



Year of Call

2008

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Frances Willmott

Crime

Frances has a strong criminal practice prosecuting and defending in serious and complex cases. Frances is regularly instructed in cases involving drugs conspiracies, weapons, serious violence and sexual offences. She acts alone and as a led junior. Frances is adept at dealing with cases involving large volumes of technical evidence. She is known for her careful preparation, clear advice and sound judgement.

Frances has experience of dealing with witnesses and defendants with particular vulnerabilities or communication difficulties due to their age or disability, including the use of intermediaries both when prosecuting and defending. She has received praise from Judges for her skilful handling of difficult cases. Frances has represented adults and children charged with serious sexual offences in both the Crown and Youth Courts, including the successful cross-examination of very young children. She has significant experience of s.28 cases (pre-recording cross-examination). Frances is a member of the CPS Rape Panel and a Category 3 prosecutor.

Cases of interest

- Operation Fullbacks [2019] – Led junior in a drugs and explosives conspiracy. The explosives element of the case arose out of a ‘tit for tat’ campaign of violence between two rival gangs, resulting in a live grenade being left on the driveway of a family home. The case involved complex and expert evidence on cell siting, various types of encrypted telephone contact, explosives, DNA and voice recognition.
- Operation Samurai [2018] – Led junior in a drugs and firearms conspiracy involving over 25 defendants and two trials. The conspiracies involved multiple incidents and spanned more than a year. There were complex legal issues that arose relating to the nature of the conspiracies. In one trial the jury took over a month to reach verdicts. Frances is now acting as junior alone in the resulting Proceeds of Crime Act and Serious Crime Prevention Order proceedings.
- Operation Tyke [2018] – County lines drugs conspiracy involving adult and youth defendants. Frances was instructed as prosecution junior shortly before the trial and mastered large volumes of evidence quickly and effectively. All the defendants were convicted.
- R v MC [2018] – Secured an acquittal of a defendant for rape allegedly committed in prison. Frances had previously represented the defendant when he had pleaded guilty to serious offences committed while a youth and on his 18th birthday, and had appeared in the Court of Appeal in relation to the sentence for that case which resulted in a 25% reduction in the sentence imposed.
- R v DW [2017] – Successfully defended in a shaken baby case which involved significant expert evidence and necessitated the cross-examination of leading medical experts in the fields of paediatric neurology and paediatric neurosurgery. Frances secured a concession from one of the experts that the injuries were likely caused before the defendant ever had contact with the child; the jury acquitted in less than an hour.
- R v Boardman [2015] EWCA Crim 175 – In one of the leading cases on the exclusion of telephone evidence Frances successfully argued, defending against Queen’s Counsel, that the trial Judge’s order to exclude telephone evidence due to late service was correct. Lord Justice Leveson upheld the terminating ruling and which resulted in the defendant’s acquittal.

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Inquests

Frances has been instructed in the Coroners Court to protect the interests of both the family of the deceased and those potentially subject to criticism by the Coroner. Frances has a particular interest in inquests involving significant advocacy where she can use the skills from her criminal practice. She is adept at dealing with cases with the sensitivity that is always required in the Coroners Court.

Frances is able to master complex and specialist medical and technical evidence. She ensures that the coroner explores all relevant aspects of the case during the inquest, while always seeking to protect the interests of her client.

Cases of interest

- Inquest into the death of FA [2019] – representing the council licensing department in an inquest where a teenager had died of an ecstasy overdose at a rave. The inquest involved consideration of whether the licensing conditions were appropriate and whether they had been complied with. There had already been criminal proceedings regarding the supply of the drug.
- Inquest into the death of RW [2018] – inquest into the death of a man who fell down stairs at Old Trafford Stadium. The inquest involved a jury. There was a very large volume of evidence that required all parties to become familiar with the design, operation and safety standards applicable to stadium design and management.
- Inquest into death of MR [2017] – Frances represented the family of a man who had been found dead at home having hung himself. The family had concerns about the wider circumstances and through the inquest Frances was able to help them sensitively explore those concerns. A narrative verdict was returned.
- Inquest into death of BS [2013] - representing the designer of a zip wire where a child had fallen and died. The Coroner did not criticise the designer of the zip wire. The owners of the zip wire were subsequently prosecuted for breaching health and safety regulations.

Career History

Frances trained in Liverpool and Nottingham. She became a tenant of Linenhall Chambers on its establishment in 2011. Prior to joining Chambers Frances worked for the Criminal Cases Review Commission, reviewing potential miscarriages of justice, and for the Crown Prosecution Service.

Education

Nottingham Law School, Bar Vocational Course 2008

University of Liverpool, LLB (Hons.) 1st Class, 2007

UWC Atlantic College, International Baccalaureate, 2004

Memberships and Associations

Wales and Chester Circuit

Criminal Bar Association

Lincoln's Inn