

Judicial Appointments Commission

Strategic Plan 2016–20

incorporating the Business Plan 2019–20

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April 2019

Section 1: Purpose and Aims

This document sets out the aims that the JAC intends to achieve over a four-year period, 2016–17 to 2019–20, and the specific objectives that we will pursue in support of these aims during 2019-20. This plan will be adapted as necessary to take account of the internal and external factors that may affect us, such as HMCTS reform, changes to staff and the Commission, new legislation, Brexit, new ways of working, pay and recruitment controls, all within overarching financial spending control limits.

Completed annual business plans for 2016–17, 2017–18 and 2018–19 are on the JAC website: <https://www.judicialappointments.gov.uk/business-plan>

Purpose

The JAC is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice.

Our purpose is:

- to be an independent selection body for judicial appointments in courts and tribunals in England and Wales and for some tribunals with UK-wide jurisdiction
- to run a selection programme agreed with the Ministry of Justice and respond to individual requests from the Lord Chancellor
- to make selections solely on merit
- to select only persons of good character and
- to have regard to the need to encourage diversity in the range of persons available for selection

Aims

We will achieve the following aims in order to fulfil our purpose, whilst recognising the government's overall objective to reduce public expenditure:

- flexibly support the evolving business need
- increase confidence in the selection process and selections
- promote and encourage diversity throughout the selection process
- continually improve the candidate experience
- make the JAC a centre of excellence in selection
- be digital by default

Section 2: Objectives for 2019–20

The JAC intends to deliver 5 main objectives during 2019–20:

1. Select high calibre candidates on merit, to meet requirements identified by our business partners
2. Develop and deliver new digital services and tools that support delivery of selection exercises, and continuous evaluation and improvement of JAC processes
3. Ensure selection tools and materials used across all exercises fully assess the potential of candidates from diverse backgrounds, and are developed with efficient and sustainable use of expertise
4. Work actively with our partners to develop a diverse, high calibre candidate pool, including through improving the candidate experience
5. Support our people to deliver Commission aims in line with our values

Plan for addressing objectives

The following detail sets out what is to be delivered in 2019–20.

1. Select high calibre candidates on merit, to meet requirements identified by our business partners

Actions	Timetable
1.1 Ensure effective and timely planning and delivery of selection exercises, in accordance with the selection exercise programme agreed with partners, to meet projected requirements while allowing for flexibility where appropriate	Ongoing
1.2 Deliver selection exercises in line with the Commission's selection policy, with proportionate quality assurance, and ensuring transparency	Ongoing
1.3 Apply effective governance around proposed variations to selection policy, through the internal Selection Exercise Programme Board (SEPB) and escalating to the Commission Board as required	Ongoing
1.4 Ensure effective delivery of senior judicial selection exercises (Court of Appeal and Heads of Division) to meet statutory and stakeholder requirements	Ongoing

2. Develop and deliver a new digital platform and tools that support delivery of selection exercises, and continuous evaluation and improvement of JAC processes

Actions	Timetable
2.1 Develop and test a new digital platform for candidate application and tracking on selected exercises, with a view to moving all exercises to the new platform, enabling production of enhanced management information	By October 2020
2.2 Develop and test the new digital platform and tools, including qualifying tests, through an agile approach, using multi-disciplinary teams to deliver business and develop new ways of working	By December 2019
2.3 Make user research an ongoing and integral part of continuous improvement of the digital platform and tools to improve candidate experience and enable innovation in assessment methods	Ongoing
2.4 Maintain robust data security arrangements and ensure high resilience of all JAC security systems	Ongoing

3. Ensure selection tools and materials used across all exercises fully assess the potential of candidates from diverse backgrounds, and are developed with efficient and sustainable use of expertise

Actions	Timetable
3.1 Implement the recommendations of the independent review of JAC shortlisting tools	Phased approach concluding October 2020
3.2 Develop alternative approaches to selection tools, including role play, and combined qualifying tests, which can be used to assess candidates for more than one role	By March 2020
3.3 Evaluate application processes adopted recently across High Court and Deputy High Court Judge exercises and consider whether these should be rolled out to other exercises	From June 2019
3.4 Implement streamlined processes to select non-legal tribunal members, tailoring to different applicant pools while ensuring efficient and sustainable use of resource	From May 2019
3.5 Make best use of data, including enhanced and ongoing feedback from candidates, to inform continuous improvement of selection tools	Ongoing
3.6 Apply rigorous quality assurance to the development of selection tools, including through use of external expertise	Ongoing
3.7 Extend use of name-blind shortlisting to paper sifts of applications as well as all online tests, initially in smaller exercises ahead of development of a digital platform enabling full roll-out	Exercises launching from June 2019

4. Work actively with our partners to develop a diverse, high calibre candidate pool, including through improving the candidate experience

Actions	Timetable
4.1 Deliver refreshed JAC communications and engagement strategy, working with partners to target potential applicants from non-traditional backgrounds and the JAC's target groups	From May 2019
4.2 Work with partners, including through the Judicial Diversity Forum, to continue to break down barriers to application to ensure strong, diverse candidates apply and progress, including by supporting delivery of joint Pre-Application Judicial Education (PAJE) programme	Ongoing
4.3 Improve the candidate experience, supported by new digital services and user research, in order to encourage applications from diverse, high calibre candidates	By March 2020
4.4 Evaluate pilots providing more targeted feedback to near-miss applicants, and consider whether these should be rolled out to better inform potential future applications	By June 2019

5. Support our people to deliver Commission aims in line with our values

Actions	Timetable
5.1 Embed the measures introduced in response to the People Survey, including the introduction of new dignity at work advisers	By May 2019
5.2 Ensure all staff have access to improved learning and development opportunities, including through roll-out of line management training	By March 2020
5.3 Develop an agreed statement on JAC values in practice, alongside a refreshed People Plan	June 2019
5.4 Review support for panel members from the point of recruitment onward, ensuring they are fully supported to assess applicants in line with JAC values and policies	July 2019
5.5 Ensure Commissioners are fully supported in fulfilling their role in line with JAC values and achieving Commission aims.	Ongoing

Section 3: Resources

This sets out the details of resources used over recent years, and those planned in 2019–20:

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19 Forecast	2019-20 Planning
Applications	5,591	2,356	2,588	2199	5,125	5,500	7,000
Recommendations	806	310	340	290	749	1,015	1,200
Average applications per recommendation	6.9	7.6	7.6	7.6	6.8	5.4	5.8
Number of Exercises reported	35	30	22	26	28	32	32
Staffing average FTE over year	67	59	50	49	47	60	75
Cash funding available (£000)	4,911	4,683	4,375	4,120	5,152	6,937	7,200
Expenditure (£000)	4,180	4,016	3,725	3,581	5,041	6,585	7,200
Non-cash charges (£000)	1,388	1,427	1,153	1,290	892	1,301	1,301
Total spend (£000)	5,568	5,443	4,878	4,871	5,933	7,886	8,501

The JAC's programme of work is determined by the demand for judicial recruitment in consultation with the Lord Chancellor, Lord Chief Justice and Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service. In 2018–19, the JAC made 1,031 recommendations compared to 749 in the previous year. This is reflected in the increased level of expenditure last year.

The JAC's programme of work for 2019–20 is expected to increase further due to very high indicative numbers of appointments for large fee-paid exercises. This has also meant that additional staff have been recruited to support delivery of the programme.

Section 4: Measures

Success will be measured through the delivery of the selection exercise programme, as agreed through the MoJ and HMCTS. Summary details of the selection exercise programme (as delivered to the Lord Chancellor) are provided below, as well as the diversity of JAC selections and the 'end-to-end' appointments process time. The JAC also publishes a wide range of information on its policies, processes, operations and official statistics. In addition, it publishes an annual report and the minutes of all Commission Board meetings.

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Average applications per recommendation	6.9	7.6	7.6	7.6	6.8	5.4	5.8
Number of Exercises reported	35	30	22	26	28	32	32
Average cost per application	£996	£2,310	£1,885	£2,215	£1,158	£1,465	£1,214
Average cost per recommendation	£6,908	£17,558	£14,347	£16,797	£7,921	£7,936	£7,084
End-to-end appointments process*	21 wks	17 wks	22 wks	21 wks	19 wks	-	-
Recommendations – % women candidates	50%	43%	42%	39%	48%	-	-
Recommendations – % BAME candidates	11%	13%	9%	20%	12%	-	-
Recommendations – % disabled candidates	12%	4%	3%	6%	7%	-	-

* The end-to-end time is the time from the launch of an exercise to the Judicial Office sending out offer letters. [except from 2017–18 onwards where estimate is for JAC end to end process]

In line with central government departments we are transparent with information on our operations, where this does not affect personal data of those applying for judicial appointment. For example, we will continue to publish generic reports on performance in qualifying tests to support unsuccessful candidates and inform future applications.

We will continue to manage the operation of the JAC using the measures captured under previous key performance indicators, including diversity of applications, timeliness of exercises and levels of complaints.

Section 5: Risks

The following sets out the key risks as currently provided in the JAC Corporate Risk Register, which may affect our ability to deliver the Business Plan.

Risk	Mitigating action
<p>Failure of digital service</p> <p>Risk: That the Judicial Appointments Recruitment System (JARS) and JAC website are not available to candidates, referees or staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JARS Programme Board with Commissioner Chair formed to provide governance and oversight. • Digital help desk process introduced • New Digital Developer contractor and User Researcher contractor added to the team • Security accreditation of JARS completed for 3 years, subject to annual review • Emergency Response Plan approved by senior leaders
<p>Progression and diversity of selection</p> <p>Risk: Target groups do not apply or progress in line with the eligible pool</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panels briefed on diversity, fair selection and unconscious bias at annual training event and before each exercise • Outreach plan developed for all exercises • A delivery group for the Pre-application Judicial Education (PAJE) programme, targeted at under-represented groups, has been formed • Deep-dive analysis has been completed to understand in more detail the progression of target groups through different stages of JAC competitions, • JAC Advisory Group provided with all selection materials for comment • 'Am I Ready' tools on website to enable candidates to assess their readiness to apply
<p>Confidence in the selection process</p> <p>Risk: That stakeholders including candidates; the judiciary, Commissioners, panel members, MoJ and staff do not have sufficient confidence in the selection process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant policy developments subject to approval of Commission Board • Minor policy developments subject to approval by Selection Exercise Programme Board co-chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Operations and Digital • Customer feedback is collected on candidate experience in all selection exercises, and taken into account when reviewing and developing selection processes • All major changes to the selection process are piloted, evaluated against business plan aims, and only taken forward if they deliver improvements
<p>Confidence in the effective delivery of the selection exercises</p> <p>Risk: That stakeholders do not have sufficient confidence that the JAC can deliver a selection exercise or that it fails to deliver on merit and from a diverse field of candidates in an efficient and effective manner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed rolling programme of key exercises to 2023 • Introduced lessons learned meetings to review operational issues • Created an operations manual covering due process and emergency/recovery protocols • A new operational training team has been created to ensure new and existing staff are able to deal with a range of responsibilities • Operations team is expanding further to accommodate increased programme for 2019–20

Risk	Mitigating action
<p>Staff engagement and morale</p> <p>Risk: That staff engagement and morale reduces due to increased workloads, reduction in staff complement and poor performing systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly meetings with senior leaders to discuss HR-related issues, including staff resources and deployment of existing staff at each senior leaders meeting • Further flexibility provided regarding when and where staff can work through enhanced IT delivery • Regular CEO stand-ups with staff, providing opportunity to disseminate information and hear views from staff • New Reward and Recognition policy and process in place, which will enhance nominations
<p>Loss of corporate knowledge</p> <p>Risk: That sufficient experience, knowledge of staff and commissioners remains to ensure that business delivers its priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of 2 new Commissioners to take place by the end of the year • Appropriate knowledge transfer when staff leave to incoming staff, or to others to ensure business interruption kept to a minimum • Cadre of panel members now up to 85 with appropriate induction undertaken
<p>Financial resources</p> <p>Risk: That financial resources are insufficient, either in current year, or next year, especially if large exercises are rolled forward</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings with MoJ Sponsorship team to review the financial position and upcoming programme of work There is an agreed understanding that the JAC is a demand led organisation and therefore the required budget is subject to change during the year • Management accounts are reviewed monthly by senior leadership • FOM agreement with MoJ that includes support from two financially qualified person • Regular contact with budget managers to ensure accurate forecasting
<p>Information security</p> <p>Risk: That data will be lost/purported or obtained by unauthorised persons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service management process in place for JARS suppliers to carry out regular security updates • Anti-virus software embedded in JARS platform • Laptops and devices covered by MoJ Security updates • Security policy and guidance to staff reviewed regularly