

Annual Report 2025–2026

Judicial Appointments & Conduct Ombudsman
Annual Report 2025–2026

**Presented to Parliament pursuant to Paragraph 15(4) of Schedule 13
of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005**



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ISBN 978-1-5286-6542-1

E03588186 07/26

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum.

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller
of His Majesty's Stationery Office.

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The Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman

The Ombudsman

Mr Douglas Marshall is the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman (JACO). He was selected through an open competition and appointed in March 2021 by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, on the Lord Chancellor's recommendation. He was reappointed for a further five-year term with effect from 1 March 2026.

The Ombudsman's Role

The JACO is independent of Government, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and the Judiciary. The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 outlines the JACO's role and power. This allows him to consider the following types of complaint.

Complaints about the Judicial Conduct Investigations process

The JACO can:

- Review complaints about how an Investigating Body (such as the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office, a Magistrates' Advisory Committee, or a Tribunal President) handled complaints about a judicial office holder's personal conduct. These concerns can be raised by complainants or judicial office holders involved in the investigation. Typically, the JACO requires complainants to have finished their dealings with the Investigating Body before considering a complaint.
- Determine if the Investigating Body failed to follow the processes outlined in the Judicial Discipline (Prescribed Procedures) Regulations 2023¹, or if there is other maladministration².
- Recommend various forms of redress, including:
 - Setting aside an Investigating Body's decision and directing a new investigation, or a review of the decision, if maladministration made it unreliable.
 - Suggesting improvements for the Investigating Body's complaint handling.
 - Recommending compensation as a result of loss due to maladministration by the Investigating Body.

1 The Judicial Discipline Regulations and supporting Rules came into effect from 13 October 2023. The JACO continues to consider complaints under the Judicial Discipline Regulations 2014 and supporting Rules, which includes complaints dealt with by a Tribunal President, or a delegated Tribunal Member.

2 The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 does not formally define maladministration. In broad terms, JACO uses the term to refer to poor administration, including delay and procedural failings.

Complaints about the Judicial Appointments process

The JACO can:

- Look at complaints from candidates for judicial office who claim to have been adversely affected by maladministration in the way their application for appointment and/or any subsequent complaint was handled by the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC).
- Make recommendations for redress, including an apology, reconsideration, procedural changes, or compensation for loss suffered as a result of maladministration.

Foreword

This is my sixth Annual Report, and I am delighted to enter my second term of Office as Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman.

I have seen stabilisation following the higher levels of staff turnover which I have reported on in previous reports. To address the continuing rising workload, work has been undertaken to consider how best to support delivery, build resilience and improve performance. We constantly strive to provide the best possible service to complainants, and we are always open to constructive feedback and ways to improve our service.

The Office continues to perform well against our business objectives. Building on this, it has been my desire for some time to see a reduction in the time taken for Full Investigations. The team have worked tirelessly over the last year to bring the oldest of our investigations to a conclusion. This is key progress as it can be very frustrating for complainants waiting a long time for the outcome of an investigation. We are aware of this, and we keep complainants regularly updated with progress.

As the figures in this report show, my Office has continued to work with great commitment and resilience in response to a significant increase in demand. The number of Preliminary Investigation Reports completed this year is the highest on record, and we have also managed a high volume of correspondence. The cumulative impact of consistent workload increases over a number of years has put pressure on my Office. Even so, the Office has continued to meet its performance measures.

We continue to consider ways of assisting complainants in understanding my remit. The number of challenges to my decision by judicial review has remained stable (2 in both 2024/25 and 2025/26). However, there was a substantial increase in pre-action protocol letters (from 3 in 2024/25 to 16 in 2025/26). Judicial review proceedings can draw JACO resources from case progression and incur costs for all parties. It is therefore important that complainants understand my remit at an early stage.

Significantly, my remit precludes me from reviewing decisions taken by those considering conduct complaints. I can look only at the process by which those complaints were handled. This is fully set out in the Constitutional Reform Act 2005.

I am also providing feedback to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO) so that its correspondence to complainants is clearer about how complaints have been considered and the limited grounds on which I can accept a complaint for Full Investigation.

Most of my work continues to arise from JCIO cases, with few complaints involving judicial appointments. This has been constant since I commenced in the role and mirrors the experience of my predecessors.

We remain committed to addressing the needs of complainants and providing clear explanations and reasoning. We also seek constant improvement, and the next 12 months will be no different, to ensure each individual complainant gets the best service we can give regardless of whether their complaint is upheld or not.



Douglas Marshall

Performance

This chapter provides information about the enquiries and complaints received by the JACO Office³, how they are dealt with, and performance against the business objectives⁴.

Summary

In 2025/26, in comparison to 2024/25, the Office:

- Received 76% more correspondence (9648 compared to 5494).
- Considered 37% more cases to determine whether a Full Investigation was necessary (613 compared to 447).
- Concluded 33% more Preliminary Investigation Reports (564 compared to 424).
- Progressed 113% more cases for Full Investigation (49 compared to 23).
- Concluded 52% more Full Investigations (35 compared to 23).
- Upheld or partially upheld 17 complaints compared to 11. As a proportion of all complaints concluded by Full Investigation, this was broadly consistent at 49%, reflecting the overall increase in the cases concluded.

Alongside increased case volumes, the Office continued to meet its key business objectives by maintaining a timely and consistent service, improving processes, and using its resources more efficiently.

Performance against the Office’s key business targets shows that these objectives continued to be met in practice.

Target	Performance achieved in 2024/25	Performance achieved in 2025/26
Acknowledge receipt of 98% of new complaints and correspondence within 5 working days	98%	98%
Handle 90% of correspondence within 15 working days	100%	99%
Provide an initial decision within 6 weeks of receiving enough information to consider a complaint in 90% of cases	100%	99%
Keep complainants updated monthly in 98% of cases	98%	99%

The Office also introduced a number of practical changes during the year to improve service delivery, responsiveness, and efficiency:

- Reduced the number of complaints for which Full Investigation had been ongoing for more than 12 months, from 22 at the end of 2024/25 to 4 at the end of 2025/26.

3 Hereafter, the Office.
4 Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

- Continued to assess the impact of the Judicial Conduct Rules 2023 and Judicial Conduct (Magistrates) Rules 2023 and provided feedback to the JCIO.
- Made changes to inbox management to better distinguish between emails requiring action and those that do not.
- Reviewed the electronic complaint form and introduced changes to prevent users progressing unless they met the requirements to complain, reducing unnecessary submissions and follow-up correspondence. The form was also revised so that each submission generated a single email rather than two, reducing inbox volume.
- Developed and published a new electronic complaint form for judicial office holders' use in conduct-related complaints and published an updated appointment-related complaint form.
- Improved signposting to JACO in Investigating Body's decision letters to help complainants provide the required information first time with the aim of reducing follow-up emails.

Taken together, these measures helped the Office to manage rising demand whilst maintaining service standards and operating efficiently.

The Office remains committed to providing a high level of customer service in 2026/27. Our aims for next year include to:

- Continue to review internal JACO processes to increase efficiency.
- Reduce the time taken to conclude Full Investigations and review the current 6 – 9 month expected time frame.
- Update the signposting used by Investigating Bodies.
- Review the JACO website and consider alternative domain options.
- Review JACO communications.
- Review current processes for recording correspondence to improve efficiency and accuracy.
- Review the reasonable adjustments policy and process.

Casework process

The Office handles enquiries and complaints through a three-step process outlined below.

Initial checks

The Office receives enquiries by telephone, email, and post and aims to acknowledge them within 5 working days. Initial checks establish whether the enquiry is within JACO's remit, including whether the original complaint has been concluded by the relevant Investigating Body. Where matters are outside remit, or the original complaint is not yet concluded⁵, the Office explains this and provides appropriate signposting. Enquiries within remit are passed for Preliminary Investigation.

⁵ The JACO may review cases alleging undue delay by an Investigating Body, provided the application is made within a reasonable time (usually after a delay of more than six months).

Preliminary Investigation

At the Preliminary Investigation stage, the Office assesses complaints to decide whether they should proceed to a Full Investigation. The Office requests the relevant papers from the Investigating Body and provides advice to the JACO on whether:

- There is a realistic prospect that the issues raised could result in a finding of maladministration.
- The complaint is made within 28 days⁶ of the Investigating Body's decision.
- The complaint is in a form approved by the JACO.

If a complaint does not meet these requirements, the JACO explains his decision for not progressing the case by way of a letter or Preliminary Investigation Report. If it does, the case is passed to the investigation team for a Full Investigation⁷.

The Ombudsman aims to provide a decision within six weeks of receiving the Investigating Body's papers in 90% of cases.

Full Investigations

Full Investigations involve a detailed and comprehensive analysis of large volumes of often complex documentation. The JACO considers the complainant's correspondence, evidence from the Investigating Body, and (in conduct-related matters) the relevant conduct rules to decide whether there was maladministration in the process.

To support a balanced review, the JACO invites the Investigating Body to comment on the process followed and any provisional findings. These comments are considered alongside the available evidence, and relevant points are addressed in the JACO's final report to the complainant.

The JACO is required to refer a draft of his report to the Lord Chancellor and either the Lady Chief Justice (in judicial conduct complaints) or the JAC Chair (in appointment complaints), and take account of comments made before finalising his report.

Given the varying complexity of Full Investigations, and the need to consider input from the Investigating Body and the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice, they can take many months to conclude.

The Office aims to update complainants on a monthly basis in 98% of cases.

Correspondence received

In 2025/26, the Office received 9648 individual pieces of correspondence, the majority received by email. This figure includes correspondence that raised issues which, although strongly felt, did not relate to the JACO's remit or the remit of Investigating Bodies.

This figure shows a 76% increase compared to 2024/25, when the Office received 5494 pieces of correspondence.

6 Under sections 110(4) and (9) of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, complaints to the JACO have to be made within 28 days of the complainant being notified of the decision reached by the Investigating Body's response to their complaint. This deadline can be extended at the JACO's discretion.

7 This is referred to as a "Review" in Section 110 of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, which also sets out the criteria for carrying out that review.

Initial checks

The Office undertakes initial checks to determine whether correspondence received falls within the JACO's remit. Of the correspondence received, 74% (7152) required no further action following these checks.

In 2025/26, a significant proportion of email correspondence was generated by a small number of individuals who submitted multiple messages in relation to the same issue. The volume of correspondence recorded also includes generic Civil Service updates, marketing communications, and repeat correspondence received after the Office has confirmed that a complaint has been concluded. As a general rule, the Office does not respond to emails sent to multiple recipients.

The remaining 2496 items of correspondence were actionable in some way. This figure comprises the total volume of complaints and enquiries received, including new complaints and complaint-related correspondence, general enquiries, post-decision correspondence, and other matters such as requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Subject Access Requests, and litigation-related correspondence.

Where correspondence cannot be taken forward, the Office explains the JACO's remit and provides appropriate signposting on next steps. The Office handled 99% of the correspondence that required a response within 15 working days, supporting its aim of providing a timely and responsive service.

In 2025/26, the Office recorded 952 new complaints. In the same period, 613 cases were considered to determine whether a Full Investigation was required. This variance may arise for a range of reasons, including where a complaint submission is incomplete and the complainant does not respond to a request for further information, and where multiple linked submissions are managed under a single reference number and progressed as a single case. Notwithstanding these factors, in 2026/27, the Office will review how enquiries and new complaints are recorded to improve the consistency and accuracy of reporting.

Preliminary Investigations

This is the second full reporting year following the implementation of the Judicial Conduct Rules 2023 and the Judicial Conduct (Magistrates) Rules 2023⁸ on 13 October 2023.

In 2025/26, the JACO considered 613 cases relating to his judicial conduct investigations remit, compared to 447 cases in 2024/25, representing a 37% increase. Of that figure:

- 563 were concluded by a Preliminary Investigation Report.
- 1 was concluded by a Preliminary Investigation Report after being passed for Full Investigation⁹.
- 46¹⁰ progressed to a Full Investigation.

8 Hereafter, the Rules.

9 This case was handed over for a Full Investigation in 2024/25 and concluded by Preliminary Investigation Report in 2025/26.

10 This figure is for the conduct complaints process and does not include complaints about the judicial appointments process.

In 2024/25, the JACO concluded 424 cases by a Preliminary Investigation Report, marking a 66% increase on the previous year. In 2025/26, the JACO concluded 564 cases. This is a 37% increase on 2024/25 and is the highest figure on record.

Most cases concluded by Preliminary Investigation Report related to the JCIO, with only a small number involving Advisory Committees and Tribunals. Since the introduction of the Judicial Conduct Rules 2023, Tribunal-related conduct complaints are handled by the JCIO.

A continued rise in the number of complaints to the JCIO has led to more complaints to the JACO. The largest increase in complaints to the JACO concerned cases rejected by the JCIO at the initial assessment stage, mainly because they did not contain sufficient relevant detail to satisfy the published requirements for a valid complaint. In 2025/26, the Office conducted 467 Preliminary Investigations in relation to such cases, compared with 326 in 2024/25. These matters accounted for 83% of all cases considered at the Preliminary Investigation stage in 2025/26. The JACO is grateful for the JCIO's constructive response in reviewing the information provided to complainants in its decision letters. This work supports the Office's aim of improving service delivery and helping complainants provide the necessary information at the earliest stage.

Despite this increase, the Office exceeded its target to conclude 90% of Preliminary Investigations within 6 weeks of receiving enough information to determine the complaint, achieving this target in 99% of cases.

Full Investigations

Cases progressed to Full Investigation

In 2025/26, the JACO directed 49 cases for Full Investigation to determine whether there was evidence of maladministration by an Investigating Body, compared with 23 cases in 2024/25. While this represents a 113% increase, it equates to a rise of only 3% as a proportion of overall complaints considered.

Of those 49 cases, 37 related to the JCIO. The remaining cases comprised 5 matters involving both an Advisory Committee and the JCIO, 4 relating to an Advisory Committee, and 3 relating to the JAC.

Cases concluded

In 2025/26, the JACO concluded 35 cases following a Full Investigation. This was 12 more than the 23 concluded in 2024/25. The table below summarises the outcomes by Investigating Body.

Investigating Body	Upheld	Partially upheld	Not upheld	Total
JCIO	1	11	9	21
Tribunals	0	4	4	8
JCIO and Advisory Committee	0	1	1	2
Judicial Appointments Commission	0	0	4	4
Total	1	16	18	35

In 2025/26, the JACO upheld or partially upheld 17 cases. This was 6 more than the 11 upheld or partially upheld cases in 2024/25. This represents 49% of the Full Investigations concluded and is broadly similar to the proportion of cases upheld or partially upheld in 2024/25.

Redress

The JACO considered the appropriate redress in the cases that were upheld or partially upheld as follows:

- In 1 case, the JACO recommended an apology.
- In 7 cases, the JACO found that an apology was the appropriate redress but did not recommend one because the Investigating Body had already apologised.
- In 8 cases, the JACO found that an apology was the appropriate redress and noted that the Investigating Body had already agreed to provide this.
- The JACO did not set aside the Investigating Body's decision under section 111(5) of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 in any cases. In 2 cases, the JACO would have set the decision aside, but the Investigating Body agreed to reconsider the issues that might have amounted to maladministration before the JACO concluded his report.
- In 6 cases, the JACO made recommendations for systemic changes to prevent recurrence. These included: ensuring relevant documents are uploaded to the case management system; clarifying what information may be shared with a Nominated Judge; ensuring that the appropriate audio recording is reviewed; assessing the impact of the content of disciplinary statements on others; and explaining any changes in decisions to complainants.
- In 1 case, the JACO recommended compensation due to significant poor case management. This is the first occasion the current JACO has made such a recommendation. Compensation is not a usual form of redress and will be appropriate only in exceptional cases, including where maladministration has resulted in actual loss.

Maladministration themes

When viewed in the context of the overall number of complaints received, incidences of maladministration remain low.

Issues where the JACO found maladministration included:

- Delay in concluding complaints.
- Poor case management.
- Insufficient consideration of privacy in the drafting of a disciplinary statement. In response, the Investigating Body strengthened its review checks for disciplinary statements, so no further recommendation for redress was made.
- Failing to follow its own process regarding timeframes and information sharing.
- Overlooking or failing to properly consider aspects of a complaint.
- Failing to follow its own process (timeframes and information sharing).
- Unclear explanations and signposting by the Investigating Body, although this did not affect the decision to dismiss the complaint.

Unsuccessful complaints and themes emerging from investigations

The JACO expressed concerns in other cases which fell short of maladministration; this included whether the Investigating Body had:

- Inappropriately shared material from a previously dismissed complaint with the Nominated Judge. The JACO was satisfied that the material did not inform the decision and found no maladministration. The Investigating Body subsequently clarified guidance on what additional information may be shared.
- Failed to keep a complainant updated, but no maladministration was found as the JACO accepted its explanation and the complainant was not materially disadvantaged.
- Failed to explain that it did not intend to consider a complaint whilst proceedings were ongoing.

Complaints that the JACO considered but found no evidence of maladministration included whether:

- The timing of the publication of a disciplinary statement was appropriate.
- It handled the complaint appropriately, including its approach to considering and recording evidence, addressing procedural issues identified during the process, and providing adequate reasons for dismissing the complaint.
- The Investigating Body had responded appropriately to post-complaint correspondence.
- The Nominated Judge's role in considering a complaint was appropriate.
- Duplicated complaints were handled appropriately.
- There was unreasonable delay in progressing a complaint, including the reasonableness of any deadlines set.
- An Investigating Body failed to consider the timing of a judicial office holder's resignation.
- Complainants were disadvantaged in accessing services.
- Candidates for appointment were adversely affected by maladministration.

Time taken to conclude complaints¹¹

In previous years, most Full Investigations were completed within 6 to 9 months with more complex investigations taking longer.

However, meeting this aim has been challenging since 2021/22 with the number of cases taking more than a year to conclude steadily increasing. This is attributable to a number of factors, including the increased complexity of cases, staff turnover rates impacting retention of institutional knowledge, and the impact of ongoing staffing constraints on a small team.

All 35 cases concluded in 2025/26 took longer than 6 months. 3 cases took between 9–12 months to conclude. The remaining 32 took in excess of 12 months. There were 3 cases where the complaint to JACO was put on hold whilst the Investigating Body considered it again.

¹¹ The figures in this section include complaints about the judicial appointments process.

At the end of 2024/25 there were 22 cases where investigations had been ongoing for more than 12 months. There were 4 such cases at the end of March 2026, representing a substantial reduction over the reporting period. This reduction supported the Office's objective of improving service delivery and reducing delay in the most longstanding cases. We will continue this work in 2026/27 and consider whether previous expected timeframes for completion of Full Investigations remain appropriate.

At the end of March 2026, there were:

- 51 cases where draft reports had not yet been referred to the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice or the JAC Chair. These included:
 - 2 that remained on hold due to litigation.
 - 1 of the 4 investigations ongoing for more than 12 months had been on hold for nearly 15 months.
 - 2 further cases that were on hold, 1 for 8 months, and 1 from March 2026.
- 6 cases where the JACO was awaiting a response from the Lord Chancellor and Lady Chief Justice. In 2 of those cases, the response period had not yet expired.

The Office met its target to keep complainants fully informed on a monthly basis in 99% of cases.

Time taken to receive responses to referred draft reports

The JACO refers his draft report to the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice (in conduct investigation complaints) or the JAC Chair (in appointment complaints).

The Ombudsman asks for a response within 4 weeks of referral.

- In 15 cases, a response was received in 4 weeks or less.
- In 9 cases, a response was received in 4 weeks to 6 weeks.
- In 4 cases, a response was received in 6 weeks to 8 weeks.
- In 7 cases, a response was received in over 8 weeks.

As far as possible, referrals for conduct-related complaints are submitted in batches to support efficient consideration, and where possible, timely responses.

It is recognised that changes in the Office of the Lord Chancellor during 2025/26 (including one change of office holder, and the current Lord Chancellor's dual role as Deputy Prime Minister) impacted response times.

Judicial Appointments process

The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 enables the JACO to consider complaints about the Judicial Appointments process from candidates for judicial office who claim to have been adversely affected by maladministration in the way their application for appointment, and/or subsequent complaint was handled.

There were 3 cases outstanding at the end of 2025/26, none of which were outstanding for more than 12 months.

The JACO determined 4 complaints about the Judicial Appointments process in 2025/26. None of these cases were upheld or partially upheld. The JACO made no recommendations for redress or systemic change.

These figures are reflected in the outcomes and information reported under Full Investigations.

Post-investigation correspondence and challenges to JACO decisions

The JACO considers a limited amount of correspondence from people who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaints (following a Preliminary or Full Investigation). Complainants can ask the JACO to review his decision following the conclusion of a Full Investigation if they think: the JACO overlooked a point of complaint that would impact his findings; the JACO relied on information that the complainant can demonstrate is inaccurate; or they have new information about the Investigating Body's handling of the complaint which may affect the JACO's decision.

During 2025/26, the JACO responded to:

- 98 pieces of correspondence sent following a Preliminary Investigation.
- 7 requests to review the decision following conclusion of a Full Investigation.

The JACO did not change his decision as a result of any post complaint correspondence or a review.

The Office's approach to post-investigation correspondence is intended to provide complainants with clear and timely responses on the outcome of their case while using resources proportionately and efficiently.

The JACO responded to 16 pre-action protocol letters that did not progress to an application for permission to apply for judicial review by the end of March 2026. Of which, 1 did not relate to a complaint made to the JACO.

There were 2 cases where complainants sought to judicially review the JACO's decision, both of which were refused by the court. In a further case, a decision that was challenged through the appellate court in 2024/25 was concluded in 2025/26 when the application was refused.

In a further case, proceedings issued against the JACO in the County Court were struck out.

Complainants and stakeholders

This section reflects the Office's commitment to providing a timely, consistent, and transparent service to complainants and stakeholders, while continuing to improve its processes and service delivery. It also demonstrates the Office's aim to provide an effective, responsive, and professional service to all users, while operating efficiently and cost-effectively. The information below shows how these objectives were reflected in the Office's relationships with stakeholders, its approach to accessibility, and feedback on the service provided.

Relationships with stakeholders

The JACO and the Office have continued to maintain strong professional relationships with stakeholders, including the bodies within the JACO's remit, whilst preserving the independence of all parties. These relationships support constructive engagement and help the Office to identify opportunities to improve processes and service delivery. The JACO retains the right to conduct reviews and reach conclusions based solely on his observations of whether there was maladministration within his remit.

Reasonable Adjustments

In line with the JACO's Reasonable Adjustments policy, published in March 2022, the Office is dedicated to ensuring that people with disabilities and long-term conditions can access its services without any disadvantage. The Office aims to inform people about this policy and offer assistance when they first make contact.

As a result, in 2025/26, the Office made several reasonable adjustments, including:

- Allowing complainants to provide details of their complaint orally over the telephone, voice note, or video call.
- Providing telephone updates.
- Adjusting the formatting and content of written responses and reports to ensure accessibility.

Service complaints received

The Office addressed 6 service complaints during 2025/26. These related to matters including the time taken to progress complaints, requests for reasonable adjustments that went beyond what could be reasonably provided, and unfounded allegations made against members of staff. In two cases, the Office accepted that its service had fallen below the standard expected, apologised, and took steps to reduce the risk of recurrence.

In 2023/24, the Office developed and implemented an Unreasonable Behaviour Policy to address actions considered unreasonable. These actions include abusive and offensive behaviour, unreasonable demands, excessive unhelpful communication, refusal to cooperate, misuse of the complaints process, or any other unreasonable behaviour. As a result, the Office may limit or withdraw its services and, in exceptional circumstances, contact the police. This policy was not used in 2025/26.

Compliments received

During 2025/26, the JACO and the Office received compliments from complainants and others which reflected appreciation for professionalism and consistency of the service provided, including the care taken in assessing complaints, the clarity of the explanations given, and the support shown during investigations.

Corporate Governance

Status of the JACO Office

The Office is an independent Arm's Length Body. In accordance with the requirements of Schedule 13 of the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, the Office is sponsored and funded from money voted to the MoJ. The MoJ also provides a range of support services, including accommodation, IT, telephone, and some legal support services.

During the year, the JACO Officials had regular meetings with the MoJ's Sponsorship and Finance Teams to discuss its performance and financial position. Quarterly review meetings continued in 2025/26 and remained beneficial in terms of providing opportunities to raise and resolve issues. Additionally, the JACO met with senior officials from MoJ. Combined, these meetings provided appropriate governance and support for the delivery of JACO's statutory functions.

In the 2024/25 reporting year, it was agreed the Office and Sponsorship Team would collaborate on a full review of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which sets out governance and support arrangements. This work has been put on hold pending the outcome of ongoing work to strengthen JACO's operational resilience and effective delivery, so that revisions can reflect the latest position and continue to promote timely, proportionate, and effective engagement.

Officials also participated in other Arm's Length Body groups discussing matters such as Risk Management, Business Continuity, Training, Security, and Health and Safety. These are useful and constructive discussions.

Financial resources

The Office remains committed to managing its resources effectively. It has thorough and appropriate financial governance arrangements in place, including reporting to the MoJ's Finance and Sponsorship Teams on how actual expenditure compares with the budget forecast. These controls assisted key business targets to be met within the limitations of the budget agreed within the MoJ.

The Office continues to manage its allocated budget. The budget for 2025/26 was £576,000; the outturn expenditure was approximately £565,000, an underspend of £11,000. More than 95% of outturn expenditure was in respect of staff costs, including the JACO's contracted remunerations.

The Office is hosted by the MoJ, and it is not recharged for office and related costs. The outturn expenditure figure included approximately £15,000 in respect of legal fees, compared to the £10,000 budgeted.

The Office made no ex-gratia payments during 2025/26.

The Office budget for 2026/27 is £591,000. As in previous years, the unpredictable nature of the need for legal support to respond to legal challenges made in response to the JACO's decision is the single biggest financial risk.

Staff resources

The JACO is a Public Appointee. During the 2025/26 reporting period, there were no instances in which the Lord Chancellor appointed a Temporary Ombudsman to consider a specific case.

The Office has sought assistance from the Government Legal Department where necessary but has not engaged any other consultants or agency workers during 2025/26.

The Office staff are Civil Servants, employed and appraised under MoJ terms and conditions, including the MoJ's 'Reward and Recognition' scheme. All awards under the scheme are 'benchmarked' with the Sponsorship Team to ensure consistency.

At the start of 2025/26, the Office comprised two Band B Joint Heads of Office, one being the Business Manager and the other the Senior Investigating Officer, six Band C Investigating Officers, and a Band E Administrative Officer. The Office was at full staff complement, with nine full-time staff members, until December 2025, when an Investigating Officer left the team. In 2026/27, the Office aims to recruit a Band C Investigating Officer.

The Office lost less than 4 days per member of staff to sickness during 2025/26.

The Office made no compensation or exit payments during 2025/26.

MoJ Corporate plans and longer-term expenditure trends

The Office provides input into the development of MoJ corporate plans and policies where they relate to issues within the JACO remit. It does so in a way that is consistent with the JACO's status as an independent Public Appointee and with the Office's status as an independent Arm's Length Body. Its contribution is proportionate to the size of the Office.

The Office has provided input to the MoJ discussion about longer-term expenditure trends and the Place for Growth Strategy and will continue to do so.

Training and Development

Staff in the Office are trained to carry out their responsibilities and have a high level of complaints investigation experience; a number of the Office staff hold a BTEC Advanced Professional Award in Complaints Handling and Investigations. For those who do not hold a formal qualification, options are currently being explored to meet the specific requirements of JACO Investigating Officers, and it is envisaged this will be achieved in 2026/27. A bespoke report writing workshop was delivered to Investigating Officers in the reporting year, further strengthening the quality and consistency of reports.

All JACO staff are fully compliant with mandatory Civil Service Training.

Information Assurance

The Office holds a range of personal information, some of which would be classed as sensitive. This information is obtained and processed solely for the purpose of enabling the JACO to carry out his statutory functions under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 and associated responsibilities, such as responding to requests for information under the Access Legislation.

The Office is grateful for the Data Protection Officer support provided by the Officials in the MoJ's Data Privacy Team.

The Office is its own data controller and is separately registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. It responds to information rights requests under the Data Protection Act 2018, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and related legislation and guidance, including correspondence the Office treats as a request. The Office handled 25 requests during 2025/26, compared with 12 in 2024/25. One request, received in March 2026, had a response deadline in April 2026 and was outstanding at year end. The Office responded to 21 requests within the statutory time limits.

It also received 10 requests for an internal review, compared to 1 in 2024/25, and responded to 7 within the statutory time limits. These cases can be complex and time-consuming, requiring consideration of large volumes of material, legislation, and guidance outside the JACO's statutory remit.

In 2025/26, the Office received notification of 5 complaints to the Information Commissioner's Office. 3 of these complaints were closed with no action, and 2 remain outstanding in 2026/27.

The Office received 1 Data Controller complaint in 2025/26. The complainant requested a review and subsequently complained to the Information Commissioner's Office who issued advice on timeliness which was accepted.

Comparison of statistical data for 2024/25 against 2025/26

Statistical Data	2025/26 Financial Year	2024/25 Financial Year
Cases determined by Preliminary Investigation Report	564	424
Cases determined after Full Investigation	35	23
Complaints related to conduct (JCIO, Tribunal, Advisory Committee)	17 upheld or partially upheld 14 not upheld	11 upheld or partially upheld 11 not upheld
Complaints related to appointments	4 not upheld	1 not upheld
JACO's time (days per week)	2	2
Staffing	9 (8 full-time equivalent)	10 with effect from 17/03/25 (9 full-time equivalent)
Budget Forecast to the nearest £1,000	£576,000	£547,000
Actual Spend	£565,000	£500,000

Office Structure (as of March 2026)



