Judicial Conduct
Investigations Office

Annual Report

2025–26

Contents

Introduction by the Head of JCIO 1
Part 1: The judicial disciplinary system 3
Part 2: Performance, staffing, and budget 5
Part 3: Breakdown of complaints received 8
Part 4: Complaints rejected or dismissed 10
Part 5: Complaints upheld 12
Part 6: The Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman 15

Introduction by the Head of JCIO

I am pleased to introduce the 2025–26 Annual Report of the independent Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO). As the statutory body supporting the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice in their joint responsibility for judicial discipline, the JCIO plays a vital role in maintaining public confidence in the independence, integrity and accountability of the judiciary.

The judicial disciplinary system ensures that allegations of misconduct are dealt with efficiently, fairly and proportionately, while preserving the independence and good standing of the judiciary.

The JCIO's role in the judicial disciplinary system involves considering complaints of misconduct against salaried and fee-paid courts and tribunal judges, non-legal tribunal members, and coroners. Misconduct means a breach of the high standards of personal conduct expected of judicial office-holders that is serious enough to require formal disciplinary action. Part 1 of this report outlines how the disciplinary system operates and the JCIO's role within it.

Part 2 summarises the JCIO's performance during the reporting year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. In 2025–26, we received 3,910 complaints, compared to 3,279 in 2024–25, an increase of approximately 19%. Despite this increased workload, the JCIO's performance improved on 2024–25 against four of its five performance targets.

The JCIO concluded 3,892 complaints in 2025–26, more than in any year since it was established in 2013. We met or exceeded the target for assessing complaints and informing complainants whether a complaint could be accepted for further investigation within 15 working days of receipt in 3,391 cases. This equates to 97% of cases, against a target rate of 90%. We also met our target of providing parties to ongoing investigations with monthly updates in 95% of cases. The small proportion of cases in which targets were not met were mainly more complex cases affected by factors often outside our direct control, such as waiting to receive audio recordings of court hearings.

Part 3 provides further information about the complaints received by the JCIO in 2025–26. A significant and persistent challenge is that a substantial proportion of complaints fall outside our investigatory remit, for example because they concern the substance of judges' decisions, which can only be challenged through the courts, or because they contain generalised allegations unsupported by relevant details.

Part 4 covers complaints rejected or dismissed by the JCIO. In 2025–26, 90% of all complaints received by the JCIO were rejected following assessment for these sorts of reasons. A further approximately 6% of complaints were accepted for further consideration but later dismissed because they did not meet the criteria for progression to the next stage of the investigation process.

Part 5 sets out information about complaints that resulted in disciplinary action. The Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice (or her senior judicial delegate) issued 95 disciplinary sanctions for misconduct in 2025–26, compared to 89 in 2024–25. As in previous years, with approximately 25,000 judges, magistrates, coroners and tribunal members in England and Wales, misconduct remains rare.

Part 6 covers the independent Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman, who considers complaints about the JCIO's handling of cases. I am pleased to report that, in common with earlier years, complaints upheld or partially upheld by the Ombudsman represented a very small proportion of our overall caseload.

Looking ahead, our priorities for 2026–27 remain focused on handling complaints efficiently, continuing to improve performance, and delivering a high-quality service. A key part of this will be the relaunch of our website, with a more modern look and a more user-friendly interface, alongside a comprehensive review of guidance for complainants, aimed at improving understanding of the JCIO's statutory remit and reducing the considerable resource expended on complaints that fall outside it. We also remain committed to promoting transparency and increasing awareness of our work, and we welcome suggestions from readers of this publication on how we might do so. Please send any suggestions to: general.enquiries@judicialconduct.gov.uk.

Finally, I would like to thank the JCIO team for their dedication and professionalism during a challenging year in which their workload has continued to increase. I also wish to acknowledge the vital contributions of nominated judges, investigating judges, regional conduct advisory committee secretaries, and their teams, nominated committee members, and the judicial and lay members of disciplinary panels. Their work helps to ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly, thoroughly and effectively, and continues to uphold the integrity of the disciplinary process.

Simon Parsons
Head of JCIO

Part 1: The judicial disciplinary system

The role of the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice

Under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice share joint responsibility for judicial discipline in England and Wales.

Standards of conduct

Judicial office-holders are expected to uphold the standards set out in the *Guide to Judicial Conduct*, first published in 2003. The Guide is based on three core principles: independence, impartiality and integrity, and is regularly updated to reflect changes in judicial and public life.

Judicial independence

Judicial independence is a cornerstone of our democracy. It ensures that judges can act impartially and without external influence, including from government. The disciplinary system addresses personal misconduct only; it does not interfere with judicial decisions, which can only be challenged through the courts.

Misconduct

Misconduct refers to breaches of expected standards of conduct that are serious enough to warrant formal disciplinary action. Examples include:

- Bullying or harassment.
- Discriminatory language.
- Aggressive or rude behaviour.
- Misuse of judicial status.
- Misuse of social media.
- Failure to report involvement in legal proceedings.
- Unreasonable delay in issuing judgments.

Misconduct is categorised into three levels to clarify the link between behaviour and sanction:

- Misconduct.
- Serious misconduct.
- Gross misconduct.

The power to take disciplinary action

Disciplinary powers are jointly held by the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice. Sanctions ranging from formal advice to reprimand are issued by the Lady Chief Justice with the Lord Chancellor's agreement. The Lord Chancellor has the authority to remove an office-holder for misconduct with the agreement of the Lady Chief Justice. The exception is judges of the High Court and above, who can only be removed by the Monarch following an address to both Houses of Parliament.

In cases involving misconduct by magistrates, the Lady Chief Justice has delegated her disciplinary powers up to the level of issuing a reprimand to a High Court judge.

Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO)

The JCIO's role is defined in *The Judicial Discipline (Prescribed Procedures) Regulations 2023* and *The Judicial Conduct Rules 2023* ("the 2023 Rules"). While the JCIO can reject or dismiss complaints that do not meet the statutory criteria and advise decision makers on potential sanctions, it does not have the power to make findings of misconduct or take disciplinary action.

For complaints that meet the criteria for investigation, the JCIO may review hearing recordings, seek input from third parties, and request comments from the office-holder concerned. Before any disciplinary action is taken, the office-holder must be given the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

Judicial and lay involvement in the disciplinary process

Independent judicial involvement is central to the disciplinary system. Nominated judges, who must be at least equivalent in rank to the office-holder concerned, investigating judges, who must be senior in rank to the office-holder concerned, and judicially chaired disciplinary panels, which consider some of the most serious cases, are responsible for making findings of misconduct and recommending sanctions to the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice. Lay people also make an important contribution as disciplinary panel members and nominated committee members, who consider complaints about magistrates.

Complaints about magistrates

Complaints about magistrates are considered first by a regional conduct advisory committee and are referred to the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice via the JCIO if a finding of misconduct is made.

Summary process

This process is used for cases where removal from office is recommended without the need for further investigation—such as serious criminal convictions or persistent failure to meet mandatory minimum sitting requirements specified by the Lord Chancellor.

Expedited process

This is an opt-in route for straightforward cases where facts are undisputed, and the likely sanction is at the lower end of severity (formal advice or formal warning). If agreed by the office-holder, the JCIO refers the case directly to the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice for a decision.

Final decision

Following consideration by the relevant authority, the JCIO refers the case to the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice. Once a decision is made, parties are notified in writing. Where a sanction is imposed, a statement is published on the JCIO website to promote transparency.

Part 2: Performance, staffing, and budget

The JCIO uses a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor its effectiveness and support the delivery of a high-quality service. The table further below shows our performance against our KPIs for complaints concluded during the 2025–26 reporting year alongside the same information for the previous reporting year.

Overall, the JCIO performed strongly against its key performance indicators during 2025–26, despite receiving almost 20% more complaints than in the previous reporting year and concluding more complaints than at any point since its establishment. Performance against all but one of the KPIs (KPI 4) improved on the previous reporting year. The JCIO exceeded its target for the initial assessment of complaints and met its target for providing regular updates to parties during ongoing investigations. These results reflect the team's ability to maintain a timely service while managing a significant increase in workload.

The areas in which performance fell below target were concentrated in a relatively small number of more complex cases. Of 31 complaints in which the target for concluding investigations and dismissing complaints following JCIO enquiries was not met, around a third were affected by delays in obtaining audio recordings of court or tribunal proceedings. The remaining cases principally involved either the complexity of the issues requiring investigation or other case-specific factors.

Performance against the targets for referral to, or dismissal by, a nominated judge, and for referral to the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice, was affected by similar factors. Cases completed outside the target timescales were generally more complex, required additional work within the JCIO, or were affected by delays in obtaining hearing recordings, vacancies, rising workload or the time required to complete internal clearance before submissions could be finalised.

Although these factors affected performance in a relatively small number of cases, the figures demonstrate that the substantial majority of complaints were progressed within target timescales, notwithstanding the increasing volume of work and the often-complex nature of the cases being considered.

We will continue to identify and implement improvements in areas where performance remains below target.

Key Performance Indicator	Complaints concluded	Completion target	2025–26 performance	2024–25 performance
Notify complainants that their complaint does not meet the criteria for acceptance by the JCIO within 15 working days of receipt	3,494	90%	97%	93%
Conclude complaints accepted for further consideration and then	177	90%	83%	74%

Key Performance Indicator	Complaints concluded	Completion target	2025–26 performance	2024–25 performance
dismissed following enquiries by the JCIO within 12 weeks of receipt				
Conclude complaints which are dismissed by a nominated judge or refer complaints in which a nominated judge recommends a disciplinary sanction to the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice (or her senior judicial delegate) for a decision within 26 weeks of receipt	45	90%	80%	67%
Refer complaints in which a conduct advisory committee has recommended a disciplinary sanction for misconduct by a magistrate to the Lord Chancellor and Lady Chief Justice for decision within 8 weeks of receipt	88	90%	69%	72%
Provide monthly updates to parties in ongoing investigations	2,371	95%	95%	93%

It should be noted that the completion figures do not tally with the total number of complaints received during the reporting year (3,910) because the KPIs measure different stages of the complaints process, and some complaints were still under consideration at the start or end of the reporting year.

Staffing

The JCIO has a staff complement of 20 civil servants, who are contractually employees of the Ministry of Justice. This staff complement is composed of the following roles and grades:

- One Head of JCIO (Grade 6).
- One Head of Casework (Grade 7).
- Two Senior Casework Managers (Senior Executive Officer).
- Four Senior Caseworkers (Higher Executive Officer).
- Twelve Caseworkers (Executive Officer) (two of whom also provide business support functions to the team).

Staff are recruited to the JCIO through the standard Civil Service recruitment process. Due to the sensitive nature of our work, all JCIO staff must hold CTC (Counter Terrorism Check) security

clearance. Our staff are also subject to Ministry of Justice terms and conditions of appointment and are required to adhere to the Civil Service Code.

Budget

The JCIO's budget for 2025–26 was £28,000. This does not include staffing or legal costs, which form part of the central Judicial Office budget. The JCIO adheres to the same financial governance requirements and associated process as the Judicial Office.

Part 3: Breakdown of complaints received

Complaints received by the JCIO are categorised by subject matter. The table below brings together all complaint categories used during 2025–26 with the number and proportion of complaints recorded in each category. Categories in which no complaints were received are included for completeness.

Category	Receipts	% of receipts
Bankruptcy	0	0%
Breach of guidelines about contact with the media	4	<1%
Bullying and/or harassment	47	1%
Conduct liable to call into question judicial impartiality	40	1%
Conviction for other types of offence (or acceptance of a caution in some circumstances)	3	<1%
Delay, without a reasonable excuse, in issuing a decision or approving a hearing transcript	257	7%
Dishonesty	9	<1%
Displaying anger or aggression	124	3%
Failure to engage with, or report a relevant matter to, a senior judicial officer	7	<1%
Failure to follow guidance about use of social media	30	1%
Failure, without a reasonable excuse, to meet sitting or training requirements	41	1%
Falling asleep in court	2	<1%
Improper handling of, or accessing of, sensitive information	5	<1%
Judicial decision/case management	2,526	65%
Misuse of judicial status	19	<1%
Motoring-related conviction	13	<1%
Other	494	13%
Rudeness	287	7%

Category	Receipts	% of receipts
Subject to serious criticism in a personal capacity in legal or professional disciplinary proceedings	2	<1%
Total	**3,910**	**100%**

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Part 4: Complaints rejected or dismissed

The JCIO is obliged to reject complaints which do not meet the criteria for acceptance set out in Rule 8 of the 2023 Rules. Those criteria require that complaints must:

(a) state the name of the person making the complaint;

(b) state the address or email address of the person making the complaint;

(c) contain an allegation of misconduct on the part of an identified or identifiable person holding an office, which is supported by relevant details as specified in guidance published by the JCIO from time to time; and

(d) state the date, or dates, that the alleged misconduct took place unless the JCIO decides that this is unnecessary taking into account all the circumstances of the complaint.

In 2025–26, the JCIO was obliged to reject 3,494 complaints following assessment because they did not meet one or more of the criteria above. This is despite detailed guidance on our website about the types of complaints we can and cannot accept and about the information we need from complainants.

Before a complaint is rejected, a caseworker must carefully assess it. Such complaints therefore take up a significant amount of staff time, even though they are not taken forward for further investigation.

The 2023 Rules require that complaints must be made to the JCIO within three months of the matter complained of. This time limit can be extended in exceptional circumstances. In 2025–26, the JCIO was obliged to reject 57 complaints because they were out of time and there were no exceptional reasons to extend the time limit.

A further 28 complaints were withdrawn by the complainant.

For complaints accepted for further consideration, the JCIO makes the inquiries necessary to establish the facts. These inquiries depend on the nature of the complaint. For example, as noted in Part 1, to consider complaints about misconduct in court, the JCIO will typically obtain the audio recording of the hearing and may obtain other evidence, such as third-party statements. Complainants are not required to provide a transcript of the proceedings. Following this process, the JCIO must decide whether to dismiss the complaint, or part of it, on one or more grounds set out in Rule 23 of the 2023 Rules, or progress it to the next stage of the investigatory process.

The table below provides a breakdown of the 246 complaints dismissed by the JCIO in 2025–26.

Reason for Dismissal	Number of Complaints Dismissed
The complaint was misconceived	134
The facts alleged in the complaint were obviously untrue	37
Even if the facts alleged in the complaint were true, they would not require a disciplinary sanction to be issued	26

Reason for Dismissal	Number of Complaints Dismissed
The complaint was about a judicial decision or case management and did not raise a question of misconduct	26
The complaint, for any other reason, did not relate to misconduct by a judicial office-holder	10
The complaint raised a matter which had already been dealt with under the JCIO process or otherwise, and did not present any significant new evidence	7
The complaint was about the private life or professional conduct in a non-judicial capacity of a judicial office-holder and raised no question of misconduct	3
The judicial office-holder no longer held office	2
The complaint was vexatious	1
Total	**246**

Part 5: Complaints upheld

A core principle of the judicial disciplinary system is that where misconduct by a judicial office-holder is established, a disciplinary sanction must be issued. The authority to issue sanctions lies solely with the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice (or a senior judicial delegate). In every case, the sanction must be agreed jointly.

As outlined in Part 1, the available sanctions are set out in legislation and, in ascending order of severity, are:

- Formal advice.
- Formal warning.
- Reprimand.
- Removal from office.

The sanction applied in any given case will depend primarily on the seriousness of the misconduct. Other relevant factors likely to be considered include:

- Whether the office-holder has accepted responsibility for their actions.
- Whether the conduct has harmed others or posed a risk to the reputation of the judiciary.
- Whether personal circumstances, such as ill-health, contributed to the behaviour.
- Precedents set in similar cases.
- Any previous disciplinary findings against the office-holder.

Even the least severe sanction represents a serious outcome for a judicial office-holder. All sanctions are published on the JCIO website and remain on the individual's record.

In 2025–26, 95 judicial office-holders were found to have committed misconduct, representing just 0.4% of the approximately 25,000 judges, magistrates, non-legal tribunal members and coroners in England and Wales.

The table below shows a breakdown of cases of misconduct by sanction and type of office:

Office	Formal advice	Formal warning	Reprimand	Removed	Total
Magistrates	25	14	9	15	63
Salaried and fee-paid courts judges	11	5	0	0	16
Tribunal judges and non-legal members	10	0	0	3	13
Coroners	1	2	0	0	3
Total	**47**	**21**	**9**	**18**	**95**

The proportion of cases of misconduct by magistrates reflects the fact that magistrates make up

approximately 60% of judicial office-holders in England and Wales.

Formal advice

During this reporting period, 47 cases of misconduct resulted in a sanction of formal advice. Examples of misconduct which resulted in this sanction included:

- Unreasonable delay in issuing a judgment or hearing transcript.
- Failure to report personal involvement in legal proceedings.
- Misuse of judicial status.
- Accumulation of points for driving offences.
- Comments that risked undermining confidence in judicial impartiality.
- Discourteous comments made to parties to proceedings, judicial colleagues and court staff.

Formal warning

During this reporting period, 21 cases of misconduct resulted in a sanction of formal warning. Examples of misconduct which resulted in this sanction included:

- Racially insensitive remarks.
- Rudeness towards court staff.
- Accumulation of points for driving offences.
- Failure, without a reasonable excuse, to meet mandatory minimum sitting requirements.
- Delay in issuing a judgment or hearing transcript.
- Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.
- Misuse of social media.
- Aggressive conduct towards a party to proceedings.

Reprimand

During this reporting period, 9 cases of misconduct resulted in a sanction of reprimand. Examples of misconduct which resulted in this sanction included:

- Failure, without a reasonable excuse, to meet mandatory minimum sitting requirements.
- Misuse of social media.
- Misuse of judicial status.
- Comments that risked undermining confidence in judicial impartiality.

Removal from office

During this reporting period, 18 cases of misconduct resulted in removal from office. Examples of misconduct which resulted in this sanction included:

- Failure, without a reasonable excuse, to meet mandatory minimum sitting requirements.
- Misuse of judicial status.
- Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information.

Part 6: The Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman

The role of the independent Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman (JACO) was established pursuant to the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, and the Ombudsman is appointed through a public appointments process. The JACO – currently Douglas Marshall – is supported by a team of civil servants.

The JACO's role in relation to the judicial disciplinary system is to provide an independent route for the consideration of complaints about the JCIO's handling of cases. Such complaints may be made by a complainant to the JCIO or by the office-holder who was subject to the complaint.

While the JACO can review the process by which the JCIO has reached a decision, he cannot review the decision itself. However, if the JACO decides that the JCIO has mishandled a complaint, for example by failing to follow the 2023 Rules correctly, he can direct us to take remedial steps. This may include setting aside a decision and reconsidering a complaint or part of a complaint. The JACO can also consider complaints about how Regional Conduct Advisory Committees – the bodies responsible for considering complaints about magistrates – have handled a complaint.

In 2025–26, the JACO received 613 complaints regarding the JCIO's handling of cases. The JACO upheld, or partially upheld, only 17 of those complaints. This equates to approximately 0.4% of the 3,910 complaints received by the JCIO during 2025–26.

The outcomes of the small proportion of complaints upheld by the JACO are used to inform guidance and training for JCIO staff and help us improve the service we provide. We may also make changes to policies and procedures as a result of learning from the JACO's decisions.

Further information is available on the JACO's website.