



Saoirse Townshend

Call 2010

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Described as “a brilliant lawyer with a sharp mind and an unwavering determination to protect her clients”, Saoirse Townshend has developed a dynamic court and advisory practice specialising in extradition and public law.

She is recognised as a “leading junior” across the directories. Skilled at both arguing complex and novel points of law before the Supreme Court and the Divisional Court, Saoirse also has great expertise handling witnesses before the lower courts, tribunals and Inquiry settings.

Expertise

Extradition & Interpol

In extradition law, Saoirse is known as an “incredibly capable extradition barrister”. She has a wealth of experience representing requested persons and requesting states in some of the defining cases of the past decade.

On Article 6 ECHR, she was instructed for an Appellant before a Divisional Court arguing that the Appellants could no longer obtain fair trials due to the controversial Constitutional changes to the judiciary between 2017-2021 (*Wozniak v the Circuit Court in Gniezno* and *Wojciech Chlabicz v Regional Court in Bialystok* [2021] EWHC 2557 (Admin)). Saoirse also represented Mr Lange in the case *Lis and Lange v Poland* [2018] EWHC 2848 (Admin); [2019] EWHC 674 (Admin)), which was the predecessor Polish Article 6 case.

In relation to prison conditions (Article 3 ECHR), Saoirse has been instructed in the lead cases relating to a plethora of EU countries: Lithuania (*Bartulis v Lithuania* [2019] EWHC 504 (Admin)); Latvia (*Danfolds v Latvia* [2020] EWHC 3199 (Admin)); France (*Shumba, Henta and Bechian v France* [2018] EWHC 1762 (Admin)); Bulgaria (*Chechev v Bulgaria* [2021] EWHC 427 (Admin) and *L. Georgiev, I. Dimitrov and B. Georgiev v Bulgaria* [2018] EWHC 359 (Admin)); Hungary (*GS v Hungary* [2016] EWHC 64 (Admin)) and Italy (*Elashmawy v Italy* [2015] EWHC 28 (Admin)).

On suicide risk, Saoirse was instructed by the Polish Judicial Authority in *Bobbe v Poland* [2017] EWHC 3161 (Admin) an extradition appeal which changed the legal test following the CJEU case of *CK and others v*



Slovenia [2017] 3 CMLR 10. In addition, following this case, she successfully represented the Appellant in *Debiec v Poland* [2017] EWHC 2653 (Admin) in one of the first cases in which the s.25 bar has been successful in EAW cases since *Poland v Wolkowicz* [2013] EWHC 102 (Admin).

On the charge/try bar, she represented an Appellate requested person in the lead case of *Puceviciene v Lithuania* [2016] EWHC 1862) on s.12A; which provided new definitions of “charge” and “try”.

Saoirse has also represented both Requested Persons (*Turkey v Koc* [2021] EWHC 1234 (Admin); *Albania v Koleci*; *Albania v Sultan Dragjoshi* and *USA v Okeakpu*) and Requesting States (*Turkey v Charles* [2017] ACD 84 and 563553) in complex Part 2 cases. Recently in *Koc* (supra), Saoirse successfully represented the Appellant, accused of robbery and kidnap in Turkey from 2002, on the grounds of s.85 (deliberate absence from trial), s.82 (oppression due to passage of time) and Article 8 ECHR.

In addition, Saoirse is instructed in judicial review proceedings arising out of extradition and criminal proceedings. She was successful in the first judicial review in the area where the requested person in extradition proceedings was not removed within the statutory time period (see *R (on the application of Mechlinksi) v Westminster Magistrates’ Court* [2015] EWHC 2043 (Admin)). Further, she successfully represented the CPS in the lead habeas corpus application post-Brexit; *Cosar v Governor of Wandsworth Prison* [2020] EWHC 1142 (Admin).

Saoirse compliments her extradition practice with publications. She has written chapters in: ‘A Practical Guide to Extradition Law Post-Brexit’ (Law Brief Publishing, 2021) and ‘A Practitioner’s Guide to Judicial Review in the Criminal Justice System and Related Areas’ (Hart, 2014).

Inquiries

Saoirse has a thriving practice in public inquires work. She has a variety of experience in different roles in several high-profile public inquiries. She has undertaken significant oral and written advocacy as Counsel to the Inquiry in the Brook House Inquiry; and has acted for significant Core Participants in the Infected Blood Inquiry (for the Department of Health) and the Covid Inquiry (for the Ministry of Justice).

Saoirse is instructed as second Junior Counsel to the Inquiry. The Inquiry has investigated the circumstances surrounding the mistreatment of individuals detained at Brook House Immigration Removal Centre. Saoirse led on a large topic; use of force, and drafted several complex written advices concerning the application of Article 3 ECHR. She also questioned eleven significant live witnesses during the Inquiry’s lengthy hearings, including the Inquiry’s use of force expert.

She is also instructed as Junior Counsel by the Department of Health and Social Care in the Infected Blood Inquiry. This Inquiry has examined the circumstances in which NHS patients in the UK were given infected blood since 1970. Saoirse’s role has been to advise in relation to scores of Rule 9 requests from the Inquiry. Saoirse has advised on witness statements on behalf of current and former Ministers, Special Advisors and Senior civil servants.

In addition, Saoirse is instructed as Junior Counsel on behalf of the Ministry of Justice in the ongoing Covid Inquiry. Thus far, she has advised on complex Rule 9 requests from the Inquiry for disclosure of documents and witness statements from senior MOJ civil servants concerning a variety of issues.



Inquests

Saoirse advises and represents a range of interested parties at Pre-Inquest Review Hearings and Inquests, both with and without a jury. Saoirse has experience in inquests relating to deaths in prison custody. Saoirse also accepts instructions on behalf of families, including pro-bono.

Public Law

Saoirse's public law practice is also thriving. Since the beginning of her practice, Saoirse has represented Claimants in the First Tier and Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) on a wide range of issues, from asylum to EEA Visa and ETS cases. In April 2019, Saoirse was appointed to the Attorney General's C Panel of Junior Counsel. She regularly appears before the Upper Tribunal (Administrative Appeals Chamber), County Courts and Coroner's Courts in a variety of cases relating to and including social security appeals, and civil claims made by prisoners.

Appointments

- Assistant Coroner, Luton & Bedfordshire appointed in April 2024
- Junior Counsel to the Crown – B Panel (2023)
- Junior Counsel to the Crown – C Panel (2019-2023)
- Crown Prosecution Service Advocate Panel Extradition Panel – Grade 3

Awards

- Lord Mansfield Scholarship (BVC)
- Lord Bowen Scholarship (GDL)

Education

- BVC, BPP
- GDL, BPP
- BA (Hons) Politics & Parliamentary Studies (First Class), University of Leeds

Memberships

- Defence Extradition Lawyers Association