



*"I would wholeheartedly encourage any person who wants to practise at the Employed Bar to apply for pupillage the NMC".*

**Rachel Culverhouse-Wilson**

**Pupil barrister at the Nursing and Midwifery Council**



I recently started pupillage at the Nursing and Midwifery Council ("NMC") in the Fitness to Practise Directorate ("FtP"), having previously worked in the same Directorate as a senior paralegal. Despite a lack of knowledge about working in-house when I started as a paralegal, very shortly I realised that the Employed Bar offered all of the same interesting and challenging work that the Self-Employed Bar offered.

A benefit of being a pupil barrister at the Employed Bar is access to a wealth of knowledge from over 50 lawyers in FtP, all with varied backgrounds at both the Employed and Self-Employed Bar with experience in healthcare, crime, family and civil. In addition to the extensive time and support your pupil supervisor provides, all lawyers are willing to give you unparalleled assistance and advice. There is also stability and a work life balance which you may not always find at the Self-Employed Bar.

As a pupil at the NMC you are given significant responsibility early on including working on high court matters. Before the end of your First Six, you are on your feet presenting one day non-substantive cases and before the end of your Second Six, you will be able to and will have presented up to three day final hearings. No two days are ever the same and neither is any case, with our cases regularly featuring in the media and being mentioned in Parliament.

I fully appreciate that having such a specialised practise may not be the route everyone wants to take and as you are employed by one organisation, you are constrained to the type of work assigned to you.

The NMC regulates over 680,000 nurses and midwives in the United Kingdom, existing to protect the public. This includes setting standards of education, maintaining a nurse and midwife's registration, and considering concerns about whether a nurse or midwife is fit to practise. Lawyers within our six directorates take on very different work to each other however I will be discussing the work of the Case Preparation and Presentation Team ("CPP") of the Fitness to Practise Directorate, where pupillage is carried out.

Lawyers in CPP conduct advocacy on cases before the NMC's practice committees and on appeals and applications before the High Court, including on the most serious, complex and high profile cases. Lawyers are also responsible for providing legal advice on cases and operational matters. Work will range from conducting advocacy on a one day non-substantive hearing, to conducting an eight week and above final substantive hearing, to conducting advocacy in the high court in respect of an appeal or judicial review on a matter which may change the law and transform how the NMC and other professional regulators conduct and approach their proceedings.

The focus of your First Six is getting to know the NMC's work and teams by shadowing and assisting lawyers, attending all types of hearings, and initially preparing the legal work on a case. During this time you are also seconded for a month to a set of chambers to see other areas of practice as well as gaining experience in different departments within the NMC. Your Second Six is spent presenting hearings, conducting legal reviews and building up a caseload. At the end of pupillage you will be fully capable and confident to present up to three day final substantive hearings, demonstrating the high quality of pupillage at the NMC and quick progression of your practise.

The first few weeks of pupillage have given me the opportunity to work on a number of interesting and challenging matters including working on two appeals to the High Court in London and the High Court in Northern Ireland. I produced a briefing note on relevant case law, legislation and the merits of the appeal. By my

third week I was preparing for an eight day final hearing case as if I were to present the hearing myself, comprising of preparing all submissions for each stage of the case and drafting questions for the witnesses.

A highlight so far was shadowing an NMC barrister on a high court appeal and at a quarter to five the Appellant presented a document which appeared to introduce a brand new ground of appeal and new submissions, and observing how the barrister and judge decided to handle this matter last minute. I considered this a great learning experience which reinforced that anything can happen and that it is never truly over until you have the verdict.

For all of these reasons I would wholeheartedly encourage any person who wants to practise at the Employed Bar to apply for pupillage the NMC.