

Press release: Justice Minister chairs roundtable on media access to courts

- Discussion on how to maintain and enhance media access to courts
- 18 media representatives due to attend
- Part of ongoing engagement between the MoJ, HMCTS and the media

The invitation was extended by the government as part of its ongoing court and tribunal reform programme, which will allow people more efficient access to justice.

The roundtable, to be held at the Ministry of Justice this afternoon (Thursday, 15 November), seeks to invite views and suggestions on how to maintain and enhance media access as modernisation continues.

Justice Minister, Lucy Frazer, said:

Open justice is a fundamental part of our legal system and impartial court reporting is crucial in maintaining public confidence.

As we continue to reform our courts and tribunals, it is important that we work with the media to ensure access is maintained and, where possible, enhanced. This roundtable is an opportunity to do just that and I'm grateful to all those sharing their views with me.

Legal Policy and Regulatory Affairs Director, News Media Association, Santha Rasaiah said:

Open Justice and court reporting cannot be compromised by Court Reform. The NMA therefore warmly welcome the minister's initiative and the opportunity for local, regional and national news media to discuss direct the all important practicalities of maintaining media access and contemporaneous coverage.

The roundtable will be attended by representatives of a range of large and small news organisations from across England and Wales, including editors and reporters, to help support and promote the principle of open justice.

This is part of ongoing engagement between the Ministry of Justice, HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) and the media to protect and enhance court access for journalists. It follows updated media guidance developed by a working group of media, MoJ and HMCTS representatives that was issued to all courts and tribunal staff last month.

This group is now being reshaped to consider how the reform programme can support and enhance media access as part of our wider commitment to open justice.

1. Today's roundtable is due to be attended by the representatives from the following media: Press Association; ITN; BBC; Evening Standard; News Media Association; Huffpost UK; Johnston Press; Express and Star (Wolverhampton); Coventry Evening Telegraph; News UK; Associated Newspapers; The Sun; Guardian Media Group; Manchester Evening News; Newsquest; Daily Telegraph; BuzzFeed; Society of Editors.
2. The Government is investing £1 billion in reforming and modernising courts and tribunals. We want to ensure that those who come into contact with the justice system not only have a fair system but that the process is as simple and straightforward as possible:
 - Whether you have committed a minor motoring offence so that you can make your initial plea online. Some 1500 pleas are dealt with online every week. Court staff and the police automatically receive the completed online plea form as soon as the defendant has submitted it, reducing delays.
 - If you are a small business and you have a claim against a supplier you can make a small money 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.
 - Or you are getting a divorce you can apply for it online – this process has cut errors in application forms from 40% to less than 1%, saving people time and trouble during a traumatic time.
 - Or your parent has died you can apply for probate online -which has also cut errors, sped up the process, and has a satisfaction rate of more than 90%.