



PIERS COLEMAN
K&L Gates

A partner in electoral law and the global government solutions practice at the London office of K&L Gates, Piers Coleman was the first of his family to become a lawyer. He looks back on his early career with some fondness: "I was articled to an extraordinary criminal lawyer who taught me a great deal. He always said: 'I may not teach you much about the law, but I will teach you to be a lawyer.' That is a mantra that I have used with trainees for many years."

Coleman's background is in transactional real estate law but he has also provided advice on policy and electoral law throughout his career. This has included involvement in the conduct of elections, working with candidates, political parties and election officials, and in major electoral disputes. Perhaps the most notable of these was the successful

parliamentary election petition for the House of Commons seat of Oldham and Saddleworth in 2010 – the first of its kind in 100 years. Coleman has also advised broadcasters and political parties on broadcasting rules during elections and between, and has advised on issues concerning campaign spending in the 2016 referendum and the 2017 general election.

Coleman cites *R (Miller) v Secretary of State for Exiting the EU 2017* as the historic case he would most like to have acted in. It ruled that invoking Article 50 required parliamentary approval. "We first made that point in a flyer many weeks before the referendum," he says, "and the political figures were incredulous." Recently, Coleman has provided advice to K&L Gates' corporate and charity clients, while continuing his involvement in election issues.

What would you do if you were justice secretary for a day?

There have been so many cuts, and the court system is short of staff and short of funding. Fee rates for the publicly funded bar are too low. The consequence is that the risk of injustice (both criminal defendants and those seeking civil justice) is too high. We seem to have cut too far, and with extra resources being offered elsewhere by the Prime Minister, hopefully the justice system will have extra resources as well.

What changes would you like to see made on the electoral side?

One thing is that there is still no slip rule whereby errors made by returning officers at a count can be easily put right. Counting errors, or other general mistakes at an election count which affect the result, can only be corrected via a full-blown election petition. For example, as has happened several times in recent years, a husband and wife as candidates in a multi-candidate ward, where the wife is declared elected rather than the husband or vice versa. A slip rule allowing applications to correct minor errors – probably uncontested – via the local county court would save court time and save costs.

If you hadn't become a lawyer what would you have been?

A sports reporter or a film reviewer or both. I love watching competitive sport, and to be able to be present – and commenting on – some of the great sporting events would be a huge privilege. Part of my role all those years ago as an articled clerk was to write film reviews for a well-known legal journal (albeit they appeared in my principal's name), and that was a very enjoyable job to be asked to do, not least because the film showing was coupled with a very well-stocked bar.

What do you enjoy doing on a day off?

I love playing tennis. Watching cricket or horse racing as well. And, of course, spending time with family – I now have three grandchildren.



"We first made the point that Article 50 required parliamentary approval many weeks before the referendum – and the political figures were incredulous"