

BRIEF

Encounters



James Frampton reflects on his career thus far as a junior tenant at Keating Chambers.

What made you choose Keating?

I was on the GDL looking for pupillage at a commercial set. At one of the pupillage fairs I attended (and would recommend to all budding barristers), two of the three speakers at the “Life at the Commercial Bar” talk were construction barristers, including one member of Keating Chambers. Before then I was not aware that there was a distinct “Construction Bar”. However, I was struck by the passion with which the “brickies” on the panel described their jobs and immediately shared their interest. Put simply, it is far more enjoyable and stimulating arguing about, and having to understand, something which is physically there! For example, I have already had to master how an iron ore mine and a nuclear power plant are built and function. Once I had settled on the Construction Bar, Keating was the obvious choice.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?

I was lucky enough to be led in my first big case, just three months into tenancy, by Simon Hughes QC. At the beginning of last year, I spent over two months in Singapore for a five week arbitration concerning a mine in Australia. Not only was it incredibly exciting to be acting in one of the biggest disputes in Asia, but I also had a ring-side seat watching Simon, the distinguished arbitrators, and counsel for the other side in action. It was an unparalleled learning experience in cross-examination, submissions and general court/tribunal advocacy. I was even able to spend two weeks travelling around south-east Asia once the hearing finished. At the other end of the spectrum, I more recently had my own two-day arbitration in Taunton! While less glamorous, it was equally enjoyable as I could put all I had learned into practice.

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What is the balance of your practice between international and UK work?

International construction cases can be enormous and my domestic cases are typically smaller, so the balance of my practice can vary at any given time. For example, last year I was involved in two international arbitration hearings which both lasted over four weeks. Overall, I would say that the balance of my practice is roughly 50% international work and 50% domestic work. One of the best things about being a barrister at Keating Chambers is the diversity of the work. You can go from being a second or third junior on a multi-billion pound arbitration one day, to acting as sole counsel in a £20k dispute on the next day. Both are equally challenging and rewarding!

What aspects do you think are important for building a career as a modern barrister?

I think it is increasingly essential for modern barristers to be able to work as part as a team. Within chambers generally as well as in the counsel or wider legal team in each case, it is vital that you are able to

build personal relationships with people and fulfil your role in the team. Solicitors and leaders are looking for junior barristers they can both rely on during a hearing and share a beer with after. Plus this team spirit will keep you going through even the most difficult cases! Similarly, marketing – whether it is writing articles, giving talks or attending dinners – is a crucial part of a barrister’s practice. Luckily, at Keating Chambers we are assisted by our brilliant marketing team – Marie and Maddy!

James Frampton became a tenant at Keating Chambers in 2017 after the successful completion of his pupillage. James is developing a busy practice across the range of Chambers’ specialisms both domestically (led and unled) and internationally. He has appeared as a sole advocate in the County Court and the High Court, as well as acting in several large-value arbitrations concerning high-profile international projects. James is an Honorary Lecturer in the Bartlett School of Construction and Project Management at UCL, teaching a MSc module on contractual claims and dispute resolution.