

JUDGING – STEPPING OUT OF THE SHADOWS

In October 2009, the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) launched the Judicial Shadowing Scheme.

Supported by the Lord Chief Justice's Office, the Bar Council, the Law Society, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and NIJAC, the scheme gives medical professionals, barristers, solicitors, and land valuation experts an unique opportunity to spend a day in a court or tribunal of their choice and go behind the bench.

Consultants and General Practitioners serve as Tribunal panel members on the Appeal Tribunals for Northern Ireland and the Mental Health Review Tribunal; and are welcome to spend a day shadowing the medical and legal judicial office holders of these Tribunals.

The contribution of the medical profession to the work and the decision making of these Tribunals is greatly valued by the respective Tribunal President and Chairman.

Medical professionals are only required to have two years' experience to apply for the judicial shadowing scheme.

Nine months after its launch, the scheme is proving popular. Adeline Frew (NIJAC, Head of Diversity and Communications) says *'To date 24 people have applied and the majority have been solicitors. The overwhelming reason given for applying has*

been to gain inside experience of the court or tribunal. We welcome all requests and we would be particularly keen to have medical professionals participate in the scheme’.

Two local solicitors and a land valuation expert give their personal views on their judicial shadowing experience.

Peter Thompson (Thompson Mitchell Solicitors) who shadowed Master Wells (Office of Care and Protection) states that the experience was professionally helpful *‘I observed solicitors and barristers from the judge’s perspective and gained a better understanding of what lawyers should be doing to prepare and present their case to the Master’.*

Peter would have no hesitation in recommending the scheme to others *‘not only for potential applicants for a judicial appointment but also for any lawyer to gain an insight into a judge’s perspective’.*



Peter Thompson, Thompson Mitchell Solicitors, Portadown

This was a view echoed by David McKinney, a local land valuation expert with James A McKinney Sons, Ballymena, who used the opportunity to shadow Mr Michael Curry, Member of the Lands Tribunal of Northern Ireland.



David McKinney, James A McKinney Sons, Ballymena

Prior to participating in the scheme, David had only limited dealings with the Lands Tribunal and, as a land valuation expert, was keen to get an insight into the mechanics of the Tribunal and how it handled its business.

David was full of praise for the experience and commented that the most useful aspect of the shadowing day was being able to *'...find out how the process of mentions generally brings the parties to agreement of their own accord without having to proceed to a costly hearing.'*

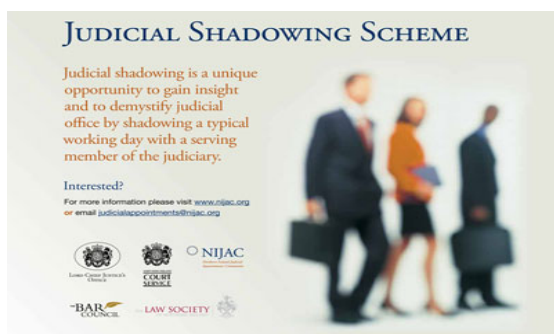
Another local solicitor, who shadowed District Judge McCourt in the Magistrates' Court was keen to praise the helpful attitude of the judge who was very willing to discuss both his role and how he conducted the business of the court.

The solicitor commented that *'getting behind the scenes, being able to talk openly and honestly with the judge about his work and its challenges, was the most beneficial aspect of the day...and something that could not have been gained by merely sitting in the Magistrates' Court.'*

Participants have spoken of how the scheme gives unique access to judicial office holders, to see what goes on behind the scenes, and case management.

If you are interested in gaining experience that will contribute to your personal development, acquiring an insight into a new or less familiar field, perhaps interested in a judicial office as an aspect of your career, or you are just simply curious about life on the bench, then please visit NIJAC's website for further information on the Judicial Shadowing Scheme: <https://www.nijac.org/JudicialShadowing/default.htm>

Alternatively, if you would like to speak to someone directly about the scheme, please telephone NIJAC's Diversity and Communications Team on 02890 728 702.



NIJAC will be recruiting shortly for Consultants and GPs to serve the Appeal Tribunals. For information on the role, what required, fees, and to express an interest visit www.nijac.org .