

Pupillage at St Philips Chambers: Everything you need to Know





A pupillage at St Philips Chambers: everything you need to know

St Philips is the foremost set of chambers in the Midlands, and we aim to provide pupillages which are commensurate with our status in the region and beyond. Please read on to find out:

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We have our main
office in Birmingham,
with another smaller
but very busy office
in Leeds.

Who we are

We are the leading set of chambers in the Midlands, and operate at the top end of Business & Property, Crime, Employment, Family, Personal Injury and Regulatory work.



Our barristers have been recently instructed in cases in the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal, together with the Grand Cayman Appeal Court.

We have our main office in Birmingham, with another smaller but very busy office in Leeds.

The statistics below show just how strong a set we are.

We have 17 King's Counsel and 140+ junior barristers, with barristers ranked as Band 1 in 15 practice areas in the Chambers & Partners guide, and barristers in the 'Leading Silks', 'Leading Juniors' and 'Rising Stars' categories of 15 practice areas in the Legal 500 guide.

Our barristers have been recently instructed in cases in the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal, together with the Grand Cayman Appeal Court, the International Criminal Court as well as historic work on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

In the past 20 years, we have had an ex-members of chambers sitting as a Court of Appeal Judge, 4 as High Court Judges or Deputy Judges, 31 as Circuit Judges or Recorders, 6 as District Judges or Deputies, 8 as Tribunal Judges, 1 Chancellor of the Diocese of Coventry and 1 Chancellor of the Diocese of Lichfield. Members of chambers have acted as Attorney General of the Cayman Islands and of the Falkland Islands.

In addition, we have members of chambers and staff on the board of the Birmingham Law Society and on the committees of the Birmingham Law Society, Birmingham Solicitors' Group, Birmingham Pro Bono Committee, the Bar Council's Retention Panel, and the Bar Council's Equality, Diversity and Social Mobility Committee. We are also represented within the Birmingham Black Lawyers Association, Midlands Society of Asian Lawyers, Worcestershire Law Society, the Legal Practice Management Association, and the Institute of Barristers' Clerks.

We were one of the first chambers in the country to achieve the Bar Council's Wellbeing Certificate, and are signatories of the Women in Law Pledge, Wellbeing of Women Menopause Pledge and Advocate's Chambers Pro Bono Framework.

Our clerks are variously described in the legal directories as:

"The clerking is brilliant, absolutely on top of their game."

"Clerks are responsive and collaborative. They ensure to search out feedback and ensure instructions are dealt with promptly."

"The clerks of St Philips are always keen to help and assist in finding counsel, agreeing fees and also liaising with the court where the strength of their relationships can prove invaluable."

"I have worked with clerks up and down the country. This set is head and shoulders above the rest."

"Clerks are excellent... always efficient and diligent in engagements."

We continue to be the first and only choice for top-tier instructing solicitors in all of our practice areas. We have not sat on our laurels: we have invested heavily in our buildings, which are entirely set up as remote courtroom and conference facilities, and which regularly host events run by chambers and outside organisations; we continue to attract the best talent by the recruitment of established practitioners, and through our rigorous pupillage application process (you can read the report on the 2023 process [here](#)).

Chambers goes far above and beyond the minimum requirements for equality, diversity and inclusion. We are committed to the creation of a diverse Bar which represents wider society, and each year we take students from the Bar Council's flagship social mobility programme, the Bar Placement Scheme. We were one of the first sets in the country to obtain a Certificate of Recognition from the Bar Council in recognition of the work of our Wellbeing Committee; we have signed up to the 10,000 Black Interns programme, and have published its own Anti-Racist Statement. We have dedicated Equality and Diversity Officers, who are embedded into the decision-making processes at board level, and we have modern and meaningful policies on tackling bullying and harassment.



What we do

Within each of our separate practice areas, we do a vast range of work, all of which is available to you as you progress in your career here.



Our barristers are regularly involved in numerous high-profile cases, and at every level from Supreme Court to first instance.

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In Business & Property work, we undertake a huge range of high-value and complex commercial and chancery litigation, including all aspects of contract and tort, real property, fraud, insolvency and restructuring, company and partnership, trusts and probate, banking, professional negligence, and restraint of trade. Several members of chambers also undertake intellectual property dispute work, and arbitrations. Members of chambers are in courts all over the country, undertaking well-publicised cases of significance at all levels, including the Supreme Court and Privy Council, with many opportunities to be led in the early years of practice.

Within our ever-expanding Crime team, we are instructed to prosecute and defend homicides, serious sexual offences, money laundering and POCA proceedings, terrorism, white collar crime and motor offences, many of which are items of national news. The team works closely with the regulatory team, which prosecutes and defends some of the most serious cases involving environmental, health and safety, trading standards, VAT and excise, animal welfare and licensing matters. We have members of chambers who act in International War Crimes Tribunals, and who sit on the Court of Arbitration for Sport and the UK Athletics Disciplinary Tribunal.

In our Family team, as one of the largest groups of family law barristers in the country, we act for parents, children, Local Authorities and extended family members at all levels of public law work, including in complex cases such as those involving non-accidental injury to children, parents with learning difficulties or disabilities or where parents lack capacity.



The individual barrister profiles on the St Philips Chambers website show that even those practitioners at the start of their careers are given fantastic opportunities far beyond what one would ordinarily expect in the early years.

In private children law, members of chambers act for parents and children in matters at all levels including those involving allegations of domestic abuse and parental alienation. Members of the team act for parties in Injunctive Applications such as for Non Molestation and Occupation Orders. We have a renowned team in the field of ancillary relief (often for high net-worth individuals) including in high-value TOLATA claims.

Our Employment team represent claimants and respondents in Employment Tribunals on a nationwide basis, including in unfair and wrongful dismissal claims; collective consultation and TUPE disputes; and discrimination, equal pay and whistleblowing claims. Members frequently appear in the Employment Appeal Tribunal, with cases also going on to the Court of Appeal. Members also appear in the High Court in employment-related civil litigation, such as restraint of trade disputes, industrial action disputes, and claims for breach of contract including for enhanced redundancy payments and arising from job evaluation exercises. Our Personal Injury/Clinical Negligence team covers a range of work including road traffic accidents including motor fraud and credit hire, travel and holiday claims, industrial injuries, clinical negligence cases, and inquests. Senior members are regularly instructed in catastrophic injuries. The team receives instructions from national solicitors' firms and insurance companies from across the country.

As a marker of how confident we are in our junior tenants, the individual barrister profiles on the St Philips Chambers website show that even those practitioners at the start of their careers are given fantastic opportunities far beyond what one would ordinarily expect in the early years, both as led juniors and as sole counsel.

What our pupillage looks like

We offer a 12-month pupillage, split into a first Six which is spent shadowing your supervisors, and a second Six in which you are on your feet conducting your own work (though still under a more hands-off supervision).



We are very careful about picking pupil supervisors, and we ensure that who we select will have a track record of high-quality and constructive supervision experience.

The Pupillage Committee decides whether to recommend you for tenancy in your final month, and the rest of chambers undertakes a voting procedure thereafter.

We have set out the current format of the pupillage application process in our most recent report (which concluded in May 2023), and you can find all the details [here](#). In short, it comprises a paper application, a short first-round interview, followed by a second round interview with (a) a detailed legal problem at the second-round stage, and (b) a more general interview based on your CV and application.

We are very careful about picking pupil supervisors, and we ensure that who we select will have a track record of high-quality and constructive supervision experience. You will be allocated a main supervisor for the first 3 months, you will spend a month each with two other sub-supervisors in narrower specialisms of work, and the final month is spent shadowing the junior tenants to see what work you will be undertaking from month 7 onwards. So, for example, a pupillage could look like this:

- October-December: main supervisor;
- January: sub-supervisor 1, alternative sub-area of work;
- February: sub-supervisor 2, a further alternative sub-area of work;
- March: shadowing junior tenants;
- April-September: second Six, carrying out your own work.

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In the second six, when you will be undertaking your own work, you are guaranteed to bill at least £25,000, and chambers commits to underwrite this figure in the highly unlikely event of a shortfall.

We offer one of the highest pupillages award outside London, comprising the following:

- You will receive an award of £25,000 to cover the first six and the start of your second six, which is treated as being a non-taxable educational grant;
- In the second six, when you will be undertaking your own work, you are guaranteed to bill at least £25,000, and chambers commits to underwrite this figure in the highly unlikely event of a shortfall.

The Pupillage Committee reviews the pupils every 3 months, and each supervisor collaborates with the pupil to produce a report setting out achievements and targets. The pupil is assessed against a number of criteria as either 'meeting expectations', 'needs some support' or 'needs significant support'. The reviews are designed to be conversations, not examinations, and the Committee's job is to give the pupil all the tools they need to succeed, not just in pupillage but in junior practice. Where issues are identified, they are dealt with early on, and our impeccable track record for progressing pupils through to tenancy speaks for itself.



What makes a pupillage here distinctive

Everyone has heard horror stories about pupillages – you won't hear any from St Philips.




We do place value on the pupils being good citizens and strong all-rounders: people who can do their best in court.

We have a supportive and encouraging ethos, and we see you as treasured investments rather than 'cannon fodder'.

- We are absolutely committed treating our pupils like legal professionals who are worthy of respect. Harassment, bullying and exploitation are not tolerated, and we seek to integrate pupils into chambers life from the outset.
- We only take as many pupils as we have tenancy spots available. There is no pupil taken on without a tenancy identified for them. This means that a pupil's competition is only with themselves, and they are only compared to the ceiling of their own potential (if, indeed, there is a ceiling).
- We have a strong emphasis on 'in person' supervision for at least 4 days of every week, which is the best form of learning. A thriving professional and social scene is important at all levels of seniority, but in particular the early years – we do everything we can to encourage and facilitate that.
- We see issues early, and deal with them in a fair and supportive manner long before the tenancy vote. We want the pupils to succeed, and we give them all the tools to do so. There are no nasty surprises in store.
- The review meetings are a two-way conversation, where the pupil tells us how they are dealing with matters and what they need from us, and where we give them the guidance and encouragement they need.

- Chambers has a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. We have a modern building designed to encourage connection and friendship between colleagues, and there are no stiff rules of etiquette or archaic traditions to put you on edge.
- We place no value on long hours or constant pressure; we allow our pupils to develop as quickly as their talent allows, but which doesn't push them to breaking point. A pupillage is structured and logical, not a test of stamina.
- We do place value on the pupils being good citizens and strong all-rounders: people who can do their best in court, who learn well, who want to be an active part of chambers life both professionally and socially, and who use their skills to better those around them.





Our primary focus is
to get you into court
from the first day.

What about London?

We have many junior tenants who have either worked or lived in London, or who turned down tenancy offers in London to come to Birmingham.

For those wondering what the difference is between a practice in Birmingham and London, we think they are the following:



The Midlands has an abundance of high-quality work, and many of the larger solicitors' firms in the country have major offices (or headquarters) in the region.

- An infinitely better work/life balance, and a much lower cost of living. If you've never visited Birmingham or its surrounding areas, you will be amazed at its rich array of entertainment and retail, sports and events, arts and culture, beautiful and varied residential areas, and abundant green spaces; all of this just 90 minutes from London and for a fraction of the price.
- Courtroom advocacy from the outset. Many junior tenants in London will work on high-quality cases during their second Six and early tenancy, but very often as a led junior; at St Philips, there are plenty of opportunities to be led, but our primary focus is to get you into court from the first day. That is presumably why you wanted to be a barrister, isn't it?
- A chance to progress quicker. The Midlands has an abundance of high-quality work, and many of the larger solicitors' firms in the country have major offices (or headquarters) in the region; junior tenants here are often trusted with sole instructions on bigger work quicker than they would be in London.
- A genuine camaraderie. The Midlands Circuit is one of the friendliest in the country, and in every robing room or court waiting room (or on the end of a phone) you will find someone you know and who is prepared to help you with any question, big or small. That same familiarity goes for the court staff and Judges who you see frequently.

What happens at the end of pupillage

In the final review meeting, the Pupillage Committee decides whether to recommend a pupil for tenancy – that is the overwhelming outcome of our pupillages over the recent past.



The pupil is then a tenant in chambers, and will be expected to remain within their chosen specialist area of work for at least 3 years post-tenancy.

That recommendation is then made to the whole of chambers, and the members of chambers are taken to adopt that recommendation unless at least 8 members object to it; in those circumstances, there is a full chambers meeting, where a majority vote is taken. That procedure has never yet been invoked, as members of chambers trust the Pupillage Committee's judgement, and have seen for themselves the quality of junior tenants who have been recruited.

The pupil is then a tenant in chambers, and will be expected to remain within their chosen specialist area of work for at least 3 years post-tenancy. By that point, we expect that they will have begun to establish a strong practice in their desired areas, and to take a full role in chambers life.





St Philip's

The Pupillage Committee decides whether to recommend a pupil for tenancy.

How to maximise your chances

We would strongly recommend reading the Pupillage Committee report from the previous year, available on the 'Pupillage' section of the St Philips Chambers website ([available here](#)).



We encourage any potential applicants to gain as diverse work experience as they can, to take every opportunity to undertake mooting or public speaking exercises, to carry out pro bono work, and to make meaningful connections with members of the legal profession.

The report will set out the format of the application, how it is marked, what attributes successful candidates had and what were common pitfalls for unsuccessful candidates, and some other helpful hints to help you do yourself justice in your application.

In the meantime, we encourage any potential applicants to gain as diverse work experience as they can, to take every opportunity to undertake mooting or public speaking exercises, to carry out pro bono work, and to make meaningful connections with members of the legal profession – that can be done by attending events at the Inns of Court, asking your Inn to match you with a mentor, or simply speaking to barristers at talks and social events and following up with them afterwards. If you do all of that, and take a genuine interest in your specialism in the months leading up to your application, your efforts will shine through. We recruit on the basis of merit, not social status or family connections, and our process tends to lead to the recruitment of excellent candidates of all backgrounds and experience.

If you would like to experience what life at St Philips Chambers is like, we would encourage you to look at the website for details on how to apply for a mini-pupillage. Alternatively, if you have any questions, please contact pupillage@st-philips.com and we will aim to get back to you with an answer as quickly as possible. Otherwise, we hope that this guide has been helpful, and we look forward to meeting you in the future.

What our former pupils say



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Pupillage at St Philips helped significantly in developing a strong practice made up of the highest quality work as I moved into life as a self-employed tenant. Doing a specialist Criminal and Regulatory pupillage meant that all of my experience was focussed on the areas which I wanted to work in from the get-go. The specialist process lets you gain the experience you want at a quicker rate than other sets, and makes you stand out with instructing solicitors as a real expert in your area of law. The work opportunities arising from this continue for me years after my pupillage finished.

Building a busy work practice at St Philips highlighted another huge positive – the social scene within chambers and the importance chambers' places on work-life-balance. Year after year St Philips take on more pupils than any other set in the Midlands, and regularly recruit junior tenants on top of that. The sheer size of the junior end creates a collegiate atmosphere with plenty of opportunities to make friends as well as colleagues, and means there is always somebody around to bounce ideas off, ask for help or take some time out from work with.

Matthew Cullen (2018 call)





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I was thoroughly supported throughout the entirety of my pupillage by both my pupil supervisor and Chambers as a whole. I was set a series of written and oral advocacy tasks, where the focus was always on improvement and development, which I found especially useful as I approached my second six. My supervisor was always available to offer guidance and advice (and in fact still is when it is needed!).

Every member of chambers, from the most senior to the most junior, were approachable and kind. There was no such thing as a stupid question, and I felt that I could properly air my thoughts and views on a particular legal issue/topic without fear of judgement. Similarly, I felt that I was treated like a member of chambers before I actually became one. Chambers hosted regular review meetings, which allowed me to take stock of progress made, but also look at what I needed to do in the future to succeed.

Anybody that obtains pupillage at St Philips will soon realise that we are a friendly, down to earth set with an “open door policy” – any member that you come across will go out of their way to help and assist you. I am perhaps a bit biased given that Birmingham is my hometown – but I think that it is a fantastic city to live and work in and the Birmingham bar has a sense of camaraderie that is second to none.”

Ryan Hodgins (2019 call)



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In my first six I spent time with each of my supervisors who specialise in different areas of Business & Property work; I liked this structure because my training was focussed in areas that my supervisors were specialists in, and I saw how each specialism encompasses a variety of skills and knowledge which can overlap with each other. I also completed written work for each supervisor and completed advocacy exercises, including conducting a mock small claims trial - I felt that I was thoroughly prepared for second six.

In my second six I was in court at least 3-4 times a week on a range of hearings, plus written work, which included more complex work - a challenging but rewarding experience. The beauty of second six life at St Philips Chambers is that you are thrown at the deep end but with all the tools you need to swim! My supervisors were always at the end of a telephone call when I needed help with a case or there was always someone in Chambers I could talk to. The clerks are understanding and supportive but also encouraging when it comes to being ready for a challenge.

During pupillage generally, I was invited to chambers' social events and to networking events with clients, and I was also asked to participate in the annual Insolvency Conference. Members of the group were always hands on with giving advice in relation to managing my diary and the administrative aspect of self-employed life. I really felt like a part of the Business and Property team.

From a social aspect, Chambers' atmosphere is down to earth and super supportive. Whether you are passing a member of staff or barrister in the corridors, you will always be greeted with a friendly smile and a "hello". We also have a tasteful social room where you can spend your lunchtime, make a brew or catch up with a colleague.

I would highly recommend St Philips Chambers to any candidate wishing to join - pupillage here is not just about "shadowing" but about rolling up your sleeves and being prepared to challenge yourself, and apply yourself practically to the realities of what working as a self-employed barrister brings.

Amanprit Kaur (2021 call)



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I really enjoyed my pupillage at St Philips, and believe that the process set me up well for developing my own practice in my second six and as a junior tenant. Something which really struck me about St Philips, right from the start of my pupillage, was how supportive and approachable members of Chambers were. I am pleased to say that this is still the case a few years down the line, from junior members right through to those that are much more senior.

Being able to call on other members of Chambers for support is something which I have found invaluable and was particularly important in the early days of being 'on my feet', when you frequently come across factual scenarios or practical and legal problems which are new to you, and sometimes at very short notice.

The family clerks at St Philips are, in my view, a particularly brilliant clerking team, whether that is through assisting with tailoring your practice towards the areas that interest you or resolving the inevitable last-minute hiccups to the diary. They are a standout feature of practicing here!

Anna Peaston (2017 call)



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For me, one of the particularly helpful aspects of having undertaken a pupillage at St Philips is the approachable attitude of both the junior and senior members of chambers. The friendly culture within chambers meant that I was readily able to speak to senior members, both about their work and to assist me with my own cases. I found that this enabled me to not only develop professional relationships with senior members of chambers whom I could ask for help whenever I needed but it also allowed me to have a much greater exposure to complex cases at a much more junior level. The senior members of chambers regularly go out of their way to get to know the current pupils which in turn enables junior members to feel more confident in contacting them for assistance. The clerking team have always been incredibly supportive, they are extremely equitable in assigning cases which enables pupils and junior members to undertake more challenging work at an earlier stage. The clerks are all approachable and personable, they have always made me comfortable such that I have felt able to speak with them when required about personal circumstances that have necessitated changes in my work diary, they always work flexibly including with pupils to ensure that you feel supported and confident with the work you are undertaking.

Beth Armitage (2019 call)





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