

Judicial Appointments Commission

Strategy 2024 to 2027

Business Plan 2025 to 2026

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Foreword

I am pleased to set out the JAC's new business strategy for the next three years, my first as its Chair.

The strategy, which has been developed following extensive input from our independent Commissioners, senior leaders and staff, builds on strong foundations established by the previous Commission team.

We have laid out an ambitious vision for the JAC from 2024-2027, with sufficient flexibility to respond to emerging challenges in the years ahead.

The four strategic aims we have set ourselves will guide our work and help everyone involved in judicial recruitment understand our values and direction.

We will build on successful initiatives that encourage and support applications from talented candidates from a wide range of backgrounds, including our Targeted Outreach Programme which is already providing tailored support to almost 500 candidates from underrepresented groups. We will ensure that our policies and processes are rigorous, excellent and in line with best practice, continuously using evidence and research to refine and improve our selection tools. Furthermore, by working with our partners we want to do more to publicly explain the work we do, to demystify the process for potential applicants and help them to prepare thoroughly before making their application.



I want the JAC to be seen as a trusted expert body, a true 'centre of excellence' for merit-based recruitment that is deeply committed to greater judicial diversity.

This strategy sets out how we intend to get there.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'H. Pitcher'.

**Helen Pitcher OBE, Chair of the
Judicial Appointments Commission**

About the JAC

Our purpose

The independent Judicial Appointments Commission selects candidates for judicial office in England and Wales, and for some tribunals with UK-wide powers. Our core statutory duties are:

- to select candidates solely on merit
- to select only people of good character
- to have regard to the need to encourage diversity in the range of people available for selection.

We report performance against our aims in our Annual Report and Accounts, which includes performance indicators and success benchmarks. We also publish a 6-monthly 'Diversity Update' which sets out more detail about the work we are delivering on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Our vision

Attracting and supporting the widest range of high calibre candidates for judicial office and making independent selections on merit through fair and open competition. Doing this to help maintain the world-class independent judiciary, assist in ensuring a full complement of judges and play our part in supporting the creation of a more diverse judiciary.

Our values

Our five values represent the culture within our organisation and are the guiding principles behind everything we do:

- **Fairness:** Commitment to equitable opportunity and progression for all staff. We aim to accelerate equity for underrepresented groups within the organisation.
- **Respect:** We are respectful and sensitive of people's individuality, creating an environment where we treat people with dignity and respect regardless of their culture, religion, age, race, sexual orientation, gender or disability.
- **Professionalism:** We aim to achieve excellence by working to the highest standards.
- **Learning:** We strive for continuous improvement, encourage feedback and personal growth.
- **Clarity and Openness:** We communicate in a clear and direct way.

Recent achievements

Over the past four years the Commission has been guided by the aims and vision of the 2020-24 Strategy. During that period the JAC achieved a number of important successes across a range of areas:

Delivery of the judicial recruitment programme

25,000+

applications processed



4,074

recommendations for
judicial appointment



102

selection
exercises during
2020 to 2023



35

exercises are set to
be finished by the
end of our 2023 to
2024 programme

- We successfully ran 102 selection exercises during 2020 – 2023 and processed over 15,000 applications resulting in 3,207 recommendations for judicial appointment. A further 37 exercises are set to be finished by the end of our 2023-2024 programme.
- 100% of our recommendations were accepted by the appropriate authority.
- Delivered full programmes of recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet the needs of the courts and tribunals. The hybrid approach to assessment that we introduced during that time has now been fully developed and embedded, providing efficiencies in our approach and flexibility for candidates.
- We have supported over 100 remote and in-person outreach events, working with partners in the legal professions to reach wider audiences and support groups of diverse and talented candidates to apply for judicial appointment.
- The JAC-led Targeted Outreach programme has been developed, piloted and expanded. Working alongside the judiciary we have provided targeted support to candidates from underrepresented groups. Evaluation of the programme has shown improved outcomes for programme participants.
- We chair the **Judicial Diversity Forum (JDF)** and have worked with our partners from across the legal sector to develop a thematic JDF action plan underpinned by common monitoring and evaluation principles. Four annual combined statistical reports have been published through the JDF, shining a light on the progression of underrepresented groups through the legal professions, JAC processes, and within the judiciary. The JDF's Pre-application Judicial Education (PAJE) programme has supported over 600 target group candidates to feel more confident and better informed about making a judicial application.
- Following the independent review of the operation of statutory consultation we implemented changes to the approach and guidance to enhance transparency and effectiveness.

Supporting diversity

- We have implemented a range of measures in support of increasing judicial diversity, including extending the use of our Equal Merit approach to cover the shortlisting stage and analysing progression of underrepresented candidate groups through a statistical 'deep dive' analysis. A subsequent research project used quantitative and qualitative methods – alongside an independent review – to examine the qualifying test and identified improvements to support diversity.

Developing our people and tools

- We have enhanced the support provided to panel members and have introduced a policy of monitoring and publishing the ethnic diversity of all our selection panels.
- We have increased our digital capability through developing our online application platform, providing candidates with a positive customer experience. We have also designed interactive digital tools for candidates to use as part of their preparation and new digital selection tools including non-live video assessment.
- We have delivered our People Plan to recruit, develop, support and retain a diverse workforce within an inclusive environment.

Strategic aims for 2024-27

In achieving the purpose and vision outlined above, we have adopted the following four strategic aims:

1

Ensure we are a centre of excellence in selection, applying best practice to fairly select talented individuals with the necessary skills and abilities across the entirety of judicial roles.

2

Work with partners to attract well-evidenced applications from the widest range of high-calibre candidates, supporting the achievement of greater judicial diversity.

3

Ensure the JAC is widely recognised as the trusted expert body on independent, merit-based and inclusive appointment to the judiciary.

4

Develop people and tools to support the delivery of the Commission's aims.

Strategic aims in detail



Ensure we are a centre of excellence in selection, applying best practice to fairly select talented individuals with the necessary skills and abilities across the entirety of judicial roles.

Our current approach

The JAC plays an important constitutional role in meeting the needs of the courts and tribunals. It is crucial that our processes are open, fair and merit-based. We deliver our busy recruitment programme in conjunction with our partners; the selection process begins when the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) ask the Commission to run an exercise with a Vacancy Request. The Vacancy Request that we are given includes details such as the location of the vacancies, the eligibility requirements and a job description provided by the judiciary. We strive to achieve operational excellence within our areas of responsibility; always looking to improve and learn as we go.

Our competency framework and skills and abilities framework – aligned with the judiciary's Skills and Abilities Framework – sets objective criteria which allows diverse candidate groups to show they have the qualities required for the role. Our processes are regularly evaluated and are subject to independent reviews, the most recent review finding that our shortlisting tools are fair and in line with best practice. Our selection materials are drafted by judges and reviewed by an independent Advisory Group – which is chaired by a Commissioner – to help ensure that no candidates are unfairly disadvantaged by their personal or professional background.

In 2024-25 we have

- Worked with delivery partners to consider options, and deliver, more targeted recruitment to certain salaried judicial roles with the aim of reaching a wide and diverse audience of high-quality candidates. This included an exercise for the district bench specific to the South Eastern circuit where the majority of vacancies currently arise, and bespoke selection exercises for some First-tier Tribunal chambers which required the assessment of specialist knowledge and experience.
- Launched a project with the Work Psychology Group (WPG) to understand the latest research and best practice in supporting neurodivergent applicants through recruitment processes. The project is reviewing key elements of our processes to ensure they are inclusive, accessible and fair.
- Evaluated the approach to recruitment of non-legal tribunal members to enable candidates from a wide range of backgrounds to give evidence of their eligibility and suitability for the roles to which they are applying for.
- Inputted into the judiciary-led review of the Judicial Skills and Abilities Framework (JSAF) via Commissioner membership of the steering group.

The review produced an updated JSAF suitable for use in the recruitment, training and appraisal of all judges. The JAC has committed to use the revised JSAF, **published by the Judicial Office in January 2025**, for selection exercises launching from autumn 2025 onwards.

- Evaluated the revised approach to the operation of statutory consultation introduced in 2022 in response to the independent review published in 2022.

In 2025-26 we plan to

- Implement the revised Judicial Skills and Abilities Framework (JSAF) within the JAC's selection processes; this will entail a number of changes which will take effect in exercises launching from autumn 2025. We will use the opportunity to undertake a wider review of our processes, including reviewing the weighting of competencies, the operation of our paper sifting of applications and the use of competency-based interviews.
- Review the shortlisting methods used in our largest exercises and explore any potential alternatives. Ensure our current approaches remain in line with best practice, support progression of underrepresented candidates, and allow for the most efficient use of resources to draft and deliver.
- Consider the research into neurodivergent candidates and review our selection approaches and reasonable adjustments policy in light of the findings.
- Continue to explore options with delivery partners for more targeted recruitment to certain salaried judicial roles, and to evaluate impacts on application numbers, the candidate

experience and recommendations.

To support this we will continue to work collaboratively with partners to help ensure that clear, timely Vacancy Requests are received which meet the requirements of each part of the judicial system and provide transparency for candidates.

- Consider the recommendations of the evaluation of the revised approach to the operation of statutory consultation, with final findings to be published following further stakeholder engagement with the Judicial Diversity Forum. Continue to work with delivery partners and stakeholders in explaining the use of, and role of, statutory consultation within the overall selection process.

From 2026 onwards we plan to

- Continue the implementation of the new JSAF across all JAC exercises.
- Commission bespoke guidance materials and resources and consider programmes of support to further strengthen the accessibility of the selection process for neurodivergent candidates.
- Consider the research into potential alternative shortlisting methods and seek to make improvements or changes as appropriate.
- Continue to review our selection approaches to ensure best practice is being followed throughout the judicial appointment process.

What success for Aim One looks like

Efficient and effective delivery of the agreed 2025-26 selection exercise programme.

2

Work with partners to attract well-evidenced applications from the widest range of high-calibre candidates, supporting the achievement of greater judicial diversity.

Our current approach

We are strongly committed to diversity and want to see a judiciary that is better reflective of diversity in society. We go to great lengths to encourage people to consider an application for judicial office, whatever their personal or professional characteristics. We are committed to supporting those who do apply by processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive.

We focus our efforts on four ‘target groups’ of people who are underrepresented in the judiciary; women, ethnic minority people, disabled people and solicitors, although all protected characteristics, plus socio-economic background, are considered when we are undertaking our outreach and quality assurance measures. We also encourage those from other underrepresented professional backgrounds, such as chartered legal executives, legal academics and government lawyers, to consider a variety of pathways into and within the judiciary.

We work with leaders from across the legal sector as part of the Judicial Diversity Forum (JDF) to identify and break down barriers to appointment. We work independently and alongside our partners to ensure that candidates from underrepresented groups are supported during their careers and are encouraged to apply when they are ready. Through the JDF we support the delivery of the Pre-application Judicial Education (PAJE) programme which provides lawyers from underrepresented groups with the opportunity to develop their understanding of the skills required to be a judge. We also lead, alongside the judiciary, the recently expanded Targeted Outreach programme that provides tailored guidance to candidates from underrepresented groups and has had a significant positive impact on their progression through selection exercises.

We have seen steady progress over recent years for applications and recommendations across all diversity categories. We are not complacent and know that the pace of change is not fast enough, particularly with regards progression rates for black candidates and the representation of women and ethnic minority people in senior roles.

In 2024-25 we have

- Conducted a review of our communications and outreach approaches and launched a new Communications and Engagement Strategy. The new strategy aims to strengthen our relationships with candidates, internal and external stakeholders and the wider public, and ensure consistency of messaging.
- Begun work to further enhance the JAC website to encourage and support a wide range of candidates to submit strong applications. This work has identified the need to further improve the useability and navigation of the website and further expand the preparatory resources available to candidates.
- Reviewed the JAC-led Targeted Outreach programme after two years following its re-launch and expansion. Quantitative and qualitative information was used to ensure that the programme, including the judiciary-led guide scheme, is operating effectively and supporting improved outcomes for underrepresented target groups across all legal exercises.
- Launched a new pilot of enhanced support within the Targeted Outreach programme, specifically aimed at engaging former programme participants experiencing challenges in progressing past selection day.
- Worked with partners to continue delivery of our extensive programme of outreach activities to ensure that candidates from a wide range of backgrounds are able to engage with current and future selection processes. Bespoke candidate resources

were provided for some selection exercises including District Judge and Circuit Judge.

- Continued to collaborate with the Judicial Diversity Forum to implement the Forum's 2024 action plan. Improvements to the Qualifying Test process and guidance were implemented, incorporating all areas detailed in the work programme arising from the JDF's Qualifying Test research which focussed in particular on differential progression for ethnic minority and solicitor candidates.
- As Chair of the JDF, arranged a number of thematic discussion sessions and invited experts from the Business Disability Forum to present to the Forum, sharing insights on best practice regarding disability inclusion.
- Published the JDF Action Plan 2025, an update on the wide range of actions that the JDF are undertaking to achieve a more diverse and inclusive judiciary. Priorities include a collective effort to address representation of women in senior court roles and on black legal professionals entering the judiciary.

In 2025-26 we plan to

- Work with partners to support wider outreach to build the concept of a judicial career to those studying law and to employers. Explore potential for a joint outreach plan with partners covering the full scope of the candidate journey from law school to judiciary, highlighting the varied roles available and the type of experience which is required.

- Further build upon the approaches to remote outreach, working with partners to consider further ways in which candidates can access support anonymously or confidentially if they wish to due to personal or professional reasons. Enhance the approach to in-person outreach through the use of more tailored workshop-style sessions.
- Work with partners to review the JDF action plan and annual combined diversity statistical reports to identify gaps in activity and data, including development of a new interactive statistics tool to accompany the JDF's 2025 diversity of the judiciary report.
- Review our **Equal Merit** approach – which currently can be applied to women and ethnic minority candidates – to ascertain whether a suitable evidence base exists within the judiciary for the Commission to consider expansion to cover other protected characteristics such as disability.
- Trial new support methods for unsuccessful candidates, with a view to enhancing the wider Targeted Outreach programme. We will undertake statistical analysis into the success rates of candidates who reapply to JAC selection exercises after initially being unsuccessful.
- Work with the Ministry of Justice and Judicial Office to explore the feasibility of a centralised, online “hub” for candidates to access the appropriate support and consider how this can incorporate initiatives offered by all JDF partners.
- Rebuild and launch a new JAC website that will enhance the current functionality, accessibility, and user experience for those considering and currently applying for a judicial role.
- Further our relationships by widening our engagement and deepen our understanding of the priorities of stakeholder groups, allowing for a more collaborative approach to addressing issues surrounding judicial diversity.

From 2026 onwards we plan to

- Enhance the granularity of routine reporting to support the progression of black lawyers, those from underrepresented professional backgrounds – including chartered legal executives – and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- Work with partners to further develop outreach activities, with the aim of creating JAC led events, tailored to underrepresented groups, including targeted support and regular Q&A sessions.
- Engage and collaborate with legal education providers to encourage underrepresented groups to consider judicial careers.

What success for Aim Two looks like

Underrepresented candidate groups applying and progressing more closely in line with their numbers in the eligible pool.

3

Ensure the JAC is widely recognised as the trusted expert body on independent, merit-based and inclusive appointment to the judiciary.

Our current approach

We recognise the national and international importance of our role therefore our processes are subject to regular review and improvement to ensure we remain at the forefront of judicial appointment best practice. In undertaking consistently high volumes of recruitment we focus on delivering a positive candidate experience, fair and inclusive selection across all exercises and using our financial resources in a responsible way. We monitor the progression of target groups and seek feedback from candidates at every stage of our process. We are grateful for the support of our partners in delivering our work, and we in turn support them through the sharing of evidence and insight into our independent, merit-based judicial appointments. We approach our work with integrity and use evidence to drive our decisions.

Wider stakeholder engagement is a key part of our work in this area. We engage regularly with the Welsh Government to support the filling of Welsh tribunal posts and national vacancies in Wales. We help to shape judicial appointment best practice through engagement with the Scotland and Northern Ireland appointments bodies and meeting with other common and civil law jurisdictions. To increase understanding of the JAC and its work we engage with mainstream and legal media, the legal professions, academics and parliamentarians. We engage with reviews and proposals for reform affecting judicial appointments, providing objective, expert evidence to inform debate.

We also keep our corporate governance policies and supporting documentation under regular review to ensure that frameworks are in place for effective delivery of our work. We monitor organisational performance, are transparent about our processes and take a risk-based approach to our Government Internal Audit engagements to maintain the required levels of assurance.

In 2024-25 we have

- Promoted the JAC's 2024-27 business strategy, 2024-25 Annual Report and 2024-25 diversity statistics through regular engagement with key partners and stakeholders.
- Continued to monitor the diversity of JAC panels, ensuring a balance of both gender and ethnicity representation on panels across all selection exercises.
- Worked to increase Welsh speaking representation on JAC panels, engaging with the Welsh Language Commissioners Office to accelerate Welsh outreach.
- Formalised the selection day observation process, establishing a growing database of observation insight. This has provided a central reference point for the continued enhancement of the candidate experience, an audit trail, and evidenced responses to complaints and panel appraisal.

- Continued dialogue with key stakeholders including the senior judiciary. We continued to work closely with the Senior President of Tribunals' Diversity Taskforce on various projects alongside promoting information about the enriched experience a Tribunals career can provide.
- Conducted an analysis on our key audiences and the strategic aims of reaching those audiences to inform our wider communications and engagement approach, utilising the findings from this analysis to update our organisational key messages.
- Reviewed and published our Good Character guidance for candidates to provide additional clarity on our Selection and Character Committee's decision-making and expectations of applicants.
- Continued to raise the prominence of diverse voices from across the appointments process through various channels, including JAC blogs, judicial case studies, and promotion of videos highlighting the work of individual members of the judiciary.
- Hosted the 2025 judicial appointments tripartite conference in London with the Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission. The conference allowed us to share insights and best practice on judicial appointments and explore shared challenges.

In 2025-26 we plan to

- Continue to foster a better understanding amongst key audiences – including candidates, judges, the public, the media and other stakeholders – of the JAC approach and how we deliver in partnership, developing new ways – such as infographics – to demonstrate our processes. Continue to welcome and reflect on feedback and engage openly to address challenge or criticism.
- Develop a Parliament and Senedd engagement action plan, to sit alongside the new Communications and Engagement Strategy, which will support closer engagement with the Justice Select Committee.
- Continue to foster and maintain positive and constructive relationships with key partners and stakeholders at a formal and informal level. We will continue to share knowledge and insight, highlighting areas of progress and seeking to explore common challenges in partnership.
- Address the key areas of feedback received from the senior judiciary during engagement meetings in 2024/25 as part of our continual review and improvement of our selection processes.
- Mark the 20 year anniversary of the establishment of the JAC in 2026, reflecting on achievements and progress since the pre-JAC period and highlighting our constitutional role.
- Engage with the Welsh Government on the outcomes of their review of the devolved tribunal system in Wales.

- Progress a proposal for the formal inclusion of the JAC lay panel member role as a public duty within the Employments Right Act 1996, Section 50.

From 2026 onwards we plan to

- Hold a conference with JDF partners, involving wider stakeholders, to raise the profile of the Forum and examine systemic barriers to judicial diversity.
- Build on key messages from previous campaigns to roll out a myth-busting campaign across our various platforms to address and correct common misconceptions about the judicial appointments process, focusing on eligibility, competency-based interviews, the competitive nature of our exercises, and statutory consultation.

What success for Aim Three looks like

There is widespread confidence in the JAC's selection approach and engagement with candidates, partners and stakeholders is positive and constructive.

4

Develop people and tools to support the delivery of the Commission's aims.**Our current approach**

We ensure the judicial appointments process is served by diverse, motivated and skilled teams throughout the organisation. We maintain an inclusive working environment – free from discrimination – where talent is nurtured and staff are equipped with the tools they need to deliver their objectives. We have an engaged workforce who are dedicated to the JAC's mission and have confidence in the Senior Leadership Team. Our hybrid approach to office, offsite and remote working is focussed on delivering the business need whilst prioritising staff wellbeing and needs in parallel. We focus on making sure that our ways of working across the organisation are as efficient as possible and deliver good value for money.

We have put a lot of energy over recent years into ensuring we have the necessary digital tools and systems to deliver against our aims. Our Digital Platform provides a positive candidate user experience and is continually being improved to make judicial selection exercises easier for our staff and panel members to run.

Selection panel members – both our lay panellists and the judicial panellists provided to us by the Judicial Office – have a key role in ensuring that we conduct our high-volume recruitment efficiently and effectively with a focus on our statutory duty to select on merit. We have a high-quality cadre of diverse lay panel members who work alongside judicial panel members from a range of professional backgrounds to prepare assessments which inform the final selection decisions made by the Commission. All panel members receive regular training on fair selection and we proactively seek to convene ethnically diverse panels.

Members of our Board of Commissioners come from a wide background bringing a breadth of knowledge, experience and independence. Commissioners oversee the delivery of every selection exercise and take a leading role in outreach and engagement with candidates and stakeholders. We undertake regular Board effectiveness evaluation to contribute towards enhanced performance.

In 2024-25 we have

- Introduced Personal Growth Maps across the organisation to help JAC staff evaluate and reflect on their own performance and form objectives for their personal development goals with their line manager.
- Launched a new three-year People Plan for 2024-2027 for staff, which takes into consideration the aims and objectives of the organisation's three-year business strategy to ensure that its activities are aligned to the wider ambitions of the organisation and are underpinned by a commitment to staff wellbeing.
- Reviewed and updated the lay panel member terms and conditions to ensure we are providing the best possible offer and are strengthening our commitment to their continuous professional development.
- Utilised the Crown Commercial Service's G-cloud framework, to secure two call-off contracts for the provision of a full range of digital services, to help maintain and develop the JAC's online recruitment platform.
- Commissioned an external review of the architecture and software that underpins the JAC's online recruitment platform, the 'technology stack'. The review concluded that the technology we use remains a suitable, reliable and flexible solution to support user needs and the organisation's strategic and operational goals.
- Through the Ministry of Justice, commissioned the UK's National Standards Body to undertake an IT health check (a security assessment) of the JAC's online recruitment platform, to identify any vulnerabilities and prevent unauthorised access.
- Commenced an external board effectiveness review, in line with Cabinet Office guidance for Arms-length Bodies.
- As part of our commitment to continuous upskilling, we have inducted and developed new Commissioners and have planned learning and development sessions for the full Commission Board.

In 2025-26 we plan to

- Develop the staff learning and development programme to address the findings from staff Personal Growth Maps. We plan to provide a refreshed learning and development offer to staff including visits to courts, tribunals, barristers chambers and law firms and deliver enhanced training to support and develop leadership capabilities for the JAC senior leadership team.
- Review our hybrid 'ways of working' arrangements for staff. Ensure that approaches in both the remote and physical domains, including in the JAC's new office location, remain appropriate and effective for supporting the delivery of the JAC's strategic aims.
- Identify actions to be carried out in response to the findings of the technology stack review to ensure it remains modern, flexible and appropriate for current and future needs.

- Take forward lessons learned from the pilots of panel member support approaches, such as the enhanced feedback loop, and rolling out key approaches to the full cohort.
- Conduct further analysis on how individual panel members are utilised to improve understanding of where we might see pressures on resource in periods of high selection activity and ways in which we might take fuller advantage of individuals' unique skillsets and experience.
- Consider the findings of the external board effectiveness review and implement changes as necessary, including to the current Board development programme.
- Take account of the outputs from the IT Health Check and technology stack review undertaken in 2024-25, and build a new, three-year digital strategy, bearing in mind digital innovation, automation and security, and the user experience.
- Continue to make iterative improvements to support JAC operational processes and to create efficiencies through digital innovation.

From 2026 onwards we plan to

- Undertake another IT health check, to assess the security of the platform, identify vulnerabilities and to prevent unauthorised access, and to take remedial action as necessary.

- Undertake a further technology stack review to consider whether the online recruitment platform continues to best support user needs and aligns with our strategic and operational goals. As part of the review we will consider whether there is more we can do to maintain the platform's technical efficacy, and whether there are other digital solutions we might want to consider to support business requirements in the longer term.

What success for Aim Four looks like

Everyone within the JAC has the resources, support and working environment they need to deliver their work to a high standard.



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