

Recorder Competition - 2015 Selection Exercise

The Second Stage of Shortlisting – 18 May 2015

**SUPPLEMENTARY
FEEDBACK REPORT
OF THE
CHANCERY BAR ASSOCIATION**

PENELOPE REED QC

Chair

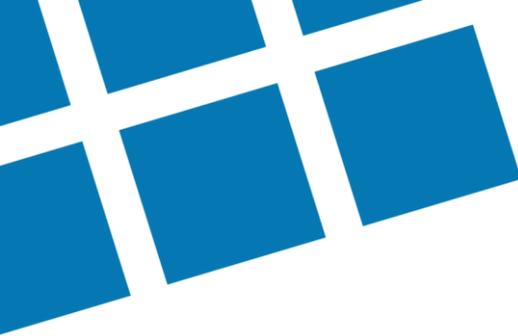
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25 November 2015

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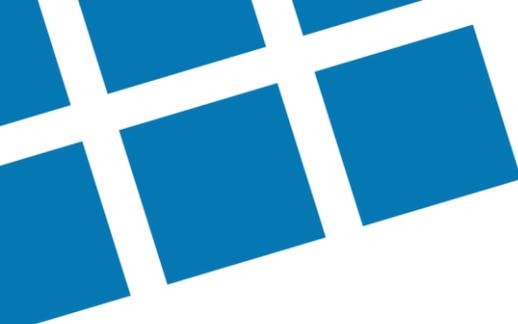
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(A) **INTRODUCTION**

(i) **Summary and purpose of this further report**

1. This report supplements the Chancery Bar Association’s “Feedback Report” dated 25 September 2015 in relation to the qualifying test which took place on 7 May 2015 (“**the First Feedback Report**”). This further report must be read together with the First Feedback Report¹.
2. Second stage shortlisting was used for the first time in the 2015 Recorder Competition. It was an additional step in the selection process, which took place between the qualifying test (the first stage) and the selection day (the third and final stage). 396 or so candidates reached the second stage (256 candidates for crime and 140 candidates for family²). The second stage of shortlisting resulted in a “merit list” from which the 198 or so candidates (128 for crime and 70 for family³) with the highest scores following the second-stage test were invited to the selection day.
3. This report confirms that, in relation to the 2015 Recorder Competition, the second stage of shortlisting was also profoundly unfair to non-criminal and non-family practitioners.
4. This is because, in determining which candidates had the highest scores at the second stage and therefore proceeded to the selection day:
 - a. the score of the qualifying test was carried forward and was added to (i) the score of the second-stage test, and (ii) the marks allocated to a candidate’s self-assessment; and
 - b. the second-stage test was an online written assessment featuring “a situation a Recorder may face” the answer to which required technical knowledge/experience of criminal or family law (depending on the test).
5. On 14 May 2015 the applicants who passed the qualifying test were invited by email to take part in the second stage of shortlisting. This included an online scenario based test which took place in a 24-hour test window that started at noon on Monday 18 May 2015. These candidates were given notice of this test after 7pm on Thursday 14 May 2015. This meant that, apart from the weekend, the candidates only had one working day to prepare⁴.
6. In the First Feedback Report we explained (paras 5, 8 and 9):

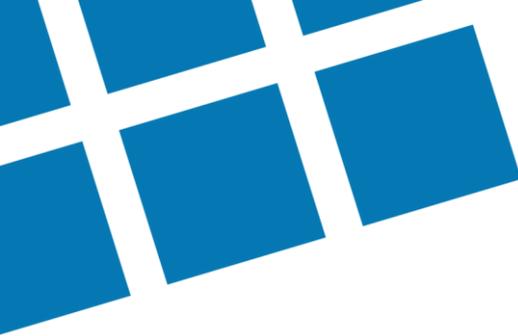
“[5] ...The scores for the successful candidates [in the qualifying test] were then combined in respect of the three parts [of the qualifying test] and a “merit list” created. The candidates with the highest scores were invited to participate in the

¹ The defined terms used in this Supplementary Report are the same as those set out in the First Feedback Report.

² 1,223 candidates took part in the qualifying test and the number of candidates was reduced to 396 or so as a result of the qualifying test: para 4 of the First Feedback Report.

³ Para 4 of the First Feedback Report.

⁴ This gave a very limited time frame for preparation, particularly for anyone with existing court/professional commitments and/or family/caring responsibilities.



second-stage shortlisting and their score from the qualifying test was carried forward to this second stage. The candidates with the highest overall scores as a result of the qualifying test and second-stage shortlisting were then invited to the selection day, the third and final stage of the selection process...

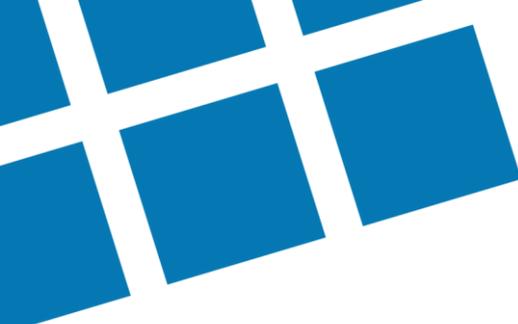
[8] ... even if non-criminal or non-family practitioners passed the qualifying test, they were stuck with their score in that test, and that score was taken into account in determining which 198 or so candidates were eliminated from the selection exercise at the second-stage shortlisting and which 198 or so candidates were invited to the selection day. The prejudice suffered by non-criminal and non-family practitioners in the qualifying test was therefore carried forward into the second-stage shortlisting, and inevitably will have had a “knock-on” effect as to whether they then made it through to the selection day. Their chances of making it through to the selection day were further reduced because the written assessment used in the second-stage shortlisting also required technical knowledge of criminal or family law (depending on the test). The areas of law were notified in advance, but from the limited feedback received it appears that any candidate who practised in criminal or family law had an inherent advantage in identifying, and dealing with, all the issues that test gave rise to.

[9] Save for the points mentioned in paragraph 8 above, this report does not address the second-stage shortlisting in any detail. This is because, given the unfairness of the qualifying test used for the initial sift of applicants, the ChBA has not yet sought specific feedback in relation to the second-stage shortlisting.”

7. For the reasons set out in the First Feedback Report very few members of the ChBA made it through to the second stage of shortlisting. Nevertheless, in the ChBA’s email newsletter dated 8 October 2015 feedback was sought from the members of the ChBA in relation to the second stage of shortlisting.

(ii) Conclusion

8. This further report explains why the members of the ChBA, and indeed anyone who does not practice in criminal or family law, were at a significant disadvantage in relation to the second stage of shortlisting. This report follows and is based on feedback received from the ChBA’s members in October 2015 (which is set out at paras 31 to 40 below).
9. The second stage of shortlisting was unfair to non-criminal and non-family practitioners because:
 - (1) The score from the qualifying test was carried forward to the shortlisting in the second stage. This disadvantaged candidates who passed the qualifying test, but got a lower score in that test. The candidates most likely to be in that position were the non-criminal or non-family practitioners. The reasons for this are explained in detail in the First Feedback Report.

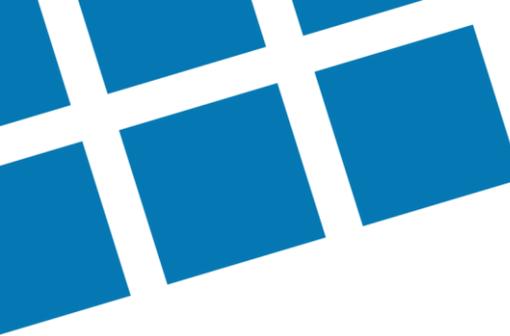
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- (2) The second stage of shortlisting failed to take any account of, or give any credit for, the fact that non-criminal and non-family practitioners who had managed to pass the qualifying test had thereby demonstrated the ability and commitment to acquire some of the requisite behaviours in the Competency Framework in a short time frame (ie Possessing and Building Knowledge, Assimilating and Clarifying Information⁵). Rather, having passed the qualifying test, they were then placed at an immediate disadvantage because they were the candidates likely to have obtained a lower score in the qualifying test than the criminal or family practitioners, and that score was taken into account in drawing up the second stage shortlist: see sub-para (1) above.
- (3) There was no reason at all to carry forward a candidate's score from the qualifying test for the purpose of a creating the second stage shortlist or "merit list". If a candidate had passed the qualifying test and thereby demonstrated the skills examined by that test, namely technical legal knowledge and situational judgement⁶, it was unnecessary to include their score from the qualifying test as part of the second stage of shortlisting. Rather, the second stage shortlist could have been drawn up by reference to the following factors, namely:
- a. an online scenario test, designed:
 - i. to test a candidate's communication skills (which is what this test was apparently designed to examine⁷); and
 - ii. to be accessible to candidates from across the profession regardless of their jurisdictional specialisation.
 - b. the candidate's self-assessment.
- (4) The online scenario test involved technical issues of criminal law and procedure or, depending on the test, family law and procedure. This was inherently unfair as it inevitably disadvantaged candidates who did not specialise in criminal or family law and, as a result, such candidates were unlikely to have scored as well in this test as any candidate who was familiar with these particular areas of law. Further, the test for Recorder (Crime) was not based on "a typical situation that a Recorder may face", as it concerned an appeal against conviction. Recorders are required to be authorised, or "ticketed", to hear appeals in the Crown Court⁸, and not all recorders are authorised to hear appeals against conviction.
- (5) There is no reason why, if a second stage is necessary in relation to a recorder selection exercise, the JAC cannot set an on-line scenario test in a courtroom situation which is even-handed and not based on any technical aspects of criminal or family law and/or procedure.

⁵ Para 51 of the First Feedback Report.

⁶ Paras 47 and 60 of the First Feedback Report.

⁷ This what the JAC told the ChBA on 11 November 2014: see para 16 below.

⁸ See para 36 below.



(6) It is not clear what proportion of the marks were given to a candidate's self-assessment or how the self-assessment was marked. In particular, it is not known:

- a. what marks were given to a candidate's ability to acquire the behaviours identified in the Competency Framework⁹, rather than being able to actually demonstrate the behaviours in question; and
- b. whether proper weight was given to the achievements of non-criminal or non-family practitioners in deciding whether they should attend the selection day.

10. To the ChBA's knowledge, only one of its members (who did a criminal pupillage) was invited to the selection day.

11. The only conclusion to be drawn from this is that the second stage of shortlisting was not fit for purpose. It was not designed to allow candidates from across the profession regardless of their jurisdictional specialisation who had made it through to the second stage then to proceed to the selection day. This is a further reason why it was incorrect for the JAC to describe the 2015 Recorder Competition as being open to candidates with no previous experience of criminal law or family law. Such candidates, even if they passed the qualifying test, were placed at significant and unfair disadvantage by reference to the structure and content of the second stage of shortlisting.

12. The ChBA is very concerned to draw this conclusion to the attention of the JAC so that this significant unfairness does not arise again in relation to any future recorder competitions (or indeed any competitions). This is particularly important for the very same reasons identified the First Feedback Report: see in particular paras 12 and 138 to 149.

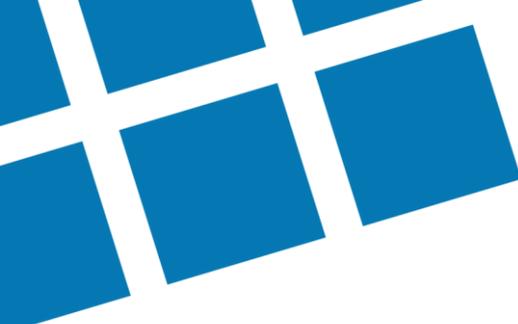
(iii) COMBAR support

13. This further report is written with the support of COMBAR, the specialist association of the English and Welsh Commercial Bar.

(iv) Distribution of this report

14. This further report is being sent to Mr Christopher Stephens, Chairman of the Judicial Appointments Commission; Sir Terence Etherton, The Chancellor of the High Court; Sir Brian Leveson, President of the Queen's Bench Division; Dame Heather Hallett DBE, Vice President of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division); Mr Alistair MacDonald QC, Chairman of the Bar Council; Miss Chantal-Aimee Doerries QC, Chairman-Elect of the Bar Council; and Mr Laurence Rabinowitz QC, Chairman of COMBAR.

⁹ Paras 49 to 51 of the First Feedback Report.



(B) THE SECOND STAGE OF SHORTLISTING

(i) Information provided by the JAC on 11 November 2014

15. There was a meeting between the JAC and the ChBA on 11 November 2014 in relation to the 2015 Recorder Competition: see paras 45 to 48 of the First Feedback Report.

16. At that meeting the JAC told the ChBA that the second stage of the application process would be:

“Second Shortlisting: This will be a scenario-based assessment, designed to test the candidate’s communication skills. The format being considered by the JAC is for the candidate to be given some papers and a short period of time to consider them in order to prepare a brief summing up or judgment. There will be an interview during which the candidate will present the short summing up or judgment to a panel. The JAC said that they are considering using recorded video interviews for this stage. This additional step in the process is new. The JAC explained that, if included, its purpose is: (i) to ensure that more candidates are given a chance to present themselves to a panel; and (ii) to exclude fewer candidates as a result of the online test (ie just on the basis of their knowledge of black letter law and intellectual skills) (underlining added).”

17. From this explanation the ChBA understood from the JAC that the purpose of this new step in the application process would be to allow more candidates through the qualifying test and to provide candidates who had passed the qualifying test with an opportunity to demonstrate a different skill, namely communication skill, which would then be taken into account in determining which candidates proceeded to the selection day.

18. In the end the scenario-based assessment did not follow the possible format of a recorded video interview. Nevertheless, as far as the ChBA was aware, the purpose of this new step remained a test of communication skills, albeit with a different format, ie online.

(ii) Information provided by the JAC on 11 March 2015

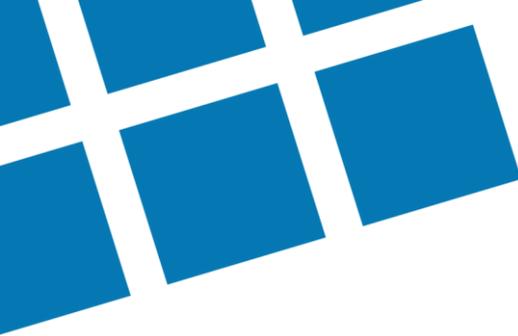
19. On 11 March 2015 the ChBA contacted the JAC by telephone in relation to the Competency Framework: see paras 56 to 61 of the First Feedback Report.

20. In response to the ChBA’s questions, on 11 March 2015 the JAC (Stuart Burrows) explained and emphasised the following, among other, points to the ChBA¹⁰:

- (1) If applicants did not have any previous experience of criminal or family law, or of sitting as a judge, then they were “expected to demonstrate an ability to acquire the behaviours [set out in the Competency Framework] if they do not already possess them”¹¹.

¹⁰ Paras 56 to 60 of the First Feedback Report.

¹¹ Para 58(4) of the First Feedback Report.



(2) The application process was designed to test that a candidate had the requisite skills or “behaviours” or can acquire them¹².

21. The JAC also provided the ChBA with the following information about the second stage of shortlisting, which the ChBA provided in a Note to members dated 11 March 2015:

“Following the qualifying test the number of candidates will be reduced so that the total number of candidates remaining will be 4 candidates for every post. At this second stage, there will be a written assessment. More details are set out in the email from SB annexed to this Note (so please read that). This stage of the process is new.

This assessment will be conducted on-line, at a time to the convenience of the candidate (but within a specified window of dates).

It is a test that has been developed by judges, and candidates will be presented with a typical situation that a Recorder may face. Candidates will be provided with written case materials in advance, which they will need to assimilate and then answer questions in relation to the situation in question. How far in advance candidates will be provided with the case materials is not clear at the moment.

The written assessment will be marked by a Judge, together with two independent panel members. Further, it is at this point that a candidate’s self-assessment will be considered and marked... The number of candidates will be halved as a result of this stage so that, by the stage of the selection day, there will be 2 candidates for every post.”

22. The relevant parts of the email from Stuart Burrows (Assistant Director, JAC) which were annexed to this Note explained as follows:

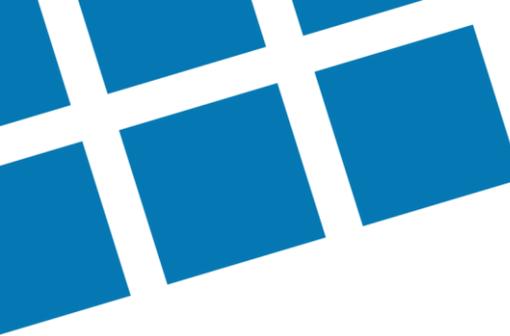
“We are planning for the second shortlisting stage to entail a written assessment and a review of the self-assessment part of the application form, assessed by an independent panel chair and a judicial panel member.

The written assessment will involve a situation a Recorder may face. It is being designed as a more in-depth assessment than the scenario questions in the qualifying test and it will require a typed response rather than answering multiple choice questions. The assessment will be run online via the JAC website.

Like all of our other assessments, it will be written by a relevant judge and the content will be cleared in advance by our Advisory Group of representatives from the profession and the judiciary.

At this stage in the shortlisting process there will also be a review of the self-assessment part of the application form.

¹² Para 58(5) of the First Feedback Report.



The independent panel chair and judicial panel member will then review the scores from each stage of the shortlisting process – the qualifying test and both parts of the second stage shortlisting – and the candidates who have the highest scores overall will be invited to the selection day, in the usual proportion of around two candidates for every vacancy.

Previous selection exercises for fee-paid legally qualified judicial roles have used a similar shortlisting process.”

23. The candidate’s self-assessment was therefore considered by the JAC at this second stage of the application process.

(iii) **JAC’s email to candidates on 14 May 2015 on the second-stage scenario test**

24. The successful candidates who applied for Recorder (Crime) were sent the following email by the JAC on after 7pm on Thursday 14 May 2015:

“00800: Recorder 2015

Thank you for applying for the above post. As stated in the information page of the JAC website the shortlisting process for this exercise consists of two stages. I am pleased to inform you that you have been successful in the first stage for the Crime post.

*You are now invited to take the second stage of shortlisting - an online scenario test. The test consists of one scenario question and you will have up to a **maximum of 2 hours and 30 minutes** in which to complete the test. The exact time will be stated in the information page you see prior to entering the actual test. If you have requested a reasonable adjustment your time will be adjusted accordingly.*

You can access the test between 12:00 noon on Monday 18 May and 12:00 noon on Tuesday 19 May 2015.

You can access the test anytime during this period but must start the test no later than 9:30 am on Tuesday 19 May.

Please take time to read the instructions on the information page before taking the test as this will give you information on how to navigate the test and submit your answers.

In advance of taking the test, the drafting judges have suggested that candidates familiarise themselves with the following areas:

Crime:

- *Appeal against conviction*
- *Special measures*”

25. In the case of candidates who had applied for Recorder (Family), they received an email in identical terms except that the drafting judges suggested that candidates familiarise themselves with the following areas: (i) Family Procedure Rules PD12J, and (ii) Children Law & Practice: B[332].

(C) FEEDBACK ON THE SECOND STAGE OF SHORTLISTING

(i) The ChBA’s request for feedback and the responses received

(a) Feedback request on the second-stage scenario test

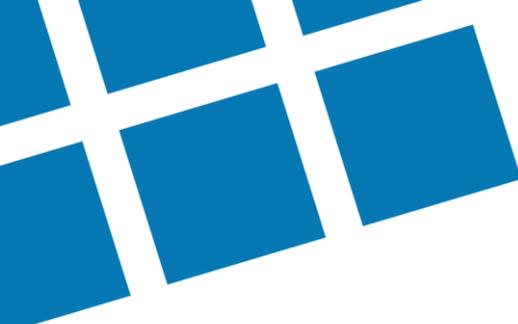
26. The ChBA’s request for feedback was made in the following terms on 8 October 2015:

“To date the ChBA has only provided feedback to the Judicial Appointments Commission on the unfairness of the First Qualifying Test Although we had not specifically requested it to date, we have received some feedback from members that anyone who practiced in criminal law would have had an advantage in relation to Second Stage Scenario test.

If you took the Second Stage Scenario Test, we would be very grateful for your thoughts/feedback and in particular:

- (i) What preparation you did for the test, both in terms of reading and the time you were able to spend preparing;*
- (ii) Whether you were able to address all the issues in relation to the situational question and, if not, why not;*
- (iii) Any other comments on the Second Stage Scenario Test. We are particularly interested to hear about the “technical” aspect of the test.*

The ChBA would like to have this feedback as it likely that we will be meeting with the Judicial Appointments Commission later this term, and we wish to explain why this test was also unfair to our members. Please could you provide this feedback to Amanda Tipples QC by 5pm on Friday 16 October 2015 at atipples@maitlandchambers.com. Amanda will anonymise any feedback she receives for purpose of any correspondence with the JAC on behalf of the Association. Thank you very much.



(b) The responses received

27. Three members of the ChBA provided feedback in response to the request set out above. Of these members:

- (1) They were all juniors called between 1983 and 2000. They were therefore all more than 15 years' call.
- (2) Two were male and one was female.
- (3) Two people took the second-stage test for Recorder (Crime); One person took the second-stage test for Recorder (Family).
- (4) None of them made it through to the selection day.

28. The ChBA was also contacted by one female QC who is a civil practitioner and wished to provide feedback, even though she was not a member of the ChBA. This was because, as she did not practice in family or crime, she considered herself to have been unfairly disadvantaged by the second-stage test for Recorder (Crime).

29. The ChBA has used all the feedback provided in preparing this report. Those who have provided such feedback are referred to as “**respondents**” below.

30. The conclusions to be drawn from the feedback received by the ChBA are set out at paragraphs 8 to 12 above.

(ii) **Feedback received: the second stage of shortlisting for Recorder (Crime)**

(a) Preparation for the second-stage scenario test

31. One respondent explained that they:

“had to read and absorb a large amount of criminal law in a short time. However, by that time I had worked out that the depth of knowledge required (as opposed to breadth) was likely to be limited because the QT did not eventually require depth. So I concentrated on understanding the principles in relation to the topics on the syllabus...”

32. Another respondent explained:

“I spent much of that weekend reading up on appeals against conviction and special measures (which was not particularly convenient for a person with family responsibilities ...). However I had no realistic prospect of acquiring any practical experience of the operation of hearings involving these issues within the allotted time.”

(b) The second-stage scenario test favoured criminal practitioners

33. The on-line test provided a scenario in a Crown Court situation and candidates were asked to provide a written answer to the question. The answer had to be provided in direct speech and use no more than 400 words.

34. This scenario-based test disadvantaged civil practitioners because, as one respondent explained:

“I don't see how you could have passed part 2 without being a criminal practitioner. You had to address a litigant in a courtroom situation. The brief was about 4 sentences long. It was very simple ... So if you were a criminal practitioner you could presumably have written something quite elegant based on your experience. And if you had never seen this scenario in practice you were at a total disadvantage.”

35. The technical issues arising in the test were explained by the same respondent as follows:

“... the test appeared to require familiarity with a further area of technical law, namely the restriction on defendants cross-examining witnesses, which was not identified in the pre-reading.

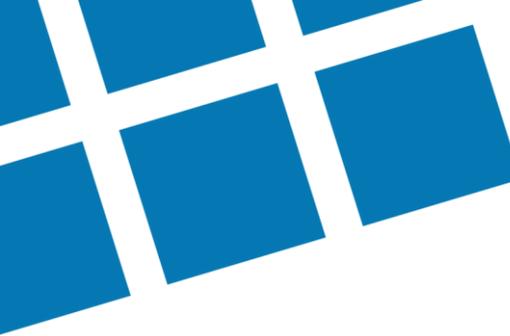
It is surely beyond debate that candidates with experience of such applications [ie appeals against convictions and special measures] and how they operate in practice, and with a feel for what a judge would and would not say, would have been in a far better position to provide a strong answer.

... the marking scheme for the Second Stage Test should have operated in a manner which recognised that non-criminal practitioners would not have been familiar with all relevant areas of law, could not have acquired relevant practical experience within the timeframe of the test and could not have known what a realistic answer would look like. In fact, I do not believe that the actual marking scheme reflected these considerations at all.”

36. It is also important to note that, contrary to the information provided by the JAC to the ChBA on 11 March 2015¹³, an appeal against conviction is not necessarily a “typical situation a Recorder may face”. This is because Recorders have to be authorised or “ticketed” to hear appeals against conviction. Recorders are notified by the Judicial Secretariat if there is a ticketing process taking place and, to receive authorisation, a Recorder has to apply to hear appeals by completing a “Request for authorisation form”¹⁴. If the application is approved, then the Recorder will in due course receive a letter from the Presiding Judge informing him or her that they have been approved to hear appeals in the Crown Court. This, of course, means that not all Recorders are necessarily approved to hear appeals.

¹³ Para 21 above.

¹⁴ This form requires the Recorder to provide a “brief description of the professional background and reasons for applying” and has to identify the Resident Judge or Designated Civil or Designated Family Judge to whom “PJJs/FDLJs can consult if required”.



37. The unfairness of the second-stage was also explained by another respondent in these terms:

“Much to my surprise having done the qualifying test, I passed the first stage. I had thought that the second stage would play more to my strengths, in that my self-assessment form had stood up reasonably well to review by colleagues in chambers (including one who is now a judge). But the second stage involved inter alia (i) a situational question which, again, was one in which those with a criminal practice background would find much easier to deal with and (ii) a final score that combined the results of the first and second stage.

It was this last point that I thought to be particularly unfair. With a lot of studying, I had managed to meet the required standard for the first stage. But I suspect that I scraped through, and this would have meant that the second stage (presumably intended to test different competencies) was affected by the outcome of the first.

That, to me, seems the wrong approach: if we had demonstrated sufficient competence in the three areas tested by the first stage, I am unclear why the second stage needed to take into account (or ought to have taken into account) the results of stage one again.

I have been put off applying again...”

(c) Self-assessment

38. The second stage of shortlisting also took account of an applicant’s self-assessment. However, it is not known what proportion of the marks were allocated to self-assessment, or how such marks were allocated.

(iii) Feedback received: the second stage of shortlisting for Recorder (Family)

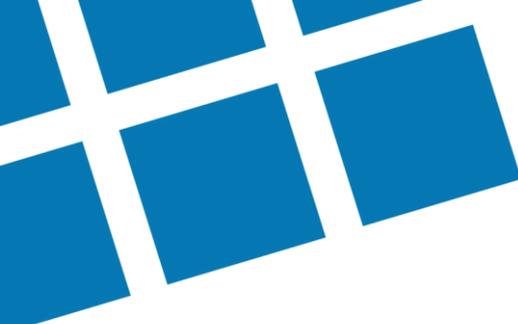
(a) The second-stage scenario test favoured family practitioners

39. The one respondent who was able to provide feedback in relation to the scenario test for Recorder (Family) identified:

- (1) that a family practitioner would have had a “massive advantage” in relation to this online test; and
- (2) the prejudice caused by aggregating the scores of the qualifying test, the second-stage test and the marks from the self-assessment.

40. In particular, this person explained the position as follows:

“I sat the 2nd Stage Family (not Criminal) Test. I found it to be highly unsatisfactory (and somewhat mysterious)... The test (as I read it) presented a very short directions private-law children scenario and asked for a written judgment (limited in number of



words – I think to somewhere between 250-500, I cannot remember) regarding directions giving 45 minutes for this test...

The timing for the test seemed inapposite and inconsistent with the 1st Stage and the competency of dealing with matters quickly. To have 45 minutes in which to compose such a word length was far too long, and not what would arise in practice.

It was not at all clear as to which were the relevant “issues” [which] were supposed to have arisen upon which directions were required. It was possible from the scenario to envisage various possibilities but wholly unclear as to which were serious and in circumstances where the limited word length meant that it was only possible to deal with a limited number. The limited, and entirely unreal, word-limit turned this into an English restricted-length composition exercise which lacked clearly stated aims. I accept that a judge should be able to isolate the essential issues, but that should happen within the hearing itself.

In any event, an experienced family practitioner would have a massive advantage as they would know what were the standard directions in a scenario of this particular nature and what in family law was regarded as having particular importance – any other practitioner who did not have a judicial private law ticket or relevant private law children experience must have been at a concomitant disadvantage.

I was left with the feeling that I could not be sure that I had understood the question and that only an experienced family practitioner could have been confident that they knew what was being sought from the candidate.

I would add that the concept of the second stage being an assessment against both the (combined) test results and the self-assessment form does not feel satisfactory. If there is to be a “test” filter, then [the test] should be the filter as (i) it is transparent and (ii) the two elements cannot be measured against each other in any real way as one is objective and the other is heavily subjective. I am left not really knowing why I “failed” notwithstanding having beaten the filter on the first stage.”

(b) Self-assessment

41. The second stage of shortlisting also took account of an applicant’s self-assessment. However, as with the shortlisting for Recorder (Crime), it is not known what proportion of the marks were allocated to self-assessment, or how such marks were allocated.
42. The conclusions drawn from the feedback have been set out and explained at paragraphs 8 to 12 above.

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