



## **NORTHAMPTON CHAMBERS PUPILLAGE POLICY DOCUMENT**

### **1. Description of Chambers**

With 4 barristers at the current time, Northampton Chambers is a relatively small provincial set but it boasts a vast quantity of high quality work and very well regarded advocates from the Head of Chambers down to the second six pupil. We pride ourselves on service, high quality advocacy, and on being the set that goes the extra mile to ensure excellent preparation, reporting following hearings, and representation at all stages of proceedings. We are committed to quality service, and the training of top-quality advocates but consider ourselves to be an approachable set, offering a friendly, practical and down-to-earth environment in which to complete pupillage. We don't shy away from the fact that our pupils have to work very hard indeed, but this is simply to equip our prospective tenants with all the requisite skills to succeed in life at the Bar.

Pupillage is very important to us, we take pupils on with a view to offering tenancy at the end of successful completion and view ever increasing junior tenants as a necessity to Chambers' continual progression. Tenancy will be awarded on merit and to those who have demonstrated the necessary skill and commitment to succeed.

The joy of pupillage at Northampton Chambers means you are not competing with others for a single place. We don't believe in taking on multiple pupils to service our work only to be tossed aside after months of dedication. Pupils to us are an investment in our future, and one which we aim to continue for many years to come.

## **2. Areas of Work**

The majority of Members of Chambers undertake Family work, and a great deal of this is Children Act work although many members also undertake Financial and TOLATA work too. Children Act work in chambers is varied but many junior members find themselves involved in significant public law proceedings from an early stage, which is not the norm in many sets.

We are experienced in handling cases that are sensitive and high profile. Chambers has a particularly strong reputation in Children Act matters involving fact-finding hearings and allegations of serious child abuse and sexual abuse, as well as non-accidental injuries in infants.

Some members of Chambers have a mixed practice, which involves family and civil, and there is some civil and immigration work available as well. As a junior in Chambers you are not encouraged to specialise your practice at an early stage unless you particularly want to and in that case the dedicated clerking team can assist in moulding your practice. Many juniors report, however, that they prepare to 'find their feet' and take their time developing their advocacy skills in all areas before deciding if they wish to specialise and in what field, according to the cases they have experienced for themselves.

Members of Chambers also appear on behalf of a wide range of clients (in addition to general lay clients through solicitors and on a direct access basis) including but not limited to; Local Authorities, Children through their Guardians, Local Councils, the DWP, Probation Service, and the Secretary of State.

In terms of location, members of Chambers appear in Courts in a significant geographical area, including; Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Leicestershire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire and the West Midlands. We have loyal solicitors based in all of these areas and so pupils and tenants alike are expected to travel.

### **3. Pupillage Committee**

Responsibility for the management of pupillage falls to the Pupillage Committee, the current members being the Head of Chambers, Miss Maria Savvides and Mr. Robert Pettit.

### **4. Pupillage Recruitment**

Chambers is not a member of Pupillage Gateway, the recruitment process is usually by way of handwritten covering letter and CV, with the details of the same being published upon both our website and the standard pupillage recruitment websites.

Chambers recruits 2 pupils each year; one in April and one in October, so that there is always 1 first-six pupil and 1 second-six pupil in Chambers.

### **5. Selection Processes**

Northampton Chambers is committed to a policy of equal opportunities and candidates are welcome regardless of race, ethnic, or national origin, nationality, citizenship, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or political persuasion. We aim to recruit candidates, regardless of their background, who can demonstrate the necessary commitment to a career at the Bar and in particular to Northampton Chambers. The recruitment of pupils is taken very seriously because every pupil is selected on the basis that it is hoped they will go on to become a tenant in Chambers.

We look for applicants who not only demonstrate intellect and sound legal knowledge but who balance this with common sense and a pragmatic approach that makes them accessible to solicitors and lay clients alike.

All applications received are considered by members of the Pupillage Committee against standard criteria. In addition to the qualities detailed in the paragraph above and those generally expected, we look for ability to manage copious, detailed, and complicated

information and to communicate such information in a straightforward manner, evidence of interaction with a wide range of people from a variety of social and professional levels, the ability to prioritise work commitments whilst sustaining other interests or facing life's challenges, and of the ability to cope and achieve results under pressure.

No formal requirements are imposed as to the level of degree or BPTC attained, although our assessment process does take this into account, and as a rule of thumb a 2:1 is required at degree level, as a minimum, and a Very Competent at the BPTC. Candidates falling outside these criteria are however always considered when extenuating circumstances prevail.

Around 300 applications for pupillage are generally received each year, and from this pool around 25-30 candidates tend to be short-listed for first-round interview. All members of the Pupillage Committee, generally conduct the Interviews, which tend to be over the course of a weekend (or 2 consecutive Saturdays). Each interview will last around fifteen minutes and candidates will be asked 5 set questions devised by the committee, there may also be some general questions, and the aim of each is to tell us about you, your personality, and your suitability to Chambers. We tend to avoid attempting to challenge your intellect during this process since we already know you have the intellectual ability to succeed if you have been invited for interview. As well as getting to know you, however, we do use this opportunity to assess your ability as an Advocate but in a general sense rather than via a particular exercise.

A limited number of no more than 10 successful candidates (usually) will then be called to attend a second-round interview. This is generally held on a weekday evening within a fortnight of the initial interview and is a 30-minute or more interview. The interviewing panel generally remains the same, although sometimes other members sit depending upon members' Court commitments.

This second interview normally comprises of both an Advocacy exercise (either a legal

application made available upon arrival with 30 minutes to prepare) or a more general exercise where candidates are asked to pick a topic from a range offered to them, which is prepared in advance. Sometimes both are required. There are also further general questions asked of candidates at this time.

## **6. Pupillage Awards**

Pupils taken on for twelve months will receive a £12,000 grant payable in regular monthly installments.

While travel expenses in the Northamptonshire area are deemed covered by the overall pupillage award, pupils will be reimbursed for travel further afield during both the first six months when accompanying members of Chambers and also in the second six whether attending Court as briefed or to accompany a member of Chambers.

## **7. Pupillage programme**

Pupils are assigned to one pupil supervisor for each six-month period. During the first six non-practising months pupils are assigned to the Head of Chambers, Miss Savvides: They attend court with her as pupil supervisor on a daily basis (or an alternate member of Chambers if the Head of Chambers is on papers), and complete research and written work as directed by her. Effort is taken to ensure that the pupil has contact with, and the opportunity to work for, tenants of all levels of seniority within Chambers although tenants are to ask permission from the Head of Chambers if assigning work to a pupil to ensure that tasks remain manageable at all times.

During the second six months pupils are assigned to Mr Robert Pettitt. Pupils will conduct cases in court alone and can expect to develop their own busy practice from a very early stage. In the event pupils are not in Court for a day they are expected to attend Court with another member of Chambers, allowing the pupil to spend time with each tenant in turn. Pupils are subject to regular reviews and are observed by members of Chambers whilst in Court during the second-six period. Pupil supervisors also offer feedback of all work done,

and comments from instructing solicitors and the clerking team.

## **8. Training**

Chambers will pay for pupils to attend the three compulsory courses necessary for Continuing Education (Advocacy, Practice Management, and Forensic Accounting) and time off is provided to allow for completion of the same.

## **9. Recruitment to Tenancy**

Pupils are considered for tenancy towards the end of their year's pupillage, once they have confirmed their application for tenancy is being made. It is rare for pupils to be asked to undertake a third-six in Chambers and a decision will generally be made towards the end of pupillage, for obvious reasons such a decision cannot be made at an earlier stage due to the nature of pupillage itself. This can of course be a worrying time for pupils but every effort is made throughout the entire 12 months to provide reassurance when appropriate and areas for development to ensure any difficulties are ironed out as early as possible.

Pupils who have worked hard, shown commitment to Chambers and a career at the Bar, and who have the necessary skill set to promote Chambers' general reputation and gain regular work are generally recruited. You are, therefore, often judged on your own merit and rewarded according to the effort you put in.

The decision as to whether a pupil is to be taken on as a tenant is made by every member of Chambers at a Chambers' Meeting. To be taken-on as a tenant, pupils must secure 75% of the votes of the members of Chambers (excluding any new members who were pupils who at the same time as them).

Prior to the Chambers Meeting and all pupillage reviews, all members of Chambers are asked whether they have information or opinions on any pupil, which they reduce into writing for consideration by all members of Chambers. The Pupillage Committee will also consult with

the Head of Operations Mr Adam Gayton for his perspective and with the fees clerk and administrator, Mr. Iain Pettitt. Pupils may be asked to provide a selection of their written work to be made available for perusal by members of Chambers.

In the event that a pupil is not successful in securing tenancy, a third-six pupillage may be offered, in the alternative, Chambers will endeavour to help you find an alternative position and pupils will be allowed to remain in Chambers for a period of three months from the date of the relevant Chambers Meeting on a squatting basis.

### **10. Third six pupils**

Third six pupils are occasionally recruited, according to the needs of Chambers. Applications are received on an ad hoc basis and are considered against the same criteria used for full pupillages by at least two members of the Pupillage Committee. Applicants who fulfill the criteria will be invited to attend an interview in front of three or four members of the Pupillage Committee. Third six pupils are also recruited on the basis that they are potential tenants; they are subject to the same interview and recruitment procedures as twelve-month pupils.

### **11. What to expect**

On your first day you will be introduced to Chambers by an appointed member of the pupillage committee or by the current pupil. You will be introduced to the clerking team and have the general expectations of Chambers outlined to you. You also be shown around the building and provided with keys, alarm codes etc.

November 2014

Mr Robert Pettitt  
Pupillage Committee  
Northampton Chambers