

GLASS



THE
WIG

CEILINGS



A Note From Our Editors

Dear Readers,

A warm welcome to the inaugural edition *The Wig*, the University of Bristol Bar Society's magazine!

We aim to provide an alternative perspective to the Bar. Through which, we hope to further strengthen the community of present and aspiring barristers. The theme for this edition is "Glass Ceilings". We are immensely honoured to have various leading barristers contributing to this edition, reflecting on their journey to the Bar and the glass ceilings they have shattered along the way. We are also grateful to our sponsors, without whom such an endeavour would be impossible.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to our editorial committee for their dedication and hard work, ensuring a successful first edition of *The Wig*. We are also tremendously thankful to Nafisa El-Turke for her original illustrations. Finally, a special thank you to our managing editor Ana Tolmacheva for bringing the entire edition to life.

It has been an absolute joy working with such a wonderful team and we hope you enjoy reading *The Wig* as much as we enjoyed putting it together!

Yours Sincerely,



Co-Editors-in-Chief



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*President of University of Bar Society
2021-2022*

Foreword

If 16-year-old me were to be told that in three years' time I would be attending a top academic institution, writing a foreword as President of the second largest law society on campus, all whilst doing a joint honours degree, I would not believe it. As a first-generation immigrant born to teenage parents, there were points in my life where higher education was a distant dream. As my parents had barely achieved a high school diploma, growing up, I never dared to dream of the possibility of academic and professional success until my late high school years. As children, we never question the circumstances that we are faced with. Rather, we accept that this is simply the way things are. As we grow older, we realise that this is not how change works. If we want to succeed, we must fight against the barriers that limit our growth, particularly in the opportunities presented to us.

We must fight

This was what drove my presidential campaign and what still pushes me today to ensure the University of Bristol's Bar Society remains successful and cognisant of diversity. For me, it was imperative that our society continued with the various diversity initiatives of our predecessors whilst incorporating new ones. Our BAME, Female and LGBTQ+ mentorship scheme is one example. This year, we have extended the scheme to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those who have been in care, attended non-selective state schools or have been eligible for free school meals. This has allowed us to increase the opportunities available to students who have been disadvantaged by their background and may not have had the opportunity to explore the Bar prior to attending university.

Moreover, we have ensured that our diversity series talks are extended to other marginalised groups. Alongside our 'Being Black at the Bar' talk, we will be hosting talks on 'Disability at the Bar', 'Being Muslim at the Bar' and 'Mental Health at the Bar'. We have also introduced a new talk series titled 'Boundaries for Women at the Bar', which will discuss being a woman at the Bar and the challenges it entails, which will discuss being a woman at the Bar and the challenges it entails.

This seeks to shed a light on sexual assault at the Bar and how to identify inappropriate advances from those who may exploit their professional superiority. Aside from this, we are consistently ensuring that the barristers who we invite to speak at our events represent marginalised communities. In doing so, we are able to show that the Bar is not only for white men, for the industry is changing.

Bridge the gaps that continue to exist

However, true change will only happen if we all rally together to encourage students from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue a career at the Bar. The University of Bristol's Bar Society is one which truly believes that there is *no Bar to the Bar*. As such, we will continue to do all that is within our means to bridge the gaps that continue to exist at the Bar today. We hope that the incoming committee will follow in our footsteps and continue to break glass ceilings long after the end of my own tenancy as President.

Isaac Chambers

*Former President of University of Bar Society
2020-2021*

Foreword

It is unfortunately still the case that a glass ceiling exists for marginalised communities and is prevalent at the Bar. However, I did not realize that a similar ceiling would be in place at both law school and the Bristol Bar Society. A fundamental component of my election campaign and presidency became shattering this glass. I ran my campaign on a promise to make the Bar Society diverse and visible to marginalized communities in order to increase engagement and promote pathways to the Bar as a viable option for these communities.

After having been successfully elected as the first minority President of the Bristol Bar Society, I believed that the glass ceilings had effectively been shattered, only then to find myself precariously on a glass cliff. My Presidency looked bleak and began during a global pandemic which showed no signs of slowing down. However, I was able to effectively navigate down the cliff with the help of my extremely hard-working committee. My committee worked tirelessly to ensure that we kept my campaign promises and helped shatter other glass ceilings hindering our members.


As President, I spearheaded various initiatives and entrenched them into our constitution to preserve and ensure their longevity. I successfully set up the LGBTQ+, BAME & Female mentorship scheme to tackle inequalities and to help motivate marginalised groups at the Bar. The University of Bristol Bar Society was the first and only society to set up a mentorship scheme of this kind which is tailored to these groups. The mentorship programme pairs students who are LGBTQ+, BAME, and female with mentors who identify alike. Moreover, we started a "No Bar to the Bar" webinar series, which is open to all students who are looking to pursue a career at the Bar. These webinars aim to provide tailored information and advice to students who have often been neglected (e.g. international students).

Additionally, in my capacity as President of the University of Bristol Bar Society, I wrote an open letter concerning the Black Lives Matter movement to the University of Bristol Law School. This obtained the signatures and support of the Presidents of other law societies on campus. Riding on this, I pushed for the University to increase the representation of Black speakers at events by partnering with Black Solicitors Network; to release its data on black student intake and the black speakers it has invited to address the underlying problems of systemic racism within the Law School; and lastly to set up an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion student group to speak to black students about how to tackle the issues they face. I am pleased to say that the Law School has agreed to all these initiatives and has successfully implemented them since.

No Bar to The Bar

In all, I believe that my efforts during the last academic year have shattered several glass ceilings and have positively impacted the Society and the wider student community. I would like to thank Cher Lyne Peh, my Vice-President and close friend, who shared my vision for a brighter future. We have since passed the baton on to our successors to continue our work chipping away at those glass ceilings that prevent progress.

Lastly, I would like to congratulate India and Michelle for successfully kickstarting the Wig. I am immensely proud to see the Bristol Bar Society's growth into its own unique publication. The publication is in the safe and capable hands of two brilliant individuals who have an exciting vision for its future. Therefore, it seems only fitting that the first edition of the Wig focuses on how we in the Bar can continue to work on shattering any glass ceilings that hinder growth.



‘If we
want to
succeed,
we must
fight
against the
barriers
that limit
our
growth’

– *Maja Koscicka*

‘We
must
shatter
any
glass
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that
hinder
us’

– *Isaac Chambers*

The Importance of Diversity at The Bench

Written by – Eduardo Robinson

Baroness Hale once wrote ‘we want a judiciary in which women and visible minorities are much better represented than they are at present’ and that ‘everyone with the requisite ability and personal qualities should be able to feel that the judiciary is open to them, whatever their religion or belief, their sexual orientation, their socio-economic background or origin’. Despite this, the upper echelons of the judiciary of the United Kingdom were and still are dominated by Oxbridge-educated white men. The causes of this appear to stem from the structures of the legal professions and the appointments process itself. Having a bench which does not reflect the makeup of the present society can be questioned on grounds of public legitimacy. In keeping with the theme of this edition, the focus of this article will be on the barriers faced by women, ethnic minority groups and those from lower income backgrounds who aspire to the judiciary.

In 2021, 34 percent of judges and half of tribunal judges are women and 29 percent of judges are women in the High Court and above. Meanwhile five percent of judges were from Asian backgrounds, one percent were from black backgrounds and four percent of judges in the High Court and above were from these backgrounds. It is clear from these figures that there is a long way to go for a bench that truly reflects the community it represents.

Everybody in the UK should be represented

Judicial diversity ensures that better and fairer decisions are made. Underrepresented groups should be encouraged to embark upon judicial careers. This in turn would allow the bench to reflect the make-up of the UK and, in doing so, would produce a better-quality judiciary.


Lady Arden has suggested that ‘people may well have more confidence that their concerns have been taken into account if the judiciary reflects more of a cross-section of society’.

Judges are not independent from the society within which they adjudicate. Their decisions derive their legitimacy from the general public.

This legitimacy is diminished where judges do not reflect those individuals who pass through their courts. If not for this, there could be subliminal prejudices which could affect judgements. It is likely that judges who are far removed from the ordinary man do not command the same level of trust.

This trust is further strengthened by fair appointment processes - fair appointments include diverse appointments. Diversity is important for the fulfilment of one of the criteria required of judicial candidates found in the Judicial Appointment Committee’s Merit Criteria ‘an awareness of the diversity of the communities which the courts and tribunals serve and an understanding of differing needs’. Thus, equal representation of all groups would further increase judicial legitimacy as representation of all groups is a fundamental cornerstone of democracy.

Judicial diversity is integral to the legitimacy of any legal system. JUSTICE’s report outlines that a senior judiciary that does not reflect the ethnic, gender or social composition of the nation represents a serious constitutional issue. Way back in 2011, Lord Neuberger called for the use of Section 159 of the Equality Act to increase diversity in the judiciary. This would mean that when two candidates are of equal merit, positive action is taken to increase diversity - why not just choose the female or BAME candidate? Nevertheless, judges have to understand the experiences of the parties before them, and a diverse judiciary can draw on different perspectives to bear on the development of the law. Truth may be derived from collaboration so the collective experiences of each individual could lead to fairer decision-making. The use of Section 159 would send out a strong signal that diversity in judicial appointments is highly important.



Nobody should have fewer opportunities in life merely because they are women or are not white or come from a background which is socially or economically underprivileged. The bedrock of a democratic society means protection of these characteristics. If there is limited diversity in the judiciary, people from a wide variety of backgrounds are less likely to see it as just and that it is *their* judiciary.

Perhaps, the solution might be that the Judicial Appointments Committee looks elsewhere other than barristers to fill judicial posts – other groups such as solicitors are more diverse than barristers. It is the capacity to be a good judge and not the capacity to be a good barrister that is essential to merit. Other types of lawyers could easily satisfy the Judicial Appointment Committee’s Merit Criteria of high levels of expertise, sound judgement, and ability to produce clear reasoned judgements expeditiously (including leadership and managerial skills where appropriate). An amendment to the Senior Courts Act 1981 could be made to allow more part-time appointments. This is because for the number of women in the judiciary to increase, there needs to be more flexible working and career breaks. Equally, the UK could follow the example of Germany and appoint career judges directly from law school and a judicial training college. Lord Neuberger supports this suggestion as it would make sure that the judiciary is not ‘too cloistered’ with a blend of career and ex-practitioner judges.


Although some of the measures advocated here may seem unpopular, if the issue is to be addressed, this is perhaps the only path which can be taken. A diverse judiciary would hardly undermine the quality of judgements and would only serve to increase public trust and confidence in the justice system. There should be a duty on those presently involved in the judiciary to continue with the improvements. As is evident from the figures set out at the start, there is a very long way to go. It is time that the United Kingdom accepts that everybody in the UK should be represented at all levels throughout British society and the judiciary is one of the most fundamental elements of this. If the judiciary is unable to work towards equality, then society should turn to Parliament for a solution to the diversity problem.

What Empowers You?

'Achievin
for you a

We asked our
Committee
Members what
empowered them to
defy and break the
glass ceiling they
are confronted
with...
so, what empowers
you?

'People who have overcome
great adversity and succeeded
despite the seemingly low odds'



beyond the expectations that others have
and being able to fulfil my potential'

'I feel empowered by making
arguments and finding solutions'

'The ability of ordinary people to ambitiously
break societal norms and eradicate discriminatory rules'



The English Bar: *A view from Greece*

Written by – Lenia Konstantinidou

On the gates of Bar School, a sign reads ‘proceed with caution’. Dame Caroline once said, ‘I don't think the authorities at universities, Bar schools, the Inns of Court, tell it like it is to the students about how difficult it is, what the statistics are [and so on]’. With various barriers hindering one's access to the Bar, the problem appears to be more prominent for international students. What is it then, that drives so many international students to the Bar, in spite of these difficulties? This article will analyse the English's Bar popularity among overseas students, while considering the hurdles of language, diversity, and biases that need to be overcome. A comparative case study with the Greek legal system will further develop this point, revealing how the English Bar holds a certain social status not found anywhere else.

Statistics for 2021 released by the Bar Standards Board suggest a decrease between 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 in students enrolled on the BPTC. Overseas students dropped from 823 to 781, and UK/EU students from 926 to 904. Amongst the cohort, 52% lived in the UK before enrolment, 1.5% lived in the EU, and 46.5% from elsewhere. Evidently, there has been an increase in students from abroad, rising from around 30% in 2011-2012 to 46.5% in the previous year. This suggests a rise in international interest in the English/Welsh Bar.

However, where does this interest and increase in overseas enrolment stem from? With increasing tuition and Bar School fees, and the already strenuous and difficult process of applying for pupillage, the question becomes even more difficult to answer. The stakes are getting even higher, putting internationals in the uncomfortable situation of questioning whether this is all worth it.

Perhaps by drawing on the Greek legal system, the mystery behind this increasing interest can be resolved. Compared to the Greek system, English and Welsh barristers enjoy an elevated social status. Though Greek barristers do not fall short in terms of acuity and intellect, they certainly do so when it comes to **salary and opportunities for career advancement**. There is a clear office hierarchy, where **the glass ceiling** implicitly debars individuals from progressing. A 23-year-old barrister in the UK acquires a level of social status which their Greek counterparts would not dream of achieving until at least their 40s. Such a disparity can only be rectified by the Greek government. The disappointment felt by previous generations lies in this **lack of international recognition**. Thus, Greek students decide to take the initiative and choose to ‘migrate’ to other legal systems, especially that of England and Wales.

However, an international student’s transition to the English legal system is fraught with many difficulties which may make them question whether they can really cross the finishing line. The BPTC 2019-2020 outcomes reveal that around **52%** of full-time **UK/EU** students and **49%** of full-time **overseas** students passed the Bar preparatory course.

Reform is needed

As of May 2021, only **3%** of overseas students received an outstanding grade, compared to **22%** of **UK/EU** students. With outstanding students being the most likely to secure pupillage, this might suggest another limitation for overseas candidates. This barrier was underlined by **Baroness Deech’s** suggestion of introducing an English language test, to be taken before application to Bar School. The Bar Standards Board had previously been suspicious of this new candidate-evaluation measure, considering it to be **discriminatory towards non-native speakers**. Indeed, such a measure would further hinder steps towards a more **ethnically diverse system**.

The above information may suggest a sense of **bias** found during the application process and may be the reason for the low numbers of practitioners who have come from other countries in chambers. The low numbers might also be attributable to overseas candidates returning to their home-countries **owing to family pressures or fear of failure**. Minimal representation of people from a variety of backgrounds appears unjustified.

With pupillage seen as unattainable by many overseas candidates, faith quickly drains. On the flip side, for the international students who have enjoyed success in their journey to the Bar, their unique backgrounds have sometimes enabled them to find the perfect Chambers for them. **International markets** and businesses are closely affiliated with the English legal system. As such, an international student’s knowledge of **other languages can be a huge asset to them**.

International candidates are the future not the enemy

It is now or never for international candidates to take the leap forward and give the English Bar a chance. There is **high demand for different cultures and perspectives within the profession**. There are various initiatives which intend to promote a more international image for the Bar. Evidently, the Bar is open to anyone who is ambitious enough. Social status, global recognition, and great opportunities are only a few of the benefits enjoyed by barristers in England and Wales. However, in order to facilitate a rise in international students applying to become barristers, **reform is needed**. We should first turn to the Inns of Court and then the government to demand reform. International candidates are the future not the enemy.

Mathias Cheung

About Mathias ...

Mathias graduated from his LLB at King's College London with first class honours in 2013, and then went on to obtain a Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) at the University of Oxford. After completing the Bar Professional Training Course (BPTC) at City Law School in 2015, he completed his pupillage at Atkin Chambers and has been practising there since 2016 as a commercial barrister specialising in construction, infrastructure, energy and professional negligence disputes. In addition to his routine diet of domestic cases, he has developed a diverse international arbitration practice which takes him to jurisdictions far and wide, including Hong Kong, Singapore and the Middle East.

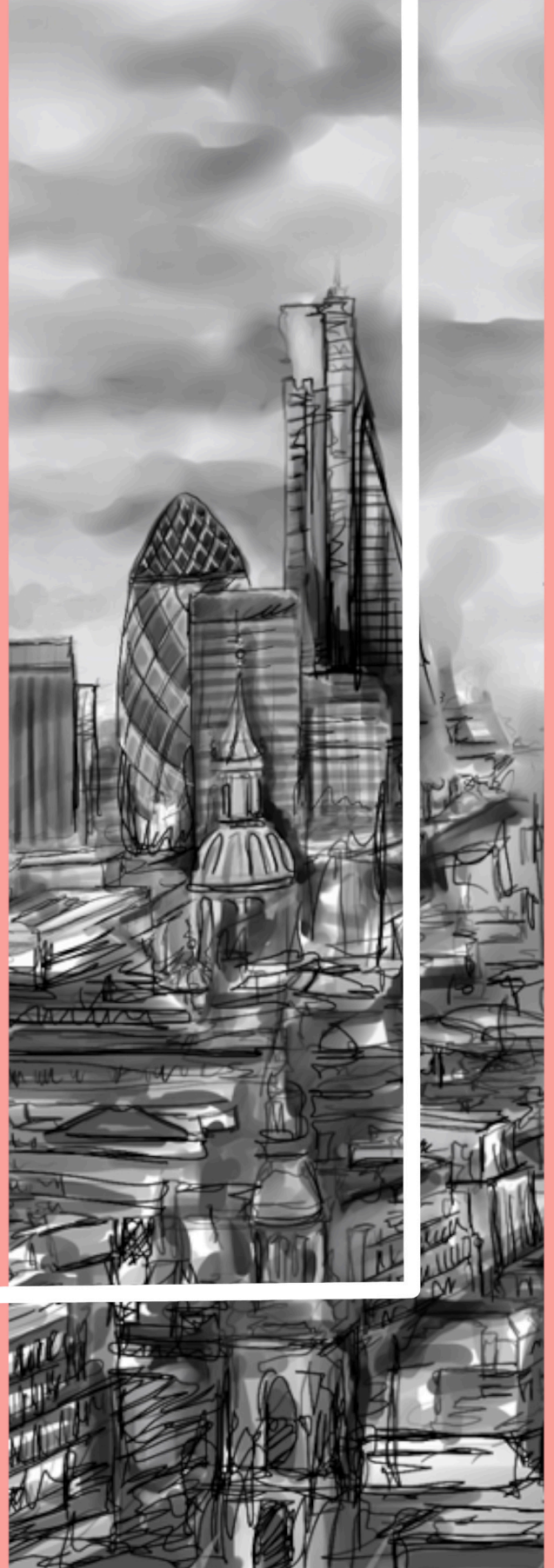
Fun Fact!

Mathias loves singing and playing the guitar and was part of a band when he was at bar school.

A Letter to His Younger Self

The context of Mathias' letter:

This letter is addressed to Mathias' 23-year-old self after he had graduated from his LLB and BCL, when he was facing a dilemma between applying for pupillage in the UK or returning to Hong Kong to qualify.



Dear Mathias,

First off, congratulations – you have made it through four long years of legal education, and your year in Oxford was a challenge on a whole new level. It was by no means a walk in the park, so give yourself a pat on the back before moving on to the next great endeavour (yes, I know you are about to do yet more studying on the BPTC)! There is still a long way ahead.

I know your mind is tirelessly thinking about what to do next, and whether you've got what it takes to get pupillage in London. You have made your first attempt at applying for pupillage, and although you got a reserve offer from a good set, it just feels so close yet so far. You must be wondering whether what others are saying is true – that it is very rare (if not impossible) for an international student to get to the London bar. The stats are certainly not terribly encouraging, and looking at Chambers' websites, you hardly see any recent tenants who are from an international background.

Do not be afraid though. You are not the only candidate receiving rejections, and I can tell you every current pupil / tenant who has been through this process has faced rejections at some point. You know what your dream is, and there is no reason to think that you will not find a set of Chambers out there who will value your unique background and skillset.

Think carefully about which set(s) you think you will probably fit into, and look at the sort of international work that they do in other jurisdictions – you are fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin, so let them know this can be a key asset for working in the Asia Pacific region! I know you have a particular passion for European law and constitutional law, but do not forget that you are very much open to commercial sets, and they may well be a better fit for you if you want a cross-jurisdictional practice.

Remember not to let any of the self-doubt stop you from applying for pupillage again during your BPTC year. There is so much more that you can do in 6 months' time to pack your CV and get better at interviews. It is not going to be a honeymoon year, but if you try your best and grab hold of every opportunity that comes your way (be it mooting, pro bono work or writing for legal blogs), you will see how it pays off when you walk through Chambers' doors for your next interviews. Every little bit counts.

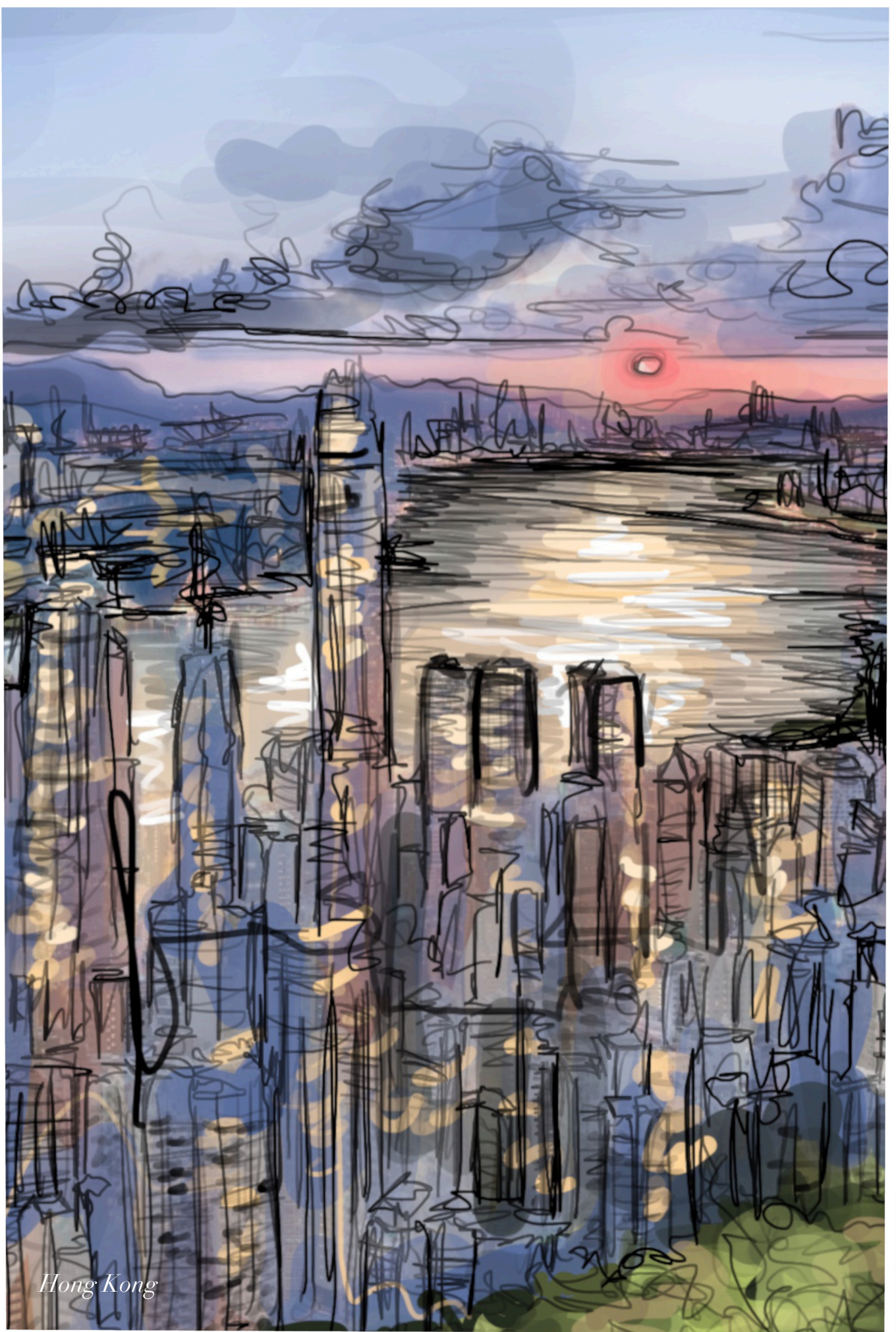
I know what you are thinking next – would it be sustainable in the long run to live and work in London while your family is still in Hong Kong? All I can say is that you should not worry too much about the distant future. Give the London bar a shot while you are still young and have relatively few constraints – it is now or never, and if things do not work out, then you always have the option of returning to Hong Kong. In fact, you might find in a few years' time that you have to spend months on end in Hong Kong working on arbitration, public inquiries and what not, so visiting your family might not be an issue at all.

There is no doubt a lot to take in and reflect on, but ultimately, do not lose sight of what is dearest to your heart – your friends from university are mostly here in London, and you have fallen in love with this wonderfully diverse and vibrant city. Enjoy every moment that you get to spend here, try something new every day, maybe even start a band with your mates! Sorting out your career is important, but it is just as essential to lead a beautiful life while you are at it, and the many wonderful people you meet along the way will become your lifelong friends.

Years from now, you will look back at this period of your life and remember it very fondly. Whatever happens on your next pupillage applications, just have a little faith and make sure that you make the most out of the coming days, so that you will have no regrets by the time you finally leave academia and join the bar.

All the best,

Mathias



Hong Kong

An Interview

With Nathalie Koh

About Nathalie...

Nathalie graduated from the University of Oxford in 2018 upon the completion of her BA and BCL. She is currently a tenant at Fountain Court Chambers, where she focuses mainly on commercial law and regulatory work. Nathalie grew up in both Singapore and New Zealand – two very different places.

Q What was your journey to the Bar like?

My journey to the Bar was, initially at least, somewhat ridden with conflict and doubt. While I knew that I would enjoy a career as a barrister, I wasn't entirely sure if I'd be good enough (or, to some extent, lucky enough) to get pupillage. Ultimately, I made a decision to give it a go anyway. I made that decision out of a recognition that it's incredibly important to pick a career that you find fulfilling and valuable, and that's what I wanted for myself.

I then quickly learnt that it's important to not shy away from failure or rejection. While every barrister worth their salt will make you think otherwise, it is entirely common to be rejected from your 'dream set' or to receive criticism of your work product once you're there. A crucial part of pupillage is having the fortitude and sense of self to know that it doesn't necessarily reflect on your abilities or potential, and that you should take any feedback on board and just get on with things.

Q Did you encounter any glass ceilings along the way? If so, how did you approach them?

I've been fortunate enough to not have experienced any 'external' glass ceilings thus far. This is largely because I am extremely lucky to be part of a set that ensures that everyone feels welcome and valued. Although, having said that, I'm aware that my positive experience is not widely shared in certain areas of the Bar and there is more work that needs to be done to make sure that barristers from non-traditional backgrounds are treated fairly.

The glass ceilings that I've encountered are primarily internal. As a young BAME female, I can see how it's easy to feel like you don't belong in rooms where important decisions are made by people who look and sound very different from you. Or, if you do get to those rooms, to feel like someone who couldn't possibly contri-

bute anything valuable to the conversation. I think the best approach to this (for me at least) is: (i) to know that it's mainly in your head and everyone else is likely preoccupied with other things; (ii) to not take anything too personally; and (iii) to take it as a challenge (one to be relished and seen as a bit of fun).

Q What advice would you give your younger self?

Keep perspective and work hard.

Q Lastly, if you weren't a barrister, what would you be doing?

I'd definitely be a journalist.




What Is Diversity to You?

The second question we asked our committee was what diversity personally meant to them ... so, what does it mean to you?

'Diversity means that everybody is welcomed and accepted'

'Pr
gro
tha



'Diversity is a chance for the cultivation of open mindedness, with all its intrigues and manoeuvres'

Providing underrepresented groups with the opportunities that others benefit from'

'It is the promising image of people from all different backgrounds being represented equally in all aspects of life and society'

Some Reflections on an Accent Bias

Written – Lucia Cipolat

As a white British woman, I am privileged in countless ways, and I am not here to ignore that. I unequivocally respect and appreciate that other women do face barriers that I will never truly understand or experience. Whilst the gap between men and women at the Bar is closing, there is still a disparity. According to the Bar Standard Board, the overall percentage of women at the Bar increased 0.2 percent from December 2018 to December 2020 to 38.2 percent. This is in contrast to an estimated 50.2 percent of the UK working age (16-64) population being female. There are 21.4 percent more male Queen's Councils compared to female Queen's Councils. Thus, it is clear that there is still work to be done. Nevertheless, in this article, I will be focusing on the glass ceilings I have felt as a female law student

and in my journey to the Bar so far. Specifically, I will be exploring how an accent bias is far more pertinent against women than men.

Coming from a village on the border of Wolverhampton and Stafford, I have a mild West Midland accent. Before University, I had never considered my accent as a reflection of my goals or abilities. However, at University, when interacting with new people, my accent was frequently, if not always, questioned. Looks of disapproval or judgment were often present when I would pronounce a word differently or use unfamiliar colloquial terms. Slowly, I became more aware and conscious of how I spoke.

However, I began to note that my experience with accent bias differed greatly from my male counterparts. It was not until I told my male friend of this prejudice that I noticed this disparity. He was a friend who went to the *same* school, achieved the *same* grades and is also studying Law at the *same* university. When I discussed my experiences with him, he did not share the *same* sentiment. Despite having a similar accent, this friend of mine did not feel any particular need to alter his accent. Neither did he express that he had received any criticisms.

***There is still work
to be done***

This double standard between men

and women concerning accent bias can be felt at the Bar itself. In an article for the Counsel Magazine regarding ‘Accent Diversity at the Bar,’ Dr Drummond argues that it is the responsibility of current barristers to ‘challenge the status quo’ of how one should sound when doing advocacy in court. It was suggested that that they should make it possible for those coming into the profession to preserve their unique linguistic approach. However, it is worth noting that Dr Drummond argues this from his experiences of life at the Bar as a man. Evidently, for women, it is much more difficult to break these glass ceilings of accent bias, and women are *no strangers* to the struggles of not being taken *seriously*.

‘If you sound posh, you must be clever’

The United Kingdom has some of the highest levels of accent diversity in the English speaking world (Accent Bias Britain). In ‘How to Break into the Elite’, Rayjan notes that accent bias is ‘still the most deeply rooted superstition in Britain today: if you sound posh, you must be clever.’ Moreover, the Bar is a context, along with many others, in which speech style and perceived professional competence are often synonymous. The Bar, undoubtedly requires one to speak persuasively

and eloquently, two qualities becoming of a successful barrister. However, the notion that an argument is better presented using ‘received pronunciation’ is less easy to accept.

This gender disparity in the context of accent bias has been illustrated by respected political and legal figures in England. According to BBC Worklife, Margaret Thatcher swapped her Lincolnshire accent for a ‘posher’ one by adopting the standard ‘received pronunciation,’ at the time this was thought to be more in keeping with a position of political power. Conversely, Tony Blair and George Osborne took their accents in the opposite direction and instead attempted to introduce more working class ‘mockney’ into their upper-class speeches to enhance their perceived approachability. It is particularly notable that within this context, a woman has to improve the way she says things rather than what she is saying, to authenticate her position as an important political figure. However, Blair and Osborne were already in a position where they were taken *seriously* and sought to gain popularity with a different class of voters.

Even though the discrepancy between men and women at the Bar is slowly closing, it is undeniable that women do and have had to work harder to get to where they are. Women often feel a heavier burden to change and reinvent themselves to fit society’s expectations of what an

*Women are no
strangers to the
struggles of not being
taken seriously*

elite professional should look and sound like. These expectations within the profession have never discriminated against men. I cannot deny that after almost a year and a half at University, my accent has definitely faded and changed. However, I no longer want to conform to this status quo. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of how people perceive me, I now recognise that knowing my own self-perception and understanding my strengths and weaknesses is *far* more important.

‘I no
longer
want
to
conform
to
this
status
quo’



Nasreen Shah

About Nasreen ...

Nasreen holds an LL.M in International and Comparative law, with a specialism in International Women's Rights from the George Washington University, Washington DC, and a LL.B (Hons) in Law with French from the University of Buckingham. She is currently a tenant at Great James Street Chambers in London as well as the Founder and Director of Her Bar Ltd, a company focusing on the support and progression of women at the Bar.

Fun Fact!

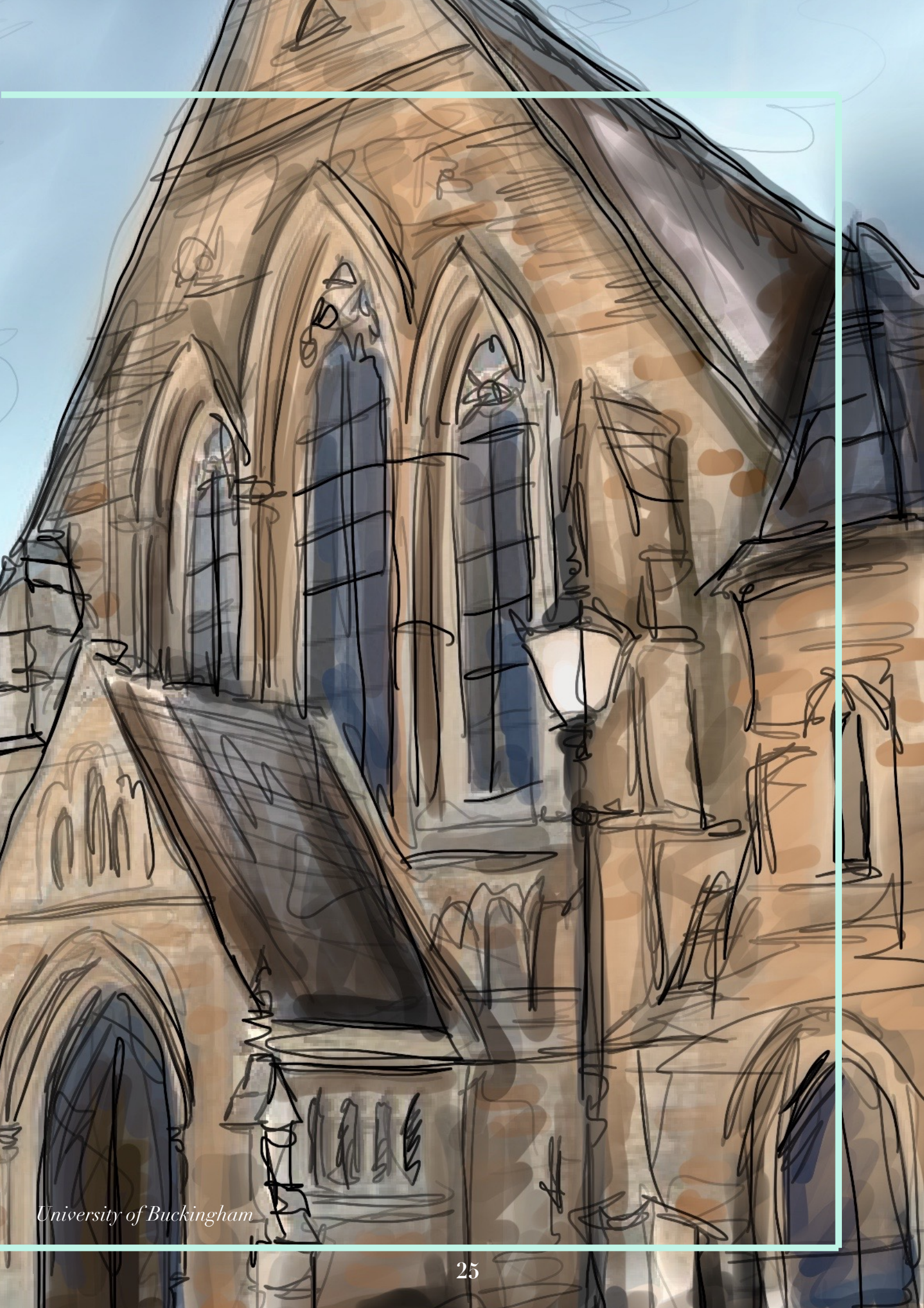
In her spare time Nasreen is a dancer who enjoys archery.

A Letter to Her Younger Self

The context of Nasreen's Letter:

This letter is addressed to her 20-year-old self, during her first year of law school at the University of Buckingham.







Dear Nasreen,

It's been a while. You've taken your first step into the unknown, an unpredictable future with many important choices lying ahead of you.

You've made the decision to leave your country in the pursuit of a career you know virtually nothing about. You don't have any contacts in the legal profession, English is not your first language, and you generally feel like a bit of an anomaly. You wonder if you made the right decision but within the first few weeks you started to enjoy yourself. You made friends and got to appreciate humorous common law precedents. Remember...? *Carlill v Carbolic Smoke Ball Co...*

You doubt yourself and your skills daily, but you show strength by stepping outside of your comfort zone. You entered mooting and negotiation competitions all the while having a paralysing fear of public speaking. You ultimately overcame your fear, finding your voice in the belief that you could advocate for others in your community and beyond.

You keep gaining confidence throughout your first year and you start believing in yourself for the first time in your life unequivocally. The Nay-sayers are slowly forgotten.

You will grow into a person who strongly believes in making the world a better place. You will come to learn that it is easier said than done and it will frustrate you.

You will reevaluate and decide to make your little corner of the world better. You will advocate for women and children around the world, and you won't accept no as an answer. People you work with will describe your calmness as steady and your fierceness as unexpected. It will lead to many amazing outcomes for women and children alike. You will become a frontline worker in many ways before you reach your destination – the Bar of England and Wales.

You will embark on a new journey, face new challenges but the foundations you laid when you were 20 will set you on the right path. Be patient, be generous and keep caring for the people around you. However, don't forget that you matter too, self-care is important. Saying no every now does not make you less of a person.

Don't be scared to make mistakes.

Own them along the way.

Remember you are on a beautiful journey to become your best self.

I promise, you will find yourself and be proud of the person you become, flaws and all.

Love,
Nasreen

How Can We

'Those at the apex of the profession should welcome new ideas and people from exceptional backgrounds'

'By raising awareness and encouraging aspiring barristers, from underrepresented backgrounds, to believe in their value and the importance of their input in the future Bar'

'Tackle the problem earlier on in education by encouraging members of these minority groups to pursue Law at University, so that they can then progress to the Bar'

We Make The Bar More Diverse?

After our committee members established the issue of the lack of diversity in the Bar, we asked them how they would solve such a serious problem... what would you propose?

For a more diverse Bar,
people should be open to new experiences,
leaving fear behind'

'Through the use of the Equality Act
- even if this is a radical solution'

bers of

Can Anyone Be A Barrister?

Written by – William Sargent

Amongst the barriers which exist to accessing the Bar, it seems that one of the largest challenges is faced by those with disabilities. The Bar Standards Board (BSB) regulates barristers in England and Wales. Their most recent report on diversity, displaying the data from 2020, makes this challenge clear. They estimate that though around 11.3% of the employed working age population reported a disability, only 3.5% of those at the bar declared a disability under the standards set out by the 2010 Equality Act. What is even more concerning is that the figure for QCs was a mere 1.6%. This leaves us asking the question, why are those with disabilities so disproportionately underrepresented at the Bar and why are the opportunities limited?

Unfortunately, one of the main reasons is the simple question of infrastructure and physical accessibility to both courts and chambers for those with limited mobility. Lord Keen of Elie reported that as of April 2019, 31 out of the 56 court and tribunal buildings in Greater London would not be able to facilitate the needs of those with disabilities. Moreover, it would be very expensive to re-develop many of these old buildings to make them suitable for wheelchair users, and other disabilities. However, given the backlog of cases within the courts, it is unlikely that this is going to be a priority in the near future for the government. Similarly, chambers are often located in old and listed buildings. Narrow corridors and doorways, poor ramp access and unreachable intercoms for entry are all difficulties which limit accessibility for aspiring barristers in search of chambers which can accommodate their needs.

There is also a financial burden which has to be factored in. The cost of special equipment and higher travel costs which result from having a disability can be extremely detrimental in this profession which is, to a large extent, self-employed. Such restrictions will impact adversely on earnings. Whilst there is financial assistance available which is reducing the effects of this issue, it is not necessarily seeing the uptake at its full potential. For many, the

prospect of asking for the money comes with a risk of reducing their chances at achieving a pupillage as they also contend with the fear of discrimination.

Mental health disabilities are often more discreet. However, they can equally have a detrimental effect on opportunities at the Bar if not properly addressed. As a consequence of COVID-19, never before have we been more aware, as a society, of the seriousness of mental health and the focus that should be put on it in the workplace.

The Bar Council and other similar organisations have been working hard to break the stigma around psychological wellbeing in the profession and pushing for a more open discussion. This way, those suffering do not feel restricted or afraid to ask for support. Yet, given the highly demanding professional environment of the Bar, it is perhaps unsurprising that this has not been reflected in improving statistics of those reporting disabilities or joining the profession. This suggests that perhaps it is not a sustainable career for these groups, and there is still much more to be done to accommodate these needs so that they are given an equal chance to succeed in this environment.

Anyone can be a barrister

It becomes quite plain to see that there are a myriad of issues for those with disabilities to gain equal access to the Bar, and these can make it even harder to get ahead in an already fierce and competitive environment. Thus far change has been slow. Fortunately, societal trends suggest that support for mental health will continue to improve. Unfortunately, it is unclear how quickly changes will come about for those with physical disabilities. Hopefully, the government and other organisations within the profession plan to do more to change the statistics. After all, *anyone* can be a barrister.



Mary Prior QC

About Mary ...

Mary is a Queen's Counsel in criminal law. She was recognized as Woman of the Year 2020 at Women in Law Awards and she currently sits as Vice Chair of Education at Gray's Inn. Mary is also a Tier One Silk in the Legal 500 and chair of the Midland Circuit Social Mobility Committee.

Mary was the first one in her family to attend University. She grew up in a council house in the Midlands. Her dad was a coal miner and then received benefits when he could no longer work. She had no connections in law prior to joining the Bar.

Fun Fact!

Mary is a season ticket holder at Leicester City FC

A Letter to Her Younger Self

The context of Mary's Letter:

This letter is addressed to her 21-year-old self, when her father died in the middle of her second-year law school exams. During which, she was struggling to deal with his loss and with the financial difficulties of studying. She was also in a toxic personal relationship and had little self-confidence.

Dear Mary,

You do not know this yet, but you are extraordinary. Why? You have achieved so much, far beyond what was expected of you by the community in which you lived. Do not waste time comparing yourself with the students now around you. They have their own journey. Yours is different. Instead of focusing on what you do not possess, focus on what you do possess. When you were at school, you had the discipline to study at home without a desk, without quiet, without books or any parental assistance or encouragement. The same applied at sixth form. You studied whilst working at the weekends until 16 then both at the weekends and in the evenings because no pocket money was available for you. You did not receive a general education from your parents, trips to museums, concerts, meals out, time spent together at the weekend. You provided this for yourself. Your nutrition was limited. With that background it is astounding that you achieved your place studying law.

Now, your beloved father has died and you are considering giving up your place, obtaining full-time employment and forgetting the notion of moving up in the world. Don't. Although your journey will take longer than the journey of others, you will succeed. In fact, you will exceed all expectations of you and reach the top of your profession. Let me give you some advice to ease the process of getting there.

Take a piece of paper now, a blank piece of paper, and write down all of your skills, your achievements. Next, take a piece of paper and write down all the things you need to work on. Instead of comparing yourself to others, learn to value you, and focus on the things you can do something about. Learn to understand who you are and what you have to offer.

When others criticise you or attempt to undermine your confidence, take no notice. As time progresses you will pass them in your journey. Such behaviour is difficult for you to accept. You are a people pleaser, but you need to learn not to try to make everyone else happy. Simply be kind to everyone, however they treat you. That way you will keep your dignity and improve your self-confidence.

Learn to accept that aggressive or unpleasant questioning or behaviour means that the questioner has lost their dignity and their power rather than believing that this is a reflection on you. Remember how you felt in your childhood when spoken down to and retain that feeling so that you can understand the reactions of clients when you meet them. Fear, being overwhelmed and anxious often presents as anger in those who have not had the same opportunities as others. Be patient, understand it is no reflection of you.

Take your time to learn and perfect your craft. See any perceived failures as no more than learning experiences. Take nothing personally. Leave your personal sensitivity at home and become a forensic lawyer, but never lose your humanity. Nothing will be easy for you. You will need to open the doors. You will need to make the connections. You will need to be at your best each and every time.

When you do this, and you will, your career will develop and you will be a barrister who is respected and admired. You will make a difference to the vulnerable people you will represent and above all, you will be able to help others from a similar background to yours to shine. Never give up. Never give in. You have got this.

Love,

Mary





‘Never give
up.
Never give
in.
You have
got
this’

– *Mary Prior QC*

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**‘Don’t be
scared to
make
mistakes.**

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**Own them
along
the
way’**

— Nasreen Shah

Meet The Team...



Michelle Leong
Co – Editor-in-Chief

Is a Third-year student of Law
Fun Fact!

‘I used to fence competitively’



India Claybourn
Co Editor -in-Chief

Is a Second-year student of Law with French
Fun Fact!

‘I bought my first pair of skates this winter and learning how to figure skate!’



Ana Tolmacheva
Managing Editor

Is a Fourth-year student of Law with French
Fun Fact!

‘I am obsessed with Formula 1’



Nafisa El-Turke
Creative Director & Illustrator

Is a First-year student of Law
Fun Fact!

‘I run my own business selling art on Etsy’

Our Writers ...



Eduardo Robinson

Is a Second-year student of Law with German

Fun Fact!

'I enjoy wild swimming, especially in winter'



Lucia Cipolat

Is a Second-year student of Law with a year abroad in Hong Kong

Fun Fact!

'I am a Third Dan Black Belt in Shotokan Karate'



William Sargent

Is a First-year student of Law with French

Fun Fact!

'I'm a Timothee Chalamet super fan!'



Lenia Konstantinudou

Is a Second-year student of Law

Fun Fact!

'I subconsciously won't allow myself to watch popular shows'



3 VERULAM BUILDINGS
BARRISTERS



Enterprise

CHAMBERS



BPP
UNIVERSITY



DEANS COURT
CHAMBERS



St John's
CHAMBERS



NEW COURT CHAMBERS



NEW SQUARE

XXIV

BARRISTERS' CHAMBERS



No Bar to The Bar