

# Questions and Answers Pupillage Webinar

January 2024

We held our first Pupillage Webinars in November and December 2023 and this January and really enjoyed meeting all those attending. Many of those attending had questions, and we thought it would be helpful to put our answers to some of those questions onto our website, to add to the information that's already available in the Pupillage section of the webinar. We may update this list again before the Gateway closes, so do watch this space.

## HOW ARE GATEWAY APPLICATION FORMS ASSESSED?

### 1. How will academic achievements be assessed?

We assess candidates' academic achievements using a points system in which a candidate needs to achieve at least 8 points to be considered for a mini-pupillage, calculated as set out below. (Once we have established that a candidate has the requisite points for academic achievement, we go on to consider the other competencies we are looking at at this stage – analytical ability, communication/advocacy, motivation and resilience/determination.)

For academic achievement, we award points as follows:

Undergraduate degree - 1st – 8 points

Undergraduate degree 2:1 – 6 points

Undergraduate degree 2:2 – 4 points

Postgraduate degree 1st/Distinction – 2 points

OR

Undertaking postgraduate degree/completed postgraduate degree Pass/merit – 1 point

Extenuating circumstances affecting academic performance – up to 2 points

Evidence of exceptional academic ability – up to 2 points

Points awarded on the basis of the RARE contextual recruitment system identifying exceptional potential – up to 3 points

If you have done more than one undergraduate degree, we will look at the highest graded of these. Where you are working towards an undergraduate degree we will allocate marks on the basis of a predicted grade only where supporting evidence is provided, for example in the form of a mark transcript.

If you have done more than one postgraduate degree, we will look at the highest graded of these. We will allocate marks on the basis of a predicted grade only where supporting evidence is provided, for example in the form of a mark transcript – otherwise 1 mark will be awarded. We treat the BPTC as a vocational course rather than a postgraduate degree – including when there is an LLM component on the course – so no extra points are awarded for that. We treat the GDL, and accelerated law degrees, as a postgraduate degree.”

The same points awarded for UK degrees are awarded for their overseas equivalent.

**2. Having read the Q&A document, I’m not entirely clear whether it is possible to obtain more than 8 points for academic achievements alone (e.g. a 1st \*and\* exceptional academic ability)?**

Yes, this is quite possible; this could happen in a number of ways, such as 8 points for a 1st plus up to 2 points for a postgraduate degree; 8 points for a 1st plus up to 2 points for exceptional academic ability; 6 points for a 2:1 plus up to 2 points for exceptional academic ability; or 8 points for a first plus 3 Rare points. There are various other possible permutations as well.

**3. I’m currently working in an area where I'm bound by confidentiality duties. How can I explain those experience (as evidence of advocacy) given confidentiality duties?**

We do appreciate that people may be limited in what they can say because of confidentiality. In this situation it’s of course for the applicant to decide what they can properly say, and if necessary give a generalised description which does not breach confidentiality, or alternatively rely on another example. As we explain, we are not looking for a long list of examples, but for a particular example or examples which demonstrate your skill at advocacy.

**4. Do you have any advice on how to address mitigating circumstances relating to mental health struggles that adversely affected one's final undergraduate results? How does Blackstone take such disclosures into account when reviewing applications?**

As we explain above, we do take extenuating circumstances into account, and in those cases we ask that you provide as much information as possible about any adverse effect there has been on your final degree results, so that we can assess how to take it into account. We will add up to 2 points for extenuating circumstances, so if you think you would have obtained a higher degree class in the absence of those circumstances, please tell us, and explain your basis for saying that, in as much detail as possible.

### **5. How would you advise applicants to approach the Interests and Hobbies section of the application form?**

We can't advise on how to approach that generally, as other Chambers may differ in their approaches. For us, the important question will be how candidates demonstrate the characteristics we are assessing on the application form (Please see our selection criteria document here [https://www.blackstonechambers.com/documents/Selection\\_Criteria\\_37SII0l.pdf](https://www.blackstonechambers.com/documents/Selection_Criteria_37SII0l.pdf)). So, if you think you have, for example, demonstrated resilience or communications skills through one of your interests or hobbies, you may want to make that clear in your answers to the questions in the form.

### **6. Looking at your recent pupils/tenants' bios, it seems like a lot of them have studied at Oxbridge and studied at top American law schools. Does the university you attend boost/diminishes your application?**

No! As we've set out above, we don't distinguish between universities and degree subjects – when we score the application forms, we treat all universities, and all degree subjects, equally in terms of points awarded. This is why we use the Gateway redaction scheme for redacting information about academic institutions. Of course we may become aware of the universities that applicants have attended, in the course of the application process, but we don't give any preference to candidates from particular universities, or vice versa.

### **7. How are international undergraduate degrees assessed?**

We ask students who have studied at international universities to indicate whether their degree classification is equivalent to a 1st, 2:1 or 2:2, and to explain their basis for saying that. Apart from that we treat them as equivalent to an undergraduate degree from a UK university – and as we explain in our guidance, we don't treat any university or degree subject as superior to any other. (This is why we have the name of the university redacted on the application form.) We also use external sources of information about evaluation of international qualifications.

### **8. What's the best way to stand out as a non law student who does not have a first degree in law?**

Many barristers at Blackstone do not have a first degree in law, and when we recruit pupils we're looking for the same qualities in all applicants - exceptionally high academic ability, written and oral advocacy and communication skills, and with an interest in and aptitude for a successful career at Blackstone Chambers. We wouldn't recommend that non law students apply for pupillage before they have started their postgraduate law studies, as it would be difficult for them to do the assessed mini-pupillage without any legal knowledge – and in practice none do. However, if you do an assessed mini-pupillage while, say, you are on the GDL course, we will take into account the stage that you have reached in your legal studies when assessing your work. We hope that the questions in the application form will give candidates an opportunity to demonstrate the criteria that we are assessing on the application form – see link inserted here, [https://www.blackstonechambers.com/documents/Selection\\_Criteria\\_37SII0l.pdf](https://www.blackstonechambers.com/documents/Selection_Criteria_37SII0l.pdf) so our advice to all applicants would be to ensure that you answer those questions as effectively as possible with those criteria in mind.

**9. Are the grades from the BPC considered? If we get a distinction in the BPC will this be viewed favorably in our application.**

We don't take the BPC into account when assessing academic ability as that is treated as a vocational course; so grades on the course, or a distinction, would not affect an applicant's score for academic ability when their application is being considered.

**10. How do you treat an LLM that is done as part of the BPC?**

We treat the BPC as a vocational course, even if there is an LLM component. This means that it is not treated as a postgraduate course, and a distinction in the BPC wouldn't be taken into account when we are assessing academic achievement. So, in answer to one of the questions that we were asked at the webinar - would Blackstone consider an application from someone with a 2:2 at undergraduate level and distinction at BPC/LLM level? - the answer is that it would be unusual for an applicant to be offered mini-pupillage with those grades. However, as we set out in the guidance, where candidates are identified by the Rare Contextual Recruitment System as having significant potential we take that into account and award up to 3 extra points when assessing academic achievements. We also take into account extenuating circumstances affecting academic performance, and other evidence of exceptional academic ability.

**11. Would you recommend doing an additional LLM or the BCL? Is the BCL more for those in commercial practice than for public law lawyers?**

There are many factors that people will want to take into account when deciding whether to do further postgraduate education, and if so what course, including of course the financial considerations. We wouldn't recommend any particular course over any other, as it depends so much on individual circumstances, interests and career aspirations. However, we can say that many of the barristers at Blackstone who did the BCL have substantial public law practices; equally, an LLM can be a very good foundation for commercial practice. And of course, many barristers at Blackstone did not do the BCL or an LLM – it is certainly not an essential step to become a barrister.

**12. Do those who have not had the top first or top BCL distinction have a shot at the assessed mini pupillage, provided they meet the threshold of 8 academic points on the application?**

Yes, definitely! It's by no means necessary to have the top first to get an assessed mini-pupillage (or to have done a BCL at all). As we explain above, the top 50 or so rated applications will be offered an assessed mini pupillage. The academic points will count towards that rating, but the other criteria we will be assessing will also be very important.

**13. If someone does not do an LLM but spends a year as a paralegal or other relevant legal experience, do these weigh equally?**

We take the LLM into account when we assess academic achievement. We don't take into account legal work/volunteer experience in that assessment. However, that experience may well be relevant when we are assessing other competencies such as communication/advocacy, motivation, working with others, resilience and determination and working independently. One important thing to remember is that if you have that kind of experience, we want to hear how it is relevant in your answers to the questions on the application form – for instance in the question about motivation or the question about what demonstrates that you will be a good oral or written advocate.

**14. Is the Juris Doctor qualification considered a post-grad degree?**

In some cases we will treat it as a postgraduate degree, but this will depend on the precise details of the qualification, so please do give us as much information as possible. If you would like to ask us about a specific qualification before deciding whether to apply, do contact us directly at [pupillage@blackstonechambers.com](mailto:pupillage@blackstonechambers.com)

**15. How is a PhD (in law) considered under the academic qualification scoring?**

A PhD in any subject is treated as a postgraduate degree, so one point is awarded for that. We don't distinguish between PhDs in law and PhDs in non-law subjects. Also worth noting that we award points for only one postgraduate degree even where candidates have done more than one – and we take the highest scoring of those degrees. So if for example you have also obtained a distinction in an MA before doing a PhD, we would award two points.

**16. I did not apply for scholarships because I was not aware how important they are later on; will that affect my pupillage application. If I do not have scholarships or awards does this mean my application will not be considered?**

Your application will certainly be considered! It is in no way a requirement to have any scholarships or awards to receive an offer of pupillage at Blackstone. We may in some cases award additional points for exceptional academic ability - evidence for that can include eg academic prizes, publications of exceptional note, high-level academic positions and, on occasion, scholarships. We would only award a point for scholarships if they were awarded on merit rather than means-based, and only if they were evidence of exceptional ability. We would not normally award extra points for college scholarships and prizes as these are not available at most universities.

### **17. How can we demonstrate our interest in the commercial bar?**

The Gateway application form will ask why you want to be a barrister at Blackstone Chambers, and ask you to refer to any work and other experience (legal and non-legal) that you think provides evidence of your motivation to join our chambers). We are interested in any experience (work, voluntary, or anything else relevant) that demonstrates that interest. As we say in the guidance, we appreciate that not all candidates will have had the same opportunities to gain legal work experience (and we ask you to tell us if there any particular reasons why you have been unable to) and we are also interested in non-legal experience.

You might also want to tell us why you find commercial law interesting (perhaps by reference to particular cases), and how you have developed that interest, for example by choosing to study particular areas, or writing on them.

### **18. How much advocacy experience is expected from applicants? Will mooting and advocacy on the Bar Course be sufficient? If one has not had a chance to do mooting or debating, what other experiences do you consider to be relevant to showing oral advocacy skills?**

We're looking for evidence that demonstrates that you will be a good oral and written advocate. We're not looking for a long list of experiences; our primary concern is not the amount of advocacy that you've done, but how what you've done demonstrate your skills – for example how you have put effective arguments, or achieved a particular outcome. Mooting and advocacy on the Bar Course may provide you with good examples of this. We also appreciate that not all candidates will have the same opportunities to do mooting or debating. We are interested in all kinds of oral advocacy – for example if you have had to put forward oral arguments on a particular issue at work or volunteering, or as a student, or teaching. And of course if you have done any volunteer advocacy, for example from a law clinic, we're also very interested in hearing about that.

### **19. On advocacy, I have a lot of written advocacy experience but not a lot of oral advocacy... is one valued more than the other?**

We value both very highly, and both written and oral advocacy are a vital part of work at Blackstone and the Bar generally. It's worth noting that when looking at oral advocacy we are not just interested in mooting, debating etc, but in any examples of oral advocacy, for example in the context of work, voluntary work or other activities - so you may have more oral advocacy experience than you think!

### **20. Is working as a clerk useful experience ahead of applying for a pupillage?**

Working as a clerk may give you some insight into the life of a barrister, and what it's like to be in Chambers. We wouldn't say it was more useful than any other type of work experience, because so much depends on the individual job, and what the individual hopes to get out of it. So if you would be interested in doing it, we'd say go ahead, but we don't think it would give applicants any particular advantage during the recruitment process!

**21. For those who are transferring solicitors, it may have been some years since we participated in mooting and debating etc (e.g. 5 years). Is less weight given to older experiences? So for example, will such candidates be expected to talk about more recent advocacy experience (e.g. convincing a client to accept a certain settlement offer), or is it ok to rely on those older but perhaps more directly transferable experiences?**

We would be just as interested to hear about older experience, and that would not be given any less weight simply because it is longer ago. Equally, it's likely that as a solicitor you will have been involved in oral advocacy of some kind, and we will be interested to hear about that as well.

**22. Would you advise those on the GDL to wait until after they have completed their course to apply?**

As there are so many factors involved in that decision, we wouldn't make a blanket recommendation. We frequently offer pupillage to students who are on the GDL. We treat the GDL as a postgraduate degree, so will take into account a distinction in that.

**23. How do you view applications from career changers?**

We welcome them, and quite a few members of Chambers are on their second career. We don't give preference to either route (career changers or those who are following a path straight to the Bar), but assess all applications on their own merits.

**24. I am a qualified lawyer. How should I apply to Blackstone – through the Gateway?**

Except in exceptional circumstances, we require all applicants to apply through the Gateway, so that there is a consistent process for everyone.

## ASSESSED MINI-PUPILLAGE

**25. What do you look for in the assessed work that all mini-pupils undertake?**

We assess the set-work on the basis of 4 competencies – analytical ability, communication/advocacy, resilience & determination, and working independently. The set-work is anonymized and marked by two assessors (who won't as a general rule be the mini-pupil supervisors).

**26. Is it possible to do the mini-pupillage multiple times if you do not make it to the interview stage in the first year? Does an unsuccessful application for pupillage at Blackstone count against an applicant if they apply for pupillage at Blackstone in a subsequent year?**

We welcome repeat applications. If you've done an assessed mini-pupillage here as part of a previous pupillage application to Blackstone, the Pupillage Committee will - where relevant - consider whether you've demonstrated that your application has improved since then when deciding whether to offer you an assessed mini-pupillage in this application round. So, if you are re-applying, and have previously done an assessed mini-pupillage here, you may want to address that question in your application form.



**27. Is the assessed work likely to favor those who are stronger in contract/tort rather than eg public law/HR?**

We use a new piece of set-work each year; sometimes the focus is on commercial law, sometimes on public law. However we always try to choose an exercise which does not require candidates to have very detailed prior legal knowledge to do well, as we know that some candidates will only have been studying law for six months at this point. The nature and extent of your prior legal knowledge and/or experience will be taken into account when comparing your mark to that of other candidates.

**28. Excluding the written assessment, how is the mini-pupillage assessed? And how is this weighted in relation to the written assessment/paper application?**

We assess mini-pupils on the basis of analytical ability, communication/advocacy skills, motivation, interpersonal skills, resilience & determination and working independently. We won't apply a fixed weighting to performance during mini-pupillage, written assessment and the paper application, but will look at all of these together when deciding who to invite to final interview. However, in practice since all candidates will already have been assessed to have performed exceptionally well on paper their performance during mini-pupillage will be more significant than the paper application for the purposes of determining who to invite to a pupillage interview.

**29. How friendly is the work environment especially for juniors who will be doing their mini – pupillage.**

We think Blackstone is a friendly, and inclusive, environment, and our aim is for mini-pupils to have an enjoyable as well as informative experience. While applicants doing mini-pupillage will spend a lot of their time working, we're always keen to introduce them to other people in chambers, and ensure that they have time to chat. We also aim that mini-pupils are able to attend a get-together or two if they would like – maybe over lunch, our once-a-week tea, or at an early evening get-together, depending on what else is going on.

**30. Are religious requirements such as praying on time for Muslims accommodated?**

We will always do our best to accommodate any religious requirements. We have a quiet room for prayer, and always try to accommodate dietary requirements at any get-togethers during the mini-pupillage. We also ask mini-pupils to let us know if they have any other requirements.

**31. Any internship or mini- pupillage opportunities happening early 2024? Any unpaid work opportunities for 2024?**

The procedure for applying for mini-pupillage is set out above. We do also offer a number of placements, although these are not part of the pupillage recruitment procedure. For further information about these, see <https://www.blackstonechambers.com/pupillage/access-to-the-bar/>

**32. What does Blackstone do to ensure equal access (so far as possible) to professional opportunities at the bar, including for women and those from non-traditional backgrounds? There have been a few reports from the Bar Council that are presented as regards the wider profession rather than specific sets.**

As we set out elsewhere on our website, we're committed to the principle of equality of opportunity and equality in the workplace without discrimination on grounds of race, disability, age, religion or belief, sex, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity or sexual orientation. To try to put this into practice regarding pupillage applications, we've taken a number of steps. Since 2019 we've used the Rare Contextual Recruitment System for our pupillage recruitment process, which takes into account the social, financial and educational background of applicants. We've recently taken advice from external consultants on equality diversity and inclusion when reviewing our application procedures. We also actively support and participate in the work of [Bridging the Bar](#), [COMBAR's mentoring scheme for under-represented groups](#) and [10,000 Black Interns](#)).

We also take steps to seek to ensure that all members of Chambers have fair opportunities of access to work and training.

## FUNDING

**33. What is Blackstone's policy on reimbursing or funding a student's legal studies?**

We don't fund or reimburse students' legal studies, but as we explain at [https://www.blackstonechambers.com/documents/BlackstonePupillage\\_2023\\_uUoiT8L.pdf](https://www.blackstonechambers.com/documents/BlackstonePupillage_2023_uUoiT8L.pdf) pupils may apply to draw down part of the pupillage award during their BPC year – at the moment, they may draw down up to £22,500.