

Client Service at the Bar

The following sets are particularly commended for their provision of quality client service.

Atkin Chambers

Atkin's "modern and impressive" approach to client service is commended by instructing solicitors, who speak of a set "which has gone from strength to strength, led by the clerks room." Commentators are particularly impressed by the culture of straightforward, "attentive and responsive" communication which prevails under the direction of senior clerk Justin Wilson, himself described as "amazing" and "customer-oriented." Wilson "makes sure he knows exactly what you want, and makes sure he doesn't over-promise or under-deliver," and his team is always "upfront about barristers' availability." Sources can rely on the team to "always find a suitable junior at whatever level you want." One commentator finds the clerks "are brilliant at knowing who you will get on with." Interviews reveal a tireless commitment to commercial awareness on the part of the clerks, who "understand the business environment and are speedy and sensible on pricing" and will try to "accommodate the billing structure clients want."

29 Bedford Row

Instructing solicitors consider it an "inspired decision" of 29 Bedford Row's to appoint James Shortall as senior clerk, commenting that "the clerks are excellent and James Shortall leads the team with exceptional levels of service and responsiveness." Shortall himself is praised for doing "a fantastic job bridging the gap between solicitors and barristers" and for being "commercial and very, very user friendly." The wider team is highlighted for being "incredibly proactive and on top of contacting you," and instructing parties find them "responsive and easy to deal with." Sources consider the team "a real pleasure" to work with, saying: "The clerking at 29 Bedford Row is phenomenal. They bend over backwards to give a top notch service. When they recommend someone for a case, we know we can have absolute confidence in their recommendations. They have never let us down with things like over-booking diaries or estimating fees. They are commercial and flexible in their approach to fees. They are a delight to deal with."

Brick Court Chambers

Brick Court houses "a fantastic clerking team," which is "very commercially astute and does everything it can for the client." Led by senior clerks Julian Hawes and Ian Moyler, the group is described as "proactive and helpful," and is particularly praised for its ability to provide clients with excellent barristers at short notice. Deputy senior clerk Paul Dennison is singled out for praise by a number of instructing so-

licitors, with one noting that "he is incredibly responsive and understands what we need from them," whilst another simply notes him as "one of the best." "They have got it down to a tee," according to commentators, who also label Brick Court "the best set in town for client service because of their tremendous client service ethos." The clerks are "reasonable when it comes to fees" and it is said that "you can have a dialogue with them" when it comes to billing. The set's fees are in line with other Magic Circle sets, but the service and work is described as "very impressive" and there is a consensus amongst clients that the team provides value for money.

Cloisters

Cloisters is a "client orientated" set which is recognised for its friendly and helpful clerks. "They are understanding and try to accommodate us and work with us to find solutions to cover hearings and put people forward. They have a charm; they are not aggressive or pushy, and Cloisters is a very good set to deal with," enthuses one interviewee. One instructing solicitor says: "The clerks are very helpful and accessible. They always come back to us and it is a very efficient and modern set. Cloisters has a proactive approach." Another solicitor mentions the welcoming feel of the chambers, which is particularly helpful when greeting clients involved in sensitive personal injury, clinical negligence and employment cases. Senior clerk Glenn Hudson attracts particular praise from a commentator who says: "He is great, authoritative, and he knows everybody. He is up there with the greats of the clerking world."

Fountain Court Chambers

The clerking team at Fountain Court are highly praised by sources who note that they are "very commercial and forward thinking and operate chambers a bit like a law firm," whilst another says "the clerking is probably the best I've come across." Senior clerk Alex Taylor is labelled as "a very good leader" while deputy senior clerk Paul Martenstyn is also highly praised. The larger clerking group is also highly recommended, with one instructing solicitor stating that "I find them a fantastic team and really enjoy working with them. I always find them very responsive and they know their lawyers well. I always feel comfortable taking a steer from them because they know their team and clients so well." The set is also praised for its reasonable approach to billing. While its fees are in line with top end commercial sets, numerous sources attest to the fact that they do provide real value for money. The set is also praised for its open approach to billing and it is noted for

being willing to negotiate on fees. One solicitor said: "You can have a grown up conversation with them about where there could be a trim or being flexible about how the work could be attributed to the team."

Francis Taylor Building

Francis Taylor Building is singled out by sources for the "fantastic client service provided by the clerks." "They are effective and responsive and understand the expectations of the solicitors," and "clients love them," report instructing solicitors. The clerks room is praised for its "can-do attitude" and "sensible discussions on fees." One commentator reports that "they never say no, are always accommodating, in particular on fees and time-scales, and are very good at being realistic and providing accurate estimates." Senior clerk Paul Coveney heads the clerking team at the set and is lauded for being "conscientious" and for "always following up with a smile." He is supported by a "very well run and very personable team, who always give you their full attention, get back to you promptly" and "will go out of their way to make sure documents will be sent, even at weekends." This team includes the "very able" Rachael Osborne, as well as the "very straight-talking" Tom Rook and James Kemp who all "come back to you very quickly, and are always willing to juggle diaries to squeeze you in at the 11th hour." Commentators also appreciate that the barristers too are "very easy to get on with."

Hailsham Chambers

Hailsham Chambers attracts consistently high praise for its team of dedicated and experienced clerks. "Everyone is working in concert," comments an interviewee, who makes particular mention of the set's strong group of clerks. Senior clerk Stephen Smith leads the "excellent clerking team" who ensure that "nothing is ever a problem." One source goes so far as to say: "One of the reasons I use them is because their service is excellent. It is very helpful to have an administrative team that is always there. If we want to borrow a room, for example, they go out of their way." The efficient team is also commended for taking a "very personable" approach, with special mention reserved for receptionist Kaz O'Callaghan: "Their receptionist in particular is lovely and makes the clients feel at ease, especially at times when clients might be nervous." Speed of response and action is one of the team's strengths, and its organisation and efficiency causes one interviewee to proclaim: "I would put them down as the best clerks I have worked with."

1 Hare Court

Instructing solicitors are universal in their praise for 1 Hare Court because “both the barristers and clerks are very supportive and provide a wonderful service.” They add that they will “go back to them time and time again” because “they go the extra mile for you.” Another source notes: “They are really effective – they will pull out all the stops and make it happen for you.” Also highlighted is their “commercial,” “extremely practical” and “sensible” approach. The “outstanding” and “very helpful” senior clerk Steve McCrone leads a team of “brilliant clerks who are efficient to deal with and just make the whole thing really easy for the client.” Another source adds that “the clerking really is head and shoulders above the rest, they have a really big team who are very willing to help.” Sources also appreciate that they “can have honest transparent conversations about fees,” because they are “quite easy to talk to in terms of negotiating fees and being fair.” This chambers is also noted for its provision of annual seminars which instructing solicitors say are “really very informative and quite fun.” One very satisfied client sums up the strengths of this set: “I have a high regard for the set as a whole – I have been using them for over three decades because of the excellent quality of the barristers combined with clerks who are lovely, funny, efficient and friendly.”

Henderson Chambers

Chief clerk John White “has always run the clerking team extremely well,” according to instructing parties, who consider the team at Henderson “a pleasure to work with.” Praise is forthcoming for the “absolutely brilliant” clerksroom, and solicitors particularly appreciate that “there is always somebody available to speak to you.” As well as receiving widespread praise for being “very friendly, engaging and responsive,” Henderson’s clerks “will always try and help, and seek to fit their service to the clients’ needs.” With clerks who are “knowledgeable about their barristers” and who have “built up a good and deep working relationship with all of them,” it is no surprise to learn that “efficient” and “accommodating” are common epithets for the team. Counsel, too, are widely praised as “personable” and “user-friendly.”

6KBW College Hill

One commentator neatly summarised the quality of 6KBW’s client service, noting: “They are the Rolls-Royce of the criminal sets and every dealing you have with them reinforces that.” Sources consistently echo the view that “the support staff are absolutely first-rate and the clerks are really outstanding.” Senior clerk

Andrew Barnes “leads a tight ship and the clerks are responsive, helpful with listings, accommodating and flexible.” “One of the most open and friendly clerks around,” he combines the courteousness of old-school clerks with a “willingness to try new ideas and forge relationships.” Under his direction the clerks are “reliable, very prompt in getting back to solicitors and they do their best to find the most appropriate person for the matter.” They are also realistic and upfront about the availability of the set’s much sought-after barristers, with sources noting they are “really straight-up and good at making sure counsel is not overcommitted.”

7KBW

Sources “rate 7KBW very highly for client service,” because “from the top to the bottom, the set is very customer-focused,” and “always a pleasure to deal with.” Much praise is directed at senior clerk Bernie Hyatt, who “does a great job of managing the chambers.” “He is very responsive,” and “runs a very tight but good ship in terms of support,” sources add. Sources are also impressed with the “brilliant” senior clerk Greg Leyden, as he “bends over backwards for clients” and “does a great job.” A major draw for clients is the “down to earth and less formal” approach adopted by the team, which means they “can just call them up and have a direct chat with them.” Instructing solicitors report that the clerks can always be trusted to “place you with the most appropriate barrister,” because “they really know their barristers, both their strengths and weaknesses, so their recommendations are always spot on.” One client encapsulates the general feeling amongst sources this year: “The set is top drawer really-responsive, helpful and always available.”

11KBW

Joint senior clerks Lucy Barbet and Mark Dann “run a very tight ship” at 11KBW, with clients commenting that the clerking team is “exemplary in all respects” and “can’t seem to do enough for you.” Barbet herself is “excellent – very responsive, helpful and very accommodating,” whilst solicitors are confident that Dann “will always sort us out with the right person.” First junior clerk Lee Cutler is also commended as “superb, highly responsive, friendly and with a can-do attitude,” and believe that he is “a great ambassador for the chambers.” Instructing solicitors particularly appreciate the team’s barrister recommendations, with one saying: “They are good at finding the right barrister, and provide good after care too.” The clerks go “out of their way to help” and “make you feel as though the team

are there to sort out any problems you have.” Solicitors and clients alike comment on the set’s seminars and training events, particularly in the context of education, data protection and the public sector. Clients say they “provide very good training” in public authority law and solicitors add that “you can put them into a client seminar and they are engaging, funny and really bring a subject to life.” From clerks who “go the extra mile” to “approachable and academically capable” counsel, the set is one of the most user-friendly at the Bar.

Kings Chambers

“At Kings the clerking is brilliant – very organised and very responsive,” reports one appreciative instructing solicitor. The client service at the set receives effusive praise from a variety of sources, especially in relation to the speed and acuity with which they handle enquiries and requests. “They offer very good service,” says another impressed commentator – “we are kept informed, get a good range of alternatives, and receive a generally high level of efficiency and courtesy.” The team as a whole is widely regarded as uniformly strong, with a number of clerks being individually singled out for praise by market sources. “Colin Griffin, Gary Young, Harry Young and Andy Reaves are all absolutely superb, very responsive, easy to talk to, flexible and supportive. First class,” says one solicitor. Heading the clerking teams are William Brown, Colin Griffin and Stephen Loxton, who marshal the “excellent” clerksroom regarded by solicitors as being “really helpful and able to have frank discussions about fees and about who is the best person for the job,” and who oversee the client service at a set that also offers “very good facilities that are a good place to meet clients.”

Maitland Chambers

Maitland Chambers is characterised by a conscientious and modern approach to client service. One source spoke approvingly of “a high-quality commercial chancery set that has sensible and highly approachable barristers who work exceptionally hard and give you a service you can rely on.” At the heart of Maitland’s service ethos, and the first point of contact, is the clerking team led by senior clerk John Wiggs, himself described as a “linchpin of the set.” Sources say he is “not overly formal and has a very gentlemanly style,” and is “very easy to work with.” Instructing solicitors say the team as a whole is “fantastically helpful. They are excellent at suggesting barristers and go out of their way if you want someone specific. They are personable and well organised.” Further, numerous commentators find that they are “very accommodating and reasonable

with fees, always flexible” and are understanding and open to discussion “when the client is really up against it.” Sources also appreciate the quality of the set’s facilities and meeting rooms.

Old Square Chambers

The clerking team at Old Square Chambers is widely praised by instructing solicitors for their “business-like and efficient approach” on the one hand, and their “friendly” manner on the other. Solicitors particularly like that the clerks are “attentive and very approachable, with no airs and graces at all” as well as “on the ball and responsive.” Senior clerk William Meade “goes out of his way to help,” according to sources, who add that the clerks in general “bend over backwards” to support instructing solicitors. Clients also highlight the high value for money that this set can offer, commenting that “they are well run and have many top quality barristers whose rates compare favourably with barristers of similar experience and quality elsewhere.” The set’s client service receives praise from top to bottom and, in the words of one commentator, Old Square Chambers is “a really reliable, professional outfit, from clerks to barristers. I’ve been impressed with the set; everyone I’ve dealt with I would recommend. The clerking is really good, very helpful and accommodating. They’re very friendly and really good at managing diaries.”

4 Pump Court

“The client service at 4 Pump Court is outstanding,” which many commentators attribute to the excellent clerking team, which is described as “very efficient, user friendly and cost effective.” The “absolutely great” Stewart Gibbs serves as senior clerk at the set and is singled out for being “brilliant – there is nothing he can’t deal with.” Instructing solicitors believe that Gibbs’ “responsive and proactive manner” is instrumental in setting the client-friendly tone for the rest of the set to follow. Gibbs’ team of “extremely helpful” clerks ensure clients always receive a “seamless service.” Sources also highlight the set’s willingness to be “flexible on fees,” and the offer of a “better deal than the headline rates.” One instructing solicitor adds: “They’re really reasonable and realistic on fees and there’s never that moment of dread when presenting the invoice to the client.” Overall, sources say they “would happily work with them again,” because “4 Pump Court is more user-friendly than other chambers, and appears to have a more modern approach to dealing with the clients and providing the ever-evolving services which barristers are called upon to provide.”

Quadrant Chambers

The clerking team at Quadrant Chambers is led by senior clerks Simon Slattery and Gary Ventura, who have shaped the set’s client service offering in their own image. “Gary Ventura leads by example,” according to one client, who noted that “the whole team bends over backwards to help you get the service you need when things are screamingly urgent.” The team is noted for being “extremely helpful and user friendly” and “always in possession of the information you need and quick to get back to you with it.” The team is also noted for its modernising approach: “They want it to be a team effort, they’re not stuffy at all, they’re really commercial and practical.” The co-ordination across the set is also highly praised with sources noting the “exceptional” joined up service across counsel and the clerk room, as well as the “very impressive, very slick and very professional approach.” The clerks are “commercial when it comes to fees,” they are open to “negotiation on fees” and “are happy to work with the client with whatever they are having to do with fees.”

Radcliffe Chambers

Radcliffe Chambers is highlighted for its “first rate” clerking team who provide instructing solicitors with a “very responsive, very efficient” service. The team, led by senior clerks Keith Nagle and John Clark, is commended for its helpful and knowledgeable service, with one source noting: “The clerks are helpful in sourcing other specialists when the barrister I usually go to is away.” Several commentators also mention the clerking team’s approachability and flexibility, saying: “They always do what they can to accommodate us” and “I appreciate the lack of formality; I can just pick up the phone.” In addition, and of crucial importance to clients and instructing solicitors, the team is “always prepared to discuss fees sensibly,” say sources. “A big tip of the hat to the clerks down there,” exclaimed one source, “they always deliver. They are very user friendly and easy to get along with. They are just thoroughly pleasant people.”

Ropewalk Chambers

“They are a chambers prepared to share the burden,” says one source, who reserves particular praise for senior clerk Tony Hill for being “very astute and willing to talk sensibly about difficult situations.” The client service at Ropewalk garners enthusiastic comments from a wide range of sources, who are appreciative of the welcoming and flexible approach to instruction taken by the set’s clerksroom. “The clerking at Ropewalk stands out – there

is consistently a gold standard of service. There is always a phone call back the same day, there is a named point of contact, they are always on time and the clerks are approachable and meticulous,” gushes one admiring solicitor. The strength in depth of the counsel organised by the clerks at Ropewalk is another key factor that keeps solicitors returning to the set: “If you don’t get your first choice of barrister, you can rely on the fact that they’ll have someone for you. They work as a team with the counsel, can discuss things very clearly and openly, and are accessible.” Another commentator was particularly positive about the fact the clerks “are very commercially minded. When they need to be flexible, they will be – they find a way to work with us while providing the quality we need.”

Serjeants’ Inn Chambers

Serjeants’ Inn has undergone somewhat of a reinvention following a recent change of premises as well as an overhaul of its senior management. The clerking team is now led by senior clerk Lee Johnson and its client service offering has been augmented by a number of new-hires, including bringing in the highly-rated Catherine Calder as director of client care. This structural change has not gone unnoticed by instructing solicitors, who praise the set’s forward drive in terms of professionalism, modernity and commerciality. Counsel and clerks alike are praised as “wonderful and very helpful” as well as “very responsive and very prompt in dealing with things.” The clerking team in particular is noted for its proactivity and is said to “get the ball rolling with cases and make sure that the barristers are involved.” This modernising fervour has extended to the set’s approach to billing. Commentators note that “they are good at negotiating on fees because they understand that cost is a key issue, especially in certain practice areas.”