
MEMORANDUM: PUPILLAGE APPLICATION STATISTICS

Introduction

1. The Johannesburg Society of Advocates is committed to a pupillage admissions process that is fair, principled, transparent and consistent with the constitutional values of equality, non-racialism and non-sexism.
2. This memorandum provides an overview of pupillage admissions data for the period 2016 to 2026. Its purpose is to assist members of the profession, prospective applicants, and members of the public, understand the broad trends reflected in the JSA's pupillage admissions statistics over the past decade.
3. The statistics are presented in three related tables. The first table records the number of applicants for pupillage in each year, broken down by race and gender. It therefore reflects the composition of the applicant pool from which pupils were selected. The second table records the number of applicants admitted to pupillage in each year, using the same race and gender categories. It therefore reflects the composition of the admitted cohort. The third table records the ratio of successful applicants to total applicants in each category. It does not show the number of pupils admitted, but rather the percentage of applicants within each demographic category who were successful in a given year. The three tables should therefore be read together: the first shows who applied, the second shows who was admitted, and the third shows the success rate within each category.

1. APPLICANTS FOR PUPILLAGE AT THE JSA IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES									
Year	TOTAL	AFRICAN		WHITE		COLOURED		INDIAN	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2016	177	78	45	18	22	1	3	5	5
2017	209	80	55	25	24	4	2	11	8
2018	210	82	55	26	19	5	3	11	9
2019	274	130	80	20	21	2	4	11	9
2020	253	119	81	22	16	2	1	4	8
2021	207	93	70	16	16	2	4	5	1
2022	288	134	97	12	18	5	2	9	11
2023	289	136	106	9	15	5	3	5	8
2024	330	148	138	10	11	2	7	9	5
2025	328	152	133	11	7	7	0	10	8
2026	350	157	153	6	9	2	4	11	8

2. ADMITTED PUPILS TO JSA IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES									
Year	TOTAL	AFRICAN		WHITE		COLOURED		INDIAN	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2016	80	23	27	6	17	0	1	2	4
2017	100	25	35	10	20	2	2	3	3
2018	100	18	39	12	13	3	3	7	5
2019	100	41	33	5	7	0	4	2	8
2020	80	37	26	1	8	0	0	3	5
2021	80	30	22	9	11	1	3	3	1
2022	80	27	25	5	7	4	0	6	6
2023	80	29	36	0	4	2	2	3	4
2024	76	27	33	5	3	0	4	1	3
2025	80	31	32	4	2	4	0	2	5
2026	73	31	31	2	2	1	0	3	3

3. RATIO OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS TO TOTAL APPLICANTS IN EACH CATEGORY									
Year	TOTAL	AFRICAN		WHITE		COLOURED		INDIAN	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2016		29,49%	60,00%	33,33%	77,27%	0,00%	33,33%	40,00%	80,00%
2017		31,25%	63,64%	40,00%	83,33%	50,00%	100,00%	27,27%	37,50%
2018		21,95%	70,91%	46,15%	68,42%	60,00%	100,00%	63,64%	55,56%
2019		31,54%	41,25%	25,00%	33,33%	0,00%	100,00%	18,18%	88,89%
2020		31,09%	32,10%	4,55%	50,00%	0,00%	0,00%	75,00%	62,50%

2021		32,26%	31,43%	56,25%	68,75%	50,00%	75,00%	60,00%	100,00%
2022		20,15%	25,77%	41,67%	38,89%	80,00%	0,00%	66,67%	54,55%
2023		21,32%	33,96%	0,00%	26,67%	40,00%	66,67%	60,00%	50,00%
2024		18,24%	23,91%	50,00%	27,27%	0,00%	57,14%	11,11%	60,00%
2025		20,39%	24,06%	36,36%	28,57%	57,14%	0,00%	20,00%	62,50%
2026		19,75%	20,26%	33,33%	22,22%	50,00%	0,00%	27,27%	37,50%
Average over 10 years		25,22%	38,84%	33,33%	47,70%	35,19%	48,38%	42,65%	62,64%

4. The data records, for each year, the number of applicants for pupillage, the number of pupils admitted, and the ratio of successful applicants to total applicants in each demographic category.
5. The figures do not, on their own, explain every individual admissions outcome. Nor can they capture the full range of considerations that arise in the assessment of candidates for pupillage. They do, however, provide a useful empirical basis for understanding the changing composition of the applicant pool, the admitted cohort, and the relative success rates across demographic categories.

Overview of the Data

6. The data reflects four broad features of the JSA's pupillage admissions process over the period under review.
7. First, demand for pupillage at the JSA has increased substantially. In 2016, the JSA received 177 applications for pupillage. By 2026, that number had increased to 350 applications. The number of available pupillage places has not increased correspondingly. While 80 pupils were admitted in 2016, 73 pupils were admitted in 2026.

8. Secondly, the applicant pool has changed materially. African applicants constituted a substantial majority of the applicant pool throughout the period, but their proportion increased significantly over time. In 2016, there were 123 African applicants out of a total of 177 applicants. In 2026, there were 310 African applicants out of a total of 350 applicants.
9. Thirdly, the admitted cohort has become increasingly representative. In 2016, 50 of the 80 admitted pupils were African. In 2026, 62 of the 73 admitted pupils were African. The data also reflects substantial progress in gender representivity. In 2026, the admitted cohort consisted of 37 men and 36 women.
10. Fourthly, the data shows that outcomes must be understood in the context of both application numbers and success rates. A decline in the number of admitted candidates from a particular demographic category may result from a decline in the number of applicants from that category, a change in the relative performance of applicants in that year, the limited number of available pupillage places, or a combination of these factors.

Increased Demand and Greater Selectivity

11. One of the most important features of the data is the marked increase in demand for pupillage at the JSA.
12. The number of applications almost doubled between 2016 and 2026. That increase has not been matched by an increase in the number of available pupillage places. The consequence is that the admissions process has become considerably more competitive.

13. In 2016, approximately 45% of applicants were admitted. In 2026, approximately 21% of applicants were admitted.
14. This decline in the overall admission rate should be understood principally in the context of capacity. The number of places available in any given year is necessarily affected by the number of members available to act as mentors, the administrative and training resources of the JSA, the ability of chambers to accommodate pupils, and the broader capacity of the profession to absorb and train pupils properly. The JSA trains pupils at its own cost, derived from its membership fees.
15. The data therefore demonstrates that the JSA faces not only an admissions challenge, but also an institutional capacity challenge. Any meaningful attempt to expand access to pupillage must grapple with the practical requirements of maintaining a rigorous and sustainable training programme whilst also understanding financial and practical limitations on its ability to do so.

Transformation of the Applicant Pool

16. The data shows that the applicant pool has become increasingly transformed.
17. African applicants increased from 123 in 2016 to 310 in 2026. In percentage terms, African applicants constituted approximately 69.5% of the applicant pool in 2016 and approximately 88.6% of the applicant pool in 2026.
18. The number of white applicants declined over the same period. In 2016, there were 40 white applicants. In 2026, there were 15 white applicants. As a proportion of the total applicant

pool, white applicants declined from approximately 22.6% in 2016 to approximately 4.3% in 2026.

19. Within that broader trend, the decline in white male applicants is particularly marked. In 2016, there were 18 white male applicants. In 2026, there were 6. This is important when assessing the number of white male candidates ultimately admitted in any given year. A smaller applicant pool may produce a smaller number of successful candidates, even where the success rate for that category remains comparable to, or higher than, other categories.
20. The number of Indian applicants remained relatively stable, although as a modest proportion of the total applicant pool. The number of Coloured applicants remained small throughout the period, which means that year-on-year percentage changes in that category should be interpreted with caution.
21. The transformation of the admitted cohort must therefore be understood against the background of the transformation of the applicant pool itself. The composition of those admitted to pupillage is influenced not only by admissions criteria and scoring, but also by the demographic composition of those who apply.

Transformation of the Admitted Cohort

22. The admitted cohort has become substantially more representative over the period under review.

23. In 2016, African pupils constituted 50 of the 80 admitted pupils, or approximately 62.5% of the admitted cohort. In 2026, African pupils constituted 62 of the 73 admitted pupils, or approximately 84.9% of the admitted cohort.
24. This is a significant development. It reflects the growing participation of black candidates in the JSA's pupillage programme and contributes to the broader transformation of the profession.
25. At the same time, the data should be read responsibly. The fact that the admitted cohort has become increasingly transformed does not mean that the JSA's work is complete. Transformation is not merely a statistical exercise. It requires sustained attention to access, support, mentoring, retention, briefing patterns, and the conditions under which young advocates are able to build sustainable practices after admission to the Bar.

Gender Representivity

26. The data reflects substantial progress in gender representivity.
27. In 2016, the applicant pool comprised 102 men and 75 women. By 2026, the applicant pool comprised 176 men and 174 women. The 2026 applicant pool was therefore close to gender parity.
28. The admitted cohort in 2026 also reflected near parity, with 37 men and 36 women admitted to pupillage.

29. This is an important and encouraging feature of the data. It suggests that, at least at the point of entry into pupillage by 2026, the JSA is attracting and admitting men and women in broadly equal numbers.

African Women in the Pupillage Pipeline

30. A particularly important feature of the data is the increased participation of African women.
31. In 2016, there were 45 African women applicants. In 2026, there were 153 African women applicants. African women now constitute a substantial proportion of both the applicant pool and the admitted cohort.
32. In 2026, 31 African women were admitted to pupillage. This represented approximately 42.5% of the admitted cohort.
33. This development is significant. It indicates that transformation in the pupillage pipeline is not confined to race or gender considered separately. The data reflects meaningful progress in the participation of black women, whose inclusion and advancement remain essential to the transformation of the advocates' profession.

White Male Applicants: Applicant Numbers, Admissions and Success Rates

34. The data also requires consideration of the position of white male applicants.
35. The number of white male applicants has declined materially over the period under review. There were 18 white male applicants in 2016. The number was 20 in 2019, 22 in 2020, 16 in 2021, 12 in 2022, 9 in 2023, 10 in 2024, 11 in 2025 and 6 in 2026.

36. This decline in applications has an obvious bearing on the number of white male candidates admitted in any particular year. A category with a small and declining applicant pool will, in ordinary statistical terms, produce fewer successful candidates in absolute numbers.
37. The success-rate data is therefore an important counterbalance to any analysis based only on the number of admitted pupils. Over the period 2016 to 2026, 59 white male applicants were admitted from a total of 175 white male applicants. That produces an aggregate success rate of approximately 33.7% when white males' application prospects are measured as against each other over the period. Statistically, roughly one in every three white males who apply for pupillage have been admitted.
38. That aggregate success rate is higher than the aggregate success rate for African male applicants over the same period, which was approximately 24.0%, and also higher than the aggregate success rate for African female applicants, which was approximately 32.5%.
39. It is lower than the aggregate success rates for white female, Coloured male, Coloured female, Indian male and Indian female applicants. Those comparisons should, however, be treated with appropriate caution because some of those categories involve relatively small applicant numbers.
40. The point is not that any demographic category is advantaged or disadvantaged in a uniform way across all years. The more measured conclusion is that the data does not support a simplistic reading of the admissions outcomes. In particular, the reduction in the absolute number of successful white male applicants must be understood against the substantial decline in white male applications and the fact that, over the full period, white male applicants

achieved a higher aggregate success rate, and in some instances higher head-to-head success rate, than at least some larger applicant categories.

41. There were, however, particular years in which the number of successful white male applicants was unusually low. In 2020, one white male applicant was admitted. In 2023, none was admitted. Those outcomes deserve explanation, but they should not be considered in isolation from the ranking and score data.
42. Analysis of the underlying scores indicates that, in those years, the candidates who would have been admitted if the HDI component had not been applied were not candidates situated in the upper range of the admitted cohort. They were candidates close to the selection threshold. In 2020, the additional white male candidates who would have been admitted on that hypothesis scored below the average score of the successful candidates for that year. In 2023, the same broad pattern emerged.
43. This suggests that, the extent that HDI points feature in assessing a candidate's scoring, it operates principally in close cases near the admission threshold. Candidates who score strongly across the other components of the scorecard are not materially affected by that component. The HDI component is therefore best understood as one factor in a broader evaluative process, rather than as a mechanism which determines outcomes irrespective of merit.
44. The JSA considers it important that admissions data be capable of this kind of analysis. Public confidence is served when outcomes are explained by reference to evidence, context and the structure of the admissions process.

Success Rates and Responsible Interpretation

45. The data records the ratio of successful applicants to total applicants in each demographic category.
46. These ratios should be interpreted with care. Some categories, particularly the Coloured and Indian categories, involve relatively small numbers of applicants. In such cases, one or two admissions can produce large percentage movements. Year-on-year percentages in small categories should therefore not be treated as a sufficient basis for broad conclusions.
47. The aggregate data nonetheless provides useful perspective.
48. Over the period 2016 to 2026, the approximate aggregate success rates were as follows:
 - 48.1 African male applicants: 24.0%.
 - 48.2 African female applicants: 32.5%.
 - 48.3 White male applicants: 33.7%.
 - 48.4 White female applicants: 52.8%.
 - 48.5 Coloured male applicants: 45.9%.
 - 48.6 Coloured female applicants: 57.6%.
 - 48.7 Indian male applicants: 43.2%.

48.8 Indian female applicants: 65.0%.

49. These figures indicate that success rates have differed across categories. They also show why the data should be approached with nuance. Absolute admission numbers and success rates may tell different parts of the same story. A category may have a lower number of admitted pupils because fewer candidates applied. Conversely, a category may have a relatively high success rate while still producing a modest number of admitted pupils because the applicant pool is small.
50. Admissions outcomes may be affected by a range of factors, including the size of the applicant pool, academic performance, interview performance, prior experience, repeat applications, the quality of written applications, and the number of available places in any given year.
51. The JSA will continue to consider whether the admissions process operates fairly, consistently and transparently, and whether any further measures are required to ensure that talented candidates from all backgrounds are able to compete meaningfully for admission to pupillage.

Points for Historically Disadvantaged Individuals (HDI Points)

52. Where HDI points are applied, the available analysis suggests that stronger candidates are not materially prejudiced by their operation, irrespective of demographic category. Candidates who perform well across the other components of the scorecard remain well placed for admission. This includes strong white male candidates, who would ordinarily remain within the admitted cohort notwithstanding the application of HDI points.

53. The data shows that the practical effect of HDI points is more likely to be felt in close cases near the admission threshold. In that range, the scorecard gives measured recognition to historical disadvantage where candidates have achieved comparable scores on the components of the scorecard unrelated to HDI. That approach is consistent with the JSA's constitutional commitment to transformation, equality, non-racialism and non-sexism. The comparative success rates of white males over the years and the aggregate success rate for white males over the period, demonstrates that this does not operate as a cap on the admission of white males. Rather, it is a consequence of the number and quality of white males forming part of the applicant pool, over which the JSA has no control.
54. The application of HDI scoring is considered important in a profession whose senior ranks remain insufficiently transformed, including from the level of middle juniors through to Senior Counsel. The continued presence of white male candidates in the admitted pupillage cohort, even against the background of declining white male applications, must also be borne in mind. The use of HDI points is therefore not an arbitrary preference. It is a principled mechanism by which the JSA seeks to ensure that applicants from historically excluded and disadvantaged groups are able to compete meaningfully in a profession still shaped by persistent structural inequality.

Capacity, Access and the Future

55. The data suggests that the most significant structural challenge facing the JSA is capacity.

56. The number of applications has increased very substantially. The number of pupillage places has not kept pace. This produces a lower overall admission rate and inevitably increases the pressure on the admissions process.
57. Expanding access to pupillage therefore requires more than admissions reform. It requires the profession to consider how to increase training capacity without compromising the quality of pupillage. This includes questions of mentorship, chambers accommodation, training infrastructure, financial support, and the ability of newly admitted advocates to enter and remain in practice.
58. The JSA's commitment to transformation must accordingly be understood as part of a broader institutional project. The aim is not simply to admit a more representative cohort of pupils. The aim is to build a profession in which talented advocates from all backgrounds are able to enter, remain and flourish.

Conclusion

59. The pupillage admissions data for 2016 to 2026 reflects a profession in transition.
60. Demand for pupillage at the JSA has grown sharply. The applicant pool has become substantially more transformed. The admitted cohort has also become increasingly representative, with notable progress in both racial and gender representivity. African women, in particular, now constitute a significant part of the pupillage pipeline.
61. The data also demonstrates the importance of careful interpretation. The absolute number of successful candidates in any demographic category must be read alongside the number of

applicants from that category, the available places in that year, and the relative success rates across the period.

62. In the case of white male applicants, the data shows a substantial decline in the number of applicants over time. It also shows that, over the period 2016 to 2026, white male applicants had an aggregate success rate higher than African male and African female applicants, although lower than certain other categories. The small number of white male admissions in particular years appears, on the available analysis, to be connected to the ordinary operation of scoring and ranking near the admission threshold.
63. The JSA remains committed to an admissions process that is fair, defensible, transparent and consistent with the constitutional project of transforming the legal profession. The data reflects meaningful progress, but also confirms that the work of transformation requires sustained institutional effort, careful analysis, and continued institutional self-scrutiny.

Dated at SANDTON on 15 June 2026.


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Chair: Johannesburg Society of Advocates