



Judiciary of
England and Wales



The Lady Chief Justice's Report 2024

Independence, Impartiality, Integrity



**Judiciary of
England and Wales**

The Lady Chief Justice's Report 2024

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 5(1)
of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005



© Crown copyright 2024

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at www.judiciary.co.uk

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at website.enquiries@judiciary.uk

ISBN 978-1-5286-5260-5

E03231647

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

Published by: Judicial Office
11th Floor Thomas More Building,
Royal Courts of Justice,
Strand,
London WC2A 2LL
www.judiciary.uk

Contents

Introduction by the Lady Chief Justice	2
Work of judges and magistrates	6
Civil	7
Criminal	14
Family	21
Modern judiciary	24
Diversity and inclusion	25
Judicial communications	28
Leadership	29
Recruitment and appointments	30
Training	32
Judicial wellbeing	34
External and international engagement	36
External communications	37
Legal profession	38
School engagement	39
Transparency and open justice	39
Working with the government	40
International	42
Wales	44
Other activity	46
Judicial activity	47
Supporting activity	48
Glossary	51

Introduction by the Lady Chief Justice

This annual report is my first since becoming Lady Chief Justice. It offers a welcome opportunity to record and reflect on events over the last year (to September 2024). Throughout this time, I have been impressed by the steadfast and unwavering commitment to the administration of justice of our judges (courts and tribunals), magistrates, and coroners. It has been a period of change, including a new government, marked among other things by the swearing-in of a Lord Chancellor who is the first Muslim and first former member of the employed Bar to hold this great Office. I look forward to working alongside her, as we strive to deliver on our shared commitment to the rule of law.



The year has brought with it both anticipated and unforeseen opportunities and challenges, each of which the judiciary has worked through or is continuing to navigate: advancements in technology, including artificial intelligence, progress in transparency, fresh or changing legislation, court closures due to estate issues and security concerns, to name but a few. It is in no small part because of the resilience and adaptability of judicial office holders and our shared goal for commitment to progress, that we have managed to achieve so much.

Since taking office, I have visited every circuit across England and Wales and have engaged with as many judges, magistrates, and tribunals as possible, whether in person or through my online open forum sessions. Highlights have included seeing Intensive Supervision Courts, Pathfinder Courts, Women's Problem-Solving Courts, the newly refurbished Birkenhead County Court, the new Business and Property Courts in Leeds, a National Justice Museum event and a Youth Knife Crime Initiative.



Wales has naturally been an important area of focus, with visits and/or sittings in Cardiff, Swansea and Newport, alongside the swearing in of a Welsh Circuit Judge partly in Welsh. This is the first time that the annual report is available in Welsh as well as English.

All of these visits have allowed me to see first-hand the important work that is being carried out day-to-day, but also the daily challenges that are the consequence of historic under-resourcing, including in areas such as security and estates.

Modernisation and digitisation have continued to develop across this period. The Virtual Region, and the cross-deployment of Tribunal judges, have allowed for speedier hearings of small claims and fast-track claims from London and the South-East.

In Civil, we have also seen progress in the Online Civil Money Claims Service which has, on average, allowed for cases to receive a direction order around 20 weeks faster than those issued on paper. Work is on-going to improve listing in the County Courts and the Crown Court Improvement Group continues to focus on boosting the timeliness of cases in the Crown Court. For example, rape and serious sexual offences cases that have been in the court system for two or more years are, where possible, being given a fixed trial date at the first hearing. While it is still early days for the initiative, there are promising signs that it will be successful. Focus will now be on ensuring that this practice is adopted nationally.

I am grateful to judges in the Crown Court who have worked so hard and collaboratively with other justice partners to reduce the high backlog of cases. Despite these efforts, the backlog has continued to rise, caused in part by an increase in receipts and a complex case mix. In particular, I would like to thank those judges involved in dealing with cases arising out of the recent civil disorder, both in the Magistrates' and Crown Courts.

In Family, we have expanded the Pathfinder Programme that was piloted in North Wales and Dorset to include Birmingham and the South-East of Wales. This initiative has had a significant positive impact, ensuring that families involved in these cases have an outcome more quickly than previously.

Transparency of the justice system continues to be a key priority for me, and I was delighted to establish the Transparency and Open Justice Board in my first year. The core aim of this group is to increase public understanding of what happens in our courts and tribunals. This is a long standing and essential component of the rule of law. I look forward to seeing the work of the Board develop during my tenure. Relatedly, I have also increased my engagement with parliamentarians and expanded the pool of Parliamentary Liaison Judges to help Members of Parliament better understand the work of the judiciary, judicial independence, and the important role that it plays for their constituents. I held my first Press Conference for journalists in early 2024 and appeared before the Justice Select

Committee at the House of Commons on 16 January 2024, when I had a public opportunity to set out my early priorities and objectives.

Over this period, I have been conscious of the dedication of magistrates who, as unpaid professionals, administer criminal, family and youth justice everyday across England and Wales. It was a pleasure to be able to highlight and celebrate their efforts alongside His Majesty King Charles III who visited the Royal Courts of Justice in December 2023. I was also pleased to celebrate International Women's Day and join a question-and-answer session with two female magistrates, and I attended a Magistrates' Appreciation Day at the Old Bailey. It is reassuring to know that we now have a record number of members of the public applying to become magistrates. The important work of training magistrates has now transitioned to the Judicial College, where the skills and expertise of those who train our judges can be utilised for the magistracy as well.

In addition to travelling the length and breadth of our jurisdiction, I have represented the judiciary of England and Wales on several international engagements including Dublin, Qatar, Strasbourg, and Stockholm. On each occasion, I have been reminded of the global respect for the integrity, intellect and skills of our judiciary. The positive impacts of our justice system are far-reaching beyond our borders and the high regard with which we are held has been obvious, particularly as I have welcomed international Chief Justices and senior judiciary at the Royal Courts of Justice.

We have also continued to support training initiatives in international jurisdictions, helping to uphold and promote judicial independence and the rule of law.

I would like to take this moment to thank all of those, including HMCTS staff, who have played a role in the administration of justice in England and Wales over the past year for their support in my first year as Lady Chief Justice. I also pay tribute to those

within the Judicial Office who have provided me with invaluable advice and assistance. Looking ahead, I know that the judiciary will continue to do everything that it can in order to achieve or sustain progress, improving efficiency and timeliness, building judicial unity, modernising the justice system and maintaining the rule of law.

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Carr
of Walton-on-the-Hill**





Work of judges and magistrates



Civil

Court of Appeal Civil Division

During this reporting period, the Court of Appeal saw the announcement of five new appointments: Sir Peter Fraser, Sir Jeremy Baker, Sir David Holgate, Sir Stephen Cobb, and Sir Anthony Zacaroli.

The workload of the Court of Appeal (Civil Division) increased during the reporting period. This can be measured statistically in terms of numbers of permission to appeal applications received, numbers of appeals heard, and numbers of appeals waiting to be heard. It is, however, hard to measure that workload in numbers alone for three reasons:

- The profile of appeals has changed significantly since the Covid pandemic. There are now more very long appeals (taking three days or more), more long appeals (taking two days or more), and far fewer shorter appeals (taking less than one full day).
- Since the change some years ago from allowing an automatic right of oral renewal to dealing with all permission to appeal applications on paper, those applications tend to take judges significantly more time.
- The hearings of substantive appeals are allotted more time than they once were. By definition, every appeal to the Court of Appeal (Civil Division) is important, having received permission to pursue it either from the judge below or the Court of Appeal itself.



The timeliness of decision-making in the Court of Appeal (Civil Division) also increased during the reporting period. The average time taken from each of the date of issue, the grant of permission to appeal, the hearing of the substantive appeal, to the hand-down of the judgment has fallen¹.

In July 2024, a new administration structure was introduced to the Court of Appeal (Civil Division), following the changeover to the use of CE-File the year before.

The most significant changes from the users' point of view are that (a) staff now deal with cases all

the way through in three categories: Civil, Public and Business, and (b) the office is now split into three teams which deal with issuing the appeal, case preparation, orders and correspondence. An appeal only leaves its administration team when it is referred to the listing office either for the allocation of the permission to appeal application to a judge, or for the listing of an appeal hearing.

The main benefits of this model are that: (a) the court user no longer needs to navigate between different offices depending on the status of the case, and (b) the speed at which cases moves through the system is increasing.

¹ Internal data

The work of the three teams is split into the following categories of case types:

Business: including Chancery, Commercial, Tax, Competition, Technology and Construction, and Intellectual Property.

Private: including Family, Personal Injury, County Court, Kings Bench General, Defamation and Media.

Public: including Public Law, Tribunals, National Security, Immigration and Asylum, Employment and Civil Procedure Rules and Costs.

The Court of Appeal (Civil Division) continued to increase its transparency and accessibility. The majority of hearings were live-streamed. The Court also continued to sit regionally whenever that was possible and appropriate. It heard several cases in Wales and elsewhere during the reporting period.

High Court

The King's Bench Division (KBD) and the specialist lists within it have been extremely busy in 2023/2024, as have the KBD judges who deal with an immense variety of work in its specialist lists and in some of the tribunals, as well as trying serious criminal cases throughout the country out on circuit. The outstanding work of the leadership judges in the specialist lists to improve efficiency has been crucial to the performance of the Division, and the Lady Chief Justice would like to thank all judges for their hard work this year. New editions of the Guides to the King's Bench Division and the Administrative Court have been published.



I know that... my biggest asset is my judges. Because the judges of England and Wales in the courts and tribunals work tirelessly and fearlessly with a single purpose, which is to serve the public and the rule of law, and that gives me both optimism and confidence."

Judicial review continues to be at the forefront of the Administrative Court's work, as are planning and extradition appeals. The Administrative Court has dealt with many high-profile judicial review challenges, including in the Divisional Court. A great deal of this work is urgent and comes in at short notice. Keeping pace with the volume of work is challenging and the Court's administration is working at full capacity. As is the case across the High Court, continued administrative support from HMCTS staff is critical to the efficient listing and disposal of cases. It is hoped that the move to a digital system for all case work (CE-File) will assist.

The Planning Court has also been busy with a substantial number of claims concerning nationally important infrastructure projects, environmental issues, housing for asylum seekers, and planning decisions which concern historic buildings and conservation areas.

The Commercial Court is a crucial part of the international offering of the High Court in this jurisdiction. It continues to maintain its outstanding international reputation for commercial litigation and international arbitration, with an increase in claims being issued and cases being tried in both the Commercial and Admiralty Courts. The Court is currently trying several long and complex cases involving international parties, in which the parties have chosen the law of England and Wales to govern their transactions or agreed to the jurisdiction of the English courts to resolve any disputes.



Applications relating to arbitrations remain an important part of the Commercial Court's work.

The KBD Civil List has seen a continuing upward trend of hearings concerning protester injunctions and civil claims of sexual abuse. The Media and Communications List has also had a busy year, with an increase in defamation cases, and harassment (by speech) claims.

The Technology and Construction Court (TCC) has seen more of its work undertaken outside of London. This aligns with moves taken to encourage an increase in KBD work issued and heard in centres such as Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, and Cardiff.

Further, following the full implementation of the Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA) and the litigation that is already coming into the TCC as a result, a BSA Working Group has been established to consider new procedures that may be required and to create a body of knowledge and guidance in relation to BSA claims. International disputes continue to form a significant proportion of TCC work undertaken in London, and an increasing number of software-related disputes are now being litigated in the TCC.

Business and Property Courts

The workload in the Business and Property Courts of England and Wales has remained broadly stable following a steady increase since the Covid pandemic. The persistent high workload signifies that these courts remain the jurisdiction of choice for litigation for both international and domestic business disputes. Lead times for listings of any duration have remained stable across the board.

The Business and Property Courts remain at the forefront of emerging areas of litigation, including Artificial Intelligence and Digital Assets. Regular, highly specialised training seminars are held to ensure judges can deal with new and emerging areas of litigation.

The Regional Business and Property Courts continue to expand their workloads, enabling more disputes to be heard locally to where they occur and affect people the most.

Chancery Division

The new Chancery Guide², first published in July 2022, continues to be kept up to date with the most recent update in July 2024. The new Chancery Guide is continuing to successfully align the practice in the Chancery Division with the practice in the other Business and Property Courts. The Guide also applies in the District Registries out of London, save for where local guidance is necessary.

The Chancery Masters continue to hear trials while also case managing larger cases jointly with High Court Judges. The Insolvency and Companies Court Judges remain busy following several years of steadily increasing workload.

County Court

The priorities for civil justice in this reporting period were digitisation, reducing backlogs and improving the public's understanding of the civil justice system. Civil leadership judges sought also to encourage measures aimed at improving inclusion and diversity for staff and judiciary alike within the County Courts.

Some important achievements across the civil jurisdiction were:

- Publication of the second edition of guidance on listing best practice. The guidance was incorporated into HMCTS training materials for listing staff to enhance consistency nationally.

2 [The Business and Property Courts of England & Wales Chancery Guide 2022 \(judiciary.uk\)](https://www.judiciary.uk)

- Automatic referral to mediation for small money claims issued under CPR Part 7.
- Amending the Civil Procedure Rules and the overriding objective to encourage greater use of alternative dispute resolution, leading to fewer disputes requiring a final hearing by the court.
- The implementation of the new intermediate track, extending the advantages of fixed recoverable costs to cases up to £100,000 in value.
- The utilisation of the “Virtual Region”, and the cross-deployment of Tribunal judges, to allow speedier hearings of small claims and fast track claims from London and the South-East. Both schemes were improved, and a full evaluation of cross-deployment was undertaken.
- The Small Claims Paper Determination Pilot was extended, following promising internal data showing its efficacy in reducing the time taken for many claims to receive a judicial decision.
- The number of Designated Civil Judges has been increased by the creation of seven new posts. These new leadership positions provide more focused local civil judicial leadership.
- The Master of the Rolls and his senior civil leadership team completed their 109th visit to a civil court centre (out of 139). These visits improve morale and allow judges and staff to communicate local successes and challenges.
- End-to-end digital case progression was released to all County Courts for legally represented cases up to £25,000. Cases issued in the Online Civil Money Claims Service received a directions order, on average, 20 weeks faster than those issued on paper.³

The average time from issue to hearing for a small claim reduced by four weeks between Q3 of 2023 and Q1 of 2024.⁴ These improvements will continue. The performance improvement plan being implemented by the Civil National Business Centre should have a significant positive effect on timeliness.

The time that mortgage possession claims took between (a) claim and warrant, and (b) claim and repossession, improved slightly, despite the highest volume of claims since Q2 of 2019.⁵ Volumes of landlord possession claims also increased, particularly in London.⁶ That regional concentration may explain a slight increase in delays, not assisted by judicial vacancies in the South-East.

3 [Fact sheet: Online Civil Money Claims – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

4 Timeliness’ report (page 9) on [Civil Justice Statistics Quarterly Publication PowerBI Dashboard](#)

5 [Mortgage and landlord possession statistics: April to June 2024 – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) (Section 2)

6 [Mortgage and landlord possession statistics: April to June 2024 – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) (Section 5)



The Deputy Head of Civil Justice led a cross-jurisdictional group, which published guidance on the responsible judicial use of AI in December 2023. The group continues to review and update the guidance as technology improves.

The Civil Justice Council (CJC) has gone from strength to strength. It published Part I of its Pre-Action Protocols report in August 2023. The CJC's working group considering the Procedure to Determine Mental Capacity in Civil Proceedings held a successful and well-attended consultative seminar in March 2024. The final report is expected in Autumn 2024. The 2023 National Forum on access to justice in a cost-of-living crisis attracted a record number of delegates, with discussions on generative AI, civil justice data, ADR, education and more. It was addressed by the Lord Chancellor, the Lady Chief Justice, and the Master of the Rolls.

The CJC has also taken on important new projects addressing (a) the Supreme Court's decision in PACCAR and litigation funding more generally, (b) data and the extent of digital disadvantage, (c) the reform of the legal costs regime established by the Solicitors Act 1974, and (d) the reform of enforcement of civil judgments.

The Online Procedure Rules Committee has been fully constituted and appointed an excellent array of hugely well-qualified members to its sub-committee. It will be the engine of the creation of Digital Justice System for civil cases, alongside family and tribunals cases. It is expected that the coming year will see the realisation of its first rule-making in the pre-action, as well as the post-action, space.

Civil justice in Wales was given a high priority during the reporting period, with strong Welsh Representation on the Civil Procedure Rules Committee and CJC, and regular reporting lines by the Welsh Government.

Criminal

Court of Appeal Criminal Division

Receipts to the Court of Appeal Criminal Division (CACD) have continued to rise gradually, as was expected given the increase in trials completed in the Crown Court, but recently have been levelling off. The volume of applications for leave to appeal against conviction and/or sentence are almost back to pre-pandemic levels. It is to be noted that the proportion of applications lodged by Litigants in Person has increased again this year and amounted to around 40% of conviction applications received, which is a result of the steps taken to improve access to justice. The number of Attorney-General's References under the Unduly Lenient Sentences scheme, however, has reduced.

Efficiency continues to be a focus for the Criminal Appeal Office, to improve ways of working to ensure the CACD is able to deal with the expected continuing rise in receipts as a result of more cases being dealt with in the Crown Court. Criminal Appeal Office lawyers, who support the judges, now have access to the system for playing CCTV and video material used in the Crown Court. This will be of enormous assistance in ensuring material provided can be viewed by the judges and has been properly referenced by counsel, saving valuable judicial time in cases involving such material.

However, this legal year has seen a rise in the number of outstanding cases, which reflects the increase in applications for leave to appeal awaiting allocation to a single judge. This increase is due to a combination of efficiency in preparing applications for consideration by a single judge, increased complexity, and length of grounds of appeal, requiring more judicial time and the limits on the time available to judges to consider paper applications.



A Court User Group meeting was held in October where users were given an update on significant judgments given by the CACD in the last year and a suggestion that a newsletter would be prepared and circulated two or three times a year was well received. Users were reminded that papers lodged less than a week before the hearing were considered “late”, and the correct procedure must be followed or there was a real possibility the papers would not reach all or some of the judges.

The Vice President of the CACD emphasised the importance of oral advocacy bearing in mind that the judges will have fully read all the papers in advance of the hearing.

Links were also provided to the Guide to Proceedings in the CACD, which contains the latest information about practice and procedure for users. The Vice President reminded practitioners that while most CACD judgments are given *ex tempore*, where judgment is reserved, the restrictions that apply when the draft is circulated must be observed and care should be taken to read the instructions and warning that accompany the draft when it is circulated.

The court continues to adopt a flexible approach to the conduct of hearings before the court: the default position remains that hearings are conducted in person, but allowing remote participation where it is in the interests of justice to do so. A further reminder was given at the User Group meeting of the correct process for making an application for remote participation in, or observation of, CACD proceedings with links to the relevant forms and a reminder of the correct email address to use. The Vice President explained that former legal representatives who are not formally instructed in the appellate proceedings must apply to observe, rather than participate in, the proceedings. The court has granted many requests to observe proceedings in furtherance of the principle of open justice and this facility is of particular importance to victims.

Crown Court

During this reporting period the Crown Court sat more days than in previous years, at a record level of 107,700 days for 2023/2024. Despite this, the backlog of cases remains high for several reasons including a continuing rise in receipts and an increasingly complex case mix. (Issues arising out of the allocation of sitting days in the Crown Court for 2024/2025 did not materially impact performance in this reporting period.) The Lady Chief Justice recognises that this situation has placed huge demands on the system and is grateful to those working to ensure that the courts operate as efficiently as possible under these circumstances.

A rise in the prison and remand population during this reporting period has impacted cases in the Crown Court, where statutory time limits for defendants in custody mean cases have to be given priority for trials. Impacts on other services, such as the Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) and the late delivery of prisoners, and estate-related issues, have also contributed to disruption. For example, Harrow and Doncaster Crown Courts have been closed due to discoveries of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC), and days have been lost across the estate due to overheating, cooling, ventilation and planned maintenance throughout the year. There has also been an increase in the number of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) being prosecuted, which generally have a higher not-guilty-plea rate than other types of crime and take longer to deal with in court because of the sensitive issues involved.

Efforts have been made by the former and current Senior Presiding Judges to improve timeliness in RASSO cases, targeting cases that have been in the Crown Court for two years or more. RASSO cases wherever possible are now given fixed trial dates at the first hearing, taking into account advocates' availability. Some Resident Judges also addressed timeliness locally by setting aside specific court time for the trial of RASSO cases where the defendant is on bail – in the same way the courts are required to do in cases where the defendant is in custody.

In addition to these initiatives, the Crown Court Improvement Group (CCIG) has continued to make excellent progress in identifying areas for improvement, focussing on three key measures that could be used to improve timeliness: promoting earlier guilty pleas by defendants, reducing the ineffective trial rate, and reducing the number of hearings per case.

The Lady Chief Justice thanks Lord Justice Edis, the Senior Presiding Judge throughout the reporting period, for his leadership of the CCIG and all members for their ongoing contribution to improving efficiency in the Crown Court.

In particular, progress has made via:

- An initiative to encourage the listing of all RASSO cases before the end of July 2024 for all cases that were more than two years old as of 31 December 2023.
- Improvements to access of video facilities and the production of prisoners by HMPPS.
- Improvements to the quality of evidence in police files submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) through a joint initiative of the National Police Chiefs Council and the CPS.
- The introduction of judicial-led problem solving groups, led by the Crime Presiders (in liaison with Resident Judges), with assistance from HMCTS.
- A national roll-out of the provision of Pre-Sentence Reports on committal by the Probation Service in order to support sentencing at first hearing in the Crown Court.
- An expansion of a Legal Aid Agency pilot on early engagement with 12 police forces.

Magistrates' court

Recruitment

Between March 2023 and April 2024, 2,029 magistrates were appointed to the magistracy of England and Wales. This is the most ever appointed in a 12-month period. This is a huge achievement, and the Lady Chief Justice would like to praise everyone who played a part in making this possible. Her particular thanks are extended to all those that have volunteered to perform this important role.

Transforming Summary Justice

The principles of Transforming Summary Justice (TSJ) were relaunched in July 2023 to improve the way in which cases are handled and processed through the Magistrates' courts. Guidance on the principles has since been provided to each Magistrates' court and magistrates have been offered training through the Judicial College. Local Criminal Justice Boards are responsible for ensuring compliance with the principles.

However, a combination of factors has meant that the refresh of the principles has not led to desired improvements in performance in the Magistrates' courts over the last year. Funding and capacity issues remain challenging, with an increasing caseload and a high volume of overnight remands creating additional pressure.

The TSJ Group continues to seek solutions that will alleviate the pressures on Magistrates' courts and deliver the improvements required.

LJA Consultation

Efforts continued during this period to see through the abolition of Local Justice Areas (LJAs). A public consultation was due to launch in the spring, but this has been temporarily postponed due to the calling of the general election. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) are in discussions with new ministers to reaffirm the removal of LJAs and to continue with the consultation. The judiciary remain committed to the consultation which will continue to value the importance of local justice, while providing opportunity for greater flexibility in how Magistrates' courts operate.

Civil Disobedience

Throughout late July and early August 2024, violent disorder took place across the country. The criminal justice system responded at pace to prioritise these cases, ensuring confidence in the system, and undoubtedly acted as a deterrent for further public disorder taking place. The Magistrates' courts were at the frontline in dealing with these cases. This involved sitting late to ensure cases were dealt with quickly and effectively in the interest of justice. These were exceptionally challenging circumstances with heightened personal anxiety and the Lady Chief Justice commends the Magistrates' courts for all their efforts and all those working in the criminal justice system who ensured that these cases were prioritised.

Criminal Procedure Rule Committee

The Committee's substantial programme of work during the reporting period included the making of a wide range of rules and rule amendments.

These included rules to supplement new statutory provision for sending for trial by an online procedure; to supplement other new statutory provisions in the National Security Act 2023, the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 and the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023; to provide for IDVAs and ISVAs; to adjust the rules about the supply of information from court records; to codify practice on the correction of errors in court records; to

codify disclosure management practice; to implement Law Commission recommendations about costs in restraint proceedings and about a timetable in confiscation proceedings; to codify practice on the use for sentencing purposes of confidential information about assistance given by a defendant to the police; and to regulate procedure on service of a defective appeal notice in an extradition case.

The Committee began a review of the rules about contempt of court in the light of recent case law and emerging Law Commission proposals and began to prepare for a fresh consolidation of the Criminal Procedure Rules in 2025.



The Sentencing Council for England and Wales

The Sentencing Council is an independent body. The Lady Chief Justice is its President, and it is chaired by a senior judge. The Council has a statutory duty to produce its own annual report, the latest of which was published in October 2024.

Throughout the reporting period, under the chairmanship of Lord Justice William Davis, the Council continued to meet its primary duty of developing guidelines that promote a clear, fair, and consistent approach to sentencing.

The Council ran five consultations on new and revised sentencing guidelines, covering: the imposition of community and custodial sentences; blackmail, kidnap, and false imprisonment offences; aggravated vehicle taking offences and other motoring related matters; immigration offences; and non-fatal strangulation and suffocation. The Council conducted its third annual consultation on miscellaneous amendments to sentencing guidelines. Consequent amendments came into effect on 1 April 2024. The Council published findings from two evaluations of existing guidelines, namely offence specific guidelines relating to bladed articles and offensive weapons and aggravating and mitigating factors in sentencing guidelines generally and their expanded explanations.

During the period, the Council also published responses to the government's domestic homicide sentencing review and the Justice Committee report, 'public opinion and understanding of sentencing'.

The Service Justice System

The Service Courts include the Court Martial, the Summary Appeal Court (for hearing appeals from summary decisions made by Commanding Officers), and the Service Civilian Court (to hear cases overseas involving civilians subject to Service discipline). There are two permanent Military Court Centres (Catterick in North Yorkshire and Bulford in Wiltshire).

The judiciary

During this past year, Assistant Judge Advocate General (AJAG) Alistair McGrigor has retired, after 20 years of service, and AJAG Darren Reed was appointed to the Circuit Bench. Two new AJAGs have been recruited: AJAG John Atwill from the Royal Navy and AJAG Tom Mitchell from the District Judge (Magistrates' court) bench. The full-time judiciary in the Service Courts is now at full complement for first time in nearly two years.

The Lady Chief Justice wishes to thank Alistair for his dedicated service over two decades and offers her warm congratulations to all those new appointees.

Case numbers

The last year has seen a slight increase in the number of service personnel coming before the Court Martial. In the period from 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024, 207 individual service personnel were tried in the Court Martial and their cases were completed. This compares with 193 individuals with completed cases in the same period the previous year.

Listing times

Listing times in the Court Martial remain below pre-pandemic levels. Plea and Trial Preparation Hearings are listed within 42 days of case direction by the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA). This is a KPI for the Military Court Service (MCS) which they have met in the last two quarters. The average waiting time from direction by the SPA to trial in the Court Martial is 176 days, or a little under six months. The most common factor requiring cases to be listed beyond the KPI is the availability of defence counsel.

Short listing times in the Service Courts, especially for high priority cases like those involving allegations of rape and serious sexual assault, are an important means of supporting the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces by providing timely resolution to the benefit of victims, defendants, and their units. Delays in getting a case to trial leads to uncertainty and aggravates feelings of anxiety in victims and defendants. Where the uncertainty lasts for months, or years, this can undermine the morale and operational effectiveness of the units to which they belong.

Case Management

A new case management system for the MCS, Thomson Reuters' Case Center, went live in September 2023. It is compatible with the Service Police's Connect system. Feedback from judiciary, lawyers and staff using the system has been positive. Case Center represents a significant upgrade in case management capability and has made the process more efficient and effective

IT for board members

The MCS has recently introduced laptops for board members, with the facility to display video and documentary material such as CCTV, interview summaries, maps, plans, and judicial directions. Documents loaded onto Case Center can be sent to board members for them to view and use in their deliberations. The Court Martial is, in some cases, entirely paper free, obviating the need to copy documents for boards and advocates. There will remain some cases where paper copies of documents are necessary.

Cases involving secret martial

Two recent cases in the Court Martial have demonstrated the need to be able to hear and record evidence classified as secret. After a recent security review and upgrade, the MCS at Bulford can now conduct trials, or sentencing proceedings, in which unclassified evidence is heard in open court, and secret evidence can be heard in a closed court, fully compliant with MOD security requirements.

Pre-recorded cross examination

Both Military Court Centres are now able to conduct pre-recorded examination of vulnerable witnesses, thereby providing the full range of special measures as is available in the Civilian Justice System.

Board members

A pilot scheme using tri-Service boards (equivalent of juries) in the Court Martial and Summary Appeal Court commenced in October 2023. Each Service is equally represented on the board.



The Judge Advocate General (JAG) has welcomed this development as it allows cases to be listed at the earliest opportunity, rather than waiting for a single-Service board to be available, meaning that cases are concluded more quickly with advantages for the personnel involved and their units. Tri-Service boards have significantly reduced MCS costs and resources spent in de-conflicting board members. Feedback from board members during the pilot has been positive.

Commonwealth Military Transformation Project

Since 2021, the JAG has been participating in this project, coordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat, to support member states in modernising their military justice systems.

Family

Private Law

Private law children proceedings resolve disputes between parents or others and are focussed on the future arrangements for a child's care and wellbeing. In the year to March 2024, 51,070 cases were started, which is a 2% reduction on the same period to March 2023. The average case length for January to March 2024 was 43.9 weeks, down from 45.7 weeks for the same period in 2023.

This period also saw the successful expansion of the Pathfinder Courts pilot, which had been launched in Dorset and North Wales in 2022. Pathfinder Courts focus on earlier resolution of disputes by providing the court, at the start of the proceedings, with a child impact report which focuses on the impact of a parental dispute on the child.

Initial evidence suggests that the pilot has been successful in Dorset and North Wales, allowing it to be expanded across the jurisdiction. These new larger court areas will test the model further to understand whether cases can be resolved earlier.

Public Law

Children public law proceedings involve cases brought by local authorities to protect a child from significant harm and ensure that they receive the care that they need.

15,688 cases were started in the year to March 2024, a 4% reduction on the same period to March 2023. The average case length for public law proceedings in January to March 2024 was 37.7 weeks, down from 40.1 weeks for the same period in 2023. In March 2024 there were 10,809 outstanding public law cases compared to 12,081 in March 2023, which is a 10% reduction. This is an indication of the improvements brought about as a consequence of the relaunch of the Public Law Outline in January 2023.

In September 2023, the Public Law Working Group's Adoption Sub-group published its interim report: 'Recommendations for Best Practice in Respect of Adoption'. It considered the wide variety of circumstances in which adoption orders are made and offered recommendations on a range of matters, including openness within adoption.

Financial Remedies Court

The Financial Remedies Court is a specialist part of the Family Court which helps ensure that, following

the breakdown of a marriage or civil partnership, family finances are resolved fairly and efficiently.

44,580 financial remedy applications were made in the year to March 2024, a 9% increase in the same period last year. The number of financial remedy applications which were made by consent at the outset account for 71% of all applications made and increased by 11% to 31,580 in the year to March 2024. Comparatively, cases which were contested at issue increased by 7% to 13,000.

Transparency

Work continued on implementing the recommendations published in the President of the Family Division's Transparency Review Report. The Media Reporting Pilot (which allows accredited journalists or legal bloggers to attend and report on Family Court hearings) was rolled out to 16 more areas in January. It is now live in around 50% of all family court areas. Guidance to assist judges in pilot areas to engage with the media and to anonymise judgments was published. The Financial Remedies Court launched its Reporting Pilot at the Central Family Court, Birmingham and Leeds in January.

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) evaluated the impact of the Reporting Pilot and also undertook research on the availability of data. Both reports were published in July. The findings show an absence of data on the support provided to families before they enter court proceedings. Information on what happens to families after court decisions are made is also limited.

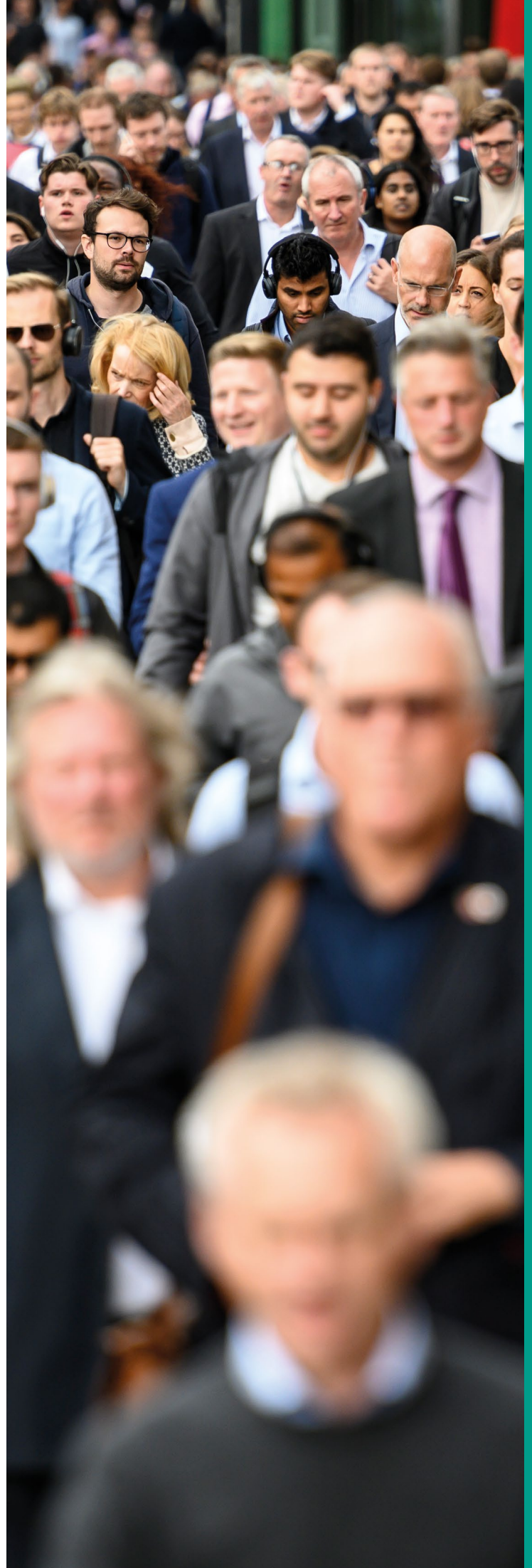
Deprivation of Liberty

Applications to deprive young people of their liberty under the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court continued to be issued at the Royal Courts of Justice. Annual figures from Cafcass indicate that the number of deprivation of liberty orders granted per year have increased from 102 in 2017-18 to 1,238 in 2023-24. The increase in the granting of these orders reflects the increasing number of applications received by the High Court from local authorities and the degree to which the statutory scheme is falling short of the demand for secure welfare placements. Requests for deprivation of liberty orders show no signs of decreasing and the judiciary are concerned that these orders are being made outside of any statutory regime, with judges feeling compelled to make the order, as not to do so leaves the young person much more at risk.

Court of Protection

The Court of Protection (CoP) is a specialist court that makes decisions on financial or welfare matters for people who lack the mental capacity to make those decisions.

In January to March 2024, there were 8,525 applications made to the CoP under the Mental Capacity Act which is a reduction of 5% on the equivalent quarter in 2023 (8,948 applications). The number of orders made under the Act was 14,679 – this is an increase of 15% on the same quarter in 2023.



A man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit and a blue and white striped tie, is focused on his work. He is sitting at a desk with a laptop, his hands resting on the keyboard. In the background, another person is visible, working on a laptop, but they are out of focus. The office environment is bright and professional.

Modern judiciary



Diversity and inclusion

Diversity, inclusion, and equality are fundamental to the rule of law and underpin much of the work of judicial office holders. The Judicial Diversity and Inclusion Strategy⁷ is now in its fourth year. Its overarching aim is to increase the personal and professional diversity of the judiciary by growing the number of applicants for judicial appointment from diverse backgrounds. The Strategy also aims to support the progression of these applicants within the judiciary and encourage increased retention rates by fostering an inclusive culture for all judicial office holders. Progress against the Strategy is published annually.

The objectives set out in the Strategy are aligned with the Lady Chief Justice's priority focus areas which include judicial unity. Lady Justice Whipple succeeded Lady Justice Simler as Lead Judge for Diversity and Inclusion in November 2023 and oversees delivery of the Strategy.

⁷ <https://www.judiciary.uk/about-the-judiciary/diversity/diversity-strategy-2020-25/>



On diversity – I do feel passionately it’s about working from the bottom up, and working with the professions, in fact with the schools and the universities, right from the beginning to make sure that we’re getting the most able people, the most diverse cohort of people, from which to select our judges.”

The Statement of Expected Behaviour⁸, first published in January 2023, was included in a revised Guide to Judicial Conduct to assist judicial office holders in understanding standards of behaviour expected inside and outside the hearing room. The Statement makes clear that the same standards of behaviour are expected between judicial office holders as they are towards staff and court users. It emphasises the responsibility on the individual to help foster a positive environment where diversity is

recognised and valued, and everyone is treated with dignity and respect. It is the responsibility of every judicial office holder to ensure that they are contributing to this positive environment.

The judiciary continues to play an active role in community outreach and in supporting applications for judicial office. Over 140 judges and 60 magistrates volunteer as Diversity and Community Relations judges and magistrates in their local areas, each undertaking community outreach work with legal professionals, community groups, and educational establishments. The latest annual return of activity indicates that they have undertaken over 900+ engagements.⁹

The judiciary continues to hold judicial application seminars and provide mentoring and shadowing schemes for those considering applying for appointment to the judiciary and for existing judicial office holders considering other judicial roles. From August 2023 to September 2024, just under 400 legal practitioners were given an insight into the work of a judge through the Judicial Work Shadowing Scheme. The mentor pool is being increased to meet demand. Around 2,900 people attended pre-application judicial seminars in the 12 months from August 2023. It is not possible to make a direct correlation between participation in these schemes and judicial application rates.

⁸ <https://www.judiciary.uk/guidance-and-resources/statement-of-expected-behaviour/>

⁹ All engagement figures in this and subsequent paragraphs are drawn from activity returns received. It should be noted that other engagements may occur that will not be captured in this process.



Currently, black, Asian and minority ethnic legal professionals apply for judicial appointment at a higher rate than the eligible pool and this profile has increased between 2022-23 and 2023-24.

The 2024 annual update on the Judicial Diversity and Inclusion Strategy identified the current underrepresentation of black judges as an area of focus. A review of black lawyers' participation levels in outreach programmes indicated that black lawyers are participating at representative levels when benchmarked against the eligible pool of black lawyers. This review provided insights that will enable further work to be done, such as more targeted outreach with black legal professionals.

The 2024 annual update also identified an increase in support for disabled judicial office holders as a priority. Collaboration continues between the judiciary, HMCTS, and MoJ to achieve this goal. Additional resources were made available to assist disabled judicial office holders by reducing barriers and minimising delays in the provision of reasonable adjustments.

The judiciary is a second career and increasing judicial diversity is a joint effort with the legal professions and others. The judiciary continues to be an active member of the Judicial Diversity Forum¹⁰, of which the legal professions, the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC), and the MoJ are also members.

¹⁰ <https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/equality-and-diversity/diversity-and-equality-measures/judicial-diversity-forum/>

In July 2024, updated statistics¹¹ were published on diversity within the existing judiciary, the appointments process, and the legal professions. This aids us to have continued visibility of the pipeline from the professions through to appointment into the judiciary.

To strengthen the support to candidates on the Targeted Outreach Programme¹², the judiciary and the JAC co-launched the Judicial Guide scheme, with 241 candidates supported by the programme. 171 judges act as judicial guides, supporting candidates in understanding all aspects of the selection exercise process.

The pre-application judicial education programme continued to support potential applicants for judicial office. This provides digital resources and judge-led discussion groups to support lawyers from under-represented demographics who aspire to secure a judicial role. There are three cohorts of participants in the programme each year, with a total of 31 judges currently assisting in facilitation of the workshops.

The Judicial Reverse Mentoring Scheme provides an opportunity for judges to be mentored by legal professionals from under-represented backgrounds. The 2024 cohort is underway with 71 judges participating.

Judicial communications

Over the course of the reporting period, the Judicial Office Communications team sought to support improved internal communications from members of the senior judiciary to all judicial office holders.

To support the Lady Chief Justice's first year in post, internally for the judiciary, several articles and videos were published, and a series of open forums were introduced. These enabled judicial office holders to engage directly with the Lady Chief Justice and ask her a range of questions. The forums were a mix of national events open to all with some circuit specific sessions. They coincided with the Lady Chief Justice's visits to courts and tribunals in those areas.

In June 2024, a new judicial intranet was launched following feedback and input from the judiciary on how the site could be enhanced. The site has been restructured, with an improved search function to make it more modern and accessible. Feedback, from judicial office holders, on the new site has been positive, particularly in relation to the improved navigation.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/diversity-of-the-judiciary-2024-statistics/diversity-of-the-judiciary-legal-professions-new-appointments-and-current-post-holders-2024-statistics>

¹² <https://judicialappointments.gov.uk/targeted-outreach-and-research-team/>



Over half of our Tribunal judges are solicitors by background. We are doing much better with women, certainly up to the higher levels, and we are making progress with certain ethnic minorities. We are not making enough progress when it comes to black people in particular. We do not have enough black judges, and that's a priority for me to look at this year, and also actually disabled judges. That's something I don't think we've looked at sufficiently in the past and those are two of our focus areas under our strategy for this year."

Leadership

Many of the responsibilities for the welfare, training, and guidance of judges vested in the Lady Chief Justice are delegated to, and daily undertaken by, leadership judges across the judiciary. The Lady Chief Justice is grateful to all leadership judges for their work in ensuring that justice is administered and delivered efficiently and for their pastoral support for colleagues.

Judges in leadership roles are undertaking their enhanced responsibilities in addition to their core roles as judges. It is, therefore, important that leadership judges are also properly supported in carrying out leadership activities and in their wider development.

The Judicial College continued to deliver leadership training for those new to leadership through the Essential Leadership Programme, which is a mandatory three-day course for all judicial office holders newly appointed into such positions. Between October 2023 and July 2024, the College delivered five Essential Leadership Programmes to a total of 92 judicial leaders.

The last 12 months has seen improvement to the support provided to leadership judges. A new approach to induction for leadership judges within the Courts Judiciary was piloted in 2023/24 and complemented the training provided by the Judicial College. The induction sessions equip new leadership judges with the practical information and knowledge they need.



In March, a year-long pilot was initiated to support leadership judges with their own development. This “Leadership Feedback” will link to other development activities for leadership judges, including discussions between them and their own senior leadership judge.

The Judicial Peer Mentoring Scheme has continued to offer salaried judges the opportunity to receive mentoring from more experienced judges. Leadership judges have remained involved in appraisal schemes across the judiciary which support development for fee-paid judges.

The Judicial Attitude Survey took place during June and July 2024 for all salaried and fee-paid judges and non-legal members including all salaried and fee-paid Coroners.

The aim of the survey is to assess the attitudes of the judiciary in key employment and management areas including the experience of being a judicial office holder, morale, working conditions, remuneration, training and personal development, retention, and leadership. I look forward to receiving the results and using them to support further work to improve the experience of the judiciary.

Recruitment and appointments

Between August 2023 and September 2024, 724 judicial office holders were appointed across all court and tribunal jurisdictions. This follows significant recruitment efforts across the courts and tribunals over previous and live financial years.

After another successful recruitment exercise, the High Court is currently only running with one vacancy in the KBD. The next exercise will launch in October for appointments across the KBD and the Chancery Division. Since 2019, there is a slight upward trend in the overall profile of black, Asian and minority ethnic High Court judges. However, this is not consistent across individual ethnicities who make up this group.

A Circuit Judge exercise has recently concluded with vacancies being successfully filled in Civil and Family; however, not all vacancies in Crime have been filled. The next Circuit Judge exercise has launched with recommendations expected in summer 2025. Similar to last year, there is a significant shortfall in the recruitment of District Judges to sit in the County and Family Court. To assist with capacity gaps at the District Bench, in addition to regular recruitment, a mix of up to 40 First-tier Tribunal and Employment Judges were deployed to hear County Court work (Civil and Family) through flexible deployment in late 2023/early 2024. Furthermore, the next District Judge exercise launching later in 2024 will focus on the London and South Eastern circuit where the shortage of District Judges is most acute. An approach to more targeted recruitment is likely to continue into 2025-26.

Work continues to make salaried judicial office as attractive a prospect as possible, reducing the system's over reliance on fee-paid posts. The judiciary is heavily engaged in this area, as are the legal professions, and the Judicial Appointments Commission.

Following an Expression of Interest exercise open to serving District and Circuit Judges, Her Honour Judge Alison Raeside was appointed as the Lady Chief Justice's new nominated representative on the HMCTS Board. The Lady Chief Justice thanks District Judge Tim Jenkins for his exceptional contribution to the Board and to the administration of justice in England and Wales more widely.



The strength, the vitality of our criminal justice system depends upon attracting and retaining individuals who are independent-minded, who exemplify diversity of thought and background, who understand that justice must be available to all.”

The Judicial College has six objectives in its 2021-2025 Strategy:

- Playing its part in ensuring the judiciary has the right skills and knowledge;
- Meeting the future needs of the magistracy;
- Preparing for innovation and change;
- Effective leadership;
- Contributing to a transparent and outward facing judiciary; and
- High quality support for modern training.

Training

The Lady Chief Justice has a statutory responsibility for the maintenance of appropriate arrangements for the training of the judiciary of the courts, which is fulfilled by the Judicial College.

Between October 2023 and July 2024, the College delivered 408 judicial training events, providing almost 15,700 places for delegates.¹³ This included 104 induction seminars for just over 2,370 judicial office holders who were new to the judiciary or taking on new roles, along with other regular training, including jurisdictional and skills-based seminars.

In addition, the College took responsibility for delivering training for the magistracy from HMCTS in February 2024 in all regions of England and Wales. This marks a significant step

to enhance the consistency and profile of magistrates' training and ensure that training continues to meet the needs of the magistracy as it increases in size and diversity. Between October 2023 and September 2024, the College delivered just over 1,460 training events to around 12,700 magistrates. The College rolled out the Judicial College Learning platform to magistrates so that they can access a single system to book courses and access online training resources.

By the end of March this year, the College had delivered 163 inclusion training sessions to approximately 5,800 Courts and Tribunal judges and Tribunal members, as part of their continuation training. The training focused on understanding, identifying, and responding to exclusionary behaviour and promoting a positive, respectful, and inclusive culture for all those who work in and with the judiciary.

¹³ All training figures in this and subsequent paragraphs are bespoke figures produced for this report to cover the period October 2023 to September 2024. Detailed annual figures on training are published in the Judicial College's [Reports Archive – Courts and Tribunals Judiciary](#).

The College commissioned research into culture, behaviour, and inclusion within the magistracy, reflecting the voluntary nature of the magistracy and the unique status of the role. This research will form the basis for training to support magistrates to foster an inclusive culture.

It will also help to develop a greater understanding among magistrates and users of the justice system.

Building on the intensive one-year programme of live training on the harms of domestic abuse in 2022/23, a further training provision with 120 places was made in the first half of the 2023/24 training year for those Family judges who had not been able to attend the training in the main roll-out. This training was supplemented by an e-learning resource to support new and existing judges.

The College published a new edition of the Equal Treatment Bench Book (ETBB) in July 2024, following a comprehensive triennial review.¹⁴ The ETBB is an important resource for judges and aims to increase the understanding of the different circumstances of those who come before the courts and tribunals. The new edition is up-to-date, concise, and user-friendly. In January 2024, the College published an interim update to the Youth Court Bench Book, which brings together information about young defendants for judges in the Crown Court. In July 2024 the College published an updated version of the Crown Court Compendium.

The College continued its international engagement this year, including through the International Organisation of Judicial Training and interactions with members of the Commonwealth. In partnership with the European Judicial Training Network, the College delivered a seminar in March 2024 in Germany on designing an e-course from preparation to evaluation, as part of a wider seminar on applying new technologies to judicial training. The College attended the annual UK and Ireland Judicial Studies Council meeting in Belfast in November 2023, and, during the year, delivered training together with the Judicial Institute for Scotland on the topics of mentoring and artificial intelligence.



¹⁴ [Equal Treatment Bench Book \(July 2024\) \(judiciary.uk\)](https://www.judiciary.uk/equal-treatment-bench-book-july-2024/)

The College provided a suite of resources to support judges as the HMCTS Reform programme concludes and is embedded into everyday practice. This comprised a comprehensive library of interactive e-learning modules and webinars on new systems and tools such as video hearings and digital case management. The College also provided training to support judges in their digital skills.

Judicial wellbeing

The Lady Chief Justice has a statutory responsibility to maintain appropriate arrangements for the welfare of the judiciary of England and Wales

within the resources made available by the Lord Chancellor. In addition to the appointment of a lead judge for judicial wellbeing in 2023, there are two judges who hold delegated portfolio responsibility for welfare for the courts and tribunals judiciary respectively. Both these judges provide vital peer support to colleagues and leadership judges, providing a safe, confidential space for conversations. Any broad themes from such conversations help improve our wellbeing support to the judiciary. Internal news items are used to promote the launch of new wellbeing guidance and initiatives. In addition, there are groups of locally appointed wellbeing judges who offer peer support to colleagues within the jurisdiction or chamber in which they work.




The Judicial Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been in place since 2021 and will be reviewed in 2025. The Strategy is supported by a wellbeing action plan which is reviewed annually.

Guidance was also provided to support judicial office holders who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness. This guidance outlines their welfare support options and advice for judicial leaders.

In addition to the dedicated pages on the judicial intranet, posters promoting welfare services were distributed for display in courts and tribunals throughout England and Wales.

The following activity to support judicial wellbeing took place between August 2023 and September 2024:

- **Guidance to support judicial office holders with caring responsibilities:** this was published internally in October during National Work Life Week. It offers practical, emotional, and psychological support for judicial office holders with child and eldercare responsibilities. An internal news item, written by two Tribunal judges and published during National Carers Week 2024, provided insight into the experience and challenges of being a judicial office holder with such responsibilities.
- **Guidance to support judicial office holders going through a bereavement:** the guidance was developed with the support of HR experts, welfare judges, and members of the Judicial HR Committee. It outlines the welfare support available. A supplementary document for judicial leaders, 'How to have supportive wellbeing conversations', was published in tandem.

A close-up, over-the-shoulder shot of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a light-colored shirt, operating a professional video camera mounted on a gimbal. The camera's flip-out LCD screen is visible, showing a blurred scene. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting. The overall tone is professional and focused.

External and international engagement



External communications

During the reporting period, the Judicial Office delivered a programme of communications activity on behalf of the judiciary that sought to appeal to a diverse range of audiences through multiple online and offline platforms.

A communications plan supported the Lady Chief Justice's first year in post. Externally this included livestreaming her swearing-in ceremony and producing a video message for her first day for both internal and external audiences.

The annual Press Conference for the Lady Chief Justice was held in February 2024. During the Press Conference she invited and answered questions from national and specialist media.

A new series of 'day in the life' videos was launched in May 2024, in which seven judicial office holders across England shared an example of a day in their working life. By 31 August 2024, these had been viewed over 8,000 times on YouTube.

The communications team has continued to use social media to increase understanding of the judiciary and showcase outreach and diversity initiatives. These have amassed almost 120,000 followers and subscribers across five channels: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X (formerly known as Twitter) and UK Judiciary YouTube.

Working closely with the MoJ, the communications team supported a campaign to recruit more magistrates to the England and Wales bench. In the year April 2023 to March 2024, over 2,000 new magistrates were appointed – the most ever appointed in a 12-month period.

The team also worked closely with the Sentencing Council to support their **'You be the Judge'** initiative, which launched in July 2024. The interactive website, aimed at secondary school pupils and the general public, works to increase understanding of how judges and magistrates decide sentences using sentencing guidelines. By 31 August 2024, the social posts about 'You be the Judge' have generated 1,700 clicks and 500 likes.

Legal profession

The judiciary's relationships with the Bar, the Law Society, and the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives remain strong. The Lady Chief Justice has met regularly with senior representatives from each branch of the profession over the past 12 months.

In November 2023 the Lady Chief Justice, the Master of the Rolls, and Heads of Division issued a joint statement encouraging greater participation of junior counsel in courts and tribunals hearings. It is hoped that this will support the continuing development of junior advocates and give female juniors in particular more opportunities to advance oral argument in courts and tribunals.



In June 2024, the Lady Chief Justice gave the keynote address at the Annual Bar and Young Bar Conference, followed by a question-and-answer session. Her theme was the judiciary and legal profession working together.

The Lady Chief Justice has also found regular meetings with the Heads of Legal Operations (senior lawyers working within HMCTS) useful in sharing information about the efficient and effective operation of the courts. In April 2024 she addressed the annual conference of Magistrates' court legal advisers and Tribunal legal officers (employed lawyers by HMCTS).

School engagement

The latest 12-month activity returns received from Diversity and Community Relations judges and magistrates indicate that over 550 schools, universities, or colleges have been visited in person or online. Visits by judges and magistrates play an important role in enhancing an understanding of the justice system and encouraging future lawyers and judges. As part of the programme of school outreach, the Lady Chief Justice visited Mercia School in Sheffield in June 2024, and the King's Academy Prospect School in Reading in July 2024.



A robust and independent press is an essential part of the fabric of a healthy democracy. Just as a robust and independent judiciary is an essential part of that fabric. While we may play our parts in different ways, we both do so to secure the rule of law.”

¹⁵ <https://www.judiciary.uk/transparency-and-open-justice-board/>

Transparency and open justice

Part of the judicial constitutional role is to protect and promote open justice as an essential element of the rule of law. A core principle of the administration of justice is the concept that justice must be seen to be done. The public has a right to know what happens in their courts and tribunals and should have confidence that processes are built on the principles of transparency and open justice.

The Lady Chief Justice has created a new Transparency and Open Justice Board. Chaired by Mr Justice Nicklin, the board aims to examine and modernise the approach to transparency and open justice across the courts and tribunals of England and Wales.

The members of the Board and an outline of its work are set out in published terms of reference¹⁵. The board has met regularly since inception early in 2024 and has already begun to engage widely in setting key objectives to guide its work. Its first stakeholder committee forum was held in late July, attended by many media outlets, academics, and those with an interest in open justice.

The Board will support and coordinate a programme of changes to promote transparency and open justice in partnership with HMCTS and MoJ. In doing so, it will identify (and if necessary, establish) appropriate sub-committees in each of the jurisdictions in the courts and tribunals in England and Wales.



Working with the government

In line with the Lady Chief Justice's statutory responsibilities, and in line with constitutional boundaries, it is her duty to regularly engage with government as is appropriate and necessary. Having been sworn into office in October 2023, the Lady Chief Justice engaged frequently with Alex Chalk KC MP, former Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, until July 2024 when she oversaw the taking of the oath from Shabana Mahmood MP as the new post-holder. This occasion was the first time in history that a Lady Chief Justice swore into office a female Lord Chancellor and the first Muslim holder of the role. She has met with the Lord Chancellor on a number of occasions as well as the Permanent Secretary

and other senior officials within the MoJ. The Lady Chief Justice also swore into office two new Law Officers: The Lord Hermer KC and Sarah Sackman KC MP as Attorney General and Solicitor General respectively.

Since becoming Lady Chief Justice, she has had meetings with two Prime Ministers: Rishi Sunak MP and Sir Keir Starmer KC MP. The Lady Chief Justice met Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on 13 February 2024 and Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer on 30 August 2024.

On each occasion, they discussed a wide range of topics of mutual interest and the Lady Chief Justice made representations on behalf of the judiciary. Other members of the senior judiciary also have bilateral meetings with relevant Ministers to ensure that the views of the judiciary as a whole are conveyed to the government.

Regular topics for discussion with both Lord Chancellors have included matters that have an impact on the judiciary including finance, efficiency, modernisation, prison capacity, the rule of law and judicial independence, and judicial recruitment.

The Lady Chief Justice has also met with the Speaker of the House of Commons (in February and October 2024) and the Lord Speaker (in February 2024). At each meeting, they have discussed the separation of powers, the rule of law, and judicial independence. The Lady Chief Justice met Daniel Greenberg, Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, to continue a discussion on how to mitigate against inappropriate instances of Members of Parliament (MPs) writing to courts and tribunals, on behalf of their constituents, to seek inappropriate information on the progress of specific cases.

The Lady Chief Justice has also met with senior officials and Ministers from a range of government departments including the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) and the Leader of the House. She also met with the Cabinet Secretary in February and June 2024.

The Lady Chief Justice gave evidence to the Justice Select Committee of the House of Commons in January 2024 and is scheduled to re-appear before this Committee in November 2024 and the Constitution Committee in December 2024.

In line with the Lady Chief Justice's ambition to build an understanding of the courts and tribunals judiciary among parliamentarians, she

increased the number of Parliamentary Liaison Judges in June 2024. This group hosted a reception for parliamentary committee staff at the Royal Courts of Justice in December 2023. The Lady Chief Justice has also developed and championed with this group a court and tribunal visits programme which sees judges and tribunal members inviting their local MP to visit their constituency court and tribunal centres. The aim of this initiative is to assist MPs to better understand what happens day-to-day within such a setting in their constituency.



I think first, and front and centre, is that I am here to recognise and promote the strengths and the positives of our judicial system and that includes in particular communicating effectively what I see is the vital role of the judiciary in supporting democracy, society and the economy. Because a well-functioning justice system is essential to the economic growth and the health of society as a whole.”

International

The judiciary engaged with a number of international organisations and partners throughout the reporting period and welcomed several Chief Justices and numerous senior judicial visits to this jurisdiction, both as part of the Opening of the Legal Year in October 2023 and over the course of the legal year. The judiciary continued to deliver training and capacity building overseas, working with other jurisdictions to promote the rule of law.

Within the Commonwealth, engagement continued with a number of jurisdictions, building upon previous visits to share best practice and expertise. India remained an important focus with the Master of the Rolls leading a delegation to Delhi for the

Indo-British Legal Forum in March 2024. Magistrates training in Nigeria continued with a mixture of online webinars and face-to-face sessions, and work with Jamaica on specific training and the development of their judicial curriculum expanded over the year.

Engagement in Europe has continued through membership of a number of organisations such as the European Network of the Councils for the Judiciary, the European Association of Judges, and the European Law Institute among others. Through the European Judicial Training Network, judges have been attending seminars covering a variety of topics as well as exchange programmes throughout Europe. The biennial Franco British Irish Judicial Cooperation Colloque was held in Edinburgh in June 2024. Bilateral cooperation with Albania through a judicial exchange partnership and training programme has been developed and study visits focussing on extradition have been conducted in Paris and Rome.

In International Family Law, judges have continued to strengthen relationships with other jurisdictions and international partners (including members of the International Hague Network of Judges) through engagement in a variety of activities. These have included attending the Special Commission in the Hague on the Practical Operation of the 1980 Child Abduction Convention and the 1996 Child Protection Convention and participating (remotely and in person) in judicial and other conferences and meetings as well as hosting visiting overseas judges.



This engagement has contributed to the overarching goal of developing common approaches in family law, promoting the effective and consistent operation of international instruments and assisting with the expeditious resolution of individual cases.

The judiciary continued to support the Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts. The Forum held its fifth meeting in Doha in April 2024 with 50 jurisdictions attending in person. Subjects covered a wide range of areas including Artificial Intelligence (AI) in dispute resolution and disputes involving AI, judicial cooperation between jurisdictions, and commercial litigation funding. Online roundtable discussions have also been facilitated on the topic 'Commercial Courts and Climate Change: Questions of Corporate Legal Responsibility'. This was jointly hosted with the Asian Development Bank (ADB). A further online roundtable discussion took place earlier this year concerning 'Case Management and the relationship between Mediation and the Courts in Commercial matters in Africa'.

The Lady Chief Justice has also been supportive of I-JUMP which is the International Judicial Unique Peer to Peer Mentoring Programme. In the 2023 pilot, 23 judges from five jurisdictions were paired with mentors. This year, the programme has been expanded to involve 15 jurisdictions with which we have on-going work relations. While the target was to pair 50 domestic and international judges, this has been exceeded by 14 pairs (which means that there is now a total of 64 pairs and 128 judges participating).

This was only possible because of the overwhelming interest and support we have received for our endeavour by the lead judges of each jurisdiction.



It is true to say that judges have to have broad shoulders – they must take a robust approach to such matters and not allow themselves to be swayed by campaigns, the media or their own personal views. But judges do not simply obtain the moral courage necessary upon appointment. There is no secret sauce in the judicial oath in that respect. Rather moral courage is something that judges and magistrates develop in their careers before appointment. Where one looks at the moral courage of the judiciary, they look at the moral courage of the advocates they were before.”

Wales

Wales is meeting and exceeding performance targets across Civil, Family and Magistrates' jurisdictions.

As noted above, Pathfinder was successfully extended to South-East Wales in April 2024. As in the other locations where this has been rolled out, results are showing a significant improvement.

Wales is exclusively administering the National Regional and Virtual Pool in the Civil jurisdiction to allow speedier hearings of small claims and fast track claims. The use of the pool is supported through filling fee-paid District Judge vacancies for South-East England and London.

Digital Audio Video Evolution (DAVE) is improving technology in Welsh Courts. Mold Crown Court was the first in Wales to receive this on 31 July 2023, followed by Cardiff Crown Court in March 2024. Substantially improved audiovisual equipment is enabling better remote participation where suitable for defendants and witnesses.

There continues to be greater parity and cohesion between all judicial office holders across Wales. Lay magistrates are now trained in Wales by the Judicial College and regular meetings have been established between Tribunal leadership judges and the Presiding Judges and Family Presiding Judge to identify and address areas of common interest.



The Judicial College delivered a Welsh language seminar in March 2024 for around 50 delegates, which aimed to enhance the judiciary's experience of using Welsh and interaction with all court users through the medium of Welsh. In addition, the College completed training in response to the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, as part of its broader commitment to support training in devolved matters.

A Welsh version of MyHMCTS was released this year, enabling professional court users to submit and manage Civil, Family and Tribunals cases in Welsh and this has now been extended for litigants for civil money claims.

The Lady Chief Justice visited Cardiff in October 2023 for the annual Legal Wales Conference, the meeting of the Association of Judges in Wales, and the service marking the opening of the legal year in Wales. The conference provided a platform for continuing dialogue on constitutional and legal developments in Wales, including the proposed reform of the Welsh Tribunals.

The Lady Chief Justice returned to Wales in March 2024 to sit in the Court of Appeal. During this sitting she swore-in a new circuit judge who is now the Designated Family Judge for South-East Wales. This was the first time for some years that a swearing-in at this level had been done in Wales (and partly in Welsh) rather than in London.

The Court of Appeal sat in Wales four times, in both the Civil and Criminal divisions, in Cardiff and in Swansea.

Additionally, in March, the Lady Chief Justice visited courts and tribunals across Swansea and Newport, meeting magistrates and IAC Tribunal judges, among others.

Members of Welsh Government, Welsh Parliament and the judiciary met when the Presiding Judge of Wales swore in Members of the Senedd as the new First Minister and Ministers in the course of the year.



It is a matter of fundamental principle that individuals, whether they be litigants, witnesses, or members of the public with no direct interest in a particular dispute, can readily understand what goes on in our courts and tribunals. For litigants, it is a fundamental matter of access. The ability to understand proceedings, the precise claim being made or the nature of the defence being advanced, and the evidence being deployed on all sides, is required by principles of due notice, effective participation and equality of arms.”



Other activity



Judicial activity

Coroners

The Chief Coroner's jurisdiction covers England and Wales and includes a range of formal powers and duties including extensive case management powers, supervising coroner appointments and reporting to the Lord Chancellor on the coronial system by way of an annual report. The Chief Coroner provides national judicial leadership to Coroners which includes the provision of guidance and training.

The former Chief Coroner published an extraordinary report on 11 January 2024¹⁶ following 10 years of Coroner reforms introduced by the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (the Act coming into force in July 2013). The report offers reflections outlining positive impacts such as the harmonisation of Coroners with judges in other jurisdictions. His Honour Judge Thomas Teague KC retired as Chief Coroner in May 2024. The Lady Chief Justice wishes to thank him for his dedicated service in that post since 24 December 2000.

Her Honour Judge Alexia Durrant was appointed Chief Coroner on 25 May 2024 for a three-year term¹⁷. Having achieved the inclusion of Coroners on the Judicial Security Protocol and expanding Coroners access to existing online judicial resources, she will continue to pursue improving consistency between Coroners and other judicial jurisdictions.

¹⁶ [Report of the Chief Coroner – The coroner service 10 years post-reform \(judiciary.uk\)](#)

¹⁷ [Appointment of new Chief Coroner – Courts and Tribunals Judiciary](#)

During the period of this report the Judicial Attitude Survey was launched and, for the first time, included Coroners. Work with government has also continued, and the Chief Coroner has now issued guidance on the implementation of the statutory Medical Examiner System, part of the wider Death Certification Reforms which came into force on 9 September 2024.

New City of London Courts at Salisbury Square

The Lady Chief Justice and Dame Victoria Sharp, the President of the King's Bench Division (PKBD), delegated to Mrs Justice Yip, Deputy Senior Presiding Judge, the role of judicial lead of the new City of London Courts project. Scheduled to open in 2026, the Salisbury Square development will house 10 additional court rooms in the City. The Lady Chief Justice visited the site in June to meet with City officials and others involved in the project for a 'bottoming out' ceremony. The Lady Chief Justice and PKBD meet Yip J regularly to receive updates on this important development and takes a keen interest in its progress. This collaborative project between the judiciary, HMCTS, and the City of London is a substantial investment by the City into our court estate and will offer a world-leading, state-of-the-art facility for the administration of justice.

Supporting activity

Judicial Data Protection Panel

Progress has continued in raising awareness within the judiciary of data protection requirements and embedding compliance. This work continues to be overseen by the Judicial Data Protection Panel. Its role is to supervise the processing of personal data by individuals, courts, and tribunals when acting in a judicial capacity.

The Panel reviews all judicial data incidents to identify themes and inform advice and guidance. There have been few data breaches over the past year and none that have had serious consequences.

The Panel also considers complaints from individuals about how their personal data has been processed by a court, tribunal, or individual when acting in a judicial capacity.

Judicial Library and Information Service

Between August 2023 and September 2024, the Judicial Library and Information Service (jLIS) supplied almost 32,000 print publications to judges in the courts and tribunals.

The range of online resources provided to judges has continued to expand; judges now have access to an unrivalled, comprehensive range of online legal resources via eLIS, the online legal library for judges.

Use of online databases continues to increase, and the eLIS training programme has expanded accordingly as it is crucial that judges have the skills to fully exploit the resources available to them.

April 2024 saw the culmination of an 18-month collaboration with commercial colleagues to re-tender contracts for the purchase of online, print and eBook publications. The aim was to provide judicial office holders with the widest possible range of publications for the best possible value. After an unusually challenging negotiation with the suppliers, the new contracts came into effect in April 2024 and have delivered some important new online resources which have been well-received by the judiciary.

jLIS continued to support the International Law Book Facility charity, which sends unwanted legal books to not-for-profit organisations around the world. Over 850 donations were sent to Kenya, Nauru, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Zimbabwe.

April 2024 marked the second anniversary of the new Find Case Law (FCL) Service, hosted by The National Archives. Since then, over 10,000 judgments from the Court of Appeal, High Court, Administrative Court, Family Court, Court of Protection, Upper Tribunal, and the first tier General Regulatory Chamber have been published.

The scope of the service has now been expanded to include a limited selection of key judgments from the Crown and

County Courts where they feature novel points of law, establish legal precedent, or are of sufficient interest to be made public.

Old tribunal decisions are also being transferred to FCL from existing MoJ legacy IT systems.





Glossary

Circuits: the courts of England and Wales are divided into six geographical regions, known as 'circuits'. These regions are Midland, North Eastern, Northern, South Eastern, Wales and Western.

County Court: deals with civil (non-criminal) matters in which cases arise when an individual or a business believes their rights have been infringed.

Court of Appeal: the highest court within the Senior Courts of England and Wales, it deals only with appeals from other courts or tribunals. It is divided into two Divisions, Criminal and Civil.

Crown Court: deals with the most serious criminal offences. It sits in over 70 court centres across England and Wales, including the Central Criminal Court, more commonly known as the Old Bailey.

High Court: deals at first instance with all high value and high importance civil law (non-criminal) cases, and also has a supervisory jurisdiction over all subordinate courts and tribunals, with a few statutory exceptions. The High Court consists of three divisions: the King's Bench Division, the Family Division, and the Chancery Division.

Litigant in person (LiP): an individual, company or organisation who has to go to court without legal representation from a solicitor or barrister.

Magistrates: are trained, volunteer members of the local community who make decisions in criminal and family cases in Magistrates' courts and the Family Court. The most complex cases in Magistrates' courts are heard by professional District Judges.

Magistrates' courts: deal with around 95% of criminal cases and virtually all criminal court cases start in them. More serious criminal offences are heard in the Crown Court, either for sentencing after the defendant has been found guilty in a Magistrates' court, or for trial with a judge and jury.

Private law: the areas of law dealing with those relations between individuals with which the state is not directly concerned, e.g., the relations between husband and wife or parent and child, and disputes arising from property, contract, torts, trusts, legacies, etc.

Public law: the part of the law dealing with the role of the state. It governs the conduct of public bodies (including central and local government) and regulates the relationship between individuals and the various branches of the state.

Presiding Judge: High Court Judges who are responsible for the deployment of judges and allocation of cases on their Circuit. They also have a responsibility for general supervision of judges on their circuits.

Resident judges: senior circuit judges who oversee the administration and management of an individual court or courts.

ISBN 978-1-5286-5260-5

E03231647