

## **Launch of Electronic Filing in the Queen's Bench Division**

**Lord Burnett of Maldon, Lord Chief Justice**

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Welcome to this event to celebrate the launch of electronic working and filing in the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court. In a short while you will see the system demonstrated by judges of the Queen's Bench Division and the Business and Property Courts and also by Thomson Reuters who have designed it. We are grateful to Thomson Reuters for supporting this event. Thank you.

It is sobering to think that despite being one of the most advanced economies in the world, with as mature a legal system as exists anywhere, that we are only now moving towards widespread electronic working and filing in our civil courts. In September last year, the Chief Justice of Papua New Guinea proudly showed me on his computer how he could access all relevant documents, evidence and submissions in every case in the High Court in Papua New Guinea and its appellate courts. We have much ground to make up. We have had electronic filing in the business and property courts in the Rolls Building for some time and it is good news indeed that we are now able to extend the pilot to the Royal Courts of Justice. The construction of this building makes that difficult. But electronic filing and working, CE File, is now firmly established in the Queen's Bench Division.

The introduction of CE Filing is part of a much wider and larger programme to modernise the working of the courts and tribunals and, in particular, to harness technology in a way which improves the administration of justice and widens access to justice.

The benefits of CE Filing are perhaps obvious. It will enable parties to issue claims and applications with ease. Pleadings and other court documents will be filed on line. Parties will be able to access the court file electronically. Non-parties will have access to those parts of the files which are properly available to the public. But there are many additional benefits for the court service. There will no longer be any need to process and deal with vast volumes of paper. Court staff will be able to devote their time to more productive tasks than receiving paper at court counters, issuing claims and applications by processing documents, opening envelopes and filing documents on the correct file and so on.

It is now about three years since the digital case system was introduced in the Crown Court making it an almost paperless environment. That has avoided printing off about 70 million sheets of paper. The offices and judges' rooms are no longer piled high with paper. The space released as a result of doing away with banks of filing cabinets and cupboards is being put to good use.

We now have a time table for the roll out of the electronic working system to other courts within the Royal Courts of Justice and to the Civil and Family Courts and Tribunals outside London. The Chancellor of the High Court recently announced that the Business and Property Courts outside London commenced E Filing on the 25 February. The Senior Courts Costs Office, the Court of Appeal Civil Division and High Court Family Appeals and the Administrative Court will follow later in 2019. The Upper Tribunal Chambers and Employment Appeal Tribunal will follow in 2020.

The success of these projects depends upon the integrity of the electronic systems and the software that supports them. Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service,

and in this instance Thomson Reuters, have worked to ensure that some of the problems we have experienced with our legacy systems will not re-occur.

The use of CE Filing within the pilot in the Queen's Bench Division has not been mandatory for Queen's Bench professional users. But it will become so on 1 July 2019 when all professional users will be required to make use of CE Filing. The position with litigants in person will be different. Although encouraged to use the online system, a paper based option will remain available.

I have often observed that the reform programme in which the court service and the judiciary is engaged is better seen as modernisation, most of which is long overdue. We must be the last organisation in the country to operate a paper-based system which for all intents and purposes has remained the same for many decades if not longer. It is welcome that the court service has finally been provided with the resources to undertake this long overdue modernisation. Within a few years, if not months, I suspect that we will look back and wonder how on earth we managed for so long living in the past.