

D04/09 NEWS RELEASE TUESDAY 7 JULY

Diversity Seminar backs joint action

Key bodies interested in increasing diversity in the Judiciary have agreed a series of measures to speed up the process.

A seminar today, hosted by the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC) Diversity Forum and chaired by Baroness Prashar, was organised to consider the findings of the JAC's recent research into what attracts or deters lawyers from applying to become judges.

The research, conducted by the British Market Research Bureau in partnership with the Bar Council and Law Society, revealed some widely held myths about who can apply for appointment, concerns about Judicial working patterns and culture, a lack of support from solicitors' firms and a lack of part-time working.

The joint action agreed includes the following initiatives:

- a mentoring scheme to support solicitors interested in judicial office, to be run by the Law Society;
- an extension of the Bar Council's Circuit mentoring scheme to focus more on candidates from a wider range of groups;
- a film of a mock role-play to help prepare candidates for the selection process, to be jointly funded by the JAC, the Law Society with the support of the Black Solicitors' Network.

Initiatives already in place include:

- The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Panel on Judicial Diversity, chaired by Baroness Neuberger, will recommend changes in the autumn.
- The Lord Chief Justice hosted a conference in March entitled 'A Judiciary for the 21st century' which examined the issues of what the necessary qualities and abilities judges should have in the 21st century; how they should be tested and what were the barriers to widening the pool of applicants.

- The Judicial Work Shadowing Scheme for potential candidates has recently been extended.
- The Institute of Legal Executives' continued work with the JAC to encourage its Fellows to apply. Fellows of ILEX have been eligible to apply for some judicial posts since a change in the law in October 2008.

A detailed action plan will be agreed by the Diversity Forum and published by the end of this month.

Baroness Prashar, Chairman of the JAC, said:

“The results of our research confirm that concerted effort is needed to achieve speedy results. There are barriers that lie outside our control and myths to dispel, and today’s seminar has been extremely encouraging in showing that all concerned with judicial diversity are willing to make changes in their respective areas to achieve results. The JAC Diversity Forum, which we established over a year ago, laid the foundations for this work on which we will continue to build.”

Mark Bishop, President of ILEX, said:

“Background gender or race should not be a barrier to progress to any individual who has who has the ability to fulfil a particular role and we support the work being undertaken to increase diversity in judicial appointments.”

Paul Marsh, President of the Law Society, said:

“The Law Society is committed to achieving a faster pace of change in judicial appointments working with the JAC and partners across the legal profession. We hope that today's meeting will help to achieve that gear change.”

Ingrid Simler QC, Chair of the Bar Council's Equality and Diversity Committee: said:

“A modern judiciary needs to be reflective of the communities it serves. We will continue to give priority to retaining a more diverse membership, encouraging applications for judicial appointment from those qualified and to work with the JAC and others to make faster progress towards a diverse judiciary.”

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EDITORS NOTES

1. For details of the JAC/British Market Research Bureau Research see:

<http://www.judicialappointments.gov.uk/about-jac/165.htm>