

A day in the life...

5SAH Chambers' Louisa Collins details her life as a specialist extradition barrister, juggling family commitments with exciting, challenging, and emotive cases

Usually a 'day in the life story' starts with the morning, but for this job it usually commences the evening before, readying myself for the following day. The adrenaline of being in court brings with it a rush of activity close to the hearing date. I tend to prepare for examining witnesses the day before a case, to keep matters fresh in my mind. It also helps me to stay on top of any last minute developments.

The work I deal with concerns extradition, where an individual is wanted in another country to face trial or to serve a sentence. Cross-border crime is becoming ever more prevalent and this has meant that states increasingly have had to cooperate to find ways to fight it and to protect themselves from

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becoming ‘safe-havens’ for fugitives from justice.

One only has to look at the change in the criminal landscape over the last few decades to see that terrorism, human trafficking, and crimes against humanity are on the rise. So too are cross-border frauds and financial crimes. Thus, there is a drive to ensure that mechanisms can be relied upon to bring perpetrators to justice, bringing the need for international collaboration through extradition.

But the process of extradition will frequently involve the deprivation of someone’s liberty during the course of proceedings and then their forcible removal to another country. Extradition can be misused as a tool by state authorities against a political enemy. It is, therefore, an area of law which commonly gives rise to human rights arguments, used to resist extradition.

All the extradition caseload in England and Wales is conducted before Westminster Magistrates’

Court in London. Appeals come before the Administrative Court based in the Royal Courts of Justice. It is a relatively small group of barristers who regularly practice extradition, when compared with the wider criminal Bar. This comes with a number of positives. There is a good deal of familiarity among members of the Bar and this means there are always colleagues around who can be a useful soundboard when a tricky legal issue crops up.

Intense mornings

I am a mother of two young girls, so my mornings tend to revolve around the theatre of appeasing the demands of their ever-changing breakfast requirements, then the coaxing and bribery to get out of the house and to the school gates before the 8:50am cut-off.

The court day starts at 10:00am but before that, if I am defending, I will need to take instructions from my client or advise them on the court process. If my client is in custody, then it’s worth getting to the cells early to avoid the scuffle for one

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of the five legal rooms. Many of my clients require interpreters, which means the conferences can take longer. This, when coupled with the service of last minute material, can mean that the need to be able to take focused instructions on the essentials is paramount. Mornings can be quite intense.

Court hearings vary from day to day. One day might bring a series of case management hearings and a bail application. Another, a full extradition hearing, which may last a day or more. I find myself in the High Court about once a month. This can involve an application seeking permission to appeal against an extradition order or a substantive appeal. The court work can be exciting, challenging, and sometimes emotive. Other times it can be plagued with long periods of waiting with no canteen to supply a decent coffee. I always bring work with me to fill those gaps – my office is my laptop.

After my hearings have concluded, I will update my instructing solicitors as to what happened at court and to

advise on the next steps to take in the case. Extradition work involves a fair amount of drafting, including skeleton arguments and written advices. There is sometimes a limited amount of time in the day to get this work done, so I try to keep a day free each week for papers. But the court listing doesn’t always accommodate this precious day I factor into my timetable and thus my evenings never stay clear for very long.

One part of my daily timetable that I do manage to protect is being home in time to read a story and put the children to bed. I am fortunate in this regard as my work-life and home-life are in London. I treasure the moments I get when I manage to get a school day snippet here and there.

So, after dinner, but before my own retreat to bed, I will check emails and squeeze in the case prep for the following day. While my social life, hours spent watching Netflix, and sleep tend to suffer, I go to bed happy as my days are rewarding and full. ●