



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

Public Law and Human Rights

Catherine is an experienced public law practitioner and has taught constitutional law at Cambridge University for over ten years. She 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) and *R (Miller) v The Prime Minister* (challenging the prorogation of Parliament on behalf of the Shadow Attorney General). Her broad public law practice encompasses judicial review and human rights claims across a range of sectors including environmental, healthcare, regulatory, national security, economic sanctions and financial services.

Catherine carried out a significant amount of advisory and litigation work for the Cabinet Office, the Department for Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Justice relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. This included a challenge to the Government's decision to authorise the administration of the Covid-19 vaccination to children under 18, a proposed challenge by Lloyd Weber Theatres to the Government's decision to postpone relaxing Covid-19 measures in relation to theatres, and a proposed challenge by the Howard League for Penal Reform to the response to Covid-19 in prisons.

In 2023, she was appointed as legal advisor to the Coronation Claims Office, for which she was awarded a coronation medal.

Cases of note:

- ***The Law Society v Lord Chancellor* [2024] EWHC 155 (Admin)** - Acted for the Lord Chancellor (led by Sir James Eadie KC) in a challenge to the lawfulness of the Lord Chancellor's response to the Independent Review of Criminal Legal Aid.
- ***R (SM) v Lord Chancellor* [2021] 1 WLR 3815** - Acted for the Lord Chancellor in a challenge under the Human Rights Act 1998 to the arrangements for the provision of publicly-funded legal advice to immigration detainees in prison.
- ***Privacy International v Investigatory Powers Tribunal* [2019] UKSC 22** - Acted for the Government (led by Sir James Eadie KC and Kate Grange KC) in a challenge to the lawfulness and constitutionality of ouster clauses.
[Judgment](#)
- ***R (Miller) v The Prime Minister* [2019] UKSC 41** - Acted for the Shadow Attorney General (led by Deok Joo Rhee KC) in a challenge to the Prime Minister's advice to the Queen to prorogue Parliament.
[Judgment](#)
- ***Jennings v Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority* [2022] EWHC 69 (Fam)** - Acted for the claimant (led by Jenni Richards KC) in a successful application for a declaration that a widower could lawfully use an embryo with a surrogate following the death of his wife. The claim was brought on the basis that preventing the use of the embryo would constitute a disproportionate interference with his Article 8 Convention rights.
[Judgment](#)
- ***AB v Secretary of State for Health & Social Care* [2022] EWHC 1996 (Admin)** - Acted for the Secretary of State in a challenge to decision to authorise the use of Covid-19 vaccines on children and young persons under the age of 18 on public law and human rights grounds.
[Judgment](#)
- ***Dawson v United Lincolnshire Trust* [2021] EWHC 928 (Admin)** - Acted for the Claimant (led by Vikram Sachdeva KC) in a successful challenge to an NHS Trust's decision to close and Accident & Emergency department on the ground that the Trust had failed to involve service users in decision-

making about services in breach of its obligation under section 242 of the National Health Service Act 2006.

Judgment

- **Re Y [2018] UKSC 46** - Acted for an NHS Trust (led by Vikram Sachdeva KC) in the landmark Supreme Court decision concerning withdrawal of life-sustaining medical treatment.
- **R (AR) v The Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police & Others [2018] UKSC 47** - Acted on behalf of the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police (led by Jenni Richards KC) in this appeal to the Supreme Court concerning the legality under the Human Rights Act of Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate which disclosed the fact that AR had been acquitted of rape.
- **R (Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee) v Secretary of State for Health [2018] EWCA Civ 1925** - Appeared for the claimant (led by Alison Foster KC) in a challenge to the lawfulness of funding reductions imposed on community pharmacies. Led by Alison Foster KC.

Judgment

- **Smith v Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and another [2017] EWCA Civ 1916** - Appeared for the successful claimant (led by Vikram Sachdeva KC) in a challenge to the compatibility of section 1A of the Fatal Accidents Act 1976 with Article 14 read with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights on the basis that the exclusion of unmarried cohabiting partners from the scope of those who can claim bereavement damages is unlawful.
- **Core Issues Trust v Transport for London [2013] EWCA Civ 34, [2014] WLR (D) 35** - Acted for Transport for London (led by Nigel Fleming KC) in the Court of Appeal in a challenge to its decision to refuse to permit an advertisement to be placed on London buses on the basis that it would cause public offence.

Judgment

Constitutional law

Catherine has a particular interest in cases raising constitutional issues and is regularly engaged to assist with cases raising novel questions of constitutional law.

Catherine has taught constitutional law at Cambridge University for over 10 years and was a visiting lecturer in public law at the Paris campus of the Université Catholique de Lille (2014 –2015). She is brought in to advise on cases with a constitutional dimension, including on questions pertaining to devolution and legislative competence.

She acted on behalf of the FCO and GCHQ (led by James Eadie KC and Kate Grange KC) before the Supreme Court in the appeal in *Privacy International v Investigatory Powers Tribunal*, a case which raises important constitutional questions about the effect of an ouster clause in the Regulatory and Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

Fertility and Reproductive Rights

Catherine has developed a niche expertise in healthcare, human rights and regulatory issues relating to the fertility sector having acted in the following matters:

Cases of note:

- **Jennings v Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority [2022] EWHC 69 (Fam)** - Acted for the claimant (led by Jenni Richards KC) in a successful application for a declaration that the claimant can lawfully use an embryo with a surrogate following the death of his wife. The claim was brought on the basis that preventing the use of the embryo would constitute a disproportionate interference with his Article 8 Convention rights.

Judgment

- **Equality and Human Rights Commission v NHS England** - Acted for NHS England (led by

Fenella Morris KC) in a discrimination and human rights challenge to NHS commissioning of fertility preservation treatment for trans patients.

- ***Assisted Reproduction and Gynaecology Centre v The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority* [2017] EWHC 659** - Appeared for the claimant (led by Jenni Richards KC) in a challenge to the lawfulness of decisions taken by the HFEA pursuant to its statutory duty to publish information for persons who are receiving fertility treatment.
- ***Warren v CARE* [2014] EWHC 602 (Fam)** - Acted for the claimant (led by Jenni Richards KC) in an application for a declaration as to the lawfulness of the preservation of the applicant's late husband's sperm under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 and the Embryology (Statutory Storage Period for Embryos and Gametes) Regulations 2009. Led by Jenni Richards KC
- ***Rose v Thanet CCG* [2014] EWHC 1182 (Admin)** - Acted for a CCG in discrimination and human rights challenge to CCG's policy on fertility preservation challenge.
- ***NHS Trust & Ors v FG* [2014] EWCOP 30 (COP)** - Acted for two NHS Trusts in the guidance case on medical treatment applications relating antenatal, perinatal and post-natal care

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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