

'Dieselgate' and church scandal keep firm busy

Nearly 850,000 drivers take on carmakers over emissions tests, while abuse victims call for compensation

Leigh Day

Lawyers 265

Turnover Not disclosed
Offices 10

Almost 850,000 drivers are collectively bringing claims against five leading car manufacturers over the alleged use of "defeat devices" to cheat emissions tests, in a three-month High Court trial.

In the UK's largest ever group claim, Leigh Day and 21 other law firms are representing drivers in the so-called dieselgate case being heard in the High Court.

They allege that vehicles from Mercedes-Benz, Ford, Renault, Nissan and Peugeot/Citroën were fitted with software designed to detect when cars were being tested and temporarily limit emissions to legal levels.

It is claimed that the cars emitted far higher levels of nitrogen oxides and particulates on the road, harming air quality and public health. The

carmakers deny wrongdoing, insisting that the devices were lawful and necessary to protect the engines.

The judgment is expected in mid-2026.

Leigh Day is also representing seven Zimbabweans in an abuse scandal that led to the resignation last year of the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby.

The claimants are victims of John Smyth, the late British barrister who abused children in the 1970s and 1980s at summer camps for young Christians. He is believed to be the most prolific serial abuser associated with the Church of England.

Smyth sexually, psychologically and physically abused about 30 boys and young men in the United Kingdom and 85 in Zimbabwe and South Africa over five decades. In 1992, 16-year-old Guide Nyachuru died at one of the camps in Zimbabwe.

Church officials first became aware of the abuse in 1982, when the Iwerne Trust circulated an internal report, citing the "horrific" beatings Smyth meted out to boys and young men. No action was taken and Smyth moved to Zimbabwe in 1984, later settling in South Africa.

In 2024, the Church of England-commissioned Makin Review found evidence of an "active cover-up" by church and Iwerne Trust figures to prevent the 1982 report coming to light. It also revealed that in 2013, Welby, then the Archbishop of Canterbury, had failed to report the abuse to the police when he became



Justin Welby resigned as Archbishop of Canterbury in 2024 after the publication of a damning report

aware of it. This failure eventually led to his resignation.

Six men and the mother of Nyachuru are seeking a full apology and independent review into the abuses perpetrated by Smyth in Zimbabwe and South Africa, as well as financial compensation.

Leigh Day acted for Joy Dove in the second inquest into the death of her daughter Jodey Whiting, which found that the withdrawal of benefits by the Department for Work and Pensions had triggered her suicide. It

also represented six Tamil Sri Lankan asylum seekers from a group of 61 held for more than three years in Diego Garcia. The Supreme Court of the British Indian Ocean Territory found they were unlawfully detained and were eligible for compensation.

Commended for administrative & public law; employment; human rights; personal injury & clinical negligence

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“A review found evidence of an ‘active cover-up’ by church figures

TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER RICHARD POHLE



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