

Mark Ford KC

Call to Bar: 1991

Silk Year: 2020



"Mark is one of the very best criminal defence advocates in the north. He is excellent with the client, he fights their corner vigorously and fairly, and he is very user-friendly for solicitors"
- Legal 500, 2025

"Mark is a first-rate advocate, incredibly rigorous when it comes to preparation in paper-heavy cases, and a team player. He is excellent with clients, especially with vulnerable and young clients charged with serious and grave offences." - Crime (General and Fraud) - Legal 500, 2024

"Mark is one of a kind - his attention to detail is second to none and he can be relied upon to find out the material within a case which will challenge the prosecution case. He is very thorough in his case preparation and will leave no stone unturned in trying to find any areas of weakness for the Crown. He is a pleasure to work with, considerate and always open to discussions and welcoming the instructing solicitor's opinion on matters, never making decisions without asking for input first." - Legal 500, 2023

"A brilliant silk." - Chambers & Partners, 2022

"Absolutely top-drawer silk for serious criminal cases." - The Legal 500, 2022

'An outstanding advocate, with technical ability to match. His proactive approach makes him a pleasure to work with.' **'He is careful in his preparation, thoughtful in his advocacy and very effective in front of a jury.'** **'Very astute and bright.'** - Chambers & Partners, 2021

'One of the few advocates who can literally turn a hopeless case into a winner purely by court room performance.' – The Legal 500, 2021

'A very determined barrister.' – The Legal 500, 2018

Mark has for many years undertaken criminal work at the highest level. Many of the cases in which Mark has appeared for both the prosecution and the defence have been of national significance. Two have been made into documentaries shown on national television.

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Practice areas:

Business Crime & Financial Regulation

Criminal Law

Inquests

Regulatory

Professional appointments:

Crown Court Recorder

Former Solicitor, Admitted 1986

Mark Ford KC

He has extensive experience in successfully representing clients charged with the most serious offences, including murder and manslaughter (including gang-related homicide, corporate manslaughter and gross negligence manslaughter), conspiracy to commit armed robbery, high level drug importation and distribution, serious sexual offences, multi-million pound frauds, money laundering, political corruption and regulatory offences (health & safety, trade descriptions & environmental).

Mark has a strong privately funded practice, representing clients facing a variety of criminal offences, and has an exceptional acquittal rate. A client Mark successfully defended recently told the BBC "This man can do no wrong".

Mark has been ranked by legal directories as a Leading Silk and a tier 1 Silk.

Mark sits as a Recorder of the Crown Court and is authorised to try serious sexual offences

NOTABLE TRIALS

Fraud & Money Laundering

Mark has appeared in many high profile fraud cases, including as a leading junior. Notable cases include the following:

R v N – Client charged with money laundering on behalf of an OCG alleged to be engaged in a major conspiracy to supply class A drugs from Liverpool to Scotland. Acquitted on the direction of the judge following legal submission after 6-weeks of evidence. The trial is continuing against the other defendants.

R v N and others [leading junior] (Manchester Crown Court) – An SFO prosecution concerning a conspiracy to defraud a government agency of more than £100 million.

R v L and others (Manchester Crown Court) – An SFO prosecution involving a conspiracy to defraud a banking syndicate of funds in excess of £220 million. Highly complex trial lasting more than 6 months.

R v R and others [leading junior] (Manchester Crown Court) – A conspiracy to launder more than £120 million through money transfer facilities.

R v J (Preston Crown Court) – Multi- million pound fraud against Rochdale Metropolitan Council.

R v O and others (Central Criminal Court, London) – Fraud and money laundering involving inside knowledge of client's insurance details and sophisticated creation and operation of false companies and identities. Presentation of case commended by trial judge.

R v B and others (Sheffield Crown Court) – Fraud involving political corruption.

R v C (Nottingham Crown Court) – Multi-million pound long firm fraud.

R v A and another (Manchester Crown Court) – International banking fraud.

Professional Clients

Instructions are received regularly to represent fellow professionals, often, though not exclusively, in connection with white collar crime:

R v C (Southwark Crown Court) – Solicitor charged with mortgage fraud.

R v T and others (Burnley Crown Court) – Solicitor charged with mortgage fraud and breach of money laundering regulations.

R v W (Manchester Crown Court) – Senior magistrate charged with fraud arising from expense claims against government agency.

R v B (Manchester Crown Court) – Senior bank manager charged with theft of assets from high worth clients in breach of trust. Custodial sentences.

Murder and Manslaughter

Mark has appeared in many cases of alleged homicide, as a led junior, junior acting alone, and as a leading junior. The following cases are representative of his practice rather than comprehensive:

R v A and others: Conspiracy to murder. Successfully defended one of 3 defendants alleged to have travelled to an address in order to shoot members of a rival OCG, killing one and wounding a second. Case involved detailed analysis of complex timelines and CCTV evidence.

R v C and others: Conspiracy to murder. Successfully defended client alleged to have arranged the killing of a person said to have owed money to his OCG. Remaining members of the group convicted.

R v D and others: Successfully prosecuted to conviction a defendant alleged to have murdered a rival who was taken from his home address and shot twice. Case involved complex ballistics expert evidence.

R v B: Client admitted murder of man lured to canal path and stabbed to death. Successfully defended on remaining charges of robbery.

R v P, O, B & W: Defendants successfully prosecuted to conviction of manslaughter and robbery after victim attacked by group of defendants in order to steal his watch.

R v W & N: Prosecuted 2 juveniles accused of stabbing 14 year old boy to death. Complex presentation of inter-connected CCTV and social media messaging. Convictions for murder and manslaughter resulted.

R v B: Murder. Represented client already convicted of 4 counts of murder arising from the petrol bombing of a house

Organised Crime

R v B and others: Successfully defended client charged with conspiracies to supply firearms with intent to endanger life and to supply drugs of class A. Weapons recovered in the investigation included an Uzi sub-machine gun and a firearm used in an attempted murder.

R v K and others: Client charged with laundering the proceeds of a national conspiracy to supply drugs. Client the only member of the alleged conspiracy to be acquitted.

R v R and others: Legally and technically complex case concerning multiple conspiracies to import, export and supply drugs of high worth using the 'dark web'. First case of type prosecuted in UK, and involving more than 1 million pp evidence mostly obtained by FBI. Highly technical expert evidence relating to computer data.

Sexual Offences

Mark has appeared in many cases of rape and serious sexual abuse. Of the 15 cases cited by The Times in their investigation into the grooming and abuse of vulnerable children, Mark prosecuted or defended in 7 of them. The following cases are provided as representative examples of his practice:

R v W: Represented a teacher alleged to have entered into a sexual relationship with a pupil. Case attracted intense national media attention. Through deployment of expert evidence and detailed forensic analysis of social media data, demonstrated that sexualised messages alleged to have been sent by the client were likely to have been manipulated. Client acquitted.

R v M: Client charged with historic sexual offences committed against players in academy at Crewe Alexandra FC when acting as a coach. Client acquitted.

R v S: Professional client charged with sexually assaulting 5 year old. Complex DNA evidence successfully challenged. Client acquitted.

R v C: Successfully defended pilot alleged to have engaged in serial rape and sexual assault of partner.

R v M: Successfully defended client said to have held wife prisoner and raped her following an arranged marriage

Football Association Disciplinary

Football Association -v- Dario Gradi MBE - Instructed to represent Dario Gradi MBE following a decision by the Football Association to issue an Interim Suspension from all football related activity. The FA referred the case to the Safeguarding Review Panel [SFR]. At the time of the application to the SFR, DG was Director of Football at Crewe Alexandra FC, having relinquished full managerial duties in 2011.

This was a high profile case. The referral immediately generated national media coverage. He had a long and distinguished career, and was awarded an MBE for services to football. Character references were provided from, amongst others, former England internationals.

The case involved a thorough examination and application of the regulatory framework under which the proceedings were brought and the drafting of extensive written submissions. The following is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the issues considered, but included:

Addressing the powers of the SFR;

The right to legal representation in person, opposed by the FA but granted by the SFR;

The relevance of historic civil proceedings brought against Crewe Alexandra;

The safeguarding of children regulations;

The applicability of local authority interventions;

Risk assessments conducted by the FA and LA welfare officers;

Expert evidence;

The review conducted by Clive Sheldon QC and Operation 'Hydrant';

The police investigation into Mr Gradi's activities;

The investigation conducted into the criminal activities of Barry Bennell;

Forensic of the FA's Safeguarding Risk Assessment Report (described by the Chairman of the SFR, Christopher Quinlan QC as "a careful...coruscating analysis [supplemented by] helpful oral submissions";

The SFR concluded that Mr Gradi did not, despite the submissions of the FA, pose, or may not pose, a risk of sexual harm to children.

Motoring Offences

Mark receives regular instructions to represent clients charged with causing Death by Dangerous Driving and by Careless Driving. He is preferred counsel for DWF Solicitors and appears throughout the country on behalf of private clients and in insurance funded cases.

Regulatory

Mark is on the approved list for the presentation of cases on behalf of the General Medical Council. He has also appeared for defendants and companies in connection with breaches of regulations relating to Trading Standards, Housing, Fire Safety and the provision of Financial Services.

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