

www.womeninpubliclife.gg

Jurat of the Royal Court

trusted by your community to decide serious court cases

What does the Royal Court do?

The Royal Court

The Courts in Guernsey are responsible for the administration of justice.

The Royal Court, amongst other things, deals with criminal and civil matters that are beyond the scope of the Magistrates 'Court.

What does a Jurat do?

The Jurats

Guernsey doesn't have a jury system. Instead, the island has a permanent panel of Jurats who can be called upon to decide on the facts in a case that goes to the Royal Court.

Number

There are sixteen Jurats altogether, along with a reserve bench of Juré-Justicier Suppléants who may be called on, if necessary.

A minimum of seven, but usually nine, Jurats are needed for all Royal Court criminal cases and a minimum of two, but usually three, Jurats for a civil case except where a Judge may sit alone.

Process

During the days of the trial the Jurats sit on the top bench of the Royal Court alongside the Judge. The Jurats don't make decisions with respect to the law, that is the role of the Judge.

The Jurats listen carefully to the evidence and decide whether the case is proven or not.

In a criminal case, if someone is found guilty, or pleads guilty, the Jurats decide what the sentence should be, assisted by the Judge and established sentencing guidelines.

How do you get elected?

Elections

Being elected as a Jurat is a significant honour. The decision about who should be made a Jurat is taken by the States of Election which is made up of the Bailiff, the 16 Jurats, the 10 Rectors, the two Law Officers (HM Procureur and HM Comptroller), 38 Deputies and 34 Douzaine. There are two elections a year, on average, but that depends on the number of retiring Jurats.

When a Jurat retires and creates a vacancy, a Billet announcing the date of the election is sent to all members of the States of Election and published on the States website. An announcement is also placed in La Gazette Officielle.

Elections are held at the Royal Court before the start of a States meeting. Any member of the States of Election can propose candidates but it is usually Deputies who do so. A proposer and seconder each make a short speech outlining the person's experience and suitability for the role. The members of the States of Election then vote in a secret ballot. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated and the vote is held again.

The successful candidate is sworn in a few days later in an official ceremony at the Royal Court.

Nomination

People with the right skills and standing in the community may be approached by any member of the States of Election and encouraged to stand.

Candidates can also put themselves forward by asking a Deputy to nominate them or by contacting the senior Jurats or [the Bailiff's Office](#) for further information.

The Bailiff's Secretary will arrange for the person seeking nomination to meet a senior Jurat to discuss the commitment involved.

What skills do you need?

Skills

The main skills required to be a Jurat are an interest in serving the community, the ability to evaluate evidence impartially, the ability to be decisive and very good listening skills.

It is also important that each Jurat brings a different life experience so that cases are viewed from different perspectives.

You will discuss the case with the other Jurats after the evidence has been presented so you will need to be able to put your views across clearly and listen carefully to others.

What support or training is there?

Training

Jurats receive appropriate training for the various roles that are undertaken. Some of the training is carried out on an ad-hoc basis but in criminal and civil trials it is the Judge who delivers the summing up who gives the most necessary instructions.

Support

Each group of four Jurats ('Quarter') is led by a Lieutenant-Bailiff (senior Jurat) whose experience is useful to newer recruits.

The roster of duties and distribution of case papers is managed by the most senior Jurat who is currently Jurat Stephen Jones OBE.

What's the time commitment?

Time commitment

New Jurats can serve until they are 72. They are expected to commit until they are 72 but it is possible to retire earlier by becoming a Juré-Justicier Suppléant or if there are extenuating circumstances.

On average, each Jurat is needed on 85 days each year. A 'day' could involve a morning and afternoon session hearing evidence in the Royal Court. Or it could be less than an hour of overseeing house sales in Conveyancing Court.

Royal Court sessions are from 9.30am to 12.30pm and from 2.30pm to 4.30pm.

It is possible to be a Jurat and to be employed as long as you are self-employed or have an understanding employer who values your contribution to the community.

The 'Quarter' system

The 16 Jurats are divided in four calendar 'Quarters'. When a case arises, the Jurats of that Quarter are called on first. If there aren't sufficient Jurats from that Quarter, Jurats from other Quarters are called on by rotation.

Civil cases requiring three Jurats are less frequent than criminal matters but can take up to a month to resolve and require considerable reading.

Criminal cases require nine Jurats. They generally last up to two weeks or more and require a lesser amount of reading.

It is difficult to generalise but there are about fifteen criminal cases in a typical year in the Royal Court and over 30 sentencings and each Jurat is likely to sit on about half of them.

Contracts and Ordinary Court

Jurats of the Quarter attend Contracts Court on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week, starting at 9.30am and finishing by about 10.15am. The Jurats sit in a row at a raised bench while Advocates and their clients are called before them to agree house sales and other contracts.

Twice a month, three Jurats will go on from Contracts Court to attend Ordinary Court. Here they are dealing with mostly commercial matters, for which there can be significant time needed for preparatory reading in advance of the hearing.

Other duties

Jurats also have important honorary duties. For example, for the public, watching the island's Jurats parade in full robes and toques (hats) behind the Bailiff is an important part of the Liberation Day parade.

Do you get paid?

Remuneration

There is no salary – being a Jurat is a voluntary role in service of your community.

There are some small fees paid for Contracts Court and acting as a Commissioner for insolvency proceedings.

Rewards and downsides

Rewards

Being a Jurat is a high honour. You will be trusted by your community to make important decisions that will deeply affect lives and liberty.

You will be an intrinsic part of the rule of law in the Island and will be respected for your service.

Downsides

Being a Jurat is a very significant commitment both in terms of the time it takes up each year and the number of years you will serve. Cases can last several weeks.

Cases can be disturbing and difficult to move on from afterwards but support is available, if needed.

It is important that you are seen to be impartial and not conflicted at all times. This will have an impact on other roles you can take on. As a Jurat you could not be on the Parole Review Committee or Independent Prison Monitoring Panel, for example, or hold political office or express political opinions.

Where can I find out more?

More information

The role of a Jurat is described in detail on these two pages on the Royal Court website:

[1. Jurats \(includes a current list of Jurats\)](#)

[2. Jurats – more information](#)

People considering standing for election as a Jurat are encouraged to contact the Senior Jurats or [the Bailiff's Office](#) to find out more about the role. They are happy to talk to potential candidates, even if you may not be ready to go ahead for a number of years.

You may also wish to discuss the role with a [Deputy](#) to determine whether you have the right skills and experience to be successful in a Jurat election.

[Connect magazine interview with Jurat Joanne Wyatt.](#)

[Guernsey Press interview with Jurat Felicity Quevatre-Malcic.](#)

[Guernsey Press interview with Jurat Heather Reed.](#)

Download this information

To download all of this information about the role of a Jurat of the Royal Court as a PDF, click the PDF symbol on the right of this page.

Corrections

This description of the role of Jurat has been researched by Women in Public Life volunteers. If you spot an error, please do let us know by emailing hello@womeninpubliclife.gg.

Questions?

If you have a question about being a Jurat that isn't answered on this page, email us at hello@womeninpubliclife.gg. We'll research the answer and then publish it here to help inform others who might be curious about the same thing.