



The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council

Judicial Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2025

Annual Update 2024

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Foreword

By the President, Lord Reed



This report is the third annual update on the Judicial Diversity and Inclusion Strategy that we published in May 2021 and that runs through to 2025. The strategy aims to support the progress of under-represented groups into judicial roles and to further build an inclusive and respectful environment for the Justices and staff of the Court where differences are valued.

Our work and strategy on Judicial Diversity and Inclusion reflects the Court's awareness of the often -invisible barriers that many people face in the legal profession, resulting in their under-representation in the judiciary and more senior levels of the legal profession. This strategy reflects the commitment of the Court to identify those barriers and contribute to eliminating them to ensure equal opportunity for everyone, regardless of factors such as race, disability, gender or religion.

During this past year it has been a privilege for the Court to learn from different groups about the challenges faced as part of their experiences working in the legal sector. The Court has engaged in a learning and listening process, and we aim to do more in the coming year. Only by knowing what barriers exist to achieving diversity and inclusion can we aim to bring about meaningful change and progress. One of the barriers to progression that we have addressed this year is to help create more opportunities for junior counsel to participate in hearings. Advocacy experience is essential to enable progression to senior levels of the Bar and we hope that this will help to provide the experience needed to progress.

A highlight of the year has been engaging with school and university students in educational programmes such as 'Ask a Justice' sessions. Justices have been able to interact with pupils from across the four nations and contribute to their perception and understanding of the legal and judicial professions.

Progress is being made, but the Court recognises that barriers are entrenched in our society as well as the legal profession, and the solutions to eliminating them are complex and multifaceted. The Court will continue to play its role in removing those barriers and promote equal access to opportunities.

Introduction

This document sets out the progress that the Court has made in achieving the five objectives set out in our [Judicial Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#):

- 1. To support and build an inclusive and respectful culture and working environment at the Court, where all justices support the strategy and lead the way by:**
 - being open to an inclusive environment, valuing differences of approach and opinion
 - improving their knowledge of diverse groups' experience of the Court, and taking action where issues are identified
 - creating an awareness of bias and actively working to minimise its impact

- 2. To support the progression of underrepresented groups into judicial roles across the judiciary by:**
 - Justices publicly promoting greater diversity within the judiciary
 - supporting and working in partnership on initiatives led by other parts of the judiciary
 - listening and learning from groups underrepresented in the judiciary

- 3. To support an increase in the number of well-qualified applicants from underrepresented groups for the role of justice at the UK Supreme Court by:**
 - building a greater understanding of the role of justices
 - introducing mentoring, events and other opportunities for underrepresented groups

- 4. To proactively communicate the Court's support for diversity and inclusion to the legal profession and the public through:**
 - outreach and education work
 - supporting and working in partnership with organisations working in this area
 - highlighting the value of diverse perspectives on our website and in our communications

5. To fulfil our obligations under the Equality Act 2010: As part of the Court's obligations under the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), the Court is required to demonstrate, in the exercise of its functions, due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other acts prohibited by the Equality Act (2010)
- advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Our activities continue to be guided by the action plan set out in the strategy document. The following progress update provides details on the activities and work undertaken to support each of the objectives listed above since we last reported in [July 2023](#).

Progress Update

Objective 1: To support and build an inclusive and respectful culture and working environment at the Court, where all Justices support the strategy and lead the way

In November 2023, Justices had the opportunity to take part in a discussion with the Chair and Chief Executive of the organisation Black Talent Charter (BTC). The speakers talked to the Justices about the barriers faced by black lawyers in the UK and their experiences. We will continue to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences by groups facing barriers in the legal and judicial profession to support Justices in building an inclusive and respectful culture.

The President and Deputy President of the Court operate an open-door policy and encourage informal discussions where Justices can raise any concerns. Justices also hold regular meetings to discuss ways of working to ensure that everyone feels included and valued.

We continue to offer a 'Peer Support System' for newly appointed Justices at the Court, in addition to a full induction programme. Lady Simler, who became a Justice of the Court on 14 November 2023, found the scheme helpful for her first six months at the Court. She said: "As well as the reassurance offered by a friendly face in the very early days, it was particularly helpful to have somebody to explain the way PTAs are dealt with at the Court (as this differs significantly from the process for determining PTAs at the Court of Appeal), and to be able to ask those "silly" questions that would otherwise take up a lot of time to work out by oneself. [...] . My peer support made clear that his door was always open (at least metaphorically) and was typically generous with his time."

Two Justices are participating in the Judicial Office Judicial Reverse Mentoring Scheme. The scheme entails junior legal professionals from under-represented groups mentoring a judge, who will be their mentee, with a strong focus on diversity and inclusion. The scheme aims to foster greater understanding among the judiciary of the experience of individual lawyers from underrepresented groups, and of the barriers faced by these groups in accessing a career in law and in the judiciary.

The Court remains committed to ensuring workplace support and reasonable adjustments are in place for all Justices and staff, with the appropriate supporting policies. In the last year, the Court has installed a new hearing loop system in the court rooms to ensure appeals are more accessible for people with hearing loss. This has included

working with Counsel appearing before the Court to ensure that the correct adjustments were in place prior to the hearing, and for parties to an appeal.

Objective 2: To support the progression of underrepresented groups into judicial roles

In November 2023, the Court welcomed a third cohort of eight interns for a five-day paid internship programme, organised in partnership with Bridging the Bar. During the programme, each intern was assigned to one of the Court's Judicial Assistants and had the opportunity to meet with their respective Justice. They also had the opportunity to sit in on cases taking place that week and then discuss them with Judicial Assistants and Justices. Interns attended the swearing-in ceremony for new Justice, Lady Simler.

Feedback from the interns continues to be overwhelmingly positive. The following are quotes from two of the 2023 interns about their experience:

"Justices made it known that they truly valued my opinion."

"Part of our role was to share some of the barriers we've faced in trying to access the profession and engage the Justices in a meaningful, broader conversation about diversity and inclusion. It was clear across the week that there was a genuine desire to understand these issues and to proactively do something about them where possible."

The Court is committed to continuing the partnership with Bridging the Bar and looks forward to welcoming the next cohort of interns in November 2024.



Bridging the Bar Interns, 2023

We have continued to build links with representative organisations, not only in relation to staff recruitment exercises, but also to help us to understand and learn from the experience of underrepresented groups. Over the past year, this has included:

Black Talent Charter:

After becoming a signatory of BTC in June 2023, the Court hosted a hybrid event in partnership with them titled 'Black Talent in the Legal Profession: Tackling Barriers and Creating Pathways'. The event, which took place in November 2023, provided practical advice for Black lawyers and senior leaders within the legal community to help them progress their careers and reach senior positions within the law. The event was opened by Lord Reed, and followed by a panel moderated by BTC CEO, Laura Durrant, and comprising BTC Chair, Harry Matovu KC, Lord Leggatt, Stephanie Boyce (past President of the Law Society) and Elaine Banton (Co-Chair of the Bar Council Equality, Diversity and Social Mobility Committee).

Topics covered the urgent need to accelerate work on the recruitment and progression of Black talent across the legal profession and the judiciary; the competition for talent and the risk to the legal profession from more fast-moving and diverse sectors; barriers to progression for Black lawyers, and how best to meet those challenges; and the responsibility of senior leaders to drive change individually and collectively. Courtroom 1 of the Supreme Court, where the event took place, was packed with participants, and more than 100 people watched online.

One of the BTC signatories said about the event: "The intellectual capacity in the room was astonishing... I have attended a number of events like this from the standpoint of an ally and none have got anywhere near this in terms of education and promoting awareness."

Law Society:

The Court hosted a career pathways webinar in September 2023 in partnership with the Law Society. The webinar aimed at encouraging solicitors to consider a career in the judiciary. The event gave attendees an opportunity to gain an understanding of the role of a judge and provided practical advice on the application process. Panellists gave first hand insights into a judicial career and on the required preparation ahead of applying for a judicial role. There were very practical tips on how to demonstrate transferrable skills and competencies in the application process. The panel featured Lady Rose (Justice of the Supreme Court), Jane Furniss CBE (at the time, Lay Commissioner, Judicial Appointments Commission) and Judge Mulready (First Tier Tribunal Judge, Immigration and Asylum)

Chamber). The session was introduced by Vicky Fox, Chief Executive of the Supreme Court, and chaired by Lubna Shuja, President of the Law Society of England and Wales.¹

Freshfields Stephen Lawrence Scholarship Foundation:

The programme is designed to address the disproportionate underrepresentation in large commercial law firms and other City institutions of young black men from less socially mobile backgrounds and to enable them pursue careers in the law and in the City more broadly. The Court hosts Scholars from this scheme annually. The last visit took place in June 2024 and involved twelve Scholars. During the visit they received a tour of the Court, attended a Court hearing and then sat down with Lord Leggatt for a Q&A and discussion about the case.



Stephen Lawrence Scholarship Foundation Visit, June 2024

Big Voice London:

The Court continues to work in partnership with Big Voice London to improve social mobility within the law. Students take part in a moot competition and are supported by mentors. In the last year, in November 2023, the Court hosted a launch event for Big Voice London's new programme, as well as its moot's final, which was judged by a Justice.

Sikhs in Law Association:

We continued to work with the Sikhs in Law Association, which aims to promote, encourage, empower and develop the UK Sikh community within the legal profession. Building on our ongoing relationship, in the last year we provided a visit to the Court and

¹ The recording of the webinar can be found at the following link: <https://youtu.be/CwjOi4Becoo>.

meeting with Lord Hodge for Mr Justice Singh, who was the keynote speaker at the Sikhs in Law Association's Bandhi Chhor celebration.

Girls Human Rights Hub:

This organisation works to empower girls to use advocacy, leadership and litigation to further girls' human rights globally. The Court had the pleasure of hosting the Girls Human Rights Hub opening ceremony for their 2024 festival in February, where Lady Simler, along with Nicholas Thorpe, Jenna Ralfe, and Nadia Montraghi KC, spoke as panellists on the importance of girls' human rights and their own lived experiences.



Girls Human Rights Hub Festival, February 2024

Young Muslim Leadership Programme:

This programme is run by the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and aims at encouraging greater participation by Muslims in public life. A group of students from the 2023 cohort visited the Court in July 2023. The group received a tour of the Court and met with Lord Leggatt for an informal discussion.

UK Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists:

In June 2023, a delegation from the Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists visited the Court and engaged in a discussion with Lady Rose, Lady Simler and the Chief Executive on the role and work of the Court.

Objective 3: To support an increase in the number of well-qualified applicants from underrepresented groups for the role of Justice

We have continued the practice of regularly inviting senior judges from lower courts to sit on cases at the Supreme Court and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC), to provide a more diverse bench and broaden and cement strong relations with the appellate courts. This practice serves to break down barriers and provide experience of working at the Court. In 2023-204, we welcomed 9 visiting Judges from across the UK jurisdictions (including 1 female judge and 1 judge from an underrepresented group).

Welcoming judges from lower courts has proven to be a successful exercise that brings diversity of thought, expertise and experience to the Supreme Court and JCPC. It has also shown to be an excellent experience for visiting judges.

Lord Justice Singh, who sat on the JCPC case *Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago v Vijay Maharaj Substituted on behalf of the Estate of Satnarayan Maharaj for Satnarayan Maharaj and another (Trinidad and Tobago)* [2023] UKPC 36, said about his experience: "it was an honour to sit in the Judicial Committee, especially as this case concerned a constitutional issue of a kind which would not arise in the Court of Appeal of England and Wales, which is where I usually sit."

The Court issued a [Practice Note](#), which took effect in April 2024, encouraging parties to give junior counsel opportunities to advance oral argument before the Court. Experience in advancing oral argument is essential to enable progression to senior levels of the Bar. Women, minority ethnic and disabled lawyers are currently underrepresented at senior levels of the legal profession. Giving junior counsel opportunities to progress as advocates can therefore help to increase the diversity of the pool from which future Justices are drawn.

Objective 4: To proactively communicate the Court's support for diversity and inclusion to the legal profession and the public

In April 2024 the Court published a [video](#) highlighting the Court's work in supporting and working in partnership with organisations promoting diversity and inclusion, and offering an accessible and welcoming experience to the public visiting the Court.

Lord Leggatt, who continues to be the lead Justice for the Court's Judicial Diversity and Inclusion work, said when the video was released:

"It is a key part of our Judicial Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to support the progress of underrepresented groups into judicial roles. As this country's highest court, we have a role

to play, working alongside others across the judiciary and the legal profession, to encourage and support the ambitions of people from all backgrounds to join the legal profession, to progress their careers and to apply for judicial roles.

Our activities involve people at every stage of their careers, from school and university students to junior and mid-career lawyers and those considering first judicial appointments.

[...] Progress is being made but more is needed and at a faster pace. We are committed to promoting and developing a judiciary drawn from the widest possible pool of talent and reflective of the society we serve."

In addition to their work in hearing and deciding cases, the Justices are committed to enhancing public understanding of the role of the Court and its work. Justices contribute to the Court's education programmes and participate in a number of speaking events at universities across the UK.

Our education and outreach programmes inspire and engage students of all ages across the UK with the work and role of the UKSC and the JCPC. The Court sets targets to widen participation in its education programmes and to make them more accessible to the whole UK population. During the 2023 – 2024 financial year:

- 13 'Ask a Justice' Sessions were delivered. All sessions were delivered for state funded schools. 6 of these schools were from England, 6 were from Wales and 1 from Northern Ireland.
- 10 Debate days were held, both virtually and in-person. 90 percent of schools selected were state comprehensive schools, and 3 schools were from areas of multiple deprivation.
- 12 Moots were delivered in-person, with participation from universities across all the four nations.

Justices have committed to increasing the number of 'Ask a Justice' sessions because of the overwhelmingly positive feedback received. Feedback from teachers and pupils show that this programme makes a real difference in pupils' perceptions of the legal and judicial professions and inspires them to consider a career in the legal and judicial sector.

The feedback below from an Ask a Justice session with the Sirius Academy in Hull and delivered by Lord Reed, in February 2024, demonstrates the impact of this programme:

“Lord Reed provided sage, purposeful, and highly individualised advice to young people passionate about potential future careers in the law (and other fields). He was relatable, appropriately informal, and left the students truly inspired, raising their expectations and broadening their intellectual, and aspirational horizons. Events such as these are indicative of the approach to open justice fostered by the most senior court in the UK.

They also afford those students who are not geographically proximate a wonderful chance - without prohibitive cost - to engage intellectually, and collaboratively with the most senior members of the judiciary. A chance that would otherwise be deprived of them, regardless of their desert, or competence. Lord Reed's words and advice will last long in the minds of my students. They will take with them the four attributes he considers to be most important to aspiring members of the profession: integrity, resilience, curiosity, and flexibility. Wise words for us all.”

A student participating to the same session said:

“Before speaking to Lord Reed I was worried that my background may be an obstacle to my succeeding in a legal career. His advice made me realise that it's not about where you come from, it's about hard work, intelligence, and dedication, and that my background is not something that can prevent my achievement. This has given me so much confidence and made me realise that a career in law is possible”.



Virtual Ask a Justice Session at Sirius Academy in February 2024

In September 2023, the Chief Executive was invited to speak at the Westminster Legal Policy Forum Conference – “Next Steps for equality, diversity and inclusion in the legal profession”. This was an opportunity to demonstrate the Court’s support for increased diversity and to explain the work the Court is doing. The Chief Executive also had the opportunity to speak about the Court’s Judicial Diversity and Inclusion strategy for the “Do One Better” podcase by Alberto Lidji, providing an opportunity to raise awareness of the Court and its work more generally to an audience interested in policy, politics and law.

The Court had the opportunity to engage with a number of activities in the last year to communicate its strong commitment to diversity and inclusion in the legal sector. One such example is the “Next 100 years Inspirational Women in Law” awards. This initiative champions the legacy of the first women admitted as barristers and solicitors in England & Wales, over 100 years ago in 1922. In November 2023, the Court’s Chief Executive was invited to be part of the judging panel for the awards. The awards ceremony provided a good opportunity to showcase women’s achievements across the legal profession.

Each year, the Court invites applications for Judicial Assistants to support the work of the Justices over the course of the legal year. In the last year, the requirement to be a qualified solicitor and barrister was removed as mandatory. Now, to be a Judicial Assistant you must either be qualified or have completed a course or courses involving two years’ full time substantive legal studies (or the equivalent in part time studies).

Over the past year, the Court held a series of information events for prospective Judicial Assistants to raise awareness of the scheme and encourage applications from a wide range of backgrounds. Partners with whom these events were organised include Bridging the Bar.

This year, for the Judicial Assistants recruitment the Court introduced a wholly digital application form which was hosted by Rare Recruitment and which interfaced with their contextual recruitment system. Rare Recruitment is a company which has developed a contextual recruitment system designed to help recruiters to put candidate’s achievements into context, thereby enabling them to take more informed decisions. The system identifies the most socially and economically disadvantaged candidates, and the candidates who have outperformed their schools by the greatest amounts. It also provides recruiters with comprehensive data on diversity and inclusion at all stages of the recruitment process, enabling them to determine whether particular groups may be disadvantaged. Of the ten Judicial Assistants recruited this year, five are female and five are male. Seven are from white ethnic groups, two are from minority ethnic groups, and one preferred not to say. The contextual recruitment system has enabled the Court to confirm that it is attracting and recruiting candidates from a wide range of backgrounds.

We continue to use our social media presence on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) to foster greater awareness of the Court's work and our support for diversity and inclusion.

Objective 5: To fulfil our obligations under the Equality Act 2010: As part of the Court's obligations under the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

We remain committed to delivering the objectives set out in the [Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy 2021-2025](#) which is closely aligned with the Judicial Diversity and Inclusion strategy.

This strategy supports the administration's vision to be a true reflection of the society we live in, to respect our differences and support equal opportunity for everyone. The administration undertakes a number of activities to implement the strategy that include quarterly diversity forum meetings. Over the past year staff members have led or organized events on a wide range of topics such as menopause, Memorial Day, South Asian History Month, visual awareness.

Volunteers from across the Court wrote articles and created playlists to celebrate occasions from Pride month, Black History month, LGBTQ+ History month, and International Women's Day.

Our staff receive ongoing training to ensure an inclusive experience for all visitors of the Court. The Court offered 3 British Sign Language (BSL) interpreted tours during the last year and provided visual impairments awareness training and hidden disabilities and autism awareness training to staff.