



Department of

Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Máinnystrie O tha Laa

www.justice-ni.gov.uk

Broadcasting of Courts

A consultation on proposals to allow the recording and broadcasting of certain court proceedings

The consultation seeks views on proposals to allow the recording and broadcasting of certain court proceedings.

Responding to the Call for Evidence

Please use this questionnaire to tell us your views.

The closing date for receipt of responses is **5pm on Wednesday 16 July 2025**.

Please note that it is unlikely that responses to the consultation will be accepted after this date.

Please send your response by email to:

DoJCivilJusticeandJudicialPolicyDivision@justice-ni.gov.uk

Privacy Notice

All responses to this consultation may be published on the Department's website except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity, e.g. a member of the public. All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity may be published. Where relevant, email addresses and telephone numbers will be removed from responses. However, apart from this, they will be published in full. For more information about how personal data is handled, please see the Department's consultation privacy notice at Annex A of the consultation paper.

Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("FOIA") and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 ("EIR"). However, all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, you should explain in your response which particular section(s) of your response is confidential and why it should potentially be withheld (please refer to the Information Commissioner's Office's guidance on the application of the section 41 exemption (Information provided in confidence). This will form part of the consideration should the Department receive a request for the information under FOIA or EIR.

Consultee Details (Please enter your details below)
Full Name: Gail McGreevy
Title: ☐ Mr ☐ Ms ☐ Mrs ☐ Miss ☐ Dr <i>(please tick as appropriate)</i>
Organisation: Probation Board for Northern Ireland
Job Title <i>(if applicable)</i> : Head of Communications & Engagement
Address, including Postcode: 80 - 90 North Street, Belfast, BT1 1LD
Email Address: Gail.mcgreevy@probation-ni.gov.uk

Question 1:

Do you agree that the recording and broadcasting of certain court proceedings should be allowed? Please explain the reason for your answer.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNi) agree that the recording and broadcasting of certain court proceedings should be allowed.

Probation staff carry out their role working in courts, the community, custody and directly with victims of crime. Our work in courts centres on the provision of pre-sentence reports provided to the Judiciary to assist with sentencing decisions. Probation Officers may be called to give evidence in Court. Within Belfast Magistrates Court we also work in partnership to deliver services to people who commit crimes related to their drug or alcohol abuse through the Substance Misuse Court. We engage closely with the Judiciary, legal profession and staff of the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunal Service.

We agree fully with the principle of open justice, and with the long-established principle that justice must not only be done but must also be seen to be done. Allowing the recording and broadcasting of certain court proceedings would in our view assist to build openness, transparency, public understanding and confidence in the justice system.

Whilst court proceedings are currently reported on by journalists to the wider public, we believe that there is a need for an informed public conversation to raise understanding about sentencing and in particular community sentencing. It is an ongoing challenge for PBNi to explain to stakeholders and the wider community the value and impact that community sentences imposed by the Courts provide. The Lady Chief Justice recently commented on some of the challenges that persist and used the example that ‘an offender who has been made the subject of an eighteen-month probation order has not ‘walked free’ – even if that phrase might make better copy – but, on the contrary, remains subject to a significant curtailment of liberty and is indeed liable to be placed in custody for a breach of the terms of his/her order. (Sentencing Practice in NI: A Public Lecture)

We would hope that allowing the recording and broadcasting of certain court proceedings would assist in beginning that public conversation about what effective sentencing looks like and help build awareness and confidence in the effectiveness of community sentences in particular.

If you agree that there should be broadcasting of courts, please answer the following questions:

Question 2:

Do you agree with the proposal to provide a general power in primary legislation for the Department, with the agreement of the Lady Chief Justice, to make a broadcasting order to allow the recording and broadcasting of certain court and tribunal proceedings? Please explain the reason for your answer.

We agree with this proposal and that the broadcasting order should specify the types of proceedings and circumstances in which recording and broadcasting may be allowed and set out those individuals who are excluded from being recorded and broadcast.

Question 3:

Do you have any other comments to make on the proposed provisions to be included in primary legislation (see section *Power to disapply the current legislation*)?

We have no other comments to provide.

Question 4:

Do you consider that the list of conditions in the section *Circumstances in which recording and broadcasting may be allowed* provides sufficient safeguards in relation to the recording and broadcasting of court proceedings? Please explain the reason for your answer.

We agree with the list of conditions and the safeguards in place including that recording or filming of victims, witnesses, parties to proceedings, jurors, members of the public or court staff will not take place and that the decision on filming in a particular case would rest with the judge hearing the case. Probation Officers on occasion attend court and provide evidence and our view is that they too would not be filmed or recorded.

Question 5:

Do you agree with the proposals for the making of a broadcasting order to allow certain aspects of cases being heard in the Court of Appeal to be recorded and broadcast (see section *Recording and broadcasting of the delivery of judgments in the Court of Appeal*)? Please explain your answer.

We agree with what is set out in the proposal and given the general public importance of legal arguments heard in the Court of Appeal and, therefore, believe that its judgments should be made as widely available to the public as possible.

Question 6:

Do you agree with the proposals for the making of a broadcasting order to allow sentencing remarks in the Crown Court to be recorded and broadcast (see section *Recording and broadcasting of sentencing remarks in the Crown Court*)? Please explain your answer.

We agree with what is set out in the proposal. The filming of sentencing remarks is critical as it gives the public the opportunity to hear judges explain their reasons for sentences for serious offences. Sentencing decisions can be complex and it is important that the public have as much information as possible to assist them to understand why a sentence has been passed.

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Question 7:

Regarding the section *Further options for recording and broadcasting of courts and tribunals*, if you think that other court and tribunal proceedings should be recorded and broadcast, please state which type of proceedings, including which aspects of those proceedings, and the reason for your answer.

We have no specific additions at this time.

Question 8:

Do you have any other comments to make to assist our consideration of the recording and broadcasting of certain court proceedings?

We would suggest that the broadcasting and recording of certain court proceedings is part of a wider package of measures to help raise understanding and confidence in the justice system. For example, we believe there is a need for an overarching communications and engagement strategy to put data and insights into the public domain to help build confidence in the work we carry out across justice.

Question 9:

Do you have any comments to make on the impact assessments?

We are satisfied with the impact assessments.