

Lawyers' protest is a fight for justice, not fees



Picture: BNPS.CO.UK

Presenting her case: Sophie Webb

DRUMMING up public support for lawyers is challenging, but there should be huge support for those barristers who refused to turn up to court on Monday. It's a fight for justice, not fees. Only a minority of criminal barristers earn more than £100,000 a year. According to Ministry of Justice statistics, the average is £56,000. In reality, it's around £37,000, but let's work with the £56,000 to prove the point. After VAT, this figure comes down to £46,600. After overheads and tax, it's around £22,400. This for a profession which often entails a 90-hour working week. Justice Secretary Chris Grayling is misleading hardworking taxpayers with false information, wanting you to view criminal barristers as 'fat-cat lawyers'

when they've trained for five years at great cost. The Bar Professional Training Course alone, one year of the five, costs £12,000 to £17,000. Some of the best criminal barristers can't even pay off their student debts. They're self-employed with no pension, maternity or sick pay. Grayling has no legal training and has never worked in the criminal justice system, yet pockets £142,000, has a very generous pension and is in line for an 11 per cent salary increase. Criminal barristers have seen no increase, only a 28 per cent income cut over the past three years. Grayling wants to cut this by a further 17.5 per cent in all cases and 30 per cent in the most complex ones. I'm a law student

who had ambitions to become a criminal defence barrister. I've now been told that entering the criminal bar will be almost impossible. One told me not to bother unless I 'fancied it as a hobby' and had another source of income. Charter Chambers cancelled its pupillages (the final stage of training) this year because 'it's not fair to offer a pupillage when the uncertainty of work is so great'. This inability for new talent to enter the criminal bar is disastrous for the criminal justice system. Defendants will have inadequate representation. And with less able barristers in criminal law, more criminals will walk free. *SOPHIE WEBB, University of Exeter and Bournemouth, Dorset.*