

Press release: Government announces easier court entrance for legal sector

A scheme allowing practising legal professionals direct entrance to courts without the need to be searched will be piloted by HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) in five courts, with registration beginning in August and fast-track entry from September.

The Bar Council has led the development of an app for its members to use as ID, and Law Society members will benefit from the pilot, using approved photo ID.

While tightened security procedures introduced during the last year will continue, the 'Professional Entry Scheme' intends to ease queues to get into court buildings and allow easier and swifter access for legal professionals who come to court regularly.

The scheme will recognise the trusted status of legal professionals without compromising security and is supported by the judiciary.

Justice Minister, Lucy Frazer, said:

Courts and tribunals are the daily workplace for many trusted legal professionals. This pilot will make it easier for them to simply get on with their job.

Of course, we need to do this in the right way, without compromising the security of our courts. To ensure this pilot is a success we are working closely with the legal profession.

Chair of the Bar, Andrew Walker QC, said:

The Bar Council has worked hard with HMCTS to promote a scheme that enables barristers to avoid long delays and searches.

We are delighted that this has now led to a pilot of the Professional Entry Scheme. If the pilot is a success, then the new secure, easy to use ID app that we are developing should enable practising barristers to make the most of the scheme, wherever they practise.

Law Society President, Christina Blacklaws, said:

There is no doubt that easier access will benefit our members and we welcome this sensible initiative.

We have spoken to HMCTS officials about the delays practitioners can face in clearing security and we hope the pilot will pave the way for a permanent system of easier access.

In advance of the pilot, practising legal professions will need to register with their local court, agree to conditions of entry (which continue to include a list of prohibited items) and meet secure ID authentication requirements when they attend court. This includes identifying themselves as a legal professional and showing photographic ID, which will be checked by a court security officer against a registration list.

Random searches on a proportion of the participants in the pilot will be carried out to make sure the scheme is working as intended.

Legal practitioners will be invited to register with their local court from today, with fast-track entries predicted to open in early September.

If successful, the scheme will be extended nationally and could be grown to other professional groups. It will not be implemented at courts hearing terrorist or high security cases.