

**Scottish
Sentencing
Council**



6TH EDITION - SEPTEMBER 2025
Spotlight on Sentencing Circular

Welcome from the Council's Communications and Engagement Committee



Welcome to the sixth edition of the **Spotlight on Sentencing Circular (SSC)**. In this issue, we welcome our **new members** Sheriff Scott Pattison, Summary Sheriff Alison Michie and Summary Sheriff Joanna McDonald who have been appointed to the Council as judicial members.

Our new members join us as we celebrate our **10th anniversary year**, and we are hosting a series of events and activities to recognise this important milestone, which you can read more about in the newsletter.

Since the last newsletter, we have now reached the final stages of developing our draft **guidelines on rape offences**. Progress also continues on our other guidelines in development including those on domestic abuse, sexual assault, sentencing after a guilty plea, environmental and wildlife crime and indecent images.

In May, we hosted our second **research symposium** which focused on examining efficacy from a comparative perspective and was an opportunity to share knowledge with those working in sentencing. We also release our **latest blog**, written by the Council's Principal Research Officer, Dr Nicole Vidal, on how evidence-based research informs our work and shapes Scotland's sentencing guidelines.

Earlier this year, we were sad to hear of the passing of Lord Justice William Davis, Chair of the Sentencing Council for England and Wales. Our thoughts and condolences go out to his family and colleagues.

You can read more about our recent work below and, as always, stay updated on our latest news and information via our social media channels, [previous newsletters](#) and on our [website](#).

Latest News



New members appointed to the Council

Three new members have been appointed to the Council.

Sheriff Scott Pattison, Summary Sheriff Alison Michie and Summary Sheriff Joanna McDonald join the Council as judicial members. All have been appointed for five-year terms by the Lord Justice General, Lord Pentland, after consulting the Scottish Ministers.

Sheriff Pattison has been a sheriff for 14 years, working initially in Aberdeen and Ayr sheriff courts and latterly as a floating sheriff across all the courts in South Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway. He was appointed as a temporary High Court judge in 2021.

Summary Sheriff Michie was appointed as a summary sheriff in September 2020. She initially served as a floating summary sheriff throughout the sherrifdom of Tayside, Central and Fife, but has been based in Falkirk since 2022.

Summary Sheriff McDonald was appointed as a floating summary sheriff in October 2021, becoming a resident summary sheriff in Glasgow in April 2024.

Lord Beckett, Chair of the Council, said: "I am delighted to welcome our new members to the Council. The knowledge and expertise they bring will be invaluable."

The new appointments fill vacancies created by the end of terms in office for former members Lord Colbeck and Susan Fallone JP and a change of judicial role for former Council member Sheriff Amel Elfallah. However, Sheriff Elfallah currently remains an advisor to the Council. We are grateful to them for their significant contribution to the Council's work during their time with us.

[Read more about the new Council members](#)



Scottish Sentencing Research Symposium

The Council, the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (SCCJR), and the Sentencing Academy hosted the second Scottish Sentencing Research Symposium on 20 May 2025 at the Edinburgh Law School, University of Edinburgh.

The symposium, chaired by Lord Beckett, focused on three central themes: the effectiveness of sentencing; public perceptions and awareness of sentencing; and the impact of research on sentencing practice and policy.

The Council has published a report on discussions from the symposium highlighting the important research work being undertaken in these vital areas. The report also illustrates the role of discussions in informing policy development.

The presentations from the symposium are available to watch on our website and showcase research in these three key areas related to sentencing, and promote greater awareness and understanding.

Lord Beckett said: “This symposium provided an opportunity to engage not only in the sharing of knowledge but in the exchange of ideas that will help inform future discussions regarding sentencing in Scotland. It is encouraging to see how events such as this continue to support the Council’s wider role in contributing to the development of sentencing policy and in promoting public understanding of sentencing.

“These discussions demonstrated both the diversity and the depth of expertise among those with a professional and academic interest in sentencing, and I am pleased that the connections established and insights shared are already creating opportunities to widen networks and broaden understanding.”

[Read the full report and watch the presentations](#)

Speaker's Conference inquiry on the security of candidates, MPs and elections

On 2 July 2025, Lord Colbeck, a judicial member of the Council at the time, gave evidence at the Speaker's Conference inquiry on the security of candidates, MPs and elections in London.

The session looked at how the existing legislative frameworks and criminal justice processes respond to crimes of abuse and intimidation against MPs and candidates.

[Watch the full session](#)



New education resource: case study printable

The Council has created a print version of its popular interactive online 'If you were the judge' case study on death by dangerous driving. The latest print version puts pupils in the shoes (or robes) of a judge, who must decide the sentence in the case.

Other case studies, available both online and in printable form, are on offences of robbery and speeding. A range of educational material, including classroom lesson plans and short animated videos, are also available.

[Test your knowledge](#)



10 year anniversary plans take shape

Activities recognising the Council's 10 year anniversary are coming together. One of the highlights will be a conference to be held in November.

The conference will feature remarks from the Lord Justice General, Lord Justice Clerk, Lord Advocate and a wide range of other speakers. Speeches and panel discussions will explore the Council's work to date as well as the challenges likely to be presented in the next decade.

An essay competition for pupils in S4 – S6 on the title "Is Sentencing in Scotland Fair?" is currently taking place in partnership with the Modern Studies Association (MSA). The winner will be invited to Parliament House to meet with a senior judge and will also receive a small prize, generously sponsored by the MSA.

Finally, Council member Dr Jay Gormley will be editing a collection of academic reflections on the anniversary conference and the years ahead, for publication as part of a symposium edition of the Edinburgh Law Review.

Keep an eye on our website for further details.



Council published report on modern slavery and human trafficking in Scotland

The Council has commissioned and published a new literature review examining the sentencing of offences involving modern slavery and human trafficking in Scotland. It was conducted by academics from the University of Glasgow's School of Law.

The review sets out the legal framework in Scotland as it relates to these offences, as well as comparable offences which are likely to be relevant to prosecution and sentencing in this context. It explores the sentencing framework in Scotland, with reference to available data on prosecutions and disposals, reported case law and unreported cases.

The review also looks at the equivalent landscape in England, in light of recent development of sentencing guidelines in this area. Finally, the report considers this topic from a socio-legal perspective and in particular examines the experiences of victims.

[Read the literature review](#)

New Blog: How research shapes Scotland's sentencing guidelines



The Council is often asked how it decides what goes into sentencing guidelines. The answer lies in our commitment to evidence-based and comprehensive research. Sentencing involves complex considerations, and even issues that may seem straightforward can raise questions.

Our work is firmly rooted in evidence, and we are committed to thoroughly evaluating insights derived from research, engagement, and consultation. In our latest blog, the Council's Principal Research Officer, Dr Nicole Vidal, discusses research and how it informs our work.

[Read the blog](#)

Guideline latest

Table of progress

Guideline	Stage 1 - Initial consideration of the guideline topic	Stage 2 - Development of a draft guideline	Stage 3 - Seeking the views of judges	Stage 4 - Consulting on the guideline	Stage 5 - Finalising the guideline	Stage 6 - Submitting the guideline for approval	Stage 7 - Raising awareness about the guideline	Stage 8 - Monitoring and review
Rape	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Domestic abuse	✓	✓	✓					
Sexual assault	✓	✓						
Indecent images of children	✓	✓						
Sentencing after a guilty plea	✓	✓						
Environmental and wildlife crime	✓							
Statutory offences of causing death by driving	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sentencing young people	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The sentencing process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Principles and purposes of sentencing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

[Read more about our guidelines on our website](#)

Minutes from the latest meeting

The minutes of the last Council meeting on 6 June 2025 are now available and published on our website.

[Read the minutes from the latest Council meeting](#)



Upcoming meetings

3 October 2025

The next meeting of the Scottish Sentencing Council will take place on Friday 3 October 2025.

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