

EXCHANGE

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Week 7 was one I had been looking forward to since the start of pupillage, and it had finally arrived. My supervisor – [Charlotte Rimmer](#) – was prosecuting on [Operation Lytton](#), one of the latest cases in what is more commonly known as the “Rochdale grooming cases”, alongside [Neil Usher](#) from Lincoln House Chambers, and [Harriet Lavin](#) (also from Exchange). It was a first on several counts: I hadn’t yet seen my supervisor in “Prosecutor Mode”, nor one where she had been “led” as a Junior; I also hadn’t seen a case of such magnitude before.

There were – and are, the case runs until August – eight defendants, some with two Counsel. The practicalities of fitting everybody into the court room was the first consideration. Counsel had to shuffle chairs around, squashed up together behind the court desks, trying to fit all their various accoutrements into the very limited space, all the while dealing with the crushing heat of wearing a wig and gown in 20+ degrees Celsius. Don’t let anybody tell you that life at the Bar isn’t glamorous, ladies and gentlemen.

One of the things I noticed immediately about such a large-scale case was how it moves differently from other single issue/single defendant cases. Big machines tend to move slow, and a multi-handed, years-spanning, historic sexual exploitation case was a clear example of this.

Instead of what I had become accustomed to – where a prosecutor and defence barrister quickly and efficiently hash things out prior to, and during, the trial – this was a case involving a much more fragmented timetable: one legal argument relating to s.41 questioning, for example, turned into three, four, or five arguments depending on how many different Counsel wished to ask different questions; spinning the plates of managing juror availability became a mammoth task involving the cross-referencing of 12 timetables over a period of 3 months, as opposed to 3 days, as was factoring in and balancing witness and complainant availability.

No sooner had the trial finally started, things ran immediately into a slight...complication. As is the very nature of jury trials, the jury’s strength lies in its unique composition of individuals from different backgrounds and demographics. However, that doesn’t always lend itself to the swearing in of individuals who are particularly enamoured with the idea of sitting as a juror for three months. In this case, one of the jurors couldn’t help but hide their lack of interest by literally falling asleep midway through the opening of the trial!

Having now observed several trials where juries had acted in surprising ways – for example, by returning no verdicts and being discharged on more than one occasion – and now a further jury being discharged due to unexpected lassitude, I was beginning to wonder whether I should start taking it personally.

After a couple of bumps in the road, however, the wheels of justice started turning, and the trial started properly. This time, juror torpor had been nipped in the bud, and the attentiveness was striking. Given the sheer scope of the trial, notes were being taken by almost all jurors, and as the evidence was worked through in the form of *Achieving Best*

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Evidence video interviews of the first complainant, you could feel the sense of importance being impressed upon the jury as to just how far-reaching this trial was.

The subsequent weeks went slowly but smoothly, with regular breaks being taken to account for the oppressive heat of the court building, to allow jurors to keep their full attention. Whilst *Operation Lytton* continued, Harriet Lavin also very kindly asked whether I would like to attend various hearings she had in her diary alongside the main trial.

This was a fantastic opportunity to see how the balancing of various diary commitments works in practice, as well as seeing somebody more junior – although certainly no less talented or capable – undertake the sort of work I would be doing when I'm on my feet in a few months.

The weeks flew by, including one week where we weren't sitting which allowed me to catch up on preparation for other cases and general admin, and before I knew it, it was time for a few days away from court for some off-circuit training. Each week has been a process of absorbing a tonne of new information and seeing a whole host of different advocacy styles. But the one thing that has remained consistent is the feeling of settling in to life at the Bar, and how exciting each new day and week is.