



DISPUTES

THE LAWYER'S
TOP 20 CASES:
AN ANALYSIS OF
THE LAST 10 YEARS

February 2023

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INTRODUCTION

This report dives into the data behind the past 10 years of *The Lawyer's* Top 20 Cases. It tallies and provides observations on all the lawyers involved in the Top 20 Cases for the years between 2014 and 2023, which feature 200 cases, 920 barristers, 592 partners, 84 chambers and 180 firms.

The Top 20 Cases in its current form began in 2011, having previously been the Top 10 Cases. As it says on the tin, it lists what we believe will be the top 20 cases reaching trial in the coming year. It is a product of journalism. There is no science to it, no objective maths, no measurement of fees made. It is a subjective list of the most exciting, prominent, consequential or simply fascinating cases in any given year. At times, some of the most interesting cases in a year do not appear on the list, either

because (on rare occasions) they are not set down when the list is released, or because they happen so quickly that the case is launched and heard within the space of 12 months. Last year's High Court battle over the UK Government's Rwanda migrant policy is a good example.

As with any list or ranking, there will always be potential to argue about the fringe cases that should not have been included, and those that should. Nevertheless, we would contend that each list provides an excellent insight into the best 20 cases hitting the courts that year, and who is trusted to handle what, by their nature, are mostly complex, difficult disputes. Accordingly, this report provides a valuable overview of the best legal practitioners working in the country.

The Lawyer's Top 20 Cases between 2014 and 2023



200

Cases



180

Law firms



592

Partners



84

Chambers



920

Barristers



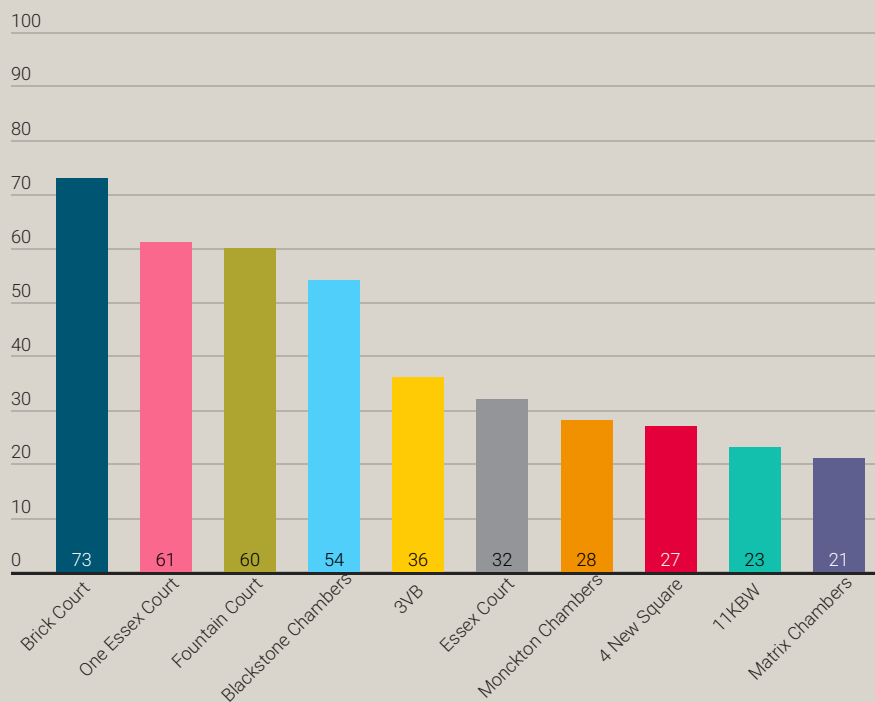
CHAMBERS

As is the way with legal line-ups, different members of the same chambers frequently appear for several different parties on a case. This report has therefore broken down the data on chambers into two categories. First, chambers by case, which counts only whether a chambers appears on a case. Second, chambers by team, which counts how many teams to which a chambers contributes. By “team”, we mean a single team of barristers and solicitors who may act for either a single party to the litigation, or a number of parties that have been grouped together. For example, if we take the example of this year’s monster *Republic of Mozambique v Credit Suisse and others* litigation, which features nine teams of lawyers for more than a dozen parties, Fountain Court members appear twice. Richard Lissack KC appears for one team, Prinvest and Mr Iskandar Safa, while Timothy Howe KC appears for another, VTB Capital. Accordingly, Fountain Court gets one

tally in the chambers by case category, and two in the chambers by team category.

If we examine the top chambers in both categories, the dominance of magic circle chambers is immediately apparent. Brick Court, One Essex Court (OEC), Fountain Court, Essex Court and Blackstone Chambers – together, the “magic circle” – are often lauded as being the pinnacle of the English Bar. These results certainly aid that reputation. When measuring chambers by case, four of the five appear in the top four. Brick Court stands head and shoulders above the rest, however, having appeared on 12, or 20 per cent, more cases than second-place OEC on 61. A member of Brick Court was therefore present on nearly 37 per cent of all Top 20 Cases in the past 10 years. Fountain Court falls in just behind OEC, with one case fewer, while Blackstone Chambers is in fourth place on 54. Sixth-place Essex

Top chambers by number of cases





Court, however, is significantly behind its magic circle rivals, on 32, despite clearly being on a roll recently, with 21 cases featuring in the past five years. 3VB (winner of *The Lawyer's Chambers of the Year* in 2022), however, disrupts the magic circle party at the top of the ranking, winning fifth place and pushing Essex Court into sixth by three cases.

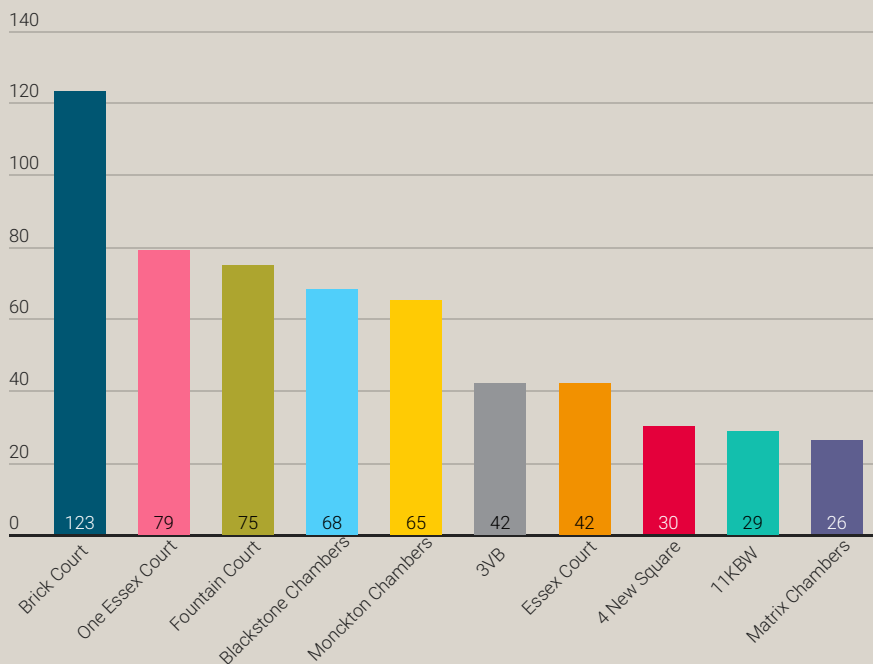
Nor are these numbers a reflection of the number of tenants in each set. In 2022, according to *The Lawyer's Bar Top 30* report, OEC (126) had the most barristers, followed by Blackstone Chambers (119), Essex Court (103), Brick Court (101), Fountain Court (95) and 3VB (92). Likewise, all magic circle sets had similar numbers of silks, with Blackstone leading the way (58), followed by OEC (50), Brick Court (47), Essex Court (48) and Fountain Court (41). 3VB, making their fifth-place ranking all the more impressive, had comfortably the lowest number of silks, with 33. This distribution of member numbers has not changed much over the years. In 2016, for example, although the sets were smaller, they remained in the same order by size – OEC with 101 members, Blackstone with 100, Essex Court with

88, Brick Court with 83, Fountain Court with 71 and 3VB with 67. There is therefore no clear numerical pattern that might explain the difference in Top 20 Cases inclusions between these six sets.

The same four chambers are also at the top of the ranking by team. Brick Court is even further ahead than its nearest rivals, with its tenants members of 123 teams over the past 10 years. OEC, on 79, is 44 teams behind. Fountain Court (75) and Blackstone Chambers (68) follow.

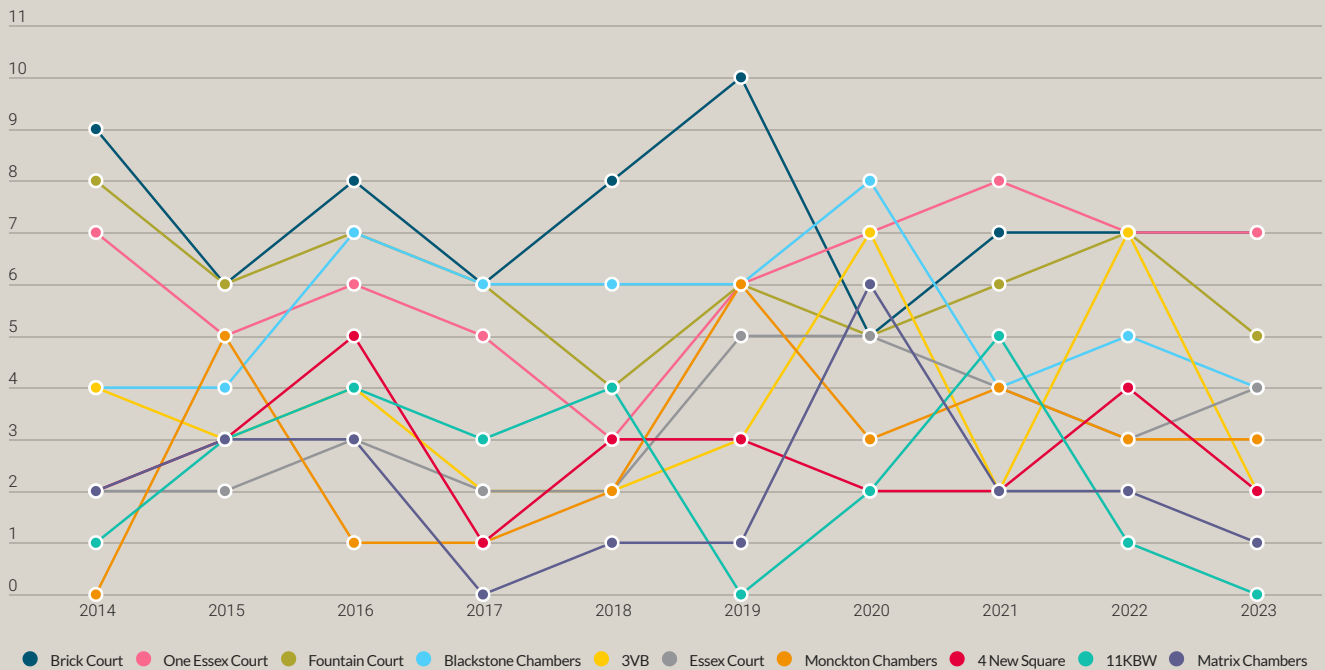
The magic circle is broken again, however, by two sets in this category. Monckton Chambers, which sits in fifth place just behind Blackstone Chambers, has had 65 team appearances in the past 10 years. That is far ahead of both Essex Court and 3VB, which are tied at 42. Competition-focused set Monckton Chambers has made particular gains in the past five years, appearing 19 times between 2019 and 2023 compared to nine in the previous five years, which reflects the increasing prominence and frequency of competition litigation. Indeed, Monckton Chambers was just behind the magic circle and 3VB in the

Top chambers by number of teams





Ten-year trends of the top chambers by number of cases



chambers by case category, and only four cases behind Essex Court. Perhaps more notable is the fact that Monckton does not even make the Bar Top 30, having only 65 members.

The number of teams to which the top seven sets (the magic circle plus Monckton Chambers and 3VB) have contributed indicates just how often they feature in the sort of high-profile cases that make up the Top 20. These seven chambers featured on 494 teams over the past 10 years, more than the other 77 chambers combined, which feature on 410. Teams of barristers for a case are built around a variety of imperatives. Often it will be that a lead counsel is chosen for a case, and he or she then

wishes to keep the entire matter in-house, choosing juniors from their own set. Other times, teams may include several silks with different expertise, each from different chambers and handling different aspects of the case, who may bring their preferred juniors with them. In other circumstances, a team may include juniors from different sets thanks to their own growing reputation in a particular area of law, or due to client preferences, or simple availability. The fact that members of these seven chambers are selected so often speaks to their depth of talent.



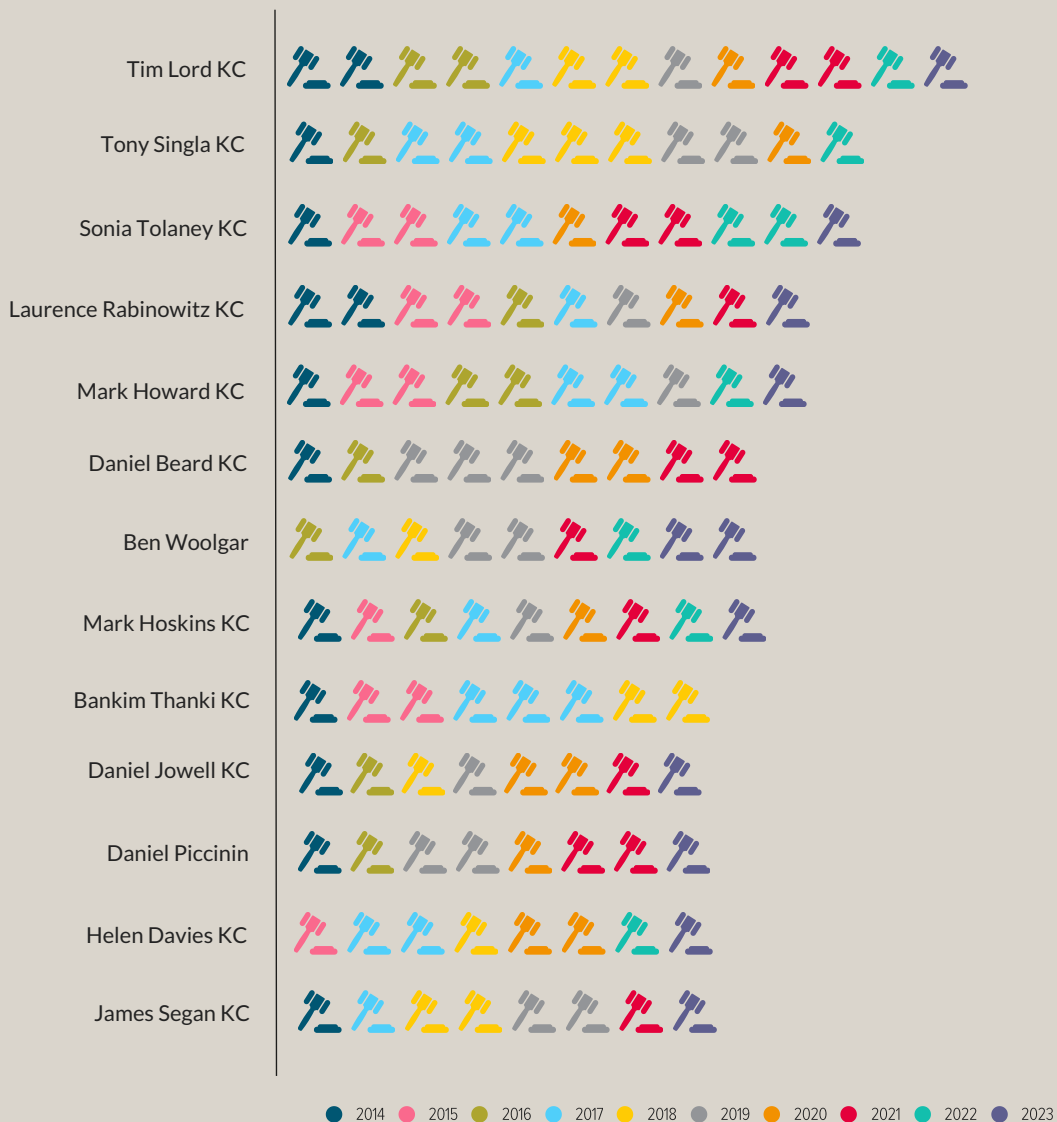
BARRISTERS

More than 900 barristers have appeared in the Top 20 Cases over the past 10 years. Around 370, or 40 per cent, of them are currently King's Counsel; many would have taken silk at some point in the past 10 years.

Featuring in the Top 20 Cases is context-dependent. It does not necessarily mean the same thing for each barrister. For example, a junior may appear more

than a silk, but may not have ever led a case. Take 11KBW's Amy Rogers, who has appeared six times in the Top 20 Cases in the past 10 years, the same as Essex Court's Joe Smouha KC. Smouha, however, has led on four of his cases, and co-led on the remaining two. Rogers has only led on one, although being trusted enough to act as junior on the sort of high-profile, complex matters that make the Top 20 is a compliment in itself. The Top 20 Cases' ranking of

Top barristers' number of cases by year





the best trial barristers is also notable, with eminent appeal counsel like Blackstone Chambers' Lord Pannick KC not featuring at all.

Brick Court boasts eight of the top 10 barristers on the list. The top 10 are in fact 13, with five barristers tied in ninth equal place. Commercial barrister Tim Lord KC of Brick Court tops the list with 13 appearances in the past 10 years. He is closely followed by his Brick Court colleague Tony Singla KC on 11; they are joined in the top 10 by Mark Howard KC, Ben Woolgar, Mark Hoskins KC, Daniel Jowell KC, Helen Davies KC and Daniel Piccinin. Two OEC tenants, Sonia Tolaney KC and Laurence Rabinowitz KC, make the cut into the top 13, along with Daniel Beard KC of Monckton Chambers, Fountain Court head of chambers Bankim Thanki KC and Blackstone Chambers' James Segan KC.

Lord, Singla, Tolaney, Rabinowitz and Howard are the only barristers to have appeared in the Top 20 Cases more than 10 times, although none featured on the list every year. None of the five's appearances have surged or dropped in number over the past 10 years, except for Howard: 70 per cent of his cases featured prior to 2018.

Two juniors also make the top 10. Brick Court's Ben Woolgar is in seventh place and Daniel Piccinin is

in ninth. Even though they were not in a leading capacity, the achievement is notable simply by the fact that only 20 per cent of counsel in the top 30 are not silks. Tony Singla KC, however, who sits in second place, took silk only in 2021. Of his 12 instructions that made the Top 20 Cases list, only two have been as lead counsel, namely on 2022's cyberattack case *Lonestar Communications v Kaye and Ors*, and the 2018 Competition Appeal Tribunal case of *Peugeot SA & Ors v NSK Ltd & Ors*. Yet what can be taken from these three, and the other juniors or recently made up silks who sit towards the top of these rankings, is that to be chosen so regularly for the sorts of cases that make up the Top 20 indicates that they are inevitably future stars of the Bar.

Of the top 30 barristers, all of whom have made the list at least six times, only six are women, accounting for just over 20 per cent. Even for the Bar, the branch of the legal profession which probably struggles with gender diversity the most, this is a low ratio. According to *The Lawyer's Bar Top 30* report last year, for example, 35 per cent of the tenants in the country's largest sets are women, although women make up fewer than one-third of the members at half of those sets. As will be discussed later in this report, however, the number of partners is much worse in terms of gender balance.



LAW FIRMS

In the past 10 years, 180 firms have appeared in the Top 20 Cases. No fair comparison can be made between firms and chambers. Firms can only appear on one side of a case, and competition among them is significantly higher than it is between chambers, reflected by the fact that only 84 chambers have appeared in the Top 20, mostly the magic circle, 3VB and Monckton Chambers.

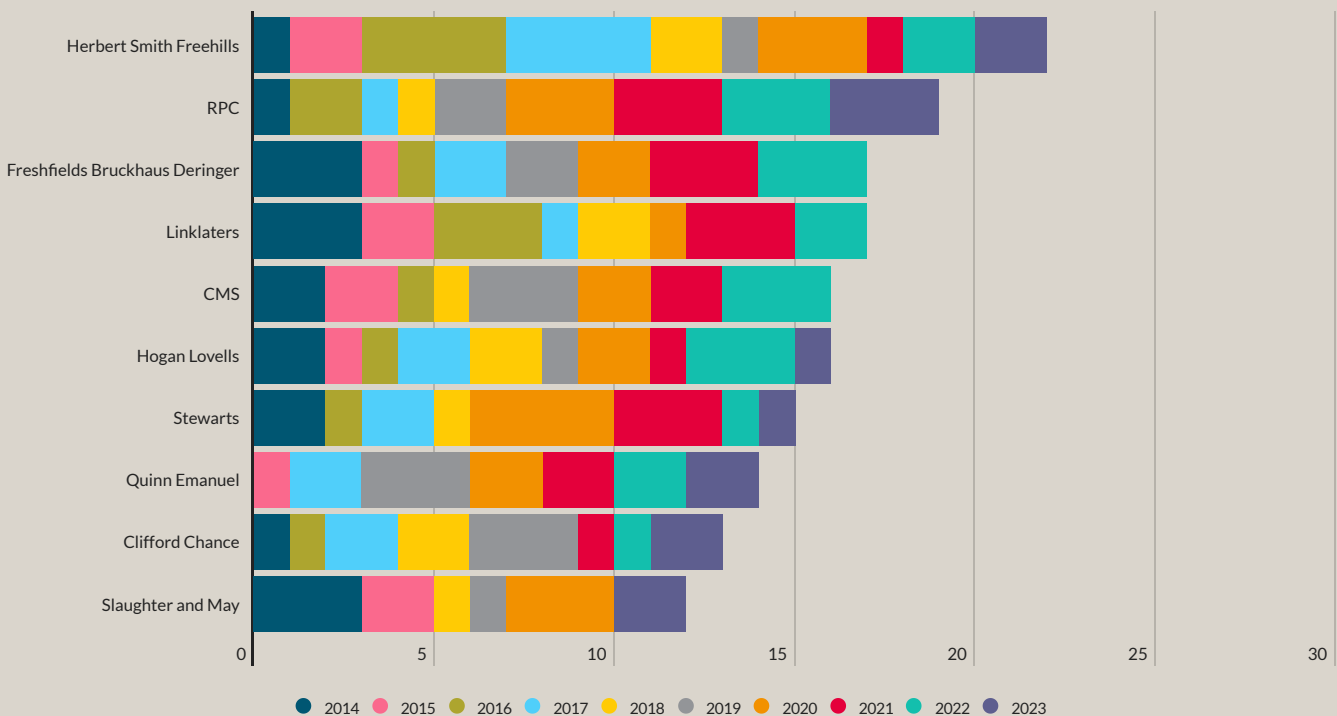
11 per cent of all cases. As might be expected, these disputes covered a range of practice areas, with clients such as Lloyds Bank, Bernie Ecclestone and the Post Office. The firm's number of entries in the Top 20 Cases has been broadly consistent over the 10 years, and, along with sixth-place Hogan Lovells, is one of only two firms to have appeared on the list every year.

The leading firms paint an eclectic picture. Save for specialist firms Signature Litigation in 17th place, Peters & Peters in 24th and Hausfeld in 27th, the top 30 firms all appear, or have previously appeared, in the *The Lawyer's* UK Litigation 50. Even so, they are a broad mix of practice specialties, sizes and reputations. Litigation behemoth Herbert Smith Freehills leads the way, having appeared on 22, or

Much like the chambers, there seems to be no relationship between how many disputes partners a firm has and the number of times it features in the Top 20 Cases.

Looking at the top 10 firms, the number of cases per contentious partner, based on the firms' UK Litigation 50 numbers from the end of last year,

Top law firms by number of cases by year





ranges from 0.14 case per partner for CMS, to 0.89 for Slaughter and May. Again, while partnership numbers have fluctuated, this nevertheless gives a fair indication that larger teams do not necessarily mean more Top 20 cases. Certainly, those firms with larger contentious partnerships that remain either full service or close to it are likely to produce a lower ratio, as cases stemming from the worlds of construction and real estate make the Top 20 less frequently. For example, 15th-place Eversheds Sutherland, which considers itself to be a full-service

litigation practice, has a ratio of partners to cases of 0.09, while 14th-place Clyde & Co's is 0.08. Compare that to Quinn Emanuel, which tends to focus on big-ticket litigation, with a partner-to-case ratio of 0.51. Indeed, Quinn Emanuel's 14 appearances reflects its booming London growth, both in terms of partners and revenue. The firm was listed three times between 2014 and 2018, but 11 times in the following five years.



PARTNERS

The list of 592 partners who have appeared in the Top 20 Cases over the past 10 years is notable for its concentration. On the barrister list, the top 12 all appeared eight or more times. Compare that to the partner list, where one partner appeared seven times, one six times and three four times. The next 26 appeared three times, 96 were named twice and the remaining 465 each appeared once. Very few partners featured on more than one case in a single year. Only two appeared twice on two cases in the same year, and six were on two cases in a year.

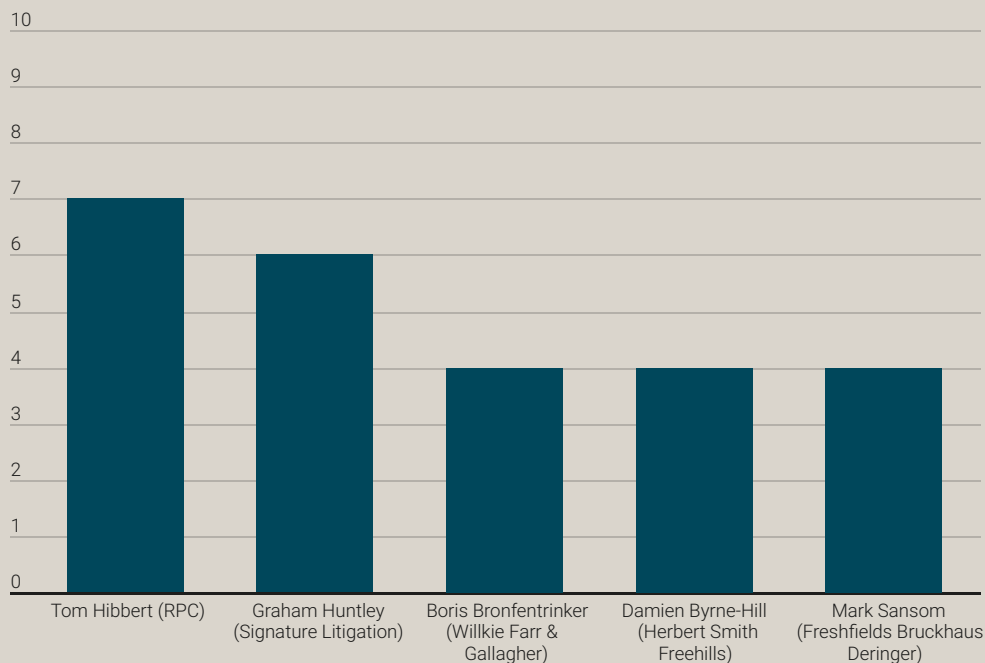
The nature of their roles means that barristers tend to act on more cases over the course of a year than partners do, but the concentration of partners is also explained by the fact that most cases that make the Top 20 are highly complex, meaning the time

commitment for the solicitors involved is extreme and that, given the intense competition between firms in the market, such cases can be few and far between.

Hundreds of partners have appeared in the Top 20 Cases over the past 10 years, but this concentration indicates that the sort of case that makes the Top 20 is often career-defining. Some of the biggest names in litigation in London, like Quinn Emanuel's Paul Baker and Herbert Smith Freehills' competition head Stephen Wisking (whose team has picked up some of the most exciting mandates in the Competition Appeal Tribunal) appeared only once.

While it is the Bar that often draws criticism for its poor female representation, only three of the top 31 partners (those appearing on three or more cases) are

Only five partners appeared on four or more of the Top 20 Cases over the past 10 years





women: Ashurst antitrust partner Anna Morfey; RPC insurance litigator Catherine Percy; and Kirkland & Ellis IP partner Nicola Dagg.

At the top of the table, RPC's head of commercial disputes, investment banking litigation expert Tom Hibbert, just edges out Signature Litigation founding partner Graham Huntley with seven appearances to Huntley's six. The three partners sitting in third equal place are well-known names: former Quinn Emanuel competition star, now Willkie Farr partner Boris Brofentrinke; Herbert Smith Freehills managing partner of dispute resolution Damien Byrne-Hill; and Freshfields dispute resolution head Mark Sansom.

Hibbert's cases include 2022's Ingenious tax litigation and the \$1bn dispute between Nigeria and JP Morgan in 2019, his casebook making up more than a third of RPC's Top 20 Cases places. Obviously not one to abandon a winning partnership, Hibbert has

instructed the barrister with the most appearances, Brick Court's Tim Lord KC, on five of these cases. Second-place Huntley specialises in commercial and banking litigation; his past Top 20 Cases include the securities dispute between RBS Shareholders Action Group and RBS, and litigation over part of Vasily Anisimov's stake in mining company Metalloinvest, a dispute which stemmed from the battle between Boris Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich. His cases amount to more than half of Signature Litigation's 12 appearances on our list. Five of these cases were listed prior to 2018, with 2023's tuna-bonds battle being his first appearance in the past six years.

With such a tight table, and a number of partners with more than three appearances on the list edging towards retirement age, all eyes will be on whether Hibbert can maintain his place as kingpin of the Top 20 Cases.



END TABLES

Top chambers by team

Rank	Chambers	Number of teams	Rank	Chambers	Number of teams
1	Brick Court	123	17	5RB	12
2	One Essex Court	79	18	Keating Chambers	11
3	Fountain Court	75	=19	Erskine Chambers	10
4	Blackstone Chambers	68	=19	Twenty Essex	10
5	Monckton Chambers	65	=21	8 New Square	8
=6	3VB	42	=21	Outer Temple Chambers	8
=6	Essex Court	42	=21	South Square	8
8	4 New Square	30	=21	XXIV Old Buildings	8
9	11KBW	29	=25	Henderson Chambers	7
10	Matrix Chambers	26	=25	Landmark Chambers	7
11	Wilberforce	25	27	Crown Office Chambers	6
12	Serle Court	24	=28	4 Pump Court	5
13	4 Stone Buildings	21	=28	Atkin Chambers	5
14	7KBW	20	=28	Hardwicke Chambers	5
15	Maitland Chambers	14	=28	Littleton Chambers	5
16	39 Essex Chambers	13	=28	Old Square Chambers	5

Top chambers by case

Rank	Chambers	Number of cases	Rank	Chambers	Number of cases
1	Brick Court	73	=17	XXIV Old Buildings	8
2	One Essex Court	61	=20	Erskine Chambers	7
3	Fountain Court	60	=20	Henderson Chambers	7
4	Blackstone Chambers	54	=20	Outer Temple Chambers	7
5	3VB	36	23	Keating Chambers	6
6	Essex Court	32	=24	Crown Office Chambers	5
7	Monckton Chambers	28	=24	Hardwicke Chambers	5
8	4 New Square	27	=24	Old Square Chambers	5
9	11KBW	23	=27	3 Hare Court	4
10	Matrix Chambers	21	=27	39 Essex Street	4
11	4 Stone Buildings	20	=27	4 Pump Court	4
12	Serle Court	19	=27	8 New Square	4
13	Wilberforce	18	=27	Atkin Chambers	4
14	7KBW	16	=27	Doughty Street Chambers	4
=15	Maitland Chambers	14	=27	Landmark Chambers	4
=15	Twenty Essex	14	=27	Littleton Chambers	4
=17	39 Essex Chambers	8	=27	South Square	4
=17	5RB	8			



Top firms

Rank	Firm	Number of cases	Rank	Firm	Number of cases
1	Herbert Smith Freehills	22	=18	Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner	10
2	RPC	19	=18	DAC Beachcroft	10
=3	Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer	17	=18	Leigh Day	10
=3	Linklaters	17	=21	Macfarlanes	8
=5	CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro Olswang	16	=21	Norton Rose Fulbright	8
=5	Hogan Lovells	16	=23	Allen & Overy	7
7	Stewarts	15	=23	Peters & Peters	7
8	Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan	14	=25	Baker McKenzie	6
9	Clifford Chance	13	=25	Fieldfisher	6
=10	Slaughter & May	12	=25	Hausfeld	6
=10	Addleshaw Goddard	12	=25	Reed Smith	6
=10	Clyde & Co	12	=29	Ashurst	5
=10	Simmons & Simmons	12	=29	Dentons	5
=10	Stephenson Harwood	12	=29	Enyo Law	5
=15	Eversheds Sutherland	11	=29	Kingsley Napley	5
=15	Mishcon de Reya	11	=29	Pinsent Masons	5
=15	Signature Litigation	11			

Top partners

Rank	Partner	Number of cases	Rank	Partner	Total
1	Tom Hibbert	7	=6	Khaled Khatoun	3
2	Graham Huntley	6	=6	Mark Hastings	3
=3	Boris Bronfentrinker	4	=6	Mark Humphries	3
=3	Damien Byrne-Hill	4	=6	Michael Barnett	3
=3	Mark Sansom	4	=6	Michael Roberts	3
=6	Anna Morfey	3	=6	Nicholas Cotter	3
=6	Catherine Percy	3	=6	Nicholas Heaton	3
=6	Charles Brasted	3	=6	Nicola Dagg	3
=6	Edward Allen	3	=6	Paul Hopkins	3
=6	Graham Shear	3	=6	Richard East	3
=6	Greg Lascelles	3	=6	Richard Swallow	3
=6	Jason Woodland	3	=6	Rupert Lewis	3
=6	John Fordham	3	=6	Scott Campbell	3
=6	Jonathan Cotton	3	=6	Simon Clarke	3
=6	Jonathan Tickner	3	=6	Ted Greeno	3
=6	Kambiz Larizadeh	3			



Top barristers

Rank	Barrister	Number of teams	Rank	Barrister	Number of teams
1	Tim Lord KC	13	=14	Adam Zellick KC	7
=2	Tony Singla KC	11	=14	Daniel Jowell KC	7
=2	Sonia Tolaney KC	11	=14	Hugo Leith	7
=4	Laurence Rabinowitz KC	10	=14	Jon Turner KC	7
=4	Mark Howard KC	10	=14	Marie Demetriou KC	7
=6	Daniel Beard KC	9	=14	Richard Hill KC	7
=6	Ben Woolgar	9	=14	James Eadie KC	7
=6	Mark Hoskins KC	9	=23	Amy Rogers	6
=9	Daniel Piccinin	8	=23	Edward Harrison	6
=9	Bankim Thanki KC	8	=23	Emma Mockford	6
=9	Helen Davies KC	8	=23	James MacDonald KC	6
=9	James Segan KC	8	=23	Jason Coppel KC	6
=9	Daniel Jowell KC	8	=23	Joe Smouha KC	6
=14	Josh Holmes KC	7	=23	Justin Fenwick KC	6
=14	Dinah Rose KC	7	=23	Mark Brealey KC	6
=14	Rob Williams KC	7			



THANK YOU FOR READING: *THE LAWYER'S TOP 20 CASES:* AN ANALYSIS OF THE LAST 10 YEARS

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