



# WOMEN IN THE LAW

For many years there have been women in the legal profession but the numbers of those being called to the Bar and being admitted as solicitors have recently significantly increased. Now all Law Schools seem to have virtually equal numbers of male and female students.

One only has to look at the present number of women judges and women silks (Queen's Counsel) to appreciate that equality in numbers has not always been the case. Women barristers who were called to the Bar before or immediately after the Second World War were not entitled to become members of Bar Messes. They could not attend certain functions held on circuit. Happily that situation changed in the middle of the 1960s.

Those of us who were lucky enough to embark upon practice in the early 1970s were made very welcome on Circuit. With the advent of the Crown Court system in 1972 gradually more women embarked upon practice in the law.

For women who have taken a career break it is not always easy to return to practice in Chambers as self-employed barristers. Solicitors not involved in litigation may have found this aspect slightly less problematical. Litigation is always unpredictable. One can never reliably assess the length of a case. Working part-time as barrister involved primarily in court work is essentially impractical. In criminal trials, for example, one is dependent upon the jury's deliberations and the time these may take is unpredictable.

Now all sets of barristers' chambers adopt a more enlightened policy to assist members to retain their tenancy and resume their practice after any form of career break.

Lawyers (solicitors and barristers) seeking to embark upon part-time judicial careers - sitting as Assistant Recorders in the crown or county court - may apply to the Lord Chancellor's Department. On the residential Induction Course organised by the Judicial Studies Board there are now more women than previously although as yet the numbers of men and women are by no means equal.

The reason why there are still comparatively few women judges and

women QCs is because this promotion generally occurs after at least 15-20 years in practice. From now on there will be increasing numbers of women of that seniority in practice. In another say 10 years the situation may be very different.

I have no hesitation in saying that I have never experienced any prejudice as a result of being a woman in the law. I have always been extremely fortunate within my own Chambers in Birmingham and practising on the Midland and Oxford Circuit. Similarly, when I started to sit part-time in the Crown Court I encountered no difficulties. My colleagues have invariably been welcoming and helpful. In my experience the opportunities are certainly equal.

I have now been a Circuit Judge for nearly 5 years. In my view being a woman in no way affects the cases one hears or the way in which one judges them. We are all the same under the wig!

*Judge Elisabeth Fisher practised for nearly 20 years as a barrister and now sits as a Circuit Judge. She is a member of the Criminal Justice Consultative Council.*

## GENDER IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

(92 figures unless stated otherwise)

	of total population
<b>POLICE</b>	
Women officers	12%
Women assistant chief constables	2%
<b>CPS</b>	
Women staff (all grades)	60%
Women senior management grades	25%
<b>SOLICITORS (1991 figures)</b>	
Women assistant solicitors	45%
Women partners	10%
<b>BARRISTERS</b>	
Women in private practice	19%
Women QCs	5%
<b>THE MAGISTRACY</b>	
Women lay magistrates	45%
Women stipendiary magistrates	13%
<b>THE JUDICIARY</b>	
Women assistant recorders	10%
Women recorders	5%
Women circuit judges	5%

Source: Gender & the Criminal Justice System. Home Office 9/92

THE INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY  
University of Cambridge

## CROPWOOD SHORT-TERM FELLOWSHIP AWARDS 1995

The Institute of Criminology is offering Cropwood Awards to practitioners in statutory and voluntary services connected with criminal justice, crime prevention or the treatment of offenders (including juveniles).

Fellowships are tenable for one year and holders are able to spend up to twelve weeks attached to the Institute for a period of work or study, which may involve a specific piece of research; the completion of an enquiry already begun and the presentation of results; the preparation of special lectures; or the intensive study of a topic of practical concern. There is no restriction on the topics which may be proposed; applications are judged entirely on their merits. However, the selection committee welcomes especially studies which address, directly or indirectly, the issues of race relations policy and equal opportunities within the criminal justice system.

*The closing date for applications is 30 September 1994 and the address for further enquiries is:*

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