

Judicial Appointments Commission

# Strategy

2020 – 23

2020-21 Business Plan



## Purpose

The JAC's statutory purpose is the independent selection of candidates for judicial appointment on merit from a diverse field, in order to support the functioning of courts and tribunals across England and Wales, and some tribunals with UK-wide jurisdiction.

## 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, in order both to ensure a full complement of judges and maintain the world-class independent judiciary.

***“The JAC’s statutory purpose is the independent selection of candidates for judicial appointment on merit from a diverse field.”***

## Values

**Fairness:** We promote equality of opportunity and treatment for everyone.

**Professionalism:** We achieve excellence by working to the highest standards.

**Clarity and Openness:** We communicate in a clear and direct way.

**Learning:** As a learning organisation, we strive for continuous improvement, encourage feedback and personal growth.

**Respect:** We are respectful of and sensitive to people's needs. We create an environment where everyone feels included and thought about.

# STRATEGIC AIMS FOR 2020-23

1

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

2

Attract well-evidenced applications from the widest range of high calibre candidates, supporting greater judicial diversity.

3

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

4

Support delivery of Commission aims in line with our values, including by way of a new digital application system and tools.

# 1

*Ensure we are a centre of excellence in selection, applying best practice to identify talented candidates with skills and abilities across the entirety of judicial roles.*

## **To ensure business continuity and recovery following the COVID-19 outbreak, we will:**

- 1.1 Continue all selection activity that can be completed remotely, making reasonable adjustments for candidates where their application or performance in a selection exercise is adversely affected by COVID-19.
- 1.2 Develop and refine the approach to remote assessment, building on experience and extending to cover all key elements of the selection process as a contingency, and as part of the recovery phase for exercises that have been paused.

In 2020-21 we will also:

1.3 Complete the two-year programme of work implementing the recommendations of the 2018 independent expert review of JAC selection tools, including:

- A common first-stage test for Deputy District Judge/ Fee-paid Judge of the First-Tier Tribunal/Fee-paid Judge of the Employment Tribunal, following a successful pilot that improved the candidate experience and helped maximise the available pool of talent.
- A new approach to the role-play used to assess candidates at selection days for this year's Fee-paid Judge of the First-Tier Tribunal exercise. This follows a successful pilot using a pre-recorded video scenario,

to enhance consistency of candidate experience and assessment of merit. The extent to which this can be progressed will be considered as part of the remote assessment work at 2. above.

- The use of other shortlisting and selection tools, including non-live video assessments, where these can help assess the skills and abilities required for the full and expanding range of judicial roles.

1.4 Evaluate the streamlined selection process introduced for non-legal tribunal roles in 2019.

1.5 Evaluate the streamlined application format and concise 'skills and abilities' to assess candidates introduced for judicial leadership roles in 2019.

1.6 Evaluate the operation of the 'equal merit' provisions (EMP) at shortlisting, introduced in 2019; and pilot an alternative to a second interview where a tie-break is needed to select between candidates of equal merit who share the same protected characteristics.

1.7 Share best practice with selection bodies from other sectors, as well as other judicial appointments bodies, to support the effective assessment of merit.

1.8 Consider which elements of remote assessment might be rolled out beyond the business recovery stage and adopted in future selection exercises.

2020-21

By 2023 we plan to:

Review the skills and abilities or competencies against which candidates for judicial roles are assessed, ensuring they remain aligned with the Judicial Skills and Abilities framework, and that the way they are assessed remains relevant for a modern, diverse judiciary.

Evaluate all changes made in implementation of the independent 2018 review.

Continue our ongoing review and improvement of selection processes, including trend analysis of survey feedback to better understand the candidate experience at selection day.

Continue to develop non-live and/or online approaches to shortlisting and selection tools, where these can help improve the assessment of merit and the candidate experience.



## 2 *Attract well-evidenced applications from the widest range of high calibre candidates, supporting greater judicial diversity*

**To ensure business continuity while face-to-face outreach activity is suspended or curtailed following the COVID-19 outbreak, we will:**

2.1 Work with partners to deliver alternative arrangements for remote outreach and candidate preparation, prioritising exercise-specific activity.

In 2020-21 we will:

2.2 Develop our new online application system to provide a better candidate experience.

2.3 Develop a range of new resources for a new-look website with improved ways to help potential applicants assess and develop their readiness to apply and then prepare for the selection process.

2.4 Further improve feedback to 'near-miss' candidates, including by providing better feedback where a candidate has applied unsuccessfully for more than one role or exercise.

2.5 Working with our Judicial Diversity Forum (JDF) partners, bring together JAC statistics with data on the judiciary and legal professions into the first annual combined statistical report, providing a fuller picture of the eligible pools for 'entry-level' and more senior roles to inform debate and action on judicial diversity.

2.6 Develop a common monitoring and evaluation framework with the JDF to better assess the impact and effectiveness of diversity initiatives such as the Pre-Application Judicial Education (PAJE) programme targeted at under-represented groups.

2.7 Work with JDF partners to identify and develop further initiatives aimed at increasing diversity.

2.8 Enhance targeting of candidate pools including solicitors and academics, working with key partners to promote the benefits of judicial appointment and tackle barriers.

2.9 Highlight existing diversity of judicial appointments and pathways into and within the judiciary, including through use of legal communications and social media and in partnership with judicial role models.

By 2023 we plan to:

Use the new evaluation framework to identify and expand those diversity initiatives with greatest impact, including a potential expansion of PAJE, targeted courses for particular groups, and for current judges seeking salaried or more senior roles.

Build on and expand the resources available through the new JAC website, further levelling the playing field for potential candidates from non-traditional backgrounds.

Explore the role of existing professional quality marks, accreditation schemes and legal rankings or publications, and the scope for these to promote and support judicial careers for those from diverse professional backgrounds.

By 2023



# 3 *Ensure the JAC is widely recognised as the trusted expert body on independent, merit-based appointment to the judiciary*

**To support our approach to business continuity and recovery, we will:**

3.1 Continue to update candidates and other stakeholders on our approach, and engage with delivery partners to ensure this reflects broader priorities and concerns.

In 2020-23 we will also:

Continue to shape and share best practice with other judicial appointments bodies, meeting annually with JABS and NIJAC and engaging with other common and civil law jurisdictions.



Engage with reviews and proposals for reform affecting judicial appointments, providing objective, expert evidence to inform debate.

Share evidence and insight with government, judiciary and legal professions to ensure JAC and partners maximise and coordinate support for independent, diverse appointments through fair and open competition.

Engage actively with parliamentary committees, academics, mainstream and legal media and others to increase understanding of the JAC and judicial appointments.

2020-23

# 4 *Support delivery of Commission aims in line with our values, including by way of a new digital system and tools*

## **To support business continuity and recovery and promote the well-being of staff, Commissioners and panel members we will:**

- 4.1 Ensure sufficient ongoing JAC staff capacity to deliver business continuity and recovery plans following the COVID19 outbreak.
- 4.2 Ensure staff, panel members, Commissioners and all involved in delivering selection exercises have the resources and support they need to work remotely.
- 4.3 Provide well-being support and advice to staff, both generally through the Corporate Services Team and individually through line managers.
- 4.4 Support the social 'Friends of JAC' committee to offer events and activities remotely for both staff and Commissioners.

In 2020-21 we will also:

- 4.5 Develop our new digital system and tools, making it easier for staff and panel members to deliver selection exercises across the entirety of judicial roles.
- 4.6 Refresh the JAC People Plan, with a focus on:
  - Learning and development, expanding capability in key areas such as digital, communications, assessment expertise and data analysis to support continual evaluation and improvement of policies and processes.
  - Promoting JAC values, including by improved internal engagement, and further action to support diversity and inclusion
- 4.7 Continue to roll out the programme to improve the support to selection panel members launched in 2019, including action to increase the diversity of panels, and enhanced training on fair selection and the assessment of transferrable skills from other professional or judicial contexts.
- 4.8 Learn from the new ways of working developed during the business continuity and recovery stages, and identify best practice for the future.

2020-21

By 2023 we plan to:

Evaluate the improvements to panel member support, before deciding how to take forward ideas identified for consideration in the longer term, including more digital support

*Implement the refreshed 2020-23 People Plan and monitor impact through staff surveys.*

Continue to streamline application handling processes through further development of the digital system.



By 2023



JUDICIAL  
APPOINTMENTS  
COMMISSION