

Judicial and Legal Diversity Board – Website Minutes (21 May 2026)

Opening Remarks

- The Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) emphasised the need for urgency in accelerating progress on judicial diversity. He highlighted the symbolic importance of leadership, referencing his role as the first Black DPM/Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice as the first woman in her role.
- The Lady Chief Justice welcomed the renewed focus on this important work, stressing the need to refresh and reinvigorate diversity efforts across the professions and judiciary and build on previous initiatives.
- Both co-chairs reinforced the Board's role in driving faster, coordinated change across the system.
- The Board agreed to progress its work whilst respecting the constitutional and organisational responsibilities of its members.

Under-represented Groups - Employed Lawyers

- The Board identified declining representation of non-barrister appointees within the judiciary and prioritised work to better understand the potential barriers facing employed lawyers.
- A range of potential barriers were discussed - from the difficulty faced by employed lawyers in balancing applications and judicial sitting with their professional responsibilities; to concerns that recruitment methods may not fully reflect their strengths such as case management and leadership skills, to cultural barriers and differences by region, practice type, and role (e.g. in-house, CPS, government lawyers).

Under-represented Groups – black judges

- The Board examined representation of black judges which remains concentrated at lower levels with very limited presence in senior judicial roles.
- In discussion, the Board considered several issues – potential reasons for early-stage attrition in the recruitment process, candidate experience and the need for quality feedback, the importance of role models and targeted support. Members then spoke about specific progression challenges and how that varied by jurisdiction before considering the King's Counsel route which remains a key pathway to senior judicial roles and may require stronger support mechanisms.

Legal Education and Skills

- The Board discussed the future sustainability of the legal workforce, particularly in light of expected technological and demographic changes.
- The Board heard concerns about a potential mismatch between current educational pathways and the demands of the labour market and concerns this may have unequal impacts on disadvantaged groups.

- There was acknowledgement from some that legal training may not always be keeping pace with developments in legal tech and AI. The Board was reminded to keep in mind the experiences would vary by legal sector and region, with some seeing more acute recruitment pressures than others.
- The Board agreed that whilst an emphasis on entry ways into the legal sector were important, the role of continual professional development and lifelong learning was as important.
- Members agreed there was a need for more consistent data across qualification routes and career progression pathways.

Summary

The Board agreed a programme of work to:

- Examine and remove barriers for employed lawyers,
- Address under-representation of black judges, and
- Strengthen legal education pathways to support future diversity and workforce needs.

These strands will be progressed through dedicated task and finish groups, with further proposals and updates going to the Board later in 2026.