales & Chester Circuits. Chambers - the collective name for a group of self-employed barristers who share premises, a corporate identity, staff and overheads.

Clerk – chambers' staff responsible for generating and assigning work

and managing barristers' diaries.

Counsel – this is simply another way of referring to a barrister.

CPS – the Crown Prosecution Service, the primary body responsible for the prosecution of criminal offences in England and Wales.

Devilling – completing paid work for other members of chambers. Employed barrister - most barristers are self-employed and practise from chambers. The remainder are employed to act as inhouse barristers by law firms, companies and the Government, including the Crown Prosecution Service.

GDL – 'Graduate Diploma in Law': the law 'conversion' course which aspiring barristers who do not

Key terms

have a law degree must undertake before commencing the vocational component.

Head of Chambers – a senior barrister in a set of chambers who is elected or appointed as its head.

Inns of Court – the four historic institutions with the exclusive right to Call barristers to the Bar. In addition to the provision of scholarships for training for the Bar, the fundamental role of the Inns of Court is the education and training of students and barristers. The Inns also have societies dedicated to mooting, debating and social events. As membership organisations, they retain strong relationships with their members throughout their careers.

Junior – a barrister who is not King's

Counsel (KC). Junior brief – a case on which a junior barrister is led by a senior, usually a KC, in a big case which would be too much work for one barrister alone. The more senior barrister will usually conduct the advocacy. Marshalling – work experience shadowing a judge.

KC/King's Counsel – a senior barrister who has been appointed by the King as “one of His Majesty's Counsel Learned in the Law” (following a formal and transparent recruitment process, operated by the KC appointments panel). KCs are senior members of the Bar, and it is a mark of excellence. They appear in the most serious and important cases.

Mini-pupil – the name given to someone undertaking work experience in a set of chambers. Some


sets of chambers may expect potential pupils to have completed a mini pupillage at that set.

Moot – a legal debate in which participants conduct a case in a mock appeal court.

Pupil – the name given to barristers undertaking the practical element of their training, which is essentially an apprenticeship.

Pupillage – one year (or possibly two years) of apprenticeship in chambers or another approved organisation. For the first six months, the pupil will not be practising and will shadow their pupil supervisor. In the second six months they will continue to shadow a pupil supervisor, but may also undertake their own cases, with supervision.

Key terms



Pupillage Gateway – the Bar Council’s online application portal for pupillages (to which some, but not all, chambers subscribe).

Pupil supervisor – a barrister who acts as a pupil’s mentor during pupillage.

Qualifying Sessions – Students who enrol on the vocational component of a Bar Training Pathway from September 2020 will have to complete Qualifying Sessions across five themes prior to being Called. At least two sessions must be interactive and require preparation in advance.

Recorder – a part-time judge, who is often also a practising barrister.
Set - informal term for chambers. Silk – informal term for a KC – so-called because they wear a silk gown in court.

Squatter – a pupil not invited to become a tenant may be offered the opportunity to become a ‘squatter’ in chambers. They are allowed to remain and to continue to take on their own cases for a period, without having a permanent place in the chambers.

Tenant – a member of a set of chambers.

Tenancy – towards the end of their pupillage, an individual may be offered a tenancy, which is the entitlement to continue to practise from a set of chambers as a self-employed barrister.

Probationary tenancy – a pupil not invited to become a tenant may be offered a ‘probationary tenancy’; essentially another six months as a pupil in another set of chambers,

usually with a view to gaining tenancy if completed satisfactorily. This is not an additional training period.

Vocational Training – several new ways of studying for the vocational training will become available from September 2020. This course is available at various providers and teaches procedure, advocacy, ethics research methods and practical skills. It is followed by the work-based stage of becoming a barrister, known as pupillage.