



## Information and Advice for Students Interested in Pursuing a Career at The Bar

Having taken the decision to pursue a career in law the next important step is to consider whether to become a solicitor or a barrister. Both professions are extremely competitive and it is important to take initiative and plan at the earliest possible stage.

A potential solicitor will need to hone different skills to a potential barrister. For a barrister, public speaking and advocacy skills are paramount and developing these skills and gaining appropriate experience early will ensure you make the right personal choice and give yourself a competitive edge later on.

### Researching a Career at the Bar

Excellent sources are the Bar Council and Inns of Court websites. Details can also be found in the publication 'Your Career as a barrister' published by the Bar Council.

Steps along the career path -

1. Law Degree (or other degree followed by CPE or GDL)
2. Joining an Inn of Court and completing 12 Qualifying Sessions, (formally known as dining). Qualifying Sessions take the form of moots, debates, guest nights, grand nights, concert nights, mixed messes, matins and Sunday lunches, residential weekends
3. The Bar Professional Training Course – a one year course offered at 11 providers across the country. It can be undertaken as a fulltime or part-time course
4. Call to the Bar
5. Pupillage – a one year apprenticeship
6. Tenancy – joining a set of chambers on a self employed basis

### Experiencing the world of the Bar

Recommended experiences would be visiting courts as a member of public and observing barristers at work, applying to marshal a judge for a few days, undertaking mini-pupillages in barristers' chambers (typically a 3 day work experience shadowing a barrister). Work experience at a firm of solicitors would also provide useful insight into the profession that will instruct you as a barrister later on in your career.

Details on Courts in England and Wales can be found at [www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk](http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk)

A directory of barristers' chambers can be found at [www.thelegalhub.co.uk](http://www.thelegalhub.co.uk)

### Building Advocacy Skills

It is a good idea to grasp as many public speaking opportunities as possible to build skill and confidence: debating and mooting (the presentation of a mock legal argument) are the most valuable.

### Academic Qualifications

An excellent academic record is extremely important and the vast majority of pupillages are awarded to those with a first or 2.1.

## Scholarships & Awards

### BPTC

Applications for BPTC scholarships must be made almost one year in advance of commencing the BPTC. The online application system opens on the Inn's website 6 weeks before the application deadline.

In 2014/15 Gray's Inn received 128 applications, shortlisted and interviewed 70 and awarded 39 scholarships

You do not need to have a confirmed place on the BPTC at time of interview at Gray's Inn.

If you are a strong candidate, statistically you will fare best applying to Gray's Inn as the majority of our scholarships are in excess of £10,000 (up to £19,000). The other Inns have large funds but these are spread more thinly.

### What are the Scholarship Panel Looking For?

**Intellectual ability** (academic record – most easily demonstrated on the application form)

**Extra curricular achievement** (broad category including demonstration of self-discipline, diligence, drive, independent spirit). Examples might be creative projects, travel, music, sport, charity work, relevant legal work experience (mini-pupillages, court visits, work experience at a solicitors firm), mooting and debating. Overcoming obstacles or adversity will also be highly regarded (for example a single parent continuing with study).

**Indicators of potential for successful practice at the Bar** (more likely to be addressed in the 15 minute interview when level of confidence and articulacy are observed).

**Interviews** last for 15 minutes and typically take place late February/early March. On arrival candidates are given 1 or 2 topical legal issues to consider and discuss. An important question to prepare for is 'why do you want to be a barrister?'

### The Inns of Court

The Inns of Court are essentially 'communities of barristers' offering similar environments, facilities and support. Each Inn has a library, a hall for dining and an education department. They are also substantial estates leasing property to barristers' chambers.

The four Inns of Court are Lincoln's Inn, Inner Temple, Middle Temple and Gray's Inn. The Inns play an important role in a barrister's education and training by hosting Qualifying Sessions and they hold the exclusive right to Call barristers to the Bar. Once you are qualified the Inn will also provide 'continuing professional development' courses which are compulsory for practising barristers.

Membership has 'student' status until the member is Called to the Bar, thereafter it has 'barrister' status. The cost of admission to the Inn is £100 and this is a one off fee for life if you go on to take the BPTC within 5 years. Membership will lapse if you do not go on to do the course within 5 years.

As a student member you can dine and use the library only at your own Inn. As a barrister member you will be able to dine and use the libraries of all four Inns. Joining a particular Inn will not exclude you from a relationship with the other Inns of Court during your career. For example, you may join Gray's Inn as a student, undertake pupillage at chambers in Lincoln's Inn, but eventually secure tenancy at chambers in Temple.

You are able to join an Inn of Court from as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a law degree, but will be required to do so 6 months before commencing the Bar Professional Training Course. If you are planning to do the CPE/GDL then you are eligible to join on confirmation of your place on the course.

Details on applying for admission can be found on the Inns' respective websites. It is worth noting that if you are in the middle of your law degree you will need course transcripts predicting a minimum 2.2 in order to be admitted.

Your Inn could help towards the financial costs of training through its substantial scholarship funds. It is worth noting that applications must be made up to a year in advance, so forward planning is important.

Membership offers the unique opportunity to meet and learn from a wide spectrum of senior members of the profession, from Judges to QCs to newly qualified barristers and build an understanding of different areas of the law. Support offered by the Education Department includes advice on making applications for pupillage, arrangement of mock interviews with barristers, a mentoring scheme, and opportunities to moot and debate.

# **COMING TO THE BAR? STOP! READ THIS and THINK!**

This notice is issued jointly by the four Inns of Court and the BPTC Providers.

1. The Bar is a great career with great rewards if you are successful.  
You will only be successful if you
  - have a high level of intellectual ability and
  - are highly articulate in spoken and written English and
  - can think and communicate under pressure and
  - have stamina and emotional energy.
2. Because it is such a great career it is a very popular choice, and therefore very difficult to get into.
3. You need to know about these difficulties so you can decide how likely you are to succeed. You need to know what follows below.
4. **Cost**
  - Expect the BPTC qualifying year to cost £25-£30,000 (including fees and living expenses).
  - Whilst the Inns give substantial financial help to the most highly qualified, you may well need to find most of the cost yourself.
5. **Shortage of pupillages**
  - Over 3,000 people may be applying for around 500 pupillages in any year.
  - You must expect these pupillages to go to the most highly qualified.
  - Almost 2 ½ thousand people will be left without pupillages every year.
  - You can only seek pupillage for up to 5 years after completing the Bar Course.
6. **The standard needed to get pupillage**
  - Most applicants won't even get an interview. In sifting the hundreds of applications for each pupillage placement, Chambers only interview those who stand out on paper.
  - They will look for proven intellectual ability . most require at least a 2:1 degree.
  - They will look for proven success in areas which are likely to make for a good barrister including mooting, debating, acting, public presentation and pro bono work.
7. **Getting a tenancy**

Even if you get a pupillage, you will have to compete against other pupils . from your own Chambers and elsewhere . for a tenancy.
8. **For further details and available help READ and/or VISIT**
  - Your career as a barrister published by the Bar Council
  - The Bar Council ([www.barcouncil.org.uk](http://www.barcouncil.org.uk)),
  - The Young Bar Hub ([www.youngbarhub.com](http://www.youngbarhub.com)),
  - The Bar Standards Board ([www.barstandardsboard.org.uk](http://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk)),
  - Gray's Inn ([www.graysinn.org.uk](http://www.graysinn.org.uk))
  - BPP Law School, London, Birmingham, Leeds, and Manchester ([www.bpp.com](http://www.bpp.com))
  - City University, London ([www.city.ac.uk](http://www.city.ac.uk))
  - The University of Law, London and Birmingham ([www.law.ac.uk](http://www.law.ac.uk))
  - Cardiff Law School ([www.cf.ac.uk](http://www.cf.ac.uk))
  - Manchester Metropolitan University ([www.law.mmu.ac.uk](http://www.law.mmu.ac.uk))
  - University of Northumbria, Newcastle ([www.law.unn.ac.uk](http://www.law.unn.ac.uk))
  - Nottingham Law School ([www.ntu.ac.uk/nls](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/nls))
  - University of the West of England, Bristol ([www.uwe.ac.uk](http://www.uwe.ac.uk))