

MAGISTRACY

Magistrates (also called Justices of the Peace) are members of the local community, appointed by the Lord Chancellor to sit in magistrates' courts to hear criminal and some civil cases. Experienced and specially trained magistrates sit in youth courts and family courts.

What?

Magistrates deal with less serious crime such as theft, criminal damage, public disorder and motoring offences as well as more unusual cases such as environmental offences, truancy from school, copyright theft and cruelty to animals. If a defendant is found guilty, or pleads guilty, magistrates will use sentencing guidelines to help decide the appropriate sentence.

Who?

Magistrates come from a wide range of backgrounds and occupations. They are ordinary men and women with common sense and personal integrity. They know their community well, are able to listen to all sides of an argument and can contribute to fair and reasonable decisions. Ideally, the local magistrates' bench reflects the community it serves in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin and occupation. There is a particular need for more young and ethnic minority candidates.

Some people are not eligible. Police officers, traffic wardens (or their close relatives) and people in related occupations where a conflict of interest could arise, will not be appointed. Candidates must be between 18 and 65 years of age; magistrates must retire at 70.

Legal or academic qualifications are not required. Training includes discussions, talks, practical exercises, observation in court and prison visits. This training is compulsory. New magistrates are assigned a mentor to support them in their first two years. Magistrates sit in panels of three, with equal responsibility for decision-making and with a qualified legal adviser to help on aspects of law. Those appointed must be available to sit for a minimum of 26 half days a year and be available for full-day sittings. Arrangements are usually worked out well in advance. Training and meetings are an additional commitment but are often held outside normal working hours.

QUICK GUIDE

- members of the local community
- must be between 18 and 65 years of age
- full training given
- must be available to sit for 26 half-day sittings a year and some full-day sittings

Magistrates are unpaid but may receive allowances for travel expenses and subsistence. Many employers allow paid leave; those who lose pay may be able to claim an allowance.

How?

Further information and application forms are available by telephoning 080 0003 007 or the website of the Department of Constitutional Affairs www.magistrates.gov.uk. Alternatively, contact your local advisory committee. The number of the nearest committee is available from a freephone number 0800 003 007.

More information about magistrates can be obtained from the Magistrates' Association (see [Useful Addresses p.28](#))

NOT FOR YOU?

Try looking at:

- » Policing (page 5)
- » Restorative Justice (page 8)
- » Victims (page 9)
- » Independent Monitoring Boards (page 17)
- » Circles of Support and Accountability (page 20)

"I have found the work frustrating and compelling in equal measure. No two days are ever the same ... the foibles of human nature which pass before us are endlessly challenging ... From time to time it is possible to feel that lives have been changed for the better"

A magistrate with twenty years service