



BAR COUNCIL NEWS UPDATE – MONDAY 5 JUNE 2017

Court Sitting Hours

The Brief, [Law Society Gazette](#), [Local Government Lawyer](#), [Legal Voice](#) – The legal media report that the Bar Council has called for the adoption of a new Court Sitting Hours' Protocol for all hearings in the High Court, County Courts, Crown Courts, Magistrates' Courts and Tribunals, amid concerns that a tendency has developed to list cases increasingly early or late in the court day without reference to the majority of court users.

In [a document inviting adoption of a protocol \(as set out below\)](#), the Bar Council said this tendency was particularly prevalent in the criminal and family courts.

“This has widespread implications for the professional practices of barristers, as well as their ability to manage appropriately their professional duties, own wellbeing, and any caring and personal commitments that they may have,” it argued.

The Bar Council said research it had conducted with the Bar Standards Board had identified variable sitting times – at the unexpected behest of the court – to be a key factor contributing to the pressures upon barristers with caring responsibilities, particularly women, and therefore a significant barrier to retention after childbirth.

“This is one of the reasons why the profession (though roughly 50:50 at the outset) is estimated only to become 44% female in about 30 years' time,” the Bar Council said.

“It is beyond argument that the Bar should continue to recruit and retain the best and brightest lawyers solely on merit and regardless of their gender, ethnic background, age, sexual orientation or disability. Where there are any barriers and obstacles still in place that artificially act to distort that equal recruitment and retention, we must act to remove them to ensure that there is genuine equality of opportunity and that our legal system and judiciary is capable of better corresponding to the community it represents.”

Judicial Diversity

[Scottish Legal News](#) – Chair of the Equality and Diversity Committee Robin Allen QC is quoted in coverage of the [Judicial Appointments Commission \(JAC\) statistical release on the equality and diversity](#) of this year's judicial appointments.

He said: "We cannot go on having no BAME [black, Asian and minority ethnic] applications for senior judicial roles. The rule of law requires a fully diverse judiciary. Once again the figures reveal the urgent need for positive action to make BAME applicants more successful and to increase the number of eligible women applicants.

"These figures stress the importance of the Bar Council's ongoing training and coaching programmes for BAME and women lawyers who wish to serve as members of the judiciary."

Vice-Chair of the Bar

The Barrister - The Barrister reports that criminal law barrister Richard Atkins QC has been named as next year's Vice-Chair of the Bar, the body that represents all 16,000 barristers in England & Wales. Andrew Walker QC, the current Vice-Chair, has been confirmed as the 2018 Chair of the Bar. He will take over from the current Chair, Andrew Langdon QC, on 1 January 2018.

Richard Atkins QC, of St Philips Chambers, was called to the Bar in 1989 and took silk in 2011. He practises in crime and regulatory law (Health and Safety and Trading Standards) as well as in the VAT tribunal. He has been a Recorder since 2005 and a Mental Health Tribunal Judge since 2014. He is Leader of the Midland Circuit and a Legal Chair for the Financial Reporting Council Disciplinary Tribunal. Richard became a member of Bar Council in 2003 and was Chair of the Bar Council's Member Services Board from 2010 until 2016.

Since 2016, he has been Co-Chair of the Bar Council's Bar Representation Board. In 2014, Richard chaired the Annual Bar Conference. He is a Bencher at Gray's Inn. Outside the Bar, Richard was a Governor of the Coventry School Foundation (King Henry VIII and Bablake schools in Coventry) from 1999 until 2011, becoming Chair of the Governors from 2011-2014.

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The graphic features a large orange silhouette of a person's head in profile, facing right. Inside the silhouette, the words 'Bar Talk' are written in white. To the left of the main silhouette is a smaller, darker orange silhouette of a person's head in profile, facing right. Below the smaller silhouette are several colorful, overlapping loops in shades of red, orange, yellow, and purple. To the right of the main silhouette are three overlapping circles in shades of orange, purple, and pink, each containing text. The background is a light blue gradient.

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