

Scottish judges feel “disrespected”

Judges in Scotland say they feel disrespected, overworked, stressed and underpaid, according to a new survey.

The UK Judicial Attitude Survey (JAS), is conducted with all serving judges in the UK and is the only known survey of its kind in the world.

Undertaken by University College London’s Judicial Institute, it aims to assess the attitudes, experiences and intentions of serving judges in key areas including the experience of being a judge, morale, working conditions, wellbeing, remuneration, retention, leadership, training and personal development.

The newly published 2024 survey found that almost every salaried judge and fee-paid office holder in Scotland felt they provided an important service to society.

However, more than half said members of the judiciary were respected less by society than they were just two years ago, and over eight out of ten were concerned about the loss of respect for the judiciary by government.

Around a third of salaried judges said that their overall working conditions were worse in 2024 than they were in 2022 and a similar number said their case workload was too high.

The survey found that over the decade to 2024 a majority of Scottish judges had said their pay and pension “does not adequately reflect the work they have done and will do before

retirement” and have reported a loss of net earnings in the previous two years.

Over the decade since the survey was introduced only a minority of salaried judges in Scotland have said that they would consider leaving the judiciary if this was a viable option, although this increased from 20% in 2014 to 32% in 2024.

In the first national study of judicial stress, the 2024 JAS asked all members of the judiciary for the first time about the levels, nature and sources of stress in their job.

According to the survey “large proportions” of Scottish judges reported stress symptoms over the last two years associated with their work, with the most prevalent symptoms including sleep disturbances, irritability and headaches.

The factors most often attributed to stress by Scottish judges were lack of personal time due to judicial workload, managing trials and difficulties achieving a reasonable work-life balance.

A total of 39 members of the judiciary in Scotland reported having to take sick days in the last two years due to the stress of judicial work.

The factors making judges in Scotland most likely to quit their job were increases in workload, limits on pay awards and further demands for out of hours working.

Higher remuneration, appointment to a higher post and increased flexibility in working hours would make judges more likely to remain, according to the findings.

Almost all judges in Scotland took part in the 2024 survey, including 96% of all salaried judges and 79% of all fee-paid judges.

After a decade of surveying salaried judges in the UK

judiciary – Northern Ireland, England & Wales and Scotland – a number of UK-wide trends have emerged on remuneration and retention.

For a decade a majority of salaried judges in all three jurisdictions have repeatedly experienced a loss of net earnings at two-year intervals.

Throughout the decade a majority of judges have said that their pay and pension entitlement does not adequately reflect the work they have done and will do before they retire, and only a minority of judges in all three jurisdictions have ever agreed that they are paid a reasonable salary for the work they do.

There has been an increase in salaried judges in all three UK jurisdictions who would leave the judiciary if it was a viable option and an increase in salaried judges planning to leave the judiciary early within five years.

Morale over judicial salary is not as low as it was a decade ago, but it is still an issue for most judges in Scotland and England and Wales and has worsened in the last two years in Northern Ireland.



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