

CHAMBERS OF MARK PLATTS-MILLS QC

POLICIES IN RELATION TO PUPILS

Number of Pupils

Chambers generally expects to award one or two funded pupillages each year, to applicants who are perceived as being strong contenders for tenancy in due course. Such pupillages are for twelve months, with a review at six months.

Finance

For funded pupillages, Chambers makes an award of £40,000 - £20,000 award and £20,000 by way of guaranteed income. Pupils may draw down a portion of this award while they are studying the Bar Professional Training Course.

Owing to the complex nature of the law practised by members of Chambers and the time it takes to learn, there is not a great deal of suitable work for pupils to undertake in their second six months, and recent experience has been that they will generate some fees, but usually not up to the level guaranteed.

Selection Procedures

It is Chambers' policy to select pupils in the following way:

- (a) Application is initially through Pupillage Gateway
- (b) On the basis of their Pupillage Gateway applications, a number of applicants are asked to attend a first interview. The first interview is with three or four members of Chambers and the Senior Clerk and is intended to assess applicants' motivation and suitability for practice at the intellectual property bar;
- (c) On the basis of their first interviews, a number of applicants are asked back for a second interview, which is also with three or four members of Chambers and the Senior Clerk. The panel for second interviews sometimes includes some of those involved in first interviews and some different members. The second interview is intended to assess applicants' aptitude for legal reasoning and argument and takes the form of a questions on a legal problem. It is not intended to assess knowledge of the law of intellectual property, which is not expected of candidates. No preparation is required, but applicants will have an opportunity to consider the problem for a short time before the interview begins.

- (d) To ensure that applicants are treated uniformly throughout the selection process, Chambers tries to make sure that all are asked similar questions at both interviews, that the questions asked are appropriate and fair, and that the same panels of members of Chambers attend all of the interviews in each round (professional commitments permitting).

Role and Duties of Pupils

Pupils spend almost all of their time, particularly in the first six months, observing their pupil supervisors (and other members of Chambers) and assisting them by drafting pleadings and opinions, undertaking legal research, summarising or analysing documents, working with their pupil supervisors in preparation for trial and hearings, and so on.

In their second six months of pupillage, some pupils will also undertake a certain amount of their own work, usually devilling, simple opinions or pleadings, or straightforward Court hearings in the Applications Court or in front of Masters. For the reasons mentioned above, it is unlikely that pupils will do much work on their own account, although such work usually increases significantly in the last couple of months of pupillage for pupils who have been taken on.

It is Chambers' objective that by the end of pupillage each pupil should have sufficient experience to undertake the kind of work done by very junior tenants, without assistance.

Working Hours

A pupil's working hours will depend on the demands of practice – usually a normal (9 hour) working day, but on occasions it may be necessary to work longer hours. Pupils will be asked to sign a waiver from the Working Time Regulations.

General Pattern of Pupillage

Pupils usually spend two-three months with each pupil supervisor. Chambers is however flexible in this respect, and pupils may spend slightly more or less time with a particular pupil supervisor, for example, in order to see a case to its conclusion, and may spend time with other members of Chambers if deemed particularly interesting or useful to do so.

Check List

All pupils are given a copy of a check- list of those aspects of practice of which they should gain experience during pupillage. This is designed to be used by pupils in intellectual property chambers.

Policy and Procedure for the Recruitment of Tenants

Chambers' policy is to recruit as tenants those who Chambers consider have the ability and aptitude to become successful practitioners in the areas of law in which Chambers primarily specialises. The decision to offer tenancy to pupils is made by Chambers as a whole and

depends in large part upon the assessment by Chambers of the performance of pupils during their pupillage.

Policies and Procedures for Pupils not Taken On

Chambers makes every effort to assist such pupils, by suggesting other chambers, firms of solicitors, patent agents, or companies, to which they might apply. Chambers further assists by contacting such persons on the pupil's behalf and by giving advice and support generally. Chambers has in recent years been very successful in ensuring that such pupils are able to find a tenancy or further pupillage in other chambers, or offers of employment.

In addition to this, Chambers makes decisions about whether or not pupils will be taken on well in advance of the end of their pupillages; decisions about tenancy are nearly always made in July. Pupils who are not going to be taken on are told so as soon as possible.

Chambers considers that it is in the best interest of pupils who are not taken on to make other arrangements as soon as possible, while at the same time recognising that this can take some time in the present extremely competitive atmosphere. Such pupils are always allowed a reasonable time to remain in Chambers while they look around, and are treated in a friendly and supportive manner while they do so.

Grievance Procedure

In the first instance, pupils should discuss problems, complaints and grievances with their pupil supervisor if they feel able to do so.

Chambers recognise that there may be situations where, perhaps because of the very nature of the concern or grievance, it is plainly inappropriate or pointless to attempt to resolve the matter by discussion with a pupil supervisor. In such cases, or where the pupil is dissatisfied with the result of his or her discussion with the pupil supervisor, the pupil should raise the matter which concerns them with any one of the silks in chambers. That silk will discuss the matter with the pupil and thereafter with the pupil supervisor (if it is a matter which concerns the pupil master). The pupil will be informed of the result of that discussion.

If any pupil remains concerned then that pupil is invited to raise the matter with the Head of Chambers, who will consider the matter himself or refer it to a three-person committee appointed by him. The pupil will be informed of the determination of that consideration by the Head of Chambers or the Committee, as the case may be.