

# PUPILLAGE RECRUITMENT GUIDE 2024



# INTRODUCTION

This guide is written to assist those who are considering applying or re-applying for pupillage at 25 Bedford Row. We recognise that it can be a daunting prospect to go through the selection process and so hopefully this document will assist you in preparing your application and for the rounds of interview.

We are very proud of our pupillage programme at 25 Bedford Row and are very keen for our pupils to succeed at the Criminal Bar. Our Pupillage Committee runs all aspects of our in-house education and training, with training sessions taking place every other week throughout the 15-month pupillage. A majority of tenants in chambers were once pupils at 25 and so have an understanding of what life is like for pupils.

If you are considering applying to our chambers we encourage you to attend our Open Evening (details on our website) as this will give you the chance to hear more about what 25 Bedford Row can offer, and to meet tenants and members of the Pupillage Committee as well as some of our current pupils.

We very much look forward to meeting the next generation of aspiring pupils at our interviews in 2025.

**Sebastian Gardiner**  
**Head of the Pupillage Committee**



# THE HEADLINES

During this year's recruitment round, we were privileged to meet many talented and ambitious lawyers who were either at the start of their career, or who were seeking to change careers. We were impressed by the dedication and passion many have shown towards a career at the Criminal Bar.

We understand the majority of applicants will have been disappointed not to have received pupillage from us or from another set this year. We hope you will find this document useful in preparing you for any future application.

In this guide, we have tried to outline what successful candidates have done well, as well as what could be done by way of improvements.

While this guide explores, in some detail, each stage of the recruitment process at 25 Bedford Row, we have noted four areas which candidates may wish to consider before the 2025 application process:

- a) Structure – one key problem identified across the different stages was a lack of structure. A good structure can really lift a piece of advocacy you are doing to the next level. A good structure helps the tribunal (or marker) to follow your argument. Without a solid structure, good points can become lost or obscured.
- b) Analysis – make sure you take the time to consider properly the factual basis of whatever scenario is thrown at you. We appreciate that this is difficult under the pressure of time, and particularly difficult in an interview scenario. However, proper analysis and consideration of the facts provides the bedrock for your submissions.
- c) Commitment – our panels are consistently looking for evidence of commitment to a career as a barrister, and in particular to those seeking to develop a practice in criminal law. Candidates who did well in this area were generally able to demonstrate this by (i) showing a commitment to advocacy (whether through participation in mooting competitions, public speaking, or voluntary work including FRU / schools exclusion projects / community projects), and (ii) by being able to point to something concrete which demonstrated a real interest in criminal law or the criminal justice system.
- d) Knowledge – we understand that candidates come to pupillage interviews with differing levels of knowledge. We make allowances for the fact that many applicants apply to us without first having taken the Bar Practice Course. However, many candidates of all levels this year clearly had not kept up to date with legal issues such as the impact of the Post Office Scandal on the Court of Appeal, proposed legislative changes or media interest in changes to trial by jury.

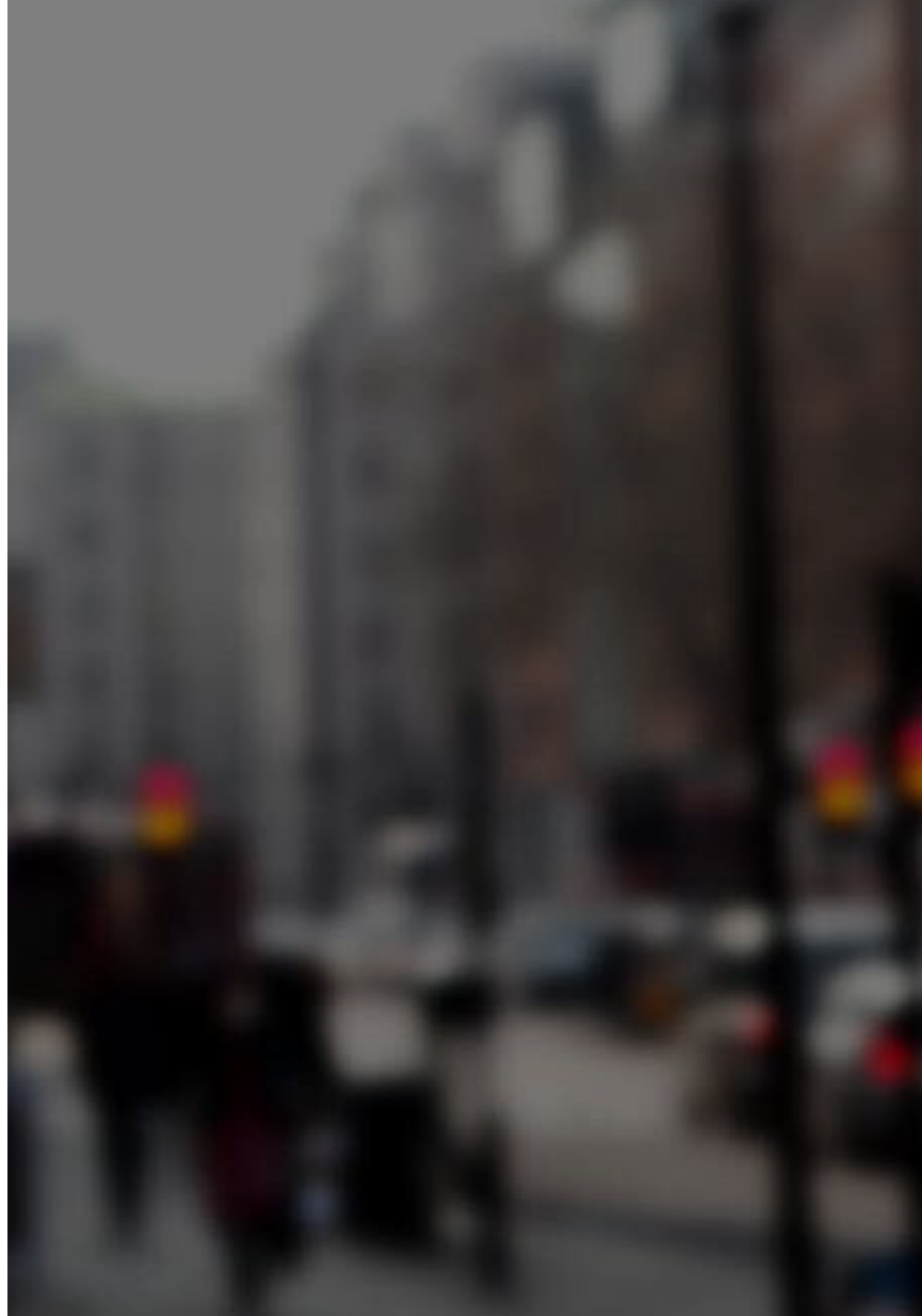
# APPROACH TO RECRUITMENT

25 Bedford Row is committed to the recruitment of exceptional pupils. In order to do that, our recruitment process involves almost all of chambers – from the most junior, to the most senior.

At the first stage of our recruitment process this year, a paper sift was completed by 59 of our members to identify those candidates with the greatest potential.

Following the paper sift, there were three rounds of interviews which this year were conducted almost entirely face to face. As ever, 25 Bedford Row is committed to interviewing as many candidates as possible. This year, we interviewed 67 candidates in our first round and 32 candidates in our second round. A final 13 candidates were invited for a third round.

At each round, we have looked to progress as many applicants as possible.



# PAPER SIFT

All applications received through the Advocates' Gateway were considered by two members of Chambers and moderated by the Chair of the Pupillage Committee. This year, we convened 31 panels.

Application forms were anonymised prior to being sent to markers. Marks were pooled between markers. Where there was striking disagreement between panel members, the Chair of the Pupillage Committee completed a third mark of the application form in addition to their role as moderator.

Unfortunately, the panels saw a number of basic errors being made by candidates. Grammatical or spelling errors persisted in a number of application forms.

Candidates were assigned marks against the following four criteria, each of which carried equal weight. Consequently, in order to secure an interview, candidates had to score sufficiently across each of the criteria:

- a) Education;
- b) Experience;
- c) Commitment;

- d) Chambers' questions.

## Education

Chambers continues to welcome applicants from all educational backgrounds. Unlike some sets we do not exclude those with 2:2s or their equivalent, and candidates are assessed according to all the educational information placed on their form.

Where candidates feel that their grades are not as they should be, we would encourage them to be as open and honest with us as possible as to the reasons for this. This should be clearly noted in the 'extenuating circumstances' section of the form.

## Experience & Commitment

As noted above, candidates who did well in this area were generally able to demonstrate this by (i) showing a commitment to advocacy (whether through participation through mooting, public speaking, or voluntary work including FRU / schools exclusion projects / community projects), and (ii) by being able to point to something concrete which demonstrated a real interest in criminal law or the criminal justice system. It was rarely sufficient to simply profess an interest in criminal law without more.

The best candidates were able to tell us what they had learned during experiences such as mini-pupillages and how that informed their decision to apply for a criminal pupillage / career at the Criminal Bar.

A number of candidates were career changers. It is helpful for such applications to explain their change and link to commitment to a career at the Criminal Bar.

### **Chambers' Questions**

Candidates were required to answer five chambers specific questions. The first three of those questions were designed to provide candidates with an opportunity to set out their understanding of what is required for a successful career at the Criminal Bar, and to explain their motivation for applying to 25 Bedford Row.

The final two questions required candidates to engage with two propositions and to argue in favour or against them. This was an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their-advocacy skills and understanding of important current issues in the criminal justice system. The best answers were well structured and direct, while some candidates struggled by failing to engage with what was being asked of them. We were most interested in candidates' ability to construct a persuasive and coherent argument. Whilst the best responses were underpinned and informed by thorough research on the topic in question, it was not necessary to quote extensively from relevant statutes, authorities or other sources. Our view is that doing so will rarely enhance the force of the argument being advanced.

## **FIRST INTERVIEWS**

First round interviews took place on 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

67 candidates were interviewed over three nights by 10 panels. The panels were comprised of two members of chambers. Panels were drawn from across chambers, from the most senior to the most junior.

Each interview lasted 15 minutes and were based on:

- a) An advocacy exercise;
- b) A legal question.

The advocacy exercise was a bail application in respect of an allegation of burglary. The exercise was provided to candidates 25 minutes before their interview was due to begin.

Candidates were also asked to consider three topical legal questions in advance of the interview and to answer one question of their choice.

### **The Advocacy Exercise**

This involved two allegations of burglary. In summary, there was some CCTV and a screwdriver with the defendant's DNA on it. The

defendant had some convictions for offences of dishonesty and was facing a probable custodial sentence, but had a family and caring responsibilities.

The best candidates:

- a) Followed a clear structure;
- b) Demonstrated an appropriate understanding of the underlying facts;
- c) Made their points succinctly and forcefully before moving on;
- d) Moderated the pace and tone of their submissions and maintained good eye contact;
- e) Addressed the Crown's opposition, put forward relevant conditions and dealt with key factors such as community ties and character;
- f) Made appropriate reference to personal factors;
- g) Were realistic about the strength of the evidence and the impact of this on the presumption of bail.

Many candidates struggled with:

- a) A realistic assessment of the nature and seriousness of the offence;
- b) The impact of the antecedents – whether dwelling or non-dwelling burglary.

### **Legal Question**

As with the advocacy exercise, the best answers were well structured by the candidates and demonstrated a genuine engagement with the issues raised by the questions provided.

Panels were encouraged to challenge candidates on their responses to questions, and were generally impressed with candidates' ability to think on their feet.

## SECOND INTERVIEWS

Second interviews took place on 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

32 candidates were interviewed over three nights by 6 panels. Each panel was made up of three members of chambers.

Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and comprised two parts:

- a) An advocacy exercise;
- b) A three-minute presentation on a non-legal topic.

Candidates were asked in advance to prepare their three-minute presentation. The advocacy exercise was sent to candidates 25 minutes before their interview was due to begin. Reasonable adjustments were made where needed.

### Advocacy Exercise

Candidates were allowed five minutes to make a plea in mitigation in respect of a non-domestic burglary. The defendant fell to be sentenced after a guilty plea at PTPH, had previous convictions for dishonesty and strong mitigation. An ethical matter was included.

The best candidates:

- a) Followed a clear structure;
- b) Demonstrated an understanding of relevant considerations for a Judge when sentencing;
- c) Were realistic about the guidelines;
- d) Delivered the personal mitigation persuasively.

Many candidates struggled with:

- a) A lack of structure;
- b) Identifying their strongest points/arguments;
- c) Judicial intervention.

### Three-Minute Presentation

Candidates were provided with a list of four non-legal questions in advance of the interview, and were asked to prepare a three-minute presentation on a question of their choice.

The three-minute presentation is always a highlight of the interview process as we find that it allows candidates to relax and speak on



topics with which they are more familiar. It is an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their skills of persuasion and description.

The best candidates:

- a) Followed a clear structure;
- b) Had thoroughly researched the topic of the question they chose to answer;
- c) Demonstrated an engaging advocacy style, delivered from notes, rather than read.

## THIRD INTERVIEWS

Thirteen applicants were interviewed at third round by a panel comprising of Sebastian Gardiner, Paul Keleher KC, Chiara Maddocks and Chantel Gaber. This took place on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

This interview focussed on questions relating to a candidate's application form and then some questions unrelated to law. In general, these questions were aimed at better understanding a candidate's motivation for applying to 25 Bedford Row, or the Criminal Bar of England and Wales. Candidates generally gave thoughtful and persuasive answers to these questions.

## PUPILLAGE OFFERS

Acknowledging that the calibre of applicants was extremely high this year, we made four offers of pupillage and three reserve offers. All four who were offered pupillage accepted our offer.



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