Digital Reform and the Tribunal User Experience in the Modernised Tribunal Service

March 2026

A Report by the Digitisation Working Group
of the Administrative Justice Council

Chair's Foreword

It is ten years since the launch of 2016 His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) Reform Programme. The overarching vision was to transform the courts and tribunals system in England and Wales into a modern, efficient, accessible, and user-centric justice service. It was designed to move beyond digitising isolated processes but instead reimagine how justice is delivered in a digital age. As the Reform Programme was reaching its conclusion, with tribunals in particular resuming 'business as usual' (BaU) the Administrative Justice Council (AJC) convened this Working Group to assess the impact of the digital reforms on appellants, representatives, judicial office holders, tribunal staff, and government respondents.

The Working Group's findings were intended to inform the development, evaluation and enhancement of user experience for all tribunal stakeholders, as well as for parties to proceedings. Improvements to the user experience for any of these groups ultimately benefit appellants, creating a clearer, more efficient and more navigable journey for those seeking a tribunal decision and respondents seeking finality. The Working Group, therefore, adopted user experience (UX) methodology, actively seeking the views of advisors, representatives, the judicial office holders, tribunal staff and government respondents to understand their needs, challenges, and interactions with reformed digital processes.

From the outset, the Working Group was clear that its focus was neither on judicial outcomes nor operational performance, such as case delays. These aspects are already monitored through established performance frameworks, statistical reporting and independent inspection or evaluation mechanisms. The then Senior President of Tribunals and Chair of the AJC emphasised that a user experience review operates under different governance principles and is intended to complement, rather than conflict with, other existing oversight functions. It was also decided that Employment Tribunals would not fall within the scope of the Working Group's review, as it does not fall within the remit of administrative justice.

Details of the group's scope, objectives and membership are provided in Appendix A.

The impact and progress of the HMCTS Reform Programme have been examined and reported on by a range of organisations. Curiously, these assessments do not expressly address tribunals. This omission is significant. Tribunals provide a vital route to justice for some of the most vulnerable members of society and play a central role in the system of administrative justice. They also serve an important function for government departments and public authorities, whose decisions affecting citizens are subject to appeal. Administrative justice begins with a citizen's interaction with a public service, with tribunals being a critical component of how departments' decision-making and overall performance are tested, corrected and improved.

The Working Group did not, however, consult appellants in any of the tribunals which were in the focus of this report directly. An appellant's overall impression of a tribunal is

inevitably linked to the outcome of their case, which may be their first and only one. We therefore relied on advisers and representatives to tell us about their clients' user experiences, as well as their own experience of dealing with a tribunal. Consequently, our review did not capture the user experience of unrepresented appellants. We were nonetheless mindful of the work being undertaken by the parallel AJC working group chaired by Lucy Scott-Moncrieff CBE: *Addressing Disadvantage in the Administrative Justice System*. It is unsurprising that many of the findings and recommendations of the two Working Groups mirror each other.

In March 2024, this Working Group published an interim report examining the experiences of different users of the reformed digital processes in the Social Security and Child Support (SSCS) Tribunal, part of the Social Entitlement Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal and made a number of recommendations to improve the user experience in that jurisdiction. For this report, the Working Group expanded its focus to other tribunal jurisdictions, including the Immigration and Asylum Chamber and the 'Specials': those tribunals excluded from the HMCTS Reform Programme halfway through the programme.

The Working Group began by gathering information from each tribunal to provide a snapshot of the jurisdiction and user experience at the point when the HMCTS reform programme concluded.

At the time this final report was being prepared, artificial intelligence (AI) had begun to get widespread public attention, with the government committing to exploring its use across public services to improve efficiency and accessibility. AI can be seen as a natural extension of HMCTS tribunal reform, providing solutions such as case triage, document review, evidence management and scheduling. Emphasising the need to manage the risks, we have ventured to suggest AI solutions to many of the issues and challenges raised by tribunal users.

Tribunals, due to their pivotal role in the administrative justice system and their connection to public services such as welfare, immigration and asylum, are uniquely positioned to lead cross-departmental collaboration in delivering the government's vision for transformation through AI and public service reform. The government endeavours to measure social value cross-departmentally and should recognise the knock-on effects and benefits of tribunal reform for the respondent departments. HMCTS and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) should ensure tribunals serve as an exemplar for collaboration, harnessing the benefits of AI while keeping the user at the centre of future reforms, and carefully identifying and managing any associated risks. Chamber Presidents recognise that the benefits of technology can only be realised for users of their tribunals through effective cooperation, while at the same time preserving independence and integrity, and maintaining public trust.

There are already encouraging examples of what can be achieved swiftly and effectively through strong cross-departmental collaboration. An inspiring illustration is the initiative we have reported at the War Pensions Tribunal, where a bespoke digital case management system was developed in record time through close partnership between the judiciary,

HMCTS teams and tribunal stakeholders. This collaborative approach demonstrated how shared expertise, clear objectives, and joint ownership can deliver practical digital solutions that respond directly to the needs of tribunal users and those who operate the system.

Too late for this report, we have recently learnt of another impressive example for the new Infected Blood Compensation Tribunal within the Social Entitlement Chamber. HM Courts & Tribunals Service successfully delivered an independent appeals process to support the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme, ensuring that people have access to a fair, transparent and robust route to challenge compensation decisions if needed. Working at pace and in close partnership with the Infected Blood Compensation Authority, the judiciary and delivery partners, HMCTS established the necessary people, processes, and digital systems to be fully operational ahead of the first appeal. This included setting up dedicated appeal handling arrangements, publishing clear public guidance, and delivering an end-to-end digital process.

These examples of jurisdiction specific reforms could only have been achieved with the vision and leadership of the Chamber Presidents. Indeed, the Working Group is grateful to the Chamber Presidents for the encouragement and enthusiasm they have shown for this review, which enabled meaningful engagement with the teams working on the front line of their tribunals. I must also express appreciation to members of the Working Group, who have shown extraordinary enthusiasm and resilience throughout what has been a long project. They have given up hours, even days, of their own time attending meetings, interviews and focus groups, as well as in compiling our reports. Many thanks to each of you. We must also thank Heidi Bancroft, the Secretary of the AJC, for her dedicated work and commitment throughout the life of the Working Group. She has organised all meetings and contacts with users and has maintained the focus of the project from the outset. None of this would have been achievable without her.

This Working Group will disband upon the publication of this report. Monitoring the digitisation of tribunals, ensuring the continuous improvement commitments made by HMCTS and overseeing the adoption of new user-centred processes should, however, remain a priority for AJC scrutiny.

Caroline Sheppard OBE

Chair of the Digitalisation Working Group

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1. Introduction

Context – The HMCTS Reform Programme

The digitisation and reform of HMCTS tribunals must be understood within the broader context of the HMCTS Reform Programme. Launched in 2016, it was one of the most ambitious and far-reaching programmes of court and tribunal reform undertaken internationally, encompassing all HMCTS jurisdictions in England and Wales. The programme was wide-ranging and complex, comprising more than 50 discrete projects. Its overarching vision was to deliver a justice system that is just, accessible and proportionate, enabled by modern technology and new ways of working.
Key objectives included:

- digitising services to reduce paper use and errors

- enabling remote hearings and digital case handling

- improving access to justice

- updating IT systems

- reducing the court estate by closing underused buildings.

The Reform Programme formally concluded in March 2025, with some tribunals having been left out of scope. From April 2025, tribunals returned to 'business as usual', alongside a stated commitment to continuous improvement.

The Reform Programme was deliberately designed around a set of common components, applied across jurisdictions, to enable large-scale transformation of courts and tribunals in a consistent, efficient and sustainable way. These included case management and workflow platforms, scheduling and listing services, as well as video and remote hearing technology. This approach inevitably involved compromises between the different jurisdictions and general rather than jurisdiction-specific architecture and design. The result is that a process designed for one jurisdiction's users can complicate the experience for users in another jurisdiction. Inevitably, resources and development needed to be divided up between the many wide-ranging HMCTS jurisdictions. The largest and busiest First-tier tribunals were selected for reform: Social Security and Child Support (SSCS), and the Immigration and Asylum Chamber (FTTIAC). The Employment Tribunals were also reformed– (the Employment Tribunal is not subject to this report).

A fully reformed tribunal would involve several interrelated elements that shape the user experience and operational efficiency:

- Case management systems providing the backbone for recording, tracking and progressing cases, ensuring information is accurate and accessible to authorised users.

- Self-service capabilities allowing appellants and representatives to submit applications, upload documents and track case progress without manual intervention.

- Remote hearings and engagement enabling users to participate in proceedings from different locations, increasing accessibility and flexibility while reducing delays.

- A range of communication channels, including notifications, emails and digital portals, ensuring timely and transparent interaction between tribunal users, administrative staff and the judiciary, supporting a more coherent and responsive justice process.

- Provision of a range of aids and modes of advice, enabling all users – particularly unrepresented appellants – to access justice and navigate the system effectively.

Although the original vision for reformed tribunals may have included all these features, and the intention was to provide an end-to-end service for tribunal users, as time went by and the reform programme progressed, ambitions had to be scaled back and the scope of vision narrowed. We have therefore reviewed such reforms that have been achieved in the different tribunals, including the 'Special' tribunals that have never made it into the reform programme at all.

Our approach – Tribunal user experience

The Working Group adopted a user experience (UX) approach to understand how tribunal digital services operate in practice. Rather than focusing on operational performance or judicial outcomes, the group sought to examine the experiences of those who interact with tribunal systems day to day. Evidence was gathered from a broad range of user groups, including judiciary, professional representatives, advisers, and tribunal staff, to identify common challenges, good practice and areas where digital processes either support or hinder effective access to justice.

Even without full-scale data analysis or formal research, our in-depth user interviews and focus groups provide significant value in understanding tribunal users' needs, behaviours, and pain points. Their value comes from the rich, qualitative insights, which are often difficult to capture through surveys or quantitative metrics alone. We did not conduct any interviews with appellants. It is a specialist exercise to engage with appellants not least because their impressions are inevitably bound up with the outcome of their appeal. We nonetheless valued the insights of their representatives and advisers.

We are also conscious that we did not hear from appellants who had successfully used the digital systems without the need to consult an adviser or representative. The HMCTS Insight and User Experience teams are better able to conduct that research.

Our UX exercise therefore focussed on the five principal groups of tribunal system users:

- Appellants (as reported by their representatives and advisers)
- Representatives and advisers concerning their own experiences

- Public authority respondents:
  - Department for Work and Pensions.
  - Home Office.

- Tribunal staff:
  - HMCTS directors, regional administrators, policy and insight teams and IT managers.
  - Legal officers and case workers.
  - Tribunal administrators and clerks.

- Tribunal judiciary:
  - Salaried judges.
  - Part-time judges.
  - Tribunal members (who have specialist medical or other qualifications or experience)

The Working Group gained insights through evidence-gathering meetings and focus groups – both with individuals and in groups – in person and online. Our members also observed in-person SSCS hearings and a remote hearing, and participated in two regional tribunal user group meetings, providing direct engagement with tribunal users across different jurisdictions (as noted in the 2024 interim report). The Working Group also issued a Call for Evidence to widen the reach of its enquiries.

Above all, the Working Group examined how users interact with each stage of the appeal process, focusing on how digital systems affect their experience. Throughout the review, we listened to their feedback and gathered suggestions for improvements, including practical changes that could make the process easier, more accessible, and more responsive to their needs.

The limitations of the report should be noted. The report's wider contribution is to bring together themes that emerged through the fact-finding meetings. It therefore does not provide quantitative research, but instead qualitative evidence and a sample of responses from representatives through our Call for Evidence.

Navigating tensions between efficiency and justice

The Working Group also considered the government standards for digital public services. These establish consistent expectations for how government organisations should plan, build, operate, manage and improve digital services for the public. They are intended to ensure services are user-centred, accessible, reliable, secure, efficient, and interoperable.

The principal standards and frameworks are set by the Government Digital Service (GDS) and the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) under Cabinet Office oversight.[1] There is an underlying tension in applying government digital service standards to tribunals. The standards are efficiency-focused and executive-led, while justice relies on judicial independence, procedural certainty and case-by-case discretion. The challenge for HMCTS is to design digital systems that promote standardisation, agility, metrics and self-service, without constraining legal procedures, fairness or judicial discretion.

This report identifies ongoing opportunities for HMCTS, the MOJ and individual tribunals to maximise the benefits that digital enhancements can offer. As every government process now includes some element of digitisation, the present challenge lies in integrating these digital systems effectively. Creating a seamless and efficient experience for all users of the justice system is the ultimate goal – a task the Online Procedure Rule Committee is committed to advancing.

This report sets out the key themes that emerged from the Working Group's work. It also highlights the ongoing digitisation of society and the justice system's evolving strategies in response to this trend. As digital technology becomes more deeply embedded in everyday life, the justice system must continually adapt its processes and services to remain effective and accessible. Reform is not a one-off event but an ongoing journey, requiring regular updates and improvements to ensure that the system keeps pace with technological advancements.

The public is already looking at other digital services, for example the 2025 Lloyds Digital Report shows that 95% of people are online (up 6.3 million since 2016) and 93% use digital banking. They will expect a similar digital experience for their appeal to a tribunal.[2] New opportunities arising from technology that we are only beginning to understand will require further rounds of digitisation. The constant novelty of new technology, coupled with regulatory and other changes, means that new proposals or reports will have come through in the time between the conclusion of drafting and the report's publication. However, the principles that underpin this work will remain even if the precise details change. Indeed, this Working Group's recommendations speak to the need to build faster feedback loops and public reporting to ensure transparency and continuous improvement within the administrative justice system. So, in line with the need for continuous improvement in a changing environment, the work begins anew.

Bearing in mind the resource restraints for any public services this report highlights opportunities for HMCTS, the MoJ, and individual tribunals that build on delivered digital

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[1] The Government Digital Service Standards are: 1) Understand users and their needs; 2) Solve a whole problem for users; 3) Provide a joined-up experience across all channels; 4) Make the service simple to use; 5) Make sure everyone can use the service; 6) Have a multidisciplinary team; 7) Use agile ways of working; 8) Iterate and improve frequently; 9) Create a secure service which protects users' privacy; 10) Define what success looks like and publish performance data; 11) Choose the right tools and technology; 12) Make new source code open; 13) Use and contribute to open standards, common components and patterns, and 14) Operate a reliable service.

[2] Lloyds Banking Group, 2025 Consumer Digital Index, The Generative AI Edition (2025),P6: https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/media/consumer-digital-index.html

reform. Recommendations focus on improving access and usability for appellants, enhancing capabilities for representatives and advisers, aligning government respondent processes with tribunal systems, and supporting judges and staff to make effective use of new technology (see p16 for a list of recommendations).

2. Executive Summary

HMCTS has made some achievements in the transformation of tribunals and their processes. Online services have simplified access to tribunals by allowing users to submit appeals and supporting evidence digitally, reducing reliance on paper-based processes and improving administrative efficiency. For many users, especially representatives and frequent users, digital applications provide greater convenience, clearer audit trails and faster case initiation. They also enable HMCTS to capture structured data at the point of entry, supporting more efficient case management and reducing avoidable delays caused by incomplete or illegible submissions.

Remote hearings are a key aspect of digital reform and are widely utilised across tribunals, including those that have not otherwise undergone full digital reform. They bring significant benefits in terms of flexibility and accessibility. They can reduce the need for travel and associated costs – not only for users and representatives, but also for judicial panel members – and make it easier to accommodate vulnerable users and those with caring responsibilities. Notably, for example, young people whose education is being considered by First-tier Tribunal Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) can now participate in hearings about their future. Remote hearings have also increased listing resilience and capacity, allowing tribunals to continue operating during periods of disruption and to make more effective use of judicial time. Although there are criticisms of the platforms used by HMCTS, when well supported, remote or hybrid hearings enable timely participation while maintaining procedural fairness and the authority of the tribunal process.

Common Themes

Online Applications
The online application forms in SSCS and FTTIAC are the most successful of all the new HMCTS digital processes, scoring high satisfaction ratings in surveys. At the end of 2025 over 85 per cent of people were satisfied with online appeals for social security and child support.[3] However, digital application processes are often difficult to navigate, particularly for unrepresented users. The Working Group heard about examples of poor usability, unclear questions and document upload constraints; for example, a restriction on the number of pages of a medical report that can be uploaded in a disability appeal. Such challenges increase the risk of errors and incomplete submissions, leading to additional administrative intervention and delays. There are still too many cases where an appeal started online has had to be moved to the offline process because of the system's inflexibility in correcting errors, updating contact details or adding representatives.

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[3] HMCTS, Modernising courts and tribunals: what we've learned (2025): https://insidehmcts.blog.gov.uk/2025/03/24/modernising-courts-and-tribunals-what-weve-achieved-and-learned/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Remote Hearings

While remote hearings enhance flexibility, users report a range of challenges, including technical difficulties with the platforms, limited practical guidance to manage expectations, inconsistent experiences in participation and restricted functionality for private communication with representatives. These issues can lead to reluctance to opt for a remote hearing and may create perceptions of unfairness, undermining confidence in the process and potentially affecting satisfaction with case outcomes. Regrettably HMCTS does not routinely collect consistent data about the method of hearing cases in tribunals. The Working Group had to check the published SSCS hearing lists across regions to get a sense of the proportion of remote hearings.

Engaging with the Process

Although making an appeal online in the reformed tribunals is a huge improvement, the pre-hearing process can frustrate users, both appellants and representatives. Users frequently struggle to understand tribunal stages, timelines and expectations. Inconsistent or insufficient guidance discourages engagement, increases anxiety and raises the likelihood of missed deadlines or procedural non-compliance. It is impossible to assess the extent to which difficulties with the process causes appellants to drop out because the reason for lapsed cases is not captured or researched.

Communication

All users identify communication as a significant weakness, citing delays, inconsistent messaging and notifications and difficulty obtaining updates. Representatives reported that some digital notifications in the reformed tribunals were confusing and so frequent that users preferred to turn them off completely. Others complained that there are long periods without any communication from the tribunal. Some letters and hearing instructions are poorly drafted, using overly formal language and unfamiliar acronyms, for example CVP. In our view, many tribunal administrative communication's content and style would benefit from a cross-Chambers approach. There is also a specific content style guide for immigration and asylum – *Words matter – shaping our Home Office content style guide*,[4] which might assist communications in FTTIAC. In our interim report we referred to a report commissioned by HMCTS, among others *Designing for Inclusion- How to produce inclusive materials for advice sector clients[5]*, which is particularly relevant to tribunal users. We could not identify how and where it is used.

Bundles

The preparation and management of bundles remain complex and time-consuming. Although bundle submission has been digitised, it largely replicates the old paper-based process, rather than simplifying it. Issues such as inconsistent page numbering –

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[4] Home Office Digital, Words matter:shaping our Home Office content style guide (2024): https://hodigital.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/02/words-matter-shaping-our-home-office-content-style-guide/
[5] Dr Anna Tsalapatanis and Professor Linda Mulcahy, Designing for Inclusion – How to produce inclusive materials for advice sector clients: https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/designing-for-inclusion/designing-inclusion

particularly when parties and tribunal panel members use different numbering systems – are a frequent source of frustration. Technical constraints, poor quality scanning, late evidence, and unclear responsibilities further exacerbate inefficiencies, causing delays and placing additional strain on both parties and the judiciary.

Case Waiting Times

All users, including HMCTS administrators, were dismayed by case waiting times. Although it should not be viewed as the sole or automatic outcome of tribunal digital reform, reducing delay remains a core and legitimate expectation of digitisation. The Working Group did not, however, undertake a tribunal-by-tribunal assessment of the impact of digital reform on waiting times. While waiting times have increased across most jurisdictions since the start of the Reform Programme, the causes are multiple and complex. In particular, the full and longer-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tribunal timeliness has yet to be fully assessed.

That said, challenges tribunal users experience in both the reformed and unreformed tribunals collectively contribute to delays across the tribunal system. For many appellants and representatives, delays and uncertainty are not abstract operational problems but directly affect access to justice, confidence in the system, and perceptions of fairness. Understanding the issues raised by all the different groups of tribunal users helps explain how seemingly individual difficulties translate into wider operational backlogs.

Withdrawn and Lapsed Cases

The review did not extend to assessing whether recent reforms have influenced the likelihood of appellants withdrawing from the appeal process. At present, there is no available data indicating the proportion of cases that conclude due to withdrawal, discontinuance, or lapse because appellants simply disengage from proceedings. Similarly, there is a lack of reporting regarding the number of cases that are adjourned or determined because the appellant has failed to attend a hearing.

It is noteworthy that HMCTS does not seem to systematically collect data about cases that would identify why an appeal is withdrawn or why an appellant has ceased to participate in the process. In many instances, the reasons for withdrawal may be straightforward, such as an agreement reached with the respondent department. However, these situations merit closer scrutiny. For example, in the context of a SSCS appeal, an appellant might make a pragmatic choice to accept an offer from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) made after the appeal has been lodged rather than continue waiting for a hearing.

All the key themes disproportionately affect unrepresented and vulnerable users. But they also place strain on representatives, staff, and the judiciary. Collectively, they contribute to delays, increased administrative burden, and a diminished user experience, highlighting the need for more user-centred, consistent, and proportionate tribunal processes.

Findings from the Working Group's Tribunal User Engagement

SSCS

Within the SSCS jurisdiction, digital processes have increased efficiency and reduced reliance on paper, yet they have not overcome longstanding challenges relating to communication, evidence handling and the experience of Appellants in Person (AiP). Many users struggle to understand tribunal communications and procedural expectations, revealing that technology alone cannot remedy structural inequality. Remote hearings, now a prominent feature of the system, offer flexibility but at times affect fairness, particularly where digital access or privacy is limited.

The *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation Supplementary Report: Social Security and Child Support* by the MoJ identified similar procedural issues, including errors with the digital system, lack of equipment, the need for improved functionality, and a requirement for more training for judicial officer holders. The report concluded that "no firm conclusion can be drawn on the contribution of digital reform to improved efficiencies and speed of access to justice".[6]

FTTIAC

Similar tensions appear in the Immigration and Asylum Chamber, where 'MyHMCTS' provides structured digital workflows, but rising caseloads, and there are complex cases and high proportions of unrepresented appellants placing sustained pressure on the system. Cases frequently fall offline due to user error or system constraints, undermining the intended end-to-end digital journey. Issues relating to bundle quality, technical limitations and inconsistent procedural compliance continue to complicate case progression.

Unreformed ('Special') Tribunals

Among the unreformed tribunals, many jurisdictions – despite being excluded from formal reform – have demonstrated impressive innovation. The War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber is a notable example, having shifted from a paper-based system to a fully digital operation through close collaboration between HMCTS, the judiciary and the Ministry of Defence. Digital case files, improved bundle preparation and revised administrative processes have significantly enhanced the Chamber's efficiency and user experience. Challenges remain, however, particularly around the clarity of guidance for unrepresented appellants, many of whom are older or have additional needs. Other Special tribunals, including the Mental Health Tribunal and the SEND, Care Standards and Primary Health Lists jurisdictions, continue to rely on legacy case-management systems that limit data visibility, operational flexibility, and the capacity to deliver accessible user-facing

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[6] MoJ; Reform Digital Services Evaluation and Supplementary Report on Social Security and Child Support (2025): <u>HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation and Supplementary Report on Social Security and Child Support</u>,

information. These limitations are especially pronounced given the increasing complexity and volume of cases across several jurisdictions.

Data

Data is essential to HMCTS's digital transformation, enabling informed decision-making, process improvements, and better user experiences. Publishing data also strengthens transparency and public trust. Although the Reform Programme began in 2016, HMCTS did not issue a formal Data Strategy until 2022, and while it now publishes quarterly tribunal statistics, public reporting remains limited. The Working Group concluded that the tribunal data strategy is only partially satisfactory: progress has been made, but delivery is uneven and constrained by legacy systems and fragmented data ownership.

Strategically, HMCTS and the MoJ emphasise common data standards, reuse of information, and improved analytics, with the Core Case Data platform intended to unify systems. However, tribunal data remains fragmented across hybrid digital and legacy systems, leading to inconsistent formats, poor interoperability, and doubts about data quality. It is also unclear whether HMCTS collects the full range of data required to manage backlogs effectively. Access to timely, usable data is a further weakness, with judges and staff often unable to obtain the management information they need, while limited public data availability reduces transparency and accountability.

Devolved Nations

Much of this report focuses on England and English courts and tribunals. However, the wider context and need for digitisation in the administrative justice system exists across all of the devolved nations. The rise in AI, increasing digital literacy and expectations, and the need for government efficiency are universal. Similar efforts to improve the digital experience for court and tribunal system users exist in the devolved nations, too. The literature review in the appendix provides additional information about the activities that have occurred in each part of the UK. Some specific recommendations will not be directly applicable in the devolved nations, but the principles that underpin the recommendations apply. Wales would benefit from some of our recommendations as they embark on the reform of their devolved tribunals which involves digitisation.

3. Recommendations

The Working Group made 11 Recommendations based on its findings. They broadly include: the need to ensure the user-centric focus in Business as Usual (BaU); communication experts to shape clear, accessible user experiences; a long-term improved online video platform; trialling a commercial off-the-shelf system in unreformed tribunals, better utilisation of resources (including, legal officers, provision of technology, and the use of AI), and improved data systems to support efficiency, openness, and impact, as well as ongoing improvement.

Recommendation 1: HMCTS should adopt a multi-disciplinary team approach to tribunal communication

Evidence from users consistently shows that appellants often struggle to understand their rights, the tribunal process, and how decisions are made (see the AJC *Addressing Disadvantage in the Administrative Justice System* report). This Working Group therefore reiterates the *Addressing Disadvantage* Work Group's recommendation to improve communication and enhance users' understanding of dispute resolution.[7]

Clear and accessible information should be provided at every stage of the tribunal journey—from submitting an appeal to post-decision guidance. Communications must be timely, clear, and tailored to the diverse needs and backgrounds of tribunal users, including accessibility for those with additional needs. Signposting should be consistent, delivered via multiple channels—digital and offline—and designed to help users understand their rights, procedures, and what to expect at each step. System-driven notifications should be helpful, appropriately timed, and not overwhelming. Alternative formats for those not using online services should be integrated within the overall communications strategy rather than treated as separate projects. There should be mechanisms for regular user feedback to allow continuous review and improvement.

Balancing precision and accessibility require specialist skills leaving this responsibility to non-experts is unfair to both staff and appellants. The Working Group recommends establishing a cross-departmental, multi-skilled communications team. This team could include:

· Specialist HMCTS staff with user experience and accessible writing expertise,

· Input from judges across tribunals,

· Contributions from relevant advice and support sectors,

· A representative from GDS for alignment with GOV.UK Digital Service Standards

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[7] Administrative Justice Council, Addressing Disadvantage in the Administrative Justice System (2025), Recommendation 7, p16

The objective of the Online Procedure Rules Committee (OPRC), established under the Judicial Review and Courts Act 2022 to govern procedure rules for online tribunals, is to make rules simple and simply expressed. This principle should apply to all tribunal communications, ensuring clarity, fairness, and accessibility for all users. Accordingly, we are recommending that Practice Directions issued by judges are accompanied by an Explanatory Note, similar to those issued with legislation.

Recommendation 2: HMCTS should embed an individual User Champion to support continuous improvement in Business as Usual

To sustain the momentum of the Reform Programme as tribunals transition into BaU, HMCTS should embed a permanent, user-centred governance structure that combines clear ownership of user interests with a culture of continuous digital improvement.

Central to this approach should be establishing from within MOJ/HMCTS a dedicated Champion for Tribunal Users, operating across all tribunals and operational boards. Supporting Chamber Presidents, the Champion would provide visible leadership to ensure that tribunal users remain at the forefront of operational prioritisation and digital development. A core function of the role would be to oversee content and communications, coordinate user engagement, and ensure that all significant reforms or system changes are supported by a clear and structured user impact assessment. This responsibility would be critical where AI-enabled solutions are proposed, ensuring that efficiency gains do not compromise fairness, accessibility, or transparency.

The User Champion would demonstrate HMCTS's commitment to foster a continuous improvement culture for BaU. Clear accountability and empowered ownership for incremental system enhancements would enable staff to address operational friction promptly rather than rely on large-scale reform cycles. Lessons learned—both successes and failures—should be systematically captured and shared across jurisdictions to avoid siloed practice and to promote system-wide learning.

Together, a dedicated User Champion and a structured continuous improvement framework would create a virtuous cycle: user feedback informs refinement; refinements improve experience; improved experience strengthens confidence and efficiency. This approach ensures that the user-centric ethos of Reform becomes embedded in routine operations in BaU.

Recommendation 3: HMCTS should apply existing whole-of-government digital standards and learn from existing known better practice

With justice now delivered as a digital service, the GDS Standards provide 14 clear expectations for digital services, none of which conflict with judicial functions. Compliance with these standards will help ensure that tribunal services are accessible, consistent, usable, and efficient for all users.

This recommendation applies at both the individual Chamber level and the overall HMCTS user-experience level. Tribunal jurisdictions operate using a mix of legacy and in-house systems, only some of which were developed following GDS-compliant delivery models. Individual tribunals should leverage established best practices to implement targeted, local improvements. The User Champion can work with Chamber Presidents to identify and support improvements for users in their particular jurisdictions. HMCTS, meanwhile, should pursue its user-centric approach to ensure that digital experiences across tribunals align with the GDS Standards.

The User Champion should play a central role in monitoring adherence to the GDS Standards, overseeing the delivery of user-focused improvements, and providing assurance that accountability for digital systems and user experience is clearly defined and exercised in all tribunals, reformed and unreformed.

Recommendation 4: HMCTS should systematically capture data about withdrawn and lapsed cases and commission research to understand the underlying reasons.

This data is not routinely captured. While the Tribunal Statistics Quarterly: July to September 2025 reported that 28% of cases at FTTIAC were withdrawn similar information was not provided for other tribunals[8]. Nor is there any data as to how many and why cases lapse through inactivity from the appellant. The research should include whether withdrawal is voluntary and informed or influenced by advice or representation, and consider factors such as long waiting times, anxiety associated with hearings, digital exclusion, or other vulnerabilities. Understanding these drivers is critical to improving digital services and ensuring access to justice.

It is not enough simply to report the headline numbers of cases that are withdrawn or lapse, research should seek to establish the reasons why appellants withdraw or disengage from tribunal proceedings.

Without accurate and comprehensive data, it remains impossible to determine whether there are systemic or process-driven issues that hinder appellants from continuing with their appeals. While surveying individuals who have already dropped out of the process is inherently challenging, it should be feasible to collect information at the point when an appeal is formally withdrawn or discontinued. Additionally, there must be opportunities to follow up with appellants who have ceased to engage with the tribunal to better understand their reasons for disengagement.

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[8] See https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2025/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2025

Recommendation 5: HMCTS should acquire or develop a long-term video platform that is accessible for diverse tribunal users with different levels of access to technology.

Remote hearings are central in many tribunal jurisdictions, including those outside the Reform Programme. The Cloud Video Platform (CVP) has proven serviceable in several contexts but is a temporary solution. The Video Hearing Service (VHS) has encountered technical and rollout challenges, and the project has now concluded. From the outset of the Reform Programme, there has been the fundamental difficulty of providing a remote hearing platform common to all HMCTS jurisdictions and their differing users.

The new platform should offer a range of features to ensure accessibility, reliability, and ease of use for all participants. Key features should include high-quality audio and video, compatibility with a variety of devices (including smartphones and tablets), and an intuitive, easy-to-navigate user interface. The platform should provide clear visibility of all participants, with options to spotlight speakers and view panel members distinctly.

Additionally, it should offer secure, private messaging, allowing participants or panel members to communicate confidentially during hearings. Features such as screen sharing, virtual backgrounds, and robust technical support are also valuable. Importantly, the platform should be inclusive, accommodating users with different levels of digital literacy and accessibility needs, and adaptable to both formal and informal settings, such as tribunal hearings.

Remote hearings are not only more convenient for many users but should also be more cost-effective for those cases best suited to be dealt with at a virtual hearing. It follows that the data strategy should enable sorting those cases and appellants with the identified characteristics. This will be an area where AI may assist in flagging suitable cases to legal officers without each case being assessed manually.

Recommendation 6: HMCTS should design digital systems with data availability as the default and enable secure cross-government data integration to streamline the appeal process, support service improvement, and facilitate analysis.

HMCTS has a wealth of data but faces the challenge of it residing across numerous legacy systems that use different data formats, naming conventions, and workflows. The extent to which legacy systems have been integrated with the new common component platforms is unclear. Digital transformation is fundamentally dependent on the availability and quality of data, as robust and reliable data underpins every aspect of modernisation efforts. High-quality data enables informed decision-making, facilitates effective oversight, and supports the development of systems that genuinely meet users' needs. Without accurate, comprehensive, and accessible data, tribunal digitisation cannot deliver consistent

improvements or adapt to evolving requirements. Poor data quality impedes monitoring, planning, and the sharing of best practices, ultimately undermining the very objectives of the Reform Programme.

Nonetheless, concerns remain about access to data reports. Beyond just public access, judges and administrators reported to the Working Group that essential information was not being made available to them. Most jurisdictions now operate digital case management systems, and users frequently encounter challenges in accessing data about caseloads, listing patterns, or outcomes in a timely or usable form. HMCTS should take steps to strengthen the tribunal data environment by improving internal and public access to management information and developing reporting tools that meet the specific needs of judicial, operational, and other users.

Some data should remain within the justice system, but substantial data can and should be made publicly available to demonstrate the tribunal system's commitment to open justice. Data in this context should be broadly understood. For example, notifying parties of material evidence uploads or an impending timeline is about data visibility. Similarly, allowing tribunal members to view a party's 'view' for the evidence case management system can help them understand their challenges and provide a better experience of the justice system.

In addition, there should be cross-government data integration. Many tribunal jurisdictions rely on information and case data held by government departments or local authorities. While tribunals must remain institutionally independent from decision-making bodies, effective digital and data integration is essential to minimise duplication, reduce user frustration, and support the timely resolution of appeals. The Reform Programme has already achieved progress in this area; for example, through system linkages between HMCTS and departments such as the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions, but further improvements are needed. Interoperability should be expanded in ways that protect judicial control over proceedings, while enabling appropriate data flows between parties.

Recommendation 7: HMCTS and MoJ should undertake a structured assessment of AI-enabled tools to support the appeal process, maximising potential gains in timeliness and user experience while embedding clear governance, human oversight, and risk controls to protect fairness and due process.

The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) into HMCTS tribunals should be the next phase of the Reform Programme. This phase would build on the existing digital infrastructure to improve operational efficiency, case management, and access to justice.

Within FTTIAC and SSCS, for example, AI tools could be deployed to triage cases, summarise documents, and provide structured guidance to unrepresented appellants. In parallel, AI could provide government departments with improved feedback and data

insights, helping them identify systemic issues and reduce the volume of avoidable appeals. There are existing products for reading leases that would greatly assist judicial productivity in the Property Tribunal, for example.

Successful AI implementation is contingent on robust governance arrangements, clear ethical oversight, and effective cross-departmental collaboration. These safeguards must be underpinned by established frameworks, including HMCTS's *Responsible AI Principles*[9], relevant national guidance, and *Judicial guidance on AI*.[10] Crucially, implementation must also address the limitations of historic and legacy data—such as inconsistency, incompleteness, poor data quality, and embedded systemic bias—which may undermine model reliability, fairness, and explainability if left unremedied. A structured approach to data cleansing, validation, and ongoing quality assurance is therefore essential to ensure AI tools are accurate, proportionate, and aligned with procedural fairness.

The Working Group welcomes the current HMCTS pilots, including AI-enabled transcription and document summarisation, and recognises their potential to reduce delays and address persistent backlogs. We therefore recommend that HMCTS continues to explore and expand the use of AI within tribunals, subject to appropriate safeguards, to improve efficiency and user experience.

Recommendation 8: Commercial off-the-shelf digital solutions should be trialled in the unreformed (Special) tribunals and in Wales.

The Special tribunal jurisdictions have been deprioritised in the now-concluded Reform Programme. At the time of concluding this report, there is no indication of how and when the Special tribunals will be reformed.

Specialist dispute resolution platforms have recently been developed that provide online access and dashboards for parties and representatives. These platforms incorporate scheduling, configurable data capture and analytics, video-conferencing with breakout rooms, and other advanced features. Deploying such a platform within a small, specialist tribunal would not only enhance the user experience for parties, representatives, judges, and tribunal staff, but would also enable HMCTS to evaluate the impact of these features on tribunal performance. The resulting insights would inform the design and future development of common component systems. Working with stakeholders in the selected tribunal (see, for example, the recent project at the War Pensions Tribunal), a commercial off-the-shelf platform (COTS) could be configured to meet the needs of differing users and represent an efficient, good-value use of resources. Furthermore, a COTS system incorporating AI elements in the dispute resolution process could serve as an invaluable testbed for exploring and evaluating the broader application of AI across tribunals. The

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[9] HMCTS, HMCTS is accelerating the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) to transform the courts and tribunals (September 2025): HMCTS is accelerating the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) to transform the courts and tribunals – Inside HMCTS
[10] Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance for Judicial Office Holders (October 2025): Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance for Judicial Office Holders

Working Group notes that this approach is endorsed in the MoJ's *AI Action Plan for Justice*, which commits to adopting a 'test-and-learn' approach to externally built solutions.[11]

Recommendation 9: HMCTS should provide the right technology for tribunal office holders

Judicial office holders cannot consistently access the technology they need to provide the best service. This includes consistent access to the essential tools required for their jurisdiction, including laptops with access to software (such as the GLiMR and GAPs case management systems used in the Special tribunals) and appropriate peripherals. This would require a small initial outlay to provide medium-term efficiency.

Recommendation 10: HMCTS should optimise the Legal Officer and administrative workforce through targeted automation

Tribunals could maximise the professional capability of Legal Officers and administrative staff by ensuring their time is focused on delegated judicial functions, effective case management, and user support rather than clerical or workaround tasks. The Legal Officer role was embedded within the Reform Programme with statutory delegated powers across tribunals to support timely, proportionate, and legally robust decision-making. However, system limitations and fragmented digital processes have required Legal Officers to undertake manual document preparation, clerical validation, and workaround activities. This not only diminishes the value of their professional expertise but also contributes to avoidable delays, as clerical checking backlogs directly impact case progression and waiting times.

The responsible deployment of AI-enabled workflow tools and intelligent document processing can address these inefficiencies by automating routine administrative tasks, improving data accuracy, and reducing manual rework. This would allow legal officers and administrative staff to operate at the top of their delegated competence—focusing on procedural decision-making, case management oversight, user engagement, and quality assurance.

Recommendation 11: HMCTS/MoJ should conduct timely and focused evaluations based on live data.

Tribunal evaluations are currently lengthy, which limits HMCTS's ability to respond rapidly to emerging challenges. Implementing a robust, live data system would enable real-time identification of barriers, allowing evaluation teams to apply targeted, incremental solutions and support continuous improvement in user experience. While there are reports and real-time dashboards available internally in HMCTS and MoJ, there is a need for greater transparency through the timely publication of evaluation findings. This would strengthen public trust and accountability. HMCTS should prioritise proportionate,

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[11] Ministry of Justice AI action plan for justice (2025): AI action plan for justice - GOV.UK,

jurisdiction-sensitive evaluation models that integrate both user feedback and performance metrics, supported by close collaboration with judicial and operational leads. Adopting a more agile evaluation culture will enable faster improvements, better-informed planning, and more effective service delivery across tribunals.

4. Reform Definitions/Products

Digitalisation vs. Digitisation

Digitisation and digitalisation are closely linked, but it is important to distinguish the difference between the two for the purposes of this report. Digitisation relates to the process of converting analogue information into digital form. This includes translating paper documents into digital formats using technologies such as scanners. Digitalisation involves leveraging digital technologies to change business processes, models, and operations. It provides a broader transformation and a shift in how organisations operate and deliver value. For the purposes of this report, we use the word digitisation, even though we recognise that digitalisation is more relevant to aspects of the reform programme.

Digital Platform: Core Case Data

The reformed tribunals operate on Core Case Data (CCD) platforms, which were developed as part of the HMCTS Reform Programme to provide a common digital backbone for case management across courts and tribunals. CCD is a shared service that stores case information in a structured, reusable format and supports configurable workflows. CCD defines a common data model for cases, parties, events, and documents, enabling information entered at the point of application to be reused throughout the case lifecycle. It is designed to integrate with other common components, such as identity verification, payments, notifications, document management, and listing services.

In reformed tribunals, CCD underpins digital case management systems used by HMCTS staff and tribunal judiciary, as well as interfaces such as MyHMCTS (see below) for professional users, and online citizen services for appellants. For example, in the FTTIAC, CCD supports structured appeal submissions, evidence uploads, and procedural events, while in the SSCS it holds appeal data captured through online citizen-facing forms. Jurisdiction-specific rules and processes are implemented through configuration rather than bespoke system builds, allowing some flexibility while maintaining a common core. There are, however, persistent difficulties, and the potential of CCD has yet to be fully realised. Legal officers and judges have had to develop workarounds, and – while there have been improvements – too many cases have to be taken offline from CCD and processed manually.

MyHMCTS

MyHMCTS is HMCTS's primary online portal for professional court and tribunal users, developed to replace paper-based and email processes with a single digital channel for submitting and managing cases. It allows authorised users to submit applications and appeals, upload documents, pay fees, receive notifications, and track case progress, with all information captured directly into HMCTS case management systems. The portal is available in the Immigration and Asylum Chamber, Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum), Employment Tribunals, and parts of the SEND Tribunal. Access is primarily for

professional users such as legal representatives, government departments, and tribunal staff. Most individual, unrepresented appellants cannot use MyHMCTS – for reasons that are not clear. The service is also not widely available to advisers and representatives in SSCS.

Judicial Case Manager

Judicial Case Manager (JCM) is designed to be a judicial-facing tool allowing judges to view and manage cases digitally, including:

- accessing structured case data and digital case files held in the CCD platform
- reviewing applications, appeals, and evidence submitted by parties
- making and recording judicial decisions, directions, and orders
- managing procedural events, such as case progression and listing-related actions
- supporting paperless working and remote or hybrid hearings.

JCM is intended to support judicial work in tribunals using CCD-based systems. It is principally used in FTTIAC and, to a lesser extent, in SSCS and SEND. Its uneven deployment and integration with legacy tools reflect broader challenges in achieving consistent, end-to-end digitisation across the tribunal system.

ListAssist

ListAssist is HMCTS's automated scheduling and listing tool, introduced as part of the Reform Programme to support more efficient, consistent, and data-driven listing of hearings across courts and tribunals. It is designed to assist, rather than replace, human listing officers by automating routine scheduling tasks and applying agreed rules at scale. The platform uses structured case data – such as case type, estimated hearing length, urgency, availability of judges and members, venues (physical or remote), and procedural constraints – to generate proposed hearing dates and listings. Listing officers can review, amend and confirm these proposals. In tribunals, where listing often involves complex variables (panel composition, specialist judges, interpreters, vulnerability considerations, and remote or hybrid formats), ListAssist is typically used as a decision-support tool rather than a fully automated solution.

ListAssist has been deployed primarily in reformed jurisdictions operating on HMCTS common components, including FTTIAC, and (like JCM) in a more limited way in SSCS and SEND. The reformed tribunals operate on CCD platforms.

Digital Exclusion

Those unable to use the digital channels can still submit their application and evidence on paper. Scanning and processing paper submissions is provided in a common bulk scanning centre. A support service for people who require assistance using the digital services is provided by an external agency.

Virtual Hearings

The commission of a bespoke remote access platform is one of the common components of the Reform Programme. This was planned back in 2016 at the programme's instigation. However, the need to work remotely became an imperative when, in 2020, COVID-19 spread across the world.

Cloud Video Platform (CVP) was adopted by HMCTS for video hearings and used in the majority of jurisdictions. However, designing a single, one-size-fits-all platform was always going to be a challenge. It needs to support the contrasting ways and environments in which the different jurisdictions operate. The criminal courts require a formal courtroom with a judge and jury, whereas tribunals must operate in an informal setting with a judicial panel. A common platform must also support the needs of the family courts. A further challenge arises when the appellant is not co-located with their representative or interpreter. This requires the functionality of private 'breakout rooms'. The Working Groups' evidence-gathering meetings with tribunal users shed light on how well the platform and arrangements for remote hearings work in the different tribunals.

Bulk Scanning

The Bulk Scanning Common Component is a core HMCTS digital service designed to support the transition from paper-based to digital case management across courts and tribunals.

The bulk scanning service processes paper appeal forms, evidence, correspondence, and legacy case files for all tribunals and courts. The documents are digitised at scale using consistent technical standards, indexed, categorised, and uploaded into the relevant digital case management system.

5. Future Digitisation – The Potential of AI

The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) represents the next phase of HMCTS modernisation, building directly on the digital infrastructure, procedural redesign, and cultural transformation delivered through the Reform Programme. AI is not a separate initiative, but a continuation of the Reform vision, aimed at delivering faster, fairer, and more user-centred administrative justice.

Different types of AI are suited to specific functions within tribunals, from administrative support to decision assistance [see table in Appendix B]. At the initial case management stage, rule-based systems or supervised machine learning can support automated case triage and categorisation. These tools can quickly identify whether a case meets eligibility criteria, flag missing evidence, or suggest the most appropriate hearing pathway. By reducing manual workload, tribunals can allocate resources more efficiently and ensure that cases are routed promptly to the correct teams. Transparency and auditability are essential in these systems to maintain fairness and trust.

Document analysis and summarisation are fundamental applications of AI, particularly through Natural Language Processing (NLP). AI can assist in reviewing long submissions, evidence bundles, or witness statements, highlighting key issues, precedents, and inconsistencies. This reduces the time judges and legal officers spend on repetitive review tasks while ensuring that critical information is not overlooked. However, such tools are intended to augment human judgment, rather than replace it. The principles and safeguards set out in Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance for Judicial Office Holders[12] should apply to the use of AI at any stage of the appeal process. HMCTS follows its own Responsible AI Principles[13] to ensure use of AI in the courts and tribunals is appropriate, safe and controlled. This aligns with the Ministry of Justice's broader AI Action plan for Justice.[14]

AI predictive analytics can be applied to case scheduling and backlog management. By analysing historical case data, this functionality can estimate hearing durations, schedule cases efficiently around judicial, interpreter, and party availability, and anticipate potential bottlenecks. This approach supports resource allocation and reduces delays, though its accuracy depends on the quality and completeness of historical data.

AI-powered 'chatbots' and virtual assistants offer a user-facing application of AI, providing guidance to applicants, answering frequently asked questions, and assisting with procedural steps. Such tools improve accessibility and reduce pressure on administrative

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[12] Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance for Judicial Office Holders (October 2025): Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance for Judicial Office Holders
[13] HMCTS, HMCTS is accelerating the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) to transform the courts and tribunals (September 2025): HMCTS is accelerating the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) to transform the courts and tribunals – Inside HMCTS
[14] Ministry of Justice AI action plan for justice (2025): AI action plan for justice - GOV.UK,

staff, but they must clearly differentiate between procedural guidance and legal advice and provide ready escalation paths to human staff for complex queries.

In addition to the above functionality, AI can support decision-making processes through expert systems or advanced NLP tools. These systems can flag relevant case law, precedents, or procedural rules to assist judges in routine, low-risk matters, contributing to consistency and efficiency. Ethical oversight is critical, as AI cannot replace judicial discretion or human judgment.

FTTIAC and SSCS are particularly well-suited for early AI adoption, due to the structured nature of cases and the commonality of evidence. By leveraging existing digital systems and workflows, AI can support case triage, document summarisation, evidence management, and pattern recognition, allowing staff and judiciary to focus on substantive issues. For unrepresented appellants, AI-driven guidance can simplify the process, ensure the completeness of documentation, and provide real-time support. Respondent government departments can benefit from improved consistency and feedback loops, supporting 'right-first time' decisions and reducing appeals.

Beyond operational efficiency, AI can generate insights from tribunal data to identify trends, inefficiencies, and systemic issues, ultimately speeding up case throughput, reducing backlogs, and enhancing trust and morale among users, staff, and departments. However, realising these benefits requires robust governance, ethical oversight, integration with human expertise, and cross-departmental collaboration.

Progress is already underway. In November 2024, the Senior President of Tribunals introduced enhanced digitisation in the FTTIAC through a Practice Direction emphasising procedural rigour.[15] In November 2025, Lord Justice Dingemans highlighted the potential of AI to improve efficiency, particularly by addressing delays caused by document authentication issues, and emphasised the need for ongoing exploration of AI applications.[16]

Legal frameworks and procedural rules are critical to enabling AI-driven transformation. The Senior President of Tribunals, as a statutory member of the Online Procedure Rules Committee, is well placed to lead and oversee a cross-government initiative, ensuring that tribunal transformation continues into its next phase while maintaining fairness, justice, and accountability.

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[15] See Practice Direction: https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Practice-Direction-F-tT-IAC-01.11.24.pdf

[16] AI Trust Conference, Navigating the AI Frontier: Justice, Fairness, and Generative AI in Our Courts, November 2025: (2) Navigating the AI Frontier: Justice, Fairness, and Generative AI in Our Courts | TC 2025 | Day Two - YouTube

6. Reformed Tribunals

The reformed tribunals are those included in the HMCTS Reform Programme, which introduced digital case management, online applications, and standardised processes through common components. For the purposes of this report, the main reformed jurisdictions are First-tier Tribunals of Social Security and Child Support (SSCS) and Immigration and Asylum (IAC). The bulk of the report focuses on these two jurisdictions as an evaluation of how effective reform has been from the perspective of different users and what lessons can be learnt.

The SSCS Tribunal hears appeals from individuals challenging decisions made by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) regarding social security and related benefits. It is the largest of the tribunal jurisdictions in terms of case volume and user base. The IAC Tribunal hears appeals against decisions made by the Home Office in immigration and asylum matters.

6.1 First-tier Social Security and Child Support Tribunal

A) Caseload and Reform Context

SSCS was selected as the primary focus for the Working Group's user-experience research due to its volume and early adoption of digital processes. The jurisdiction had introduced Core Case Data (CCD) as its digital case management system, while continuing to rely on the legacy system GAPS for listing functions. Although the new scheduling tool ListAssist was under development during the research period, it had not been fully rolled out, leading to significant administrative strain as staff operated dual systems simultaneously. Most appeals (close to 90%) were submitted digitally via the 'Submit Your Appeal' interface, with a preserved paper route available for those unable to access online systems. Digital bundles, digital decision notices, and remote hearings had also become standard in many cases. However, the benefits of digitisation were tempered by practical constraints, especially during this transition period. Key components of the system remained incomplete or unintegrated, and many users, including tribunal staff and judicial office holders, relied on workarounds to maintain functionality.

B) Insights from Judicial Leadership and Tribunal Judges

Judicial feedback in SSCS, gathered through focus groups and site visits, revealed a complex picture. Judges welcomed many aspects of digital reform, particularly the shift to digital bundles, which brought efficiency gains, improved data security, and eliminated the need to handle paper files. Judges reported that digital documentation was easier to access and review in advance of hearings, with improved search functionality and integration of multimedia evidence.

Concerns were raised, however, about hearing quality, fairness, and systemic constraints. Many judges expressed a preference for in-person hearings, especially in disability benefit appeals, where they felt it was important to observe the appellant and their presentation directly, and this became the default method for hearings in this jurisdiction. Some feared that appellants with anxiety, mental health conditions, or poor digital access were opting for paper or remote hearings for the wrong reasons, not understanding the potential impact on their ability to convey critical aspects of their case.

There were also logistical challenges. Judges noted that remote hearings often required more time and could be undermined by poor connectivity, background distractions, or inappropriate settings (e.g. appellants attending from cars or public spaces). Equipment inconsistencies between tribunal centres further complicated the delivery of high-quality digital hearings. Technical barriers for appellants, particularly those using mobile phones, added another layer of difficulty. Judicial participants observed that some appellants forgot about their hearing or lacked suitable technology, resulting in delays or adjournments.

The use of interpreters also presented a particular problem in remote formats. Judges reported that it was generally preferable for appellants and interpreters to be in the same room, but resource constraints sometimes made this unfeasible. The resulting quality of interpretation varied and introduced additional risks to procedural fairness.

C) Insights from Tribunal Staff

Administrative staff from SSCS, interviewed as part of the evidence gathering, described the ongoing dual-system environment (CCD for case management and GAPS for listing) as a major source of inefficiency. Operating two systems in parallel required staff to transfer data manually between platforms, creating a risk of error and imposing a constant burden of workaround practices. Staff shortages exacerbated these issues: some hearings were reportedly cancelled due to the unavailability of tribunal clerks.

While CCD offered a stable repository for documents and structured case histories, it had not yet been integrated with ListAssist in most centres. Staff were enthusiastic about the potential of ListAssist, but its limited rollout and the incomplete functionality of CCD for scheduling purposes restricted its benefits. They reported difficulty managing case progression in this fragmented environment.

D) The Call for Evidence: Insights from the Advice Sector and Appellants

The Call for Evidence received 48 responses, mainly from representatives. Evidence showed that respondents were generally positive about the efficiency of digitisation. However, in response to an earlier survey, advice organisations and user-facing professionals raised substantial concerns about accessibility to digital processes for vulnerable users. While the online form itself was generally considered usable, and bulk

scanning had enabled high digital uptake, many appellants faced systemic disadvantages that digital reform had not resolved and, in some cases, exacerbated.

The survey showed that appellants often struggled with deadlines, evidentiary requirements, and the lack of clarity in digital instructions. Advice sector respondents noted that appellants had little understanding of what to expect from a hearing, what evidence to submit, or how to present it. Missed deadlines or miscommunications often led to delays or unfavourable outcomes.

Additional feedback from the Call for Evidence demonstrated a number of other factors:

- There are mixed views of the lodgement system. There is a general recognition that the system is easier than it used to be, but a view that, because MyHMCTS is not available at SSCS, it is hard for a representative to do it on behalf of an appellant. It also requires access to technology. The queue for hearings is invisible, meaning that people don't know how long they will need to wait.

- IT literacy is required to use the digital system. This is a new support capability that goes beyond traditional process and legal expertise.

- Access to representation remains difficult.

- The quality of communication confirming documents is inconsistent.

While video and telephone hearings offered convenience, they also risked alienating users unfamiliar with the format or lacking adequate support. Positive themes included: reducing the need for travel; reducing the stress of a formal environment, and increasing flexibility in finding remote, expert representation. Opportunities for improvement included:

- changing camera systems to make judicial office holders more visible to other participants

- greater support from clerks to help people understand the digital system (such as entering into 'lobbies' to explain how things will work)

- providing the chance to 'test' IT (camera, microphone, etc.) to ensure it is set up to enable people to contribute well.

One common issue was the absence of meaningful guidance for unrepresented appellants. Unlike legally represented users, Appellants in Person (AiP) frequently submit unstructured or irrelevant information, complicating the digital bundle. Advice providers also highlighted the inconsistent availability of digital support services and lack of coordination between HMCTS and local authorities, or third-sector organisations.

General themes were quite wide-ranging, shown in the figure below, taken from materials produced by the consultancy that led the Call for Evidence.
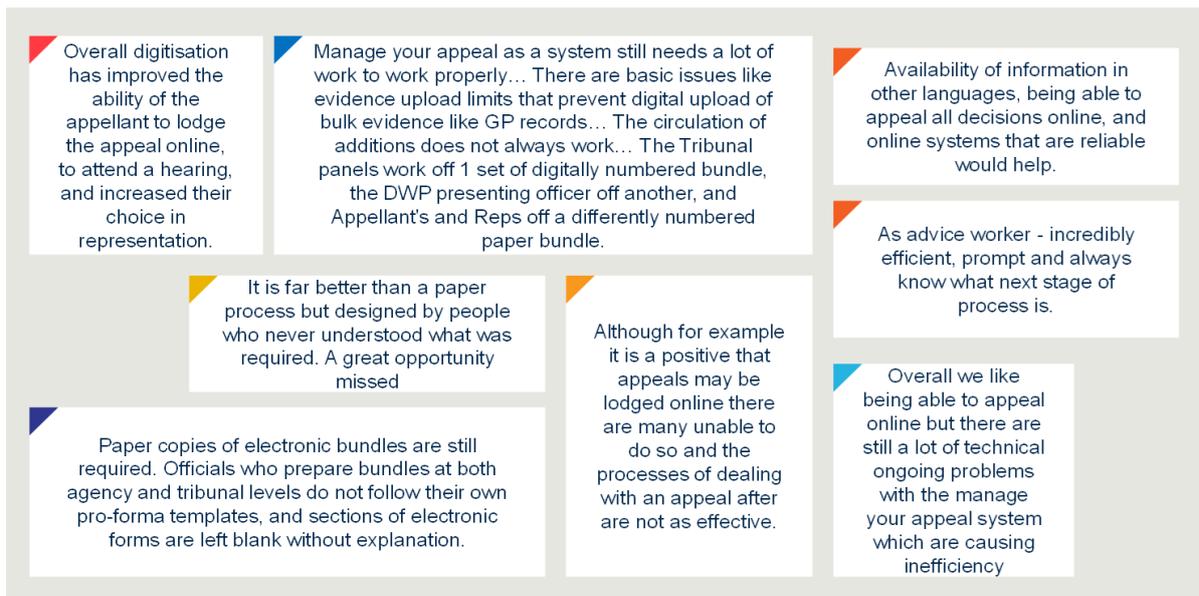
Figure 1: Call for Evidence quotes on digitisation

E) Insights from the Department for Work and Pensions

Officials at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) helpfully took part in a focus group on 25 February 2025. They described their interaction with SSCS during the process of the digital reform and now, with business-as-usual. The purpose of the engagement was to explore the impact of digital tools on their work, identify key challenges and benefits, and gather recommendations for future improvements.

DWP administrative teams currently use an internal system called 'Manage Cases' function to register appeals. This involves filtering applications, uploading necessary documentation, and passing the appeal to a case manager, who prepares the case before returning it to HMCTS for listing. However, the system lacks a centralised dashboard, which forces users to rely on filters such as region and date to find specific cases. Collaboration is further complicated by the absence of functionality to flag when multiple users are working on the same case, prompting staff to rely on Microsoft Teams chats for coordination.

One significant operational issue arises when the system accepts appeals even if a mandatory reconsideration has not occurred. Since the system cannot verify whether this prerequisite has been completed, unnecessary administrative work is generated. Cases are often passed to DWP staff for processing, only to be returned to HMCTS or redirected to a decision-maker for reconsideration. The approach to these cases varies widely among judges – some treat them as outside their jurisdiction and dismiss them outright, while others direct to DWP to complete a mandatory reconsideration before proceeding to the tribunal.

Once an appeal is validated, case managers are responsible for reviewing all relevant documents, preparing a case bundle, reassessing the decision, and – in some cases –

contacting the appellant to propose a change to the decision before the hearing. If the appellant accepts this change, the appeal is considered lapsed. However, the appellant retains the right to appeal the new decision.

Communication with the tribunal is largely conducted through Direction Notices, which a dedicated team filters and routes to the appropriate department. DWP receives incoming communications through 'Manage Cases', postal mail, and a monitored email inbox, all of which require daily triage. The use of legacy systems such as GAPS and Workbook continues, particularly for handling Child Maintenance and certain Income Support cases that are not yet digitised.

Case managers prepare paper bundles, which are then distributed by Royal Mail or via Xerox. Although the stitched bundle – a single file combining DWP and appellant documents – is created, DWP presenting officers (POs) cannot access it due to a restriction imposed by the Chamber President. As a result, pagination mismatches between the DWP's version and the tribunal's bundle continue to lead to confusion. While DWP can view documents uploaded by the appellant, the system does not send notifications when new documents are added. This requires users to manually monitor and check for updates, increasing the risk of oversight.

POs are informed about hearing attendance via an HMCTS-maintained workbook. However, they are not always notified when a hearing is postponed, which can result in wasted preparation. In general, POs prefer in-person hearings because video and telephone hearings often involve technical limitations, such as a lack of technical functionality at some venues.

After a tribunal decision is made, letters are made available on the Managed Cases system. However, these must be manually uploaded to the DWP's Personal Independence Payment Computer System (PIPCS) by administrative staff. Once uploaded, the letters are printed and sent to appellants. Plans to automate this process in the future have been discussed, but the current handling remains manual.

The rollout of ListAssist has so far been limited to DWP's Cardiff office. Concerns have been raised about its readiness for wider deployment, particularly regarding resourcing and technical capability. POs have noted that diary management remains manual and often last-minute, placing them under pressure and reducing their ability to prepare adequately for hearings.

DWP provides feedback to HMCTS through a centralised route via the Executive Directorate. While mechanisms exist to assess quality and identify trends, any changes requested are subject to budget constraints and technical feasibility. POs contribute to quality assurance by providing feedback, especially on judicial decisions they question. A continuous difficulty is the inconsistent notification of Letters of Authority from representatives.

There is a strong consensus that appellants would benefit from access to a read-only version of the system, which could reduce confusion and prevent important documents from being lost or overlooked. Misunderstandings about the purpose and content of bundles often result in hearing adjournments. Efforts are underway to improve the guidance provided to appellants, but more work is needed from both DWP and HMCTS to ensure that they understand what to expect throughout the process.

While the DWP Manage Cases system has improved document accessibility and centralisation, it continues to pose operational challenges. These include fragmented communication workflows, a lack of system integration, and the absence of proactive notifications. DWP staff have adapted effectively, but there is general agreement that further enhancements are required, particularly in terms of user-interface improvements, better visibility of documentation, and integration of the end-to-end workflow. Strengthening collaboration between HMCTS and DWP, and prioritising system updates based on user feedback, remains essential to making the tribunal process more efficient and transparent for all users.

F) Insights from HMCTS

Meetings were held with the Deputy Director of Tribunals responsible for SSCS throughout the life of the Working Group. In the most recent meeting in February 2026, an update on the progress of work in SSCS was provided. The Working Group was pleased to hear that work had been done to provide video guidance on what to expect at a hearing; a recommendation that had been made in the interim report. In addition, flexibility around prioritising preferred hearing type on the application form, was being explored by the Chamber President including providing instructions on the preferred method. Other improvements included the potential in virtual hearings for panel members to not need to be in the same room which could improve issues around the visibility of panel members. However, ListAssist had not progressed any further - the contract with the current provider would soon be coming to an end.

Common Challenges Across Groups

In the Working Group's 2024 interim report, all stakeholder groups expressed concerns about the reform's unfinished nature. The transition period placed considerable strain on administrative and judicial capacity. The Working Group found that early staff reductions, made in anticipation of long-term efficiency gains, had outpaced the actual functionality delivered by reform. There was also widespread frustration over the lack of accessible, consistent user guidance – particularly given the digital format's potential to support self-navigation.

Reflections and Further Work

The SSCS fieldwork presented in the 2024 interim report reveals a jurisdiction that had achieved progress in the Reform Programme, but continued to face significant operational, procedural, and access-to-justice challenges. Digital processes had brought real efficiencies and laid the foundation for more modern working practices, yet they had not overcome the broader structural inequalities faced by appellants – particularly those without representation, digital access, or support.

The judiciary's concerns about the limitations of remote hearings echoed the AJC's broader emphasis on user-centred design. Similarly, the advice sector's accounts of unclear communication and unsupported appellants suggested that technical platforms alone were insufficient to deliver a fair tribunal process. The lack of published data on hearing modes and outcomes further limited the ability to assess the reform's real-world impacts.

Looking forward, the fieldwork underlined the importance of continuous evaluation, procedural clarity, and sustained investment in support mechanisms. The experiences of SSCS users in the early digital environment offer critical lessons for the future design and governance of tribunal reform across all jurisdictions.

6.2 First-tier Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber

The Working Group has drawn on five sources in examining this jurisdiction: the *Immigration and Asylum Appeals Reformed Service: Evaluation Report* (January 2025);[17] interviews with judicial leadership, including a salaried tribunal judge and reform lead, as well as a meeting with the resident judge overseeing the Virtual Region, conducted in December 2024; a focus group with senior legal officers, held in February 2025; an interview with a HMCTS technology service lead, and responses to the Call for Evidence.

Over the course of 2023 and 2024, the FTTIAC experienced a marked increase in workload. In 2024/25, receipts increased by an average of 36% to 79,000, compared to 2023/24. Receipts in Q4 of 2024/25 increased by 45% compared to the same period in 2023/24. In January to March 2025, FTTIAC disposals increased by 15% to 11,000, but receipts continued to outpace disposals, contributing to a sharp rise in the open caseload.

By March 2025, the FTTIAC's open caseload had grown by 81%, reaching 79,000 cases – the largest proportional increase among all major tribunal jurisdictions. This growth has occurred since the period covered by the 2025 evaluation report and reflects both the Home Office's clearance of legacy asylum cases and an increase in Human Rights appeals. The resulting pressures on judicial and administrative capacity have been intensified by growing clearance times, with the average time to disposal across all case types reaching 49 weeks.

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[17] Immigration and Asylum Appeals Reformed Service: Evaluation Report - GOV.UK, HMCTS, 30 January 2025

A) Immigration and Asylum Appeals Reformed Service: Evaluation Report

The *Immigration and Asylum Appeals Reformed Service: Evaluation Report*, published in January 2025 (the 'HMCTS 2025 Evaluation Report') was based on interviews conducted between December 2022 and March 2023. It assessed both the legally represented and Appellant in Person (AiP) services following digital reform.

AiPs were generally positive about the concept of a digital process. They described the online appeal form as clear and accessible, with minimal jargon. Many appreciated being able to track their case digitally, avoid postal delays, and express their case in their own words. Judges were frequently described as polite and understanding, and tribunal independence was noted as a source of trust for some appellants.

However, the report also identified substantial barriers for AiPs, particularly those with limited English or digital literacy. Many AiPs struggled with uploading documents, structuring evidence, or understanding how to respond to Home Office refusal points. Some cases were taken offline due to technical issues or user error, and in April-May 2025 4% (around 9,000 cases) of AiP cases submitted online were subsequently removed from the online service. This undermined the ability to assess timeliness and outcomes for this cohort.

While many AiPs reported confidence in representing themselves, the report highlights risks of unequal access to justice, especially for those without strong written English or familiarity with the system. These concerns frame the context in which the Working Group conducted its more recent inquiry.

B) Insights from Judicial Leadership

This section summarises findings from an interview with the judicial lead for reform in the FTTIAC. His reflections provide insight into the ongoing operational and digital challenges facing the Chamber, while recognising the many opportunities created by reform and contextualising earlier findings from the HMCTS 2025 Evaluation Report. The judge's account also sheds light on the impact of sharply rising case volumes in 2023 and 2024, as reported in the most recent official statistics.

Positive Developments
The judge reported that the Reform Programme has introduced several significant improvements to the case management process. The Chamber now uses the MyHMCTS platform, which provides a searchable digital case file. For judges, this represents a major advance over previously paper-based or fragmented digital systems. The system is broadly stable and facilitates efficient case access.
ListAssist, the automated listing tool, has also been successfully rolled out for bail and standard appeals, allowing judges to view their digital caseload and plan their work. Judges also benefit from structured processes for triaging urgent or complex cases. In high-volume

areas such as asylum appeals, the platform enables more consistent workflows and better information flow between the judiciary and administrative teams.

In terms of user interface, a distinct online path has been developed for AiPs, referred to internally as '*Litigants in Person and the LiP journey*'. This version uses simplified language and presents the appeal process in an accessible format. The aim is to enable unrepresented appellants to complete and track their appeals more easily, echoing positive feedback from the HMCTS 2025 Evaluation Report, where many AiPs reported that the online form was clear and helped them express their case.

The Virtual Region (see p38), administered in Manchester, allows certain straightforward cases to be transferred from their originating hearing centre to a remote setting. It is seen as being a flexible and resource-efficient model.

Ongoing Challenges

Despite these improvements, a number of serious pressures remain. The system is under significant strain from rising case volumes, consistent with the reported 81% increase in open caseload during 2023–2024. The capacity of legal officers – key to managing routine interlocutory matters – has not kept pace with demand. There are marked regional differences in legal officer confidence and output, resulting in inconsistent quality and delays.

There has also been a drop in representation rates, which may be due to a combination of legal aid restrictions and cost pressures on providers. This reflects concerns raised in the evaluation report, particularly around AiPs struggling to navigate procedural requirements or respond to Home Office refusal points.

A major practical difficulty concerns the preparation of bundles, especially in unrepresented cases. Many AiPs submit disorganised or poorly formatted evidence, and judges often receive multiple sequential bundles from different parties with little alignment between them. Although some legal officers attempt to assist with collation, this is not always feasible due to the volume of work. The result is a procedural burden that sits disproportionately on judges.

Guidance on working arrangements in tribunals from the then Senior President, issued on 22 October 2024, sets out the preference for in-person hearings in FTTIAC cases, particularly where credibility is central.[18] While this is supported in principle, it was considered that it limits flexibility in listing and may not always reflect the practical constraints of remote users or judicial availability. That said, the Virtual region provides some flexibility.

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[18] Sir Keith Lindblom, then Senior President of Tribunals, Judicial Office Holders in the tribunals – guidance on working arrangements, (October 2024),

A number of issues have arisen with MyHMCTS including issues concerning notifications and issues concerning the visibility of documents for users.

Finally, integration between the First-tier Tribunal and Upper Tribunal remains underdeveloped. Despite operating in the same jurisdictional space, the two tiers rely on separate digital systems (CE-files in the Upper Tribunal), with key documents such as grant or refusal notices not easily transferable. This creates inefficiencies, especially in appeals on points of law.

Virtual Region within the First-tier Tribunal

The Virtual Region was established in 2022/23 as an initiative to manage part of the Chamber's workload entirely through remote hearings. It became a permanent feature following a successful pilot and is now treated as business-as-usual. Cases are transferred into the Virtual Region from their originating hearing centre at the hearing requirements stage, once all evidence has been submitted and logistical information such as interpreter needs and witness numbers has been collected.

At that point, parties can indicate whether they consider the case suitable for remote hearing. Judicial assessment is then applied, with two primary criteria: whether the appellant is represented, and whether the case can fairly be determined remotely. Factors such as appellant vulnerability, the number of witnesses, and the availability of interpreters are considered.

Eligible cases are selected from those proceeding through the Core Case Data (CCD) system. Around 85% of the Chamber's caseload follows this digital route. Each hearing centre contributes a quota of cases to the Virtual Region, proportional to its size, and selected cases are then case managed by legal officers working remotely as part of a national team. Although administered via the Manchester Hearing Centre, the Virtual Region does not yet have a separate identity on CCD. Data for Virtual Region hearings are filtered manually.

Initial perceptions are that cases are disposed of more quickly. Judges work from home, which has a positive impact on their efficiency and is helpful for those with caring responsibilities.

There are challenges for interpreters, who are not co-located with the appellant. Interpreters are also not always able to find a quiet, private place in which to participate.

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C) Insights from Legal Officers

This section draws on the views of senior and frontline legal officers in the IAC, expressed during a focus group held in February 2025. Their insights complement those of judicial leadership and provide an operational perspective on the implementation and ongoing use of the digital case management system (CCD). The discussion highlights both the system's evolution and the structural limitations, which continue to affect efficiency and user experience, particularly for AiPs.

Positive Developments

Legal officers reported that the digital platform (CCD/MyHMCTS) has improved considerably since its initial release, which was described as a 'minimum viable product' that lacked essential functionality. The system now offers integrated task lists, chronological case histories, and a portal-based interface that allows for direct interaction with other parties. For Legal officers, this has made routine case progression more structured and predictable. Judges also benefit from better visibility over the case management journey than under previous paper-based or email-driven systems.
The ListAssist tool has been positively received in those hearing centres where it has been implemented, such as Manchester and Glasgow. It supports the listing of appeals in a more automated and transparent manner. The integrated system also includes a Respondent Review stage, encouraging the Home Office to reassess its decision before the hearing, potentially avoiding unnecessary judicial time when agreement can be reached. At the time of the meeting, HMCTS reported that ListAssist was due to be rolled out to the Virtual Region in July 2025.

Ongoing Challenges

Despite these improvements, Legal officers identified a series of persistent operational and design challenges.

A key limitation is the inability to edit data-entry mistakes or withdraw directions once issued. If an error is made, a ticket must be raised and actioned externally, leading to inefficiencies, although plans are in place for administrative staff to make the changes. Similarly, the system's text-entry fields do not support paragraph formatting, which creates long blocks of dense text, particularly problematic for applicants with limited English. While the system is built to enhance access to justice, this design feature undermines clarity and understanding.

Legal officers also explained that they had to devote too much time to checking Home Office bundles to ensure the correct certificates have been produced or to remove inappropriate formats of evidence. This added to case waiting times and prevented them from undertaking functions delegated from the judges.

Another key theme was the lack of transparency about user interfaces. Legal officers do not know what AiPs or legal representatives see on their version of the portal. This disconnect makes it difficult to offer effective guidance or draft accessible directions. Although they have repeatedly requested screenshots or interface overviews from HMCTS, they have not received these, and the issue has persisted for several years. In contrast, under the legacy system, tribunal users and staff could see essentially the same interface.

Legal officers also reported that many of the same technical and procedural vulnerabilities identified in the HMCTS 2025 Evaluation Report remain unresolved. The report reveals that AiP cases must be moved offline because users are unable to comply with digital procedural steps, make data-entry mistakes, or fail to engage once representatives withdraw. In such cases, the appellant often cannot resume digital access independently. This was also identified as an issue in HMCTS Access to Justice assessments, where it was noted that:

'This can have access to justice implications as there can be a delay whilst the case is moved offline, and the user will then no longer benefit from the expected advantages of the online service'.[19]

This has since been improved and cases taken offline have decreased to 4% in April/May 2025. However, even now, 4–5 years after implementation, workarounds remain necessary to progress basic casework.

The legal officer group also highlighted that the volume of appeals has escalated sharply, in line with recent official statistics. One team reported 19,000 outstanding tasks and only 20

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[19] HMCTS, Assessing Access to Justice in HMCTS Services (2024) - Assessing Access to Justice in HMCTS Services - December 2024 - GOV.UK

staff members, making it impossible to prioritise cases unless there is a clear risk of immediate harm. This reinforces earlier points made by the Reform Lead judge about the scale of pressure on legal officer teams and the consequences for timely decision-making.

D) Insights from the Call for Evidence

Call for Evidence responses regarding the FTTIAC came from a mix of advisers, representatives and one judge. To avoid identification, this section considers their contributions collectively. Participants' overall view of the impact of digitisation on efficiency was mixed, shown in the figure below, taken from materials produced by the consultancy that led the Call for Evidence.

Figure 2. Participant's quotes on digitisation

Reflections on the pre-hearing process
These participants expressed a consistently negative view of digitisation in the stages prior to the hearing in their free-text responses. The major challenges at the pre-hearing stage primarily concern the justice system itself and the specific disadvantages that appellants in the FTTIAC face, rather than technology specific challenges. Challenges include:

Technology	Appeals ought to occur through MyHMCTS, but this is only available to representatives, making it more difficult for unrepresented appellants.
	Notifications provide unrealistic expectations of timelines.
	Many appellants have poor access to technology – potentially only having outdated mobile phones with limited data.
Support	Access to legal aid/representation is limited, given the complexity of the system.
	Comprehensive support would include the provision of a wide range of advice and services – this is not professionally possible.
	People often change representative for their appeal.
Communications	AIP are not informed of the differences between an oral hearing, a hearing on papers, or that they could request an in-person hearing, rather than an online hearing.
	The tribunal is slow at providing updates and information.
Appellant characteristics	Many appellants have low English language capability, are technically challenged, and are unable to grasp legal terminology or understand immigration law.
	Paperwork and bundles are complex for this appellant group.
	Fear pervades all interactions with the system and this is hard to overcome.
	The prospect of fees – even where there are fee waivers available – creates an environment of fear.

Reflections on Online Hearings

Comments around the digital challenges associated with online hearings were far more mixed. These comments cut across the technology itself, the appellants' ability to use it

well, and the ways in which tribunals and others used it. A positive aspect of video hearings reported was that many participants are familiar with videoconferencing software (for example, using it to engage with family or friends), meaning that the medium can be less 'unusual' than a courtroom experience. Areas for development, however, are detailed below:

- Appellants may not have the necessary technology to take part effectively, so technological support can be necessary. Poor access to technology can undermine privacy.

- Technical issues persist (though they appear less frequent than during the COVID-19 period). This has a flow-on effect on experience and timelines.

- The call experience, including seeing several participants at once, can be challenging.

- Video calls can make it harder for tribunal members and representatives to understand a person's mental state.

- Link distribution does not always go well (for example, links may not be sent or sent to the wrong person).

- Receiving support from an interpreter.

- Communicating privately with other people who are in the hearing

- Cases with credibility issues can be held remotely, restricting the judge from being able to assess whether the appellant can be believed.

E) Insights from the Home Office

This section outlines insights gathered from two senior appeal officials at the Home Office (HO) in meetings during February and March 2025. Both had been involved with the design and delivery of the Reformed FTTIAC since the outset of the Reform Programme. They were very enthusiastic about the reformed system and processes. They reported that changes to HO working that have come about are significant and the impact is very positive.

Cases in the CCD system are clear and follow a linear timeline, making it easier, quicker and more transparent for all parties. For the HO, it is an end-to-end system enabling them to validate appeals and upload bundles. The HO is notified of a new appeal through an Application Programming Interface (API). This was a joint initiative between the HO and HMCTS. The HO now has an internal service level agreement of 24 hours to validate an appeal.

After the bundle has been uploaded, there can be a considerable wait before the legal officer accepts it and moves the process on. There are still misunderstandings about disclosable evidence. The HO understands the workload pressures on legal officers and recognises that, in an ideal world, they should be able to focus on their delegated functions rather than deal with administrative tasks (although the preparation of bundles is part of their remit).

Delays also occur when the progression of a case is held up pending payment of the tribunal fee. The Working Group were informed that the HO fee-collection process does not cause the same difficulties. HMCTS reported that it would introduce work allocation tasks for administrative staff to remind them to chase unpaid fees.

There are persistent issues with representatives' use of the system that could be reduced through improved guidance and nudges within the MyHMCTS application. Despite the procedural rigour required by the Senior President's practice direction issued in November 2024, compliance by representatives and the AiPs remains a frustration for the HO.

The practice direction has been very helpful in specifying and clarifying the procedure within the digital system, as well as the format of evidence presentation and bundles. Regrettably, the internal HO guidelines do not reflect the detail of the practice direction, only the procedural rules.

As the HMCTS 2025 Evaluation Report highlighted, a significant difficulty is the number of cases that have to be taken offline because the system does not enable errors made, usually by AiPs in their initial application. If a case is taken offline, the end-to-end digital process is interrupted, requiring manual interventions for the parties and the tribunal. This can also be the case when there is a change of representative. The Working Group was informed by a representative that the change of the representation process causes significant delays, and they don't have access to the case in the meantime or receive updates and directions. As a result, deadlines can lapse, or hearings are scheduled without the appellant or new representative being notified in time.

There is a helpful and positive liaison between the HO and the tribunal, especially meetings chaired by a Regional Judge. There used to be an effective user feedback arrangement when developing the new systems – this has now lapsed but could usefully be revived. There is also a need for better data to monitor trends and outcomes.

It remains a frustration that the Upper Tribunal was not included in the Reform Programme and the development of CCD/My HMCTS.

Ongoing challenges
There are several modifications and enhancements that would improve efficiency and the throughput of cases:

- More APIs could be developed to deal with communications and notifications from the tribunal to avoid manual processing.

- There should be more guidance and nudging in the MyHMCTS appeal application to mitigate errors and the need for corrections.

- The system should be fixed so that corrections can be made without taking the case offline.

- A digital solution should be identified for the bundles to be checked, significantly speeding up the process and freeing up legal officers to undertake delegated functions.

- Fee payment and notification processes should be streamlined.

- There should be increased learning from the tribunal decisions to improve the initial decision HO making.

F) Insights from HMCTS

An HMCTS technology service lead provided insights into the benefits and challenges from their perspective on reform in FTTIAC. Although the reform programme had concluded, a list of ongoing improvements remained, with HMCTS working closely with the judiciary to prioritise areas that still required refinement. Engagement had taken place with legal officers and Home Office staff, and a workshop was planned to discuss pressure points. Workshops had already been held to examine transferring administrative tasks from legal officers to better utilise their time; however, technological changes to the system would be necessary. It was reported that the FTTIAC satisfaction rate is 98%, leading HMCTS to consider the reform effective, though they recognise that the system still needs improvements. HMCTS is collaborating with the judiciary to implement enhancements – a priority list has been developed in consultation with the judiciary for ongoing improvements. These include the introduction of a short-term business architect, who will resolve technical glitches and work collaboratively with the Home Office on their system.

There were positive developments regarding the use of AI. Two pilots were underway: the first involved a transcription service and the second a summarisation service. The transcription pilot provided judges with a transcription service for decisions, which has been reported as having low error rates. A transcript at the hearing offers a summary of relevant issues from evidence bundles. It was hoped that the pilot would be expanded to FTTIAC. There is significant potential for AI in tribunals, but deployment depends on funding. Further work included data insight activities to record information such as the duration of hearings. A proof of concept was underway by HMCTS.

Initiatives by HMCTS in FTTIAC are positive, and the recognition that the reform programme could have been better designed from the start is appreciated. This all occurs

against a backdrop of a changing landscape, with a significant increase in cases and backlog. The working group welcomed HMCTS's efforts and acknowledged that FTTIAC received relatively positive feedback regarding the reformed products. However, concerns persisted that improvements were too little, too late, and that the design had been implemented before issues were identified. The potential use of AI was seen as important for speeding up the process and reducing the backlog, especially in summarising lengthy bundles.

Reflections and Further Work

The Working Group welcomed the HMCTS 2025 Evaluation Report as a thorough and systematic effort to review the implementation and early impacts of reform. However, some participants expressed concerns that the report might overestimate how accessible the digital appeal system is for appellants appearing in person, possibly due to a sample of respondents who are more digitally proficient. Particular concern was raised about the use of unstructured text fields in appeal forms, which, although seemingly user-friendly, may encourage submissions lacking the legal relevance necessary for a successful appeal. The working group also considered the absence of a strong mechanism to guide appellants towards criteria-based evidence and noted that clearer links to expert advice services would help address this gap.

More broadly, Working Group members observed a mismatch between the report's generally optimistic tone and some of the realities seen in tribunal practice. In particular, ongoing technical difficulties and the challenge of low-quality or late-stage engagement by parties echoed the findings of the Working Group's own fieldwork. The group also welcomed signs that actions were being taken to review appellant-facing content and to improve case management functions, although there was some scepticism about whether these issues had been given sufficient priority early in the reform process.

There has been a sharp and sustained increase in demand. The digital reforms have created a stable platform for managing cases, but this platform requires further support through continuous investment in legal officer capacity, procedural guidance, and improved user-facing clarity.

The issues with bundle quality and procedural navigation for AiPs reflect key concerns from the evaluation report and remain highly relevant. Most of the cases removed from the online process were those initiated by AiPs – often due to confusion or procedural errors. This highlights the importance of exploring ways to ensure that online routes are not only accessible, but also better supported to promote fair engagement.

While efforts to enhance the AiP journey for unrepresented appellants are welcome, they cannot replace the necessity for representation in more complex cases. Future initiatives could focus not only on digital efficiency but also on ensuring procedural fairness for unrepresented users through improved signposting, guidance, and support with document preparation.

The legal officer focus group provided an honest view of frontline users of the reformed digital system. While there is widespread support for its intended functionality, the current system still falls short in key areas, particularly in supporting unrepresented appellants, handling cases with complex procedural requirements, and enabling real-time judicial oversight.

The issues highlighted reflect many of those identified in both the HMCTS 2025 Evaluation Report and by the judicial leadership: poor bundle preparation; the challenge of procedural engagement for AiPs, and the gap between formal digital capability and practical implementation. It is notable that, despite the long period since rollout, the system does not provide legal officers with clear insight into how the system appears to other users.

Looking ahead, enhancements to user interface design, procedural transparency, and internal editability may be prioritised when suitable. There is also a case for revisiting communication between HMCTS service teams and operational tribunal staff to ensure system developments respond to those most familiar with daily operations. Without these changes, the goal of a fully functional digital tribunal environment will remain only partly realised. The Working Group was informed that both HMCTS and the Home Office are considering AI solutions; for example, the contents of bundles could be checked quickly using AI, thereby allowing legal officers to focus on delegated judicial duties.

6.3 First-tier Tribunal Criminal Injuries Compensation – Social Entitlement Chamber

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal considers appeals from applicants who have been refused compensation for injuries sustained as a result of violent crime. These include cases involving serious physical or psychological injury, sexual assault, and in some instances, bereavement and dependency claims. This section draws on discussions with the then judicial lead for the First-tier Tribunal Criminal Injuries Compensation (CIC) jurisdiction. The tribunal handles a substantial volume of appeals each year, with wide variation in complexity, representation, and the emotional weight carried by individual cases. Children can appeal from 10 years old and can attend their own hearings. There are 80-90 judicial office holders, including judges and specialist members. At the time of writing the report, there were 19 salaried judges, who typically sit in the SSCS jurisdiction as their primary jurisdiction but can sit for up to 30 days a year in CIC. Specialists include psychiatrists, psychologists, trauma specialists and finance specialists.

The Tribunal has a distinct history within the broader HMCTS reform programme, having been among the early jurisdictions to adopt a version of the Common Platform, known internally as CCD (Core Case Data), replacing a legacy system known as GAPs. Although originally developed for social security appeals, CCD was adapted for use in criminal injuries compensation cases, with the Tribunal benefiting from a configuration tailored to its procedural requirements. This system is used exclusively by HMCTS staff and judges

who access it through similar, but distinct, portals known as JCM (Judicial Case Manager) and Manage Cases -there is limited digital front-end for appellants, who can lodge appeals on-line. The internal platform allows for digital case file management, scheduling, and storage of evidence and correspondence, enabling efficient preparation and conduct of hearings. However, some limitations remain. For example, the system does not automatically generate task notifications for judges, and it is not designed to support regionally aligned case allocation, both of which require ongoing workarounds. Judges are unable to create final decisions within the system, with these having to be forwarded to administrative staff to issue.

Currently, post-hearing work such as set aside requests and requests for full written statements of reasons must be handled outside of the system. Despite these constraints, the platform is broadly seen within the judiciary as fit for purpose, having supported the jurisdiction's predominantly digital hearing model with relative consistency and minimal disruption. It possesses an additional useful feature known as Case File View, which is not available in other more complete versions of JCM, such as that in use in the SSCS jurisdiction, and which allows all documents to be viewed in one place without having to open multiple tabs. It benefits from a simpler design that makes it easier to use and less prone to errors.

Positive Aspects

The Tribunal has long embraced remote working, with approximately 97% of hearings now conducted via the Cloud Video Platform (CVP). This practice was established during the pandemic and has proven to be effective and preferred by both appellants and judicial office holders. It enables flexible scheduling, reduces adjournments, and facilitates participation from geographically dispersed panel members and appellants. Audio recordings are undertaken through CVP, which serve as the official record. This has improved transparency and reduced the volume of complaints regarding panel conduct, as well as reducing the number of decisions that have been set aside. Judicial panels may vary in composition but typically include trauma-informed judges and specialist members in psychiatry, psychology, and finance. This structure supports high-quality adjudication and accommodates the sensitive nature of the cases.

Ongoing Challenges

The Tribunal operates with a combination of digital systems including CCD, legacy GAPS (used alongside PDF-based case files to replace paper bundles), and CVP for remote hearings. This multi-platform environment can create practical challenges for judicial users managing bundles and video hearings simultaneously. CCD does not currently generate automated task notifications for judges other than for those undertaking interlocutory work, and administrative staff are restricted from assigning tasks within the platform, necessitating manual monitoring. The platform is also not configured to support regionally based judicial deployment, leading to logistical inefficiencies. While bundles are primarily

digital, format inconsistencies and lack of pagination can complicate navigation, particularly for unrepresented appellants. Despite these challenges, day-to-day operations continue with minimal disruption, and the judiciary has found effective workarounds.

Reflections and Further Work

The Tribunal's experience under the HMCTS reform programme reflects the benefits and limitations of adapting shared digital platforms to specialised jurisdictions. Although the CCD system is broadly effective, outstanding functionality such as regional allocation and task notifications would significantly enhance judicial workflow. There remains an appetite among judicial leadership to further streamline operations and explore limited outward-facing tools for improving communication with appellants, subject to feasibility. The Tribunal's continued success in delivering remote-first adjudication highlights the potential of specialist-focused digital design, particularly when combined with stable staffing, specialist expertise, and practical administrative support.

7. Unreformed Tribunals – The Special Tribunals

The descoped or 'Special' tribunals were not part of the reform programme. However, they face many of the same challenges as the tribunals that are included. Although collectively referred to as the 'Specials', these jurisdictions vary significantly in their institutional histories, scale, and subject matter. What unites them is the experience of being excluded from the main tribunal Reform Programme. Nevertheless, their relationship to reform has not been uniform: some gained early exposure to new systems or practices through involvement in pilot exercises or related projects, while others have largely remained outside the digital transformation process. These differences have shaped both the challenges they encounter and the adaptations they have developed. See Appendix C for an organisational chart of the tribunals.

The Working Group engaged with a variety of uses from the following descoped tribunals:

- War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber.

- First-tier Tribunal (Mental Health Tribunal in the Health, Education and Social Care Chamber.

- First-tier Tribunal: Special Educational Needs and Disability; Disability Discrimination in schools; Care Standards; and Primary Health Lists in the Health, Social Care and Education Chamber.

- First-tier Tribunal Property Chamber.

- First-tier Tribunal General Regulatory Chamber.

- First-tier Tribunal Asylum Support in the Social Entitlement Chamber.

- First-tier Tribunal Tax Chamber.

The Specials are using a range of case management platforms in the absence of the reform product CCD. These platforms are detailed in the following jurisdictional sections and outlined in the table below.

Tribunal / Chamber	Case Management Platforms	Description
War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber	GLiMR (Generalised Listing, Management & Registration system) –replaced PAT 2000.	GLiMR is a back-office system, with no direct interface with appellants or representatives. It allows more efficient reporting and case tracking.
Mental Health Tribunal	MARTHA.	A legacy case management system.

Tribunal / Chamber	Case Management Platforms	Description
SEND/Disability Discrimination	GAPS (General Appeals Processing System): and Microsoft shared drives that store electronic files.	GAPS is a 1990s software platform for basic case tracking and management statistics.
Property Chamber: Residential Property	ResCase (which replaces a legacy based system).	Manages digital files, bundles and case progression steps.
General Regulatory Chamber	GLiMR and Microsoft Sharepoint.	As above.
Asylum Support Tribunal	No integrated case management system.	
Tax Chamber	GLiMR and Microsoft Sharepoint.	As above.

This section sets out how each jurisdiction is currently working digitally despite being descoped from the reform programme.

7.1 First-tier Tribunal War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber

The Chamber hears appeals from serving or former armed forces personnel in England and Wales against decisions made by the Secretary of State for Defence concerning entitlement and assessment of compensation for illness or injury related to their service. The Working Group has based its findings on a 2024 user experience survey conducted by the HMCTS Insight Team in July–August of that year, as well as discussions held on 17 February 2025 with the Chamber President of the War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber (WPAFCC), and representatives of the Royal British Legion.

The tribunal is a national jurisdiction for England and Wales, and uniquely, all full hearings are conducted by a three-member panel comprising a judge, a medical member, and a service member (a veteran). It is a small jurisdiction with only three salaried judges, including the Chamber President, alongside a salaried chief medical member. The tribunal's work is also supported by fee-paid judicial office holders and salaried judges from other tribunal jurisdictions. Legal support includes two full-time legal officers and a part-time senior legal officer.

The user base consists of existing or former members of the armed forces, or their dependants, many of whom are elderly and/or live with long-term physical or mental health conditions. While approximately 70% of appellants are supported by service charities, around one-third remain unrepresented – many without even informal support – which has been shown to correlate with lower satisfaction and greater difficulty navigating the process. Most representatives are not legally qualified.

A significant recent structural change has been the move to direct lodgement of appeals. Appellants now submit their cases directly to the tribunal, rather than through the departmental respondent's agency (DBS Veterans UK). While this has enhanced transparency and accessibility, it has introduced delays in appeals that have not yet gone through the mandatory reconsideration process required under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme. In such cases, the tribunal must pause processing and return the matter to the Secretary of State for Defence, delaying the hearing of the appeal. The older War Pension Scheme does not include a mandatory reconsideration stage, meaning those appeals can proceed more swiftly.

The administrative team, comprising approximately 20 full-time equivalent staff, has undergone considerable change. Originally based with the judiciary in London, they were first relocated to Leicester as part of reform-related restructuring, and then again, at short notice, to the Courts and Tribunals Service Centre in Loughborough. This second move resulted in a high turnover of staff, which was compounded by a loss of experience and knowledge specific to the jurisdiction. That has been addressed by putting all staff through a new and comprehensive training plan, which has brought about significant improvement in the quality of the administrative support for the judiciary.

The Chamber has a single dedicated hearing room in London and otherwise operates a peripatetic model across HMCTS venues nationwide. Around 70–80% of hearings are now conducted via video link. Face-to-face and hybrid formats are also used as needed.

Challenge

WPAFCC was a paper-based jurisdiction with an outdated and unreliable case management system. In December 2020, the Tribunal's administration was moved to a completely new team and from being co-located with the judiciary to a base in the Midlands. That move was predicated on the Chamber's processes being digitised through the Reform Programme. Shortly after, the Chamber was descoped, leaving a wholly inefficient way of working as physical files had to be couriered up and down the country, with judges and legal officers not able to work easily within the operational team.

Positive Developments

Despite being excluded from the Reform Programme, WPAFCC has made notable progress towards digitisation. Through collaborative efforts between the judiciary and HMCTS, a strategy to digitise the Chamber was devised. The process of converting physical files into digital format commenced in March 2023, starting with scanning paper files. Over time, with iterative development and substantial judicial input, a model electronic file was developed. This occurred amidst considerable operational challenges, including the recent introduction of a new process called 'Direct Lodgement of appeals' and an unanticipated, short-notice office relocation that involved transferring over 1,500 paper files.
In April 2024, WPAFCC launched the GLiMR case management platform to enhance case visibility and reporting. This replaced its previous case management system (PAT 2000),

which had improved administrative stability and the ability to monitor case progression. GLiMR is a back-office system with no direct interface with appellants or respondents, but it enables more efficient reporting and case tracking. Importantly, this was supported by a comprehensive bespoke training programme for all of the HMCTS team, which, due to staff turnover caused by the relocation, was virtually entirely new. The judiciary was heavily involved in developing the training, and this investment in staff has transformed ways of working.

Then, in April 2025, WPAFCC began trialling panels that work with electronic bundles and digital interlocutory work, involving salaried judges and legal officers using digital case files accessible to the judiciary via Microsoft SharePoint. Although progress was initially slow – partly due to managing the internal transition – these pilots marked important steps towards reducing reliance on paper. Since mid-May 2025, all Tribunal panels have used electronic scanned versions of the document bundle for hearings, further decreasing the Chamber's dependence on paper.

Once again, it was an iterative process with considerable judicial input, which has led to enhanced accessibility, reduced paper handling, and streamlined case progression.

In June 2025, digital-only appeals were introduced, and WPAFCC is now fully digital. Further work has been carried out in collaboration with DBS Veterans UK to improve the quality of the digital bundles. The bundle is now produced in a properly paginated digital format rather than being a scanned copy of the paper bundle. This transformation has improved HMCTS team efficiency, enhanced service delivery, and positioned the Chamber in its strongest operational state over the last five years. HMCTS has also worked hard at collaborating with the MoD's agency, Defence Business Services, to introduce a platform for exchanging electronic bundles and ensure accessibility for all users.

The widespread adoption of video hearings, facilitated through the Cloud Video Platform (CVP), has allowed for more efficient listing, better use of panel members' time, and the clearance of the pandemic-era backlog. Online hearings have also reduced dependence on physical venues and allowed greater flexibility for both panel members and appellants. Findings from recent user surveys showed high attendance and generally positive user experiences. Many appellants have adapted well to this format, notwithstanding any age- or disability-related challenges. The format of the hearing is ultimately a decision for the Tribunal, but all appellants are given a choice, and the majority opt for online. The respondent always attends online, subject only to being directed to attend in certain exceptional cases.

Ongoing Challenges

Digitisation efforts have been hampered by the inconsistent quality of bundles submitted by DBS Veterans UK. Bundles are often poorly structured, scanned with poor legibility, and inconsistently paginated. Judicial guidance has been prepared to improve bundle quality and usability. DBS Veterans UK is undergoing its own digital transformation, and the

operational teams have undertaken joint work to coordinate processes and to agree on a timeline for implementation. This work will be co-ordinated across the three geographical jurisdictions, including the equivalent tribunals in both Scotland and Northern Ireland. The challenges of digitisation are compounded by disparities in technology access, especially among fee-paid judges using personal laptops, as well as the inconsistent availability of audio-visual equipment in hearing venues.

Communication with appellants has also been identified as an area for improvement. These operational difficulties are reflected in user feedback, with fewer than half of respondents in the 2024 HMCTS user survey expressing satisfaction with the process. Particular concerns include delays, unclear communication, and limited understanding of the distinct roles of DBS Veterans UK and the Tribunal. Although the Chamber has previously revised its guidance materials in line with the 'Human Voice of Justice' initiative, intended to promote clearer, more accessible communication, recent customer insight research has revealed ongoing confusion among users. Many appellants reported difficulties in understanding the process and in knowing what to expect at hearings, suggesting that current guidance may fall short of meeting users' needs.

Appellants are issued an information leaflet at the point of lodging an appeal, which outlines the process in broad terms. However, because this material is received early, there is concern that it may not be retained or revisited closer to the hearing date. Additional information is available on the GOV.UK Tribunal webpages, but this may not always be easy to navigate, particularly for those with limited digital literacy.

Guidance specific to remote hearings exists in the form of judicial practice notes, but these are not sufficiently tailored to the needs of unrepresented appellants, limiting their accessibility and effectiveness.

Efforts have been made centrally to improve standard communications, including the creation of new HMCTS-wide letters for video hearing listings. These letters aim to provide clearer instructions on how to join and participate in hearings, and a Chamber initiative to encourage the appellant to test the hearing link is due to start shortly.

In light of these concerns, a comprehensive review of communications has been put in place, building on insights from the recent user research. This review will encompass both public-facing materials and operational correspondence, with the aim of ensuring that appellants are better supported in understanding and navigating the appeals process, especially as the Chamber continues to expand its use of digital hearings and case materials.

Finally, given the Chamber's user base, many of whom are not digitally literate and may only have access to a mobile phone, the Tribunal is cautious about moving completely away from paper. There will remain a significant group for whom paper-based communication and documentation will continue to be essential, and the Chamber and

Respondent are committed to ensuring that this remains an option. There is concern that unless appellants are helped to understand early on that they can request a hard copy of the hearing bundle, issues in accessing the papers may only arise at or shortly before the hearing, thus increasing the need for last-minute adjournments.

2024 HMCTS User Survey

The 2024 survey explored user perceptions of the appeals process from application to decision, and, though not representative of the full user population, it offers valuable insight into user experience and expectations.

Approximately one-third of appellants lacked formal representation, and many had no informal support. These unrepresented users reported lower satisfaction and greater difficulty navigating the process. There is a recognised need to improve access to support services and simplify procedures to reduce reliance on representation.

The appeal process itself presented barriers: 78% of users did not receive help completing the appeal form, and many cited difficulties with jargon, evidentiary requirements, and unclear instructions. Many of these users will have been referring to the old process, where the appeal was lodged with DBS Veterans UK and the form and supporting information were the responsibility of the MoD. Satisfaction was higher among those who had used the more recent direct lodgement process to lodge their appeal directly with the Tribunal, which is an encouraging statistic and suggests the process may be more accessible, although numbers were small.

Satisfaction with video hearings was generally high, driven by perceived clarity and convenience. Overall satisfaction levels were high, with only 13% of users reporting dissatisfaction with the hearing, regardless of the outcome. A small minority reported a lack of support at the hearing. However, concerns were raised about the lack of information regarding next steps and delays in the entire process, including the listing of cases.

Overall, about a quarter of users expressed some dissatisfaction with the appeal process, mainly regarding the time it took from appeal to decision. Since many of these appeals were lodged under the old process, the delays may have occurred before the case reached the Tribunal. While the direct lodgement process has provided some greater control over timescales for DBS Veterans UK to respond to appeals, there are no statutory deadlines for mandatory reconsiderations, which can cause significant delays at the start of the appeal.

Awareness and uptake of reasonable adjustments were limited, but most users reported being satisfied with the process. There were very few formal complaints, although most of those who complained were dissatisfied – which is common in user research, as it can be hard to separate the process from the initial issue.

Reflections and Further Work

The War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber continue to play a highly specialised and vital role within the justice system. Despite longstanding structural constraints, such as reliance on paper-based processes, decentralised staffing, and a reduction in scope from central reform programmes, the Chamber has shown resourcefulness and determination in maintaining service delivery and pursuing gradual improvements.

A clear message from the 2024 survey is the urgent need to strengthen clarity in communication, procedural transparency, and the support framework for unrepresented appellants. Users reported confusion around the distinct roles of Veterans UK and the Tribunal, inconsistent access to guidance, and limited information about the status of their case. A more intuitive, timely, and responsive communication strategy, underpinned by plain English principles and better use of digital tools, will be central to enhancing trust and user confidence. The use of GOV.UK as a portal for engaging with both the respondent and the Tribunal may be a factor in generating confusion concerning the respective executive and judicial functions.

Moving forward, key areas of focus should include finalising the digital case file system with robust quality controls, improving the formatting and consistency of case bundles, and completing the review of all public-facing guidance and standard correspondence within the Tribunal and DBS Veterans UK. Digital bundles, in particular, offer clear cost and efficiency savings, along with reduced risks (some bundles get lost in the post, and in some cases, this presents not only privacy but also serious security concerns). Support for unrepresented users must be prioritised through simplified procedures and accessible explanatory materials at each stage of the process. Ultimately, the Chamber needs a modern, integrated digital case management system that interfaces with both DBS Veterans UK and users to provide a more efficient, streamlined process.

While operating within a no-new-budget environment, the Chamber has demonstrated that meaningful change is possible through collaboration, adaptation of existing tools, and focused effort. The sharing of experience between the special tribunals using GLiMR is likely to be beneficial, as are the lessons learned from Tribunals where the HMCTS Reform programme has been implemented.

Despite challenges, the Chamber has recently been considered a success story due to becoming fully digital, even though it wasn't formally part of the reform programme:

The War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber (WPAFCC) has successfully transitioned from a paper-based system to a fully digital operation, significantly improving efficiency and service delivery for veterans, the MoD, and the judiciary. This transformation addressed major challenges, including outdated systems, relocation, and the need for digitisation. Key milestones included scanning physical files (March 2023), launching the GLiMR case management platform with bespoke staff training (April 2024), and introducing digital bundles and workflows (April 2025). By June 2025, digital-only appeals were implemented, making the Chamber fully digital. Collaboration between HMCTS, the judiciary, and MoD was critical, supported by iterative development and strong judicial input. The change has streamlined case progression, enhanced accessibility, and positioned the Chamber at its most efficient operational state in five years, with ongoing work to improve bundle quality and guidance. Chamber President, Fiona Monk, reported that:

"This transformation of the Chamber's ways of working has only been possible because of consistent, collaborative working between the Chamber's judges and legal officers and HMCTS. It has also been dependent on the flexibility and commitment of all our judicial office holders and dedicated support from our HMCTS operational team, the change team, jurisdictional support team, development coaches and digital support colleagues. It showcases what can be achieved by joint working and persistence."

7.2 First-tier Mental Health Tribunal

The section draws on meetings with the Chamber President for the Health, Education and Social Care Chamber, two salaried judges and a representative. The Mental Health Tribunal is responsible for hearing applications and references under the Mental Health Act, including those seeking discharge from detention in hospital. It receives approximately 17,500 cases each year, the vast majority involving detained patients who are legally represented.

Approximately 10% of the caseload involves patients subject to additional restrictions under Part III of the *Mental Health Act 1983*, which require the involvement of a more senior judge – typically a circuit judge, recorder, or salaried district tribunal judge.

Tribunal panels are made up of three members: a judge, a medical member (usually a consultant psychiatrist), and a specialist lay member drawn from professions such as

nursing, social work, or policing. The jurisdiction places a premium on interdisciplinary decision-making and procedural fairness for some of the justice system's most vulnerable users.

Legal representation is a defining feature of the Mental Health Tribunal's operation. Nearly all appellants qualify for legal aid and are represented by solicitors accredited by the Law Society's Mental Health Accreditation Scheme. In cases where an individual lacks the capacity to instruct a representative, the tribunal has the statutory power to appoint one. This safeguard ensures that vulnerable individuals are not left without advocacy in a highly technical area of law.

Positive Developments

The jurisdiction benefits from a high degree of continuity in both its judicial and administrative teams. Tribunal members highlighted strong working relationships across the salaried and fee-paid cohort, and noted the stability this brings to scheduling, decision-making, and panel dynamics. These longstanding relationships, supported by experienced administrative staff, have contributed to consistently high throughput, low adjournment rates, and a low rate of successful appeals.

The Mental Health Tribunal adopted online hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to public health risks and the need to avoid a growing backlog. The Cloud Video Platform (CVP) was introduced as the standard format for remote participation, enabling the tribunal to maintain continuity of service across a jurisdiction with a high volume of cases. This transition was achieved at pace and has remained in place as a core feature of the tribunal's hearing model.

Since 2022, patients have been offered a choice between an in-person or online hearing at the point of application. This approach reflects the principles of autonomy and user engagement endorsed by the Independent Review of the Mental Health Act. Tribunal judges retain the discretion to override the mode of hearing where appropriate, and a small number of hearings continue to be directed on operational or clinical grounds.

Internal survey evidence gathered between October 2022 and May 2023 indicates that a majority of patients (approximately 69%) opt for online hearings. This preference holds across different categories of detention and is particularly strong among community-based patients. Some patients have cited anxiety about face-to-face hearings as a reason for preferring video participation. These findings suggest that online hearings are not inherently problematic for patient engagement, and that a digital option may enable broader participation in some cases. Outcome data also points to a stable pattern of decision-making. The Care Quality Commission's monitoring reports for 2020–2022 confirm that discharge rates have remained consistent following the move to online hearings. In each of these reporting periods, the tribunal discharged patients in approximately 10% of cases, with no statistically significant variation from pre-pandemic levels.

The Tribunal continues to monitor and adapt its hearing practices in light of operational experience and user feedback. A national survey of patient preference has informed recent adjustments to hearing arrangements, including the default use of video hearings for certain categories of cases in which patients express no preference or do not plan to attend. Legal representatives may apply for a change of hearing format where needed, and judges retain ultimate discretion over the mode of hearing in line with procedural fairness.

Ongoing challenges

While the option of online and in-person hearings allows for flexibility and user choice, both formats present distinctive challenges in the context of mental health detention. A small number of patients report anxiety about video hearings or confusion during remote proceedings. In some cases, patients are not co-located with their legal representative, limiting opportunities for informal consultation before or during the hearing. Although breakout rooms are available in the online platform, they are not always used consistently, and patients may feel isolated or unsupported in the hearing room – particularly where the only staff present are clinical witnesses.

In-person hearings also bring difficulties. Some patients report significant anxiety about returning to hospital settings for tribunal hearings, especially those living in the community. Scheduling full panels for in-person hearings, particularly for restricted cases or in remote geographical areas, remains complex. Situations occasionally arise in which hearings are directed to be held remotely or in person for operational reasons, such as illness, geography, or panel availability. These cases are a small minority but reflect the logistical pressures under which the jurisdiction operates.

Concerns about visual cues or perceived disengagement – such as a patient leaving a video hearing – have been raised by some stakeholders, though judicial leaders emphasise that panel members are trained not to rely on visual presentation as a primary source of evidence. Similarly, assumptions that patients would routinely find video hearings disorienting or distressing are not strongly supported by recent survey data, which indicates a greater number of patients reporting anxiety about face-to-face hearings than about video participation.

The quality and conduct of legal representation in the Mental Health Tribunal is widely regarded as a strength of the jurisdiction. However, some aspects of current practice continue to raise questions about the consistency of approach, particularly in relation to hearing format and client contact. While all legally aided representatives are accredited under the Law Society's Mental Health Accreditation Scheme, recent practitioner feedback highlights variability in how patients are advised and supported, particularly where appeals originate through administrative processes or where representation is allocated late. Concerns have been expressed about the proportion of representatives who no longer visit patients on the ward or attend face-to-face hearings unless required. Although these decisions may reflect practical constraints, such as firm-wide preferences, legal aid mileage limits or the amount of productive time lost through travel, they can affect the depth of

patient engagement, particularly where no pre-hearing meeting occurs and communication is limited to video or telephone.

Some representatives report that the hearing format is often determined before they are appointed, with patients marking "Don't Mind" on the appeal form in the absence of legal advice. While this option reflects the tribunal's simplified application process, it may not capture patient preference informed by advice about hearing types and their implications. Legal practitioners have described amending hearing mode preferences once instructed.

Finally, although survey evidence shows high levels of user preference for video hearings overall, some groups, such as those with complex trauma histories, may be less comfortable with remote formats. Representatives with substantial experience in these areas emphasise the importance of tailoring hearing mode decisions to individual needs, supported by consistent communication and early involvement in the appeal process.

While the Tribunal has long experience in adapting to the needs of vulnerable users, challenges persist in ensuring consistent and accessible participation for all appellants. Particular attention is required where patients are deaf, have cognitive impairments, or are neurodivergent. Judicial leaders noted that many panel members have direct professional experience in relevant disciplines, and that the tribunal routinely receives and implements requests for reasonable adjustments. These include sign language interpretation, additional breaks, use of simplified language, and support for patients with autism or learning disabilities. However, not all adjustments are made in a fully standardised way, and some parties report variability in how requests are logged and followed through. Adjustments may be omitted when forms are incomplete or have been passed through multiple administrative layers. Judges have discretion to adapt proceedings when needs arise during a hearing, and panel members often exercise it flexibly. Nonetheless, consistent capture and implementation of accessibility needs at the pre-hearing stage remains an area of operational focus.

The tribunal's administrative systems continue to rely on 'MARTHA', a legacy case management platform now more than two decades old. While staff and judges have adapted their working practices around the system's limitation – often relying on secure email, manual record-keeping, and routine cross-checks – MARTHA lacks the capacity for digital document storage or real-time updating. As a result, case files are fragmented across multiple channels, limiting visibility and increasing the administrative burden on staff. These constraints are not unique to the Tribunal, but they pose particular challenges in a jurisdiction where the fairness and effectiveness of hearings often depend on tailoring the process to individual vulnerabilities.

These issues have not prevented the Tribunal from maintaining consistent throughput or timely listing. However, the absence of an integrated system presents a material risk to scalability, particularly in light of anticipated legislative reform. The current infrastructure also makes it more difficult to share information about reasonable adjustments and

hearing preferences across judicial and administrative teams. While the Tribunal has managed these constraints to date, sustained investment in digital infrastructure is likely to be necessary to preserve service resilience over time.

Reflections and Further Work

The Mental Health Tribunal has demonstrated considerable resilience and adaptability in managing a high and complex caseload. Strong working relationships, interdisciplinary expertise, and a well-established legal aid framework have supported consistent decision-making across both in-person and online hearings. Uptake of video hearings reflects genuine user preference in most cases, and available evidence suggests that online participation has not diminished fairness or access to justice.

At the same time, the tribunal operates under conditions of structural constraint, particularly in relation to digital infrastructure and the visibility of case information. The current case management platform has served the jurisdiction for over two decades, but it is not designed for integration, document handling, or the real-time exchange of information about hearing needs. Workarounds have enabled continuity, but there is limited scope for scale or automation under current arrangements.

This matters because further demands are anticipated. Legislative reform of the Mental Health Act is expected to increase the tribunal's caseload by around one third. More patients will become eligible to challenge their detention or conditions, and hearings may become more complex and scrutinised. While the timetable for reform remains uncertain, the direction of travel is clear, and planning is already underway across the justice and health systems.

The Tribunal's capacity to maintain high throughput and low adjournment rates rests on the resilience of its administrative and judicial systems. Behind the scenes, efficient listing and scheduling depend on the careful coordination of legal, medical, and specialist panel members – a task made more complex where restricted patients or secure settings are involved. In some regions, the availability of accredited members can be limited, placing additional demands on scheduling staff. While long-standing teams manage these challenges with professionalism and flexibility, the system relies heavily on individual experience and institutional memory. This has enabled continuity but may be more difficult to sustain as case volumes rise or staff turnover increases.

In this context, investment in digital infrastructure and pre-hearing coordination would not only improve current operations but help future-proof the jurisdiction. A modern, integrated case management system could support more consistent implementation of adjustments, reduce administrative burden, and give panel members clearer access to the information they need to conduct fair and efficient hearings. Where resources remain constrained, interim gains may be achievable through clearer templates, structured referrals, or greater use of existing secure platforms.

Clear and accessible information remains a key gap in the user journey for patients appearing before the Mental Health Tribunal. Concerns raised by the charity MIND – and echoed by tribunal users and practitioners – highlight that many appellants do not fully understand the purpose of the tribunal, who will be present, or what will happen during the hearing. While notices of hearing are routinely sent, they tend to focus on procedural details and may not provide patients with broader contextual information in a format they can easily engage with.

In response, the judiciary has developed plain-English resources to support user understanding, including a written guide for patients and an explanatory video. However, constraints on the GOV.UK platform – particularly around formatting and authorship – have limited the options for hosting these materials in a central and accessible way. As a workaround, the JUDICIARY.UK website has begun to serve as a platform for these resources, offering greater flexibility in tone and presentation. This is a welcome development, though awareness of the site remains relatively low among users.

As online hearings become more embedded in the Tribunal's operating model, further research will be important to deepen understanding of user experience across different modes of participation. While existing survey data provides helpful indicators, more detailed and independently conducted studies could help identify how different user groups engage with video and face-to-face formats, and whether particular barriers or enablers are emerging over time. Academic research of this kind could draw on interviews, observation, or co-designed methods with users, and would offer a useful evidence base for both operational planning and future reform. Work of this kind is already under consideration in some areas, and would complement the tribunal's existing commitments to fairness, accessibility and continuous improvement.

7.3 First-tier Tribunal: Special Educational Needs and Disability; Disability Discrimination in schools; Care Standards, and Primary Health Lists

This section draws on two meetings held in October and November 2024 with the then Deputy Chamber President. The First-tier Tribunal's Health, Education and Social Care Chamber includes four distinct jurisdictions: Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND); Disability Discrimination in schools (DD); Care Standards (CS), and Primary Health Lists (PHL). Each stream serves a different user group and legal framework, ranging from appeals about children's special educational needs and disability discrimination in schools, to regulatory cases concerning care standards and the professional listing of healthcare practitioners.

Together, these jurisdictions reflect the operational complexity of a tribunal system that is required to apply consistent standards of procedural justice across distinct legal domains while operating outside HMCTS's core reform programme. SEND/DD and CS/PHL use

separate digital systems, statutory frameworks, and listing arrangements, contributing to ongoing administrative fragmentation and placing pressure on staff and judges alike.

The judiciary across these jurisdictions is nationally dispersed, with panel members and judges in SEND routinely sitting remotely from their respective locations. Since 2020, the SEND/DD jurisdiction has adopted a fully remote model for hearings, and panel members may be based in entirely different regions – such as Caernarfon, Carlisle, and Cornwall – brought together by video hearing technology. Hearings are typically conducted by a panel of three, and listing is coordinated on a national basis, allowing for efficient scheduling and the ability to manage fluctuating settlement rates effectively.

The core administrative team for SEND/DD/CS/PHL is located in Darlington, where they have developed longstanding expertise in managing appeals and user engagement. A telephone support team is in the process of being relocated, but other administrative functions are already geographically distributed, enabled by the Chamber's use of remote digital tools and shared drives. Staff responsibilities include registering and processing appeals, managing listings, and providing direct support to parties on procedural issues. These teams operate under considerable pressure, often using improvised systems developed internally.

The user communities across these jurisdictions are equally diverse. In SEND, appellants include both parents and young people aged 16 to 25, with the number of young people's appeals exceeding earlier projections. Many appellants are unrepresented or rely on informal assistance, especially in SEND/DD, where cases often involve complex health and educational needs. In CS, users tend to be individuals appealing prohibitions or restrictions on working with children or vulnerable adults within the care sector. Meanwhile, PHL cases concern doctors, dentists, optometrists, and other healthcare professionals contesting decisions related to their inclusion on NHS practitioner lists.

Each jurisdiction also faces distinct digital infrastructure challenges. The SEND/DD jurisdiction still relies on GAPS (General Appeals Processing System), a 1990s-era software that is useful for basic case tracking and management statistics, but lacks modern case management functionality. It is supplemented by Microsoft-based shared drives that store electronic files, developed in collaboration with the judiciary. Across the Chamber, the absence of modern, interoperable case management systems continues to impose manual workarounds and limits the availability of real-time performance data.

Positive Aspects
In the SEND/DD stream, judges have developed sustained familiarity with digital hearings, and the digital systems (despite being legacy arrangements) are well understood by the Tribunal's staff. In CS/PHL, professional representatives tend to be experienced users of the process. Also in CS/PHL, the situation has only recently improved with the retirement of Lotus Notes, a legacy system that had long hampered administrative efficiency. The two tribunals are now using a new CaPe system, which was introduced in early 2024. Judge

Tudur reported that the transfer was seamless – it is anecdotally said to be preferred by the staff to the previous system. While it doesn't provide any management information, it stores information about cases, hearings and live cases.

Tribunal staff in the SEND/DD stream have become highly familiar with digital processes over time, despite the constraints of older platforms. While the systems are not integrated with HMCTS-wide tools, they are well understood operationally. In Care Standards and PHL, representatives often engage with the tribunal from a position of relative procedural fluency, which can ease the demands on judicial oversight where parties are represented.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SEND successfully transitioned to remote hearings using the Cloud Video Platform (CVP), enabling the Tribunal to continue listing and determining appeals despite significant operational pressures. The shift to digital hearings was managed quickly and effectively, helping the Tribunal to maintain progress against its 22-week Key Performance Indicator for case disposal, even during the height of disruption. The Tribunal's success with remote hearings also supported the wider rollout of CVP across courts and tribunals. In the current operating model, almost all SEND/DD hearings continue to be conducted remotely, with parties – including young appellants aged 16 to 25 – participating by video link. Requests for face-to-face hearings are now extremely rare, estimated at around 1%.

Ongoing Challenges

Users still experience difficulty navigating GOV.UK, and judicially approved content has, on occasion, been altered without oversight. There is a persistent procedural complexity affecting unrepresented users, especially in the SEND stream. Distinct legacy systems persist between jurisdictions, with no unified case management system, which affects consistency and efficiency. Cross-stream work is further complicated by the fragmented nature of digital provision and limitations in internal data visibility.

Each of the streams relies on distinct legacy case management systems, many of which originated prior to HMCTS central reforms and were developed in isolation. SEND's system is relatively mature but siloed; CS and PHL inherited separate administrative pathways when incorporated into the Chamber. There is no unified digital platform, resulting in inefficiencies, duplicated effort, and inconsistency in data availability.

Video hearings have evolved unevenly across the streams. SEND had earlier exposure due to its involvement in testing video conference rooms, but a preference for face-to-face hearings has constrained uptake in CS/PHL, where hearings are now generally listed to hybrid, with the panel and representatives in the hearing room and some witnesses attending remotely by video. Suitability varies across user groups, and it was noted that there are some appellants in SEND with issues regarding accessibility and digital literacy among unrepresented families. This has been resolved to a large extent by offering pre-hearing sessions with a clerk to check connectivity, and the Tribunal does ensure pre-hearing clerking support and makes adjustments to increase their accessibility.

The continued use of document stores (SharePoint, G Drive, G Drive Plus) presents ongoing operational difficulties for consistency and resilience.

Reflections and Further Work

The judge expressed concern about GOV.UK's appropriateness as a platform for judicial guidance, citing both the structural independence concerns and practical frustrations in updating or expanding content which had led to inaccuracies (once edited by the Government Digital Service [GDS] or HMCTS). She highlighted the user-friendly, media-rich approach of the Welsh tribunal system as a comparative example: the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales, which operates a separate website. That platform is more directly tailored to its user group, includes clearer and more accessible language, and has the capability to host multimedia material such as videos and downloadable guidance. It may offer a useful reference point for future development of judicial communication practices, navigating complex tribunal processes – an approach that is currently not possible within the constraints of GOV.UK. At a constitutional level, the appearance of judicial independence is weakened when tribunal guidance appears on a website operated and branded by the executive. This blurs the line between independent adjudication and administrative messaging.

The most pressing requirement across all three streams is the development of integrated, fit-for-purpose digital systems – not necessarily uniform, but interoperable, and capable of tracking, listing, communicating, and archiving without manual workarounds. The continued use of document stores (SharePoint, G Drive, G Drive Plus) presents ongoing operational difficulties for consistency and resilience.

In the SEND jurisdiction, a more structured approach to case progression, emergency flagging, and bundle management is needed. In CS and PHL, investment in searchable precedents, case summaries, and regulatory guidance could improve legal clarity and speed up case preparation. For all three streams, real-time access to operational performance data would support resource allocation and inform policy development.

There is also further scope for academic research, particularly in the SEND and CS jurisdictions, to explore how appellants experience the tribunal process, including representation, participation, and post-hearing outcomes (following research undertaken by Professor Creutzfeldt et al. in 2022). As with other jurisdictions, many of the most vulnerable users navigate the system with limited support, and reform may be usefully considered when circumstances allow, grounded in a clearer understanding of their needs.

7.4 First-tier Tribunal Property Chamber

The First-tier Tribunal Property Chamber hears a wide range of civil disputes concerning land, housing, and property in England. Its jurisdiction includes matters such as leasehold enfranchisement, leasehold management, rent increases and repayment orders, local authority enforcement in respect of housing conditions, building safety, orders against

rogue landlords, land registration references, agricultural tenancies, and disputes involving park home sites. Residential Property has the highest volume of the Chamber's jurisdictions and has been the focus of recent digitisation efforts. While many applications are legally straightforward, the Chamber handles some of the most procedurally diverse work in the tribunal system. Applications may be brought by individuals, landlords, managing agents, or public bodies, and involve both represented parties and a high number of litigants in person.

This account draws on discussions with the Chamber President, a tribunal judge, as well as operational input from a legal officer lead.

Positive Developments

To support internal modernisation, the Residential Property jurisdiction transitioned in 2024 to a new case management system known as ResCase, replacing a legacy platform that had been in place for over two decades. The legacy system, though well regarded by judges, was no longer supported within HMCTS infrastructure. ResCase was intended to consolidate fragmented systems across five regional offices and reduce reliance on paper and email-based workflows.

The system is now used by administrative teams and salaried judges to manage digital files, bundles, and case progression steps. It is being rolled out to fee-paid judges and members; however, it remains internally focused. There is no user-facing digital service for case submission or payment. At present, applications must be submitted by email or post, and payments can only be made by a cheque enclosed with the application or by providing card details over the phone. These limitations regularly cause delay, as cases cannot be registered or progressed until the fee has been successfully received and reconciled. In high-volume centres such as Manchester, administrative staff may spend substantial portions of the day contacting parties by phone to obtain outstanding fee payments, which contributes to delays in case registration. Despite these limitations, the system's internal interface is reported to be clearer and more stable than its predecessor. Legal officers and operational leads describe it as an improvement in terms of file organisation and tracking, but its benefits are constrained by the labour-intensive intake process and limited automation.

Digital bundles are now in widespread use. Around 90% of bundles are submitted electronically, and administrative teams provide support for their compilation and upload. However, document sets can be extremely long – 5,000 pages or more is not uncommon. Bundles are typically compiled using PDF Exchanger.

Hearing formats vary significantly by region. In some areas, up to 75% of hearings are held in person, while in others – such as Manchester, which has a wide catchment area – remote hearings are the default. Remote hearings are generally conducted using the Cloud Video Platform (CVP).

Ongoing Challenges

The Chamber's workload is growing in both volume and complexity. Rent cases, leasehold cases – including right-to-manage disputes – financial penalty appeals, and cases under the Building Safety Act are increasingly common. Many of these matters involve multiple parties and overlapping statutory obligations. Although procedures are broadly consistent across the Chamber, time limits and evidentiary standards vary between legislative regimes, increasing the burden on administrative and judicial teams alike. ResCase has not eliminated this complexity. The absence of a user-facing digital service means that administrative officers are still required to receive applications manually, chase payments, manage document uploads, and relay instructions from legal officers to parties. Legal officers have taken on additional responsibilities to compensate for procedural bottlenecks. The engagement of salaried judges with the system has been uneven, and levels of confidence vary.

Litigants in person, who comprise roughly 75% of parties, are typically leaseholders or tenants. While digital literacy levels are generally higher than in some other jurisdictions, these users are still often reliant on administrative communication through email or by telephone. There is no centralised channel for user queries or document submissions, and all correspondence is routed through local admin teams.

Other than London, the tribunal is peripatetic, and hearings take place in a variety of locations, including magistrates' courts and council offices. Listing practices and communication protocols currently differ widely across regions, although the Chamber is working toward a more centralised listing model.

Looking ahead, the Chamber expects significant further pressure on its workload from recent and upcoming legislative reforms. The *Building Safety Act 2022* has already introduced new, complex caseloads involving landlord accountability and leaseholder protections. The *Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024*, which is due to commence in 2026, will expand rights to enfranchisement and lease extension, simplify processes, and strengthen challenges to service charges and management practices. The *Renters Rights Act 2025* will also have a significant impact, especially for cases concerning rent disputes. These developments will place additional demand on judicial and administrative resources. It is expected that the caseload for Residential Property will triple within the next three years.

Reflections and Further Work

ResCase has stabilised internal case tracking and improved data organisation, but without a user-facing digital service, the system continues to impose significant demands on administrative staff and delays engagement with parties.

There is strong support from judicial leadership for technology that is designed in close consultation with users and tailored to the distinct demands of tribunal jurisdictions. Looking ahead, future priorities include:

- a user-facing digital service for application submission and payment

- more integrated and automated workflows, especially for fee reconciliation and listing

- an administrative model that supports flexible hearing formats and consistent communication with parties.

Strengthening confidence among the judiciary in the use of digital technology presents a clear opportunity to improve consistency in case management, reduce reliance on administrative intermediaries, and support more efficient engagement with evolving systems. This could be achieved through targeted support, peer learning, and systems designed with judicial workflows in mind.

The Chamber's work spans a complex jurisdictional landscape, and any future system must be sufficiently adaptable to manage that diversity. As the Chamber prepares for increased volume following major legislative changes, the need for a fully integrated digital infrastructure will become more acute. Without it, case progression will continue to depend on manual processes that delay justice and limit the Tribunal's capacity to respond effectively to user needs. Work is ongoing to provide a business case to support financial investment to accommodate digitisation for all of the Chamber's jurisdictions.

The Chamber also falls within the remit of the Online Procedure Rule Committee (OPRC), which is developing rules to support court and tribunal proceedings in a digital environment. A dedicated sub-committee is exploring how future digital systems might accommodate the Chamber's work. This alignment with wider procedural reform offers an opportunity to shape emerging platforms in ways that reflect the specific needs and operational realities of the jurisdiction.

The Chamber may also be especially well placed to benefit from an artificial intelligence (AI) pilot exercise, with anticipated increases in workload creating a strong case for streamlining administrative and judicial processes in ways that improve the experience for users. Administrative tools could expedite case progression through, for example, automated checks that procedural requirements have been met at the start of proceedings. Tools may also support judicial decision-making in a non-determinative way in complex cases with large document sets. Tools could be used for identifying recurring issues, extracting relevant sections, or grouping related content – thereby enabling more efficient case handling without compromising judicial discretion. Tools could also enable more focused and effective use of conciliation or mediation where appropriate by analysing the content of submissions to identify points of agreement or points requiring clarification. Of course, any use of AI in judicial settings must be approached with caution, ensuring that tools are transparent, do not undermine procedural fairness, and are deployed only in ways that respect the independence and authority of the judiciary.

7.5 First-tier Tribunal General Regulatory Chamber

This section draws on discussion with the Chamber President and a salaried judge in November 2024. The General Regulatory Chamber (GRC) is one of the most structurally diverse tribunals within the First-tier Tribunal. It comprises a wide range of distinct jurisdictions, including, but not limited to: Information Rights; Charity; Transport; Environmental Appeals; Estate Agents; Pensions; Professional Regulation, and others. The Chamber also hears appeals in matters containing National Security marked documentation, which are procedurally and administratively different from all other areas of the Chamber's work. Each of these areas operates under different enabling legislation, applies varying procedures, and serves different user communities. Some jurisdictions primarily hear appeals from regulators or public bodies, while others involve disputes between private individuals and government departments or agencies.

Because of this diversity, the GRC functions as a cluster of mini jurisdictions sharing a common administrative home, rather than as a single homogeneous body.

Positive Aspects
There is strong judicial continuity and subject-matter expertise across most areas of the Chamber. Panel members and judges are generally well-versed in the applicable law of their specialist jurisdictions, and there is a growing emphasis on consistent decision-making. Many cases are suitable for paper determination, which can streamline resolution. The Chamber has developed effective triage systems to direct cases to judges with the right subject-matter experience. Administrative and listing teams are responsive and supportive, and the structure allows judges to be allocated across multiple jurisdictions as demand dictates.

Remote hearings have become common and are used effectively where appropriate. Many users are represented, particularly in the Information Rights and Charity jurisdictions, and digital bundles are widely used. Parties tend to be legally or professionally literate, and hearings are often conducted in a formal legal style, with written submissions and established evidentiary frameworks.

The Chamber also benefits from the relative maturity of procedural guidance and templates in some of its larger jurisdictions. These materials contribute to consistency and provide a reliable framework for both parties and judges.

Ongoing Challenges
The diversity of the Chamber's work makes standardisation difficult. Rules, expectations, and formats differ widely across jurisdictions. This limits the effectiveness of shared administrative processes, and there is no single case type that can be treated as a norm or baseline.

The GRC operates without a dedicated, fit-for-purpose case management system. Instead, it uses GLiMR and Microsoft SharePoint. While some processes have been digitised at the administrative level, the judiciary lacks access to real-time case status and digital workflow tools. Many listings are handled manually.

Interlocutory complexity is another major pressure point. Judges report high volumes of preliminary applications, case management issues, and procedural disputes, especially in Information Rights appeals, where parties may raise multiple points of law and fact before the substantive hearing. This increases the burden on judges, registrars, legal officers, and administrative staff, and often delays final resolution.

The Chamber sees a mix of represented and unrepresented users. Users may be unfamiliar with tribunal procedure, legal terminology, or digital tools. This variation presents challenges in terms of communication, fairness, and procedural efficiency.

Data collection and performance monitoring remain inconsistent. Basic metrics on case progression, hearing formats, and adjournments are difficult to access across the Chamber as a whole, and this limits the ability to evaluate systemic pressures or drive reform. The chamber's cross-cutting nature means that reforms affecting one jurisdiction may not translate well to another.

Reflections and Further Work

Future development could include a flexible case management system capable of adapting to varied rules and decision types. This would allow for standardisation where appropriate, while still respecting jurisdictional autonomy. More consistent use of digital tools, particularly for the lodging of appeals, listing, bundle preparation, and document service, would support both users and judges.

There is also a strong case for improving user-facing information, tailored to the specific needs of each jurisdiction. For some parties, guidance is already clear and accessible. For others, particularly those without legal representation, there is a risk of procedural disadvantage if key information is unclear or inaccessible.

The Chamber's experience demonstrates that even where subject-matter expertise is strong and listing functions are stable, the absence of a coherent digital foundation will continue to limit efficiency and resilience. Any future reform must reflect the operational reality that the GRC is not one tribunal, but many, each requiring targeted support within a cohesive framework.

7.6 First-tier Tribunal Asylum Support

The Asylum Support Tribunal (AST) hears appeals against decisions made by the Home Office regarding accommodation and financial support for asylum seekers. This section draws on discussions with judicial leads for the Tribunal, as well as responses from

representatives to the AJC Call for Evidence. It outlines the operational and procedural aspects in the context of the Tribunal's unique position within the HMCTS system.

The AST is a specialist tribunal within the Social Entitlement Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal. It deals exclusively with appeals against decisions to refuse or discontinue financial support and accommodation to asylum seekers. This support is provided under Sections 95 and 4 of the Immigration and *Asylum Act 1999*. The AST does not handle appeals related to the asylum claim itself, which are heard by the Immigration and Asylum Chamber. The tribunal is located in East London.

Several factors make the challenges facing the AST unique. Almost all appellants are destitute. Among other things, this means that although many have access to phones, they often lack mobile data. Appellants also often lack access to a quiet or private space to attend a virtual hearing. Most do not speak English, and although an interpreter is provided for the hearing, this does not assist with prior stages such as filling out the notice of appeal or responding to directions. Appeals take place over a very short time frame. Because legal aid is not applicable in England and Wales, there is patchy help available with making applications, and around 50% of appellants are unrepresented.

Positive Developments

The Tribunal has effectively utilised remote hearing technologies, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Although face-to-face remains the default mode of hearing, video hearings have become more prevalent, as for some appellants they allow greater flexibility and accessibility. This shift has reduced the need for physical attendance, which can be challenging for asylum seekers facing financial and logistical constraints.

There is a dedicated team of judges and staff who are experienced in handling the sensitive nature of asylum support appeals. The Tribunal has developed a culture of attentiveness to the vulnerabilities of appellants. Many appellants submit their appeal without professional assistance, are unrepresented in their hearing, and are unfamiliar with legal processes. Efforts are made to ensure that hearings are conducted in a manner that is both fair and comprehensible to all parties involved.

Ongoing Challenges

The AST operates with limited digital infrastructure, lacking an integrated case management system. Most communications and document submissions are handled via email or post, leading to inefficiencies and potential delays in processing appeals. There is no digital portal for appellants to track the progress of their cases or submit documents securely online. They also do not use bundles, which was cited as being problematic as documents for the hearing are sent as individual email attachments. Time is often wasted at the start of a hearing checking whether everyone has the same documents, which is not always straightforward in the absence of an identifiable 'bundle'.

Appellants often find it difficult to understand the appeals process when they are unrepresented. The legal framework surrounding asylum support is complex and can be overwhelming. There is a lack of guidance for appellants about how the appeals process

works. While organisations like the Asylum Support Appeals Project offer accessible information tailored for asylum seekers, these resources are not well signposted to appellants – either from the appeal form or on GOV.UK – are only available in English and contain significant gaps. For example, there is no information about the technological requirements for attending a hearing remotely, nor about the need to have access to a quiet and private space from which to join the hearing.

The AST has also encountered jurisdictional challenges, especially in cases where the Home Office has deemed an asylum claim to be 'implicitly withdrawn' due to non-attendance at interviews or other procedural issues. Such determinations can lead to the cessation of support, and the Tribunal has had to navigate the legal complexities of intervening in these situations to prevent unjust outcomes.

Reflections and Further Work

The AST plays a critical role in safeguarding the rights and welfare of asylum seekers in the UK. To enhance its effectiveness, there is a pressing need for investment in digital infrastructure, including the development of a comprehensive case management system and an online portal for appellants. Such advancements would streamline processes, improve communication, and reduce administrative burdens.
There is also a need for clearer signposting, guidance and resources for appellants, particularly those without legal representation. Developing user-friendly materials and support services could empower asylum seekers to navigate the appeals process more effectively.

Furthermore, the Tribunal's independence and specialised focus underscore the importance of maintaining its distinct identity within the broader judicial system. Ensuring that the AST has the necessary resources and autonomy to fulfil its mandate is essential for upholding justice and fairness in asylum support matters.

7.7 First-tier Tribunal Tax Chamber

The First-tier Tribunal (Tax Chamber) hears a wide range of appeals arising from decisions made by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), encompassing both straightforward tax disputes and complex, high-value cases. The Chamber's caseload includes a substantial proportion of litigants in person, estimated at 75–80%, alongside represented parties, including well-resourced taxpayers and government departments. HMRC is the principal respondent in most cases and is typically represented by in-house litigators, although Counsel is also utilised, typically for larger cases. The user community is therefore both procedurally diverse and technically varied, with some individuals requiring tailored procedural support and others bringing highly structured legal arguments.

This section is based on a meeting held on 20 February 2025 with the then Chamber President, as well as the Judicial IT Lead and Deputy Service Manager, HMCTS.

The Tribunal's judicial complement comprises ten salaried judges (increasing to 14 from the 2026/27 financial year, as four new salaried judges will join the chamber in February and March), including the Chamber President, and fifty-three fee-paid judges located throughout the country. Salaried judges are based in London, Birmingham and Manchester. Video hearings are the default mode for the less complex cases. Face-to-face hearings are typically reserved for complex or heavily contested cases, especially where multiple representatives are involved. Anecdotally, Counsel prefers face-to-face hearings. Around 25% of hearings are in-person, 60% by video, and the remainder either hybrid, paper or ex parte applications (these, too, are heard remotely).

Administrative support is provided through the centralised HMCTS team in Birmingham, which also manages post-hearing processing and physical case files. The system remains heavily dependent on paper-based processes, with correspondence printed and filed manually. In January 2025, the Chamber introduced a Microsoft SharePoint-based digital filing system. However, the system is not yet fully integrated into judicial workflows. The primary case management tool in use is GLiMR (the Generalised Listing, Management and Registration system), which functions as a diary and registration platform. It does not support digital case files or full lifecycle management. Currently, access to GLiMR is limited to a single salaried judge with a DOM1-accessible laptop, with ongoing concerns about wider judicial access and system interoperability. Judges and caseworkers mainly rely on manual email referrals for paper cases (i.e., all cases received before 1 January 2025), which require scanning, printing, and physically attaching documents to paper files, often causing delays and making it difficult to maintain continuity or visibility throughout a case's lifecycle. All referrals for matters filed electronically also involve extracting documents to be sent to the judge for case management, as attachments are not stored separately within the electronic filing system.

The Chamber was an early adopter of the Video Hearing Service (VHS), which showed early promise, but encountered significant technical issues during later stages of rollout and has, since the time of the interview, ceased to be used by the MoJ. At the time of the interview, the Tribunal was using Microsoft Teams as an interim platform, though it was acknowledged as a temporary measure pending resolution of the issues preventing VHS use. Until recently, the Chamber continued to use Teams whilst a suitable alternative to VHS is established. Resistance to the continued use of Teams and the inability to record hearings on that platform are forcing a shift away from its use. Cloud Video Platform (CVP) is the only alternative platform available. It is not without its constraints, as the Tribunal does not have access to clerking resource, as other tribunals do. A workaround is being developed through the training of judges to set and monitor admission and recording. This has also not been without difficulty, as HMRC has settings issues, meaning participants cannot hear proceedings without making a settings adjustment. This usually 'wastes' 10–20

minutes at the start of all hearings despite efforts to assist HMRC to ready their representatives.

Positive aspects

Despite operating in a largely paper-based environment, the Tax Chamber has introduced several process improvements that have enhanced its ability to manage a varied and technically complex caseload. Video hearings are now the standard format for many appeals, enabling national listing and improved access for parties and judges. While face-to-face hearings remain appropriate for some cases, the transition to remote hearings has reduced the need for judicial travel and improved scheduling flexibility, particularly for case management and short procedural matters.

The jurisdiction benefits from considerable subject-matter expertise, with salaried judges experienced in both substantive tax law and tribunal procedure. The use of single-judge case management enables early judicial engagement in more complex appeals and helps ensure consistency in interlocutory directions and procedural control.

Administrative arrangements, though under strain, have shown resilience. The central team in Birmingham has maintained continuity of service, despite the burdens of manual processing and legacy systems. Some limited digital innovation is now underway, including the Microsoft SharePoint pilot referenced above for file sharing, as well as a growing understanding among staff of how case materials can be managed more efficiently. These adaptations, though modest, reflect a practical and incremental approach to service improvement.

Ongoing Challenges

The Tribunal continues to face substantial operational constraints due to its reliance on paper-based processes, fragmented digital tools, and a lack of delegated case management support. While GLiMR supports registration and listing, it does not facilitate full digital case management, and judicial access is very limited. Despite the SharePoint pilot, judges continue to depend heavily on manual workflows, including scanned emails and printed I referrals, which reduce efficiency and hinder oversight.

A major constraint is the physical separation between the judiciary – many of whom are based in London – and the paper case files held in Birmingham. This structural divide causes delays in access to up-to-date materials. At the time of the consultation, the Birmingham administrative team was managing a backlog of over 400 files, many of which contained correspondence several-months old. This not only delays case progression, but also risks judicial decisions being made without access to recent submissions. Judges are often required to provide routine case management-tracking responses, issuing directions, and clarifying procedural steps due to resource constraints in the administrative team. Case management is now predominantly undertaken by duty judges. The use of a single duty judge's email address accessed by the relevant duty judge each day is alleviating this

partially, but it is a makeshift answer to the lack of digitisation. The strain is exacerbated in appeals involving litigants in person, where evidential gaps, late submissions, or non-responses often result in adjournments and procedural delays.

Bundle management remains problematic. Documents may arrive unpaginated or incomplete, despite directions. HMRC's internal systems, including Enterprise Vault, can delay or obscure relevant evidence. Judges often take steps to reorganise and review bundles themselves. Judicial users frequently rely on personal equipment, often without dual-screen capability or consistent technical support.

Reflections and Further Work

Although the Chamber has the advantages of a stable, salaried judiciary and experienced administrative staff, there are clearly a number of issues impacting efficiency and disposal times, which are no doubt frustrating. Recent pilot initiatives, including the SharePoint trial for file access, suggest that incremental improvement is possible even in the absence of large-scale system change. Structural changes that have resulted in the physical separation of the judiciary from the administrative team and case files were presumably made on the assumption that the Chamber would remain in the Reform Programme, and would have access to CCD. It is unfortunate that the VHS facility for hearings, which had been well received by the Chamber, has now ceased to be used by the MoJ due to operational difficulties.

8. Conclusion

The digitisation and reform of HMCTS tribunals formed part of the wider HMCTS Reform Programme, launched in 2016 as a £1.3 billion initiative – the most ambitious global effort to modernise courts and tribunals in England and Wales. The programme aimed to create a justice system that is just, accessible, and proportionate, leveraging technology and new working practices. It concluded in March 2025, transitioning tribunals to 'business-as-usual', with a commitment to continuous improvement.

Key Achievements and Challenges:

- **Digital Foundations:** Online case management and virtual hearings introduced efficiencies and flexibility, particularly in high-volume jurisdictions such as the First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support) – SSCS – and (Immigration and Asylum) – FTTIAC. However, these gains were uneven and did not fully address structural inequalities faced by unrepresented appellants or those without digital access.

- **Persistent Issues:** Reports from 2024 and 2025 highlighted procedural errors, unclear communication, and insufficient support for AiP. In FTTIAC, technical limitations – such as editing errors and bundle quality – often forced cases offline. Lack of published data on hearing modes and outcomes constrained the evaluation of real-world impact.

- **Operational Concerns:** Operational feedback stressed the need for better functionality, training, and communication between HMCTS service teams and tribunal staff. Legal officers noted shortcomings in supporting complex cases and unrepresented users.

- **Technology and Future Outlook:** Artificial intelligence (AI) solutions are under consideration to improve efficiency (e.g. automated bundle checks). However, digital reform alone cannot ensure procedural fairness. Future efforts should focus on guidance, signposting, and representation support.

- **'Special' Tribunals:** Lower-volume jurisdictions were largely excluded from reform, relying on older systems and video platforms. While remote hearings improved participation (e.g., in Special Educational Needs and Disability cases), technical issues with bespoke platforms led to reliance on off-the-shelf solutions, such as Microsoft Teams.

- **Video and Bundle Management:** Inconsistencies persist across jurisdictions in evidence bundle access and video hearing functionality, underscoring the need for standardisation and improved user experience.

The HMCTS Reform Programme delivered significant digital infrastructure and operational improvements but fell short of its transformative vision. Sustained investment, procedural clarity, and user-focused design, particularly for vulnerable and unrepresented appellants, are essential to realise a fair and fully functional digital tribunal environment.

9. Appendices and Glossary

SPT	Senior President of Tribunals
AJC	Administrative Justice Council
HMCTS	His Majesty's Court and Tribunals Service
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
HO	Home Office
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
LO	Legal officers – tribunal staff who handle casework
Reform Programme	The programme undertaken by HMCTS to digitise courts and tribunals
FTTIAC	First-tier Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber)
SSCS	First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support)
Specials	Low volume tribunal jurisdictions that have been taken out of the Reform Programme
AI	Artificial intelligence
OPRC	Online Procedure Rules Committee
Case Management System	Digital system that stores case details
Virtual Region	Initiative administered in Manchester, allowing certain straightforward cases of the FTTIAC to be transferred from their originating hearing centre to a remote setting
AiP	Appellants in Person
CVP	Cloud Video Platform
VHS	Video Hearing Service
Bundles	Papers for a hearing that have been collated together for the parties and judicial office holders
GLiMR	A case management system

GAPS	General Appeals Processing System
CCD	Core Case Data
ListAssist	New scheduling tool
MyHMCTS	An online portal used for submitting and managing cases.
Direction Notice	A set of instructions to the parties with the date, time and type of hearing the Tribunal has chosen for your appeal.
JCM	Judicial Case Manager
CTSC	Courts and Tribunals Service Centre
WPAFCC	War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber
MHT	Mental Health Tribunal
MARTHA	Legacy Case Management System
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
DD	Disability Discrimination in Schools
PHL	Primary Health Lists
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
ResCase	Case Management system
GRC	General Regulatory Chamber
AST	Asylum Support Tribunal
BaU	Business as usual
GDS	Government Digital Service

Report Process, Scope and Membership - Appendix A

The Working Group was convened by the Administrative Justice Council in December 2022 in response to a presentation at the AJC full council meeting in July 2022 by His Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on the progress of the reform programme. The overall aim of the group was to review the 'user experience' of tribunal users in the light of the HMCTS Tribunals modernisation programme. The outcome of the review was intended to contribute to the development, evaluation and enhancement of the user experience of the different tribunal users and assess the impact of the reforms on stakeholders as well as the parties. During the life of the Working Group, reform came to an end and attention turned to other areas including the use of AI to improve efficiency in tribunal procedure. AI was therefore added an additional area looking to the future. The group focussed on enhancing the experience of those users who engage with the online processes, addressing issues of accessibility, usability and trust in the process. This included appellants, respondents, representatives and judicial office holders. The group focussed on the end-to-end process from making a digital appeal to the tribunal through to the final outcome, with or without a remote hearing. The aim is to identify any touch points or areas for improvements to ensure a fair, accessible and effective process, and address perceptions of barriers to online engagement.

The Working Group had the following objectives:

- To review the impact of the modernisation programme on tribunal users applying including drawing on existing research and by engaging with users to get insight into their experience;

- To identify jurisdictions that require the most attention;

- To recommend best practice solutions from other jurisdictions and the private sector;

- To identify pressure points and drop-off points in the end-to-end process;

- To work with HMCTS to identify gaps in research which will assist in the evaluation process; and

- To ensure that the modernisation programme is improved by HMCTS to ensure it is accessible to all users.

The Working Group included a range of expertise in the area of digitisation and included stakeholders from the administrative justice system. Members included:

- Caroline Sheppard OBE, Chair

- Amanda Finlay CBE

- Ray Burningham, Consultant

- Nic Dillon, Director, Nous

- Paul Yates, Head of Pro Bono, Freshfields LLP

- Diane Sechi, Senior Solicitor, South-West London Law Centre and Simmons & Simmons

- Andrea McMahon, Gowlings WLG

- Callum Bruce, Principal Research Officer, HMCTS (observer)

- Heidi Bancroft, Secretary to the Administrative Justice Council

In February 2024, an interim report was published which focussed on the Social Security and Child Support Tribunal[20]. This report is the final report looking across all jurisdictions (except the Employment Tribunal which is party to party).

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[20] Digitisation and the tribunal user experience in the modernised tribunal service, February 2024, Administrative Justice Council: Digitisation and the tribunal user experience in the modernised tribunal service

Mapping AI Types to Tribunal Stages – Appendix B

Tribunal Stage	AI Type	Function / Use Case	Benefits	Controls / Oversight
1. Case Submission / Intake	Document Classification & Pattern Recognition	Automatically identify and categorise incoming documents (appeal forms, evidence, letters). Flag missing or misfiled documents.	Ensures procedural completeness, reduces admin backlog, accelerates case registration.	Human verification of flagged issues; AI only suggests checks, does not approve cases.
	Rules-Based Automation	Check deadlines, file formats, and compliance with submission requirements.	Reduces administrative errors; ensures compliance with tribunal rules.	Human oversight; maintain audit trail.
	OCR / AI-Enhanced OCR	Convert scanned or handwritten evidence into machine-readable text.	Enables digital processing, search, and indexing of all evidence.	Quality checks to ensure accurate conversion; human review for low-quality scans.
2. Case Management / Pre-Hearing	NLP / Large Language Models	Summarise individual documents or bundles; extract timelines, key facts, and parties involved; create structured case briefs.	Reduces preparation time for administrators and judges; improves organisation of evidence.	Outputs clearly labelled as AI-generated summaries; judges retain full discretion; human review mandatory.

	Document Classification & Pattern Recognition	Maintain organised digital bundles; identify redundant or irrelevant files; flag new evidence.	Improves consistency and retrieval efficiency; reduces risk of missing key evidence.	Regular validation against manual audits; human oversight.
	Rules-Based Automation	Trigger alerts for incomplete bundles or missing responses; manage case workflow.	Ensures timely progression and reduces administrative delays.	Human intervention required for exceptions or disputes.
3. Hearing Preparation	NLP / Large Language Models	Produce condensed briefs, highlight key evidence, identify precedents, generate timelines or summary tables.	Supports judges' efficiency; enables faster comprehension of complex cases.	AI outputs advisory only; judges verify and approve content; full audit trail retained.
	OCR / AI-Enhanced OCR	Enable text search across large evidence volumes, including legacy scanned files.	Quick retrieval of relevant information; reduces time spent manually reviewing documents.	Accuracy checks; human verification for critical evidence.
	Document Classification	Ensure all required hearing documents are present; track updates or supplementary evidence.	Prevents procedural delays; maintains bundle integrity.	Human confirmation before hearings.
4. Post-Hearing / Reporting	NLP / LLM Analytics	Assist in generating anonymised case reports, performance summaries, and trend analysis.	Provides insights for tribunal administration, quality assurance, and departmental feedback.	Human validation of any analytical conclusions; outputs for administrative purposes only, not judicial decisions.

Tribunal Organigram – Appendix C

Court of Appeal, Court of Session, Court of Appeal (NI)

Upper Tribunal and First-tier Tribunal presided over by Senior President: The Rt Hon. Lord Justice Dingemans

Upper Tribunal

Administrative Appeals Chamber

President Mrs Justice Heather Williams

(First instance jurisdiction: forfeiture cases and safeguarding of vulnerable persons. It has also been allocated some judicial review functions.)

Also hear appeals from: PAT (Scotland), PAT (NI) ('assessment' appeals only), MHRT (Wales), SENT (Wales)

Tax and Chancery Chamber

President: Mr Justice Thompsell

(First instance jurisdictions: Financial Services and Markets and Pensions Regulator.)

Hears appeals from: Taxation Chamber and from the Charity jurisdictions in the General Regulatory Chamber. It has also been allocated some judicial review functions.

Immigration and Asylum Chamber

President: Mr Justice Lavender

Lands Chamber

President:

Mr Justice

Edwin Johnson

Employment Appeal Tribunal

President:
Lord Fairley

First-tier Tribunal

War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Chamber

President:

Judge Monk

Jurisdiction:

England and Wales appeals only

Social Entitlement Chamber

President:
Judge McMahon

Jurisdictions:

Social Security and Child Support,*

Asylum Support,**

Criminal Injuries Compensation

* Except NHS charges in Scotland

**No onward right of appeal

Health, Education and Social Care Chamber

President:

Judge Sutherland Williams

Jurisdictions:

Mental Health, Special Educational Needs & Disability,

Care Standards,

Primary Health Lists

General Regulatory Chamber

President:
Judge O'Connor
Jurisdictions include:

Charity (onward appeals to Tax & Chancery),

Animal welfare

Estate Agents,

Transport (Driving Standards Agency Appeals),

Information Rights,

Pensions, Professional Regulation

Gambling,

Immigration Services,

Environment

Tax Chamber

President:

Judge Amanda Brown KC

Jurisdictions include:

Direct and indirect taxation,

MPs Expenses

Immigration and Asylum Chamber

President:
Vacant

Immigration and Asylum

Property Chamber

President:
Judge McGrath

Jurisdictions:

Residential property, Agricultural lands & drainage, Land Registration

Employment Tribunal (England and Wales)

President:
Judge Clarke

Employment Tribunal (Scotland)

President:
Judge Walker

Key: United Kingdom   Great Britain   England and Wales   England only   Scotland only

Updated on 17 October 2025

Digitisation in the Devolved Nations and International Jurisdictions – Appendix D

Chronology of the review

The previous report for the Interim Report, provided a review of the publicly available material reporting on various issues surrounding digitisation of Tribunal Services, focusing on its impacts on users of the Social Security Tribunal. Where the previous report centred around England and Wales, this report will look at how international jurisdictions, including the devolved administrations, propose to deal with the impacts which digitisation of Tribunal Services has on its users.

Annex A details the reports which have been reviewed, setting out their contents and any relevant findings or recommendations. Similarly to the previous report by Gowlings WLC, commissioned by the Administrative Justice Council, the reports have been reviewed chronologically and the same seven themes listed in the Key at the start of Annex A are the focus. Please note that there are minor changes to themes dependent on the issues of focus internationally. However, the review in Annex A follows the objective of this report and looks internationally, specifically at what jurisdictions, other than England & Wales, are doing in the wake of the impacts to users following the modernisation of Tribunal Services.

Devolved administrations

The justice system across the United Kingdom is undergoing significant reform to incorporate technological advancements. The devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have each pursued unique strategies in modernising their respective tribunal systems, shaped by their governance structures, policy priorities, and legal traditions. Scotland has prioritised the development of a hybrid tribunal system integrating digital processes while maintaining in- person proceedings where necessary. Wales on the other hand is in the process of overhauling its tribunal architecture, creating a more unified system with standardised procedural rules and digital integration. Northern Ireland, meanwhile, has embarked on a large- scale digital transformation initiatives, with the introduction of the Themis Programme marking a major investment in modernising its court and tribunal services.

Scotland

Scotland has been an early adopter of digital reforms within the justice sector, particularly in the tribunal system. Recognising the diverse needs of tribunal uses, the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service (SCTS) is focused on developing a hybrid model that allows flexibility in how cases are heard. While this approach is being largely welcomed, it has also raised concerns regarding digital exclusion, the administrative burden on judiciary and staff and the need for consistent procedural safeguards to ensure fairness in digital proceedings.

A core component of Scotland's digital tribunal strategy is at the Integrated Case Management System (ICMS), which enables users to submit applications online, access case information, and receive updates on tribunal proceedings. This has significantly improved efficiency, reducing delays and minimising the reliance on physical documentation. However, disparities in adoption remain across different tribunal types, leading to concerns about consistency in service delivery. The introduction of hybrid hearings to attend proceedings either in person or via video conferencing was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic and has since been integrated as a permanent feature of the tribunal system. While the flexibility offered by hybrid hearings has been beneficial for many users, there are concerns regarding the quality of engagement for those participating remotely, especially for individuals with limited digital literacy or unreliable Internet access. The judicial profession has also noted the challenges associated with managing hybrid hearings, including difficulties in assessing nonverbal cues ensuring effective participation from all parties.

Another major development has been the expansion of live streaming tribunal proceedings, improving public access and transparency. Live streaming Civil Appeals has already been piloted, and there are plans to extend this. While this initiative has been praised for enhancing openness, it also raises privacy concerns, particularly for vulnerable participants. Striking the right balance between transparency and protecting the rights of individuals involved in tribunal cases remains an ongoing policy challenge. To strengthen the effectiveness of digital tribunal services, Scotland must continue refining its hybrid model ensuring that procedural fairness is maintained regardless of whether a participant attends in person or remotely. Investments in digital literacy programmes and support services for tribunal users will be crucial in preventing digital exclusion. Furthermore, continued assessment of live streaming policies is necessary to safeguard the privacy of vulnerable users while upholding the principles of open justice.

Wales

There has been both administrative and legislative reform in Wales over the years. Most significantly, the Wales Act 2017 drew together several devolved tribunals as the Welsh Tribunals and created the office of President of Welsh Tribunals with supervisory functions over the Welsh Tribunals. However, the constituent tribunals as individual tribunals each remain governed by separate legislative frameworks, leading to inconsistencies between them which is a longstanding challenge as noted in the report.

Unlike Scotland, which has integrated digital processes into its existing tribunal system, Wales is undergoing a more structural transformation. The Welsh Government's White Paper "A New Tribunal System for Wales", outlines plans to unify the country's tribunal services, moving towards a more coherent and standardised system. This reform effort seeks to simplify processes, improve accessibility and leverage technology to enhance efficiency.

The proposals for reform of the devolved tribunals in Wales are to create a coherent and unified tribunal system comprising of a tribunal of first instance and an appeal tribunal. It will be a familiar structure, and one akin to the UK First-tier Tribunal and Upper Tribunal supported by HMCTS and the Scottish equivalent tribunals supported by the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service. Legislation creating those tribunal systems was enacted in 2007 and 2014 respectively.

One of the key pillars of Wales tribunal modernisation programme is the establishment of a Tribunal Procedure Committee, tasked with developing a uniform set of procedural rules across all devolved tribunals. The current lack of standardisation has been a long-standing challenge, leading to inconsistencies in how cases are processed. By introducing a unified framework, the Welsh government aims to make the tribunal system more user friendly and efficient. Digital integration forms a crucial component of this reform effort. Wales has aligned itself with the broader HMCTS reform programme which has introduced digital applications and remote hearings across England and Wales. While these developments have the potential to enhance accessibility, they also bring challenges, particularly in ensuring users are adequately supported in engaging with digital systems. To address this, a national digital support service has been established to assist individuals who struggle with online services, providing guidance and alternative access routes where necessary. Despite the progress made, Wales faces a number of hurdles in its digital tribunal transformation.

The implementation of standardised procedural rules requires careful coordination across multiple tribunal types and there is a risk that overly rigid frameworks could fail to accommodate the specific needs of different user groups. Additionally, while remote hearings offer flexibility, they also present barriers for individuals who lack digital access or expertise. Ensuring that the transition to digital services does not disadvantage those most in need remains a critical policy consideration.

Members of the Welsh Tribunals are supported by access to the HMCTS eJudiciary platform and Welsh Government and HMCTS are working to establish a specific Welsh Tribunals offer relating to that and other digital services.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has embarked on one of the most ambitious digital transformation programmes in the UK justice system. Unlike Scotland's hybrid model or Wales's structural reorganisation, Northern Ireland's approach has centred on a technological overhaul, fundamentally redesigning how tribunals operate and interact with users. The Themis Programme, a £85 million investment represents the largest modernisation effort undertaken by the Northern Ireland courts and tribunal service (NICTS), introducing an integrated IT system to replace outdated processes and transition towards a fully digital, paper-light tribunal environment.

At the heart of the Themis Programme is the implementation of a new case management system, designed to streamline all tribunal services into a single digital platform. This system allows for electronic case filing, remote access to documentation, real-time case tracking and seamless communication between parties. By reducing reliance on physical documentation and manual processing, the programme aims to improve efficiency, reduce delays, and enhance user experience. For legal professionals, instant access to case files and hearing schedules through the new digital portal is expected to simplify case preparation and procedural compliance. One of the most transformative aspects of the programme is the expansion of remote hearings, a feature that has become increasingly embedded in tribunal services across the UK. While Scotland and Wales have implemented hybrid hearing models, Northern Ireland has taken this a step further by integrating remote participation as a core function of its new digital justice framework. Virtual hearings are now facilitated through secure video conferencing tools, enabling wider access for tribunal users, particularly those in rural areas or with mobility challenges. However, while remote access provides greater flexibility, there remain concerns about procedural fairness, a challenge that all devolved nations are navigating. Judges and legal professionals have raised questions about the ability to assess credibility and engagement in remote settings, particularly when non-verbal communication plays a role in decision-making.

While the Themis Programme marks a major step forward in tribunal modernisation, its full implementation and impact remains to be seen. The transition to a fully digital system presents challenges in adapting workflows, training tribunal staff, and ensuring user confidence in the new technology. Additionally, issues of digital exclusion remain, particularly for individuals without reliable Internet access, digital literacy or the necessary technology. Unlike Wales which has introduced national digital support services, Northern Ireland's approach to bridging the digital divide within its tribunals remains a work in progress.

International issues

The research that we have carried out focuses on the challenges which are addressed by the increasing trend in digitising court systems. Notably, the aim is to enhance access to justice and improve the efficiency of court systems by modernising the way in which court services operate. However, we have noted that despite several countries' best efforts to create unified case management systems, there are barriers to effective access to justice caused by lack of cross-border collaboration and limited standardisation of definitions and processes.[21] Annex A sets out several examples of where international strategies to digitise court services are limited. For example, the Strategy for British Columbia details challenges posed by the introduction of digital services, for example rural users lacking reliable connectivity to broadband[22], but it does not detail a strategic action plan or timeline to implement remedies to the issues. One of the key recommendations, consistently

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[21] Digitalisation of Justice: Turning Challenges into Opportunities – Event Report eu-LISA Industry Roundtable

[22] *Achieving Digital Equity in Access to Justice*, Kate M. Murray (2021)

highlighted across all international strategies, is the need for stakeholder engagement during the transition to a more digitised court system, particularly in the EU where this could inform policy decisions and improve standardisation of processes cross-border. British Columbia highlights that stakeholder engagement, via a continuous feedback loop will promote the monitoring and evaluation of the processes, so that improvements to the digitalisation and resultant efficiency of court services can be improved throughout the transition period.[23]

Conclusion

The digitalisation of tribunal services across the devolved nations represents a major step towards a modernised more accessible justice system. Each jurisdiction has approached digitalisation differently: Scotland has embraced hybrid models and live streaming initiatives; Wales is pursuing a large-scale structural reform alongside digital integration and Northern Ireland is implementing one of the most comprehensive IT overhauls through the Themis Programme. While digital transformation has brought significant benefits, including increased efficiency, improved accessibility, and reduced administrative burdens, each nation faces key challenges. Digital exclusion remains a pressing issue, particularly for those without reliable Internet access or sufficient digital literacy. Hybrid hearings, while offering greater flexibility, raises concerns around procedural fairness and ensuring equal engagement for all parties. Additionally, the growing reliance on digital systems necessitates robust cyber security measures to protect sensitive data and maintain public trust in the justice system.

In the research, we have seen that several international jurisdictions have begun implementing digital case management systems which unify all court services available, serving as a one-stop-shop. However, there is still a long way to go to ensure that there is a positive correlation between efficiency and digitisation as well as less of a divide between developed and developing economies. The first step is to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to start implementing digitisation which includes ensuring there is sufficient training for staff, sufficient resources available and that services are prepared for the transition. After that, focus needs to be on addressing the cross-border challenges to access to justice as well as engagement with stakeholders to ensure that justice is accessible to all users, including vulnerable users. While the previous report noted slow progress in addressing digitisation challenges for vulnerable users, this report also shows that progress remains slow. It highlights that without clear action plans and goals, international efforts to address the challenges posed to vulnerable users of digitalised court services will be hindered.

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[23] British Columbia: Court Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2029

Annex A – International Strategies

A table showing the International Strategies for the digitisation of Court and Tribunal Services with a focus on:

- Users requiring digital assistance[24]

- Socio-economic status

- Protected Characteristics

- Disabilities and mental health conditions

- Individuals without digital skills

- Users of the reformed/digital service

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[24] This includes individuals who have connectivity or broadband difficulties as a result of living in remote locations.

Date	Title	Jurisdiction/groups	Scope	Overall Findings/key concerns	Recommendations and Useful insights	Comments/Progress
Nov-23	Digitisation of Justice: Turning Challenges into Opportunities – Event Report eu-LISA Industry Roundtable	eu-LISA is the European Union Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice. It has a particular focus on large-scale IT systems which support implementation of asylum, border management and migration policies in the	Over two days, the eu-LISA Industry Roundtable discussed the digitisation of justice, the role of data in the Justice system and eu-LISA's role in the digitalisation of justice in the EU. Explored the use of digital technologies and their importance to improving access to justice and advancing cross-border judicial cooperation within the EU.	Spain's efforts to digitalise its justice system was highlighted by the Ministry of Justice of Spain and called for private-public cooperation and a data-centric approach. Spain introduced Carpeta Justicia which is a unified platform designed as a one-stop-shop providing access to judicial information across all Spanish regions.

eu-LISA's justice portfolio includes ECRIS RI, ECRIS-TCN, e-CODEX, and JITs | The Roundtable continued to highlight that digitisation of justice is a collaborative and agile practices requiring joint effort to ensure cross-border judicial cooperation in the EU.

To combat the initial challenges posed by a paper-based court system and underfunded and outdated IT systems, the Courts Service of Ireland reorganised its ICT team, introducing new roles and | The strong interest by EU member states to incorporate the use of AI, particularly generative AI into their judicial systems, was explored by many of the speakers. The application of AI could range from case allocation to process automation, legal analysis or automatic anonymisation of judgments. However, the focus would need to be on non-high-risk AI applications to alleviate administrative burdens whilst ensuring that biases embedded in AI would not impact the quality |

		EU. eu-LISA's system have far-reaching impacts, particularly in Schengen border management but also across the whole of the EU.	To highlight EU initiatives to digitise court services, the Roundtable heard discussions from the Spanish Ministry of Justice and the Courts Service of Ireland.	CP[25], focusing on secure, interoperable systems for exchanging criminal records, judicial data, and facilitating cross-border criminal investigations.	structures to facilitate the transition to more advanced digital initiatives in the system. The need for stakeholder engagement during the transition was identified as well as a need for standardisation in legal definitions and processes across the EU	of justice administration. The initiatives introduced by Spain and Ireland both focused on developing a centralised, unified case management system.

[25] For further information about the use of these large-scale IT systems see: https://www.eulisa.europa.eu/activities/large-scale-it-systems

| Dec-23 | World Bank Group Global Indicators Briefs No.25 - Digitizing Court Systems: Benefits and Limitations | It examines the introduction of digital systems across 120 economies globally. | Explores the global trend of digitising court systems which was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. | After the Pandemic, many economies introduced e-filing, remote hearings and digital document management which improved accessibility and transparency within judicial systems.

The key concerns with this introduction to digitisation is that it has not improved efficiency and has created further divide between developed and developing economies. Concerns remain surrounding data security. | Recommendations include the need for Court systems to adopt a comprehensive strategy which not only introduces new technology and digitisation, but which has the infrastructure for it Ensuring that there are robust data protection measures in place is crucial. | This research paper concluded that advancements and adoption of new technologies does not correlate positively with judicial efficiency and the relationship between the two was weak. |

| Aug-24 | British Colombia: Court Digital Transformation Strategy 2024-2029 | Within British Colombia, the strategy aims to support and serve the public, judges, those in the legal profession, police, and court services staff.

The Strategy prioritises the safety and responsiveness to Indigenous peoples who face challenges accessing justice where there is often insufficient connectivity in rural and remote | The aim of the strategy is to enhance access to justice to improve court services by building on a strong foundation of modernisation and promoting accessibility for court participants. It considers the use of evolving technologies and digital transformation in the courts to ensure efficient use of resources and efficiency of court processes.

Over the next 5 years, the Strategy looks at its plan to | By highlighting a number of existing challenges in the court system such as outdated technology, inefficiency and barriers to access, the Strategy sets out it's plan to deliver user-centred digital services which are affordable and efficient. The report highlights the benefit of digitisation for intuitive use, convenience, enhanced information sharing and assurance with regards to data safety and security.

The key concerns set out in the document include: challenges and barriers to | Flags the importance of engaging stakeholders (similarly to what was discussed in the eu-LISA Roundtable) via a continuous feedback loop whilst monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the transition to a digital court system to ensure that iterative improvements can be made throughout the digitisation process. The Strategy also highlights the importance of securing funding | British Colombia highlights those other countries such as Indonesia, Estonia, Singapore, and Australia, jurisdictions such as Ontario, Alberta, and the City of Vancouver, and several American states, which are all commencing digitisation of their justice services.

The Strategy is limited where it generally outlines aims, objectives and positives to court reform in the digital age but it does not yet set out a comprehensive and strategic action plan to address the challenges other than where the Strategy calls for enhanced connectivity, |

| | | areas.[26] The Strategy aims to design the digital systems to accommodate for the needs of marginalised and Indigenous communities. | improve technology to support virtual and remote court appearances, to access court information and eFiling services as well as have enhanced data management systems for the court information and documents. | implementation such as resistance to change and the resulting need for further training; obtaining the funding and resources necessary to implement such changes and ensuring that the digital solutions are accessible to all users. | early on as well as the need to offer ongoing training and technical support to everyone who works in the Courts. | better equipment for recording and accessing remote court appearances, it states that it will ensure that all users are adequately supported, whilst not detailing exactly how.

A governance framework, including the Court Technology Board and a planning committee, will guide the court's digital transformation. The Board ensures alignment with judicial and governmental goals, while the committee recommends priorities and projects. The latter will curate the overall roadmap to achieve the goals for digitisation. |

Jan-25	European e-Justic Strategy 2024-2028	Examines the strategy for digitisation of justice systems across the EU, particularly in the area of freedom, security and justice and the impacts it will have on justice professionals and all citizens and users of justice services.	The Strategy applies to all Member States from 2024-2028 and calls for a review and possible revision in 2026 and aims to guide the ongoing digital transformation to the justice domain across the EU. The Strategy focuses on an Action Plan to digitalise the justice system in order to facilitate and enhance access to justice and improve effectiveness and	The Strategy calls for services to be people-centred to ensure that everyone, including those without digital skills or tools can effectively participate in judicial proceedings. By flagging the digital divide as a cause for inequality in access to justice, the Strategy promotes collaboration between Member States to maintain a people-centred approach. The Strategy in the EU embraces a 'digital by default' approach which will streamline processes and reduce	Recommendations for digital empowerment and capacity-building amongst users to ensure that they are provided with the digital skills required for the court services as well as providing training to justice professionals to better deliver digitalised court services.	The Strategy also highlights that it would be useful to create a collaborative follow-up mechanism to analyse and evaluate progress made by each of the Member States towards the objectives and actions set out in the Strategy. The focus in the EU is on collaboration, particularly interoperability between justice systems across the Member States to ensure for unbroken data exchange.

| | | | efficiency of services. | paperwork however it notes that non-digital alternatives need to be maintained to provide those who are choosing not to, or are unable to embrace technological developments, with legal protection and equal access to justice.

The Strategy also expands on their | | |

24. *Achieving Digital Equity in Access to Justice*, Kate M. Murray (October 2021)