

# Decision time



ILEX Fellows have the skills to become judges, says **Charles Newman**. Here he outlines the appointments process and says it is never too early to prepare

**W**hen I started as an articled clerk in 1969, managing clerks were a valuable source of training and advice for all solicitors. I learnt at their knee. Nothing in the subsequent 40 years has changed my high respect for your knowledge and work.

Over the last 20 years as a district judge, I have had the privilege of seeing ILEX Fellows appearing before me, and I have been impressed by your performance – in no way outclassed or outperformed by adversaries, whether solicitors or barristers. If you can compete on equal terms in court and in the office, you can do the same in an application for judicial office.

## Quality wins out

Since November, if you have been an ILEX Fellow for five years, you are already entitled to apply for deputy district judge posts, both civil and criminal, and for a range of jobs under the new framework of the Tribunal Service. From October 2010 ILEX Fellows with five years' qualification will be entitled to apply to become district judges.

Do consider applying across the range of posts, including the Tribunals Service. They can all provide a rewarding and valuable career in their own right, or if you want to change paths, the skills and experience you can get as a tribunal judge are clearly valuable in the civil and criminal judiciary. Mr Justice Hickinbottom, one of the latest High Court appointments, got his foot on the first rung of the judicial ladder as a fee-paid parking adjudicator.

The important status of tribunals in our judicial system has been underlined by changes which came under the same Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 which opened judicial posts up to ILEX Fellows.

Of course, I cannot promise you will be successful, but I can promise you will be considered on merit. Although competition has never been tougher, if you are one of the best candidates, you will be successful. Professional background is not an issue – merit is the only criterion.

## See for yourself

I would give you the same advice we give all applicants – do everything you can to prepare yourself to be as strong a candidate as you can possibly be.

While it is still too early for there to be ILEX judges to ask, you can still get advice and tips. For example, you can already apply for judicial work shadowing through the Judicial Office. There is no better way to find out about the job than seeing life for a day or two from the other side of the bench.

Even if you are not ready to apply now, or while you are waiting for the right job to be advertised, you can start preparing. You should start approaching potential referees and gathering information for the self-assessment section of application forms.

If you look at any selection exercise listed on the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC) website, you will find an application form. While each form is tailored to a particular vacancy, it will give you a good insight into what is generally required, and you can start planning information for your application in advance.

Some successful candidates have said they found it useful to keep a 'scrapbook' of examples of their own experiences to illustrate the qualities the JAC is seeking. It does not have to have been in court – it might come from your life outside your daily work.

The purpose of references is to allow the referees to provide up-to-date information on the applicants' track record and potential. These are considered alongside all other evidence, and the weight given to them depends not on the status of the referee but the relevance and cogency of the evidence provided.

## Testing times

The JAC uses qualifying tests as a shortlisting method for most selection exercises below senior circuit judge. Tests provide reliable evidence of candidates'

abilities, irrespective of their specialism within the legal profession.

The exercises for judges of the employment tribunal and social entitlement chamber of the first tier tribunals will use tests, and they have been used already for exercises including deputy district judge (magistrates) and district judge.

Candidates are being tested on the qualities and abilities required for judicial office, such as their ability quickly to absorb and analyse information, their independence of mind and sound judgement, and their ability succinctly and clearly to explain procedure and decisions reached. These are defined on our website.

The JAC has been working closely with ILEX to help support your ambitions, and to make sure you have the information you need to make your applications as strong as you can through the test, and if called to the selection day, at the interview and where part of the process, in the role plays.

Judging isn't for everybody, which is why work shadowing can be so important. You can see for yourself.

As to my own post as district judge, I take decisions on a daily basis which impact directly on people's lives. That is a huge responsibility, but one I find challenging and a privilege. District judges may not influence the

development of law in the same way as the senior judiciary, but there are different attractions. They have direct contact with a large range of people, which is something I particularly enjoy. It is not an ivory tower.

I was just over 40 when I became a full-time judge, and I was concerned it might be rather flat after the excitement and pressure of private practice. I have not regretted a single day.

*District Judge Charles Newman has been a JAC Commissioner since January 2006*

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