

Press release: HM Courts & Tribunals Service launches project to promote press access to courts

Bringing together representatives from HMCTS and across the media, the group will develop new ways to build strong relationships between media organisations and their local courts and improve and promote the existing guidance to staff relating to media access. They will also explore how transparency and openness are embedded into HMCTS' £1bn reform and modernisation of courts and tribunals. The changes introduced through digital reforms will mean there are many more ways to access justice without the need to travel and physically attend court. For cases that do need to go to court, there will be more modern and well-connected courtrooms.

The group – which will make recommendations to HMCTS CEO Susan Acland-Hood – will include representatives of the Society of Editors and the News Media Association, and the Judicial Office, and will be chaired by Ed Owen, the Head of Communications for HMCTS.

Susan Acland-Hood, CEO of HMCTS, said:

The reporting of court proceedings has long been an important part of maintaining public confidence in our justice system. So its decline in recent years represents a real concern.

I want to ensure that HMCTS is doing all we can to promote media coverage of court hearings as part of our commitment to openness and transparency, and I am pleased that media organisations have joined us to consider this issue together. I look forward to receiving its recommendations.

Ed Owen will launch the initiative at a Society of Editors event today, and will say that court reporting is vital for democracy and for public confidence in the justice system.

Ian Murray, executive director of the Society of Editors, said:

The Society of Editors is delighted to be involved in this tremendously important work in ensuring open access to the courts for journalists. Nothing can be more important for local communities than to have faith that justice is being delivered fairly on their behalf and that can only be done by reporting court proceedings. The Society is grateful to HMCTS for initiating this procedure.

Santha Rasaiah, legal, policy and regulatory affairs director for the News Media Association, said:

Court reporting is essential to open justice. The NMA warmly welcomes this HMCTS initiative to help the courts and news media, local and national, to work together in furthering and facilitating press access and reporting.

This translates that vital principle into everyday practice, to the benefit of the public that they both serve. It is in itself another example of such constructive co-operation and we are pleased to be working together again.

Note to editors:

The event will include a discussion on how to get reporters back into courts. Panellists include:

- The former Lord Chief Justice, Lord Judge
- Ed Owen
- Ian McGregor, The Society of Editors President and Emeritus Editor of the Telegraph
- John Whittingdale MP
- Ian Murray, Society of Editors Executive Director
- Tristan Kirk, courts correspondent for the London Evening Standard