

Pupillage at Garden Court North

Frequently asked questions



What sort of barrister do I want to be?

So you want to be a barrister? There is no doubt that the work is intellectually stimulating, provides endless variety and can be financially very rewarding. But what sort of law do you want to practice and what sort of barrister do you want to be?

If you think that practising as a barrister is a passport to wealth, big expensive houses, fast cars and a privileged lifestyle then the opportunity is there. Work in the fields of company law, tax, pensions and insurance and all that can be yours. But is that why you have wanted to become a lawyer? Is that your motivation for all the hard work and study you have already undertaken?

Or has your motivation been a deep feeling that there is enormous injustice in the world, that justice in this country is a concept which is being too readily sacrificed to the government's perennial concern to cut expenditure on the legal system and that as a barrister you can make a difference to the lives of ordinary people? Imagine the exhilaration of obtaining an acquittal in a criminal trial on behalf of your client some of who are factually innocent and the difference that can make to their lives and that of their families. Or the feelings of satisfaction when you win an appeal before an immigration tribunal on behalf of someone fleeing persecution in their own country and who is desperate to try to build a new life in the UK. Or how good it feels to win a case on behalf of a tenant threatened with eviction from their home or to obtain justice for a person who has lost their job or had their rights at work ignored.

If these are the kind of feelings you have had when thinking about becoming a barrister then you may want to consider applying for pupillage at Garden Court North.

I want to know more about Garden Court North chambers?

Garden Court North (GCN) was set up in by a group of young barristers who wanted to provide an alternative in Manchester to the more traditional sets on the Northern Circuit. The head of chambers, Ian Macdonald QC, is also a member of Garden Court in London and was for many years one of its two joint heads of chambers. Since then we have grown and there are now 25 of us - of those 12 are women and 13 are men, we come from a number of different ethnic backgrounds, and three of us are also tenants at Garden Court in London. We are all involved in making the important decisions that affect the running of chambers. Decisions are made through the chambers meeting and planning committee and each of the interests groups (crime, immigration, housing and employment) hold regular meetings to discuss issues relevant to their specialisations.

We have always had a strong commitment to publicly funded work. This used to be provided by the Legal Aid Board and is currently provided by the Legal Services Commission. We try to provide the Pupillage at GCN – FAQs (last updated November 2011)

best service we can to our clients, many of whom are disadvantaged by poverty, discrimination and social need, using our skills to articulate the arguments that our clients would if they could and we seek to ensure that in whatever forum we are operating we uphold the legal rights of our clients to the maximum extent. The main areas in which we practice are criminal defence, immigration, housing and employment law but we also undertake work in public law, inquests, prison law, claims against the police and public authorities, community care, mental health and education law.

What sort of pupillages does Garden Court North offer?

We offer two pupillages of 12 months duration to start in the autumn of each year. Each pupil will receive £14,000 during that period. We seek to provide you with high quality training so that you will be prepared when the time comes to argue your own cases in court. At present pupillage is only offered in crime, immigration and housing. We aim to give pupils the opportunity to obtain experience in each of these three areas during the non-practising first 6 months. This will give pupils as much chance to consider which areas of practice they may wish to engage in later as well as offering pupils experience of different courts and tribunals. Having said that, we will try to accommodate an expressed preference for particular areas of practice.

Do you also offer mini-pupillages?

Yes. Chambers offers one mini-pupillage lasting no longer than one week each month. Applicants must be 16 years old or older.

What will happen during my first six?

During pupillage you will work closely with your supervisor or other members of chambers. You will be able to familiarise yourself with the papers in each case. You will be given the opportunity to draft pleadings and opinions in civil cases. In criminal cases you will also help prepare advices, defence statements, skeleton arguments on legal issues and grounds of appeal. You will attend conferences with the lay clients and representatives of the firm of instructing solicitors. Sometimes these are in chambers and sometimes at the offices of our solicitors. In criminal cases some of our clients are in custody and conferences have to be held at the prison. You will travel to court for the case either with your supervisor or alone. Barristers from Garden Court North are regularly briefed in cases throughout the North of England and the Midlands so you should be prepared for a fair amount of travelling. This will often involve early starts and punctuality is vitally important on all occasions. Chambers will pay the cost of all travel connected with pupillage.

In addition to the compulsory training provided to pupils either in London or on circuit we provide extra seminars in chambers covering different topics and situations that you will encounter in your practice. You will be able to work through particular practical exercises.

How will I work during my second six?

In the second six months you will gain experience of actually presenting your own cases in court. Depending on circumstances this may involve a number of different tribunals. You will still be closely
Pupillage at GCN – FAQs (last updated November 2011)

supervised to ensure that you know what is expected of you and how to deal with the challenges thrown up in each case. You will be expected to report back to your supervisor about the case you have done so that any difficulties can be dealt with. You will also be able to discuss issues raised in cases which you are appearing in before you go to court. In addition to your supervisor, all members of chambers will be happy to help you with any queries or issues raised in any case you are covering.

I don't know Manchester very well – will working in Manchester appeal to me?

For those of you who are contemplating making an application and who are not already familiar with the area here's a little information to assist you. Manchester is the third largest city in England. It has two separate Crown Courts which are extremely busy as well as the County Court. It is an exciting city in which to live and work. It has a vibrant city centre with all the shops you would expect and more. It has dozens of restaurants and bars and a busy night life. In addition to two main railway stations and two free buses that run around the city centre there is also a very good tram services to various parts of the city which makes getting around very easy, especially compared to London.

How do I make an application and how will it be processed?

If you like what you have read about us and think that you would like to do your pupillage with us then applying is easy. We are members of OLPAS so you should go to their website at www.pupillages.com and complete the on-line application form. You should bear in mind that we receive several hundred applications each year, so competition is stiff. In particular we will be looking for candidates who are committed to the ethos of these chambers and who are able to demonstrate that commitment through their activities. This may be work (paid or voluntary) at a Law Centre or Advice Centre or it might be through a human rights organisation involving an overseas internship. As we are very committed to the principles of equality of opportunity we will treat all applications in the same way. We will not consider any further documentation that you might send in, including a C.V. or references so please tell us all you want us to know on the on-line application form. The recruitment season for pupillages usually begins at about Easter and applications have to be received within a period of about 6 weeks. You should consult the OLPAS website for details. Interviews are held at the beginning of July and offers are made on 1st August to begin in the autumn of the following year.

Once we have received your application it will be considered along with the others that we receive. Invitations to come for interview will be sent out to those we consider to be best suited to these chambers. Those whose applications are not successful will be notified by e-mail. Following interviews all candidates will be notified as to the outcome.

I don't have a degree from a so-called leading university. Will this affect my application?

No. Of course we want to recruit people with high levels of educational achievement and we do award more marks during assessment of your application for a first than a 2.1 and for a 2.1 over a 2.2. However it is the standard of degree you obtained that counts rather than where you got your degree from.

What sort of experience are you looking for in your pupils?

You don't need us to tell you that obtaining a pupillage is getting harder and generally more competitive. You can see from our website at www.gcnchambers.co.uk the sort of work that we do. It will help your application if you have already obtained some experience in civil liberties or human rights areas of work. This may come in all sorts of ways. University law clinics provide a good way of getting early hands on experience of the work that lawyers do. The same applies to Innocence Project work that a number of universities are involved in these days. Other candidates have undertaken an internship usually abroad with charities such as Amicus or Reprieve or through international agencies including the UN. Others still have worked in law centres or advice centres or even obtained employment with firms of solicitors who do sometimes recruit members of the Bar who have been called but not yet completed pupillage to do work in areas which can allow you to gain some experience in advocacy.

I have more specific questions about pupillage at Garden Court North, who can I ask?

If you have any further queries about pupillage please address your queries in writing to Mark George at the Pupillage Committee via the chambers address.

**Garden Court North, Chambers of Ian Macdonald QC
22 Oxford Court, Manchester M2 3WQ**