



# Judicial Conduct Investigations Office

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[www.complaints.judicialconduct.gov.uk](http://www.complaints.judicialconduct.gov.uk)

Mr Dominic Watts  
Via portal

Our ref: 33718/2020

18 February 2021

Dear Mr Watts,

## **Your complaint about Deputy District Judge (DDJ) Mills**

I write further to my correspondence of 22 January.

I have concluded my assessment into your complaint and this letter explains that it has been dismissed in accordance with the Judicial Discipline (Prescribed Procedures) Regulations 2014 and supporting rules. I have explained the reason for this below, and I have provided you with information about the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman.

### Your complaint

As you are aware, I requested DDJ Mill's comments and third party recollections in order to assess your complaint that DDJ Mills:

- a) Was "rude and condescending" and spelt out his name M-I-L-L-S, he:
  - "Appeared to have superiority complex by the language used". He spelt out his name in "an incredibly patronising way".
  - Stated, "I suggest you continue your studies in English Law Mr Watts as you appear to know nothing".

### DDJ Mills' comments

In his response dated 11 January, DDJ Mills advised that he did not recall the hearing. He said he was dismayed that there was no recording available in respect of the hearing and explained that with a BT Meet me hearing the parties would normally be contacted by a member of the court staff who would read them rules for the hearing, introduce the case name and number, and then introduce and link in the judge.

He went on to advise that while he could not recall this particular hearing, he considered it highly unlikely that he would spell out his name in an incredibly patronising way. He

explained that his name is frequently misheard as Hills, so he often has to spell it out. He was equally sure that, as a judge with considerable experience in dealing with parties, he would not have said "I suggest you continue your studies in English Law Mr Watts as you appear to know nothing".

On 9 February, upon invitation, the judge confirmed that he considered he had said all that he could in relation to the allegations and did not wish to add anything further.

#### Recollections of Ms Battie, barrister

On 25 January Ms Battie confirmed that she was present during the Pre-Trial Review hearing on 1 October 2020 as she represented the other party. She advised that she had reviewed her attendance note, which she wrote immediately after the hearing, and which contained her typed note of the hearing.

Ms Battie advised that she did not recollect DDJ Mills spelling out his name in a patronising way. She did recollect that the judge was clearly aware that you were representing yourself and thus, it seemed, DDJ Mills was mindful to ensure that you understood what his decision was and the reasons for his decision.

She explained the note she had of what DDJ Mills said did not, to her, indicate a "superiority complex by the language used". She did not recall how the judge spelled his name out, but she was conscious that the hearing was by telephone and there was, therefore, a particular burden on the court and herself, as an officer of the court, to ensure that everyone involved understood clearly what was being said.

She did not recall DDJ Mills saying, "I suggest you continue your studies in English Law Mr Watts as you appear to know nothing" and nor did her note of the hearing reflect that such a comment was made. She believed that she would have noted such a comment down as it would be a very unusual comment for a judge to make but she did not have a note of this and did not recall it being said and therefore she could comment no further on this allegation.

#### Reason why your complaint is dismissed

Rule 21 (g) of the Judicial Conduct (Judicial and other office holders) Rules 2014 requires that the JCIO dismiss a complaint, or part of a complaint, that is untrue, mistaken or misconceived. Rule 21 (f) of the rules states that the JCIO must dismiss a complaint, or part of a complaint, that, even if true, it would not require any disciplinary action to be taken and 21 (e) of the rules requires the JCIO to dismiss a complaint that is without substance.

Having taken your complaint into consideration alongside DDJ Mills' comments, and the recollections of Ms Battie, I cannot substantiate your allegations. While the judge has said he does not recall the specific events of your hearing, he has indicated that he would not act in the manner complained of. In terms of the allegations that he "appeared to have a superiority complex by the language used", and that he said, "I suggest you continue your studies in English Law Mr Watts as you appear to know nothing" this was not agreed by Ms Battie, either in her official notes, or from her recollection of the events. Based on the

evidence to hand, these parts of your complaint are. therefore, dismissed under rule 21 (g) as they are untrue.

Turning to the fact that the judge spelled out his name, DDJ Mills has explained that he often has to do this as his name is misheard and Ms Battie has advised that although she could not recall how the judge spelled out his name, as the hearing was by telephone it was incumbent upon the officials present to ensure that everyone involved understood clearly what was being said. The act of a judge spelling out their name, as opposed to providing it without indicating how to spell it, would not attract a disciplinary sanction in any event, and the fact that DDJ Mills may have chosen to spell out his name in order to ensure you had the correct details would not amount to misconduct. This part of your complaint is, therefore, dismissed under rule 21 (f). In terms of the tone and manner in which the judge spelled out his name, this cannot be substantiated as neither the judge, nor Ms Battie, could recall how this was done. This part of your complaint is, therefore, dismissed under rule 21 (e).

In conclusion, your complaint is not substantiated, and it has been dismissed for the reasons given above.

Please note that we cannot respond to any further correspondence about your complaint that does not contain **relevant** new information which might give rise to the need to reconsider our decision.

### **Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman**

You can complain to the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman, Paul Kernaghan CBE QPM, if you believe that we have not handled your complaint properly. The Ombudsman does not have the power to investigate the complaint itself, but he can consider how we handled it. You should make your complaint within 28 days of receiving this letter. The Ombudsman is not required to consider complaints outside this period and will only do so if he believes it is appropriate in all the circumstances.

The Ombudsman's office can be contacted:

- In writing: 1.55, 1st Floor, The Tower, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ
- By e-mail: [headoffice@judicialombudsman.gov.uk](mailto:headoffice@judicialombudsman.gov.uk)

You can find further information about the Ombudsman and complaint forms (including an easy-read version) at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/judicial-appointments-and-conduct-ombudsman>

A copy of this letter has been sent to the judge.

Yours sincerely,

*Jane Keeling*  
**Miss Jane Keeling**  
Caseworker