

County Court Judge Judge McReynolds

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.

She is married with two children.

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?

I work full time and the post does require a huge time commitment. 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. I think my previous experience as lecturer at Queens University Belfast was particularly useful. I was accustomed to explaining law to students and this was invaluable as I could adjust explanations to a level appropriate for juries of lay people.

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 (7pm to midnight and later is common). I work every weekend during term time.

In terms of work life balance, this role is not ideal but the 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 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 graduated in 1981, soon after Margaret Thatcher came to power so I suppose I come from a generation of women who believed we might "have it all". Sometimes I feel we were simply allowed to "do it all."

Perhaps in hindsight, we were "mistaken rather than misguided" but I think there are real opportunities now for women who want to have a fulfilling legal career and a good work/life balance.

My daughter has just graduated. Her degree is in law so those who believe I have any influence over her will conclude that I am confident about the future for young female lawyers.

I love to see young women progressing through the profession and am delighted to see the careers of young male and female lawyers flourishing.

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.

I derive considerable personal satisfaction from this unfortunately relatively rare experience.