

## Lawyer of the week **Carolyn Ott**

Carolyn Ott, a solicitor at Leigh Day, acted for single mother Nichola Salvato who brought a legal challenge against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) over its universal credit childcare payments system. The High Court ruled that the requirement for upfront childcare payments was discriminatory and unlawful.

**What were the main issues in this case?** Convincing the court that the way in which the DWP deals with universal credit childcare costs results in unjustified discrimination and is irrational. We gave compelling evidence that the system is putting families in hardship and debt, and is having disproportionately prejudicial effects on women.

**What is the best decision you have taken as a lawyer?** Building a diverse background. Studying and qualifying in both the US and UK, and working on issues ranging from war crimes to immigration appeals confirmed that I love doing work I believe in.

**Who has inspired you in your career?** Many colleagues and clients: Nichola Salvato, who bravely fought for much-needed support for single mothers; my supervising partner Tessa Gregory, for her grace and humour,

and my partner and family who have taught me to never give up.



**What is the funniest thing that has happened to you?** At the international criminal trial for the former Yugoslavia, I assisted on the cross-examination of a ballistics expert, testifying on behalf of an alleged war criminal. Her testimony relied on the fact that an explosive device must have been planted because it could “under no circumstances” be unscrewed. One of the judges unscrewed it using a pencil.

**What is the best advice you have received?** Listen to your client, your team and your opponent with the goal of understanding.

**Which three qualities should a lawyer have?** Perseverance, precision and empathy.

**What law would you enact?** Requirements for more transparency in government. The tools available under the Freedom of Information Act are often inadequate.

**How would you like to be remembered?** As someone who cared deeply and laughed loudly.

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