JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS BOARD FOR SCOTLAND

Minutes of the Board Meeting
Monday 20 October 2025
9:15am to 2:40pm
Thistle House
Edinburgh

Present:
Mr Lindsay Montgomery CBE, Chairing Member
Mr Jonathan Barne, KC (left the meeting for agenda item (8))
Mrs Liz Burnley, CBE
Mr Paul Cackette, CBE
Sheriff Principal Kate Dowdalls, KC
President May Dunsmuir
Sheriff Jane Farquharson, KC
Mr Paul Gray
The Hon. Lady Shona Haldane, KC
Ms Emma Marriott
Dr Fiona McLean
Mr Gareth Morgan, QPM
The Hon. Lord Robert Weir, KC

Attendees:
Mrs Laura McGeary, Chief Executive (CE)
Mr Stuart Scott, Digital and Continuous Improvement Manager (DCIM)
Mr François Marfaing, Finance Officer (agenda item 6 only)
Mrs Julie Tarbet, Appointments Manager

Apologies:
Mrs Wilma Canning
Mr Peter Murray

Guest Attendees:
Cat Dalrymple, Director Justice Scottish Government
Mandy Williams, Head of Courts and Tribunals Scottish Government

1. Welcome and Apologies / Declarations of interest

1.1 The CM welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1.2 There were no declarations of interest raised by Board members.

2. Business from previous meeting

2.1 Minutes of the 18 August 2025 meeting

2.1.1 The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

2.2 Action Tracker

2.2.1 The Chief Executive (CE) updated the Board on the positive progress made in several areas. She noted that a full review of the Action Tracker was planned to more easily present progress and outstanding actions to the Board. The aim is to develop a dashboard that presents key information more effectively. This will be available at the next Board meeting.

Action point 1: CE to review and redesign the presentation of the Action Tracker for the next Board meeting.

3. Director of Justice, Cat Dalrymple

3.1 The Chair welcomed Cat Dalrymple, Director Justice, and Mandy Williams, Head of Courts and Tribunals at the Scottish Government, to the meeting.

3.2 The Director Justice thanked the Board for the invitation and for the impressive amount of work undertaken by the Board. She highlighted the importance of enhanced engagement between the SG, JABS and the JO to develop a more strategic approach to judicial appointments, strengthening collaboration and the continuing focus on diversity.

3.3 She then provided a strategic overview of current developments within the Scottish justice system and how these relate to JABS. She outlined developments in the Scottish Tribunals, the evolving landscape of civil and criminal justice in Scotland, highlighting recent and forthcoming legislative developments including the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill and the establishment of Sexual Offences Courts and other reforms that may impact JABS. She also shared the Scottish Government’s perspective on the role and work of JABS and reflected on strategic planning priorities and policies in particular digitalisation.

3.4 The Board thanked the Director of Justice for her comprehensive update and acknowledgement of the work undertaken by JABS. The Board welcomed the greater emphasis on a more strategic and collaborative approach to judicial appointments - a view which echoed JABS’ position

4. Chairing Member Oral Update

4.1 The Chairing Member (CM) reflected on several matters; he thanked the members of the current appointment panels for all of their hard work. He explained that a revised Senator role profile was expected, following a productive meeting with the Lord President, Lord Justice Clerk and SCTS colleagues. The Senator competition will likely to be the next competition to start in 2025/26. He is looking at planning the allocation of Board members to future competitions and will be in touch with members to confirm these as soon as there was greater clarity on the order of future competitions.

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4.2 The CM confirmed that the Annual Report had been published and acknowledged by the Cabinet Secretary and the Diversity Report will be published later this month. The CM thanked Fiona McLean for her contribution to the Diversity Report. The Website redevelopment was progressing well, and he was grateful to the DCIM, Paul Cackette and Emma Marriott for their work on this project.

4.3 He then provided an updated on:

- upcoming meetings with the Dean of the Faculty, Law Society of Scotland and the Society of Solicitor Advocates about a number of matters including on JABS consultations.
- the first meeting of the Character and Conduct Committee (CCC) was held to explore the committee's purpose and aims. The Terms of Reference will be brought to the Board in due course.
- the Communication and Engagement Plan was under review, and planning is underway for a Board Strategy Day in January 2026 to help shape JABS priorities for 2026–2027 and the new Corporate Plan (2026–2029). BMU will establish members' availability shortly for the strategy day.
- a meeting of the Diversity Reference Group is planned to take place later next month.

4.5 Finally, the CM confirmed that he had accepted a second term as JABS Chairing Member beginning in January 2026.

Action point 2: CCC Terms of Reference to be brought to the Board following consideration by the CCC.

Action point 3: CE to confirm the date of the Board Strategy Day in January 2026.

5. Chief Executive Update

5.1 The Chief Executive (CE) introduced the paper and provided an update on current staffing. She had received feedback from the team indicating that workloads were manageable, and there was a continued focus on a positive work/life balance. She also reported that the National Records of Scotland had approved the JABS Records Management Plan and thanked the Head of Operations and DCIM for their work.

The Board noted the CE's report and expressed appreciation for the timely circulation of the Board papers and draft minutes.

6. Finance Update

6.1 Budget Update for 2025-2026

The CM welcome François Marfaing, Finance Officer (FO), to his first Board meeting to provide a finance update to the Board.

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The FO spoke to the paper and explained that a full review of JABS financial process continued. He then explained the current financial position, the improved forecasting for competitions and financial reports for the Board.

The Board noted the paper and the significant improvements made to financial processes.

7. Progress v Business Plan

7.1 The CE introduced the paper and explained the progress made against a number of priorities set out in the 2025/2026 Business Plan. The CE reported:

- the successful completion of the 2024/25 recruitment programme and confirmed that the 2025 programme was underway with Sheriff Principal and Chamber President competitions progressing well and that Parole Board for Scotland (Chair) competition was due to launch shortly.
- Programme for Change was continuing although progress had proved challenging this year because of the very high pressure of competitions and availability of resources. A further update will be provided at the December Board meeting.
- the policy review was ongoing, with a fuller update to follow at the next meeting.
- staffing levels and BMU recruitment team structure continued to be monitored and reviewed.

The Board noted the content of the paper.

8. Risk Register Review

8.1 The CE presented the paper and explained that the intention was to review the current risk register format to enhance clarity, improve accessibility and support more effective presentation, monitoring and reporting of risks. This review will also ensure closer alignment with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Public Finance Manual. The Board discussed the proposed approach and expressed interest in considering risk appetite as part of the assessment process.

Action point 4: CE to provide the updated risk register and table a discussion about the Board's risk approach at the December Board meeting.

The Board noted the updated and welcomed the review of the risk register.

9. Current and Future Competitions

9.1 Current and Upcoming Rounds

9.1.1 The CE gave a brief overview of the paper and details on current and potential upcoming rounds. The Board noted the paper.

10. Tribunal 24 Light Touch

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10.1 The CM introduced the paper and explained the rationale for recruiting a Legal Member of the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland Tax Chamber through a Light Touch process. The Board discussed the comparison exercise and Light Touch process and agreed that the Light Touch approach was the most appropriate method for recruiting a specialist Tax Chamber Legal Member.

The Board approved the Light Touch recruitment and agreed that a suitable panel should be formed to progress this.

Action point 5: CM to liaise with the President of Scottish Tribunals to nominate a tribunal representative for the Tax Chamber Legal Member panel.

11.1 Website update

11.1 The DCIM provided an update on the progress of the content review. The first draft of the website content was currently being reviewed to ensure a consistent style and tone. He confirmed that Jonathan Barne had volunteered to review the content for consistency, and two other Board members would be asked to help to review the content. A sense check will also be carried out with both legal and non-legal applicants. A further meeting is being arranged for the content review. The DCIM confirmed that the project remains on track and that training will be provided to the BMU on managing website content.

The Board noted the paper and commended the significant progress made.

12. Programme for Change

12.1 Programme for Change Update

12.1 An update will be provided at the December 2025 meeting.

13. AOCB

13.1 The CM confirmed that The Lord President will be attending the Board meeting on 15 December 2025.