

Guidance Notes

AUTUMN 2023

Guidance Notes to Application Form 2023-2024

Thank you for considering making an application to Blackstone Chambers. These guidance notes provide you with information about the way in which we decide which candidates will be offered an assessed mini-pupillage. The assessed mini-pupillage is one of the key stages in the pupillage application process at Blackstone. These notes are intended to help you to complete your application form in a way which provides us with the information we need and gives you the best possible chance of having an assessed mini-pupillage with us.

Application forms are anonymised and we also use the Gateway's scheme for redacting information, including information about academic institutions and personal details. Your application form will be assessed by one or more members of our pupillage committee. Their focus will be on the evidence contained in your application form of your academic achievements; your analytical abilities; your communication and advocacy skills; your motivation for a career at the Bar, and at Blackstone Chambers in particular; and your resilience and determination.

Candidates will be assessed against the selection criteria and the top 40-50 candidates invited to attend an assessed mini-pupillage. If your application is rated amongst the top 40-50 candidates and you have previously completed an assessed mini-pupillage at Blackstone Chambers the pupillage committee will consider any evidence of how your application may have improved, before deciding whether you should be invited to complete another assessed mini-pupillage.

We are looking for candidates of exceptionally high academic ability. We consider past academic performance at degree level to be a good indicator of academic ability and generally require as a minimum that candidates have either obtained a first-class undergraduate degree; or obtained a 2:1 and a distinction (or equivalent) at post graduate level. (We treat the GDL and accelerated (2 year) law degrees as a postgraduate degree in this context.) However, we make exceptions for candidates identified by the Rare Contextual Recruitment System as having significant potential. We also make exceptions for candidates who can demonstrate that there were exceptional circumstances (for example relating to health) which led to their receiving a lower overall grade than they otherwise would have done; and those whose applications contain other evidence of exceptional academic ability. We do not treat degrees provided by any particular universities, or any particular degree subjects, as being superior to any other. This is why we redact "institution" before assessing your application.

We do not consider A level or GCSE results (except inasmuch as they are taken into account by the Rare system).

Please make sure that you provide us, on your application form, with your overall degree mark/grade, as well as the breakdown for individual subjects. If you have a postgraduate degree please tell us what grade you achieved; if is awarded only on a pass/fail basis, please tell us whether you consider that you received the equivalent of a pass/merit/distinction and on what basis you consider that to be the case. If your degree or postgraduate degree is from an overseas university, please tell us what you consider the UK equivalent degree grade to be, and on what basis. If you are in your third year of university working towards an undergraduate degree and would like us to rely on predicted grades, or if you would like us to take into account a predicted grade at post-graduate level, you will need to provide supporting evidence of that predicted grade, such as marks achieved to date, or other evidence from your university.

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If you are inviting us to take account of any exceptional circumstances, please explain the effect those circumstances had on your overall grade and provide us with any supporting evidence such as mark transcripts showing that your grades were affected.

Please do provide as much information as you can about your academic achievements. The more evidence we have of high academic achievement, the better your chance of being invited for mini-pupillage.

Please also consider very carefully the importance of providing contextual information to us and giving your consent for that information to be shared through the Rare Contextual Recruitment System. We use Rare in order to help us level the playing field and identify potential in candidates from less advantaged backgrounds. So, if you do not provide the contextual information requested and provide consent for it to be shared with Rare, we may not be able to take that information into account in assessing your application.

Our chambers puts great emphasis on high quality written and oral advocacy. Your application form is your opportunity to demonstrate your persuasive written communication skills and tell us about your oral communication. Think carefully about your answers to the questions we have asked. Make sure that all of your answers are well structured; clear; and persuasive. When telling

us what you think demonstrates that you would be a good advocate, examples of advocacy and communication skills might include mooting, representing clients through FRU or legal advice centres, or non-legal such as debating or advocating for a particular cause on behalf of an interest group, or in a work environment. We do not expect applicants to have experience of all of these – we are interested in hearing about examples which demonstrate effective advocacy and communication.

Overall, we are looking for evidence of skills and interests which are relevant to a career as a barrister generally, and to our chambers in particular. We appreciate that not all candidates will have had the same opportunities to gain legal work experience. What we are looking for is evidence of your interest in and aptitude for a career in the law. If there are particular reasons why you have been unable to get legal work experience (such as mini-pupillages) we will consider them when assessing your application so please do tell us about them. We also consider that non-legal experience is important so please do tell us about any work experience, or other relevant experience, you have and think carefully about the way in which experience outside the law might be relevant when considering your answers to the questions we have asked. You may, for example, have had to deal with vulnerable people, or difficult customers; you may have advocated on behalf of particular individuals/groups. All of this experience is relevant, in whatever context you have gained it, and we want to hear about it. We are also interested in legal and non-legal experience that you may have arranged, but not yet completed at the time that you apply.

Before completing your application form please carefully consider our selection criteria and present your evidence in a way which demonstrates how you satisfy those criteria which we assess by reference to the form.