



NIJAC

*Northern Ireland Judicial
Appointments Commission*

A GUIDE TO JUDICIAL CAREERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND



published by NIJAC

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Foreword by the Chairman

I commend this guide to anyone considering judicial office in Northern Ireland. It has been produced after a great deal of consultation, research and hard work by the Commissioners and staff in the Judicial Appointments Commission. It seeks to explain the Commission's role and a number of related issues about appointments, as well as giving pen pictures on a number of those appointed. I hope you will find it informative.



Brian Kerr

Message from the Chief Executive



Robert Quinn

The Commission hopes that this Guide will help raise awareness about opportunities for appointment to judicial office and will inform readers on the processes for applicants as well as providing details of the day-to-day responsibilities of judicial office holders. Naturally it can not be a definitive resource on all judicial posts but it seeks to cover areas such as the role of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission and the work of the courts and tribunals. It also highlights sources for further information.

The Guide seeks to dispel some of the misconceptions that we are aware of from our research about those who can become a member of the judiciary. We also hope that it will help to dispel some of the myths about the system of appointment so that possible candidates are not deterred from putting themselves forward. While there are, naturally, eligibility requirements for the posts, the Commission has looked at these very closely and is satisfied that they are required for the nature of the work concerned.

It is worth highlighting some of the challenges that lie ahead for the Commission. If there is devolution of justice, then the Northern Ireland Act 2009 will extend our statutory responsibilities. There is also the prospect of the unification of the Tribunals Service in Northern Ireland which may well lead to further appointments falling to the Commission.

I would like to take an opportunity to thank those members of the judiciary who provided profiles for this Guide. They are all busy people and their contributions are very much appreciated.

I trust that you will find this Guide to be informative. If there are any areas that you feel that should be covered which have not been, then please do let us know.

The role of NIJAC

The Belfast Agreement (1998) provided for a wide-ranging review of criminal justice in Northern Ireland.

The establishment of NIJAC flows from the Criminal Justice Review, which recommended a more open and transparent way of appointing judges by giving responsibility for identifying the best person to an independent Commission (NIJAC).

NIJAC has five key responsibilities:

- To conduct the appointments process and make selections and recommendations to the Lord Chancellor in respect of all listed judicial appointments up to and including High Court judge.
- To recommend individuals solely on the basis of merit.
- To engage in a programme of action to secure, so far as it is reasonably practicable to do so, that appointments to judicial office are reflective of the community in Northern Ireland.
- To engage in a programme of action to secure, so far as it is reasonably practicable to do so, that a range of persons reflective of the community in Northern Ireland is available for consideration by the Commission whenever it is required to select a person to be appointed, or recommended for appointment, to a listed judicial office.
- To publish an annual report setting out the activities and accounts for the past year.

NIJAC's core business is running appointment schemes for judicial office; legal, professional, and lay members: 779 judicial posts in all, with 124 offices in the Courts, 423 in Tribunals and 232 lay members.

Since its inception in 2005, NIJAC has conducted 19 recruitment campaigns and has recommended for appointment to judicial office 174 people: 57 legally qualified, 8 medically qualified, 3 from the Forces and 106 lay members. The Commission has also overseen 84 reappointments to judicial office during this time*.

* Figures as at 1 January 2009



NIJAC Commissioners

The Lord Chancellor has appointed (or reappointed) the following Commissioners.

The Right Honourable Sir Brian Kerr,
the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland;

Mrs Sinéad Burns, Lay Magistrate;

The Right Honourable Lord Justice Coghlin, Appeal Court Judge;

Mr Peter Cush, Barrister-at-Law;

Mr Donal Flanagan OBE;

Mr John G Gordon, Solicitor;

District Judge Amanda Henderson, District Judge (Magistrates' Court);

Mrs Ruth Laird, Lay Member;

Her Honour Judge Loughran, County Court Judge;

Professor John Morison, Lay Member;

Dr Raymond Mullan OBE, Lay Member;

Dr Nichola Rooney, Lay Member; and

The Honourable Mr Justice Weatherup, High Court Judge.



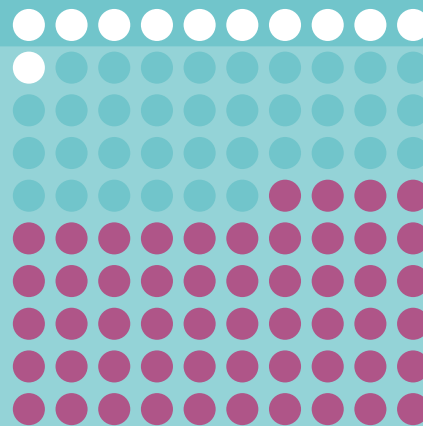
Individual profiles of each Commissioner can be viewed on our website at the following address: <http://www.nijac.org/commissioners>

Courts, Tribunals and the Judiciary in Northern Ireland

The work of the courts and tribunals is wide and varied as are the judicial offices that serve them. This chapter provides an insight to their work and profiles some judicial offices.

Figure 1:

% Breakdown of the 779 current Judicial Offices



Judicial Posts

- Court of Appeal, High Court, Crown Court & County Court **11%**
- Magistrates' Court **35% ***
- Tribunals **54%**

* includes Lay Magistrates





The House of Lords

The House of Lords is the final Court of Appeal in the United Kingdom and hears appeals on points of law in cases of major importance.

During 2009, judges in the House of Lords will transfer to a new Supreme Court for the UK and will be known as Justices of the Supreme Court.

The Court of Appeal

The Court of Appeal sits at the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. The four judges of the Court of Appeal are the Lord Chief Justice, who is the President and three Lords Justices of Appeal.

The Court of Appeal hears appeals in civil matters from the High Court and in criminal matters from the Crown Court. It also hears appeals on points of law from the county courts, magistrates' courts and certain tribunals. A Court of Appeal case will usually be heard by three judges.

Currently in Northern Ireland the Court of Appeal, High Court and the Crown Court are collectively known as the Supreme Court of Judicature of NI.

Constitutional reform during 2009 will mean that the Supreme Court of Judicature of NI will be renamed as the Court of Judicature of NI.

The High Court

The High Court sits at the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. It currently consists of the Lord Chief Justice and ten High Court judges.

The High Court handles cases of high value or certain complex cases or applications, such as judicial review.

The High Court comprises three Divisions: Chancery, Queen's Bench and Family.

Masters are generally responsible for exercising the jurisdiction of the High Court where, by statute or under Rules of Court, jurisdiction does not fall to a judge.

Queen's Bench, Chancery and Bankruptcy Masters deal with most of the interlocutory work and applications arising within their areas of jurisdiction, and in certain circumstances may also try actions.

The Taxing Master has powers to assess the costs of any actions in the Supreme Court of Judicature of NI and hears appeals against decisions made by determining officers in the Crown Court.

Crown Court

The Crown Court has exclusive jurisdiction to try offences charged on indictment. Offences tried on indictment are the more serious offences.

The Lord Chief Justice is President of the Court and the Lords Justices of Appeal, High Court judges and county court judges may exercise the jurisdiction of the Crown Court. The Crown Court sits at 13 venues throughout Northern Ireland.

In ordinary criminal cases (those that do not involve terrorist-type offences), if a defendant pleads not guilty, a jury of 12 men and women (members of the public) decides whether or not he or she is guilty.



There is no jury in cases certified by the Director of Public Prosecution which, for example, are believed to involve proscribed organisations. In such cases, only the judge decides whether the defendant is guilty or not. In both types of case, only the judge decides the sentence. In certain circumstances the defendant may appeal to the Court of Appeal and in non-jury trials the defendant has the automatic right to appeal to the Court of Appeal.

County Court

In Northern Ireland there are seven county court divisions. There is currently a complement of 17 county court judges, 31 deputy county court judges, four district judges, and five deputy district judges. A county court judge can hear a case up to the value of £15,000; a district judge £5,000 contested or £15,000 uncontested. County courts are where everyday civil disputes are heard.

Typical cases involve the recovery of debts, trespass, negligence, adoptions and undefended divorces. Applications for the grant of intoxicating liquor licences and certificates of registration for clubs are also made to the county courts.

The county court also hears appeals from the magistrates' courts.

The judge has the jurisdiction to over-turn, uphold or give her/his own judgment in relation to decisions/sentences of the lower court.

Four county courts have been designated as Family Care Centres to deal with certain applications or appeals relating to the care or welfare of a child or young person under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Magistrates' Courts

There are 21 petty sessions' districts in Northern Ireland.

A magistrates' court (other than a youth court or family proceedings court) is presided over by a district judge (magistrates' court).

Magistrates' courts exercise two basic functions in respect of criminal proceedings:

1. the summary trial of relatively minor offences or of indictable offences which may be tried summarily. The vast majority of criminal cases in Northern Ireland are dealt with by the magistrates' courts.
2. youth courts are specially constituted courts of summary jurisdiction composed of a district judge (magistrates' courts) and two lay magistrates (of whom at least one must be a woman) which deal with criminal matters in relation to children.

The main types of civil business transacted by the magistrates' courts are family and domestic cases, debt processes and applications for certain licences.



Coroners' Court

There are four full-time coroners in Northern Ireland - one of whom is a Senior Coroner. In addition, there is a part-time Presiding Coroner, a position held by a High Court judge.

Coroners inquire into deaths reported to them that appear to be unexpected or unexplained; as a result of violence or an accident; as a result of negligence; or from any cause other than natural illness or disease.

A coroner will consider if it is necessary to hold an inquest into a particular death, and he or she may also direct a post-mortem examination. This may be followed by the holding of a formal inquest, which may either be conducted over by the coroner only or by a coroner with the assistance of a jury.

The purpose of an inquest is to establish how, when and where the death occurred. An inquest does not decide questions of criminal or civil liability.

For further information about the courts in Northern Ireland go to www.courtsni.gov.uk

Enforcement of Judgments Office

The Enforcement of Judgments Office (EJO) deals with enforcing money judgments and judgments that are connected with the possession of land and property.

The EJO also provides access to the public register of judgments and provides creditors with reports as to the assets and liabilities of the debtors they are enforcing against. It is not a debt-collecting agency.

For further information about the EJO go to www.courtsni.gov.uk





Tribunals

Tribunals are independent judicial or quasi-judicial bodies set up under legislation to hear and determine appeals and other legal matters to do with specific areas of the law or decisions from government departments.

There is a vast range of tribunals. Some tribunals employ large numbers of administrative and judicial staff working through extensive case loads, and other tribunals sit only occasionally.

Not all are under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Court Service as some are the responsibility of other government departments. NIJAC currently recruits on behalf of many, but not all tribunals.

On many occasions, members of the tribunal will sit as a panel to adjudicate on cases. Although usually chaired by a member with a legal background, the career background of the other panel members will depend on the tribunal.

The Northern Ireland Executive endorsed the reform programme in 2008 and asked for work to be taken forward. This work is now complete and it is expected that the Executive will shortly consider the programme further and approve the transfer of tribunals over a 12-15 month period. The Northern Ireland Court Service will then be responsible for the administration of 20 tribunals which deal with approximately 30,000 cases per annum.

The reform programme seeks to provide an independent and modern tribunal system which is customer focused.

The President of each tribunal sits on a Tribunal Presidents' Group chaired by a Lord Justice of Appeal.

This Group and the office holders it represents will play a key role in shaping and implementing the reforms.

This is an interesting and challenging time for tribunal judicial office-holders.

Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal

One of the largest and busiest tribunals is the Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal. A panel of three will typically consist of one legal professional (known as the “Chairman” - and not necessarily male - as the title might imply), one lay member with a Trade Union background and another lay member typically from a management or Human Resources background - www.employmenttribunalsni.co.uk

For more information on the work of Judicial Officers in the Industrial Tribunal and Fair Employment Tribunals, please see pages 22 and 32.

Social Security Commissioners and Child Support Commissioners

The SSC&CSC are responsible for dealing with applications for permission to appeal to, and from, appeal tribunals and child support appeal tribunals.

Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal (NIVT)

The NIVT is responsible for determining appeals from the Commissioner of Valuation for NI, in respect of domestic rates and other rating appeals, including those relating to disability, education and lone pensioner rating relief - www.nivaluationtribunal.org

For more information on the work of NIVT, please see page 28.

The Care Tribunal

The Care Tribunal hears appeals relating to the regulation of residential care homes, nursing homes, children’s homes, nursing agencies and independent health care providers and other care services; decisions prohibiting or restricting the employment of individuals teaching or working with children or working with vulnerable adults or decisions concerning the registration of social workers - www.caretribunalni.gov.uk

For more information on the work of Care Tribunal, please see page 34.

Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland

The Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland resolves a range of disputes about the value of land and buildings, and about their occupation, use or development - www.landtribunalni.org

For more information on the work of the Lands Tribunal, please see page 36.

Mental Health Review Tribunal

The Mental Health Review Tribunal is responsible for deciding upon the necessity for the compulsory detention of mentally disordered patients in hospital or the continuation of guardianship or aftercare under supervision.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal

The function of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal is to hear appeals from parents against certain Education and Library Board decisions on their children’s special educational needs.

Pensions Appeal Tribunals

The Pension Appeal Tribunals (PAT), deal with appeals against certain decisions the Veterans Agency have made on war disability pensions. A PAT panel will normally consist of three members - a qualified lawyer, a qualified medical practitioner and a member who served in the armed forces.

To view the full range of judicial offices for which NIJAC currently recruits see: www.nijac.org/publications



THE JUDICIARY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Myths and Realities

Myth

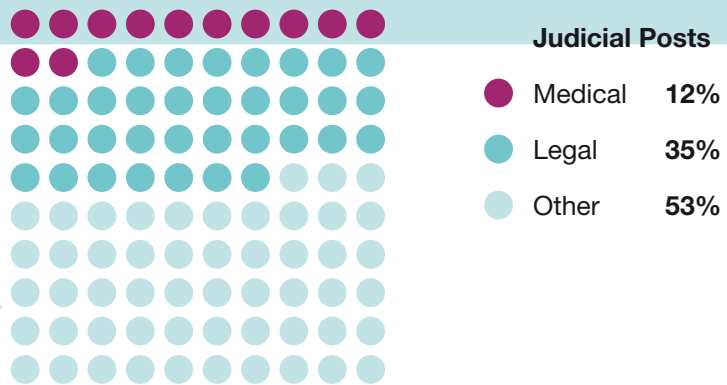
Reality

You need to have a legal qualification for all judicial offices

It is true that a legal qualification is mandatory for posts in the higher court tiers but you do not need to be a legal professional (i.e. solicitor or a barrister) to become a judicial office holder (see Figure 2). There are many judicial posts in Northern Ireland which are held by people from different professions (e.g. medicine, human resources, valuation specialists, etc). Most non-legal posts are fee-paid and are found within the magistrates' courts and tribunals.

Figure 2:

Professional Background of Judicial Post Holders



Myth

Reality

Most Judicial Office Holders in Northern Ireland are men

While there are no female judges currently in the High Court, 4 out of 17 County Court judges are women. Furthermore, women also constitute approximately 50% of tribunal membership and at lay magistrate level 54% are women.

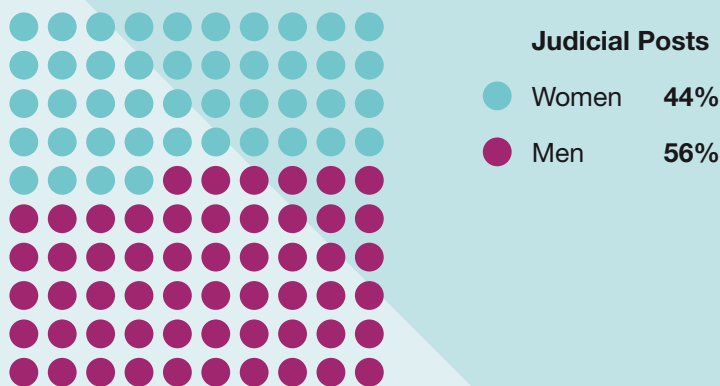
As at 1 January 2009 the overall gender breakdown of the Northern Ireland judiciary was fairly balanced (see Figure 3); women constitute 346 (44%) of current judicial office holders out of a total of 779 judicial appointments. Whilst there is no woman High Court judge, the High Court only accounts for 11 judicial posts out of a total of 779.

Whilst more men than women are likely to apply for legal judicial office (23% and 13% respectively) proportionately women are more successful with their application (48% men and 59% women).

Statistics are taken from the NIJAC equity monitoring database as at 1 January 2009.

Northern Ireland Research & Statistics Agency - Survey of Views about Judicial Appointments (May 2007)

Figure 3: Gender Breakdown of Current Judicial Post Holders



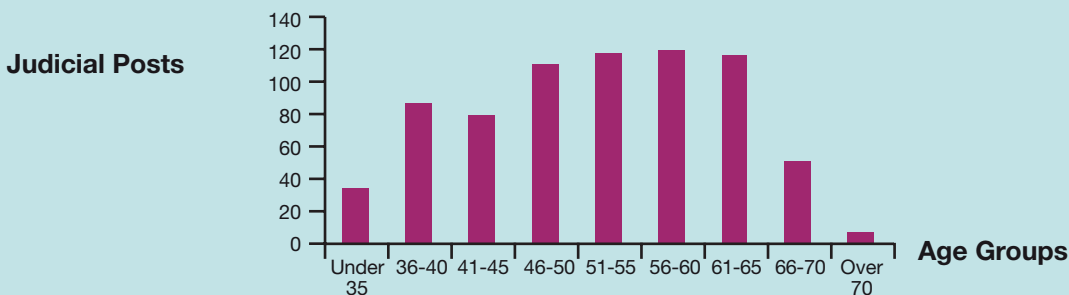
Myth

Becoming a Judicial Office Holder is something to consider at the end of my career.

Reality

Senior judicial posts that require a legal background ask for a minimum number of years' standing; currently 5, 7 or 10 years depending upon the position. Figure 4 shows a break-down of age over all judicial posts. 43% of judicial post holders are aged 50 and under, with only 24% over 60. Some judicial office holders who are profiled in this guide have highlighted that they first secured a fee-paid role before applying for a full-time judicial post.

Figure 4: Age Profile of Judicial Post Holders as at 1 January 2009



Myth

All Judicial Office Holders wear court dress

Reality

Tribunals constitute 423 (approximately 54%) of judicial appointments. Tribunal proceedings tend to be more informal and Presidents, Chairmen and members (ordinary and non-legal professionals) do not wear wigs and gowns. In addition, lay magistrates constitute 30% of judicial appointments and they also do not wear formal court dress.*

Statistics taken from the NIJAC equity monitoring database as at 1 January 2009.

Myth

Being in Judicial Office can be an isolating experience.

Reality

A number of current judicial office holders across courts and tribunals have given an insight to their working lives. A few of these judicial office holders do comment on the isolation of the role; however many highlight the satisfying aspects of their roles which over-ride any sense of isolation.

There are a number of formal and informal networks organised, for example by the Judicial Studies Board, where individuals meet.

Myth

Judicial Appointments are still a case of “who you know and not what you know.”

Reality

Absolutely not, indeed recent research findings reveal that two thirds out of a total of 1,087 respondents (judicial office holders, solicitors and barristers) had no previous links to the legal profession before entering it, with only 11% stating that they had a parent linked to the legal profession.

On closer inspection, it was revealed that a higher proportion of women than men (69% and 63% respectively) had no such links and the proportion of those from a Protestant and Catholic community background was almost equal i.e. 66% Protestant and 65% of Catholic respondents had no previous links or involvement with the legal profession.

NIJAC selects and recommends applicants for judicial office on merit, through open and fair competition and by selecting from the widest possible range of eligible applicants.

Myth

Women are not inclined to apply for judicial office as it doesn't provide a good work/life balance

Reality

Research revealed that flexible working patterns was one of the primary concerns for women considering judicial office. It is interesting to note that 77% of all respondents (legal professionals and judicial office holders) considered that flexible working was an attractive aspect to applying for judicial office (25% of the 77% were men).

In fact 94% of all respondents were attracted by the 'interesting work' aspect of judicial office, 89% by the public service ethos and 78% by the potential to change career focus.

Myth

You have to be Barrister if you want to hold Judicial Office

Reality

Recent appointment schemes have demonstrated that more and more solicitors are applying for judicial office, and many of the judicial office holders interviewed for this guide have indicated that they have a solicitor background.

Furthermore, 65% of current judicial office holders are either ‘ordinary members’ recruited from the public or from a non-legal professional background.

Myth

Community Background plays a role in the Judicial Appointments Process

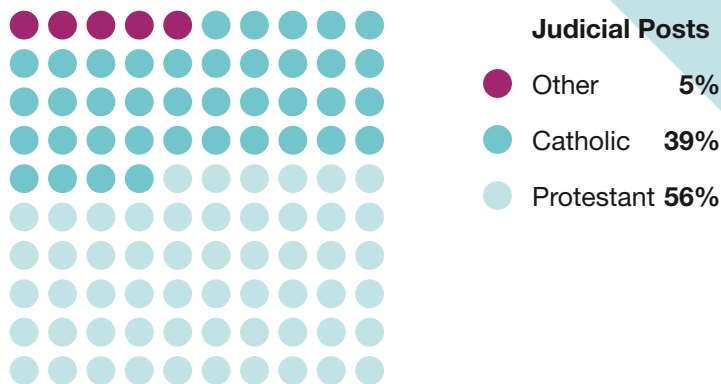
Reality

56% of judicial office holders declared a Protestant community background, 39% declared a Catholic community background and 5% stated that they were from neither background (see Figure 5). This is reasonably reflective of Northern Irish society.

Recent research findings also reveal that respondents felt that the issue of community background was irrelevant in relation to the judicial appointments process.

Figure 5:

Community Background of Judicial Post Holders



For further information about the research undertaken by the Commission - please click on the following link www.nijac.org/publications/research

Profiles of Judicial Post Holders in Northern Ireland



Judge Burgess

Recorder of Belfast

Judge Burgess was appointed county court judge in 1992. He was the first Northern Ireland solicitor to be appointed to this position.

He became Recorder of Londonderry in 1993 and in 2005 he was appointed Recorder of Belfast. The judge assigned to the Belfast Recorder's Court is termed the Recorder of Belfast and is assisted by 3 other county court judges who are also assigned to that division. Traditionally the Recorder of Belfast is regarded the senior county court judge in Northern Ireland.

What attracted you to this post?

I had been a deputy county court judge, sitting part-time but regularly, on civil work for a couple of years, so I had a fair idea of the judicial function. The decision to accept full-time appointment and to give up other plans, which were at an exciting stage, was frankly a difficult one. But I have absolutely no regrets about my choice, and I am delighted also that we now have three other solicitor colleagues: Judge Derek Rodgers, Judge David McFarland and Judge Philip Babington serving with such distinction on the county court bench.

Is the job what you imagined it to be?

The position of Recorder of Belfast has always tended to be regarded de facto as distinctive, if only because the amount of work transacted in Belfast has historically made it the busiest court venue.

In April 2006, however, a new dimension was added to my role with my appointment as Presiding Judge

with responsibility for the county courts. This was part of the re-structuring of responsibilities for judicial business under the Justice Act 2004, with presiding judges appointed at each court tier accountable overall to the Lord Chief Justice.

Describe a typical day or week in your post

The practical outworkings of all this is that, in addition to sitting each day in Court (mainly in the Crown Court but also in civil and family matters) I remain responsible for the administration of the county court work in Belfast specifically, but I am also responsible for the delivery of an efficient and timely disposal of the work of the county courts across Northern Ireland.

This involves working with my colleagues to ensure the best allocation of judicial resources, but also to develop good, standardised and consistent working practices and protocols aimed at managing cases from an early stage to hearing or trial.



I have other responsibilities in terms of sitting on Committees and chairing the County Court Rules Committee. I also have responsibility for working with the Court Service in the running of the Laganside Courts Complex, and chair the Users' Committee comprising a wide range of users of the court building and the court system.

What part of the job gives you the most satisfaction?

No matter how important efficient case management and technical aids are to the job, judicial work will always be fundamentally a people business. The intellectual challenge and stimulation are rewarding.

While achieving an efficient service will always bring a proper sense of satisfaction, the real work as a judge is, that this must always be conducted at a human level.

There is nothing as sobering but at the same time rewarding as discharging, to the best of your ability, responsibilities which you know have a significant impact on the present and future lives of others, victims and defendants, many being vulnerable human beings.

This applies whether you are dealing with a finely-balanced question of guilt or innocence, length of custodial sentence, or the emotional devastation of a family break-up and determining the arrangements for children.

What is your view of a judicial career?

A judicial career will not be for everyone. Like any job it has its fulfilments and frustrations but there has never been a more propitious time for solicitors to consider this as a serious career option. The fact that solicitors are now eligible statutorily for all judicial posts is important and welcome but is only part of the picture.

We also have young people, female and male, of ability and tremendous potential joining the solicitors' ranks, and a Judicial Appointments Commission which is keen to explore ways of maximizing the attraction of able candidates.

My last word of advice and encouragement to any solicitor would be - if you get a chance to serve in a judicial capacity, whether full or part-time, take it. The prospect may be a little scary, but you never know where you may end up.

Source: *The Writ*, October 2006.

Reproduced with the kind permission of the Law Society of Northern Ireland and His Honour Judge Burgess.

“My last word of advice and encouragement to any solicitor would be - if you get a chance to serve in a judicial capacity, whether full or part-time, take it.”

Judge Burgess,
Recorder of Belfast





District Judge Prytherch

District Judge (Magistrates Court)

District Judge Prytherch is a district judge (magistrates' court).

District Judge Prytherch was appointed to her current position in 2005 having spent 18 years as a Partner in a Belfast-based Commercial Practice, specialising in Employment Law.

She is married with three young children.

What attracted you to this post?

Having been in private practice for many years, I had reached the point where I wanted to take on something new and challenging.

With three young children not everything would have suited as I wished to continue to work part-time, so when I saw the position of Resident Magistrate (as it then was) advertised on a part-time permanent basis I decided to apply.

Is the job what you imagined it would be?

Before my appointment I was a partner in a commercial law firm and I specialised in employment law. I was looking for a change and a challenge and I can safely say that the job of district judge (magistrates' court) has certainly been both.

In addition to the real challenge of taking on a judicial position in areas of practice previously unfamiliar to me, I have found the position to be very interesting and rewarding. It has more than lived up to my expectations.



“My current role as a part-time district judge (magistrates’ court) maintains this balance (work/family) and I would certainly not have applied for the job had it not been advertised on a part-time basis.”

District Judge Prytherch (Magistrates’ Court)

What does your working day look like?

There isn’t really a typical day for me. As a part-time district judge (magistrates’ court) I work 3 days each week. I am largely peripatetic.

I usually know two weeks in advance where I will be sitting and the type of court (e.g. youth, domestic, family, adult) but I will generally not know what cases are in the list before I arrive at court.

I try to get to court early enough so that I can find out what is listed and if there is anything which requires specific attention before court begins.

I will also try to read any reports which have been prepared for cases in the list at this stage. Often before court there will be emergency applications to be dealt with: these are generally ex parte applications in respect of children or in respect of domestic violence.

Once the court starts things can move very quickly and the pace in the adult courts in particular is usually very brisk indeed.

What is the hardest part of your job?

In private practice I would have had time to consider any problem in the privacy of my office and ask colleagues for their views. Now by and large all of this is done in public in the court room and, save for the family and youth courts, the decisions made are mine alone.

What would you say to someone considering applying for judicial office?

I would say apply.

Even if someone considers that their experience is not directly relevant they should not under-estimate their ability to learn something new if they are prepared to put in the work necessary and can overcome the initial terror.

Is your job conducive to a good work/life balance?

I have always sought to achieve a good work/life balance (which at this stage in my life is really a work/family balance) and in private practice I changed my working pattern to part-time once I had children.

My current role as a part-time district judge (magistrates’ court) maintains this balance and I would certainly not have applied for the job had it not been advertised on a part-time basis.



District Judge Wells

District Judge

District Judge Wells was appointed a deputy district judge (a fee-paid position) in 1993 whilst in private practice.

Prior to succeeding at competitive interview to his present position in January 1996, District Judge Wells had spent 15 years in private practice as a solicitor where he specialised in commercial and property work, and three years serving as a deputy district judge.

What attracted you to this post?

Leaving private practice was a big change and a huge personal decision. In many ways, it was a step into the unknown but then again, I really enjoyed my time as a deputy district judge and I got a taste for the kind of work that district judges do.

Looking back, it is rare that you get an opportunity to do something completely different mid-career. I am glad that I had the opportunity to go for it.

When I did decide to apply for the post, it was with an understanding that I would be contributing more in terms of public service.

Is the job what you imagined it would be?

In many ways, it is much better than I expected it would be.

Personally, I have settled into the role and job very well. I do not miss the commerciality of private practice and I can honestly say, I am not sorry to have left that aspect of practice behind me.

An important part of my role now centres on case management; I find it much more fulfilling to commence work on a case and follow it quickly through to completion.

In private practice, there were always other people, colleagues, barristers, etc collaborating on cases and helping bring issues to a resolution. Now I have much greater control over case progression; that is my own personal responsibility.

What does your working day look like?

I usually get into my chambers around 9am and will read my papers ahead of my first court sitting at 10am. I generally keep going until the last case is heard and I manage my day around that. The time you leave office or court really depends on when you finish your work. Very often I will read the next day's case papers before I leave (particularly with Ancillary Relief cases).

Personally speaking, I am able to get all of my work done at the court office and I very rarely, if ever, am required to work at home or late in the evenings.

The role allows you to be in control of your work but this in turn requires a lot of personal skill, especially in relation to case management.

Is your job conducive to a good work/life balance?

Yes - for me it is. I enjoy the stress of the work and I feed off the dynamic nature of the job. The job allows me free time, in the evenings and weekends, to keep on top of my outside interests.

What part of your job gives you the most satisfaction?

I enjoy working with other lawyers, the court staff and the interaction with litigants in person.

I enjoy developing the cohesion that allows me to resolve issues that individuals, insurance companies, other lawyers and barristers have not been able to resolve.

I enjoy the case management function and the contribution I can bring to the smooth running of cases.

Finally, district judges have a huge variety of work, including civil trials, ancillary relief and in the Small Claims Court, where, on any given day, you are out in open court delivering final judgments on a wide range of issues (some times for very large sums of money) which directly affect people in their day-to-day lives.



“Looking back, it is rare that you get an opportunity to do something completely different mid-career. I am glad that I had the opportunity to go for it...”

District Judge Wells



Patricia Smyth

Vice President of the Industrial Tribunals
and Fair Employment Tribunal

Patricia Smyth is Vice President of the Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal.

These Tribunals are independent judicial bodies which hear and determine certain claims in the employment field including discrimination and unfair dismissal.

What attracted you to this post?

Having been a practising barrister for many years, I had reached the stage in my career where I wanted to know what it would be like to conduct the hearing and decide the case myself. I became a part-time Chairman in 1998 and loved the work.

When the opportunity arose, I applied for the full-time position in 2002 and in December 2007 I was appointed Vice President. Applying for the position of Vice President was a natural career progression for me.

Is the job what you imagined it would be?

Yes. Having been full-time Chairman for five years I knew what the demands of the Vice President's role would be. I hear cases, deputise for the President in her absence, and assist her with the training of Chairmen and panel members as well as ensuring the judicial quality and efficiency of the tribunals.

Describe a typical day or week in your post?

There is not really a typical day or week. I will be in work before nine. I rarely take a lunch-break because so much of my work involves urgent queries and being available to Chairmen and staff if a problem arises. I do make a point of leaving work at 5.00 pm, even if I need to take work home.

As well as hearing cases and dealing with case-management, it is difficult to predict what issues are going to arise. For example, I am the Judicial Complaints Officer, and if a complaint is received it must be dealt with immediately regardless of other demands I may have.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Because legal aid does not extend to tribunals, parties are frequently unrepresented. The cases may involve complex legal and factual issues, and it takes a great deal of skill and personal empathy to enable an unrepresented person to fully explain his/her complaint and the basis for it, and to ensure that he/she is not disadvantaged by the lack of legal representation.

Is your job conducive to a good work/life balance?

I do have some flexibility to deal with a domestic crisis if I am not actually hearing a case.

During the summer when my work was more office-based, childcare gaps were filled on a couple of occasions when my son curled up in an armchair in my office with a hot chocolate and a good book. But, if a case is going on there really is no flexibility.

What part of your job gives you the most satisfaction?

Doing every part of my job well gives me enormous satisfaction. The part that I enjoy most is training the Chairmen and panel members. If I had not become a lawyer I would have been a teacher.

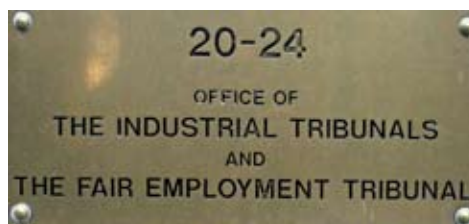
Further information on the work of the Industrial and Fair Employment Tribunals can be accessed on their website:

<http://www.employmenttribunalsni.co.uk/>

“Doing every part of my job well gives me enormous satisfaction. The part that I enjoy most is training the Chairmen and panel members.”

Patricia Smyth,

Vice President, Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal





John Leckey

Senior Coroner

Coroners are independent judicial officers who are available to deal with matters relating to deaths that may require further investigation to establish the cause of death. They can either be barristers or solicitors.

The Coroner will seek to establish the cause of death and will make whatever inquiries are necessary to do this e.g. ordering a post-mortem examination, obtaining witness statements and medical records, or holding an inquest.

What attracted you to this post?

I qualified as a solicitor in 1974.

When the post of deputy coroner for Greater Belfast was advertised in 1984, I decided to apply for it, was successful at interview and was subsequently appointed.

I was in this post for 8 years until I was appointed full-time Coroner for Greater Belfast in 1992. The Coroners Service for Northern Ireland came into being in April 2006 and that is when I was appointed Senior Coroner for Northern Ireland.

People often ask me what attracted me to this post and I cannot put it better than one of my colleagues in England who was interviewed for the Daily Telegraph and said “how people die is interesting” - and that’s true, it is very interesting.

Is the job what you imagined it would be?

It has changed considerably since I was appointed a deputy coroner. Now families no longer accept, without reservation, what the medical profession tells them.

Family expectations are much higher than they were 10 or 15 years ago and people now are generally much more inclined to challenge judicial decisions. When I was first appointed a judicial review of a coroner’s decision was practically unknown. Now legal challenges are much more common and I think that is a reflection of how litigious our society has become.

Furthermore, the internet also gives people the ability to go online and research medical issues. Knowledge gained in this way allows them to challenge explanations given by the medical profession and to raise issues about medical care and treatment with the coroner.

What does your working week look like?

A typical week is often split between office based work i.e. making decisions about deaths that are reported to the office, determining whether a post-mortem exam is necessary, arranging inquests with the support of my administrative staff, etc.

There are approximately 250 inquests held each year and I would estimate that my time is split 2/3rds with inquests (which can take place at any courthouse in Northern Ireland) and 1/3rd in the office.

A lot of a coroner's time is taken up with the investigation of the death. Our work generates a lot of correspondence and there is regular contact with bereaved families. Unlike a judge, a coroner is "hands on". The inquest process is inquisitorial in nature, there are no parties as in other court proceedings and the coroner leads the investigation.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Dealing with deaths of children is emotionally very difficult.

Is your job conducive to a good work/life balance?

Under the legislation coroners must be available at all times. The advent of the era of mobile telephones has made life a lot easier so in terms of work/life balance I would say the job now is certainly more family friendly than it was 20 years ago.

What part of your job gives you the most satisfaction?

Holding an inquest and getting positive feedback from a family that they regard the investigation as having been thorough. Providing answers to questions that have been troubling a bereaved family may assist the grieving process and help to bring some measure of closure.

The job of coroner is not for everyone.

Contact with bereaved families is commonplace and you have to be comfortable dealing with family members who are distraught and tearful. Witnesses too may be deeply distressed and traumatised by what they have seen.

Tact, sensitivity and the ability to empathise are important qualities for all coroners to possess - or at least to aspire to.

Further information on the work of the Coroners Office can be accessed online at www.coronersni.gov.uk

“The advent of the era of mobile telephones has made life a lot easier so in terms of work/life balance I would say the job now is certainly more family friendly than it was 20 years ago.”

John Leckey, Senior Coroner

Judge McReynolds

County Court Judge

Her Honour Judge McReynolds is a county court judge, sitting in various county court divisions as a peripatetic judge.

She was appointed to her current position in September 2004 having spent five years as a Master in the Family Division of the High Court dealing with Probate and Matrimonial cases.

Prior to this she worked as a Barrister for 17 years with particular focus on Family law.

What attracted you to this post?

It was a natural progression by way of career advancement. I had previously worked as a Barrister in general practice and latterly Family Law and was often appearing before the Master, so I was familiar with the court and practice before my appointment as Master.

After five years in post, the county court was the next rung on the judicial ladder. Movement through judicial tiers is an important method for promoting diversity among judicial office holders. Had I not had the experience as Master, I would not have felt sufficiently confident to apply for this post.

Is the job what you imagined it would be?

In terms of knowledge, I found that when I joined the county court, the learning curve was quite steep - especially Crown Court work. That was a relatively unfamiliar world for me and Counsel appearing before me knew the law and practice inside out.

That said, the practitioners I have encountered in the Crown Court are not simply excellent lawyers but as individuals are both collaborative and helpful in their approach. There is a shared interest in maintaining the integrity of jury trials.



What does your working day look like?

I am always busy and a regular week would involve spending most of the working day in court or my chambers at Laganside or wherever I am sitting (9.30am to 5pm). I would also work most evenings and every weekend during term time.

Vacations usually coincide with school holidays so with a little planning, one can schedule a well earned break and family time.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Initially I found it quite a challenge to master criminal evidence but fortunately, just as I took up my new post, the legislation was changed and I have found these changes left me less disadvantaged as everyone was dealing with the new challenges.

Is your job conducive to a good work/life balance?

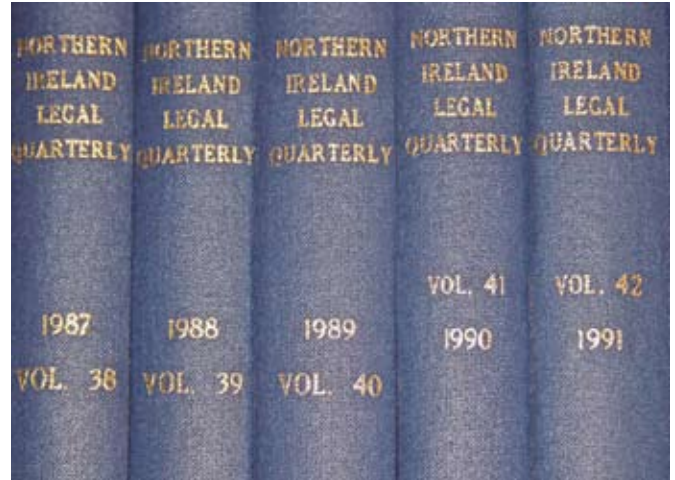
Anyone who applies for the post of county court judge will know that the hours involved with the post are not conducive to a favourable work/life balance but as I said before, the recesses are normally family friendly.

I think there are real opportunities now for women who want to have a fulfilling legal career and a good work/life balance.

What part of your job gives you the most satisfaction?

Seeing individuals with whom I have taken a sentencing risk turn away from re-offending.

This is of course almost entirely because of the tireless effort of the Probation Service, but even judges accustomed to the firing line derive satisfaction from our minor role in offering individuals opportunities to turn their lives around, whether these arise in criminal or family courts.



“Vacations usually coincide with school holidays so with a little planning, one can schedule a well earned break and family time...”

Judge McReynolds,
County Court judge



Jim Leonard

President of the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal

Jim Leonard is President of the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal which was established on 1st April 2007 to hear and determine appeals concerning the new system of capital values for property in Northern Ireland in respect of domestic rates and certain other matters.

What attracted you to this post?

I suppose my route to judicial office is not entirely traditional. I was admitted as a solicitor in 1980 and in 1986 I established my own firm which then merged with other firms of solicitors in which I became a Partner. In 2003 I commenced working in the Crown Solicitor's Office. I suppose I was attracted to the idea of the challenge of a new judicial post.

When did you take up the position of President of NIVT?

I was appointed as President of NIVT in April 2007. However, in terms of holding judicial office, I have been a fee paid Chairman of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal (IT/FET) since 1998.

How do you manage the different roles?

Wearing my "different hats", I have to be very alert to potential conflicts of interest between my various roles. For example, if I observed any potential conflict on account of any other roles that I perform, I would have to refuse to participate in the hearing.

In terms of my role as President of NIVT, the level of appeals began fairly slowly when set against initial expectations. The significant escalation recently in property values was partly responsible for that, as rating capital values are currently set at 2005 levels for the time being - and thus appear "low" in comparison to current house values.

However, I think that there is now a steady increase in appeals given the current financial climate and the tightening of families' purse strings. I think people might well start challenging their property valuation and that in turn could create an upturn in the volume of work that NIVT undertakes. There will also be a general revaluation in due course.

That said, the Tribunal is well resourced to handle any upturn. NIVT normally sits with panels of three, a legal Chairman, a valuation member, and a "lay" member.

What does the role of President of NIVT entail?

In my role as President of the NIVT, I was involved in the initial induction and training of members. I also heard the first batch of cases to establish initial procedures and practice and decision-making.

Now, I tend to concentrate a little more on administrative functions, monitoring, and planning the training and other needs of NIVT and attending meetings with the Commissioner and Court Service. I am also engaged in meetings and consultation exercises regarding legislation and wider tribunal reform matters (for example as a member of the Tribunal Presidents' Group). I have also been engaged with NIJAC in a recent recruitment exercise.



Describe your typical working week.

For me, there is no such thing as a typical day or week.

I am extremely fortunate in that the CSO, have agreed a flexible approach to my different workloads and judicial responsibilities.

The work for my judicial posts requires a commitment to long and often irregular hours in preparing for cases and decision-writing.

This does impinge on my family life to a certain extent. I have four children and although I do spend a lot of time working at home in the evenings and at the weekends, I do have a rule that I leave one day at the weekend completely free in order to “switch off” and enjoy time with my wife and children.

What advice would you give to someone thinking of a role in judicial office?

Judicial office is intellectually demanding and certainly demanding in terms of time. However, it is extremely rewarding too. I suppose it is not unlike any other practice area in that you need to constantly keep abreast of the latest developments in law.

I do get great satisfaction from playing my part in managing the tribunals system and indeed from delivering an authoritative judgment which is well received and which perhaps might serve to clarify certain areas of the law.

Further information on the work of the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal can be accessed on their website: <http://www.nivaluationtribunal.org/>

“I do get great satisfaction from playing my part in managing the tribunals system and indeed from delivering an authoritative judgment which is well received and which perhaps might serve to clarify certain areas of the law...”

Jim Leonard,
President of the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal



Suzanne Anderson

Coroner

Suzanne qualified as a solicitor in 1986, working in private practice before joining the Crown Solicitors Office (CSO). During her time at the CSO, Suzanne was seconded to the Coroners Office for four years, where she developed a real interest in this specialised field.

When the position of Coroner was advertised two years (2006), Suzanne applied and was appointed to her current position.

What attracted you to this post?

I knew the law and it interested me. I had spent four years on secondment to the Coroners Office so I had a very good understanding of the law and the particular work which Coroners undertook.

If I hadn't have been working in the CSO, I would not have had the opportunity for the secondment. When the opportunity arose to apply for the position of Coroner, I took it.

Is the job what you imagined it would be?

Yes. I had a good idea of what I was getting into.

However, before the new automated call system was introduced, the "on-call" aspect of the job very stressful. You could expect calls at any time of the day or night and at weekends.

Since the introduction of the automated system - which allows doctors and police officers to telephone the Coroner's Office and report a sudden or suspicious death, things have improved greatly with regard to the work/life balance for me and my family.

What does your working day look like?

I work office hours when in Belfast. However I also have to sit in inquests which can take place anywhere in Northern Ireland.

These can last from one day to a few weeks and, depending on where they are taking place, they can add a bit of time onto your working day, especially if you are travelling to and from Derry, Omagh etc.

“There is nothing more satisfying than the family of a deceased individual thanking you for the sympathetic and professional way in which you handled the inquest into the death of their loved one.”

Suzanne Anderson, Coroner

Describe a typical day or week in your post?

The position as Coroner is very “hands on” and I enjoy that. I am involved in setting up cases, choosing witnesses and managing the relationships between families, the PSNI and pathologists.

However, with the support of office staff who deal with the administrative functions of sudden, unexpected or suspicious deaths and our Coroner Liaison Officers, I am able to concentrate on cases and the law involved in same.

I frequently speak with doctors, the PSNI and pathologists over the issuing of death certificates and the medical background to cases.

Very often you have to deal with families too - and it would not be uncommon for information to come to light at the last minute. That information may well have a consequence on my findings.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Knowing that you are dealing with people who are bereaved, in shock and at the lowest point in their life. They have just lost someone very close to them, often in sudden, tragic and unexpected circumstances.

Dealing with all the issues, sensitivities and emotions can be difficult and as a Coroner you need to be extremely careful and sensitive in everything that you say and do.

Is your job conducive to a good work/life balance?

Before the introduction of the automated call system I would say that the position did not lend itself well to a good work/life balance.

I often work outside office hours but I try to keep weekends as free from work as possible.

What part of your job gives you the most satisfaction?

There is nothing more satisfying than the family of a deceased individual thanking you for the sympathetic and professional way in which you handled the inquest into the death of their loved one.

That gives me enormous satisfaction.

Further information on the work of the Coroners Office can be accessed online at www.coronersni.gov.uk



Patrick Kinney

Chairman of the Industrial Tribunals
and Fair Employment Tribunal

Patrick Kinney is a full-time Chairman of the Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal. He was previously the managing partner of a medium-sized commercial practice based in Newry.

Why did you leave private practice for this position?

I had been considering judicial appointment as a career prospect for some time. I had a desire to be more involved with the community in a broader and more immediate way in my work and hopefully also make some small difference in people's lives.

The opportunity came up as a fee-paid Chairman of Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal in 2004. I decided to apply and was appointed in 2005. Two years later I applied and was appointed as a full-time Chairman.

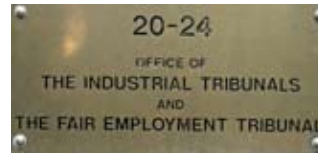
I believe my appointment demonstrates an openness in the judicial appointment process to a wide range of experience and acknowledgement of skills across the legal profession.

Did you know much about the role before you applied for it?

Yes. Although I did not practise primarily in the employment law field I had previous experience as a part-time Chairman which whetted my appetite for sitting in a judicial capacity.

What does the Chairman actually do?

The main activities of a Chairman are to chair hearings of the tribunals with two other panel members, conduct certain types of hearing on his or her own, conduct case management discussions, reviews of decisions, and case manage multiple claimant cases, which can range from a few cases to up to 6000 claimants.



Is the job living up to your expectations?

The role is quite varied - much more so than I originally anticipated.

I regard it as a great honour to be a Chairman of Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal. I enjoy the interaction with lawyers and others in the Tribunals. I like the intellectual challenge that the role poses. I also like the sense that at the end of the day I have done my best to do something really important and satisfying. I value the impartiality and the independence of the role and the opportunity it gives to help resolve disputes.

Do you have a typical day?

It is difficult to summarise a typical day. Sitting at Hearing and writing up cases comprise the major part of the work but there is a wide range of other duties. These include making certain decisions and directions that do not require a hearing and also advising administrative staff on practice and procedure in respect of tribunals.

It is also very important to stay up to date in this complex and dynamic area of the law. The variety of the work contributes to job satisfaction. It is a constant source of learning and never boring.



What is the most challenging part of your work?

One of the most challenging aspects of conducting hearings is in dealing with the diversity of those appearing in tribunal. It is important all users can participate fully in the proceedings. The explanation of complex legal concepts and the fair management of proceedings requires a full range of communication and analytical skills.

What would you say to someone considering applying for a position in the Tribunal Service?

My advice to potential candidates, particularly those from a non-traditional background is to acknowledge and utilise the advantages that your experience brings. However that does not mean you should not familiarise yourself with the jurisdiction. Do your research.

Finally, is this role conducive to a good work/life balance?

Yes. The role is stimulating and at times challenging. I've found this personally very satisfying and fulfilling. The shape of my working day has changed, with more emphasis now on a structured day of Hearings. Whilst this structure is less flexible than my previous work, it is more predictable.

This change of approach has facilitated a greater balance between my work and home life. I have been able to organise and shape my work in such a way as to maximise the quality of time that I spend with family and friends.

Further information on the work of the Office of Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunals can be found at www.employmenttribunalsni.co.uk

“I enjoy the interaction with lawyers and others in the Tribunals... I like the intellectual challenge”

Patrick Kinney,
Chairman of the Industrial Tribunals
and Fair Employment Tribunal



Kenneth Irvine

Part-time Chairman of the Care Tribunal

Kenneth Irvine was appointed part-time Chairman of the Care Tribunal in 2005. He also sits in a similar role in the Appeals Tribunal.

He has been involved with Appeals Tribunal work for the past 25 years. Here, he explains how he got involved in the two Tribunal posts he currently holds, in particular fee-paid Chairman of the Care Tribunal.

What attracted you to working in a judicial post?

I commenced working on the Appeals Tribunal over 25 years ago, doing one day a week. Over the years, and since my retirement from private practice in 2005, this has grown to a time commitment of 2-3 days a week on average.

Just as I was moving totally out of private practice the Care Tribunal was established and I was asked to be one of its two Chairmen. (I had been Chairman of its two predecessor Tribunals, the Registered Homes Tribunal and the Social Care Tribunal, but, unlike the present body, those Tribunals rarely were called upon.)

Is the role in the Care Tribunal what you imagined it would be?

I have found this to be a most challenging and rewarding experience. To date all of our cases have been in relation to Child Protection and Vulnerable Adult matters.

We are dealing with new law and therefore we have the opportunity to shape the practice and procedure in these important fields. These are challenging because on the one hand we are asked to determine the right of a person to work in their chosen occupation and on the other hand there is the very important matter of protection of the vulnerable.

You're in total control of the time you commit to it. There is a large degree of flexibility with it - this comes from having to schedule hearings two or three months in advance. This element of control makes it much easier to achieve a good work/life balance, which is personally very important to me.

What does your working day look like?

It really depends on whether I am involved in a hearing. The length of cases varies. We could be sitting all week, or for two weeks, but generally the case only lasts between two and three days. We will normally sit from 10.30 a.m. to around 4 p.m.

How much support do you have at the Care Tribunal?

Each of the two part-time Chairmen of the Care Tribunal is supported by one full-time secretary, seconded from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and a part-time secretary.

The Secretariat is based in Castle Buildings, Stormont but we both work from home, which also leads to a good work/life balance.

What is the hardest part of your job?

The legislation can be quite constricting. It would be good if the legislation gave us the power to give direct orders to recommend re-training or that individuals should be strictly supervised at work.

Is the role of Chairman of the Care Tribunal conducive to a good work/life balance?

Yes. This role allows me to schedule my time personal and family commitments. For me, weekends have always been sacred.

Another great aspect of this job is that you can switch off. You are not constantly tied to a mobile phone fielding calls from the office.

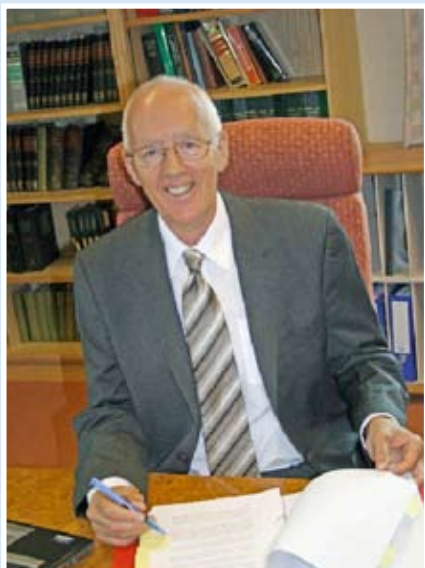
Finally, what part of your job gives you the most satisfaction?

The attraction of working part-time as a Tribunal Chair is that it enables me to continue to exercise my legal skills and to make a contribution to the community while at the same time allowing time for family and relaxation.

Further information on the work of the Care Tribunal can be accessed online at www.caretribunalni.gov.uk

“The attraction of working part-time as a Tribunal Chair is that it enables me to continue to exercise my legal skills and to make a contribution to the community while at the same time allowing time for family and relaxation.”

Mr Kenneth Irvine,
Part-Time Chairman
of the Care Tribunal



Michael Curry

Member of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland

The Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland resolves disputes about the value of land and buildings, and about their occupation, use or development.

Its unique feature is its combination of members with property and legal expertise. Persons serving on it are barristers or solicitors of seven years' standing or persons experienced in the valuation of land.

What does the Lands Tribunal do exactly?

The functions of the tribunal include deciding disputes about rent reviews; compensation for compulsory acquisition ranging from the value of city centre premises to unfit houses; rating appeals including appeals from the NI Valuation Tribunal; business tenancies including rent, duration and other terms for lease renewals; and restrictive covenants impeding the development of land.

Describe your typical working day in the Lands Tribunal

My day falls into one of two categories - either an all-day formal court hearing, or meetings ('mentions') with representatives of parties in dispute followed by work on a decision.

Unless there is a case to be heard, my day in the office begins with a series of mentions. An early start and offices in the Royal Courts of Justice facilitates counsel to both attend the mention and appear in other courts. As I have several hundred live cases, mentions continue for much of the morning.

The mention allows a discussion of the real differences between the parties (sometimes for the first time). By applying some authority, expertise and specialist knowledge, I assist the parties to assess the strength of their cases, help them understand how they may resolve their dispute and encourage early settlement by monitoring progress.

“I find making important decisions that will shape how property issues will be resolved in the future both challenging and satisfying.”

Michael Curry,

Member of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland

Between and after the mentions the Registrar will bring files to me for directions on new cases and cases in which something that ought to have been done by a party has not been done. I will also deal with other matters, perhaps to do with facilitating tribunal reform or supporting the property professions. I may then have a short hearing, perhaps by conference call, on a straightforward matter. On most days there is no all-day hearing scheduled and I spend the rest of the day on crafting decisions.

Can you give some idea of the kind of work you deal with?

Although called a ‘Tribunal’, that term reflects the combination of legal and technical expertise of the Court and does not mean there will be more than one person hearing the case. Each member has full judicial powers so I deal with the entire range of work of the tribunal, usually on my own but with the President on exceptionally important or sensitive cases.

Do you find the role challenging?

The Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland and its equivalents in England & Wales and Scotland all share the respect of their users for delivery of expertise and independence. I find making important decisions that will shape how property issues will be resolved in the future both challenging and satisfying.

Is the role conducive to a good work/life balance?

Although my workload is unpredictable and very heavy at times, it does suit a flexible pattern of working. I must give reasons for all my decisions and (apart from arbitration awards) these are published. The crafting of a written decision in a large and complex case may take weeks or months and thinking about cases is not easily confined to office hours. Although, waking up with an idea that may crack an issue is a good start to a day.

Further information on the work of the Northern Ireland Lands Tribunal can be found on their website: <http://www.landtribunalni.org>



Judging your future - career options

Eligibility

Eligibility for judicial office differs from post to post.

Legislation relevant to each judicial office will indicate the appropriate eligibility requirements. Typically for legal appointments it will be necessary to have been fully qualified as a barrister or solicitor for a stated period.

However, there are many posts which do not require formal qualifications for example, ordinary members of the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal or Lay Magistrates. Other appointments may require technical or professional qualifications e.g. medical (Pension Appeals Tribunal, Medical Member), valuation or human resources etc.

Other Requirements

Judicial appointments in Northern Ireland are generally open only to citizens of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland or a Commonwealth country. Holders of dual nationality that includes one of the above may also apply.

It is very important when considering applying for judicial office that you carefully check the Terms and Conditions of the post being advertised regarding nationality and retirement.

Merit and Diversity

Judicial appointments are made strictly on the basis of merit regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, marital or civil partnership status, sexual orientation, political opinion, religious belief, disability, and whether or not you have dependants.

Assessment Framework

In addition to the statutory eligibility requirements for each judicial office, NIJAC assesses applicants against a framework of the knowledge, skills and attributes appropriate to each judicial office.

Disability

Reasonable adjustments can be made upon request during the appointments process for applicants with disability.

Full-Time Appointments

Some examples of full-time judicial posts include: High Court judge, county court judge, President of the Industrial Tribunal/Fair Employment Tribunal and coroner. These posts are pensionable and recesses coincide with school terms.

Fee-Paid Appointments

The majority of appointments are fee-paid - a fee is payable for each sitting day (or ½ day sitting). These include lay magistrates, Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal ordinary members, Pension Appeals Tribunal members, deputy district judges and deputy county court judges. These posts are non-pensionable. The number of sitting days is determined by the level of business of the court or tribunal.

Part-Time Salaried Appointments

There are currently two part-time salaried posts at district judge (magistrates' court) level and there is also a part-time salaried member of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland. These posts are pensionable.





Judicial Office: Diversity of Experience

Whilst the public often think of judges and tribunal members presiding in court, hearing evidence and legal submissions and making decisions, the role is much more extensive. It often involves preparatory work for court hearings and in some cases, judgment writing.

Judges engage in outreach activities including, for example, introducing schoolchildren to the operation of the criminal court and assessing the performance of fifth and sixth year students in mock trials.

They also liaise with colleagues in other jurisdictions and conferences are held jointly with judges from other countries including France, England and Wales, the Republic of Ireland and Commonwealth countries. There are also opportunities for judges to visit courts in Europe and further a field.

It is, of course, essential for them to keep fully up to date with developments in the law and this is achieved through private study and by attending seminars organised by the Judicial Studies Board at which there is lively discussion with colleagues.

Committees on which judges serve include the Judicial Appointments Commission, the Parole Board, the Franco-British Judicial Committee, the Board of Visitors of Queen's University and the United Kingdom Association of Women Judges,

The work of a judge is therefore diverse, interesting, challenging and personally and professionally enriching.

Range of Judicial Offices (as at 1 January 2009)



Judicial Post	Number in Post
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Court of Appeal and High Court

Lord Chief Justice	1
Lord Justice of Appeal	3
High Court Judge	10
Temporary Judge of the High Court*	1
Master	7
	22

County Court

County Court Judge	17
Deputy County Court Judge*	31
District Judge	4
Deputy District Judge*	5
	57

Coroner's Court

Presiding Coroner	1
Coroner	4
	5

Magistrate's Court

District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)	21
Deputy District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)*	19
Lay Magistrate	232
	272



* Fee-paid posts

Judicial Post	Number in Post
Tribunals	
Chief Social Security & Child Support Commissioner	1
Social Security & Child Support Commissioner	1
Deputy Social Security & Child Support Commissioner*	2
IT/FET President	1
IT/FET Vice President	1
IT/FET Full-time Chairman	6
FET Part-time Chairman*	24
Appeal Tribunals President	1
Appeals Tribunal PT Members Legal*	41
Appeals Tribunal PT Members Experienced*	51
Appeals Tribunal PT Members Financial*	6
Appeals Tribunal PT Medical Consultant*	20
Appeals Tribunal PT Medical Generalist*	68
Chair & VP of VAT Tribunal	1
VAT Tribunal Member*	4
Chairman of the Reserve Forces Reinstatement Committee	1
Lands Tribunal - President	1
Lands Tribunal - Member	1
Mental Health Review Tribunal President	1
Mental Health Review Tribunal Member*	25
National Security Certificates Appeal Tribunal*	4
NIVT - President	1
NIVT - Valuation*	9
NIVT - Legal*	23
NIVT - Ordinary Member*	95
Pensions Appeal Tribunals President	1
Pensions Appeal Tribunals - Medical*	6
Pensions Appeal Tribunals - Services*	6
Pensions Appeal Tribunal - Legal*	6
PT Lay Members Tribunal Est S91 NI ACT*	5
SENDT - Legal Chairman	2
SENDT Part Time Chairman*	6
Care Tribunal - Chairmen	2
	423
TOTAL	779

Summary of Judicial Offices in Northern Ireland as at 1 January 2009

Office	Qualifications	How addressed
Lay Magistrates	No formal qualifications	“Your Worship”
Tribunal - Other	Dependent on post	Dependent on post
Tribunal - Medical	Medical practitioner of at least seven years standing	Dependent on post
Tribunal - Legal*	7 years standing as solicitor or barrister	Dependent on post
Coroner*	5 years standing as solicitor or barrister	“Coroner”
District Judge* (Magistrates’ Court)	7 years standing as solicitor or barrister	“Your Worship”
District Judge*	7 years standing as solicitor or barrister	“Your Honour”
County Court Judge*	10 years standing as solicitor or barrister	“Your Honour”
High Court Master*	7 years standing as solicitor or barrister	“Master”
High Court Judge*	10 years standing as solicitor or barrister	“My Lord” or “Your Lordship”

*a member of the Bar Council of Northern Ireland or a solicitor of the Supreme Court of Judicature of Northern Ireland

CONTACT DETAILS

Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission

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Northern Ireland Court Service

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The Office of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman

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Judicial Studies Board (NI)

Royal Courts of Justice
Chichester Street
Belfast BT1 3JF

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Law Society of Northern Ireland

The Law Society of Northern Ireland
40 Linenhall Street
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Web: www.lawsoc-ni.org

The Bar of Northern Ireland

91 Chichester Street
Belfast BT1 3JQ

Tel: 028 9056 2349
Web: www.barlibrary.com

OUTSIDE NORTHERN IRELAND

Ministry of Justice

Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London SW1H 9AJ

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Web: www.justice.gov.uk

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Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland

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The Bar Council (England and Wales)

The Bar Council (England and Wales)
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Law Society of Ireland

The Director
The Law Society
Blackhall Place
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Tel: 003531 672 4800
Web: www.lawsociety.ie

Bar Council of Ireland

Bar Council Administration Office
Four Courts
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Web: www.qub.ac.uk/ipls

School of Law (UUJ)

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Web: www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/gspole

The Council of Legal Education (NI)

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