
Crime

At the criminal Bar you may be called on to act for either the defence or the prosecution. Specialist criminal law chambers offer expertise in all areas, including drug offences, violent and sexual crime, fraud and white collar crime. As might be expected, criminal barristers spend more time in court than those in almost any other sector of the Bar. The international aspect of criminal law includes human rights, terrorism, war crimes, organised crime, drug trafficking and money laundering.

“Once you find an area of practice that you enjoy and excel in, you almost organically start getting more instructions in that specialism. Your talent will be recognised. It may not be the area that you anticipated,” Ini Udom muses on her career path that started with a mixed caseload of civil work and crime and gravitated toward general criminal law, before specialising in financial crime and fraud. The root of her passion for criminal law can be traced to her childhood, when conversations with her father, who studied law but did not practice, snippets from newspapers and TV courtroom dramas sparked her interest in becoming a lawyer. This interest, from the beginning, was always centred on the courtroom and the intricacies of criminal trials.

She completed pupillage at what was then 1 Harcourt Buildings in Middle Temple, which later moved out of Temple to acquire its own premises and become 5 St Andrew’s Hill, as it is known today. The set predominantly specialises in crime, although it has also diversified into other areas. Ini’s pupil supervisor during her first six specialised in construction law, while in her second six she was supervised by a barrister with a general crime practice. As a result she had broad foundations from which to build her own career.

Building a practice

In the first few of years of practice, she started off doing “a mixture of personal injury, general civil work and crime.” She enjoyed the advocacy in criminal cases – usually short jury trials for either the prosecution or defence in matters such as assault, burglary, robbery and drugs offences – and naturally began to lean in that direction. As her practice developed, she specialised further into fraud. In addition to finding fulfilment and enjoyment in the specialism, Ini explains that moving in this direction “also suited me and the work-life balance I was comfortable with. In the early days, I found both the travel to courts all over the country and the uncertainty very challenging. When you are a junior, at four o’clock in the afternoon you will be given a trial that starts the next morning, at 10 o’clock, and you are necessarily working right up until you go into court to get your arguments up to standard and make sure you have digested the papers. There is a thrill that comes with that and you run on adrenaline, but when that becomes your daily life it requires a lot of flexibility and stamina and it is hard – anyone starting out needs to prepare for that. I have three young children and for me that lifestyle was not compatible, or sustainable, with my family life”. Moreover Ini enjoys the detailed planning and preparation that is needed for a complex fraud case – although she does not rule out a return to more general criminal work later in her career.

Fighting organised crime

Currently, Ini is principally involved in prosecuting complex fraud cases involving money laundering and serious organised crime, with extended lead times and lengthy trials. “I am instructed quite early on in cases so a lot of my time is spent helping with the preparation and shaping the argument, then there are big chunks of time in court for trials, which tend to run for several weeks,” she notes.

For more chambers that work in this practice area, please use the “Pupillage index” starting on p519.



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Prosecuting those suspected of involvement in complex organised crime inevitably means that there is an international flavour to the work. "The money generated from the index criminality in the UK is passed around the country before being transferred overseas," Ini explains. "In preparing these cases, we need to make enquiries internationally to try to trace the money and find out what other interests the suspects may have." This international aspect is particularly important to her personally: "I have an international background and I am also qualified at the New York Bar, so keeping an international element in my work means that I can use all my qualifications."

In fraud cases, the advocacy itself is different to that of other criminal trials. Cases are document heavy and complex. "An important focus in a fraud trial is making sure that the tribunal understands the case you are presenting," Ini observes. "That means prioritising simplification, clarification and highlighting the links or key points that you are trying to make. In contrast, I find that the advocacy may be much more emotive when you are dealing with a robbery or assault in front of a jury – you need a different approach."

Weighing up the contenders for the highlight of her career so far, Ini admits that she "can't pinpoint a single case because they are all so different." Instead, she points out that "the reward I get from my work isn't from the monetary value of the case or winning the argument, but the impact you can have on the client – even though that may sound cliché. I also do a lot of regulatory work, where clients are individuals from various professions that have been called up in front of their regulator and could face being struck off, so it is incredibly rewarding and satisfying to be able to listen to them, take their case and present it in a way that they feel is fair and appropriate. It's the same with crime – if you are defending, a lot of your clients will feel that they have

never been listened to and it is an incredibly humbling and powerful thing to act as their mouthpiece. For most people, coming before the criminal courts is a crisis in their lives and to be able to help them through that period is something I find extremely rewarding."

Top tips

Turning to her advice for those seeking pupillage, she highlights that work experience and exposure are essential: "You have to demonstrate that firstly you are sufficiently dedicated to have sought experience, and secondly that you have a proven track record of working in this arena and of taking responsibility. Build up your CV with experience by volunteering. Think outside the box – it doesn't necessarily have to be experience in a criminal law firm or advice clinic. Think about the key skills that you can demonstrate, such as interacting with clients, or being given documents that you needed to understand within a short timeframe and succeeding. If I was applying for pupillage now, I would be applying broadly and resisting the temptation to pigeonhole myself to certain chambers. Look at the range of work they do and you may find that there are many types of chambers that you might fit with."

Ini's final – crucial – piece of advice emphasises the value of planning your own career path. "The one thing I would want to push to readers is the need to have a plan, ideally a five-year plan," she argues. "When you start practice you need to have an idea of where you want to be going and what you want to be achieving. When you are self-employed there is always the fear that if you turn down work, nothing else will come along, so it is easy to get into a pattern of constantly taking on any work that people are sending or is allocated to you, but you also need to think about the direction that you want your practice to go. A plan helps you tailor the work that you seek out and the instructions you accept."