



# Judicial Appointments Commission Strategy 2024 to 2027

Business Plan 2024 to 2025

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# Foreword

I am pleased to set out the Judicial Appointments Commission (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 to 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, 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 six-monthly 'diversity update' which sets out more detail about the work we are delivering on equality, diversity and inclusion.

## Our vision

Our vision is to attract and support the widest range of high-calibre candidates for judicial office and make independent selections on merit through fair and open competition. We will do this to help maintain the world-class independent judiciary, assist in ensuring a full complement of judges and play our part in creating 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 champion personal growth.
- **Clarity and openness:** We communicate in a clear and direct way.

# Recent achievements

Over the past four years the JAC has been guided by the aims and vision of the 2020 to 2024 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

- 100% of our recommendations were accepted by the appropriate authority.
- We 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.
- We have developed, piloted and expanded the JAC-led Targeted Outreach Programme. 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)**<sup>2</sup> 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**<sup>1</sup> 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.

1 <https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/diversity-and-equality-measures/equal-merit>

2 <https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/diversity-and-equality-measures/judicial-diversity-forum>

## 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 to 2027

In achieving our purpose and vision we have outlined, 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 JAC'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 and His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service ask the JAC 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 Judicial Skills and Abilities Framework (JSAF) – 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.

### Our plans for 2024 to 2025

- Continue to work closely with partners to meet the shared challenges of recruitment to certain salaried judicial roles. Deliver enhanced and joined-up outreach for key salaried vacancies to reach the widest and most diverse audience of high-quality candidates. 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.

- Evaluate the changes to the operation of statutory consultation after a two-year cycle of exercises is complete. These changes followed an **independent review** which was published in 2022.<sup>3</sup> The evaluation will include engagement with partners, including members of the JDF.
- Input into the judiciary-led review of the JSAF via Commissioner membership of the steering group. The review aims to produce an updated JSAF which can be used for the recruitment, training and appraisal of all judges.
- Explore with candidates, judges and experts the potential barriers facing neurodivergent candidates within our processes. Commission research to better understand the requirements of neurodivergent individuals and ensure our processes are inclusive, accessible and fair.
- Review our approach to non-legal tribunal member exercises to ensure we are attracting the widest possible fields of suitably qualified candidates. Review the selection process and tools used to ensure they are not a barrier to candidate applications.

## Our plans from 2025 onwards

- Review our skills and abilities and competency framework, ensuring they remain suitably aligned with the revised JSAF and are used in a way which

best supports diversity. In particular, we plan to review the weighting of competencies, the operation of our paper sifting of applications and the use of competency-based interviews. Once the JAC has responded to the review, we will update the guidance provided to candidates on our shortlisting and selection methods in line with any resulting changes to ensure continued relevance.

- 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 recommendations.

## What success for aim 1 looks like

There is efficient and effective delivery of the agreed 2024 to 2025 selection exercise programme.

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3 <https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/judicial-appointments-commission-responds-to-independent-review-of-statutory-consultation>

## 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. However, 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 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 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 to progression rates for black candidates and the representation of women and ethnic minority people in senior roles.

## Our plans for 2024 to 2025

- Review our communications and outreach approaches, with the development of a new Communications and Engagement Strategy. Ensure our outreach is tailored and targeted where it is most needed, is reaching broad audiences, is combating myths and is focusing on explaining the fairness and transparency of our processes. Continue to concentrate efforts on attracting applicants for vacancies which are more challenging to fill, such as district judge and some salaried tribunal roles.
- Enhance the JAC website to encourage and support a wide range of candidates to submit strong applications. Provide further resources and preparatory tools, greater clarification and transparency on each stage of the selection process, and details about judicial pathways. Continue to enhance the layout and navigation to help candidates locate information more easily.
- Consider additional guidance and reassurance for those who are unsuccessful after applying. Undertake statistical analysis of reapplication rates and use the findings to prepare guidance and feedback to assist candidates with preparing and tailoring their applications.
- Continue to collaborate with the JDF to implement their 2024 action plan, including the new work programme arising from the JDF's qualifying test research into differential progression

of target groups. Place a particular focus on broadening our reach to new candidate pools of black lawyers, those from underrepresented professional backgrounds – including chartered legal executives – and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Ensure JDF activity is informed by the findings of the new analysis into the judicial talent pipeline, a project commissioned from public policy researchers SQW, which is due to report in 2024.

- Invite wider stakeholders to contribute their expertise to the work of the JDF to bring fresh perspectives and lived experiences. Place initial focus on further exploring barriers for ethnic minority candidates and disabled candidates.

## Our plans from 2025 onwards

- Work with partners to support wider outreach and 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 on the approaches to remote outreach, and work with partners to consider further ways in which candidates can access support anonymously or confidentially due to personal or professional reasons. Enhance the approach to in-person outreach through the use of more tailored workshop-style sessions.

- Review the JAC-led Targeted Outreach Programme after two years following its re-launch and expansion. Use quantitative and qualitative information 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.
- Work with partners to review the JDF action plan and annual combined diversity statistical reports to identify gaps in activity and data. Explore areas where existing initiatives can be built on or expanded and identify where additional research or analysis may be beneficial.
- 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 JAC to consider expansion to cover other protected characteristics such as disability.

## **What success for aim 2 looks like**

Underrepresented candidate groups apply and progress 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, ensuring 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 help fill Welsh tribunal posts and national vacancies in Wales. We also help to shape judicial appointment best practice through engaging 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 Agency engagements to maintain the required levels of assurance.

### Our plans for 2024 to 2025

- Provide enhanced confidence to Parliament about the JAC's role and delivery of merit-based appointments. Engage more closely with the Justice Select Committee and raise awareness of our strategy, annual report and the JDF's combined diversity statistical report.
- Foster a better understanding among key audiences – including candidates, judges, the public, the media and other stakeholders – of the JAC's approach and how we deliver in partnership. Review our organisational key messages and develop infographics to demonstrate our process. Continue to welcome and reflect on feedback and engage openly to address challenge or criticism.

- Focus on fostering and maintaining 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.
- Raise the prominence of diverse voices from across the appointments process. Better highlight the experiences of candidates, panel members, lead judges and Commissioners to provide greater insight into what we do.
- Review our good character guidance for candidates to provide additional clarity on our Selection and Character Committee's decision-making and expectations of applicants.
- Host the 2024 judicial appointments tripartite conference in London with the Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission. The conference will enable us to share best practice and focus on key emerging challenges within the judicial appointments sphere.
- Hold a conference with JDF partners, involving wider stakeholders, to raise the profile of the JDF and examine systemic barriers to judicial diversity.

## What success for aim 3 looks like

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

## Our plans from 2025 onwards

- Mark the 20-year anniversary of the establishment of the JAC in 2026, reflecting on achievements and progress since the pre-JAC period.
- Engage with the Welsh Government on the outcomes of their review of the devolved tribunal system in Wales.



## 4

## Develop people and tools to support the delivery of the JAC'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 focused on delivering the business need while 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 JAC. All panel members receive regular training on fair selection and we proactively seek to convene ethnically diverse panels.

Members of our [Board of Commissioners](https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/the-board-of-commissioners/commissioners)<sup>4</sup> 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.

4 <https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/the-board-of-commissioners/commissioners>



## Our plans for 2024 to 2025

- Undertake a staff skills audit through individual learning plans to identify current capability and the skills needed for delivery of JAC aims. Identify strengths and gaps for staff development and foster our talent pipeline.
- Develop a new three-year JAC people plan, to be concentrated around areas for particular focus and improvement including workloads, wellbeing and embedding hybrid ways of working effectively.
- Undertake a review of our technology stack (the architecture and software that underpins the JAC's online platform), to consider whether it 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.
- Further develop our digital platform to enhance the user experience and automate the more repetitive and resource-intensive tasks.
- Continue to ensure appropriate safeguarding and secure handling of customer data, and maintain the integrity and availability of the digital platform. We will do this by conforming to best practice and government guidelines, internal and independent assessment, and through use of the most up-to-date solutions to protect against malicious threats and cyber risks.
- Place further focus on developing the lay panel member cadre through an enhanced feedback loop and the hosting of workshops and training events to ensure they are up to date on best practice methods in selection and assessing transferable skills. As part of this, we will ensure further uptake of opportunities to observe courts and tribunals ahead of working on an exercise.
- Review the terms and conditions for panel members to ensure we are providing the best possible offer and are strengthening our commitment to their continuous professional development. This will help us attract and retain high-quality, diverse individuals who are motivated to sit regularly on JAC panels.
- Run an external board effectiveness review, in line with Cabinet Office guidance for arm's length bodies.
- As part of our commitment to continuous upskilling, build capacity within a new-look Commission Board following arrival of new Commissioners, placing a particular emphasis on providing training for the assigned Commissioner role.

## Our plans from 2025 onwards

- Develop the staff learning and development programme to address the findings of the skills audit. We plan to provide a refreshed learning and development offer to staff including visits to courts, tribunals, barristers chambers and law firms.
- Review our hybrid 'ways of working' arrangements for staff. Ensure that approaches in both the remote and physical domains 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.
- Closely monitor the evolution of new and emerging technologies that could be incorporated into the digital platform, or used off-platform, to increase automation and embed the hybrid business model.
- Take forward lessons learned from the pilots of panel member support approaches, such as the enhanced feedback loop, and roll out key approaches to the full cohort.

- Conduct further analysis on how individual panel members are used 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.

## What success for aim 4 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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