

Part 2 – Eligibility for the magistracy

Factors affecting eligibility

Age

- 2.1. The minimum age of appointment as a magistrate is **18**. The statutory retirement age is **70**.²
- 2.2. The Lord Chancellor will not generally appoint anyone over the age of **65**. **Appendix 2A** contains a letter to send to such applicants, explaining the Lord Chancellor's policy.
- 2.3. It is not lawful to refuse to interview a person over 65 who, having been made aware of the Lord Chancellor's policy, decides to proceed with their application and they meet all basic eligibility criteria.
- 2.4. Advisory committees are not precluded from recommending such a candidate for appointment. However, they must make clear their reasons for recommending that the Lord Chancellor deviates from his general policy of non-appointment.

Nationality

- 2.5. British nationality is not a requirement, but all candidates must be willing to take the Oath of Allegiance.³
- 2.6. Candidates in the process of seeking asylum or applying for indefinite leave to remain in the UK are ineligible.

Residence

- 2.7. A fundamental strength of the magistracy is that it involves the dispensation of local justice by local people. There is a general expectation that candidates should apply to an area close to where they live or work. However, candidates are not **required** to live or work in the area to which they apply.
- 2.8. Where an advisory committee receives an application from a person from further afield than usual, it is acceptable to ask about their reasons for applying to the area. If then considered appropriate, the candidate may be encouraged to consider applying to an area closer to where they live or work. However, if the applicant insists on proceeding with their application, they must be assessed solely on merit.

² Section 13, Courts Act 2003.

³ Section 6, Promissory Oaths Act 1868.

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Health/disability

- 2.9. The Lord Chancellor will not appoint anyone whose health prevents them from fully carrying out the duties of a magistrate.
- 2.10. Applications are welcome from people with a disability who are able, either unassisted or with the benefit of reasonable adjustments, to carry out the full range of duties.
- 2.11. Further information on considering applicants with a disability is set out in **Part 3** of these Directions.

Minimum length of service expectation

- 2.12. There is no formal minimum term of appointment for magistrates. However, the Lord Chancellor expects that magistrates will aim to serve for a minimum of **five years** and be in a position to be able to offer that commitment. This policy reflects the fact that a new magistrate requires a considerable investment in training and support.

Occupations, voluntary work and political activity

- 2.13. Certain occupations and activities will, or may, depending on the circumstances, affect the eligibility of a person to become, or remain, a magistrate. Guidance on particular occupations and activities appears at **Appendix 2B**. Whilst every effort is made to make the eligibility guidance as comprehensive and easy to follow as is possible, unusual cases may arise which are not covered by this Appendix. Advisory committees should contact the Magistrates HR Team if they need advice on handling unusual cases.
- 2.14. Applications should not be accepted from anyone who holds an occupation or office that disqualifies them from appointment. For the purposes of recruitment to the Family Court, applications from a person holding any office or occupation including those mentioned in Appendix 2B may be accepted.
- 2.15. Where disqualification may depend on the particular circumstances, committees should examine those circumstances to establish whether a conflict is likely to arise and whether it can be effectively managed. Relevant factors include:
 - nature and geographic area of the work;
 - any attendance in relation to the work at the court to which the applicant/magistrate may be assigned; and
 - frequency of any contact with persons likely to appear before the bench.
- 2.16. Where a magistrate accepts any position or office which would have categorically disqualified them from appointment, they should inform the bench chairman and justices' clerk. The general expectation is that the magistrate will resign (or transfer to another local justice area if the guidance at **Part 5** of these Directions permits).
- 2.17. In all other circumstances, the presumption should be that the magistrate may sit unless there is a real danger or appearance of a conflict. And, advisory committees should consider whether potential conflicts could be managed by restricting the person's magisterial duties.

Contacting an employer for further information

2.18. Advisory committees may consider it necessary to contact a candidate's/ magistrate's employer for further information. They must obtain the candidate's/ magistrate's consent beforehand.

Undertaking to give up voluntary work which conflicts with the role of magistrate

2.19. A person who does voluntary work which would disqualify them from appointment may still be eligible if they are prepared to undertake to give it up on appointment. If appointed they should be required to provide confirmation that they have fulfilled their undertaking prior to commencing sitting.

Convictions, orders and other legal proceedings

2.20. The Lord Chancellor will not appoint anyone in whom the public would be unlikely to have confidence.

2.21. When considering candidates who have been the subject of any order of a court, whether civil or criminal, advisory committees need to consider:

- the nature and seriousness of the offence;
 - how long ago it was committed;
 - the penalty or order; and
- any subsequent offences.

2.22. If the advisory committee decides to recommend a candidate with convictions (except for motoring offences – see below), it must set out its reasons in the appointments submission.

Motoring offences

2.23. The Lord Chancellor will not generally appoint a person who has been convicted of:

- a serious motoring offence resulting in disqualification from driving for **12 months or more** within the last **ten years**; or
- a serious motoring offence resulting in disqualification from driving for **less than 12 months** within the last **five years**; or
- motoring offences which have resulted in **six penalty points or more for one offence** within the last **five years**, or **nine penalty points** for totting-up purposes within the last **five years**.

2.24. If a recommendation to appoint is made notwithstanding the above guidance, the committee must provide a comprehensive note of the circumstances of the offence(s) and give full reasons as to why they are making the recommendation.

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- 2.25. When considering candidates who have incurred penalties other than, or in addition to, those listed above, committees should consider the factors listed at **paragraph 2.21** above. A candidate who shows a disregard for the law must not be recommended for appointment, and in this context it is permissible for committees to weigh up in their thinking cases where candidates have agreed to attend a driving awareness course in lieu of receiving penalty points on their licence for a motoring offence.

Family or close friends

- 2.26. Where the family or close friends of an applicant have convictions or cautions, or have been given penalty notices for offences, each application should be considered by the advisory committee; nobody should be automatically refused. Committees should consider the following factors:
- the nature, number and seriousness of the offences (or involvement in criminal activity), and when they took place;
 - the extent of contact with the relative or friend;
 - whether or not the candidate appears to condone the offence; and
 - whether the circumstances, if they became generally known, might bring the magistracy into disrepute or cause the candidate's standing as a magistrate to be questioned.

Bankruptcy and liquidation

- 2.27. A bankrupt is not legally disqualified from appointment as a magistrate. However, the Lord Chancellor will not generally appoint un-discharged bankrupts.
- 2.28. If a candidate is, or was, the director of a company that went into liquidation, the Lord Chancellor may seek information about the case from the Insolvency Agency. Advisory committees are, therefore, advised to refer such matters to the Magistrates HR Team.

Divorce proceedings

- 2.29. A Magistrate in the process of a divorce will not be appointed, until the divorce has been completed if they have children who are expected to become subject to a court order (for example in respect of residence, contact, specific issues or financial maintenance). A magistrate in the process of divorce should not sit in the Family Court until the divorce has been completed if they have children who are expected to become subject to a court order. Other magistrates, subject to advice from the secretary to the Advisory Committee, will normally be permitted to continue serving on the family panel while going through a divorce.

Maintenance or child support orders

- 2.30. If a candidate is subject to, or the beneficiary of, an order (for example, a maintenance assessment order or child support order) enforceable by the same local justice area to which an appointment might be made, the advisory committee must undertake to ensure that arrangements are made to transfer the order to another local justice area if it becomes enforceable. (Advisory committees should bear in mind that the transfer can be a lengthy process.)

Relationships to other serving magistrates

- 2.31. There is generally no bar to a close relative of a magistrate being appointed to the same bench, but the magistrates should not sit on cases together.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

- 2.32. It would not be appropriate, given the role of the various crime and disorder strategies, for magistrates to be directly or closely involved in their day-to-day management and operations. However, it is important that the views of courts are fed into the planning process. To achieve this, there need to be effective channels of communication between courts and the various bodies at a suitably strategic level. The extent to which magistrates become involved is a matter they should discuss with their bench chairman and justices' clerk.
- 2.33. It is recognised that magistrates who are county or district councillors, will probably have had some input into the planning of crime and disorder strategies. This is not considered a problem, provided they do not act as spokesperson on the subject for the local authority.
- 2.34. In the case of county or district council employees, concerns are unlikely to arise, unless the magistrate holds a prominent position or works specifically on crime and disorder issues.

Rehabilitation courses

- 2.35. Magistrates may observe rehabilitation courses for drink-drive offenders or similar schemes, subject to advice from their justices' clerk. They may also sit on the management board for such schemes.

Government steering groups

- 2.36. There is generally no objection to magistrates serving on these groups. However, each case should be considered on its merits with the benefit of advice from the justices' clerk.