



GUIDANCE NOTE

THE OFFICE OF SHERIFF PRINCIPAL

(Two Vacancies)

SHERIFFDOM OF NORTH STRATHCLYDE

&

SHERIFFDOM OF GLASGOW AND STRATHKELVIN

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Guidance Note is provided for applicants who are considering applying for the role of Sheriff Principal. The two vacancies advertised in this round are for the sheriffdom of North Strathclyde and the sheriffdom of Glasgow and Strathkelvin. This document provides information and guidance about how to apply and how to complete the application form.

2. THE OFFICE OF SHERIFF PRINCIPAL ROLE PROFILE

The Role Profile, which is produced by the Judicial Office for Scotland, outlines the responsibilities and required skills for Sheriffs Principal.

The salary for a full-time Sheriff Principal is currently £194,314 per annum. The Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) is currently undertaking a major review of judicial salaries, with particular attention given to the role of a Sheriff Principal.

It is expected that the successful applicants will be appointed in April 2027, when they will commence the induction process with the Judicial Institute for Scotland.

Please read the [Role Profile](#) on our website.

3. ELIGIBILITY

3.1 Statutory Eligibility Requirements

The eligibility for the Office of Sheriff Principal is set out in section 14 of the [Courts Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) and is noted below.

(1) An individual is qualified for appointment to a judicial office mentioned in subsection (2) if the individual —

(a) immediately before the appointment, held any other judicial office specified in that subsection, or

(b) at the time of appointment—

(i) is legally qualified, and

(ii) has been so qualified throughout the period of 10 years immediately preceding the appointment.

(2) The judicial offices are—

(a) Sheriff principal, (b) Sheriff, (c) summary Sheriff, (d) part-time Sheriff, (e) part-time summary Sheriff.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (1), an individual is legally qualified if the individual is a solicitor or an advocate.

A period of devilling does not constitute a break in the continuity of legal qualification in accordance with a recent ruling of the Court of Session. The ruling can be viewed on the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service [website](#).

3.2 Mandatory Retirement Age

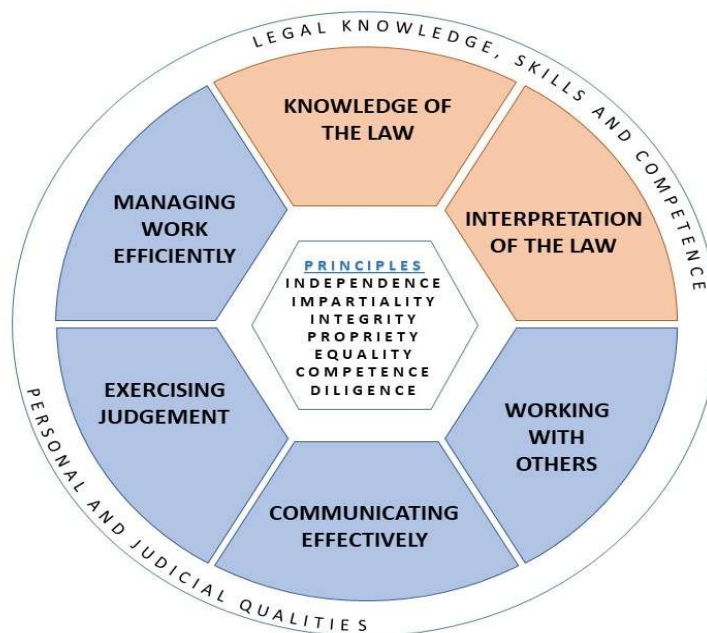
There is a mandatory retirement age of 75 for judicial office holders as defined in Section 16 of the [Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993](#).

4. JUDICIAL SKILLS AND QUALITIES

4.1 Skills and Qualities

We assess each applicant against a set of legal, judicial and personal qualities that are necessary for the role, as set out in the role profile.

Legal, Judicial and Personal Qualities for Sheriff Principal



We do not expect applicants to be familiar with all of the areas of a Sheriff Principal's work. Once appointed, there will be opportunities for training and development. However, it is important that a Sheriff Principal is a lawyer of high standing whose decisions will command confidence, including when sitting in the Sheriff Appeal Court. It is critical that you can demonstrate both the ability and the motivation to succeed at this level.

Applicants should preferably have considerable court experience.

In reaching our decisions on making a recommendation for appointment, we will assess candidates through the application and interview process by taking account of all the available evidence. The following are skills, abilities and characteristics which are required for the role of Sheriff Principal and which will be tested during the process.

4.2 Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Being Sought for the Role of Sheriff Principal

Set out below are the legal, personal and judicial characteristics which are being sought for this role.

Criterion 1: Knowledge, Interpretation and Application of the law

A Sheriff Principal candidate will have a very high level of legal knowledge, experience and standing in the area(s) of law in which they specialise. In particular, they will have very strong skills in the analysis and interpretation of the law, which will be necessary for considering and deciding cases in the Sheriff Appeal Court. They require:

- Very high level of knowledge of the substantive law in the area(s) of the applicant's practice or specialism
- High level of skill and competence:
 - in the interpretation and analysis of case law and statute law in either or both civil and criminal law and practice
 - in identifying, distinguishing and analysing complex issues of fact and law
- Ability to interpret and apply the law in unfamiliar areas

Personal and Judicial Qualities

In addition to their legal expertise, Sheriffs Principal are expected to have excellent personal and judicial qualities. These include being able to demonstrate sound leadership and management skills, or the ability to acquire such skills in office to ensure the efficient operation of the courts within the sheriffdom.

Criterion 2: Leadership and Strategic Thinking

- Ability to lead effectively, inspiring confidence and respect
- Ability to think strategically
- Ability to identify the need for change and facilitate the effective administration of justice

Criterion 3: Working With Others

- Ability to work collegiately
- Ability to support and promote the professional and personal development of judicial colleagues in the sheriffdom
- Ability to identify, build and sustain effective relationships within and beyond the sheriffdom

Criterion 4: Managing Work Effectively and Efficiently

- Ability to manage the work and resources of a sheriffdom effectively and efficiently
- Ability to manage own time and cases effectively and efficiently
- Ability to deliver work at speed and under pressure

Criterion 5: Exercising Judgement

- Ability to be open-minded and fair to all, exercising discretion appropriately
- Ability to analyse and assess complex evidence and arguments, reason clearly and reach clear conclusions
- Ability to make sound judicial and other decisions with confidence including complex cases in the Sheriff Appeal Court

Criterion 6: Communicating Effectively

- Ability to communicate clearly and effectively with a wide range of others

- Ability to listen with patience and respect
- Ability to produce written work, including decisions in complex cases, that is clear, concise, well-reasoned and timeous

Criterion 7: Personal Qualities

- Ability to model and promote the highest standards of judicial conduct
- Ability to maintain personal resilience, while managing a varied and demanding workload

4.3 Education, Professional Qualifications, Training and Career History

While we place great importance on the legal career of an applicant, and success in that career, we also value experience outside the law that may be relevant to the qualities required for judicial office.

Judicial experience (including part-time or full-time, court or tribunal) is something that we will take into account; however, it is not a requirement for appointment to full-time judicial office. If you have not held judicial office, you should not be deterred from applying. You should draw attention to any aspect of your career or any other experience that demonstrates the qualities required for this judicial office.

5. THE PANEL

The panel comprises six members of the Board: three who are either judicial or legal members and three lay members, one of whom will chair the panel. They will assess applications, undertake interviews and make recommendations to the JABS Board for appointment. Only the judicial and legal members assess the legal competence of applicants in accordance with [section 13 of the Judiciary and Courts \(Scotland\) Act 2008](#).

6. THE PROCESS

You must complete an online application. Applications will be assessed by the panel on a name-blind basis against the required criteria. You will then be notified whether or not you have been shortlisted for interview.

Final decisions on recommendations to the Scottish Government are made by JABS in line with statutory requirements. Recommendations are made solely on the basis of merit provided JABS is satisfied about the good character and conduct of applicants.

You can view the whole assessment process, including guidance, hints and tips, on [‘The Process’](#) page on the JABS website.

7. ONLINE APPLICATION

On the first occasion you apply online for judicial office where the process involves JABS, you will be required to register on the GetGo portal via the JABS website. The email registered will become the default email contact for the recruitment process. If you have any difficulties, please contact the Business Management Unit (BMU) on 0131 244 3131 or email us directly on mailbox@jabs.gov.scot.

When you submit your application, you will receive an acknowledgement by email. You should contact us if you have **not** received an acknowledgement within 24 hours of submitting your application.

Please note the application system will not spell or grammar check your submission. Please take care to check that there are no typing, spelling or grammatical errors.

Evidence will be taken into account by the panel from across the entire application when assessing your personal and judicial characteristics. For example, the legal written work submitted with the application will provide evidence for the Communicating Effectively criterion.

Applications need to be submitted by 12 noon on the closing date of Monday 28 September 2026. Applications received after this will not be accepted.

8. COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

The online system is designed to be intuitive and includes instructions for completion within the form. You should also review the [Application Section](#) of our website before completing the form. There are some areas in the application form that require instruction and these are detailed below:

8.1 Personal Information

It is mandatory to include your first name and surname in your application. It is optional to include 'Any Other Surnames' by which you are known, but this may be needed to correctly identify you for the process of eligibility, consultation and disclosure. If you have a middle name, it is mandatory to include this for the purposes of obtaining a Royal Warrant, should you be recommended for appointment. If you do not have a middle name, please add 'N/A'. Applicant names and personal information will not be shared with the panel for shortlisting purposes but will be shared with the panel if you are invited to interview.

There is a mandatory retirement age of 75 for judicial office holders, as defined in Section 16 of the [Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993](#). It is therefore mandatory to include your date of birth for eligibility purposes. Applicants' dates of birth will not be shared with the panel.

A preliminary assessment of each application is carried out by the Business Management Unit of JABS (BMU) in relation to eligibility and whether applicants meet the age requirement. Should a concern arise, the BMU will send anonymised information to the panel to make a decision on the matter.

8.2 Nationality

It is mandatory to include your nationality. Applicants should be aware that the panel will consider applications from applicants who are not citizens of the British Commonwealth. However, if recommended, the Scottish Ministers may be unable to appoint such an applicant. Applicant nationality will not be shared with the panel.

8.3 Address and Contact Information

Applications are automatically linked to the email address used to create your GetGot account. If you wish to use a different email address for future correspondence, you may either create a new GetGot account using your preferred email address or email mailbox@jabs.gov.scot to request an update. Please note that any request to change your correspondence email must be sent from the original email address associated with your

GetGot account. Your address and contact information will not be shared with the panel at any point.

8.4 Role Choices

You should also indicate which sheriffdom you are applying for or whether you would like to be considered for both roles.

8.5 Statutory Eligibility

You must confirm that you have read the statutory eligibility criteria in this Guidance Note (Section 3). You should also give a brief description of how you meet the statutory eligibility criteria - you do not need to use the full 300 words.

8.6 Relevant Memberships in Scotland

In this section you are asked to confirm if you are a member of the Law Society of Scotland or the Faculty of Advocates. Please ensure the dates you provide are consistent with the relevant organisation's membership records on their website.

[Law Society of Scotland](#) [Faculty of Advocates](#)

You will also be asked to confirm if you currently hold a judicial office.

8.7 Education, Professional Qualifications and Training

Please give any details of your degree(s), as well as any other relevant qualifications or training completed, such as devilling.

8.8 Career History

The system only allows you to enter one current role. We are aware that you may have more than one. If that is the case, you should enter what you consider to be your main role in the 'Current Job' section. Any other current role(s) should be entered in the 'Previous Job' section. Where you are asked to add in your leaving date, in the box 'Dates To' enter the date that you submit your application.

If you are self-employed or a judicial office holder, use the 'Employer Name' field to state this.

If relevant, please include information on any breaks in employment. This is not mandatory.

8.9 Tribunal and Other Judicial Appointments

Please give details of any judicial appointments, including courts and tribunals, which you hold or have held, including dates (starting with the most recent) that are not included elsewhere in the application. Please include a brief description (no more than 50 words) of work undertaken in these roles. Appointment to the Parole Board for Scotland or as a Justice of the Peace should also be noted here.

8.10 Membership of Specialist Professional Organisations

Please give details of any specialist professional organisation of which you are a member, if relevant.

8.11 Any Other Relevant Experience and Membership of Organisations

Please provide any other experience, including memberships of organisations, which is relevant to your suitability for judicial office, and not referred to elsewhere in your application.

8.12 Personal Statement

This section of your application is your opportunity to demonstrate how your skills, experience and personal qualities align with the requirements of the role of Sheriff Principal.

Your response should be no more than 1200 words.

Please explain:

- Why do you consider yourself ready and suitable for appointment to this judicial office, as outlined in the Sheriff Principal role profile, and why have you chosen to apply for the role at this stage in your career?
- What do you see as the key challenges of the Sheriff Principal role, and how will your experience prepare you to address them effectively?
- Have you identified any gaps in your experience, knowledge or skills in relation to the Sheriff Principal role? If so, what steps have you taken, or do you intend to take, to develop in these areas?

8.13 Experience in Areas of Law

The purpose of this section is to let the panel see the breadth and depth of your experience in certain areas of law. This may include your experience in practice or from any judicial role held.

There is a limit of **300 words** for each section. This is your opportunity to highlight the strengths of your legal experience and knowledge.

Your response should include such things as:

- Timescale – when you were involved in each area of work
- An indication of the volumes and range within each category
- Please include reference to significant published cases, transactions, advice or opinions, preferably recent

It is not expected that you will have experience in all areas of law noted below.

Civil

Family

Public Law

Commercial

Private Law (e.g., property, taxation, trusts & succession, insolvency)

Personal Injury

Other (please detail)

Criminal

Summary Criminal – including appeals

Solemn Criminal – including appeals

8.14 Self-Assessment – Legal (Criterion 1)

In this section you are required to provide evidence, including by reference to examples, which demonstrates Criterion 1, Knowledge, Interpretation and Application of the Law.

Your self-assessment should provide evidence, including through specific examples and descriptions, which demonstrates depth of knowledge, competence and experience in your area(s) of legal practice. It should also include example(s) which illustrate an ability to acquire and apply new areas of legal knowledge in depth and demonstrate your ability to work effectively in areas of the law that may arise in the course of the work of a Sheriff Principal.

You should provide evidence of your ability to analyse, interpret and apply the law in a manner which would be appropriate for a person holding the office of Sheriff Principal, including the requirements of the Sheriff Appeal Court, which can deal with complex and novel matters of legal interpretation. The examples that you choose should ideally be recent and clearly demonstrate the legal competence criterion.

There may be occasions when the use of bullet points in an application can be helpful. However, it is important that in your response you convey the context and nuance of the example provided and substantial use of bullet points may not achieve this. In addition, both the application form and the legal written work submitted are used to provide evidence of written communication skills and excessive use of bullet points may limit the value of this evidence.

You may refer to reported and unreported decisions of the courts or tribunals in which you have been involved and significant pieces of legal work or other relevant work in the law for which you have been personally responsible.

There is a limit of **1500 words** for this section.

Legal Written Work

The purpose of the legal written work is to provide additional evidence of your legal skills and abilities, in particular your ability to analyse and interpret law. By providing the panel with relevant written work, you are giving them an insight into your legal skills. It will also provide evidence of your written communication skills.

You are required to provide three examples of your written work. Your written work should ideally be recent and should clearly demonstrate the legal competence criterion.

Please consider your selection carefully. Not all legal documents are best suited to demonstrate this criterion. Make sure your examples are concise and focused, but still demonstrate appropriate complexity. When selecting written work, you should bear in mind the nature of the role of Sheriff Principal.

Examples of written work may include:

- advice given to clients in the form of letters or memos
- opinions or notes
- written submissions or other written legal arguments
- reports
- judgments
- stated cases
- decisions letters given in a judicial, tribunal or similar capacity
- written advice given internally in a firm or other institutional environment
- any other written explanation of the law, and how that applies in the circumstances of a particular case or other factual situation
- an article on an area of law authored by you

The panel requires three examples. Each example can be up to 1500 words and should not exceed this amount. If the piece of written work you submit is shorter than 1500 words, the panel will consider the whole document.

If you submit an example that is longer than 1500 words, you must identify the passage(s) of up to 1500 words within that piece of written work which best demonstrates Criterion 1 for assessment by the panel. If you have not clearly identified the passage(s) to be considered, the members of the panel will restrict their assessment to the first 1500 words of that piece of written work.

It is important that your legal work is clearly laid out and accessible to the panel. When a document longer than the allowed word limit is submitted, identification of the selected passages should be clearly set out and not create a barrier to overall understanding of the document. Candidates are reminded that written communication forms part of the assessment criteria and the written work provided is used as evidence by the panel.

Where appropriate, you should delete or redact references to the identity of clients or others in your examples for reasons of confidentiality and sensitivity. You should also redact your own name from the document as the panel members will not see your name on the application or supporting documents when assessing this. The panel will treat your examples as confidential.

Legal Written Work Summary

You should provide any necessary context to your written examples and explain briefly (in no more than 300 words per example) how and why each example demonstrates your skills and competence relating to Criterion 1 – Knowledge, Interpretation and Application of the law – in particular interpretation and analysis of the law.

If relevant, you should also use this section to identify the passage(s) of your work that you wish the panel to consider (whether by highlighting parts of the document, reference to paragraph numbers or by another means).

How To Upload Your Legal Written Work

Your written work examples must be uploaded in one PDF document.

To convert a Microsoft Word Document to PDF format you must:

Open the Microsoft document that you would like to convert to PDF.

Click 'File', then click 'Save As'

Click the 'File Format/ Save as type'

Select 'PDF' on the drop down list.

Click 'Export/ Save'. This will save your document as a PDF. However, you will still have the original Word document.

8.15 Self-Assessment – Personal and Judicial Qualities

In this section, you are asked to provide evidence, including specific examples, demonstrating how you meet the personal and judicial qualities set out in Criteria 2-7, addressing each of the sub-criteria.

Please ensure that your response addresses **all of the points** listed under each criterion.

Your response to criteria 1- 6 can be up to **750 words** and for criterion 7 can be up to **650 words**.

When providing examples, you may find it helpful to structure your response as follows:

- Briefly outline the situation or context
- Explain what you were seeking to achieve
- Describe the action you took, including your specific role and contribution, what you did, how you did it and why
- Explain the outcome or result, including any learning or reflection arising from the experience

There may be occasions when the use of bullet points in an application can be helpful. However, it is important that in your response you convey the context and nuance of the example provided and substantial use of bullet points may not achieve this. In addition, the application form as well as the legal written work submitted are used to provide evidence of written communication skills and excessive use of bullet points may limit the value of this evidence.

Do not use hyperlinks. You should also avoid relying on lists of responsibilities, generalised descriptions, aspirational statements, or references solely to positions held. The focus should be on specific examples or descriptions that demonstrate how you meet the criterion.

8.16 Reasonable Adjustments

We are committed to making reasonable adjustments to support your participation in the recruitment process fairly.

A reasonable adjustment is a change that should be made, where possible, to remove or reduce any disadvantage associated with a person's disability.

You can submit a reasonable adjustment request anytime in the process by emailing us at: mailbox@jabs.gov.scot.

Please note that it may not be possible to meet all reasonable adjustments requests, especially if they are made at short notice. Please ensure that, wherever possible, you highlight your individual needs at the earliest opportunity.

We consider requests individually. The information you provide is not used in the selection process.

If you require larger font size for the Guidance Note, please contact the BMU. You are able to increase font size of the application form on GetGot.

8.17 Conflicts of Interest

You are required to note family, personal or professional relationships with any JABS Board member (whether part of the panel for this competition or not) as well as Lay and Legal Appointment Advisers. The panel members for this competition are indicated with an asterisk (*).

JABS Board Members:

Mr Lindsay Montgomery CBE, Chairing Member *

Mr Jonathan Barne, KC *

Mr Paul Cackette, CBE

Mrs Wilma Canning

Chamber President May Dunsmuir, Health and Education Chamber

Sheriff Farquharson, KC

Mr Paul Gray *

The Hon. Lady Shona Haldane, KC *

Ms Denise Loney

Ms Emma Marriott

Dr Fiona McLean *

Mr Gareth Morgan, QPM

Mr Peter Murray

The Hon. Lord Robert Weir, KC

Sheriff Principal Nigel Ross

Sheriff Principal Kate Dowdalls, KC*

Legal and Lay Appointment Advisers:

Mrs Gillian Mawdsley, Legal Appointment Adviser

Dr Geoff Garner Lay Appointment Adviser

Mr Peter McGrath, Lay Appointment Adviser

Ms Marieke Dwarshuis, Lay Appointment Adviser

Mrs Deirdre Fulton, Lay Appointment Adviser

You should read the [JABS policy on conflicts of interest](#) which is on our website. The conflict test is whether any particular relationship might reasonably create a perception by others that you might be treated differently from other applicants.

Infrequent social interaction or simple contact with a JABS Board member or others specified above in a professional context, such as having appeared before the JABS Board member in a court or tribunal, sitting in the same court, or having involvement in the same cases will not usually constitute a professional relationship without further involvement, and does not need to be declared. However, frequent contact of this nature may constitute a professional relationship and should be declared.

8.18 Good Character and Conduct

Applicants are asked to respond to a number of questions relating to their personal and professional life, relating to character and conduct. This includes the need to disclose any

unspent criminal convictions as well as any other issues which may call into question an individual's suitability for judicial office. Applicants must also disclose spent convictions unless those spent convictions are protected from disclosure by virtue of the [Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 \(Exclusions and Exceptions\) \(Scotland\) Order 2013](#).

8.19 Judicial Ethics

The Judicial Office for Scotland has published guidance to Judicial Office Holders on Judicial Ethics in Scotland. At the application stage you are required to confirm that you can comply with this guidance, which is available online at the [Judicial Office website](#). If invited to interview, you will be asked some questions on your ability and willingness to adhere to requirements relating to the Guidance to Judicial Office Holders on Judicial Ethics in Scotland.

8.20 Diversity Questions

The Board has a duty under Section 14 of the Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Act 2008 to have regard to the need to encourage diversity in the range of individuals available for selection for judicial appointments. To help us do this, we ask applicants to provide information at the application stage allow us to create aggregated diversity data. We use this data to let us better understand the diversity of the applicant pool.

The questions are deliberately wide-ranging since we consider it important to cover all the areas relevant to Section 14 considerations.

This questionnaire will be separated from your application form. The panel and the wider Board will not have access to this form. The purpose of this is to provide data for recruitment rounds. The information contained in it will not be held or otherwise processed in a manner which would allow the Board or panel members to identify you or otherwise link that information to you. The information is held by the Business Management Unit and used to produce diversity reports for each competition, which show overall summaries and do not identify any individual.

The declaration on the application form does not relate to information provided in the diversity monitoring form. JABS decisions on making recommendations for appointment are made solely on merit and matters to do with diversity cannot be taken into account.

9. DISCLOSURE SCOTLAND

We are required to carry out a Level 2 Disclosure Scotland check as part of the appointment process.

Should you be successful in being invited to interview, a link to the online disclosure application form and guidance will be sent to you with your outcome decision letter. You will be required to pay the cost of the check, which is £25.

Only those with a satisfactory disclosure check will be recommended for appointment.

10. CONSULTATIONS

We will undertake for consultations relating to applicants who are invited to interview. These consultations will be sought from (amongst others):

- The Lord President
- Sheriffs Principal
- The Crown Agent
- Scottish Legal Complaints Commission
- Professional Bodies (such as the Faculty of Advocates and the Law Society etc)
- The Scottish Legal Aid Board

If you are invited to interview, you will be given the opportunity to address any relevant queries or concerns arising from the [consultation](#) process.

11. SOCIAL MEDIA CHECKS

Candidates who are invited to interview will be subject to social and general media background checks. These will be conducted by an external party contracted by JABS, Giant Screening. This will involve personal information including your name, email address(es) associated with your social media accounts, date of birth, national insurance number and address details for the preceding five years being provided to Giant Screening for this purpose only. Additional information will be provided to relevant candidates after shortlisting.

12. FEEDBACK

We aim to offer feedback to those candidates who request it. We are unable to offer a timescale for this feedback.

The Business Management Unit will send you a survey to be completed following the application and interview stages.

These surveys provide you with an opportunity to comment on your experience of the JABS recruitment process, which provide valuable feedback to JABS to help us review and improve our processes and we encourage all candidates to complete them.

The surveys are anonymous and individual responses will not be seen by the board.

13. COMPETITION SCHEDULE

We anticipate following the key milestone dates as detailed below:

Date	Milestone
31 Aug 2026	Application window opens
28 Sep 2026 – NOON	Application window closes
Oct – Nov	Shortlisting period
w/c 7 Dec & w/c 14 Dec	Interview period
Jan 2027	Final decision meeting
Early 2027	Interview outcome letters issued and recommendation report sent to the Scottish Government

14. COMPLAINTS

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the handling of your application, you should refer to the [Complaints Handling Procedure](#) on our website.

15. FURTHER SUPPORT

Business Management Unit staff are available to answer queries on the process, please email any questions to mailbox@jabs.gov.scot.