

A Reader's Reflection

By Megan Caristo

Q: *How long have you been at the bar?*

A: Not long! I was meant to complete the May 2020 Bar Practice Course, which was cancelled in light of the pandemic. Given the highly unusual circumstances, the Bar Association has allowed me to practise on a restricted certificate between now and the September 2020 Bar Practice Course.

Q: *What areas do you practise in?*

A: As a reader, I am open to anything and everything! As a solicitor, I practised primarily in public law but one of the reasons I joined the Bar was to diversify the areas in which I work.

Q: *Where have you been working during COVID?*

A: I have been working from home, where I have a well-stocked library and new IT equipment. As restrictions are being eased, I am hoping to start working from chambers a few days a week.

Q: *When the pandemic hit in March 2020, how did that immediately affect your practice?*

A: There was an initial period of uncertainty after the May 2020 Bar Practice Course was cancelled. I was lecturing at the University of Sydney and the University of NSW and my contracts ended in April to allow me to do the May 2020 Bar Practice Course. I was grateful when the Bar Association announced that people in my position could apply for a restricted practising certificate between May 2020 and the September 2020 Bar Practice Course and granted my application.

I wish to take the opportunity to thank Peter Braham SC, the head of Chambers at Eleven Wentworth, my tutors, Zelig Heger of Eleven Wentworth and Robert Yezerski of Banco, my clerk Zach Rymer and barristers on Eleven Wentworth and other floors who contacted me when the May 2020 Bar Practice Course was cancelled to offer support and advice and who assisted me with my application for a restricted practising certificate.

Q: *How have you found starting at the bar / practising at the bar as the pandemic has continued?*



I have been touched by the support that barristers and other readers have shown me during this time. I had not appreciated how collegial the Bar can be, especially in difficult times.

A: I was not sure what to expect starting as a reader during the pandemic but I have enjoyed a variety of devilling work from barristers on Eleven Wentworth and other floors and have been briefed to prepare advices and a special leave application to the High Court. Having been a solicitor before I joined the Bar, I already have relationships with some barristers, including some senior counsel, and I am indebted to them for recommending me for briefs and introducing me to potential clients during the first few weeks of my reader's year. I have already completed some of my criminal reading by dialling into appeals and am grateful to Miiiko Kumar and Belinda Baker at the Crown Prosecutors' Chambers for their efforts with my criminal reading requirements.

Q: *What have you done to try to adapt to starting at the bar / practising at the bar during COVID?*

A: Eleven Wentworth has been hosting Friday night Zoom drinks (and trivia) and has a WhatsApp group. I have also been Zooming

with some barristers on Eleven Wentworth at lunchtimes to learn how they are adapting to the new environment. I am fortunate to live only a few streets from Zelig Heger so we have been meeting for coffees at our local café and going for walks since restrictions have been eased to discuss my experiences as a reader.

Q: *What is the oddest thing that you've encountered in your work during COVID?*

A: As I am only new to the Bar, it is hard to know what is normal and what is odd! I am sure it is not usual for a reader to have a puppy sleeping at their feet as they prepare a research note or to have already seen the living rooms of so many barristers.

Q: *What has been the hardest feature of your work during COVID?*

A: I appreciate that my experience as a reader is likely to be very different to those of readers before me. I recognise that it may take me longer to build my practice and gain court experience than it may have otherwise but I am determined to do my best!

Q: *What has been the most positive feature of your work during COVID?*

A: I have been touched by the support that barristers and other readers have shown me during this time. Many barristers who I worked with as a solicitor, and some who I have met only once or not at all, have contacted me to lend their support. I had not appreciated how collegial the Bar can be, especially in difficult times.

Q: *Is there anything about your current working arrangements or practice that you would like to see continue as COVID restrictions ease?*

A: I imagine that electronic briefing is happening much more often than previously, as I rarely briefed counsel electronically as a solicitor. Electronic briefing has been great as a reader as barristers have been able to email me briefs when I am devilling or reading to give context to my work. I hope that the practice continues as restrictions are eased.

BN