Reform update
Introduction

We have started a very ambitious programme of court reform, which aims to bring new technology and modern ways of working to what is – and will remain – the best justice system in the world.

The principles that underpin the system are enduring. But our systems and processes have not kept pace with the world around us. We know we can make justice less confusing, easier to navigate and better at responding to the needs of the public.

In collaboration with the senior judiciary and the Ministry of Justice, we are investing £1bn to reform our courts and tribunals system. We have made a good start. But we can’t do it alone; and we certainly can’t do it well unless we involve all those who work within it and care about it.

Some of what we are doing is controversial, but much of what we are doing is not so contested and consequently, often less well known.

We’re keen to share our plans, listen to those who use our courts and tribunals, and work together with our partners to achieve the best possible outcome.

Susan Acland-Hood
Chief Executive
HM Courts & Tribunals Service
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Our ambitious reform programme

As you will know, we’re changing the courts and tribunals system to make it more straightforward, accessible and efficient.

The reform programme was launched in 2016 with a joint statement from the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Chief Justice and the Senior President of Tribunals. They said:

“The reforms will [combine] … our respected traditions with the enabling power of technology. The vision is to modernise and upgrade our justice system so that it works even better for everyone, from judges and legal professionals, to witnesses, litigants and the vulnerable victims of crime. When they have to engage with the system, we want everyone to have available to them the finest justice system in the world.”

Their vision reflected the importance of the enduring principles at the heart of our system, as well as a recognition that by working differently we can give effect to them better.

Why is change needed?

HMCTS is responsible for the administration of criminal, civil and family courts and tribunals in England and Wales – and non-devolved tribunals in Scotland and Northern Ireland. We handle about four million cases a year, operate from around 350 courthouses and hearing centres and employ more than 16,000 people, most of whom are frontline, operational staff.

Our people are dedicated, hard-working and deeply committed to justice. But the systems and processes they work with are labour-intensive, counter-intuitive, and heavily reliant on paper and legacy systems that need a lot of re-keying, maintenance and workarounds, which produce error, duplication, inefficiency and overstretch.

We often lack a simple way of dealing with what is – or should be – a simple thing. Our systems don’t help distinguish what is straightforward from what is complex or significant; and even once that distinction has been made, systems designed for paper don’t adapt well to the digital age. Ambiguity, for instance, about who has filed what, who has complied with what directions, or whether someone has received something during proceedings too often results in a labour-intensive face-to-face hearing to sort things out. It is just one example of where our processes and systems drive unnecessary travel, clog-up lists (it also makes them less predictable), and leave the public (and their representatives) in unnecessary uncertainty about a case which is extremely important to them.

Navigating even the most common court processes can leave many bewildered or excluded. 98% of divorces are uncontested. But before we created our digital divorce service, 40% of the divorce forms we received were incorrectly completed and had to be sent back. This happened because the system was designed around the people who drafted or operated the rules and legislation and not the public who need and use the service. The result was a waste of applicants’ (and their solicitors’) time and, with a large amount of work effectively being done twice by HMCTS, poor use of public money too. Without making any changes to underlying divorce law, the digital service has cut that return rate to under 1%.

This shows the potential for a system where effectiveness for the individual citizen and efficiency for the taxpayer go hand-in-hand. Designing our processes around the citizens who need them makes the system less forbidding, more considerate of others’ time and convenience, and also more efficient.
Our reform programme spans the full range of our work and is undeniably ambitious. There are more than 50 distinct projects (outlined in the projects summary) working across all jurisdictions (in criminal, civil, family and tribunals), and we are investing more than £1bn over six years. This is an historic opportunity to make a system we care about deeply work better.

But it will not – and should not – happen all at once, and it needs discussion, debate, involvement and evaluation. Digital systems are being developed incrementally, using agile methods and building in small blocks to allow us to test them with real users quickly, but also to refine and improve them as we learn more about their impact and effectiveness. Many common components are designed to be re-used across different areas. In parallel, we will need to make changes to our staffing and infrastructure – some of them significant – in a way that provides better national services, but also improves the support and service we provide in courts and tribunals locally, including improvements to buildings.

**Working with the judiciary**

HMCTS occupies a unique constitutional position, reporting to the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Chief Justice and the Senior President of Tribunals through their separately constituted Board. The way we operate is set out in our framework document. It goes without saying that providing effective support to an independent judiciary is at the heart of what we do.

Judges are part of the governance of HMCTS as a whole, reflecting the partnership between these two branches of state, and this is reflected in the governance of the reform programme. As well as forming part of the decision-making structure, we have the privilege and benefit of having judges embedded in many of our individual projects and programmes.

**Public and wider engagement**

The successful delivery of reform is highly dependent on having effective engagement with the public and our partners, including other government departments.

**Engaging legal professionals**

Since 2014, engagement with stakeholders within the legal profession such as The Bar Council, The Law Society and CILEx has taken place at both Chief Executive and policy level. These bodies are also working collaboratively with us to ensure their views are considered in the development of proposals and design of reformed services. Over the past year, we have hosted eight reform engagement events attended by over 200 legal professionals, and we will do more.

**Engaging the public**

The early launch of user-focused online services has drawn very heavily on research and testing with members of the public.

**Engaging other government departments**

Our Social Security and Child Support project is working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) so that they can share evidence with us digitally. Recent start-up events for public family law reform and immigration have closely involved the relevant government departments, local authorities and third sector organisations.

**Engaging criminal justice partners**

The Common Platform is jointly led with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); but we are also working with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the Legal Aid Agency, the Youth Justice Board, the criminal defence community, and many others.
Engaging HMCTS people

Our 'One Conversation' programme regularly gives time and content to allow all our people, led by their managers, to ask questions and think about what reform means to them. We can't eliminate the anxiety that comes from change and uncertainty but we can give people opportunities to help shape the change, and support them through it too.

Early progress, making a real difference to the public

During the first phase of the reforms, we focused on testing the basics behind the plans, testing early digital services (the earlier versions of the divorce, probate and online plea services, for instance); started to create national teams to deliver more consistent service (such as call handling, to make it easier to get hold of us); put in infrastructure (including more Wi-Fi); and stared less visible, but important work to prepare for the next phase (such as procurement work, location analysis, building leases for buildings, demand modelling, design work and so on).

In the current second phase, we are starting to make these first services available to more people; starting work on their equivalents in other parts of the system (public family law, for example); building out ‘enabling’ services (such as video connections and technology to support listing); and standing up more national ways of working that give the public more responsive and consistent service (such as case tracking and assisted digital support). The first tranches of work are attracting very positive feedback.

The reform programme, designed collectively with the judiciary and other court users, is wide and complex. On the following pages, we set out three overall strands to illustrate the main elements of the programme, including some of the key things we have already done and some of the things you can expect to see over the coming months. The three strands are:

- **Crime**: What we are doing to change the way the criminal justice system operates.
- **Civil, family and tribunals**: What we are doing across the civil, family and tribunals jurisdictions to support the resolution of cases fairly and speedily.
- **Cross-cutting projects and services**: What we are doing across jurisdictions to improve underpinning systems and processes.
Crime

This area of the reform programme supports our ambition to provide smarter, more joined-up and streamlined processes to deliver better criminal justice for all.

The crime area of the reform programme will support digital working throughout the criminal courts; enable all participants in the criminal justice system to work from the same information to reduce duplication of effort; and introduce more consistent working practices. It will also allow us to deal differently with things that don’t need to be in court.

We have already...

- Introduced the ability to **plead online** for low-level offences (instead of by letter), increasing the proportion of people who respond, and rolled this system out across all police forces for traffic offences, and across London, for Transport for London (TfL) fare evasion prosecutions.

- Developed a new digital system for **summary non-imprisonable offences being heard by a single justice**, now being used to process on average around 350 TfL cases each week.

- Set up an **online rota system**, now being used by all magistrates, speeding up scheduling of court sessions.

- Removed the need for a physical court file in the magistrates’ court. Sentencing information is now published on the **case management system** in real time, direct from the courtroom and shared with other criminal justice agencies.

- Put in place the **digital case system** in the Crown Court, moving us away from paper bundles and saving us from printing over 68 million pages of paper. Stacked, that’s higher than Mount Fuji.

- Started to build the **Common Platform** – which goes beyond this to connect the police, CPS and courts seamlessly – and begun to test the first piece of this on real cases in Mersey-Cheshire CPS and Liverpool Crown Court.

- Introduced the ability to reply to a **jury summons online**, tested it successfully in Preston and Guildford, and started to roll it out.

Over the next 18 months, we will...

- Build on the work to digitise the single justice process in Lavender Hill and online pleas for TfL fare evasion cases to include **TV Licensing** and **DVLA** cases enabling greater numbers of high-volume, low-level offences to be dealt with more efficiently.

- Extend the functionality of the **Common Platform** in Liverpool, including the type and number of cases passing through it. Legal professionals will have **early access to details of their clients' charges and initial case material online**. Work will also start to plan the extension of the system into other Crown Court centres and magistrates' courts.

- Further test the use of **video hearings** for remand hearings and in support of case progression where appropriate.

- Introduce the ability for defendants to indicate their plea online and **more efficiently allocate cases** to the appropriate court (subject to legislation).

- Build further functionality for the Common Platform to support **more sophisticated case progression** across the criminal justice system to help ensure that when a case goes to court the hearing is effective.
Crime projects

There are 11 projects included in the crime reform programme, which we have detailed below. The full list of projects is included in the projects summary.

Projects supporting summary justice

The Single Justice Service (SJS) contains all services delivered by the magistrates’ court which can be considered by a single magistrate. It builds upon the implementation of the Single Justice Procedure (SJP), introduced to process some 850,000 summary non-imprisonable cases per year; this involves working with prosecutors, including TV Licensing, TfL, the DVLA, the police and other non-police prosecutors such as local authorities. The purpose of the SJS is to deal more proportionately with the least serious offences, to which the majority of defendants either do not respond or plead guilty, and which almost exclusively result in a financial penalty. Subject to legislation, this may include the ability to accept a statutory fixed fine online for the most minor offences (in which case the implications of doing so will be carefully and clearly explained). The option for a hearing will always remain, and increasingly video hearings will be offered for the most minor offences.

The SJS is underpinned by a digital system known as Automated Track Case Management (ATCM) and is supported by the Single Justice Contact Centre (SJC). So far, the service is live for cases prosecuted by TfL. TfL can upload their cases onto ATCM digitally; and the single magistrate can adjudicate the case with the support of a legal adviser – all on a digital platform without the need for paper, which is also the system of record for resulting, which means there is no longer a need for re-keying of results into a separate system. Those who plead not guilty have the case transferred for a hearing in the magistrates’ court. Since 12 April 2018, defendants have been able to plead online if they choose to do so. The SJC contact centre team based in Stoke takes calls from defendants and help those who would like to plead online to do so.

ATCM feedback

“The new system [gives] our Investigations and Prosecutions team more time to target illegal behaviour and bring those who break the law to justice.”

– Transport for London

The ability to plead online builds on the experience of the ‘Make a Plea’ service, which has been live since August 2014 for defendants involved in summary non-imprisonable motoring offences, such as speeding and having no insurance, and has been rolled out to all 43 police forces. In 2017, over 83,000 pleas were registered through this service.

Make a plea feedback

“Perfect, if only all government and other services worked like this!”

– User

Find out more about the ‘Make a Plea’ service.
Projects supporting hearings in the magistrates’ and Crown courts

For other cases, we have set out at a headline level a new model for how the criminal jurisdiction will operate in future, and have divided it into a number of projects to lead the detailed design and implementation of the relevant elements. The model is now being developed in collaboration with the judiciary and with partner agencies across the criminal justice system, as well as through engagement with the professions.

- **Online plea and allocation:** This project will make it possible for defendants (initially through their legal representative) to indicate a plea online, before coming to court; and for decisions on allocation to be taken outside the courtroom where that is appropriate. The aim is to support earlier engagement with the court and swifter allocation of cases, and to free up courtroom space and time currently used to hear pleas. Subject to legislation, the project will also enable indictable only cases to go straight to the Crown Court without the need for an unnecessary hearing in the magistrates’ court. The project will ensure that defendants are guided to access appropriate legal advice, and assisted digital support will also be available.

- **Case progression project:** This project aims to ensure all activities required to achieve an effective trial or sentencing hearing in the magistrates’ and Crown courts are carried out by the participants to the case in advance and that trial and sentencing hearings can go ahead as planned. It builds on the recommendations of the Leveson report on criminal justice efficiency and will enable the majority of case progression activity to take place outside the courtroom through online, audio and video channels; will allow earlier access to material and easier visibility of what has and has not been done; and will also reduce unnecessary travel to court, especially for uncontested case management decisions. This project has a particular focus on improving communication with victims, witnesses and defendants about progress in their case.

- **Court hearings project:** This project is specifically focused on trials and sentencing hearings in both the magistrates' and Crown courts. This project will ensure that criminal trials and sentencing hearings are enabled by the right technology and physical environment in the courtroom to ensure the smooth running of the hearings on the day, building on the increasing use of technology that we see already in the criminal courts. The project will also deliver quicker and more reliable sharing of results from hearings to all parties.

- **Video remand hearings:** This project will transform the way in which remand decisions are administered for defendants held in police custody. Building on already widespread use of video and on the experience of those areas where police to court video links already operate for these hearings, the project aims to improve the systems and processes that underpin video hearings, and enable remand hearings to be done fully by video (in other words, with the option of not just the defendant, but others appearing by video, subject to judicial agreement and discretion). The aim is to provide quicker decisions, reduce the amount of time defendants are held in custody without a judicial decision, and reduce unnecessary journeys. The project is giving careful consideration, including through involvement of the Legal Aid Agency, to ensuring defendants can be supported to access legal advice at this stage in the process, as well as testing and carefully evaluating what makes such hearings effective and efficient for all involved.

- **Youth project:** This project will look specifically at the needs of children and young defendants to ensure that we do not apply adult processes to children, but instead look at each stage of the process and shape a version of it that is appropriate for young people, with the right safeguards and enhancements. The project will support the wider aims of the youth justice system to ensure access to justice, prevent re-offending and contribute to maintaining the safety and well-being of children and young people going through the youth justice system.
All these service projects will be underpinned by the digital infrastructure known as the **Common Platform**, a shared system between the police, HMCTS and CPS and accessible by participants across the criminal justice system. In particular, this will allow earlier access to the **Initial Details of the Prosecution Case (IDPC)** for legal professionals; better handling of multimedia; a single, shared view of cases; and direct transmission of case results to those who ought to know. The work of the projects and the Common Platform is overseen by the Crime Programme Board.

We are keen for your feedback and your involvement, either at our showcase sessions or as volunteers for testing our new service. If this interests you then please [contact us](#).

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**The Common Platform feedback**

“Our experience of the [test] has been really positive. The user experience has been overwhelmingly good – screens are easy to navigate and intuitive.”

– User

Find out more about the [Common Platform](#).
Civil, family and tribunals

We are developing a range of digital services to support the resolution of civil, family and tribunals cases fairly and speedily, and give new routes to justice which will in time comprise the ‘online court’.

Civil

In the civil jurisdiction, existing processes can be protracted, inefficient and costly. We will create a system that enables people to manage and resolve a dispute fairly and speedily. This will involve more mediation and fewer hearings. It will involve simpler processes and online routes into and through the courts – providing good quality digital systems to support the civil system, which at present is very paper-heavy, and allowing the kind of digital working in civil courts that legal professionals and others have become used to in the criminal court.

We have already…

- Created a system allowing online issue of, and response to, online civil money claims under £10,000 for litigants in person, and made it widely available in ‘public beta’ in March 2018 – so far over 6,000 claims have been issued.
- Created a system allowing online issue by a small group of legal representatives. This is allowing us to test and develop functionality to meet users’ needs before it is rolled out.
- Added an online settlement tool, to allow people to get redress quickly and simply.
- Completed activities to understand the needs of our users and develop ideas to improve the current civil enforcement service. We have visited a small sample of users to understand their systems, the difficulties of the current service and what works well. We have also held a one-day external event to gather views and understand future opportunities.

Over the next 18 months, we will…

- Expand our online civil money claims service – and the legal representatives’ version of it - so it can be used by everyone. We will continue to add sections to the service, building it out so that in time it supports cases going to hearing as well as those settling beforehand (which will also allow us to operate paperless civil courts).
- Set out in more detail what we will do through the civil enforcement project and create and test new ways of working to improve the current service.
- Start a project on possession in October 2018. Early opportunities have been identified to simplify the process for possession cases, improve engagement between parties and HMCTS and digitise the end-to-end service for all claims, providing support for users that need it.

Civil projects

Four projects make up our civil work, including:

- **Online Civil Money Claims**: This project has started by developing a digital service that allows users to resolve civil money claims in a simple, accessible and proportionate way. In August
2017, we launched a controlled test where users were invited to use the new online service and between August 2017 and March 2018, 1,500 claimants issued claims within the new service. Over 80% of those users, including claimants and defendants, have told us that the service was very good and easy to use. Further evidence gathered suggests that the online system has improved access to justice, with engagement from defendants being higher than that in the traditional civil money claims service. We used the feedback to keep improving the service, and opened it up to all users on 26 March 2018. As well as allowing issue and defence of claim, the system allows without-prejudice offers to be made and accepted (and constructs agreements based on these offers and acceptances). We also have a version of the system designed to support legal professionals who are managing multiple claims on behalf of their clients, which is currently being tested with 10 firms and which will be rolled out later this year. Our next step will be to build further stages of the system, allowing more online negotiation and settlement; upload of evidence; giving judges the facility to decide cases ‘on the digital papers’ but also to ask questions and seek clarification from parties; and also providing the digital underpinnings for cases going to and through hearings.

Find out more about online civil money claims.

- **The Royal Courts of Justice:** This project will deliver a digital case management system for the civil jurisdictions of the High Court and Court of Appeal, Upper Tribunal, the Employment Appeal Tribunal, Regional Business and Property Courts and District Registries. As with the county court jurisdiction this will enable claims to be issued and responded to and cases managed by the court digitally. We will also improve the hearing stage of the service by enabling evidence and e-bundles to be uploaded and shared digitally and presented digitally at hearings. The project begins in June 2018 and aims to deliver the new case management system to two of the jurisdictions this year.

- **Civil Enforcement:** This two-and-a-half-year project which began in January 2018, aims to improve civil enforcement to deliver better information and increase the likelihood of successful enforcement. The project is currently focusing on understanding user needs and identifying opportunities to improve the service. This includes looking from first principles at how the process should work, as well as providing a digital system to increase efficiencies. This project is at an early stage, and we welcome input and involvement in support of the design, and will want feedback on our early conclusions and test products over the summer.

- **Possession:** The shorthold tenancy possession claim process will be made digital. As a first step, administrative processes will be improved, automated and streamlined to make them more efficient and reliable. The project will formally start in October 2018, and we welcome input, suggestions and involvement in helping to design a better possession process.
Family

There has been much change in the practice and administration of family justice in the last five years. The family area of the reform programme is focused on building on those improvements by making the system easier to understand and navigate, which in turn ensures that it better meets the needs of the people who use it and is more efficient as a result. This includes new technology for the family court to make the system simpler and more efficient for everyone; improvements to the court estate; and enhanced case officer/legal adviser functions to make best use of judges.

We have already...

- Built a system that allows online applications for divorce, and rolled it out nationally in May 2018. During private beta, 1,064 petitions were issued and since opening the service up to the general public, we have received 1,881 (as at 21 May 2018).

- Launched a similar service in private beta for applying for probate online, with very positive feedback. As at 14 May 2018, the service has received 2,871 applications with just over 2,418 grants of probate having been issued.

- Introduced Help with Fees, which has made it far easier for people to check whether they can get help, reducing the number of applications that are sent back and saving £1m a year.

- Begun a new project on family public law. The project has just finished the first phase, where, in consultation with local authorities, the judiciary and legal professionals, the opportunities for change have been identified, and a first design for the new way of working has been developed. The project is currently building a set of prototypes to test key parts of this with users.

Over the next 18 months, we will...

- Extend our systems for divorce and probate, adding more features and making the probate system available to everyone. The divorce system will be extended to cover financial remedy and there will be dedicated versions for solicitors allowing them to manage multiple cases.

- Like divorce and probate, the family public law project will introduce an online application. In addition, the project will start to introduce seamless digital working to and through court, so that evidence can be submitted and shared electronically and cases can be managed much more securely and effectively. This will help us to test and develop a core document management system for the family courts that can then be extended. It will also enable in-court digital presentation of evidence.

- Within the scope of the public law project, we will also start to digitise the adoption process for both public and private law cases, again developing systems to manage these cases more securely and effectively. Once all the parts are complete, they will fit together so that cases can move seamlessly from one process to another.

- Start developing systems and processes to enable private family law litigants to initiate and manage their cases online.

Family projects

There are six projects included in the family reform programme, including:

- Online divorce application: This project aims to deliver a transformed digital service for individuals and their legal representatives to make an application to legally end their marriage or civil partnership and resolve associated financial issues. The first stage – supporting applications for uncontested divorce, and allowing digital upload of marriage certificates – was rolled out nationally in May 2018 and we have received 1,881 petitions (as at 21 May 2018).
Fewer than 1% of applications have contained errors that meant they needed to be resubmitted, compared to over 40% of the old paper forms.

**Online divorce feedback**

“The online divorce [test] has been a triumphant success and shows, to my mind conclusively, that this is – must be – the way of the future.”

– Sir James Munby, President of the Family Division

“Marvellous, pain-free and less stressful than the paper form.”

– User

Find out more about online divorce.

- **Online probate application**: This project aims to provide a digital, user-designed application form and a new case management system to actively manage probate applications. The project will create a simpler, digital process for users, as well as reducing the cost and time spent processing applications. As at 14 May 2018, the service has received 2,871 applications with just over 2,418 grants of probate having been issued.

**Online probate feedback**

“Really easy to complete... one of the most user-friendly websites around.”

– User

“Brilliant idea and a much better way to process this sort of information. Thank you.”

– User

Find out more about online probate services.

- **Family public law**: This project will make the public law process more efficient, ensuring the court, parties and their representatives have access to the right information at the right time to help decide the best outcomes for children involved in public law cases. In particular, it will allow evidence to be submitted and shared electronically and cases can be managed much more securely and effectively. It will also allow orders to be written and produced in real time in court (in many cases), meaning that everyone leaves with immediate clarity on what has been agreed. We are currently developing the first parts of this new system, which will be tested over the summer, and we welcome feedback. To get involved and learn more please contact the team.

Find out more about family public law.

- **Adoption**: Following on from the first stage of the work on family public law, we will start to digitise the adoption process for both public and private law cases, again developing systems to manage these cases more securely and effectively. Once all the parts are complete, they will fit together so that cases can move seamlessly from one to another. We hope this work will start imminently and will run alongside the public law service development.
• **Court of Protection:** This project will be to enable people using the Court of Protection to initiate and manage their cases online. This work will begin in Spring 2019.

• **Private Family Law:** We will then move to develop and implement systems and processes to enable private family law litigants to initiate and manage their cases online – again, fitting together seamlessly. We expect to begin this work in Summer 2019.

**Tribunals**

We will create simpler processes and online routes into our tribunals, allowing people to manage and resolve disputes fairly and speedily. This will include providing tools that support online dispute resolution and 'continuous online hearings', with helpful interfaces for judges to communicate directly with parties; and further development of the roles of case officers, working in support of the judiciary.

**We have already…**

- Introduced a system allowing **online appeals to the Tax Tribunal**.
- Developed a system that allows appellants in Social Security and Child Support to **track their appeal online**, and receive text and email alerts letting them know what is happening, and made this available nationally.
- Made it possible for social security and child support appellants to **submit their appeal online** and tested this in the Midlands and the South East.
- Introduced **caseworkers**, working under judicial supervision to carry out routine tasks previously undertaken by judges.

**Over the next 18 months, we will…**

- Extend the ability to **appeal online** in the Social Security Chamber nationally.
- Introduce a similar ability to appeal online, and track appeals for the **asylum and immigration tribunal**.
- Build an **evidence share function** between HMCTS and other government departments to allow for the efficient transmission of appeals and case bundles.
- Test and introduce a system for continuous online resolution into the Social Security and Child Support Tribunal to allow appellants to participate in **online hearings**.
- Test the use of **screens and laptops** in certain tribunals to allow hearings to be undertaken without papers.
- Expand the use of tribunal **case workers** across a number of jurisdictions.

**Tribunals projects**

There are five projects included in the tribunals reform programme, including:

• **Social Security and Child Support (SSCS):** We have begun by developing ‘Track Your Appeal’ - an online tracking tool which allows users to track the progress of their appeal against the key stages of appeal received, response received, hearing booked and decision. The user is also able to sign up to updates by email and text messages which notify them about progress and provide focussed links to supporting information. The service is currently available to all users in England and Wales who have made a Personal Independence payment (PIP) appeal since 1 March 2018 and have opted for an oral hearing, as well as some Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) appeals in North West England. As at May 2018, 795 users have signed up to the new service. We then developed ‘Submit Your Appeal’, which allows appeals to be submitted online (we started with tracking rather than submission because that is what users told us they wanted most). ‘Submit Your Appeal’ is currently available to
users making a PIP appeal who live in the Midlands and South-East England. It is being tested and refined based on feedback; it will be made available nationally in the summer. The next stage is the development of software to support ‘continuous online hearings’, allowing judges and panel members to ask appellants and the DWP questions and get responses (which can be typed, or provided through audio or video recording) to allow them to make decisions. We will also develop systems that allow cases to be supported digitally through a hearing, allowing paperless working as their appeal is submitted.

Track Your Appeal feedback

“Easy to keep track of what’s happening – it’s really good.”
– User

“Courts, judges, decision all quite frightening. This calms you down.”
– User

Find out how we used user research to develop our Social Security and Child Support online application service.

- **Immigration and Asylum Chamber (IAC):** This project is focussed on delivering an efficient and transparent Immigration and Asylum tribunal service that is simple, fair and accessible for everyone using it. It will build on the developments made and lessons learnt for the Social Security and Child Support Chamber, and will similarly enable cases to be resolved online where that is appropriate, as well as supporting the use of video and face to face hearings.

- **Upper Tribunal:** This project is focussed on new digital ways of working across the Upper Tribunal and the RCJ (and is the same project as described in the Royal Courts of Justice civil section, above).

- **Employment Tribunals:** This project will use a combination of the tribunals and civil money claims models to develop a new Employment Tribunals service that works better for those who use it. Because we expect this to draw on earlier civil and other tribunals projects, we have planned this for later in the programme, and expect to start work in 2020.

- **Specialist Tribunals:** This project will establish new ways of working across the specialist tribunals, developed on a tribunal-by-tribunal basis, but re-using elements of what has been developed for SSCS, IAC and others where that works to provide a good service quickly. Again, this has been planned for later in the programme to enable it to learn from the earlier projects, and it will start 2020.
Cross-cutting projects and services

This area of the reform programme will improve systems and processes across jurisdictions, supporting modern ways of working.

We have already…

- Installed Wi-Fi in over 95% of our courts and tribunals and have over 63,000 professionals accessing Wi-Fi in our courts each week. Wi-Fi rollout to the remaining courts will be complete in the next few months.
- Announced Stoke on Trent and Birmingham as the first two locations for new Courts and Tribunal Service Centres which will greatly improve our administration and give faster, better guidance and help both to the public and to professional court users.
- Consulted on a new estates strategy and raised over £115m from the sale of court buildings which we did not need, all of which has been reinvested into modernising our services and making it easier for people to access justice.
- Tested fully video hearing with legal professionals in the Immigration and Asylum Chamber for simple case management hearings. We have begun a time boxed test in the Tax Chamber. The test is enabling participants, including members of the public, to join a video hearing from their chosen location via their own computer, with no need for specialist technology.
- Announced a partnership with the charity Good Things Foundation to deliver the face to face assisted digital service. Where someone needs a higher level of support to engage digitally, they will be offered a face to face appointment with a Good Things Foundation Online Centre, of which there are around 5,000 across the UK, including libraries, Citizens Advice and community hubs. There is no charge to the end user for this service.

Over the next 18 months, we will…

- Finish installing Wi-Fi in all our buildings (summer 2018) and upgrade Wi-Fi in those courts where we need more bandwidth; and install screens for the judiciary, witnesses and litigants in person that will support digital working.
- Refine our estates strategy based on the responses to our consultation, setting out the principles we will apply when we make decisions about the future court estate.
- Explore further locations for Courts and Tribunals Service Centres to provide maximum support.
- Conclude the fully video hearing tax test in Summer 2018. We have commissioned an independent evaluation to learn more about the way people engage with the system, identify what is working well in the adoption of service and look at users’ experience. We are working with members of the judiciary to identify the type of hearings which are suitable for further early testing.
- Design and begin to test new digital tools and new processes to support better scheduling and listing of cases.
- Develop design standards for new buildings and courtrooms, ensuring that spaces are flexible, accessible, well-equipped and suitable for modern needs, particularly around IT infrastructure.
- Test a variety of different sitting patterns in different jurisdictions and evaluate their impact. Flexible hours will only be considered more widely if the evaluation shows they support better access to justice – if not, we will not pursue them.

Projects and services

There are 26 projects included in the cross-cutting projects and services reform programme, which we have grouped below into categories. The full list of projects is included in the projects summary.
• **Video hearings:** This project is developing fully video hearings, which will allow individuals to participate through a web browser, removing the current need for participants to access specialist video conferencing equipment to appear in court via video. We believe making this technology available will assist in making hearings more accessible and provide increased flexibility.

Fully video hearings will not be mandated and the final decision about the mode of hearing will be taken by a judge who will only choose a fully video hearing when they have taken into account all the circumstances of the case and are satisfied it will facilitate full and effective participation.

“It is a major benefit to the client that they don’t have to pay for a lawyer to go physically to the court and bear the cost of travel and waiting. The other great potential advantage is that the court might be able to be more efficient and deal with more cases.”

Michael Hanley
Senior Partner, Wilson Solicitors

“What I was pleased to see and impressed with was the clarity on the screen and that in this version it was easy to see who the parties were.”

Judge Campbell
Resident Judge, Taylor House Tribunal and Hearing Centre

Find out more about video hearings.

• **Scheduling and listing:** This project will design a digital tool and form new processes for supporting the administration of scheduling and listing. This will increase efficiency, reduce delays and make it easier and quicker for our listings officers to perform their role. Court users can have competing needs – which is why listing is often thought of as more art than science. Judicial control of listing will remain sacrosanct, but a better underpinning system could make it easier to collect and manage a wide range of information about needs and availability, and give us better data about how successfully lists are balancing competing demands, which can in turn be fed back into good practice.

• **Operating hours:** We have proposed a series of tests to examine the feasibility of different operating hours, testing different models in different jurisdictions. The project includes an independent evaluation to assess the impact for all participants and the costs and benefits across the justice system. We do not need to roll out flexible operating hours to deliver the promised savings from reform, though if the tests suggest different hours could improve access to justice, they may allow us to use some of our buildings and space more effectively. We have recently spent time listening to views on this proposal, which has been controversial, and are currently carefully considering those views before proceeding with the test.

• **Assisted digital:** This project is defining and developing the new assisted digital services. Our assisted digital services are informed by extensive user research and user testing by real end users of every transformed service. We have engaged with external organisations such as Citizens Advice, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Disability Rights UK, AGE UK, and more. The assisted digital support offered to users will be tailored to their needs and abilities and is focused on allowing otherwise digitally excluded users to use digital systems with confidence. Assisted digital services, whether by telephone, webchat or face to face, will follow the same business rules as elsewhere in HMCTS operations in that they will not offer legal advice, only assistance with the process. We have no plans to mandate the use of digital channels for public users and channel choice will be offered. However, our aim is to create digital services that are so intuitive and easy to use that people will choose to use them.
We have partnered with the charity, the Good Things Foundation to deliver the face to face assisted digital service. The Good Things Foundation is a registered charity and the UK’s leading digital inclusion organisation. The foundation delivers its programmes via a network of over 5000 local community partners, including libraries, Citizens Advice offices, and community hubs. Their local networks allow excellent customer reach with a variety of partners who can specialise in providing assisted digital support based on individuals’ needs.

- **The Courts and Tribunals and Regional Tier Project; and the Courts and Tribunals Service Centres Project:** These two projects together will re-shape how we work as an organisation. Our courts and tribunals will be much more focused on supporting trials and hearings. We will continue to have court clerks and ushers in court (with no fewer of them per hearing than we have today, and in some cases, more). But their roles will change, and they will be able to support judges and users of the court in more ways as technology supports their core role. Courts and tribunals will also have listing officers where they do now, and staff to support judges, including more with delegated powers where this is agreed with the judiciary. There will also be members of staff focused on maintaining the building, and keeping the increasing digital technology in good order (and troubleshooting where necessary). Most administrative processing will move out of court and tribunal buildings, into dedicated Courts and Tribunal Service Centres, which will also be the first port of call for the public wanting information on their cases – allowing us to answer calls, emails and queries much more quickly and reliably, developing specialisms to improve consistency and accuracy, with less vulnerability to shifts in staffing than a small court office.

  The first two Courts and Tribunals Service Centres, which will begin by supporting our first reformed services (divorce, probate, the Single Justice Service and Social Security and Child Support) will open in Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham in January 2019.

- **Property:** We have always kept our operational estate under review and this remains a priority while we reform our courts and tribunals. The history of HMCTS means that in many places we have multiple buildings; and many are not where you would put a court if you were planning the system today. It is not right to view the historic distribution of courts and tribunals as a given; nor to keep underused courts open when the cost of running them could be put to better use. We have recently consulted on the principles and approach which will guide us in taking future decisions on the estate, and will publish a response to that consultation later this year.

  In addition, we are defining the standards we will use for future building design which we will apply to new buildings or when we refurbish or add courtrooms to existing buildings. The ‘Courts and Tribunals Design Guide’ which sets out these standards, will be published later this year. We have completed a comprehensive survey of our estate, and will use this to prioritise our spending to address our backlog of maintenance. We are also working closely with our facilities management contractors to improve performance in addressing day-to-day maintenance issues, and are preparing to re-compete those contracts to secure a better service in future. Last year we also took forward a project to explore how we can optimise hearing capacity in our buildings, working with the judiciary to look into this, with the series of recommendations now being implemented.

- **IT infrastructure and digitisation:** This project ensures we have the underpinning IT infrastructure to support new ways of working. This includes completing the roll-out of Wi-Fi across the full court estate (it is already provided in every criminal and combined court, and the roll-out to civil and family courts and tribunals will finish this summer). We have already started to upgrade Wi-Fi in some of the earlier criminal sites to improve the robustness of the service and increase coverage. We are also in the process of providing screens for the judiciary, witnesses and litigants in person in civil and family courts and tribunals, which will support digital working. We also have an on-going project to provide Wi-Fi and screens in the Royal Courts of Justice.
We will provide (and improve) videoconferencing equipment in courts to support video hearings; and will ‘unlock’ the justice video service so that (with appropriate security). Links can be opened-up to criminal jurisdiction users on any device (allowing, for example, lawyers to have case conferences with prisoners from their chambers rather than having to use a court ‘end-point’).

We will also establish services to support bulk scanning and printing; improve the payment of fees and expenses to judges and tribunal panel members; and increase the level and efficiency of the collection of criminal financial impositions through improved business processes and IT systems.

- **HMCTS people and cultural transformation:** This project focuses on the skilled and dedicated people who work in HMCTS. It includes work to re-design roles; to train and develop our staff; to give more and better routes for career development and progression; to review, update and develop policies for recruitment, retention, and redeployment; and to actively and sensitively manage the significant change that will come from the reform programme, engaging people at every stage and giving them a chance to help shape the changes. We will be a smaller organisation after these reforms. We have around 16,300 (Full Time Equivalent) staff at present, of whom 2,100 are temporary/agency staff; at the end of the programme we anticipate having between 10,000 and 11,000. Around half will work in courts and tribunals, and the other half in Courts and Tribunals Service Centres (with a small number in headquarters or performing regional roles). Some types of role – those predominantly concerned with processing paper, or re-keying between legacy systems, for example – will no longer exist; and others will change, typically becoming more skilled and involving less repetitive, routine work (as a result of better digital systems). We are therefore working closely with people to think about future opportunities, and support them in making career choices, including developing new skills. We will provide a career transition support service available for all staff – not just those whose roles are directly affected – and will give notice of change, and good-quality support.

- **Data and management information:** Finally, we are consciously and deliberately planning the data and management information that we want our new systems to provide, and which will be the foundation of further improvement – allowing us to see much more readily where there are blockages or difficulties, and whether the things we are doing to address them are working. This shift to readily-available, real-time information about how things are working – coupled with the way we are designing our systems, which incorporates an assumption that we will want to change and improve them regularly in future – helps to make our changes future-proof by designing for further improvement. We will also make data available – in a suitably anonymised way – for researchers and academics to use.
We want to hear your views

As our reform programme gathers pace, we want to continue the conversation with you. You can find out the latest and tell us what you think in any of the following ways:

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