



The Inns of  
Court College  
of Advocacy

# Waiver of Academic Entrance Requirements

Guidance for ICCA Bar Course applicants who  
do not meet the required academic entrance  
criteria

This guidance replaces the Mitigating Circumstances Applications Guidance v5

22 August 2025

# Introduction, Purpose and Scope

## 1. Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1 The ICCA welcomes applications from students who are motivated, bright, dedicated and diligent with a realistic chance of attaining the standard required for an award of pupillage, irrespective of their social, cultural and economic backgrounds.
- 1.2 Our usual academic requirements are based on statistical evidence which shows that the vast majority of those who complete their full Bar training by obtaining a pupillage have at least a 2:1 degree. The Bar Council Pupillage Gateway Report November 2024 found that, in 2023/24, 671 pupillages were advertised on the Pupillage Gateway and there were 3,408 applicants. Degree classification was a key indicator of success. Candidates with a First-Class Honours degree were more than twice as likely to secure an offer than those with a 2:1. No students with a 2:2 degree secured a pupillage offer via the Gateway during this period. The Bar Council Pupillage Gateway Report January 2024 revealed that in the 2022/2023 application period, 60.1% of offers made were to applicants with a First-Class Honours degree and 36.1% of offers made were to those with an Upper Second-Class Honours degree. We think it is important that people who are investing time and money in training to become barristers are aware that the statistics show that past academic performance is a predictor of success.
- 1.3 We understand, however, that circumstances occur which may have prevented candidates from achieving their academic potential during their degree course. Similarly, we understand that candidates will have a diverse range of life experiences and may have followed a non-traditional route to the Bar. Others may have achieved considerable distinction or success in their professional lives and careers, despite not having achieved academic success at an earlier stage. We want to encourage applications from such candidates, but we also want to make sure that applicants really do have a good chance of successfully achieving a career at the Bar, so we look at those applications with special care.
- 1.4 This guidance explains how we can help you if you do not meet our usual academic entrance requirements. It explains how and when you can apply to the ICCA to waive (disapply) the usual academic entrance requirements to the ICCA Bar Course. This is known as a 'waiver application'.
- 1.5 Please read this guidance carefully. It contains all the information you will need to make a waiver application. We take great care in considering every waiver application received. Please take the same care to follow the mandatory requirements set out in this guidance. Doing so will enhance your chances of success.

## 2. Scope - When does this guidance apply?

- 2.1 This guidance applies to any candidate who has not achieved the usual academic standards required by the ICCA as set out in paragraph 3.1 below.
- 2.2 This means that if you have achieved a 2:2 in your degree (in law or any other subject) or a pass grade in your graduate diploma in law (or equivalent qualification) you can apply for the usual academic entrance requirements to be waived on those grounds set out below in this document.

- 2.3 A waiver application can only be made during the online application process for the ICCA Bar Course. Speculative waiver applications or any application made outside the usual application process will not be considered.
- 2.4 The ICCA is not able to waive [BSB regulatory requirements](#) including:
- (a) Minimum undergraduate degree standards and requirements (including those below 2:2 level)
  - (b) Minimum Graduate Diploma in Law (or equivalent law conversion course) standards and requirements (including those below pass level)
  - (c) Certificates of Academic Standing
  - (d) Complying with time-limits for commencing Bar training
- 2.5 We are unable to consider a waiver regarding any Graduate Diploma in Law (or equivalent law conversion course) of less than 120 credits.
- 2.6 We are unable to consider waiver applications for candidates who do not achieve the conditions of their offer to the ICCA Bar Course (e.g. achieving a minimum Commendation grade on their GDL or equivalent law conversion course by the time of enrolment).
- 2.7 A Waiver application can only be made by applicants who have already attained their degree award or Graduate Diploma in Law classification. For applicants who are still to receive their degree or GDL award, the ICCA understands that circumstances beyond an applicant's control may detrimentally affect their academic progress. In such instances, the ICCA expects applicants to have taken appropriate action through their course provider to ensure the relevant examination bodies have allowed or will allow for such circumstances.

## Grounds and Criteria

### 3. Our usual minimum Academic Entrance Requirements

- 3.1 The usual minimum academic entrance requirements to enrol on the ICCA Bar Course are:
- (1) an acceptable<sup>1</sup> law degree awarded at a minimum level of Upper Second Class (2:1)
  - or**
  - (2) an acceptable degree in any other subject awarded at a minimum level of Upper Second Class (2:1) together with a Graduate Diploma in Law (or equivalent law conversion course) with a Commendation or a Distinction.
- 3.2 Please see the ICCA [Entry Requirements page](#) under 'Degree and GDL requirements in more detail' for the meaning of 'acceptable law degree' and 'acceptable degree'. Please also see on this page the requirements for non-UK Republic of Ireland degrees.

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<sup>1</sup> See 3.2

## 4. Waiving our usual Academic Requirements – Grounds and Criteria

4.1 Candidates who do not meet the ICCA minimum academic entrance requirements may apply to the ICCA for the exercise of discretion to waive these requirements in their individual case on **either or both** of the following grounds:

### 4.2 **Ground 1 - Significant Cause**

- (a) there is clear evidence of a significant cause which prevented the applicant from fulfilling their full academic potential, which has not already been considered by their course provider in the award of their degree or GDL classification; **and**
- (b) there is clear evidence that the applicant is academically of upper second-class quality (where the application concerns a degree award) or of Commendation or Distinction quality (where the application concerns a GDL or equivalent award) overall.

### 4.3 **Ground 2 – Additional Qualifications, Experience and Achievements**

- (a) the applicant has additional qualifications, professional experience or other achievements, which provide clear evidence that the applicant is academically of upper second-class quality (where the application concerns a degree award) or of Commendation or Distinction quality (where the application concerns a GDL or equivalent award) overall, **or**
  - (b) the applicant's additional qualifications, professional experience or other achievements, provide an other good reason why the minimum academic entrance requirements should be waived in their individual case.
- 4.4 It is vital that you address the criteria under the specific ground(s) you are applying under when making your application. Below are some examples of how these grounds apply.

### Examples of using these grounds

- Ash suffered a bereavement which led to depression shortly before their university final exams, and narrowly missed achieving a 2:1 despite good performances in earlier exams. Ash might apply for a waiver based on Ground 1.
- Birch obtained a 2:2 degree in the early 1990s. After some years in work, they went back to university and obtained a PhD and have published several articles in peer-reviewed journals, and passed their GDL with distinction. Birch might apply for a waiver based on Ground 2 (a).
- Chiti obtained a 2:2 degree. They went on to work in the charitable sector, and attained substantial management responsibility and experience in that sector which have given them skills and experience they can bring to the Bar. Chiti might apply for a waiver based on Ground 2 (b).

# Making Your Waiver Application

## 5. The Application form

- 5.1 The ICCA Bar Course online application form contains a section for you to provide a statement setting out the ground(s) and reasons for your application, together with the facility to upload references and evidence in support.

## 6. Your statement and evidence in support

- 6.1 You have the opportunity in your statement to set out the details of your application. During the application process you will also be able to upload evidence in support. Below you will see a **checklist** for your application under Grounds 1 and 2. Please ensure you follow this carefully.

### 6.2 **Ground 1 – Significant Cause**

If you are relying on Ground 1, your statement must set out the significant cause you are relying on and **must** address the application criteria at paragraph 4.2 above. This means that you are required to:

#### (a) Give Details of the Significant Cause

Provide clear details in your statement of the significant cause you are relying on. Please be specific, since it is important that we understand fully what it is that you are relying upon. Remember that the cause must be ‘significant’ so a vague or unspecified cause is unlikely to lead to a successful waiver application.

#### (b) Give Details of why this Significant Cause prevented you from achieving your full academic potential

It is important that we understand not only what the significant cause is, but also why this prevented you from achieving either at least an upper second in your degree or a commendation in your GDL (or equivalent law conversion course). To enable us to consider your application fully, please be as precise as you can about this.

#### (c) Provide Evidence in Support of the Significant Cause

Evidence in support of the significant cause you are relying on is required. If you are unable to provide evidence in support, please explain why. You can upload documents online when you make your application.

#### (d) Mention Previous Consideration of the Significant Cause

An application under Ground 1 requires the ICCA to be satisfied that the significant cause you are relying on has **not** already been considered by your course provider in reaching a final decision on the award of your degree or GDL classification. In many organisations, this would be called a ‘mitigating’ or ‘extenuating’ circumstances application.

For this reason, if applying under Ground 1, you should confirm in your statement that the significant cause you are relying on was not considered by your course provider in the award of your degree/GDL result (as the case may be) and explain why. This means that you should explain either:

- That **no application** was made to your course provider to consider the significant cause concerning the award of your degree or GDL classification, and explain why you did not make such an application, **or**
- That you **made an application** for the significant cause to be considered concerning the award of your degree or GDL classification, but this was not considered by your course provider in the award of your degree or GDL classification. It is important that you upload details of the application you made **and** the response received. If you are unable to provide this, please explain why.

#### (e) Demonstrate your Academic Ability

A successful application under Ground 1 requires you to demonstrate that you are academically of upper second-class quality (where the application concerns your degree) or of Commendation quality (where the application concerns your GDL or equivalent law conversion qualification) overall.

Please be clear about what you are relying on and how this demonstrates your academic ability. You can include details of pre- or post-graduate qualifications, professional qualifications, achievements and experience.

#### (f) Provide Evidence in Support of your Academic Ability

Upload at least one recent academic reference in support and, if relevant, details of additional qualifications or professional experience in support of your application. Providing additional evidence in support may assist consideration of your application; this could include, for example, previous academic qualifications, results or prizes; post-graduate or professional qualifications; or a high level of professional experience and achievement, and not necessarily in law.

If you are unable to provide an academic reference, you will need to explain why and upload any additional evidence you have in support. Please read more below in section 7 about academic references requirements.

### 6.3 Ground 2 - Additional Qualifications, Experience and Achievements

If you are relying on Ground 2(a) or (b), your statement should set out the additional qualifications, professional experience or other achievements you are relying upon and must address the application criteria at paragraph 4.3 (a) or (b) above. This means that you are required to:

#### (a) Demonstrate your Professional Qualifications, Experience and Achievements

In your statement set out details of your (1) additional qualifications and/or (2) professional experience and/or (3) the specific achievements you are relying upon. Additional qualifications may include post-graduate academic qualifications and other professional qualifications and achievements.

#### (b) Demonstrate your Academic Ability - Ground 2(a)

A successful application under Ground 2(a) requires you to demonstrate that you are academically of upper second-class quality (where the application concerns your degree) or of Commendation quality (where the application concerns your GDL or equivalent law conversion qualification) overall. Please be clear about what you are relying on and explain how this demonstrates your academic ability. You can include details of pre- or post-graduate qualifications, professional qualifications, achievements and experience.



### (c) Demonstrate other Good Reason – Ground 2(b)

A successful application under Ground 2(b) requires you to demonstrate that your additional qualifications, professional experience or other achievements, provide a **good reason why** the minimum academic entrance requirements should be waived in your individual case. Please explain what you consider this good reason to be. Remember that what we are mostly looking for is evidence that your qualifications, professional experience, or other achievements show that you will be able to successfully complete the ICCA course and have a realistic chance of obtaining pupillage.

### (d) Provide Evidence in Support – Ground 2(a) or (b)

Please provide evidence of the additional qualifications, professional experience and achievements you are relying upon. If you are unable to provide this, please explain why. Evidence can be uploaded during the online application process.

## Academic References Requirements – Ground 1

- 7.1 Applications under Ground 1 must be supported by one or more recent academic references, unless for good reason this is not possible. You will need to arrange for an academic reference or references yourself (such as from your tutors/lecturers) giving details, from their own knowledge, of circumstances considered relevant to your application.
- 7.2 The reference should:
  - a) contain a description of your general overall performance as a student
  - b) state whether your degree/GDL result accords with the expectations of your tutors, derived from your performance in previous examinations
  - c) state whether any deterioration in your performance on the degree/GDL could be attributed to a significant cause which prevented/impeded you fulfilling your full academic potential; and
  - d) include details of the extent to which any mitigating circumstances were considered by the awarding institution.
- 7.3 Referees must have first-hand knowledge of the applicant. The referee(s) you choose should know your academic work and be able to provide an accurate assessment of your academic potential.
- 7.4 References must be written in each referee's own words.
- 7.5 References should be dated and recent (within the last calendar year). References outside this timescale will not be considered in the absence of a compelling reason.
- 7.6 Academic references should be written on official notepaper from their academic institution and signed by the author.
- 7.7 There is no minimum or maximum number of references required. However, all references must relate directly to the purpose of the application.
- 7.8 Where it is not possible to give an academic reference, you must explain why this is in your statement.

## Additional evidence and information in support of your academic ability

7.9 Where you are applying under Ground 1 and it is not possible to give an academic reference, and where you wish to provide additional evidence in support of your academic ability and potential, it is helpful to give us as much information as possible in order to determine, for the purposes of this application, if you are academically of upper second-class quality (where the application concerns a degree award) or of Commendation or Distinction quality (where the application concerns a GDL or equivalent award) overall. Examples of evidence in support which may assist your application are:

- academic qualifications attained prior to your degree/GDL award;
- recognition or prizes received for a high level of academic achievement;
- post-graduate or professional qualifications;
- a high level of professional experience and achievement, not necessarily in law.

## Uploading References and Evidence in Support

8.1 Your references and evidence must be uploaded into your application using the upload facility in the online applications system.

## Time Limits

9.1 All references and evidence must be uploaded by the closing date for applications. We are unable to consider any references or evidence received after this date.

## Your Personal Responsibility

- 10.1 This guidance has been provided to help you. Please read and follow it carefully. Please bear in mind that it is your responsibility to set out your application clearly and to provide and upload evidence and any reference(s) in support by the application closing date.
- 10.2 The ICCA will not seek clarification or further information from you and will not seek evidence or references on your behalf, other than for verification purposes.

## Process, Confidentiality and Disclosure

### 11 Consideration

11.1 All waiver applications will be considered by the ICCA Vice-Dean (or nominee).

### 12 Successful and unsuccessful applications

- 12.1 Successful applications will be marked as meeting the minimum academic acceptable law degree or GDL requirements and will be passed on to assessors who will consider the application according to the usual criteria. Assessors will have no knowledge of the details of the waiver application.
- 12.2 Should your waiver application be unsuccessful, you will be considered not to have met the minimum academic requirements for the ICCA Bar Course and your application will be withdrawn.



## 13 Verification and additional information

- 13.1 You agree that the ICCA may contact referees and other providers of the information/evidence submitted by you or on your behalf for verification purposes. The ICCA may also seek official transcripts of qualifications referred to by you in your application. Further information may be sought from you in consideration of your application, although please note that this would be an exceptional course and does not absolve applicants of the requirements in this guidance.

## 14 Statement of truth

- 14.1 By submitting your application, you undertake that all information, references and evidence submitted by you are true. The ICCA reserves the right to withdraw an application for admission to the ICCA and to notify an applicant's Inn of Court and/or the Bar Standards Board where an application is suspected to contain false information, including full details of the application, references and evidence provided.

## 15 Management of your information

- 15.1 The ICCA will ensure all information is managed in a way that is consistent with this guidance, its Academic Regulations and the provisions of the Human Rights Act, the General Data Protection Regulation, the Freedom of Information Act and any other relevant legislation.

# Appeals and Complaints Procedure

## 16 Appeals and Complaints

- 16.1 Applicants who are unsuccessful in their waiver application, and who wish to appeal the decision, should follow the two-stage appeal process as outlined in the Admissions Appeal Procedure, provided as an annex to the Fair Admissions Policy.
- 16.2 Applicants who do not wish to appeal the decision made on their waiver application, but who are dissatisfied with their experience or the service they received during the application process, may make use of the two-stage complaints process outlined in the Admissions Complaints Procedure, provided as an annex to the Fair Admissions Policy. Applicants are recommended to attempt informal resolution of any complaint at the local level before initiating a formal complaint.
- 16.3 Please note that time limits apply for admissions appeals and complaints, as outlined in the annexes to the Fair Admissions Policy.