

It was a moral conundrum for many in the legal market, but **Alisdair Williamson QC** (Call: 1994) believed in Ryan Beckwith's case throughout.

From the **initial defeat** in the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT) through to his client's **successful High Court appeal**, Williamson represented the former Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer partner in his battle against the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA).

"The first result was very difficult and actually quite emotional," said the **Three Raymond Buildings**' barrister, who took silk in 2017. "I don't think the [SDT] panel found it easy [either]. Inevitably, I form a close relationship with my clients because you are their voice, and in many ways them during the trial.

"It was difficult because I perhaps thought we had done enough, and I recognised that for him it was devastating. Freshfields had said he had to resign. He wasn't sure he would ever work as a lawyer again. That was difficult because I believe they had got it wrong."

However, despite the SRA's ruling against Beckwith, Williamson did not lose hope: "I said to Ryan at the time that this wasn't over. I would take this on to the High Court."

This turned out to be the right decision, and on Friday 27 November, Beckwith succeeded in his bid to overturn the SRA's initial verdict.

Setting aside the decision, the High Court agreed with Williamson that Beckwith's actions did not cross over the threshold of professional misconduct during a sexual incident involving a junior female colleague.

Williamson's reaction to the result was one of relief, as what he saw as a perceived wrong was righted.

Despite restrictions relating to Covid-19, the High Court appeal took place in-person back in October. "That corridor outside the court is a very nervous place to be," Williamson recalls. "Any advocate who says otherwise is either foolish or mistaken.

"Zoom advocacy is a new front, and it is not one that is easy. It is an exercise in narcissistic advocacy."

As a specialist defence counsel, often in homicide, fraud and sexual offence matters, he is accustomed to taking an unpopular stance in cases, although he does not view himself as a "crusader": "The moral justification for our role involves taking the unpopular role when we have to," he says. "I am often in the position of defending the unpalatable."

This is not something that comes lightly and he admits that "sometimes you look up from your desk and the weight of what you are dealing with is extremely hard to bear."

Most recently, he has been representing the lead defendant at the manslaughter trial arising from the tragic deaths of 39 Vietnamese migrants concealed in a container, which serves as an example of Williamson's genre of work.

Due to the nature of his practice, he says the biggest challenge is trying to keep perspective; striving to stay "level-headed in an occupation that can consume you". "That is the struggle," he says. "Trying to maintain some sort of balance."