

HMCTS and Good Things Foundation Digital Support Pilot

Research Bulletin
February 2020

Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) is currently undergoing a £1bn reform programme to redesign the way courts and tribunals services are provided. As a result HMCTS systems will be more accessible – with less reliance on physical access to a building and greater use of technology to provide a range of ways to engage with Courts (including paper, online or by telephone). Since September 2017, HMCTS and Good Things Foundation have been working together to pilot a face-to-face Digital Support service. This Bulletin summarises learning to date and plans for the current Phase 3, which runs until August 2020.

Findings to date

- People who have used the Digital Support pilot service in community-based centres have been overwhelmingly positive about the support they received.
- People who use the Digital Support pilot service usually have broader needs which can include emotional, procedural, legal support, and help with accessibility, literacy or English language. Support appointments frequently meet these wider support needs, and reflect the type of support already available from centres.
- Only 20 of the 31 centres involved in Phases 1 and 2 of the Digital Support pilot delivered appointments with HMCTS users. Reasons for this include:
 - A limited number of referrals from HMCTS call centres and self-referral routes;
 - Concerns around staying within the scope of the face-to-face Assisted Digital pilot service (as specified in Phases 1 and 2, i.e. without legal advice);
 - Lack of organisational capacity, staffing issues, or competing pressures.
- Most referrals to the Digital Support pilot have been self-referrals generated by community-based centres, rather than referrals from HMCTS Courts and Tribunals Service Centres.

Next steps

Phase 3 of the pilot runs until August 2020. HMCTS and Good Things Foundation have identified changes to testing in Phase 3 which, based on learning to date, should increase the number of people referred to and supported by the Digital Support pilot service. The changes will help identify requirements for a national service when the pilot concludes:

1. Participating community-based centres can now provide support to complete an online form alongside their regular support offer, such as welfare and legal advice;
2. Participating community-based centres can choose the HMCTS services they support (instead of being required to support all HMCTS services);
3. HMCTS will improve training and processes to increase referrals from people calling Courts and Tribunal Service Centres;
4. Increase the number of participating community-based centres that already provide welfare advice or legal support in the pilot.

About the Digital Support pilot

Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) is currently undergoing a £1bn reform programme and is redesigning the way courts and tribunals services are provided. Part of this programme involves moving services online and reducing the high volumes of paper which go through the system. While not everyone who needs to use the courts and tribunals will want to access digital services, others may require help and support to do so. To support people, HMCTS is piloting Digital Support, as well as improving its non-digital channels such as paper and telephone services.

In September 2017 Good Things Foundation, a national digital inclusion charity which supports an extensive network of community-based organisations – the Online Centres Network – was commissioned by HMCTS to co-design and pilot a face-to-face Digital Support service focusing on specific digital HMCTS services. The pilot is comprised of three phases. This bulletin updates on the project to date and outlines the direction of the current Phase 3, which will run until August 2020.

Phase 1 (September 2017 – September 2018)

In September 2017 Phase 1 of the pilot began. 10 community-based centres were recruited across a variety of locations, reflecting the likelihood of digital exclusion in the local population, and the volume of Social Security and Child Support appeals. During Phase 1, a number of online HMCTS services were launched to the public. Concurrently, centres were trained through online webinars and printed materials to provide face-to-face Digital Support to users accessing these services. Phase 1 was based purely on referrals into the pilot from Courts and Tribunal Service Centres.

Phase 2 (October 2018 – June 2019)

During Phase 2, in response to low referrals from HMCTS call centres, a 'self-referral' route was added, enabling participating community-based

centres to generate referrals into the pilot service directly. Insights from Phase 1 also informed further service improvements in Phase 2:

- Providing typing assistance for people unable to use a keyboard easily;
- Recruiting a wider range of community-based centres, based on experience and ability to deliver HMCTS services as well as geographic distribution. A further 8 centres were recruited to the pilot during this phase.

Phase 3 (July 2019 – August 2020)

Phase 3 of the Digital Support pilot began in July 2019, building on data, design and research insights from the previous phases. This phase of the pilot is ongoing.



Improving referral routes

Findings from Phase 2 showed that self-referrals were greater and generated higher attendance rates than referrals from the HMCTS Courts and Tribunal Service Centres, although we continue to see successful referrals from HMCTS. In Phase 3, self-referrals will be the primary route for HMCTS users into the pilot, while continuing to receive referrals from Courts and Tribunal Service Centres. HMCTS will also work with Courts and Tribunal Service Centre staff to ensure the right training and processes are in place to provide Digital Support during calls, and refer to face-to-face Digital Support when appropriate. In addition, HMCTS will work with court staff to explore ways to advertise the face-to-face Digital Support pilot service and route users to local participating community centres.

23.03.18	26.03.18	30.04.18	19.07.18	15.11.18	13.12.18
Single Justice System	Civil Money Claims	Divorce	Probate	Personal Independence Payments (Social Security and Child Support appeal)	Employment and Support Allowance (Social Security and Child Support appeal)

Improving selection of partner centres

Informed by Phase 2, changes have been made to the criteria used in the selection of community-based centres participating in the pilot. Priority is given to recruiting centres with demonstrable reach and expertise in identifying and supporting people who may be potential HMCTS Digital Support users: particularly specialist centres already providing welfare benefits advice and guidance (e.g. supporting people with appeals). Some centres have been identified from the Online Centres Network, and some have been identified by partner organisations in the Litigants in Person Engagement Group (a HMCTS / judicial advisory group made up of sector representatives such as AdviceUK, Citizens Advice, Law Centres and Support Through Court). This new tranche of centres will allow us to learn more about the interaction between legal advice and Digital Support.

Improving support to partner centres

Feedback from staff in community-based centres participating in the pilot has led to the following changes which will be tested in Phase 3:

- Moving from a payment-by-results model to a combination of up-front payment and staged performance payments, enabling centres to put in place the capacity they need to begin engagement within their local communities and increase self-referrals;
- Ensuring that multiple members of staff are trained to deliver Digital Support in each participating centre;
- Enabling new participating centres to select which HMCTS services they support;
- Improving how online HMCTS service changes are communicated to participating community-based centres.

Phase 3 progress to date

As of 31 January 2020, there have been 457 attended appointments since the pilot started, through 22 participating centres. We are starting to see positive results from the changes introduced.

For more information about this project, please contact:

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