

St.Mary's

Membership Prospectus

FAMILY LAW SPECIALISTS



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St.Mary's

Overview



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Overview

As a specialist chambers we have a clear vision to be the number one choice for family law outside London.

We strive to provide honesty, transparency, and clarity in everything we do.

We want our barristers, pupils and staff to feel a keen sense of job satisfaction by having:

- access to high quality work,
- the time, resources and support to do a good job, and
- a good work/life balance

Our people and our clients are key to all that we do. We listen to what they say, and we treat them fairly and with respect.

Through efficient working methods we provide our members with the platform to offer our clients the highest levels of service.

We aim to continually improve the quality of service we provide by monitoring and measuring our performance and by actively seeking constructive feedback.

When we do something well, we inform all our people and we make sure we keep doing it; and when we need to change, we make sure that we address the root causes and find better ways to work.



Overview

Because we are family law specialists our focus and resources are not split across several practice areas.

Our clarity of purpose has meant that average income per member has increased by 27% over the last five years.

Wellbeing is paramount and our members are encouraged to take more time out of court, this translates to members taking on average two and a half weeks more time away from work per year than five years ago.

Practice development is key, our team works together with individual members to develop short, medium and long term plans for career progression.

Our clerking team provide effective administrative support, pro-active diary management, and highly efficient credit control.

We recently moved to new premises designed specifically for the needs of a modern family law chambers; offering professional yet comfortable working spaces backed by cutting edge web conferencing equipment.

We have invested in IT to provide case and document management systems which are accessible anywhere from virtually any type of device, making it possible to easily work wherever suits you.

Former members have taken up posts as Designated Family Judges and lead Financial Remedies Court Judges in courts both local and further afield, six current members hold part-time judicial post.



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Finances

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Finances

We offer extremely competitive introductory packages of reduced expenses for new members.

Contributions to expenses are calculated based on a percentage of monthly receipts.

There is no fixed rent sum and there are no additional charges.

Once income exceeds £150,000 in a financial year the percentage reduces to a much lower level.

The Management Committee set contribution levels before the start of each financial year by in order to meet our planned budgetary expenditure. Members are encouraged to raise issues or concerns in advance either by email or by anonymous message.

There is no large up-front cost to joining us, nor at any other point during tenancy. We lease our office space, so you don't need to buy a share of the building. All you pay is a percentage of your income on a monthly basis.

Fee scales which illustrate our pricing strategy for all non-legal aid work are available to all members.

All scales are reviewed annually based on available data on hours of work involved in preparation and attendance on cases and on the input of clerks, members, and clients.



Finances

We designed automated systems to ensure private client and local authority invoices are sent as soon as possible with 94% of private client invoices and 90% of local authority invoices sent within 7 days of work being completed.

Highly efficient credit control and debt management systems ensure early payment. On average in the last financial year private clients paid within 13 days and local authority clients paid within 26 days.

Legal aid billing is undertaken using a streamlined workflow with different types of cases managed based on the LAA regulations. For most standard cases billing is completed within 24 hours of the provision of billing documents, with payment following within in less than 14 days.

High Cost Cases are identified at the earliest possible stage and channels of communication are opened with solicitors, costs lawyers, and the LAA to ensure cases are well managed and payments on account are claimable as soon as available.

Our Chief Executive regularly appears as a speaker at [Bar Council](#) and [LAA](#) events about legal aid billing in family law. He also works with the LAA in designing guidance and improving systems relating to High Cost Cases.



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Diary

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Diary

When available to work barristers are engaged 92% of the time.

Our specialism isn't just that of our barristers. Our clerks have a combined clerking experience of over 90 years solely from working at St. Mary's.

Through practice review meetings and pro-active diary management our clerks ensure our barristers are in work when they want to be and are doing the type of work they want to do.

When they want a break from work, we make sure they our members can take time away easily, and when necessary, at short notice.

A process of providing regular reminders to our instructing solicitors ensures that diaries are kept up to date and papers are delivered in good time to allow effective preparation.

A significant proportion of incoming enquiries fall within the BSB definition of unallocated work and distribution of these work opportunities fall within the provisions of our Fair Allocation of Work policy.



Diary

Income is up and planned time away from work is also up – wellbeing strategies and proactive practice management produces better results for all.

Because our expenses structure is based solely on a percentage of income received it is easy for our members to work flexibly.

We have a number of barristers who have been supported in having long and short career breaks to focus on family, take on teaching posts, travel etc. before then supporting their return to the Bar, either full time or part time alongside other roles.

We understand there is no one size fits all approach to being a barrister and we encourage each individual to achieve their own goals.

However you want to work we can support you to create the practice that suits your lifestyle. We offer you the choice over the type of work you undertake, with no requirement to do areas of law you are not interested in.

Our maternity and parental leave policies provide support to members before they take leave, during their time away, and as they return to work. We offer periods of reduced and zero contributions to expenses to ease any financial pressures.

Our clerks work with each individual barrister and manage their diary to meet their needs.



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Facilities



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Facilities

We recently moved into leased offices which have been newly converted and designed to our specification.

Specialist web conferencing equipment has been installed to provide high quality remote court hearing and conference facilities.

Multi-use meeting rooms provide modern, bright, and airy spaces for quiet solo working, for traditional face to face meetings, or for remote meetings and court appearances.

These rooms also offer the perfect solution for dispute resolution services such as Private FDR hearings or arbitrations.

Energy efficient air conditioning and heating equipment ensures that workspaces are comfortable regardless of the weather.

We've invested in high quality furniture and equipment and have secured the premises for at least the next ten years.



Facilities

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Meeting Room 1



Meeting Room 5



Facilities



St. Mary's

Clerks' Room



Barristers' Room



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Technology



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Technology

We have IT facilities and systems in place to actively support paperless working.

All incoming case documents are managed using a strict naming convention to make it clear exactly what they are, they are then uploaded to our document management systems by the clerking team.

The documents are stored on Microsoft cloud-based servers allowing ease of access through OneDrive and the highest levels of security.

This allows our barristers the option to work from home, from Chambers, or whatever location best suits their needs.

All members are provided with a full Office 365 license which gives the user the entire Microsoft suite of programs which can be loaded onto five different devices.

We have outsourced our IT support to a provider who offer dedicated support both remotely and in-person where required.



Technology



The web conferencing equipment has six cameras in each device, each of which will focus on a participant in the room.

This makes joining CVP and other remote court hearings a much better experience for the judiciary and other parties.



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Meeting rooms can be booked for remote hearings, conferences, or just as a quiet working space using an online booking app or via the room control panels.



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Business Development



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Business Development

We utilise a range of marketing methods to promote both Chambers as a whole and our individual members.

Members regularly contribute to our monthly cases law updates which provide a brief overview of any important judgments from the previous month in our three main practice areas: Public Law, Private Law Children, and Financial Remedies. These are circulated to 2,000 subscribers to our mailing lists, and through our social media channels receiving up to 1,500 impressions per posting.

We held a one-day Financial Remedies conference earlier this year and are planning a Children Law conference next year. Both will now be annual events offering the chance to showcase our own expertise and that of our guest speakers. They also offer the perfect opportunity to network throughout the day and at the after-conference drinks reception.

The Business Development team focus on making new connections and undertaking client service reviews, ensuring our clients know that we are put them at the forefront of all we do.

Practice Review meetings are a key component in all our marketing efforts. We can't effectively promote our members unless we know what it is that they want, and so we seek to regularly review their practice with them to keep everything moving in the right direction.



Business Development

At the beginning of the pandemic, we quickly grasped the need to change how we worked and rapidly shifted to effective remote working.

This included setting up hearing hubs so that client and barrister could attend remote hearings whilst sat in the same room to aid communication and provide a better quality of service.

We continue to use these hubs today utilising our new web conferencing equipment which provides a greatly improved experience for all involved.

We have been at the forefront of promoting dispute resolution services in both financial remedies and children law matters. Our [Private FDR](#) and [Arbitration](#) services give clients a range of options as an alternative to traditional court hearings.

The future of family law will contain a mixture of traditional and alternative solutions and will require both in-person and remote services and we will continue to be at the forefront of whatever comes next.



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Diversity



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Diversity

Our [diversity data](#) shows that as an organisation we are reasonably diverse, but we felt we could do more.

Using the Bar Council diversity tool kit, we have created an action plan to ensure that we are doing all we can to improve diversity in Chambers and more generally at the Bar.

We implemented a range of new measures to promote and improve diversity. We have reviewed all our existing policies and procedures to ensure fairness for all.

This included improving the terms of our maternity leave package so that members pay no contributions to expenses for the period of maternity leave where they are not working. We set no fixed time limit on this non-working period. Upon return-to-work members are eligible for reduced contributions for up to two years.

Fair allocation of work is key to ensuring all barristers are treated fairly. Our Chief Executive wrote a recent article for [Counsel Magazine](#) on this subject. He has also authored guidance documents and appeared as a speaker for the Institute of Barristers' Clerks on matters of equality and diversity.



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Growth

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Growth

We have been following a strategic growth plan for several years which has been part of our continued success.

Over the last five years turnover has increased by 37% and membership has grown by 17%.

We normally recruit two pupils a year and train our future members not only in family law but also in the St. Mary's ethos.

We are always looking for new members to join us whether they be established barristers or solicitors wishing to transfer.

Of our current members five have successfully made the switch from solicitor.

We are also interested in applications from barristers who practise in other areas of law but are looking to specialise in family law.

We have recently supported two of our current members to transfer from criminal law to family law.



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Administration



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Administration

Transparency is the
cornerstone of how we
manage our administration.

The Management Committee usually meets monthly and produce an agenda in advance of each meeting.

Members are encouraged to raise issues or concerns in advance either by email or by anonymous message.

All reports prepared for ManCom meetings are circulated with the minutes normally within 7 days of the meeting.

We have two full chambers meeting a year which all members are required to attend.

Since the start of the pandemic these meetings have taken place remotely and there are no plans to return to in person.

Members are encouraged to be involved in the various committees that assist Management Committee and in the sharing of all responsibilities that contribute to the continued success of Chambers.

St. Mary's became a limited company in 2022 in order to better meet the demands of the modern commercial world and to provide greater security to our members.

The Management Committee act as the directors of St. Mary's Chambers Ltd.



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Application Process



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Application Process

Initial enquiries should be made to our [Chief Executive](#) who will be able to guide you through what we can offer you.

Any conversations about joining us will be in the strictest confidence and won't be discussed with anyone else unless and until you make a formal application to join.

Once you make an application this will be provided to our Recruitment Committee who will normally invite you for an interview.

They will then decide whether to make a recommendation to Chambers that you should be invited to join us.

Your application will then be circulated to all members and a decision will be made democratically.

If the committee decide not to make a recommendation to Chambers, then your application will remain confidential, and the details will not be circulated to Chambers.



Contact Us

For an informal chat about what we can offer please contact our Chief Executive, Scott Baldwin

scott@stmarysfamily.co.uk
0115 678 1519
07507 015114

He will arrange to discuss any aspect of life at St. Mary's either in person or virtually at a time to suit you.

St. Mary's

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