

Marianne Alton

Call to Bar: 2014



“Marianne is an exceptional and fearless advocate. She is incredibly thorough in her preparation and is able to assimilate large volumes of evidence, and she presents concisely and persuasively.” – Legal 500, 2025

Marianne is a highly sought after junior with a focus on the prosecution and defence of serious and complex crime. Her recent instructions have included serious and high-profile criminal cases ranging from the successful prosecution of the UK's largest ever drugs importation case to the successful defence of the former Manchester United star Ryan Giggs. She is regularly instructed in paper heavy cases with a multi-jurisdictional element such as cases involving allegations of high value fraud, international money laundering, drug importation and people smuggling. Marianne is appointed to the CPS General Crime, Serious Crime, Fraud and Counter Terrorism Panels (at Level 3) and to the Serious Fraud Office B Panel.

Alongside a busy practice in the UK, Marianne is a founding member of the legal development charity Evolve-FILA and leads Evolve's casework projects. Through her work with the charity, she has delivered training to both prosecution and defence advocates in Uganda, presented to the Ugandan Judiciary on sentencing, and has worked alongside Ugandan advocates to prepare numerous successful capital appeals on a pro bono basis. She was previously selected as Young Pro Bono Barrister of the Year at the Bar Council's Annual and Young Bar Conference.

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Practice areas:

Business Crime & Financial Regulation
Criminal Law
Health & Safety
Prison Law
Regulatory
Road Traffic Law

Professional appointments:

CPS General Crime Panel (Level 3)
CPS Specialist Serious Crime Panel (Level 3)
CPS Specialist Fraud Panel (Level 3)
CPS Specialist Counter Terrorism Panel (Level 3)
Serious Fraud Office Panel B List

Examples of Marianne's criminal work include:

Led:

R v PG and 24 others: prosecuted the largest ever detected conspiracy to import drugs with an estimated value of £7 billion and three trials the first of which lasted 23 months. The case involved evidential Dutch wiretaps, witnesses from abroad, limited companies, false identities, banking evidence, Encro phones, expert evidence in cell site, mobile phones, computers, handwriting, fingerprints, drugs and legal issues including hearsay, bad character, admissibility of foreign intercept material, abuse of process, disclosure of unused material, Notification and PII applications. There were over 200,000 pages of served evidence, millions of pages of unused material and nearly 30 linked investigations including in foreign jurisdictions. At the conclusion of the case, the trial Judge commented on the "vast amount of work undertaken by the prosecution in this case...it is self-evident that counsel in this case have burnt gallons of midnight oil between them, but this has seen a successful conclusion to all three trials...a remarkably polished and professional team".

Marianne was also led for the Crown Prosecution Service in linked Judicial Review proceedings before the Divisional Court. The claimants were defendants in the second trial and had been remanded pending the conclusion of the first trial. They applied for Judicial Review of the trial Judge's decision to extend CTLs. The applications for Judicial Review were dismissed. Involved consideration of whether the Judge had provided sufficient reasons for his decision to extend CTLs and whether as a matter of law he was entitled to have regard to Bail Act considerations in declining to exercise his residual discretion to refuse to extend CTLs.

R v MZ and five others: prosecuted six men for high-level people smuggling offences. The lead defendant masterminded a series of people smuggling conspiracies, the most serious of which involved the smuggling of migrants, five of whom were children, in the back of a refrigerated lorry for significant financial gain. The case arose out of a cross jurisdictional investigation between the NCA and Dutch, Belgium, and French law enforcement. It involved companies, surveillance evidence, CCTV, mobile phones, evidence obtained from abroad including evidential Dutch wiretaps and consideration of over 10,000 pages of served evidence. The lead defendant received a sentence of 20 years imprisonment.

R v RG: defended the former Manchester United star and Wales Coach in his high-profile trial for alleged offences of assault and coercive controlling behaviour against his former partner.

R v TD and others: prosecuted offences of modern-slavery (in the domestic context and later in the context of cannabis farms) and conspiracy to supply and produce cannabis. The lead defendant received a sentence of 11 years imprisonment.

R v AZ: defence of a man alleged to have murdered his baby daughter through suffocation. Complex medical evidence with multiple experts.

R v ZA and RK: led prosecution junior – joint enterprise murder.

R v DB and another: led defence junior in a complex investor fraud.

R v PC and another: led junior prosecuting two men for joint enterprise murder (drugs background).

R v JK: led defence junior in a Trading Standards prosecution concerning the sale of £1.5 million of counterfeit goods.

R v MB: instructed for a defendant in a complex POCA following his conviction for immigration fraud. The prosecution alleged a benefit of over £1.3 million (almost all of which was assumed benefit) and an available amount of £1.1 million. Marianne advised on disclosure and the instruction of a forensic accountant, following which the case resolved with a benefit figure and available amount both in sums around £1 million below the figure initially contended for by the prosecution.

R v JHS and others: disclosure counsel in a case involving an allegation of conspiracy to murder. The case involved a ride-by shooting outside of a nightclub in Newcastle. The investigation was rooted in organised crime and the trial was moved to the Central Criminal Court against a background of jury tampering and witness intimidation. Marianne was instructed as disclosure counsel for a year and a half and throughout the 11-week trial at the CCC.

R v AC and others: disclosure counsel in a multi-million pound MTIC VAT fraud.

R v AS and five others (ongoing): led prosecution junior in a case involving an allegation of conspiracy to import up to 500kg of class A drugs into the UK. There are six defendants and over 14,000 pages of served evidence.

R v MR and 19 others (ongoing): led prosecution junior in a money laundering case involving the transmission of around £40 million from the UK to Dubai.

Junior Alone:

R v JB: defence of a woman indicted with section 18 wounding alleged to have 'glassed' another woman. The injuries were three incised wounds, with one of the shards of glass having penetrated through the chin and into the base of the tongue. She was acquitted of section 18 assault following trial.

R v AF: defence of a woman indicted with section 18 wounding alleged to have stabbed her husband. Marianne drafted written representations to the CPS following which the prosecution offered no evidence.

R v GW: prosecution of the defendant for offences of possessing a shotgun and a sniper rifle. Involved consideration of legal issues including hearsay and bad character. Guilty pleas entered shortly before trial.

R v PC: instructed to prosecute allegations of stirring up racial and religious hatred. Involved consideration of legal argument (ultimately abandoned by the defence) including the admissibility of expert evidence and the timing of Attorney-General consent.

R v MM: successful defence of a man charged with violent disorder. Offence said to have taken place during the 'Million Mask March' in London. Marianne successfully applied to exclude the statement of a police officer purporting to identify the defendant.

R v BM: successful defence of a man indicted with possession of cocaine with intent to supply.

R v KM: successful defence of a youth charged with a knife point robbery. The trial centred on recognition evidence given by two witnesses and a police officer.

Marianne cross examined a police officer in relation to numerous breaches of the PACE codes.

RSPCA v JK: – defence of a man charged with fraud in the context of alleged puppy farming. Marianne secured a stay of proceedings following submissions on abuse of process.

R v GT: instructed to prosecute the sentence of a man charged with malicious communications offences in which the victim was the then Home Secretary.

Other Experience, Education, Scholarships and Pro Bono / International work:

Marianne graduated from the University of Oxford with a degree in Philosophy and Theology. She spent a year working in a homeless centre in Salford and thereafter completed the GDL (with Distinction) and BPTC (82%). She was awarded scholarships including an Exhibition from Pembroke College, Oxford and the Lord Denning major scholarship, Hardwicke entrance award and Sunley scholarship from Lincoln's Inn. During her legal studies Marianne volunteered for various charities and pro bono organisations including the Free Representation Unit. For example, she acted pro bono in an employment case, resulting in the award of over £24,000 in damages in favour of her client. She was a Kalisher scholar in 2014 and spent six months coordinating a capital mitigation project in Uganda.

Although she has now chosen to focus her practice on criminal work, Marianne previously enjoyed a mixed practice and has a wide range of experience including in immigration and civil law. She has acted successfully before the First-tier and Upper tribunal – including in relation to cases turning on human rights arguments. In her civil work, Marianne undertook work for both claimants and defendants and acted successfully in small claim and fast track trials.

Through the legal charity Evolve-FILA, Marianne has worked with defence advocates in Uganda to prepare numerous appeals against conviction and/or sentence in capital cases.

Examples of Marianne's pro bono death penalty cases include:

WM v Uganda (Court of Appeal of Uganda - 2024) – WM was convicted of the murder of his grandmother and sentenced to death. Marianne worked with Mary Ruck KC and a Ugandan advocate to prepare his appeal. The trial Judge had determined, on State medical evidence, that WM was an adult at the time of the offence, but his own evidence at trial had been that he was 15 years old. Marianne's section of the written submissions contended that the findings of the trial Judge in relation to WM's age were seriously flawed. The Court of Appeal agreed, quashed his sentence, and ordered that he should spend no further time in custody.

OJ v Uganda (Court of Appeal of Uganda - 2024) – OJ pled guilty to murder and was sentenced to death. Marianne worked with Mark Ruck KC and a Ugandan advocate to prepare his appeal. The appellant had killed his father while suffering an episode in which he described hearing voices and thought that he was bewitched. He confessed immediately to the killing. He had no previous history of violence. Following intervention by his legal team, psychiatric evidence was obtained. The Court of Appeal found that he had not been of sound mind at the time of the offence, and he was released.

KD v Uganda (Court of Appeal of Uganda) – Marianne worked with a Ugandan advocate to prepare an appeal against the appellant's conviction for murder and sentence of death. Involved consideration of legal and evidential issues including the contamination of forensic evidence and the strength of the circumstantial evidence facing the appellant. The Court of Appeal allowed the appeal, quashed the conviction, and released the appellant.

BM v Uganda (Court of Appeal of Uganda) - Marianne worked with a Ugandan advocate to prepare a case in which the defendant suffered from mental health problems and had served around 20 years in prison pending appeal following his conviction for murder and sentence of death. Marianne's written submissions addressed international and Ugandan caselaw on the test for the death penalty and the approach to be taken to cases involving individuals with mental disorders at the time of the offence and/or sentence. The death sentence was not maintained, and a determinate sentence was imposed resulting in his almost immediate release.

RI v Uganda (Supreme Court of Uganda) - Marianne worked with a Ugandan advocate and other UK barristers to prepare an application to the Supreme Court of Uganda (Marianne drafted the submissions). The Supreme Court was persuaded that their own decision to uphold a death sentence was a nullity as they had failed to apply their own caselaw. The application was allowed, the death sentence was quashed, and a determinate sentence was ultimately imposed in the lower court to which the case was remitted.

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