Twitter Thread by John McNamara



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It's pupillage season with the Gateway opening. I'm not on the pupillage committee at @5SAHLaw but I do deal with mini-pupillages. This is a thread for aspiring barristers applying for both pupillages and mini-pupillages. I hope it helps some of you through a difficult process.

1/ What makes a good application is to an extent subjective. I hope I've pulled out some key features which are universally accepted as being important, and will hopefully improve your application and your chances of an interview. Disclaimer: these are all my opinions of course.

2/ PROOF READ. Seriously, proof read it again, and again. Take a break for a day and proof it again. Print it off and read it out loud. Get rid of any typos, spelling or grammatical errors. Your application represents you it should not be sloppy.

3/ Please use the correct name of the chambers you apply to. You wouldn't believe it but I receive mini applications for other chambers. Given the number of applications received for pupillage received don't let a mistake like this damage your chances.

4/ Be succinct. Don't use 10 words when 4 will do. The word limit is a limit not a target. Don't use flowery adjectives. Bullet points can work. Your audience is a lawyer, make the language direct and driven. Being succinct takes time, strip out non-essential words & information.

5/ Make sure you know what your point is. Make sure it is answering the question. Each sentence should be driven to the conclusion you are building too. Examples work well to answer questions and will automatically make your application less generic and more personal.

6/ If you're applying off of Gateway and a cover letter is requested, format it like a letter. Other formatting should be "justified." Formatting is important. As a lawyer your written work represents you. As an aspiring lawyer it still represents you. Make it presentable.

7/ Why do you want to be a barrister? An awful and difficult question. Avoid generic statements. Think about why you do. The question is not why you deserve to be a barrister. Think about applying your experiences to make the answer personal.

8/ Why these chambers? The real answer to this may be “because you’re offering a pupillage” but you can’t say that. If you’ve done a mini there, draw on that. If you want to practise in a certain area that chambers undertake, explain that. Doing that will make it personal.

9/ The work experience part of the form is important. Listing a million minis may be of limited value. Target your work experience and explain it, it is another chance for you to demonstrate skills you have. What skills did you learn?

10/ But seriously, if you did a mini on a serious trial don’t say you authored a legal argument or came up with a point that the barrister then used in their closing speech. They were probably being nice to you. Don’t overstate your achievements – keep it accurate.

11/ Don’t undervalue your non-legal work experience. Many barristers worked part-time during university. Don’t be afraid to draw them out the skills it gave you. We can’t all do 3 months work pro bono in some tropical climate, although if you have good for you, include that too.

12/ JUDGEMENT. Exercise it. This is what the job is really about, recognising strengths and weaknesses of factual circumstances. This applies to your application and equally to interviews, pleas in mitigation will have weak aspects. Focus on the good points. Wear the bad.

13/ It’s a numbers game. Start now. Apply to the maximum number of sets you can. The odds are against you statistically. The more apps the better your chances. But don’t let the number of apps impact on the quality of each one. It’s time consuming but you have to do it right.