

James Onalaja

Called: 2004

Email: clerks@187chambers.com

Telephone: 020 7430 7430

Ranked as a Leading Junior in The Legal 500 UK Bar

James is an experienced and effective advocate with a great eye for detail. He has cultivated a structured common law practice particularly focused on: all aspects of criminal law including cases of violent and organised crime, serious and complex frauds, allegations of sexual offences and gender based crimes, asset forfeiture and confiscation; extradition matters; military justice and armed forces law; regulatory law and tax litigation; and civil actions to protect the rights of vulnerable individuals including actions against government bodies especially on matters involving allegations of violations of human rights. He is ranked in The Legal 500 Lawyer Rankings as a Leading Junior Counsel in all areas of General Crime and Fraud.

James was recently instructed as Lead Counsel in a complex matter re allegations of a spate of conspiracies to defraud financial institutions and telecommunication companies with a potential value of £119 million, involving an international network of co-conspirators, the dark web, crypto currencies and substantial amount of electronic data evidence.

James is admitted to the International Criminal Court's (ICC) List of Counsel and the List of Specialist Counsel at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC). As a result, he is eligible to represent defendants and victims at both international criminal tribunals in the Hague on international criminal law matters including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. He is an elected member of the International Criminal Court Bar Association (ICCBA) Amicus Committee and Training Committee.

He is fully trained in and has an in-depth experience in dealing with vulnerable and youth clients as well as in the handling of sensitive cases and vulnerable witnesses with the necessary respect and delicacy in order to extract essential and cogent evidence.

James is accredited by the Bar Standards Board to receive cases and instructions directly from members of the public and non-legal corporate entities in all practice areas.

Specialist Areas

Criminal Defence	Criminal Prosecution
Fraud & Financial Crime	Private Prosecution
Asset Forfeiture and Confiscation	Professional Discipline
Inquests & Inquiries	Regulatory Law

Specialist Areas	
Public Law Tax Appeals	Court Martial & Military Law

Testimonials

> “Meticulous attention to detail, preparation from start to conclusion. Excellent client care skills and a very competent courtroom advocate.”
>
> **Legal 500 2027**

> 'James' main strength is his tenacity in following particular leads. His attitude to his cases is to leave no stone unturned in his pursuit of the best outcome for his client.’
>
> **Legal 500 2026**

> "187 Chambers' James is a consummate professional and excels in all areas. He is an excellent and tenacious advocate. He is a great tactician, with an excellent rapport with the clients, whatever their background or circumstances."
>
> **Legal 500 2025**

> ‘Intelligent, meticulously researched, charismatic, and understanding of challenging clients and their needs.’
>
> **The Legal 500, General Crime and Fraud (2021)**

Ranked In

Cases

Asset Forfeiture & Confiscation

James is regularly instructed in proceedings under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2000, including on matters involving allegations of money laundering and acquiring criminal property, resulting in asset forfeiture and confiscation proceedings. A sample of cases he has dealt with include:

R v KK – Proceedings under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2000 for the confiscation of assets alleged to be proceeds from the commercial supply of class A drugs.

R v DW – Confiscation proceedings arising out of a determination that the defendant had a criminal lifestyle linked to the commercial supply of Class A drugs.

R v GF – Post-conviction confiscation proceedings following multi-handed convictions for conspiracies to supply Class A drugs. Involved arguments re the third party interest of the defendant's partner to monies seized from the defendant.

R v TT – Confiscation proceedings re £147,677 said to be the defendant's proceeds from a criminal lifestyle arising from facilitating the illegal entry of migrants into the UK.

R v W – Confiscation proceedings re £20,000 cash discovered at the home of an individual found to be involved in the commercial supply of Class B dugs. Involved arguments re 3rd party interest of family members and business partners in the cash.

M & M v UKBA – Challenge to the forfeiture order obtained by the UK Border Force following its seizure of large quantities of monies in different currencies from an appellant with mental health difficulties travelling via Heathrow Airport and alleged to be a conduit for an international organised criminal group.

Bribery & Corruption

James receives instructions on matters involving allegations of bribery and corruption, including under the Bribery Act 2010.

Tax Appeals

James is regularly instructed in tax dispute matters before tax tribunals by individuals, corporations and HMRC. He has acted as junior and sole counsel for HMRC on a number of multimillion pounds tax disputes, particularly those arising out of allegations of Missing Trader Intra-Community (MTIC) fraud. He was instructed by HMRC as sole counsel on a tax dispute matter worth over £13 million. Cases he has dealt with include:

Synectiv Ltd v HMRC [2017] UKUT 0099 (TCC) – £1.4 million tax dispute arising from allegations of MTIC fraud, leading to the appeal of findings of the First-Tier Tribunal to the Upper Tribunal (Tax and Chancery Chamber) (Junior Counsel).

CH v HMRC [2016] UKFTT 316 (TC) – Challenges to HMRC's enquiries into tax returns and right to request information and impose penalties for failures to comply.

Gold Nuts Ltd et al v HMRC [2016] Lloyds Rep. F.C. 249 – Legal arguments re the limits of the privilege against self-incrimination excisable by company directors and corporations during HMRC enquiries into corporation and self-assessment tax returns.

QP Ltd v HMRC [2016] UKFTT 100 (TC) – HMRC powers to request information and documentation as part of enquires allegedly opened for an improper motive and the nature and extent of statutory records for the purpose of schedule 36 information notice requests.

Annova Ltd v HMRC [2014] UKUT 0028 (TCC) – Multi-million pounds VAT dispute leading to the appeal of the findings of the FTT to the Upper Tribunal (Tax and Chancery Chamber) (Junior Counsel).

Synectiv Ltd v HMRC [2013] UKFTT 677 (TC) – £1.4 million VAT dispute matter arising from allegations of MTIC fraud (Junior Counsel).

Base Interactive Ltd v HMRC [2013] – Tax dispute worth over £13 million arising out of allegations of MTIC fraud and a complex contra trading network involving a large number of companies across Europe.

Softhouse Ltd v HMRC [2012] LON/2008/01903 – £2.9 million tax dispute (Junior Counsel).

Annova Ltd v HMRC [2011] UKFTT 742 (TC) – Multi-million pounds VAT dispute arising from allegations of an extensive MTIC fraud (Junior Counsel).

Trading Standards

James is experienced at dealing with licensing, trademarks and copyright matters, and receives instructions in this area. He has acted for a number of individuals and corporations facing allegations of digital piracy as part of FACT investigations and prosecutions. He has provided advice to corporations on the protection of intellectual property.

Criminal Defence

James is ranked in The Legal 500 Lawyer Rankings as a Leading Junior in all areas of General Crime. He has developed a solid criminal practice, with emphasis on both defence and prosecution work. He regularly appears in Crown Courts throughout the English jurisdiction, represents clients facing serious allegations before summary courts and deals with appeal matters at all levels of the appellate jurisdiction. He has greatly benefited from an exposure to a wide spectrum within the said practice area, including: allegations of serious and organised crime; violent crime; matters of dishonesty and; serious sexual offences. Cases he has dealt with include:

R v RB – Allegation of Arson by a defendant with enduring mental health issues including schizoaffective disorder.

R v YJ – Allegations of a spate of sexual assaults in public spaces by a defendant with a history of mental health difficulties.

R v EB & Another – Allegations of a multi-handed violent armed robbery of a home.

R v HF & Others – Allegations of a targeted revenge shooting by members of an organised criminal gang.

R v DT (Court of Appeal) – Appeal against conviction and sentence in a case involving allegations of historic child sex abuse by a family member. Issues re what amounts to bad character evidence and the impact of the trial judge's refusal to give a good character direction to the jury.

R v RH – Old Bailey matter re unlawful wounding of restaurant staff by prospective customer, with extensive CCTV evidence.

R v DT – Allegations of historic child sex abuse by a family member, involving delicate and skilful handling of child witnesses and evidence.

R v TC – Sexual assault of vulnerable complainant with mental health issues.

R v EM & Other – Alleged violent multi-handed armed robbery of alleged local 'drug dealer' by defendant with mental health issues.

R v TJ – Allegation of possession of firearms with intent to endanger life following a 'gangland' shooting allegedly over a drug dispute.

R v HR – Allegation of gross dishonesty against a serving RAF personnel.

R v AW – Attempted murder and section 18 GBH by soldier re 2 separate complainants.

R v JL – Allegation of gang violence against publican arising from alleged protection racket.

R v AS & Other – Alleged Hampstead Heath gang armed robbery involving a vulnerable defendant.

R v L (Court of Appeal) [2012] EWCA Crim 830 – Limits to the impact of joint enterprise in sentencing, and the relevance of actual roles played by defendants in a violent gang armed robbery and 'carjacking'.

R v D (Court of Appeal) [2010] EWCA Crim 1998 – Appeal against conviction re multi-handed gang assault with intent to rob.

R v M – Case re five deaths by dangerous driving by a military personnel.

R v H & Others – Multi-handed attempted robbery.

R v BY – Allegations of sexual assaults by penetration of a learning disabled individual.

R v GY – Allegations of making indecent images of children.

Criminal Prosecution

Alongside his solid defence base, James is regularly instructed by a number of prosecution and public authorities thus ensuring a healthy balance which encapsulates all the essential skills of a competent advocate. This includes: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC); Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), local government authorities and; The Probation Service. He is ranked in The Legal 500 Lawyer Rankings as a Leading Junior in all areas of General Crime. A sample of cases he has had conduct of include:

R v AD – Case involving a violent armed robbery on a public transport by a defendant with an extensive history of mental health difficulties.

R v JN – Allegations of child sex abuse, production of images of the abuse and indecent images of other children in the family as young as 6 months by their uncle, and the distribution of the indecent images across an international paedophilia network via the 'dark web'.

R v LW – Allegations of armed robbery of a luxury vehicle outside a primary school involving threats of acid attack, and dangerous driving in an attempt to evade arrest.

R v AR – Allegation of a gang conspiracy to burgle a neighbourhood of several residential properties in one night.

R v MW – Case involving allegations of child cruelty and child neglect by a mother with vulnerabilities linked to substance abuse.

R v BM – Allegations of violent assaults by a prisoner on a number of medical and prison staff after alleged consumption of psychoactive substances.

R v CR – Allegations of coercive control, violent domestic assault, burglary and extensive criminal damage of the victims' home by the defendant (ex-partner and father respectively).

R v MS – Alleged attempted armed robbery of a financial institution.

R v EP – Allegation of forgery and extensive fraud against a local authority.

Civil Disputes, Human Rights & Public Law

James is cultivating a growing practice in civil actions particularly against government departments and bodies exercising executive powers, including matters involving allegations of violations of human rights, civil liberties, and judicial review of the exercise of powers by branches of the State. Matters he has dealt with include:

JB v Commissioner for Police of Metropolis & Chief Constable of West Midlands Police High Court – Civil action re repeated acts by numerous police officers of: wrongful arrests, unlawful detention; negligence, breaches of Data Protection Act '98 and actions under the Human Rights Act '98 for infringements of Article 5 and 8 ECHR, following repeated arrests over several years for an alleged murder.

Colchester Borough Council v NC – Civil action to prevent a local authority from obtaining an injunction which restricts a vulnerable defendant from accessing mental health services and seeks to restrain him from displaying symptoms of his disorder.

B v Chief Constable for Sussex Police – Civil action re repeated: wrongful arrests, unlawful detention; negligence, and actions under the Human Rights Act '98 for infringements of Article 5 and 8 ECHR by numerous police officers.

RS v Sec of State for Home Department – Civil claim for unlawful detention, harassment, and under the Human Rights Act '98 for violations of Articles 5 and 8 ECHR by UK Border Force agents, following an unlawful attempt to deport.

AG v Direct Line Insurance – Negligence and breach of contract claim re wrongful cancellation of car insurance.

Tosdevine v Cooperative Group Ltd – Medical negligence cost dispute.

ASNWA Ltd v VA & Others – Advice re intellectual property rights, constitution of unincorporated organisation and rights of members.

Extradition and International Law

Extradition and International Law:

James is admitted to the Crown Prosecution Service's International Justice and Organised Crime Division's Specialist Extradition Advocate Panel. He is trained in and able to act for both the requesting States and for requested individuals in extradition proceedings throughout the UK jurisdiction.

James is admitted to the International Criminal Court's (ICC) List of Counsel and the List of Specialist Counsel at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC). As a result, he is eligible to represent defendants and victims at both international criminal tribunals in the Hague. He is trained and experienced at working on cases with international and transnational criminal law elements including allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, serious and complex cross-border crimes, cases involving obtaining or utilising evidence from other jurisdictions and matters involving international organised criminal groups.

He is trained and experienced at working on matters involving international humanitarian law and international human rights law and recently worked on such matters with Prakken d'Oliveira International Human Rights Lawyers whilst based in the Netherlands. He has worked with members of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) in preparing the committee members for the 122nd Session of the UNHRC in Geneva, where the committee conducted periodic oral dialogues with States and reviewed their implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

James is an elected member of the International Criminal Court Bar Association (ICCBA) Amicus Committee, charged with responding to requests for ICCBA amicus curiae opinions to assist the ICC chambers, through the provision of legal or factual expertise that is relevant to the determination of issues in cases before the ICC. James is also a member of the ICCBA Training Committee, responsible for the design and

implementation of training in substantive and procedural international criminal law and advocacy for all ICCBA members.

Matters he has dealt with include:

Latvia v IV – Represented Latvia in its European Arrest Warrant (EAW) extradition proceedings, for the surrender of a fugitive convicted of Grievous Bodily Harm resulting in the victim's death.

Poland v W – Represented Poland in the contested EAW extradition proceedings for the surrender of a fugitive of 11 years to serve a substantial sentence for being party to extensive conspiracies to defraud by an organised criminal group.

R v SF & Others – Acted for one of the defendants in a multi-handed case of an international conspiracy re cross-border people smuggling.

122nd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) – Worked with members of the UNHRC in preparation for and in Geneva at the periodic oral dialogues with States, reviewing the States' implementation of the ICCPR.

Case 004/02 Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia – Worked with the team of defence lawyers on the defence response to the prosecution's submissions re the closing orders by the co-investigating judges on the sufficiency of evidence to support charges including crimes against humanity and genocide.

R v X – Instructed to advise a UK resident and high net worth individual on extradition and transnational criminal law issues following the instigation of criminal prosecution in her home country and the said State's issuing of a Red Notice via Interpol.

Operation Galvez – Independent Counsel re dispute issues arising from a cross-border investigation and prosecution re an alleged large scale and wide ranging tax fraud involving several international corporate entities and individuals.

Operation Amazon – Appointed as Independent Counsel to advise on issues arising from a wide ranging HMRC prosecution for alleged large scale, international carbon tax credit fraud, involving a wide network of off-shore companies, investment vehicles and the obtaining and use of evidence from other jurisdictions.

Fraud & Financial Crime

James is regularly instructed on matters of serious and complex fraud. He is ranked in The Legal 500 Lawyer Rankings as a Leading Junior Counsel in Fraud cases. He was on the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) Prosecution Counsels List, B Panel until 2017. He was instructed as Independent Counsel to the SFO in its first investigation into the 2008 financial crisis and the allegations of fraud leading to the collapse of a major international bank. He is experienced at acting as independent counsel and has been instructed on a number of HMRC operations and investigations, advising the investigators, suspects and defendants on issues arising out of the investigations. Matters he has dealt with include:

R v OA & Another – Lead Counsel in an alleged complex spate of conspiracies to defraud financial institutions and telecommunication companies with a potential value of

£119 million, involving an international network of co-conspirators, the dark web, crypto currencies and a substantial amount of electronic data evidence.

R v OB – Allegations of a prolonged and wide-ranging fraud on an extended family by a defendant allegedly posing as a police officer conducting a criminal investigation.

R v CA – Allegations of defrauding a number of healthcare institutions over an extended period of time and acquiring thousands of pounds in criminal property as a result of the alleged fraudulent obtaining of employment and possession of identity documents with improper intention.

Operation Galvez – Independent Counsel re dispute issues arising from a cross-border investigation and prosecution re an alleged large scale and wide ranging tax fraud involving several international corporate entities and individuals.

Operation Epsom – Instructed as Independent Counsel to advise on the Legal Professional Privilege dispute arising between HMRC and a suspect in an ongoing HMRC investigation.

R v HC – Allegations of perverting the course of justice, using a false instrument and fraud re the fraudulent obtaining of a writ of possession from the Royal Courts of Justice, fraudulent eviction of leaseholders and obtaining vacant possession of real estate property worth £1.2 million.

Operation Amazon – Appointed as Independent Counsel to advise on issues arising from a wide ranging HMRC prosecution for alleged large scale, international carbon tax credit fraud, involving a wide network of off-shore companies, investment vehicles and the obtaining and use of evidence from other jurisdictions.

R v T – Allegations of an extensive and wide-ranging fraud on the exchequer and a local authority.

R v AT – Matter re allegations of a conspiracy to defraud various financial institutions by an international network of organised criminal gangs fraudulently using identities and credit card details of third parties.

Rawlinson & Hunter Trustees and Vincent and Robert Tchenguiz v SFO – Independent Counsel advising parties on LPP issues arising out of the proposed SFO prosecution for alleged multi-million pounds' fraud following the collapse of Kaupting Bank.

Military & Courts Martial

James receives instructions to represent armed forces personnel appearing at Courts Martial both within the UK and abroad. Over the years, he has developed a professional working relationship with service men and women of varying ranks, and also with civilian staff who are caught within the ambit of armed forces law. Cases he has dealt with include:

Private M – Military Courts Martial – Allegations of misconduct and violent assault on a superior officer.

Guardsman C – Military Courts Martial – Allegations of AWOL by a soldier following orders re deployment to Afghanistan.

Private A – Military Courts Martial – Allegations of a violent sexual assault of a fellow military personnel.

Air Trooper W – Military Courts Martial Appeal – Allegations of AWOL by military personnel with severe mental health issues.

Guardsman H & Others – Military Courts Martial, Germany – Alleged multi-handed violent assault and counter allegations of fundamentalist terrorism.

Professional Discipline

James acts on cases before the professional disciplinary panels including the Nursing and Midwifery Council and is experienced at representing both the interests of regulators, professional bodies and professionals. A sample of cases include:

HL v NMC – Advise re substantive order imposed by the NMC Practice Committee striking the Registrant from the register of practicing nurses following allegations of the entry being fraudulently procured.

PD v NMC – Conduct and Competence Committee review Under Art 30 Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001 of a substantive suspension order imposed on the Registrant.

TB v NMC – Review of the conditions of practice order imposed on the Registrant by the Conduct and Competence Committee of the NMC.

SB v NMC – Review of a condition of practice order imposed on the Registrant following findings of lack of competence and misconduct.

SDNH v MS – Internal grievance and disciplinary proceedings involving allegations of harassment and bullying of the company accountant by senior management.

Regulatory Law

James is regularly instructed on matters of regulatory law, including the following matters:

Synectiv Ltd v HMRC [2017] UKUT 0099 (TCC)
£1.4 million tax dispute arising from allegations of Missing Trader Intra-Community (MTIC) fraud, leading to the appeal of findings of the First-Tier Tribunal to the Upper Tribunal (Tax and Chancery Chamber) (Junior Counsel).

CH v HMRC [2016] UKFTT 316 (TC)
Challenges to HMRC's enquiries into tax returns and right to request information and impose penalties for failures to comply.

Gold Nuts Ltd et al v HMRC [2016] Lloyds Rep. F.C. 249
Legal arguments re the limits of the privilege against self-incrimination excisable by company directors and corporations during HMRC enquiries into corporation and self-assessment tax returns.

QP Ltd v HMRC [2016] UKFTT 100 (TC)
HMRC powers to request information and documentation as part of enquires allegedly opened for an improper motive and the nature and extent of statutory records for the purpose of schedule 36 information notice requests.

Annova Ltd v HMRC [2014] UKUT 0028 (TCC)
Multi-million pounds VAT dispute leading to the appeal of the findings of the FTT to the Upper Tribunal (Tax and Chancery Chamber) (Junior Counsel).

Synectiv Ltd v HMRC [2013] UKFTT 677 (TC)
£1.4 million VAT dispute matter arising from allegations of MTIC fraud (Junior Counsel).

Base Interactive Ltd v HMRC [2013]
Tax dispute worth over £13 million arising out of allegations of MTIC fraud and a complex contra trading network involving a large number of companies across Europe.

Softhouse Ltd v HMRC [2012] LON/2008/01903
£2.9 million tax dispute (Junior Counsel).

Annova Ltd v HMRC [2011] UKFTT 742 (TC)
Multi-million pounds VAT dispute arising from allegations of an extensive MTIC fraud (Junior Counsel).

Professional Memberships

- International Criminal Court (ICC) List Counsel
- Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) Specialist Counsel
- International Criminal Court Bar Association (ICCBA)
- ICCBA Amicus Committee
- ICCBA Training Committee
- International Bar Association – War Crimes Committee
- International Criminal Defence Lawyers Association
- Criminal Bar Association
- Association of Military Courts Advocates
- South Eastern Circuit
- Honourable Society of Lincoln’s Inn
- Amnesty International

Awards, Qualifications & Other

- October 2004 (Lincoln’s Inn)
- LLM with Distinction (Cum Laude) in International Criminal Law, Amsterdam Law School, University of Amsterdam
- Global Alliance Certificate in International Criminal Law, Columbia Law School, Columbia University in the City of New York.
- PG Dip., Professional and Legal Skills, Inns of Court School of Law, City University, London
- LLB (Hons), College of St Hild & St Bede, Durham University
- Named in the 2025 Pro Bono Recognition List.

Scholarships:

- Keble Scholar, Lincoln's Inn
- Hardwicke Scholar, Lincoln's Inn

Associated Work:

• Member of the Bar Council's 'Speak up for Others' schools outreach programme;
• Involved in the training and mentoring of bar students at Lincoln's Inn and the University of Law;
• Provides CPD accredited lectures and training to legal practitioners and other professionals.

Publications:

• "Resolving the Al-Bashir Conundrum – In light of the conflicting opinion of the ICC judges on the legal basis for finding State parties non-compliant with the ICC request for the arrest and surrender of Omar Al-Bashir, are State parties to the Rome Statute under an obligation to Arrest Al-Bashir and surrender him to the ICC?" – University of Amsterdam UvA Scripties Online [2018] – http://www.scriptiesonline.uba.uva.nl/665712
• "Day in the Life of a Barrister" – Student Law Review, Cavendish/Routledge Publishing [2007]
• "Journey to the Axis of Evil" – Durham21.co.uk [2002]

Languages:

• Native fluency in Yoruba (Nigeria)
• Basic French

Interests:

James is a keen photographer and artist. He enjoys experiencing new cultural destinations and has a passion for travel journalism. He has been awarded the Queens Golden Jubilee Millennium Volunteer Award of Excellence for his work in the community. James has sat on the boards of trustees of two charities responsible for outreach projects across North London.

Direct Access

James Onalaja is qualified to accept instructions directly from clients and is registered under the Bar Council's Public Access Scheme, meaning that members of the public who seek specialist advice can come directly to him. In addition, he welcomes instructions from solicitors, in-house law departments, qualified foreign lawyers, and clients licensed by the Bar Council to give instructions directly to barristers under the Bar Council's Licensed Access Scheme. For more information please visit our Direct Access page here.