



Opening Hours

Monday to Friday
9.00am - 8.00pm

Saturday and Sunday
10.00am - 3.00pm

Who's Who in Court

Magistrates

Magistrates sit at the front of the courtroom facing the court. The role of the magistrates is to determine whether a defendant is guilty or not and to pass the appropriate sentence. Magistrates are volunteers from all walks of life and are not required to have any legal qualifications. They also decide upon requests for remand into custody as well as applications for bail. In addition, the magistrates are responsible for committing more serious cases to the Crown Court for sentencing.

Judge

A judge also sits at the front of the courtroom facing the court but unlike magistrates they will sit alone. A judge is legally qualified (usually as a solicitor or barrister). They only wear gowns and wigs in the Crown Court.

Jury (Crown Court)

The jury is made up of twelve people who know nothing about the trial before they come to court. It is their job to listen to all the evidence presented and to decide whether or not the defendant is guilty.

Note Taker (Crown Court)

There is usually someone in Crown Court who records what everyone says.

Legal Advisor

The legal advisor, also known as 'court clerk', sits at the front of the court, in front of the Magistrates or Judge. The role of the Legal Advisor is to act as an advisor to the court and to ensure the court conducts proceedings in accordance with the relevant rules and laws. This includes making sure that any sentence passed is lawful and just. In the Magistrates court the legal advisor also acts as the note taker.

Probation Service

Each court will usually have a representative of the Probation Service present during hearings. Their role is to prepare pre sentence reports to assist the court with recommendations on sentencing and to report to the court details of any current community orders that the defendant may be subject to. The Probation Service is also responsible for prosecuting defendants who fail to comply with the requirements of a community sentence.

Prosecutor

The prosecutor is usually a lawyer from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) who tries to demonstrate that the defendant has broken the law. They do this by presenting facts and evidence to the court. Agencies other than the CPS can prosecute defendants in court depending on the type of case. For example: Group 4 Security Services (for failure to comply with an electronic curfew), the RSPCA (for the neglect or abuse of animals), the Probation Service, the Department for Work and Pensions (for benefit fraud) and others.

Usher

The court usher will wear a black robe. It is their responsibility to ensure court proceedings run smoothly. The usher will call defendants to the dock and inform the court who is representing who. If witnesses are involved in the case they also ensure they are seated in the correct place and show the public where to sit. They are also responsible for reading out the oath or affirmation to the witnesses. When the magistrates/judge enter or exit the court, the ushers will ask everyone to stand.

Defence Lawyer

It is the defence lawyer's job to help the defendant by trying to show the defendant did not break the law if they have pleaded not guilty. They will also present information or evidence to the court to help to ensure the defendant receives a fair sentence for their offence if they have pleaded guilty.

Defendant

The defendant is the person that has been accused of breaking the law. The defendant stands or sits in the dock and does not speak to the Magistrates or Judge unless they are

spoken to (unless they have chosen to represent themselves). An adult defendant may be in an open dock if they have come to court on bail or in a secured dock if they have been taken to court in custody.

There is often a dock in Youth Courts but unless defendants are appearing from custody they do not have to sit in it. Instead they must sit, or stand in front of the Magistrates.

Members of the Public

Adult court proceedings are open to the general public unless the court has specifically restricted it. Anyone over the age of 14 can attend court to observe, providing they do not disturb court proceedings in any way. The public are not permitted to attend Youth Court hearings.

Witnesses

In some cases witnesses may be called to court to give evidence. The witness answers questions in court from the witness box. In certain circumstances, for example where the witness is a child or classed as vulnerable, or in particularly serious cases, evidence can be given from behind a screen or via video link. The witness service (provided by victim support) can support witnesses emotionally, and can provide information before the trial about what to expect and even obtain access to a court room beforehand. They can provide support during, and after court proceedings.

