

Christopher May

YEAR OF CALL: 1983



Chris is a heavyweight criminal barrister instructed in some of the most serious and often high profile criminal cases either as the leading junior or sole advocate. He is ranked in Chambers & Partners and the Legal 500 for his criminal work.

"Chris is a very thoughtful and thorough prosecutor. He is fair and proper, but no pushover. He quickly masters a brief and is a robust and effective cross-examiner. He also has a lovely manner with the court and the jury."

The Legal 500, 2025

"He is meticulous in preparation and presentation and has an extremely good brain."

Chambers & Partners, 2025

Overview

Chris is a heavyweight criminal barrister instructed in some of the most serious, and often high profile criminal cases either as the leading junior or sole advocate. Chris is ranked in Chambers and Partners and the Legal 500 for his criminal work.

Chris is the head of the Criminal Prosecutions Team at 5SAH and he is the Senior of the Kent Bar Mess.

"Expertly dissects a brief and homes in on the key points."

Chambers & Partners, 2023

"He has a superb analytical brain and excellent manner of delivery."

Chambers & Partners, 2022

"A polished advocate who is charming and carries a lot of weight with the jury."

Chambers & Partners, 2021

"Chris is an exceptional barrister with very detailed drafting skills and a wealth of advocacy experience."

Chambers & Partners 2024.

"Chris is an exceptional barrister with very detailed drafting skills and a wealth of advocacy experience."

Chambers & Partners, 2025

Examples of Chris's instructions include: murder, organised crime, serious offences against

the person and sexual assaults and rapes, including historical allegations. Chris also has extensive experience of cases involving large-scale frauds, confiscation and asset forfeiture and regulatory health and safety matters involving allegations of corporate manslaughter.

"Can I take the opportunity to express my sincere thanks to yourself and of course John [Keal] for your handling of this very difficult and complex case. You have been superb and have delivered a prosecution of the utmost quality. It has been a pleasure working with you."

Detective Inspector, Complex Abuse Unit Surrey in the case of R v Chilcott and Pusey.

"Mr May was extremely professional, very approachable and in my view his delivery of the evidence was very impressive. This is the second case I have had with Mr May, on both occasions his dedication shone through."

Feedback from those instructing Chris May. November 2016.

Chris is an experienced criminal barrister and safe pair of hands. He has an impressive style and presence when appearing in court.

Additional information

Direct Public Access

Chris accepts direct public access instructions in appropriate cases.

Professional panel appointments

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) List of prosecuting advocates at Level 4: London and the South Eastern Circuit.

CPS Serious Crime Panel at Level 4.

CPS rape and serious sexual assault prosecution list: London and the South Eastern Circuit at

Level 4.

Band C (10 years' call and above) appointed advocate for the General Dental Council (GDC).

Education and awards

MA (Hons) Cantab.

Exhibitioner in Law, Christ's College, Cambridge.

Professional Memberships

South Eastern Circuit (Elected representative for Kent).

Criminal Bar Association.

Proceeds of Crime Lawyers Association.

Senior of the Kent Bar Mess.

Business Crime & Financial Regulation

Chris has prosecuted and defended in fraud cases of all types, including giving pre-charge advice in potential MTIC and money-laundering cases. He has successfully conducted VAT fraud cases involving companies and company directors (e.g. R v Bayly; Harrow Crown Court).

Criminal Defence

Chris is a heavyweight criminal barrister and is instructed to defend in some of the most serious, and often high profile criminal cases either as the leading junior or sole advocate.

Criminal Prosecutions - Private & Public

Chris appears in the most serious criminal cases. He has appeared as either leading or sole Counsel in many homicide cases including sexually motivated killing (R v Coates); the murder by a woman of her partner on the day of his release from prison (R v Carter) and joint

enterprise Murder.

He has prosecuted gang violence cases, including leading in a 20 Defendant case at Woolwich Crown Court (all convicted). He has appeared in many cases involving allegations of organised criminal activity including drugs and violence. He has long experience of Flying Squad and HMRC cases and those involving all forms of sensitive material, surveillance and PII. He has considerable experience of kidnapping cases and those involving firearms.

Sexual Offences

Chris is on the CPS Rape Prosecution list for London and the South Eastern Circuit at Level 4. He has enormous experience of both prosecuting and defending in sexual cases, whether historical allegations or those involving children or other vulnerable witnesses or defendants; including the use of the full range of special measures and intermediaries. He has appeared in cases involving multiple complainants and allegations of sexual abuse spanning several decades.

Chris successfully defended a man on life licence charged with 5 offences of rape and other offences of violence (R v D; Isleworth Crown Court). Chris also succeeded in the defence of a mother jointly charged with other family members of the abuse of a very young child (R v G; Maidstone Crown Court). He recently prosecuted a case involving transmission of HIV through sexual abuse resulting in the imposition of a life sentence.

Chris accepts Private Prosecution Instructions.

Cases of Note

R v DJ 2019 4WLR 43; 2019 2 CrAppR 7

Historical indecent assault case. Appeal re: directions to the jury. Judgment is that of Hallett LJ Vice President of the Court of Appeal Criminal Division.

R v AB: Lewes Crown Court; 28th October 2016.

Chris May secured the acquittal of an 18 year-old accused of two rapes and penetrative

sexual assaults on girls aged 12 and 13 years old at Lewes Crown Court. The defendant was convicted of one count of inciting penetrative sexual behaviour on the 12 year-old. The prosecution sought a starting point of an 8-year custodial sentence. Following Chris' mitigation, the judge was persuaded to impose a suspended sentence.

R v Neil McKenna; 27 November 2015.

Chris May prosecutes Neil McKenna, a paedophile former soccer coach who preyed on young boys to sexually abuse them over three decades. McKenna was sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment by Judge MacDonald Q.C.

REPORTED CASES

R -v- Bianco [2001] EWCA Crim 2516 (Court of Appeal)

Duress.

R -v- Harmer [2002] Crim LR 401 (Court of Appeal)

Duress.

R -v- Arnaot [2008] EWCA Crim 121 (Court of Appeal)

Duress/Necessity.

R -v- Henworth [2001] 2 Cr App R 120 (Court of Appeal)

Abuse of Process.

R -v- Macdonald & Others [1998] Crim.L.R. 808 (Court of Appeal)

Abuse of Process.

R –v- Jama [2008] EWCA Crim 2861 (Court of Appeal)

Inferences from silence in interview.

Accreditation

