



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE

Judge for Yourself event: 22 November 2012

You are very welcome, every single one of you, without exception, whatever your colour, creed, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, background, or for that matter the background of your parents or grandparents. You are welcome whether your great grandmother was a suffragette, or both your grandfathers served prison sentences.

May I also welcome to your midst a significant number of Diversity and Community Relations judges. There are some 90 of these judges across England and Wales, coming from all levels of the Bench and the Tribunal judiciary. Look around you. See if you can spot them. If you cannot spot them, it is because judges are people just like you are. If you think you can, then it may be that you have been struck by the energetic enthusiasm that they bring to this broad issue of diversity in the judiciary. But, as judges who have volunteered to take on these responsibilities, may I welcome them, and express my gratitude to them.

They are here to help anyone of you to answer any questions that you may wish to ask which will help better inform you of the possibilities of judicial appointment, and if you are interested, in how best to approach the issue. Talk to them. Listen to them. Every one of them is here because he or she is on your side. So am I. So are the senior members of the judiciary who are here.

You are about to listen to five more speeches. That is burdensome. It would not help for us to say the same thing to you. Even if we use different language.

So I want to speak to you about how I see it. Every human being is a unique human being. And because every human being is a unique human being, we are all different in one way or another. Some of the ways are obvious. There are adults and children. There are men and women. Skin colour varies – it varies among children in the same family. So does athleticism and physical

proWess – even in the same family. So does brain power – even in the same family. And think if you can remember them of your grandparents, if you were lucky think of all four of them. All of them are or were different, and although you carry their genes, you are different from each of them.

So what am I going on about? My message is very simple. When it comes to judicial appointment the obvious differences of gender, racial origin, social background, all of them and any of them, are differences which do not make any difference, which cannot make any difference, and which we will not allow to make any difference.

I want the people best qualified to be judges to be appointed as judges. And only people of the necessary quality. No more, and certainly no less. In that list I gave you the only relevant differences are between children and adults, because children cannot be judges, and brain power, not that brain power is the only judicial qualification, but you do need it.

If you are qualified for judicial appointment, ask yourselves whether you want to apply. Remember that being a judge is not easy. It is not a retirement from an active professional life. You take on great burdens. You pass prison sentences on people whose spouses think they are innocent. You separate children from one or other or both parents. You make decisions to return somebody to the country from which they came which, if you are wrong, will result in their death or torture. So it is never an easy job. On the contrary, it is hard, and difficult, and sensitive. If you do it you will learn a great deal about yourself, your own humanity, with your flaws and your qualities exposed to others, but to none more than to yourself. If you are a good judge it is a very self revealing profession.

And it is also a wonderful profession. You are trusted – trusted to make these immensely sensitive and difficult decisions. Every single case which you hear matters to the individual in front of you more than any other case there has ever been, and you have to decide it, and you are always doing your best to get it right, although as a sensible human being you will know that at times you will get it wrong. Nevertheless you must decide. And in the process you see humanity in all its stages, the worst, those who do things that make you ashamed to be part of the same human race, and the best, whose nobility will make you feel utterly humble.

If you want to know the reality of what being a judge is like, speak to the Diversity judges. Enquire, ask, seek help, arrange to sit with the judge for a week, in which ever jurisdiction you are interested, and see whether you like it, and whether you can do it. If you think you can, if you think that you are man or woman enough to do it, then put yourself forward. And put yourself forward at the right level. By that I mean be realistic. Do not set your sights too high, or apply too soon, but equally, do not set them too low. To be a judge you have to be realistic. Be realistic about yourself, and with due modesty recognise the qualities that you have. If you want to apply – then you must apply. So do it. Make the application. All that I want is for the best men and women to come and adorn our Courts and Tribunals as judges, irrespective of colour, creed, gender, social background or whatever it is that is believed to hold someone back. The process of selection, like justice itself, is blindfold. It will not see these differences which make no difference. And the judicial conscience which will bind you if you are appointed, will similarly be utterly without colour or gender or background bias or prejudice.