

Charlotte Eborall

Charlotte was called to the Bar in 2004 and has now been a member of chambers for over fifteen years. She specialises in the fields of banking (including consumer credit), regulatory and financial services and investigations, civil fraud and general commercial disputes. She is also married to a commercial barrister.



How did your career at the Bar begin?

I applied for pupillage at the commercial Bar in the final year of my undergraduate law degree. I undertook pupillage at 3VB and, shortly after being awarded tenancy, was seconded to the then Financial Services Authority for six months, before returning to practice in chambers.

For the first decade of my practice, I was busily employed in mainly my own work, comprising fast-track trials, interim applications, and other court hearings, together with paperwork and some led work. During this time, I also took the opportunity to undertake a Pegasus scholarship to Australia, which ended in November 2008, shortly after the global financial crisis hit. I returned to the UK and to a busy practice, largely comprising banking and financial services and disputes.

What was your experience of life at the Bar during and after maternity leave?

After the birth of my first child in May 2014, I came back in January 2015 to my usual diet of financial disputes litigation. Working four days a week (where I could) and managing my own workload worked well, and, together with a dedicated nanny and supportive husband, in October of that year, I was able to conduct a five-day trial as sole counsel in Manchester and, in January of the following year, a 10-day, led trial in Leeds – safe in the knowledge that my daughter was happy and cared for at home.

My return to practice after the birth of my second child in late 2016 was slightly different. When he was three months old, I began working from home with the benefit of a nanny there to care for my daughter and baby whilst I was pleading and drafting. That is a key benefit of the Bar – I could pick up small pieces of work with longer deadlines and manage that work at home around caring for my new baby and seeing my daughter. But I was keen to be back in court, and amongst my colleagues in chambers again, and I returned to chambers when my second child was eight months old.

This was undoubtedly a harder transition. The demands of a developing senior junior practice, a changing work climate (the effect of the banking crisis having tailed off) and the need actively to promote oneself at what were invariably evening seminars and events in a competitive market, together with a toddler and young daughter for whom the nanny (or even Daddy) was not always enough, meant that I often felt pulled in too many directions at any one time.

How have you managed to overcome juggling family and career?

I cannot say that I have yet fully mastered the art of juggling – and perhaps the answer is that one never does. But, during my time as a mother and a barrister, I have learned several things.

First, one of the keys to working effectively and efficiently, and still having a family life, is organisation and planning. That has been achievable for me because of the constant support that I have had from my clerking team in Chambers. My practice managers are aware of school term dates, nativity plays and similar events which I add to the diary as much as they are of court hearings and deadlines, seminars and conferences. Through working with me and with my solicitor clients, I have been able, with my practice managers' hard work, still (in the main) to attend important dates in my children's annual calendar as well as maintaining my practice.

Secondly, working efficiently does not mean sitting in Chambers from 8:30am until 6:30pm, toiling on paperwork. Again, the practice managers, and Chambers IT structure and policies and procedures, means that flexible and independent working is very much a part of Chambers' ordinary working practices. This is something that not only primary carers can take advantage of, but from which all members of chambers and, indeed members of staff, can benefit. When not a Court day, I may sometimes only be in chambers from 9:30am until 5:30pm – I can do the school run in the



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morning and relieve the nanny at the end of the day. But the Chambers IT remote access system and Chambers phone system allow me to work outside those hours and to access my work easily at home, which I often do once bedtime stories are read and all is quiet. The advent of being forever contactable on mobile devices can be a blessing and a curse. But for me, and used wisely, I find it assists me because I know what incoming work I have to manage, and I can respond quickly to short queries whilst commuting or otherwise out and about.

Thirdly, I believe that perception and culture are changing. Although I am still met with the occasional client who does not wish to acknowledge that anything outside their own matter exists, the majority of my instructing solicitors and clients are, themselves, managing their own family and personal lives together with busy practices. Indeed, I was heartened, when on a conference call with, among others, a partner at a Magic Circle firm, he was required to quieten an inquisitive daughter before continuing the conference call.

Fourthly, a frequent plight of female barristers, particularly after having had children and returning to build up a practice halted by maternity leave, is loss of confidence. This is what distinguishes maternity leave from other reasons for not having been in the market recently (for example, instruction on one, large case, or foreign work, or a secondment). Chambers has a mentoring system in place for those returning from maternity leave. I have also found support and encouragement from senior (male) members of chambers who have played a significant role in persuading me to rebuild and progress my practice after maternity leave. In more recent years, women's events including the Temple Women's Forum and female advocates' breakfasts have been instigated to tackle this (among other issues).

How do you divide your time between your career and family life now?

Whereas on an evening or weekend in my first decade in Chambers, I might have been found in chambers crafting legal submissions for a forthcoming hearing, I am now more likely to be found crafting...literally (the last endeavour was a model Tudor house for a half term project...)

My husband and I now try to keep weekends (at least) clear of papers so that family time takes priority. Of course, that does not always eventuate, we juggle the childcare or rise early and/or work late so that we still have a weekend with the children.

That is not to say that, when a case demands it, I will not work into the early hours, or over a weekend – indeed, trials (both in their preparation and their execution) invariably demand late night and weekend work. But, if I am in trial, I ensure that the “reinforcements” (husband, nanny, babysitter and, occasionally, parents) are close at hand, and that, if possible, there is a break in my practice post-trial to re-engage with the children before getting stuck into the next large matter.

I had cause recently, however, to be very grateful for my son's unwitting assistance on a court case. Having worked late preparing oral submissions for a case in Manchester the following morning, I accidentally set my alarm to catch the 7am train on the wrong day. Fortunately, our son's “regular as clockwork” 6am call was just early enough for me to throw on my suit, collect my papers and hop in a taxi – and I made the train on time!

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mother and a better barrister because of an intellectually demanding and fulfilling career, and meaningful, quality time with our children. And I am also convinced that it is right that both our daughter and son should see the joint management of family life and career by both parents, as a possible template for the future.

The Bar is still catching up and the proportion of female barristers here in Chambers is typical of the disappointing retention rate of female senior juniors across the profession. But I am confident that, now that equality and diversity are at the forefront of the BSB's work and in the minds of several instructing solicitors and clients, the statistics will improve. At 3VB, equality and diversity are enormously important to us and Chambers has put in place many initiatives to ensure the retention of women, and to encourage them to continue to apply. Moreover, as my own experiences have shown, it is not simply about policies and processes, but about people. It is the support, and the actions, of other barristers, invariably senior leaders in Chambers, and of our practice managers, which have really made a difference. I am optimistic that, in the years to come, we shall see more female barristers emerging not only to the upper echelons of our Chambers, but that we shall also have more female role models generally at the top of our profession and a more equal and diverse Bar.