



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 a dynamic court and advisory practice specialising in extradition, public inquiries and inquests. She is *"very much a junior in demand"*; *"a wonderful legal brain that makes the complicated seem simple. Wonderful to work with too"* (Legal 500 2025).

She is recognised as a *"leading junior"* across the directories. She is skilled at arguing complex and novel points of law before a range of courts and tribunals. Saoirse is described as *"exceptional"*, *"an accomplished advocate, eloquent and always well prepared"*. She has appeared before the Supreme Court and regularly appears in the Administrative Court both alone against Silks, and being led, providing exceptional advocacy on a range of complex legal issues. Saoirse also has great expertise handling witnesses before the lower courts, coroner's courts and in Inquiry settings.

Expertise

Extradition & Interpol

In extradition law, Saoirse is banded as Tier 1 in Chambers & Partners. She is known as an "incredibly capable extradition barrister" and a go-to junior. She has a wealth of experience representing requested persons and requesting states in some of the defining extradition cases of the past decade.

Saoirse has represented both Requested Persons (Turkey v Demir & Others [2024] EWHC 2351 (Admin), 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 Varzari v Moldova [ongoing]) in complex Part 2 cases. Recently in Demir, Saoirse successfully represented by Demir in the Government's appeal; a Divisional Court found that the offence for which he was sought, was not an extradition offence.

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 & 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 countries: Turkey (Turkey v Demir & Others [2024] EWHC 2351 (Admin) (Lithuania (Urbonas v Lithuania [2024] EWHC 33 (Admin), Bartulis v Lithuania [2019] EWHC 504 (Admin)); Latvia (Danfelds v Latvia [2020] EWHC 3199 (Admin)); France (Shumba & Ors v France [2018] EWHC 1762 (Admin)); Bulgaria (Chechev v Bulgaria [2021] EWHC 427 (Admin) and Georgiev & Ors 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'.

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 Mechlinksj) 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). Recently she represented the Secretary of State in first judicial review against a decision to defer a warrant over a request under s.179 of the Extradition Act 2003 in *R (on the application of Santos Coelho) v Secretary of State of the Home Department (SSHD)* [2025] EWHC 2293 (Admin). She also represented one of the Requested Persons in a judicial review before Swift J of the SSHD's decision to order extradition for a blood feud murder (*Haxhia, Mithan, Bridgeman, Simpson and Hunt v The Secretary of State for the Home Department (SSHD) and Government of the Republic of Albania*).

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 2025 editions) 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), the Covid Inquiry (for the Ministry of Justice) and the Afghan Inquiry (Ministry of Defence Witness Legal Team (individual soldiers)).

In the Brook House Inquiry, Saoirse was instructed as Junior Counsel to the Inquiry. The Inquiry 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.

In the Infected Blood Inquiry, Saoirse acted as Junior Counsel by the Department of Health and Social Care. 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 Rules 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 the ongoing Covid Inquiry, Saoirse is instructed as Junior Counsel on behalf of the Ministry of Justice. 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.

In the ongoing Afghan Inquiry, Saoirse is instructed as Junior Counsel on behalf of the Ministry of Defence Witness Legal Team (individual soldiers).

She has advised on several Rule 9 requests regarding very senior witnesses.

Inquests

Saoirse advises and represents a range of interested parties, including families of the bereaved, at Pre-Inquest Review Hearings and Inquests, both with and without a jury. She has vast experience in inquests where Article 2 ECHR is engaged in inquests which have involved investigation into police failings; suicides in the community and deaths in State custody. Drawing on her experience as Counsel to the Inquiry in the Brook House Inquiry where she led on the use of force against immigration detainees topic, Saoirse has particular expertise in cases where an issue arises as to the correct application of force by police/prison guards.

Saoirse sat as an Assistant Coroner in Luton and Bedfordshire since April 2024 and since January 2026 she has sat as an Assistant Coroner in Inner London Coroner's Court. She has presided over a huge range of different types of inquests, where many complex issues have arisen such as deaths abroad; suicides; and deaths in state detention custody.

Public Law

Saoirse's public law practice is 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 and in 2023, she was promoted to the B Panel. 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
- Assistant Coroner, Inner London appointed in January 2026



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

Recommendations

“Combines huge experience with excellent judgment and laser-like intelligence. A fabulous advocate in writing and in court too.” **Legal 500 2026**