

Sheriff Judiciary of Scotland



Contents

- A foreword from the Lord President
- The Sheriffdoms
- Role Outline:
 - Overview
 - Nature of the Work
 - Induction and Support
- Remuneration
- 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 in Scotland, a historic and respected judicial office at the heart of the justice system. 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

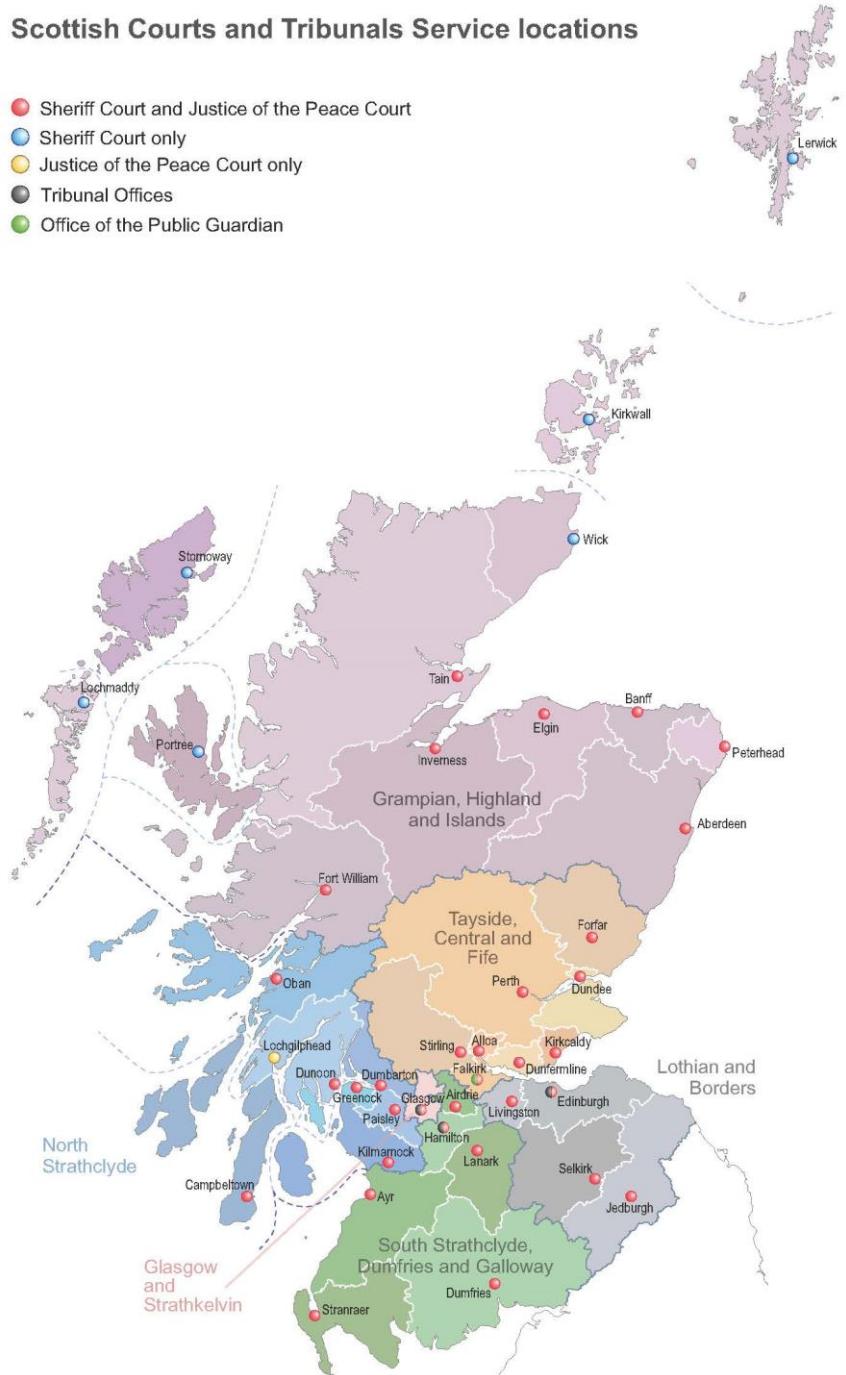
There are six Sheriffdoms in Scotland.

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." The Sheriff 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

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service locations

- Sheriff Court and Justice of the Peace Court
- Sheriff Court only
- Justice of the Peace Court only
- Tribunal Offices
- Office of the Public Guardian



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 and 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 judicial colleagues and the Sheriff Principal who regularly share their knowledge, experience and insights with their less experienced counterparts.



Training at the Judicial Institute

Remuneration

Sheriffs receive an attractive remuneration package. This comprises a base salary and competitive pension arrangements.

A sheriff is paid £173,854 per annum.

A new Judicial Pension Scheme was introduced for all sheriffs in April 2022. Details of the 2022 scheme can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/judicial-pension-scheme-2022-guide.

The salary, terms and conditions of a sheriff's tenure is determined by the Senior Salaries Review Board (SSRB). As at the date of this recruitment notice, the SSRB is undertaking a major review of judicial salaries. Further changes to these salary arrangements may arise from that review.

- The mandatory retirement age for Judicial Office Holders is 75.

A message from Sheriff Sara Matheson

“ I did a very general traineeship in a large high street legal aid firm. I particularly enjoyed court work and the firm had a large number of agency instructions in civil matters. As time went on I began to specialise in child and family law work. I did a great deal of children’s referral work. In 2007 I had my first child and was persuaded to go into a large corporate firm to found their family law department in their Glasgow office. It was a very different environment. Time recording, targets and business development were new concepts for me. High value divorce work and a move away from legal aid to private feeing gave me another perspective. In 2010 I had another child and was kept very busy.

In 2015 an advert appeared for the new office of summary sheriff. At first blush I didn’t see myself as a likely candidate. I had been to comprehensive school. I was the first lawyer in my family. I had two relatively young children with all the demands that brought, and worked in a small firm. Although the summary sheriff was to have jurisdiction for family law work and children’s referral and adoption work I imagined the bulk of the work would be summary crime and thus my relatively low exposure to recent criminal work would surely stand against me? However, I thought about things further and realised that I could probably demonstrate competence in getting to know new areas of law. I had been appointed as a Convenor to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal for Scotland in 2007 and much of the substantive law there had been new to me. I knew I would enjoy working in court every day so I decided to apply.

The application process was a difficult one, particularly as I hadn’t made a formal job application since my traineeship. It required a different way of thinking, which I found challenging to tune into. The examples now provided on the JABS website would have been very helpful, but they didn’t exist then. Similarly I had no idea what to expect from the interview and it was a demanding 90 minutes or so. Again, things like the information evenings now run by JABS would have been a great help. I was surprised to be successful and to be offered a post as a Summary Sheriff in Airdrie.

After taking up the post I realised how much I enjoyed the job. Every day was different and colleagues were helpful and inspiring.

I went through the JABS process again in 2019 when I was appointed as a sheriff in Inverness. It was less taxing because of my familiarity with the process. I would encourage those who may not think they fit the typical profile, particularly those who come from a small firm, to apply. Your day to day firm management, your time-management, your communication and your broad legal knowledge brings skills that are demonstrable and would translate well to the bench.

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A message from Sheriff Liam Murphy

“ After my traineeship in local government I worked in private practice principally as a criminal legal assistant for 18 months before being appointed as a Procurator Fiscal Depute at Hamilton. As a young and inexperienced depute I drew support and encouragement from a talented team of prosecutors as I developed my legal and advocacy skills and gained a real love for court work in both summary and solemn crime. At this stage in my career I did not think judicial office was a realistic aspiration for a young Dundee graduate from a Lanarkshire working class background who specialised in the prosecution of crime.

I remained a prosecutor for 20 years and was fortunate that I was appointed to several interesting and challenging roles. These appointments inevitably took me away from appearing in court on a regular basis but did give me the opportunity to continue developing other skills such as managing work efficiently, addressing competing priorities, working with and communicating with internal and external colleagues and becoming an Advocacy trainer. When I started to think seriously about a judicial career I recognised that these were transferable skills essential for a judicial office holder.

I began to think about judicial office several years before I felt ready to apply. I obtained information on the roles and the qualities required from the website of the Judicial Appointments Board (JABS). From this I would periodically undertake critical self assessments of myself to identify what I perceived to be obstacles to me presenting as a credible candidate. I also attended a number of awareness raising events organised by JABS and took on board advice given by board members which I felt was pertinent to me as a career prosecutor particularly in relation to areas of the law in which I had no experience.

I have been involved in the JABS process on three occasions. In 2018 I was appointed as a floating summary sheriff in South Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway and was appointed Sheriff based at Hamilton in 2021.

Given the impact decisions of judicial office holders have on society I anticipated that the process would be extremely challenging. I have found that to be the case. On each occasion, however, I have found the process to be fair, transparent and respectful to the candidate. For me the planning and the application process required a significant time commitment. It required time being set aside to plan what steps I had to take to become a judicial office holder and consequently a credible candidate. It also required time to identify relevant experiences to demonstrate my skills and qualities, time to complete application forms and significant time preparing for the thorough interview process.

My first application was unsuccessful and I was not invited for interview. I received feedback which provided a general explanation of the main deficiencies from those who applied and were unsuccessful. On reflection, a critical review of my application through the lens of this feedback provided valuable information on deficiencies in my application which highlighted that I had not provided the requisite evidence to meet the criteria. I used this in my subsequent successful applications.

I feel very fortunate and privileged to be appointed to judicial office. I have found my colleagues to be extremely supportive and life on the bench to be extremely interesting and challenging. It has allowed me to return to court work and to challenge myself in areas of the law which were unfamiliar to me. I have no hesitation in recommending judicial office to legal colleagues from all backgrounds and experience.”

Essential Requirements

Successful candidates will be required to demonstrate:

- 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 sheriffs and 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.
- It would be desirable to have experience of appearing in the sheriff court.

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.

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 holistic 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
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