

UK magistrate quits the bench over reprimand for Tweeting on Twitter

April 27th, 2009 by Kara



Professor Steve Molyneux, was reported by a colleague for putting details on the social networking site.

The 54-year old, former Microsoft professor at Wolverhampton University was ordered to appear before the chairman of the bench at a meeting in February at Telford Magistrates court.

What is a magistrate?

Cases in the magistrates' courts are usually heard by a panel of three magistrates (Justices of the Peace) supported by a legally qualified Court Clerk. The magistrates are collectively called a Bench and are assigned to a Local Justice Area but have a national jurisdiction pursuant to the Courts Act 2003.

Magistrates are appointed by the Crown (retiring at the age of 70). They are not paid but may claim expenses and an allowance for loss of earnings. They come from all walks of life and do not usually have any legal qualifications. Qualified clerks advise them on the law. They are unpaid but receive travel and subsistence allowance. There are around 30,000 in England and Wales. They undergo a substantial amount of training supervised by the Judicial Studies Board.

From Her Majesty's Courts Service
<http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/infoabout/magistrates/index.htm>

Some samples of his micro-blog message content include his telling those following him on Twitter, how he sat “In the Gods passing sentence on the criminal fraternity”, and... “Just keeping up whilst I’m (sic) court deciding on sentence.”

Apparently, the reprimand was just too much for Magistrate Molyneux as he stated, “he considered being reported by a colleague a breach of trust.”

His goal was to simply make the public aware of the legal system's processes and he stated that he never posted online while a hearing was in session or in a courtroom. His most compelling comment to me: “The powers that be have totally overreacted to this by about 300 per cent, they probably don't even understand the technology.”

Hmmm – I'm not so sure about using the “technological trump-card” on this one...

He also stated that he never posted online while a hearing was in session or in a courtroom. Clearly, our sister-country is facing challenges similar to ours in their courtrooms. Obviously, there needs to be a separate set of rules for Tweeting and posting on other social platforms when you're involved in a court case. Although, while protocol appears transparent to many, what's clearly missing is the clarification of the rules, because relying on people's common sense, simply isn't working.

Things are heating up across the water over our favorite social media buzz-bridge, and I can't wait to hear the commentary!

Read the story I full at [Telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)

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