

Judiciary of Scotland

Sheriff

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Contents

- A foreword from the Lord President
- The Sheriffdoms
- Role Outline:
    - Overview
    - Induction, Training & Support
- Remuneration & Benefits
- Testimonials
- Eligibility
- Essential Requirements
- Application and Assessment Process

Foreword by the Lord President



Lord Pentland

I am pleased that you are considering appointment as a sheriff, a historic and respected judicial office at the heart of the justice system in Scotland. Sheriffs play a vital role in delivering fair, timely, and accessible justice within local communities across the country.

Sitting in courts throughout Scotland, sheriffs deal with the majority of civil and criminal business, including substantial civil cases and both summary and solemn criminal proceedings. The work is challenging, rewarding, and offers the opportunity to make a meaningful public contribution.

We provide first-class arrangements for induction and training as well as a highly collegiate atmosphere of mutual support.

If you consider that you have the necessary skills and attributes, I would encourage you to apply.

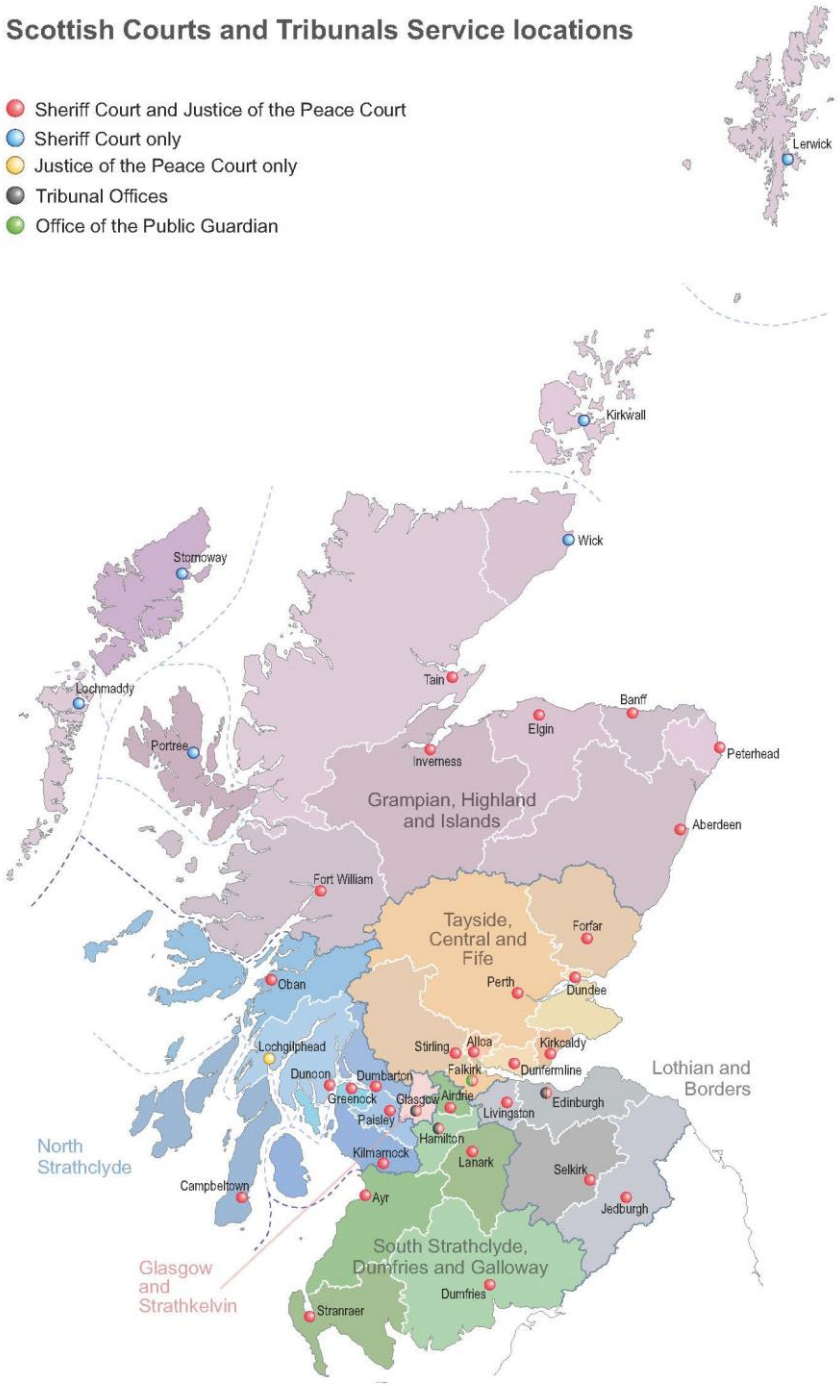
The Sheriffdoms

There are six Sheriffdoms in Scotland.

Each Sheriffdom is led by a Sheriff Principal, who carries a range of important responsibilities for the courts within their jurisdiction. Central to this role is the statutory duty "to secure the efficient disposal of business in the sheriff courts of that Sheriffdom".

Sheriffs Principal provides judicial leadership, oversees court performance, and ensures that justice is delivered effectively and consistently across their sheriffdom.

- Glasgow and Strathkelvin
- Grampian, Highland and Islands
- Lothian and Borders
- North Strathclyde
- South Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway
- Tayside, Central and Fife



Role Outline - Overview

Sheriffs have a broad and varied judicial role at the heart of Scotland's justice system. They preside at first instance over both criminal and civil business and are required to deliver clear and reasoned decisions, often at pace and under pressure. Sheriffs exercise the same powers and responsibilities throughout Scotland. In larger courts, they work alongside colleagues, while in smaller or more remote courts they may be the only judicial officer present. The role demands integrity, independence of mind, strong case-management skills, and the ability to maintain authority in complex and unpredictable circumstances.

Sheriffs are public servants whose decisions have a profound impact on individuals and communities. The role requires the highest standards of conduct, fairness, and impartiality. Sheriffs must demonstrate resilience and professionalism, particularly in the face of public scrutiny or criticism, and carry out their duties with integrity, independence of mind, and respect for all who appear before the court.

In criminal business, sheriffs exercise jurisdiction in both summary and solemn proceedings. In summary cases, they deal with high-volume, fast-moving business and may impose custodial sentences of up to 12 months, fines and a wide range of discretionary orders. They must maintain control over proceedings, including where accused or witnesses are disruptive or under the influence of drink or drugs. Cases may attract public or political attention and sheriffs are expected to be resilient in the face of any criticism, even when it may appear unfair or ill-informed. In solemn cases, sheriffs preside over trials, impose sentences and take a proactive role in case management. Sheriffs also undertake responsibilities arising from appeals, including preparing reports, stated cases, and opinions for the Sheriff Appeal Court and the High Court.

In civil business, sheriffs manage a wide range of cases, including family actions, which often involve sensitive and emotionally significant issues. The sheriff court has exclusive competence in lower-value claims and concurrent jurisdiction with the Court of Session in most other civil matters. Sheriffs are expected to manage cases actively, deliver judgments promptly, and engage with parties where appropriate to encourage early resolution.

Sheriffs also exercise important specialist and statutory jurisdictions, including children's referrals and child welfare hearings, simple procedure and ordinary cause actions, summary applications and Fatal Accident Inquiries, in which they make findings and recommendations to prevent future harm.

Over and above their judicial duties, sheriffs have numerous opportunities to contribute to the development and decision-making of statutory and advisory bodies whose work interfaces with the courts. Sheriffs frequently serve, and are sometimes required by statute to be represented, on a wide range of bodies, and may also represent the judiciary in domestic and international forums, including working and research groups.

Role Outline - Induction, Training & Support

Professional training and support is available for all newly appointed sheriffs to help them to develop the necessary judicial skills. This includes:

- A six-day induction programme provided by the Judicial Institute. This training is designed to help and support new sheriffs transition from practice to their new judicial role.
- Peer to peer learning which examines the wide jurisdiction of sheriffs. Time is built into the programme for discussion about how to handle common challenges faced by sheriffs.
- Shadowing an experienced sheriff for a minimum of three days, so new sheriffs can familiarise themselves with the judicial environment, observe judicial work, and discuss how best to prepare for and manage the challenges of the role.
- Guidance and support from Sheriffs who regularly share their knowledge, experience and insights with their less experienced counterparts.
- The Judicial Institute provides an annual programme of courses on subjects relevant to the work of judicial office holders. The Institute also maintains the Judicial Hub which is the judicial intranet. The Hub hosts a wide range of written guidance and other materials designed to support judicial office holders in their daily work. It is regularly updated to assist judicial office holders to keep track of current developments. In addition to the induction course, sheriffs are free to attend many of the other courses for serving sheriffs run by the Institute as part of its annual programme of judicial training.

Remuneration & Benefits

- A sheriff is paid £179,939 per annum. The salary is determined by the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB). At the date of this recruitment the SSRB is undertaking a major review of judicial salaries.
- A reformed Judicial Pension Scheme was introduced for all judicial office holders in April 2022. Details of the JPS 2022 scheme can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/judicial-pension-scheme-2022-guide.
- The mandatory retirement age for judicial office holders is 75.
- A sheriff is entitled to 7 weeks leave each year.
- There are a range of guides and policies to support judicial office holders including:
  - Occupational Health & Ergonomic Assessments
  - Eyecare Voucher Scheme
  - Cycle to Work Scheme
  - Mentoring
  - Employee Assistance Programme
  - Counselling Services
  - Mental Health and Wellbeing Support
  - Online & Social Media Guide
  - Menopause Guide
  - Judicial Security Guide

A message from Sheriff Euan Gosney

My legal career began in 2008 and, aside from the first year of my traineeship in a large commercial law firm, I have spent my career in private practice specialising exclusively in criminal defence work.

Appearing in court was always the aspect of practice I enjoyed most. Over the course of my career, I represented clients at every level of the criminal courts, from summary trials in the Justice of the Peace Court to trials in the High Court of Justiciary and in appellate proceedings.

As my career developed, I sought opportunities to broaden my experience through tribunal appointments. I served as a legally qualified member of the UK Athletics Disciplinary Tribunal and later as a legally qualified Chair of Fitness to Practise Panels for the Scottish Social Services Council. These roles exposed me to new areas of practice and required a different skill set from that developed in private practice. I found I enjoyed this work every bit as much as appearing in court: hearing and assessing evidence, managing proceedings, making decisions and communicating those decisions clearly to tribunal users. Through these experiences, I began to consider a judicial career more seriously.

When recruitment opened in 2025, I did not initially consider applying. I had a young family and the firm I had helped establish was continuing to grow. At first blush, the application process was unfamiliar to me, and I found it a challenge to get to grips with. I was also concerned that my limited civil court experience might count against me.

However, having reflected on my experience, I realised there were examples from my personal and professional life that I felt demonstrated the competencies required for judicial office. I felt that I had reached a stage in my career where I was ready to take on the responsibility of judicial office, and I decided to apply.

The JABS process requires a degree of self-reflection that many lawyers are not accustomed to. Like many candidates, I found it easier to focus on the cases I had conducted than on the skills and qualities I had developed through them. For anyone unfamiliar with competency-based applications, my experience is that investing time in preparing examples and reflecting on your experience is invaluable. I recognise that this is not always easy when balancing the demands of private practice.

I found it helpful to speak with others who had previously been through the process and to make full use of the resources provided by JABS. The Law Society of Scotland's training on competency-based applications and interview techniques was particularly useful.

The process is demanding but fair. The case studies are provided in advance, allowing candidates adequate time to analyse and determine issues of law, often in areas outside their day-to-day practice. It quickly became clear to me that the process is not simply about demonstrating legal knowledge or professional achievement; it is designed to identify the wider personal and professional qualities required of a judicial office holder.

I feel very fortunate to have been appointed as a sheriff. The work is varied, intellectually stimulating and provides a genuine opportunity to serve the public. I have also found both judicial colleagues and court staff to be exceptionally welcoming, supportive and generous with their time and experience.
My advice to anyone considering applying is not to assume there is a single route to the bench or a typical successful candidate. Many lawyers underestimate the value of the skills they have developed throughout their careers. Whether your background is in private practice, advocacy, tribunals, public service or another area of law, you may have more relevant experience than you realise. If judicial office is something you have considered, I would encourage you to explore the opportunity and not rule yourself out before applying.

A message from Sheriff Jennifer Gear

I completed a general traineeship at a large firm in Edinburgh. Having particularly enjoyed family law during my degree and my traineeship, on qualifying I took up employment in a high street firm in Perth, undertaking mainly family law on a private and legal aid basis. Having never done any legal aid work during my traineeship, this was entirely new, but I thoroughly enjoyed the regular trips to Perth Sheriff Court, developing client relationships and the busyness of a mixed private/legal aid case load. In addition to family law, I also covered a large volume of local agent instructions, giving me invaluable experience of general civil work. After a number of years in Perth, I joined another high street firm, based in Edinburgh. This involved mainly family law and legal aid work, in the Sheriff Court and Court of Session, and gave me invaluable experience representing a large volume of individuals from a variety of different backgrounds.

Whilst living in Edinburgh, the chance to relocate to Shetland arose, and I moved in 2014. After a short career break, the opportunity to join a large Scottish firm, who had recently merged with a local Shetland firm came up and I joined as a solicitor, again undertaking predominantly family work. Living and working in a small community, and attending the local sheriff court on a regular basis, was something I really enjoyed. After a number of years in this role, I embarked on a new challenge and moved to the local authority, doing general litigation, social work and education law.

Having practised in Shetland for a number of years, I was aware of the role of Sheriff becoming vacant. I had always enjoyed civil court work, and the role appealed to me, albeit I wasn't convinced I had the experience or longevity in the profession to apply at this time, especially as I had virtually no exposure to a criminal court. In advance of submitting an application, and to gain more of an idea of the criminal side, I applied for the Judicial Work Shadowing Scheme, run by the Judicial Office for Scotland, which gave me 3 days shadowing different sheriffs in a mainland sheriff court, seeing a variety of criminal (and civil) business. This was invaluable and gave me the opportunity to speak to other sheriffs about the job and their own journeys to appointment. Inspired by this and with a fair amount of encouragement, I embarked on the application process when this launched in early 2026. The application itself took a considerable amount of effort, and I spent a lot of time reviewing all the helpful material available provided by JABS regarding the process and reflecting on my own knowledge. I included in my application the more unusual examples of litigation work I had undertaken, to ensure my application was varied, and showed the breadth and depth of my experience. I felt my private practice and local authority background demonstrated I could adapt to different practice areas. Making it through the application process to interview, I felt was an achievement, and the interview was testing. However, I was delighted to be appointed as Sheriff at Lerwick, in my local community.

I have found colleagues to be extremely supportive and the range of work, especially in a smaller court, varied and interesting so far. If you are thinking of applying, I would say there is no 'right or wrong' experience. It wasn't until I was preparing my application, that I appreciated the knowledge and strengths I had for the role.

Eligibility

Sheriffs are appointed by His Majesty, The King on the recommendation of the First Minister. The First Minister receives recommendations for the appointment of a sheriff from the Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland. The First Minister must consult with the Lord President of the Court of Session, before submitting his or her recommendations to the monarch.

Those eligible for appointment are:

- Advocates or solicitors of at least ten years standing; or
- Immediately before appointment been a Sheriff Principal, summary sheriff; part-time sheriff; or part-time summary sheriff.

Candidates should check they fully comply with the eligibility requirements for appointment to the role of a sheriff as set out in section 14 of the Courts Reform (Scotland) Act 2014.

Those seeking appointment should be judicial office holders or practitioners of standing, whether King's Counsel, advocates or solicitors. They should preferably have considerable court experience.

Essential Requirements

Successful candidates will be required to demonstrate and confirm:

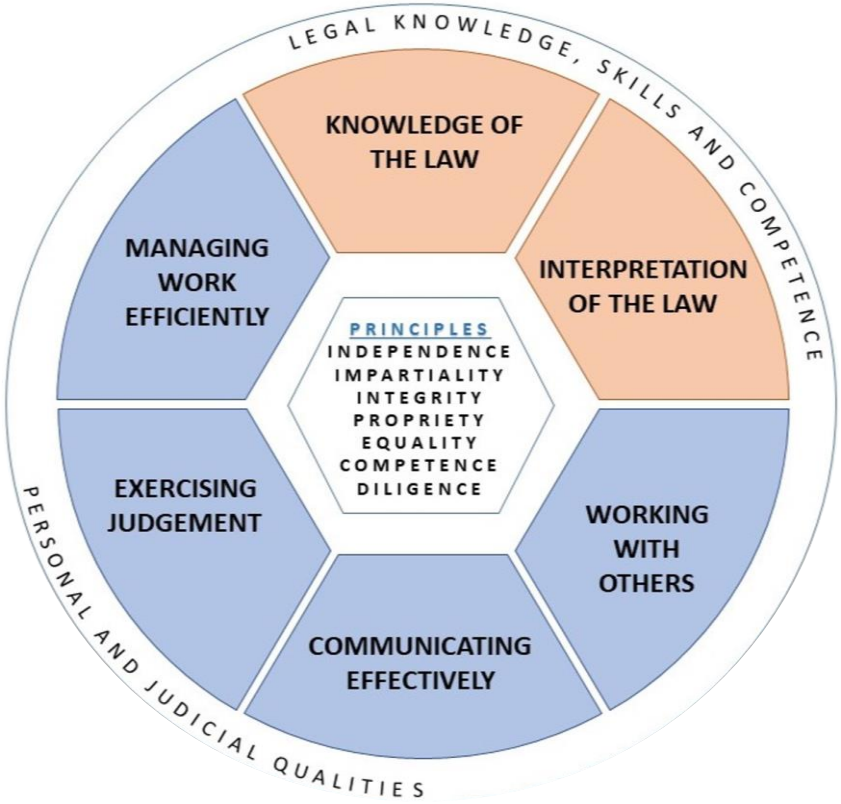
- The ability and legal standing to perform the functions of the office of sheriff. This requires knowledge and experience not only of civil law and practice but also of summary and solemn criminal law. Candidates who do not have knowledge or experience in each of these disciplines must demonstrate the ability to acquire knowledge in unfamiliar areas of the law.
- Excellent decision-making skills, with the ability to make clear and timeous decisions on complex and challenging cases, and to manage cases and overall caseload effectively and efficiently.
- The ability to produce clear, accessible, and sound written judgments in a timely manner.
- The ability to work collegiately with fellow judicial colleagues and contribute to the effective administration of the courts..
- Diligence and a commitment to upholding the rule of law and enhancing the standing of the courts.
- Resilience in making judgments on complex and challenging matters in a demanding operating environment.
- The ability to communicate clearly and effectively with others, including parties, agents and court users.
- Should have considerable court experience.
- Those applying for “floating” positions, should note that you will be required, at the direction of the Sheriff Principal, to travel to all courts within the Sheriffdom.
- Successful applicants will also be ordinarily resident within a one-hour journey of their base court.

Application and Assessment Process

The Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland (JABS) is an independent non-departmental public body whose statutory role as set out in the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008 is to make recommendations for judicial appointments solely on merit

Candidates for the role of sheriff go through a comprehensive application process which tests the level of skill, experience and professionalism required to perform the duties of the office. JABS encourages diversity and particularly welcomes applications from groups currently under-represented in the judiciary. The principles of fair and open competition will apply and recommendation for appointment will be made solely on merit.

Each applicant to judicial office will be assessed against a set of skills and qualities which are necessary for the role:





Judicial Office for Scotland
2026