

# Factsheet – The role of a jury in a criminal trial

## The role of the jury

A jury is made up of 12 people selected at random who are tasked with hearing the evidence presented by both the prosecution and defence in a trial and collectively making a decision on if the person accused of a crime is guilty or not guilty.

Jury trials take place in the Crown Court, where the most serious offences are dealt with, such as burglary, robbery and murder, are heard. The Old Bailey, also known as the Central Criminal Court, is the most well-known Crown Court. Jurors are asked to decide, based solely on the evidence presented to them in court, whether the person charged with a crime is guilty or not guilty.

To find out more about juries visit [gov.uk](http://gov.uk)

## How jurors are selected

You cannot volunteer to be a juror. Instead, jurors are ‘summoned’ at random by the Jury Central Summoning Bureau (JCSB) using the electoral voting registers. The electoral registers are a list of everyone who has registered to vote and these lists are shared with HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) by local authorities in England and Wales on a yearly basis.

This information is used to randomly select the number of jurors that each court needs. Each court has its own catchment area, from which jurors are summoned. The random selection is all done by a computer.

Each year everyone on these electoral lists in England and Wales has an equal chance of being summoned. Due to the nature of random selection, some people will be summoned more than once, whilst others may never be called. This random selection is intended to ensure that jurors are impartial and that jury trials are fair.

Once at court, and once a judge indicates that a trial is ready to start, those who have been summoned are once again randomly selected by a computer system to form a panel to go into court. From this panel usually 12 are then selected at random, in court, by the court clerk to form a jury on each trial. Those not selected will return to the waiting area to be available for selection for the next panel.

## Deciding on the evidence

After all the evidence in a case has been presented the jurors will be asked to retire and consider the facts presented to them – they must usually all agree on their decision to find the defendant guilty or not guilty. In some cases a judge can give a direction that “majority verdict” will be accepted (usually at least 10, jurors must still agree). The verdict is delivered in the courtroom by the foreperson, who is essentially spokesperson for a jury.

For justice to be done fairly, jurors must remain impartial and should only consider the evidence presented to them in court by the prosecution and defence when deciding on the verdict. They must not look for information about the case or the people involved online or read news items about the case as this may bias their decision. Furthermore, while the trial is ongoing, jurors are not allowed to discuss the case with anyone else who is not on the jury, this includes friends and family and even after they have finished jury service, they can't tell anyone about the discussions in deliberation.

## Does a jury have to explain its decision?

A jury cannot and will never be asked to explain its reasoning. Even after a case a juror must never discuss or reveal what took place in the privacy of their jury room, as this would, again, amount to contempt of court.

Information taken from [Understanding the jury selection process – Inside HMCTS](#)

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