

**MENTORING FOR UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS:  
A SCHEME RUN BY THE COMMERCIAL BAR ASSOCIATION (“COMBAR”)  
GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS**

**Aim of Mentoring Scheme**

1. The aim of the Mentoring Scheme is to encourage people from groups of people who are under-represented at the English Bar and in particular the Commercial Bar to pursue careers as barristers. The Scheme is not, however, confined to those interested in the Commercial Bar.
2. There are a limited number of places on the Scheme, so candidates who do not intend to make full use of the Scheme are asked not to apply. (We have had candidates who, once accepted, have failed to arrange or attend meetings with their mentor, nevertheless taking up a mentoring place that could have been given to another candidate.)

**Who we are and what we do**

3. The sets of Chambers participating in the Mentoring Scheme in the academic year 2023-2024 are set out in the Appendix to this Guidance.
4. Barristers at these sets of Chambers work on a wide range of different types of cases. The emphasis varies from set to set, and from barrister to barrister, but the areas of law include the following:
  - 4.1. commercial law (which includes, for instance, contractual disputes, insurance law, banking and financial services law, shipping and international trade, construction, IT and telecommunications, and civil fraud). This accounts for the majority of work done in most of the participating sets of Chambers;
  - 4.2. European Union law (including the law governing the new relationship between the EU and the UK);
  - 4.3. tax law;
  - 4.4. employment law;
  - 4.5. competition law (which includes, for instance, the law on cartels, other anti-competitive practices, and mergers);
  - 4.6. product liability and group actions;

- 4.7. professional negligence and liability;
  - 4.8. insolvency law;
  - 4.9. public law; and
  - 4.10. white collar crime.
5. Although the mentors' experience is likely to be in one or more of the areas set out above, and they will be unable to offer detailed advice in relation to areas of practice outside those areas, the mentoring scheme is open to those interested in a career at the Bar generally, or non-commercial parts of the Bar, and not only those interested in a career at the commercial Bar. However, candidates who are hoping to practise in very dissimilar areas of law (such as criminal law) may wish to look at alternative schemes.

### **Eligibility**

6. Eligibility criterion 1: Prospective mentees may apply for the Scheme at any time from their first year of undergraduate study (whether in law or any other discipline). Applicants may be of any age and any background, but they should not have already been awarded a pupillage, or have commenced pupillage. Experience suggests that applicants are likely to get the most out of the scheme if they apply earlier in their university career but the scheme can be worthwhile at other times.
7. Eligibility criterion 2: Prospective mentees may be from any group(s) which is/are under-represented at the English Bar or the Commercial Bar. For instance, such groups may (non-exhaustively) include:<sup>1</sup>
  - 7.1. people with disabilities;
  - 7.2. Black people;
  - 7.3. people who attended state schools, in particular non-selective state schools, for the majority of their secondary education (i.e. between the ages of 11 and 18 years);
  - 7.4. people who were in the first generation in their family to attend university;
  - 7.5. people from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (as indicated, e.g., if an

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<sup>1</sup> In decreasing order of underrepresentation in pupillage according to the official Bar statistics in the Diversity at the Bar 2021 report published January 2022: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/uploads/assets/be522642-160b-433b-af03a910a5636233/BSB-Report-on-Diversity-at-the-Bar-2021.pdf>. COMBAR recognises that the extent to which particular groups are under-represented in particular areas of the Bar, and at different levels of seniority, may differ from the above.

applicant was eligible for free school meals, or comes from a family on income support);

7.6. LGBTQ+ people;

7.7. people who spent time in care;

7.8. people from minority ethnic backgrounds (other than Black, which is separately listed above);

7.9. women.

8. Applicants must meet eligibility criteria 1 and 2 (and we recognise that many of our candidates, although by no means all, fall into more than one of the groups listed in paragraph 7 above, and some may come from under-represented groups not so listed).

### **Assessment criteria**

9. Applications from individuals who meet the eligibility criteria identified above will be assessed according to the following two assessment criteria, which shall be given equal weighting:

9.1. the applicant's need (i.e. how much they are likely to benefit from the mentoring); and

9.2. the applicant's potential to pursue a career at the Bar.

10. Assessment criterion 1: In relation to need, difficulties the candidate has faced, the candidate's educational and social background, will be taken into account. Demonstrated access to other assistance will also be taken into account, although having some such access to assistance, as well as having previous knowledge or experience of the Bar, will not prevent applicants being granted a place on the scheme.

11. Assessment criterion 2: Potential to pursue a career at the Bar may be demonstrated by reference to the following exclusive criteria, which shall be weighted equally:

11.1. Evidence of intellectual ability. This may, for instance, be demonstrated through educational achievement, in particular in the context of average attainment at the educational settings attended by the applicant.

11.2. Evidence of a desire to pursue a career at the Bar. This may, for instance, be demonstrated through relevant work experience (although it is recognised that applicants will not have had the same work experience opportunities), summer work or extra-curricular activities, or other evidence of commitment to a particular activity

or skill.

11.3. Evidence of an ability to write and/or speak persuasively, and/or to show compelling reasoning, in particular in the answers to the two long-form questions on the application form.

12. When assessing potential to pursue a career at the Bar, we will seek to consider the applicant's achievements in the context of any extenuating circumstances and any other difficulties which they may have encountered.

### **Mini-pupillage and pupillage applications**

13. The Scheme is separate from the mini-pupillage and pupillage application processes of the participating Chambers. It follows that an applicant for mini-pupillage and/or pupillage at any participating set of Chambers will not be at any disadvantage because they have not participated in the Mentoring Scheme, and participation in the scheme will not give particular insight or advice into an individual Chambers' application processes. You are asked to disclose all mini-pupillages which you have undertaken already or secured in the future in your application form because this factors into the assessment of assessment criterion 1. For the avoidance of doubt, participation in the Mentoring Scheme will not automatically entitle an applicant to a mini-pupillage, pupillage, or interview at their mentor's (or any other participating) set of Chambers.

### **Process**

14. Applications should be made by midday on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023, by uploading them to the COMBAR website through this [page](#). If you have any questions on the submission process please email [SocialMobility@combar.com](mailto:SocialMobility@combar.com). Successful applicants will be informed by e-mail by late October/early November 2023.

### **What the Scheme will involve**

15. Successful applicants will be allocated an individual mentor, who will be a member of one of the participating sets of Chambers.

16. The Scheme will run between October 2023 and July 2024. During that period, mentees will be offered the following:

16.1. between three and five one-on-one meetings with your mentor (as a guide, although some mentees may have fewer or more meetings);

- 16.2. a workshop on applications for pupillage; and
- 16.3. a social event for mentors, mentees and members of the participating sets of Chambers.
17. The above sessions will take place in person, to the extent possible; otherwise, they will be held via video-conference (and if mentees prefer, meetings with mentors can always take place via video-conference). Where sessions are held in person, the set of Chambers of which your mentor is a member will reimburse reasonable travel expenses. All claims and enquiries regarding travel expenses should be directed to those Chambers, and not to COMBAR.
18. After the end of the mentoring period, mentors are not obliged to (but may agree to) continue to provide assistance to mentees.

### **GDPR**

19. Data provided by applicants and mentees will be processed and held in accordance with applicable data protection regulations, including the requirements of UK GDPR. For information on how your personal data is processed, please see our privacy notice, which can be accessed on the GDPR page of the COMBAR website.

### **Termination of mentoring relationship**

20. The experience of COMBAR is that the vast majority of mentoring relationships are successful. However, occasionally issues have arisen between a mentoring pair. The pair are encouraged to try to resolve such issues between themselves in the first instance, but if it is not reasonably possible to do so, either may terminate the mentoring relationship on reasonable notice, by notifying COMBAR by email to [SocialMobility@combar.com](mailto:SocialMobility@combar.com) and giving brief details of the nature of the issue that has arisen.
21. Upon such notification, COMBAR may, depending on the issue that has given rise to the termination of the mentoring relationship, take reasonable steps to find another mentor for the mentee, whether at the same or another participating set of Chambers. What steps (if any) are to be taken shall be in the absolute discretion of COMBAR, and COMBAR can provide no guarantees that an alternative mentor can be found, particularly later in the mentoring year.

**APPENDIX: PARTICIPATING COMBAR MEMBER SETS FOR SCHEME YEAR**  
**2023-24 (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)**

Blackstone Chambers

Brick Court Chambers

Devereux Chambers

Essex Court Chambers

Fountain Court Chambers

Gatehouse Chambers

Henderson Chambers

Keating Chambers

One Essex Court Chambers

7 King's Bench Walk

11 King's Bench Walk

Monckton Chambers

4 New Square

Quadrant Chambers

4 Pump Court

Radcliffe Chambers

Serle Court

South Square

4 Stone Buildings

36 Stone

2 Temple Gardens

Twenty Essex

3 Verulam Buildings

XXIV Old Buildings