

New expert group to increase confidence and standards in e-signatures

News story

Industry Working Group of experts to improve standards, reliability and security in electronic signatures.



The Ministry of Justice has established an Industry Working Group of experts to improve standards, reliability and security in electronic signatures and other means of legally executing documents, and to address best practice in this area.

The Group was set up following a recommendation by the Law Commission which the Lord Chancellor welcomed and has implemented, with the membership recruited via a public appointments campaign.

The Group is chaired by Mr Justice Fraser under the oversight of Lord Justice Birss, and assisted by Professor Sarah Green of the Law Commission. Members are experts drawn from the legal, business and technology sectors.

The Group began meeting in summer 2021 and is aiming to produce an interim report by the end of the year, setting out its initial thoughts and areas to be explored further, together with those areas that may require public consultation

Its terms of reference include best practice guidance for the use of electronic signatures, analysis of different technologies' security and reliability and investigating solutions and safeguards for video-witnessing of deeds.

The Group will make recommendations for reform to government as well as provide guidance which will insist businesses and professional practitioners.

The government sees the Groups as playing an important role, alongside

existing law reform projects, in ensuring the UK is a centre for legal excellence in developing the law to support and facilitate digital trade and commerce.

Notes for Editors

1. The Industry Working Group on Electronic Execution of Documents (the IWG) was formed following the Law Commission's 2019 [report](#), which found that while e-signatures were legally valid for most purposes in England and Wales, there remained a lack of clarity and confidence around their use, which may hinder businesses' uptake.
2. The members of the group are Mr Justice Fraser (Chair) under the oversight of Lord Justice Birss, Professor Sarah Green of the Law Commission and the following specialist legal, business and technology experts: Catherine Goodman, Charlotte Ponder, Chris Jones, Elizabeth Wall, Eoin O'Reilly, John Joliffe, Jonathon Read, Michael Lightowler, Neil Singer, Quintus Travis, Simon James, Simon Law.
3. The Group's Terms of Reference is:
 - Considering how different technologies can help provide evidence of identity and intention to authenticate when documents are executed electronically
 - considering the security and reliability of different technologies used to execute documents electronically
 - producing best practice guidance for the use of electronic signatures in different commercial transactions, focusing on procedural steps to be followed, evidence, security and reliability where documents are executed electronically
 - producing best practice guidance for the use of electronic signatures where individuals, in particular vulnerable individuals, execute documents electronically
 - considering challenges arising from the use of electronic signatures in cross-border transactions and how to address them
 - considering potential solutions to the practical and technical obstacles to video witnessing of electronic signatures on deeds and attestation
 - considering how these potential solutions can protect signatories to deeds from potential fraud
 - to make recommendations to government and others on proposals in areas where the group consider reforms should be made

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