

## **Judge Prytherch District Judge (Magistrates Court)**

District Judge Prytherch is a District judge (Magistrates Court) (DJ (MC)).

She 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.

### **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.

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. As I have said, I was looking for a change and a challenge and I can safely say that the job of DJ (MC) has certainly been both! In addition to the real challenge of taking on a judicial position in areas of practice hitherto unfamiliar to me, I have found the position to be very interesting and rewarding. It has more than lived up to my expectations.

I knew about the role in general terms but until I started looking at the role more closely prior to my interview I hadn't appreciated the breadth of the magistrates' courts' jurisdiction and the variety of work involved.

As I have already mentioned, the jurisdiction is very broad indeed. A DJ (MC) will hear and determine less serious criminal cases involving adults; criminal cases, including more serious cases, involving youths; family proceedings cases; and some civil and domestic cases. In the Family Proceedings Court and the Youth Court we sit with two lay magistrates. In essence the role of a DJ (MC) is to manage the business of the court and to adjudicate on the cases heard before the court.

### **What does your working day look like?**

There isn't really a typical day for me. 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 on the list before I arrive at court.

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 so it can sometimes feel quite lonely.

Also it can be quite daunting facing the unknown in that quite often tricky problems seem to appear out of nowhere and without warning. Also the sheer volume of work can be quite exhausting and it is important to concentrate for the entirety of the court.

Gone are the days when I could stare into space for a while or wander into another room to keep someone else back!

**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?**

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