



Rt. Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Secretary of State for Justice
The Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
Westminster
London
SW1H 9AJ

20th January 2025

Sent by email to: public_enquiry.mhu@justice.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State

Suitability of Chair of Judicial Appointments Commission

I am writing on behalf of the GMB Judicial Branch, to ask you to remove Helen Pitcher as the chair of the Judicial Appointments Commission.

We do not believe that a person who is unfit to lead the Criminal Cases Review should be overseeing appointment of Judges. A discredited JAC chair reflects badly on judges as the JAC appoints Judges and therefore undermines public confidence in the justice system.

Worse, there are equally serious problems in the JAC as there have been in the CCRC.

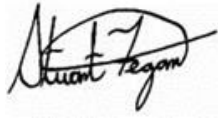
Lawyers' organisations and Judicial Associations such as the GMB Judges Branch have been saying for some time that the JAC is a failing organisation. Senior appointments have been irregular, with a lack of procedural fairness, and recurrent serious failures in due process which impede proper access to jobs and promotion. Only yesterday the judicial office published a report on diversity and equality which shows, with a 1% profile for Black lawyers, diversity is static or even going backward in significant areas.

The JAC takes secret references when Judges apply for promotion which outweigh assessments of their ability and their open references. Candidates are not told what is in them and so cannot comment or correct errors. A senior judge in the Court of Appeal, Sir Geoffrey Vos criticised this as unfair in June 2024, in a case brought by District Judge Kate Thomas. This practice contributes to an atmosphere of intimidation in the judiciary.

Ms Pitcher's record in a previous post of appointing silks was not promising in terms of improving diversity, which as with the JAC consistently treats diversity as an upstream issue to avoid examining faulty attitudes and practices internally that perpetuate, and according to reports worsen this situation.

We look forward to hearing what you decide.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stuart Fegan". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Stuart Fegan
Senior Organiser