

Judicial Profile

Mr Henry Spence

Valuation 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.

In this interview, Henry Spence gives us an insight into his role of a Valuation Member for the Lands Tribunal.



Henry was appointed as the Valuation Member of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland in July 2012.

Prior to that, he worked in Land and Property Services for 37 years specialising in public sector valuations including rating and compensation

He is the Vice Chairman of the UK Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Rating Diploma Holders Section and speaks regularly on valuation matters at seminars in both Northern Ireland and England.

Henry became Chairman of the section in November 2012 and will be the first person from Northern Ireland to hold this post

Why did you apply for this role?

I had a lot of experience of appearing at the Lands Tribunal through my previous work and when I saw the position advertised, I researched it and felt I met most of the criteria for the job.

I thought it was something I'd like to try and that it would present a fresh challenge to me at this stage of my career.

What was your experience of the judicial appointments process?

It was a very positive experience. I was impressed by it.

There was a lot of information online about the role and what was expected from Valuation Members – and when it came to applying, I found that the application form allowed me to express how my experience met the criteria which NIJAC were looking for.

I also found that the assessment process (test and interview) was challenging but a very practical way of determining whether applicants were right for the role.

I also liked that there was a particular focus on practical skills rather than theory.

Describe your typical working day

A typical day would involve either attending an all day formal court hearing or dealing with “mentions” – which are basically giving directions to parties who are disputing issues and assisting them to resolve their differences.

While the caseload is varied, the volume of work is consistent. As a result of the current economic climate, a lot more people are now challenging rating assessments – the vast majority of these being commercial ratepayers.

Since I started the role, I have dealt with matters such as business tenancies, restrictive covenants, arbitrations, rating taxation assessments and compulsory acquisition valuations.

On the days when there is no hearing scheduled I will spend my time crafting decisions on cases which I have already heard.

Is the job what you imagined it would be?

Basically yes.

Although the amount of work has surprised me and I am very satisfied at how well the “mentions” process works.

I would estimate that about 60-70% of Tribunal business is resolved in this way, which is fantastic.

Is the role conducive to a good work life balance?

I suppose it varies.

Whilst I am busy at the moment and the Lands Tribunal will continue to see an increased workload over the next few years, for most of the time I think the role does lend itself to having a good work life balance.

However, I also find that I am frequently thinking about cases at home in the evening, crafting decisions and weighing up everything I've heard from the parties.

It's sometimes difficult to switch off!

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

Research the role. Make an informed decision about whether it's for you.

Find out what is expected from you and if you are satisfied that you could do it, then go for it.

I am really enjoying this role and I am getting a great amount of satisfaction from seeing people resolve their disputes, with the Tribunals assistance and on a lot of occasions without recourse to costly formal legal proceedings.