

## Bar Placement Week: A student's experience in Manchester

Intense. That's the first word that entered my mind as I put one foot into the courtroom and took my seat across the jury. I take in my surroundings: so, this is the world of a barrister? It's a little more intimidating than watching it through a screen. I am the cliché I expected to be, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. The sounds of a keyboard clicking from the ambitious and like-minded pupil barrister beside me fill the room. This lifestyle seems challenging, but it poses an important question.

'What makes a good barrister?' I ask Christian as he types away. He ponders.

"It's all about defending the little man against the big man," he finally tells me, "Morals over money."

What does that *actually* mean? I can't say I was completely sure, but I tried to let his words sink in for the duration of the day.

I continue to make notes on the barristers who I'm shadowing today. I study their defence. They're calm, collected – everything an eminent barrister usually is. They handle the case with the sensitive attitude it deserves, out of respect for the family behind them. Their argument is undeniably strong, and you can infer for yourself the hours of work they've put in to hone their skills for this trial. I wonder to myself; do I have the capability to be like them when I'm older?

One of them says something, however, and it has stuck with me since.

"Members of the jury, your decision does not come down to whether or not you approve of the defendant's lifestyle. It comes down to whether or not you will let that cloud your judgement."

Christian's words now clicked.

It's a common perception that the justice system is simply about punishing someone for breaking the law, but my experience this week has proven it is so much more than that.

Being a successful barrister cannot be achieved without the desire to play a part in the wider community, in an attempt to achieve positive change. People are not as simple as they may seem, they have a certain vulnerability to them and it's about seeing that there is always more to a situation than meets the eye. Pragmatism and empathy underpin a career as a successful barrister, as demonstrated by the ones I have shadowed recently.

Understandably so, it may sound like an incredibly romantic notion that a group of motivated individuals are striving for moral justice, but I do feel that through my time in the chambers, I've come to recognise this as the core of being a barrister.

"You haven't put her off yet, Christian!" His supervisor, Clare, exclaims jokingly sometime during the week, and he laughs.

"I'm trying, but her mind's made up." Is his reply.

It most definitely has been.

**Zaynah Kousar**

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