

Judicial Appointments Commission

Strategy

2020 – 23

2021-22 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.*

In 2020-21 we:

Continued all selection activity that could be completed remotely, making reasonable adjustments for candidates where their application or performance in a selection exercise was adversely affected by COVID-19.

Developed and refined 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 were paused.

Evaluated the streamlined selection process introduced for non-legal tribunal roles in 2019, concluding that the new process should continue to apply.

Piloted 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.

Completed 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.



In 2021-22 we will:

- 1.1 Continue to deliver all selection activity remotely while COVID-19 restrictions remain in place.
- 1.2 Evaluate the approach to remote assessment and take forward the lessons learned into the approach to future selection exercises.
- 1.3 Consider 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 range of judicial roles.
- 1.4 Evaluate the streamlined application format and concise 'skills and abilities' to assess candidates introduced for judicial leadership roles in 2019.
- 1.5 Evaluate the operation of the 'equal merit' provisions (EMP) at shortlisting, introduced in 2019.

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.

By 2023

- 1.6 Review the approach to combined testing for fee-paid roles in the forward selection exercise programme for main courts and tribunal roles from 2022-23.
- 1.7 Review the approach to additional testing for roles located in Wales, including the assessment of applicants' understanding of the administration of justice in Wales.
- 1.8 Continue to share best practice with selection bodies from other sectors, as well as other judicial appointments bodies, to support the effective assessment of merit.

2021-22

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.

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

In 2020-21 we:

Worked with partners to deliver alternative arrangements for remote outreach and candidate preparation.

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

Launched a new-look website, based on extensive feedback and user research, that prioritises the information candidates have told us that they are looking for and is easier to navigate

Worked with our Judicial Diversity Forum (JDF) partners to 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

Launched a pilot programme of targeted outreach for key court and tribunal roles, to identify and work with specific eligible candidates from under-represented target groups.



In 2021-22 we will:

2.1 Develop new website resources to further help potential applicants assess and develop their readiness to apply and then prepare for the selection process.

2.2 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.



2021-22

By 2023 we plan to:

Use the new evaluation framework to identify and expand those diversity initiatives with greatest impact, including further 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.

2.3 Carry out research, analysis and stakeholder engagement on measures used successfully by other common law jurisdictions to improve judicial diversity, to better understand how these might be used in England and Wales.

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

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

2.6 Further improve feedback to 'near-miss' candidates, including where a candidate has applied unsuccessfully for more than one role.

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*

In 2020-21 we:

Kept candidates and other stakeholders updated on our approach to remote assessment throughout the year, and engaged with delivery partners to ensure this reflected broader priorities and concerns.

In 2021- 23 we will 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.

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

In 2020-21 we:

Increased JAC staff capacity to deliver business continuity and recovery plans, and ensured staff, panel members, Commissioners and all involved in delivering selection exercises have the resources and support they need to work remotely.

Provided well-being support and advice to staff, and supported the social 'Friends of JAC' committee to offer events and activities remotely for both staff and Commissioners.

Refreshed the JAC People Plan for 2020-23, with a focus on improved internal engagement, and further action to support diversity and inclusion.

Developed our digital system and tools, making it easier for staff and panel members to deliver selection exercises across judicial roles.

Refreshed and the pool of JAC panel members, increasing the diversity of those assessing applicants for judicial roles at shortlisting and selection day.



In 2021-22 we will:

- 4.1 Continue to support staff, panel members and Commissioners to work remotely, and to prepare for a transition to new ways of working once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.
- 4.2 Learn from the experience of working remotely to develop future ways of working that support staff wellbeing and ensure effective delivery of JAC business.
- 4.3 Continue to develop our new digital system and tools, to further streamline application handling processes, and to support effective data monitoring and analysis.

2021-22

4.4 Continue to implement the refreshed JAC People Plan, with a continued focus on:

- Promoting JAC values, embedding them in future ways of working; and
- 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.

4.5 Ensure we convene ethnically diverse selection panels, and enhance training of all panel members on the assessment of transferrable skills from other professional or judicial contexts.

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

Monitor and evaluate the impact of the People Plan through staff surveys

Continue to develop the digital system in support of the Commission's objectives.

By 2023



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