



Rosalind Phelps QC

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“Although I was attracted to the Bar as a career, it never occurred to me to think seriously about whether my choice of career was going to be family-friendly.

No-one in my family had ever been involved in the legal profession and we certainly did not know any barristers when I was growing up. As a result, I did not know much about the Bar until I began to think about careers at university.

Now that I have been in practice for some time, I realise that I have fallen on my feet. I have taken three periods of maternity leave in the last few years, and now combine a busy practice with looking after my three young children.

Fountain Court has a generous parental leave policy, and a detailed protocol for keeping in touch with barristers who are away from chambers on leave. My clerks maintained contact with me while I was away, and carefully managed my return to chambers. Following this, I was able to maintain my practice and, with the support and guidance of chambers, made a successful application to be a QC five years after returning to work from my third period of leave.

Although being a commercial barrister can undoubtedly require you to work long hours from time to time, my experience has been that it is definitely compatible with having a family. This is not least because (i) as you are self-employed you can to a large extent choose your own hours and your own way of working. Many people with families choose to work from home; (ii) the work is relatively well-paid and you can therefore afford high-quality and flexible childcare; and (iii) court vacations often coincide with school holidays, so you are able to take plenty of time off to spend with your children.

Indeed, my own experience suggests that female barristers are often able to combine careers and families more successfully than their counterparts in law firms, who have less flexibility about hours and working patterns.”