

## Letters to the Editor

**The Times, Wednesday March 23 2011**

### Technology is slow in assisting justice

Sir, Judges have long recognised that "technology will see justice done" (letter, Mar 21) and welcome its widespread use in the courts. As long ago as 1996, Lord Woolf advocated it in his ground-breaking report on civil justice reform, Access to Justice Report. In 1999 the old rule book was thrown out and new Civil Procedure Rules introduced under which judges would "actively" manage cases to ensure access to justice at a reasonable and proportionate cost by, among other things, "making use of technology". In 2000 the Cabinet Office followed suit and published e.gov: Electronic Government Services for the 21st Century. It committed £1 billion to implementing electronic service delivery (ESD) of all public services by 2005. ESD was hailed as the way to deliver efficiently and effectively "more convenient, more joined-up, more responsive and more personalised public services".

This strategy required change in three broad areas, according to the executive summary: "Ensuring that government electronic service delivery is driven by the citizens who use it; opening the electronic delivery of government services to the public and voluntary services; and putting in place new incentives, levers and institutional structures to make sure the transformation happens."

Other countries such as Australia, Singapore and the US also committed themselves to pursuing these goals. In the sphere of justice, they have now fulfilled their objectives and adapted so that almost all records are stored, sorted, produced and transmitted electronically. Here in the UK the situation is the converse: almost all evidence and court files are still in anachronistic, inefficient and expensive paper form. The Review of Civil Litigation Costs by Lord Justice Jackson 2009 emphasised the urgent need of achieving ESD of our court services to give access to justice at a reasonable and proportionate cost.

Hopefully, the current straitened circumstances of our public services will act as the catalyst of a public-private partnership on public service technology advancing us into the 21st century envisaged a decade ago by senior judges, the Civil Service and the Government alike.

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*His Honour Judge Simon Brown, QC*