

## **Caroline Haughey QC, Furnival Chambers, London**



Caroline said that the fact that she was now one of Her Majesty's Queen's Counsel had not really sunk in yet. She had thought that her first application for silk would be a 'dry run', so when she received her successful letter - on her birthday - she was very pleasantly surprised. Caroline felt that QC was an accolade bestowed on those at the pinnacle of the profession and an enormously important quality mark that indicated to the court and to clients the highest level of advocacy skills, integrity and behaviour. It was also a beacon of fairness, impeachability and honesty around the world. The QC 'badge' was also an accolade on behalf of those in the profession who supported your application and who encouraged you to apply for silk. She considered the award, therefore, an enormous honour.

Caroline had an unusual background. She came from what she termed a 'mixed marriage' having been born to Catholic/ Protestant parents in Northern Ireland during the height of the sectarian 'troubles'. Uncompromisingly positive and highly liberal-minded people, her parents had wanted Caroline to make up her own mind about matters of religion (and other issues that could divide society). However, given that schools in Northern Ireland were largely divided along sectarian lines, her parents decided to send her abroad to attend a private school (at a time when the family's income was still modest). It was a decision for which Caroline said she would be eternally grateful. She was fiercely proud of her family and its encouragement of inclusivity and debate. She fondly recalled many a healthy argument around the kitchen table as she was growing up. The seeds of her advocacy skills were sown in her childhood home, along with her strongly-held values around integrity, loyalty and tolerance.

Caroline said that she knew that she wanted to become a criminal barrister from the age of eight when a news report about a missing girl in Northern Ireland (who was subsequently found to have been murdered) fired her interest in, and passion for, criminal justice. The British legal system was at the hub of the development of legal thinking and Caroline cited as an example the anti-slavery and anti-people trafficking legislation that she had been so instrumental in developing within her specialism since prosecuting the first modern slavery case in April 2011. This had come about as a result of her experience of working with vulnerable witnesses, after the CPS had approached her about a case which involved the trafficking of an African woman. Caroline's involvement and passion for the subject grew rapidly from there.

Besides helping develop the Modern Slavery Act 2015 at the request of Prime Minister, Caroline had also led an independent review a year on into the effectiveness of the Act. She had played a significant part in making the law easier to understand, and making sentences more commensurate with the crime: hitherto, the maximum sentence for people trafficking was fourteen years, meaning that a criminal could "receive a longer sentence for smuggling a couple of kilos of cocaine than for smuggling a thousand human beings". The core messages about this subject, she said, were the same whether she was addressing a meeting in Downing Street or talking to police officers at the sharp end of enforcement of the law.

Caroline had also defended and prosecuted cases that included, supply of drugs, perverting the course of justice, money-laundering, rape, murder, serious fraud and dishonesty, serious sexual and violent offences, supergrasses, attempted murder, death by dangerous driving, armed robbery and bribery. She was a Grade 4 prosecutor. Caroline had also regularly appeared in cases where mental health was at issue, and she had been interviewed on this issue by BBC Radio 4.

The assurance she received from colleagues across the profession that she had cases of the necessary calibre to make a credible application for silk was a powerful spur to her deciding that the time was right to apply for QC - despite one or two comments from others that suggested that she was as yet 'too young'. Unlike colleagues in the commercial field, she could not look to the level of her fees as a marker for where her practice stood. Indeed cuts to publicly-funded work meant that she earned less now than she had ten years ago. Therefore the metaphorical nudge from trusted colleagues was invaluable. Working, as she had since being called to the Bar in 1999, in a "female-silk heavy" Chambers had been a great help too. Caroline was mother to four girls, all under the age of nine: Her youngest (at the time of the interview for this profile) was still teething! But, as she put it, "every time I have a child my career seems to take a leap forward!" She recognised, however, that her personal circumstances and having a highly supportive husband made it possible for her to work in her chosen area of speciality.

As regards making her QC competition application, Caroline found the advice provided by some barrister friends who acted as "ad hoc mentors" (including three silks, and one who was now a judge) particularly helpful. She said that the written part of the application process was very challenging as it required considerable introspection and honesty: "You had to think very carefully about why you wanted to be a silk." She recommended that future applicants began thinking about their application at least six months beforehand. She also recommended that once the application form was completed that "you walked away from it for 24 hours" and "came back to it with fresh eyes".

Caroline had to overcome a final hurdle in deciding whether to make her application, which was her concern as to whether she had a sufficient number of cases. She had had a difficult birth during the relevant two to three year time period for cases which had led to extended maternity leave. This meant that she was quite heavily reliant on two long, albeit substantial, cases. However, Caroline was reassured by the guidance for applicants (and advice from the QCA Secretariat) that made it clear that having fewer than the requested number of cases was not necessarily a barrier to a successful application. It was clear that the Selection Panel would not hold a shortage of cases against an applicant where it resulted from matters such as extended maternity leave or other factors (e.g. due to the nature of an applicant's specialism) so long as these were explained on the application form. She also received particularly encouraging advice in this regard from two prospective assessors, both of whom indicated that they welcomed her approach.

She thoroughly enjoyed her interview and would have been happy for it to continue much longer. It was challenging and thorough but also something of an exchange of information, where she learned a great deal from the Panel interviewers, as well as they about her. It felt like a debate in the proper sense of the word. At the end of it she felt that she had been given the very best opportunity to convince them of her credentials for silk. She also felt that if she were not to be successful the experience would have equipped her well for a future attempt - which she would have had no qualms in making.

Diversity was possibly the hardest of the competencies to get to grips with, she said. She appreciated that coming, as she did, from a diverse background was not enough in itself. You needed to be honest about yourself and be prepared to question your own views - "none of us are without some prejudices, so you need to be able to call yourself up on them". She herself had experienced prejudice from those who thought she was 'posh' due to her private school education and at the same time from others who rather looked down on her because of her Northern Irish accent.

It had been great to share the pomp, solemnity and sheer joy of the QC Ceremony in February 2018, with her mother, husband and four girls. Caroline also loved meeting old

friends in the profession with whom she shared “a very cold but brilliant day”, adding that “it was a bit like a thousand simultaneous weddings”. Westminster Hall was notoriously chilly and Caroline said she was glad that she had brought along hot water bottles for her girls. Her only sadness that day was that her late father was not there to share the joy.

Caroline doubted whether the award of QC would make a great difference to her life/ work balance, which she already strived to get right. Whilst she cheerfully described herself as a “criminal justice addict” devoted to her career, her *raison d’être* was her husband, children and extended family, who would always come first. She hoped that the recognition and respect that came with being a silk would mean that she would be able to make even more of a difference for her clients. She felt “incredibly lucky and privileged” to be in a position to help those who come behind her, and her own mentoring work would continue.

Caroline concluded that women - who were becoming successful in the competition in steadily growing numbers - owed a huge debt of gratitude to the women who blazed a trail for them, such as Dame Rose Heilbron, who was one of the first two women to be appointed (then) King’s Counsel and Elizabeth Lane, the first woman to be appointed a High Court Judge. She was conscious that, to date, fewer than 400 women had been appointed as Queen’s Counsel, so there was still some way to go. Nonetheless, Caroline considered that these days any talented lawyer irrespective of their gender (or any other irrelevant personal characteristic) could aspire to join the ranks of the “fiercely impressive” silks. However, beyond talent, aspirant Queen’s Counsels needed to have and demonstrate the highest personal and professional standards, integrity and a willingness to work extremely hard over sustained periods.