

Law change opens door to deaf jurors

- opens jury service to over 80,000 profoundly deaf people
- move permits British Sign Language interpreters to enter jury rooms
- part of sweeping reforms to the justice system announced today

Current laws strictly prohibit anyone beyond the 12 sworn jurors from entering jury deliberation rooms. This is to safeguard against outside influence. However, it means that an interpreter would be deemed an unlawful '13th person', thus preventing those who require their assistance from participating in this important civic duty.

Ministers are determined to ensure the justice system is accessible to everyone and will therefore legislate to remove this barrier to allow British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters inside jury rooms.

The move will mean over 80,000 deaf people across England and Wales can now participate in jury service. It forms part of wider reforms announced today seeking to build a fairer justice system.

Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

Disability should not be a barrier to people carrying out this most important civic duty.

I am delighted we can open up jury service to many thousands more people and ensure our justice system becomes as accessible and inclusive as possible.

BSL interpreters can already enter courtrooms to assist deaf jurors, however they are currently not allowed into the room where verdicts are considered. This has meant that people with significant hearing impairments would need to be able to lip read during the deliberation process.

Under the changes, interpreters will be contractually bound to a confidentiality agreement, stipulating their obligation to remain impartial at all times and not to divulge any discussions that take place in jury rooms.

It builds on a range of provisions in place to ensure accessibility for jurors with disabilities, including making sure wheelchairs can be properly positioned to view proceedings, and allowing the use of guide dogs and braille cards.

Meanwhile, a £1 billion modernisation of courts and tribunals is underway, seeking to boost the use of technology, upgrade systems, and ensure it better responds to the needs of the public. It comes as hundreds of millions is being invested to tackle the impact of the pandemic on the courts and deliver speedier justice for victims.

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Justin Tomlinson said:

I am committed to making sure disabled people can participate fully in society and this announcement is a key step forward in achieving that ambition.

Our upcoming National Strategy for Disabled People will build on this, looking across government at how we can unlock opportunities to positively impact the lives of disabled people now and in the future.

Annie Roberts, Advocacy Officer at RNID said:

We welcome the planned change in the law allowing deaf people to sit as jurors. Jury service is an obligation we all have as law abiding citizens, deaf people are citizens and therefore its only right that we should be able to play our part in society equal to everyone else. This is a small step forward for an inclusive society and valuing the contribution of the deaf community to our country.

Notes to editors

- New legislation to allow BSL interpreters to be present in a jury deliberation room was introduced to parliament today as part of the Police, Crimes, Sentencing and Courts Bill.
- The impact of this change will be that profoundly deaf individuals will not be excluded from completing jury service simply because they require the assistance of a BSL interpreter.
- The courts already make reasonable adjustments for jurors with disabilities and arrange pre-trial visits to allow individuals to view the facilities at court and discuss their needs in more detail with court staff.
- For example, wheelchair users can receive practical help in dealing with documents and the appropriate positioning of their wheelchair to get a better view of proceedings. Blind and partially sighted jurors can be provided with braille oath cards, large print documents as well as having a guide dog present at all times.
- The courts also monitor developments in potential new technology which may provide further assistance to disabled jurors.
- Trial by jury is a fundamental aspect of our criminal justice system and serving as a juror is one of the most important civic duties that anyone can be asked to perform. Juries are composed of 12 individuals randomly selected by the Jury Central Summoning Bureau from the Electoral Register. This random selection enables jurors to bring varying life experiences and to be representative of the society they serve.

[UK's world-leading ivory ban moves step closer](#)

The UK's world-leading ban on importing, exporting and dealing in items containing elephant ivory in the UK moves a step closer today following the launch of a [consultation on the implementation](#) of the [Ivory Act](#).

Once implemented, the Ivory Act, which was a key government manifesto commitment, will introduce a near total ban on the import, export and dealing of items containing elephant ivory in the UK, regardless of their age, allowing only for a narrowly defined set of exemptions.

Elephants are the world's largest land mammal and can live past 60 years of age in the wild. However they are commonly targeted for their tusks. The savanna elephant populations declined by about 30 per cent – equal to 144,000 elephants – across 15 African countries between 2007 and 2014. The UK's landmark Ivory Act will help protect the world's elephants by banning sales of ivory that may contribute to poaching.

The eight-week consultation seeks views on the registration and certification process and fees for exempted items. People will only need to register and certify items for the purposes of dealing in items containing ivory. Those who own but are not planning to sell ivory items do not need to register and certify them.

Animal Welfare Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

Our Ivory Act introduces one of the world's toughest bans on elephant ivory sales, ensuring that we do everything we can to save this magnificent species from extinction.

As a global leader in animal conservation, we are sending a clear message that we consider the commercial trade in elephant ivory to be totally unacceptable.

Dr Mark Jones, Head of Policy at the Born Free Foundation, said:

In passing the Ivory Act into law, the UK Government has boldly introduced some of the toughest restrictions on ivory trade anywhere in the world, vindicating Born Free's longstanding assertion that only by banning the trade in ivory can we hope to bring an end to the industrial-scale poaching of elephants for their tusks.

The Government made a manifesto commitment to bring the ivory ban into force and to extend it to cover other ivory-bearing species such as narwhals, killer whales and hippos. Defra is currently considering evidence submitted in response to a [call for evidence on non-elephant ivory trade](#), and will be consulting on this later in the year.

The implementation of the Ivory Act was delayed due to unsuccessful legal challenges but it will now help cement the UK's place as a global leader in conversation and will help us play a leading role internationally in addressing threats to endangered species.

The UK government is working closely with the international community to address the threats to the conservation of elephants from poaching and both the legal and illegal ivory trade. Since 2014 the UK has contributed £2.6 million to projects around the world to stop the ivory trade through the [Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund](#).

The eight-week consultation by can be found [here](#).

The Ivory Act 2018 creates narrow and carefully defined exemptions to the ban for:

- Items with only a small amount of ivory. Such items must comprise less than 10% ivory by volume and have been made prior to 1947.
- Musical instruments. These must have an ivory content of less than 20% by volume and have been made prior to 1975.
- Portrait miniatures. A specific exemption for portrait miniatures – which were often painted on thin slivers of ivory – made before 1918 and with a surface area of no more than 320cm².
- Sales to and hire agreements with qualifying museums.
- The rarest and most important items of their type. These must be items of outstanding artistic, cultural or historic value, and made prior to 1918. Decisions on applications for such items will be based on expert advice from a selection of institutions deemed to have the necessary knowledge and expertise.

[OSCE roundtable on women's leadership in peacebuilding and conflict prevention: UK contribution](#)

Why is it important to have more women in leadership positions in conflict prevention and peacebuilding?

Five main reasons:

(a) The starting point is very low – between 1990 and 2017, in all major peace processes – women made up only 2% of mediators; 8% of negotiators and 5% of witnesses and signatures. Barriers include assumptions that, as women are often not direct combatants, their role in cessation of hostilities is limited. But there are serious myths which need puncturing – chief amongst them that: there are not enough qualified women to participate in peace processes (which is wrong); and that peace processes should not take into account informal power structures in communities (which is also wrong).

(b) Peace processes set the blueprint for the future – without women at the peace-table (who make up around 50% of the population), we are missing valuable expertise and experience in shaping that future. Although women are often not direct combatants, women's role in informal power structures in communities can be used to promote both conflict and peace.

There are good examples here. In Colombia, the comprehensive peace agreement in 2016 set an international example for women's involvement: women rallied public opinion for the talks and were significantly represented as delegates in the inclusive peace talks, mediating local cease-fires that led to passage of people, food and medicine and negotiating release of hostages. During the Northern Ireland negotiations, female signatories representing the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition acted as channels for bi-communal civil society involvement in the official peace-making process and were able to broaden the negotiations to include victim's rights and reconciliation.

(c) Backed up by facts – when women meaningfully participate in peace processes, the resulting agreement is 64% less likely to fail and 35% more likely to last at least 15 years (UN Women). So without the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in these processes, we are all exposed to a much less stable world. Diversity, and diversity of leadership, leads to more informed decision making and better policies.

(d) Women and girls can also ensure broader societal issues are included in peace and security mechanisms – According to the UN, women and girls may face increased vulnerabilities during or after a crisis. Some 60% of all preventable maternal deaths in the world take place in conflict, displacement or disaster settings. Girls in conflict settings are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys. And the rise and resurgence of conflict and violent extremism, triggers patterns of sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage. Evidence from GAPS, Women's International Peace Centre and LSE also suggested women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change. And over the last year we have seen women on the front line of the global pandemic, providing vital humanitarian relief and services.

(e) Essential step towards ensuring the equal rights of women and girls – Women's rights are human rights. And it is therefore fitting that this discussion is taking place on International Women's Day.

What can the OSCE and participating States do to promote women's leadership

in peacebuilding and conflict prevention?

(i) Ensure there is an inclusive culture in OSCE's peacebuilding and conflict prevention forums and mechanisms – like any workplace. Women need to be included in the format and substance of discussions from the onset. Need a positive working culture that is free from any form of discrimination, bullying or harassment, including sexual harassment. For those of us in these structures – we need to challenge ourselves about any implicit bias we have. And we listen – to obstacles and roadblocks which others have. We call out bad behaviour which may limit certain individuals wanting to take up leadership positions.

(ii) Actively seeks ways to ensure women's full participation in OSCE's conflict prevention and peacebuilding structures – building on the OSCE's toolkit – Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes. This includes consultations with and listening to civil society groups on aspects of the conflicts which affect peoples' lives – freedom of movement, jobs, schooling, health care, access to pensions, electricity, water, gas or roads. Need to challenge ourselves – with the conflict mediation and resolution structures the OSCE has, is there more we can do, consistent with the OSCE's toolkit.

(iii) Provide tangible support and protection for women peacebuilders, through:

- supporting Women Mediator networks – so women can learn from other role models, get access to support, and there are identifiable individuals who are ready to be deployed to support peace processes around the globe
- Women Peacebuilders often work at great personal risk and face threats, violence and abuse on a regular basis. The International Civil Action Network has developed a [Protection Framework for women peacebuilders](#) which the UK supports and which was developed through conversations with women peacebuilders about their experiences and needs. The framework lists a series of 19 recommendations including establishing protection guidelines and protocols, supporting the capacity of law enforcement officers to respond to threats, and establishing and implementing rules of engagement to ensure respectful communication and treatment during peace processes, amongst others. By the OSCE and its participating States supporting and implementing the recommendations of the Framework, we can help protect women peacebuilders and facilitate greater involvement of women in peace processes at all levels of leadership.

(iv) Support also starts earlier. Ensure women and girls are able to reach their true potential (1) – through being free of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence or sexual violence in conflict. So:

- a focus by the OSCE, its structures, its field missions and vitally the participating States to prevent domestic violence (which has increased shockingly under COVID-19) is essential
- ensure a zero tolerance approach for sexual exploitation and abuse is

vital for the OSCE as an organisation and us as contributing participating States

- ensure women and girls who have experienced sexual violence in conflict are prevented from re-traumatisation (putting the needs of survivors at the heart of a response – through initiatives such as the [Murad Code](#))

(v) And ensure women and girls are able to reach their true potential (2) – through access to quality education, training and positive role models:

- ensuring access for all girls to quality education – and over a decade of quality education
- that girls' experience is built around positive role models, and is free of discrimination or gender stereotypes
- ensure gender is mainstreamed into all activities, including talent pipelines and recruitment processes

What role can men play to promote women's leadership? How to engage men actively to support such efforts?

- we need to help in implementing all the above. Because it is obviously in interests of men as well to ensure more sustainable peace processes and ensure we account for all elements to enable a comprehensive approach to security. All these above tangible steps need men, as well as everyone, to help bring to fruition
- ensuring women and girls reach their full potential, through access to quality and training is vital and needs all of us, including men
- we need to enable a positive working culture and environment – that is free from any form of discrimination, bullying or harassment. That needs us all – including (or particularly men). We all need to challenge ourselves and educate ourselves about the implicit bias we have and listen to others – about obstacles and roadblocks, and do something about them. Reverse mentor schemes are good in this regard
- men need to call our bad behaviour. And – in a privileged position as a male leader I am in – we need to listen to obstacles and roadblocks. And do something about it
- as men often perpetrators, there needs to be essential focus on stopping domestic violence, sexual violence in conflicts and sexual exploitation and abuse
- and a key role for us in standing up to others. Bystander and ally training is an important initiative
- and there needs to be more men in senior positions and leadership

positions to stand up and communicate and advocate for women's leadership. Get over any myths of this being a zero sum game and being in everyone's interest

UK to send millions of pounds recovered from corrupt officials back to Nigeria

The UK and Nigerian governments have signed an agreement today (Tuesday 9 March) to send £4.2 million (2.2 billion Naira) of stolen funds recovered by UK agencies back to Nigeria, where it will be spent on key infrastructure and building works for the Nigerian people.

This is the first time that money recovered from criminals will be returned to Nigeria since an agreement was signed in 2016 to recover and return the proceeds of bribery or corruption in a responsible and transparent way.

The money – stolen by the former Governor of Nigeria's Delta State, James Ibori, and his associates – was retrieved through operations led by UK law enforcement agencies, who worked to identify assets bought in the UK with illicit funds and recover them. In February 2012, Mr Ibori pleaded guilty in a UK court to money laundering, conspiracy to defraud, and forgery, and was sentenced to a total of 13 years in prison.

UK Minister for Africa, James Duddridge said:

When money is stolen from public funds it hits the poorest communities the hardest and means money can't be spent where it's most needed.

The UK's work on this case to recover millions of pounds will support vital infrastructure and building works. The UK and Nigeria will continue to work together to tackle crime and corruption across our nations.

The Nigerian government has pledged to use the returned funds for projects that will benefit and improve the country. This includes boosting support to substantial building work for the Lagos to Ibadan Expressway, the Abuja to Kano road and the second Niger Bridge.

Home Office Minister, Baroness Williams said:

This is a significant moment in our fight against illicit finance wherever it is found.

Recovering the proceeds of crime is a critical part of our fight against serious crime and this sends a clear message to criminals that we will relentlessly pursue them, their assets and their money.

Under the agreement, worked up with UK officials, a detailed budget plan, including a work and expenditure schedule has been made for each project and agreed by representatives from the Government of Nigeria. They have committed to using the funds with the utmost transparency, and information about its management will be made available to the Nigerian public, as well as accountability reports which will be published annually.

The UK continues to be a driving force in bringing countries together to tackle serious and organised crime. Between 2019/2020 the UK recovered just under £208m from the proceeds of crime, an increase of almost 10% compared with 2014/15. Of this, £139m was collected through confiscation orders.

Chief Crown Prosecutor for CPS Proceeds of Crime, Adrian Foster said:

Corruption anywhere is corrosive and has a drastic impact on the lives of the people where money is embezzled from. Where there is international corruption carried out from England and Wales, we will robustly prosecute and deprive individuals of their ill-gotten gains.

Thanks to diligent and complex work of our prosecutors, £4.2 million is being returned to the people of Nigeria and will go towards projects which will massively benefit the country.

This forms part of the CPS's ongoing asset recovery work.

Notes to Editors:

- The money was retrieved through operations led by the Metropolitan Police Service, National Crime Agency (NCA), Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), and supported by the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Home Office.
- The agreement to return the recovered funds will be signed in Nigeria by the British High Commissioner, Catriona Laing and Nigerian Minister for Justice Mr. Abubakar Malami.
- The projects on which the funds will be spent will be administered by the Nigeria Sovereign Investment Authority and independently audited. The Federal Republic of Nigeria has established a Monitoring Team to oversee the implementation of the projects and to report regularly on progress.

- The Nigerian government has also engaged The Cleen Foundation, which has expertise in substantial infrastructure projects, civil engineering, anti-corruption compliance, anti-human trafficking compliance, and procurement to provide additional monitoring and oversight.
- Today's agreement also builds on a 2016 UK-Nigeria Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), that reinforces the two countries' commitments to return the seized proceeds of bribery or corruption in a responsible and transparent way. This is the first time that money has been returned to Nigeria from the UK under this MoU.
- The MoU signed between the UK and Nigerian governments provides the framework for returning stolen assets to Nigeria. It also makes provision for transparency and monitoring in the return of any assets to Nigeria. More details on the MoU [here](#).

Judicial retirement age to rise to 75

Press release

Judges, magistrates, and coroners will be allowed to continue to serve until they are 75, as the Lord Chancellor today confirmed plans to increase their mandatory retirement age.



- mandatory retirement age (MRA) increased for the first time in over 27 years
- government determined to retain expertise of experienced judicial post holders
- part of move to boost recruitment and attract wider range of applicants

The move, which will raise the retirement age for judicial office holders from 70, is the first change to these rules in 27 years. It seeks to address the fact that people now work later into their lives, with the government determined not to lose valued judges, magistrates and coroners. This will provide greater flexibility for those judges who do not wish to retire at 70.

This follows a full consultation last year which received over 1000 responses from across the magistracy, judiciary, the legal profession, and other key stakeholder groups. The majority supported raising the age limit to reflect improvements in life expectancy and an increase in cases that need dealing with.

The new retirement age is expected to have a positive impact on diversity by promoting opportunities for individuals considering applying to the bench later in life, such as those who may have had gaps in their career to balance professional and family responsibilities.

Today's announcement forms part of wider reforms to boost judicial recruitment and retention. The government is investing £1 million to recruit more people into the magistracy and improve its diversity from under-represented groups, such as the BAME community. Meanwhile, the introduction of a pension scheme is planned for next April.

The Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

Our judges, magistrates and coroners are world-renowned for their excellence, expertise and independence. It is right we hold on to them and do not cut off careers unnecessarily.

Raising the retirement age will mean we can retain their invaluable experience, while ensuring that judicial roles are open to a wider pool of talent.

It will also make sure our courts and tribunals can continue to benefit from a world-class judiciary, as we emerge from the pandemic and beyond.

Ministers will legislate to increase the mandatory retirement age as soon as parliamentary time allows. Magistrates above 70 who have retired before the increase will be able to come back to the bench if there is a business need in their local area.

Notes to editors

- Published on 16 July 2020, the Judicial Mandatory Retirement Age consultation sought views on proposals to raise the mandatory retirement age (MRA) for judicial office holders to 72 or 75; and to allow magistrates' appointments to be eligible for extension past the MRA if in the public interest.
- MOJ's analysis of average retirement behaviour suggests that raising the MRA to 75 could retain an average of 399 Judicial Office Holders (JOHs), (excluding magistrates and coroners) per year across courts in England and Wales and in Unified Tribunals across the UK. This is the equivalent of 5% of the total headcount of judicial office holders in this group or 40% of the current recruitment programme of 1,000 vacancies. The same analysis for magistrates estimates a much higher impact. Raising the MRA to 75 for magistrates could retain approximately 2,122 magistrates over

time. This is the approximate equivalent of 15% of magistrates in England and Wales.

- We have no evidence that an increase in the MRA would impact adversely on public confidence in the judiciary. Public trust in the judiciary remains very high at 84%, with the Ipsos Mori Veracity Index (2020) placing judges in the top five most trusted professions. This has remained consistently high since the index was first published in 1983.
- The majority view of those that responded to the consultation felt that raising the MRA to 75 would not lead to the public having less confidence in the judiciary. With improvements in average life expectancy in the UK and the tendency for individuals to now work for longer, a higher MRA of 75 reflects these societal changes. Additionally, the benefit for judicial resource from retention of experienced JOHs supports the effective operation of our courts and tribunals, which could help to maintain and promote public confidence in the justice system.
- This move is not a specific response to the number of outstanding cases that have accrued since the start of the covid pandemic. It is instead focussed on addressing the recruitment gaps in both judges and magistrates, as demands on most jurisdictions increases. As well as reinforcing the belief that having a mandatory retirement age for JOHs helps maintain public confidence in the judiciary.
- We have invested £113 million into a range of measures to boost recovery and ensure justice continues to be served:
 - [25 Nightingale Courts are now up and running](#) – the Nightingale programme has provided 50 courtrooms across the estate which enables more crime work to be dealt with.
 - We've installed plexiglass screens into more than 450 courtrooms and jury deliberation rooms.
 - Over 290 courtrooms have been assessed as being routinely available to hold jury trials – more than before the pandemic.
 - 20,000 hearings using remote technology are taking place each week – compared to around 550 in March 2020 – a 4000% rise.
 - We are in a much stronger position to manage the impact of the pandemic compared to last spring, and public health experts have confirmed our measures remain sufficient to deal with the current variants of the virus.
- These efforts will be [bolstered by a £337 million Spending Review settlement](#) to deliver speedier justice to convict offenders, support victims, and protect the wider public.
- Every HM Courts & Tribunals building – including Nightingale Courts – meets the government's COVID-secure guidelines, and public health experts have confirmed the arrangements remain sufficient to deal with the current strains of the virus.
- On 1 February 2021 the [Ministry of Justice announced an extra £40 million to help victims during pandemic and beyond](#), building on the unprecedented £76 million the government has pledged to help the most vulnerable in society during this challenging time.