

Circuit Judge

Demanding but rewarding

A day in court can be very demanding but rewarding. Circuit judges usually live locally to their courts and I am usually at my court by about 9am. I often receive the papers for my cases the night before and sometimes on the day itself, so when I arrive at court there is much to be done.

Civil cases

I sit in all three jurisdictions – civil, criminal and family, but usually the court day is restricted to one of them. Recently my civil work has mostly been multi-track trials involving road or industrial accidents. The papers include skeleton arguments on fact and law so by the time I sit in court I am aware of all the issues. Such cases often lead to me having to reserve and write judgments and I always find the hearings fascinating – not only because they involve interesting points of law but also can include expert evidence which I can find very instructive and educational.

Family work – a heavy responsibility

If I am sitting in family work I will normally be concerned with welfare issues for children, deciding with whom a child should reside and how much contact that child should have with the absent parent. This involves quite an amount of reading, consideration of reports and listening patiently to the evidence from the parents, guardians and experts.

The responsibility to reach the right conclusion is clearly a heavy one, and reaching findings of fact can be very daunting. However this has to be done and it can be particularly rewarding to learn from later hearings in the same difficult case that the judgment I came to was the correct one for the child concerned.

My role in a criminal case

In crime the judge can rely on the jury to reach the factual conclusions but has a pivotal role in the trial and the responsibility for sentence. Most of my work is in the Crown Court and I especially enjoy presiding over the trial process, keeping the jury informed and contented, ensuring the witnesses and defendants give the best account of the facts they can to the jury and controlling the advocates.

A fair hearing for all

All court work involves contact with members of the public and the judge's decisions will have a significant influence and impact on their lives. A judge has an enormous responsibility to do justice and to ensure that everyone has a fair hearing.

No regrets

By the end of a court day – usually about 4.30pm – I can feel quite exhausted and there may still be other paperwork and preparation to do. However I have never had a day in my many years of sitting when I have ever regretted becoming a judge – and the next morning I am ready and willing for another court day.