



Bar Council: Court dress guidance

Purpose:	To recommend to barristers appropriate dress for courts and tribunals
Scope of application:	All practising barristers
Issued by:	The Legal Services Committee and Equality, Diversity and Social Mobility Committee
First issued:	June 2009
Last reviewed:	July 2025
Status and effect:	Please see the notice at end of this document. This is not 'guidance' for the purposes of the BSB Handbook I6.4

This note provides general guidance to members of the Bar on appropriate court dress when appearing as counsel.

This guidance is not intended to effect any change in court clothing norms. It is, however, intended to provide a ready guide as to what clothing will generally be expected and acceptable, reflecting the seriousness of the function barristers perform in court and the need to ensure the dignity of the court, the role of court dress as the uniform of the profession, and the need for such uniform to be inclusive for those with different protected characteristics.

This guidance is approved by the Lady Chief Justice.

1. This guidance has been developed to enable counsel to understand easily when and where wigs and gowns are required to be worn.
2. The table below sets out those types of hearing where court dress is required, namely wigs, gowns, wing-collars, and bands or collarettes. In all other cases, professional 'business attire' is worn.
3. In general, business attire means smart professional office wear. This will usually mean a dark, dark grey or dark blue suit with tie or similarly coloured jacket and

either skirt or trousers, but this is not prescriptive. Counsel may wear clothing as appropriate to their gender identity.

4. This guidance is intended to ensure court dress requirements do not operate in a discriminatory way in relation to protected characteristics.¹
5. Counsel should generally adopt the principle that if the judge is robed, they should be robed.²
6. The definition of ‘trial’ includes any final hearing in court of a claim brought under CPR Part 7 or CPR Part 8 (including preliminary issues), any final hearing in court of a contested Petition for Divorce, or Nullity, and any hearing in court of a winding up or bankruptcy petition but not including an application for Default or Summary Judgment.
7. By convention in the High Court, Family Court and County Court cases which directly relate to the liberty of an individual require court dress (such as committal hearings).
8. The following guidance applies to in-person hearings. Please note, where a barrister attends a hybrid hearing, the barrister should dress as if they are attending the hearing in person, whether they in fact attend in person or remotely. If the in-person hearing is robed, the barrister attending remotely should also be robed. If that causes difficulty in any given case, the barrister in question can seek a one-off dispensation from the judge.
9. Business attire is the norm for any hearing before a tribunal (First-tier or Upper Tribunal) or for any hearing in a Coroner’s Court or in the magistrates’ court.

Court of Appeal	Business Attire	Court Dress
		✓
High Court	Business Attire	Court Dress
Commercial Court and Circuit Commercial Court (all occasions)	✓	
Admiralty Court (all occasions)	✓	
Technology and Construction Court (all occasions)	✓	

¹ Equality Act (2010)

² Unless the judge directs differently. From 15 April 2024 the judges sitting at the Central Family Court will be robed, but wigs will not be worn. It is not expected that practitioners should robe.

Other King's Bench Division		
Administrative Court (all occasions)		✓
Trials (apart from those in the Commercial Court, Admiralty Court Mercantile Court and Technology and Construction Court)		✓
Other occasions	✓	
Chancery Division		
Trials and appeals except those with no oral evidence (for example Part 8 claims)		✓
IP matters from the IPO (usually no oral evidence)	✓	
Public examinations of bankrupts and of directors or other officers of companies; applications for discharge from bankruptcy or for suspension of such discharge; all proceedings under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986; petitions to wind up companies; final hearings of petitions for the reduction of capital of companies		✓
All other occasions	✓	
Family Division		
Contested divorce and nullity petitions (and on all other occasions when the court sits in open court unless the judge otherwise directs)		✓
All other occasions	✓	
County Court		
All applications	✓	
Appeals from applications	✓	
Trials, appeals from trials, and appeals under the Housing Act 1996 sections 204 and 204A		✓
Fast-track trials	✓	
Masters, Registrars and District Judges		
Chancery Division hearings in court including IP cases/appeals (not in the judge's room)		✓

County Court winding up proceedings before a district judge		✓
All other occasions	✓	
Magistrates' courts (all occasions)		
All occasions	✓	
Crown Court		
Matters heard in chambers	✓	
All other occasions		✓
Cases involving the liberty of the subject		
Magistrates' court	✓	
All other courts and occasions		✓
Youth Courts		
All occasions	✓	

Dispensations

10. Dispensations are available to adjust court dress based on religion, race, disability, and sex. Newly available dispensations based on race, sex and disability will be available for a trial period of three years from July 2025. The reason for a dispensation is a private matter and all professional court users will be expected to accept adjustments to another's court dress without comment. In some circumstances the judge may direct all professional court users to adjust court dress (eg remove wigs). In such circumstances, counsel should follow the judge's direction.
11. In some rare circumstances specific guidance or a court direction will be required as to whether dispensation or reasonable adjustments are permitted in a particular court or type of hearing, but that will arise only where the clothing in question may affect the just determination of proceedings.

Religion/Faith

12. In general, clothing that is worn as a requirement or emblem of faith is permitted to be worn in court. Some common examples are given below. This list is not exhaustive.

- Christianity:** Jewellery bearing crosses or other symbols of religious belief is permitted (and this applies equally to other beliefs).
- Islam:** Headscarves may be worn but should be dark, dark grey or dark blue, in line with business attire. Those wearing headscarves need not wear wigs where court dress is required.
- Judaism:** Kippahs may be worn (and worn under wigs where court dress is required).
- Sikhism:** Turbans may be worn but should be dark, dark grey or dark blue, in line with business attire. Turban-wearing Sikhs need not wear wigs where court dress is required.

Race

13. In some ethnicities, there are associated hairstyle traditions that would make wearing a wig uncomfortable or impractical. In such cases, the relevant barrister need not wear a wig where court dress is required. No application is required.

Other dispensations

14. Additional dispensations are available on the grounds of disability, pregnancy, or menopause upon request. An application should be made to the Bar Council [using the online form](#). A dispensation certificate will be issued. A dispensation certificate is valid for 12 months.

15. No application to the judge hearing a case or notice to opposing counsel is required when counsel has a dispensation certificate. Counsel should consider including a copy of the certificate alongside any papers sent to the court in advance of any hearing. Presentation of a copy of the certificate should also be made to the judge's clerk or judge on request.

Disability

16. In circumstances where ordinary court-wear (whether business attire or court dress, when applicable) is impossible, impractical, or uncomfortable because of any disability of the barrister, counsel may make reasonable adjustments to their dress, which may include not wearing a wig and/or gown, as required and following receipt of a dispensation certificate (see para 14).

For example:

- Wearers of bone anchored hearing aids may experience hearing difficulties if required to wear a wig

- Carrying robes to court may, due to their bulk, prove particularly difficult for a barrister using crutches (or similar mobility aids) or a barrister who is a wheelchair user
- Those with arthritis may struggle to put on court collars or bands without assistance
- Disabled barristers whose movement is restricted may find putting on or removing a gown difficult

Sex

17. Counsel may also adjust dress, for example, wigs and/or gowns may be removed where not to do so would be physically uncomfortable on grounds of sex, principally menopause or pregnancy related. A dispensation certificate will be required (see para 14).

Process to be followed by counsel seeking a dispensation certificate

How to apply for a dispensation

Counsel seeking a dispensation certificate should [complete a short application form](#). Counsel are not required to disclose personal details, instead they are asked to make a declaration that they are entitled to a dispensation on the grounds of either disability or sex.

Any questions can be directed to equality@barcouncil.org.uk

Once agreed, an electronic certificate will be available for counsel to use. This may be sent to the judge's clerk or judge ahead of any hearing or on request.

If you have a dispensation certificate you do not need to apply for a dispensation for individual hearings and there is no need to notify opponents etc.

The dispensation certificate is valid for 12 months.

Please allow up to three business days for processing upon receipt of an application.

Whilst the Bar Council is responsible for issuing a dispensation certificate, it is on the understanding the judge is responsible for the proceedings in court, and this includes matters relating to court dress (see below).

There is no fee.

Important notice:

Counsel should recognise that the management of proceedings in court is a matter for each judge, whose responsibilities include ensuring that the dignity of the court is respected and maintained at all times. When presented with a certificate confirming the need for a reasonable adjustment, it is unlikely that a judge will have any objection to the

dispensation(s) in question. In the event that the judge has any concerns, the judge should, in the first instance, raise the matter with the advocate concerned in a discreet and appropriate manner. The judge should give careful consideration as to whether there may be consequential case management issues to be discussed with the advocates/parties and, if so, to how these should be determined.

This process applies only to reasonable adjustments to which the advocate is not already entitled (which would include where a faith requirement or an ethnic hairstyle tradition would make wearing a wig uncomfortable or impractical).

We have prepared this document to assist barristers on matters of professional conduct and ethics. It is not 'guidance' for the purposes of the BSB Handbook I6.4, and neither the BSB nor a disciplinary tribunal nor the Legal Ombudsman is bound by any views or advice expressed in it.

It does not comprise – and cannot be relied on as giving – legal advice. It has been prepared in good faith, but neither the Bar Council nor any of the individuals responsible for, or involved in, its preparation accepts any responsibility or liability for anything done in reliance on it. For fuller information as to the status and effect of this document, please see our [information and disclaimer](#).

Bar Council, July 2025

Example – not to be used or copied



The Bar Council

Court dress dispensation certificate

This court dress dispensation certificate may be sent to the court ahead of any hearing and should be handed to the judge's clerk or judge on request.

It applies to all hearings and no application is needed for any individual hearing/there is no need to notify opponents etc.

This certificate is issued by The Bar Council and is agreed by the Lady Chief Justice.

This certificate is issued on the understanding that the management of proceedings in court is a matter for each judge, whose responsibilities include ensuring that the dignity of the court is respected and maintained at all times.

Name of counsel _____

I confirm that counsel has been granted a dispensation to their court dress valid until

Adjustment to court dress required:

Signature

Example – not to be used or copied

Chair of the Bar, Barbara Mills KC