



# CONFERENCE REPORT

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## JUSTICE SECTOR EQUALITIES CONFERENCE



**28TH AUGUST 2025**

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# Introduction

The Justice Sector Equalities Conference is FJSS Group's flagship annual gathering, bringing together stakeholders across the justice system to confront persistent inequalities and drive actionable solutions that strengthen ethnic minority representation, policy development, and inclusion across law enforcement, the courts, and the wider justice sector.

## CONFERENCE BACKGROUND

Since its launch in 2019, the conference has grown significantly in scale and influence, attracting senior leaders and institutions across Scotland. Returning to COSLA—its original venue—this year's conference built on key milestones, including the establishment of the Justice Sector Interface at CONF2024, which has deepened cross-sector collaboration and strengthened collective accountability.

## JSEC 2025

This year, the conference held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. The programme included a tribute and special obituary for the late Professor Emeritus Sir Geoff Palmer KT OBE, former FJSS Group Chairman, alongside a keynote address by Rt. Hon. Angela Constance MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, Scottish Government, and presentations from sector leaders, including:

- Lindsay Jack, Head of Diversity at the Law Society of Scotland
- ACC Wendy Middleton of Police Scotland
- Heather Simpson, Head of Strategy Governance at the Judicial Office for Scotland
- Graham Boyack of Scottish Mediation
- Karen Nailen, CEO of Citizens Advice Bureau West Lothian, among others.

The conference was supported by respected partners such as the Scottish Government, the Law Society of Scotland, the Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland, Police Scotland, the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, the Faculty of Advocates, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, and leading law firms and public bodies. Their involvement underscores the sector's shared commitment to justice reform, diversity, and meaningful system change.

This report summarises the key presentations, discussions and resolutions from the conference and captures the collective insights and commitments that will guide continued progress across the sector.

# Opening Remarks and Tribute

Delivered by:

**PROFESSOR AMOS HANIFF**

Vice Chairman, FJSS Group

Professor Sir Godfrey Henry Palmer KT OBE served as Chairman of FJSS Group from February 2019 until his passing on 12 June 2025. Throughout his tenure, he was a constant source of wisdom, courage and steady leadership, motivating us even in moments when racism and discrimination felt particularly heavy.

As a pioneering Black Scottish scientist, a champion of human rights and racial inclusion, and a leading voice on historical injustice and the legacies of slavery and colonialism, Sir Geoff often spoke candidly about the long road toward recognition.



He would remind us: “I was only knighted in 2014.” His point was never bitterness, but perspective. He encouraged us not to be disheartened if our work is not immediately celebrated, because, as he would say, “Time is the best judge - speak through the work.”

Sir Geoff’s impact was unique in its duality: working at the highest institutional levels while remaining deeply connected to grassroots communities. He valued what the community told him about lived reality and used that feedback to influence policy and structural change. For him, speaking publicly the way he did public about representing the community. He believed his voice belonged to a community that remained underrepresented in key platforms.

He had a rare ability to bridge the sophistication of institutional power with the honesty and simplicity of community experience. His encouragement to us remains clear and enduring: “Continue doing the wonderful work. You may not see its value today, but those who come after you will.”

Sir Geoff leaves an indelible imprint on our work and our hearts. To continue building, challenging and advocating with integrity is the truest way to honour his legacy.

We will miss his leadership and wise counsel.





## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### RT HON. ANGELA CONSTANCE MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Justice and  
Home Affairs

**The Cabinet Secretary** opened by thanking FJSS Group and underscoring the conference's role in advancing fairness and equality within Scotland's justice system. She welcomed Rev. Clive Foster MBE as the new Windrush Commissioner and reiterated support for the Wendy Williams Review, emphasising the need for full implementation and meaningful outcomes following past injustices in migration policy.

Reaffirming Scotland's 2022 Vision for Justice, she highlighted the government's commitment to a just, safe and resilient society through trauma-informed, person-centred justice services, shaped by lived experience and partnership.

The Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform Bill, now nearing completion, represents a major step toward modernising justice, improving experiences of victims and witnesses, and supporting cultural change across the sector. She also confirmed the enactment of the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Act, strengthening oversight, consumer protection and access to justice, including expanded models of legal service delivery.

Ongoing legal aid reform aims to create a more transparent, sustainable and user-centred system, supported by broad sector engagement. Work through the Future of the Legal Profession Group continues to widen diversity and equal opportunity, improving public trust and representation.

She recognised Police Scotland's Policing Together Strategy and acknowledgement of institutional discrimination, noting continued reforms in leadership accountability, equity training and data-driven improvement.

Updates from the Scottish Prison Service included progress on trauma-informed practice, ending custodial placement of under-18s and continued development of HMP Highland and HMP Glasgow. The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service is further enhancing Open Justice through digital investment and livestreaming. The extension of free mediation for civil disputes under £5,000 was noted as a key access mechanism that reduces court pressure but remains underused.

She paid tribute to Professor Emeritus Sir Geoff Palmer KT OBE, commending his leadership, scholarship and lifelong advocacy for equality, and closed by reaffirming the government's commitment to an inclusive, rights-based justice system, thanking FJSS Group for providing a platform to drive shared progress and accountability.



## PRESENTATION SUMMARY

OPERATION EVOLVE - Criminal Justice Improvement Programme

**ACC WENDY MIDDLETON**

Police Scotland

**Assistant Chief Constable Wendy Middleton** reflected on leading Police Scotland's Criminal Justice portfolio since 2023, noting the privilege of working alongside committed justice leaders across Scotland. She emphasised that the justice system is not just its institutions - police, prosecution, and courts - but the people within it and those who experience it first-hand. Listening to lived experience, she said, must remain central to shaping and improving services.

She acknowledged the complexity of public views on justice and the differing experiences of victims, witnesses, and offenders, noting that individuals can move between these roles. Post-pandemic, the system still struggles to flex to demand. Middleton stressed the importance of proportionate responses to offending to avoid unnecessary court backlogs, reminding the audience that "justice delayed is justice denied."

ACC Middleton outlined initiatives aimed at easing demand while maintaining fairness. Direct Measures, including Recorded Police Warnings and Anti-Social Behaviour Penalties, target low-level offences while excluding hate crimes, sexual offences, and domestic abuse. A new "street referral" model will connect low-level offenders directly with support services to reduce re-offending.

Digital transformation is a major step forward. Body Worn Video has reduced assaults on officers, sped up complaint resolution, and supported early guilty pleas. The Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC) now allows secure transfer of footage and digital evidence without seizing devices, streamlining the journey from crime scene to court.

On custody, Middleton highlighted the importance of trauma-sensitive responses, especially for children and vulnerable individuals. Police Scotland has reintroduced the Voluntary Planned Interview Pathway to progress investigations without unnecessary detention. A new partnership with Childline supports children in custody, ensuring compassionate intervention for young people entering the system.

Finally, she addressed improvements in prosecution. Collaboration with COPFS redesigned the Standard Prosecution Report to enhance clarity and ensure trauma-aware information sharing. Summary case management, led by the judiciary, has reduced trial numbers and increased early pleas, benefiting victims and reducing repeated court attendance.

ACC Middleton closed by reaffirming Police Scotland's commitment to collaborative, trauma-informed justice reform - ensuring responses are proportionate, efficient, and centred on those who rely on the system most.

## PRESENTATION SUMMARY

Sustaining the Interface

**JENNIFER WALLACE**

Strategic Improvement Coach



**Jennifer Wallace** outlined the next steps for sustaining the Scottish Justice Sector Interface following a successful first-year proof of concept. She highlighted three central challenges:

- how to build and maintain the Interface long-term
- how to secure sustainable support for FJSS Group
- and how to collectively understand and measure the difference the Interface makes across the justice sector.

She presented two potential membership models to support long-term sustainability.

**Model 1** proposes a flat-based membership system with fees scaled to organisational size, offering benefits such as targeted FJSS policy support, peer-learning meetings, shared tools and frameworks, and reduced conference ticket rates.

**Model 2** introduces tiered memberships—Standard, Accredited, and Strategic Partner—with progressively increased benefits, including brand licensing, annual strategy sessions, leadership symposium invitations, bespoke consultancy, and tailored impact evaluations.

Jennifer also outlined a suite of additional services, available either to strategic partners or as add-ons. These include staff training, inclusive communications workshops, diversity and inclusion audits, strategic reviews, inclusive recruitment assessments, equality impact advice, commissioned outputs such as evaluation frameworks, and community engagement support.

She closed by engaging participants in forward-looking reflection, asking them to imagine the Interface's success in 2030: how its impact should be measured, which membership model best supports long-term outcomes, and what further ideas could strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of equality and diversity work across Scotland's justice sector.

## PRESENTATION SUMMARY

Diversity and Mediation

**GRAHAM BOYACK**

Director, Scottish Mediation



**Graham Boyack** outlined Scottish Mediation's vision of a Scotland where people, communities, and organisations handle disagreements respectfully. Their contribution toward this vision includes promoting mediation, demonstrating its benefits, raising its public profile, and supporting excellence and innovation in mediation practice.

He emphasised Scottish Mediation's strategic objective: to better reflect the diversity of the population it serves, recognising that broader representation enriches thinking, practice, and accessibility. Mediation, he noted, fits across multiple settings—within the formal justice system, alongside it, and within communities—making diversity essential to its effectiveness.

Graham described the organisation's journey since the 2020 Hallmark of Inclusion recommendations. Guided by a working group and informed by surveys, Scottish Mediation first sought to understand its starting point: it was not diverse, but members, staff, and the Board were committed to change.

Key barriers identified included the cost of mediator training, limited opportunities to gain experience, income constraints, low awareness in diverse communities, and a need to strengthen EDI skills within the mediation community.

Progress so far includes increased outreach to individuals and community organisations, stronger links with advocacy groups, steps to improve Board and membership diversity, and efforts to make mediation more accessible—including using alternative terms that resonate with wider audiences.

Looking ahead, Scottish Mediation will continue to review and refresh its approach, benchmark progress against original findings, maintain engagement, and learn from partners across the sector.



## PRESENTATION SUMMARY

Access to Justice - The Role of the  
Citizen's Advice Network in Scotland

**KAREN NAILEN**

CEO, Citizens Advice Bureau West Lothian

**Karen Nailen** highlighted the central role of Scotland's Citizens Advice network in advancing access to justice nationwide. Across 59 bureaux and nearly 300 locations, the service provides free, confidential and impartial advice on issues including social security, debt, housing, employment, energy, complaints, and legal proceedings. In 2023/24, over 192,000 people were supported, more than 680,000 advice issues addressed, and £158 million returned to individuals and communities. The network's support particularly reaches those facing multiple vulnerabilities: nearly two-thirds of clients report a disability or long-term health condition, one-third reside in highly deprived areas, and over half are women.

Karen stressed that many individuals are now navigating near-constant crisis due to the cost-of-living pressures and post-pandemic strain, leaving limited capacity to assert or enforce fundamental rights such as food, housing, health, and social security. Legal needs remain significant: in 2024/25, law and courts advice pages attracted over 970,000 views, and bureaux provided more than 41,000 pieces of legal advice, including support at courts and tribunals where advisers act as authorised lay representatives.

Key barriers persist, particularly digital exclusion, reduced legal aid coverage, and limited access to local representation. Increasing digitisation of justice procedures risks leaving many unable to meaningfully participate, with recorded digital exclusion rising by 59% since 2021/22. Distance to legal support, mobility constraints, and rising costs were also identified as compounding challenges.

Karen called for sustained investment in access to justice initiatives, longer-term funding for in-court advice models, and a genuinely mixed delivery approach prioritising early intervention. She highlighted ongoing policy engagement with Scottish Government, Parliament, and justice partners to secure civil legal aid reform, strengthen public accountability through the forthcoming Scottish Human Rights Bill, and improve accessibility in courts and tribunal systems.

Through advice, advocacy and evidence-based influencing, the Citizens Advice network remains a critical vehicle for ensuring rights can be understood, upheld, and enforced across Scotland.

## PRESENTATION SUMMARY

Systemic Functions of the Courts and  
Connections with Sector Modernization

### HEATHER SIMPSON

Head of Strategy Governance, Judicial  
Office for Scotland



**Heather Simpson** shared the key challenge facing the judiciary: ensuring that strong candidates from a wide range of backgrounds are considering and applying for judicial office. She explained that, given the current demographics of the judiciary, there remains significant work to be done to achieve a more representative judiciary in Scotland.

Heather outlined the ways in which the judiciary supports and promotes diversity, including inclusive internal policies and support available to those in judicial office. Judicial training plays an important role in embedding an inclusive culture, both through how training is delivered and its content. Examples include Trauma-Informed Training and substantial updates to the Equal Treatment Bench Book, which help equip the judiciary with the knowledge and skills needed to engage effectively with diverse individuals.

She also offered a detailed exploration of how the courts function as a system and their critical role within the wider justice sector. She highlighted that courts do not operate in isolation; their effectiveness relies on interconnected processes, from case management and prosecution to support services for victims, witnesses, and offenders. This systems-based perspective, she emphasised, is key to ensuring fairness, efficiency, and access to justice.

A key focus of her presentation was the link between the courts and sector modernisation. Heather outlined how digital innovation, streamlined case management, and improved data sharing are helping courts respond more effectively to demand while maintaining transparency and integrity. She noted, however, that reform must balance efficiency with keeping the human experience of justice—particularly for vulnerable individuals—at the centre.

Heather encouraged a forward-looking approach, stressing that modernisation is not simply about new systems or processes, but about creating a responsive, connected, and resilient court system. Through collaboration across justice partners and evidence-led change, she argued, the courts can continue to meet the evolving needs of society while upholding the rule of law.

# Summary of Conference Discussions and Outcomes



**LINDSAY JACK**

Head of Diversity,  
Law Society of  
Scotland

## MODERATED BY:

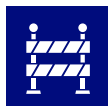
**KAREN NAILEN**

CEO, Citizens  
Advice Bureau,  
West Lothian



Participants engaged in an open and honest discussion about what is working within the Scottish justice system, the persistent barriers affecting progress, and practical steps needed to strengthen equity, diversity, and access to justice across the sector.

## What is not working?



Attendees highlighted several systemic barriers, including:

- Ongoing attrition within the legal profession, limited progression routes, and insufficient mentoring and advocacy support.
- Gaps in legal aid, particularly for BAME women, alongside fewer solicitors willing or able to take on legal aid cases.
- Intersectional inequalities, lack of accessible support systems, poor representation, and limited diverse role models across the sector.
- Structural issues such as housing insecurity, justice delays, inconsistent sentencing, inaccessible services, excessive jargon, and siloed working.
- Organisations often recognise diversity in principle, but struggle to embed intersectionality, deliver consistent EDI practice, or make anti-racism training meaningful.
- Short-term funding cycles, weak accountability mechanisms, poor data quality/sharing, and political shifts hinder long-term progress.

## What is working?

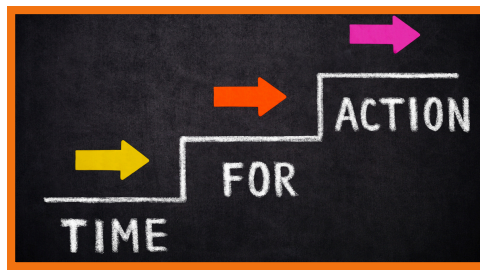




Despite challenges, several positive developments were acknowledged:

- Increasing sector-wide recognition of institutional racism, early intervention, trauma-informed practice, and person-centred approaches.
- Strong willingness to collaborate, share learning, and engage across agencies and communities.
- Improved use of EQIAs, growing awareness of intersectionality, and more accessible services that incorporate advocacy, mediation, and early dispute resolution.
- Honesty from major institutions—such as Police Scotland acknowledging institutional discrimination—was seen as a significant step forward.
- Pockets of good practice locally, stronger engagement with service users, and commitment to nurturing the next generation.

## What we are doing/could be done.



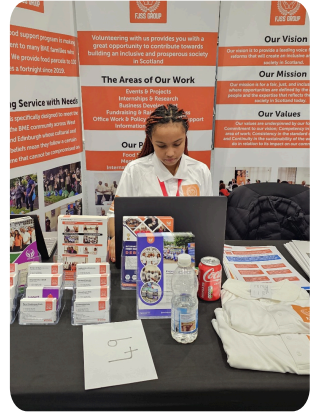
Participants proposed several constructive actions to address gaps and drive sustainable change:

- Strengthen funding structures, including longer-term funding (minimum three-year cycles), expanded investment in services, and more corporate social responsibility from well-resourced firms.
- Reform legal aid—increase rates, widen access, and consider mandatory participation by law firms.
- Expand restorative justice, inclusive communication approaches, and community-focused public education to build trust.
- Enhance collaboration and data sharing, ensuring common monitoring systems and stronger regulatory frameworks.
- Prioritise mandatory training (anti-racism, trauma-informed practice, intersectionality), delivered early in careers and consistently across institutions.
- Improve representation across decision-making spaces and governance bodies to ensure lived experience informs policy and operational reform.
- Reduce silos through joint strategy development, cross-sector learning, and sustained engagement between justice bodies, community organisations, and local services.

## Stakeholder reflections

Representatives from organisations such as CEMVO Scotland, SCRA, and the Scottish Sentencing Council noted their desire to deepen involvement, learn from the wider sector, and close key gaps—particularly regarding children’s experiences in the justice pathway, intersectionality, and the “missing links” in current structures.

# Photo Highlights





# THANK YOU!

We hope this report provides a clear understanding of the discussions, experiences, and shared commitments that shaped this year's conference. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact us.

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