



Meet the Cartels team: What it's like working at the CMA

What it is like working in the Cartels and Criminal Group at the Competition and Markets Authority: interviews with members of the team

Colleagues working in cartel enforcement volunteered to talk about their work, backgrounds and the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to convey the challenges, support and opportunities they experience.



Name: Sonya Branch

Role: Executive Director, Enforcement

Career: After completing my law degree I joined Linklaters. During my time there I worked on the ‘Windfall Tax’, which introduced me to an exciting mixture of economics, anti-trust law and politics. I next moved on to Clifford Chance where I led the Group’s financial services anti-trust practice, and worked on a number of international mergers and cartel investigations for some of the firm’s key clients, and became a partner.

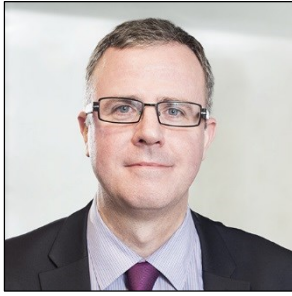
I was approached by the Chief Executive of what was then the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and joined as Senior Director in 2007. I joined the board in 2012.

Why are you still at the CMA? To be absolutely honest, I was only intending to join the OFT for a short stint of possibly two years. I thought that it would be beneficial for my clients if I spent some time with a regulator. It was and is the intellectual challenge, the calibre and variety of the work, and the quality of the teamwork which have compelled me to stay longer.

It is also a unique moment in the history of the UK competition and cartel regimes, with the establishing of the CMA and the passing of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 which I did not want to miss.

The sheer scale and depth of the work is intellectually stimulating and I think it is more challenging to deliver on this side of the fence – spending public money demands rigour and I enjoy working with a sense of public duty rather than being client-led.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Without hesitation. It’s a real privilege to work with such high-calibre, committed colleagues on intellectually stimulating cases which have real importance to millions of consumers.



Name: Stephen Blake

Role: Senior Director, Cartels and Criminal Group

Career: I qualified at Stephenson Harwood where I worked as an Assistant Solicitor. I joined the CMA's predecessor, the OFT, in 1998 as a competition lawyer and have been here ever since.

Why did you join in the first place? I arrived when the 1998 Competition Act was going through Parliament, it was an exciting opportunity to be involved at the start of a new regime.

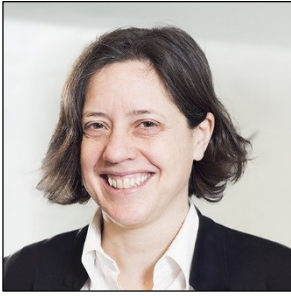
Why did you stay? I didn't have a game plan for my career, but certainly didn't expect still to be here 16 years later. I've stayed because the work has been so interesting. There have continued to be fundamental reforms to the competition regime and I have been able to play a part in that. This has included advising on some of the earliest Competition Act cases and appeals, including the Napp Pharmaceuticals case, and overseeing some of the UK's most significant civil cartel cases, such as the Independent Schools, Passenger Fuel Surcharges, Construction and Loans to Professional Services Firms cases. I also led the Marine Hose criminal investigation and had the opportunity to spend two and a half years on secondment to the European Commission's Directorate-General for Competition where I led the Professional Videotapes case and also helped develop the leniency provisions of the Commission's Network Notice.

In addition to the work itself, there have been opportunities for promotion and more responsibility which mean that I have been able to enjoy a successful, challenging and satisfying career.

Typical working day? Doesn't exist. The variety of the work is one of its many attractions.

Outside work? One of the benefits of being at the CMA is that it's easier to strike a healthy work/life balance. My family wouldn't necessarily agree, but by and large I think I have been able to achieve that.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Absolutely. I have no regrets whatsoever. The work is continually stimulating and there are excellent opportunities to develop your career – whether within the CMA or elsewhere.



Name: Juliette Enser

Role: Director – Cartel Enforcement

Career: My postgraduate diploma at the College of Europe in Bruges left me with an abiding interest in competition law. Having qualified as a barrister, I took a post as a junior lawyer in the Brussels office of global law firm, Weil Gotshal & Manges. I stayed at Weil for around ten years before joining what was then the OFT in 2010 as Assistant Director, Cartels. I became a Director in 2013.

What does the job entail? It really breaks down into two parts. Firstly, developing cartel policy, so that our regime is optimised to achieve effective enforcement: this involves liaising with international and domestic partners as well as working with colleagues in other areas of the CMA like Policy and Communications.

The other main part of my role is doing case work: assembling teams, providing strategic oversight, and engaging with external parties. I also play a substantial role in overseeing our leniency programme.

Why did you come to the CMA? I really liked competition law and I was excited by the opportunity to work in cartels as that was a relatively new area for me. I was initially unsure about working in the public sector, but I knew that even if it didn't suit me, I would have valuable experience for when I returned to private practice.

Why did you stay? I love it. I like the quality of the work. I get to influence the development of cartel law in the UK and beyond; I tackle difficult and frequently novel issues; I think about precedent-setting instead of putting up the best argument for my client; and I work with talented people with a range of skills from a variety of backgrounds. And in addition to that I have a massive amount of control over my time – if I am working at 11pm it is my choice.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Haven't I just done that? Of course, I would. It's a great place to work for all the reasons I've already mentioned. One final thing – in my entire time here I have never once been bored. Challenged, fascinated, intellectually stimulated, frustrated and many other things, but never once bored.



Name: Sarah Northam

Role: Assistant Director, CA98 Cartels Enforcement

Career: I qualified as a solicitor at Slaughter and May and worked in the EU and Competition group. I later moved to Norton Rose where I continued to specialise in competition law. I joined what was then the OFT in 2001 as a Principal Case Officer, Cartels. I have had a number of different roles including acting as a policy and legal adviser and representing the organisation internationally. Then around five years ago I moved back to the CCG as Assistant Director.

Why have you stayed so long? The work is high quality and always interesting; it is also important that I feel like I am contributing to the public good whilst doing it.

It doesn't matter if I am working on a case, policy project or working to influence legislation whether domestically or internationally: every day you come up against a novel issue or question that no one has seen before.

I also enjoy working with colleagues from different professional backgrounds, for example specialist investigators, who bring their own skills and experience to projects.

It is one of the strengths of working at the CMA and in the CCG in particular that we work in multi-disciplinary teams where a variety of different perspectives are brought together to create a stronger outcome.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Absolutely. For all the reasons I've already said but also because the CMA is a vibrant and young organisation which is very open to new ways of working; you are well rewarded both in terms of salary and work/life balance and you will never, ever be bored.



Name: Ruth Ashworth

Role: Assistant Director, CA98 Cartels Enforcement

What did you do before you came here? My background is in competition and regulatory law. I worked at Oftel and Ofgem and spent time on secondment to the Government of Gibraltar. Knowledge of competition issues across different sectors, combined with a background in the principles of EU law, have all proved useful to my work at the CMA.

What's good about the CMA? My workload is always interesting, varied and challenging. I make a strong contribution to wider policy projects across the organisation. Advocacy is vital to the CMA's work and I play a key part in this, for example writing speeches and helping produce guidance documents for external stakeholders. CCG is a stimulating place to work.

I work with specialist investigators, economists, policy advisers, and legal experts in the civil and criminal competition regimes. Every day is exciting and challenging. The CMA provides excellent learning and development opportunities, which are fully supported by staff managers.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Why? I have no hesitation in recommending the CMA as a place to work. The work has real variety and often calls for the ability to think of innovative solutions for complex problems and it is satisfying to feel that I am part of making a real difference to the lives of people and the UK economy as a whole.

And the opportunities for flexible working are second to none. I can work part-time and from home which allows me a good work/life balance.

I can say without any doubt that if I'd been working anywhere else I would not have returned from maternity leave. The CMA has enabled me to work flexibly and from home and still do useful and interesting work. Senior managers are hugely supportive and colleagues are always helpful. It is a great place to work.



Name: Lucília Falsarella Pereira

Role: Assistant Director, CA98 Cartels Enforcement

Career: Before settling in the UK I worked at DG Competition in Brussels, and as a competition lawyer in private practice in Brazil. I joined the OFT working as a case handler and head of EU mergers in the OFT's Mergers Group. I subsequently spent two and a half years seconded to HM Treasury, advising on competition law and policy during the financial crisis and its aftermath. I then returned to the OFT to join CCG.

Why have you stayed? The work is incredibly varied and challenging. My job involves dealing with almost all aspects of cartel enforcement and policy from handling leniency applications to representing the UK's interests in international gatherings and, of course, delivering cartel enforcement cases.

The CMA also offers many opportunities for exploring different roles and areas. For example, last year I took a two-month break from my job in CCG to lead a large multi-disciplinary team advising the Chancellor in relation to the divestments being made by RBS and Lloyds Banking Group. What motivates me the most is the impact of our work. We are very focused on delivering cases that make a real difference for consumers, with a beneficial impact on business behaviour and on the economy.

Typical day? There really is no such thing and I'm sure all my colleagues would agree. I will normally have ongoing strategic responsibility for at least one cartel case, but will simultaneously work on a number of other matters. In a single week I may be representing the UK at The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), working with experienced investigators to develop our strategy for a new cartel investigation, and acting as the 'devil's advocate' in a complex merger case. I also work closely with the Communications team to develop innovative compliance initiatives to ensure that the deterrence messages of our enforcement work are heard within the relevant industries.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? I certainly would. It is great to be part of the team that is building a respected and influential authority, and it's a particularly exciting time for CCG given our investment plans. I cannot think of a better place for someone who wants to work on challenging competition cases for the public good.



Name: Deborah Wilkie

Role: Assistant Director, CA98 Cartels Enforcement

Career: I joined the law firm Herbert Smith (now Herbert Smith Freehills) as a trainee in 2005. I qualified into their Litigation and Arbitration Division, representing clients in international arbitration proceedings as well as private competition litigation claims. I joined the OFT (now the CMA) in January 2014.

Why did you join? You're not the first to ask. I'm not a competition lawyer by background and lots of my former colleagues wondered why I was taking what seemed like such a leap into the unknown. In reality, the skill sets required have a lot of similarities. In private practice I was working on large-scale commercial disputes, which called for analysing, collating and presenting evidence, as well as talking to witnesses, dealing with experts and managing a team to deliver the case on time – which also forms a significant part of what I do now. So, I wasn't stepping into something entirely new but my new role was sufficiently different to make it feel like a challenge. Having worked in quite a specialised area, I wanted to build a more rounded and balanced CV. I had always been keen to spend some time working in the public sector and finally, I have a young family and this job has allowed me to spend more quality time with them without having to compromise on the quality of work I get to do.

Has it met your expectations? Definitely. The work has been incredibly varied, and it has been particularly exciting joining the CMA as a new organisation. As well as my day-to-day casework investigating suspected price-fixing and similar, I have also been involved in broader policy work. I've also really enjoyed the management side of things so, yes, it has been even better than I expected. The people side of things has also been a real pleasure – colleagues are from a real mix of backgrounds and disciplines, which is a refreshing change from private practice. There really is a strong sense of collegiality and senior management are also highly supportive, which has made taking on all the new challenges far less daunting than it might have been.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Absolutely. Working at the CMA has really delivered in terms of quality and variety of work and has given me opportunities to test myself in a completely new area. In the past few weeks, for example, I have been working with colleagues from across the CMA and the Cabinet Office, taken leniency calls from undertakings reporting cartel activity, represented the UK at meetings in Brussels, as well as making time to attend a seminar for the postgraduate course on European Competition Law which the CMA is funding me to do. I also think it's very useful to get an insight into how a regulator works – whatever your long-term career plan – and it's stimulating to step out of your comfort zone and to push yourself to try something new.



Name: Barbara Lievens

Role: Principal Case Officer

Career: I started out doing corporate law for international law firm Ashurst in Brussels in 2002, then I moved to their London office in 2005 where I worked as a competition lawyer until 2009 when I had a career break. I joined what was then the OFT in 2012 as a case officer in CCG, I was then promoted to Principal Case Officer in August last year.

Why did you join the CMA? I wanted to do interesting work in the field of competition law while maintaining a work/life balance and I was attracted to the public service aspect: working to make markets work well for consumers.

How has it worked out? Even better than I expected. I wasn't sure if working in cartels would suit me as I was concerned it might be too narrow but the work is very interesting and varied, and my recent promotion has brought new challenges. The atmosphere is very supportive and I feel appreciated.

There is a great deal of international work with competition authorities outside the UK, which I enjoy and I get involved in policymaking which gives a new perspective on the work. It's also very stimulating working with people other than just lawyers – there are investigators, forensic IT specialists, economists and others – and that makes for a diverse and interesting environment.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Of course. For all the reasons I just gave!



Name: Laurenz Maurer

Role: Principal Case Officer

Career: I started as a trainee solicitor at city law firm Masons (now Pinsent Masons) and then worked for five years as a commercial litigation solicitor at Osborne Clarke's Bristol office. My partner and I took a year's sabbatical to travel in Asia and move to London. When I came back in 2008 I joined the Government Legal Service (GLS), working first at the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) as an Investigative Lawyer and from 2011 as Litigation Lawyer and then Principal Case Officer at what was then the OFT (now the CMA).

Why did you join the GLS and then the CMA? Variety and quality of work. In the GLS you can apply to be a lawyer in any department. This in itself was an attraction although I was particularly interested in white-collar crime and regulation, areas in which I felt that I could also use my litigation experience. It may seem like moving from working as a solicitor in private practice to the SFO and then CMA was a big leap, but litigation skills such as taking witness statements, gathering and assessing evidence and project management are entirely transferable.

What do you do now? Part of my work involves working in the leniency team. I find leniency an exciting feature of competition law enforcement. I deal with companies or individuals which wish to confess they have been operating a cartel in exchange for immunity or leniency – taking the initial calls, receiving and analysing the evidence and advising on what action the CMA should take.

It's stimulating to work on a potential case from inception and to be involved in decisions about whether the CMA should prioritise it for investigation. Alongside this I also work on a number of cartel cases which the CMA has opened, and areas of policy work.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Yes. The work is really interesting and rewarding. The organisation understands the importance to its staff of a work/life balance. Teams are made up of talented and motivated staff from a diverse range of professional disciplines and backgrounds. These features make it addictive! However, there are good opportunities to move to other parts of the GLS or back into private practice or industry if people choose to do so.



Name: John McInnes

Role: Legal Director

Career: I qualified in 2002 at a City law firm and left to work at Ofcom for several years. I went back into private practice in 2006 and joined the CMA in 2014.

Why did you join the CMA? I was attracted by the role, which offered me the opportunity to work across the full range of the CMA's competition and regulatory functions. It was also an exciting time to join the CMA, shortly after it had been created.

Has it met your expectations? I have been involved in a wide range of different projects since I joined. The work has been particularly interesting and I really feel that I play a key part in important decisions. I have also taken on added responsibilities such as management. So, yes, it has met expectations.

Typical working day? No such thing and that's one of the most attractive things about my job and the CMA. Each day brings new challenges. One day I could be advising on a complex legal point that has arisen in an ongoing investigation and the next day I could be involved in helping to defend a decision of the CMA before the courts.

Would you recommend the CMA to others? Joining a regulator such as the CMA can enhance your career prospects. It is not a once-and-for-all decision – I have now moved between the private and public sector on several occasions. This has enabled me to see situations from both sides and has helped me to become better at my job.