



# Juggling work with Judicial duties

Magistrates come from all walks of life – and all employment backgrounds.

They manage to juggle their working lives with judicial duties in very different ways, and each takes different skills and experiences from the role. Here are a few real life case studies.



*As a community health worker, Joyce Hays's heavy workload is flexible enough to rearrange with court work. After becoming a magistrate in 2004 she found she learned new contract management skills and saved her employer's money.*

## Why did you become a magistrate?

I wanted to learn new things and improve my skills. Also, in the community where I work there's a lot of fear of crime. I felt it would help to discuss these things with clients from a position of knowledge.

## How did you apply?

Once I'd decided to apply, I explained to my line manager why I wanted to become a magistrate, and how it could link to my job. Though I'd only been there for about six months, she could see I was committed so I don't think she saw my job as suffering. The interview process was really hard and I heard only after six months. I was thrilled when I was accepted.

## How did you feel about sitting as a magistrate at first?

To tell you the truth, though I enjoyed it, it was a bit like being thrown in the deep end at first. In the first year I think you have to work on your own a bit – not everyone does – but a couple of hours a week keeps you on top of it. I liked the camaraderie and the sense of humour – I guess you have to have that. I'd been responsible at work but it was a different type of responsibility.

## How do you balance your work with court?

The workload is heavy but I can be pretty flexible. No one does my work while I'm away. I timetable meetings to suit, perhaps meeting after court finishes with a community group. I always sit on the same day of the week, but if there's an important meeting I'll just cancel court. I justified, financially, getting a Blackberry, so I can check emails before sittings or at lunch. When there's waiting time at court, I'll take reports with me to read.

## What skills do you think you've gained as a magistrate?

■ In my job we manage contracts. In the past, the organisation had struggled with it: providers weren't delivering but we couldn't prove it. From the magistracy I learned to pick out relevant evidence for a business case and see gaps in an argument. I had the confidence to make contract decisions and justify my points coherently. I've now instituted a whole new system of measuring outcomes and saved the organisation a lot of money. Senior managers were amazed at my results. They wanted to know what training I'd been on!

■ At court you have to really concentrate on the case despite the distractions. Now I can just switch off and finish a report in a busy office – I can focus a lot better.

■ As a JP you need to read paperwork quickly. You learn to absorb written information much faster which is great for meetings especially.

**“I had the confidence to make contract decisions and justify points coherently. Senior managers were amazed... they wanted to know what training I'd been on”**

## So do you think you bring something to the magistracy too?

Yes. I think my work experience on how crime affects lives helps. I know how people can spiral out of control when they take drugs or are unemployed. In some cases that's helped with the decision at court. It's just a different perspective.

## How do your colleagues view you?

They're very supportive although sometimes they do seem to think I can sort out their legal problems! I've told them I can't use my position to gain favour, and anyway in court there's always a qualified legal adviser.

## What has the magistracy done for you?

It's been a great opportunity to learn new things. It's rewarding and stimulating, and I'm part of something which is actually making a difference to the community. It's fantastic!





Once a bus driver, Alan Austen now manages quality in the same bus company. He thinks the magistracy needs people like him to represent the whole community. He admits it is a big commitment, but his skills have improved and he feels he is making a difference.

Why did you become a magistrate?

I saw an advert on the bus. I used to think only middle class people did things like this and it was about time that more people like me sat as magistrates. We should represent all the community.

How did you feel about sitting as a magistrate at first?

I'd already done some union work, so I was quite confident anyway and everyone was really welcoming. With the mentoring system in the first year I always had someone to answer my questions.

What skills do you think you've gained as a magistrate?

The structured decision making approach they teach you makes you look at things afresh. It allows you to judge dispassionately, look at each individual separately. As a manager of people, these are skills which really help at work.

More recently as a manager I've been involved in disciplinary hearings and my magistrates training has helped me to assess evidence.

I've been a mentor at court, which feeds into my management skills.

How do you balance your work with court?

If I'm honest, it's hard. I sit more than the minimum because I sit in youth court. I used to do shift work so I'd sit on my off days. But now I'm a manager, if I'm away at court no one does my work. So I do two days work in one when I get back. My employer's are supportive – it's never meant I couldn't do my work, but it is a commitment. But when you like what you're doing it's not bad at all.

Do you think you bring something to the magistracy too?

Well everyone does. But with my background I

know what it's like to find it hard to pay the rent...I think it helps that people who make decisions for others in court understand where they're coming from.

How do your colleagues react?

I tell them about my role and once my boss even came to court. I've never had any hostility but sometimes they'll ask about some case in the papers. I'll explain I don't know the facts, that you have to look at everything.

**"It allows you to judge dispassionately, look at each individual separately. As a manager of people, these are skills which really help at work"**

What have you got out of being a magistrate?

It's one of the best things I've ever done. We're not social workers, but often we try our best to help

people. I sit in youth court too and sometimes – not always – you hope that you've helped change someone's life in a positive way.



As a local authority community protection manager, Matt Redditch uses technology to make sure a day in court does not mean a day off work. He feels the magistracy has improved his judgement and gives him a better sense of perspective.

As magistrates we're expected to operate at a professional level and carefully document our reasonings. This really helps with my job. I can be very clear about my decisions and leave a good paper trail.

My time planning is a lot better. I have to manage my diary more efficiently because I'm at work less.

I respect other people's views more and look at the details.

Even though I'm not a court chairman yet, I chair meetings better – I know how to take the lead and balance different opinions.

I get involved in disciplinary procedures at work, so knowing about rules of evidence is really helpful.

How do you balance your work with court?

With modern technology, if I'm out of the office all day it doesn't mean I'm out of touch or not working. Court starts at 10am so I'll check and

deal with my emails before court. Lunch is from 1-2pm so I can speak to staff then. After court finishes at 5pm I'll work from home. Even though I get paid leave from work for court, I still get all my work done.

What would you say you've got out of the magistracy?

It gives you a sense of perspective. Every day in court is a real eye opener, you see so much about the way other people live. Sometimes I feel I've really had a positive effect on a person's life, that I've made the right decision. In one case an eastern European immigrant had been

**"...my personality at work is much more sensible, considered, measured. My employer appreciates that"**

accused but the evidence was contradictory. We found her innocent and I saw her face when we pronounced. It looked as if someone finally believed her. Like her faith in the system in this country had been restored. That was good.

As an IT shift worker, Raghbir Sandhu works most of his sittings around 'off shift' days. Working for an international airline, he thinks the magistracy taught him to communicate better and makes him more committed to his job.

Why did you become a magistrate?

I'd thought about it a lot earlier but felt I couldn't commit while my family was younger. It was the right time for me when I saw the advert.

What was your employer's reaction?

Difficult at first. I think my boss thought I'd be away from work all the time. There's a lot of myths around. On the application form they like you to get your employer to agree so I asked her to sign it. She just sat on it. In the end another manager signed. He told me about company policy – that we get days off for public duties. When I was appointed my regular boss was OK. She could see I didn't let it affect my work. She's retired now and another manager took over who's more supportive.

**"My attitude is different... I'm happy to work extra for nothing. I give 110% now"**

So how do you manage in practice?

My shift pattern is two lates, two earlies, two nights and then four days off. Usually I sit on my off days. We've agreed that any court meetings and half days (I usually sit full days)

I take from holiday. If court is cancelled I'll go into work afterwards. Since my current boss is very supportive I chose to take on extra court work. I now use 8-10 days public duties leave too (we're allowed 26).

Do you think it's affected your career?

I don't know. Sometimes I think I've been passed over for promotion because of it, but you can't be sure. I know they're very happy with me. It's a choice you have to make. If I'd been a manager I would have gone off shift, and I didn't want to have to manage the extra time commitment. I enjoy being a magistrate.

Has it benefited your work?

My attitude is different. In my sort of work, when you finish a shift you just hand over to the next person. So I always used to go right on time. Now I'm used to working full days for free in court, I'm happy to work extra for nothing. I give 110% now.

It's really increased my confidence – when I first went into court I was shaking but now I can manage the court as a chairman easily.



I can communicate better. I've learned to negotiate. I know how to explain why I need something done, the pluses and minuses – it helps the team.

It's been great for my personal development too. My profile is definitely different at work. People are much more likely to take my opinion into account.

What do you think you've got out of being a magistrate?

I'd recommend anyone to do it if they can. Even if you don't become a JP I'd recommend people to go into court and see what goes on. You see all walks of life. You're not just there to punish people. You try to help them – like sending a drug addict to rehab. Even if you only help one or two people it's very satisfying. I've never regretted one day of being a magistrate.



Liz Morris never saw herself as anything other than a mother or a secretary. As a magistrate she gained confidence and is now studying for a PGCE to teach law.

Why did you apply?

As a single mother I went back to college to study law. A lecturer on my course said "they're looking for people like you to be a magistrate" so I thought why not? I was so surprised when they appointed someone like me!

How often do you sit?

I sit two full days a month. Not everyone sits full days, but in my court they arrange it like that so we always sit on the same day of the week. I like it that way, I know where I am. But it doesn't suit everyone.

How did you feel about sitting as a magistrate at first?

It was a lot of responsibility. I'd never seen

myself as anything more than just a mother or a secretary. Now here I was in court making important decisions and sitting in front of the lawyers and the defendants in court. I couldn't believe it was really me.

What do you think you've got out of being a magistrate?

What it's given me most is confidence. I'd been out of the work for a long time and it taught me that I was capable of doing this responsible role. Now, in college, I'm standing up in front of other people talking and I know they will listen to me. I couldn't have done that before.

I think it's given me a more unbiased view about things – I'm aware there could be a reason why something happens or something is said, even if I don't know what it is.

It's taught me about diplomacy, which helps at college – you have to be very diplomatic to try to get people to agree on a

decision when you're a bench of three.

It's taught me how to manage my time better – balancing my children, the coursework and the magistracy.

How do you fit it all in?

I got a lot of help from my parents at first with the childcare. Though they do sometimes pay childcare. With the studying, they know I'm away on Wednesdays. I just have to catch up in my own time. It's hard work but worth it. The lecturers were all very proud of me.

And jobs?

Actually, when I finished my degree I applied to a few big law firms. They thought me being a magistrate was great, but they wanted me to do four days a week so

I could fulfil my court duties. I've decided to go down the teaching route instead which will hopefully give me better support as a magistrate.

**"Now, in college, I'm standing up in front of other people talking and I know they will listen to me. I couldn't have done that before."**



**Janice Piper's job as a primary school teacher links well to her role as a family court magistrate. She makes up extra sittings in school holidays but recognises it is a two way process and her employer comes first.**



magistrates know where their loyalties lie. If it affected my school financially or otherwise I think I'd have to have to reconsider.

**So how do you manage sittings?**

I sit extra because of the family court, but I try to make that up in holidays. Being a primary teacher means they need to get a stand in. It's different for secondary school teachers. They can timetable in court sitting afternoons because it's more flexible.

**How does it affect your work?**

■ I work in an inner city school and deal with the problems of looked after children. My understanding of the system from family court really helps in work. My professional experience helps in court too, but there I'm only one of three and you need all perspectives judging a case.

■ Having gone through several appraisals, chairmanship training and mentoring, it's made me much more confident.

■ After being in any job for a while you can get blinkered. Being a teacher, sometimes you feel like you're the only one carrying the burden. The magistracy broadens your perspective and has made me feel a lot better about my job.

**How did your employers react?**

My headmaster was fine about it but later I found out teachers in my area weren't allowed time off for public duties. I rang up my union who gave me a lot of information. I told the court and thought that was that. I don't know what happened but a few months later this leave had been extended.

**Is your employer supportive?**

Yes, but it's a two way process and I think my attitude helps promote their attitude.

I recognise my work pays me and being a magistrate doesn't, so work comes first.

Recently we had Ofsted looming (we get three days notice). I told the court if the call came I'd just have to drop court. I also know the school doesn't lose out financially if I sit. Employers need to have confidence that

**"I recognise my work comes first. Employers need to have confidence that magistrates know where their loyalties lie... it keeps you learning and that's great"**

**What have you got out of it?**

At this time in my life, when I could have been winding down, I've grown, broadened my perspective and improved my confidence. And it keeps you learning. That's great.

**Kay Clement is a self-employed florist. She has staff to cover while she's in court and the court helps her with this cost. Despite her job she believes the magistracy has enhanced her people skills and challenges her mentally.**



Library picture

**Why did you become a magistrate?**

I'd been a Samaritan for 9 years and part of that was going into prisons. I love working with people, and this was also all about people, so I thought why not?

**Did you worry about leaving your business alone?**

I've got two staff. When I first applied I consulted both, I had to make sure they were OK with it. I have complete faith in my staff – you've got to haven't you? I couldn't run the shop without that.

**So how do you manage the sittings?**

On average I'm away about once every two weeks. Sometimes for a half day, sometimes a whole day. One of the girls is happy to work extra as long as it's not too regularly. You do have to juggle a bit, but it's not a big thing. I've found as long as you're fair, it works fine.

**Do you lose money by not being there?**

The court pay me what I have to pay my girl to be there. I don't get the full financial loss allowance but I'd have to prove we'd make more money if I was in the shop for that. But it covers me. It was never my intention to make any money!

**Has it helped you in your work at all?**

It's hard to believe with my experience in the shop and in the Samaritans, but I think it's enhanced my people skills. I'm more tolerant – better at seeing the bigger picture and I've learned a lot about how other people live. It's challenging too – it really does get your brain working.

**What do you think you've got out of being a magistrate?**

It is a commitment, and you can't muck about with it, but I think I learn something every day I'm there. I really enjoy it.

**"I'm more tolerant, better at seeing the bigger picture... it really does get your brain working"**

**the employer's perspective...**



**John Trayner is Managing Director of Go-Ahead London. It employs 5000 staff providing 16% of the London bus market. In one bus garage alone they employ four magistrates.**

It's a tough commitment, but we assess the ability of the individual to fulfil their obligations. We make a business judgement on how many others there are doing such 'extra curricular' activities. If they are in a frontline operations role, we will work with them to make it work, because we know we also benefit.

I went with one of my employees to court one

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day. I was surprised at the high level of training magistrates receive.

The nature of our work means we are at the heart of the community. Magistrates come across a wide range of issues which are valuable to this work. We seek to be a reflection of our community and we see employing magistrates as putting something back.

We believe it's a win-win situation. It means we have more well rounded and experienced people who work for our organisation. It's a difficult balancing act between the individual and the company but we believe it's worth it.

**www.magistrates-association.org.uk or www.direct.gov.uk/magistrates**