



House Williams

## Family and Matrimonial Practice

January 2020

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**Howse Williams is an independent Hong Kong law firm which combines the in-depth experience of its lawyers with a creative, forward-thinking approach.**

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## **About Us**

Our key practice areas are corporate/commercial and corporate finance; commercial and maritime dispute resolution; clinical negligence and healthcare; insurance, personal injury and professional indemnity insurance; employment; family and matrimonial; property and building management; banking; financial services/corporate regulatory and compliance.

As an independent law firm we are able to minimise legal and commercial conflicts of interest and act for clients in every industry sector. The partners have spent the majority of their careers in Hong Kong and have a detailed understanding of international business and business in Asia.

The HW partners and their teams have an excellent reputation for delivering high quality legal advice with a practical and commercial approach to solving legal issues in line with clients' commercial objectives.

## Our Approach

We provide a personal, practical and cost-oriented approach to clients who are often undergoing a very stressful and difficult period in their lives. We work closely with other professionals in the field of family disputes, particularly mediators, to provide the best solution for our clients. We fully support mediation as an alternative method of resolving family disputes. We are accessible, respond immediately when emergencies arise and provide our services efficiently and effectively. Our clients' privacy and the confidentiality of their personal arrangements are treated with the utmost importance. We ensure that our clients have a realistic idea of what to expect from our services. We have no hesitation in taking action by way of legal proceedings immediately if the necessity arises but overall our approach is conciliatory. We are mindful that the cases we handle are very sensitive and often involve children. We provide practical solutions and protect our clients' interests.

## Our Family and Matrimonial Practice

Our team is led by **Linda Heathfield**, who has over 20 years of family and matrimonial legal experience. Our clients include professionals, entrepreneurs, owners of family businesses, celebrities, and high net worth individuals, often with assets in multiple jurisdictions around the world. Linda and her team have experience of contested multi-jurisdictional cases in the USA, France, Switzerland, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Canada, and the UK and have been involved in cases relating to the Hague Convention on the Abduction of Children involving children wrongfully removed from, or wrongfully brought to Hong Kong. In addition we provide advice upon the following:

- Relationship breakdown, divorce and separation, including financial applications and arrangements for children.
- Disputes involving the custody, care and control of children, including access and child maintenance.
- Issues involving children such as paternity, schooling and name change applications both in respect of married and unmarried couples and cohabitants.
- Abduction or return of children to or from Hague Convention and non-Hague Convention countries.
- Family financial issues such as maintenance claims and capital claims, including property transfers.
- Emergency injunction applications (e.g. to prevent the disposal of assets or their removal abroad and to protect the victims of abuse and domestic violence).
- Applications for private adoptions.
- Pre-nuptial agreements, post-nuptial agreements and separation deeds.
- Reputation management and media issues.
- Drafting of wills, probate and general civil litigation matters.
- Trusts, in particular family trusts, educational trusts and charitable trusts.

## International Fraud Group (IFG)

In 2015 HW was invited to join The International Fraud Group (IFG), an elite group of handpicked lawyers across 17 countries focused on unravelling fraud and tracing and returning assets. Being part of the IFG group enables us to track the electronic movement of money and, with an order, compel the institution that has handled it to tell us where it has gone. If it is still there, we will freeze it. IFG lawyers are experts in the use of cross-border piggyback injunctions. Being part of the IFG global network enables us to pursue fraudsters and recover assets across jurisdictions. HW is the sole Hong Kong representative of the group.



## Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (STEP)

HW Partner Stacey Devoy is a full member of STEP and is a qualified Trust and Estate practitioner. Stacey and her team give advice on a wide range of inheritance and succession matters including:

- Drafting trusts, wills and powers of attorney
- Safely passing on a family business from one generation to another
- Providing for an individual following their partner's death, while protecting the interests of their children
- Ensuring elderly or vulnerable relatives are cared for and supported
- Protecting the interests of co-habiting couples
- Helping clients to support charitable causes in an effective way

STEP is a worldwide professional association with over 20,000 members across 95 countries. STEP holds its members to the highest ethical and professional standards.





## Linda Heathfield

*Partner*

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Born in England and holding both British and Australian nationality, Linda was admitted to practice law in Hong Kong in October 1994 and in England and Wales in June 1995. She was later admitted to practice in Queensland Australia in January 2002.

Linda's cases often involve families with assets in multiple jurisdictions around the world. Her work includes all manner of children's issues, including custody, care and control and other parenting disputes, such as access, child maintenance, paternity and schooling applications both in respect of married and unmarried couples and cohabitants. Linda has processed a number of applications for private adoptions, usually with extended families or step-families and cases involving the abduction or return of children to or from Hague Convention and non-Hague Convention countries. Her work in respect of family finances has covered maintenance claims made for or against her clients, capital claims, including property transfers as well as an increasing number of pre-nuptial agreements, post-nuptial agreements and separation deeds.

Linda became an Executive Committee Member of the Hong Kong Family Law Association in 2006 and was its Chairlady in 2010 and 2011. She was elected a Fellow of the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers in 2007 and became a member of the International Academy of Collaborative Practitioners in 2009 with the objective of becoming an active collaborative lawyer. She has undertaken the first multi-disciplinary training set up in Hong Kong for collaborative family law. Linda has completed mediation and advanced mediation courses in 1996 and 1997 and whilst never becoming a practicing mediator, actively promotes mediation as a means of resolving her clients' disputes.

Linda has edited educational materials on family law and matrimonial practice for Legal Executives studying in Hong Kong through Hong Kong University in conjunction with the Institute of Legal Executives in the UK.

### ▼ *Experience*

2012 Howse Williams  
2008 Ip & Heathfield  
1994 Boase, Cohen & Collins

### ▼ *Education*

University of Hong Kong, 1991-1992  
University of Liverpool, 1973-1976

▼ *Professional Qualifications*

1994 Hong Kong

1995 England & Wales

2002 Australia (Queensland)

▼ *Professional Affiliations*

Fellow, International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (2007)

Member, International Academy of Collaborative Practitioners (2009)

Member of Lawasia



## Stacey Devoy TEP

*Partner*

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Stacey brings to Howse Williams almost 30 years experience as a litigator. Her practice deals with all issues confronting families when new relationships are formed or when relationships break down including marital agreements, separation, divorce, custody and access disputes, international relocation of children and all financial arrangements.

Prior to specializing in family law, Stacey worked in London's 'Magic Circle' dealing with complex, high value offshore trust litigation including the reported cases of Alhamrani in the Channel Islands and Minwalla, a leading family law decision of the High Court in London on 'sham' trusts that was enforced against a Jersey Trust and led to a change of legislation in Jersey.

Stacey is qualified to practice in Hong Kong, England & Wales and New Zealand. She was elected a fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers in 2017.

Stacey is particularly known for her skilled handling of complex multi-jurisdictional disputes and cases involving substantial wealth, offshore assets or trust structures. Stacey advises trustees caught up in divorce litigation and families involved in trust disputes in Hong Kong and abroad. She is often called upon to advise families in matters of wealth preservation, including the preparation of domestic and/or international nuptial agreements.

As a LEADR qualified 'all issues' mediator and specialist family mediator trained by Resolution in London, Stacey also assists parties to reach their own agreed and informed decisions concerning issues relating to separation, divorce, children, finance or property, by negotiation. Resolution describes Stacey's mediation style as 'insightful', 'balanced' and 'warm'.

Stacey is the author of 'Divorce in Hong Kong' for LexisNexis Practical Law. She is also a Registered Trusts & Estates Practitioner with STEP (the Society of Trust & Estate Practitioners) and is chairperson of STEP's Matrimonial Sub-Committee in Hong Kong. Stacey has been awarded the STEP Diploma in International Trust Management with distinction.

Stacey's international litigation credentials and connections benefit her clients wherever they encounter issues globally. Stacey's flair, technical skills and 'can do' approach attract many compliments from clients and other lawyers alike.

According to Chambers Asia Pacific Guide 2020, Stacey is 'quickly establishing a reputation in the market' and is 'definitely someone who is making an impact on family law'.

## ▼ Experience

2014 Howse Williams  
2008 Withers, London and Hong Kong  
2005 Mishcon de Reya, London  
2003 Clifford Chance, London  
2001 Peters & Peters, London  
1990 Carlie Dowling Solicitors, New Zealand

## ▼ Education

2016 STEP Diploma in International Trust Management (Distinction)  
2012 Resolution Qualified Mediator  
1998 LEADR Qualified Mediator  
1993 NZ Law Society Diploma Litigation Skills (Advocacy)  
1990 Victoria University of Wellington, NZ, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Laws

## ▼ Professional Qualifications

2013 Hong Kong  
2001 England and Wales  
1991 New Zealand

## ▼ Professional Affiliations

2017 Fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers  
2016 Registered Trust & Estate Practitioner, STEP  
2012 Hong Kong Family Law Association





## Karen Lam

*Partner*

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Karen was admitted to practice law in New South Wales, Australia in 2007 and Hong Kong in 2008. Karen's practice focuses on family law matters with emphasis on matrimonial disputes including divorce and separation, child custody, wardship and financial applications, third party interests, injunctions and settlements. Karen's other areas of focus are will drafting, probate and general civil litigation matters. Karen has litigation experience in the Court of Appeal, High Court, District Court and Family Court in Hong Kong.

Karen is a member of the Family Law Committee of the Law Society of Hong Kong and the Executive Committee of the Hong Kong Family Law Association. Karen was involved in the establishment of and is a member of the Executive Committee of the Hong Kong Collaborative Practice Group.

Karen is an Accredited Mediator on the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre's (HKIAC) Panel of General Mediators and is a Civil Celebrant of Marriages in Hong Kong.

Karen teaches the part time PCLL Course at The University of Hong Kong.

Karen speaks fluent English, Cantonese and Chinese Mandarin.

### ▼ *Experience*

2012 Howse Williams  
2009 Ip & Heathfield  
2008 Boase, Cohen & Collins

### ▼ *Education*

PCLL, City University of Hong Kong  
Bachelor of Laws, University of New South Wales, Australia  
Bachelor of Commerce, University of New South Wales, Australia

### ▼ *Professional Admissions / Qualifications*

2008 Hong Kong  
2007 New South Wales, Australia  
2010 Accredited General Mediator  
2016 Civil Celebrant of Marriages

▼ *Professional Affiliations*

Member of the Family Law Committee, The Law Society of Hong Kong

Member of Executive Committee, Hong Kong Family Law Association

Member of Executive Committee, Hong Kong Collaborative Practice Group

Member, LAWASIA

Member, International Academy of Collaborative Professionals

## Our Team



**Victoria Ng**  
*Senior Associate*

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Victoria was admitted to practice law in Hong Kong in 2013. Her practice focuses on family law particularly marital disputes, including divorce and separation, custody, care and control matters, access arrangements, financial settlement, ancillary relief applications, injunction applications and pre-nuptial and post-nuptial agreements. She engages in cross-jurisdictional cases, especially in relation to relocation of children applications and forum non-conveniens disputes litigation.

Victoria is a member of the Family Law Association. She is fluent in English, Putonghua and Cantonese.



**Stephanie Ng**  
*Senior Associate*

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Stephanie was admitted as a solicitor in Hong Kong in 2013. She advises on all areas of matrimonial law, including matters relating to divorce and separation, ancillary relief applications, wardship proceedings, and disputes with regard to custody and access to children. Stephanie also has experience in dispute resolution, trusts and probate. Stephanie is fluent in English, Cantonese and Mandarin.



## **Nicole Cavanagh**

*Associate*

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Nicole graduated from Leicester University with a genetics degree before undertaking her legal studies at the College of Law in York. She then joined a UK firm as a trainee and became a partner before moving to Hong Kong in 2012.

Nicole qualified as a Solicitor of the High Court of Hong Kong in 2013. She joined Howse Williams in 2019 as an Associate in the firm's Matrimonial Department and works with both local and international clients.

Throughout her career, Nicole has worked on cases involving divorce, separation, nuptial agreements, finances and matters relating to children's arrangement, including relocation.



## **Julia Wilhite**

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Julia trained in one of Ireland's largest law firms and qualified into its leading tax practice. Julia was admitted to practice law in both Ireland and England & Wales in 2018 and as a Registered Foreign Lawyer in Hong Kong in 2019. Julia works on matters relating to divorce and separation, ancillary relief applications, and disputes with regards to custody and access to children.

