

Woolf reforms



Outline the major changes introduced by the Woolf Reforms

Since Lord Woolf recommended reforms in his report in 1996 there have been many changes in the civil justice system. In 1995 Lord Woolf stated how a civil justice system should be: •Be fair in the result it delivers •Be fair in the way it treats litigants.

- Offer appropriate procedures at a reasonable cost.
- Have cases dealt with at a reasonable speed.
- Be understandable to those who use it. Provide as much certainty as the nature of particular cases allows.
- Be effective, sufficiently resourced and organised. The report found that the system back then was not meeting any of those points. The report contained 303 recommendations. The most important ones proposed as follows:
 - Extending small claims up to 3000.
 - A fast track for straightforward cases up to 10,000.
 - A multi-track for cases over ? 10,000 with capping of costs.
 - Encouraging the use of ADR.
 - Giving judges more responsibility for managing cases.
 - More use of information technology Simplifying documents and procedures and having a single set of rules governing proceedings in both the High Court and the County court.

- Shorter timetables for cases to reach court and for lengths of trials In 1997 a ‘second opinion’ was commissioned called the Middleton report and this supported most of Woolf’s proposals however it is suggested that the small claims limit should be raised to 5000 and the fast track to 15,000. Because of the Woolf and Middleton report the civil justice system was reformed in April 1999.