



Catherine Dobson

Year of call: 2009

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“A genuine rising star – highly intelligent and extremely thorough, she is always willing to go the extra mile.” The Legal 500

“The level of technical detail that she can absorb, digest and quickly turn around advice on is phenomenal. Whatever the subject and whatever the issue, she just gets it instantly.” Chambers and Partners

Catherine Dobson has a broad practice which combines general public law, regulatory and environmental law.

She was called to the Bar in 2009 and since then has been instructed in some of the leading cases in these fields, including *Privacy International v Investigatory Powers Tribunal* (the leading Supreme Court decision on the constitutionality of ouster clauses), *R (Miller) v The Prime Minister* (challenging the prorogation of Parliament on behalf of the Shadow Attorney General, *Re Y* [2018] UKSC 46 (the landmark Supreme Court decision concerning withdrawal of life-sustaining medical treatment), and *R (London Borough of Hillingdon and others) v Secretary of State for Transport* (challenging the Government's decision to support a third runway at Heathrow Airport).

Catherine has been ranked as a leading junior for several years by Chambers & Partners. She is a member of the Attorney General's A Panel of Counsel and the Attorney General's Public International Law C Panel of Counsel.

In 2020 Catherine was named Environmental and Planning Law Junior of the Year in the Chambers UK Bar Awards.

Catherine is a Fellow of St Edmund's College, Cambridge, where she supervises constitutional law.

Areas of expertise

Public Law and Human Rights

Environmental Law

Public Inquiries

International Arbitration and Public International Law

Environmental Law

Catherine has acted in some of the leading environmental cases in recent years including *Friends of the Earth v Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy* (acting for Friends for the Earth in the successful challenge to the Government's Net Zero Strategy and *R (London Borough of Hillingdon and others) v Secretary of State for Transport* (the Government's decision to support a third runway at Heathrow Airport).

She has detailed knowledge of international, European and domestic environmental law and is has advised in cases raising issues under the Aarhus Convention, the SEA Directive, the EIA Directive and the Habitats Directive. In addition to this general experience, she has particular expertise in the following areas:

Water resources

Catherine has considerable experience working in the field of water rights and regulation, having appeared in two of the most important cases in this field : *Canal & Rivers Trust v Thames Water Utilities Ltd* [2018] EWCA Civ 342 and *Manchester Ship Canal v United Utilities plc* [2014] UKSC 40. She worked on a 12 month instruction acting for Southern Water Services Ltd, culminating in a public inquiry concerning the interface between environmental legislation and the water abstraction licensing regime.

Air Quality

Catherine has expertise in the legal and scientific issues arising in relation to health-related air quality limits. Recent work has included advising on the application of the National Emission Ceilings Regulations 2018, acting for the claimant in a human rights challenge arising from hydrogen sulphide pollution and challenging the Government's decision to support a third runway at Heathrow on, amongst other grounds, the basis that the Government's approach to air quality was flawed.

Nuisance

Since her involvement in the landmark case of *Barr v Biffa* [2012] EWCA 312, Catherine has gone on to act for a number of claimants and defendants in a group private nuisance claims relating to the operation of a range of businesses including landfill sites, waste treatment sites and food production sites.

Nuclear law

Catherine has a particular interest in the nuclear sector. She has advised both Government departments and private companies on issues relating to domestic and international law regulation of the sector. In addition, she devised and delivered a six-part training programme for in-house lawyers at a nuclear new-build facility and devised and delivered a one-day round table conference on nuclear cyber liability in conjunction with the Washington DC based Stimpson institute and spoken at a number of industry conferences on the implications of Brexatom. In 2023, she delivered a paper to the International Nuclear Law Association on the future regulation of small modular reactors in the UK.

Cases of note:

- ***R (Friends of the Earth and others) v Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy* [2022] EWHC 1841 (Admin)** - Acted for Friends of the Earth (led by David Wolfe KC) in a successful challenge to the Government's net zero strategy.
[Judgment](#)
- ***Friends of the Earth and Others v Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy*** - Acted for Friends of the Earth (led by David Wolfe KC) in a challenge to the Government's Carbon Budget Delivery Plan.
- ***Packham v Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy*** - Acting for Chris Packham (led by David Wolfe KC) in a challenge to the decision to delay key policies for

achieving the Government's net zero strategy.

- ***R (London Borough of Hillingdon and others) v Secretary of State for Transport* [2020] EWCA Civ 214** - Acted for the Mayor of London, Greenpeace and 5 local authorities (led by Nigel Pleming KC, Stephen Tromans KC and Ben Jaffey KC) in a high profile environmental law challenge to the Airports National Policy Statement, which supports the construction of a third runway at Heathrow Airport.
Judgment
- ***Richards v Environment Agency* [2021] EWHC 2501 (Admin), [2022] EWCA Civ 26** - Acted for the claimant, Mathew Richards, (led by Ian Wise KC) in a human rights challenge to the lawfulness of the Environment Agency's response to hydrogen sulphide emissions from a landfill site.
Judgement
- ***Wild Justice v Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*** - Acted for the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (led by Stephen Tromans KC) in a challenge to the regulation of game bird release on grounds of non-compliance with the EU Habitats Directive.
- ***Humane Being v Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*** - Acted for the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, successfully resisting a human rights challenge to the Government's approach to intensive farming.
- ***Group opposed to Expansion of Southampton Airport Ltd v Eastleigh Borough Councils* [2022] EWHC 1221** - Acted for the respondent (led by Paul Stinchcombe KC) in successfully resisting an application for judicial review of the grant of planning permission for a runway extension at Southampton Airport.
Judgment
- ***Austin v Miller Argent (South Wales) Limited* [2014] EWCA Civ 1012** - Acted for the claimant (led by Stephen Tromans KC) in a landmark case concerning the Aarhus Convention's requirements on the cost of litigation in environmental matters as applied to private nuisance claims. In addition to the matter before the Court of Appeal a communication was made to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee.

Recommendations

- *"Catherine brings together academic qualities with a strong sense of the practical, making her the ideal public lawyer."* The Legal 500 2021 (Administrative and Public, Leading Juniors)
- *"Catherine is extremely industrious, able to filter and analyse a mass of information, and produce (often at very short notice, and under great pressure) first class pleadings and written arguments."* The Legal 500 2021 (Administrative and Public, Leading Juniors)
- *"A superb senior junior, she takes incredibly technical information and creates a clear, decisive understandable path and does it without any arrogance."* The Legal 500 2021 (Environment, Leading Juniors)
- *"She provides immensely helpful technical advice."* The Legal 500 2020 (Administrative and Public, Leading Juniors)
- *"A genuine rising star – highly intelligent and extremely thorough, she is always willing to go the extra mile."* The Legal 500 2020 (Environment, Leading Juniors)
- *"She is quick to grasp often very technical detail and to give well-crafted advice to tight deadlines." "Her advocacy was phenomenal."* Chambers and Partners 2022 (Environment, London Bar)
- *"Every time I've seen her I've been impressed."* Chambers and Partners 2022 (Administrative and Public Law, London Bar)

- *"The level of technical detail that she can absorb, digest and quickly turn around advice on is phenomenal. Whatever the subject and whatever the issue, she just gets it instantly."* Chambers and Partners 2020 (Environment, London Bar)
- *"Very quick to grasp often very scientific and technical details and to give well-crafted technical advice to tight deadlines."* Chambers and Partners 2020 (Environment, London Bar)
- *"Catherine is phenomenally clever – she has an impeccable grasp of the case law and legislative framework and is able to apply this to novel or unusual circumstances in a way which is clear and highly effective. Her written work is extremely clear and elegantly worded. She is always accessible and fantastic with clients."* The Legal 500 2021 (Court of Protection and Community Care, Leading Juniors)
- *"She is very meticulous and analytical, and has a robust approach. She puts a lot of effort into preparing cases."* Chambers and Partners 2020 (Court of Protection, London Bar)
- *"She is extremely bright but also caring and kind. She has the perfect balance and approach for vulnerable clients."* Chambers and Partners 2020 (Court of Protection, London Bar)
- *"Catherine Dobson is fantastic, very clever and very on the ball."*
- *"She's incredibly approachable and consistently good."*
- *"Her skeleton arguments are excellently constructed and she has empathy and understanding for those in difficult circumstances."*
- *"She's wonderful with clients. She thinks beyond the legal ramifications and considers what the personal impact on the client is."*

Memberships

- Administrative Law Bar Association
- Liberty
- UK Environmental Law Association
- British Institute of International and Comparative Law

Qualifications

Education

- 2002-2006: Jesus College, Cambridge University, MA Law (Double First Class)
- 2005-2006: Université de Poitiers, France, Diplôme universitaire d'études juridiques françaises
- 2007-2008: Lincoln College, Oxford University, BCL

Scholarships and Prizes

- 2008-2009: Princess Royal Scholarship, Inner Temple
- 2007-2008: Arts and Humanities Research Council Scholarship
- Exhibitioner and Scholar, Jesus College, Cambridge
- 2006: The Russell Vick Prize for Law, Jesus College, Cambridge
- 2003: The Glanville Williams Prize for Law, Jesus College, Cambridge
- 2003: Peter Glazebrook Mooting Prize, Jesus College, Cambridge
- 2003: Peter Glazebrook Mooting Prize, Jesus College, Cambridge

Additional Information

Appointments

- Fellow, St Edmund's College, Cambridge (2009 – September 2021)
- Dean, St Edmund's College, Cambridge (January 2019 – present)
- Bye-Fellow, Jesus College, Cambridge (2014 – 2015)
- Visiting lecturer, Paris Campus of Université Catholique de Lille (2014 –2015)
- Catherine was a judicial assistant to Lord Clarke at the UK Supreme Court from September 2010 to July 2011

Pro bono

Catherine undertakes a number of significant of pro bono cases each year and is very happy to consider pro bono instructions.

Languages

Catherine speaks fluent French having grown up in Brussels, studied law at the University of Poitiers and worked within a francophone team at the International Criminal Court.

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