



serle court

pupillage

Information for 2023 applicants



“Serle Court is a friendly, inclusive chambers which welcomes excellent advocates and thinkers from all backgrounds.”

Elizabeth Jones KC
Head of Chambers



At Serle Court, we regard the recruitment and training of pupils as being of the utmost importance. Our pupils are our future tenants, and we want to ensure that Serle Court can continue to provide excellent service to its clients. We welcome applicants from all backgrounds.

This brochure includes information for those who seek pupillage commencing in October 2024. We set out our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusivity, what we look for in applicants, how our pupillage application process works and what we offer. Some of our junior tenants also give an insight into their experience of pupillage with us.

If you have any further questions and would like to speak to someone, you can find contact details on the last page.

Zoe O'Sullivan KC
Chair of the Pupillage Committee

Who we are

Serle Court provides a wide range of services across the spectrum of commercial & chancery law, including civil fraud, commercial litigation, company, insolvency, international and offshore, partnership and LLPs, private client, trusts and probate, property, mediation and arbitration.

We are acknowledged as *'one of the very best commercial chancery sets, and one of the few that genuinely competes in both traditional chancery and commercial litigation.'* - Chambers and Partners.

We are recognised as one of the top sets at the English Bar, and currently comprise 74 barristers including 27 silks. Serle Court is regularly recognised in the legal directories, where it is recommended in all its core practice areas.

What we are looking for

Serle Court looks for highly motivated individuals with outstanding analytical ability, a practical approach, sound judgment, an ability to develop good client relationships and the potential to become an excellent advocate. Serle Court has a reputation for *'consistent high quality'* and members who are *'highly intelligent, user-friendly, approachable and supportive'* and seeks these qualities in its pupils.

Chambers generally requires a degree classification of a good 2:1 as a minimum. We aim to recruit 3 pupils each year with a view to offering tenancies to all who meet our standards.

Funding

Funding for your legal training and pupillage can come from two main sources: a Pupillage Award from chambers, and scholarships from the Inns of Court.

Most Inns of Court scholarships are means-tested, so that the largest scholarships go to those in the greatest financial need. More detail on the Inns scholarships can be found on the Bar Council website¹. There are scholarships to cover both the PGDL and the Bar Course. For example, Lincoln's Inn now awards up to £12,000 for the PGDL and up to £25,000 for the Bar Course².

The Serle Court Pupillage Award is £75,000, and up to £25,000 of that can be drawn down during the preceding year, in addition to any Inns scholarship you may receive. Thus, an incoming Serle Court pupil who also receives an Inns scholarship will receive funding comparable to that offered by City law firms for the vocational year. A Pupillage Award is tax-free in respect of the first six months, making the post-tax value of the Pupillage Award substantially higher than an equivalent salary.

At Serle Court, a pupil can presume they will be taken on if they meet our training standards. Later on in this brochure, we explain the earnings a new tenant can aspire to in the early years of practice.

¹ <https://www.barcouncil.org.uk/becoming-a-barrister/students-and-graduates/student-funding-and-scholarships.html>
² <https://www.lincolnsinn.org.uk/scholarships-prizes>

Application and Selection Process

Serle Court participates in the Bar Council online centralised application scheme, the Pupillage Gateway. Every application for pupillage at Serle Court must be made through the Gateway and within its timetable.

Once the deadline has been reached, all applications are anonymised, reviewed separately by at least 2 members of chambers, and assessed in accordance with our selection criteria. In the past, this process has led to about 30 candidates being invited to a first interview of about 35 minutes conducted by panels of 3 members of chambers. This year, to assist with improving diverse outcomes through our recruitment process, we are also trialling a short online situational judgment multiple choice test, created by business psychology consultants who are assisting us with optimising the diversity of our recruitment. We intend to invite all applicants to sit this test, and there will be further first round interviews available for candidates who do particularly well on the test who did not make it through the manual sift. No-one will lose out by sitting the test this year, as it is a trial year, but some may gain!

From those candidates interviewed in the first round, around ten will be invited to a second interview. The second interview is also conducted by a panel of three members of chambers. These interviews will centre upon a mock client conference. Candidates will be given 40 minutes to consider a short problem question and prepare to deliver advice in a

conference to members of chambers playing the role of clients/solicitors. The mock client conference itself will last around 30 minutes. The overall interview will be a little longer so that we can give candidates a chance to have a good look at us, too!

Please note that neither interview is intended to assess candidates' legal knowledge, and the questions are designed to be capable of being answered just as well by someone with one term of legal education as by someone who has completed a whole law degree.

Rare

Serle Court is supported by the Rare Contextual Recruitment System in the pupillage process. For more information about Rare, please visit their website: <https://contextualrecruitment.co.uk/>

Life as a pupil at Serle Court

How pupillage is structured

As a pupil at Serle Court, you sit with four supervisors, each for a period of three months, and a real effort is made to have supervisors from each of Serle Court's practice areas, including general commercial litigation, civil fraud, traditional chancery and domestic trusts. One of the best aspects of Serle Court is its breadth of practice areas, but that was also very challenging – one day I would be focused on a freezing order in a commercial case, and the next I would be researching law from an offshore jurisdiction for a trusts case. As well as doing work for your supervisors, once you are settled in you can begin to do work for other members of chambers, which is a good way of getting to know them and of experiencing more specialist practice areas. However, your supervisor tends to act as a gatekeeper, which stops you from feeling overworked.

Pupillage hours are genuinely 9am–6pm at Serle Court; although I sometimes chose to stay later, that was, and felt, entirely voluntary.

The type of work you do as a pupil

I was very fortunate to experience three trials as a pupil at Serle Court, all concerning very different areas of law: one was a six week Chancery Division trial concerning breach of directors' duties with multiple defendants

(which meant that my supervisor, and I, ended up working closely with barristers from other sets who were representing those defendants).

Another was a fraud trial being run in parallel to a criminal investigation into the same defendant, and the last was about knowledge and approval of a will, in which one of the central factual issues was whether the testator could speak English. I really enjoyed assisting with drafting submissions and cross examination notes.

Experiencing trials meant that I was mainly focused on "live" work, but that was also a general feature of pupillage. Working on live files meant I was able to compare my final product with my supervisor's, and get a good sense of how long they took to complete the same piece of work. The only time I worked on "dead" files was in my last few weeks of pupillage, where my supervisor checked whether there was anything I hadn't done, and got me to practise drafting particular types of documents. One of the documents was a settlement agreement, and I was very relieved I had done that when I found myself drafting one late at night in a mediation a couple of months into tenancy.

Atmosphere

While pupillage at Serle Court is demanding, members genuinely try to make it as stress-free as possible. Pupils are not in competition with each other; my two co-pupils both got taken on alongside me, and we are good friends. Assessment of pupils is less formal than at other sets; in my pupillage there was one formal advocacy exercise and one written pupil exercise that all the pupils did (neither of which was treated as a competition!), but otherwise the focus is on supervisor feedback. Members of chambers were very welcoming to us, and we were invited to all chambers events.

Stephanie Thompson
Pupil 2017–2018



Life as a pupil at Serle Court

The type of work

Even though I had a sense of what a commercial chancery practice entailed before I started pupillage, I was still (pleasantly) surprised by the breadth of work that chambers did. In effect, 'commercial chancery' – to Serle Court at least – comprised a spectrum with 'pure commercial' work at one end, 'traditional chancery' at the other, and everything in between. For example, one week I would be drafting submissions for a dispute that followed the fallout of an M&A deal; and the next I would draft a skeleton for a trusts and estates dispute. (The quality of the work was not affected by this range – all across that commercial chancery spectrum, my supervisors were often up against chambers that were in the top tiers for that kind of work).

This variety is especially valuable during pupillage as this provided plenty of opportunities to see and learn different types of advocacy – as well as keeping things interesting.

The pieces of work I did were equally varied. My supervisors made sure that I had a good diet of the bread and butter work (opinions, pleadings and skeletons). However, I also got to try out other, less traditional, pieces too. This included letters before claim; cross-examination notes; submissions to an expert accountant; and mock conferences.

pupillage

The vast majority – almost the entirety – of what I did during pupillage was on 'live' work. I found this very satisfying. Supervisors were always genuinely interested in my input and it was rewarding to see the fruits of my work go before a judge or client. This did present its own challenges: deadlines were often tight. But, in turn, this gave me a good feel for the pace of practice.

The structure of pupillage

I sat with 4 different supervisors, each for 3 months. My hours were very respectable and regular: 9am to 6pm. Although, there were inevitably some exceptions to this, this was a result of helping with urgent deadlines. There were two formal assessments (an opinion and an advocacy assessment), pupillage at Serle Court is more informal in the sense that the tenancy decision is predominantly based on the feedback from your supervisors. There was no risk of being left in the dark as to how I was doing though. In addition to appraisals after sitting with each supervisor, I would often be told whether each piece of work I did was up to the standard expected. This was very much appreciated so I properly knew where I stood.

From the very first day, it was impressed upon me and my co-pupil that there was enough space for both of us if we met the requisite standard. There was therefore no sense of competition – which meant that we could be each other's sounding board during difficult times.

The atmosphere in Chambers

Pupillage is undoubtedly a demanding experience but everyone at chambers was supportive and friendly. Following accepting my offer, chambers organised celebration drinks. I was particularly impressed by the fact that a wide range of members attended these: from junior juniors to silks. It seemed like lots of people from chambers were genuinely interested in pupils and getting to know them. Between my offer and starting, I was invited to events in Chambers so that I had the opportunity to meet people before I joined. On my first day, a number of members stopped by to introduce themselves. Then, welcome drinks a few weeks into pupillage were also well attended – with the clerks coming in order to meet us properly. As to this, it was noticeable how strong the relationship between the barristers and clerks was in chambers.

When I was applying for pupillage, I would often read sets describe their work as varied and the atmosphere as friendly and collegiate. These are things you often hear. I feel that my pupillage at Serle Court demonstrated this concretely.

Tim Benham-Mirando
Pupil 2019-2020



Life as a pupil at Serle Court

A year of training

During pupillage I was constantly (and pleasantly) reminded that it was a year of training. I remember being quite surprised in my first few months by the number of barristers at Serle Court who would refer to 'when' I joined chambers, rather than 'if'.

Pupillage is of course challenging, and many times I did not see attaining tenancy as a 'when', but definitely an 'if'. However, the confidence members of chambers had in Serle Court's training process, and the confidence they had in me, made a great difference.

I received feedback on every piece of work I submitted and undertook two oral advocacy training exercises. The first being a mock summary judgment application, and the second being a mock trial which involved witness handling. I received really helpful feedback in both exercises and also found them very fun!

Range of work

Over the year I had four supervisors – each for three months. This allowed me to see a range of work, as each supervisor had different specialisms – such as company law, probate or intellectual property. Seeing a range of work is really important. When you start pupillage you often don't really know what you want to do (and even if you do that might dramatically change later). For me, it was great to get an opportunity to do intellectual property – an area of law which

I had neither studied nor any prior interest in - but am now determined to practise in.

During the year you will also do lots of work for other members of chambers. I found this a great way to get to know other barristers and see practice areas outside those which your supervisors specialise in. I was able to assist a number of more junior barristers which gave me an insight into the type of work I would be doing in the not too distant future. Work from other members of chambers comes via your supervisor and I always found that my supervisors were very protective and ensured that I never had too much on my plate.

Diversity and Inclusivity

During my first few months I noticed that my experience of pupillage was very male dominated. I mentioned that I would appreciate working with more women. My request was immediately acted upon. I was assigned a female mentor and also a female supervisor for the following seat. This response was uplifting. From that point onwards I met a lot more women in Chambers and now have an abundance of role models. I am very grateful to be at Serle Court, a set which, in my view, has a genuine commitment to issues of diversity and inclusivity.

Niamh Herrett
Pupil 2021-2022



What to expect during pupillage

Each pupil will spend a 12-month period shadowing four members of chambers, which enables pupils to be exposed to a range of practice areas. By shadowing members of chambers, rather than taking on work in their name, each pupil is as well-qualified and confident as possible before starting practice. During the year, pupils do not get the opportunity to undertake advocacy in court; however, we ensure that advocacy exercises, conducted in front of a senior member of chambers, and other assessments designed to improve practical skills, take place. Supervisors provide frequent and relevant feedback and monitor pupils' progress to ensure that the work they are given fulfils their training needs.

We want to make pupils feel a part of chambers from the time that they accept their offers of pupillage. They are invited to chambers events, both formal and informal, and are encouraged to get to know both members and staff.

Tenancy at Serle Court

Serle Court strives to live up to its reputation as a *'definite go-to chambers'* (Chambers and Partners), but we also believe it is important to have a balanced life. Tenants can choose their own working hours and strategic approach to their practice, and will work alongside the clerks to achieve this. Our clerks are highly recommended in the legal directories, with clients stating, *'it's an absolute breeze to instruct them – the clerks are*

really responsive and good, very available and respond quickly' (Chambers and Partners).

Our clerks adopt a flexible and sensitive approach working with our barristers to assist them in building the practice they desire. However, new tenants can usually expect to earn in excess of £100,000 in their first year.

Also, new tenants at Serle Court pay no rent in their first year of practice, and no chambers expenses until their earnings exceed £60,000 per annum. We provide an income guarantee worth up to £120,000 over the first two years of practice (but no new tenant has ever earned less than the guaranteed amount over that period).

Mini-Pupillage

Mini-pupillage at Serle Court is designed to be an enjoyable and useful experience. Our mini-pupils experience various aspects of life as a practising barrister and gain first-hand experience of our informal and friendly atmosphere. Mini-pupillages last for one day and are unfunded, but we will reimburse your expenses in attending. Nor are mini-pupillages formally assessed, though we encourage prospective pupils to undertake a mini-pupillage with us prior to making their application.

We offer mini-pupillages each year to individuals who have completed the first year of a law degree or at least one term of the GDL or equivalent. Please note that they are heavily oversubscribed. In view of the demand for mini-pupillages at Serle Court, we have recently revised our mini-pupillage process. Further details can be found on our website.

Applications for mini-pupillage should be made on the Serle Court application form, which can be found here: <https://www.serlecourt.co.uk/join-us/mini-pupillage>

We particularly encourage applications from women, LGBTQ+, people from ethnic minority communities, and disabled candidates as well as candidates from other underrepresented groups in the legal sector.

Applications must be addressed to April Fisher and can be submitted via email to: pupillage@serlecourt.co.uk, or by post to 6 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, London, WC2A 3QS.

Reserved Mini-Pupillages

Three of our mini-pupillages are reserved for applicants from groups that are underrepresented at the bar. You are eligible to apply for a reserved mini-pupillage if you went to a non fee-paying secondary school and:

- You are black, or of mixed black heritage; or
- Neither of your parents went to university; or
- Anyone in your immediate family has received state benefits at any point; or
- You were ever eligible for free school meals; or
- You have been in care; or
- You have caring responsibilities; or
- You have refugee status.

Applications have closed for the reserved mini-pupillage scheme in 2023.

Recipients of reserved mini-pupillages will be guaranteed a first round interview should they apply for pupillage in the recruitment cycle immediately following their mini-pupillage offer.

Facilities Support

Serle Court is located in one of the finest buildings in Lincoln's Inn. It is a spacious 17th century premises which has undergone extensive refurbishment, providing excellent facilities for members, clients and staff.

Chambers is headed by the Chambers Director, Kathryn Purkis, who was formerly a member of Chambers. Our clerking team is made up of 11 clerks, a fees clerk, and an operations team of 3, all of whom are consistently recognised for providing a *'good service and making things happen'* (Chambers and Partners).

Working alongside the clerks, we have a business development team of 3, a finance manager, extensive external IT support, a housekeeper, and a reception team who provide additional administrative support for our library. We have access to all the best online research facilities and all of our IT platforms are accessible remotely, enabling members to work from home, or indeed any location around the world.

Your personal data & GDPR

Serle Court holds and processes a wide range of data, some of which relates to the individuals who are applying for pupillage. All of the information that we obtain has been provided by you on your application, for example, by having given your contact details. Your details are anonymised before members of chambers see your application during the selection process, though naturally the pupillage administrator and Chambers Director see and have access to the full application. Once the first interview shortlist is compiled, those applications will be seen unredacted.

All applications that are not successful are destroyed at the end of the calendar year.



“Pupils and juniors are consistently very good. They appear to receive excellent training and are a glowing reflection on Serle Court”

Legal 500, 2023

List of all members of chambers

King's Counsel

Elizabeth Jones KC
 Patrick Talbot KC
 Kuldip Singh KC
 Paul Chaisty KC
 Dominic Dowley KC
 Conor Quigley KC
 Philip Marshall KC
 Philip Jones KC
 Lance Ashworth KC
 David Casement KC FCI Arb
 Christopher Stoner KC
 Michael Edenborough KC
 John Machell KC
 Hugh Norbury KC
 David Blayney KC
 Jonathan Adkin KC
 Rupert Reed KC
 Zoe O'Sullivan KC
 Andrew Moran KC
 Daniel Lightman KC
 Richard Wilson KC
 Prof. Jonathan Harris KC (Hon.)
 Dakis Hagen KC
 Constance McDonnell KC
 Justin Higgo KC
 Timothy Collingwood KC
 Giles Richardson KC

Juniors +10 Years

Julian Burling
 Andrew Francis
 William Henderson
 Beverly-Ann Rogers
 James Behrens
 Nicholas Harrison
 Andrew Bruce
 David Drake
 Thomas Braithwaite

Further Information

Pupillage Secretary

Dan McCourt Fritz

Mini-Pupillage Secretary

Tim Benham-Mirando

Pupillage Administrator

April Fisher

Simon Hattan
 James Brightwell
 Jennifer Haywood
 Ruth Jordan
 Jonathan Fowles
 Matthew Morrison
 Paul Johnson
 James Mather
 Dan McCourt Fritz
 Gareth Tilley
 James Weale
 Paul Adams
 Thomas Elias
 Jennifer Meech
 Sophie Holcombe
 Adil Mohamedbhai
 Jonathan McDonagh
 Emma Hargreaves
 Zahler Bryan
 Amy Proferes
 Prof. Suzanne Rab
 Adrian de Froment

Juniors –10 Years

Oliver Jones
 Stephanie Wickenden
 Eleni Dinenis
 Charlotte Beynon
 Gregor Hogan
 Mark Wraith
 Stephanie Thompson
 Jamie Randall
 Tim Benham-Mirando
 Max Marenbon
 John Eldridge
 Andrew Gurr
 George Vare
 Wilson Leung
 Niamh Herrett
 Stefano Theodoli-Braschi

For further information regarding pupillage or mini-pupillage, please contact us at:

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