Abolishing the Office of Lord Chancellor

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This article argues for the abolition of the office of Lord Chancellor and the transfer of all his judicial responsibilities to the LCJ, with other responsibilities being transferred to ministers or to the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the case of matters relating to the Church of England.

1. INTRODUCTION

The office of Lord Chancellor (‘LC’) is an old and venerable one. Probably, it existed before the Norman Conquest (1066). The LC was the closest government official to the sovereign himself and his most trustworthy confidant. In particular, it is likely that the LC was in ultimate control of financial and legal matters. In the case of the latter (probably) he held the Great Seal of England by which the sovereign executed legal state documents as such (i.e. qua sovereign).¹

Moving down the centuries - by the 20th century - the role of the LC may be described as a politico-legal one. He sat in cabinet and, thus, his role was a political one. He also sat as speaker of the House of Lords - being the ‘link’ between the sovereign and that house (‘hus’, legislative chamber).² As importantly, the LC was head of the judiciary. Yet, retaining these distinct roles became increasingly strained. Not least, because Parliament is quite distinct from government. It is the supreme legislative assembly to which government is accountable; it is not part of government. Also, the judiciary are quite distinct from government. They uphold the rule of law and comprise a separate pillar of the constitution. They are not - and should never be - subject to government. Given this anomalous situation, it was appropriate that the government, in 2005, considered the office of LC and whether it was still needed. However, the way things were handled was very poor.

What should have happened?

- The office of LC should have been abolished and any ecclesiastical functions relating to the Church of England (the ‘CoE’) should have passed to the Archbishop of Canterbury (or designate);
- All other functions of the LC should have been analysed. All functions of a judicial nature - such as the ability of the LC to appoint judges and members of legal tribunals - should have passed to the Lord Chief Justice (‘LCJ’) or designate. Why? Because these comprise judicial functions in respect of which it is essential that the holder be a lawyer. And, that they be wholly impartial;
- Other functions - such as the LC being involved in judicial pension schemes or making rules - should have been reviewed since, in many cases, it was more appropriate for the person to be a minister (including the Justice Minister). In other words, these did not have such a judicial content that it was essential for the LCJ to be involved;
- Consideration should have been given to the abolition of the UK Great Seal. It is an anachronism³ since the sovereign is a formal (i.e. a non-executive) head of State. Further, there is little (or no) accountability to Parliament for the use of the UK Great Seal - unlike Statutory Instruments (‘SI’s’)⁴ which must pass before Parliament. Even if retained, responsibility for sealing should have passed to the Justice Minister⁵ (or other ministers) since the documents required to be sealed are government (political) acts.

¹ Likely, even then, the sovereign had a former of privy (privy) seal or signet, used for personal correspondence.
² That is, the LC was appointed by the sovereign in early times.
³ The seal was required because sovereigns were, often, illiterate and could not even sign their own name. Recent sovereigns - since Henry VIII (1509-47), at least - have such an ability.
⁴ SI’s took over from proclamations which constituted quasi-legislation issued by the sovereign alone to which the Great Seal was attached. However - by the early 17th century - they became (effectively) defunct since it was held by caselaw (the Case of Proclamations (1611)), that the sovereign could not change the law. After 1717 - when George I (1714-27) no longer sat in Cabinet - proclamations were, effectively, issued by the government. Today, they are of no real legal worth and it would be better if they were called ‘Royal Notices’, since - these days - they merely record factual events (royal marriages, births, deaths etc).
⁵ I use this as a short form to refer to the Secretary of State for Justice.
As it is, what happened in 2005 was a half-way house and it has proved unsatisfactory because it is unclear. In 2005, the intention of the government was to abolish the office of the LC and simply retain that of the Justice Minister. However, the judiciary were (understandably) concerned that what had been a juridico-legal office in the past would, then, become a wholly political one, with the result that judges were, effectively, employees of the state. Thus, the office was retained - but in an unsatisfactory way. The relevant legislation - the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 (the ‘2005 Act’), Sch 7 - listed various protected functions of the LC. That is, ones which could only be removed by means of the means of amending legislation. However, there was no list of the other functions of the LC’s office, such as to enable a review of its ambit. If there had been, it would have disclosed that all the main functions of the LC had, actually, been listed - save in respect of the CoE.

We are now in the year 2022 (some 17 years on from 2005) and it is asserted that it is time to abolish the office of LC and to properly allocate to the LCJ all functions which - due to this his being head of the judiciary (and, now, tribunals) - are appropriate to be held by him (or a designate). As to the allocation of functions, it is suggested that this is, actually, quite simple since it involves analysing the Acts cited in the 2005 Act, Sch 7.

2. UK GREAT SEAL

The law on this has been analysed in a prior article. The use of the Great Seal is governed by the common law and by legislation.

(1) Common Law - Obligation to Use the Great Seal

- In the case of the common law, it (probably) now only applies to the execution of Crown grants relating to:
  - (a) freehold interests in Crown Estate land;
  - (b) chattels real (being restricted to certain Crown leases these days);
  - (c) the grant of honours (e.g. hereditary peerages etc);
  - (d) the grant of franchises (also, called liberties) (obs).

- That said - in practice - both (a) and (b) are subject to a number of exceptions, such that the Great Seal is not needed in most instances. More importantly, since 1760, the sovereign has not been in charge of the Crown Estate. Thus, the purpose behind the requirement to use the Great Seal has gone since the sovereign cannot interfere with the same (i.e. dispose of Crown land);
- As for (c), hereditary peerages are no longer granted by the sovereign save in respect of members of the royal family. And, it does not apply to life peerages which are governed by legislation;
- As for (d), all franchising of Crown prerogatives (‘CP’s’), post-1702, are rare (if at all). Thus, it is obsolete.

Further, there is no reason why all of the above - if still required - cannot be granted by means of a SI (since there is, then, much more accountability to Parliament) or under the sign manual (i.e. the royal signature).

(2) Statutory Obligation to Use the Great Seal

As for legislation, the Union with Scotland Act 1706, art 24 (and its Scots counterpart, the Union with Scotland Act 1707), provides for the UK Great Seal to be used for:

- (a) sealing writs to elect (and summon) the Parliament of Great Britain;
- (b) sealing treaties with foreign princes and states;
- (c) all public acts, instruments and orders of state which concern the whole of the UK;
- (d) all other matters relating to England in which the Great Seal was used prior to 1706 (see above).

As to these, today, in the case of:

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7 Their concern seems well founded.

8 It is suggested that - in most cases - powers of appointment can be allocated to another senior judge since the office of LCJ is an onerous one already, with so many responsibilities. Also, most judges are now, effectively, appointed by commissions, with the LCJ’s role simply being a formal one to confirm this. That said, the formal appointment of judges (i.e. signing letters of appointment - as well as those relating to incapacity and dismissal for misconduct) should be undertaken under the personal signature of the LCJ. Also, it may be noted, the LCJ should be recognised as a corporation sole, the holder of office being the appointer of other judges etc - and not the individual in person.


10 In practice, these are only granted to the members of the royal family these days; and no new types of hereditary peerages are granted, see GS McBain, Modernising the Constitution - A Crown Act (2021) Int. Law Research, vol 10, p 30. Ibid, Modernising the Constitution - A Constitution Act (2022) LR, vol 11, p 278.

11 It was required to stop sovereigns pre-1702 (Crown Lands Act 1702) disposing of the Crown Estate secretly (or granting long leases). As it is, even with such a requirement, sovereigns (often) did the same and the courts did not stop them because of the sovereign’s power.

12 After 1688, the sovereign was financed by way of a civil list. Thus, there was no need for the same to franchise Crown prerogatives in order to raise money. In any case, many of the Crown prerogatives were obsolete (strays, waifs etc) or of no financial interest to franchisees (royal fish, swans etc). The author is not aware of franchises, post 1702 (Crown Lands Act 1702).
(a), it is better that such matters be undertaken by the speakers of the House of Lords and the House of Commons - given that the role of the sovereign is that of a formal (i.e. non-executive) head of state only;13
(b), it is now covered by legislation (the 2005 Act) and - thus - not relevant;
(c) in the case of (a), it related only to Great Britain prior to 170714 (i.e. prior to Ireland joining in 1800) and it must be seen in that context. In other words, this provision is out of date, especially since SI’s and legislation now, generally, govern such matters;
(d), this has been discussed vis-à-vis the common law above.

Suffice to say that all this uncertain - and complex - law governing the legal requirements as to when the UK Great Seal should be used, can be dispensed with by the abolition of the Great Seal and, instead, the means of execution employed for any of the above being by means of a SI or the sign manual. In the case of the LC, the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, sch 7 states that a protected function includes:

1. Any function of the [LC] that relates to the custody or use of the Great Seal of the [UK].

If the UK Great Seal is abolished this s 1 can be repealed. So too, if the functions of the LC under the Great Seal are reallocated to a person other than the LC.

In conclusion, the office of LC should be abolished vis-à-vis the UK Great Seal since the same should be abolished.

3. FUNCTIONS UNDER 2005 ACT & CRIME AND COURTS ACT 2013

The Constitutional Reform Act 2005, sch 7 states that a protected function includes:

2. Any function of the [LC] under this Act, including any function under provisions inserted into the Act by: (a) the Crime and Courts Act 2013 or; (b) any earlier or later enactment.

3. Any function of the [LC] under another enactment, if the function is conferred and modified by an amendment made by this Act.

3A. Any function of the [LC] under the Legal Services Act 2007.

Most of these functions of the LC under this legislation - i.e. the 2005 Act, Crime and Courts 2013 and the Legal Services Act 2007 - should be transferred to the Justice Minister, since there is no indication that there have been any problems with the same performing them to date, qua LC.

- For example, there are copious references to the LC15 in the Legal Services Act 2007 which are performed - in practice - by the Justice Minister, without problem. In a few cases (possibly) reference might be changed to refer to the LCJ (or, better, to any judge designated by the same).

In conclusion, the office of LC should be abolished vis-à-vis the above legislation referred to. And, in most cases, reference to the Justice Minister (or other relevant minister) is appropriate instead of to the LC. Further, it seems to have produced no problems, to date.

4. OTHER STATUTORY FUNCTIONS OF THE LC

The 2005 Act also contains a list of c. 94 general and c. 17 Northern Ireland (‘NI’) specific Acts which make reference made to the LC in legislation (over the years the original list has been considerably reduced).16 These are listed in Appendix A (general) and Appendix B (NI). These references fall - in the most part - into the following categories:

1. Power of the LC to appoint judges, members of tribunals, arbitrators etc;
2. Power of the LC to appoint to lesser posts;
3. Power of the LC in respect of pension schemes for judges etc;
4. Obligations to consult the LC on various matters;
5. Power of the LC to make regulations in respect of various matters.

A SI should amend the references in all this legislation, from the LC to another person. In the case of 2-5, this should be the Justice Minister (or other relevant minister) since these are not judicial powers. Only in the case of 1 - in most instances - should the LCJ himself (or a designate) be required to appoint in replacement of the LC. Thus, for example, in writing, the LCJ should appoint all judges and members of tribunals, this by means of a standard form of words.17 In all other cases, in this listed legislation, reference to the LC should be repealed and the Justice Minister and other ministers handle the same.

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13 See n 9, (2nd article), p 266.
14 Although the Union with Scotland Act 1976 was enacted in 1706, its Scots counterpart, the Union with Scotland Act 1707, which completed matters, was not enacted until 1707. Thus, it is (probably) better to refer to 1707 since that was when act 24 achieved full effect, the union of the crowns.
15 e.g. ss 6, 8, 15, 23-6, 42-8, 59-62, 66, 69, 75-80, 118, 130, 139,152, 165,168-9, 172-3, 183, 194C.
16 The government website (www.legislation.gov.uk) has failed to pick up various repeals.
17 As noted in a previous article, the sovereign appointing by means of a sealed document is no longer appropriate since her role is a formal one only now. And, the Justice Secretary (or LC) appointing is inappropriate since their role is a political one. See GSMcBain, Modernising the Constitution - Some Final Crown Prerogatives (2022), vol 15, no 3, pp 5-9.
In conclusion, the office of LC should be abolished vis-à-vis the above legislation referred to. And, in most cases, reference to the Justice Minister (or other relevant minister) is appropriate instead of to the LC. Further, this seems to have produced no problems, to date. In the case of judicial functions, these should pass to the LCJ (or, in many instances, to his designate).

5. ECCLESIASTICAL FUNCTIONS

As noted in a prior article,18 the LC still exercises various powers - and has various rights (such as in respect of patronage and visitation) - vis-à-vis the CoE. This was problematic when the same was a catholic.19 Today, there is absolutely no reason why such powers and rights should not pass to the Archbishop of Canterbury (or his designate). That is, there is no reason why the LC should be involved in religious issues.

In conclusion, the office of LC should be abolished and CoE rights passed to the Archbishop of Canterbury (or his designate).

6. CONCLUSION

Even a most casual review of the above matters indicates a compelling case to abolish the office of LC and to ‘divvy out’ his legal rights and obligations to others. Thus, those which relate to judicial functions should be allocated to the LCJ (although many can go to another designated judge, to prevent the same being overloaded). And, the others should pass to ministers (mainly, the Justice Minister). All this could be done by means of a SI (which can also deal with any other functions of the LC not mentioned in a SI).

The abolition of the office of LC is important in that it can rectify the error made by the 2005 Act, in that there should be a clear demarcation between the political role of the Justice Secretary and the judicial role of the LCJ, who should take over the judicial functions of the LC (appointment of judges, judicial members). At the moment, things are very unclear as to the separation of the judicial and political spheres, which is not good for democracy. As for abolition of the office of LC, legislative provision would not be difficult:

1. The:
   (a) office of Lord Chancellor (‘LC’) is abolished.
   (b) legal rights and obligations of the LC shall be transferred to other persons according to a SI.

Is there need for any long report or discussions on the abolition of the office of the LC? The short answer is ‘no’. This article and Halsbury, Laws of England (5th ed) provide sufficient data.

18 See McBain, n 9 (article 1), p 50.
APPENDIX A - UK LEGISLATION

This refers to the legislation listed in the 2005 Act, Sch 7, pt 4, which lists references to the LC in general legislation.

**Legislation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Role of LC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheriffs Act 1887</td>
<td>Sheriff etc may take fees &amp; poundage fixed by the LC (obs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War Pensions (Administrative Provs) Act 1919</td>
<td>Constitution of Pension Appeals Tribunals as LC may determine with Minister of Pensions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation (Defence) Act 1939</td>
<td>LC to appoint Shipping Claims Tribunal members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture Act 1947</td>
<td>Ibid, board of referees re pension rights disputes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Telegraphs Act 1949</td>
<td>Ibid, arbitration committee members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949</td>
<td>Ibid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Designs Act 1949</td>
<td>Ibid, persons to hear appeals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Compensation Act 1950</td>
<td>Constitution of Foreign Compensation Commission [obs]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve and Auxiliary Forces (Protection of Civil Interests) Act 1951</td>
<td>Rules by LC to appoint courts and procedure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlord and Tenants Act 1954</td>
<td>LC to fix remuneration of assessor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963</td>
<td>Ibid, Betting Levy Tribunal members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation Act 1965</td>
<td>LC to make rules re superannuation benefits with the Minister for Civil Service’s consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts-Martial (Appeals) Act 1968</td>
<td>LC to appoint Judges of the Court Martial Appeal Court.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside Act 1968</td>
<td>LC to appoint arbitrator.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transport Act 1968</td>
<td>Ibid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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20 S 20.  
21 Sch, paras 1,2,3,8,9.  
22 S 8.  
23 S 109(2).  
24 Sch, paras 2(1), 2A, 2B, 3C & 5.  
25 S 61(1) & 64 (10).  
26 Sch 9.  
27 S 6(4).  
28 S 7(6), 9(4)(a).  
29 S 18(3).  
30 Ss 27A & B.  
31 S 1(1), (4).  
32 Ss 28,30, 31 (4), 32, 33.  
33 S 5.  
34 s 63(6)(c).  
35 Sch 2, paras 4(3), (4).  
36 Sch 6, para 3(4).  
37 S 29.  
38 S 39(A)  
39 Ss 2, 5, 7(2), 30.  
40 S 15A (3).  
41 Sch 4, para 13(3).  
42 S 10(3).
Courts Act 1971\textsuperscript{43}  
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971\textsuperscript{44}  
Immigration Act 1971\textsuperscript{45}  
Administration of Justice Act 1973\textsuperscript{46}  
Juries Act 1974\textsuperscript{47}  
Solicitors Act 1974\textsuperscript{44}  
Industry Act 1975\textsuperscript{50}  
Domestic Proceedings & Magistrates’ Courts Act 1978\textsuperscript{50}  
Customs & Excise Management Act 1979\textsuperscript{51}  
Magistrates’ Courts Act 1980\textsuperscript{52}  
Judicial Pensions Act 1981\textsuperscript{55}  
Supreme Courts Act 1981\textsuperscript{55}  
Transport Act 1982\textsuperscript{56}  
Administration of Justice Act 1982\textsuperscript{57}  
Mental Health Act 1983\textsuperscript{58}  
Car Tax Act 1983\textsuperscript{59}  
County Courts Act 1984\textsuperscript{60}  
Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984\textsuperscript{61}  
Administration of Justice Act 1985\textsuperscript{62}  
Transport Act 1985\textsuperscript{63}  
Landlord and Tenant Act 1985\textsuperscript{64}  
Insolvency Act 1986\textsuperscript{65}  
Criminal Justice Act 1988\textsuperscript{66}  
Education Reform Act 1988\textsuperscript{67}  
Ibid, circuit judges. And, to recommend recorders.  
Ibid, Tribunal members.  
LC to determine rules of procedure.  
LC to fix judicial salaries.  
LC to summon juries, panels etc.  
LC to make rules re remuneration.  
To appoint members to a tribunal. And, rules made by LC.  
Ibid, appoint a referee.  
Ibid, referee.  
LC may make/require rules.  
Scheme approved by LC etc.  
LC to fix remuneration and allowances.  
LC to appoint arbitrator.  
Ibid.  
Regs made with concurrence of LC.  
LC to appoint members of Tribunal.  
LC to appoint referee.  
Concurrence to appoint CC judge. LC to make keeper of records by SI. LC to fix fees & fines.  
Concurrence of LC.  
LC may order, by SI, the recognition of judicial bodies etc.  
LC may appoint to Transport Tribunal.  
Ibid, rent assessment committee members.  
Consult with Insolvency Rules C-ee, fees etc.  
Power to assess compensation re assessor.  
LC to appoint arbitrator.

\textsuperscript{43} S 16(1), 18, 21, 24, Sch 2, paras 4(3) & 9 (2).
\textsuperscript{44} Sch 3, paras 1(1), 3 & 4 and in the Table in para 21, the entry for para 1.
\textsuperscript{45} S 22.
\textsuperscript{46} Ss 9 & 12.
\textsuperscript{47} Ss 2, 3(1), 5(1), 8, 19, 21, 23(2).
\textsuperscript{48} S 56.
\textsuperscript{49} Sch 3, para 4(1)(a) & 17.
\textsuperscript{50} S 2(3).
\textsuperscript{51} Sch 3, para 17(4).
\textsuperscript{52} S 137, 144(2) & (3).
\textsuperscript{53} Ss 3,5,7, 10,11, 13, 13A, 14A, 23, 29B, 32A, 33ZA, 33A, Sch 1, para 3(3), Sch 1A, paras 2 & 11, Sch 2, para 2(2).
\textsuperscript{54} S 9(8), 11(7) & (8),12, 54(3), 57(4)(a), 71(4)(a), 74, 75, 91, 92(1) & (3A), 98, 102, 126, 133, 140(4)
\textsuperscript{55} S 28N (3)
\textsuperscript{56} S 66(4)(a)
\textsuperscript{57} S 25(3)(a)
\textsuperscript{58} Ss 78, 143(1), Sch 2, paras 1-3
\textsuperscript{59} S 3(5)
\textsuperscript{60} S 8, 12(1), 128, 130.
\textsuperscript{61} S 37
\textsuperscript{62} S 9(7), 69(2), Sch 3.
\textsuperscript{63} Sch 4, paras 2(1)(a), 3(4) & (5), 6, 7, 15 & 16.
\textsuperscript{64} S 29(4)
\textsuperscript{65} S 117, 413-5, 420(1), 421 ( ), Sch 7, para 1(1)(a).
\textsuperscript{66} Sch 12
\textsuperscript{67} Sch 10, para 9(4).
Local Government Finance Act 1988\textsuperscript{68}  
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988\textsuperscript{69}  
Electricity Act 1989\textsuperscript{70}  
Children Act 1989\textsuperscript{71}  
Broadcasting Act 1990\textsuperscript{72}  
Courts and Legal Services Act 1990\textsuperscript{73}  
Child Support Act 1991\textsuperscript{74}  
Ports Act 1991\textsuperscript{75}  
Land Drainage Act 1991\textsuperscript{76}  
Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992\textsuperscript{77}  
Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993\textsuperscript{78}  
Coal Industry Act 1994\textsuperscript{79}  
Trade Marks Act 1994\textsuperscript{80}  
Employment Tribunals Act 1996\textsuperscript{81}  
Reserve Forces Act 1996\textsuperscript{82}  
Police Act 1996\textsuperscript{83}  
Arbitration Act 1996\textsuperscript{84}  
Defamation 1996\textsuperscript{85}  
Broadcasting Act 1996\textsuperscript{86}  
Civil Procedure Act 1997\textsuperscript{87}  
Finance Act (No 2) Act 1997\textsuperscript{88}  
Plant Varieties Act 1997\textsuperscript{89}  
Special Immigration Appeals Commission Act 1997\textsuperscript{90}  
Social Security Act 1998\textsuperscript{91}  
Crime and Disorder Act 1998\textsuperscript{92}  
Ibid, tribunal members.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
LC power to make regs.  
LC to appoint arbitrator.  
LC to allocate court business.  
LC has power re child maintenance orders.  
LC to appoint arbitrator.  
Ibid, to appoint panel.  
LC to appoint chairman.  
Deals with judicial pensions, 	extit{etc} LC.  
LC to appoint arbitrator.  
Ibid, members to hear appeals.  
LC power to confer jurisdiction to employment Tribunals.  
LC to appoint chairman and members of Tribunal.  
LC to nominate to Police Appeals Tribunal.  
LC to allocate proceedings to HC & CC.  
LC to prescribe amount of damages.  
LC to appoint arbitrator.  
LC may establish Civil Justice Council.  
LC has power to modify regs.  
LC power to appoint to Tribunal.  
LC has power to make rules.  
Power to appoint president and panel.  
Concurrence of LC.

\textsuperscript{68} Sch 11, para A7.  
\textsuperscript{69} S 145(2), 146(6), 150, 291(5), 292.  
\textsuperscript{70} Sch 10, para 9(2)(a).  
\textsuperscript{71} S 104(1).  
\textsuperscript{72} Sch 9, para 5(5)(a).  
\textsuperscript{73} Ss 1, 53, 60, 72, 89, 125(4), Sch 19, para 17.  
\textsuperscript{74} S 8, 52 (1), Sch 4, para 2(1) & (2).  
\textsuperscript{75} Sch 2, para 11(5).  
\textsuperscript{76} S 31(1).  
\textsuperscript{77} S 6(2), (8) & (9), s 9, 13, 15, 16(2), Sch 5, para 7(4).  
\textsuperscript{78} Ss 1, 2, 3, 9, 9A, 10, 11, 12, 13, 19, 20, 21, 26(9), 31. Sch 2. Paras 2,11, 12 & 13, Sch 2A, paras 1 & 2, Sch 5, as it applies in relation to the office of chairman or other member of Rent Assessment Committees, Sch 7, para 2.  
\textsuperscript{79} Sch 2, para 8(6)(a).  
\textsuperscript{80} S 77.  
\textsuperscript{81} S 3, 22(1)(c) & (2), 27, 30.  
\textsuperscript{82} S 90 & 91.  
\textsuperscript{83} Sch 6, para 1(a).  
\textsuperscript{84} S 105.  
\textsuperscript{85} S 9(1)(c).  
\textsuperscript{86} Sch 5, para 8(6)(a).  
\textsuperscript{87} Ss 3,6.  
\textsuperscript{88} Sch 2, para 11 (2).  
\textsuperscript{89} Sch 1 3, paras 2(1), 13 & 16.  
\textsuperscript{90} S 5, 8, Sch 1, paras 1-4.  
\textsuperscript{91} S 5(1), 6(1)-(4), 79, Sch 4 paras 1(2), 2,3,6 & 8.  
\textsuperscript{92} S 51, 51D, 81.
Human Rights Act 199893
Social Security Contributions (Transfer of Functions etc) Act 199994
Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 199995
Immigration and Asylum Act 199996
Terrorism Act 200097
International Criminal Court 200198
Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 200199
Land Registration Act 2002100
Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002101
Tax Credits Act 2002102
Enterprise Act 2002103
Nationality, Immigration & Asylum Act 2002104
Finance Act 2003105
Communications Act 2003106
Courts Act 2003107
Income Tax Act 2007108
Tribunals, Courts & Enforcement Act 2007109
Coroners and Justice Act 2009110
Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013111
Public Service Pensions 2013112
Additional Learning Needs & Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2008113
Sentencing Act 2020114
Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Act 2022115

93 Sch 4.
94 S 13.
95 S 43.
96 S 53(6), Sch 7, paras 1 & 2, Sch 10.
97 Sch 3, paras 1-3 & 5.
98 Sch 1, para 7.
99 Sch 6, paras 1,2,3 & 5.
100 S 108(5).
101 Sch 12, para 5(3).
102 S 65.
103 S 12(2)(a) & (b), 16. Sch 2, paras 1 & 3.
104 S 16, 81, 106, Sch 4 paras 1,2,6 & 7, Sch 5, paras 1-5, 9-11.
105 Sch 17, paras 6-10.
106 Sch 2, para 4(7)(a).
107 S 1, 22(1), 24, 27, 35-7, 51, 61, 70(2)(a), Sch 1, paras 2 & 6, Sch 5, para 43, Sch 6, para 1, Sch 7, paras 2 & 12.
108 S 704 (1).
109 Pt 1, s 51, Pt 3, ss 95-102.
110 S 119 (1) & (2),120(6), 122(4), 124(1), 131(2), 132(1), (4) & (6), s 133, Sch 15.
111 S 8.
112 Sch 1, para 2(1), Sch 2, para 2.
113 S 91(3) & (4).
114 Sch 23, para 19.
115 S 124(3) & (4), 127.
APPENDIX B: NI

Judicial Pensions Act (NI) Act 1951

LC may make regs with Treasury consent. Recommendation by LC of pension for Social Service C-er.

Counties Courts Act (NI) Act 1959

Services and allowances for judges determined by LC with Treasury consent.

Resident Magistrates Pensions Act (NI) 1960

ELECTING not be a member of the pension scheme, notice served on LC.

Magistrates' Courts Act (NI) 1964

LC may make regs with Treasury consent.

Lands Tribunal and Compensation Act (NI) 1964

Social Security (NI) Act 1975

Judicature (NI) Act 1978

Magistrates’ Courts Act (NI) 1964

County Courts Act (NI) Act 1959

LCJ recommends for C-er’s pension (obs). LC may appoint members of Tribunal.

Resident Magistrates Pensions Act (NI) 1960

Electing not be a member of the pension scheme, notice served on LC.

Statutory Rules (NI) Order 1979

LCJ represents judiciary views to the LC. Also, LC appoints listed judicial officers.

Social Security Administration (NI) Act 1992

Registered Homes (NI) Order 1992

Decision to remove LCJ. Pensions of statutory officers.

Justice (NI) Act 2002

Rules for appeal to the Tribunal pursuant to s 91 of the Act.

Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction & Care of Churches Measure 2018

Must consult LC before approving chancellor of a diocese.

Child Support (NI) Order 1991

LC may pay travelling allowances to persons attending proceedings before the Child Support C-er.

Statutory Rules (NI) Order 1979

Power of LC to make regs.

Social Security Administration (NI) Act 1992

LCJ represents judiciary views to the LC. Also, LC appoints listed judicial officers.

Registered Homes (NI) Order 1992

Rules for appeal to the Tribunal pursuant to s 91 of the Act.

Judicial Pensions (NI) Order 1991

Power of LC to make regs.

Statutory Rules (NI) Order 1979

LCJ represents judiciary views to the LC. Also, LC appoints listed judicial officers.

Welfare Reform and Pensions Order 1999

Justice (NI) Act 2002

Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction & Care of Churches Measure 2018

Statutory Rules (NI) Order 1979

Power of LC to make regs.

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Power of LC to make regs.

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Statutory Rules (NI) Order 1979

Power of LC to make regs.
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