



The Council
of the Inns
of Court

Pupillage Matched Funding Scheme: Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ explains the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Council of the Inns of Court (COIC) match-funded pupillage schemes, including how the scheme works, who can apply, the key criteria, the funding available, and key application dates.

What has been announced?

The Ministry of Justice has announced a landmark scheme to invest up to £1.5 million per year to increase the number of match-funded criminal pupillages and support entry into the Bar. COIC is partnering with the Ministry of Justice to distribute this government funding in addition to its own scheme, which has successfully match funded pupillages in predominantly legally aided sets since 2014.

What is the purpose of the scheme?

The purpose of both schemes is to **match fund** the first six months of pupillages in addition to those pupillages that chambers would have offered in any event. By way of example, if but for the funding, Chambers only had funds to enable them to recruit a single pupil, but with the funding they were able to recruit a second, the pupillage match funding would fund the first six of the second pupillage.

The new MOJ scheme is intended to fund up to 100 match-funded pupils, in addition to the pupillages match funded by COIC, to improve opportunities and increase the number of junior barristers practising in **criminal Bar**.

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Is the MOJ funding separate from the existing COIC scheme?

Yes. The MOJ funding is separate and in addition to the existing COIC match-funding scheme, however both are applied for through the same application form on the COIC website.

When is the MOJ funding available until?

Funding is currently available for pupillages starting before December 2028.

What are the COIC match funding criteria?

The COIC match funding criteria remain the same as in previous years. The fundamental condition is that the chambers (from any practice area) are engaged predominantly in legally aided work.

What are the MOJ match funding criteria?

The MOJ match funding criteria focus specifically on chambers that undertake predominantly public criminal legally aided work. Applicant chambers are also expected to incorporate all three equal opportunity measures in their recruitment process and commit to providing data to assist with monitoring and evaluation of the funding.

It is the MOJ preference for chambers to recruit using the Pupillage Gateway to reduce administrative burdens on collecting and processing monitoring data and to make it easier for chambers to access contextual recruitment tools.

What are the equal opportunity measures and how do we apply them?

Chambers will be expected to incorporate the following equal opportunities measures in their recruitment process:

Targeted outreach – activity to raise awareness of the pupillage opportunities amongst those from underrepresented groups. Examples of suitable targeted outreach activities include, but are not limited to the following:

- Attending careers fairs or other events at universities with higher proportions of students from underrepresented groups or lower socio-economic backgrounds,
- Hosting e.g. open days/other events for under-represented groups which introduce chambers/your practice area/explain your application process,
- Mentoring aspiring barristers from underrepresented groups, including lower socio-economic backgrounds (or work with charities that do so),
- Providing practice with applications and interview techniques, e.g. through joint working with the Inns,
- Participating in Pupillage Fairs e.g. the Bar Council's Pupillage Fair, other pupillage fairs; university careers fairs where there is a high proportion of students from under-represented groups.

Contextual Recruitment – activity during the sifting process to assess candidates in the context of their wider circumstances, such as socio-economic backgrounds, caring responsibilities or experience of care.

For guidance on contextual recruitment as part of a recruitment process, please see Bar Council guidance available here: <https://www.barcouncilethics.co.uk/documents/fair-recruitment-guide/> (Section 1a – Contextual recruitment). **Note:** contextual recruitment data is available through Rare on the Pupillage Gateway system. For chambers who do not use the Pupillage Gateway, you may need to contract separately with an agency providing contextual recruitment data. If you need further advice on the application of contextual data, please speak to the Bar Council's EDI team equality@barcouncil.org.uk.

Under the Equal Merit (or tie break) provision – activity only at the final stage of the recruitment process where two or more candidates are assessed as of equal merit. This provision allows chambers to take a protected characteristic into consideration when deciding whom to recruit or promote where people having the protected characteristic are at a disadvantage or are under-represented in chambers. We expect chambers to apply this measure only in circumstances where the candidates have been assessed as being as qualified as each other. As a matter of good practice, chambers should clearly inform applicants in advance (ie in the advert) that they plan to apply the equal merit provision during the pupillage recruitment. For more information on the Equal Merit Provision (including its lawful basis), please see <https://www.barcouncilethics.co.uk/documents/positive-action/>

For advice on appropriate application of positive action for this funding programme, please speak to the Bar Council's EDI team equality@barcouncil.org.uk

How does the match funding work?

Matched-funded pupillages must be in **addition** to those that chambers would have offered in any event. COIC and the MOJ will match pupillage funding already provided by chambers with a grant to fund the first six months of a second pupillage.

What are the 2027 and 2028 grant rates?

Chambers can apply for match funding two years in advance, therefore during the 2026 process, Chambers are able to apply for pupillages starting in 2027 and 2028. However, for applications made during the 2026 process the MOJ's preference is to match fund pupils starting in 2027. The grant award values are reviewed annually and combine the London Living Wage rate and as well as inflation.

The grant award rates are as follows:

- For 2027 London pupillages: £12,400
- For 2027 out of London pupillages: £11,350
- For 2028 London pupillages: £13,500
- For 2028 out of London pupillages: £12,350

These figures are based on chambers recruiting a single pupil but for the funding, and with the funding recruiting an additional pupil. As COIC does not recognise either pupil as the

‘match funded pupil’ if pupillages are staggered throughout the year, half of the above grant is paid when the first pupil commences and the remaining half when the second pupil starts.

Who is responsible for ensuring the pupillage award meets the minimum requirement?

Chambers are responsible for ensuring that the total pupillage award meets the Bar Standards Board’s minimum award for the relevant year.

How do chambers apply?

Chambers must apply through a single application form. The application will determine whether the organisation meets the eligibility criteria to receive COIC and/or MOJ match funding.

Why is there a preference for using the Pupillage Gateway?

It is mandatory for chambers to advertise pupillages through the Pupillage Gateway; however, it is optional to use the gateway as their application system. Where possible, the MOJ have a preference for chambers adopting the gateway application system as it simplifies the collection of certain data for evaluation purposes. It also simplifies the implementation of contextual recruitment for chambers as the relevant contextual recruitment data is available through Rare on the Pupillage Gateway system.

Can I apply for extra funding of additional pupillages, if I have already secured a COIC PMF grant for 2027?

Yes, the MOJ scheme will not affect existing 2027 match funded grants awarded by COIC during 2026. If your chambers wish to apply for COIC and or MOJ funding in addition to what has already been awarded, please acknowledge you have existing funding on the application form and **only** apply for funding of further additional that have not already been accounted for.

Who determines the COIC and PMF Grant Awards?

Pupillage match funded grant award decisions will be made by the COIC PMF Grants Committee, chaired by Mrs Justice Nathalie Lieven and representatives from each of the Inns of Court.

When can applications be submitted?

Applications to match fund 2027–2028 and 2028–2029 pupillages are invited between 1 September and 16 October 2026 and can be made via the [COIC website](#). Decisions will be communicated during the week commencing 2 November 2026.

Who can I contact for more information?

For more information, please email Hayley Dawes at hdawes@coic.org.uk.