



You be the judge ...

Career opportunities in
the judiciary in England
and Wales

Step up to a judicial career

Thinking about a career in law? If so, there's a chance that when you're experienced enough you could consider applying to become a judge.

Our legal system needs judges from all sections of society, to ensure that the public trusts the justice system. Judges are appointed in an open and transparent way. We encourage applications from groups currently under-represented in the judiciary, including women, people from ethnic backgrounds and those with disabilities.

What do judges do?

Judges preside over proceedings in all the different types of court – criminal, civil and a range of tribunals. Depending on the specific appointment, the court and type of case, they have many varied roles. These include:

- case preparation
- case management
- hearing actions
- considering and deciding on legal issues
- giving directions to the jury (in criminal cases)
- summing up proceedings
- determining applications
- sentencing
- giving judgments

Range of judicial appointments

There are some 9,446 judges and tribunal members in England and Wales (as at 1 July 2005). The following table shows the types of courts and the categories of judge who sit in them.



Type of Court

Type of judge

Deals with

High Court

- High Court Judges
- Masters
- Registrars
- Deputy Masters
- Deputy Registrars
- District Judges/ Deputy District Judges who sit in the Family Division or District Registries

The more complex civil and family cases. The High Court is divided into three divisions: Chancery, Queen's Bench and Family. The High Court is located in London but there are District Registries of the High Court located in various parts of England and Wales.

Crown Courts

- Circuit Judges
- Recorders

The more serious criminal cases which are tried before a judge and a jury.

County Courts

- Circuit Judges
- Recorders
- District Judges
- Deputy District Judges

Civil and family cases.

Magistrates' Courts

- District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)
- Deputy District Judges (Magistrates' Courts)

Less serious criminal cases, also family cases and many civil cases.

Tribunals

- Tribunal Members

Tribunals vary in size from one to 2,000 members. Tribunals specialise in a particular area and settle many claims and disputes. Some of the larger tribunals are: Finance and Tax Tribunals, Employment Tribunals, Asylum and Immigration Tribunal.



Appointments

Fee-paid posts

A judge must usually serve as a 'fee-paid' judge before he or she can be considered for salaried judicial posts. Fee-paid judges sit in the courts or in tribunals on a part-time basis, usually for a minimum of fifteen days a year. For the rest of the time they continue pursuing their usual day to day activities.

A fee paid appointment gives the appointee the opportunity to decide whether he or she wants to pursue salaried office (see below) and whether they have a preference for a particular jurisdiction. It also allows them to build up the necessary practical experience to apply.

Salaried appointments

Salaried judges work in the courts and are supported by their fee-paid counterparts.

Working life as a judge

Work-life balance/flexible working

The flexible and varied nature of judicial work can make a career on the Bench a practical and fulfilling option whatever your legal background or personal circumstances.

A judicial appointment provides opportunities to allow for a good work-life balance, including a five-day week, standard working hours, opportunities for part-time working and Judicial Stages Overseas (opportunities to have a judicial position overseas).

Non-traditional career backgrounds

Wherever possible, applications for judicial appointment are encouraged from people with non-traditional career backgrounds, such as those from academia and those who have worked as a government lawyer.



What it takes to be a judge

Whilst applicants must meet the statutory qualifications and requirements of the post applied for, they must also be able to exercise judgement, professionalism and people skills.

There are a number of ways to gain the appropriate experience for a judicial post, including working as a lawyer in private practice, in the public sector or in industry. Academics who teach law are also eligible to apply.

Professional qualifications

To be appointed to judicial office it is currently necessary to have been fully qualified as a barrister or solicitor for a minimum time period (at present, seven years since qualifying), depending on the office in question. Legislation is being put forward to reduce the minimum to five years. Advocacy experience is not an essential requirement for appointment to judicial office.

The Government is also planning to legislate to allow Registered Patents Agents, Trade Mark Attorneys and Fellows of the Institute of Legal Executives with the required number of years' experience to apply for certain appointments.

Merit

Judicial appointments are made strictly on merit regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, marital status, sexual orientation, political affiliation, faith or disability.

Nationality requirements

Judicial appointments are only open to citizens of the UK, the Republic of Ireland or a Commonwealth country.



Age requirements

There is no lower age limit for candidates for judicial appointments, although you need to have been qualified as a barrister or solicitor for a set number of years.

Disability

Reasonable adjustments are made during the appointments process for applicants with an impairment. If appointed, reasonable adjustments will also be made to ensure that a disabled judge can take up and perform in office.

How judges are appointed

Applying for a post

There are currently four parts to the process of being selected as a candidate for a judicial appointment: application, consultation, sift and assessment centre or interview.

Most judicial positions are advertised in the national and legal media.

There is a rolling programme of competitions and details are available on the DCA website.

Training and development

Newly appointed judges must attend intensive residential induction courses and sit with an experienced judge for a week. They also attend annual training days run by the Judicial Studies Board and are called back for continuation training every three years.

Regular training and refresher courses are also provided for existing judges.



Duncan Birrell
first CPS lawyer
to become a judge

“I have been a Crown Prosecution Service lawyer for 20 years. After a part-time appointment with the Mental Health Review Tribunal in 2003, I became a Deputy District Judge (Magistrates’ Courts).

As a prosecutor I am not allowed to hear CPS cases, but Manchester is a big city. There’s never any difficulty finding me non-CPS work.

My view is that a non-traditional background is a unique selling point. And if you’ve been a prosecutor for as long as I have you have a very broad experience of crime and an in-depth knowledge of the way the criminal justice system works.

My advice to potential candidates for office from a non-traditional background is to look at it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage – you have something different to sell.”



Katharine Marshall
District Judge
(Magistrates' Courts)
London

“It is easier to balance your family commitments with being a judge than it is with being a barrister or solicitor.

I'm a former barrister. After having three children in the early 80s, I returned to law as a legal adviser in the Magistrates' Courts Service. I only thought about becoming a judge when a female magistrate asked me when I was going to apply.

My present jurisdiction covers crime, youth and family cases.

Being a judge is a job where you really feel you can make a difference to people's lives; to the community in general by dealing appropriately with people who pose a threat, or by giving individuals the opportunity to make reparation or turn their lives around.”



John Lafferty

Recorder

London

“I was partially sighted until my mid-20s and then I completely lost my sight. It didn’t affect my work as managing partner of a firm of solicitors and it doesn’t affect my present work as a judge. After all, I’ve lived with it all my life.

Once I was established in the legal profession my disability was never a problem, or an issue for clients. It certainly hasn’t been a disadvantage in my career as a judge.

As a judge, it is very satisfying to know that your sole purpose for being there is to ensure fairness.”



Araba Obodai

District Judge

Manchester

“It’s good to become a judge at a fairly young age because you’ve got all the time ahead of you to learn and do more. Also, there is a perception that judges are all old people, so I think it’s nice to debunk the myth.”

Further information

website: www.judicial-appointments.org.uk

email: becomingajudge@dca.gsi.gov.uk

A 32 page booklet Step Up to a Judicial Career is also available at the web address above.

The Law Society and Bar Council can provide advice and guidance on a career in the legal profession. Visit their websites below.

www.lawsociety.org.uk

www.barcouncil.org.uk

Alternative formats of this booklet are available on request from the e-mail address above.

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