

Entry 1

The first day of everyone's pupillage is highly anticipated but there was a particular sense of anticipation having received an offer two years prior to my start date. I was immediately put at ease by my supervisor, Fiona Clancy, who invited me into chambers the Friday before and treated me to lunch!

This nurturing atmosphere has been felt throughout my opening weeks both at Exchange and at court. My supervisor made an active effort to introduce me to barristers, chambers and court staff – all of whom were extremely friendly and offered their assistance should I ever need it. The other more junior criminal barristers at Exchange in Manchester were also very welcoming. Within my first two weeks, I was treated to pizza and drinks, and it was made clear to me that I could go to them with any questions as and when I had them. David Temkin KC (who was leading my supervisor in my first case) and the solicitor caseworker were encouraging and supportive in a number of ways, not least in their provision of snacks throughout the trial.

My first day coincided with the first day of a double-handed youth murder trial at Manchester Crown Court (Crown Square). So as first days go, it was quite something! Our 13 year old client was charged with murder on a participation basis; they were said to have assisted or encouraged the principal offender in stabbing a fellow youth. The principal offender was raising self-defence. It goes without saying that this was a tragic and highly emotive case.

There is a lot to take in and learn in your first two weeks. A number of the learning points were practical: remember to take your wig into court; remember to put your wig on (there was an occasion that I spotted my wig on the bench and had to subtly slip it onto my head at an inconspicuous moment); take every opportunity to go to the toilet and the list goes on. While pupils aren't required to be wigged and gowned, getting used to court dress will no doubt smooth the transition to second-six: it will be one less thing to worry about.

The first two weeks also involved absorbing a great deal about the reality of court room advocacy. Seeing a trial in practice naturally elevates the level of understanding you get from the bar course. For example, while learning about bad character applications, both the theory and how to make one, I hadn't give much consideration to when the application should be made and why it would be appropriate to hear applications at specific times until I was exposed to that decision making process in the early stages of this trial.

It was also immediately evident the importance of communication with your client, particularly when they are a youth. It was clear how consistent conferences (at least one a day but often more) ensured trust, clarity and reassurance. Our client was also very humorous so you could guarantee a laugh - while not forgetting or indeed undermining the gravity of the situation or the sadness of the case, building a rapport with our client was crucial to the successful presentation of their case.

After the prosecution opening, the Jury were taken through what is called the sequence of events. It does essentially what it says on the tin. In this case, it involved the officer in the case (via prosecution counsel) showing clips of CCTV, talking through phone evidence (largely snapchat messages) and generally painting a picture of what happened up to, during and after the incident. This is a case where the stabbing itself was captured on CCTV. It is probably not surprising to hear that it is a difficult watch.

All but two of the individuals called by the prosecution to give evidence were children. It was a fantastic learning experience watching the cross-examination of child witnesses. It certainly poses more challenges; counsel is tasked with abiding by the 'principles of questioning child witnesses' while also ensuring they are acting in their clients' best interests. There were 8 child witnesses in the case, some came to court to give evidence in person while others appeared via a live link.

The final piece of evidence that I observed in my first two weeks in this trial was that of the expert, the pathologist – naturally a completely different kettle of fish to what had come prior. The injuries on both the principal offender and the victim were described. It was then outlined to the Jury how the nature of the wound can go some way to explaining how it might have been inflicted. The Jury were shown artificially generated images of the fatal injury.

I am tasked with the attendance note of this trial, which involves making a verbatim note of the evidence. I was also grateful for the opportunity to conduct a research task on the relevance of context when considering the admissibility of evidence through gateways f (to correct a false impression) or g (attack on another person's character).

My first fortnight in pupillage concluded with shadowing Tom Farr, a recent tenant at Exchange. The aforementioned trial wasn't sitting on this day so while the rest of the team were working hard with our client, preparing them to give evidence, I was gaining exposure to the sorts of hearings that I am more likely to be doing when I start on my feet (PTPHs, Newtons, Sentencing etc). Having got used to being in only one court room, I feel I erred in my choice of high heels given the pace at which we were required to move from one court room to the next!

For anyone who is worried about moving for pupillage, I think it is also worth noting that I relocated from London to Manchester to start at Exchange. So far – the transition has been a smooth one. I will no doubt expand on this in my next entry.