



Recruitment Pack Guidance for applicants



Thank you for your interest in the Lay Observers

We are very pleased that you are considering applying to become a Lay Observer (LO). LOs are unpaid public appointees who play an important role providing oversight on the welfare of detained persons whilst in court custody and during transportation between prison and court.

LOs have a unique opportunity to help improve the experience of those held in court custody through regular visits to court custody suites across England and Wales.

We strongly recommend that you follow this document as you work your way through the application form. It will provide you with information to help you complete each section and contains important details that you will need to know.

Before beginning your application

To ensure that joining the LOs is the right opportunity for you we recommend that you do the following before beginning your application:

1. Read the information on the [LOs website](#) and check that you understand what the role involves.
2. Check whether you meet our [key qualities](#) and can provide evidence to support these in your application.
3. Check that you live within the advertised recruitment areas.
4. Check that you understand the [time commitment](#) and need for flexibility involved in being a LO and how you would manage this if appointed to the role.

If you have any queries, please send an email to LOrecruitment@justice.gov.uk and we will help you.

Expectations

When people come to volunteer with us, we want them to feel safe and that they belong, are treated with empathy and respect, and have the support and solidarity of their colleagues.

In applying, you agree with our values and the [seven principles of public life](#).

If a candidate shows behaviour or uses language that does not meet the expectations set out above, we reserve the right for that to be taken into consideration as to their suitability for the role, with the potential for their application to be withdrawn from the process.

Overview of the LO recruitment process

1. Application form: candidate completes the application form and send them to LOrecruitment@justice.gov.uk by the submission deadline.
2. Sift of applications: a selection panel may carry out an initial sift of applications. Applicants will be notified whether they will be invited for an interview. Conflicts of interest are also considered.
3. Interview stage: the interview consists of two parts: a written task, and a virtual interview.
 - a. Written task: the applicant is sent a short written task approximately three days before the interview. This should take no more than one hour, and they have 48 hours to complete it.
 - b. Virtual interview: the applicant is interviewed over Zoom. The interview panel with consist of three interviewers.
4. Background checks: if the applicant is recommended for appointment, security clearances are undertaken, and any outstanding conflicts of interest are finalised.

5. Notification of result: applicant informed whether their appointment has been confirmed by the Minister and invited to be a LO.

Completing the application form

To apply to become a LO, please complete all sections of the application form and submit it by the deadline stated on the website.

All fields are mandatory. If a section does not apply to you, please write 'not applicable'. Incomplete applications may not be considered.

Please ensure all responses are typed directly into the application form.

Once you have completed the required form, please email them to LOrecruitment@justice.gov.uk.

Section 1 – About yourself

Please complete all personal details accurately.

Availability

LOs are expected to complete a minimum of two visits to court custody suites per month. LOs are expected to visit courts within a 55 mile radius of their home, although this may be amended subject to your ability to access some courts e.g. where public transport is used.

Although the time commitments vary for each visit, the total time needed to research, travel, visit a court, and complete a report will often take around eight hours. LOs can choose when visits are made but are expected to undertake the majority of their visits during weekdays, and during working hours, as most courts are not open at weekends.

There is also no guarantee that a court custody suite will be occupied on every day a court is open, as such flexibility around your availability to visit is encouraged.

Please confirm that you have the ability to carry out a minimum of two visits per month and have sufficient flexibility in your time to manage the uncertainty of numbers of custodies in some courts.

IT access

You must confirm that you have access to Microsoft Word and Excel to complete reports at home.

Right to work

Please note that if you do not have a right to work in the United Kingdom your application will not be accepted.

If you have lived outside the UK for more than six months in total in the last three years, you may be required to provide a Certificate of Good Conduct.

Section 2 – Employment

Please provide details about any paid employment you have undertaken within the last five years. If you have been retired for more than five years, please state that as well as the details of your last job.

Under the heading 'nature of work' please provide a brief overview of your main responsibilities and key tasks of the role.

Section 3 – Activities not related to employment (including voluntary work)

Please provide details of any voluntary work, community involvement or other relevant activities. Where appropriate, include your role, responsibilities and any achievements related to the role. If this section does not apply to you, please insert 'not applicable' here.

Section 4 – Ministerial and/or public appointments

Please indicate whether you have ever held a previous public appointment. This includes any appointment to a public body set up by government which delivers public services.

Section 5 – Convictions

In this section, please list any previous convictions, however long ago they occurred. We ask you for this information so that our internal panel can consider any related conflicts of interest and whether we should progress your security clearance through an alternative route. If we know up front that you have a criminal history, we can prevent delays occurring at the vetting stage. This information will not form part of the interview assessment.

Please be aware that cautions and convictions are not an automatic bar to being appointed as a LO, each application is judged on its own merits by taking into consideration the nature of the conviction/caution, the length of time that has passed since it occurred and also any patterns of convictions/cautions.

It is important to note that **failure to disclose any relevant information as described in this section will result in your application being rejected, or appointment being revoked.**

Due to the unique work of the LOs, s they are exempt from the *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1975*. All applicants are required to declare on their application form all convictions and cautions (spent or unspent) *other than* protected convictions or cautions.

There is a specified list of offences which are never protected and must be disclosed. These include serious violent and sexual offences. [The full list can be found on the government website.](#)

For other offences, a conviction received by an adult is protected from disclosure and does not need to be declared if,

- i. 11 years have elapsed since the date of conviction
- ii. It is the person's only conviction
- iii. It did not result in a custodial sentence; and
- iv. It was not one of the specified offences which must always be disclosed

A caution received by an adult will be protected from disclosure if six years have lapsed since it was given and if it was not one of the specified offences that must always be disclosed.

A security clearance will always reveal convictions resulting in a custodial sentence, whether or not suspended, so these should always be disclosed.

Section 6 – Conflict of interest and other information

A conflict of interest occurs when an individual's personal interests (family, friendships, financial, or social factors) could, or could be seen to, compromise their judgement, decisions, or actions.

Put simply, it is when your judgement in one role, could be influenced by your involvement in something else.

One of the most important requirements for LOs is that they perform their duties impartially and objectively. It is also vital that the public has confidence in their independence, as even the perception of a conflict of interest could be damaging to the LOs' reputation.

Therefore, it is important that you tell us about any current or previous personal situations, connections or obligations that could, or could be perceived to influence your actions, decisions, or judgements, or make it difficult for you to do the LO role fairly. This should also include connections to friends, close family members, or people living in the same household. Close family members includes siblings, partners, parents, adult children, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews.

If you are in doubt whether your situation or relationships could cause a future conflict, [please get in contact and provide us with details](#), so we can properly advise you on whether a conflict may exist..

A conflict of interest doesn't necessarily mean you can't become a LO. Each case will be considered individually and many declared conflicts of interest are entirely manageable, with the correct assurances in place.

If you declare a potential conflict of interest, someone from the LO staff team may contact you to ask for additional details or assurances.

If you have any questions, please contact LOrecruitment@justice.gov.uk

Section 7 – How did you hear about the LOs

We would be grateful if you could complete this section and tell us where you first saw the advertisement for the LOs. This will help us with future recruitment campaigns.

Section 8 – Statement of suitability

This section asks you to demonstrate why you would be a good LO. You should demonstrate how your skills and experience show you have the following skills and attributes:

1. Be objective.
2. Be prepared to challenge the status quo.
3. Be analytical.
4. Have good verbal and written skills.
5. Be able to communicate effectively with a wide range of people, including the individuals who will be in court custody when you see them (detained persons).
6. Have attention to detail. Be persistent in checking information from more than one source whenever you can
7. Have good, critical observational skills.

Please note we do not require you to have any knowledge or experience of the UK criminal justice system. All information required will be provided during training upon appointment.

We recommend you use the STAR method to provide clear, specific examples:

- Situation – briefly describe the context and background.
- Task – explain your role and what you were required to achieve.
- Action – describe the specific actions you took, focusing on your personal contribution.
- Result - outline the outcome and, where possible, what you learned or how this demonstrates the required skills.

Try to keep your examples clear and concise and focus on recent or relevant experience where possible. Your statement must be no more than **500 words**.

Section 9 – Interviews

If shortlisted, you will be invited to:

1. Complete a short written task (sent approximately three days before interview)
2. Attend a virtual interview via Zoom

You will have 48 hours to complete the written task.

If you are unavailable during the interview period, outlined on our website, contact LOrecruitment@justice.gov.uk.

Section 10 – Declaration

Failure to complete this section will result in your application not being considered.

Section 11 – Requests for reasonable adjustments

Please indicate whether:

- You have a long-term physical or mental health condition
- Your condition affects day-to-day activities
- You require reasonable adjustment

If applicable, provide details so we can support you appropriately.

Diversity monitoring

To support our ability to monitor the diversity of applicants, we ask applicants to complete the diversity monitoring section. The information you provide will help to support us in ensuring that our recruitment processes are fair to all and allow us to attract diverse and talented candidates. You can select “prefer not to say” if you would prefer not to answer any of these questions.

The information you provide in this section:

- Will **not** be used as part of the selection process.
- Will **not** be seen by the interview panel.
- Will **only** be used by the department, the commissioner for public appointments, and the Cabinet Office for statistical purposes.

No information that could identify an individual will be shared as part of the shortlisting or interview process.

What happens next

Initial sift

If we receive a high number of applications, we may choose to sift the applications based on suitability for the role.

Interviews

If you pass the sift you will be invited to interview. This is in two parts:

- a written task to be completed before the interview
- a virtual interview on Zoom

You will be contacted by the LO staff team to confirm your interview and written task times. If you are unable to attend either the proposed written task or interview times please let us know and we will find an alternative.

If you are unfamiliar with how to use Zoom please follow this guidance: [How to use Zoom for the first time](#).

Background checks

If you are successful at the interview, we will carry out a number of background checks before you can be recommended for appointment.

The checks we will carry out include:

- Due diligence checks: this will include scanning for information held on the internet such as social media, news stories, etc.
- Conflicts of interest considerations: these will be considered by our internal assurance panel.

- Security clearances: you will be asked to complete baseline personal security standard (BPSS) and enhanced disclosure and barring service (DBS) checks.

Why are background checks needed?

LOs are public appointees, appointed by a government minister, who carry out a challenging role in secure establishments. LOs encounter a great deal of confidential information, and it is vital that the public and the people that LOs encounter have confidence in the integrity and independence of those undertaking the role. For this reason, there are a number of background checks which need to be undertaken when a person applies to be a LO.

Appointment

If you are appointed you will be required to sign a compact agreement, including the LOs' code of conduct, which sets out the principles of how a LO should conduct themselves in the role.

There will be an initial induction period. During this time, you will be required to undertake at least three joint visits with experienced LOs and attend an in person training event. Once you have completed the joint visits and in person training you will be expected to complete a minimum of two visits per month. These visits will usually be on your own but occasionally with another LO.

Further information

If you have any queries about completing the application form, or if you require advice around your personal circumstances before submitting an application, please contact the LOs at: LOrecruitment@justice.gov.uk.