



Becoming a Judge

Tim Collins takes you through the process of what it takes to make it to the Bench

The Judicial Appointments Commission is a non-departmental public body that “seeks to uphold the rule of law, through the fair appointment of the most meritorious candidates to judicial posts.”

Its budget has been slashed by 30% to £4.85 million but it has been emboldened to continue its work and direction of travel following recent publication of its Triennial Review. The JAC runs competitions to meet the needs of HMCTS as directed by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

Judicial career paths

The JAC recruits between 500 and 600 candidates each year for the main judicial posts, as well as for 29 MoJ tribunals. So, if you are interested in sitting, do investigate and consider other sitting options (e.g. medical, financial and sports tribunals), as well as the MoJ tribunals. Candidates could make very positive contributions and gain excellent experience through these positions. We increasingly see DJs appointed to the Circuit Bench and calls for judicial career paths to promote diversity.

Lengthening odds

Annually, the JAC typically processes in excess of 5,000 applications for every 500 vacancies. So for example, the last MHRT and Police Appeals competitions saw success ratios of 22:1 and 27:1 respectively. The current DDJ (Civil) competition had 1,104 candidates for the 87 posts (c13:1). With the growing pressures and uncertainty for many in the professions, coupled with the reductions in the number of vacancies and frequency of competitions, the appointment ratios are only likely to increase.

All about the competencies

The JAC's recruitment process has evolved and developed over the years. Central to their selection process were their qualities and abilities and now their new competency framework with

the specific requirements varying for each role. The six headline competencies are:

- Exercising judgement
- Possessing and building knowledge
- Assimilating and clarifying information
- Working and interacting with others
- Communicating effectively
- Managing work efficiently

Selection on demonstrated merit

Candidates are short-listed for a selection day either by sitting an on-line test or by a paper sift via an application form and references. In some competitions a further assessment after the qualifying test has now been introduced to ensure a stronger pool of candidates for the selection days.

Expect a searching panel interview. Many fee paid posts use actors in role-play situations to assess performance under pressure.

Throughout the selection process candidates are measured against the JAC's core competencies for the position. Successful candidates are able to give strong evidence and demonstrate the required competencies in the application form, on the selection day and through their referees.

Planning for a Judicial career

There are very helpful resources on the JAC's websites and the JAC hold regular roadshows throughout the country which are very informative.

Candidates will benefit hugely from Judicial shadowing as well as talking to successful candidates about their experience of the selection process.

Those who understand the process and are well prepared hold a significant advantage.

Tim Collins is the founder of the Tim Collins Consultancy