

EXCHANGE

CHAMBERS

Nina K Rawlings – Diary Entry Week 1

There is no cliché that will do justice to what starting pupillage feels like. Having received my offer in May 2023, I had somewhat gaslit myself into thinking that my pupillage did not actually exist to the extent where I had printed out my offer email so I could remind myself when needed that I hadn't made it up! I was therefore extremely relieved that when I attended at Liverpool Civil and Family Court on Monday morning I was not turned away and was indeed met by my fearless leader for the coming 12 months, my supervisor, the one and only Mr Simon Povoas. I was fortunate enough to have met with him a few weeks prior so I could accustom myself to the Court and meet some of the many esteemed Exchange family barristers. I was also fortunate enough to have previously been invited to meet our head of Chambers, Neil Wright, and on a separate occasion my fellow pupils for a pizza evening. Having recently moved to Liverpool for this pupillage, all these encounters acted to reduce any anxiety about starting and I can genuinely say that every single member of Chambers I have met thus far has been extremely gracious in welcoming me and introducing me to other people.

For me, it was always going to be family – my experience is entirely public family based having worked as a paralegal for approximately five years on Local Authority matters – but to actually enter the Court arena as a family pupil was something else. I have come to the Bar via a somewhat convoluted and unconventional route having initially been on track for a career in academia. I then was thrown in at the deep end with LA paralegal work – experience for which I will always be grateful – and thus followed the GDL and BTC process. As I expect is the case for most, it has been a long and difficult graft, but for it all to culminate in pupillage at Exchange makes it all very worth it.

We started the week with a pre-trial review in respect of a matter concerning a baby with human bite marks. I'd had the papers in advance which enabled me to familiarise myself with the matter and then it was straight to business, meeting with the client and liaising with the other advocates. My supervisor Simon kept me fully involved and engaged, asking my opinions and graciously answering all of my sometimes niche queries! He also shared the orders with me so I could understand the process in full. The rest of the week was spent on the last few days of a part heard finding of fact hearing concerning a sexual abuse allegation. This was when I got to see the masters at work! Watching Simon and the LA barrister cross examine the father in the case was gripping. To see how they go about teasing information out of witnesses and box them in was an unparalleled experience. Furthermore, it was invaluable to learn how Simon goes about preparing his matters and planning his examination. I have had the privilege of going to Court many times in the past but this is a wholly different experience in which as a pupil I am less a silent onlooker taking an attendance note but rather actively involved in the process. We rounded the week off with a remote conference with a client ahead of a finding of fact next week to determine who bit the baby. Again, to see how Simon deals with different clients even at this early stage has been of great value to me. Sometimes a client needs a bit of tough love to protect their own interests, sometimes the client is a professional and will guide the process a bit more. Each situation will require a nuanced approach.

This week has also been an introduction into the social side of the Bar for me. I attended my first Mess which was a truly unique experience! I've always considered time to be one of the true fixed aspects of existence but it turns out that 8pm at Mess is what one might class as flexible! I also went into Chambers on Friday and got to meet a lot of the wonderful clerks, following which I had the privilege of spending some time with some of the criminal barristers enabling me to

meet people who I would not come across on a day to day basis in Court. Again, I was welcomed and made to feel very much included.

Overall, I couldn't have asked for a better first week. I cannot bring to mind another career where you get the opportunity to just learn – and from such experienced people – for such a period of time, and it is one of the many wonderful aspects of pupillage. If the next however many weeks of this pupillage are as interesting and enjoyable as this week then I truly believe I've won the pupillage lottery.