

DIVERSITY UPDATE

July 2025



Background

Under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, the Judicial Appointments Commission's (JAC) statutory duties are to:

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

The JAC has identified four target groups of people whom data shows are underrepresented in the judiciary: women, ethnic minority individuals, disabled individuals, and solicitors. However, all protected characteristics, as defined in the Equality Act 2010, are considered when carrying out equality measures.

Our statutory purpose is the independent selection of candidates for judicial appointment on merit from a diverse field. Diversity is at the forefront of our strategy, and one of our strategic aims is to attract well-evidenced applications for judicial office from the widest range of high calibre candidates, supporting greater judicial diversity.

The JAC Diversity Update is a biannual publication that reports on ongoing progress and new activity undertaken by the JAC in line with the JAC's diversity strategy. The strategy has three key strands: outreach; fair and non-discriminatory selection processes; and working with others to break down barriers.

Recent highlights

- In March 2025, the JAC completed the Qualifying Test (QT) Work Programme, a set of actions agreed by the JAC and JDF partners to address findings of our [2-year research project](#) investigating lower success rates at the QT for ethnic minority and non-barrister candidates. Improvements have been made across the process, covering [guidance provided to candidates regarding how to prepare for QTs](#), the drafting process for QT questions and their content, time allowed to complete the test, and feedback and messaging provided to unsuccessful candidates.
- In July 2025, the [Judicial Diversity Forum \(JDF\)](#) published its [sixth combined statistical report](#). Like last year's report, it brings together data about the diversity of the judiciary, judicial appointments, and the relevant legal professions. The data demonstrates that since its inception in 2006, the JAC has overseen, on average, positive steps towards increased diversity in applications and appointments across all groups. For legal exercises reporting in 2024 to 2025, women constituted 52% of recommendations and candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds made up 17%, which is the highest representation of ethnic minority candidates in recommendations on record.
- Following the publication of [a revised Judicial Skills and Abilities Framework](#) in January 2025, the JAC has published a [dedicated section of its website](#) to explain the implications for JAC selection processes. The Framework sets out what is universally expected of those in judicial roles and is has been developed to be comprehensible and accessible to all.
- As part of the JAC Business Strategy 2024 to 2027, the JAC has begun a comprehensive review of the Equal Merit Provision (EMP), which currently applies to women and ethnic minority candidates.
- Work has begun to rebuild the JAC website to enhance the functionality, accessibility and user experience of those considering a judicial role. This is a commitment outlined in the Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2025 to 2027, which places a particular focus on using clear, targeted, and accessible communications to ensure all eligible candidates feel informed and supported.

1. Targeted outreach and support for potential applicants from underrepresented groups

New activity

- The Targeted Outreach Programme continues to support candidates in all legal selection exercises. As of November 2024, the programme has received over 1,095 applications, of which, following sifts by former JAC Commissioners, 613 candidates are taking part in the programme and receiving support from a former Commissioner and/or a judicial guide. Of accepted candidates, 71% are women, 60% are ethnic minority, 19% declared a disability, and 67% are solicitors.
- In March 2025, the JAC Commission Board was provided with a two-year overview of progress and developments across the Programme, following its re-launch and expansion in 2023. Findings included the following:
 - 7 out of 10 candidates rated the impact of support provided by the programme as positive.
 - 4 out of 5 candidates said they are likely to recommend the programme for judicial positions.
- The key priorities for the Targeted Outreach and Research team for 2025 include:
 - Building on findings from the focus on Rejection, Reflection and Resilience in 2024, develop resources for candidates unsuccessful at selection day, supporting candidates to overcome barriers to judicial appointment, and encouraging reapplication.
 - Continuing internal research and analysis to improve outcomes for key priority groups, including Black lawyers, CILEX lawyers, and the intersection of social mobility as a factor in progression.
 - Developing of the Programme's stakeholder referral mechanism into a visible pipeline for judiciary-led talent spotting and referral of suitable candidates.
- In April 2025, the JAC launched four new priority research strands to shape future policy, data, stakeholder engagement, and communications approaches from April 2026 onwards, aiming to accelerate progression:
 - Black candidates
 - Disabled candidates
 - Target candidates seeking senior and leadership roles
 - Social mobility
- To enhance the support provided by the Programme, the TOR team have undertaken the following activities over the last six months:
 - Evaluation of the 2024 to 2025 Enhanced Support Pilot, which tested new support mechanisms.
 - Expansion of former Commissioner support to the programme.
 - Continued enhancement of data sets, analysis and evaluation tools.
 - Increasing the level of senior judicial stakeholder engagement, to increase the number of stakeholder referrals to the Programme.
- Following an internal audit of the Programme in 2024, five key priorities were identified to further enhance the offering. This included further support activities for Targeted Outreach candidates, more robust feedback mechanisms, reviewing the Judicial Guide training offer for 2025, and root cause analysis to understand whether any aspects of the JAC's selection exercises are unintentionally favourable towards non-targeted groups. As of April 2025, all audit activities have been successfully completed.

Ongoing activity

- Monitoring and evaluation have been embedded within the Targeted Outreach Programme and we use data from the JAC digital platform to track candidate performance through selection exercises. Analysis of the programme has shown that:
 - **Female ethnic minority solicitors** on the Targeted Outreach Programme (3 of 4 of our target groups) have been **appointed at rates approximately two and a half times higher** than the comparator group of candidates with those characteristics over the last three years.
 - Black candidates on the Programme are both shortlisted and successfully recommended at **approximately twice the rate** of all black candidates applying for legal exercises in the last three years.
- As of June 2025, 56% of Targeted Outreach participants who have been on the Programme for at least 12 months and made at least one application have reached a selection day or been recommended to a judicial role. 28% of Targeted Outreach participants who have been on the programme for at least 12 months and made at least one application have been successfully recommended to a judicial role since joining the programme.
- The Judicial Guide Scheme which provides additional support to candidates specifically with the JAC selection exercise process in mind. To date, over 340 candidates have received support from a member of the judiciary as part of the Scheme.
- The Judicial Guide Scheme is overseen by HHJ Nigel Lickley KC, Director of Training, and, following a recruitment exercise, Tribunal Judge Carolyn Fyall has been appointed Deputy Director of Training. To date, 163 Judicial Guides have been trained and accredited through the Scheme.
- As part of the JAC's 2024 to 2027 Business Strategy, we are committed to reviewing our approach to ensure we are attracting the widest possible fields of suitably qualified candidates. This includes the development of a new Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2025 to 2027. The strategy underpins the JAC's approach to strengthening relationships with candidates, stakeholders, and the wider public and places a particular focus on using clear, targeted, and accessible communications to ensure all eligible candidates are well informed and supported.
- We continue to deliver our extensive programme of outreach activities to ensure that candidates can engage with current and future selection processes. Recent events include seminars hosted by the Government Legal Department, an in-person event with the Leeds Law Society, and the 2025 Bar Council conference.
- The JAC continues to support the delivery and development of the Pre-Application Judicial Education (PAJE) programme. There is evidence to show that the programme has successfully targeted underrepresented groups, and that PAJE attendance correlates with improved success rates in judicial exercises. The JAC is supporting a wider review of programme to inform future developments.

2. Fair and non-discriminatory selection processes

New activity

- The judiciary have published a revised [Judicial Skills and Abilities framework](#) (JSAF) in January 2025. The JAC has worked with the judiciary over the last year to assist in developing a framework which can be used across the recruitment, training and development of judicial office holders. The Framework sets out what is universally expected of those in judicial roles and is has been developed to be comprehensible and accessible to all. Exercises launching from October 2025 will operate under this new framework. Any exercises launched prior to October 2025 will operate under the existing competency framework and JAC Skills and Abilities frameworks. The JAC has published a [dedicated section of its website](#) focused on the introduction of the JSAF.
- Work has begun to rebuild the JAC website. The main focus of this is to enhance the functionality, accessibility and user experience of those considering a judicial role. Current areas of focus include improving the usability and navigation and improve the content to improve understanding of the appointments process.
- The JAC have commissioned research into best practice recruitment for neurodivergent candidates. This research will allow us to better understand the requirements of neurodivergent individuals and ensure our processes continue to be inclusive, accessible and fair. The review will consider the latest research and best practice available in neuroinclusive recruitment. This will inform organisational understanding of how the JAC can best support neurodivergent candidates.
- The JAC has begun a comprehensive review of the Equal Merit Provision (EMP), which currently applies to women and ethnic minority candidates. This review aims to review the implementation of this provision and establish whether a suitable evidence base exists to expand EMP to cover other protected characteristics, such as disability.

Ongoing activity

- The JAC applies quality assurance checks throughout the selection process to ensure proper procedures are followed, standards are maintained, and all stages of recruitment are free from bias. All protected characteristics, as defined in the Equality Act 2010, are considered when carrying out equality measures. Other characteristics, such as socio-economic background and professional background, are also considered to ensure that the JAC selection process is open and fair.
- Selection exercise materials are developed in line with independent expert advice and are reviewed throughout their development for possible unfairness. This includes:
 - assigning a JAC Commissioner to each exercise to oversee quality assurance and fair selection;
 - All selection exercise materials are reviewed by staff and the JAC Advisory Group to ensure that selection materials do not unfairly advantage or disadvantage any candidate on the basis of their protected characteristics or background;
 - testing all assessment materials with mock candidates and then adjusting the content and timing.
- The selection process itself is also carefully monitored, including:
 - Monitoring and analysis of progression of target groups at key points in the selection process;
 - Briefing panel members on fair selection before each stage of a selection exercise;
 - Conducting observations of all elements of the selection process to ensure consistency and the use of fair selection principles across panels.
- Since September 2021, the JAC has monitored the ethnic diversity of panels for each selection exercise, encompassing both lay and judicial panel members. We work closely with the Judicial Office to ensure we convene balanced panels across each exercise, aiming for ethnic diversity in line with the latest ONS data on ethnicity in the population of England and Wales (Census 2021, ONS).
- The Judicial Office has refreshed the pool of judges for deployment on JAC exercises to support our shared commitment to achieving both ethnic and gender diversity across our shortlisting and selection panels. The pool of 263 judges comprises 52% women, 22% ethnic minority judges, and 49% solicitor judges. The pool will be considered alongside the JAC's own cadre of lay panel members to ensure ethnic and gender diversity across our panels.
- 75% of our lay panel members are female and we achieve a gender mix on almost every panel convened. 21% of our lay panel members are ethnic minority and 14% of lay panel members declared a disability. To improve transparency in this area, a breakdown of panel diversity data is included in our Annual Report.
- In addition, the JAC is committed to attracting Welsh speaking panel members, increasing the observations of lay panels to enhance the candidate experience, as well as several internal projects to enhance the recruitment, retention, and development of lay panel members.
- Following the implementation of the revised approach to Statutory Consultation in September 2022, an evaluation of its operation is taking place throughout 2025.
- Reasonable adjustments are considered at all stages of the process for candidates with physical, sensory, and mental health disabilities, and long-term health conditions.
- When two or more candidates in a selection exercise are judged as being of equal merit, we can give priority to one or

more candidates from underrepresented groups through our equal merit approach. This approach can be used where there is underrepresentation regarding ethnicity or gender at both the shortlisting stages and final decision-making stage of every exercise. The JAC is now making full use of the provisions within statute to encourage diversity and continues to monitor and evaluate the impact of the equal merit approach. For exercises reporting in the 2024 to 2025 period, as a

result of using EMP, 32 candidates were advanced to the next stage of the process at the shortlisting stage, and 6 candidates were recommended at the final decision-making stage.

3. Working with others to break down barriers

New activity

- In February 2025, the JDF published its [priorities and actions for 2025](#) which sets out the activities that JDF partners will undertake in the next year and how the impact of each initiative will be measured. The JAC is working to deliver against the JDF action plan and collaborate with partners to better measure and evaluate the impact of initiatives, and identify gaps in current approaches where further action may be required.
- In March 2025, the JAC completed the Qualifying Test Work Programme, a set of actions agreed by the JAC and JDF partners to address findings of our [2-year research project](#) investigating lower success rates at the QT for ethnic minority and non-barrister candidates. Improvements have been made across the process, covering [guidance provided to candidates regarding how to prepare for QTs](#), the drafting process for QT questions and their content, time allowed to complete the test, and feedback and messaging provided to unsuccessful candidates.
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- For the first time, the JAC published data in the combined statistical report on a new socioeconomic question, which asked candidates about the occupation of the main household earner in their home at age 14. For all legal exercises completed in 2024/2025 financial year, candidates from a working class or lower socioeconomic background made up 29% of applications and 21% of recommendations.
- The JAC is working with JDF partners 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.
- The JAC is working to widen its engagement and deepen its understanding of the priorities of stakeholder groups, allowing for a more collaborative approach to addressing issues surrounding judicial diversity. This includes a project focused on underrepresentation of Black lawyers in the judiciary. In support of this work, the JAC is hosting a roundtable with Black legal professionals to discuss their experiences of the legal professions, the appointments process and the judiciary.
- The JAC continues to work alongside the Judicial Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to support and engage with judicial appointments bodies and judicial office holders from other jurisdictions, including international engagement. In April 2025, we hosted the Chief Justice of Nepal and a delegation of Supreme Court judges, where we shared best practice regarding selection process and actions undertaken to promote diversity within the judiciary.

Ongoing activity

- The JAC chairs the JDF, which brings together leaders of the Ministry of Justice, Judiciary, Legal Services Board, and the legal professions to provide strategic direction to activities aimed at encouraging greater judicial diversity. The Forum challenges structural barriers to appointment, analyses and addresses the reasons behind differential progression, uses evidence to generate ideas, resolves issues of common concern, and supports the coordination of agreed activities aimed at increasing judicial diversity. Forum members support each other's initiatives and undertake joint projects.
- We have continued to work with the Ministry of Justice and His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service on the availability of flexible working for judicial vacancies. The JAC position is that it should be available by default, unless

there are good and specific reasons why it is not practical. We have seen a gradual shift towards this, and it is something that we will continue to promote.

- The JAC regularly speaks about the selection process at events run by the legal professions, the judiciary, Judicial Office, and other groups.
- The JAC continues to highlight stories from under-represented candidate groups, where possible. We recently worked with our former Solicitor Commissioner, Sarah Lee, to publish [a blog on the JAC website](#) which outlines the skills solicitors possess which are transferable to judicial roles, and provides practical advice to solicitors regarding preparation for a judicial application.

4. Diversity data 2024-2025: Applications and outcomes

This section presents diversity data relating to JAC applications and outcomes. All figures are taken from the Judicial Diversity Forum's annual [Diversity of the Judiciary Statistics Report](#), published in July 2025.

Lawyers in the eligible pool for legal exercises

- The 'eligible pool' comprises all those lawyers who meet the minimum statutory criteria for judicial appointment (typically, at least 5 years of post-qualification legal experience). Data from the Bar Standards Board, Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives shows that diversity in the eligible pool is increasing. However, applications for judicial appointment tend to come from more lawyers with more experience than is required by statute. The average amount of post-qualification legal experience held by applicants to roles requiring 5+ years' experience was around 18 years for selection exercises during the 2024 to 2025 reporting period. Diversity in the more experienced and senior levels of the legal professions remains lower, although this too is increasing.

Legal exercises

- **Women** were recommended for appointment in legal selection exercises in 2024 to 2025 in line with their representation in the eligible pool and had a recommendation rate from application slightly higher than male applicants.
- Across all legal exercises, women accounted for 52% of recommendations for appointment; this is slightly higher than the expected representation (49%) if recommendations were in line with the overall eligible pool for exercises during the 2024 to 2025 financial year.
- Representation of women in legal exercises remained stable throughout the selection process – women accounted for 49% of applications, 47% of those shortlisted and 52% of those recommended for appointment.
- The intersectionality section of the report (Section 8) showed that once the impacts of being an ethnic minority or a solicitor have been accounted for, being a woman is associated with a 24% increase in the likelihood of appointment.
- **Ethnic minority** candidates were recommended for appointment in legal selection exercises in line with (or slightly above) their representation in the eligible pool for the third successive year.
- Across all legal exercises in 2024 to 2025, ethnic minority candidates accounted for 17% of recommendations for appointment, which is slightly higher than expected representation (15%) if recommendations were in line with the overall eligible pool for 2024-25 exercises.
- Ethnic minority candidates continue to apply for judicial appointments in high numbers and their representation decreased throughout the selection process, particularly at shortlisting. Across all legal exercises in 2023 to 2024, ethnic minority individuals accounted for 27% of applications, 19% of those shortlisted and 17% of those recommended for appointment. Within the ethnic minority group, recommendation rates from the eligible pool for Asian and Black candidates respectively were approximately in line with those for White candidates, while the recommendation rate from eligible pool for candidates of Mixed ethnicity was significantly higher than for White candidates.
- Across all legal exercises in 2023 to 2024, candidates who declared a **disability** represented 11% of applications and 8% of

all recommendations made for judicial appointment. Disabled candidates were recommended for appointment at a lower rate than candidates without a disability this year (7% those with a disability, 9% for those without).

- Eligible pool data for disability was available for the first time in this year's statistics report. The data covers barristers and Chartered Legal Executives, but not solicitors at this stage. This data shows that 8% of barristers and Chartered Legal Executives eligible for judicial appointment have declared a disability. Therefore, disabled lawyers were recommended in line with their representation in these two pools in 2024 to 2025. 2023 data from the Solicitors Regulation Authority reported that 6% of lawyers working in SRA-regulated law firms declared they had a disability.
- To improve the accuracy of reporting of **solicitors**, from 2019 we have included analysis of applicants who have declared ever holding the role of solicitor, as well as those who have a current legal role of solicitor. However, we still see a disparity in recommendation rate between solicitors and barristers.
- Recommendation rates from application for solicitor candidates were significantly lower than for barrister candidates. Across all legal exercises in 2024 to 2025, there was a higher representation of solicitors (45%) than barristers (37%) among applications, but solicitors constituted a smaller percentage of recommendations (24%, compared to 48% for barristers).
- Candidates who were "ever" solicitors accounted for 37% of those recommended for appointment. In comparison, candidates who were "ever" barristers made up 63% of the recommendations for judicial appointment.
- Candidates who were "ever" Chartered Legal Executives constituted 2% of

applications for legal exercises in 2024 to 2025, and 1% of those recommended. It is important to note that Chartered Legal Executives are not eligible to apply for all legal exercises.¹

Non-legal exercises

- The JAC selects candidates for recommendation as non-legal members of tribunals and does so using the same selection panels and selection tools that are used to select judges in legal exercises.
- Each year the types of non-legal selection exercise included in the reporting year vary, and each may have significantly different representation of target groups in their respective eligible pools – something we are not able to analyse.
- Non-legal exercises continue to see positive target group representation. For 2023 to 2024 exercises, women accounted for 69% of recommendations for appointments to non-legal tribunals in this year, and had a higher recommendation rate from application than men.
- Ethnic minority candidates constituted 28% of applications and 23% of recommendations for non-legal tribunal posts in 2023 to 2024. These recommendations can be further broken down as 15% Asian, 3% Black, 3% Mixed ethnicity and 2% "Other" ethnicity.
- Across all 2023 to 2024 non-legal exercises, 33% of applications and 31% of those recommended for appointment declared themselves to have a **disability**. There was a large exercise recruiting for Disability Qualified Members of the First-tier Tribunal reporting in 2024 to 2025, which accounts for significantly higher representation of candidates with disabilities than in previous years.

¹ In 2024-25 CILEX lawyers were eligible to apply for the following judicial posts (including fee-paid or "deputy" equivalents): District Judge, District Judge (Magistrates' Courts), Judge of the First-tier Tribunal, Employment Judge, Road User Charging Adjudicator,

Senior Coroners, Area Coroners and Assistant Coroners, Judge of the Upper Tribunal and Recorder (eligibility was expanded to include the latter two roles in 2023).

