

A Day in the Life of a Court of Appeal Judge

A Court of Appeal Judge writes about their experience in the role below.

Outside the courtroom

In order to ensure effective use of court time, the papers for every case have to be read in advance and many cases at this level are of such complexity or importance that time has to be taken in considering the submissions and preparing a written judgment after the hearing rather than delivering an immediate oral judgment. In addition to the work of judging individual cases, most members of the Court of Appeal have additional responsibilities within the Court of Appeal or within the wider court system or on other bodies related to the justice system.

No 'typical' day

This means that there is no 'typical' day. Every judge has at least 1 day a week kept free for reading case papers or judgment writing. On days when a judge is sitting in court, cases are generally listed for hearing between 10.30am and 4.15pm, with a break for lunch between 1.00pm and 2.00pm, though the judge sometimes sits earlier in order to hand down a written judgment or to hear a short application. Additional preparation and judgment writing, together with meetings and other work commitments, have to be fitted round these sitting times. It is frequently necessary to work at evenings and weekends in order to get everything done.

Varied work

Very broadly, the legal term is divided for administrative purposes into slots of some 3 weeks each. In a term of 12 weeks a judge who covers the full range of work might expect to have 2 slots in the Civil Division, one in the Criminal Division and one in the Divisional Court. The work itself is varied and interesting, and sometimes very challenging. Most of the cases raise issues of law, but many are also of very real human interest. It is striking how often one reads reports of them in the newspapers or sees news items about them on television.