

Kiwisfirst.co.nz 2014 New Zealand Judge Survey

Surveys are from lawyers and court observers and cover four perceived criteria on a scale of 1 to 10, with the score being an equal-weighted average. (Intelligence, fairness, legal knowledge and personal character)

RANK	JUDGE	Score	Comments
1	Sian Elias	8.4	Mixed results on personal character but consistently held in high regard in every other category by respondents. Widely respected where not highly regarded. This judge has truly overcome her negatives.
2	Ailsa Duffy	8.4	A judge who impresses all with her interest in the submissions of parties, solid grounding in the law and her apparent desire to be reasoned and fair (a rare combination in New Zealand). The beauty of her contribution to the bench lies in this simplicity.
3	Timothy Brewer	8.4	A judge who has impressed lawyers with his military bearing, no nonsense professionalism and strong convictions in most cases to serve the best interests of justice within the parameters of the law. So far, this relatively new judge who was a stalwart supporter of the Crown as a lawyer has surprised many observers with his independence on the bench.
4	John Stephen Kos	8.4	A new judge who is making a good first impression and perceived to be conscientious. Cautionary notes by a couple respondents that most judges become less independent with time and hoping Kos J is not one of them.
5	Jillian Mallon	8.3	Seen by lawyers as often courageous, fair and takes the time necessary to get most decisions right. But not immune from outside pressure and lawyers have noticed recently more cause for concerns.
6	John Fogarty	8.3	Generally considered to be more courageous and disciplined than his judicial peers. But for some low marks on legal acumen, he would have rivalled for top ranking.
7	Paul Heath	8.3	Highly regarded in general for his proficiency in the law and fairness. As one lawyer commented, "Ruling in conflict of interest situations is common in NZ and Heath is not without his, but they appear comparably few."
8	Mark Alexander Woolford	8.3	Another new judge who is either wooing his bride on the honeymoon or, hopefully with fingers crossed, is as good as initial reports indicate.
9	Rodney Hansen	8.3	Recently retired but may do cameos. Generally regarded as a relatively honest and thoughtful judge for New Zealand, with a fair comprehension of the law, but he has some powerful friends which probably helped his score.
10	John Priestley	8.3	Recently retired but may be back for cameos. Considered to be a bit erratic and not adverse to taking judicial liberties, but generally regarded as a solid and often caring judge
11	Lynton Stevens	8.2	A judge with consistent scores across all categories. Few detractors. Generally respected and considered to be a straight shooter.
12	Noel Anderson	8.2	Retired but may be back for cameo appearances. Comments included high compliments on his willingness to listen and gentle manner, but the scores overall left a little to be desired for a judge on the highest court
13	Grant Hammond	8.2	Currently on the Law Commission. The court intellectual whose moral approach apparently disintegrated with time on the bench. May have gotten out just in time. Hammond J writing a book on judicial conflicts of interest was received more as a yarn than a ground-breaking legal digest and seems to have turned off more lawyers than it inspired. Still, many lawyers see him as independent as NZ offers.
14	Rebecca Ellis	8.1	A judge who has impressed lawyers with her evident determination to be fair, listen, and get it right. Some lower marks on knowledge of the law.
15	Susan Glazebrook	8.0	Once seen by lawyers as dowdy but diligent and insightful, some lawyers consider her self-importance and obsession with personal image grew inversely proportional to her disregard for law and justice in recent years. Some consider Glazebrook J a highly capable but sad shell of a presence on the Supreme Court bench in most cases, having apparently lost her passion for the law.
16	Graham Lang	8.0	Survey indicates where Lang J does not have a conflict he is quite capable and fair. A good, solid judge.
17	Joseph Williams	8.0	Some detractors but generally regarded as one of the more fair judges. Slightly above average in other respects.
18	Helen Winkelmann	8.0	Considered inconsistent. Brilliant at times, but with pronounced blind spots. Winkelmann J received praise for her limited gifts and condemnation for her occasional unreasoned judgments and exhibitions of poor personal judgment. Chief High Court judge because of her weakness in a court that fears strong leaders. Politically connected lawyers love her; the independent ones not so much.
19	Jeremy Doogue	7.9	Regarded as a mediocre if not stoic judge whose daily routine is guided by less concern for the law than personal errands and cleverly playing favorites. Even those few jilted victims of Doogue's clever perversions mostly go away feeling as if Doogue gave them time to be heard.
20	Peter Woodhouse	7.9	A judge widely considered to suffer from many limitations who nevertheless tries hard in most cases. Another one considered to owe his appointment to his father being a judge and his dedication to protecting judicial "dependence" upon one another, sometimes with justice and law becoming casualties.
21	Andrew Tipping	7.8	Recently retired. Commonly perceived as taking a genuine interest in cases before him, but scores indicate his talents are mediocre, particularly for a judge on the highest court.

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22	Christian Nathaniel Whata	7.8	Impresses many with his desire to be just. Questions over his approach at times and credentials. Score is rough due to newness of judicial appointment and few lawyer responses.
23	David Abbott	7.8	Appears prone to cast the law aside when no one is looking but generally regarded as more fair than most and having sufficient skills to perform adequately in the limited role of Associate Judge.
24	John Faire	7.8	Not perceived to be particularly bright, but generally adept and conscientious in his limited role as Associate Judge
25	Graham Ken Panckhurst	7.7	"quintessentially average" best summarises Panckhurst J. Few lawyers gave him high marks or low marks. "Court wallpaper" was a remark which seemed to summarise what many lawyers thought of Panckhurst J but failed to express as succinctly.
26	Ellen Dolour France	7.7	Perceived mediocre ability and legal knowledge has not hampered her advancement to Court of Appeal president. Generally France J is regarded as playing it safe and keeping court scandals close and her head down, which some insiders consider is the key to advancement in a court with more than a few egomaniacs.
27	Terrence Arnold	7.6	Criticised for weakly reasoned rulings based upon how his day is going rather than the relevant law. Some consider legal logic is not Arnold J's strong suit, exposing this weakness where Arnold gets too involved. One lawyer said of Arnold J, "What his rulings lack in detail is made up for in their brevity".
28	Patricia Courtney	7.6	Considered a mediocre judge who some think can be reckless at times. Poor judgment is sometimes too apparent but most seem to believe she tries hard.
29	Lester Hugh Chisolm	7.6	Recently retired. Survey suggests Chisolm was not regarded as particularly bright and this handicap often taints his legal rulings. Appears to be easily bullied by more arrogant and intelligent judges and Crown officials. Nonetheless, lawyers seem to generally like him.
30	David Brian Collins	7.6	Despite being a controversial appointment due to questions of his integrity, lawyers generally consider this new judge fair, although not commonly regarded as a proficient jurist. Some criticism for Collins J's broad use of suppression orders and protection of Crown interests as demonstrative of his inability to truly transition from prosecutor to impartial judge.
31	Denis Clifford	7.5	An enigma to many for judgments which often are unexplained. Many lawyers are suspicious of Clifford J's motives and he is regarded as suffering from insecurities.
32	Ronald Young	7.5	A refreshing, animated and engaged judge in most proceedings. Suffered the fate of many NZ judges with no outstanding talent who become more political and jaded in their approach with tenure.
33	Peter Blanchard	7.5	Blanchard is regarded as a judge brilliant in certain aspects of the law, with a keen intellect, but past his expiry date long before his recent retirement. Developed a conviction his opinion was more valued than law but few lawyers were apparently following this pied piper lately. May be back for cameos and certain to be appointed to judicial positions.
34	Forrest Miller	7.5	Comments offer a mixed bag, many likes and dislikes. Generally regarded as a thorough judge, despite suggestions his ability is lagging. Can be unpleasant at times. Some lawyers considered him reasonably fair, while others thought him basically unfair.
35	Douglas White	7.5	Many uncomfortable with his rapid rise and the familial basis of his appointments (White's father, uncle and cousin all having been Court of Appeal judges). Still an enigma to many but at least one close colleague has called the judge insincere in his dealings.
36	Mary Peters	7.5	Some strong comments in favour of her legal knowledge and fairness are offset by equally strong comments that she is less than independent on the bench and is slow in producing less than impressive judgments. Still a new judge who many lawyers have not appeared before, so ranking is less than definitive.
37	Simon France	7.5	Some negative comments in the survey about Judge France taking a less than judicial approach to his duties on the bench. Survey suggests only a few lawyers have been very impressed with his approach.
38	Pamela Jean Andrews	7.5	Once regarded as a thoughtful and good steward of the law, albeit limited in skills, Andrews J has increasingly fallen victim to her perceived self-importance, a dangerous juxtaposition with her role as interpreter of law which she too frequently knows little about.
39	Robert Andrew Dobson	7.5	Generally regarded as competent and fair, but some expressed considered reservations about his personal character in disclosing personal interests influencing his decisions.
40	Marion Frater	7.4	Perceived to be more fair than knowledgeable
41	Christopher Allan	7.4	Considered a mediocre performer, as fearless as the cowardly lion. Lawyers know they are in trouble when he turns red and starts blinking rapidly.
42	John Warwick Gendall	7.4	A judge whose substance abuse problems took the blush off the rose years ago, left the High Court for an appointment as head of the parole board and most lawyers feel relief.
43	William Young	7.4	Consistently lower marks on fairness. Comments indicate Young suffers from indifference or bias in many cases. Some recall Young J's glaring conflicts as a Crown-employed lawyer. Few lawyers were willing to give Young top marks in any category.
44	Murray Ashley Gilbert	7.4	Comments range from marginal and out of his depth to likeable and competent. Still a new judge, with very few survey responses to allow a definitive conclusion. A couple lawyers expressed comment that Gilbert J is expected to improve with time on the bench if he is not corrupted by the system.
45	John Gordon Matthews	7.4	Limited response in respect to this judge. The few comments indicate competent associate judge who does not overly impress.

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46	Sarah Janine Katz	7.4	Quite new judicial appointment so score reflects few lawyer surveys. Initial responses suggest a capable judge who has brought political and personal agendas to the bench.
47	Geoffrey Venning	7.3	Considered one of the more clever judges in New Zealand, which underscores the low rankings on fairness he received from lawyers to result in a below average ranking.
48	Mark O'Regan	7.3	Some lawyers consider O'Regan J barely competent, with criticism for his unreasoned remarks lacking logic and some for recent rulings lacking effort, demonstrating a slip in attitude or ability. It is generally accepted his appointment young was a result of his father being a powerful judge and advancement a result of his time on the bench.
49	John McGrath	7.3	High negatives, particularly for a Supreme Court judge. Many lawyers thought McGrath J is not the best fit in a judicial role and never truly made the transition from a slightly incompetent Solicitor General. Will not be inconvenienced by any law he considers poses a threat to the status quo and custom.
50	Patrick Keane	7.2	A fair number of low marks on competence and no high marks in any category meant no lawyers were particularly keen on Keane J. Common perception is his rulings often fall safe due to his lack of skill.
51	Raynor Asher	7.2	Better than average rating on intelligence but low overall rating on fairness has revealed this judge is not living up to his potential, or worse. A former political operator for the law society is offered as an explanation for some of this.
52	Christopher (Kit) Toogood	7.2	Been a workhorse since his appointment but criticised for his slow rulings. Generally regarded as highly partisan to self-serving interests, with suspect use of discretionary powers to get around the law. This requires a certain cleverness which some gave him credit for.
53	David Ian Gendall	7.1	Many suspect Brother Gendall is out of his depth as a High Court judge, as they regarded him barely competent and often unjust with the more rudimentary tasks of an Associate Judge.
54	John Richard Wild	7.1	Many regard Wild J as a bent judge whose recklessness has increased with his time on the bench. Given this, it is perhaps surprising he scored this well. Owes his appointment to his father's legacy and still has many lawyers supporting him and covering up one scandal after the next.
55	Roger Murray Bell	7.1	Hard to tell whether Bell AJ is merely tolerated or not trusted. Something is amiss but hard for many to put a finger on. Does not seem to be overly concerned with the law.
56	Anthony Christiansen	7.0	Plagued by personal character issues, which include frequent womanizing and a former sexual violation allegation, Christiansen AJ is a survivor who has some support for his bench performance.
57	Anthony Randerson	6.9	A few society lawyers loved Randerson J but often he is held in deep disregard or with suspicion by lawyers who cited his many parochial interests as being blatantly promoted over his stewardship of the law in New Zealand.
58	Mark Cooper	6.9	From his performance in the courtrooms to head of the Christchurch Earthquake Inquiry, few lawyers were convinced this judge has anything but a façade of integrity.
59	Alan MacKenzie	6.8	Some harsh criticism of MacKenzie's competence actually made his lower than average scores on fairness look good.
60	Edwin David Wylie	6.8	Regarded as an intellectual and moral lightweight with some harsh comments ranging from pity to disgust for his indecisiveness and "fearful" approach to tackling cases concerning powerful interests. Lawyers disapprove of his clumsy, 'pukeko on the road' demeanour.
61	Rhys Harrison	6.8	Overwhelmingly low marks on fairness, at the bottom of the survey. Impervious to the law and often undeterred by facts. Knowledge of law and some lawyers who liked his sometimes engaging deameanour saved him; barely.
62	Hannah Sargisson	6.7	Bottom of the lot when it comes to intellegence and knowledge of the law. Her goose would be cooked if she was not generally a pleasant and seemingly thoughtful judge.
63	Lowell Goddard	6.5	Low marks across the board. Much criticism of Goddard J's obsession with self-image, which this judge understands can only be maintained by kowtowing to powerful special interests. Goddard J is regarded by some as a human rights hypocrite, her judgments disconnected with her diligent efforts to be portrayed as a human rights advocate. "puppet" came up more than once to describe this judge who is as white as any Irishman yet routinely presents herself as a disadvantaged Maori.
new	Warwick Alexander Smith	na	
new	Cameron Mander	na	
new	Susan Thomas	na	
new	Simon Moore	na	
new	Rachel Marie Dunningham	na	
new	Brendan Brown	na	