

Hal Watson



Call 2003

Clerks

 Ian Spencer
 0113 203 1971

 Kate Heald
 0113 203 1983

 Zoe Tinnion
 0113 518 2599

 Sara Baxter
 0113 203 1970

Appointments

- Grade 4 Fraud Panel Specialist
- Grade 4 POCA Panel
- Grade 3 General Crime Prosecutor

Memberships

- Criminal Bar Association
- North Eastern Circuit
- Fraud Lawyers Association

Overview

Chambers UK 2025 ranks Hal in Band 1 for financial crime saying that “when you see Hal Watson’s name you know you have a formidable operator and someone who knows the case inside and out.”

Instructed as leading or led junior to prosecute and defend complex criminal and quasi-criminal cases, Hal specialises in fraud and other financial misconduct in both criminal and civil jurisdictions; including very complex asset freezing, forfeiture, and confiscation proceedings.

The focus of Hal’s practice is substantial and or complicated financial crime, tax fraud, and corruption type offences where quantum is significantly in excess of £100M, allied money laundering, and subsequent confiscation proceedings. He is currently instructed in a number of international/cross-border investigations involving multinational corporates and allied bribery allegations, including section 7 Bribery Act 2010 (the corporate failure to prevent).

Hal is a CPS Grade 4 prosecutor on the CPS Specialist Fraud and Proceeds of Crime panels. In this context, he acted in the first Deferred Prosecution Agreement to be concluded by the CPS, a £615 million deferred prosecution of the FTSE listed gaming company, Entain plc: <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/first-ever-cps-deferred-prosecution-agreement-ps615-million>.

Hal has advised on internal investigations relating to financial misconduct by major financial institutions, deferred prosecution agreements, and breaches of domestic money laundering regulations.

Hal's experience encompasses cases alleging conspiracy to cheat, conspiracy to defraud (including unlawful via means), all other serious fraud type offences, money laundering (often with an international element), false accounting and Company Act offences, and large-scale benefit offences. He also conducts cases involving misconduct by directors and company officers. He is equally proficient prosecuting or defending in such cases.

Hal has particular expertise in complex VAT fraud, criminal tax avoidance and MTIC fraud, related money laundering, and in the recovery of the proceeds of crime under both pre, and post Proceeds of Crime Act legislation. He is regularly instructed in confiscation hearings where benefit figures are in excess of £10m, allied enforcement proceedings, and on applications pursuant to section 22 and 23 Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. Hal has relevant experience at first instance and in the appellate and High Courts in relation to asset freezing and forfeiture under both criminal and civil regimes.

Hal has direct experience of asset forfeiture powers arising from the Criminal Finances Act 2017 including where criminal proceedings were either not pursued or were inappropriate, and has advised on the interplay between and decisions to pursue civil as against criminal forfeiture processes.

Hal has a detailed knowledge (in particular as nominated disclosure counsel) of specialist areas including PII, Regulation of Investigatory Powers, the operation of the SAR regime, the obtaining and use of evidence from foreign jurisdictions and other disclosure and evidence gathering issues – including in the context of restraint and asset forfeiture/confiscation. He also deals with complex issues relating to Legal Professional Privilege in criminal, civil, and other jurisdictions.

Hal has extensive experience of judicial review proceedings, mostly but not exclusively relating to the criminal justice system, especially in public law claims relating to charge and criminal and civil procedures. He is instructed to consider issues of privacy and publication/protection of privileged documents arising from criminal investigations and proceedings.

In addition, he has significant experience of contempt of court proceeding in criminal and civil jurisdictions.

He routinely works in conjunction with (internal and external) forensic accountants and financial investigators both pre and post charge, and has significant experience in and regularly advises on the restraint and recovery of assets in the context of police and HMRC investigations relating to asset tracing, tax misconduct and restraint.

He has expertise in resolving criminal litigation with a view to minimising future civil litigation and asset forfeiture risks.

Hal also acts in terrorism and other complex criminal cases (<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/far-right-reverend-who-exchanged-letters-terrorists-convicted-stirring-racial-hatred>). In which context he has particular expertise in matters involving expert evidence and also in the handling and use of highly sensitive material.

Cases in which Hal is/was involved have been the subject of national and international recognition. Most recently, a case in which Hal was heavily involved was shortlisted for the 'Most Important Development of the Year' at the Global Investigations Review (GIR) Awards 2024 in Washington DC, USA, resulting from his role in the first ever Deferred Prosecution Agreement (DPA) for the CPS.

Recommendations

Consistently listed by Chambers UK as Tier 1 counsel.

See also historically from Chambers and Partners:

"A junior recognised for his experience in financial crime. He has a particular focus on the prosecution of large-scale fraud and money laundering cases."

"He is incredibly thorough and very hard-working ... a very good operator; he deals in large-scale, paper-heavy cases and is meticulous ... the go-to financial crime junior."