

The Honourable Mrs Justice Keegan

High Court Judge

Appointed 23 October 2015



Professional Background

The Honourable Mrs Justice Keegan was called to the Bar of Northern Ireland in 1994 and took silk becoming Queen's Counsel in 2006. Mrs Justice Keegan served as Chair of the Family Bar Association between 2011 and 2013 and was elected Vice Chair of the Bar Council of Northern Ireland in 2014.

Mrs Justice Keegan was sworn into the office of High Court Judge on 23 October 2015 by Sir Declan Morgan, the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, alongside Madam Justice Denise McBride. This made history as Mrs Justice Keegan and Madam Justice McBride were the first female High Court Judges appointed in Northern Ireland.

Why did you seek appointment at High Court?

The move to judicial appointment was a natural step for me in terms of career progression. I also thought I should apply for the role as I wanted to give something back and I wanted to deal with new areas of law.

What aspects of your background has proven most useful when performing day-to-day duties?

I was very fortunate to become Queen's Counsel when I was thirty-five. The twelve years I spent as junior counsel working in family law, and other associated areas such as judicial review gave me the confidence to seek Silk which I held for nine years. This valuable experience led to me applying for the role of High Court Judge. I think that my background in family law also provided me with a lot of the skills I needed, skills that are transferable into other areas of law.

Is the job what you imagined it would be?

It is not really what I imagined it to be at all. I was quite young when I was appointed, so perhaps I was a bit naive, and I probably would have benefited from judge shadowing. However, I quickly adapted into the role. I think that my regimented approach to case management helped me. Also, I get great satisfaction from forensically analysing different legal issues and I have enjoyed that challenge across different divisions. I do have a great sense of pride in being a High Court Judge. This also involves very important work and so I am also very conscious of the responsibility involved.

What is the biggest challenge you face in the post?

There are lots of case management issues, such as managing court times, papers and the delivery of judgements in good time. I think that if you get a good case management framework in place you can be efficient and effective in the role.

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

Simply put, I enjoy being a judge, and I thoroughly recommend those interested in judicial appointment to apply.

In terms of applying for appointments, I advise future applicants to have confidence in yourself and your skills, emphasise your unique background, and expand on how you deal with complex legal issues.

I would also like to encourage people with a range of backgrounds to consider applying. Although I have a background at the Bar of Northern Ireland, experienced professionals from other backgrounds should not hesitate in applying. The work is well worth doing, and so long as you are able to make certain targets and have exceptional standards you will reach the highest level.

Finally, in terms of the job itself I would say this; a successful judge needs to make decisions independently and cannot be influenced or affected by external matters. Rulings will not suit everyone and so some strength of character is needed.

With the luxury of hindsight, is there anything you wish you known before applying?

With hindsight I would have told myself to be more relaxed during the application process, and have faith in skills and my area of expertise.