

Dear Circuit,

I contemplated whether the heading of this message should simply read 'FAO all criminal practitioners and their Heads of Chambers.' But then I remembered that, as a Circuit, we are one family. And so when your pals at the Criminal Bar are under intolerable pressure and facing unimaginably difficult times – as they are at present – then so are we all. Consequently, this goes to all of you as we head into a week which will see some outside the very courts inside which they have spent a lifetime plying their trade. It will see them down the tools they wield so skilfully on a daily basis for such modest remuneration and often without recognition, let alone thanks. In short, Monday marks the beginning of action by some, many, perhaps all of those who would otherwise be busy doing what they do well and what they love. We hear much about the rate of attrition at the publicly-funded Criminal Bar and the reasons why. Not simply a question of remuneration, but years of being devalued, having to fight to be paid fairly (or at all) for work which has self-evidently been done. Some have left behind the work that they loved and at which they were rather good and are now to be found elsewhere, having carved out a practice which is perceived (by some) to be more respected and (by all) to be better paid. That any remain at all at the publicly-funded Criminal Bar speaks volumes about the decency of those people.

So what do you need from me? An assurance, perhaps, that I have been doing what I can, quietly and behind the scenes, locally and nationally, and away from the sound and fury of Twitter. I give you that assurance coupled with a promise that I will continue to work hard for you. It is what I signed up for two and a half years ago.

I cannot, sadly, prevent the judges from doing what I sincerely hope they will not. I can simply remind them, as I have throughout, that this was them not so very long ago.

There is a cadre of silks on Circuit who have offered their support. Use them. Your Head of Chambers has the list. It can also be accessed here: courts@criminalbar.com

The CBA has issued guidance – read it.

<https://www.criminalbar.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CBA-Guidance-on-Days-of-Action-and-No-New-Instructions-20.06.22..pdf>

More guidance has come from Jo Sidhu today.

But above all this please. We are one family, as I said at the outset. People have difficult decisions to make on Monday. No one will have a comfortable night on Sunday given the uncertainty that prevails under the spectre of wasted costs or the threat of reporting to our regulator. Nor does anyone relish the thought of 'crossing a picket line'. As I said at a meeting of my own Chambers on Tuesday night, whatever decision you take will be the right one for you and is, therefore, the right decision.

I remind you all of the Circuit Hardship Fund that we set up for your benefit.

Please respect each other's independence of thought and unite in your support for each other, whatever that decision. Please look after each other.

Keep going,

Lisa

Lisa Roberts QC

Leader of the Northern Circuit

