

Government response: HMCTS response to National Audit Office report on court reform programme

Responding to today's report by the National Audit Office, Susan Acland-Hood, the CEO of HM Courts & Tribunals Service said:

Today's report by the National Audit Office (NAO) is helpful and constructive, and rightly highlights the ambitious and transformational nature of the courts and tribunals reform programme.

We are pleased that the NAO acknowledges our 'early progress, and its recommendations are already helping to strengthen the way we run the programme. We are confident, therefore, that the current six-year programme is on track to deliver the benefits promised on completion and, in doing so, help create a better, more straightforward, accessible and efficient justice system for all who use and need it.

The NAO report reflects progress during the first phase of the £1bn court reform programme. This year, HMCTS has opened up new services to the public and scaled up its delivery, including:

- A new fully accessible online Civil Money Claims service giving the public the ability to make a small claim online – with over 3,000 claims issued in the first month, cases moving through more quickly, and user satisfaction over 80% during the pre-launch pilot;
- A new system for applying for divorce online, which has cut errors in application forms from 40% to less than 1%, saving the public time and trouble as well as making our system more efficient;
- A new probate system in testing which has also cut errors, speeds up the process, and has a satisfaction rate in excess of 90%;
- The first-ever fully video hearing took place in the tax tribunal as part of a pilot to test the potential for the use of video more broadly across the courts and tribunals system;
- The national roll-out of a new in-court system to record the results of cases digitally and instantly;
- A national Track Your Appeal service in social security and child support tribunals, allowing thousands of users, many vulnerable, to be kept informed about the progress of their Personal Independent Payment appeal.

The NAO report makes four recommendations focused on creating a greater shared understanding of the programme and its challenges, and improving cross-system working.

Ms Acland-Hood added:

We welcome each of the report's recommendations and are committed to implementing measures to address them. The NAO report has highlighted some areas for us to focus on as the programme continues, and will help us ensure that this vital programme of reform is delivered effectively and efficiently.