

**TRANSPARENCY IMPLEMENTATION GROUP
MEDIA ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP
WIDER GROUP GUIDANCE**

1. Introduction

1.1 The Media Engagement sub-group of the Transparency Implementation Group is comprised of academics, family and media practitioners, civil servants, and media representatives.

1.2 The aim of the sub-group is to implement the President of the Family Division's goal of establishing a relationship of trust and confidence between the media and the Family Court and to ensure that any reporting of Family Court proceedings is reliable and well informed. Such reporting will increase transparency within the family justice system, which is likely to enhance public confidence significantly.

1.3 It is anticipated that this project will improve communication between the Family Court and the media, on both a national and regional level. This in turn will assist journalists to learn more about the workings of the Family Court and encourage increased reporting.

1.4 The sub-group has developed this guidance, reflecting the purpose, aims and parameters of the national media group. Separate guidance will apply to regional journalists attending local groups with Designate Family Judges within their area.

2. Purpose and aims

2.1 The core purpose of establishing a wider media group is to improve links between the Family Court and the media, on a national level. This will mean developing greater channels of communication between the President of the Family Division and national media organisations/bodies.

2.2 It is anticipated that the introduction of this wider group will enable national media representatives to voice issues of importance, to develop greater and more detailed insight into the workings of the Family Court, and to encourage increased reporting of pertinent issues which arise within the Family Court. In turn, this will lead to greater engagement, education, and a more transparent family justice system.

3. Parameters

3.1 Operation and function

3.1.1 In order to develop these lines of communication between the Family Court and the media on a national level, it is proposed that regular wider group meetings will be convened, to be attended by representatives from national media bodies.

3.1.2 This will include members of the judiciary and attendees from major media associations and broadcasters, such as the News Media Association, the Society of Editors, the Media Lawyers Association and S4C, as well as freelancers and representatives from periodical publications. Representatives from practitioner association groups may also be invited to attend, to feedback any issues and topics of discussion to practitioners.

3.1.3 At an initial meeting, representatives will be invited to outline key issues and to provide input into how the wider group will operate at ground level. The aim is for this to be a collaborative exercise between the Family Court and national media, ensuring that issues of importance can be ventilated. An agenda will be circulated in advance of meetings, setting out topics for discussion and inviting media contribution.

3.1.4 It is proposed that remote meetings are initially convened on a six-weekly basis. Individual representatives from the main national bodies and

organisations may vary, with consideration to be given to establishing a core steering group within the wider group.

- 3.1.5 Following meetings, a note will be published and made available to the wider public via the Judicial Office Transparency web page. It is anticipated that this will increase transparency and aid local and regional media representatives in their understanding of the operation of the Family Court. Individual members raising particular issues will not be identified and the note will provide a summary of discussions.

3.2 The focus of the wider group

- 3.2.1 The wider media group will provide a forum for journalists and other media representatives to discuss topics of importance. The purpose of the group is not to comment on issues arising within individual cases, which will not be discussed, but to focus on broad process and the operation of the Family Court. The Judicial Press Office will continue to deal with media enquiries relating to specific cases, which is not the function of the wider media group.
- 3.2.2 Although meetings will be attended by members of the judiciary, attendees should not feel inhibited from raising genuine queries and issues of concern. Judges operate to extremely high levels of professionalism and attendees must be aware that matters discussed within the group will not impact the way in which a judge approaches an individual case.
- 3.2.3 Judges have wide ranging experience in attending committee groups with various stakeholders, which may include solicitors or barristers involved in cases before them. Judges may have barristers appearing before them, from within their set of Chambers. It is a fundamental principle of justice that judges are impartial, independent, and their professional judgment will not be impacted irrespective of who appears before them. This applies equally to

media representatives, who may attend a case before a judge who is also a member of the wider media group.

3.3 Reporting

3.3.1 Whilst a key aim of establishing the national media group is to increase reporting of issues arising within the family justice system, reporting must, of course, be subject to clear rules. This is to maintain both the anonymity of children and family members who are before the court, and confidentiality with respect to intimate details of their private lives. For example, in proceedings involving children under the Children Act 1989, the media generally shall not be permitted to publish any material which is intended, or likely, to identify any child as being involved in the proceedings.

3.3.2 This guidance is not intended to set out the detailed provisions established in statute and case law, as to what aspects of family court proceedings may and may not be reported, but the wider media group and its representatives should be alive to this issue.

4. Conclusion

4.1 This document has been developed to provide guidance for members of the wider media group, including both representatives from national bodies and members of the judiciary. An initial group meeting will be arranged, at which further issues including core membership, the establishment of an internal steering group, and the format of meetings will be discussed.