

The Times

Lawyer of the week: Richenda Buxton



Richenda Buxton: I come from family that has a long history of campaigning for the rights of the individual

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The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants solicitor acted in a Supreme Court case on non-European spouses coming to the UK

Richenda Buxton, a solicitor with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, a charity, acted for Amber and Diego Aguilar Quila, one of two couples in a Supreme Court case where a government ban — on non-European spouses under the age of 21 coming to the UK — was ruled unlawful.

What were the main challenges in this case and possible implications?

We lost our High Court challenge in December 2009; we had to appeal to the Court of Appeal pro bono when our client was refused legal aid because the prospects of success were deemed poor by the Legal Services Commission. The rule we challenged has been declared incompatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Government should now accept applications from foreign spouses and civil partners aged 18 to 21.

What was your worst day as a lawyer?

Representing an asylum seeker in a tribunal when I was new to immigration law, in midwinter, and the hearing went on much longer than expected. It got darker and darker and the only light in the room was a movement-sensitive one above my head. Every few minutes the light went off and I had to jump up and down to make it come back on. I came away from the hearing feeling that I had not done a proper job for the client. Fortunately her appeal was allowed.

What was your most memorable experience as a lawyer?

This case, because it is possible to make a real difference to many peoples' lives.

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why?

My grandmother, Dorothy Buxton, who with her sister, Eglantyne Jebb, campaigned for the rights of starving "enemy" children at the end of the First World War, which led to their founding Save the Children Fund in 1919. She also campaigned for the rights of refugees from Nazi Germany during the Second World War.

Why did you become a lawyer?

I come from family that has a long history of campaigning for the rights of the individual – from the 19th-century anti-slavery and prison reform movements to the rights of children and refugees more recently.

What would your advice be to anyone wanting a career in law?

Don't think that it will necessarily make you rich. It is vital to find an area of law that really interests you and that you can feel passionate about. This is not necessarily easy. I wrote off many areas of law before I discovered immigration.

If you had not become a lawyer, what would you have chosen and why?

I was a late entrant to the legal profession, having taught modern languages for four years and worked in publishing for eight. I never thought I would become a lawyer and did not qualify until the age of 43.

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

Travelling the world, I hope.