

Elizabeth McGrath KC

Head of Chambers

Year of Call: 1987
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Overview

Elizabeth McGrath KC (Liz) was called to the Bar in 1987 and has practiced exclusively in family law for over 20 years, with a focus on children and care disputes. She was appointed Queen's Counsel in 2014 and is 3PB's Head of Chambers.

Liz has extensive expertise in public law, acting for Local Authorities, parents, and children in the High Court and the Court of Appeal. She has been instructed in numerous complex fact-finding hearings involving allegations of sexual abuse and non-accidental injuries and has appeared in several reported cases.

Public Inquiries and Complex Child Protection

Elizabeth McGrath KC is a highly experienced children law silk whose practice encompasses some of the most complex and sensitive public law proceedings to come before the Family Court. She has particular expertise in cases involving sexual abuse, organised child sexual exploitation, serious safeguarding failures and parallel police investigations.

Over a career spanning more than three decades, Liz has regularly been required to undertake detailed forensic examination of how children came to harm and the response of those charged with protecting them. Her work has involved consideration of the actions and decision-making of local authorities, social workers, police and other safeguarding professionals, often against a background of extensive historic material, contested evidence and complex information-sharing between agencies.

Liz has acted in two of the most significant operational care proceedings undertaken in England and Wales. These involved major safeguarding operations, large numbers of children and parties, substantial documentary evidence and extensive parallel investigation by the police and other agencies.

Her experience encompasses the difficult interaction between family and criminal proceedings, including disclosure, evidential sensitivity and the management of overlapping investigations.

She has particular expertise in complex fact-finding involving allegations of sexual abuse. She is accustomed to analysing extensive and sometimes fragmented evidence, establishing detailed chronologies, testing competing accounts and identifying the significance of decisions and information held by different professionals and organisations.

A substantial part of Liz's practice involves children and vulnerable witnesses. She is known for combining a sensitive and approachable manner with rigorous preparation and precise advocacy. Her experience enables her to deal effectively with highly sensitive evidence while maintaining the forensic focus required in proceedings of exceptional complexity and public importance.

Her experience is particularly relevant to inquiries involving child sexual exploitation and institutional safeguarding, including questions concerning multi-agency working, information-sharing, professional decision-making, disclosure, vulnerable witnesses and the response of statutory agencies to children at risk. Throughout her career Liz has regularly acted in serious and complex fact-finding hearings concerning allegations of sexual abuse, representing local authorities, parents, children

and other interested parties.

Selected Relevant Experience

Operation Satchel Re P (Sexual Abuse – Finding of Fact Hearing) [2019] EWFC 27, presided over by Mr Justice MacDonald, the largest child sexual abuse investigation in West Midlands Police history

Liz acted in care proceedings arising alongside a major West Midlands Police investigation into organised child sexual abuse. The proceedings involved vulnerable children, multiple alleged perpetrators and substantial interaction between the family and criminal jurisdictions. Her work required consideration of extensive sensitive evidence and disclosure and the management of issues arising from parallel police and Family Court proceedings. In this major family court fact-finding hearing, MacDonald J dealt with a complex case involving 14 children from 6 different families who brought forward serial allegations of intra-familial and inter-familial sexual abuse.

Operation Directive RE AA & 25 Ors (Children) [2019] EWFC 64, presided over by Sir Mark Hedley, was at the time the largest public law children case ever litigated in the UK.

Private Law

She is often instructed in highly sensitive private law children disputes, particularly those involving residence, contact, relocation, LGBT parenting, and surrogacy. Her vast experience across both private and public family law, combined with her down-to-earth and approachable manner, inspires confidence in instructing solicitors and allows her to build a strong rapport with clients.

Liz's meticulous preparation ensures she quickly identifies the key issues in complex cases. While she provides firm and fair advice with a focus on early resolution where possible, she is also known for her concise, robust, and effective advocacy when a judicial decision is required.

Care and adoption

Public Law Care and Adoption

Liz is a recognised expert in cases involving sexual abuse and the full spectrum of serious child protection concerns. She represents Local Authorities, parents, guardians, and other interested parties in the most complex and sensitive cases, including those involving serious non-accidental injury, sexual abuse, chronic neglect, child fatalities, and fabricated or induced illness (FII).

She has also acted in some of the largest and most complex public law children cases undertaken in England and Wales, including involvement in two of the most significant operational care proceedings seen by the Family Court to date. She is highly experienced in cases arising from major safeguarding operations involving large numbers of children, multiple parties and extensive parallel investigations by the police and other agencies.

Her practice regularly places her at the centre of proceedings of exceptional scale, sensitivity and public importance, requiring the management of vast volumes of evidence, intricate disclosure issues and complex strategic case management. Elizabeth is particularly well regarded for her ability to navigate highly pressured and emotionally charged litigation whilst maintaining clear forensic focus in cases attracting substantial judicial, professional and media scrutiny.

Her extensive experience in public law proceedings under children and adoption legislation includes cases with complex medical evidence, cross-jurisdictional placements, and matters where confidentiality, disclosure, and media restraint orders are critical. Liz is also well-versed in cases requiring the use of the High Court's inherent jurisdiction, particularly where urgent intervention or protective measures are needed.

Liz's expertise in handling highly sensitive cases, combined with her strategic approach and depth of experience, makes her a formidable advocate in this field.

Recommendations

Elizabeth McGrath KC is an expert family law practitioner with a broad range of experience in children work. She regularly handles cases of neglect as well as serious injury and sexual abuse.

Strengths: "Elizabeth instils an immediate sense of trust and confidence in her clients."

Chambers UK 2025/Family/Children/Midlands Bar/Band 1

She also takes on complex financial remedy cases concerning high net worth individuals. She is sought out for her experience in cases with valuation issues.
Strengths: "Excellent advocacy and bedside manner with clients. A force to be reckoned with."

Chambers UK 2024/Family/Children/Midlands Bar/Band 1

Strengths: "Elizabeth makes her mark in care proceedings."
"Ms McGrath is a tenacious and confident advocate."
"She has an understanding and sensitive bedside manner with extensive knowledge."
"Elizabeth is an absolutely outstanding KC."

Chambers UK 2023/Family/Matrimonial Finance/Midlands Bar/Band 1
Chambers UK 2023/Family/Children/Midlands Bar

Strengths: "She is a force to be reckoned with. Her preparation is second to none." "She really gets to the bottom of matters quickly and is supportive but firm with clients and their families."

Chambers UK 2022/Family/Matrimonial Finance/Midlands Bar
Chambers UK 2022/Family/Children/Midlands Bar

Strengths: "She has a wealth of experience and her advocacy skills are to be admired." "A very safe pair of hands. Procedurally good and always extremely well prepared. She goes the extra mile to make her clients feel comfortable in what are often very difficult circumstances."

Chambers UK 2021/Family/Matrimonial Finance/Midlands Bar
Chambers UK 2021/Family/Children/Midlands Bar

Strengths: "Her diligence, thoroughness and empathy for the client stand out."

Chambers UK 2020/Family/Matrimonial/Midlands Bar

"A heavyweight in family proceedings and a very popular advocate in the Birmingham community." "She is a great advocate and has client care skills."

Chambers UK 2019/Family/Matrimonial/Midlands Bar

Strengths: "A heavyweight in family proceedings, recently taken silk and a very popular advocate in the Birmingham community." "She is a strong practitioner with integrity."

Chambers UK 2018/Family/Matrimonial/Midlands Bar

Strengths: "An excellent silk. Her client care skills are second to none and she is robust in the face of difficult opponents." "A brilliant tactician and outstanding negotiator."'

Chambers UK 2017/Family/Matrimonial/Midlands Bar

'Continues to grow an admirable practice in all areas of family law. Covers both public and private children law such as death of children, and also holds expertise in ancillary relief, high net worth business assets and pensions.
Strengths: "She is a fantastic barrister and is great to deal with. She provides excellent technical support and is great with the lay client; really human and down to earth."
"A heavyweight in family proceedings and a very popular advocate in the Birmingham community."

Chambers UK 2016/Family/Matrimonial/Midlands Bar

'A great legal brain.'
'If there's a fight to be had she won't back away but if there's a deal to be done she'll get it done.'

Chambers UK 2015/Family/Matrimonial/Midlands Bar

'Where there is a need for litigation Elizabeth is a fearless advocate, and a very skilled one at that.'

Chambers UK 2014/ Family/Matrimonial/v

'Outside the court room Elizabeth is a calming figure for parents in what can be very upsetting proceedings. She has an empathetic approach but maintains an ability to give robust advice. Her preparation of cases is rigorous and her ability to spot minute details is unparalleled. Her cross-examination and submissions are skillful, forensic and precise.'

Legal 500 2025/Family: Children and Domestic Violence/Leading Silks/Midlands Circuit - Tier 1
Legal 500 2025/Divorce and Financial Remedy/Leading silks/Midlands Circuit - Tier 1

Elizabeth McGrath KC is a 'fearless advocate' who handles public law cases, including ones with international elements. 'Elizabeth is a tenacious and confident advocate. Her attention to detail is meticulous.'

Legal 500 2024/Family: Children and Domestic Violence/Leading Silks/Midlands Circuit - Tier 1
Legal 500 2024/Divorce and Financial Remedy/Leading silks/Midlands Circuit - Tier 1

'Elizabeth is robust and empathetic. She reads the client well and tailors how she delivers her advice and guides them through the process accordingly.'

Legal 500 2023/Divorce and Financial Remedy/Leading silks/Midlands Circuit - Tier 1

3PB 'Elizabeth is tenacious and thorough in her preparation, with a canny ability to think outside the box.'

Elizabeth McGrath KC has more than three decades' experience in family law and is 'an exceptional cross-examiner'.

Legal 500 2023/Child Law (public and private)/Leading Silks/Midlands Circuit - Tier 1

'Elizabeth is able to make clients feel at ease and understood. Clients really feel that their case has been fought.'

Legal 500 2022/Child Law (public and private)/Leading Silks/Midlands Circuit
Legal 500 2022/Divorce and Financial Remedy/Leading Silks/Midlands Circuit

'She is extremely good at getting to the heart of the matter and connecting with the client.'

Legal 500 2021/Child Law (Public and Private)/Leading Silks
Legal 500 2021/Divorce and Financial Remedy/Leading Silks

'An exceptionally knowledgeable silk at the forefront of financial remedy in the region.'

Legal 500 2020/Family and Children/Leading Silks

'Very well known for her expertise in financial remedy cases.'

Legal 500 2018/19/Family and Children/Leading Silks

'Highly experienced in financial remedy proceedings.'

Legal 500 2017/Family and children, Leading Silk

Professional bodies

- Association of Lawyers for Children
- Family Law Association
- British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering