



2016

BRIEFING PACK

'Barristers in Schools'

**NOTES FOR GIVING TALKS
TO STUDENTS ON A
CAREER AS A BARRISTER**

Notes for giving talks to Schools on a career at the Bar of England and Wales

1. GENERAL

(i) Format for giving the Talk

Different schools give different levels of careers advice and so you should ask the school before the day what they hope to get out of the event and whether they have any requirements on the day.

Find out the preferred format from your contact in advance. Will you need an Overhead Projector or PowerPoint? Most events are organised on an informal basis and there should be an opportunity for questions from the students. In your talk you will be outlining the role of the barrister and dispelling any images or myths surrounding the profession.

(ii) Establishing Links

Having established your contact in the school or sixth form college, you may wish to continue to provide careers information for the remainder of the academic year. Whichever course of action you decide upon, you should make this clear to your contact.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE TALK

In introducing yourself, it is helpful to give brief words about your own career and training with, if possible, some anecdotal (but encouraging) accounts which can often help to “break the ice”. It’s a good idea to outline what you are going to talk about so that the students can follow each stage clearly. You may wish to cover the following areas;

- (i) *The career of a barrister*
- (ii) *Making the decision*
- (iii) *The recruitment situation*
- (iv) *Stages of training (academic, vocational, pupillage)*
- (v) *Practice and Continuing Professional Development*

3. THE TALK

You may want to cover the following topics. Below is an outline:

(i) *THE CAREER OF BARRISTER*

You should ensure that you dispel any myths surrounding the profession and ensure that they understand that this chosen career path is extremely hard work but is ultimately very rewarding if this is the career they really want. They should be made aware of the competitive nature of the profession and the recruitment situation. Commitment is essential.

Inform them that the number of those studying Law and seeking to complete the vocational stage of training and pupillage continue to increase each year so they must work hard to achieve good grades.

The need for good GCSE and A level grades must be stressed and you should advise students that any additional skills that they can acquire, such as work experience during the summer months or breaks from school will aide them in the future.

Advise on A levels and state that there is generally no preference as to whether candidates have studied Arts or Science A levels and most Further Education institutes accept A level Law, however some institutions will not accept A levels in General Studies or Music or Art. So when it comes to choosing their A levels they should consider their choices carefully and work hard to obtain good grades.

You might like to advise that students do not have to study law at university to become a barrister. While law is an interesting and rich subject in its own right, you are able to fulfil the academic criteria for being a barrister after your

degree by way of a Graduate Diploma in Law (this will be explained later in the presentation). Most chambers do not have a preference for which degree you studied first and some even prefer candidates who have done something different at university because they are likely to approach the law in a different way.

Explain the difference between barristers and solicitors, although some argue that the two are becoming more similar, there are still real differences between the two. *Barristers* are specialist advisors and advocates and spend much of their time appearing in court or undertaking court work whereas *solicitors* are more directly involved with the client and handle all aspects of their legal affairs.

What do barristers do?

You know better than anyone what a barrister actually does so talk to them about what your current workload is like and what sort of things you are dealing with.

Ensure that they understand the role of a barrister e.g. they are specialist legal advisers, trained to provide independent legal advice to clients on the strengths and weaknesses of their legal case. They will translate the facts that the client has given them into convincing legal arguments to present to a court.

Experienced barristers can apply to become Queens Counsel (QC). Around 10% of barristers become QCs or 'silks', so called because they are entitled to wear silk gowns. QCs take the most serious cases. Barristers who are not QCs are known as junior barristers, whatever their age.

Where do they work?

Most barristers are self-employed. Following a ruling by the Bar Council in 1990 barristers with 3 years experience can practice independently. This means they can work from home if they so choose.

There are also openings for barristers within the Crown Prosecution Service, Government Legal Services and other In-House Legal Departments.

(ii) **MAKING THE DECISION TO BECOME A BARRISTER**

This career choice requires a great deal of commitment, try and bring in a few stories about what made you decide to become a barrister. Let them know that all the hard work and sacrifices are worthwhile. This is a very rewarding and satisfying career for those with the right combination of skills.

- academic ability
- written and oral communication skills
- numeracy skills
- interpersonal skills
- IT skills

Stress to the students that anything that they can participate in that will help them towards this chosen career such as debating or public speaking should be encouraged

FINANCIAL PLANNING

Prospective entrants to the profession should be advised that the total cost of qualifying to become a barrister is considerable and they are advised to investigate potential sources of funding available to them at each stage of training.

The following costs should be pointed out to students;

- Students who do not obtain a qualifying Law degree will need to complete the GDL. Course fees for this are approximately £3,000 - £8,000
- Fees for the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) are approximately £12,500 - £19,000. In addition all students are required to join an Inn of court before commencing the BPTC and the average admission fees for this are £100.00 and Call to the Bar fee will be approximately £125. Students should be made aware of all these costs.

Also point out that sources of funding are provided by the profession:

- Pupillage is funded to a minimum of £1,000 per month.
- The Inns provide extensive scholarships each year for trainee barristers.

So, all in all, qualifying to become a barrister is a very expensive business. If this has not put them off, you should also let them know that there are lots of different ways of finding the money.

Try and keep this section simple and brief so that students don't feel bombarded with financial information.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION ON APPLYING FOR COURSES

It is advisable to give students a rough outline of what they should be doing and when in relation to preparing for their future training.

(iii) **STAGES OF TRAINING**

The Academic Stage

This stage usually consists of either a law degree or a degree in another subject of their choice supplemented by a 1 year conversion course commonly known as the GDL. Ensure the students are aware that if they take a degree in another subject that they will have to complete the GDL. Also make sure they are aware that they will normally need to have a minimum of a 2.2 degree to do this. However you should advise them that when they move on to the further stages of training the higher the class of degree the better.

Mini-Pupillages

Before committing themselves at this stage it is wise to advise them on undertaking at least one mini pupillages in order to get a feel for what a barrister actually does. These usually last a week and will involve shadowing a barrister, attending court and looking over cases. A mini pupillage may also help them to decide which areas they might like to specialise in. Students can find out about mini-pupillage opportunities on the Bar Council website.

Stress the importance to the students of gaining as much relevant experience and knowledge as they can through these various stages. If they are particularly interested at this point you could suggest they could take some time and go and sit in on a court case or their school or Sixth Form College may want to organise a trip to a court.

The Vocational Stage

After completing their degree or conversion course, students can move onto the next stage known as the vocational stage. This consists of the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC). The BPTC is a very practical course and there is heavy emphasis on developing the skills needed to practice at the Bar.

Role-play activities are involved, court room procedures and negotiating. All intending barristers are required to complete the BPTC.

The Inns of Court

There are four Inns of Court – Lincoln’s Inn, Inner Temple, Middle Temple, Gray’s Inn. Students must join one of these four Inns before they commence the vocational stage of training. The Inns provide the mechanism for how people become Barristers, known as “Call to the Bar”. However this does not entitle students to practice. In order to do this they must have completed pupillage. During the application process for the BPTC and for pupillage the Inns can provide help and guidance to their members, including mock interviews, assistance on completing application forms and assistance in gaining work experience.

Pupillage

You must stress that after successfully completing the BPTC a student is eligible to be called to the Bar, however they cannot practice as a barrister unless they have completed pupillage. This should be explained as a one year period of in-service training. Split between the first six months when you shadow an experienced barrister and the second six months when you are allowed to practice under supervision. You should stress to the students that competition for pupillage is high as there are more applicants than there are available pupillages. However put it in context of approximately 400 pupillage vacancies available per year, with approximately 1700 people graduating from the BPTC each year not all of which will compete for pupillage. If you are recently qualified, you will be able to give your own view about training and life as a barrister. Those who took the old Bar Finals should ensure they are clear on the recent changes to the Bar Professional Training Course.

PRACTICE & CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

You must ensure you stress to students that they have lots of options within this career field. If life in chambers does not appeal to them, they may prefer a career at the employed Bar. There are lots of exiting career opportunities in organisations such as:

- The armed forces
- Local government
- Government Legal Services
- European Fast Stream (Civil Service)
- European Commission
- Crown Prosecution Services
- Firms of solicitors
- A variety of organisations in commerce and industry

Currently there are about 3,000 barristers employed by various public and private public sector organisations. Ensure they understand that there are lots of options open to them.

Throughout this talk it is a good idea to draw on your own experiences as much as you can. You must remain neutral and encourage the students to do their own investigation into which of these would suit them as everybody will have a different idea of what they are looking for. Give them the website details so that they can look up information for themselves and make an informed decision. Encourage them as much as possible.

4. QUESTIONS

This is probably the most important part of the talk and the part you may enjoy the most! Adequate time should be allowed for questions. It is important that

students feel free to ask any questions that they feel relevant, however basic the point may be. Ensure you encourage them as much as possible.

5. DISTRIBUTION OF LITERATURE

You may want to distribute copies of the Bar Council/Inns current careers brochure together with any other information we provide you with.

6. SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Ensure that you tell the students that further information is available on the Bar Council's website www.barcouncil.org.uk.

If you have any questions or would appreciate further guidance, please email to Careers@BarCouncil.org.uk or telephone 020 7611 1352.