

# Fourteenth Progress Report of the Litigants in Person Reference Group (Meeting 13th December 2022)

## Introduction

At its inaugural meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019, it was agreed that a Progress Report summarising key decisions and activities of the Reference Group (RG) should be published following each meeting. This is the fourteenth of those reports and relates to the meeting held on 13th December 2022.

## 1. Thirteenth Progress Report

This was considered and approved. It is to be added to the RG's website (<https://www.litigant-voice.co.uk>)

## 2. External Engagement

### Engagement with the Judicial Studies Board

The RG heard a presentation from Terence Dunlop, Secretary to the Judicial Studies Board (JSB), on the role and work of the JSB. It was also an opportunity for the RG to describe some of the difficult experiences of litigants in person in the court system and to highlight particular areas of concern.

Given the major programme of change currently underway in the justice system, it was agreed that an annual engagement between the JSB and the RG would be mutually beneficial.

### Upcoming Webinar - “Enabling effective participation of unrepresented litigants and vulnerable witnesses in civil courts”.

- This lunchtime Webinar is to take place online on **Monday March 13<sup>th</sup> at 1pm**, in partnership with Law Centre NI
- There will be a presentation by Karen Walden-Smith, Deputy High Court Judge (GB), followed by a brief input from Professor Grainne McKeever UU and Tom Herron a member of the Reference Group who was formerly a personal litigant. The presentations will be followed by Q&A.
- It was agreed that the webinar should be advertised as widely as possible and that the Law Society and Bar Council should be approached regarding CPD accreditation for the event.

## Responses to consultations

It was noted that the RG had provided responses on three draft protocols that had been forwarded for comment. The protocols related to Personal Injury, Ejectment and Commercial Actions. The particular focus of the RG's comments had been potential impacts on unrepresented litigants.

### **3. Courts' Modernisation Programme**

#### Law Centre NI & PILA Roundtable 8th November 2022 – "Access to Justice and Digital Justice – Preliminary Lessons"

Major court modernisation programmes are currently being rolled out here and in the ROI. The main focus of this particular event was to discuss lessons learned to date on the impacts of remote hearings/justice. It was noted that Sinead Mulhern had attended this roundtable discussion on behalf of the RG. The roundtable had proved an effective forum for exchanging experiences and ideas for securing improvements going forward. Given that both jurisdictions are only in the early stages of modernisation programmes that will extend over a number of years, it had been agreed that it would be beneficial to arrange similar update events in the future.

### **4. Miscellaneous**

DOJ confirmed that it intended to set up a Reference Group and would, in due course, welcome participation by a representative of the Litigant in Person Reference Group.

The Chair referred the meeting to Inspire's 'Advocacy for All' initiative ([Advocacy for All - Inspire Wellbeing](#)). It was agreed that it would be beneficial to invite a representative from the organisation to a future meeting of the RG.