Judiciary of England and Wales



The Lady Chief Justice's Report 2026

Independence, Impartiality, Integrity

Judiciary of
England and Wales

The Lady Chief Justice's Report 2026

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Introduction by the Lady Chief Justice

Welcome to my third annual report as Lady Chief Justice, charting the work of the judiciary of England and Wales from October 2025 to September 2026. The judiciary performs a vital role in upholding the rule of law and ensuring that justice is delivered without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. This report reflects the breadth of our responsibilities and is part of my continued drive to enhance public understanding of the work of the judiciary.

As I enter my fourth year in office, I remain committed to my three priorities: recognising and promoting the strengths of the judiciary; building judicial unity; and reducing backlogs, improving timeliness and maintaining quality. You will see judicial activity in support of each of these aims threaded throughout this report.

The strength, resilience and stability of our judiciary are among the great constitutional assets of England and Wales. But resilience and stability do not mean standing still. This report shows that, while it is in many ways 'business as usual' for the judiciary, we also look to the future for ways to modernise, innovate and continue to serve a changing society.

This year sees significant (actual or imminent) retirements of heads of division and changes in judicial leadership. Sir Geoffrey Vos, Dame Victoria Sharp, Sir Andrew McFarlane and Sir Julian Flaux each made an outstanding contribution both to the law and to the judiciary as a whole. They will be sorely missed by all of us. On behalf of the judiciary as well as personally, I thank them for their outstanding contributions.

In turn, we face the 2026-27 legal year with a renewed Judicial Executive Board. In April 2026, Sir Stephen Cobb was appointed as President of the Family Division. From October, Sir Mark Warby will become President of the King's Bench Division and, from 2 November, Sir Colin Birss will become Master of the Rolls. There will be a new President of the Business and Property Division appointed in early 2027. I look forward to meeting the challenges and seizing the opportunities that lie ahead with the support of these outstanding judges and leaders.

It has been another year of change in the government and at the start of October 2026 I will swear in the Rt Hon Alex Norris MP as Lord Chancellor, the fourth Lord Chancellor during my time in office. Regular engagement with government and senior officials at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is a central part of my role and I have every confidence that I will be able to forge a collaborative and constructive relationship with the new Lord Chancellor.

I gave evidence at the Justice Select Committee of the House of Commons in November 2025 and at the Constitution Committee of the House



of Lords in June 2026. This year I also provided written submissions to the Procedure Committee's call for evidence on the principle and practicalities involving public commentary, media reporting, and Parliamentary debate on active or pending court cases to ensure a fair trial. I have approved a new Parliamentary Engagement Strategy for the judiciary. This is an important opportunity to enhance Parliamentarians' understanding of the judiciary's work and the judiciary's understanding of parliamentary processes. I am delighted that more than 100 MPs accepted our invitation to visit their local courts and tribunal centres in this reporting year.

In turn, the justice sector – and criminal justice in particular – has been a point of focus for the government, with the publication of part two of the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts (IRCC) and the proposed Courts and Tribunals Bill. Meanwhile, the passing in May of the Renters' Rights Act 2026 and the phased introduction of the Employment Rights Act 2026 are expected to lead to significantly increased caseloads for the judiciary. As policy and legislative developments place new demands on the judiciary, I will continue to emphasise that the courts should be properly funded and adequately resourced in order to respond to such changes.

As reflected in the IRCC, reducing delay in the criminal courts remains a priority for everyone in the wider criminal justice system. I want to highlight in particular the past and ongoing work of the judicial-led Criminal Courts Improvement Group (CCIG), under the watchful eye of the Senior Presiding

Judge, Lord Justice Green. The CCIG plays a central role in bringing together all parties in the system – His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), MoJ, police, probation and wider criminal justice agencies – to build understanding, innovate and drive efficiency improvements. Thank you to the judges who have dedicated so much of their time and energy to this work in addition to their daily sitting duties. In line with advice from the CCIG, in July I published the first national framework for listing cases in the criminal courts, alongside guidance on live links and remote participation. I welcomed the MoJ's announcement in February to allow uncapped sitting days in the Crown Courts as an important step towards reducing the backlog, but the Crown Court caseload remains high. Receipts in the magistrates' courts are also rising, and we have a bold target to increase the size of the magistracy by around 25% for 2028-29. A joint Judicial Office, HMCTS and MoJ National Magistrates' Recruitment Taskforce launched in April and has already met targets for recruitment. All of our judges and magistrates remain focused on reducing delay, while ensuring cases are efficiently and fairly managed throughout.

As always, we must remember that criminal justice is just one element of the judiciary's work. All the judges of our civil and family courts, and our tribunals, continue to work through heavy caseloads, to administer justice across society, and to seek new ways to modernise and improve efficiencies while maintaining their fairness and integrity.

In civil justice, notwithstanding that the County Courts are facing a rising caseload, the median time between issue and trial continues to fall. This is a welcome improvement in timeliness that builds on the work of recent years, including a sustained focus on digitalisation. The two key digital services of civil justice – Online Civil Money Claims and Damages Claims Online – are now available as fully end-to-end digital services. Together, more than a million claims have been resolved on these platforms – a testament to how carefully built and managed digital systems can improve the experience of court users and support more timely resolutions.

Our family courts, for both public and private law cases, as well as the Court of Protection and the Financial Remedies Court, are all seeing the number of applications increase but, as in the civil courts, this is accompanied by a welcome reduction in time for resolution. In March 2026, the MoJ announced the national rollout of Child Focused Courts (previously known as Private Law Pathfinder Courts) across England over the next three years. These courts, which are already in place across Wales, place expert-led interactions with affected children at the centre of their work to meet the needs of separating families. They have been a proven success in reducing significantly the time taken to resolve private law cases, with open caseloads decreasing by more than half in early-adopter areas. Their rollout across England will, we hope, help to reduce court time for the families involved and enable resolutions to be implemented swiftly. This can make a remarkable difference to the lives of countless children and families.

Modernisation – this year's theme – can take many forms, from embracing technology, to adapting governance, to evolving engagement. As AI capabilities, and our understanding of them, continue to evolve, the judiciary is considering carefully the technology's potential uses and dangers. Many judicial office holders have noted an increase in AI use among litigants in person. While improving access to justice, this also brings its own complexities, but the judiciary is responding proactively with, for example, the Court of Appeal Criminal Division's guidance for litigants on the use of AI when preparing grounds of appeal. More broadly, while we recognise the potential for AI tools – such as those used for transcription and summarisation – to reduce court backlogs and improve timeliness, the judiciary stands firm that oversight of use and decision-making will remain a human, judge-led function.

In governance, the consolidation in October 2026 of the Business and Property Courts into a single division – the Business and Property Division – represents a significant modernisation of the High Court's structure. Until now, the Business and Property Courts – one of the many good news stories in our justice system – have sat across both the Chancery and the King's Bench Divisions. This consolidation, that preserves the identity and unique strengths of each list within the new division, reinforces our position as a leading global centre for dispute resolution.

In evolving attitudes and engagement, the Open Justice and Transparency Board continues to make the work of the courts, and in turn broader public understanding of the law, more accessible than ever. After its establishment in April 2024, the Board has begun to implement change; for example with the Public Domain Documents Pilots in the Commercial Court, the London Circuit Commercial Court and the Financial list. Transparency is a vital bulwark to an effectively functioning justice system, for parties in cases and for the wider public. I continue to welcome the opportunity for frank discussion with journalists, as at my annual press conference, held in March 2026.

Making the courts more accessible to the media is just one element of open justice. Another is building on public understanding of the rule of law through community engagement across society. I remain impressed by the breadth of work in educational establishments and civic organisations from our dedicated Diversity and Community Relations Judges and Magistrates over the past year. Having visited Cathays High School, Cardiff with local judges in February, I know how inspiring discussions with future generations can be.

Wales continues to be an important source of innovation in our courts and tribunals, and demonstrates how carefully tested action can improve the experience of court users across the country, as well as support better outcomes for all. As mentioned, Wales was the first Circuit to complete the rollout of Child Focused Courts. Further initiatives, such as the women-focused problem-solving court at Swansea Magistrates' Court, illustrate its continued role in testing practical approaches. This year it was a pleasure

to meet the First Minister of Wales for a fruitful discussion of the pressures faced by the justice system, as well as to be the first Chief Justice to give evidence to the Senedd. Throughout the year we have continued to support an equal standing of Welsh and English in the courts of Wales, with our Welsh Language Liaison Judges' visit to Canada in February proving particularly inspirational to observe the practical support available in another bilingual jurisdiction.

I much enjoyed my visit to Canada in May, meeting with Prime Minister Mark Carney, as well as senior judges in Ontario. The visit was a reminder that we are strongest when we work alongside those with whom we share core values, including the importance of judicial independence, the rule of law and their key role in a free and functioning social democracy. International engagement was particularly notable across other Commonwealth and European jurisdictions this year – the first since the publication of our International Engagement Strategy. We welcomed judges from around the world for the Opening of the Legal Year in October 2025, and hosted the first European Liaison Judges Conference in February 2026. This, and much other international activity, builds on the high esteem in which English and Welsh law is held the world over. I am proud of our enduring reputation for upholding the rule of law, enhanced by the excellent and dedicated engagement between judges and their international colleagues.

Another aspect of our strong international standing is the work of the Judicial College in delivering training around the world. And, domestically, the Judicial College provides training for tens of thousands of judicial office holders. I was delighted, alongside the Chair of the Judicial College, Lady Justice King, to host an event at the Royal Courts of Justice in July to showcase its work, both here and abroad. While the College maintains delivery of its extensive core programme, it continues to innovate its offering in response to policy changes, too. The high quality of its work serves to enhance public confidence in the judiciary in a changing legal and social landscape.

The judiciary's duties are complex, challenging and increasing in number. The judiciary continues to work in difficult circumstances, sometimes with inflammatory misinformation that is only worsened and amplified by splintered discourse on social media. Support for the security and welfare of judicial office holders remains my top priority. Our Security Taskforce work, led by Lady Justice Yip, has now strengthened significantly our procedures and systems, and this year we published a new Judicial Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2026-30, with a key focus on the pastoral responsibilities of leadership judges and bench chairs. My open forum sessions with judges and magistrates continue to be a valuable opportunity to hear the questions and concerns of judicial office holders. It has been a pleasure this year to host professionals from outside the senior judiciary as my guests.

Fostering a respectful, inclusive culture for all judges, legal professionals and court users is key, not only to judicial wellbeing, but also to the functioning of the system. In July 2026 the Senior President of Tribunals, the Bar Council's Commissioner for Conduct and I issued a shared commitment to such a culture, and we will continue to strengthen confidence in raising concerns about behaviour wherever they should appear. All judicial office holders should feel valued, supported and able to thrive, always.

In another welcome step towards a more inclusive and diverse judiciary, I am pleased that this summer we were also able to report on socio-economic background, sexual orientation, and religion or belief in our diversity statistics for the first time. Knowing these numbers allows us to track progress and learn from it. The top three priorities of our five-year Diversity and Inclusion Strategy are to improve the representation of Black judges, increase diversity within the applicant pool for the High Court and above, and strengthen disability inclusion. I am particularly grateful to Lady Justice Whipple for her leadership in all of these important areas.

Our continued diversity and inclusion commitment includes support for those from under-represented backgrounds at different stages of their legal and judicial careers, as well as pre-application seminars for prospective judicial candidates. In May 2026, the then-Lord Chancellor and I co-launched the Judicial and Legal Diversity Board to bring together organisations across the legal sector. This reflects our shared commitment to judicial diversity and greater collaboration across the professions that feed into it. A judiciary that draws from the widest range of talent and excellence bolsters public confidence and enriches decision-making.

It has therefore been another busy and eventful year. Much of what has been achieved would not have been possible without the dedicated support of officials in the Judicial Office and those within HMCTS. Thank you to all these teams for your hard work and assistance throughout.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to each and every judicial office holder – judges, magistrates, tribunal members and coroners. Your work is not easy. It takes expert knowledge, dedication, moral courage and resilience to continue the administration of justice in a climate of ongoing change. Thank you for all that you do, and continue to do, to maintain public confidence, uphold the rule of law and do right by all people.

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





The Judiciary of England and Wales



The judiciary of England and Wales consists of judges, magistrates, tribunal members, and coroners. Together, these individuals uphold the rule of law.

Judges and other members of the judiciary oversee cases in different types of courts and tribunals, and in different areas of law, across the country.

Courts are structured hierarchically across different jurisdictions. The main jurisdictions in England and Wales are civil, criminal, family, tribunals, military, and coroners. Within these jurisdictions, there are different levels of court.

Judicial governance

Under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, the Lord/Lady Chief Justice is responsible for some 400 statutory functions, with support from their judicial colleagues, as well as from court administrative staff.

The Lord/Lady Chief Justice exercises their executive and leadership responsibilities through, and with the support of, the Judicial Executive Board (JEB) and has a Judges' Council, which is representative of all levels of the judiciary.

The courts and tribunals system in England and Wales

In England and Wales, the courts system has evolved and developed over 1,000 years. Different types of case are dealt with in specific courts, and have different routes into the Court of Appeal.

Most criminal cases will start in the magistrates' court, and more serious criminal matters are sent to the Crown Court. Appeals from the Crown Court will go to the Court of Appeal Criminal Division and, potentially, the UK Supreme Court.

Civil cases will usually start in the County Court. Appeals will go to the High Court and then to the Court of Appeal – although to different divisions of those courts.

The tribunals system has its own structure for dealing with cases and appeals, but decisions from different chambers of the Upper Tribunal, and the Employment Appeals Tribunal, may also go to the Court of Appeal.

The courts structure covers England and Wales; the tribunals system covers England, Wales and, in some cases, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Civil

Civil justice captures a wide range of issues, where people, businesses or other organisations are trying to resolve their disputes with each other, or ensure that they have their rights respected. The jurisdiction covers a very wide range – from quite small or simple claims, for example damaged goods or recovery of debt, to large claims between multi-national companies.

Judges in the civil jurisdiction will normally make an award for financial 'damages' to the successful party. The size of this award will depend on the circumstances of the claim. Sometimes the court will make an order or an injunction requiring defined behaviour to take place or to stop. The civil courts also have a process to ensure awards can be enforced.

Criminal

Criminal cases come to court after a decision has been made by a prosecutor, usually the Crown Prosecution Service, to prosecute someone for an alleged crime. Depending on the type of case, it can either be heard only in the magistrates' court or could be heard in either the magistrates' court or the Crown Court.

Where a defendant disagrees with the prosecution case, they have a trial. If that is in the magistrates' court it is heard either by a panel of three magistrates or by a District Judge (Magistrates' Court). They hear the evidence and make a decision on guilt or innocence. If the defendant is found guilty, the magistrates or District Judge (Magistrates' Court) will impose the sentence or send the case to the Crown Court for sentencing, if the offence, or combination of offences, is so serious that the warranted sentence would exceed their sentencing powers.

Under section 224 of the Sentencing Act 2020, magistrates may not impose a custodial sentence exceeding six months for cases that can only be heard in the magistrates' court (for a single summary offence), and 12 months for cases which can be heard in either magistrates' or Crown Court (for a single either way offence). The maximum total custodial sentence (regardless of the number of offences) is 12 months in the magistrates' court.

More serious criminal cases are tried in the Crown Court, usually by a Circuit Judge or Recorder sitting with a jury but, in the most serious and exceptional cases, it may be heard by a High Court Judge sitting with a jury. In the Crown Court, the judge is responsible for ensuring the trial is conducted fairly and explaining the relevant law to the jury. The jury is responsible for deciding whether the defendant is guilty or not.

If the jury finds the defendant guilty, then the judge will decide on an appropriate sentence. The sentence will be influenced by a number of factors: principally seriousness of the offence, the impact that the crime has had on the victim, and relevant law. Sentences may include imprisonment, suspended sentences, community sentences, fines, or discharges.

The Sentencing Council for England and Wales is an independent, non-departmental public body which issues guidelines for the majority of sentences to promote greater consistency in sentencing, while maintaining the independence of the judiciary.

Family

The family justice system exists to help families resolve disputes arising in respect of family matters quickly and with the minimum of disruption to those involved.

Family court proceedings are more informal than those in a criminal court. This reflects the often very sensitive nature of family proceedings and the need to ensure that proceedings do not increase the distress of the parties involved.

Hearings in the family courts are held in private, but the press and legal bloggers may attend a hearing with the permission of the judge.

Tribunals

The First-tier tribunals are specialist courts whose judges and members hear a wide range of cases, such as tax, property, and immigration and asylum. The Upper Tribunal and Employment Appeal Tribunal hear appeals challenging some tribunal decisions.

The Senior President of Tribunals publishes his own annual report for the Lord Chancellor, under Section 43 of the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007. His 2026 report will be published by the end of the calendar year on the judiciary.uk website.

The Service Justice System

The Service Justice System exists to maintain discipline in the Armed Forces and, thereby, to help support their operational effectiveness. 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) which are operated by the Military Court Service. The courts can sit overseas on an ad hoc basis.

The Judge Advocate General is the Judicial Head of the Service Courts and has a team of Assistant Judge Advocate Generals. All the judges are civilians, appointed through the independent Judicial Appointments Commission.

The administration of the courts themselves is managed by the Military Court Service, which is part of the Ministry of Defence.

Coroners

Coroners investigate certain deaths which are deemed to be unnatural, violent, or where the cause is unknown.

Coroners are independent judicial office holders. They are a type of specialist judge who investigates and explains certain kinds of deaths. Unlike the rest of the judiciary, coroners are appointed by local authorities. There are currently 77 coroner areas across England and Wales and each jurisdiction is locally funded.

The Chief Coroner publishes her own annual report for the Lord Chancellor, under Section 36 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

The Judicial Executive Board

Lady Chief Justice

The Lady Chief Justice (LCJ) is the Head of the Judiciary of England and Wales and the President of the Courts of England and Wales. The LCJ is the most senior judge in England and Wales.

One of the LCJ's duties is to serve as the President of the Criminal Division of the Court of Appeal and Head of Criminal Justice. The LCJ is supported in both of these duties by the Deputy Head of Criminal Justice, the Vice President of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division), and the Senior Presiding Judge.

The Master of the Rolls

The Master of the Rolls (MR) and Head of Civil Justice is the second most senior judge in England and Wales.

The MR was originally responsible for the safekeeping of charters, patents and records of important court judgments written on parchment rolls. He still has responsibility for documents of national importance, being Chair of the Advisory Council on National Records and Archives.

The MR is a judge of the Court of Appeal and is the President of its Civil Division. He is responsible for the deployment and organisation of the work of the judges of the division as well as presiding in one of its courts.

The Civil Division hears appeals against certain decisions by the three divisions of the High Court of Justice and their specialist courts, including the Administrative Court. It can also hear appeals from the County Court, Family Court and certain Tribunals. It also handles applications for permission to appeal.

The MR for this reporting period is Sir Geoffrey Vos. With effect from 2 November 2026, following Sir Geoffrey's retirement, Sir Colin Birss will be the MR.

The President of the King's Bench Division

The President of the King's Bench Division (PKBD), a member of the Court of Appeal, leads the King's Bench Division of the High Court. The PKBD has overall responsibility for the leadership, organisation, and deployment of its judges.

The King's Bench is a broad and varied jurisdiction, encompassing civil and public law matters, and specialist jurisdictions such as the Media and Communications and Planning Lists. King's Bench judges also deal with the most serious and complex criminal cases across England and Wales.

The PKBD for this reporting period is Dame Victoria Sharp. With effect from 1 October 2026, following Dame Victoria's retirement, Sir Mark Warby will be the PKBD.

The President of the Family Division

The President of the Family Division (PFD), and Head of Family Justice, leads the Family jurisdiction.

As well as the President – who is a member of the Court of Appeal – the Family Division consists of 19 High Court judges. It deals with:

- Divorce, including disputes over children, property or money;
- Adoption, wardship and other matters involving children; and
- Judgments on behalf of those who are unable to make decisions for themselves, such as persistent vegetative state victims.

The Family Division also deals with undisputed matters of probate – the legal recognition of the validity of a will – in the Probate Registry of the Family Division in London, and the 11 probate registries in England and Wales.

The current PFD is Sir Stephen Cobb.

The Chancellor of the High Court

The Chancellor of the High Court (CHC) is the president of the Chancery Division of the High Court. The Chancellor holds day-to-day responsibility for the operation of the Business and Property Courts (BPCs) in London and BPC centres outside of London.

The CHC has responsibility for the Chancery lists of the BPCs, which includes the Business List, the Insolvency and Companies List, the Intellectual

Property List (including Patents and IPEC), the Property Trusts and Probate List, the Competition List, the Financial List (jointly with the Commercial Court) and the Revenue List.

From 1 October 2026, the BPCs that hear work from the Chancery Division, Technology and Construction Court and the Commercial Court – which currently sit across the King's Bench and Chancery Divisions – will be brought together within a single Business and Property Division (BPD). Led by the President of the BPD, the BPD will not affect the wider structure of the King's Bench Division or the work of existing courts and lists; the new structure will support flexible judicial deployment and mean simplified governance and leadership arrangements.



The Senior President of Tribunals, Sir James Dingemans, is sworn in

The CHC for this reporting period is Sir Colin Birss. Sir Colin will be the last CHC; from 1 October, he will be the first President of the BPD, before becoming the MR on 2 November.

Senior President of Tribunals

The Senior President of Tribunals (SPT) is a judicial office created by Parliament through the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007. The SPT is the independent head of the reserved tribunals' judiciary in the United Kingdom.

The SPT is the judicial leader of more than 5,000 judicial office holders and is supported by 14 Tribunal Presidents.

The SPT has a number of statutory responsibilities, which includes representing the views of tribunal judges and members to Parliament, the Lord Chancellor and Ministers, and having responsibility for training, welfare and guidance within tribunals.

The current SPT is Sir James Dingemans.

Senior Presiding Judge

The role of Senior Presiding Judge (SPJ) is a wide-ranging one. As well as being a Board member of HMCTS, the SPJ oversees the work of Presiding Judges on each Circuit in England and Wales. This entails overall responsibility for the deployment of judges and allocation of work in the courts, dealing with personnel issues for judges below High Court level. In addition, the SPJ has special responsibility for the magistracy and acts as a general point of contact and communication between the judiciary, the courts and government departments.

The current SPJ is Sir Nicholas Green. With effect from 1 October 2026, the current Deputy Senior Presiding Judge, Dame Amanda Yip, will become the SPJ.

With effect from 1 October 2026, Mr Justice Jeremy Johnson will become the DSPJ.

Chair of the Board of the Judicial College

The Chair of the Judicial College provides senior judicial leadership for the College's training programme and direction. They chair its governing body, the Judicial College Board, which includes representatives from across the courts and tribunals judiciary. The Chair of the Judicial College leads the Board in setting the College's strategy and overseeing the delivery of training within the resources made available.

Lady Justice King is Chair of the Judicial College.

Lead Judge for Diversity and Inclusion, Leadership, Development and Wellbeing

The Lead Judge for Diversity and Inclusion, Leadership, Development and Wellbeing role was brought onto JEB in 2024, reflecting the importance the LCJ attaches to this work. The judge's work includes supporting the LCJ in her statutory responsibilities to encourage judicial diversity, leading the development of further action to advance diversity in the judiciary and an inclusive culture. Among other activities this involves chairing the Judicial Diversity Committee of the Judges' Council; overseeing the implementation and evaluation of the judiciary's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy; liaison with the representative bodies of the legal professions and the Judicial Appointments Commission; and supporting the LCJ in the work of the Judicial and Legal Diversity Board, which the LCJ co-chairs with the Lord Chancellor.

The role also involves being an advocate for leadership development and capability across the judiciary. The remit in relation to wellbeing involves supporting the LCJ in her statutory responsibilities to maintain appropriate arrangements for the welfare of the judiciary, including having oversight of the wellbeing provisions for judges.

Lady Justice Whipple is the current postholder.



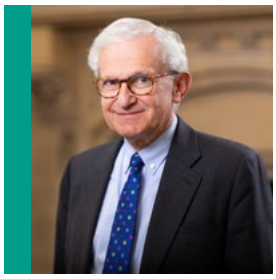
The Lady Chief Justice meets Elke Büdenbender, the First Lady of Germany, at the Royal Courts of Justice

Members of the Judicial Executive Board 2025-26

JEB is composed of the following members:



The Baroness Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill
The Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales



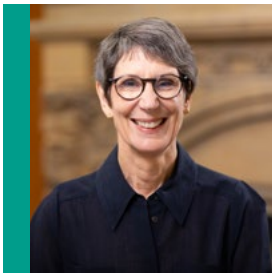
Sir Geoffrey Vos
The Master of the Rolls



Sir Colin Birss
The Chancellor of the High Court



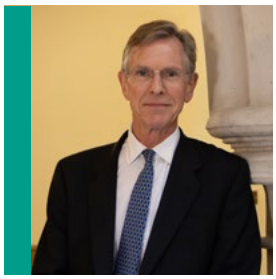
Sir James Dingemans
The Senior President of Tribunals



Dame Eleanor King
Chair of the Board of the Judicial College



Dame Victoria Sharp
The President of the King's Bench Division



Sir Stephen Cobb
The President of the Family Division



Sir Nicholas Green
The Senior Presiding Judge for England and Wales



Dame Philippa Whipple
Lead Judge for Diversity and Inclusion, Leadership, Development and Wellbeing



Michelle Crotty
Chief Executive of the Judicial Office

A working week for the Lady Chief Justice

An insight into a typical working week for the Lady Chief Justice illustrates the breadth of the work carried out by the senior judiciary.

Sitting on the most serious and important cases in the Court of Appeal, the Lady Chief Justice's week often includes time spent reading papers, sitting in court, and drafting or delivering judgments – which may include summaries to aid open justice and transparency.

Outside of court, her week may also involve internal meetings with judicial office holders, for example those who sit on the Judicial Executive Board, and other judges with leadership responsibilities. She holds the primary relationship with the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor, other Secretaries of State, and ministers representing the judiciary. She meets regularly with HMCTS senior officials involved in the operational running of the courts and tribunals.

She undertakes work such as approving appointments to leadership positions for existing judicial office holders, which are not run by the independent Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC). The Lady Chief Justice also sits on (or chairs) JAC panels, following the requirements set out in section 79 of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005.

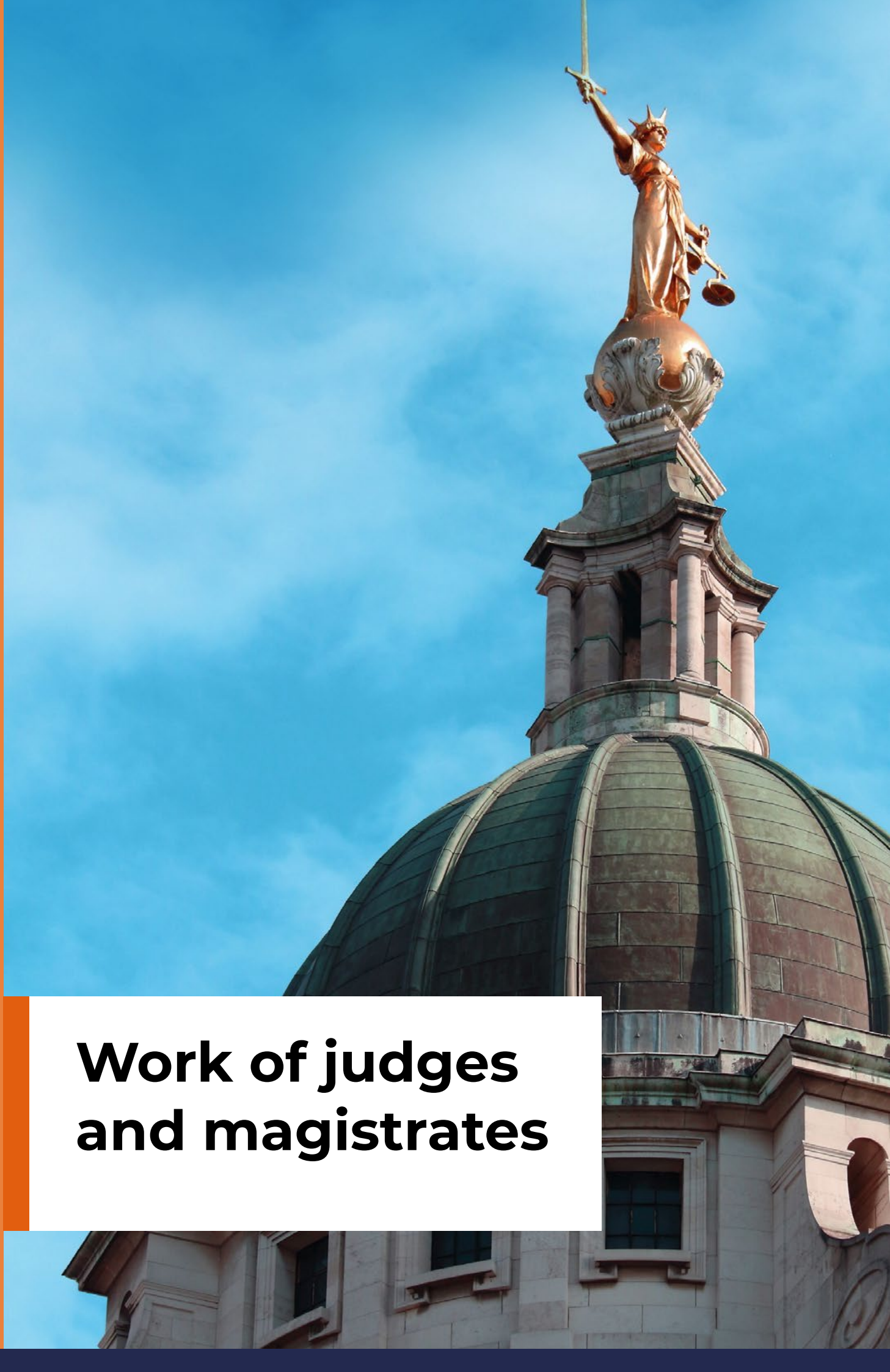
The Lady Chief Justice and the Lord Chancellor are jointly responsible for judicial discipline. Supported by the independent Judicial Conduct Investigations Office, the Lady Chief Justice decides whether misconduct has occurred in complaints that are made. If the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice find that there has been misconduct, then they will issue the judicial office holder with a sanction.

Aligning with key messages or areas of focus for the judiciary, the Lady Chief Justice regularly gives speeches or lectures, and attends conferences. She also has an annual calendar of visits to the six judicial circuits, which include meetings with local judges and magistrates, observing hearings and cases, and completing outreach activity such as visiting a school or university.

The Lady Chief Justice also has a wide ambassadorial role, and meets with organisations and individuals, such as judicial associations, and justice partners. She will often attend meetings or events hosted across the legal profession, for example at the Inns of Court or the Old Bailey.



The Lady Chief Justice prepares for a swearing-in ceremony



Work of judges and magistrates



Civil

Court of Appeal Civil Division

Trends in published statistics reflect a year in which the Court of Appeal Civil Division has successfully managed a large volume of complex, legally significant and high-profile cases. In 2025, a total of 576 appeals were filed. As their largest source, immigration and asylum accounted for 18% of all filed appeals. Total disposals increased from 465 (in 2024) to 504 (in 2025), with dismissals constituting the largest number of disposals at 256 cases.

There was a varied picture for timeliness in the Civil Division. While timeliness for Appellant's Notice filed to Permission to Appeal (PTA) decision was unchanged compared to 2024, and remained at an average (mean) 14 weeks in 2025, the average (mean) time taken from PTA granted to start of an appeal hearing increased (from 29 weeks in 2024 to 31 weeks in 2025), and the mean timeliness from the start of an appeal hearing to hand down of a judgment decreased (from seven to five weeks between 2024 and 2025). (All stats as per Civil justice statistics quarterly: January to March 2026 published on gov.uk, drawing on the annual data in the Royal Court of Justice and Sitting Days tables.)

The court warmly welcomes the announcement of the appointment of Sir Colin Birss as the new Master of the Rolls with effect from 2 November 2026. In addition, the court is delighted with the appointment of seven new judges to the Court of Appeal. The following new Court of Appeal judges will assume

office on various dates after 1 October 2026: Mr Justice Butcher, Mr Justice Chamberlain, Mr Justice Fancourt, Mrs Justice Farbey, Mrs Justice Lieven, Mr Justice Meade and Mr Justice Saini.

The Court of Appeal (Civil Division) continues to run the Livestream Pilot initiated by the Judicial Open Justice and Transparency Board. This pilot allows public access to the parties' skeleton arguments and other court documents in a number of selected cases that are live-streamed through the judiciary's YouTube channel. A Judicial Office evaluation of court users undertaken six months after the pilot had been operating produced overwhelmingly positive results.

The court intends to continue to sit outside London. Its most recent such sitting was in Cardiff in May 2026.

High Court

The High Court consists of three divisions: the King's Bench Division (KBD), the Family Division, and, until October 2026, the Chancery Division. The KBD includes within it a number of specialist courts, including the Administrative, Commercial, and Technology and Construction Courts.

In October 2026, the Business and Property Courts (BPCs) that hear work from the Chancery Division, Technology and Construction Court and the Commercial Court, which currently sit across the King's Bench and Chancery Divisions, will be brought together within a single Business and Property Division (BPD).

The BPD will sit alongside the King's Bench and Family Divisions, as the three divisions of the High Court, while preserving the existing jurisdictions, expertise and identities of its specialist courts and lists.

King's Bench Division

Published statistics show that, in 2025, a total of 5,476 proceedings were started in the KBD (the majority of which were personal injury and clinical negligence claims) (as per **Civil justice statistics quarterly: January to March 2026** published on gov.uk, drawing on the annual data in the Royal Court of Justice and Sitting Days tables). In 2025, 24,563 enforcement proceedings were issued in the KBD. These figures demonstrate the continuing scale of work before the Division, which continues into 2026. The KBD also manages a broad range of complex and urgent business, including mesothelioma and other asbestos-related disease claims, injunctions, group litigation, high-profile claims and proceedings raising issues of public or national importance. Such cases require active case management by the High Court bench and place additional demands on the judiciary, including King's Bench Masters.

In the Deed Poll Office, new **improved online guidance for users** is now available on gov.uk, resulting in fewer applications being returned due to errors. Partial digitalisation of the process in August 2025 led to a sixfold increase in applications. An ongoing project is assessing the transition of deed poll work into the HMCTS National Services Team to support a fully digital end-to-end service, while retaining judicial oversight of referrals by the King's Bench Masters.

The Media and Communications List has continued to deal with both the transformative effect of social media in providing means and opportunities for defamation and harassment, as well as the pressures on both privacy and free speech in the modern communications context. The Media and Communications List has heard high profile claims, including regarding alleged unlawful information gathering by newspapers, and considered the new Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) legislation.

Administrative Court

Workload is increasing; 1,328 applications for judicial review were received between April and June 2026, up 42% compared to April-June 2025 (as per Civil justice statistics quarterly: April to June 2026 published on gov.uk).

Judicial review claims are the mainstay of the Administrative Court, alongside professional regulatory and extradition appeals, and appeals and applications in criminal and national security matters. The court continues to deal with high-profile and complex, and in some instances politically contentious, cases, including matters relating to international relations, terrorism and immigration. The digital case management system CE-File is now available in the Administrative Court for electronic filing.

The increase in receipts into the Planning Court observed from 2024 to 2025, rising from 369 to 404 (see Royal Courts of Justice Annual Tables), is expected to continue. The court has managed a broadly stable live caseload of significant planning cases (as defined in the Civil Procedure Rules). The continuing higher level of overall receipts has resulted in a substantial rise in the live caseload of other planning cases. The new procedure for challenges to nationally significant infrastructure projects is in effect. Planning Court claims continue to range widely, including energy, data centre and transport projects, housing schemes and environmental protection.

Both the KBD Civil List and the Administrative Court saw growing numbers of Litigants in Person (LiPs) requesting reasonable adjustments and using AI to construct their claims, which is improving access to justice but is also placing significant demands on both court staff and the judiciary. Increased case management is often required to establish what remedy the LiP is actually seeking.

Commercial Court

The Commercial Court has retained its prominence as a world-leading business dispute resolution centre. The Law Society's International Data Insights Report in September 2025 noted that the Commercial Court "remains the leading international centre for the resolution of complex litigation, with parties coming from a record number of countries" (page 2), handling "disputes worth billions of pounds every year, using flexible procedures to resolve cases quickly and efficiently" (page 3). The large proportion of international work reflects the continued pre-eminence of English law and jurisdiction among parties' dispute resolution choices. That in turn flows from what TheCityUK's December 2025 report refers to as "the UK's enduring reputation as a rule of law jurisdiction, the flexibility

and resilience of English law, and the excellence of the UK legal professionals and the services they provide" (page 6). The Commercial Court plays a pivotal role in all of this. It continues to deal with complex trials, some very long, as well as many urgent and expedited hearings. Claims relating to arbitration form a significant part of the court's business, reflecting its role as the court supporting and supervising the thriving UK arbitration sector.

Technology and Construction Court

The Technology and Construction Court (TCC) remains extremely busy with a wide range of cases heard both in London and the regions. International disputes and high-profile procurement litigation continue to form a significant proportion of TCC work undertaken in London. Numerous cases continue to concern the widespread review of the adequacy of cladding and fire safety features on hundreds of buildings nationwide. TCC judgments have provided guidance to the industry on the application of the Building Safety Act 2022, Building Liability Orders and their interaction with construction adjudication. The growing importance of AI has been reflected in a series of well attended events organised for judges and practitioners by the TCC AI Working Group, as well as guidance in the new TCC Guide which was published in July 2026.

Chancery

The volume of work in the Business and Property Courts (BPCs) of England and Wales has remained stable in recent years. This reflects the courts' status as a leading forum for the resolution of business disputes, including some of the most complex and high-profile domestic and international specialist civil claims worldwide.

The Insolvency and Companies Court receipts have continued to grow year on year, reflecting the revenue market. Receipts for insolvency matters have risen by 34% to 1,610 cases between July 2025 and June 2026 compared to the same period the previous year, while companies matters have risen by 14% to 9,840 cases (see BPC_Main_Table_Q2 (Table 1_1), Civil justice statistics quarterly: April to June 2026. Note: Figures are only those listed under the Business and Property Courts of England and Wales at the Royal Courts of Justice (Rolls Building) as consistent data is not available for the regions.

A key priority for the Chancellor of the High Court (CHC) during his first year in office has been to strengthen cohesion across the judiciary within the Rolls Building and across the wider BPCs. To support this objective, he has hosted a range of engagement events open to judges across England and Wales, including regular internal events and training sessions in collaboration with practitioners, professional associations and other court users. He has also maintained a strong presence across the regional BPCs through regular visits and participation in forum events, enabling the sharing of updates and direct engagement with court users.

Cohesion has also been promoted through cross-deployment, enabling the effective use of judicial resources by allowing judges to sit across different divisions, including Commercial Court judges sitting in the Chancery Division.

A new user group has been established for the Financial List in the Rolls Building, bringing together judges, practitioners and users to ensure the best use of the list and how improvements could be made.

The CHC, with the support of Rolls Building judges, has launched an initiative to better support the judges, as well as users of the court. A Practice Note to introduce the summary assessments spreadsheet is to be used to submit the costs associated with cases to the court; this means the judges can review the costs and amend where necessary, streamlining the process.

The process of transferring cases from the Insolvency and Company Court to the Central London County Court Pilot has been extended to allow for a detailed review.

County Court

The priorities for civil justice have remained focused on digitalisation, improving County Court performance, and enhancing public understanding of the civil justice system.

Civil claims received in the County Courts have continued to rise; County Court claims were at 571,250 from April to June 2026, up 11% compared to the same period in 2025. This increase was driven mostly by money claims, which increased to 495,000 claims between April and June 2026 (up 13% compared to April to June 2025). Compared to April-June 2025, damages claims for April to June 2026 decreased by 4% to 26,000, driven by falls in personal damages and other damage claims.

The number of defended claims increased by 15% over the same period, while claims that went to trial decreased by 10%. The median time between issue and trial for small claims increased slightly by 0.7 weeks, compared to April-June 2025, to 41 weeks in April-June 2026. The median time for fast/ intermediate/ multi-track claims, however, decreased to 56 weeks during April to June 2026, with those claims being just over six weeks faster compared to the same period in 2025. This continues recent improvements in timeliness. (All stats as per **Civil justice statistics quarterly: April to June 2026** published on gov.uk.)



The Rolls Building in London, a specialist centre for financial, business and property litigation

Delivery of civil justice

Civil digitalisation

The two key civil digital services are Online Civil Money Claims (OCMC) and Damages Claims Online. Over one million claims have now been issued using these services. Access to cases is available 24/7, allowing parties to keep up to date with their litigation without needing to contact HMCTS. Both services are now available as end-to-end digital journeys, meaning that claims can be issued and managed online until a final order is made. Since May 2026, more types of claims can be issued digitally, as Damages Claims Online is expanded to allow other remedies to be claimed. The objective of removing paper from the County Court remains a clear focus for judicial leadership.

The Digital Possession Service is being built on the existing Civil, Family and Tribunal Core Case Data (CCD) platform. The service is intended to enable possession claims brought under the new regime established by the Renters' Rights Act 2026 to be started and managed online. The new possession service will provide clear guidance for users, improved case visibility, and more efficient case handling. The possession service will be rolled out in phases after careful testing. The rules will be made by the Online Procedure Rules Committee (OPRC), which will allow for digital access to those capable of accessing it, with paper access retained for digitally disadvantaged users.

There have been several notable successes including:

1. Improved timeliness: Digital services are helping users progress claims more efficiently through the County Court. HMCTS data, from a **report on the Work of the County Court** published on the Parliament website, shows that digitally managed cases progress more quickly than comparable paper-based processes, supporting wider improvements in County Court timeliness.
2. Greater user engagement: Digital services are attracting higher levels of participation from defendants using the OCMC service. Improved accessibility and clearer processes are enabling more defendants to respond to claims.
3. Supporting resolution of disputes: Digital services make it easier for parties to notify the court when a claim has been paid or settled. Simpler processes ensure cases are concluded promptly; both enable better use of court resources.
4. Increased judicial capacity: The expanded role of legal advisers in digital case management is freeing up judges to focus on the more complex cases.
5. Improved user experience and accessibility: Digital functionality and case activity notifications, alongside Welsh language capability and self-service dashboards, are providing a more accessible and user-centred experience, particularly for litigants in person.
6. The development of an interim digital document filing system, Civil Auto File Share (CAFS), has removed significant volumes of paper from the County Courts and the Civil National

Business Centre. CAFS will soon be introduced to all County Courts. Its use will improve file quality and reduce the number of incomplete case files. It will significantly reduce the inefficiencies caused by physical file transfers.

The Small Claims Mediation Service

The Civil Automatic Referral to Mediation (CARM) project implemented the government's policy of mandatory referral of defended claims under £10,000 to the Small Claims Mediation Service (SCMS). The pilot practice direction is due to run until 6 April 2027. The figures to date from SCMS are encouraging; in March 2026, more than 8,000 cases went to mediation, compared with 1,900 in March 2024 (as reported by HMCTS in a blog on their website: 'Looking ahead: the next chapter for civil courts').

Civil Justice Council

The Civil Justice Council (CJC) is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the modernisation of the civil justice system. The council's primary role is to advise the Lord Chancellor, the judiciary, and the Civil Procedure Rule Committee on how civil justice can be made more accessible, fair and efficient.

The CJC published three major reports on Litigation Funding, Enforcement and Digital Inclusion, addressing significant issues affecting access to justice and the operation of the civil justice system.

The CJC's Litigation Funding Working Group published its final Litigation Funding Report in June 2025, making recommendations to provide greater certainty and stability for the litigation funding sector. The government has announced its intention to legislate for key recommendations arising from the report, including restoring legal certainty following the UK Supreme Court's decision in PACCAR Inc. The government's early acceptance of these recommendations represented a significant endorsement of the working group's analysis and demonstrated the report's direct influence on policy development in this area.

The CJC also published its consultation on the use of AI in the preparation of court documents. Its eventual report will make a significant contribution to the national debate on the role of emerging technologies within the justice system.

The CJC's Annual Report 2025-26 was published in September 2026.

The CJC has continued work to improve diversity and inclusion across its membership and activities, including holding a regional Council meeting and progressing commitments contained within the CJC Diversity Plan. The CJC's membership was strengthened during the year through the appointment of Judge Kevin Harper as the District Judge member, alongside eight newly appointed members drawn from a range of professional backgrounds.

Online Procedure Rule Committee

The Online Procedure Rule Committee (OPRC) was set up under the Judicial Review and Courts Act 2022 to make rules governing the practice and procedure for specific types of online court and tribunal proceedings across the Civil, Family and Tribunal jurisdictions.

On 1 May 2025, a statutory instrument gave the OPRC the power to make rules in relation to possession and family financial remedies proceedings. In January 2026, the Committee recorded that ministerial approval had been given for work to begin on a further statutory instrument extending its rule-making powers to money claims, damages claims and employment cases.

The OPRC has also published its first Public Engagement Document on its framework for digital inclusion and the creation of a pre-action model. The consultation closed in September 2025, and the pre-action model remains a key area of work for the Committee.

Criminal

Court of Appeal Criminal Division

Following the retirement of Lord Justice Holroyde, Lord Justice Edis was appointed Vice President of the Court of Appeal, Criminal Division (CACD) in October 2025. Cases in the CACD have undoubtedly become more complex and the increase in References of Unduly Lenient Sentences by the Attorney General has been noticeable (as per Outcome of unduly lenient sentence referrals published on gov.uk). The court has also continued to see a rise in interlocutory applications, such as appeals by the prosecution under section 58 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, following the increase to 393 receipts (excluding conviction and sentence applications) in 2025 (see Royal Courts of Justice Annual Tables). The urgency of many of these cases means they must be listed quickly.

During what has been another busy year, the CACD has dealt with novel points of law and high-profile appeals. In particular, the court allowed several appeals against sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection imposed many years ago, including three appeals following referral by the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC). A number of applications for leave to appeal such sentences have been received this year and legal representatives have been assigned by the Registrar to enable the applications properly to be considered by the court in due course.

In relation to applications for leave to appeal, the judges who sit in crime have been working at pace to reduce the number of outstanding applications.

Criminal Appeal Office staff continue to assist the increasing number of Litigants in Person (LiP) to facilitate access to justice. The use of AI in the preparation of LiP grounds of appeal has been noted and the CACD is preparing guidance on this. The CACD is grateful for the assistance of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Appeals Unit in relation to applications lodged by LiP. Respondent's Notices are obtained to assist the court in understanding the facts of the case and the context of issues raised. The increase in work for the CPS Appeals Unit in providing such assistance to the court is noted.

Among other legislation, this year has seen changes to sentencing introduced by the Sentencing Act 2026, including the presumption that sentences of 12 months or under should be suspended. Changes to appeals in relation to ancillary orders in confiscation proceedings introduced by the Crime and Policing Act 2026 resulted in collaboration with the Criminal Appeal Rules Committee to amend the forms used in relation to such appeals. The Registrar and her staff are also alive to other changes introduced by the statute, such as Child Criminal Exploitation Orders, where an appeal will lie to the CACD.

Two meetings of the CACD User Group were again held this year with excellent attendance and participation by users. The Criminal Appeal Lawyers Association gave an interesting and helpful presentation raising important issues, including challenges affecting those who frequently act as fresh representatives lodging an appeal. Work is being undertaken to deal with these issues. The Vice President was encouraged by feedback acknowledging improved communication between counsel and the Criminal Appeal Office.



Court 4 at the Royal Courts of Justice

The CACD has sat on circuit in Wales regularly and the Court Martial Appeal Court sat at the Military Court Centre in Catterick. The Vice President presided over a series of appeals and visited an operational unit of the Light Dragoons to learn more about the military court system.

Crown Court

The Crown Court continued to face significant pressure during this reporting year. The outstanding caseload remains high, reaching a new series peak of 80,829 open cases at the end of June 2026 (as per Criminal court statistics quarterly: April to June 2026 published on gov.uk).

All judges remained focused on reducing delay, improving timeliness, and ensuring cases were managed fairly across England and Wales. The Lady Chief Justice is grateful to all judges, magistrates, legal advisers, HMCTS staff, practitioners and criminal justice partners for their continued work in exceptionally challenging circumstances.

The Lord Chancellor's decision to allow the Crown Court to sit to maximum capacity for the 2026-27 financial year was welcome. Despite sitting more than in previous years the increase in receipts (cases) meant the open caseload continued to increase, albeit at a slower rate in the latter part of the reporting year. It is essential that the Crown Court can continue to sit to the maximum capacity, but judicial capacity is only one element of dealing with the backlogs.

There are high numbers of defendants remaining on remand and the pressure of applications to extend Custody Time Limits reduces capacity in the courts.

Against this background, the publication of the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts Parts 1 and 2, by Sir Brian Leveson, was welcomed. The Lady Chief Justice responded on 17 July 2026 to those recommendations directed to the judiciary. The response highlighted the ongoing work of the Criminal Courts Improvement Group (CCIG), a judicial-led group chaired by the Senior Presiding Judge. Through its six working groups, the CCIG has continued to play a central role in driving efficiencies in response to the challenges faced by all parties in the system by bringing all the judiciary, HMCTS, Ministry of Justice and wider criminal justice partners together to identify practical system-wide improvements.

The CCIG Listings Working Group worked closely with HMCTS to explore the use of AI to assist judges (supported by listing officers) to make listing decisions, to revise the listings manual, and to develop digital listing tools.

A significant milestone this reporting year has been the publication on 6 July 2026 of the Lady Chief Justice's new Practice Direction on Listing in the Criminal Courts, coming into force on 1 October 2026. With thanks to Lord Justice Edis and other judicial members of the working group, the framework provides a consistent national approach to prioritising cases based on the core principles of assessing the human impact of delay on participants. Each of the 77 Crown Court centres in England and Wales will now develop local listing plans in compliance with the national framework that will be published, improving transparency for the public and court users. Development of local plans will support engagement between courts and the legal professions, and help ensure that accurate and up-to-date information is available when listing decisions are made.

Alongside this, the Lady Chief Justice has published new guidance on Live Links in Criminal Courts on 6 July 2026. This introduces a clear national framework for the use of remote participation in criminal proceedings, while preserving judicial discretion in the interests of justice. Remote participation may support efficiency and access to justice in appropriate cases, but it must not compromise the fairness, authority or effective conduct of proceedings.

The CCIG Working Group on Remote Participation has also overseen the scoping of Virtual Remand Courts, a National Video Model and referrals from the Single Justice Procedure. It has also looked at improving access to pre-hearing conferences for defendants on remand and their legal representatives and supporting police witnesses to attend some court hearings remotely.

The CCIG Pre-Sentence Report (PSR) Working Group oversaw the launch of Regional Action Plans to identify and address barriers to PSR timeliness, assisted with the development of a single written PSR digital template and allocation tool, and assisted with the provision of verification reports in all magistrates' courts.

The CCIG AI Working Group has led the way on sharing information among criminal justice agencies on current and planned use of AI. The group has reached agreement on the need for strong guardrails, transparency requirements, strict confidentiality and data handling rules and the principle that AI must assist – not replace – human decision making. It is also supporting work to develop, test and implement a range of new AI tools to help improve system productivity.

The Domestic Abuse Best Listing Practices Working Group has refined the scope of cases suitable for inclusion in new domestic abuse national listing guidance and reviewed the draft principles for the magistrates' courts and draft guidance for the Crown Court covering Plea and Trial Preparation Hearings, Pre-Trial Reviews and trial readiness. The group is also reviewing the national guidance to support the swifter progress of domestic abuse cases through the criminal courts.

The CCIG Better Case Management (BCM) Working Group is currently developing practical options to increase awareness of and support compliance with BCM principles.

Magistrates' court

Caseload

Caseload in the magistrates' court has remained high. From October to December 2025, 375,978 cases were received; from January to March 2026, 386,095 cases were received; and from April to June 2026, 365,357 cases were received (as per Criminal court statistics quarterly: April to June 2026 published on gov.uk).

Recruitment

There were 15,259 magistrates in post on 1 April 2026 (as per Diversity of the judiciary: 2026 statistics published on gov.uk), including 1,657 new magistrates recruited in the financial year 2025-26 (between April 2025 and March 2026).

Work is ongoing to improve diversity across the magistracy, with 55%

of appointments in 2025-26 being female, 17% from an ethnic minority background, and 36% under the age of 50 (as per Diversity of the judiciary: 2026 statistics published on gov.uk). The judiciary is engaged with work being led by the Ministry of Justice to review recruitment tools and processes to ensure the process is accessible and fair to all groups.

In anticipation of proposed reforms to the magistrates' courts and an expected increase in caseload, work is underway to increase the capacity within the magistrates' courts. The Magistrates Uplift Programme, a joint endeavour between the Judicial Office, HMCTS and the Ministry of Justice, has been established to improve the recruitment, onboarding and retention of magistrates to meet the ambition of increasing the size of the magistracy to 21,000 by 2028-29. In April 2026 a new National Magistrates' Recruitment Taskforce was launched to oversee the recruitment of thousands more magistrates to meet this target. In the first quarter of 2026-27 (1 April to 30 June 2026), 655 new magistrate appointments were made (as per Annex B of the Judicial Diversity statistics published on gov.uk).

Local Justice Areas consultation

In March 2026 the government and judiciary published their joint response to the consultation on reform of Local Justice Areas (LJAs), which ran between March and June 2025. The decision was taken to maintain the 75 existing geographical boundaries following the abolition of LJAs, with administrative bench structures being mapped directly onto current LJAs. The reform of LJAs has been a significant piece of work over a number of years, and a strong example of collaboration between the judiciary and government, with advice from officials across the Judicial Office, Ministry of Justice, and HMCTS.

Review of magistrates' governance

The Senior Presiding Judge (SPJ) has concluded his review of governance arrangements for the magistracy which he has conducted over the past 18 months, including a consultation exercise to seek magistrates' views. The new structure will be headed by a Magistrates' Executive Board (MEB) at a national level, with refreshed forums at the regional and local levels. Magistrates will be represented at every level of decision-making and there will be a clear route for escalation as well as delegation. The structures will be embedded over the coming months, with the first meeting of the new MEB due to take place in October 2026.



Magistrates in the retiring room at Westminster Magistrates' court

Single Justice Procedure

In July 2026, the judicial-led audit of the Single Justice Procedure (SJP) concluded, with the working group presenting its recommendations to the (then interim) Magistrates' Executive Board. The working group concluded that the SJP is operating broadly as intended within the statutory framework, while making six recommendations for improvements to mitigate operational risks which were identified. These recommendations include strengthening training and guidance for magistrates and legal advisers, establishing common standards for magistrates sitting on SJP cases, and improving the collection and publishing of data relating to the operation of the SJP.

The Sentencing Council for England and Wales

The Sentencing Council is an independent, arm's length body of the Ministry of Justice. By Paragraph 5 of Schedule 15 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, the Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales has the title of President of the Sentencing Council for England and Wales. The President is not a member of the Council.

The Council has a statutory duty to produce its own annual report, the latest of which was published on 9 July 2026.

On 6 October 2025 Lady Justice May was appointed as Chair of the Sentencing Council for a period of three years, following the death of the former Chair, Lord Justice William Davis, in June 2025.

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 revised rules about pre-trial recorded cross-examination, behaviour orders, magistrates' courts' summonses and the powers of magistrates' legal advisers, and new rules to supplement new statutory provisions made by the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, the Victims and Courts Act 2026, the Sentencing Act 2026 and the Crime and Policing Act 2026.

This year, Committee members took part in cross-jurisdictional groups working on contempt of court procedure, open justice, and rules about the use of AI.

The Committee has already met one of the recommendations (recommendation 101, Part II) made by the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts. Work continues on others.

Family

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.

Between July 2025 and June 2026, 16,582 public law cases were started compared to 16,270 cases started in the same period up to June 2025. For care and supervision cases, the average (mean) time to reach a disposal was 37 weeks in April to June 2026, down from 38 weeks during the same period in 2025. Median timeliness – the time within which half the cases reach disposal – was slightly lower at 32 weeks. At the end of June 2026, there were a total of 10,539 open public law cases compared to 9,930 open cases at the end of June 2025. (All stats as per Family Court Statistics Quarterly: April to June 2026 published on gov.uk.)

Private law

Private law children proceedings resolve disputes between parents or others and are focused on the future arrangements for a child's care and wellbeing.

Between July 2025 and June 2026, the Family Court saw a 13% increase in such applications: 59,032 private law cases were started, compared to 52,127 cases started in the same period up to June 2025. The average (mean) duration for private law cases to be disposed was 33 weeks in April to June 2026; this is down by three weeks compared to the same period in the previous year. Median timeliness was considerably lower, at 25 weeks in the period April to June 2026. At the end of June 2026, there were 41,637 open private law cases. This is up from 36,571 at the end of June 2025 and is largely attributable to the sharp increase in applications. (All stats as per Family Court Statistics Quarterly: April to June 2026 published on gov.uk.)

In March 2026, the Ministry of Justice announced the national rollout of Child Focused Courts (previously known as Private Law Pathfinder Courts) across England over the next three years. This follows the continued success among early adopter sites, including across all of Wales. Through this model, families benefit from a problem-solving approach which is designed to meet the needs of separating families while addressing the risks. The model enables the Family Court to make safe decisions without delay. Local, specialist domestic abuse support services are engaged in this process where domestic abuse is raised as an issue.

The Child Focused Court model was introduced in Shropshire and Black Country, Staffordshire, and Hereford and Worcester in November 2025 and in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in January 2026. These areas joined existing areas: North Wales and Dorset in February 2022, South-East Wales in April 2024, Birmingham in May 2024, Mid and West Wales in March 2025 and West Yorkshire in June 2025. The Ministry of Justice reports that, under the model, the time taken to finally resolve a case has significantly reduced, the open caseload has fallen by over 50%, and the percentage of children involved in the proceedings being seen by a Family Court Adviser from Cafcass

or Cafcass Cymru (or where relevant by local authority social workers) – in order to ascertain their views, wishes and lived experiences – has more than doubled (see Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament).

Financial Remedies Court

The Financial Remedies Court helps ensure that, following the breakdown of a marriage or civil partnership, family finances are resolved fairly and efficiently.

Between July 2025 and June 2026, 49,620 financial remedy applications were made, a 9% increase from 45,375 applications in the same period the previous year. In the year to June 2026, the number of applications which had been already agreed and simply asked for a consent order was 36,260 and 13,360 were contested (a 15% increase from 11,599 in the year to June 2025), meaning 73% of applications were consented. (All stats as per Family Court Statistics Quarterly: April to June 2026 published on gov.uk.)

Court of Protection

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

In the year from July 2025 to June 2026, the CoP received 44,021 applications under the Mental Capacity Act. This is an increase of 5,568 applications (14%) from the year up to June 2025, where 38,453 applications were received (as per Family Court Statistics Quarterly: April to June 2026 published on gov.uk).

Deprivation of Liberty Orders

Children who are at risk of causing serious harm to themselves or others may require placement within a regime that restricts their liberty and freedom of movement. Since 2022, applications to deprive young people of their liberty under the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court have been issued at the Royal Courts of Justice, as part of the National Deprivation of Liberty List.

During the year from July 2025 to June 2026, 1,575 applications were received. This is a 15% increase from the previous year (as per Family Court Statistics Quarterly: April to June 2026 published on gov.uk).



Norwich Family, Youth and Magistrates' courts

Wales

In the last year, the judiciary in Wales continued to strengthen the justice system in a country with its own language, institutions and growing body of Welsh law, while remaining part of the single jurisdiction of England and Wales. The Lady Chief Justice maintained close engagement with Wales through visits, meetings and the Judges' Council Committee on Wales, working with senior judges, magistrates, tribunal judges, HMCTS Wales and wider justice partners.

The Lady Chief Justice visited Bangor in October 2025 to attend the annual Legal Wales Conference, a meeting of the Association of Judges in Wales, and the service marking the opening of the legal year at Bangor Cathedral. The conference provided an important forum for discussion of constitutional and legal developments in Wales, including pressures within the criminal justice system, diversity and inclusion across the legal professions, and the future structure of tribunals in Wales. These engagements offered a valuable opportunity to hear directly from judges, practitioners, academics and public officials from across Wales and to strengthen relationships across the Welsh justice sector.

A landmark moment came on 2 February 2026 when the Lady Chief Justice gave evidence to the Senedd's Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee. This was the first time that any Chief Justice had given evidence to a Senedd Committee. She spoke about Welsh identity and the Welsh language, the growing body of Welsh law, strong collegiality among the judiciary in Wales, and the long-standing policy that Welsh cases should be heard in Wales. The session also covered access to justice, the condition of court buildings, waiting times and backlogs, and positive collaboration between the judiciary and HMCTS Wales. It provided an important public opportunity to explain the work of the judiciary in Wales and to recognise the distinctive legal and constitutional context in which Welsh justice is delivered.

The Lady Chief Justice also highlighted successful innovations being developed or expanded in Wales. These included the rollout of Child Focused Courts (formerly Pathfinder Courts) across Wales, which have transformed the Family Court's engagement with parents into a problem-solving model informed at an early stage by the voice of the child. She also referred to the expansion of Domestic Abuse Protection Orders in North Wales, the women-focused problem-solving court at Swansea Magistrates' Court, and the police witness live links pilot at Merthyr Tydfil Magistrates' Court. These examples show Wales's continuing role in testing practical approaches that improve the experience of court users and support better outcomes.

During the February visit, the Lady Chief Justice also sat in the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) in Cardiff and met with the First Minister of Wales, Baroness Eluned Morgan MS. Their discussions covered a range of matters relating to the administration of justice in Wales, including pressures on the justice system and the courts and tribunals estate.



The Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru) in Cardiff

Welsh language provision remained a key priority. The judiciary continued to support the principle that court users in Wales should be able to use Welsh where they choose to do so, and that the system should respond in a practical and sustainable way. Work included engagement with issues raised by the Welsh Language Commissioner about judicial Welsh language capability, workforce planning and access to justice in Welsh. That work underlined the need to combine Welsh-speaking judicial capacity with flexible deployment, interpretation and translation support, training and clear planning.

There were several visible Welsh language initiatives. The Lady Chief Justice's annual reports have been published bilingually, and the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts was also published in Welsh and English. The Divisional Court judgment concerning the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 was handed down in both languages. Work also progressed on a pilot to increase the bilingual publication of Administrative Court judgments in Wales, especially in cases involving Welsh public authorities or Welsh legislation. In addition, the Judicial College approved funding for specialist training to help judges sit in Welsh. Those initiatives support the equal standing of Welsh and English and help build public confidence in the courts. A number of key pieces of internal communication from the Lady Chief Justice for judicial office holders were also published in Welsh, and the Judicial Attitude Survey was translated into Welsh for the first time this year.

Following Her Honour Judge Mererid Edwards's visit to Canada in February 2026, as part of a Welsh delegation examining bilingual justice, an Implementation Group was established under her leadership. The group considered lessons from Canada on bilingual legislation, courtroom practice, judicial training and practical support for Welsh-language justice, identifying steps that could be adapted realistically for Wales within the single jurisdiction and Wales's existing legal arrangements.

Welsh-speaking judicial capacity and appointments were also considered. Work with the Judicial Appointments Commission and Judicial Office supported clearer terminology for appointments requiring Welsh language skills, including clearer descriptions of Welsh proficiency. Proposals for future Deputy District Judge recruitment in Wales considered how Welsh-speaking capacity could be strengthened in areas of particular operational need. The aim is to improve capability in a realistic and targeted way, without treating bilingualism as a general requirement for all judicial deployment.

The Judges' Council Committee on Wales continued to provide a forum for issues affecting courts and tribunals in Wales. Its work included preparation for the Lady Chief Justice's Senedd appearance, consideration of bilingual justice, and discussion of practical proposals following comparative work on bilingual legal systems. The Committee also supported closer links between the courts judiciary, tribunals judiciary and Welsh justice stakeholders.

Overall, the reporting period showed a judiciary in Wales that is confident, collaborative and outward-looking. It supported access to justice, strengthened bilingual provision, encouraged innovation, and maintained constructive engagement with Welsh institutions, while preserving judicial independence and the shared jurisdiction of England and Wales.

Coroners

The Chief Coroner's jurisdiction extends across England and Wales and encompasses a range of statutory powers and responsibilities under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. These include oversight of the coronial system, the provision of national judicial leadership, issuing guidance, approving training and monitoring consistency of standards between coroner areas.

The Chief Coroner has continued to oversee work aimed at promoting greater consistency across coroner areas through updated guidance, revised training materials, and engagement with coroners at national and regional forums. During the year, further work was undertaken to review and modernise Chief Coroner guidance to ensure that it remains accessible, up to date and responsive to developments in law and practice.

The 2025 annual coroner statistics published by the Ministry of Justice in May 2026 cover the calendar year and present a decrease in deaths reported to coroners. A total of 147,800 deaths were reported to coroners in 2025; a 15% reduction from the previous reporting year and the lowest level recorded since 1995. The number of deaths reported to coroners continued to decline, with post-mortem examinations also slightly down (75,900 ordered in 2025, down 7% compared to 2024), and a slight reduction in inquests opened during the year (36,000 in 2025, down 2% compared to 2024). The proportion of inquests opened per deaths reported is at its highest level, since the start of the annual time series in 1995, at 24%. The average time taken to complete an inquest remained stable at 31 weeks. Although overall volumes have reduced, coroners continue to report increasing complexity in many investigations, including those involving deaths in state detention, Article 2 obligations and external agencies.

Reports to Prevent Future Deaths remain an important aspect of coroners' work. During the year, the Chief Coroner revised the national policy governing the publication of Reports to Prevent Future Deaths and responses. The changes were intended to improve consistency, transparency and public accessibility, and were accompanied by updated guidance, templates and publication processes. The revised arrangements also provide for the publication of details of organisations and individuals who fail to respond to reports within the statutory period, with the aim of strengthening accountability and supporting the wider dissemination of lessons identified through coronial investigations.

In September 2026, the Chief Coroner published her statutory Annual Report to the Lord Chancellor covering the 2025 calendar year pursuant to section 35 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. The report includes an assessment of consistency of standards between coroner areas, Reports to Prevent Future Deaths, deaths of service personnel and long-running investigations, together with commentary on key developments affecting the coronial system.

The Service Justice System

The judiciary

The Judge Advocate General (JAG), His Honour Judge Alan Large, has been the judicial head of the Service Courts since 2020. He is retiring in June 2027 and a competition to identify a successor will launch in autumn 2026.

During this reporting year, the JAG has been asked to comment on a considerable volume of draft legislation as part of the preparation for, and passage of, the quinquennial Armed Forces Bill. The Ministry of Defence officials responsible for the Bill are familiar with the conventions governing judicial comment upon draft legislation.

Sadly, Assistant Judge Advocate General (AJAG) Andrew Smith died suddenly and unexpectedly in November 2025. He was a fine judge, a fine man and is much missed. A competition to identify AJAG Smith's successor is currently under way.

During this reporting year, two Deputy Assistant Judge Advocate Generals (DAJAGs), DAJAG Sarah Magill and DAJAG Holly Scott-Mason, have been sitting on cases in the Court Martial. DAJAGs are fee-paid judges and add some welcome flexibility to the judicial resources available in the Service Courts.

Case numbers

The last year has seen another increase in the number of Service personnel coming before the Court Martial. In the period from 22 July 2025 to 21 July 2026, 282 individual Service personnel were tried and their cases completed. This compares with 221 individuals with completed cases the previous year, amounting to an increase of 28%. The proportion of cases involving sexual offences amounted to 30%, compared to 27% the previous year. (All figures included as per internal Military Court Service management information.)

Listing times

Plea and Trial Preparation Hearings should be listed within 42 days of case direction by the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA). This is a key performance indicator (KPI) for the Military Court Service (MCS), which they have met in 98% of cases from January-March 2026, and 91% of cases from April-June 2026. The average waiting time from direction by the SPA to trial in the Court Martial, for this reporting year, stands at 169 days, or about five and a half months, compared with 156 days, or about five months, the previous year. The most common factor requiring cases to be listed beyond the KPI is the availability of defence counsel. (All figures included as per internal Military Court Service management information.)

The prioritisation of complex cases by the Service Courts, including those involving allegations of rape and serious sexual assault, are an important means of providing timely resolution to the benefit of victims, defendants, and thereby supporting the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces.

Publication of sentencing remarks

The policy has been revised regarding publication on the MCS website of sentencing remarks in cases in the Court Martial which result in dismissal. Where appropriate, there will be consultation with the victim, through the Victim Liaison Officer, to ensure they are aware that sentencing remarks are to be published and to check they are content with the redactions to avoid their identification.

Operational issues

Several section 28 cases have been heard this year, where recorded examination-in-chief is used for vulnerable witnesses, including cases involving allegations of rape and other forms of child sexual abuse, some going back to the 1980s and 1970s.

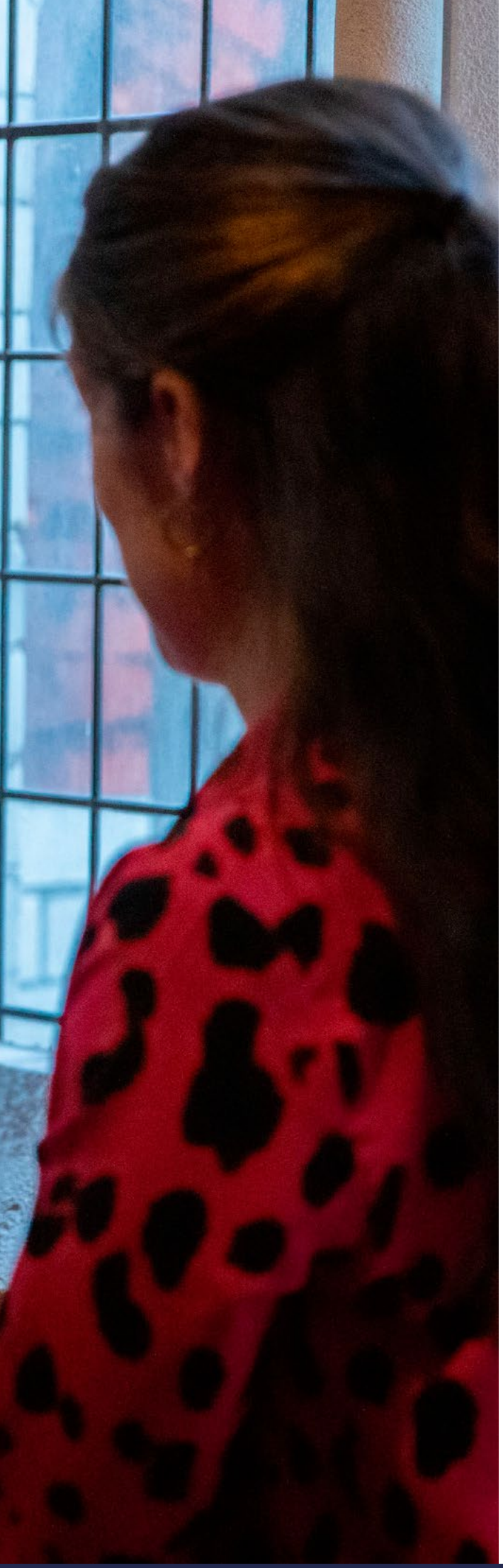
The Court Martial Appeal Court sat for the first time at the Catterick Military Court Centre in June 2026. Effective use of technology was made by providing the appeal judges access to Case Center, the digital case management system at MCS. All the case documents were provided electronically to the appeal judges for all the appeals heard at Catterick. Consequently, MCS has been asked to share its expertise and experience on digital case management with HMCTS colleagues responsible for digitising processes in the Court of Appeal.



Catterick Military Court Centre in North Yorkshire



A modern judiciary



The Lady Chief Justice is committed to ensuring the judiciary is appropriately resourced, well-equipped for the future, and is diverse and inclusive. This includes ensuring training delivered by the Judicial College is of the highest quality, not only in relation to legal knowledge and judicial skills, but also the values, behaviours and professional standards that underpin public confidence in the justice system and support the continued reputation of England and Wales as a world-class jurisdiction.

The Lady Chief Justice is supported in these aims by two JEB members: the Chair of the Judicial College, Lady Justice King, and the Lead Judge for Diversity and Inclusion, Leadership, Development and Wellbeing, Lady Justice Whipple. The Judges' Council also supports the Lady Chief Justice in fulfilling her statutory duties including through appointing three members of the Judicial Appointments Commission and chairing working groups and committees. The current committees of the Judges' Council, and their Chairs, are:

- Alternative Dispute Resolution Liaison Committee (chaired by Lady Justice Asplin)
- Communications Committee (chaired by Mr Justice Constable)
- Diversity Committee (chaired by Lady Justice Whipple)
- Judicial HR Committee (chaired by Mrs Justice Heather Williams)
- International Committee (was chaired by Lord Justice Snowden until his elevation to the UK Supreme Court in June 2026; a new chair will be appointed at the beginning of the legal year 2026-27)

- Library Committee (chaired by Mr Justice Andrew Baker)
- Resources Committee (chaired by Her Honour Judge Raeside)
- Security Committee (chaired by Mr Justice Martin Spencer)
- Tribunals Committee (chaired by the Senior President of Tribunals)
- Wales Committee (chaired by the Lady Chief Justice)

All judicial office holders have a shared responsibility to foster a positive environment, both in and out of court, in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect. The judiciary is subject to the Guide to Judicial Conduct and the Statement of Expected Behaviour.

Diversity and inclusion

The Lady Chief Justice has a duty under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 to take such steps as she considers appropriate to encourage judicial diversity. The Judicial Diversity Committee of the Judges' Council supports her in fulfilling this duty by overseeing the development and implementation of the Judicial Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

The second five-year strategy was launched in January 2026, setting out commitments through to 2030, alongside an evaluation of the 2020-25 strategy. The new strategy builds on the foundations established by its predecessor.

The strategy's initial priorities include improving the representation of Black judges, strengthening disability inclusion, and increasing diversity within the applicant pool for the High Court and above.

Much of the judiciary's outreach activity focused on encouraging more Black lawyers to consider judicial careers.

To support disability inclusion, work has included raising awareness of workplace adjustments among judicial leaders. A working group, chaired by a King's Bench Master, oversees this work and necessary liaison with HMCTS to support appropriate provision of adjustments.

The judiciary expanded the diversity data published in the 2026 judicial diversity statistics. For the first time, information on school attended as an indicator of socio-economic background was included, as well as sexual orientation and religion or belief, due to meeting the 60% threshold for declaration. This increased transparency will help inform future priorities. Additionally, data on magistrates' diversity and appointment rates have been published.

Activities and achievements in the last year have included:

- Relaunching the judicial mentoring scheme in December 2025, which has supported more than 70 legal professionals from under-represented backgrounds. A further cohort began in April 2026, with more than 60 participants receiving mentoring and support sessions, 44% of whom are Black.

- Continuing to offer opportunities through the Judicial Work Shadowing Scheme, with 307 participants since August 2025, 83% of whom were solicitors and 27% were Black, Asian or minority ethnic (with 6% identifying as Black compared to 3-4% among the eligible pool of lawyers).
- Delivering pre-application seminars attended by 5,785 prospective judicial candidates between August 2025 and July 2026. In addition, seven targeted seminars reached 985 lawyers from groups currently under-represented in the judiciary, including through engagement with the Crown Prosecution Service, Government Legal Department, Chartered Institute of Legal Executives and the Black Solicitors Network. 20% of attendees identified as Black.
- Supporting 13 aspiring barristers from under-represented backgrounds through a week-long High Court and Court of Appeal internship delivered with the Bridging the Bar charity in November 2025. This was the fourth year of the programme.
- Hosting an open day for 20 University of West London law students from diverse backgrounds in March 2026. Students participated in a Q&A with High Court and tribunal judges, observed court proceedings, and heard from professionals and organisations supporting access to judicial careers.

These activities are supported by judges who volunteer their time and expertise. More than 140 judges act as guides on the Judicial Appointments Commission's Targeted Outreach Programme.

Judges also contribute to the Ministry of Justice's Pre-Application Judicial Education Programme. 12 new judicial facilitators joined in 2026, bringing the total number of facilitators to 40.

In addition to their judicial duties, around 150 judges and 60 magistrates volunteer as Diversity and Community Relations Judges and Magistrates, undertaking outreach with legal professionals, community groups and educational establishments. Their work advances one of the core objectives of the Judicial Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategy 2026-2030, to promote greater diversity within the applicant pool for judicial office including by engaging with under-represented groups. During the April 2025 to March 2026 reporting year, Diversity and Community Relations Judges undertook more than 660 engagements, while Diversity and Community Relations Magistrates completed 135.



University of West London law students visiting the Royal Courts of Justice

The Judicial Reverse Mentoring Scheme continues to provide judges with insight into the experiences and barriers faced by legal professionals from under-represented backgrounds. The 2026 scheme included a small pilot of internal judicial mentors to share their perspectives as members of the judiciary from underrepresented backgrounds; 35 judges signed up as either mentees or mentors.

The Judicial and Legal Diversity Board was launched in May 2026. Co-chaired by the Lady Chief Justice and the Lord Chancellor, it brings together organisations from across the legal sector, including the Judicial Appointments Commission, Bar Council, Law Society, Chartered Institute of Legal Professionals, Legal Services Board, Judicial Office and Ministry of Justice. The Board reflects a shared commitment to increasing diversity across both the judiciary and legal professions through greater collaboration.



The Lady Chief Justice and Master of the Rolls hold an open forum session for judges

Internal judicial communications

The senior judiciary continues to engage with judicial office holders through a range of communications channels. The aim is for judicial office holders to feel engaged, informed, and proud to be members of the judiciary.

The Lady Chief Justice holds monthly online open forum sessions, giving all judicial office holders the opportunity to learn more about the work of the senior judiciary and ask questions. This year, the Lady Chief Justice has invited guests outside of the senior judiciary which has proved a success, for example the National Leadership Magistrate, the Chair of the Bar Council, and the President of the Law Society.

The Lady Chief Justice continues to support magistrate retention by marking events such as International Volunteers' Day and Volunteers' Week on internal communications channels.

Judicial security has been a key focus within internal communications this year. The Lady Chief Justice and other members of the senior judiciary have issued a number of messages and updates to judicial office holders. Messaging has aimed to reassure judicial office holders, remind them of the support available, and provide practical advice on staying safe both in and out of court. The Judicial Communications Team has developed a Judicial Security Guide, which brings advice and information into one place and was made available to the judiciary in September 2026.

Leadership

The judiciary relies on judges undertaking a wide range of leadership responsibilities alongside their judicial duties, providing support, direction and oversight for fellow judges. Effective leadership at all levels is critical to the administration of justice. The leadership development activity that has taken place this year has continued to support judicial unity, strengthen collaboration and ensure that judicial office holders are equipped to lead effectively.

Building on the Judicial Skills and Abilities Framework launched in 2025, a Leadership Statement and a Leadership Activities Framework were introduced (published internally for judicial office holders). The Leadership Statement provides a clear articulation of the behaviours associated with judicial leadership, setting out the collegiate, inclusive and supportive approach expected of judicial leaders in their day-to-day roles. Complementing this, the Leadership Activities Framework provides a practical overview of the leadership activities associated with judicial leadership roles at every level. It highlights the breadth of leadership contribution across the judiciary and provides a common reference point for leadership development and support for judicial leaders. Together, they provide a common foundation for leadership development across the judiciary and help foster a shared understanding of effective judicial leadership.

For the first time, all Deputy District Judges and Recorders have been linked with a leadership judge. This represents an important step in strengthening leadership connections across the wider judiciary, helping fee-paid judges feel connected to the judicial family and supporting future career and leadership development. The initiative also reinforces the judiciary's commitment to maintaining an inclusive and supportive culture in which all judges can access advice and encouragement from experienced colleagues.

The development of leadership judges remains a priority. Structured induction, mentoring and 360-degree feedback arrangements continued throughout the year, supporting both new and experienced judicial leaders to further develop their leadership practice. There has continued to be an emphasis on supporting judicial wellbeing, fostering resilient and sustainable leadership, and helping judges lead effectively through a period of continuing change and challenge for the justice system. An example of this is 'Leadership Partnering' which, building on last year's successful introduction for Presiding Judges, was expanded to support newly appointed Resident Judges, Designated Family Judges and Designated Civil Judges. The initiative pairs new leadership judges with experienced peers, providing informal and confidential support as they take on new responsibilities and helping them build confidence in role. Leadership judges have also attended after court 'bite-sized sessions' during the year to develop their knowledge in relevant areas.

Recruitment and appointments

Between August 2025 and September 2026, 937 courts and tribunals judges and non-legal members were appointed.

This year saw the appointment of Sir Stephen Cobb as the President of the Family Division. Sir Colin Birss, Chancellor of the High Court, was appointed as the Master of the Rolls, and Lord Justice Warby was appointed as the next President of the King's Bench Division. The Court of Appeal saw the announcement of seven new appointments: Mr Justice Butcher, Mr Justice Chamberlain, Mr Justice Fancourt, Mrs Justice Farbey, Mrs Justice Lieven, Mr Justice Meade and Mr Justice Saini.

After another successful recruitment exercise, the High Court remains at full complement. Planning for the next exercise is underway.

A Circuit Judge exercise launched in January 2026, with the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC) asked to recommend 64 candidates for appointment. This is due to report in February 2027. The District Judge exercise, which is seeking to fill 70 vacancies across all circuits except Wales, is progressing and is due to report in April 2027.

The last Deputy District Judge exercise delivered 124 appointments, and the JAC identified a further 30 candidates who were added to a reserve list. The reserve list will be used before the next exercise launches in autumn 2026.

Due to government policy changes increasing demand in the tribunals, including changes to employment legislation and the introduction of the Renters' Rights Act 2026, there is a continued need to recruit additional judges into the First-tier Tribunals. Recruitment exercises are progressing as part of the 2025-2026 independent JAC recruitment programme, and further recruitment is being planned as part of the 2026-27 programme. For example, the JAC successfully recruited 40 lay members of the Residential Property Tribunal, 16 fee-paid Valuer Members and Chairs, and eight salaried judges, all assigned to the Property Chamber. Further exercises to identify salaried judges and fee-paid judges of the First-tier Tribunal (Property) are also progressing.

Work continues to encourage applications to salaried judicial office, with strong engagement from the judiciary, the legal professions and the JAC.

Judicial Library and Information Service

Judges 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 a new targeted training programme in the use of online resources will be deployed in October 2026 as it is crucial that judges have the skills to exploit fully the resources available to them. On average, combined monthly use of all databases totals over 3,900 judges and legal advisers; that number continues to rise year on year. Training has increased accordingly; almost 1,200 judges received training in the past 12 months.

Between August 2025 and September 2026, the Judicial Library and Information Service (jLIS) supplied over 27,000 print publications to judges in the courts and tribunals.

The jLIS has continued to support the International Law Book Facility charity, which sends unwanted legal books to not-for-profit organisations around the world. Over 20 boxes were sent to Zambia, and a further 20 were sent for distribution to courts in the Caribbean. On 14 October 2025, the Royal Courts of Justice Library welcomed a delegation of judges and library officers from Sierra Leone and Nigeria, as part of a visit organised by the International Law Book Facility.



The Royal Courts of Justice library

Almost 7,000 new judgments were added to the Find Case Law service hosted by The National Archives; 90% of judgments are published on the day of hand down. As part of wider open justice work, the jLIS has begun the process of transferring 2,000 paper transcripts from the Court of Appeal (Civil Division) (1992-2001) to The National Archives, where they will be made available to the public.

Training

The Judicial College provides a comprehensive programme of training and resources on behalf of the Lady Chief Justice to support all judges and magistrates from appointment and throughout their judicial careers.

In January, the Judicial College launched its strategy for 2026–2030, setting the direction for judicial training for the next five years. It includes a renewed commitment to external

engagement and relationships, recognising that public confidence in judicial training is vital and that increased transparency is an important step to achieving that. To support this aim, the College invited Minister Sarah Sackman KC MP and other senior interested parties to observe training, engaged with stakeholder forums, and published a summary of judicial education in domestic abuse. In July 2026, the Lady Chief Justice hosted an event at the Royal Courts of Justice to showcase the College's work which was well attended by a diverse group of partners and agencies.

In addition to delivering a core programme of induction and continuation training for new and existing judicial office holders, the College:

- Produced new e-learning for magistrates and legal advisers on changes introduced through the Sentencing Act 2026
- Published a new edition of the Crown Court Compendium in October 2025 (updated in March 2026)
- Revised family training to reflect the skills required for new Child Focused Courts
- Created training to support the implementation of renting reforms
- Launched an online foundation module for newly appointed Deputy District Judges
- Created resources to support judicial use of AI, including e-learning, webinars and a library of prompts.

The College also reviewed its training model to support increased recruitment to the magistracy to respond to the ambitions of the Magistrates Uplift Programme referenced earlier in this report and to continue to ensure all magistrates are equipped to sit confidently and competently.

In April, the College introduced a new Senior Judicial Leadership Programme designed for senior judges with significant pastoral, strategic or cross-jurisdictional responsibilities. The focus is on effective and influential communication, maintaining morale and wellbeing, empowering others, and leading through change.

Support for inclusion remained a focus. The College developed new training films to embed the Statement of Expected Behaviour. An interim update to the Equal Treatment Bench Book was issued in February 2026.

In July, the College launched a new Practical Judgecraft Seminar for judges in their first year of sitting. This cross-jurisdictional seminar equips judicial office holders to create a fair and inclusive hearing environment, undertake effective fact-finding and decision-making, and recognise and respond to the effects of trauma on communication and participation.

The College supports the use of the Welsh language in the justice system. This year, it delivered a cross-jurisdictional Welsh language seminar, created a podcast series to support the right to use Welsh in courts, and began developing new e-learning to support a bilingual presence on the magistrates' bench.

As part of its commitment to enhancing the rule of law internationally, the College delivered training to countries including Ukraine, Malaysia and Armenia on topics such as anti-corruption, case management and judgment writing. The College delivered seminars for the European Judicial Training Network on various topics, and continued its collaboration with the UK and Ireland Judicial Studies Council and the International Organisation of Judicial Training.

Between October 2025 and September 2026, the Judicial College delivered 2,073 live training courses with 34,325 delegate places overall, including 18,773 places for magistrates (55% of the total). Available evaluation results show 93% of delegates who gave feedback agreed their training fully or substantially met the learning aims and outcomes, and the same proportion agreed the training was very or substantially useful to the judicial role, against benchmarks of 90%.

Training activity figures are based on data from the Judicial College Learning (JCL) platform, which include activities such as visits run as part of induction programmes. JCL activity figures may count modules within the same course separately, and delegate places may include the same individual attending more than one course during the year. Evaluation figures relate to College-designed and delivered training, with multi-module courses counted once, and are therefore not directly comparable.

Judicial wellbeing

The statutory responsibilities of the Lady Chief Justice include appropriate arrangements for the welfare of the judiciary of England and Wales within the resources made available by the Lord Chancellor. Lady Justice Whipple has the role of Lead Judge for Diversity and Inclusion, Leadership, Development and Wellbeing and there are two judges who hold delegated portfolio responsibility for welfare for the courts and tribunals judiciary. Local welfare judges are also appointed within some jurisdictions and chambers to support their colleagues.

The Judicial Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2026-2030 was launched in January 2026, published internally for judicial office holders. It reaffirms the commitment of the Lady Chief Justice and the Senior President of Tribunals to fostering a judicial environment in which all judicial office holders feel supported, valued and able to thrive. Building on the foundations of the original Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2021-2025), the new framework draws on evidence from the Judicial Attitude Survey 2024, internal data trends and insights from health and welfare service providers to strengthen and enhance support for the judiciary. The strategy introduces a renewed focus on key areas, including judicial stress, and sets out clear objectives to support leadership judges and bench chairs in discharging their pastoral responsibilities. It also ensures that judicial office holders have access to

effective guidance, tools and services to help maintain their wellbeing.

Delivery of the health and wellbeing objectives are supported by wellbeing action plans which are reviewed annually by the Judicial HR Committee. The findings of the 2026 Judicial Attitude Survey will help shape the development of future judicial wellbeing action plans.

On 30 June 2026, the judiciary marked Judicial Wellbeing Day, an annual initiative, introduced in 2025, which provides judicial office holders with an opportunity to focus on their health and wellbeing. The 2026 theme, Building Resilience, acknowledged that resilience was not about doing more or coping alone, but about maintaining wellbeing, perspective and effectiveness over time.

Judicial office holders were given the opportunity to participate in a programme of national and local events including workshops and webinars. The Lady Chief Justice and Senior President of Tribunals hosted a panel discussion with the two judges with portfolio responsibility for welfare. Local events across courts and tribunals encouraged exercise, social connection and discussion among colleagues.

Virtual workshops available to all judicial office holders on Judicial Wellbeing Day covered various topics including:

- Building resilience
- Mindfulness
- Trial support – highlighting the Trial Support Service and the psychological support available to judicial office holders dealing with complex cases
- The stress support tool – explaining the purpose of the stress support tool and the benefits of using it.

Plans are underway to develop a series of consolidated, bite-sized learning sessions on key topics, which will be made available to the judiciary on demand.

Behaviour and discipline

Promoting high standards of behaviour and fostering a respectful and inclusive working culture remained an important priority for the judiciary during the year. Work continued to strengthen confidence in raising concerns, improve understanding of expected standards of behaviour, and support a culture in which judicial office holders feel able to speak up and learn from feedback.

Throughout the year, the judiciary continued to build on the foundations of the Statement of Expected Behaviour, inclusion training, improving awareness of available support, and encouraging early resolution of concerns.

A significant area of focus continued to be encouraging early resolution of concerns where appropriate and ensuring that concerns can be raised safely and appropriately. A central source of guidance for all resources, including routes for raising concerns, was launched in February 2026.

The judiciary continued to emphasise the importance of leadership in shaping culture. Leadership judges play a key role in promoting respectful behaviours,

encouraging open discussion and supporting colleagues to address concerns at an early stage where possible. They have been supported in this role through the development of materials, guidance and learning opportunities designed to help leaders model the standards expected across the judiciary.

A protocol was published in July 2026 setting out and formalising existing processes available to legal professionals for raising informal concerns about judicial behaviour. In the same month, the Lady Chief Justice, the Senior President of Tribunals and the Bar Council's Commissioner for Conduct issued a joint statement that set out a shared commitment to creating and maintaining an environment in courts and tribunals where judicial office holders, legal professionals, court staff and all other court users are treated with courtesy and respect.

These activities form part of a longer-term commitment to strengthening confidence, professionalism and accountability across the judiciary. While culture change takes time, this year saw continued progress in embedding the principles of respect, inclusion and constructive challenge, creating an environment where all judicial office holders can contribute and perform at their best.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

As the lead judge on AI, the Chancellor of the High Court has overseen the transition from the development of judicial guidance on AI and small-scale testing, to a more active phase of controlled adoption.

Over the last year, work has focused on:

- Ensuring the AI guidance for judicial office holders keeps pace with the technology through a further update in October 2025
- Establishing governance to provide expertise and oversight when piloting AI tools
- Deploying secure tools in addition to Microsoft Copilot, where appropriate
- Providing training and communications support to enable confident, safe and responsible use by judicial office holders.

Pilot projects have allowed for the safe testing of functionality including oral transcription, summarisation and age-appropriate language. The testing of assistive AI tools will continue and tools will only be adopted where there is clear evidence of benefit, alongside appropriate safeguards. The judiciary is cautiously optimistic about the impact AI can have on their work while being clear that judges will always retain full responsibility for decisions, reasoning and final outputs bearing their name.

Security

Judicial security has remained a top priority for the senior judiciary as judges have had to work in a challenging landscape. There is a high level of threats to, and harassment of, judges and they are increasing in their complexity, particularly online.

Last year the Lady Chief Justice established the Security Taskforce, chaired by the Deputy Senior Presiding Judge, Lady Justice Yip. Its aim was to work collaboratively with experts from the police and other criminal justice agencies to identify what improvements can be made to present arrangements, and then to oversee implementation. The Taskforce has successfully strengthened procedures and systems and there is now increasing awareness of the importance of judicial security across law enforcement agencies. A new operational oversight group will now be set up to build on the work of the Taskforce.

In March 2026, Lady Justice Yip visited Ontario, Canada to learn about provisions for the security of their judiciary. Lady Justice Yip said: "There are many similarities in our judicial systems, and we face many of the same issues and challenges. It was very helpful to discuss the ever-changing world in which we live, including the challenges that social media and AI bring."

City of London Law Courts

Work on the new City of London Law Courts at Salisbury Square has progressed significantly over the last year. The Deputy Senior Presiding Judge, Lady Justice Yip, is the judicial lead for the project, supported by Mr Justice John Cavanagh. The Lady Chief Justice and President of the King's Bench Division continue to support developments of this exciting project which will provide a multi-jurisdictional centre in the heart of the city.

The judiciary continues to work closely with the City of London Corporation and HMCTS in preparation for the opening and operationalisation of the new court in spring 2027. Plans are being finalised for the allocation of work to the new court and for the deployment of judges to sit at the court. In July 2026 it was announced that His Honour Judge Tony Baumgartner will take up the position as Resident Judge for the City of London Law Courts with effect from January 2027.



The Lady Chief Justice speaks at the inaugural Criminal Courts Improvement Group conference



External and international engagement



A key aspect of the Lady Chief Justice's responsibilities is to promote a greater public understanding of the role of the judiciary, the administration of justice and the rule of law.

These aims are supported by relevant committees of the Judges' Council, as well as other initiatives, such as the Transparency and Open Justice Board and the work of Parliamentary Liaison Judges. Many judges undertake international engagement, which may include diplomatic engagement, knowledge sharing and training. Other judicial office holders volunteer as Diversity and Community Relations Judges and Magistrates, with the aim of engaging with the public to support the pipeline of future judges and magistrates.

External communications

A range of communications activity takes place to aid public understanding of the judiciary and the work of the courts. This includes the Lady Chief Justice giving interviews describing her role, communicating changes and advancements led by the judiciary, such as new national approaches to listing cases and increasing the remote hearings in the criminal courts, and answering an average of 300 media enquiries each month.

Social media continues to play a valuable role with 140,000 followers of the Judicial Office accounts across Instagram, LinkedIn, X and Facebook. This is an increase of 20,000

compared to the previous reporting period for those channels, with engagement on individual posts also rising. This growth was supported by an increased focus on video content produced in-house, particularly featuring the Lady Chief Justice.

Candid conversations between judicial office holders in a video series called 'Who Am I to Judge?' concluded this year. Posted on social media accounts, they showcased a variety of roles and backgrounds, providing audiences with a greater understanding of the people who hold judicial office.

Judgments and sentencing remarks are made available to the public and media in a timely manner, to ensure comprehensive and accurate coverage of the work of the judiciary. This year, 487 high-profile judgments and sentencing remarks were published on judiciary.uk. Press summaries may be distributed and published alongside the judgment in complex or high-interest cases to assist public understanding of the court's decision. Work is continuing to increase the number of press summaries published across all areas of the judiciary.

58 sentencing remarks were broadcast this year, compared with 45 in the previous reporting period. This allows the public to see and hear judges in the Crown Court explain the reasons for their sentences, aiding public understanding of how decisions are reached.

The Lady Chief Justice hosted her annual press conference in March 2026 in the historic library at the Royal Courts of Justice. National and specialist media had the opportunity to ask questions, covering various topics such as transparency, court listings and international engagement.

Speeches are another important aspect of external engagement work. This year, highlights have included: the Lady Chief Justice's speech to Queen's College (Unjust Enrichment: Is There a General, Underlying Theory?); the Master of the Rolls's speech to the Legal Geek conference (What a difference a year makes); the President of the King's Bench Division's speech to Inner Temple (Without Fear or Favour: Judicial Independence, Past, Present and Future); and the Chancellor of the High Court's speech to The City of London Law Society (Legal Professional Privilege in the Age of AI).



The Lady Chief Justice holds her annual press conference in the library of the Royal Courts of Justice

School engagement

Diversity and Community Relations Judges and Magistrates visited over 400 primary and secondary schools and more than 15 educational establishments as part of the Schools and Universities Outreach Programme over a 12-month period in 2025-26. This included school and court visits, mock trials, and educational initiatives delivered in partnership with the National Justice Museum. The National Justice Museum supports targeted outreach in line with the D&I strategy's objectives by focusing on activities with diverse and 'not yet engaged' groups.

As part of the judiciary's schools engagement programme, the Lady Chief Justice visited Cathays High School in Cardiff in February 2026 to speak with students about the rule of law in society. She was joined by His Honour Judge Paul Hopkins (Senior Circuit Judge and Designated Family Judge for Wales) and District Judge Victoria Becquer-Moreno, both of whom sit at Cardiff Civil Justice Centre. The visit included discussions about the work of judges, insights into judicial careers, and a Q&A session covering judicial independence, the rule of law, and the broader responsibilities of the judiciary. The students found the visit incredibly inspiring and helpful.



Judges talk to law students from the University of West London

Legal profession

The judiciary's engagement with the Bar Council, the Law Society, and the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives remained strong throughout 2026. Regular meetings, joint initiatives and ongoing collaboration enabled the judiciary and professional bodies to discuss issues affecting the justice system, the development of a diverse and talented profession, and how high standards across the legal community may best be maintained. These relationships continued to play an important role in ensuring that the courts and tribunals are supported by an effective and well-equipped legal profession.

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 incidents reported over the past year; 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.

Transparency and open justice

During 2025-26, the Transparency and Open Justice Board made significant progress in moving from strategy development to implementation, following public engagement on its Key Objectives and the publication of the final Key Objectives in July 2025.

The Board has established a structured Change Impact Assessment process across courts and tribunals to assess how far current practice aligns with the Key Objectives, and to identify areas where legal, procedural or operational improvements may be needed. This work is providing the foundation for jurisdiction-specific implementation and future reporting.

Governance arrangements have also been strengthened to support delivery. A smaller Executive Board now provides strategic oversight and timely decision-making, supported by a wider Steering Group and working groups focused on specific jurisdictions and themes. A dedicated Transparency and Open Justice Board webpage has also been established on the judiciary website, providing a central source of information about the board's work, including its Key Objectives, Terms of Reference, membership, updates, position statements and meeting summaries.

The Board has strengthened its engagement with the Rule Committees. It submitted a formal response to the Online Procedure Rule Committee consultation from a transparency and open justice perspective, and is working with the Civil Procedure Rule Committee, Family Procedure Rule Committee, Criminal Procedure Rule Committee and Tribunal Procedure Committee to consider how the Key Objectives may be reflected in procedural frameworks. Specifically, the Board has invited each Rule Committee to recognise open justice in each jurisdiction's overriding objective. This work is being taken forward collaboratively, while recognising the distinct requirements of each jurisdiction.

Important practical progress has been made on access to court documents in the Civil Division. The Court of Appeal Civil Division Access to Core Documents pilot was reviewed and extended for 12 months from January 2026, with feedback indicating that it has improved public and press access. The Civil Procedure Rule Committee Sub-Committee Public Domain Documents pilot has also commenced in the Commercial Court, the London Circuit Commercial Court, and the Financial List, supporting online access to documents that enter the public domain. Feedback has been broadly positive, although practical issues remain, including document access fees, timeliness, and CE-File usability. Areas for improvement that fall within the judicial remit are being identified and explored.

The Board has continued to work with the Ministry of Justice on proposals to extend broadcasting to the Administrative Court. The proposed approach would broadly mirror the established Court of Appeal model, with an initial focus on broadcasting judgment summaries and legal argument, subject to judicial approval. The relevant statutory instrument is expected to proceed through ministerial approval before being laid before Parliament. The Board is also working with the Ministry of Justice on possible reform of the Court of Appeal broadcasting framework in cases involving litigants in person, subject to judicial approval.

Progress has also been made on the publication of judgments and decisions. Work is continuing to improve publication of First-tier Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber decisions, including options for an initial pilot and longer-term sustainable arrangements.

HMCTS is undertaking further work to define the role and operating model for Open Justice Champions across courts and tribunals. This will support greater consistency in how open justice enquiries are handled and help ensure a clearer route for advice and guidance.

Overall, this has been a year of significant progress, with a clear shift from establishing principles to delivering practical improvements that support transparency, public understanding and confidence in the justice system.

Working with government and Parliament

In line with the Lady Chief Justice's statutory responsibilities, and within constitutional boundaries, it is her duty to engage regularly with government.

To support these responsibilities and to provide clear direction for parliamentary engagement work, the Judicial Executive Board, chaired by the Lady Chief Justice, approved a Parliamentary Engagement Strategy in March 2026. It builds on previous work undertaken to promote the rule of law but with a specific focus on relationships and activities undertaken with Parliament, parliamentarians and their officials. The strategy aims to:

- Strengthen mutual understanding between the judiciary and Parliament
- Promote judicial independence and the rule of law
- Enhance engagement with parliamentarians and parliamentary bodies
- Improve judicial awareness of parliamentary processes
- Increase the judiciary's visibility of parliamentary developments affecting the administration of justice.

The Lady Chief Justice has met with the Lord Chancellor and the Permanent Secretary monthly, as well as regularly meeting other senior officials within the Ministry of Justice and HMCTS. Regular topics of discussion with the Lord Chancellor have included judicial security, resourcing, judiciary-led modernisation of the courts and tribunals, prison capacity, the rule of law, judicial independence, recruitment and diversity. Implementation of the proposals to reform criminal justice set out in the Courts and Tribunals Bill following the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts, and the implementation of the Sentencing Act 2026, have also formed part of these discussions.

The Lady Chief Justice also met with senior officials and ministers from a range of government departments. Other senior judges had meetings with relevant junior ministers to ensure that the views of the judiciary as a whole are conveyed to the government, and to support collaboration with government for the benefit of court and tribunal users, the wider public, and judicial office holders across England and Wales.

The Lady Chief Justice continued to contribute to the work of Parliament, meeting with the Speaker of the House of Commons in January 2026 and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in June 2026. She gave evidence to the Justice Select Committee of the House of Commons in November 2025 and the Constitution Committee of the House of Lords in June 2026. The Lady Chief Justice also provided written evidence to Parliamentary committees on behalf of the judiciary of England and Wales, being a joint signatory to a submission to the Constitution Committee's inquiry into the rule of law in April 2025 and responding in March 2026 to the Procedure Committee's call for evidence on the sub judice rule.

The Lady Chief Justice's Office continued to invite all MPs to visit their local court and tribunal centres, with the aim of assisting MPs to build their understanding of the work of the judiciary and what happens day-to-day in the courts in their constituency, with over 100 MPs visiting their local courts and tribunals in the reporting period.

Since the last report, steps have been taken to expand the group of Parliamentary Liaison Judges, with an additional two being appointed from the High Court, and a further expression of interest exercise taking place across the circuit and district benches, tribunals and coroners.

The Parliamentary Liaison Group has also been made a sub-committee of the Judges' Council, highlighting the importance of its work and providing a direct reporting route to the Judicial Executive Board. As part of their

ongoing work, they joined the Lady Chief Justice at an event hosted by the Constitution Committee in February 2026 and met the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in July 2026. This engagement was aimed at increasing the knowledge of the justice system among all those working in Parliament.

International

The judiciary of England and Wales has continued to engage internationally to promote the rule of law, uphold judicial independence and strengthen cooperation between legal systems. The first year following the launch of the Judicial Strategy for International Engagement 2025-2029 has seen a more focused approach to this work, with activity directed towards areas of greatest strategic value and impact. During the reporting period, the judiciary undertook 35 outgoing visits, hosted 38 incoming delegations and delivered a wide programme of judicial training and capacity-building activity.

Incoming engagements

The judiciary welcomed a significant number of Chief Justices and other senior judges to England and Wales, including as part of the Opening of the Legal Year in October 2025. Visiting judges came from jurisdictions including Albania, Armenia, Australia, Bermuda, Canada, Egypt, Japan, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, the United States of America and Uzbekistan. The Opening of the Legal Year was attended by the Chief Justices, or equivalents, of Canada, France, Kazakhstan, Montenegro and Sweden. Senior members of the judiciary also met the First Lady of Germany and the Ambassadors of Uzbekistan, India and Japan.

In February 2026, England and Wales hosted the first European Liaison Judges Conference, bringing together UK-based Liaison Judges from France, Spain, the Netherlands and Romania with UK judges and justice stakeholders.

These engagements support greater international understanding of the judicial system of England and Wales, while creating opportunities for judges to share experience, foster closer judicial cooperation, and enhance knowledge of different legal traditions and practices.

Outgoing engagements

Commonwealth

During her visit to Canada in May 2026, the Lady Chief Justice met senior judicial counterparts and Prime Minister Mark Carney, strengthening bilateral judicial relations and promoting a shared commitment to the rule of law, judicial independence and common law values. The Lady Chief Justice, alongside Lord Reed, President of the UK Supreme Court, represented the UK at the J20 Summit in South Africa. In addition, senior judges have participated in Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association conferences in The Gambia and Jamaica, with wider judicial engagement taking place through regional roundtables in Kenya and Nigeria.

Europe

Judges have continued to contribute to judicial cooperation across Europe through participation in multilateral organisations including the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary, the European Association of Labour Court Judges, the European Association of Judges and the European Law Institute. In January 2026, the Lady Chief Justice attended the Opening of the Judicial Year at the French Court of Cassation, where discussions focused on shared challenges including judicial security, discipline and communications.

Global judicial networks

The judiciary has also strengthened engagement more broadly. In Vietnam, judicial dialogue supported work on the country's proposed International Financial Centre, including engagement on commercial dispute resolution and the common law. Senior judicial engagement with Japan strengthened bilateral links and cooperation on the future of justice, the rule of law and judicial innovation.



The Lady Chief Justice with Elke Büdenbender, former judge and the First Lady of Germany, and other judges

Judicial training and mentoring

With support from the Judicial College, the judiciary has continued to build judicial partnerships and support the rule of law through the delivery of international judicial training and mentoring.

The third, and largest, iteration of the International Judicial Mentorship Programme was completed this year, with 100 UK judges partnered with judges from 20 international jurisdictions. Training partnerships with Albania, Nigeria and Malaysia continued, and judges from England and Wales supported Ukrainian counterparts through the delivery of online and in-person training in the Ukraine Commercial Capacity Building Programme.

International family law

Judges have attended a wide range of international events to share best practice, including a forum on domestic abuse and the 1980 Child Abduction Convention in Brazil in October 2025, and the largest standing family law conference in Africa in Cape Town in March 2026. In May 2026, judges hosted delegates from across the UK and Ireland to facilitate closer co-operation in cross-jurisdiction family and adult incapacity cases. Engagement has maintained the profile of family justice in England and Wales internationally.



Judges host an international roundtable

Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts

England and Wales continued to play a prominent role in the Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts, which brings together commercial courts from around the world. The sixth full meeting was hosted by the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi in November 2025, with judicial delegations from more than 50 jurisdictions represented and discussions covering issues shaping the future of commercial justice. During the year, the forum also convened international judicial roundtables on maritime law and construction adjudication and received an award from the Africa Chief Justices Alternative Dispute Resolution Forum in June 2026.

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