

Hannah Slarks

YEAR OF GRADUATION 2010 UNIVERSITY BRISTOL, THEN CAMBRIDGE DEGREE SUBJECT POLITICS AND FRENCH, THEN LAW CURRENT POSITION AND AREAS OF PRACTICE TENANT SINCE 2012 PRACTISING PUBLIC AND EMPLOYMENT LAW

Why 11KBW?

I was looking for a top public and employment set, so 11KBW was the obvious choice. The barristers here are instructed in many of the most exciting cases. In the last year, members of chambers have been involved in cases on the right to die, the legality of drone attacks in Pakistan, the dismissal of Sharon Shoemith, as well as the Leveson Inquiry. Those are just a few examples.

However, the quality of the work was just the beginning. One of the most appealing aspects of 11KBW is the support and freedom given to members to develop their practices in their own way. There are members who practise exclusively in commercial and business law, while others take only public law and human rights work. There are barristers who work from home, outside of London, while others spend every day in chambers. There are members who like a busy practice that keeps them working around the clock, while others choose to work part-time.

This respect for barristers' personal choices is down to both an exceptional clerking team and unparalleled family friendly policies. Members can take up to ten years off rent free to raise a family, compared to only six months at most other chambers. Barristers on career breaks will be kept in the loop on marketing events. When they come back, the clerks will help them craft a practice that they can balance with their family commitments. Plus, work-life balance is not just for people with families. The clerks help members to balance their work with all kinds of other commitments. We even have a concert pianist in chambers!

Selection process

Applications should be made through Pupillage Portal. In addition, applicants are asked to complete a paper application for an assessed mini-pupillage. During the mini-pupillage, they spend several days working on a written exercise. These tend to involve sets of papers raising quite thorny issues and requiring a fair bit of research. About ten of the best mini-pupils are invited to an interview. In exceptional circumstances, chambers may interview someone who has not done an assessed mini-pupillage, but this is rare. Several days before the interview, they will be given a case to read. They may also be given a practical problem when they arrive.

Both the mini-pupillage assessment and the interview are challenging. At the same time, the barristers running the process are conscious of the pressures on applicants. They try to put to you through your paces with patience and compassion.

Pupillage

Each year, 11KBW takes up to four pupils. Pupils are not in competition with each other; instead, they will be taken on if they meet a fixed standard. In my year, there were two of us and we were both taken on. In fact, it has been several years since someone was not kept on following pupillage. This means that pupils can feel comfortable around each other and help each other along.

During the year, I had three pupil supervisors. In the first three months, I worked almost exclusively for my supervisor. From Christmas until the tenancy decision was taken in July, I worked both for my supervisors and other members of chambers. All the work I did for other members of chambers was double-marked. I was given extensive feedback on every piece of work. Before the decision, the tenancy committee looked over all my work to decide if I met 11KBW's required standard.



There was a strong emphasis on teaching. Many chambers will use their pupils to churn out junior level work with little feedback. Here, if someone is doing an exciting case, they will make sure that the pupils have the opportunity to work on the papers. This gave me the opportunity to draft pleadings for the Supreme Court and write opinions for major clients, all followed by detailed feedback. I was amazed at the time that barristers were willing to devote to this. It was not uncommon for members of chambers to spend more than an hour sitting with me to talk about my work. This really made a difference. I scarcely recognise my work from the beginning of the year.

Throughout the process, members of chambers were supportive and encouraging. Now I am finally a tenant, I cannot imagine practising anywhere else.