

For immediate release

New website puts the public in the judge's chair

You be the Judge, an interactive platform created by the Sentencing Council, and supported by the Judiciary of England and Wales, has gone live today. The platform allows users to put themselves in the role of a judge or magistrate to make decisions based on real-life cases and decide what they think the sentence should be.

You be the Judge gives people the opportunity to watch six shortened, dramatised cases related to burglary, fraud, assault, and possession of drugs, a knife, and a firearm. Users of the website will listen to the facts of each case as they relate to the offence and the offender and weigh up the aggravating and mitigating factors before deciding what they think is an appropriate sentence. They will then be able to see how their sentence compares with the one handed down by the judge or magistrates.

In making You be the Judge, the Sentencing Council for England and Wales aims to help people understand how sentencing works. Each of the six cases shows the difficult and complex process judges and magistrates go through to decide a sentence and how they follow sentencing guidelines to take a consistent and transparent approach.

You be the Judge launched at King's Academy Prospect in Reading on 10 July 2024 with pupils taking part in a lesson delivered by Her Honour Judge Khatun Sapnara, with the Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales and Lord Justice William Davis also in attendance. Pupils taking part in the launch event said the website was "very enjoyable and informative".

Launching the website, Chairman of the Sentencing Council, Lord Justice William Davis, said: "You be the Judge gives the public a unique opportunity to see for themselves how complex the sentencing process is and how sentencing guidelines help judges and magistrates take a consistent approach. Watching the scenarios, people will be able to see how judges and magistrates balance the seriousness of the offence, the impact on the victim, the circumstances of the offender and the need to protect the public in deciding on a proportionate and appropriate sentence."

The Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales, Baroness Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill, said: “The Judiciary of England and Wales supports the Sentencing Council’s new initiative to increase the public’s understanding of how sentencing works. Judges and magistrates make decisions based on the individual circumstances of the cases before them, and You be the Judge is a great way to encourage greater understanding of these decisions.”

Notes to editors

1. Photos from the event are available at: <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjBzhWL>.
2. You be the Judge is available at: <https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/research-and-resources/you-be-the-judge/>.
3. You be the Judge was launched on 10 July 2024 at King’s Academy Prospect, Reading.
4. The scenarios follow the law as it was on 10 July 2024 when You be the Judge was launched.
5. Sentencing guidelines must be followed, unless the court is satisfied that it would be contrary to the interest of justice to do so in all the circumstances of a particular case.
6. The Sentencing Council for England and Wales (www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk) was established by Parliament to be an independent body but accountable to Parliament for its work, which is scrutinised by the Justice Select Committee.
7. The Judiciary of England and Wales is the independent third arm of the state. It is supported by the Judicial Office, which is an arm’s length body of the Ministry of Justice. The Judicial Office promotes and safeguards judicial independence to maintain confidence in the rule of law.
8. For more information, please contact Phil Hodgson, Sentencing Council, phil.hodgson@sentencingcouncil.gov.uk, 020 7071 5788; or Freya Wilks, Judicial Office freya.wilks@judiciary.uk, 07519 575925.