

Government to match funding for 100 criminal legal aid pupillages

1 September 2026

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has pledged £1.5m a year to help fund up to 100 additional pupillages annually in criminal law.

The money is in addition to the existing match-funding scheme run by the Council of the Inns of Court (COIC) but has a narrower focus.

While the COIC scheme covers all chambers and other approved training organisations predominantly engaged in legally aided work, the MoJ scheme is focused on chambers that mainly do criminal legally aided work.

It means chambers that would have only taken on one pupil will have the backing to hire two. Chambers receiving MoJ funding will also be expected to incorporate equal opportunity measures into their recruitment practices through targeted outreach and steps to increase representation in the profession.

The COIC scheme has been running since 2014, when 14 pupillages were match funded, a figure which had risen to 33 by 2023. COIC will run the MoJ scheme too.

Matched-funded pupillages must in addition to those chambers would have offered in any event.

COIC and the MoJ will match pupillage funding provided by chambers for the first six months with a total grant of £12,400 for 2027-2028 London pupillages and £11,350 outside the capital.

The figures will rise to £13,500 and £12,350 respectively for 2028-29.

Chambers are responsible for ensuring that the total pupillage award meets the Bar Standards Board's minimum award for the year in question.

In 2026, the minimum award is £25,863 for 12-month pupillages in London and £23,504 elsewhere.

Justice minister Sarah Sackman said: "I'll never forget the day I was called to the Bar. It was a privilege to enter a profession that can help individuals in times of crisis and support the delivery of justice in this country. I want those opportunities open to the brightest people from all over the country and every background.

"This major initiative will help train the next generation of criminal barristers who are essential to upholding the rule of law and delivering swifter justice for victims."

In a joint statement, Riel Karmy-Jones KC, chair, and Andrew Thomas KC, chair-elect of the Criminal Bar Association, said: "This is a very positive step forward. The criminal justice system needs a vibrant diverse and independent criminal Bar to strengthen public cohesion."

They said the funding would support the Bar's efforts to recruit from "the widest possible pool of candidates".

Bar Council chair Kirsty Brimelow KC added: "We welcome the implementation of this initiative, the result of joint working between the Ministry of Justice, the Bar Council, the Criminal Bar Association and the Inns of Courts.

"It has been championed by the Bar Council since 2024 where it featured in our 'Manifesto for justice'."

6 in 10 aspiring barristers fail to secure pupillage first time, research finds

By Legal Cheek on Apr 10 2026

According to the Bar Council's latest pupil survey, just 4 in 10 candidates (37%) secure pupillage in their first application cycle, while nearly half (48%) succeed after two or three attempts. A further 16% require four or more cycles before finally landing a place.

A striking 90% described pupillage recruitment as either quite or very challenging, while just 10% said it was relatively straightforward.

Encouragingly, confidence in the Bar as a long-term career appears to be improving. Nearly three-quarters of pupils (72%) believe the Bar is a viable career, marking a 10% increase on last year.

Yet the data hints at something of a "honeymoon phase", with attitudes becoming less positive as pupils progress from their first six to their second six.

Work-life balance was the most commonly cited reason for doubting whether a career at the Bar is viable. These concerns were especially pronounced among women and disabled pupils. Working patterns may offer some explanation. The median working week sits between 41 and 50 hours, with 43% of pupils working more than 50 hours and just 21% working fewer than 41 hours.

The research also highlights continued disparities in earnings and access to the most lucrative pupillages opportunities. Pupils who attended Oxbridge are 15 times more likely to secure awards of £60,000 or more than those from other universities (61% compared to 4%). And, unsurprisingly, pay also varies sharply by practice area: around 83% of pupils in commercial practice reported awards of £60,000 or more, compared to 70% in chancery and just 7% in other areas.

There are, however, signs of progress on gender pay, with the gap in top awards narrowing slightly this year, as 29% of men reported receiving £60,000 or more compared to 17% of women.

Half of women working in law say their working patterns are unsustainable for their health

This report is a worrying reminder of the impact workplace pressures can have on women's mental health in the legal sector. Stress, burnout and exhaustion shouldn't just be accepted as part of the job, and it's concerning to see how many women are thinking about stepping away from the profession. There is an urgent need for workplaces to take action to address the structural and cultural factors that impact women to retain them in the sector. This matters for its long-term sustainability.

– LawCare CEO, Elizabeth Rimmer

These stark findings demonstrate the scale of the health and wellbeing issues women face and reflects the quiet, accumulated cost of years working in conditions that damage health, with insufficient support from employers. Many firms are taking health and wellbeing seriously but good intentions and wellness programmes are not enough. We need to see change in the underlying architecture – the hours, the billing model, the cultural expectations and the absence of targeted support.

– Dana Denis-Smith OBE, founder of the Next 100 Years: Women In Law and CEO of Obelisk Support

Junior lawyers split: Is AI ‘eating’ their jobs, or just an above-average paralegal?

By [Legal Cheek](#) on Jul 8 2026

Junior lawyers have been airing their anxieties about artificial intelligence (AI) online, with the responses suggesting the profession is nowhere near agreement on whether the tech is a genuine threat to legal careers as we know them or just another overhyped trend.

Posting on the [r/biglaw](#) subreddit, a self described second year transactional associate admitted the job had started to feel like “rubber stamping” now that AI is “eating such a large chunk” of their workload. Tasks like drafting, diligence and summarising documents, long considered essential junior training, were starting to feel “superfluous,” they wrote, before asking whether anyone else was losing job satisfaction over the same thing.

Plenty of people were only too happy to weigh in. One commenter, identifying themselves as a senior associate, did not hold back, predicting that the traditional grind of reviewing documents and passing them up the chain has maybe “10 more years” left in it. A similar view came from another poster, who reckoned a “new regime” was coming, in which AI does the “labour” on routine matters while a single partner signs off at the end.

Others focused on what it might mean for hiring further down the line, with one commenter suggesting firms could end up taking on fewer juniors rather than finding new work to fill their time, going as far as to claim the “pyramid model is dead.”

The uptick in lawyers turning to AI has not been without its problems. Pinsent Masons was recently criticised by a High Court judge after a junior lawyer’s AI assisted research led to the firm citing an insolvency rule that did not exist. Sullivan & Cromwell was similarly forced to apologise to a New York court after AI hallucinated citations turned up in a court filing linked to a major fraud case.

But not everyone in the thread was buying the AI doom, though. One sceptic waved much of the discussion away as “AI propaganda from people who aren’t in biglaw,” while another argued that the leading legal AI tools are, at best, “an above average paralegal.” Useful for a first pass, in other words, but nowhere close to replacing a junior outright.

Elsewhere in the thread, the consensus seemed to be that results depend entirely on who is holding the reins, with one commenter putting it succinctly. AI, they argued, is “an enhancement” for lawyers who already know what they are doing but “a replacement” for those who do not.

Opinion also split along practice area lines, with some seen as far more exposed to AI than others. Several posters argued transactional and M&A work is more exposed, given how document heavy it is, while litigation was seen as safer since advocacy and court appearances stay firmly human. Others were not convinced, pointing out that discovery and legal research, the bread and butter of junior litigation life, are apparently already being reshaped by AI tools.

Law firm cuts working week to protect people and profit

11 June 2026

A Milton Keynes-headquartered law firm has introduced a 35-hour working week as part of a long-term plan to protect both people and profit.

James Geary, managing partner of EMW Law, brought in the cap – which applies to its 70 solicitors and 90 support staff – after concluding that the model of ‘more hours equal better output’ was broken.

Research carried out last year by LawCare, the mental health charity, found “a sector where people were at high risk of burnout”.

The move to a shorter working week, which has been trialled over the last two months, means the doors now close 30 minutes earlier at EMW’s offices in Milton Keynes, Northampton, Watford, London and Brighton.

The lawyers choose when and where they work their 35 hours. There is no set number of hours per day or days per week.

Mr Geary said: “The transactional nature of a lot of our work means that our teams often work way beyond normal office working hours anyway when work is busy, but they no longer feel guilty about clocking off earlier if work is quieter.”

The changes to the working week would not cap growth at EMW, he went on. “Nothing else changes. Client service is still critical. Quality is non-negotiable and standards are as high as ever. Aside from the positive vibes from the change, it’s very much been business as usual for us.”

The move to a 35-hour week has had “no impact at all” on client relationships or services, he added; indeed, a number of clients had already adopted a similar policy, so this has brought EMW more in line with how its clients operate.

Mr Geary said: “It’s entirely driven by client needs. If the job is done, then clear off. Without people, the business fails. And I think that professional services can overlook this.”

AI and private equity “reshaping partner pay”

12 June 2026

The traditional metrics and models used to calculate partners’ pay are coming under mounting pressure from the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and private equity (PE), according to the Professional Practices Alliance.

These twin pressures are having a significant impact on how firms are re-working their financial models – from how to measure performance to what partners should earn.

The PPA is a collaboration between the London-based law firm CM Murray, partner remuneration specialist David Shufflebotham from PEP.Up Consulting, and law firm management consultant Robert Millard from the Cambridge Strategy Group.

A webinar last week heard how, to date, the only lawyers seen to have suffered from the rise of AI have been those at the junior end, with technology taking over the routine tasks they handled.

But AI is making it increasingly difficult for partners to demonstrate and justify their salary expectations, or for firms to work out who or what is generating profits.

“With AI and technology, we are seeing a shift in what actually drives value in firms. Traditionally compensation systems have been aligned to input. As firms increasingly adopt technology and AI, the value increasingly sits in other areas.

“Many compensation systems have not yet caught up with that shift in how pricing is changing in firms because of the use of AI, and how value is being delivered.”

Ms Begum said firms faced “a real risk of misalignment” by investing in AI to drive efficiencies and boost profits, whilst maintaining an old compensation system based on billable hours, that is rapidly being eroded by AI.

Mr Millard agreed: “We know that we have to adopt these new tools, but we’re still measuring largely on output and billable hours. Not only is compensation but the whole firm is hardwired around that.

“And that status quo is protected by the most senior, most valuable, partners. If we switch away from those metrics, what is the unit of account that we should use? Where does profit actually come from?”

AI is also disrupting the traditional ways of setting and measuring key performance indicators, because of the shift in who or what is actually driving value in firms.

And when meetings take place, AI has been used to try to influence outcomes, for and against partners.

Mr Shufflebotham said: “We’ve had partners coming along to meetings with their own version, generated via AI, of the numbers from the practice management system.

Law students get replica court room to hone skills

16 July 2026

Law student Mel Therese was among those who suggested the replica courtroom

A university is building a £350,000 replica crown court to allow law and criminology students gain courtroom experience before entering the profession.

The court at Bournemouth University will be used for mock trials, debating competitions and training for the Solicitor Qualifying Examination.

It follows feedback from students who wanted to practice their legal skills in a realistic setting.

The facility, due to open in January 2027, will include a judge's bench, witness and jury boxes and legal counsel desks.

Law student Mel Therese, who is on a placement at Steele Raymond solicitors, said she "can't wait" to use the facility as she works towards her Solicitors Qualifying Examination.

"I'm so pleased that the university has responded to student feedback to make this moot court a reality," she said.

"Seeing something I advocated for as a faculty student representative come to life is incredibly rewarding."

Students from other disciplines, including psychology, will also use the facility to explore how jurors make decisions, the factors that influence courtroom behaviour and the experiences of witnesses giving evidence.

Dr Joel Carlton, dean of the Faculty of Business and Law, said: "It will help build confidence, develop practical skills and ensure that students are ready to make the most of future opportunities.

"We already have an excellent track record of working in partnership with employers to develop the talent needed for a range of legal careers, and this new facility will further strengthen our approach."