

Keir Howie

Call: 2010

“Keir is fantastic; he works incredibly hard to get his clients prepared and is always professional and personable.”

Insurance, Chambers UK Bar 2025



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Keir Howie maintains a wide-ranging practice in commercial litigation and arbitration. He has particular expertise in insurance and reinsurance, civil fraud, shipping and international trade, and all aspects of private international law.

Keir is ranked by both Chambers UK and Legal 500 for his work across multiple fields of commercial practice. He has been described in the directories as “one of the best juniors currently working at the commercial bar”, “a star of the junior bar”, and “ahead of any other junior of similar call”. He was also shortlisted for insurance junior of the year at the Chambers UK Bar Awards in 2020.

Keir has substantial experience of large-scale disputes, and he is familiar with the unique demands of heavy commercial trials in which very large sums are at stake. He has acted in several of the most high-profile commercial cases of recent years: prominent examples include the **Russian Aircraft LP Claims** (concerning aircraft lost following the war in Ukraine), **Brillante Virtuoso** (marine insurance fraud), **Republic of Djibouti v Boreh** (alleged corruption relating to infrastructure projects in Africa) and **Excalibur v Gulf Keystone** (dispute over oil and gas exploration rights in Iraqi Kurdistan). Each of these disputes involved claims for hundreds of millions of dollars and trials lasting for several months, and all attracted significant media interest.

Notable current and recent instructions include:

- **Russian Aircraft LP Claims:** acting for aviation hull all risks insurers in their successful defence of multi-billion dollar disputes regarding the alleged loss of aircraft following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- **Covid-19 business interruption matters:** acting for various insurers in respect of wordings not covered by the FCA test case, including the leading cases on damage-based wordings (**TKC v Allianz**) and ‘at premises’ coverage triggers (**London International Exhibition Centre v. RSA**).
- **SKAT v Solo Capital and others:** acting for one of the defendants in a fraud claim by the Danish revenue authorities, valued at more than £1 billion.

In addition to his practice as an advocate, Keir sits part-time as a Deputy District Judge on the Western Circuit, and will also accept instructions to give binding opinions or sit as an arbitrator.

Keir has a first class degree in Japanese from the University of Leeds and a masters degree in Japanese literature from the School of Oriental and African Studies, in both cases coming top of his year group. He read law at the University of Oxford, obtaining a first class degree and coming fourth in the year. He joined 7KBW in 2011 following the completion of pupillage in chambers.

If you are interested in instructing Keir, please contact our clerks to discuss the requirements of the case and his availability.

Expertise

Insurance and Reinsurance

Insurance and reinsurance work is one of the mainstays of Keir's practice, and he has been involved in some of the most significant issues to affect the market over the past decade, including most recently the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He was shortlisted for the insurance junior of the year award in 2020, and has been described in the directories as "the senior junior for insurance work", who "may well be the best junior currently working in this area".

Keir acts in a wide range of cases in this field, and has experience of most classes of business (including aviation, business interruption, construction, cyber, D&O, employers' liability, life, marine, medical, political and war risks, professional indemnity, property and trade credit matters). His expertise covers both insurance and reinsurance disputes. In addition to having a strong advisory practice, he acts in litigation and in domestic and international arbitrations (including Bermuda Form), and also has experience of representing clients at mediations.

Selected cases:

- **Russian Aircraft LP Claims** [2025] EWHC 1430 (Comm): Keir was the senior junior in a team acting for aviation hull all risks insurers in their successful defence of multi-billion dollar disputes regarding the loss of aircraft following the invasion of Ukraine.
- **London International Exhibition Centre v. RSA and Kaizen v. HDI** [2025] Bus LR 366: a series of preliminary issue trials in linked cases involving 'at premises' business interruption policies, exploring the wider implications of the FCA COVID-19 test case. Keir acted in the lead case (with Gavin Kealey KC) and as sole counsel in another claim, both at first instance and on appeal to the Court of Appeal.
- **Brillante Virtuoso** [2019] 2 Lloyd's Rep 475: a claim in excess of US\$100 million under a marine war risks policy, in which the principal defence was that the vessel was scuttled by means of a staged piracy attack. Keir acted for war risks insurers, led by Jonathan Gaisman KC, Richard Waller KC and Nichola Warrender. The claim was dismissed following a 10-week trial.
- **Equitas v Municipal Mutual Insurance** [2020] QB 418: a test case concerning the spiking of employers' liability reinsurance claims arising from exposure to asbestos, raising important questions about the scope of an insurer's duty of good faith. Keir acted for reinsurers, led by Colin Edelman KC. Reinsurers were successful in the Court of Appeal and the case settled shortly before it was due to be heard by the Supreme Court.
- **TKC v Allianz** [2020] 1 Lloyd's Rep IR 631: litigation under a business interruption policy arising from the closure of a hospitality business during the coronavirus pandemic, raising novel questions as to whether damage-based cover can respond to loss of use. Keir acted for the insurer and successfully obtained summary dismissal of the claim Led by Gavin Kealey KC.
- Currently acting for liability insurers in Bermuda court proceedings concerning the settlement of shareholder claims. Led by Andrew Wales KC.
- Currently acting for the reinsured in a political risk arbitration. Led by John Lockey KC.
- Currently acting for insurers in a Bermuda form product liability dispute. Led by David Edwards KC.
- Acted for the insurers of a major financial institution in a dispute under a cyber policy. Led by Gavin Kealey KC.

- Acted for insurers in the successful defence of a claim under a commercial general liability policy. Led by David Edwards KC.
- Acted as sole counsel in a £2.3m property insurance claim arising from a fire at a warehouse in Manchester, and represented clients at a mediation.
- Advised as sole counsel in various Bermuda Form disputes, including as to the attachment point of cover and the treatment of expected or intended losses.

Civil Fraud

Keir is often instructed in cases involving civil fraud and dishonesty, including extremely heavy and complex commercial frauds with an international element. Much of his work in this field has involved the handling of very high-profile and hard-fought disputes. He also has considerable experience of freezing injunctions and related interim relief.

Selected cases:

- **SKAT v Solo Capital Partners and others:** Keir acted for one of the defendants in these large-scale proceedings brought by the Danish revenue authorities, claiming sums in excess of £1 billion for alleged withholding tax fraud. The claim was dismissed following the hearing of preliminary issues, then reinstated on appeal. The case against Keir's clients was settled shortly before trial.
- **Maroil Trading v Cally Shipholdings and others:** substantial claim involving allegations of breach of confidence, the iniquity exception to confidentiality, and a claim to rescind a settlement on grounds of fraud. The case was set down for trial in 2022 and was set to be one of The Lawyer's top cases of the year, until being adjourned due to the impact of sanctions. Led by David Allen KC.
- **Brillante Virtuoso** [2019] 2 Lloyd's Rep 485: a US\$100 million claim involving allegations that a shipowner deliberately set his own vessel on fire by staging a piracy attack, in order to claim the proceeds of a war risks insurance. Keir acted as junior counsel for insurers at the 10-week trial, led by Jonathan Gaisman KC, Richard Waller KC and Nichola Warrender. The fraud allegations succeeded and the claim was dismissed.
- **Republic of Djibouti & others v Boreh & others** [2016] EWHC 405 (Comm): a major fraud claim against the former head of a port project in the Horn of Africa, who was accused of earning bribes and secret profits by abuse of his position. Keir was part of the defence team which secured the discharge of a worldwide freezing order by proving that the claimants' solicitor had deliberately misled the court (reported at [2015] 3 All ER 577), and then appeared at the heavy and factually complex ten-week trial, following which the claims were dismissed in their entirety. Led by Dominic Kendrick KC and Richard Waller KC.
- **Orb a.r.l. & others v Ruhan:** acted for the defendant in a £250 million Commercial Court claim involving allegations of dishonesty in connection with the sale and redevelopment of a hotel portfolio. Led by Jonathan Gaisman KC and Richard Waller KC.
- **Simetra Global Assets v Ikon Finance:** settled pleadings in a claim concerning the misappropriation of money in an alleged Ponzi scheme. Led by Clive Freedman QC (as he then was) and Jo Higgs.
- **Gamondi v Alemagna:** a case before the Antiguan courts concerning a judgment in a ship sale dispute which was alleged to have been procured through the use of falsified evidence. With David Bailey KC, Keir prepared a strike-out application which successfully disposed of the claim.

Commercial Litigation

In addition to his sector-specific expertise in fields such as civil fraud, insurance and shipping, Keir acts in a wide variety of high-profile

general commercial disputes.

Selected cases:

- **Russian Aircraft LP Claims** [2025] EWHC 1430 (Comm): successful defence of multi-billion dollar litigation involving the fall-out from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the loss of large numbers of Western aircraft.
- **SKAT v Solo Capital Partners and others**: representing a defendant group in a multi-billion dollar claim pursued by the Danish state, involving allegations of dishonesty in connection with cum-ex trading.
- **Maroil Trading v Cally Shipholdings and others**: substantial claim involving allegations of breach of confidence. Led by David Allen KC.
- Multi-million dollar LCIA arbitration involving allegations of expropriation against a sovereign state. Led by Richard Waller KC.
- Advised in relation to the contractual bonus entitlement of a highly paid chief executive. Led by Christopher Butcher QC (as he then was).
- Advised regarding the correct interpretation of property tax legislation in the Bahamas. Instructed as sole counsel.
- Advised, settled pleadings, and represented the defendant as sole counsel at a successful mediation in claims under the Commercial Agents Regulations.
- Successfully obtained an injunction against the Bank of Scotland to prevent the disposal of a valuable motor yacht, in support of substantive proceedings for conversion. Led by Stephen Phillips KC.
- Considerable experience of seeking and resisting security for costs (including acting in some of the largest security applications heard by the Commercial Court, and obtaining novel orders for security for the costs of detailed assessment proceedings).

Shipping & Transport

Keir acts and advises in a range of shipping and transport cases, frequently as sole counsel. Much of his work in this field is resolved in confidential arbitration, including on LMAA terms.

Selected cases:

- Arbitration involving allegations of breach of a long-term contract of affreightment, and claims for deadfreight. Led by Dominic Kendrick KC.
- Acted in a substantial arbitration dispute over unpaid hire in the long-term charter of an FPSO, and successfully secured an interim award for approximately US\$50 million. Led by Dominic Kendrick KC.
- Acted as sole counsel in a claim relating to stowage problems and unsafe port allegations.
- Advised and acted as sole counsel in various time and voyage charterparty matters, including laytime and demurrage disputes, off hire, deductions from hire, stevedore damage, speed and performance claims, striking out for want of prosecution, and disputes over the identity of parties to a charterparty.
- Advised and settled pleadings in a dispute under the CMR involving the theft of cargo.

Energy and Natural Resources

Keir has experience of a range of energy disputes, including large-scale litigation and arbitration in the upstream and midstream oil and gas industry. He is comfortable in dealing with the technical expert issues which arise in such disputes, as well as cases which raise questions of the wider commercial and political context affecting major energy projects.

Selected cases:

- Advised in relation to damage caused to an LNG plant following a fire, and the contamination of pipework at an oil refinery. Led by Richard Waller KC.
- Advised a dredging contractor in relation to damage to cables in the course of the construction of a wind farm. Acted as sole counsel.
- Advised in relation to claims under the LOGIC form in relation to the costs of a geotechnical survey. Acted as sole counsel.
- Acted for the defendant in a major arbitration claim relating to alleged interference with rights concerning gas fields in the Middle East. The case involved issues of loss of a chance, causation and scope of duty, as well as detailed political, technical, and economic analysis of the prospects for the relevant national and international energy sector and the global market. Led by Jonathan Gaisman KC, James Brocklebank and Sandra Healy.
- ***Excalibur Ventures LLC v Texas Keystone & others***: acted for the claimant in a five-month trial concerning oil exploration rights in Iraqi Kurdistan. The case was factually complex and engaged a wide range of expert issues, including upstream oil industry practice, investment banking, discounted cash flow modelling and both New York and Kurdish law. Led by Simon Picken QC (as he then was), Tim Kenefick and Jessica Sutherland.

Memberships

Commercial Bar Association

London Common Law and Commercial Bar Association

London Shipping Law Centre

British Insurance Law Association

Commercial Fraud Lawyers' Association

Appointments

Deputy District Judge (2022) – civil and private law family

Education

BA in Japanese and Asia Pacific Studies (first class, top in year, distinction in spoken Japanese) – University of Leeds, 2006

MA in Japanese Literature (distinction, top in year) – SOAS, 2007

BA in Jurisprudence (first class, 4th in year) – Lincoln College, University of Oxford, 2009

Bar Vocational Course (outstanding) – BPP London, 2010

Scholarships and prizes

Crabtree Prize (2003, 2005)

Japanese Ministry of Education Scholarship (2004)

Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society Award (2006)

Don Rimmington Prize (2006)

Gluckstein Scholarship (2008)

Queen Mother Scholarship (2009)

Baron Dr Ver Heyden de Lancey Prize (2010)

Languages

Japanese (both spoken and written).