

Speech

My Lords, Ladies and Gentleman,

My journey to pupillage was a well trodden path.

After the 3 years it took me to complete my law degree - a further year was spent completing the Bar course. I spent 10 weeks completing unpaid mini pupillages. I and probably all of the candidates considered for pupillage, will have also undertaken unpaid or low paid roles interning, paralegalling or doing some other socially worthy and relevant work to gain pupillage. All this study, all this work experience came in for me at the bargain cost of £33,000.

So you can just imagine, when I received that call from my joint Head of Chambers at a leading criminal set of

chambers – I was delighted. The 7 years and hard work had all paid off.

I immediately phoned every barrister who had helped me on my path – Not one thought I had an ounce of sanity. Most were distraught that my life had taken such a downward turn in pursuing a career at the Criminal Bar.

I didn't actually know what they meant. But then, Six months later, the consultation paper was published.

On that day I was at Bromley Magistrates Court, now in my second six months of pupillage. One may have expected the atmosphere to be subdued and for the talk amongst pupils to consist of 'plan B's' and so on. On the contrary, while the pupils I spoke to were concerned about the proposed changes to the profession – they were

infinitely more concerned about their client's bail applications.

I wasn't sure if it was just those pupils whose determination to see justice done outweighed their personal concerns until later in chambers.

There, I came across some junior tenants engaged in their own heated debate about the proposals. Each had clearly read the consultation paper from cover to cover and each was proffering their own view on where they saw the Bar in five years time. I remember thinking at that point, that the concerns expressed wasn't for a career denied - but for a society where justice may not be done.

But I know, from speaking to junior barristers both at 25 Bedford Row and those I meet in court, that many who have invested so heavily both emotionally and financially

in their chosen careers, are determined to fight for their profession and for their futures in this profession.

In the face of these imminent changes, I was forced to ask myself what I believed my future should and could hold.

What has caused me personally to be resolute and to stand firm is pretty close to home; in fact it is actually something on my doorstep.

A number of years ago, I became involved in a number of projects with young people - some of whom were involved in gangs. Some of these young people had found themselves before the magistrates' and the crown courts.

All of you here this evening will be familiar with such young people. Their literacy is often limited. Their backgrounds make for tragic reading and their only

support in life is the peer group which led them towards the criminal justice system in the first place.

When these young people told me about their experience of the courts and their representatives, their stories make me proud of the criminal justice system of which I am a part. Whilst some of these young people may deserve to spend time in prison - some may have done terrible things, but many are hard working individuals and these young people are deserving of representation, in my opinion, by the best we can offer - as is every and any individual charged with a criminal offence. They spoke of being heard, of being defended fairly and without being prejudged.

I aspire to become the highly competent and skilled member of the Bar that our profession may rightly be so proud of. I, and many others in my position will continue will work hard to achieve that goal.

There is no way I would walk out of my profession, leaving a criminal justice system that risks not being fit for purpose on my understanding of the proposals.

Ultimately, I do not intend to walk away from my vocation unless I am dragged from it.

So after asking myself the question 'what could the future hold', for me the answer is still 'a career at the Criminal Bar'.

I would like to say that as summer approaches, my diary is becoming filled with glamorous fixtures, but as it is, this Monday I will be at Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court. No doubt I will be covering five first appearances, two committals, a breach of bail.... and a youth court trial. My

clerks tell me that the last person to secure tenancy regularly undertook such a case load. My supervisor tells me that I won't be able to afford my travel without such a case load, and my parents say they have found me an opening at a fantastic supermarket legal service.

My optimism, determination and passion for my chosen career path are not waning even now. I speak for many pupils of my generation when I say that we intend to remain steadfast in our future aspirations and we look to our respective chambers and professional organisations for guidance and support.

What is obvious is that without fresh blood, the Bar will wither on the branch and die. Those choosing to enter this profession choose to be here because we believe in it. As pupils we are committed, we are passionate and we hope - along with our colleagues to whom we look for

guidance....to achieve long and successful careers at the
Criminal Bar.