

Working for the Parliamentary Counsel: Evlogi Kabzamalov

I joined the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel last year, after nearly 10 years of working as a tax lawyer in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. While I greatly valued my time spent in private practice, I had become increasingly drawn to working in the public sector. I wanted to broaden my horizons and use my legal skills to make a tangible difference to society. The job description of Assistant Parliamentary Counsel aligned well with these aspirations. It offered the opportunity to work on a diverse range of important legal issues, which is not possible in the increasingly specialised private sector.

In the short time I have been here, I have already worked on several coronavirus measures, on the UK Government's response to the Grenfell fire and on the renewal of the UK's armed forces legislation, among other matters. I have had the opportunity to peer into parts of society that I might never otherwise have been exposed to and to learn how they operate. I cannot imagine that many other legal careers would have been able to offer such variety.

Drafting legislation can be daunting and difficult. I was struck by how much brainpower was required to draft even a very short provision. I found the process to be far more rigorous than drafting a clause in a commercial contract. However, this makes it all the more rewarding when you finally manage to produce a coherent and water-tight draft. There is something quite satisfying about seeing a provision which you have helped to shape appear on [Legislation.gov.uk](https://legislation.gov.uk)

The job is not limited to drafting either. You have to become acquainted with the intricacies of parliamentary procedure and learn how to handle a bill through Parliament. This not only requires a sharp legal mind but good project management and people skills. You will have to build relationships with colleagues in the office, instructing government lawyers, the House Authorities and other stakeholders. This all makes for a very interesting and rewarding career.

I joined the office at a strange time, just as the pandemic was beginning. I only had a few weeks in the office before we all had to start working from home, but everyone has been very supportive and welcoming. I have been impressed by how well the office has managed the transition. The upside of these turbulent times is that it is definitely an exciting and dynamic time to be working as a drafter. I am very glad to have made the move.

Working for the Parliamentary Counsel: Andrew Wright

I joined the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) in 2019 after relatively short stints as a Judicial Assistant at a US law firm and as a government lawyer. I came across the OPC in that last role, while instructing on a bill. I was impressed by the skill of the drafters I was working with and enjoyed the complexity and conceptual nature of bill work.

Drafters at the OPC specialise in drafting, rather than in any one area of law. The subject matter of your work as a drafter is ever-changing. So far, I have worked on bills in relation to withdrawal from and the future relationship with the European Union, investigatory powers, telecommunications, and corporate governance and insolvency. The topics of the next bills I help draft will most likely be entirely different.

The skill of a drafter is quickly getting to grips with an area of law and working out what needs to be done to give effect to the policy. That may involve making changes to the existing structure, or perhaps building a new one within, on top, or beside it. Connecting the legislative plumbing and wiring of what has been newly built into what is already there is all part of the challenge.

All of this needs to be done in a clear and coherent way. Attempting to do so can throw up inconsistencies within a policy and in how it fits with the wider policy landscape. Producing a draft also has the potential to reveal legal problems and policy questions a bill needs to say something about in order to give effect to its broader aim. Drafts develop iteratively and more of these issues are teased out with each iteration. This involvement in policy development is an important and rewarding part of a drafter's work.

The OPC places great emphasis on the training and development of junior drafters. As a junior drafter, I work closely with a senior drafter on a bill. I learn by the senior drafter carefully reviewing my drafts and discussing them with me. By the same token, I am expected to pull apart their drafts and to suggest improvements. This was slightly daunting to begin with, but each senior drafter I have worked with has been encouraging. Engaging with their work in this way is great for a junior drafter's development and I think discussing drafts is now one of my favourite parts of the job.

I have heard drafting being described as Marmite-y and I would agree. There is no getting away from the fact that drafting is hard and requires deep concentration. It is easily the most difficult thing I have done in my legal career. The job is immense amounts of fun, unique and by definition at the cutting edge of the law. If you enjoy thinking conceptually, have an eye for detail, and want a legal job that is creative, a career as a drafter might be for you.

The fightback against coronavirus

Mr Speaker. I rise to make a statement on the fightback against this virus.

Across the country, our vaccine roll-out continues at pace.

With each vaccine we administer, we are one step closer to normal.

And as of today, we've vaccinated 9.2 million people.

I want to thank everyone involved in this collective national effort that saw nearly a million people get vaccinations last weekend alone – or, put another way, one in 60 of the UK's adults.

We've now protected almost 9 out of every 10 people over 80 and over half of people in their 70s.

I'm also delighted we've visited every eligible care home – 10,307 in total.

I want to thank everyone involved in that effort – including the NHS, our dedicated staff in social care and the residents themselves – for coming forward.

And I also want to pay tribute to my honourable friend, the Minister of State for Care, who has worked so hard to help us meet this ambitious target.

I know many of us in this House are playing our part in the national vaccination effort, and today we published a new resource for the House that provides more information on the vaccine roll-out and how all colleagues can play such an important part in increasing the take-up of the vaccine in their area.

Because the take-up of this vaccine will directly impact how effective the vaccines are and how fast we can safely get out of this.

Vaccine supply

Mr Speaker, we're confident we have the supplies to meet our target to offer the vaccine to the 4 most vulnerable groups by 15 February.

We now have over 400 million doses of vaccine on order, including the additional 40 million vaccine doses from Valneva we ordered yesterday.

And, Mr Speaker, that we find ourselves in this position is no accident.

Our strategy has been to invest early – and invest at risk.

We've backed many horses – no matter where they're from.

We've also built up our vaccine manufacturing capability here at home.

As a result, today we have:

- the AstraZeneca jab being manufactured in Oxford, Staffordshire and Wrexham
- the Novovax vaccine made in Teesside
- and the Valneva vaccine manufactured in Livingston in Scotland

It's a great example of what we can achieve together, working as one United Kingdom.

South African variant

Mr Speaker, despite this optimistic backdrop, we must continue to act with caution, not least, because of the renewed challenges posed by new variants of the coronavirus.

We have now found here 105 cases of the variant first identified in South Africa, including 11 cases which do not appear to have any links to international travel.

As with the variant first identified in the UK, there's currently no evidence to suggest it is any more severe.

But we have to come down on it hard.

Our mission must be to stop its spread altogether – and break those chains of transmission.

In those areas where this variant has been found – parts of Broxbourne, London, Maidstone, Southport, Walsall and Woking – we're also putting in extra testing, and sequencing every positive test.

Working with local authorities, we're going door-to-door to test everyone in those areas.

And mobile testing units will be deployed, offering PCR tests to people who have to leave their home for work or other essential reasons.

We have also seen 11 cases of mutations of concern in Bristol, 32 in Liverpool – and are taking the same approach.

In all these areas, it is imperative that you must stay at home and only leave home where it is absolutely essential.

When your local authority offers you a test, you should take up the offer because we know that around one in 3 people with coronavirus have no symptoms

– but can still pass it on.

We are offering testing to everyone aged 16 and over – even if you have been vaccinated.

And if you live in one of those areas but have not been contacted, and you're unsure if you should have a test, I encourage you to visit your local authority website to find out.

Anyone who must leave your home to go to a workplace – for instance, because they cannot work from home – should get tested.

All local employers should support and encourage their workers to get tested.

The message is more important than ever: to stay at home, maintain social distancing and get tested.

Mr Speaker, across the whole country, we're expanding workplace testing, including here in Parliament itself.

This morning you and I visited the new COVID testing site here in Parliament, which offers all those who work here – MPs, peers and staff – the chance to get tested.

I took a test this morning – thankfully, negative. It's quick, easy – and you get the result back fast.

And I encourage colleagues who have to be here in person to sign up and do the same.

And for all of us, no matter where we live, we need to continue to follow those rules.

Because, while more scientific work is underway to learn more about new variants, we know – with absolute certainty – that social distancing works.

It denies the virus the social contact it needs to spread.

We must all keep at it.

We've all sacrificed too much – and come so far with the vaccine – to give up now.

And I know we that won't.

Closing

Mr Speaker, while we have been working night and day to fight coronavirus, I have often drawn inspiration from our fight against another killer pandemic: HIV.

A disease that also took too many people before their time.

This is HIV Test Week.

It's a reminder of how important it is to get your free HIV test.

But it's also a reminder of the progress we've made in tackling that terrible pandemic, that we can credibly commit to no new transmissions by the end of this decade.

And today, I'm sure the whole House will join me in wishing Lord Norman Fowler a very happy 83rd birthday.

He was an inspirational former Health Secretary and fearless advocate for tackling HIV and AIDS.

Lord Fowler is someone who knows the importance of taking action early, and the power of testing to turn the tide.

So, as we face these difficult weeks ahead, we can all draw inspiration from that great struggle: that even when you're facing a mountain of challenges, science, ingenuity and sheer power of will can see us to better days.

I commend this statement to the House.

[Working for the Parliamentary Counsel:](#) [Amy Perkins](#)

I joined the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) just over a year and a half ago; it has been a very steep learning curve but a really enjoyable and rewarding one.

Prior to joining OPC, I worked as a government lawyer at the Department for Work and Pensions and before that I practiced as a family law barrister and spent two years at the Law Commission working on family law projects. It was at the Law Commission that I first encountered the OPC and seeing the work they were doing really sparked my interest; I was quite envious that their job was to turn the Commission's recommendations into actual law and I really wanted to have a go at drafting! Some 3 years later, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to do so.

Drafting can be extremely challenging but that is a big part of its appeal. Turning policy into law is no easy feat and the policy often evolves as a result of the drafting process; for me that's a really enjoyable part of the job. We work closely with the Bill team, lawyers and policy officials from the instructing department, to clarify the policy and translate it into effective and clear law. That process requires us to understand the current law as well as the change that the department wants to achieve; you have to

be able to look very closely at the detail but also keep in mind the bigger picture of how this change fits into the existing and developing legal landscape.

A part of the job that I knew little about before arriving at OPC is the role that the office plays in advising departments on parliamentary procedure and helping to manage bills as they progress through Parliament. There is no expectation that new recruits will have any experience of this, and like all aspects of the job, the office provides excellent training, with a lot of the learning taking place as bills that you are working on make their way through the House of Commons and House of Lords. I joined the office around the time that there was considerable public interest in Brexit legislation and it was fascinating to be learning the detailed, and quite obscure, workings of Parliament at the same time that it was front-page news.

In my relatively short time in the office, I have worked on legislation about immigration and Brexit, Parliamentary constituencies, the Windrush compensation scheme and criminal justice; I have really enjoyed this variety. Learning and developing the skills needed for the job in all these different contexts has kept me very much on my toes. Currently, I am an Assistant Parliamentary Counsel (APC), this is the training role in which all new recruits enter the office. As an APC, you work with a supervisor who will lead the work on the bill. I have felt very well supported by my supervisors and other colleagues. There is a real culture in the office of sharing knowledge and ensuring that each piece of legislation is the best it can be; even once fully trained, members of the office will work in pairs or small teams on each bill. I can see that this is a job where you truly never stop learning, and I think that's the joy of it.

Appointment to roles of Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements and Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee on Protection

Press release

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Rt. Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP today announced the extension of appointment of His Honour Brian Barker CBE QC to the dual role of Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee on Protection and Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements in Northern Ireland.



The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Rt. Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP today announced the extension of appointment of His Honour Brian Barker CBE QC to the dual role of Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee on Protection and Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements in Northern Ireland.

The extended appointment will take effect on 1 February 2021.

The Northern Ireland Committee on Protection (NICOP) was established in 2009 to determine the policy in relation to the provision of close armed protection to individuals living in Northern Ireland. The Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements in Northern Ireland reviews annually the operation of the arrangements for national security matters.

Biography of Appointee

His Honour Brian Barker CBE QC is a former British judge. He served as the Recorder of London and senior judge at the old Bailey 2013 – 2015 and previously was the deputy senior judge and Common Serjeant of London from 2005 to 2013. He currently holds an appointment as an Assistant Surveillance Commissioner.

Terms of Appointment

- The position is a part-time appointment.
- The position attracts a daily remuneration of £848.
- The appointment will be from 1 February 2021 for a period of up to one year.

Political Activity

His Hon. Brian Barker declared no political activity in the past ten years.
Regulation

This appointment is not regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

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