

Judge or Sheriff

Judges or sheriffs preside over a court of law in civil, criminal or appeal cases – and make judgements based on the evidence presented.

A **sheriff** acts as a judge in one of the 39 Sheriff Courts in Scotland. They deal with a variety of civil and criminal cases leading to a sentence of up to five years, or a fine.

Summary Sheriffs were introduced to Scottish courts in 2016. They are restricted in the cases they oversee.

A **higher court judge** (Law Lord or Lady) presides over: Court of Session (the highest civil court) in Edinburgh, Court of Appeal (with two other judges) and the High Court of the Justiciary (the highest criminal court where sentences of over five years can be imposed).

The Work

You could be:

- listening to the evidence and intervening at points during the proceedings
- consulting with other legal professionals such as solicitors and advocates, in court and behind the scenes
- mediating between the two sides, deciding whether or not to allow opposing sides to challenge each other's evidence
- dismissing a case if there is not enough evidence, or declaring a mistrial, or ordering a retrial on legal grounds
- keeping order in court, challenging unsuitable or noisy behaviour and in extreme cases, imposing formal sanctions (such as an order for contempt of court)
- instructing and advising a jury on the evidence
- using your knowledge of the law to decide the outcome of the case. In a criminal case this can relate to making judgements and handing out suitable sentences. In a civil case it can relate to asserting blame, and then deciding the level of suitable damages. In a divorce case it can relate to division of property and custody of and access to children
- if relevant, referring the case to a higher court.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of the organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

The following pay scales are from the Ministry of Justice as of 1 April 2025.

The salary for a sheriff is £173,845 a year and £187,743 for sheriff principals. The salary for a summary sheriff is £139,469 a year. High Court judges are on a salary of £234,096 (Outer House) and £266,556 (Inner House) a year.

Conditions

- You would work in courts and offices.
- You may have to travel, staying overnight away from home.
- You must be willing to conform to and impose a strict dress and protocol (behaviour) code.
- The work can be pressurised and stressful.
- You have to make difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions which will have a significant effect on the lives of others.

Getting In

- To be eligible for appointment as a judge or sheriff, you need to have at least ten years' experience of working as an [Advocate](#) or [Solicitor](#).
- You are also eligible if you hold judicial office in a role such as sheriff principal or summary sheriff.
- In all cases you need a considerable amount of court experience before applying.
- Judges and sheriffs are appointed by the Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland, who set out the eligibility criteria, for a judicial office (see **More Information**).
- Many begin by applying for temporary judicial officer posts.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- decisive and assertive
- able to accept responsibility for your decisions
- able to communicate with people from all backgrounds
- able to absorb facts quickly
- a good public speaker
- logical and analytical
- able to think quickly and react to unexpected information when in court
- objective
- able to work under pressure and to meet deadlines.

You need to have:

- sound judgement
- good written communication skills
- respect for confidentiality
- ability to pay attention to detail
- a good memory.

Training

- Judicial training in Scotland is overseen by the Judicial Institute for Scotland. There is a compulsory induction training programme for newly appointed judicial officers within a year of appointment.

- Newly appointed sheriffs undertake induction training over a maximum of five days, and must complete at least three sitting-in days with an experienced sheriff.

Getting On

- Sheriffs may progress into the role of Sheriff Principal. Sheriff Principals are the heads of Scotland's six sheriffdoms (judicial districts) and are responsible for the overall administration of their district. One of the requirements is to have been legally qualified for at least 10 years, but they normally have around 25 to 35 years legal experience before taking up post.
- A few experienced sheriffs and sheriff principals can progress to become Supreme Court judges (to work in the High Court on criminal cases and in the Court of Session on civil cases).

More Information

You will find more information about applying for appointment as a judge or sheriff on the website of the [Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland](#).

Contacts

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Skills for Justice

Tel: 0117 922 1155

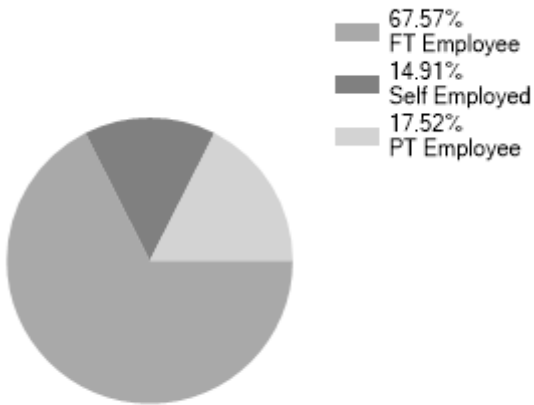
Email: info@skillsforjustice.org.uk

Website: skillsforjustice.org.uk

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Statistics

Employment Status UK %



Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.