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Francesca Levett

YEAR OF CALL: 1997 | RECORDER: 2019

Francesca is an experienced criminal practitioner who has developed a significant practice in serious crime, complex fraud, confiscation and regulatory work over the last twenty-seven years.

Overview

Francesca is a criminal practitioner who has developed a significant practice in complex fraud, conspiracy, confiscation and regulatory work over the last twenty-seven years, whilst maintaining her expertise in cases involving serious sexual, violence and drugs offences.

Francesca both defends and prosecutes in the most serious of cases. She has expertise in dealing with vulnerable defendants and witnesses, and takes proactive steps to ensure that anyone who wishes to, can fairly and effectively participate in their trial process.

Francesca also has an excellent reputation for both leading and challenging expert witnesses on complex issues ranging from mental health disorders to attribution evidence.

Francesca is recognised in the Legal 500 for her work in crime and was appointed as a Recorder in 2019.

> *‘Francesca is fabulously intelligent in the law, clever in tactics and a deeply persuasive advocate.'*
>
> The Legal 500 2024.

> *"Francesca is an impressive defence advocate. She is hardworking, utterly dedicated to her work and her clients, intelligent and counsel of choice for sensitive cases."*
>
> The Legal 500, 2023

> *"Francesca is supremely cerebral; intellectually she is on another dimension in terms of her legal prowess. She is also a supreme tactician and is much loved by clients."*
>
> The Legal 500, 2025

Nominated for the 2026 Legal 500 UK Bar Awards, Junior of the Year in Financial Crime.

Professional Panel Appointments

Appointed Recorder: September 2019.
Grade 4 appointed advocate on the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Unified Prosecution List.
Appointed to the Rape Panel of approved CPS advocates.
Appointed to the Specialist lists for Fraud (Grade 4) and POCA (Grade 2).
Appointed advocate for the General Dental Council (GDC).

Professional Memberships

Criminal Bar Association.

Proceeds of Crime Lawyers Association.

Women in Criminal Law.

Business Crime & Financial Regulation

Francesca was instructed to represent one of the alleged principals in a set of four conspiracy trials involving 24 defendants. The case alleged duty evasion on alcohol imports, and the subsequent laundering of over £25million through 14 shell companies, which was then allegedly layered through the company owned by Francesca's defendant. The trial of Francesca's defendant lasted for five months and involved the four alleged principals. Francesca's client was the only one acquitted.

Francesca has been instructed in a number of other high profile fraud trials, and has also undertaken a secondment with a leading white-collar criminal firm in London to assist them in the preparation of a complex fraud and kidnap case.

Preliminary legal arguments have been met with success while Francesca has argued alongside leading silks. In one particularly high profile case, Francesca's representations contributed to the staying of all charges whilst the prosecution were publicly condemned for their 'scandalous and contumelious conduct' in relation to disclosure.

Asset Forfeiture, Confiscation & Civil Fraud

Francesca has undertaken a considerable amount of forfeiture and confiscation work for the defence and the prosecution. She has assisted local authorities in developing financial investigations and has recently succeeded in achieving the largest confiscation award for a private prosecutor under POCA. Undertaking so many confiscation procedures on behalf of the prosecution has greatly assisted Francesca in offering the best advice to her defence clients, as she is able to foresee and overcome potential difficulties in a timely fashion, so as to bring about a fair and just conclusion.

Most recently, Francesca was instructed to assist a defendant (a former solicitor) in confiscation proceedings, following his conviction for a fraud involving carbon emissions reduction certificates, purchase options and research and education grants. The fraud resulted in tax evasion of £107million, but following a contested confiscation hearing, the benefit attributed to Francesca's client was just over £3million.

Criminal Defence

In addition to conducting high profile fraud trials, Francesca is instructed to defend and prosecute throughout London, the South East and the Midlands. She has developed a practice that promotes her ability to identify and address complex legal argument, whilst remaining focussed and robust during witness handling.

> *'Francesca is an impressive defence advocate. She is hardworking, utterly dedicated to her work and her clients, intelligent and counsel of choice for sensitive cases.'*
>
> The Legal 500 2023.

Francesca takes an active role in effective case management and encourages client conferences throughout the proceedings to maximise prospects of success. She has gained significant experience in lengthy and multi-handed cases, together with appellate work, having been instructed by leading defence solicitors in relation to referrals from the Criminal Cases Review Commission.

Francesca has celebrated success in the Court of Appeal in relation to two recent Appeals against Conviction. The most recent, currently embargoed, related to the unfair and unreasonable admission of bad character evidence in which the trial Judge failed to properly guide the jury as to how to approach the bad character evidence. This error was compounded by the fact the Judge cross examined the Defendant, gave evidence himself and then failed to properly summarise the Defendant's case claiming that he 'preferred to remind the jury of the evidence they have, rather than the evidence they don't have', when the Defendant's case was premised on the lack of DNA and identification evidence.

The second recent success was in the case of Ishaqzai [2021] EWCA Crim 222, reported in Archbold 2025 at 17B-54 and 20-78. This has become a guideline case in relation to reasonable belief as to age, following which the Defendant was subject to retrial, and acquitted.

At first instance, Francesca has recently successfully defended Rakeem Miles in a nationally reported case of murder. Mr Miles had been granted legal aid for a silk alone but opted to retain Francesca who had represented him from the outset and in whom he had confidence. Mr Miles had always accepted manslaughter and despite a number of problematic jury developments throughout the trial, the third iteration of the jury acquitted Mr Miles of murder in an interesting case in which a single punch caused a twisting injury to the neck of the deceased resulting in a fatality that arises in England and Wales only once every eighteen months.

Very recently, Francesca argued against the admissibility of ABE evidence from a severely autistic child who appeared to be subject to coaching and suggestibility from the intermediary and interviewing officer in a case alleging isolated, historic acts of sexual abuse. The application to exclude was unsuccessful, but Francesca followed this up with an application to dismiss on the first day of trial as the Defendant had not been arraigned. This Application was successful as the Judge was able to consider the ABE, the s28 responses and the unused material that had come to light leading him to the conclusion that the evidence relied upon by the Crown was inherently unreliable, tenuous and self-contradictory. Of most significance to the Judge's decision, was the fact that the complainant had not undergone a psychological assessment to illustrate her ability to understand questions and properly articulate responses – a factor raised by Francesca during the s78 Application.

Francesca has been instructed as Leading Counsel in Encrochat cases, as well as County Lines cases involving drugs offences.

Francesca was led in a high profile Appeal that sought to extend the parameters of duress to overcome the need for an objective 'imminent risk' of death or serious injury for defendants that suffer from battered woman syndrome.

Francesca was instructed to represent the first mate of a vessel that collided with another in the Dover strait, resulting in the death of the other vessel's captain and a charge of manslaughter. For the first time in a criminal trial, a simulation was generated that reconstructed the incident using the GPS co-ordinates of all vessels within the area, to enable the judge, jury and counsel to experience the accident from the same perspective as the defendant, using specialist equipment in Warsash, Hampshire.

Sexual Offences

Francesca is regularly instructed to defend in cases involving sexual allegations, from rape to historical abuse, and specialises in breach of trust cases involving teachers and family members. The emotive nature of such accusations is dealt with sensitively, but robustly, and Francesca is well versed in dealing with child witnesses, young defendants and those with mental health and learning difficulties. One of Francesca's most controversial cases involved a 12 year old male defendant who, with one other, was facing serious charges against other children they had held at knifepoint before inciting them to commit sexual acts on each other.

At Croydon Crown Court, Francesca successfully defended a teacher accused of sexual assault of two pupils. The defendant had taught for over 50 years and was committed to his vocation and devastated by the false accusations. Francesca's consideration of the unused material, served on the day of trial, combined with her skilful cross examination of the complainants resulted in the case being stopped at the close of the prosecution's case. The police's failure to properly pursue all reasonable lines of enquiry that would have revealed a very different reflection of the complainants in the case was instrumental to the Judge's decision to stop the case. The Judge was so appalled at the Prosecution's conduct that she allowed Francesca to read out the many positive character references of the Defendant to the jury after they had been directed to enter not guilty verdicts.

In 2024, at Kingston Crown Court, Francesca represented JC, who suffered from autism, ADHD and verbal dyspraxia, at his trial for historic sex offences dating back to when he was aged between 12 and 18. The case related to two neighbours who were under the age of 10 at the time of the alleged offences, but who had also reported allegations against their brother,

who had not been prosecuted. Francesca successfully argued that the complainants were mistaken in their identification of the Defendant as their abuser, and that they were honest but mistaken witnesses.

At Lewes Crown Court, sitting at Hove, in front of an all-female jury, Francesca successfully defended a 23 year old Defendant who was accused of raping a woman he had met online and travelled to the UK to meet. The Defendant claimed that his behaviour occurred as a result of 'consensual non-consent' sex. Both the complainant and the Defendant had mental health issues that led to a complicated trial involving an emotive subject matter. Careful consideration of the unused material, combined with sensitive questioning of the vulnerable complainant resulted in the Defendant's case being put effectively but robustly, and led to his acquittal.

When defending in cases involving sexual allegations, disclosure is crucially important, and often yields valuable evidence for cross examination. Francesca maintains a robust and persistent stance on disclosure, to maximise prospects of success.

Criminal Prosecutions - Private & Public

As with criminal defence work, Francesca takes an active role in effective case management and encourages professional client conferences throughout the proceedings to maximise prospects of success. She has gained significant experience in lengthy and multi-handed cases and, wherever possible, seeks to maintain consistency in representation throughout a case, from first instruction, to sentence.

One of Francesca's most challenging cases occurred when she was instructed to represent the Crown just six weeks before a three month trial was due to start. The case involved the unusual bedfellows of fraud and child neglect, in which the defendant lied about the apparent ill health of her six children over a period of 20 years, in order to claim disability benefits. Two of her children were fed through tubes placed into their stomachs, one underwent an unnecessary and irreversible operation called a Nissen's fundoplication, in which part of the stomach was wrapped around the oesophagus and stitched in place, to prevent the severe

reflux he was alleged to have been suffering. All of the children genuinely believed that they were unwell, yet made a full ‘recovery’ when removed and placed into foster care. The case involved complex issues of hearsay, as none of the children were witnesses in the case. Despite only being instructed six weeks before the trial started, Francesca was able to sift through 35,000 pages of medical notes and reduce this to a bundle of approximately 1,000 pages of evidence that demonstrated the defendant’s manipulative and evolving presentation of symptoms to the 13 consultants at different hospitals who treated the children. Francesca had to rapidly learn about the mechanics of the fraud, as well as the medical conditions the children allegedly suffered from before being able to properly lead the evidence of 13 consultants who had treated the children for respiratory and gastrointestinal complaints. Most crucially, Francesca had to adduce and challenge the psychiatric evidence, to be able to demonstrate that the defendant had complete control over her behaviour. The case resulted in unanimous convictions on all counts.

Francesca was instructed to prosecute Angel Jackson, who was ultimately convicted of 32 counts of fraud despite her attempts to derail proceedings by claiming she was medically unfit to stand trial. Angel Jackson adopted multiple personas for the purposes of claiming housing benefit and income support at addresses that she in fact owned, and which she was then renting out to third parties for cash. Miss Jackson’s trial featured in the BBC documentary series ‘Britain on the Fiddle’ and gained notoriety in the press partly due to covert footage that demonstrated her ability to run on a treadmill for 45 minutes, whilst insisting on using a wheelchair for court appearances. As well as becoming procedurally difficult, the trial was a complex one, involving multiple agencies and strands of evidence that had to be presented clearly and persuasively. Despite two episodes of witness intimidation, a change of counsel at the close of the prosecution’s case, and periods of absconding by the defendant, the case successfully concluded and the defendant received 7 years imprisonment, and a confiscation order of over £166,000, with a benefit figure of over £982,000.

Francesca was instructed in a complex conspiracy that sought to link over 60 separate serious offences in a number of counties, by reference to cell-site evidence, DNA, fingerprints, ANPR, satellite navigation coordinates and intercepted letters and dialogue. After opening the case for two days, the defendants changed their pleas to guilty.

Sexual Offences

Francesca has prosecuted in numerous trials involving serious sexual offences.

Most recently, Francesca prosecuted DD at Canterbury Crown Court who raped and abused his step daughter who was just 8 when the abuse started. The victim was unable to communicate effectively, and had severe disabilities that prevented her from escaping the sexual violence perpetrated by the Defendant. The victim's plight was paused when her mother discontinued her relationship with the Defendant for a number of years, but when he later offered to 'care' for the victim to enable her mother to enjoy some respite for her birthday, the rapes and abuse resumed. The communication difficulties of the victim and her mother resulted in intermediaries and s28 being utilised for both. In addition, Francesca advised that subtitles should be added to the video evidence of the complainant which was beneficial in terms of the jury being able to follow the victim's evidence, as she gave it. The jury returned unanimous verdicts on all counts and the Defendant was sentenced to an extended sentence of 24 years, including a 21 year custodial term.

Francesca also successfully prosecuted TT at Croydon Crown Court, for offences of rape and sexual abuse of his step daughter, when she was between the ages of 8 and 13. The horrific abuse perpetrated by the defendant was compounded by his attempts to avoid trial, absconding after the victim had given her evidence in the first trial – causing the jury to be discharged. Francesca's proactive advice resulted in the Defendant being apprehended shortly thereafter, with a re-trial resulting in unanimous guilty verdicts. Francesca instructed the CPS to obtain a psychological report on the victim to properly establish the devastating impact the offences had had on her, which resulted in the Judge concluding that the harm was in the uppermost category. Francesca also produced a detailed sentencing note and case summaries that helped the Judge to conclude that a sentence of 32 years was just and proportionate.

Francesca also successfully prosecuted George Parker, who received an extended sentence of 22 years for atrocities committed against the brother and his friends of a girl he had dated when he was 16-24, and the boys were as young as 11.

Francesca also successfully prosecuted a taxi driver who sexually abused his daughter from the age of 6, and boasted of his exploits with a schoolgirl he drove to a special needs school each day. He then progressed to abusing the schoolgirl, and boasted of his new exploits with his daughter, whom he continued to abuse. He received 18 years imprisonment.

Francesca is happy to be involved with cases from an early stage, to advise on disclosure and investigative steps, and to attend case conferences and meet with witnesses in the presence of an instructing solicitor and case officer. Francesca is approachable and driven, but maintains an objective approach, to ensure that any resultant conviction is proper and fair.

Cases of Note

RECENT CASES

R v RM, Inner London Crown Court 2025

Sole counsel successfully defending in a murder trial at Inner London Crown Court in which pathologists' conclusions were challenged.

R v BM, Lewes Crown Court, 2025

Case dismissed on the first day of trial as a result of successful argument arising from 32 breaches of the Code of Practice relating to ABE interviews.

R v H (currently embargoed), Court of Appeal 2024

Successful Appeal against Conviction arising from the erroneous admission of bad character material, inappropriate questions from the trial judge, and failure to properly summarise the Defendant's case. Re-trial pending.

R v JC, Kingston Crown Court 2024

Successful defence of a young man who suffered from autism, ADHD and verbal dyspraxia. Multiple allegations of rape against two young neighbours resulted in acquittals after sensitive cross-examination of the complainants.

R v MBS, Supreme Court of Gibraltar, 2024

Successful defence of a man accused of historical rapes and sexual assault of two of his step-daughters, requiring a rapid introduction to the law in Gibraltar, as well as a crash course in Spanish.

R v CR, Woolwich Crown Court, 2023

Successful defence of a mother accused, along with her son and his friends, of conspiring to possess a firearm with intent to endanger life, following a shooting of a man who had allegedly raped her daughter.

R v KA and another, Northampton Crown Court 2023

Leading Counsel in a five week trial of a County Lines case involving modern slavery, at Northampton Crown Court.

R v Ishaqzai [2021] EWCA Crim 222 [Archbold 2025 20-78]

Successful appeal against conviction that resulted in a guideline judgment for cases involving reasonable belief in age.

R v SL and others

Leading Counsel in a six week Encrochat case at Portsmouth Crown Court

R v BS and others (Op Surging)

Complex case involving conspiracy to conceal the proceeds of crime, arising from evasion of duty on alcohol. Representing BS, one of four alleged principals of the conspiracy. The trial lasted five months, and BS was the only one acquitted.

R v RWD and others (Op Amazon) (2019)

Instructed to represent RWD, a solicitor, during confiscation proceedings only, following his conviction for conspiracy to defraud investors and HMRC in a carbon emission reduction certificate fraud in which investments of almost £300million were made for research and development into carbon reduction projects, creating taxable offsets of £107m, that were lost to HMRC. Despite the sizeable sums involved, RWD's confiscation order was reduced to just over £3m.

R v JF (2019)

Defending a young man accused of conspiracy to rob, involving over twenty incidents and multiple defendants that relied on cell site, mobile phone attribution and CCTV. Successfully challenged during Dismissal proceedings.

R v SD (2018-2019)

Defending lead defendant in a county lines prosecution that ran between Essex, London and Southampton.

R v Parker (2018)

Successful prosecution of a defendant who, at 16, had raped his girlfriend's young brother, and committed further multiple rapes against the brother and the brother's friends. The evidence pointed to a deeply manipulative defendant who would ingratiate himself into the lives of his victims' families, making himself indispensable and seemingly trustworthy, all in a bid to ensure he was left alone with the children. He received an extended sentence of 22 years.

R v Worley (2018)

Successful prosecution of an 83 year old defendant, who had repeatedly raped his young neighbour thirty five years previously, and sexually assaulted another young neighbour. He received a sentence of 12 years, reduced by the trial judge as an act of mercy, given his age.

R v Angel Jackson (2012-2018)

Instructed to advise and then prosecute Angel Jackson for multiple counts of fraud. Procedurally complicated case involving numerous attempts to avoid the trial process claiming

a lack of fitness to plead and stand trial, the dismissal of numerous defence counsel and solicitor firms, the intimidation of witnesses and the defendant absconding for several weeks during the trial process. Unanimous convictions on all 32 counts, leading to a seven year sentence and successful confiscation proceedings.

R v N (2016)

Prosecuted a mother accused of fraud and child neglect in which she lied about the apparent ill health of her six children to generate a sum in excess of £1m in benefits that she was not entitled to. The case involved 13 consultants from a number of hospitals who had diagnosed the children with various ailments as a result of lies told by the defendant. The defendant had factitious disorder, in which she lied about symptoms that were mostly subjective, such as headaches, reflux, breathing difficulties, sickness and fatigue. She convinced the children they were unwell. When arrested, her 11 year old daughter was fed through a tube into her stomach, and still wore nappies to school, despite the fact that she was continent and could eat normally. Her 8 year old son was similarly fed, and wore nappies. His reflux was said to be so bad that he required a Nissen fundoplication – an irreversible stomach operation that makes it impossible for him to vomit, which will cause problems if he ingests spoiled food. The defendant had over £40,000 of prescription medication and prescribed food (for gastro fed patients) stockpiled in her garage. Fascinating psychiatric evidence was heard that demonstrated the defendant knew what she was doing was wrong, but that she chose to do it anyway. Convicted and sentenced to 7½ years.

OLDER CASES

GC v R

Led junior for the Appellant in a CCRC referral that seeks to broaden the defence of duress, so that the immediacy of a threat can be considered on a more subjective footing when dealing with a defendant who is suffering from post traumatic stress disorder, a more specifically, the sub-category of battered woman syndrome. R v SH and DL Conspiracy case that seeks to link over 60 substantive offences by reference to cell-site evidence, DNA, fingerprints, ANPR, satellite navigation coordinates and undercover dialogue.

R v JJ (2013)

Defence counsel in a significant fraud and money laundering case at the Central Criminal Court.

R v DK (2013)

Historical sexual abuse by a grandfather against granddaughters.

R v MI & SA (2012-2013)

Conspiracy to convert proceeds of crime, whereby hundreds of cars were stolen to order, then cloned into former insurance write-offs for profit.

OTHER CASES

LBC v Shanahan [2010] EWCA Crim 98

The applicability of more than one change in circumstances and the effect on entitlement in relation to benefit fraudLondon Borough of Croydon v Pinch a Pound (UK) Ltd [2011] 1 WLR 1189Due diligence case relevant to test purchases undertaken by the local authority

R v IN, RH and other

Defending first defendant on a nine-handed mail-dumping fraud that resulted in pleas to reduced charges and a confiscation order representing a fifth of the sum identified as realisable assets.

R v MM, SM, GC, and others

Successful application to stay proceedings in this six handed fraud centring upon fraudulent contracts against the Prudential following persistent non-disclosure on the part of the prosecution

R v A(G) and others

Successful application to quash indictment in this mobile phone ‘carousel’ fraud involving a multi-million pound evasion of VAT following the Bondhouse/Optigen decision.

Accreditation