

A Day in the Life of a Tribunal Panel Member

A Tribunal Panel Member writes about their experience in the role below.

A varied role

Every week I have is different – I might be in court one day, in a meeting for the magistracy the next, reading papers that afternoon, in a board meeting the following day, then hearing an appeal. The difference is what makes it all so interesting. A lot of what I do now is involved with the community, which I love – and I think everyone should do if they can. For 30 years I worked in local government. It was extremely interesting work and very rewarding.

What is CICAP?

Today, I am a fee-paid member of CICAP. Victims of crime can apply for compensation for their injuries to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) and I hear appeals from those people who are dissatisfied with CICA's decision. Appellants can claim an award for the injury sustained based on a tariff set out in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme and in certain cases loss of earnings and special expenses including care costs. The hearings panel comprises me, a legal and a medical member. I am 'ticketed' to chair the hearings, as are other selected lay and medical members. We all come from very diverse backgrounds, and so bring a wide range of knowledge and skills to our decision-making.

Hearings

Hearings take place across the country, and I sit for 5 days at a time, hearing up to 7 or 8 cases a day depending on complexity. So far this year I have sat in Birmingham, Leicester, London and Newcastle. It is essential that I prepare carefully for the hearings, so I receive the papers for the first 3 days' cases the week before the hearing. My day starts at 9am, when the panel meets to review the morning's cases and decide the issues to be resolved. We must be satisfied that the appellant was the victim of a criminal injury and the injury is serious enough to reach the minimum award of £1,000. I can sometimes be found observing a hearing; this is because I am a member of the panel's appraisal team. There are 2 legal, 1 medical and 5 lay member appraisers. I hear about injuries caused by knives, guns, and fists. Some people develop severe mental health problems and find it difficult to return to work, and the most difficult cases for me are those that involve the sexual abuse of children.

The impact of crime

Listening to how crime and the resulting injuries affects people has made me very supportive of the introduction into court proceedings of victim impact statements. On the days when I do not have CICAP hearings I might be in court – I have been a magistrate for 24 years.

The same skills for different jobs

2 years ago, I also trained as a mediator. I deal with a wide range of disputes in the community. In about 70% of disputes, matters are either resolved or there is evidence of improved communication or better understanding between the parties. I find the techniques I use here – especially those relating to difficult behaviour, listening and questioning – are very relevant to all the work I do. I get a lot of satisfaction from my work. I meet a lot of interesting people, and all the things I do are positive and will end up helping the community.