

## PROTOCOL ON JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE

1. The Lord Chief Justice is responsible, as President of the Courts of Northern Ireland and Head of the Judiciary, for taking any disciplinary action against Lord Justices of Appeal, High Court Judges and listed judicial office holders in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>. In this document all those covered will be referred to as “members of the judiciary”. Disciplinary procedures may be invoked as a consequence of the upholding of a complaint against a member of the judiciary or where a member of the judiciary appears to the Lord Chief Justice to have behaved inappropriately. Complaints and possible disciplinary matters will be investigated in accordance with the Lord Chief Justice’s Code of Practice on Complaints. This Protocol and the Statement of Ethics seek to build upon the Terms and Conditions of Service accepted by members of the judiciary when assuming office. They do not seek to replace these.

### Procedure

2. There are a number of circumstances in which the Lord Chief Justice may take disciplinary action:

- As a result of a complaint against a member of the judiciary being upheld;
- Where it is brought to the Lord Chief Justice’s attention that a member of the judiciary may have acted inappropriately<sup>2</sup>, the Lord Chief Justice may cause the matter to be investigated in line with the approach set out in his Code of Practice on Complaints;
- Where it is apparent to the Lord Chief Justice, either on the basis of evidence available to him or after interview with the member of the judiciary, that inappropriate behaviour has taken place, the Lord Chief Justice may take disciplinary action without further investigation, but he will first give the member of the judiciary the opportunity to comment.

3. A member of the judiciary **must** inform the Lord Chief Justice’s Office immediately if he or she has been charged with any criminal offence (including a minor road traffic offence which attracts an endorsement).

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<sup>1</sup> The judicial office holders to which this protocol applies are listed in Annex A.

<sup>2</sup> Where the matter is subject to criminal proceedings, any disciplinary action will ordinarily follow the conclusion of these proceedings.

## **Suspension**

4. A judicial office holder may only be suspended where a statutory tribunal has been convened in accordance with sections 7 and 8 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, as amended. The Prime Minister may suspend a Lord Justice of Appeal or High Court Judge, with the agreement of the Lord Chief Justice, where the Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor are considering the making of motions for the presentation of an address to Her Majesty The Queen. The remaining listed judicial office holders may be suspended by the Lord Chief Justice where a statutory tribunal so recommends.

5. In addition, the Lord Chief Justice may, after receiving representations from the member of the judiciary, instruct him or her not to sit for a prescribed period or to hear a particular class of case in the following circumstances:

- Where he or she is under investigation for a serious offence or is subject to an investigation for conduct, whether under the Code of Practice on Complaints or otherwise, which if proved calls into question his or her ability to sit;
- Where he or she is subject to criminal proceedings or there is pending an appeal from those; serving a suspended sentence imposed in criminal proceedings; or subject to disciplinary procedures in relation to conduct constituting a criminal offence for which he or she has been convicted; or
- Where he or she is, for example, awaiting training following a finding that this is required before returning to work (this may, however, take the form of a restriction in the areas of work to be undertaken, for example, that he or she should not undertake family work etc).

6. The Lord Chief Justice will not use the option of instructing a member of the judiciary not to sit other than in extreme cases. He will await the outcome of the investigation or proceedings before determining what, if any, disciplinary action should be taken.

## **Disciplinary action**

7. The Lord Chief Justice, or his delegate<sup>3</sup>, may impose one or more of the following disciplinary actions if a complaint is upheld or there is a determination that inappropriate conduct took place:

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<sup>3</sup> The Lord Chief Justice may delegate the function of giving advice to such members of the judiciary as he considers appropriate, for example, where the investigation of a complaint against a tribunal member is upheld and the Lord Chief Justice determines that the member should receive informal advice, he may delegate this function to the Tribunal President.

- Advice/Training/Mentoring - The Lord Chief Justice may give the member of the judiciary advice as to his conduct and how it could be improved in future and/or a recommendation that he or she undertake training aimed at improving the conduct in question. Arrangements may be put in place to facilitate a period of mentoring;
- Informal Warning - the Lord Chief Justice will issue the judicial office holder with an informal, written warning if his or her conduct is inappropriate but does not merit a formal warning.
- Formal Warning - the Lord Chief Justice will issue the judicial office holder with a formal written warning if his or her conduct failed to meet the required standard.
- Final Warning - the Lord Chief Justice will inform the judicial office holder in writing that his or her conduct has fallen so significantly or repeatedly short of the required standard, and that further misbehaviour could result in referral to a removal tribunal.
- Restriction of Practice - restrictions may be placed on the types of case assigned to the judicial office holder for a period of time or subject, for example, to training being undertaken.
- Referral to a statutory tribunal (sections 7 and 8 of the Act) - depending on the level of judge involved, a judicial office holder may only be removed by Her Majesty the Queen on address by both Houses of Parliament, or by the Lord Chief Justice. In either case, a statutory tribunal must first consider the case and recommend removal. Therefore, if the Lord Chief Justice determines that the judicial office holder's conduct fell so far short of the required standard that removal may be warranted, he may, after consulting the Northern Ireland

Judicial Appointments Ombudsman, refer the matter to a statutory tribunal. The statutory tribunal will present its recommendations to the Lord Chief Justice. A judicial office holder may be suspended from office when a statutory tribunal has been convened.

### **Review of penalty imposed**

8. Where the Lord Chief Justice proposes to take a particular disciplinary action he will notify the subject of the disciplinary proceedings of the proposal and invite him or her to make representations. After considering any representations the Lord Chief Justice will make a final decision and will notify the subject of the disciplinary outcome.

9. A member of the judiciary may seek a review of the disciplinary penalty imposed, where this amounts to more than advice, training or mentoring, within 10 working days from notification of the Lord Chief Justice's decision. A request for a review should be made in writing to the Lord Chief Justice's Office. The Lord Chief Justice may refer the matter to an independent judge of appropriate seniority. The judge may review the penalty imposed and make recommendations to the Lord Chief Justice. The Lord Chief Justice will notify the member of the judiciary of his decision.

Issued 28th February 2007

1st Revision 1st July 2009  
2nd Revision 4th October 2010  
3rd Revision 5th August 2011

**JUDICIAL OFFICE HOLDERS TO WHOM THIS PROTOCOL APPLIES**

Lord Justice of Appeal

Judge of the High Court

Temporary judge of the High Court under section 7(3) of the Judicature (Northern Ireland Act 1978

County court judge

Deputy county court judge

District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)

Deputy District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)

Coroner

Deputy coroner

Statutory officers (within the meaning of section 70(1) of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 - this includes District Judges and Masters of the Supreme Court.

Deputy for a statutory officer under section 74 of that Act

Temporary additional statutory officer under that section

Chief Social Security Commissioner for Northern Ireland

Social Security Commissioner for Northern Ireland

Deputy Social Security Commissioner for Northern Ireland

Chief Child Support Commissioner for Northern Ireland

Child Support Commissioner for Northern Ireland

Deputy Child Support Commissioner for Northern Ireland

President of appeal tribunals (within the meaning of Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998

Member of the panel of persons to act as members of the appeal tribunals (within the meaning of Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998)

President of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal

Acting President of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal under Article 82(6) of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998

Vice President of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal

Acting Vice President of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal under Article 82(6) of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998

Member of the panel of chairmen of the Industrial Tribunals

Member of the panel of chairmen of the Fair Employment Tribunal

President of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland

Deputy President of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland under section 3(1) of the Lands Tribunal and Compensation Act (Northern Ireland) 1964

Other member of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland

Temporary member of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland under section 3(2) of the Lands Tribunal and Compensation Act (Northern Ireland) 1964

President of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal for Northern Ireland

Member of the panel of persons who may serve as chairman of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal for Northern Ireland

President of Pensions Appeal Tribunals appointed under paragraph 2B of the Schedule to the Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act 1943 in its application to Northern Ireland

Deputy President of Pensions Appeal Tribunals appointed under paragraph 2B of the Schedule to the Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act 1943 in its application to Northern Ireland

Member of a Tribunal appointed under paragraph 2(1) of the Schedule to the Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act 1943 in its application to Northern Ireland

Member of the legal panel of persons available to act as chairmen of the Social Care Tribunals in Northern Ireland

Chairman of an Appeal Tribunal for the purposes of the Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987

Member of the panel of persons who may serve as chairmen of the Care Tribunal established by Article 44 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvements and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003  
Member of the tribunal established under section 91 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Member of the Mental Health Review Tribunal

Lay magistrate

Member of the panel of persons who may serve as chairmen of a tribunal established for the purposes of the Deregulation (Model Appeal Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1997

Chairman of a Tribunal appointed under paragraph 1(1) (a) of Schedule 3 to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 in its application to Northern Ireland

Chairman of the Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal for the purpose of proceedings brought before it in Northern Ireland

Member of the panel of person to act as chairmen of Reinstatement Committees sitting in Northern Ireland (appointed under paragraph 2(1) (a) of Schedule 2 to the Reserve Forces (Safeguard of Employment) Act 1985  
Member of the panel of persons appointed under section 6(1) of the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992 to act as chairmen of tribunals that sit in Northern Ireland

Member of the panel of chairmen of VAT Tribunals for Northern Ireland

General Commissioner for a division in Northern Ireland (appointed under section 2 of the Taxes Management Act 1970)

President of the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal

Member of the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal

President of the Charity Tribunal for Northern Ireland

Member of the Charity Tribunal for Northern Ireland