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Types of legal professions

Northern Ireland

This page gives you an overview of the legal professions in the Northern Ireland jurisdiction of the UK.

Legal professions – introduction

The legal professions in Northern Ireland include:

Judiciary

Prosecutors

Barristers

Solicitors

Organisation of the legal profession: Judges

The Northern Ireland jurisdiction has the following judicial posts:

Lord Chief Justice – head of the judiciary

Lord Justices of Appeal

High Court Judges

Masters of the Supreme Court

County Court Judges

District Judges (county court)

District Judges (magistrates court)

Lay Magistrates

Coroners

Organisation of the legal profession: Prosecutors

Organisation

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) is the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland. In addition to taking decisions as to prosecution in cases investigated by the police in Northern Ireland, it also considers cases investigated by other statutory authorities, such as HM Revenue and Customs.

The PPS is headed by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. There is also a Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions. The Deputy Director has all the powers of the Director but must exercise them under his or her direction and control. Both posts are public appointments made by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland.

The PPS is designated as a non-ministerial government department. In accordance with the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, the functions of the Director shall be exercised independently of any other person. The 2002 Act provides for the Director and Attorney General to consult with each other from time to time on any matter for which the Attorney General is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly. At present a number of prosecutorial matters are reserved to Parliament at Westminster. Duties in respect of these matters are performed by the Advocate General for Northern Ireland.

Role and duties

The primary role of the PPS is to decide whether or not to prosecute people for committing criminal offences and what the correct charges should be.

The Service also has responsibility for prosecuting cases at court. The prosecutor presents evidence to the court on behalf of the Crown. Prosecutors call and examine Crown witnesses and cross-examine defence witnesses. At the conclusion of a case, they sum up the evidence to the court on behalf of the Crown.

Organisation of the legal profession: Lawyers

Barristers (Advocates)

In Northern Ireland, barristers are divided into senior counsel (known as Queen's Counsel) and junior counsel. The bar is a body of specialist advocates experienced in litigation, to which the public have access through solicitors and, in limited circumstances, by direct professional access.

The [Bar of Northern Ireland](#) is an association of over 600 independent barristers based in the Bar Library in Belfast.

Solicitors (legal advisers)

In Northern Ireland, the [Law Society](#) is the regulatory authority that governs the education, accounts, discipline and professional conduct of solicitors. Its role is to maintain the independence, ethical standards, professional competence and quality of the services offered to the public. Solicitors may specialise in a particular field or may be general practitioners.

Notaries

In Northern Ireland, all solicitors are commissioners for oaths. This means they can witness official documents (other than those prepared by themselves or their opponents in a case).

In addition, some solicitors are notaries public, which means they can witness documents for use abroad.

Patent and Trade Mark Attorneys

Patent and trade mark attorneys are specialist advisers in the field of intellectual property. They provide legal advice to clients in this field, particularly in relation to patents, trade marks, designs and copyright. They also represent their clients in the specialist IP courts (some acquiring further rights after gaining an additional litigator's qualification).

Most patent and trade mark attorneys work in private practice. Many work in specialist practices, but some also work in partnership with solicitors.

Additionally, a sizable part of the profession works in industry.

Patent attorney and trade mark attorney litigators can represent their clients in court, in the same way as solicitors, for intellectual property cases, including instructing a barrister to conduct the case.

The [Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys](#) (CIPA) represents patent attorneys throughout the UK. Its role includes engaging with the Government over IP legislation, providing education and training for patent attorneys and trainees and engaging with the profession's regulators. CIPA seeks to promote IP law and the IP professions.

The [Institute of Trade Mark Attorneys](#) (ITMA) represents Trade Mark Attorneys and the profession throughout the United Kingdom. Its duties include negotiating with and lobbying government, its independent regulatory arm (IPReg) and other relevant organisations. It provides relevant education, training and advice for the Trade Mark Attorney profession and it is responsible for promoting the profession and IP.

The [Intellectual Property Regulation Board](#) (IPReg) deals with all regulatory and disciplinary matters, and sets, monitors and enforces standards for patent and trade mark attorneys across the UK. It acts in the public interest and it maintains statutory Registers of patent attorneys and trade mark attorneys, both individuals and entities

Other legal professionals

Court Clerks

Court Clerks and other staff in the Northern Ireland courts are non-legally trained civil servants who deal with administrative matters.

Court Clerks ensure that judges have the papers they need to preside over the cases before the court; they record the judge's decision in a case and provide any other administrative support the judges may require. While court staff can give you advice about court procedures, they cannot give legal advice, nor can they recommend what action litigants should take. All court staff are employed as civil servants by the [Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service](#) which is an agency within the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland.

Enforcement officers

Enforcement officers are civil servants employed by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. They deal with the enforcement of civil judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office. This office enforces the civil judgments of magistrates' and county courts (including small claims courts) as well as those of the High Court. The law that governs enforcement is set out in the Judgments Enforcement (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and the Judgment Enforcement Rules (Northern Ireland) 1981.

Related Links

[Public Prosecution Service](#)

[Bar of Northern Ireland](#)

[Law Society](#)

[Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service](#)

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