



Justices Training Committee of the Judicial Institute (JTCJI)

# Annual Report to the Lord President

Covering the period January to December 2025

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# JTCJI Annual Report

## 1. Introduction

In terms of the [Justices of the Peace \(Training and Appraisal\) \(Scotland\) Order 2016](#), (*the 2016 Order*) the content, scrutiny and reporting on training of Justices of the Peace (JPs) is delegated to the Justices Training Committee of the Judicial Institute (JTCJI).

This annual report provides the quality assurance required by the Lord President under articles 7(4) and 11(3) of the 2016 Order.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Report

This Report is required in terms of articles 7 and 11 of the 2016 Order and contains:

- (a) The collated Sheriffdom JTAC (Justices' Training and Appraisal Committee) Reports as required by article 7(4) of the 2016 Order (Appendix A); and
- (b) An analysis of the training delivered by the Judicial Institute (JI) and the JTACs during the 2025 training period.

### 1.2 Number of JPs

According to Judicial Office figures, at the end of 2025 there were approximately **237** JPs in Scotland.

## 2. National Training Programme and JTCJI directions

In terms of article 6(1) of the 2016 Order, by no later than 30 September each year the JTCJI is required to set out the National Training Programme for the following year. This includes the up to date National Curriculum, details of JI training courses,

and any topics prescribed for delivery by each Justices' Training and Appraisal Committee (JTAC) located in each sheriffdom in the following year.

No topics were prescribed in 2024 for delivery by JTACs in 2025. The JTCJI made a policy decision in 2017 that training topics would be prescribed in exceptional circumstances only.

## 3. JTAC (Sheriffdom) Training

### 3.1 Background

Justices have a statutory obligation to complete 12 hours training a year, with a minimum of 6 hours local training every year, and minimum 6 hours of Judicial Institute training over three years. 2025 was the third year of the three year training cycle which was 2023/24/25.

The majority of JP training takes place locally, and the content is determined by Sheriffdom JTACs within the parameters set by the National Curriculum, the National Training Programme, and any JTCJI directions. As a result, the focus of the JTCJI is not to influence the topics to be prioritised locally, but rather to set educational standards and establish processes for the quality assurance and enhancement of local training. The National Curriculum, the National Training Programme, and the JTAC annual training reports have been successfully used as a method of providing direction and reporting.

The design and delivery of training is usefully structured by the training cycle: identify the learning needs, design the training, deliver the training, and evaluate what was delivered. The JTCJI's overall analysis of the JTAC training reports, which are submitted each year to a deadline of 28 February, is based on the following two headings:

1. analysis of the overall training plan; and
2. evaluation of feedback received over the 12 month period.

## 3.2 Analysis of the overall training plan

The JTACs are each asked to provide an overall analysis of the impact of their respective local training plans and the courses delivered in the sheriffdom. This includes how learning needs were identified, what the training priorities were, and how training was delivered.

### 3.2.1 Training Needs Analysis

Training needs analysis involves identifying the specific training which learners require to expand their knowledge, to improve their abilities, and to develop the skills necessary for their role. The JTACs all evidenced a practice of this analysis, mapping their training delivery to the National Curriculum (Appendix C). They also reported on the need to produce a flexible training programme, which will remain relevant to address the needs of Justices. For example, while the training plan for Grampian, Highlands and Islands originally included training on courtroom craft and communication, the training committee appropriately adapted delivery in response to the implementation of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023. The new sessions focused on bail; combining legal input, a social work perspective and practical scenarios to support decision making under the new legislation.

Training needs analysis for current JPs was underpinned by gathering information from a number of appropriate sources – see table 1.

*Table 1 - Information sources for training needs analysis*

- feedback from Justices in post-course evaluation questionnaires
- development needs identified through the appraisal process
- assessment of legislative changes, case law and appeals
- reflections on local court issues
- procedural changes
- discussion at JTAC meetings
- post-court debriefs
- direct consultation with JPs, Legal Advisers, justice partners, and the Judicial Institute.

## 3.2.2 Priorities for Training

### Core content

Local training plans for existing JPs continued to cover the core content normally delivered: road traffic offences, sentencing, court craft and case management. JTACs recognised that these key topics remain central to local and national training. For example, the JTAC for Lothian and Borders delivered an update on Road Traffic Law, focusing on dangerous and careless driving along with an overview of drink driving. Police Scotland contributed to the session, offering valuable insight into current practices, which enhanced Justices' understanding of the approach taken by Road Policing prior to cases reaching court. Attendees were then able to apply this refreshed knowledge directly in group sentencing exercises.

### Additional training topics

In addition to this core content, a broad range of complementary training topics were also offered locally – see table 2. For example, the JTAC for Tayside, Central and Fife determined that as Justices are not presiding over as many trials as before, training on evidential hearings and developments in corroboration would be beneficial to them. These sessions ran in January and February 2025.

*Table 2 A list of some additional training topics delivered during the reporting period*

- |   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| • signing duties – Utility Warrant Protocol         | • drink driving             |
| • Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023 | • disclosure                |
| • Misuse of Drugs Act                               | • police body-worn cameras  |
| • hate crime aggravations                           | • admissibility of evidence |
| • unrepresented accused                             | • evidential hearings       |
| • defence agent in court                            | • corroboration             |
| • learning disabilities                             | • motions to adjourn        |
| • warrants and pleas of convenience                 | • fines enforcement         |
|   | • appeals                   |

## 3.2.3 Training delivery

The majority of training was delivered in person. There is consensus that there is considerable benefit from in-person contact amongst Justices, which facilitates the

free exchange of views and ideas, and provides the opportunity to form working relationships.

The JTACs recognised the benefits of a variety of modes of delivery. Some JTACs continued to provide a mixture of in-person and remote training. For example, Lothian and Borders delivered sessions in both Edinburgh and Livingston, with some sessions running virtually via Webex. A session was also run in a hybrid format, with some attendees in-person and others joining online, allowing for the maximum attendance.

Many endeavoured to continue to improve and adapt the way that remote training was delivered, to enhance the learning experience for Justices. For example, the JTAC for North Strathclyde had increasingly positive feedback on virtual training, with Justices recognising its inherent benefits in terms of accessibility, time saving, cost efficiency, and flexibility. Some Sheriffdoms made available recordings of remote sessions more broadly.

The need to utilise varied training methods, tools and techniques, whether delivered remotely or in person was evident – see table 3. A tailored blend of methodologies was chosen to enable JPs to learn in a way that best suited their learning preferences and to acknowledge their diverse experience and backgrounds. These methods were widely recognised as options available to supplement the traditional presentation and lectures, and were implemented as appropriate.

*Table 3 A list of some of the training methods used*

- |                                  |                                 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • structured workbooks           | • small group work              |
| • supplementary course materials | • role play exercises           |
| • facilitators notes             | • external observational visits |
| • Q&A sessions                   | • quizzes                       |
| • mock courts                    | • sentencing exercises          |

### **Annual training conference**

Several JTACs successfully hosted annual training conference in 2025. For example, the JTAC for South Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway provided two conferences in May and September. The September conference featured a strong focus on effective case management. COPFS provided an informative session on the Summary Case

Management project in the Sheriff Courts and explored how the core principles might be adapted for use in the JP Court. An interactive mock-court exercise, designed with input from Sheriffs Murphy and Kicinski, allowed scenarios to be acted out with participants invited to select possible outcomes using coloured voting cards. This encouraged engagement without any concern about giving a “wrong” answer. The programme also included an illuminating presentation from Stuart Ritchie on social media and judicial conduct, as well as an informative session from Sheriff McGlennan on judicial independence, impartiality and ethics. The day concluded with a Q&A “hot seat”, where JPs submitted questions in advance and received detailed responses from the Legal Adviser team. The combination of formal presentations and more informal activity-based learning helped maintain a high level of enthusiasm throughout.

### **Court observation**

A small number of JTACs were able to facilitate visits to courts. Specialist court observations expanded the learning from theory to operational application. For example, North Strathclyde organised a visit to the Sheriff Appeal Court in Edinburgh for Justices inducted in 2024. Sheriff Principal Murphy met with Justices after court to discuss the cases in the court they had observed. This visit proved to be popular and will be repeated in 2026.

### **Expert Contributors**

Training was developed and led by experienced Sheriffdom Legal Advisers and Legal Advisers. JTACs invited Judicial Office Holders and a range of external contributors to contribute their expertise and experience – see table 4 for a list of some of the contributors. For example, Lothian and Borders hosted a topical session on challenges facing the defence and prosecution in 2025. Paul Smith, Solicitor and President of the Edinburgh Bar Association, presented from the defence perspective and the Procurator Fiscal for Edinburgh, Neil Almond, provided an update from COPFS. A Q&A session allowed Justices to raise matters they felt were particularly relevant. Several discussion points directly informed changes in approach in subsequent Courts, leading to greater clarity and understanding for Justice and Legal Advisers regarding emerging issues effecting both the defence and prosecution.

*Table 4 A list of some of the external contributors*

- Scottish Women’s Rights Centre
- Scottish Violence Reduction unit
- SCTS Fines Enforcement
- Edinburgh Bar Association
- COPFS
- People First Scotland
- Police Scotland
- Public Health Scotland

### **3.3 Evaluation of courses delivered**

Across the reports, there was evidence that an in-depth evaluation of courses was informing the ongoing learning needs analysis and the continuous improvement of all aspects of course design and delivery. The method of evaluation often included a member of the JTAC being present at the training in order to review the training and report back to the committee. Feedback surveys were completed by participants for the majority of courses, many of which were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. Participant feedback was thoroughly analysed to assess strengths, identify areas for improvement, and consider suggestions relating to future topics, venues or delivery methods. Where appropriate, this feedback was incorporated into subsequent training programmes or used to refine ongoing provision. A practical example of feedback being actioned comes from Glasgow and Strathkelvin. In response to participant comments, the JTAC ensured that learning outcomes were consistently provided to speakers in advance, helping to maintain clarity and align expectations. Additionally, speakers were asked to include dedicated Q&A time as Justices indicated that this element significantly enhanced their learning experience.

Samples of anonymous feedback are provided in as an appendix to the JTACs reports (Appendix A).

### **3.4 Self-study**

In 2025 Justices were permitted to claim up to four hours self-study credit, towards the 12 hour annual training requirement. This continues to provide a valuable and flexible means of meeting the training requirements, where attendance at scheduled events is not possible. Sufficient learning opportunities were made available to enable JPs to comply with their statutory requirement. The JTACs monitor the self-

study element of training. Some JTACs strongly recommended the Hub as a useful source of up to date information and case law, and as an excellent source of self-study materials. It was noted that not all learning may be included, and the JTACs reserve the ability to ensure that self-study is linked to the National Curriculum.

## **4. Judicial Institute Training**

### **4.1 Overview**

As well as setting national standards and quality assuring local delivery the Judicial Institute maintains its important remit to deliver the core national training programme. Under the guidance of the Deputy Director, core courses delivered by the JI are intended to enhance and reinforce local learning.

### **4.2 Sherifffdom Legal Adviser Facilitation**

The national training courses benefit from a co-facilitation approach between Sheriff Cottam and Sherifffdom Legal Advisers / Legal Advisers. Direct Legal Adviser involvement provides the Judicial Institute with the opportunity to keep course materials relevant and tailored to Justices' needs. It also provides SLAs with good insight and knowledge into Judicial Institute training practices which are fed back to the Sherifffdom JP trainers.

### **4.3 The National Training Programme**

In 2025, the Judicial Institute delivered the same three core courses as in 2024, with the addition of a new Mentoring course. Throughout the core courses the Judicial Institute commits to teaching certain topics pervasively. In 2025 these included domestic abuse issues, unrepresented accused, vulnerable witnesses, equal treatment, ethics and social context. Each course was delivered twice, and there was a mix of in-person, remote, and the first hybrid delivered course.

#### Courses delivered in 2025:

- Mentoring for Justice of the Peace
- Communicating – Common Challenges in Court
- Modern Road Traffic Challenges for Justices
- Leading with Confidence: Decision Making for Justices.

## 4.4 Mentoring for Justices of the Peace, 5 June 2025 and 15 December

The Operating Framework for the mentoring scheme for judicial office holders in Scotland requires mentors to have undergone an approved training course. Sheriff Cottam, and Dr Houston, collaborated with Sherifffdom Legal Advisor Alison Rennie to design a programme that addresses both the scope of the mentoring relationship and the interpersonal skills essential to effective mentoring. This course was delivered in person to 29 Justices. In addition, a revision resource was created, using the material from this course, to act as a refresher to those mentors who have completed the course, to be taken at a later date.

*“Mentoring Skills Workshop - this was helpful in deciding what to ask the mentee regarding the problem they were having. The type of question to ask, and how to listen to their answer” Anonymous participant*

## 4.5 Communicating – Common Challenges in Court, 5 February and 10 September

Sheriff Cottam, and Sherifffdom Legal Advisors Anne Kinsella and Meghan Neville, delivered this course. 26 participants attended in 2025. The programme included a contribution by Marion Scott, from Make Yourself Heard, who focused on practical skills to improve Justices’ communication in court. Participants presented mock decisions from the bench and were also given feedback on content as well as style and tone. Justices also explored communicating with people with learning disabilities. Franck David from People First Scotland introduced two members of SOLD (Serving Offenders with Learning Difficulties) who shared their lived experiences and delivered a mock police interview scene to raise issues and

discussion. Finally, Alasdair Fay, Principal Procurator Fiscal Depute, gave a talk covering the Crown's interaction with unrepresented accused people in court.

*"People First Scotland - First hand and knowledgeable information and strategies from those who face such difficulties...raised awareness of developing own practice in this area"* **Anonymous participant**

## **4.6 Modern Road Traffic Challenges for Justices - 30**

### **April and 6 October**

The first iteration of this course, in April, was delivered in person to 17 participants. The second running of this course was redesigned and delivered in a hybrid format. 14 participants attended online, and 9 participants attended in person. This is a popular course on the substantive law and procedure in relation to road traffic cases. As well as presentations from Sheriff Cottam and from Police Scotland, participants engaged in an interactive session, judging mock submissions on exceptional hardship and special reasons. Other topics covered included mobile phones, e-scooters and e-bikes, drink driving and the unrepresented accused. Rose McLeary, Sheriffdom Legal Adviser, supported the in-person course and James McPherson, Sheriff Legal Adviser, supported the hybrid course. The hybrid course was undertaken successfully, and this course will therefore be offered in the hybrid format going forward.

*"I have copious notes which will help me on the bench given that the vast majority of cases I have before me are Road Traffic."* **Anonymous participant**

## **4.7 Leading with Confidence: Decision Making for Justices – 7 May and 20 November**

33 participants attended this highly interactive course, which was again chaired by Sheriff Cottam, with support from Meghan Neville and James McPherson. This course provides justices the opportunity to enhance and reinforce their skills by looking at different aspects of decision making and sentencing in a safe, simulated environment. The programme included: a contribution by Sheriff Principal Anwar,

who delivered a presentation on the Sheriff Appeal Court process; facilitated breakout sessions in the context of all stages of a case; and the opportunity to consider case scenarios in an interactive on the bench session.

*“The opportunity to practice and be critiqued in a non-threatening environment was very useful. As was the fact that real complaints were used.”* **Anonymous participant**

## 4.8 Evaluation of JI courses

Evaluation surveys are distributed electronically for all national training courses, and the feedback is collated and analysed by the JI Directors, Education and Learning Manager, and often the facilitating Sherifffdom Legal Adviser. This approach fosters continual improvement to individual courses and the programme overall. A sample of evaluation feedback for the JI courses can be found in Appendix B.

## 5. Judicial Institute Digital Resources for JPs

The Justices section of the Judicial Hub houses the digital resources for JPs. A range of relevant topics is covered, and the Justices’ Technical Training Committee (JTTC) assumes responsibility by supporting an annual review by Legal Advisers. Updates are often made to existing resources and new resources are identified for development, as appropriate. The JTACs recognise the importance of the Judicial Hub and actively encourage Justices to access it, acknowledging that JP development is not confined to formal sessions.

*Table 5 A list of some of the e-resources on the Judicial Hub*

- Aggravations
- Annoying Creatures
- Benefit Fraud
- Judicial Independence, Impartiality and Ethics
- Road Traffic
- Sentencing
- Out of Court Signing
- Vulnerable Witnesses
- Appeals

## 6. Conclusion

The JTACs and JI work together to continuously evaluate JP learning needs, course design, and methods of delivering training. Both the JTACs and JI remain committed to the ongoing development of education for Justices, and aim to demonstrate the provision of ongoing good quality learning for Justices across Scotland.

Article 7(3) of 2016 Order provides that this report may include recommendations. The JTCJI has no recommendations to make.

Article 11(1) (i) of the 2016 Order provides that a JTAC must implement any direction and have regard to any guidance issued by the Lord President (in carrying out the Lord President's responsibilities under section 2(2)(d) of the 2008 Act) on judicial training or appraisal that applies to JPs.

The JTCJI would be pleased to discuss matters arising from any matters relating to this annual report with the Lord President.

*Sheriff Principal N A Ross*  
*JTCJI Chair*

*Mrs J A Kindberg*  
*Senior Education and Learning Manager*  
*JTCJI Secretary*

16 March 2026