

Mock Pupillage Interview Scheme: Guidance for Barristers

The Middle Temple Mock Pupillage Interview Scheme is limited to student members who have an upcoming pupillage interview.

Time Commitment

The scheme is run on a flexible basis, meaning you can help as much or as little as you are able.

The majority of mock interviews are conducted remotely, which makes it easier to fit into your schedule and reduces the overall time taken up.

It is anticipated that a mock interview session would last approximately between 45 minutes to an hour, but this is down to the barrister. We suggest an interview of about 20-30 minutes and a 10–15-minute feedback chat with the student afterwards.

The busy period is from mid-February to April as most pupillage interviews are held throughout this period. Our aim is that the barristers who have signed up to the scheme aren't asked to conduct more than 2 or 3 interviews per year, likely to be within those 3 months. The number of interviews is down to the individual barrister and you can opt to do more or less.

Students are not often given a lot of notice by the chambers they interview at, so we often run into difficulty finding someone available on very short notice. We understand that your time is very limited, so we understand if you often cannot help us when we contact you.

Allocating a Barrister to a Student

Each student who applies for a mock interview provides a list of all the chambers they have applied to and/or intend to apply to in the current pupillage application round with the status of each one (plan to submit, pending, unsuccessful or interview offered).

To avoid any conflict of interest we don't allocate the student to a barrister based at a chambers that they have applied to (unless they have already been unsuccessful at that chambers). When it isn't possible to find a barrister in their preferred area of law who doesn't pose a conflict of interest, we would try to find the student someone in their second choice of law.

We then email the barrister and student to put them in touch with each other so they can find an agreeable time and location for the interview (in person or, in most cases, remotely). We stress to our students how precious the barrister's time is and try to ensure that they clear their schedule as much as possible to accommodate the barrister.

The Interview

The Inn is not directly involved with the pupillage process and therefore we cannot provide detailed guidance on the structure of a mock interview.

A mock interview via this scheme should only provide general interview practice - it isn't feasible for the mock interview to include any exercises. The aim is to give the student some idea of the type of questions they will face, and to allow them to practice their general interview technique. They can then use the feedback they receive to improve their performance in the real interview.

We rely on the barristers involved to base the mock on their own experience of pupillage interviews (whether their own or having been involved in chambers recruitment). Other barristers within chambers that are part of the pupillage committee might also be able to advise.

Suggestions provided by barristers involved in the scheme

Before the mock interview:

- ask the student to send you their CV and/or the application that led to offer of a pupillage interview.
- ask for details of the chambers, type of pupillage they applied for (crime/family etc.) and any details the chambers have provided prior to the interview.
- prep possible questions for the mock interview focusing on:
 - (i) their academic achievements
 - (ii) relevant work experience
 - (iii) other work experience and how those skills cross over
 - (iv) recent changes in (case) law relevant to the area of practise of the relevant chambers

The mock interview

A first-round pupillage interview is mainly based on general questions on their CV, motivation, work experience as well as specific questions on why they particularly want to work for that chambers.

You expect the candidate to have researched the members of the chambers, read a few key cases in which the set has been involved, have a good working knowledge of at least one the areas of practice of the chambers, and be able to talk a bit about their concept of the day job.

To do this, you obviously ask them in advance which sets they've applied to - and do your own reading of those web sites and areas of practice.

Cover a mix of questions around a vocation at the bar which commonly come up, e.g.

- Why do you want to become a barrister?
- What other careers have you considered and why?
- Why have you applied to this set of chambers?
- How do you consider your experiences suit you for a career at the bar?
- What is the most important characteristic for a barrister to possess?
- What will you find the most difficult aspect of pupillage?

Other type of questions that should come up (competency-based questions, law related questions, debate questions, questions to test the applicant's ability to think of their feet, the Modern Bar). A few examples below.

- Where do you get your news from? Why?
- If you could change any law, what would it be and why?
- Give 3 reasons in favour / against giving state-funded liver transplant to alcoholics
- Explain how to get from A to B on the tube to an alien
- What is the most important way to improve access to the Bar?

Although questions should be neutral and non-discriminatory, perhaps it may be worth mentioning to the candidate that they may be asked a couple of unexpected questions and/or the kind of question that is designed simply to wrongfoot such as:

- Tell us a joke.
- What film or book have you read recently that you want to persuade me to read/watch?
- Do you follow football?
- Cross-examining.

Finally, the candidate should prepare answers to:

- Do you have any questions for us?
- Are there any issues you would like to raise?

Feedback/advice:

- provide feedback and advise the student on manner, answers, style, habits.
- (where possible) discuss the chambers, who is interviewing, how to adapt techniques according to the interviewers.
- advise the student to have a few questions ready to ask the interviewers at the end of their interview.

Encourage the student to let you know how their pupillage interview went (so you can also learn what works and does not / brush up on any general changes in style).