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## 'We both ticked the box saying part-time'

INTERVIEW BY FRANCES GIBB

**For the first time two judges are to share a full-time post: that of district judge**

THE recent press release from the Lord Chancellor positively fizzed with excitement. Not only did it boast of record numbers of women and ethnic minority judges — to a level that is almost twice that ten years ago — but perhaps more significantly it announced Britain's first judicial case of job sharing.



Lorna Grosse, left, and Alison Rowley: the first lawyers to share a full-time post - a district judge on the South Eastern Circuit (ANDRE CAMARA)

Part-time judicial appointments are nothing new. But Lorna Grosse and Alison Rowley will be the first lawyers to share a full-time post between them — that of a district judge on the South Eastern Circuit. The arrangement will be fully running by next month when Grosse takes up her new post; Rowley has already started.

Neither knew the other before each was appointed. "We'd each sat as deputy district judges," Rowley says, "and then applied to be district judges. But we'd both ticked the box saying that we'd want to be part-time."

Grosse, a solicitor who works as a consultant with the London law firm Winckworth Sherwood, was initially offered a full-time post. So she arranged to see an official at the Department for Constitutional Affairs to explain that she really wanted to work part-time. "They said they would try to accommodate me. This was on the Monday. By the Wednesday they said they had found someone I could job-share with. They really got their finger out."

The arrangement could not be more ideal. The job is based in county court centres in Essex: each works three days so the courts benefit by having their services for six days, rather than five. The £93,000-a-year salary is paid pro rata, including holiday entitlements. Grosse will do two days at Southend and one at Basildon; Rowley will do one at Southend and two at Harlow. Both live in London but are happy to do the commute against the traffic.

Neither would have taken up a judicial post full-time because of family commitments. Grosse, 50, who also fits in work as a school governor and trustee of a local youth charity, has been specialising

in housing and family law since 1993; her Westminster-based firm acts for a number of Church of England dioceses and she is involved with property work for various diocesan boards. "I've been a solicitor for quite a long time and have had a lot of experience; and I've been a deputy (district judge) for a while — since 1997 — so this, for me, was a natural career progression, a way to move my career forward. I felt it would give me a challenge and that I would enjoy it."

She has two children, aged 14 and 16, and does not want to work full-time. "It will be three fairly long days, leaving early in the morning, but that's fine."

Similarly, Rowley, 41, was working part-time as a barrister in the chambers of Richard King, at 5 Paper Buildings, specialising in housing law. She was called to the Bar in 1987 and became a deputy district judge in August 2001. She has two children, aged 11 and 9. "More and more barristers are applying to be district judges. It was something that appealed to me," she says. "Since I had my children I've worked part-time, three days a week, which my chambers happily accommodated. I'd not have taken up the post full-time."

The work of a district judge lends itself to a job sharing . Most cases are short, lasting on average ten minutes. Occasionally cases run to one or two days but both women will sit consecutive days in one court, so longer cases can be heard. Grosse says: "It needs realistic listing, but even with full-time judges, if a case goes over its allotted two days it is adjourned to another date, in just the same way."

In any case courts are used to full-time judges being in one place for two days and perhaps three in another, Rowley adds. It has not proved a problem. "The judges and court staff have all been incredibly supportive."

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer of Thoroton, hopes that the arrangement will encourage others to follow suit. They agree. "There's no doubt," Grosse says, "that there are people who would like to work three days a week but continue to look after their family. It will give the Bench greater diversity, bring people in with different talents that have not been available so far. I think we also bring an air of realism to the work [disputes on housing, family matters, road traffic, small claims]."

This is also the Lord Chancellor's agenda — and from April that, too, of the new Judicial Appointments Commission, which under the chairmanship of Baroness Prashar starts taking over responsibility for appointing judges. The latest figures show that between April 2004 and September last year, 549 appointments were made, of which 37 per cent were women and 12 per cent ethnic minorities. In the six months after April 2005, women have made up 46 per cent and ethnic minority groups 17 per cent of all appointments. Inevitably there are murmurings of discontent: Lord Falconer insists there are no targets or quotas — yet statistics show that it is harder for the old judicial stereotype, the white male, to be appointed.

Grosse and Rowley have no truck with any notion that they were given favourable treatment. "Our applications were treated the same way as everyone else — we are there on merit."

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