

Inaugural Young Bar Day: Building the Future Together

The inaugural Young Bar Day opened with a clear message from **Andrew Thomas KC**, Vice Chair of the Criminal Bar Association: the future of the Criminal Bar and the justice system lies in the hands of its youngest practitioners. With judges from every level of court in attendance, the event marked a collective commitment to supporting those at the start of their careers.

The morning began with **Max Hardy** and **Elsbeth Windsor** on the **Kalisher Trust**, whose work sits at the heart of promoting access to the Criminal Bar. They spoke about outreach to schools, and the Trust's enduring belief that *merit, not means*, should define entry to the profession. Windsor's story of personal motivation was especially resonant, a reminder that continuing in this profession, given all the challenges, 'means you must care'. The call for volunteers was clear: while our time is a precious commodity, giving it offers a chance to make a tangible difference to youth (beyond the Youth Court) and to connect with colleagues.

That sense of vocation carried into the keynote address from **Lady Justice Philippa Whipple**, who reflected on life at the Bar as a way of life rather than a job. She urged the Young Bar to build networks of support, to turn adversity into learning, and to look after themselves as carefully as they serve others. Her words set the tone for the panels that followed, each one exploring what it means to sustain a healthy and resilient career. Lady Justice Whipple's message was one of partnership and honesty between the Bar and the Bench in relation to bullying and harassment: *"We the judiciary, we need your help. Unless you speak up, we can't do anything. But in return I assure you that we will take seriously any concern. We will listen."*

The first panel tackled bullying and inappropriate behaviour, a vital discussion after the Harman Review, and part of the culture change both Bar and Bench are seeking. **Ben Aina KC**, **Claire Davies KC**, and **Andrew Thomas KC** joined **Lady Justice Whipple** in offering practical guidance on how to respond: pause, reflect, seek allies, and record concerns independently (Talk to Spot was publicised).

A second panel turned to wellbeing and healthy practice, with **Heidi Stonecliffe KC**, **Mrs Justice Maura McGowan**, **Sarah Clarke KC**, and **Thom Dyke** exploring how to sustain balance in an often unpredictable profession. They spoke candidly about mental health, burnout, and the need for building self-knowledge. And encouraged the Young Bar to find ways to recreate the socialisation and support that used to exist after a day in court at Chambers. Their advice was straightforward but powerful: develop a sense of proportion, set boundaries, build relationships with clerks and colleagues, and remember that you can only serve others well if you are also kind to yourself.

The final discussion on managing your career, chaired by **HHJ Noel Lucas KC** with contributions from **Claire Davies KC**, **Andrew Thomas KC**, **Sally Hobson**, and **HHJ Rosa Dean**, encouraged junior practitioners to be proactive and open in shaping their paths. Try everything when you're starting out. Ask those who do the job you want to do. A legal career, they agreed, goes in stages and is rarely linear.

The afternoon finished with small group workshops where we debated, discussed and laughed about some of the challenges that face those practicing at the Criminal Bar. The inaugural day

offered a unique and special opportunity to interact with our senior peers as we were starting out on our careers.

- Justine Ryan
Red Lion Chambers