

Claire Roberts

Barrister at 11 Wentworth Chambers

Claire Roberts is a barrister at 11 Wentworth Chambers. Claire was admitted to practice in 2011. Before coming to the bar she worked at Ashurst and as a Federal Court associate in Australia, at Linklaters in London and at a boutique litigation firm and the Knight First Amendment Institute in New York. At the bar, Claire appears and advises in relation to a broad range of commercial and public law matters, with a particular interest in defamation and media law. She is also a current member of the CAMLA Young Lawyers Committee. Claire sits down with **Imogen Loxton**, lawyer at Ashurst, to discuss her career and International Women's Day.

IMOGEN LOXTON: Thanks Claire for agreeing to this interview! We'll start off with a rather standard question, but one which I find always has a pretty fascinating answer - did you always want to be a barrister? If yes, why? If no, what brought you to being a barrister?

CLAIRE ROBERTS: No - I had planned to become a journalist. I studied law as the "other" part of a double-degree because I enjoyed writing and debating and many people had suggested to me having some sort of specialist qualification might help me in my print career.

I accepted a graduate law role for similar reasons, but to my somewhat surprise I ended up really loving law. In my current role I get to do many of the things that had drawn me to journalism - such as writing, research, interviewing people and puzzling through complex problems.

Within law, the bar held an obvious appeal from early in my career. I really enjoy the challenge of being allocated a role in a dispute and thinking about how to approach it persuasively - including sometimes, persuading a client to abandon a point. A Federal Court associateship convinced me that this was the career I most wanted.

IMOGEN: We don't often get an opportunity to celebrate what we enjoy about our work - what has been your favourite moment in your career to date?

CLAIRE: I find appearing in court exhilarating. It can be an intimidating experience but it is also immensely satisfying to end a day knowing that you were well prepared and presented an argument in a way a court found useful - whether or not ultimately successful. I have appeared in a few Federal and Supreme Court matters "unled" (ie, where I did the talking), which have been great opportunities. I find defamation cases endlessly fascinating and I have been fortunate to work on some great cases in that space.

Before the bar, I had lots of fun experiences as a solicitor, including a few years on

the newspaper "phone hacking" litigation while in London.

IMOGEN: It's certainly been an unusual couple of years to be a barrister, given all the changes that have had to happen due to the pandemic. How have you found adapting to the change to online Court? Are you excited to be back to in person hearings?

CLAIRE: I feel fortunate to have started my reader year in late 2019 so that I was able to see at least a few months of "business as usual!"

I definitely have a strong preference for in-person hearings, and the return to some of these this year has been a welcome change.

That said, I hope that online court is retained for some directions hearings and interlocutory arguments going forward. This can be a much more convenient way of addressing simple matters, with cost benefits for clients. There have also been some great developments in open justice while members of the public have been unable to attend hearings in person - I hope we keep these up too.

IMOGEN: Looking back over your career so far, what is the best advice you have ever received?

CLAIRE: The best very specific advice I received (and the advice I give anyone thinking of coming to the bar) was to do an associateship. I learned an enormous amount and my judge has become a terrific mentor and champion of my career.

Another helpful piece of advice was to do a secondment - many litigators never get the chance to, and I think spending brief periods in-house improved the way that I approach problems and deliver advice.

IMOGEN: The 2022 International Women's Day campaign theme is #BreakTheBias. What does this mean to you and how would you suggest this is implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

CLAIRE: I think some of the most insidious bias can be quite subtle. At the bar, for example, there are perceptions about



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authority and persuasiveness in oral advocacy that can disadvantage certain voices. We are all likely to have biases that we are not conscious of and recognising this fact can be a helpful place to start.

There are great programs in private practice and in house - I was involved in "Women@Linklaters" during my time at that firm and felt there was quite a bit of momentum behind the group's initiatives. At the Bar we have the "Women Barristers Forum", which I am involved in, too - we try to ensure that female barristers feel encouraged, supported and connected in a profession that still has a way to go in improving diversity.

IMOGEN: Thanks again Claire for your time. One final question for you. We've heard about the best advice you have ever been given - what advice would you give to the next generation of women in this industry?

CLAIRE: Ask someone whose career you aspire to have if they would let you buy them a coffee. They will probably say yes.