



Rolling Training Plan

2026–2028

Judicial Institute for Scotland

Foreword

The period ahead will be one of continued and significant transition for Scotland's justice system. Legislative reform, developments in digital practice and public expectations will continue to reshape the work of the judiciary. In this environment, the Judicial Institute's aspiration is clear: to provide judicial education that remains rigorous, relevant and forward-looking, and that judicial office holders are supported by training and guidance that helps them to meet emerging demands with confidence and integrity.

This training plan sets out how the Institute proposes to fulfil that aspiration over the next three years. The approach is rooted in Scotland's specific legal and institutional context. It reflects the realities of judicial work in Scotland's courts and tribunals, the pressures experienced by judicial office holders, and the direction set by the Lord President.

While the Institute aspires to learn from other jurisdictions, its priorities have been shaped by Scottish reforms, Scottish needs and the experiences of Scotland's judiciary. The plan is practical and ambitious: it addresses immediate requirements while preparing judicial office holders for deeper changes in the justice system, particularly in digitalisation and the treatment of vulnerability.

I am grateful to colleagues across the courts, tribunals and elsewhere who contribute to judicial training and education. Their support enhances judicial training that is designed to help the judiciary to be well equipped to uphold the rule of law at a time of considerable change.

The Hon. Lady Drummond

Chair of the Judicial Institute for Scotland

Purpose and direction

The Judicial Institute's core purpose is to strengthen the competence, confidence and resilience of Scotland's judiciary through high-quality, independent judicial education that is judge-led, judge-designed and substantially judge-delivered.

Objectives for 2026–2028

The Institute will pursue the following core objectives via its programme of work:

Objective 1: Equip the judiciary to be aware of developments in statute, case law, procedure and practice in a rapidly changing legal environment

There is a regular flow of changes in statute law, procedural law and the law of evidence and judicial practice. The superior appellate courts regularly issue decisions that materially affect the understanding of the law to be applied at first instance. The Institute will continue to monitor developments closely and provide targeted and timely training courses and written guidance on the judicial intranet.

Objective 2: Strengthen digital capability and confidence.

Digital case management, digital evidence, cyber-security demands and the emerging role of AI require systematic upskilling across the judiciary.

The Institute will develop training and signpost resources on core digital systems and tools, digital evidence and cyber-security; offer clear guidance on the safe and appropriate use of AI; expand short, practical digital resources; and work with SCTS and justice partners to provide judicial training that keeps pace with ongoing digital transformation.

Objective 3: Enhancing judicial understanding, communication and inclusion

Judicial work involves people experiencing trauma, mental health challenges and digital disadvantage. Judicial education seeks to heighten awareness and understanding of these realities.

The Institute will continue to provide training to assist judicial office holders in their understanding of trauma, vulnerability, mental health and equality treatment considerations. It will help judges develop clear and effective communication skills, including in judgment writing and communicating with unrepresented parties.

Objective 4: Develop judicial leadership, professional conduct and resilience.

The Institute will endeavour to provide appropriate support for judicial leaders and those with mentoring responsibilities under the judicial mentoring framework.

The Institute will promote high standards of professional conduct. In addition, it will focus on assisting judges to build personal resilience and wellbeing and increase awareness of personal and digital security.

Objective 5: Modernise delivery models, digital resources and faculty capability.

High demand for training and resources across the courts and tribunals requires training models that are efficient, scalable and accessible.

The Institute will take steps to meet demand through improved infrastructure, enhanced learning design and effective use of digital learning tools.

Delivery phasing summary 2026 to 2028+

Short-term priorities (2026–27)	Medium-term priorities (2027–28)	Long-term priorities
Respond to legislative reform and important decisions of the superior appellate courts; strengthen digital capability; refresh training on vulnerability, equality and trauma; improve and expand induction and mentoring; modernise digital resources.	Develop specialist programmes in emerging areas; expand leadership and resilience training; enhance online learning; strengthen transparency and communication initiatives; embed AI and digital justice education.	Embed a culture of continuous learning, digital confidence, inclusive practice and judicial leadership supported by modern, sustainable educational infrastructure.

Programme of work

Senators and sheriffs

Induction courses for newly appointed salaried judicial office holders, both at Court of Session and sheriff court levels, will continue to be an important aspect of the Institute's work. In the short to medium term, several courses of this kind will be delivered. The Judicial Institute will deliver strengthened induction programmes that prepare newly appointed judicial office holders for the responsibilities of modern judicial office. Induction will cover key areas such as judicial conduct and ethics, trauma-informed practice, vulnerability awareness, digital skills and cyber security, judicial writing, communication, open-justice principles and the handling of digital evidence. The content of these programmes will be regularly updated to reflect legislative reform, important developments in case law, procedural change and wider social developments, to equip new appointees to enter judicial office with an appreciation of the knowledge and skills needed to meet current and emerging demands of their new role.

The priorities for serving senators and sheriffs are:

- The enactment of the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Act 2025, will require the development of further tailored training. As part of this work, the Institute will refresh and extend its teaching in trauma-informed judicial practice, developed since 2022, and continue to provide specialist modules on trauma in sexual offences, evidential issues and vulnerable complainers. Scenario-based workshops specific to the new court structure will be provided when the new Sexual Offences Court comes into existence.
- The Institute will continue to strengthen judicial understanding of trauma in civil and family contexts and deepen awareness of the vulnerabilities experienced by adults with incapacity. Training will also support a firm grasp of equality principles and obligations and improve understanding of the experiences of people affected by poverty, cultural disadvantage or digital exclusion. In addition, the programme will reflect recent developments in the Children (Scotland) Act 2020, ongoing bail and release reforms, and the anticipated reforms to incapacity legislation.
- The subject of judicial conduct, behaviour and professionalism will continue to be addressed in courses and other resources. These themes will not only feature in dedicated training but will also be embedded throughout the wider curriculum, ensuring they have a consistent and lasting influence on judicial education.

- Judicial training on artificial intelligence will focus on building confidence, digital fluency and sound judgment in an environment where AI is increasingly shaping legal practice and court users' expectations. If authoritative guidance is developed, judicial training will help judicial office holders understand the opportunities AI offers, such as improved efficiency, enhanced access to justice, and support with research, drafting and case management. The Institute will also endeavour to equip judicial office holders to recognise the risks, including inaccuracies, bias, over-reliance on automated tools, and potential impacts on fairness and fundamental rights. The programme will reinforce that AI has a role in supporting, but cannot replace, human judicial decision-making, enabling the judiciary to uphold public confidence as technology evolves.
- The Institute will continue to explore the topic of judicial security in depth and with the intention of developing a suite of self-study online resources to support this learning. Elements of the courses will also address the critical issue of judicial security, helping judicial office holders recognise risks, understand protective measures and contribute to keeping courts safe and secure.
- An expanded curriculum for sheriffs, so far as resources allow, in adults with incapacity, mental health, insolvency, commercial actions and commissary.
- Detailed consideration of the recommendations concerning judicial training made by Sheriff Principal Abercrombie KC's report on fatal accident inquiries. This will include work to produce a bench book of good judicial practice.
- Judicial office holders will be supported to develop a strong understanding of current community sentencing options to the extent they are relevant to the respective judicial tiers. Training will also cover changes to parole and release planning, alongside rehabilitation-focused approaches that reflect changes in prison policy and practice. In addition, it will address the evolving landscape of problem-solving justice. Rapid updates on legislative developments will be delivered through short-form learning, including webinars and briefing videos.

Justices of the peace

For justices of the peace, training will stabilise at eight courses per year following the large 2024 intake, with delivery organised into four repeating cycles to ensure accessibility.

Priorities include:

- The curriculum for justices of the peace will continue to focus on structured decision-making, judicial conduct and communication, road traffic law, and the needs of vulnerable, diverse or otherwise disadvantaged court users.
- A refreshed core justice of the peace course will be introduced, covering equality, diversity and vulnerability, hate-crime aggravations and trauma in a domestic abuse setting.
- Updated guidance aligned with revisions to the Equal Treatment Bench Book will be developed in partnership with the Justices Technical Training Committee (JTTC).
- The justices of the peace mentor programme will remain in place to support newly appointed JPs, providing tools for effective mentoring and aligning, where appropriate, with sheriff-level mentoring standards; further enhancements will be guided by participant feedback.
- The Institute will review and expand self-directed learning resources by developing video guidance, scenario-based materials, short “how-to” guides for digital processes and a potential justice of the peace webinar series, all of which will be accessible through the Judicial Hub.

Tribunals

The Institute has been asked to deliver its cross-jurisdictional Tribunal Craft course to all current First-tier Tribunal for Scotland judicial members within a four-year period. A substantial number of tribunal members (approximately 400) have still to complete the course, although significant progress has been made through increased delivery frequency and larger cohort sizes. This work will continue in the next period. Additional course cycles will be scheduled, and hybrid delivery models may be introduced to help manage attendance more effectively. Resource implications of this plan will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Priorities include:

- Expansion of digital and online learning opportunities for tribunal members through updated written guidance, refreshed bench book content, video demonstrations of tribunal-specific processes and enhanced resources for new members. The Judicial Education and Training (JET) working group will guide and shape these priorities as the programme develops.
- Continued close collaboration with chambers through the Judicial Education and Training working group.

- Expansion of the work commenced in March 2026 on leadership training for chamber presidents.
- Delivery of specialist training for judges assigned to sit in the Upper Tribunal for Scotland.
- Development of leadership training for chamber presidents, informed by and building upon the leadership training delivered with sheriffs principal in March 2026.

Bench books and resources

The Judicial Institute produces a range of written guidance including the Jury Manual, the Preliminary Hearings Bench Book, Equal Treatment Bench Book, brief notes, briefing papers and other resources designed to support judicial office holders in their work. All this material is available through the judicial intranet while the three most substantial works are also available to the profession and the wider public. Over the next period, a key priority will be to enhance the format, accessibility and overall usability of these essential publications. This will include exploring improved publishing models, strengthening collaboration with colleagues across the Judicial Office and developing designs that allow for easier navigation, quicker searching and more efficient use of content.

Priorities include:

- Continued review and regular update of existing bench books.
- Expansion and enhancement of online content and judicial work tools.
- New resources to assist sheriffs with their work presiding over Ordinary Cause Actions.
- The development of a new bench book-style publication relating to the judicial management of fatal accident inquiries.
- Thorough updating of existing guidance on contempt of court in criminal proceedings.
- Revision of written guidance on Adults with Incapacity to take account of the recent important changes in the law and practice.
- Review of the publishing platform for judicial resources.

Building capability and capacity

The Judicial Institute will continue to modernise its learning provision by improving the online Judicial Hub and expanding high quality digital resources, while maintaining a balanced and efficient approach to course delivery.

Digital learning

A greater emphasis will be placed on digital learning as a core element of flexible judicial education, expanding the availability of bitesize materials and video-based resources. Improvements to the Judicial Hub will enhance stability, usability and overall user experience, supported by strengthened security, streamlined navigation and independent video hosting. The digital offer will continue to grow through a wider range of expert recordings, scenario-based demonstrations, interactive formats and increased staff capability in high-quality video production. Short task-specific videos, updated ICMS and digital-system guides and regularly refreshed content will ensure that digital resources remain current, accessible and easy to use, enabling judicial office holders to access learning in formats that suit differing workloads and training needs.

Delivery formats

The Judicial Institute will offer a blended model of in-person, webinar, remote and selective hybrid training. In-person full-day courses will remain the preferred format for complex, high-stakes or collaborative subjects, delivered primarily in the Judicial Learning Suite. Short, focused webinars will provide responsive updates on law and digital processes, including a dedicated digital skills strand. Some of our courses, for example for JP, will be delivered in hybrid format. Hybrid delivery will be used only where resources and subject matter allow and will complement, not replace, in-person learning and to allow the Institute to deliver courses in ways that are more inclusive and flexible where possible.

Working beyond Scotland

The Institute will continue to play an active role in international judicial education by participating in multinational working groups and networks. This work strengthens Scotland's voice, supports innovation and tends to align with global best practice.

Work will include:

- A leading contribution to the EJTN “trainer lab” initiative in Lisbon in 2026 and a further iteration in 2027.
- An ongoing contribution to a joint webinar series on AI by the judicial training bodies of the UK and Ireland.
- Continued participation in EJTN programmes and working groups.
- Continued joint working with the judicial training bodies of the UK and Ireland.
- Responding to a request from Canadian judicial training colleagues by providing information about the Scottish experience in training judges on domestic abuse to assist with developing their training in the context of reforms of their law on coercive control.
- Contributions to major judicial education conferences, where resource allows.

Measuring progress

Progress will be evaluated through:

- Post-course evaluations and longer-term follow-ups.
- Feedback from sheriffs principal, tribunal chambers and committees.
- Judicial training needs analyses.
- Data on digital resource usage.
- Assessment of outcomes and educational impact via scholarly projects.

Conclusion

This rolling training plan provides a framework for judicial education over 2026–2028. It reflects the realities of judicial work, the expectations of the modern justice system and the operational pressures across courts and tribunals. The Institute is committed to supporting Scotland’s judiciary with high-quality education that is practical, future-focused and grounded in judicial independence.

