



Alexandra Marks

in 2002, is a Deputy High Court Judge. For six years, she was a Judicial Appointments Commissioner, and for five years a Criminal Cases Review Commissioner. She is also a Past President of the City of London Law Society and a Board member of JUSTICE.

Please tell us about your best day at work?

My best day at work is when I can – and do – apply the law to make a positive difference to someone's life.

This happens most obviously when I am sitting as a Recorder in the Crown Court. For instance, I may have to decide whether a convicted defendant should go to prison or not. That is a huge responsibility. Like virtually every other criminal judge I have met, I try not to send people to prison if I can possibly help it. Knowing I've given someone another chance (only, of course, if I believe it's deserved!) feels like a good day at work!

What do you think is the greatest challenge for women looking to access justice in the UK?

That is a huge question! If I were to generalise, I would say the greatest challenge is that women are more inclined than men to avoid conflict – yet our justice system is highly adversarial.

Many people, but perhaps women in particular, find this uncomfortable or even alienating. This is particularly so when they are unrepresented – which alas is becoming increasingly common – and, I believe, creates a barrier to justice.

How far has the UK come towards gender parity in the legal profession?

Gender parity has come a long way since 1919! But I'm disappointed that now 33 years since I joined the profession (when there were equal numbers of women and men studying law with me, both at university and at law school), there are still so few women at the very highest levels of the judiciary, the Bar and the solicitors' profession.

I believe this shows that the "trickle up" effect isn't working, and that more radical structural change to job design in the legal profession

Who, or what, inspires you most and why?

As Chair of a national charity called Prisoners' Education Trust, I have had the privilege of meeting many of our alumni: prisoners whose distance learning courses in prison PET has funded. It is both humbling and inspiring to hear about these men and women's achievements both inside and since leaving prison. I've enjoyed a marvellously interesting, rewarding and varied career (in part thanks to JUSTICE – without which I doubt I would have been appointed a Criminal Cases Review Commissioner!).

But it didn't happen straightaway, and a lot of luck as well as hard work was involved!