

Press release: Professional court access scheme to be adopted nationally

- pilot scheme attracted widespread legal support
- professionals will now gain quicker and easier entry to courts and tribunals nationwide
- scheme will be rolled out to the vast majority of courts by 2020

The 'professional-user access scheme' has already been trialled at 10 courts and will now be rolled out by HM Courts and Tribunals (HMCTS) to an additional five courts in May, continuing nationwide with completion expected in 2020.

Using a secure ID app, those registered can enter courts and tribunals without the need for a full security search each time. The decision to extend the scheme further follows positive feedback from professionals who have already used it, with 86% of those surveyed saying it improved entry to the court.

While tightened security procedures introduced last year will continue, the entry scheme intends to ease queues to get into court and tribunal buildings thereby freeing up security staff time to focus on other court users. Random searches will be carried out to make sure the scheme is working as intended.

Justice Minister, Lucy Frazer, said:

We have worked closely with the legal sector to ensure this scheme is a success without compromising the security of our courts and tribunals.

Expanding it across the estate will mean professionals can get on more quickly with their work.

Chair of the Bar Council, Richard Atkins QC, said:

I am delighted that the ID card access scheme that the Bar Council has been working on with HMCTS for so long now is to be rolled out nationally.

A lot of hard work and investment has gone into developing this scheme, It will be of immense benefit to members of the Bar who will hopefully now gain quicker access to the courts and tribunals in which they work and perform a vital public duty.

I hope that the roll-out will be completed as quickly as possible. I am grateful for the cooperation of HMCTS in this project.

Registration for the national scheme has begun with the Bar Council and will continue with a phased rollout programme. HMCTS is currently working with other legal associations who also wish to participate to open the scheme for their members in due course.

Simultaneously, a wider effort is being made to make sure there is clear and consistent information about search procedures when entering courts and tribunals. Under the banner of 'Expect, Inspect, Respect', HMCTS is informing all court users about the use of mandatory bag searches and archway detectors, which are necessary to keep people in courts safe.

Senior Presiding Judge for England and Wales, Lady Justice Macur, said:

Everyone who works in courts and tribunals is responsible for ensuring our buildings are safe and secure places. HMCTS security processes at our courts and tribunals are a vital part of this.

Security officers identify and confiscate numerous dangerous items every year. They carry out an important, and often difficult, role and should be treated with the respect and courtesy that all court users should expect in return.

Notes to editors

The five courts joining the scheme from 22 May 2019 are:

- Manchester Minshull Street
- York Crown Court
- Reading Crown Court
- Guildford Crown Court
- Cardiff Crown Court

The scheme has been trialled at 10 courts since September 2018. These are:

- Brighton Magistrates' Court
- Chester Crown Court
- Maidstone Combined Court
- Nottingham Crown Court
- Portsmouth Combined Court
- Southwark Crown Court
- St Albans Crown Court
- Swansea Crown Court
- Tameside Magistrates' Court
- Wood Green Crown Court

The programme is expected to be completed by mid-2020.

Some 86% out of 211 legal professionals surveyed said the overall court entrance procedures were improved or much improved because of the scheme.

The pilot will be rolled out to all courts and tribunals other than those

hearing terrorist or high security cases.