



Preventing digital exclusion

London, June 2018 - On Monday 4th June 2018, JUSTICE launches its **JUSTICE** latest Working Party report, *Preventing digital exclusion from online justice*. [JUSTICE's Working Party](#) was concerned about the wide range of digitally excluded people – such as those without access to technology or with low digital capability.

An ambitious programme of court reforms is already underway in England and Wales. Virtual, remote and online proceedings are set to expand across the justice system.

Though modernisation has potential to improve the justice system, her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service ("HMCTS") recognise that many people will need ongoing digital support to access 21st century justice. Technology is taken for granted by many, but some are left behind – despite past efforts to improve digital skills and expand free internet access. Justice reforms make tackling this problem an even more urgent priority than before.

Andrea Coomber, Director of JUSTICE, explains, *"We must address digital exclusion to unlock all the benefits of 21st century justice services. JUSTICE has previously advocated for user-centred reforms to make justice more accessible. Our Working Party's report recognises the importance of Assisted Digital support – especially for the most hard-to-reach."*

The Working Party looked at various groups at high risk of digital exclusion from modernised justice services – including homeless people and detainees. It also investigated how assistive technology and accessible design could play a part in minimising barriers facing the "computer challenged". HMCTS services to provide technical support, i.e. its "Assisted Digital" project, were considered in some detail.

With the benefit of evidence from a wide range of expert consultees, and working with HMCTS throughout, Working Party members have formulated practical recommendations for change.

Amanda Finlay CBE, Chair of the Working Party, said, *"Preventing digital exclusion from online justice will require a continuing programme of learning from users' needs and experience to improve Assisted Digital support and the Online Court itself. Inclusive, user friendly design and creative thinking will make online justice better for all users. Our recommendations are deliberately practical and achievable and we hope they will be implemented."*

The report makes 19 recommendations in total – mostly directed at HMCTS. These include:

- Greater investment in "trusted faces" in "trusted places" i.e. services already providing digital support and internet access.

- Considering the specific challenges of providing support to the digitally excluded, especially hard to reach cohorts – including testing Assisted Digital services in regions where the internet may be difficult to access.
- Paying specific attention to highly digitally excluded groups, like homeless people and detainees.
- Designing online justice services with an independent “look and feel” to reflect the constitutional independence of the courts.
- Maximising the benefits of the “multi-channel” approach – helping people move with ease between digital access, phone assistance, face-to-face assistance, and paper.
- Ensuring online justice services cater for the most affordable and ubiquitous mode of digital interaction: mobile technology.
- Conducting end-to-end pilots of online justice services, learning from hearing and enforcement stages what is required at earlier stages.
- Researching how people behave in an online environment and choices between Assisted Digital channels.
- Collecting and making available the widest range of data possible to support research by external experts.

Notes for editors

1. JUSTICE has a long history of using Working Parties of its membership to effect systemic changes within the legal system. For example, the Ombudsman system and Criminal Injuries Compensation Board were set up on the recommendation of previous JUSTICE Working Parties.
2. This Working Party, set up and supported by JUSTICE and drawn from its membership, included experts from the legal profession and beyond. The Working Party was chaired by Amanda Finlay CBE. She worked alongside Rebecca Agliolo, Alex Just, Sara Lomri, Christina Marriott, Dr Sue Prince, Cassie Robinson, Charlotte Rook, Caroline Sheppard OBE, Dr Tatiana Tkacukova, Dr Joe Tomlinson, James Walker, James Wood QC, and Paul Yates. Aoife Doolan (HMCTS) attended the Working Party in an observer capacity. We are very grateful to Freshfields and Pagefield Global Counsel who have pledged their support to the working party.
3. JUSTICE is an all-party law reform and human rights organisation working to strengthen the justice system in the United Kingdom. For more information, please visit www.justice.org.uk
4. Please direct queries to Jodie Blackstock, Legal Director on jblackstock@justice.org.uk