



Michael Jones, barrister at Deans Court Chambers

Year of Call: 2008

Practice Area: Family law (children- public and private), Court of Protection



My day usually starts about 6.30am depending on where I am in court (if I am travelling further afield it may be earlier), as a general rule I don't tend to work early mornings (I prefer to do late nights), so I will usually try to go for a run, maybe go to the gym on my way to Court (my single concession to exercise).

Court hearings in family cases tend to start at 10am, with parties at court for 9am, so I am usually at wherever I need to be at 9am to meet my client. Family lawyers will tell you that it is normally a case of meeting the client, going through any bits of evidence they may not have seen, providing advice and taking instructions. The majority of my work involves public law care proceedings, so my client may be a parent or a child, on the other hand it may be a local authority. After discussing matters with the client it is then a case of going to meet the other lawyers and having further discussions.

It is rare that everyone is geared up and ready to go for 10am, so often it may be a little later before we are ready or get called into court. Hearings can last for any amount of time – the phrase, “how long is a piece of string” is probably apt in describing how long the average hearing in a care case lasts. It can range from 30 minutes to well over an hour, or even hours if a matter is contested.

Sometimes I will have one case, sometimes two or three. Today I had one hearing in the morning, got into court at 10.45am, finished around 12.50pm. I was acting for a local authority so I needed to take around an hour after the hearing drafting an order and attendance note.

I managed to get back to chambers by 3pm and collect my papers for the next day (two cases for local authorities, one having about an inch of papers, the other 3 lever arch files full of papers).

So I am home for 4pm, where I begin prep for the next day – I do one case at a time, read the papers, draft a case summary and order – I take a break for about 90 minutes at 6pm to have something to eat (I missed lunch today – hazard of the job, any family barrister must always ensure an appropriate supply of flapjack and sports/energy bars are kept in the glove compartment of any motor vehicle they own). I finished work at about 10.30pm, then check my emails.....I have 17 emails!

Emails range from requests from the client for advice on some issues that cropped up at court today, to requested amendments to today’s order from other parties. I amend today’s order, send an email to the judge, then respond to the other emails in my inbox.

By 11.30pm I am in bed, comatose after a long day.

Some days vary – sometimes I am finished by 12 noon and finish work by 5pm – these days are rare, but it can happen.

Peaks: any time you get the result in a case that you want – there is no more rewarding feeling than getting a result in a finely balanced case. Sometimes even if it is not the result you actually want for a client, you can feel that at the end of the day it was the right result for the child, which gives you some comfort in cases where you don’t succeed.

Pitfalls: the impact of the job on your social and family life (sometimes I actually question whether being a family barrister is Article 8 compliant!).