

Mental Health & Wellbeing at the Bar

Financial Stress



Wellbeing
at the Bar

Financial stress

Student Debt

*“Students beginning university may have to spend up to £127,000 to qualify as a barrister”
Chantal-Aimée Doerries QC, Chair of the Bar (2016).*

If you were successful at obtaining funding to assist with your studies, then you might feel less pressure. This does not detract from the reality that many face after graduating, and being called to the Bar, when you might experience a period of limbo or financial instability.

Cost of living

The South-Eastern Circuit is the largest, which means that there is a high concentration of pupillages and job offers in and around London. London is a very expensive city to live in, and coupled with the basic pupillage award (discussed below), graduates (who pull down from their award) and pupils may find it difficult to keep afloat financially.

Pupillage Award

Pupillage Awards vary significantly dependent on practice area and chambers. Awards usually range between £12,000 (the minimum award), but can also range between £60-100,000 (based on an analysis of pupillages advertised on the Pupillage Gateway in 2015/16). For those on or near the minimum award income is usually split between your First and Second Six. For the first six months (First Six) you will be guaranteed 50% of your Pupillage Award. In the Second Six months, the award can be exceeded by earnings (dependent on the number of cases you are instructed to act on).

It is also worth noting income and cashflow in early practice are very real concerns for many junior barristers.

Tax

If you are about to start a self-employed pupillage, it is wise to get an accountant beforehand. You must be VAT registered by your second six. HMRC said "tax needn't be taxing" but it can be very taxing indeed! This is new, so it can be tempting to put the problem to one side until you can deal with it. However, this could cause the issue and the stress of the situation to escalate. So, an action plan is needed.

Tips to help manage your finances

1. Breathe - you have taken the first step to address the problem. It may take many steps to resolve, but one at a time makes it much more manageable. This may be overwhelming, but there will be someone to help you.
2. Budget – it is important to set limits on your spending when you start earning an income. Keep a log of your income and expenses, and be sure to put aside money to offset your tax liability down the line. You may find this website helpful <https://www.moneyadvice.service.gov.uk/en/tools/budget-planner>
3. Fixed expenditure – make a note of compulsory training, textbooks, and travel that may not be covered by your pupillage award as early as possible. Endeavour, as best you can, to save towards it.
4. Save where you can (one way of easing concerns around income and cashflow in early practice, is - if your pupillage award allows it - to make sure you put money aside each month to give you a “buffer” when you commence practice).
5. Prompt Payment - Don't ignore letters. If you are feeling stressed at the thought of it, pass the letters on to someone else to deal with.
6. Talk it out – remember that your Pupil Supervisor and Senior colleagues will have been through this process before. Seek advice, and do not be afraid to ask for referrals e.g. Accountants.

Once you secure tenancy, it is important to keep on top of your tax returns and management of your finances. Tips on how best to manage life as a qualified barrister can be found [here](#).

Note

The advice above is from Place Campbell / Metis Wealth, who very much recommend you speak to an accountant if you have concerns regarding Tax, HMRC or similar issues. An accountant has seen all manner of records, schedules and positions and will be able to help. You need not be alone.